

John Collier:

An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator	Collier, John, 1901-
Title	John Collier Papers
Dates:	1920-1976
Extent	5 boxes, 1 galley folder (2.10 linear feet)
Abstract	The papers of John Collier represent his transition from a poet to writer of novels, short stories, and screenplays. The bulk of the papers are manuscripts covering several genres, although a substantial amount of correspondence is also included.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-00872
Language:	English.
Access	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Purchases, 1967-1976, (R3732, R4786, R7297)
Processed by	Dale Sauter, 1999
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

John Collier, a writer of various genres, was born in London on May 3, 1901. He obtained a private education, and began writing poetry at age nineteen, and was first published in 1920. During the early 1930s he concentrated on writing novels and short stories. One of Collier's most popular works from this period was *His Monkey Wife*, first published in 1930. In this short novel, Collier covers the controversial topic of conjugal love between a man and a chimpanzee. Collier became best known as a writer of fantasy, and though largely unpopular in his native country, gained significant popularity in the United States.

In 1935 Collier moved from England to Hollywood where he began writing screenplays. He would remain an active screenwriter for the next thirty years, as well as do substantial writing for television. Some of Collier's screenplays include *Elephant Boy* (1937), *I Am a Camera* (1955), and *The War Lord* (1965). Collier devoted much effort during the late 1960s to the transformation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* into a screenplay. However, despite being published in book form, his hopes of turning the screenplay into a film were never realized. Collier's other published works include *Gemini* (poetry collection, 1931), *Tom's A-Cold* (novel, 1933), *Defy the Foul Fiend* (novel, 1934), *Presenting Moonshine* (short story collection, 1941), *Fancies and Goodnights* (short story collection, 1951), *Pictures in the Fire* (short story collection, 1958), *The John Collier Reader* (short story collection, 1972), and *The Best of John Collier* (short story collection, 1975).

Collier died of a stroke in Pacific Palisades, California on April 6, 1980. For the most part, his work has been ignored by scholars, but still holds wide appeal among readers of fantasy.

Sources

Benstock, Bernard, and Thomas F. Staley, eds. *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 77. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1989.

Contemporary Authors. New Revision Series, Vol. 10. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1983.

Richardson, Betty. *John Collier*. Boston: Twayne, 1983.

Scope and Contents

The papers of John Collier, ca. 1920-1976, represent Collier's transition from a poet to writer of novels, short stories, and screenplays. The bulk of the papers are manuscripts covering several genres. A substantial amount of correspondence is also included in the papers. The papers are divided into two series: I. Works, ca. 1920-1975, n.d. (4.8 boxes), and II. Personal Papers, ca. 1930-1976, n.d. (0.2 boxes).

The Works Series is subdivided by genre: Novels, Poems, Reviews, Screenplays, and Short Stories, the majority of which fall into the latter two categories. Of specific interest within the Screenplays subseries is an original screenplay for *The African Queen*, on which Collier was a collaborator, which was not used for the final film. However, the bulk of the Screenplays subseries deals with Collier's adaptation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Some correspondence documenting Collier's ongoing negotiations with agents and collaborators concerning the adaptation are also included in the *Paradise Lost* group. A large percentage of this correspondence is with Howard Hausman, Martin Poll, and Jan Stussy, ca. 1967-1970. In addition to the correspondence, there are multiple holograph and typescript drafts of the adaptation. Manuscripts for fifteen short stories, most of which date from 1955-1958 are also present. Among the short stories best represented is *Asking For It*, of which there are multiple drafts. The Novel subseries contains holograph manuscripts by Collier, including an original of *His Monkey Wife*, probably his best known novel. The Poems subseries includes both holograph manuscripts and typescripts of what became the published book *Gemini*. The small Reviews subseries contains reviews by Collier of other novels, as well as a scrapbook of newspaper reviews of his own work, *Presenting Moonshine*.

The Personal Papers Series is minuscule compared to the Works series. Contained in this series are an announcement of a poetry award given to Collier, a contract concerning the publication of *Defy the Foul Fiend*, and a very small amount of outgoing correspondence to John Beevers, Louis Golding, and Alannah Harper. Of particular note within this series is a notebook kept by Collier that records short story titles, information regarding dates of composition, length of writing time, payment received, and the publisher of the story. This record book also contains listed groupings of possible stories to be released as collections, notes for short stories, and some sketches.

The order of the collection appears to have been somewhat influenced by Bertram Rota Ltd., the dealer from which it was obtained. On the whole, this order has been maintained, though the *Paradise Lost* correspondence was put in chronological order during processing. Additionally, many of the items seem to have been labeled by the author and/or the dealer, and these were assumed largely reliable for the task of identification and description.

Index Terms

Correspondents

Barker, Lee

Subjects

Milton, John, 1608-1674 -- Paradise Lost

English literature -- 20th century

Document Types

Screenplays

Series I. Works, ca. 1920-1975, n.d.

Subseries A. Novels, 1937?, n.d.

Easy Go Grange, holograph original manuscript of first chapter of an unfinished novel with corrections, 1937?, 35p

box 1
folder 1

His Monkey Wife, holograph manuscript, n.d., 285p

folder 2-3

Subseries B. Poems, ca. 1925-1926, n.d.

Gemini

Typescript original of two poems, ca. 1925-1926, 3p

box 1
folder 4

"Three Men in One Room," composite holograph and typescript, much amended, with later revisions for print, n.d., 13p

"The Apology," introduction, holograph manuscript, n.d., 5p

Subseries C. Reviews, 1941?, n.d.

Reviews of *Presenting Moonshine*, scrapbook, 1941?

box 1
folder 5

Review of *The Search* by C. P. Snow and four other novels, n.d., 5p

folder 6

Subseries D. Screenplays, ca. 1937-1975, n.d.

African Queen, original screenplay typescript, 11 April 1947, 130p

box 1
folder 7

Ballet Story, typescript, n.d., 21p

folder 8

Evening Primrose, first draft typescript, 1937?, 85p

box 2
folder 1

Finding Ernie

Holograph manuscript, record of steps and disagreements during development from verbal description of story outline to complete screenplay, with corrections, 1972, 1973?, 7p

box 2
folder 2

Composite holograph and typescript, first draft script, used for working copy, with corrections, n.d., 175p	folder 3
Composite holograph and typescript with corrections, n.d., 176p	folder 4
Typescript, first material after starting on screen version, 1970, 116p	folder 5
Typescript, final fourth [?] material with corrections, 4 July 1971, 119p	folder 6
Typescript, third uncut version, July 28, 1971, 148p	folder 7
Typescript, final fifth material, October 1971, 122p	box 3 folder 1
For Elissa, typescript, 1953?, 129p	folder 2
The Leaning Tower of East Side Plaza, typescript with corrections, n.d., 38p	folder 3
Mary, holograph manuscript, original screenplay, with corrections, n.d., 104p	folder 4
Paradise Lost	
Correspondence, ca. 1967-1975, n.d.	
Fragments, n.d.	box 3 folder 5
1967-1969	folder 6
1970, 1975	folder 7
First presentation of concept of film, typescript with corrections, 18 January 1967, 15p	folder 8
First outline of possible adaptation for motion picture, typescript, June-July 1967, 34 p	folder 9
Rough outline of principal sequence, typescript with corrections, 1967?, 34p	folder 10

Layout of first half of screenplay containing arguments pro & con for certain aspects of the work, holograph manuscript with corrections, 1967?, 70p	folder 11
'A Second Beginning,' holograph manuscript, with corrections, 13 November 1967, 29p	folder 12
Working copy, typescript with corrections, n.d., 130p	box 4 folder 1
Draft of last scenes, holograph manuscript with corrections, n.d., 58p	folder 2
Final screenplay, typescript with corrections, 30 September 1968?, 143p	folder 3
Draft of fall sequence, typescript with corrections, n.d., 11p	folder 4
Uncut version, typescript, n.d., 164p	folder 5
Final version prepared for publication, typescript with corrections, May 5, 1972, 142p	folder 6
Introduction to published version	folder 7
Typescript with corrections, n.d., 10p	
Composite holograph and typescript with corrections, 14 October 1972, 16p	
Typescript with corrections, n.d., 10p	
Early version, holograph manuscript with corrections, n.d., 2p	
Foreword written for use in connection with the screenplay	box 4 folder 8
Typescript with corrections, n.d., 4p	
Typescript, n.d., 4p	
Notes on certain aspects of the production	box 4 folder 9
Holograph manuscript, with corrections, n.d., 9p	

Typescript, n.d., 10p

Notes and comments on the projected screenplay, typescript with corrections, n.d., 89p **box 4
folder 10**

Notes and fragments, n.d., 13p **folder 11**

Pictures in the Fire, typescript of short story version, 1937?, 28p; three typescript drafts for screenplay, n.d., 27p, 50p, 35p **box 5
folder 1**

Time Stands Still, outline, typescript with corrections, 10 January 1951, 67p **folder 2**

Wet Saturday, typescript with corrections, n.d., 25p **folder 3**

Subseries E. Short Stories, ca. 1920-1975, n.d.

Alien Corn, typescript with corrections, ca. 1958-1959, 18p **box 5
folder 4**

Asking for It (original version titled Characters More Important Than Plot) **folder 5**

Typescript with corrections, 1958-1959, 16p

Holograph manuscript with corrections, 1975?, 13p

The Chaser -- see folder 5.21

Cupid Paid, holograph manuscript, with corrections, ca. 1920-1923, 12p **box 5
folder 6**

A Dog's a Dog, with two alternative drafts numbered I & II, holograph manuscript with corrections, February or March 1956?, 13p **folder 7**

Don't Call Me, I'll Call You, holograph manuscript with corrections, n.d., 16p **folder 8**

Eyes and No Nose, typescript with corrections, 4 February 1967, 42p **folder 9**

Great Possibilities -- see folder 5.21

Mademoiselle Kiki, original holograph manuscript with corrections, 1938?, 12p	folder 10 box 5
Man Overboard, original holograph manuscript with corrections, ca. 1957-1958, 30p	box 5 folder 11
The Mask and the Maiden -- see folder 5.13	
A Matter of Taste, original holograph manuscript with corrections, December 1955 or January 1956?, 8p	box 5 folder 12
The Naked Truth in Viridian Springs, Arizona (published title, The Mask and the Maiden), holograph manuscript, with corrections, March 1956?, 26p	folder 13
None So Blind, original holograph manuscript with corrections, December 1955?, 15p	folder 14
Pictures in the Fire -- see folder 5.1	
Reindeer on the Way, original holograph manuscript with corrections, 1937?, 42p	box 5 folder 15
Son of Kiki, incomplete holograph manuscript with corrections, n.d., 2p	folder 16
The Tender Age, original holograph manuscript, with corrections, November 1955?, 6p	folder 17
Think No Evil, galley proofs with corrections, 21 November 1957 - early summer 1958, 12p (removed to galley folder)	

Series II. Personal Papers, ca. 1930-1976, n.d.

Award, pages from <i>This Quarter</i> , announcing winner of poetry award, 193?	box 5 folder 18
Contract, memorandum of agreement with Collier re "Defy the Foul Fiend," 21 June 1934, 2p	folder 19
Outgoing correspondence, 1935, n.d.	folder 20
Short story record book, holograph entries in bound notebook, ca. 1937-1976; also includes information on account with Matson, lists for collections of short stories, notes for short stories, and some sketches	folder 21

John Collier Papers--Index of Correspondents

- Barker, Lee (Doubleday & Co., Inc.)--3.6
- Hausman, Howard (William Morris Agency, Inc.)--3.6-7
- Krasner, Jack (J. H. Cohen & Co.)--3.6
- Poll, Martin (Marpol Productions, Inc.)--3.6-7
- Stussy, Jan, 1921- (UCLA)--3.5