
Emlyn Williams letters to Katharine Cornell and Nancy Hamilton
1962-1980

Abstract: Welsh dramatist Emlyn Williams wrote these letters to his two friends, actress Katharine Cornell and lyricist Nancy Hamilton.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 099, F879
Title: Emlyn Williams letters to Katharine Cornell and Nancy Hamilton
Inclusive Dates: 1962-1980
Extent: 10 items (18 p.)
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 099, F879, Emlyn Williams letters to Katharine Cornell and Nancy Hamilton, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

Shelving Summary: Box 61, F879: Shelved in SPEC MSS 099 manuscript boxes
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Biographical Notes

Emlyn Williams

(George) Emlyn Williams was an actor and playwright best known for his stage thrillers, his autobiographical play *The Corn Is Green*, and for his one-man shows in which he portrayed Charles Dickens and Dylan Thomas.

Born November 26, 1905, in Mostyn, Flintshire, Wales, Williams was educated at Christ Church, Oxford, completing a M.A. in 1927. In the same year Williams began a long and distinguished career in the theatre, making his professional acting debut in the play *And So To Bed*. His semi-autobiographical play, *The Corn Is Green*, which he also directed, was later produced as a motion picture.

Overall, Emlyn Williams produced dozens of plays, several of which later appeared in book form. In addition, he wrote a number of screenplays, authored the novel *Headlong*, and published a two-part autobiography.

In 1955, Williams began performing as Dylan Thomas after reading the poet's works at a benefit for the latter's widow and children. His Dylan Thomas performance did not involve impersonating the writer, but consisted of readings from such works as *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* and *Adventures in the Skin Trade*. Emlyn Williams died on September 25, 1987, in London, England.

Katharine Cornell

Actress, producer, and manager Katharine Cornell was one of several actresses dubbed "First Lady of the American Theater."

Born February 16, 1893, in Berlin, Germany, Cornell had her acting debut while understudying at the Washington Square Players in New York in November 1916 at the age of twenty-three.

One day after she married Guthrie McClinton on September 8, 1921, Cornell began rehearsals as Sydney Fairfield in *A Bill of Divorcement* (opened on October 10, 1921), which brought her rave reviews and her first long run.

In 1931, Cornell and her husband Guthrie McClinton founded the Cornell-McClinton Corporation and began producing plays. Cornell, directed by McClinton, began a new career as the last great actress/manager in the American theater. Over twenty-nine years, a span exceeded only by the Theatre Guild and the Shuberts, Cornell and McClinton mounted twenty-four productions in New York City and revived "the road" through nationwide tours.

Guthrie McClinton died on October 29, 1961, and Cornell never returned to work. She died on June 9, 1974, at her home on Martha's Vineyard.

Nancy Hamilton

Lyricist, actress, scriptwriter, and playwright Nancy Hamilton, was one of the first women to succeed as a lyricist.
Born July 27, 1908, in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, Hamilton was the author of an Academy Award-winning documentary on the life of Helen Keller, *Helen Keller in Her Story*, and wrote the sketches and lyrics for several successful Broadway revues.

Hamilton died on February 18, 1985, in New York, NY.

**Sources:**


Scope and Content Note

Welsh dramatist Emlyn Williams wrote these letters to two friends, actress Katharine Cornell and lyricist Nancy Hamilton.

The first of the six of the letters which Emlyn Williams wrote to Katharine Cornell was a note of thanks for a message she sent to the cast of a play with which Williams was associated. The envelope is addressed to Cornell in care of Nancy Hamilton, suggesting a connection between Cornell and Hamilton.

Following the first somewhat formal letter, Williams's letters were warm and characterized by an obvious friendship between Williams, Cornell, and their spouses. Addressing the actress as "Kit," Williams encouraged Cornell to consider starring in a revival of The Corn is Green. About this time Williams must have inquired regarding motion picture rights, since a letter from Harold Freedman of Brandt & Brandt Dramatic Department, Inc. was enclosed outlining who held rights and when productions had occurred. In a long letter dated January 1, 1963, Williams addressed some of Cornell's concerns about embarking on a project producing and acting in The Corn is Green. He declined an alternative that had been suggested by Cornell and Nancy Hamilton, namely to write a play based on his book, George: An Early Autobiography (1961).

In his letters, Williams conveyed his enthusiasm, and his wife's, for the weekend visits made to Cornell's country home, spoke of future visits, and thanked Cornell for gifts. Williams also offered his critical advice regarding a play in which Cornell considered acting.

The three letters written by Williams to Nancy Hamilton express a long family friendship. Williams wrote of health concerns, his own and Hamilton's, of family news, and of a novel on which he had worked for fifteen months.
Selected Search Terms

Personal Names

Williams, Emlyn, 1905-1987--Correspondence.
Cornell, Katharine, 1893-1974--Correspondence.
Hamilton, Nancy, 1908-1985--Correspondence.
Freedman, Harold--Correspondence.

Topical Terms

Dramatists, American--20th century--Correspondence.
Actors and Actresses--20th century--Correspondence.

Form/Genre Terms

Correspondence.

Clippings (information artifacts)

Occupation

Dramatists.
Actors.
Actresses.

Personal Contributors

Cornell, Katharine, 1893-1974, correspondent.
Hamilton, Nancy, 1908-1985, correspondent.
Williams, Emlyn, 1905-1987, correspondent.

Related Materials in this Repository

This item forms part of MSS 099 Miscellaneous Literary and Historical Manuscripts.
Arrangement

The letters are arranged in chronological order.
Detailed Description of the Collection

Emlyn Williams autograph letter signed to Katharine Cornell, [1962] [Box 61 F879]
1 item (1 p.)

Harold Freedman typed letter signed to Emlyn Williams, 1962 September 25 [Box 61 F879]
1 item (1 p.)
The letter regards the motion picture rights to The Corn is Green.

Emlyn Williams autograph letter signed to Katharine Cornell, 1962 September 26 [Box 61 F879]
1 item (1 p.)

Emlyn Williams autograph letter signed to Katharine Cornell, 1962 September 29 [Box 61 F879]
1 item (1 p.)

Emlyn Williams autograph letter signed to Katharine Cornell, 1962 December 4 [Box 61 F879]
1 item (1 p.)

Emlyn Williams autograph letter signed to Katharine Cornell, 1963 January 1 [Box 61 F879]
1 item (4 p.)

Emlyn Williams autograph letter signed to Katharine Cornell, 1963 April 23 [Box 61 F879]
1 item (3 p.)

Emlyn Williams autograph letter signed to Katharine Cornell, 1964 February 29 [Box 61 F879]
1 item (1 p.)

Emlyn Williams autograph letter signed to Nancy Hamilton, [1978 March] [Box 61 F879]
2 items (2 p.)
Includes a clipping.

Emlyn Williams autograph letter signed to Nancy Hamilton, 1979 January 23 [Box 61 F879]
1 item (2 p.)