

PRESS RELEASE

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**Emory University Libraries Acquire Correspondence of
Maud Gonne and William Butler Yeats**

The Special Collections and Archives Division of the Emory University Libraries has acquired the correspondence of Irish actress and activist Maud Gonne and renowned Irish poet and dramatist William Butler Yeats. Some 370 letters of Gonne to Yeats, and 30 of his to her comprise the collection.

One of the greatest English-language poets of the twentieth century, Yeats shaped both literature and history. Much of the power of Yeats' writing derived from his study of classical tradition and Irish folklore. For Yeats, Gonne was a figure of mythical significance, embodying Leda, Helen of Troy and Cathleen Ni Houlihan (the title character of Yeats' 1902 play).

When Yeats met Gonne in 1889, his life changed forever. Actress, activist, a person of striking stature and beauty, she was a firebrand who stirred him to strong feelings of Irish nationalism. She was also to share in the spiritual and occult interests that were the wellsprings of his art. Two years after their meeting, when Yeats proposed marriage, Maud Gonne refused. That refusal may have impelled Yeats to even greater work. Among the unpublished letters in the collection is a long letter from Gonne to Yeats explaining her reasons why the two could never marry.

Not many of Yeats' letters to Maud Gonne survive, due to her frequent moves, her fear of implicating Yeats as an Irish Nationalist by keeping his letters, and the damage caused when her Dublin house was raided by the Free State Police in 1922. A number of the letters have never been published.

As Ronald Schuchard, Goodrich C. White Professor of English at Emory, noted, "Yeats' unrequited love for Maud Gonne over forty years generated many of his greatest poems, and thus the four-hundred surviving letters that delineate their personal relationship in the midst of Irish politics and culture from 1893 to 1938 make their correspondence among the most important in twentieth-century Ireland."

For scholars researching the currents of thought, literary developments, and political motivations of this time of ferment, these letters are an important addition to the Emory Libraries' existing holdings of W. B. Yeats and his circle. Beyond their illumination of the lives and work of the two individual correspondents, the letters can serve as a kind of window on how literary productions drove social change and conversely, how the politics of Yeats's Ireland influenced the writers. As such they attest to the power of the human imagination to change history

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