

Patrick Hamilton:

An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Hamilton, Patrick, 1904 Mar. 17-1962

Title: Patrick Hamilton Collection

Inclusive Dates: 1915-1984

Extent: 5 boxes, 1 oversize box (2.1 linear feet)

Abstract: The life of Patrick Hamilton, a british author best known for his work *Rope*, is documented in this collection of published and unpublished handwritten manuscripts, including early typescript drafts of a biography about Patrick Hamilton by his brother Bruce, extensive correspondence, legal documents, and photographs.

RLIN Record #: None

Language: English.

Access: Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition: Purchase, 1994

Processed by: Nikki Thomas and Mark Downs, 2004; Catherine Stollar, 2005

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

Biographical Sketch

Anthony Walter Patrick Hamilton was born on St. Patrick's Day in 1904 at Hassocks, Sussex, England. Patrick was the last of three children—Helen (known as Lalla to the family and Diana to her friends in the theater), Bruce, and Patrick—born to Bernard and Ellen Adèle Hockley Hamilton. Although Bernard, Patrick's father, had inherited a considerable sum of money at age twenty-one, by the time Patrick was born very little of the inheritance remained, forcing Patrick to spend the latter years of his youth in a variety of middle-class boarding houses and rented rooms. His experiences and memories from these rented quarters helped to shape the characters, described in the September 1951 *Times Literary Supplement* as "the faithless, the uprooted, the lonely souls," in his early fictional work.

Patrick Hamilton's earliest published piece, a poem titled "Heaven," appeared in the respected journal *Poetry Review* in 1919. His first novel *Monday Morning* was published by Constable six years later in 1925. Michael Sadleir, a book collector and noted Victorianist, had accepted the novel for Constable and it was during the publishing of *Monday Morning* that the two men began a career-long friendship. Hamilton's most famous work *Rope*, originally presented on stage in 1929, enjoyed success as a theater and radio production and eventually as an Alfred Hitchcock film. *Rope's* success brought critical acclaim and monetary compensation to Hamilton for the rest of his life.

The 1930s were a tumultuous time for Patrick and the Hamilton family. In August 1930 Patrick secretly married Lois Martin just days after his father's death. Lois seemed to have a good effect on Patrick. She took over his finances, suggested a move to the countryside, and limited (and eventually temporarily banned) his consumption of alcohol during his composition of *The Siege of Pleasure* in 1931. Despite his newfound responsibility, tragedy struck in 1932. While walking with his sister and wife in London, Hamilton was struck by a drunk driver and dragged through the street. His injuries were devastating. After a three-month hospital stay, multiple surgeries, and a period of convalescence, Hamilton suffered physical and emotional scars that would continue with him for the rest of his life. His accident appeared in his work after he added a drunken driving accident into the *Siege of Pleasure* before its late 1932 publication. Two years later in 1934 Hamilton's mother committed suicide in response to a devastating illness. During this difficult period, Hamilton focused his creative energies to write *The Plains of Cement* (1934), the third novel in a trilogy about a pub called the Midnight Bell and the characters that frequented it. In 1935, Constable published the trilogy under the title *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky: A London Trilogy*. Noted author J. B. Priestley wrote a preface for the book signaling Hamilton's growing literary fame.

In 1933, Hamilton began to study Marxism, possibly stemming from his brother Bruce's letters during a trip to the Soviet Union, or his reading of Karl Marx and Lenin. Hamilton's interest in Marxism and his compassion for the "semi-proletariat," his term for people living life on the margins, explain his humanistic tendency to tell stories of the poor and underrepresented.

After 1937, Hamilton enjoyed a productive few years publishing a range of successful and critically acclaimed novels and plays including *Impromptu in Moribundia* (1939), *Money with Menaces* (1939), *To the Public Danger* (1939), *Hangover Square* (1941), *The Duke in Darkness* (1943), and *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947). Additionally, in 1947 Hamilton advised Alfred Hitchcock on the production of the film version of *Rope*; however, the relationship soured due to Hamilton's perceived lack of influence over the film and was eventually so displeased with the final result that he went on an alcoholic binge resulting in a brief stay at a nursing home to recover.

Although Hamilton was succeeding professionally, personally his life was becoming more chaotic. Sometime during 1948-1949 Hamilton began an extra-martial affair with Ursula Stewart, born Lady Ursula Chetwynd-Talbot, an author who published under the name Laura Talbot. For years Hamilton would live with "La," as her friends called her, during the week and return to his wife Lois on the weekend. Even after Hamilton's divorce from Lois in 1953 and his marriage to La in 1954, this triangular love affair continued until Hamilton's death. Despite his tumultuous private life, Hamilton was able to write three novels about the sociopath and criminal Ralph Ernest Gorse, *The West Pier* (1951), *Mr. Stimpson and Mr. Gorse* (1953), and *Unknown Assailant* (1954). The Gorse novels were moderately successful and were made into a television mini-series in the 1990s. His final play *The Man Upstairs* (1953) was not critically acclaimed and although it was published as a book in 1954, the play never made it to the West End in London.

The final years of Hamilton's life were unproductive and difficult. In times of sobriety, Hamilton worked on two novels "The Happy Hunting Grounds" and "Memoirs of a Heavy Drinking Man," but neither were completed or published. Hamilton's alcoholism and dysfunctional private life eventually lead to a bout of depression. On the advice of La's former husband, Hamilton underwent electroshock therapy, but to no avail. Still plagued by alcoholism, Hamilton died September 23, 1962.

Sources:

Hamilton, Bruce. *The Light Went Out: A Biography of Patrick Hamilton*. London: Constable, 1972.

Johnsen, Rosemary Erickson. "Patrick Hamilton." *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed 7 July, 2004).

Scope and Contents

Published and unpublished handwritten manuscripts and early typescript drafts of a biography make up the bulk of the Patrick Hamilton Collection, 1915-1984 (bulk 1925-1969), and are supplemented by extensive correspondence authored by Patrick Hamilton as well as legal documents and photographs. The collection is arranged into three series: Series I. Correspondence, 1915-1972, Series II. Works, 1925-1969, and Series III. Other Papers, 1962-1984.

The Correspondence series is divided into three subseries: A. Outgoing, B. Incoming, and C. Other Correspondents. All subseries are arranged chronologically except for Incoming correspondence which is arranged alphabetically by author. The bulk of the correspondence is contained in the Outgoing subseries which primarily consists of letters from Patrick to his brother Bruce Hamilton. Letters in the Outgoing subseries are both handwritten and typed and are of a personal nature documenting Patrick's daily activities, insights regarding current events, and discussion of works in progress. Also present are undated notes Patrick left for his wife and mother. The Incoming subseries is minimal, only two folders, and includes letters from friends such as Sir Osbert Sitwell and Charles Mackehenie and letters from business acquaintances. Of special note is a letter from Orson Welles requesting permission to convert one of Patrick's manuscripts into a screenplay. Subseries C. Other Correspondents houses one folder of third-party letters neither addressed to nor authored by Patrick Hamilton.

The Works Series is divided into two subseries: A. Patrick Hamilton and B. Bruce Hamilton. The Patrick Hamilton subseries contains both published and unpublished works, most of which are handwritten manuscripts, and are arranged alphabetically. Patrick's published works include *Caller Anonymous*, complete with corrections; an early draft of *The Duke in Darkness*; a typescript final draft of "The Quiet Room," published posthumously; and an early handwritten fragment of *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky: A London Trilogy*, with corrections. In addition, there are a few unpublished works including "The Licensed Trade," the beginning of "The Happy Hunting Grounds," "Memoirs of a Heavy-Drinking Man," a review of Jonah Barrington's *Master of None*, autobiographical notes, a projected book on words, and unidentified fragments. Except for the unidentified fragments, which contain handwritten and typescript pages, the unpublished works are all unfinished and handwritten in bound notebooks.

The Bruce Hamilton subseries primarily documents the author's process of writing *The Light Went Out*, a biography of his brother Patrick published in 1972, found here under its work-in-progress title, Patrick -- A Tragedy. The manuscript segments, all typescripts with corrections, have been kept in their original order. Also present is an unfinished manuscript of "Bernard -- A Tragi-Comedy" about the Hamilton brothers' father.

The Other Papers series contains a few legal documents, limited to copies of birth and marriage certificates of Patrick Hamilton. This series also contains photographs of Patrick and his family and friends, some of which were published in Bruce Hamilton's biography of his brother Patrick *The Light Went Out*, along with photographs of a few of Patrick's homes, including the house in which he died. There are also several photographs related to the production of his plays documenting principal actors and set designs. The Ephemera folder contains seven clippings, a published collection of reviews of Patrick Hamilton's publications, a note regarding Bruce Hamilton's death, a protest announcement, and a postcard.

Additional material about Patrick Hamilton can be found at the Ransom Center in the Arthur Douglas Bruce Hamilton Papers, which contain material related to Patrick Hamilton, including articles by and about Patrick Hamilton as well as obituaries and his will.

Index Terms

People

Cockburn, Claud, 1904- .
Doyle, Arthur Conan, Sir, 1859-1930.
Hamilton, Bruce, 1900- .
Priestley, J. B. (John Boynton), 1894- .
Sadleir, Michael, 1888-1957.
Sitwell, Osbert, 1892-1969.
Welles, Orson, 1915- .

Subjects

Authors--English--20th century.

Document Types

Legal documents.
Photographs.

Series I. Correspondence, 1915-1972, undated 1915-1972, undated

Subseries A. Outgoing, 1915-1962, undated

1915-24	Box 1 Folder 1
1927	Folder 2
1928-29	Folder 3
1930-32	Folder 4
1933-35	Folder 5
1936-38	Folder 6
1939	Folder 7
1940-41	Folder 8
1942-46	Folder 9
1947-50	Folder 10
1951	Folder 11
1952-53	Folder 12
1954-55	Folder 13
1956-57	Folder 14
1958-62	Box 2 Folder 1
undated	Folder 2

Subseries B. Incoming, 1929-1960, undated

A-L	Box 2 Folder 3
M-Z	Folder 4

Subseries C. Other Correspondents, 1929-1972, undated

1929-72	Box 2 Folder 5
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Series II. Works, 1925-1969

Subseries A. Patrick Hamilton, 1925-1961, undated

Autobiographical notes, handwritten, unfinished, 1959 **Box 2**
Folder 6

Caller Anonymous, handwritten manuscript with corrections, undated **Folder 7**

The Duke in Darkness, early handwritten draft, 1942 **Folder 8**

The Happy Hunting Grounds, handwritten draft with corrections, unfinished, 1961 **Folder**
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The Licensed Trade, handwritten draft, unfinished, undated **Box 3**
Folder 1

Memoirs of a Heavy-Drinking Man, handwritten draft with corrections, unfinished, 1956 **Folder**
2

Projected book on words, handwritten draft, unfinished, undated **Folder 3**

"The Quiet Room," typed manuscript, final draft, 1925 **Folder 4**

Review of *Master of None*, handwritten preliminary draft with corrections, undated **Folder**
5

Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky, handwritten fragment with corrections **Folder**
6

Unidentified fragments, handwritten and typed, undated **Folder 7**

Subseries B. Bruce Hamilton, 1969, undated

Bernard--A Tragi-Comedy, composite manuscript with corrections, unfinished, undated **Box 4**
Folder
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Patrick--A Tragedy, typed manuscript with corrections, 1969, undated

Earliest draft

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Box 4 Folder 2

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Working Draft

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Box 4 Folder 5

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Folder 7

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Carbon copy with corrections

Box 4 Folder 8

Typed manuscript with corrections

**Box 5 Folder
1-2**

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Folder 3

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Folder 4

Series III. Other Papers, 1962-1984, undated

Ephemera, 1962-1984	Box 5 Folder 5
Legal documents, 1965	Folder 6
Photographs, undated	
Patrick Hamilton	Box 5 Folder 7
Family and friends	Folder 8
Other (*oversize photograph of Dale House, Patrick Hamilton's early childhood home, has been moved to Box 6)	Folder 9*
Oversize material	Box 6

Patrick Hamilton Collection-Index of Correspondents

Names in **bold** appear in the RLIN record.

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- Blaye, Jameson--2.3
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- **Cockburn, Claud, 1904-** --2.5
- Conerlly, Lily--2.3
- D., John--2.3
- Davies, Clara--2.5
- Davies, Peter--2.3
- **Doyle, Arthur Conan, Sir, 1859-1930**--2.3
- Eamed, Claud--2.3
- Hamilton, Adèle Hockley (Nellie)--1.1
- Hamilton, Bernard--1.1
- **Hamilton, Bruce, 1900-** --1.2-2.1, 2.5
- Hamilton, Bruce, Mme.--2.5
- Hamilton, Helen "Lalla" (Diana)--2.5
- Hamilton, Lois--2.5
- Irving, Henry--2.3
- Jones, David--2.3
- Knight, G. Norman (Gilfred Norman) --2.3
- Lilton, Ernest--2.4
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- Mackehenie, Beryl--2.3
- Mackehenie, Charles (C. R.)--2.3
- Macleary, W. A.--2.3
- Masefield, John--2.5
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- **Priestley, J. B. (John Boynton), 1894-** --2.5
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- Robson, Flora, Dame --2.5
- Rosmer, Milton--2.5
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- **Sadleir, Michael, 1888-1957**--2.4
- Sargent, John--2.3
- **Sitwell, Osbert, 1892-1969**--2.2, 2.4
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- Suho, Alfred--2.5
- Sylvain, Vernon--2.3
- Waddy, Edmond W.--2.4
- Warner, P. F.--2.4
- **Welles, Orson, 1915-** --2.4
- White, E.--2.4

