Boston College Collection of Yeats Family Papers

1891-1964, undated (bulk 1900-1940)

MS.1986.054

http://hdl.handle.net/2345.2/MS1986-054

Archives and Manuscripts Department

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Summary Information

Creator: Yeats, Jack B. (Jack Butler)
Creator: Yeats, Georgie
Creator: Yeats, W. B. (William Butler)
Creator: Yeats, Elizabeth Corbet, 1868-1940
Creator: Yeats, Lily
Creator: Yeats, John Butler

Title: Boston College collection of Yeats family papers

Collection Identifier: MS.1986.054

Date [inclusive]: 1884-1964, undated
Date [bulk]: 1900-1940

Physical Description: 8 Linear Feet (18 boxes and 3 reels)

Language of the Material: 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

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
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Restrictions on access
Collection is open for research.

Processing Information

Provenance

Related Materials

Related Materials

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 Oisin 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 Crazed Girl".

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

Sources


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 Kelmscott 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


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


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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


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


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

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


Scope and Contents

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 Oisin; 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**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correspondent</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blunt, Wilfrid Scawen, 1906</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Button, William, 1922-1923</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 3-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthews, Elkin, 1904-1909</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 9-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt, Dr., 1923-1926</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelly, Mr., 1907 August 12</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warburton, Thomas, 1920</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 17-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified, 1920, undated</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 20-22</td>
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</table>

**Series II: Georgie Yeats correspondence, 1918-1938**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correspondent</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Byron, Miss, circa 1930 September 17</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy, Miss, 1938 January 27-29</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 24-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeats, Elizabeth Corbett, 1918 February 7</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 26</td>
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</table>

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

**Subseries A: Correspondence, 1901-1939**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correspondent</th>
<th>Box</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carthew, Miss (includes a drawing), 1909 January 4</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthews, Elkin, no year July 10</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waller, Pickford, 1909, 1924</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 29-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified, 1901, 1932-1939</td>
<td>box 1</td>
<td>folder 31-33</td>
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</table>

**Subseries B: Drawings, 1909**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correspondent</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brooks, Van Wyck, pencil drawing, 1909</td>
<td>box 10</td>
<td>folder 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subseries C: Manuscripts, before 1918**
Scope and Contents
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

Series IV: John Butler Yeats papers, 1913-1954, undated

Subseries A: Correspondence, 1913-1921, undated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correspondence</th>
<th>Box</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boyd, Ernest, 1921, undated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buss, Miss, 1920</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan, Miss, 1913 October 9-1919 December 30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redmond, Miss, undated</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

Subseries B: Drawings, 1920-1954, undated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drawings</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beauchamp, Geraldine, pencil drawing, undated</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeats, Lily, lithograph reproduction of drawing, 1954 September 30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentified woman, pencil drawing, 1920 February</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Series V: Lily Yeats correspondence, 1914-1937

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correspondence</th>
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<th>Folder</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Account of vision, 1916 August 28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell, Nancy, 1914 July 25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D'Esterre-Keeling, Elsa, circa 1916 February 25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elton, Oliver, 1916 August 29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton, G. E., 1915 October 22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy, Miss, 1937 November 19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

Subseries A: Correspondence, 1891-1938, undated

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correspondence</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purohit, Swami to Margot Ruddock, 1936-1937</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>51-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Date/Year</td>
<td>Box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barnes, George</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boyd, Ernest</td>
<td>Undated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finberg, H. P. R.</td>
<td>1923-1924</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gough, Margaret</td>
<td>1933-1934</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves, A. P. (Albert Phelps)</td>
<td>Undated</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyde, Douglas</td>
<td>1898 April 25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meynell, Wilfrid</td>
<td>1907 December</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyper, W. J. Stanton</td>
<td>1900-1901</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruddock, Margot</td>
<td>1934-1937, Undated</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sargent, Jessie W.</td>
<td>1904 October 1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staniforth, Maxwell</td>
<td>1912 August 29</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story, Mr., no year</td>
<td>July 11</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yeats, Elizabeth Corbet</td>
<td>1913-1938, Undated</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yeats, John Butler</td>
<td>1894-1921, Undated</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeats, Lily</td>
<td>1891-1938</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unidentified, Undated</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Subseries B: Graphic materials, 1900-1964, Undated**

**Scope and Contents**

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
- MacNie, Isa M. "Chin-angles, or how the poets passed," caricature, undated
- Stish. "Senator Yeates," caricature, undated
- Yeats, W. B. Collage of drawings, 1900 October
### Subseries C: Writings, 1884-1934, undated

- **Estrangement** and *The Death of Synge*, notebook. (Includes drafts of several additional poems, including "Annunciation" and "Leda and the Swan".), 1905-1923
- "For Anne Gregory," poem, 1930 September
- *The Irish Statesman*, announcement, undated
- "Love and Death," notebooks. (Notebook five contains inserts which also include the poems "A soul of the fountain" [partial] and "A sound came floating"), 1884
  - [Link to digital version](http://hdl.handle.net/2345/2006)
- "Memoirs," unpublished manuscript draft, 1916-1917
- "The Praise of Deirdre," poem, 1906 October 4
- Preface to H. P. R. Finberg translation of *Axéï* by Auguste, Comte de Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, before 1925
- *Supernatural Songs*, notebook , 1934
- *The Trembling of the Veil*, incomplete manuscript, before 1922
- *The Wanderings of Oisin*, incomplete, notebook, before 1889
- *The Wind among the Reeds*, notebook, 1893 August 29
- "The Withering of the Bough," poem, undated

### Series VII: Cuala Industries , 1910-1949, undated

- Advertisements, circa 1910s-1940s
- Card samples, undated
- Pricing lists, 1918-1920, undated
- Yeats, Jack B. Broadsheet advertisements, undated
- Yeats, Jack B. "Ex Libris" book plate, undated
- Yeats, Jack B. Illustrated calendar, 1910
- Yeats, Jack B. "The Midland Toast," hand colored print, undated
- Yeats, Lily and Brigid O'Brien embroidery, "The proud and careless notes live on but bless our hands that ebb"
away" (illustrating the W. B. Yeats poem "The Players Ask For A Blessing On the Psalteries and Themselves"), probably 1919-1921