



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Correspondence with Edna St. Vincent Millay and Eugen Boissevain**

1926-1950

\*T-Mss 1984-002

## Summary

**Creator:** La Branche, Emla

**Title:** Correspondence with Edna St. Vincent Millay and Eugen Boissevain

**Date:** 1926-1950

**Source:** Gift, Erik Rhodes, 12/--/1984

**Abstract:** The Edna St. Vincent Millay correspondence consists primarily of letters from Ms. Millay and her husband to Emla La Branche. Included as well are clippings collected by Mrs. La Branche documenting the career of Edna St. Vincent Millay.

### Conditions Governing Access:

Photocopying prohibited.

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**Preferred citation:** Emla La Branche Correspondence with Edna St. Vincent Millay and Eugen Boissevain, \*T-Mss 1984-002, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

**Processing note:** Processed and machine-readable finding aid created by Mary Ellen Rogan and John Burchard.

## Creator History

Edna St. Vincent Millay, author, was born February 22, 1892. In 1917 her first volume of poetry was published. Her professional association with theater began when she performed with the Provincetown Playhouse. She later appeared in the first production of the Theatre Guild. In 1923 she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *The Harp Weaver and Other Poems*, and that same year married Eugen [also known as Ugin or Eugene] Boissevain. In her thirty-four year career she produced six plays, an opera libretto, and eleven volumes containing 500 poems. She died on October 19, 1950.

During the early 1930's, Millay and Boissevain became friends with Emla La Branche and her husband George after having been neighbors and acquaintances for some time. George Michel Lucien La Branche (also known as G.M.L. La Branche) was the author of books on fly fishing. Emla La Branche began collecting correspondence received from Ms. Millay and Mr. Boissevain as early as 1926. Particularly during and after World War II, Mrs. La Branche also received correspondence from various relatives of Mr. Boissevain, who was born in the Netherlands. After St. Vincent Millay's death, Emla La Branche actively participated in the organization of memorials to the poet, and in the efforts to collect and preserve her letters and memoirs.

## **Custodial History**

The Emla La Branche Correspondence was donated to the Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, in December, 1984, by Mr. Erik Rhodes.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Emla La Branche correspondence spans the period from 1926 to 1951. The bulk of the collection consists of chronologically arranged correspondence to Emla La Branche from Edna St. Vincent Millay, from Eugen Boissevain, and from Mr. Boissevain's relatives living in the Netherlands. The collection also includes a folder of undated letters, and one of newspaper and magazine clippings.

The letters of 1926-1939 are mostly directed to Emla La Branche (sometimes to Emla and George) from Ms. Millay or Mr. Boissevain. Most of this correspondence consists of light-hearted accounts of daily life interspersed with the planning of trips and holidays involving both couples. One finds many details about the lifestyle of Millay and Boissevain in their home at Steepletop in Austerlitz, New York. Other topics discussed include fishing trips, weekend activities, visits from acquaintances, trips to Islamorada, Florida, and shopping lists for items available in New York City. Accounts of Edna St. Vincent Millay's life as a writer are sparse. Short details of her illnesses are disclosed.

The correspondence from 1940-1949 includes a few letters similar to those above. However, the majority of the letters in this file are not directly related to Ms. Millay, or written to her or her husband. They are directed to Emla La Branche by relatives of Eugen Boissevain living in the Netherlands in 1945 and 1946. Mrs. La Branche had sent packages of American goods to them, and the letters were written to thank her for the gifts. The fervent expressions of gratitude for basic household commodities suggest the austerity of living conditions in much of Europe at the end of World War II.

The correspondence of 1950-1951 includes a short last letter to George and Emla La Branche from Edna St. Vincent Millay dated September 19th, 1950. It is followed by notes -- from various friends of the La Branches -- that discuss Ms. Millay's death and the collecting and editing of her letters. This folder also includes eulogies which contain quotations from her poetry: a radio tribute by Allan Ross Macdougall [the editor of her letters, published in 1952], broadcast on "The Voice of America" on October 25, 1950; and an editorial by Captain Ben Custer in the December 1, 1950 issue of *Poetry Pilot*. A May 15, 1951 letter from Mrs. Hugh Bullock, President of the Academy of American Poets, directs Mrs. La Branche's attention to a description of Mr. Macdougall's editing work contained in the May 1, 1951 issue of *Poetry Pilot* (the issue itself is included in this folder).

A folder of undated letters, primarily from Eugen Boissevain to Emla La Branche, contains mainly information about household affairs and upcoming visits with friends at Austerlitz, New York.

The newspaper and magazine clippings [all photocopies] are not numerous. Among the more significant ones are three articles in the *Dayton Herald Tribune* [dating from 1935, 1938, and 1949] and an article in the *Dayton Daily News* [date not visible]. These articles discuss Edna St. Vincent Millay's success as a poet, her love of horses, her fiction-writing under the pseudonym "Nancy Boyd," her 1935 trip to Paris in connection with her translation of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, and her husband's death in 1949. The August 31, 1949 obituary article on Eugen Boissevain is valuable for its information about his personal life, his career, and his relatives. Several clippings contain reproductions of photographs of Ms. Millay or Mr. Boissevain.

**Arrangement:** Chronological

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

Dramatists

### **Names**

La Branche, Emla

Boissevain, Eugen, -1949

La Branche, George M. L. (George Michel Lucien), 1875-1961

MacDougall, A. Kent (Allan Kent)

Millay, Edna St. Vincent, 1892-1950

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Correspondence 1926-1939 (30 items)
- b. 1 f. 2 Correspondence 1940-1949 (40 items)
- b. 1 f. 3 Correspondence 1950-1951 (13 items)
- b. 1 f. 4 Undated correspondence (15 items)
- b. 1 f. 5 Clippings n.d. (14 items)