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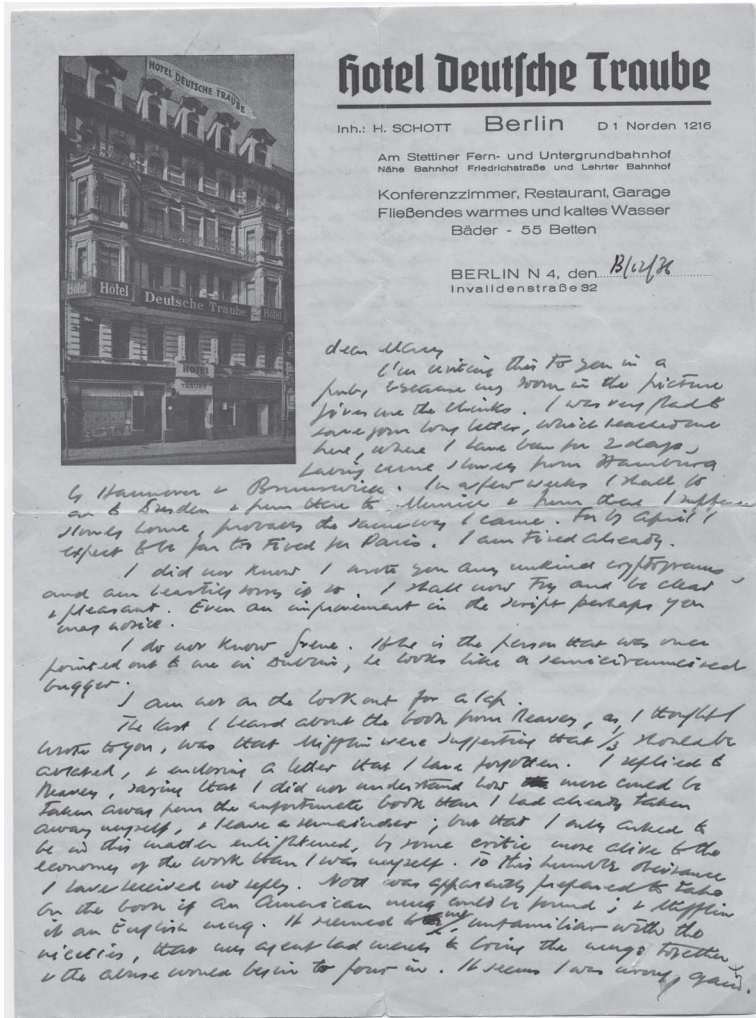
978-0-521-86793-1 — The Letters of Samuel Beckett Volume 1: 1929–1940

Samuel Beckett et al.

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

The Letters of Samuel Beckett offers for the first time a comprehensive range of letters of one of the greatest literary figures of the twentieth century. This volume includes letters written between 1929 and 1940. It provides a vivid and personal view of Western Europe in the 1930s, marked by the gradual emergence, against his own hesitations and the indifference or hostility of others, of Beckett's unique voice and sensibility. Even in the tentativeness of the early writing, the letters show his care for his work as well as what he must share or relinquish to allow it to have a life beyond himself. Detailed introductions, translations, explanatory notes, profiles of major correspondents, chronologies, and other contextual information accompany the letters. For anyone interested in twentieth-century literature and theatre this edition offers not only a record of achievements but a powerful literary experience in itself.



Samuel Beckett to Mary Manning Howe, 13 December 1936
Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center,
The University of Texas at Austin

THE LETTERS
OF
SAMUEL BECKETT

Volume I: 1929–1940

Editors:

Martha Dow Fehsenfeld, Lois More Overbeck

Associate Editors:

George Craig, Dan Gunn



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Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

To Samuel Beckett who began “it all.”

MARTHA FEHSENFELD

To Kristen, Andrew, and Jonathan, whose years have been spent with this edition, deep appreciation for their forbearance, humor, and regard, and especially for the pleasure of their company in this as in so much else. To James Overbeck, who endured, with gratitude for his loving advice and constant support.

LOIS OVERBECK

To Kate Craig, for her unfailing support and sense of the appropriate.

GEORGE CRAIG

To George Craig, my teacher for thirty years, from whom I am learning still; and in memory of Catharine Carver, the very best of editors.

DAN GUNN

CONTENTS

List of illustrations *page viii*General introduction *xi*French translator's preface GEORGE CRAIG *xxxiii*German translator's preface VIOLA WESTBROOK *xliii*Editorial procedures *xlvi*Acknowledgments *lvii*Permissions *lxx*List of abbreviations *lxxii*Introduction to Volume I *lxxvii*

LETTERS 1929–1940

APPENDIX 685

Profiles 687

Bibliography of works cited 719

Index of recipients 750

General index 751

ILLUSTRATIONS

Frontispiece: letter from Samuel Beckett to Mary Manning Howe,
13 December 1936
Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of
Texas at Austin

Plates (between pages 348 and 349)

1. William Beckett, Samuel Beckett’s father
By permission of The Estate of Samuel Beckett
2. Edward Price Roe and Maria Jones Roe Beckett (May)
By permission of The Estate of Samuel Beckett
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8. Alan and Belinda Atkinson Duncan, Thomas McGreevy
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9. Geoffrey Thompson
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10. Samuel Beckett
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Cambridge University Press & Assessment

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Samuel Beckett et al.

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

List of illustrations

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[More Information](#)

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

My unique relation with my work – and it is a tenuous one – is the making relation. I am with it a little in the dark and fumbling of making, as long as that lasts, then no more. I have no light to throw on it myself and it seems a stranger in the light that others throw.¹

Samuel Beckett was one of the great literary correspondents of the twentieth century, perhaps of any century. His letters, which stretch over a period of sixty years from 1929 to 1989, are not only numerous (more than 15,000 have been found and transcribed by the editors) but of an extraordinary range and intensity. They demonstrate his numerous commitments: to reading in a systematic way the classics as well as the literatures of several cultures; to training himself in music and the visual arts; to learning languages, becoming fluent in at least five and familiar with many more; to keeping up with a broad range of acquaintances, friends, and professional associates; to answering in polite and timely fashion practically every letter that was addressed to him, even when he became famous and the inquiries grew in number; to *writing*, of course – criticism, fiction, poetry, drama; and perhaps more surprisingly, a commitment to getting published and to seeing his dramatic work realized on stage. The letters also show the author's endeavor to lead the life that would make all these commitments realizable.

In view of how abruptly and rapidly letter writing has declined in recent decades – a decline that makes it hard to predict a great twenty-first-century literary correspondence – it may be important to state that Beckett answered his own mail. There are a few exceptions to this general rule: in the late 1940s Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil represented his interests in early negotiations with Les Editions de Minuit; Beckett's French publisher Jérôme Lindon drafted some letters concerning legal or business matters for his signature; for a short time

General introduction

in the late 1960s A. J. Leventhal assisted him; and later, when ill health and eye problems made writing difficult, he jotted notes for the replies that he wished Les Editions de Minuit to write on his behalf.

While Beckett complained of the onerousness of writing, he answered his “mountains of mail” in a scrupulous manner. His letters were composed on various typewriters but more often in a longhand that became notorious for its difficulty, though when he took pity on the postman it could be quite readable. Ink blotches are relatively few, but pens and pencils differ widely in their legibility. One manuscript specialist proffered what was for the editors the less-than-encouraging opinion that Beckett had the worst handwriting of any twentieth-century author. The letters themselves provide ironic commentary: “Don’t suppose you can read this but can’t face the machine.”² Typed letters might promise to be a transcriber’s boon, but in fact Beckett often wore a ribbon to shreds; in their amendments and corrections, typewritten letters often show more changes of mind and expression than do handwritten ones. Beckett also availed himself of any letterhead or paper at hand: tearing a page from a notebook, using the back of an invitation, writing out poems on an envelope or a match book.

The Letters of Samuel Beckett is a selected rather than a complete edition of the letters owing principally to three factors: the terms of Beckett’s authorization; the impossibility, so near in time to his death in 1989, of fixing the corpus definitively; and the practical difficulties of publishing in print form what would require more than a score of volumes to present *in extenso*. The four volumes of selected letters will present about 2,500 letters with another 5,000 quoted in the annotations. Until now, Beckett enthusiasts have had only one volume dedicated to Samuel Beckett’s correspondence, and, as in the other publications that include letters, the letters here were addressed to a single recipient.³ *The Letters of Samuel Beckett* will, therefore, be the first to integrate letters to the full range of recipients and to sample them over sixty years of Beckett’s life and work.

Beckett’s letters are addressed to intimates over decades of friendship, to occasional collaborators, to scholars, critics, students, and readers. The balance varies considerably. In Volumes I and II, up to the point where Beckett achieves public recognition – which corresponds roughly to the success of *En attendant Godot* (*Warten auf Godot*, *Waiting for Godot*) – the

General introduction

letters are predominantly to close friends and associates (including publishers), among whom are Thomas McGreevy, George Reavey, Mary Manning Howe, Charles Prentice, Morris Sinclair, Georges Duthuit, Mania Péron, Jérôme Lindon, Barney Rosset, and Jacoba van Velde. In Volumes III and IV are letters from the last three decades of Beckett's life, a time when his writing achieves worldwide attention, marked by the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. The long exchanges of letters with friends continue, and by now these include his publishers Siegfried Unseld, John Calder, and Charles Monteith, as well as translators, directors, actors, producers, and other colleagues (Alan Schneider, Donald McWhinnie, Jack MacGowran, Barbara Bray, Ruby Cohn, Walter Asmus, Christian Ludvigsen, and Antoni Libera, among them). There are numerous letters to writers and aspiring writers.

By the end of his life, Beckett's work had been translated into more than fifty languages. His enduring concern with translation is evident in correspondence with his translators. Whether explaining a local reference or advising them to find an equivalent in their own literature, Beckett worked closely with those whose languages he knew and willingly responded to the questions of translators whose languages were unfamiliar to him.

HISTORY OF THE EDITION

Those who, from their reading of his work or of the several biographies of him, have become used to thinking of Samuel Beckett as an exceptionally private man may be surprised at learning that in February 1985 Beckett authorized an edition of his letters, to be gathered during his lifetime and published following his death. Beckett's earlier antipathy toward publication of his letters, his general refusal to grant interviews, and his avowed "inability" to talk about his own writing, make it all the more welcome that he specifically wished to see published his letters bearing on the work.

The complexities of language, the dispersal of letters, and the complications of ownership, as well as negotiations with publishers and The Estate of Samuel Beckett have all contributed to delaying publication of the letters, as the history of the edition will make clear.

In February 1985 Beckett appointed his long-time friend and American publisher Barney Rosset (then President of Grove Press) as

General introduction

General Editor of the letters, Martha Dow Fehsenfeld as Editor, and he confirmed Lois More Overbeck as Associate Editor. Beckett had first become acquainted with Fehsenfeld in 1976 while she was preparing *Beckett in the Theatre* (1988, co-authored with Dougald McMillan). Following his request that she take charge of editing his correspondence, he gave her his written authorization “to consult my letters and take copies, in view of eventual publication, of such passages as are relevant to her research.” He added, “This permission applies to all my letters, to whomsoever addressed and wheresoever preserved.”⁴ Beckett made it clear that he himself had no wish to direct the edition, writing for example to Carlton Lake at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, that queries regarding the collecting and editing of his letters should not be addressed to him, since “I will not personally be responsible in any way for their selection and editing.”⁵

Notwithstanding his reluctance to direct the enterprise of gathering and publishing his letters, Beckett did have many conversations with Fehsenfeld about the edition he envisaged. He enjoined the editors not merely to collect the letters but to establish their context.

Paris
18-3-85

Dear Martha,

Thanks for yrs of Feb 20.

I do have confidence in you & know that I can rely on you to edit my correspondence in the sense agreed on with Barney, i.e. its reduction to those passages only having bearing on my work.

It would be a most difficult job and I am relieved at the thought of its being in such devoted and capable hands as yours.

I hope we may meet in Paris before too long & talk it over.

Yours ever,

Sam⁶

Realizing the scale of the project, Beckett suggested to Martha Fehsenfeld that she enlist an assistant, whereupon she chose Lois More Overbeck, then Editor of *The Beckett Circle* and a scholar of modern

General introduction

drama whose studies of Beckett were based on manuscript research, and with whom she had previously worked on several extended projects. In 1989, in order to create a shorter document of authorization that could be shared with foundations, archives, and recipients of letters, a memorandum of agreement was signed by Samuel Beckett, Barney Rosset, and the editors. It stated: “The purpose of this project is to establish an authorized text of Mr. Beckett’s correspondence, to be published internationally after the author’s death, on terms and by publishers subject to Mr. Beckett’s approval.”⁷ This agreement was countersigned by Beckett’s nephew Edward Beckett after his uncle’s death, with the addendum, “I fully support the edition of the correspondence of Samuel Beckett under the terms and conditions as agreed and signed to above by the author.”⁸

Shortly after the contract was signed (along with that for Beckett’s “production notebooks”) in March 1985, Grove Press was sold to Weidenfeld and Getty; Barney Rosset was appointed Chief Executive Officer of Grove Press within the new company; it was a post he expected to hold for at least five years. However, in June 1986 Rosset was released from this position and began legal action against Weidenfeld and Getty for breach of contract. Although the editors continued their research, only when this matter was settled could they be confident that the newly constituted Grove Press “owned” the original contract and, therefore, that they could seek funding to permit the work on the edition to go forward. In 1993 Grove Press merged with Atlantic Monthly Press to become Grove/Atlantic Inc.

The corpus of the letters grew rapidly, far beyond initial expectations; by 1996 the editors realized that a four-volume edition was necessary. Grove/Atlantic affirmed that it would be willing to consider reassigning the rights for publication of a scholarly edition of the letters, upon approval of The Estate of Samuel Beckett. Cambridge University Press, long known for its publication of literary letters, expressed interest, and its Director of Humanities, Andrew Brown, entered into formal negotiations with The Estate of Samuel Beckett.

Negotiations between Cambridge University Press and The Estate of Samuel Beckett began in early 1999, chiefly through Beckett’s Literary Executor, the owner and publisher of Les Éditions de Minuit, Jérôme Lindon. Deliberations proved complex, not least because of radically differing interpretations of what Samuel Beckett, now dead ten years,

General introduction

would have wished from an edition “only having bearing on my work.” The issue was whether this implied that the letters should be restricted to those in which there was specific mention of individual works or of his *oeuvre* (the Lindon view). The view of the editors was and remains that the letters themselves are important acts of writing, and signal Beckett’s relation to other writers and artists. When Jérôme Lindon died, in April 2001, no contract had been agreed on, although Cambridge University Press had made clear its intention to publish only Beckett’s *literary* correspondence. The position of Literary Executor passed to Edward Beckett, with whose support, in September 2003, the original contract which named Barney Rosset as General Editor was released by Rosset and reassigned by Grove/Atlantic to Cambridge University Press. Protracted discussion was still necessary before a formal contract was eventually signed among the various parties in November 2005.

During the years of these complex negotiations the editors continued to work on the task of preparing the corpus, and as they did so they expanded the editorial team. Both Richard Ellmann, Editor of the *Letters of James Joyce*, and John Kelly, General Editor of *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, urged the editors to seek the assistance of the distinguished editor Catharine Carver. She agreed to guide the editors in establishing the principles for the edition and offered creative editorial solutions to the many issues raised by the letters of Samuel Beckett. Knowing that her health would place limits on her participation, Catharine Carver introduced the editors to her friend Dan Gunn, Professor of Comparative Literature and English at The American University of Paris. In turn, he could think of no one better prepared to be French translator for the edition than George Craig, who had been his own mentor at the University of Sussex. As the French translator of the edition, Irish-born George Craig brings unusual qualifications to bear, having followed Beckett’s own academic pathway, from Trinity College Dublin to the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. Later, responsibility for German translations for the edition was taken on by Viola Westbrook of Emory University, a native German speaker and a specialist in linguistic pedagogy, who also had a serendipitous tie to Samuel Beckett in that her mother Ilse Schneider had known Beckett when he was in Hamburg in 1936.

As the project developed, it became evident that it would be best served by affiliation with a research university. At the urging of Irish literary scholar and editor Ann Saddlemyer, together with the support of

General introduction

Ronald Schuchard and Alice Benston (both of Emory University), the Correspondence of Samuel Beckett found its academic home in the Graduate School of Emory University in 1990. Emory's generous support provided space and basic funding for research; its library and faculty (from Art History to Ophthalmology, from Physics to Classics) provided a rich intellectual base for what rapidly became a worldwide endeavor. The graduate fellows who worked with the editors at Emory and in libraries abroad contributed their scholarship, insight, and energy; Emory undergraduates helped marshal the books, paper, and electronic files of the edition. Emory University contributed in-kind support for successive grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Florence Gould Foundation. The Gould Foundation award for research in French and American archives also made it possible for The American University of Paris (AUP) to serve as a Paris center for the edition. Students there collaborated in the French research as interns with the edition; they pursued queries in French libraries and, thanks to the international nature of the AUP student population, offered their further help in Germany, Greece, and England.

As the "Acknowledgments" indicate, the editors have received many grants for research in specific libraries and archives. What cannot be shown in a mere listing of names is how archivists and librarians from many institutions have become valued colleagues. Beckett scholars have been generous in sharing their work and papers with the edition. The small measure of acknowledgment afforded in print cannot begin to indicate the contribution in expertise and encouragement that the very large unofficial "team" has made to the edition.

Edward Beckett, as representative of The Estate of Samuel Beckett, has been a working partner in the preparation of this edition. He has joined editorial meetings and has been a ready negotiator at challenging junctures. Within the limitations placed on the edition by Samuel Beckett himself, he has responded generously where there was disagreement over what counts as "having bearing on the work."

LOCATING AND TRANSCRIBING
THE LETTERS

When Samuel Beckett met the editors during the summer of 1986, he said simply, "You will get round and see these people, won't you."

General introduction

These people were, of course, his correspondents. For Beckett, letters first of all represented a means of staying in touch; they were part of a living and often a life-long relationship. In order to discover and comprehend the common ground that letters both indicated and cultivated, the editors took Beckett's advice to "get round," and wherever possible met the persons with whom he had corresponded. Beckett's family, friends, and colleagues have been helpful and supportive, and in this they reflect the respect and affection they felt for the man they knew as "Sam."

The editorial project is known as "The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett," even though its publication is entitled *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*. Both sides of the conversation between letter writers needed to be heard, although few recipients had kept either letters received or copies of letters sent during the early years of correspondence. In order to discern the context of relationships and issues in the correspondence, the editors interviewed recipients, their families, and their colleagues; they consulted many archival collections well beyond those containing Beckett's letters, together with biographies, bibliographies, editions of letters, newspapers, and journals. Beckett's letters bear upon current events as well as on the broader reaches of history, literature, art, music, philosophy, psychology, linguistics, medicine, economics, philology, sport, and even meteorology. These all became indispensable fields of reference.

Samuel Beckett suggested persons whom the editors should approach, wrote cards of introduction, and made contacts on behalf of the editors. Even when he wrote directly to affirm his permission, these personal missives were occasionally challenged: "That never is Sam Beckett's handwriting," said one correspondent, "I can read every word." Beckett's letters to Thomas McGreevy (which form the backbone of the first volume of the edition, as they do of the several biographies for the period of the 1930s) were in private hands in 1985, but Beckett agreed that the editors should consult them, saying: "I talk a lot about my work in them." These letters produced a core for further research, as other collections did for the post-war period, particularly the letters to Georges Duthuit, Mania Péron, Jacoba van Velde, and Jérôme Lindon. For Volumes III and IV, letters to publishers, translators, directors, and old friends offered comparable starting points from which paths of research emerged.

General introduction

The editors first consulted Beckett collections in public archives such as the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center in Austin, the Beckett International Foundation at Reading University in England, and the manuscript reading room above the Long Room of the Library of Trinity College Dublin. By reading widely in corollary collections as well, the editors established a growing list of persons known to have corresponded with Samuel Beckett. Next, the editors arranged to consult corporate collections, including a publisher's archive kept in boxes under the stairs and an agent's collection brought from a riverside warehouse. The editors also pursued private collections, where it was not uncommon to find Beckett's letters mingled with a lifetime's accumulation of papers and books; to sort through these materials took care and time. Increasingly over the years since the project began in 1985, collections have shifted from private ownership to archives – sometimes as gifts, sometimes through a series of sales via auction houses and dealers. Often, transition has delayed access.

Whenever possible, the editors met Beckett's correspondents; if the individuals had died, the editors contacted family members and associates, and examined archives that related to their lives and work. These conversations led to other individuals within a particular circle of friends or clarified the roles played by the staff members in a publishing house or illumined Beckett's work with a theatrical production team. This both widened an understanding of the context of the letters and provided awareness of relationships between people and of differences between cultures: Dublin was as unlike Paris in the 1930s as Berlin in 1936 was unlike Berlin in 1975.

"Reading" the letters was a process involving several steps. Whenever possible, the editors first consulted the letters on location, whether in an archive or at someone's dining-room table. Letters were transcribed, both on site and (with the help of photocopies) in the project's office; they were compared as necessary with letters and documents from further collections. Additional research was done to complete partial titles or confirm a date or verify a name. The final step was to verify transcriptions against the originals.

Because each recipient's letters from Beckett embody an evolving and sometimes decades-long relationship, the editors transcribed collections from beginning to end, consulting corollary correspondences and investigating related publications. This was hardly a neatly compartmentalized

General introduction

process since archives and people were seldom in a single locale, and research was done for several collections when these were held in a common archive. In the case of business archives, the editors were greatly helped by those familiar with the procedures of a publisher or theatrical agent or the artistic processes of a production group. Judith Schmidt Douw assisted with the Grove Press archives at the University of Syracuse; Leah Schmidt helped with the London archive of Curtis Brown (the agents representing Beckett's theatrical work in English), providing context for the history of the firm's work on behalf of Beckett's texts. Stefani Hunzinger and Connie Ricono, theatrical agents representing Beckett's work in Germany and Italy respectively, offered insight into theatre management in their countries; Reinhard Müller-Freienfels, cameraman Jim Lewis, and soundstage engineer Konrad Körte, who had collaborated with Beckett on the realization of his television plays at Süddeutscher Rundfunk, helped the editors understand that process.

When a critical mass of individual collections had been prepared, all the letters were organized into a single chronological file. The merged files filled in details and offered new associations. More importantly, this overview of the whole collection, together with the chronicle of the individual collections of letters, made it possible to adjudicate proportion and balance in the subsequent process of selecting letters for publication. While it had been assumed that the letters themselves would suggest narrative lines, what also emerged was a sense of the widely varying voices of the writer. Letters written on the same day to different persons might present similar information, but to very different effect. Sometimes the passage of time altered points of view, as when a new idea or a particular production problem led Beckett to reconsider how a play might be enacted.

Viewing the letters from beginning to end made clear the scale of the editorial task. This supposedly "withdrawn" and "taciturn" writer was engaged in voluminous correspondences: two hundred letters to one individual, three hundred to another, over six hundred to another.

PRINCIPLES OF SELECTION

The four volumes of *The Letters of Samuel Beckett* will publish approximately 2,500 letters in full, with as many as 5,000 others cited in the

General introduction

annotations. As mentioned above, Beckett himself supplied the first principle of selection, when he gave permission to publish “those passages only having bearing on my work.”

Selection is, inevitably, an act of interpretation. The explicit goal has been to strike a balance between the unique and the representative, while making available as many letters as possible that are pertinent to Beckett’s writing. The editors’ first step was to establish the corpus in order to draw from the largest possible sense of the whole. As letters continued to appear or to be discovered, these inevitably tested and altered the editors’ frame and perspective. Certain letters presented themselves as obvious candidates for inclusion, no matter what the size or scope of the individual collection; others fluctuated in the context of surrounding letters. It was important that the scope and diversity of the letters be registered: simple acknowledgments, precise instructions to a publisher, rights negotiations, experiments with regard to production issues, hesitant venturings, extended aesthetic discussions, and thoughtful gestures of friendship. The selected edition needed to give space to letters that were remarkable in tone or content, and it needed to have breadth and nuance. The editors were concerned that their own interests should not dictate this scope; indeed, the diversity of their specialties helped ensure that the dialogue of selection was a lively and balanced one.

Principles of inclusion were formed and tested, then re-formed, re-tested, and re-applied. Among the central questions were: Does the letter record a signal event in Beckett’s working life? Does the letter reveal Beckett as a writer? Does it represent the working relationships that he had with colleagues? Does it offer glimpses of Beckett’s reading, thinking, and valuing? Does it show his responses to art and music? Subtending all these questions: Does the letter illuminate the *oeuvre*?

Everywhere there were choices to be made. A great many postcards were written when Beckett was away on holiday, and many letters confirm receipt of books or newspaper cuttings. Most of Beckett’s correspondents in the later years received a small correspondence card written to arrange, say, an eleven o’clock coffee at the Petit Café Français de l’Hôtel PLM on the Boulevard St. Jacques; some correspondents received many such cards. A choice among similar letters and cards was determined, in part, by the contribution each could make to the

General introduction

overall narrative. Did the particular card or letter establish or show a continuing working relationship? Did it fill a gap in time or explain a change of location? Did it lead to further communication that became important to Beckett's work?

The line between the life and the work is not easy to distinguish. What may appear entirely personal in a particular letter may turn up, months or years later, practically unchanged, in a published work. What may appear as markedly literary has often emerged from an intimate, lived sense of connection or dislocation.

The editors wished to present letters in their entirety, annotated with portions of other letters Beckett wrote. They had to accept, however, that any edition that deals with living contemporaries and their immediate families must respect personal privacy and public reputation. The editors' views have not always coincided with those of The Estate of Samuel Beckett, particularly when the Literary Executor was Jérôme Lindon who understood Beckett's "work" to mean only the published *oeuvre*. When Edward Beckett became Literary Executor, he largely agreed with the editors' insistence that letters themselves are important acts of writing, that "work" included jettisoned as well as published writing, and that Beckett's reading, and his interests in art and music, as well as his relation to other writers, musicians, and artists, were all significant to the literary work.

The editors believe, especially because the several biographies of Beckett make liberal use of the letters in quotation or paraphrase, that there remains very little reason to exclude a letter, or part of a letter, because of what Beckett says about himself. To take one example, it is the editors' view that Beckett's frequent, at times almost obsessive, discussion of his health problems – his feet, his heart palpitations, his boils and cysts – is of direct relevance to the work; with this The Estate of Samuel Beckett has disagreed.

Rather than exclude a letter because it speaks of an individual's difficulties, or includes repetition of mere gossip (here considered the relaying of the comments of a third party), or touches on matters judged too intimate, the editors have followed a policy of *inclusion*, publishing letters relevant to Beckett the writer. Although doing so has required some ellipses, the editors have tried to limit these. Every letter included in the edition is cited with its current ownership, and those in archives can be consulted in full.

General introduction

LANGUAGES

Beckett wrote letters primarily in English (65 percent), and also in French (30 percent), and German (5 percent). The choice of language may have been determined by the first language of his recipient or by a language they had in common, or sometimes by other factors, such as when he writes to McGreevy in French to safeguard the privacy of their exchanges, or when he wishes to play. The richness of his language and syntax, as well as Irish turns of phrase, occasional Gallicisms, and multilingual puns, his knowledge of several languages and his willingness to mix them, his etymological curiosity and his immense vocabulary – all these as well as many other features present challenges not faced by editors working on a writer more solidly anchored in a single tradition or time.

PRESENTATION

Beckett's letters themselves have guided the formation of the editorial principles. The editors' goal has been to let the letters speak for themselves wherever possible, their preference being for a minimum of intrusion. The letters are presented as written, preserving Beckett's habits and idiosyncrasies. Letters are presented as *clear copy*, reflecting the changes that Beckett made as or after he wrote them, that is to say, the letter as it was received by its recipient. If Beckett canceled a word and inserted a phrase, his insertion is included; if Beckett corrected his spelling, the corrected word is shown. Other than obvious typographical errors such as overtypes and extra spaces, there are no silent emendations. Editorial emendations made to clarify ambiguity are presented within square brackets (preceded by a question mark if a reading is doubtful) to signal that these are not Beckett's words. Letters are presented in their original language; translation into English follows; words or phrases from languages other than the dominant one of the letter are translated in the notes.

Each letter is prefaced by the name of the recipient and the place to which the letter was written (if known), since Beckett seldom includes the recipient's name and address in the body of his letters. The date and the place of writing are given as written. Beckett's signature is recorded

General introduction

as written. Postscripts are placed following the signature; their placement in the original is noted, if it differs from what appears.

A bibliographical note follows each letter, presenting a description of the document, indicating whether autograph or typed, whether signed or initialed, whether postcard or lettercard; this includes the number of leaves and sides of the letter. It also records any notations on the letter in another hand or damage to the document that affects legibility. This note indicates if the letter is written on letterhead or if a card bears the imprint of Beckett's name; it records the image in the case of a picture postcard. Also included are the details of sending and the envelope, if one exists: the addressee and address, the postmark, and any other notations, even in another hand, such as forwarding instructions. Finally, the note records the ownership or repository of the letter.

This information is followed, where required, by a discussion of dating. Beckett occasionally misdates letters, especially at the beginning of a new year. In a correspondence that follows a personal meeting or in which letters are exchanged with rapidity, as for example in that with Georges Duthuit, only the time of day or the day of the week may be given. Any dating supplied editorially is given within square brackets, with doubtful dating noted; occasionally the dating supplied can only suggest a date range.

ANNOTATION

During early conversations concerning the edition, Beckett told the editors, "Please, no commentary." The editors rejoined: "Not commentary, but there must be context." And to this he readily agreed.

The inevitable questions (Who? What? When? Where? Why?) led the editors into sometimes arcane areas of research, such as menus and timetables, playbills and weather reports, exchange rates and sports results. A recipient's letters to Beckett were of course the most helpful resource, when they were available. When they were not, the recipients and their associates were usually informative and ready to suggest further avenues of research. Often, other Beckett letters provided necessary information; whenever possible, these are used in the notes. When need arose to clarify an issue not addressed by published sources, specialists and scholars in many fields were consulted. In shaping the annotations, the editors wanted to open future research, not limit it,

General introduction

keeping in mind that future generations of readers and scholars would ask new questions of these letters.

There are several views which may be taken of notes in an edition of letters, ranging from what could be called the “maximalist” approach, employed for example in *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats* under the General Editorship of John Kelly, to the “minimalist” approach favored by Richard Ellmann in his edition of the *Letters of James Joyce*. Both approaches have their virtues. The former helps the inquiring reader to understand the context and the often obscure references, but risks distracting attention from the letters themselves. The latter keeps the focus on the principal object, but risks leaving the reader with many unanswered questions. This is a selected rather than a complete edition of the letters, annotated whenever possible by other letters written by Beckett. The editors have tended toward the “minimalist” approach to annotation, although, because of the very complex nature of the material, at times it may not seem so. The governing principle is that what is indispensable to the understanding of the letter be noted; however, with a writer as learned, as multilingual, and as well versed in the history of literature, art, and music as Beckett was, the quantity of what may be indispensable is often dauntingly extensive.

Any annotation makes assumptions about the level of general and specialized knowledge that readers might be expected to have, as well as about the research tools to which readers might reasonably be expected to have ready access. While the readers who may be familiar with the 1930s or even the 1950s have been decreasing in number, the quantity of readers has been growing who have almost instant access, through internet search engines, to a fund of sources, such as digitalized out-of-print texts, electronic catalogues of museum collections, and searchable text bases. The present edition seeks to be a scholarly edition of record, and it presumes levels of cultivation that this implies, while presuming this unevenly: given that readers of Beckett are more likely to be well versed in literature than in the visual arts, more is taken for granted in literary arenas than in the domains of art or music, or indeed those of chess or mathematics or television production, or the myriad other fields in which Beckett invested himself.

Annotations immediately follow the letter, its bibliographical note, and its translation; because the notes apply to both the letter and its

General introduction

translation, endnotes have been preferred to footnotes. The notes seek to identify the persons, places, events, and other references in letters. Often they point to sources for further detail, such as Beckett's own notebooks, various editions of his works, and his reading, but allusions to parallel passages or echoes in Beckett's works are not supplied because these would be too numerous. When possible, annotations draw upon other documents and letters to, from, and about Beckett. Sources of quotations are cited within the note, including location information for unpublished materials. At the end of each volume there is a bibliography of published works cited.

The initial identification of a person generally includes the full name, followed by any nickname or pseudonym, dates of birth and death, and a brief note on his or her career or activity at the time of first reference; any dubious information is preceded by a question mark. Subsequent reference will not repeat this information, but may expand on it as an individual changes name, role, or occupation; readers who do not read sequentially should use the index for the location of this information. Short biographies of recipients and other persons as well as brief accounts of publications and institutions referred to with some frequency in the letters can be found in the appendix, "Profiles." Fuller detail concerning editorial practice, including abbreviations, notations, idiosyncrasies of Beckett's usage, as well as a discussion of the editorial principles of translation, are presented later in the introductory matter. A chronology for each year provides an overview and precedes the letters for each year.

THE FOUR VOLUMES

The original contract for the edition called for three volumes of letters, but the quantity of the sixty years of correspondence quickly made four volumes more practical. The divisions between the volumes presented themselves rather naturally.

Volume I (1929–1940) begins with a letter written from Germany to James Joyce in Paris; it ends with a letter to Marthe Arnaud, the companion of Bram van Velde, written as the Nazis were about to occupy Paris. In the eleven years represented in Volume I, Beckett explores a world beyond Ireland: he is on the move, from his post at the École Normale Supérieure to his lectureship at Trinity College Dublin, from