

# Swami Vidyatmananda:

## An Inventory of His Collection in the Manuscript Collection at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center

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### Descriptive Summary

<b>Creator:</b>	Vidyatmananda, Swami, 1913-2000
<b>Title:</b>	Swami Vidyatmananda Collection
<b>Dates:</b>	1923-1986
<b>Extent:</b>	1 box (.42 linear feet)
<b>Abstract:</b>	The Swami Vidyatmananda Collection comprises correspondence to Vidyatmananda as well as correspondence he gathered through his association with the Vedanta Society of Southern California and the Centre Védantique Ramakrishna in Gretz, France. Three distinct groups of correspondence are present: letters between Christopher Isherwood and Swami Vidyatmananda (John Yale), 1950-1986; correspondence to Lady Sandwich (formerly Amiya Corbin) from Aldous Huxley, John Van Druten, Christopher Isherwood, Walter De la Mare, E. M. Forster, and Gerald Heard, 1944-1977; and letters to the French diplomat Martha Vanek from Jan Masaryk, René Fülöp-Miller, and Igor Stravinsky, 1923-1930.
<b>RLIN Record #:</b>	TXRC03-A21
<b>Language:</b>	English
<b>Access:</b>	Open for research

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### Administrative Information

<b>Provenance</b>	This collection was gathered and donated in two parts by Swami Vidyatmananda. Vidyatmananda personally collected the Isherwood correspondence over the years 1950-1986. There is a note given by Vidyatmananda at the start of the Lady Sandwich correspondence explaining how he came to be in possession of the remaining materials. Lady Sandwich was affiliated with the Hollywood Vedanta Center contemporaneously with Vidyatmananda, enabling him to assemble her correspondence. Martha Vanek had been a member of the Centre Védantique Ramakrishna in Gretz, which Vidyatmananda came to be the manager of many years later.
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Vidyatmananda, Swami, 1913-2000

**Acquisition:** Gifts, 1998-1999 (G11087, G11499)

**Processed by:** Gautam Ganeshan, 2003

**Repository:** [Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin](#)

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## Biographical Sketch

Swami Vidyatmananda, born John Yale in 1913, underwent initiation and training under Swami Prabhavananda at the Vedanta Society of Southern California. He observed brahmacharya, took sannyas in 1964, and was ordained as a monk in the Ramakrishna order.

On a trip to India, Vidyatmananda visited the Belur Math in Howrah, the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in Calcutta, and other pilgrimage sites throughout the subcontinent. Based on his experiences he contributed a number of travelogue articles to the journal *Vedanta and the West*. Eventually he collected his impressions of India to write *A Yankee and the Swamis: A Westerner's View of the Ramakrishna Order* (2001).

In time, Swami Vidyatmananda became an editor of *Vedanta and the West*, and also edited *What Religion Is: In the Words of Swami Vivekananda* (1982), with an introduction by Christopher Isherwood. He continued his career as a devotee of Ramakrishna at the Centre Védantique Ramakrishna in Gretz, France, where he served as the center's manager until his death in 2000.

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## Sources:

Yale, John. *A Yankee and the Swamis: A Westerner's View of the Ramakrishna Order*. Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2001.

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## Scope and Contents

The Swami Vidyatmananda Collection comprises correspondence to Vidyatmananda as well as correspondence he gathered through his association with the Vedanta Society of Southern California and the Centre Védantique Ramakrishna in Gretz, France. Three distinct groups of correspondence are present: letters between Christopher Isherwood and Swami Vidyatmananda (John Yale), 1950-1986; correspondence to Lady Sandwich (formerly Amiya Corbin) from Aldous Huxley, John Van Druten, Christopher Isherwood, Walter De la Mare, E. M. Forster, and Gerald Heard, 1944-1977; and letters to the French diplomat Martha Vanek from Jan Masaryk, René Fülöp-Miller, and Igor Stravinsky, 1923-1930.

The Isherwood correspondence is arranged chronologically. Among the letters is a 1955 postcard written by both Isherwood and King Vidor. Isherwood's letters to Vidyatmananda come from London, New York, San Francisco, and Santa Monica, and reach Vidyatmananda first at the Vedanta Center of Southern California, then at the Centre Védantique Ramakrishna in Gretz, France. The correspondence includes Isherwood's edits on an essay by Vidyatmananda, Vidyatmananda's edits on Isherwood's

novel *A Meeting by the River* (1967), as well as a debate on whether to dedicate that novel to John Yale or Swami Vidyatmananda. They also exchange views on Swami Prabhavananda, Vidyatmananda's monastic superior, leading to occasional tensions between them. Nonetheless, they continued to correspond until Isherwood's death in 1986.

The earliest letters to Lady Sandwich come from John van Drueten and concern the publication of articles in *Vedanta and the West* as well as a talk van Drueten gave at the Hollywood Vedanta Center. There is one letter from Aldous Huxley, dated 1955, in which he conveys his feelings and remembrances about the passing of his wife Maria that year. The letters from Isherwood reflect his concern for his brother Richard, who had succumbed to alcoholism, and his appreciation for Amiya Corbin's help in the matter. Among his correspondence are two photographs of his mother, his brother, and himself. The few letters from Walter de la Mare include newspaper clippings of reviews of his work. E. M. Forster and Gerald Heard each sent Amiya Corbin handwritten correspondence, of which a modest amount is collected here.

Martha Vanek served in the French diplomatic service in Prague, and had been a member of the Centre Védantique Ramakrishna. Collected here are a card to her from Jan Masaryk, a letter in German from René Fülöp-Miller, and a letter from Igor Stravinsky with a large photograph of himself, dated 1930.

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## Related Material

Materials related to this collection can be found in the Ransom Center's Christopher Isherwood Collection of manuscripts and diaries.

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## Index Terms

### Subjects

- Corbin, Ella Lilian (Amiya)--Correspondence.
- De la Mare, Walter, 1873-1956--Correspondence.
- Forster, E. M. (Edward Morgan),|d1879-1970--Correspondence.
- Fülöp-Miller, René, 1891-1963--Correspondence.
- Heard, Gerald, 1889-1971--Correspondence.
- Huxley, Aldous, 1894-1963--Correspondence.
- Isherwood, Christopher, 1904-1986--Correspondence.
- Masaryk, Jan, 1886-1948--Correspondence.
- Sandwich, Ella Lilian (Amiya) Corbin Montagu, Lady--Correspondence.

Vidyatmananda, Swami, 1913-2000

Stravinsky, Igor, 1882-1971--Correspondence.

Van Druten, John, 1901-1957--Correspondence.

Vanek, Martha--Correspondence.

Vidor, King, 1894-1982--Correspondence.

Vedanta.

**Document Types**

Photographs.

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Vidyatmananda, Swami, 1913-2000

## **Correspondence 1923-1986**

Isherwood, Christopher, 1950-1986

**Box 1 Folder 1**

Sandwich, Ella Lilian (Amiya) Corbin Montagu, Lady, 1944-1977

**Folder 2**

Vanek, Martha, 1923-1930

**Folder 3**

## **Index of Correspondents**

- De la Mare, Walter, 1873-1956--1.2
- Forster, E. M. (Edward Morgan), 1879-1970--1.2
- Fülöp-Miller, René, 1891-1963--1.3
- Heard, Gerald, 1889-1971--1.2
- Huxley, Aldous, 1894-1963--1.2
- Isherwood, Christopher, 1904- --1.1-2
- Masaryk, Jan, 1886-1948--1.3
- Sandwich, Ella Lilian (Amiya) Corbin Montagu, Lady--1.2
- Stravinsky, Igor, 1882-1971--1.3
- Van Druten, John, 1901-1957--1.2
- Vanek, Martha--1.3
- Vidor, King, 1894-1982--1.1