

Boston College Collection of Yeats Family Papers

1891-1964, undated (bulk 1900-1940)

MS.1986.054

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Archives and Manuscripts Department

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Summary Information

Library Unit	Archives and Manuscripts Department
Creator	Yeats, Elizabeth Corbet, 1868-1940
Creator	Yeats, Georgie, d. 1968
Creator	Yeats, Jack B. (Jack Butler), 1871-1957
Creator	Yeats, John Butler, 1839-1922
Creator	Yeats, Lily, 1866-1949
Creator	Yeats, W. B., (William Butler), 1865-1939
Title	Boston College collection of Yeats family papers
Date [bulk]	Bulk, 1900-1940
Date [inclusive]	1884-1964, undated
Extent	8.0 Linear feet (18 boxes and 3 reels)
Language	English
Abstract	The Boston College collection of Yeats family papers includes artwork, correspondence, manuscripts, notebooks, and photographs by and about siblings W. B., Elizabeth Corbet, Lily, and Jack B. Yeats; their father, John Butler Yeats; and the wife of W. B., Georgie Yeats. It also documents the running of Cuala Press, a Yeats family business.

Preferred Citation note

Identification of item, Box number, Folder number, Boston College collection of Yeats family papers,
MS.1986.054, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Processed by Annalisa Moretti, January 2017. This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit.

Restrictions on access

Collection is open for research.

Restrictions on use

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Provenance

The bulk of the collection was purchased from Michael Yeats through Kenny's Bookshops & Art Galleries in 1993. The remainder includes gifts from Brian and June Leeming (1989) and Michael Yeats (1994), and purchases from Maurice F. Neville (1981), Bertram Rota (1994), Spaulding Co. (1995), Emerald Isle Books (1995, 1997), George Robert Minkoff, Inc. (1998, 1999), Roy Davids Ltd. (1999), and De Burca Rare Books (2001, 2002).

Processing Information note

The Boston College collection of Yeats family papers was originally processed as multiple collections: Elizabeth Corbet Yeats collection, MS.1986.054; Jack Butler Yeats collection, MS.1986.164; William Butler Yeats notebooks and manuscripts, MS.1992.012; William Butler Yeats family correspondence, MS.1993.035; John Butler Yeats collection, MS.1994.017; William Butler Yeats miscellaneous correspondence, MS.1995.004; and Margot Ruddock-William Butler Yeats collection, MS.1999.013. The materials were reprocessed into a single collection in 2016.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Marion Doyle - William Butler Yeats collection, MS.1997.033, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

Lady Gregory collection, MS.1995.028, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

Cuala Press printed materials, MS.2005.035, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

Biographical note: W. B. Yeats

Poet and author W. B. (William Butler) Yeats was born on June 13, 1865, in Dublin, Ireland, the eldest child of John Butler Yeats and Susan Mary Pollexfen. For much of their childhood, W. B. and his siblings alternated living with their parents in various artist colonies in England and Ireland and staying with their mother's family in Sligo, Ireland.

As a young man, W. B. was drawn to Irish culture, legend, and art. He began to write poetry and drama around 1884. Some of his early work appeared in *The Gael* and *The Boston Pilot*. In 1889 his first significant publication, *The Wanderings of Oisín and other poems*, was released. A few years later he helped found the Irish Literary Society in London.

W. B. was fascinated by the occult, joined Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, and later became a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Lady Gregory, his friend and patron, shared his interests. Other occult interests throughout his life included spiritualism, automatic writing, and interpreting dreams and visions (a pursuit he shared with his sister Lily). The poetic expression of these influences can be seen in poems such as "The Vision" (1926).

In 1889 W. B. met Maud Gonne, an Irish nationalist and artist. She became his muse, and he harbored strong feelings for her for many years. Gonne rejected several marriage proposals from him, and in 1916 her adult daughter, Iseult, also turned down a proposal from him. A year later, W. B. married Bertha Georgie Hyde-Lees, known to most as Georgie, but to W.B. as George. Together they had two children, Anne and Michael.

Following the Irish War of Independence, W. B. was appointed a senator of the Irish Free State in 1923. He also won the Nobel Prize for Literature in that year. In 1935 he began an affair with Margot Ruddock, an actress whose stage name was Margot Collis. Their relationship was memorialized in two poems by him: "Sweet Dancer" and "A Crazy Girl".

W. B. Yeats died on January 28, 1939, in France, after years of frequent ill health.

Sources

Allison, Jonathan. "Yeats, William Butler." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Brown, Terence. "Yeats, William Butler." In *Cambridge Dictionary of Irish Biography*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press. <http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9160>

Foster, R. F. "Yeats, William Butler (1865–1939), poet." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37061>

Biographical note: Lily Yeats

Susan Mary "Lily" Yeats was born on August 25, 1866, in Sligo, Ireland, the second surviving child of John Butler Yeats and Susan Mary Pollexfen. As a child, she often lived with her maternal grandparents in Sligo because of frequent illness. She attended art school in the early 1880s in London. In 1888 she began working in an embroidery workshop at Kelmescott House run by May Morris, William Morris's daughter. She worked there until 1894.

In 1900 Lily and her sister Elizabeth became the guardians of their fifteen-year-old cousin, Ruth Pollexfen, and shortly after they moved to Dublin. In 1902 they helped to found the Dun Emer Press, and in 1908 they began their own business, Cuala Industries. Despite the quality of Lily's work, the embroidery section of Cuala had frequent financial difficulties. During the 1920s her health began to fail due to thyroid problems, and in 1932 the embroidery business had to close. She continued to do embroidery work on her own. She died on January 5, 1949.

Sources

Allen, Nicholas. "Yeats, Susan Mary ('Lily')." In *Cambridge Dictionary of Irish Biography*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press. <http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9159>

Bowe, Nicola Gordon. "Yeats, Susan Mary [Lily] (1866–1949), embroiderer." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/61425>

Coleman, Zoë. "Susan and Elizabeth, the Yeats Sisters: From the Dun Emer Guild to Cuala Industries." Women's Museum of Ireland. <http://womensmuseumofireland.ie/articles/susan-and-elizabeth-the-yeats-sisters>

Dargavel, John. "Charles and Ruth Lane Poole: Lives." National Archives of Australia. <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/uncommon-lives/charles-and-ruth-lane-poole/lives.aspx>

Biographical note: Elizabeth Corbet Yeats

Elizabeth Corbet Yeats (known by her family as "Lollie") was born on March 11, 1868, in London, the third surviving child of John Butler Yeats and Susan Mary Pollexfen. In the 1880s she began writing and contributed to *The Pleiades*, an amateur magazine she created with friends. She completed training as a kindergarten teacher in 1892 and taught art for several years afterwards. She worked as a publisher during this time.

In 1900 Elizabeth and her sister Lily became the guardians of their fifteen-year-old cousin, Ruth Pollexfen, and shortly after they moved to Dublin. In 1902 they helped to found the Dun Emer Press,

and in 1908 they began their own business, Cuala Industries. In her capacity as the head of Cuala Press, Elizabeth oversaw production of a number of her brother W. B.'s books and also did a good business selling cards, calendars, and prints. However, as Elizabeth grew older and began to suffer from ill health, her ability to run the business declined. On January 16, 1940, she died of heart failure in Dublin.

Sources

Allen, Nicholas. "Yeats, Elizabeth Corbet ('Lollie')." In *Cambridge Dictionary of Irish Biography*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press. <http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9156>

Coleman, Zoë. "Susan and Elizabeth, the Yeats Sisters: From the Dun Emer Guild to Cuala Industries." Women's Museum of Ireland. <http://womensmuseumofireland.ie/articles/susan-and-elizabeth-the-yeats-sisters>

Dargavel, John. "Charles and Ruth Lane Poole: Lives." National Archives of Australia. <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/uncommon-lives/charles-and-ruth-lane-poole/lives.aspx>

Biographical note: Jack B. Yeats

Jack B. Yeats was born on August 29, 1871, in London, the youngest child of John Butler Yeats and Susan Pollexfen. He spent much of his childhood in Sligo, Ireland, at his maternal grandparents' home. As a young man he moved to London and attended a number of art schools while also doing illustration work to support his family. He also wrote, particularly plays.

After several years of courtship, he married Mary Cottenham "Cottie" White in 1894. Jack found success as an artist. His works frequently featured common Irish people, figures of legend, and unusual characters, such as performers from the circus and Wild West shows. His art was exhibited in many places, including London and New York City. He also contributed art to Cuala Industries, which was run by his sisters. He experienced some difficulty in his career around 1915 when he began to experiment with color and work in oils, a medium with which he had no previous experience. This led to several years of depression. He recovered from this, became known for his use of color, and was prolific, producing more than a thousand oil paintings in his lifetime. He died on March 28, 1957.

Sources

Arnold, Bruce. "Yeats, Jack Butler." In *Cambridge Dictionary of Irish Biography*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press. <http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9157>

Encyclopedia Britannica. "Jack Butler Yeats, Irish Painter." Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 2005. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jack-Butler-Yeats>

Biographical note: John Butler Yeats

John Butler Yeats was born March 18, 1839, in Lawrencetown, County Down, Ireland, to Reverend William Butler Yeats and Jane Grace Corbet. He wanted to be an artist from a young age, but instead studied law and became a barrister. He married Susan Mary Pollexfen, a sister of one of his school friends, in 1863. They had four children who survived to adulthood: W. B. (born 1865), Elizabeth Corbet (born 1866), Susan Mary "Lily" (born 1868), and John "Jack" Butler (born 1871).

Soon after marrying, John left his career as a barrister to devote himself to art, primarily portraiture. His new profession was not particularly lucrative, and he had difficulty delivering commissions on time. The family moved around often, and his wife and children frequently lived with his in-laws in Sligo, Ireland. In 1908 after the death of his wife, he moved to New York City, intending only to visit; however, he stayed for over a decade, until his death. He became a well known fixture in New York artistic society. He died of heart failure on February 2, 1922.

Sources

Anglesea, Martyn. "Yeats, John Butler." In *Cambridge Dictionary of Irish Biography*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press. <http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a9158>

Biographical note: Georgie Yeats

Bertha Georgie Hyde-Lees (known as "George" by her family) was born on October 16, 1892, in Fleet, Hampshire, England, to William Gilbert Hyde Lees and Edith Ellen "Nelly" Woodmass. After her father's death in 1909, her mother married Henry T. Tucker, who was a part of the same social circle as W. B. Yeats. Georgie studied art, languages, and religion, both formally and informally, and had a deep interest in the occult. She became acquainted with W. B. at seances they both attended. In 1917 he proposed to her and she accepted, despite being thirty years his junior. They married on October 20, 1917. Shortly after they were married, Georgie began to experiment with automatic writing to help inspire her husband, and the couple engaged in the activity frequently.

Georgie and W. B. had two children together, Anne and Michael. After the deaths of her sisters-in-law, Elizabeth Corbet and Lily Yeats, she took over running their business, Cuala Press. After W. B.'s death in 1939, she served as his literary executor. She died on August 23, 1968, having willed Thoor Ballylee, the castle which she and her husband refurbished, to the state, and W. B.'s manuscripts to the National Library of Ireland.

Sources

Longenbach, James. "An Imperfect Life: On George and W. B. Yeats." In *The Nation*, May 18, 2011. <https://www.thenation.com/article/imperfect-life-george-and-wb-yeats/>

Historical note: Cuala Industries and Cuala Press

Cuala Industries was established in 1908 by Elizabeth Corbet Yeats and Lily Yeats, after they left the Dun Emer Guild, which they had founded six years before with Evelyn Gleeson. Cuala Industries included an embroidery, weaving, and tapestry studio; a printing press; and a bindery. Cuala, like Dun Emer before it, was meant to promote Irish crafts made from Irish materials, and to employ Irish women. The majority of its employees were young local girls. Lily ran the embroidery studio; Elizabeth was the director of the printing and bindery portion of the business; and their brother W. B. was the literary editor. Cuala Press printed 66 titles before it ceased publishing books in 1946, including works by W. B. Yeats, George Russell, and Lady Gregory. The Press also printed cards, calendars, and other artwork. Jack Yeats designed some of the prints published by the Press.

Cuala Press had difficulty competing with more modern and industrialized publishers and had frequent financial difficulties. After Elizabeth's death in 1940, W. B.'s wife, Georgie, took over as director of the Press until her death in 1968.

Sources

Baskin, Lisa Unger. "A Gathering from the Dun Emer Press & the Cuala Press." *The Massachusetts Review* 28, no. 3 (1987). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25089906>.

Murray, Simone. "The Cuala Press: Women, publishing, and the conflicted genealogies of 'feminist publishing'," *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 27, iss. 5-6 (2004). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2004.09.005>.

Scope and Contents note

This collection documents the Yeats family through their artwork, correspondence, manuscripts, notebooks, and photographs. Materials were created by siblings W. B., Elizabeth Corbet, Lily, and Jack B. Yeats; their father, John Butler Yeats; and the wife of W. B., Georgie Yeats. Topics include W. B.'s writing projects, business matters, and family matters; W. B.'s and Lily's interest in the occult and psychic visions; and Elizabeth's management of Cuala Press, a family business. In addition, the collection includes extensive correspondence between W. B. and his mistress Margot Ruddock, and between Ruddock and the Indian guru Purohit Swami, with whom W. B. translated *The Ten Principal Upanishads*. Notable materials include notebooks containing drafts of W. B.'s works "Love and Death," *Supernatural Songs*, and *The Wanderings of Oisín*; portraits, caricatures, and photographs of W. B.; and drawings by W. B., Jack B., and John Butler Yeats. Cards, calendars, and a finely detailed embroidery offer examples of work produced by the Yeats at Cuala Industries.

Arrangement note

The collection is arranged into seven series: I. Elizabeth Corbet Yeats correspondence; II. Georgie Yeats correspondence; III. Jack B. Yeats papers; IV. John Butler Yeats papers; V. Lily Yeats correspondence; VI. W. B. Yeats papers; and VII. Cuala Industries.

Series III is arranged into three subseries: A. Correspondence; B. Drawings; and C. Manuscripts. Series IV is arranged into two subseries: A. Correspondence and B. Drawings. Series VI is arranged into three subseries: A. Correspondence; B. Graphic materials; and C. Writings. Series VI, subseries A is further arranged into two sub-subseries, 1. About W. B. and 2. By W. B.

Materials contained in each series are authored by that person, except where specifically noted otherwise. Names in folder titles indicate recipients or subjects.

Materials are arranged alphabetically.

Collection Inventory

Series I: Elizabeth Corbet Yeats correspondence, 1904-1926, undated

Scope and Contents note

Correspondence mainly concerns Cuala Press business matters and consists of letters, invoices, and samples sent to customers.

Blunt, Wilfrid Scawen, 1906	Box 1	Folder 1-2
Button, William, 1922-1923	Box 1	Folder 3-8
Matthews, Elkin, 1904-1909	Box 1	Folder 9-13
Salt, Dr., 1923-1926	Box 1	Folder 14-15
Shelly, Mr., 1907 August 12	Box 1	Folder 16
Warburton, Thomas, 1920	Box 1	Folder 17-19
Unidentified, 1920, undated	Box 1	Folder 20-22

Series II: Georgie Yeats correspondence, 1918-1938

Byron, Miss, circa 1930 September 17	Box 1	Folder 23
Murphy, Miss, 1938 January 27-29	Box 1	Folder 24-25
Yeats, Elizabeth Corbett, 1918 February 7	Box 1	Folder 26

Series III: Jack B. Yeats papers, 1901-1939

Subseries A: Correspondence, 1901-1939

Carthew, Miss (includes a drawing), 1909 January 4	Box 1	Folder 27
Matthews, Elkin, no year July 10	Box 1	Folder 28
Waller, Pickford, 1909, 1924	Box 1	Folder 29-30
Unidentified, 1901, 1932-1939	Box 1	Folder 31-33

Subseries B: Drawings, 1909

Brooks, Van Wyck, pencil drawing, 1909	Box 10	Folder 1
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Subseries C: Manuscripts, before 1918

Scope and Contents note

This subseries contains two manuscripts of an unfinished play co-authored with William Robert Gregory, the son of Lady Gregory.

"The Risen Wind, or The Sale of the Peri," play, before 1918	Box 1	Folder 34-35
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Series IV: John Butler Yeats papers, 1913-1954, undated

Subseries A: Correspondence, 1913-1921, undated

Boyd, Ernest, 1921, undated	Box 1	Folder 37-40
Buss, Miss, 1920	Box 1	Folder 41-42
Ivan, Miss, 1913 October 9-1919 December 30	Box 1	Folder 43
Redmond, Miss, undated	Box 1	Folder 44

Subseries B: Drawings, 1920-1954, undated

Beauchamp, Geraldine, pencil drawing, undated	Box 10	Folder 2
Yeats, Lily, lithograph reproduction of drawing, 1954 September 30	Box 10	Folder 3
Unidentified woman, pencil drawing, 1920 February	Box 1	Folder 44

Series V: Lily Yeats correspondence, 1914-1937

Scope and Contents note

This series also includes a manuscript recounting one of Lily Yeats's visions.

Account of vision, 1916 August 28	Box 1	Folder 45
Campbell, Nancy, 1914 July 25	Box 1	Folder 46
D'Esterre-Keeling, Elsa, circa 1916 February 25	Box 1	Folder 47
Elton, Oliver, 1916 August 29	Box 1	Folder 48
Hamilton, G. E., 1915 October 22	Box 1	Folder 49
Murphy, Miss, 1937 November 19	Box 1	Folder 50

Series VI: W. B. Yeats papers, 1884-1964, undated

Subseries A: Correspondence, 1891-1938, undated

Sub-subseries 1: About W. B., 1936-1937

Purohit, Swami to Margot Ruddock, 1936-1937	Box 1	Folder 51-60
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Sub-subseries 2: By W. B., 1891-1938, undated

Barnes, George, 1937	Box 2	Folder 1-4
Boyd, Ernest, undated	Box 2	Folder 5
Finberg, H. P. R., 1923-1924	Box 2	Folder 6-15
Gough, Margaret, 1933-1934	Box 2	Folder 16-17
Graves, A. P. (Albert Phelps), undated	Box 2	Folder 18
Hyde, Douglas, 1898 April 25	Box 2	Folder 19
Meynell, Wilfrid, 1907 December	Box 2	Folder 20
Pyper, W. J. Stanton, 1900-1901	Box 2	Folder 21-25
Ruddock, Margot, 1934-1937, undated	Box 2	Folder 26-45
	Box 3	Folder 1-13
Sargent, Jessie W., 1904 October 1	Box 3	Folder 14
Staniforth, Maxwell, 1912 August 29	Box 3	Folder 15
Story, Mr., no year July 11	Box 3	Folder 16
Yeats, Elizabeth Corbet, 1913-1938, undated	Box 3	Folder 17-47
	Box 4	Folder 1-35
Yeats, John Butler, 1894-1921, undated	Box 4	Folder 36-49
	Box 5	Folder 1-42
	Box 9	Folder 1
Yeats, Lily, 1891-1938	Box 6	Folder 1-40
	Box 7	Folder 1-43
	Box 8	Folder 1-26
Unidentified, undated	Box 8	Folder 27-28

Subseries B: Graphic materials, 1900-1964, undated

Scope and Contents note

This subseries includes portraits, drawings, and photographs of W. B. Yeats and one set of drawings by W. B. Yeats.

Kernoff, Harry. Portrait of W. B. Yeats, 1964	Box 8	Folder 29
MacNie, Isa M. "Chin-angles, or how the poets passed," caricature, undated	Box 8	Folder 30
	Box 10	Folder 4
Stish. "Senator Yeates," caricature, undated	Box 8	Folder 33
Yeats, W. B. Collage of drawings, 1900 October	Box 9	Folder 1
Unknown. Photograph, copy prints, and contact print of W. B. Yeats, 1903 November	Box 8	Folder 31
Unknown. Photomechanical print of W. B. Yeats, undated	Box 8	Folder 32
Unknown. Portrait of W. B. Yeats, undated	Box 8	Folder 34
Subseries C: Writings, 1884-1934, undated		
<i>Estrangement</i> and <i>The Death of Synge</i> , notebook, 1905-1923	Box 12	
Scope and Contents note		
Includes drafts of several additional poems, including "Annunciation" and "Leda and the Swan".		
"For Anne Gregory," poem, 1930 September	Box 8	Folder 35
<i>The Irish Statesman</i> , announcement, undated	Box 8	Folder 36

"Love and Death," notebooks, 1884 [http://hdl.handle.net/2345/2006]	Box 13	Folder 1-5
"Memoirs," unpublished manuscript draft, 1916-1917	Box 14	
"The Praise of Deirdre," poem, 1906 October 4	Box 8	Folder 37
Preface to H. P. R. Finberg translation of <i>Axël</i> by Auguste, Comte de Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, before 1925	Box 8	Folder 38
<i>Supernatural Songs</i> , notebook, 1934	Box 15	
<i>The Trembling of the Veil</i> , incomplete manuscript, before 1922	Box 11	
<i>The Wanderings of Oisín</i> , incomplete, notebook, before 1889	Box 16	
<i>The Wind among the Reeds</i> , notebook, 1893 August 29	Box 17	
"The Withering of the Bough," poem, undated	Box 8	Folder 39

Series VII: Cuala Industries, 1910-1949, undated

Advertisements, circa 1910s-1940s	Box 8	Folder 40
Card samples, undated	Box 8	Folder 41
Pricing lists, 1918-1920, undated	Box 8	Folder 42
Yeats, Jack B. Broadsheet advertisements, undated	Box 8	Folder 43
Yeats, Jack B. "Ex Libris" book plate, undated	Box 8	Folder 44
Yeats, Jack B. Illustrated calendar, 1910	Box 9	Folder 3
Yeats, Jack B. "The Midland Toast," hand colored print, undated	Box 8	Folder 45
Yeats, Lily and Bridig O'Brian embroidery, "The proud and careless notes live on but bless our hands that ebb	Box 19	

away" (illustrating the W. B. Yeats poem "The Players
Ask For A Blessing On the Psalteries and Themselves"),
probably 1919-1921
