

Thursday February 16th 2017

Letters between WB Yeats and James Joyce feature in new acquisition by the National Library – Minister Humphreys

The Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Heather Humphreys TD, has today (Thursday) announced that she has approved extra funding of more than €500,000 to the National Library of Ireland (NLI) for the acquisition of a significant number of manuscripts from the family of WB Yeats, including a collection of 10 signed letters and a postcard to WB Yeats from James Joyce. The collection was unveiled at a special reception at the NLI attended by Minister Humphreys and members of the Yeats family.

The highlight of the new acquisition is the collection of letters to Yeats from Joyce, an exceptional series discussing Joyce's literary work including *Exiles*, *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*; letters discussing Yeats's work; and a typescript copy of Joyce's letter to Lady Gregory, dated 22 November 1902, on the eve of his departure from Ireland, sent by her to Yeats. The letters span almost 24 years of correspondence and illuminate a deep literary friendship; in one of the last of the letters Joyce expresses his gratitude to Yeats as '*it is now thirty years since you first held out to me your helping hand.*'

The second key element of the acquisition is the 'Dream Diary' of Yeats's wife George. It lists dates, times, and location of sleeps with detailed accounts of her dreams, also with other spiritualist notes and related diagrams. Large portions of the diary are in the hand of WB Yeats, including a series of questions in Yeats's hand with answers by George in automatic writing. The acquisition also includes the Yeats family library which will join WB Yeats's personal library, already at the NLI. Included are books treasured by several generations of the Yeats family as well as a significant collection of Cuala Press material.

Speaking today Minister Humphreys said:

"This is an incredible collection of material, which will add greatly to the existing Yeats exhibition at the NLI, which already attracts over 70,000 visitors per year. The letters between Yeats and Joyce in particular are unique, offering an exceptional insight into Joyce's work and shining a light on the long friendship between these two literary giants.

"I am very pleased that I was in a position to approve additional funding for the Library to allow this acquisition to take place. The Yeats family library, which forms part of this acquisition, will complement WB Yeats's personal library, which has been held by the NLI for some time.

"The improving economy has allowed me to not only provide more day to day funding for the NLI and our other cultural institutions, it has also meant that my Department could support the acquisition of this incredibly important collection of material, which may otherwise have been

lost to the State. I would like to sincerely thank the Yeats family for their generous approach, and for working so closely with the expert staff at the NLI to facilitate the transfer of these items into the national collection. Over many years the Yeats family have provided a huge wealth of material to the National Library, making it home to the largest collection of Yeats papers in the world and a centre of Yeats scholarship.”

Director of the National Library of Ireland Dr Sandra Collins added:

“Across the world the name of WB Yeats is associated with Ireland. It is a deep and emotional connection that Irish people are proud of. The National Library of Ireland held a special place in WB Yeats’s heart, and the Yeats family have been hugely supportive over generations. We are so happy to be able to acquire these wonderful items to enhance the largest collection of WB Yeats material in the world, thanks to Minister Humphreys’ support. We look forward to welcoming everyone to enjoy these treasures in the National Library.”

Speaking on behalf of the Yeats family, Caitríona Yeats said:

“I am delighted that the National Library of Ireland has been able to add to their Yeats collection. This would not have been possible without the generous extra funding approved by Minister Heather Humphreys. The additional funds have allowed the purchase of the Dream Diary, thereby completing the set, the remaining Yeats family books which will now become part of the previously donated WB Yeats library, Cuala Press material (both original and modern) and the James Joyce letters. It is a great pleasure to see these important items remain in Ireland and to know that they will be available to scholars and visitors for many years into the future.”

ENDS

Please note: Photographs from the reception will be issued after the event by Mark Stedman.

Media Queries:

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Notes to Editors:

The Yeats family has been a longstanding supporter of the NLI and facilitated the Library’s acquisition of W.B. Yeats’s personal library in 2002. The family also donated a substantial collection of editions of the works of W.B. Yeats to the Library, along with biographical and critical works. In 2016, the medal awarded to W.B. Yeats for winning the Nobel Prize in Literature and the accompanying diploma were donated to the NLI by the Yeats family.

Thanks to a series of gifts from the Yeats family, the Yeats Collection at the National Library is now the largest archive of Yeats manuscripts and books anywhere in the world. The collection is at the heart of the award-winning exhibition: 'Yeats: The Life and Works of William Butler Yeats' which is free and open to all. Each year more than 70,000 visitors enjoy this exhibition in the National Library of Ireland on Kildare Street. Included in the display are original manuscripts of his poems and plays, material relating to the occult and examples of his automatic writing.

About the National Library of Ireland: The National Library of Ireland (NLI), located on Dublin's Kildare Street beside the Houses of the Oireachtas, was founded in 1877. Today, it includes the National Photographic Archive in Temple Bar and the Office of the Chief Herald of Ireland. The Library collects and makes available the shared memory of the Irish nation at home and abroad, caring for more than 10 million books, newspapers, manuscripts, prints, drawings, ephemera, photographs and digital media. Further information is available at www.nli.ie. Follow the NLI on Twitter [@NLIreland](https://twitter.com/NLIreland), Facebook [National Library of Ireland](https://www.facebook.com/NationalLibraryofIreland), [Flickr on the Commons](https://www.flickr.com/photos/nli/) and [Vimeo](https://www.youtube.com/user/NLIreland).