

Christopher Isherwood:

An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator	Isherwood, Christopher, 1904-
Title	Christopher Isherwood Collection
Dates:	1883-1970
Extent	4 boxes (1.5 linear ft.)
Abstract	The collection comprises correspondence and works of Isherwood and diaries by him and his mother, Kathleen Isherwood (1883-1971). The bulk of the materials relates to the biography of Isherwood's parents, <i>Kathleen and Frank</i> , which was published in 1971.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-02137
Language:	English.
Access	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Purchase, 1951-1990
Processed by	Deborah Shelby, 1992
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Christopher William Bradshaw-Isherwood was born in Cheshire, England, on August 26, 1904, to Kathleen Machell-Smith and Frank Bradshaw-Isherwood. His brother, Richard, was born in 1911. Frank Isherwood was in the British military and was required to move his family several times, much to Kathleen's displeasure. She sent Christopher to St. Edmund's boarding school for a proper education in 1914. There he met W. H. Auden, who was to become a life-long friend and co-author of several books and plays. The death of Isherwood's father on May 8, 1915, during a battle in France deeply affected him, not only in his perspective of his father and how he would relate to his mother, but in his attitude towards the military and war itself.

Isherwood met Edward Upward, a life-long friend and influence, in 1919 at Repton, a prestigious public school, and later joined him at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, in 1923. In 1925, Isherwood was asked to withdraw from the university and so he took a job in London as a part-time secretary to a string quartet and began to write novels. The influence of E. M. Forster encouraged Isherwood to write and publish his first novel, *All the Conspirators* in May of 1928.

Throughout Isherwood's life, he knew and worked with many people who influenced him and whom he influenced. He was known by the Bloomsbury group, and Hogarth Press published three of his books, *The Memorial: Portrait of a Family* (1932), *Lions and Shadows* (1938), and *Good bye to Berlin* (1939). John Lehmann, a poet and an editor for the press, became a life-long friend to Isherwood and they supported each other in their work and in their personal lives.

Isherwood traveled to Berlin in 1929 to escape the social and sexual inhibitions that he felt in England. He then decided to live there and worked on his second novel *The Memorial* (1932), and what was to become one of his best known works, the *Berlin Stories*. These stories offer an insight into the pre-Hitler era of Germany and were later developed into the musical *Cabaret*.

Isherwood lived in Berlin from 1930 to 1933. Trying to avoid the restraints that Hitler was enforcing on Germany, Isherwood and Heinz, his lover, traveled around Europe looking for a place to settle until 1937 when Heinz was forced to return to Germany to serve in the army. This affected Isherwood deeply. Losing the freedoms he had felt in Germany, and knowing that England could not offer better social conditions than before his departure in 1929, he and W. H. Auden began traveling in the Orient in 1938. During their travels they wrote, *Journey to a War* (1939). They went to the United States before returning to England. In 1939, the conditions in Europe were looking more as though war was inevitable, and Isherwood did not want to be a part of this, so he and Auden returned to the United States and decided to become American citizens. In New York, Isherwood did not find the haven he had hoped for and moved to California at the invitation of Gerald Heard. From October 1941, until July 1942, Isherwood lived in Haverford, Pennsylvania, and taught English to German refugees through the Society of Friends, a Quaker organization. Isherwood received his immigration papers and was a conscientious objector to the war, however, the age was lowered and he never had to

serve his new country.

Isherwood returned to California and worked intermittently in motion picture studios in Hollywood for over 30 years. Due to this involvement, Isherwood met and worked with a variety of writers and other people who worked in the Hollywood community such as Tennessee Williams, Aldous Huxley, Kenneth Anger, Truman Capote, and Charles Laughton.

Living in Los Angeles, Isherwood became involved with Swami Prabhavanda, a Hindu monk who was head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. This had a major impact on his life, providing a spiritual foundation that supported his social beliefs as well as his sexual identity. Isherwood had determined during his years in Berlin that freedom was more than what the left-wing was preaching at that time, and that the homophobia that prevailed in this movement was one of the obvious indications that this freedom was to be limited to a select few. By the 1970s, Isherwood had begun to publicly discuss how homophobia was one aspect of the hate that must be overcome to reach a level of peace in the world.

Don Bachardy and Isherwood met in 1953 and became lovers in 1954. They worked together on number of motion pictures, television scripts, and on dramatizations of Shaw's story *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (1969) and *A Meeting by the River*. Isherwood and Bachardy remained lovers until Isherwood died in 1986.

For further information on Isherwood see

Finny, Brian, *Christopher Isherwood A Critical Biography*, 1979

Fryer, Jonathan, *Christopher Isherwood*, 1977

Lehmann, John, *Christopher Isherwood A Personal Memoir*, 1987

Scope and Contents

The Christopher Isherwood collection has three series: I. Correspondence, 1940-1960 (1 folder); II. Works, 1883-1970 (3 boxes); and III. Kathleen Isherwood, 1911-1959 (1 box). The bulk of the collection pertains to Isherwood's biography of his mother and father, *Kathleen and Frank*, published in 1971.

Letters from Isherwood consist of one letter and one telegram to Jane and Paul Bowles (1955), a letter to Peter Gamble (1940), four letters to Gerald Hamilton (1962-63), and a form letter to prospective subscribers of *Vedanta and the West* (1960). The Correspondence series is arranged in alphabetical order. Additional correspondence to and from Isherwood can be found in other manuscript collections, see the list of other materials held by the HRC.

The notes and typescript for *Kathleen and Frank* are the bulk of the collection. Also in the Works series are the typescript for *Down There on a Visit*, (1962, originally part of the T.E. Hanley, III collection), and a reprint of *What Vedanta Means to Me*, (1951). The typescript for *Kathleen and Frank* was sent in sections to Isherwood's brother, Richard, for his approval and corrections prior to being sent to the publisher. Some of these sections are accompanied by letters to Richard and have been retained with the typescripts. There are very few corrections or additions on the typescripts, yet there are differences between the typescript and the published edition. This series is arranged alphabetically by the title of the work, with notes preceding the typescripts for *Kathleen and Frank*. Two of Isherwood's diaries, 1917 and 1934, are housed at the end of this series.

Kathleen Isherwood's diaries span in date from 1911-1959 with gaps for the years 1949 and 1952-56. Transcripts of her diaries from 1883-1916 are also part of the collection, but are in Series II as part of the preparation for *Kathleen and Frank*.

The collection is in good condition, except for folder 1.5 of the typescript for *Kathleen and Frank* which has been slightly damaged by moisture and mold. These pages have been placed in mylar for protection due to their weakened state.

Related Material

- Bowles, Paul F. - Recip.
- Brooke, Jocelyn - Recip.
- Gassner, John / TA - Misc.
- Grigson, Geoffrey - Recip.
- Hamilton, Gerald - Letters, Recip.
- Harpers - Letters
- Lehmann, John - Letters, Recip., Misc.
- London Magazine - Misc., Recip.
- Owen, Wilfred - Misc.
- PEN - Letters
- Sitwell, Dame Edith - Recip.
- Walpole, Sir Hugh - Recip.
- Williams, Tennessee - Letters, Recip.

Index terms

Correspondents

Bowles, Jane Auer, 1917-1973.

Bowles, Paul, 1910- .

Falk, Eric Victor.

Gamble, Peter, 1920- .

Hamilton, Gerald, 1890-1970.

Isherwood, Kathleen Machell Smith, 1868-1960.

Subjects

Isherwood, Kathleen Machell Smith, 1868-1960.

Authors, English--20th century.

Novelists, English--20th century.

Document types

Diaries.

Series I. Correspondence, 1940-1963

Bowles, Paul & Jane (1955); Gamble, Peter (1940); Hamilton, Gerald (1962-63);
prospective subscribers to *Vedanta and the West* (1960)

box 1
folder
1

Series II. Works 1883-1971

<i>Down There on a Visit</i> , typescript, 1959-61	box 1 folder 2-3
<i>Kathleen and Frank</i> , 1971	
Transcripts of Kathleen Isherwood's diaries	
1883-6 Feb. 1901	box 1 folder 4
7 Feb. 1901-17 April 1905	folder 5
6 May 1905-6 Jan. 1909	folder 6
7 Jan. 1909-31 Dec. 1916	folder 7
Typescript, Chapters 1-4, p.1-59, 1967	folder 8
Chapters 5-7, p.60-111, 1969	folder 9
Chapters 8-9, p.112-178, 1969	box 2 folder 1
p.179-194, 1970	folder 2
p.195-210, 1970	folder 3
p.211-267, 1970	folder 4
p.268-342, 1970	folder 5
p.343-370, 1970	folder 6
<i>What Vedanta Means to Me</i> , reprint, 1951	folder 7
Diaries, 1917, 1935	box 3 folder 1-2

Series III. Kathleen Isherwood 1911-1959

Diaries, 1911-1931

box 3 folder 3-23

1932-1948

box 4 folder 1-17

1950-51

folder 18-19

1957-59

folder 20-22