

---

## **Finding Aid for the Ella Young Papers D1956.1**

Finding aid prepared by Michael P. Palmer, MLIS

Ella Strong Denison Library

1090 Columbia Ave

Claremont, 91711

(909) 607-3941

denison@scrippscollege.edu

May 2011

---

**Title:** Ella Young Papers.

**Collection number:** D1956.1

**Contributing Institution:** Ella Strong Denison Library

1090 Columbia Ave

Claremont, 91711

**Language:** The materials are written in English.

**Physical Description:** 0.4 linear foot1 box (13 folders).

**Date (inclusive):** 1931-2004

**Date (bulk):** (bulk 1951-1956).

**Abstract:** Correspondence, photographs, postcards, writings, reminiscences, and other materials relating to the Irish poet, political activist, and mystic Ella Young. The bulk of the collection consists of letters exchanged between Young and Scripps College Librarian Dorothy Drake from 1951 to 1955, letters addressed from Young to Elsa Gidlow between 1951 and 1956, and letters between Gidlow and Drake and Sybil M. Fielder, her successor as Scripps College Librarian, from 1953 to 1972. The collection includes a recorded interview, together with a published account, with photographs, of a visit to Young in 1951 by Drake and two colleagues; another recorded interview with Young from 1953; a small number of her interpretations of Irish traditions; and number of poems by Gidlow.

**Creator:** Young, Ella, 1867-1956

**Restrictions on Access**

The collection is available for research.

**Restrictions on Use and Reproduction**

For permission to reproduce or to publish, please consult Ella Strong Denison Library Special Collections staff.

**Source of Acquisition**

Gift of Ella Young, 1951-1956, and of Elsa Gidlow, 1957-1972.

**Processing Information**

Processed by Sharon A. Pittman for Archival Studies 311, Claremont Graduate University, Spring 2010; reprocessed by Michael P. Palmer, MLIS, April 2011.

**Preferred Citation**

Ella Young Papers, Special Collections, Ella Strong Denison Library, Scripps College, Claremont, California.

**Biography**

Ella Young, poet and mythographer, was born in Ballymena, co. Antrim, on December 26, 1867, the eldest of the eight children of James Bristow Young, a cornbroker, and Matilda Ann, née Russell. The family were Presbyterian and unionist. They moved several times during Ella's childhood, setting eventually in Rathmines, Dublin, where she completed her education, studying at Alexandra College and graduating BA in law and political science from the Royal University in 1898. She joined the Dublin branch of the Theosophical Society in the 1890s and became a protégé of Irish nationalist and writer George William Russell. Her first collection, *Poems*, was published in 1906 by the Tower Press, with which Russell was closely associated. She subsequently published two more collections of poetry in Ireland, *The Rose of Heaven* (1920) and *The Weird of Fionavar* (1922).

Young had experienced visions and undergone mystical experiences from childhood, and a literal engagement with Irish mythology became the defining force in her life. W. B. Yeats respected her occult powers enough to correspond with her in 1903, but by 1909 he had become disenchanted with her claims to wisdom and insight. In 1909, Young, who had learned Irish, published *The Coming of Lugh*, the first of several collections of simplified versions of Irish mythology modeled on Fiona Macleod's *The Laughter of Peterkin* (1897). Two collections were embellished with illustrations and decorations by her close friend Maud Gonne, Yeats' erstwhile muse.

Young became an enthusiastic nationalist, a member of the Daughters of Ireland, and a friend of Patrick Pearse and Constance Markiewicz; she claimed to have hidden smuggled munitions and other supplies for the Republicans during the Easter Rising. She interpreted the 1916 rising in occult and numerological terms. She subsequently became bitterly disillusioned with the free state government and quarreled with Russell.

Young had first toured the United States in the early 1920s. In 1924 she accepted an invitation to succeed Celtic studies scholar William Whittingham Lyman, Jr., at the University of California at Berkeley, as Phelan lecturer in Celtic mythology and Gaelic poetry, a position created for her by a friend, Noël Sullivan. She moved to the United States in 1925, and became an American citizen in 1931. She retired in 1936 and moved to Oceano, California, where she joined Halcyon, a

---

theosophical commune, with which she had connections since 1927. During her retirement she completed her most enduring work, her autobiography, *Flowering Dusk: Things Remembered Accurately and Inaccurately*, which includes many fascinating sketches of Yeats, Maud Gonne, George Russell, Standish O'Grady, and Yeats's friend, the magician, MacGregor Mathers, as well as a highly colored account of her mystical and visionary experiences and a heavily romanticized narrative of the period from the 1916 rising to the end of the Irish Civil War.

Young published six collections of poetry. Her verse is described as "combining a facile Pre-Raphaelitism with a fin de siècle Celticism, as much influenced by Fiona Macleod (William Sharp) as by Yeats or Russell". Her three American collections, *Marzilian and Other Poems* (1938), *Seed of the Pomegranate and Other Poems* (1949) and *Smoke of Myrrh and other Poems* (1950), were privately printed in very small editions.

Young was a strikingly handsome woman and exploited her dramatic looks when teaching in California. Her emotional life centred on two women to whom her love poetry is addressed, 'Brysanthe' whom she had known as a child and Alys Boyd, a fellow mystic, with whom she had a close friendship in Dublin. She died in Oceano on July 23, 1956.

Source: Deidre Toomey, "Ella Young", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/59452>, accessed April 30, 2011.

### **Scope and Content**

The collection consists of correspondence, photographs, postcards, writings, reminiscences, and other materials relating to the Ella Young's life and works. The bulk of the collection consists of three sets of letters: (1) letters exchanged between Young and Scripps College Librarian Dorothy Drake from 1951 to 1955; (2) letters addressed from Young to Elsa Gidlow between 1951 and 1956; and (3) letters between Gidlow and Drake and Sybil M. Fielder, her successor as Scripps College Librarian, from 1953 to 1972. The first set contains both Young's original letters and carbon copies of Drake's responses, the latter with holes punched at the top, indicating they were originally fastened together in an "administrative" file. The second set of letters, from Young to Gidlow (but without copies of Gidlow's responses) were donated to Scripps College in the 1960s and 1970s, after Young's death. Two of Young's letters to Gidlow are represented by photocopies, Gidlow having retained the originals, which may be among the Young letters cataloged among Gidlow's papers at the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California in San Francisco. The third and final set of letters, between Gidlow on the one hand and Drake and Fielder on the other, contains both Gidlow's original letters and carbon copies of Drake's and Fielder's replies, the latter, as in set 1, with holes punched at the top, indicating they were originally fastened together in an administrative file. Young's letters to both Drake and Gidlow contain discussion of her (and in the latter case, Gidlow's) writings, as well as more general conversation, news, and gossip. The correspondence between Gidlow and Drake and Fielder is centered around Gidlow's donation of Young's correspondence and other materials to Scripps College, but also includes a number of Gidlow's own poems, which are filed separately.

The collection also includes a number of postcards and Christmas greeting cards addressed to Young, 1931-1953, found among her papers, and donated to Scripps College by Gidlow; a recorded interview, together with a published account, with photographs, of a visit to Young in 1951 by Drake and two colleagues, Althea Warren and Frances Richardson; and another recorded interview with Young from 1953, recorded for radio station KPFA at Elsa Gidlow's house. Young's writings are represented by a single typescript poem, "Lute Song", donated by Gidlow in 1967, and typescript recountings of four Irish stories: "1. The Feast of Brighid ...", "2. The Feast of Beltaine ...", "3. The Feast of Lughnasa (Loonassa)", and "The Feast of Samhain". The collection includes a carbon copy application by Jane R. Thompson for letters testamentary on Young's estate, August 10, 1956; a small number of photographs of Young; and a few miscellaneous newspaper clippings.

### **Related Materials**

Ella Young Papers, Collection 402, Department of Special Collections, University of California Los Angeles Library.

### **Separated Materials**

Other letters from Ella Young to Elsa Gidlow (see Box 1, Folder 3) can be found in Box 3, Elsa Gidlow Papers, Acc. 91-16, Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California, San Francisco.

### **Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Drake, Dorothy, 1904-1995--Correspondence

Gidlow, Dorothy, 1898-1986--Correspondence

Correspondence

Fairy tales--Ireland

Folklore--Ireland

Greeting cards

Photographs

---

Poetry  
Postcards  
Tales--Ireland  
Women writers  
Women's writings

---

- Box 1, Folder 1      **Biographical materials. Circa 1951-1956.**  
                                 **Scope and Contents note**  
                                 Application by Jane R. Thompson in the Superior Court for the County of San Luis Obispo for letters testamentary, estate of Ella Young, August 10, 1956. Biographic and bibliographic notes by Dorothy Drake, circa 1951-1956.
- Box 1, Folder 2-5      **Correspondence. 1931-1956 (bulk 1951-1956).**  
                                 **Extent:** 4 folders.
- Box 1, Folder 2      **Correspondence. Ella Young and Dorothy Drake. 1951-1955.**  
Box 1, Folder 3      **Correspondence. Ella Young to Elsa Gidlow. 1951-1956.**  
Box 1, Folder 4      **Christmas Greeting Cards. 1932-1952 (bulk 1942).**  
Box 1, Folder 5      **Postcards. 1931-1953.**  
**Interviews. 1951-1953.**  
**Ella Young interview with Althea Warren, Dorothy Drake, and Frances Richardson. Oceano, June 1, 1951.**  
**Extent:** 1 1/4-inch audiotape.  
**Note**  
MISSING, May 1, 2011.
- Audiotape Reel  
TR1 Mac (Holbein  
Room)  
**KPFA radio interview "Trees and Mountains" with Ella Young. 1953-1954.**  
**Extent:** 1 1/4-inch audiotape + 1 printed KPFA program guide, March 1954.  
**General note**  
Interview of Ella Young held at Elsa Gidlow's house in 1953; broadcast by KPFA, March 9, 1954. Audiotape MISSING, June 1, 2011.
- Audiotape Reel  
TR27 (Holbein  
Room), Box 1,  
Folder 6  
**Miscellaneous. 1939-circa 1950.**  
**Scope and Contents note**  
(1) Empty envelope imprinted Mrs. Allen G. Freeman, Ridge Road, Berkeley, California, addressed to Miss Ella Young, Box 136, Oceano, California, date stamped December 9, 1939.  
(2) Poem "Processional of Joy", by Malcolm Schloss, n.d. (circa 1950).
- Box 1, Folder 7
- Box 1, Folder 8  
Box 1, Folder 9  
Box 1, Folder 10      **Newspaper clippings. n.d.**  
**Photographs. 1949-1951.**  
**Althea Warren, A Visit to Ella Young at Oceano . June 21, 1951 (published 2004).**  
**Contents**  
Account by Scripps College Trustee Althea Warren (1886-1958), recently retired Los Angeles City Librarian, of a visit by her, Scripps College Librarian Dorothy Drake, and Frances Richardson (1897-1995), at that time Director of Research at 20th Century Fox Corporation, of a visit to Ella Young at Oceano on June 1, 1951. Materials include an audiotaped interview, 3 typed versions of Warren's written account, and 2 copies of a slightly edited version of the account published by the Scripps College Press as a keepsake for the 27th Joint Meeting of the Zamorano and Roxburghe Clubs in San Francisco, october 22-24, 2004.
- Box 1, Folder 11      **Writings. n.d.**
-

---

Box 1,  
Folder 12-13  
Box 1, Folder 12  
Box 1, Folder 13

**Elsa Gidlow. Circa 1953-1972.**

**Correspondence with Dorothy Drake and Sybil Fielder. 1953-1967, 1972**  
**Poems. Circa 1953-1966.**