

## Althea Gyles collection

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MS 148 consists of holograph drafts of scenes from an untitled play, written on small sheets of lined paper and totalling 482 pages. MSS 150 and 155 are holograph copies of various works. MSS 151-154 and 156-158 are typescripts of Gyles' works, with manuscript corrections. MS 159 consists of various papers concerning Althea Gyles, including three letters sent to her niece Mrs Cazalet 1949-1951, printed copies of Gyles' poems and biographical notes. MS 1163 is a music manuscript of Carol of Goodwill, a poem by Althea Gyles, music by Joseph Holbrooke.

The Collection covers the year's c.1890-1957.

The physical extent of the collection is Around 30 items.

#### Introduction

Margaret Alethea Gyles (c. 1868 – 23 Jan 1949), known as Althea Gyles, was an Irish writer, poet and artist, mostly known for her book designs, particularly those of W. B. Yeats. Her artwork contributed to the developments of the Celtic Revival and English Decadence movements, alongside fellow figures such as AE Russell and Aubrey Beardsley.

Gyles was born in Kilmurry, County Waterford to George Gyles, a member of a 'prominent' old Anglo-Irish family, and Alithea Emma, the daughter of Edward Grey, Bishop of Hereford.

In 1889 Gyles went to Dublin to study art at a school in St. Stephen's Green. Soon after she met E. J. Dick, who invited her to live as part of the Theosophical Society's commune at 3 Ely Place. There she also met AE Russell, and in 1891 became associated with W. B. Yeats after he had joined the household. Gyles left the household after several disagreements, moving into 53 Mountpleasant Square in Dublin. She soon wrote an unpublished novel, *Woman without a Soul*, focusing on a magician who practiced black magic and animal sacrifices.

Gyles moved to London in 1892, and from 1893 began studying at the Slade School of Fine Art, where she began to write verse. Her poem *Dew-time* was published in *The Pall Mall Magazine*, influenced by AE Russell's work and occasionally worked over by Yeats. While mixing in London's literary circles she became acquainted with several writers, including Oscar Wilde, who was a great admirer of her art and would later request for her to illustrate some of his works.

In 1896 Gyles established a studio at a house in Fitzroy Square, where her friends included the art critic Lady Colin Campbell and *Yellow Book* artist Mabel Dearmer.

Several of her illustrations appeared in publications and works such as *The Commonweal* (1896) and T. W. Rolleston's *Deirdre: The Feis Ceoil Prize Cantata* (1897).

At this time both Yeats and Gyles were closely associated with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a secret society dedicated to the practice of the occult. The mystic iconography popularised by the Order inspired Gyles' wraparound designs for Yeats' *The Secret Rose* in 1897, with Celtic knotwork and naturalistic symbols such as roses, thorns, and roots. Yeats analysed her illustrations in his 1898 essay *A symbolic artist and the coming of symbolic art*, comparing her work to that of William Blake.

Gyles and Yeats continued to collaborate on designs for his books, contributing to *The Wind Among the Reeds* and *Poems* in 1899. Other covers produced by Gyles at this time included Father Matthew Russell's *The idylls of Killyowen* (1898), Ernest Dowson's *Decorations* (1899) and John White-Rodyng's *The Night* (1900).

In 1899 Gyles provided illustrations for Wilde's poem *The Harlot's House*, working with Leonard Smithers, a publisher, pornographer and patron of Aubrey Beardsley. Their relationship developed into a 'disastrous' affair, which would eventually cause the breakdown of Gyles' health, as well as the end of her friendship with Yeats. Through her interest in the occult, Gyles was also involved with Aleister Crowley, and would eventually go on to inspire the character of Hypatia Gay in Crowley's short story *At the Fork of the Roads* (1909).

In poor health and in financial difficulty, Gyles' design work slowed by the early 1900s, contributing one of her last book covers to Arthur Humphrey's Wilde anthology, *Sebastian Melmoth* (1905). However, she intermittently had verse printed in publications such as the *Saturday Review* (1900), *Kensington* (1901), *Venture* (1905), *The Academy* (1906), as well as the occultist magazine *Orpheus* (1912).

In later life Gyles regularly lived in poverty and instead gravitated towards small arts and crafts movements and religious communities, befriended by literary figures including Eleanor Farjeon and Compton and Faith Mackenzie. She was particularly drawn to the Order of the Holy Mount in Folkestone, which in [turn] with her publisher, Grant Richards, asking for her memoirs, inspired her novel *Pilgrimage* (1919), with characters based on AE Russell and Yeats. The novel was later rejected by Richards.

Gyles' last known address was 19 Tredown Road, Lewisham, where she lived in a room 'empty but for a chaise longue, some bric-à-brac', along with the manuscripts now held as part of the University of Reading's Special Collections. She died in

Kent in 1949 with several unfinished projects remaining after her death, including an alphabet design, *The alphabet of the wonderful wood*.

**NB: MS 148 and MS 1163 are currently MISSING (November 2018)**

**MS 148** Holograph drafts of scenes from untitled play - MISSING  
undated

Holograph drafts for:

Act 1 scene 1: Anty (?) & Mary

Act 1 scene 2: Druid Stones

Act 2 scene 1: Ethne & Cardinal

Act 2 scene 2: Cardinal & Ailing

Act 2 scene 3: Lisa & Malcolm

Act 3 scene 1: Ethne & Guilts, Greek Dance

Act 3 scene 2: Rose Garden

Act 4 scenes 1 & 2

Written on small sheets of lined paper, partially collated, mainly in black and blue ink but some pages in pencil

Some pages are damaged

8 folders (482 pages)

**MS 150** Holograph fair copies of poems  
undated

Pages are titled: Title page; For a sepulchre; The sword; [The outcast]; [The love of Christ]; Romantic landscape I; Romantic landscape II; From Rosamor dead to Favonius for whom she died; The outlaw; The garden at dusk; The heart-shaped space between the trees; Sympathy; To X.... who wrote in praise of my hands; Luenne the outlaw; Pierrot; The oriflamme

The manuscripts are written in violet ink on lined pages torn from an exercise book.

1 folder (16 pages)

**MS 151** Typescript of "Saint Margaret"  
undated  
the pages have some MS corrections

1 folder (19 pages)

- MS 152**      Typescript of "Aspiration"  
undated  
There are some MS corrections
- 1 folder (16 pages)
- MS 153**      Typescript of "The Christmas crib"  
undated  
There are some MS corrections
- 1 folder (10 pages)
- MS 154**      Typescript of "Winter"  
undated  
There are some MS corrections; An inscription on the verso of  
last page reads: "John Meade, Bridge House, Shepherd's Well,  
Dover".
- 1 folder (3 pages)
- MS 155**      Holograph of "Little Ivan's Christmas Tree"  
undated  
Pages are written in black ink on lined pages torn from exercise  
book, the first page is damaged.  
First page of holograph is damaged
- 1 folder (19 pages)
- MS 156**      Typescript of "Mrs Campion's Campaign"  
undated  
The typescript has some MS corrections and a MS sub-heading:  
Chapter 1 The Bolt from the Blue
- 1 folder (12 pages)
- MS 157**      Typescript of "Pilgrimage"  
undated  
The typescript has been arranged in 20 chapters (the last four of  
which are mis-numbered) and has some MS corrections.
- 248 pages

- MS 158**      Typescript of Essays II and III  
undated  
The typescript has some MS corrections
- 1 folder (11 pages)
- MS 159**      Miscellaneous papers concerning Althea Gyles  
c.1949-1957  
Papers include:  
MS letter from Clifford Bax to Mrs Cazalet, 24 February 1949  
MS letter from Cecil French to Mrs Cazalet, 24 February 1949  
Letter from Eleanor Farjeon to Mrs Cazalet, 16 May 1951 (TS  
copy)  
Notes from Lena Barrington sending Gyles' MSS to Ian Fletcher,  
14 June 1957
- Printed poems by Althea Gyles including: A child's Christmas  
carol; A Christmas ecstasy; A child's Christmas carol: the ox and  
the ass; A child's Christmas mystery; A child's Christmas carol  
[second version]; Carol of Brotherhood. All the poems except A  
child's Christmas carol and A Christmas ecstasy have been  
printed by Arthur Stace & Sons, Folkestone, for the order of the  
Holy Mount. Also included is a set of typescripts of these poems  
with a few MS corrections (12 pages)
- Typescripts of poems "A Flash" and "Pierrot", (3 pages)
- Printed obituary from a publication of the National Society for the  
Prevention of Cruelty to Children (Maud Gyles)
- Typescript list of works by Althea Gyles, being Ian Fletcher's  
brief description of the deposited papers, with some MS notes  
by him.
- Typescript, "A note on Althea Gyles (1869-1949) by Ian  
Fletcher, 1957.
- A small photograph of Lena Barrington
- MS 1163**      Music manuscript of "Carol of Goodwill", poem by Althea Gyles,  
music by Joseph Holbrooke - MISSING  
undated
- 1 folder (1 item)

