

**Inventory of the John Gielgud Correspondence to Katharine Cornell, Guthrie
McClintic, and Nancy Hamilton, 1958-1982**

*T-Mss 1990-008

Billy Rose Theatre Division



The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

New York, New York

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Descriptive Summary

Title: John Gielgud Correspondence to Katharine Cornell, Guthrie McClintic, and Nancy Hamilton, 1958-1982

Collection ID: *T- Mss 1990-008

Creator: John Gielgud

Extent: .2 linear feet; 1 box

Repository: The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
Billy Rose Theatre Division.

Administrative Information

Access: Collection is open to the public. Photocopying prohibited.

Publication Rights: For permission to publish contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

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Processing Information: The collection was originally processed in June, 1990. It was reprocessed with a finding aid written in 1998.

Biographical Notes

John Gielgud was born in London, England, on April 14, 1904. Since his first theatrical appearance in 1921 he has had a distinguished acting career on stage, in films, and on television. Between the 1950s and 1970s he had a significant directing career. He has written six autobiographical works.

Katharine ("Kit") Cornell was born in Germany on February 16, 1893. She became one of the leading stars of the American stage between the 1920s and 1950s. In 1921 she married Guthrie McClintic. Katharine Cornell died at her home on Martha's Vineyard on June 12, 1974.

Guthrie McClintic was born in Seattle in 1893. He began a distinguished career as a theater director and producer in 1921. Many of the productions he directed [such as *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1931)] featured his wife Katharine Cornell. McClintic died in 1961.

Nancy Hamilton was born in Pennsylvania on July 27, 1908. During the course of her long, versatile career she authored an award-winning documentary on the life of Helen Keller, wrote sketches and lyrics for several successful Broadway revues, and acted as assistant manager and understudy for *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* [European Theater of Operations production, 1944-1945]. Gielgud's correspondence to "Kit and Nancy" reveals that Katharine Cornell and Nancy Hamilton became close friends and neighbors after Guthrie McClintic's death in 1961. Miss Hamilton died in New York City on February 18, 1985.

Scope and Content Note

The John Gielgud correspondence consists of letters, postcards and Christmas cards sent by Gielgud to Katharine Cornell, Guthrie McClintic, and Nancy Hamilton between the years 1958 and 1982. The letters and cards are handwritten, with closings that frequently convey the well-wishes of both Gielgud and his long-time companion Martin. The collection also contains seven photographs - six of Gielgud and one of Martin's Pekingese named Caesar.

Most of the Christmas cards are undated. Gielgud generally recorded the month and day on his letters, but not the year. Because the letters continually refer to dramatic productions with which he was currently involved, the missing year dates can often be determined.

Gielgud's descriptions of the acting world document his generosity towards his fellow thespians, his reflectiveness as a critic of acting and directing, and his sensitivity to local performing conditions (theatre size, backstage maintenance, noise distractions, etc.). The numerous thumbnail assessments of plays mainly focus on the merits of particular productions (e.g., the 1965 Pittsburgh production of Albee's *Tiny Alice*), but sometimes also consider the quality of the play itself (e.g., Chekhov's *Ivanov*). Occasionally, Gielgud's critical tone becomes witty and satirical - as when he writes that the movie version of *Lost Horizon* should really be called "Hello, Dalai."

The reproductions of art masterpieces displayed on many of Gielgud's Christmas cards indirectly document his hobby of visiting art museums. Another documented hobby is jigsaw puzzles: one of the Christmas cards refers to a 2 ½-week-period during which Gielgud worked at completing a "mammoth Jigsaw Cézanne Still Life."

Besides the theater, frequent topics of the Gielgud correspondence include local weather conditions and hotel accommodations. On a more philosophical plane, the correspondence contains numerous bemused reflections on the illness and death of close friends and colleagues.

Organization

The John Gielgud Correspondence is arranged in chronological order according to the intended recipients of his messages. Photographs without an addressee have been placed in a separate folder.

Container Listing

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|------|------|--|
| b. 1 | f. 1 | Katharine Cornell and Guthrie McClintic Correspondence,
1958
2 items |
| b. 1 | f. 2 | Katharine Cornell Correspondence
6 items |
| b. 1 | f. 3 | Katharine Cornell and Nancy Hamilton Correspondence
9 items |
| b. 1 | f. 4 | Nancy Hamilton Correspondence
1959-1982
12 items |
| b. 1 | f. 5 | Photographs
1965-1966
5 items
Four photos are of Gielgud; one is of Martin's Pekingese. |