

Guide to the Robert McAlmon Papers

YCAL MSS 293



by Diane J. Ducharme

November 2008

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
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CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 293

CREATOR: McAlmon, Robert, 1896-1956

TITLE: Robert McAlmon papers

DATES: 1916-1980

BULK DATES: 1930-1952

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 2.93 linear feet (8 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The Robert McAlmon Papers consist of letters to McAlmon from literary friends, including William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and Gertrude Stein; manuscripts of several of his writings; and a small quantity of photographs and related papers.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.mcalmon>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.mcalmon>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The Robert McAlmon Papers are almost entirely the gift and bequest of Norman Holmes Pearson, 1969-1976, who purchased them from Robert McAlmon from 1949 on for eventual donation to Yale.

Letters by Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and William Carlos Williams were purchased by the Yale Collection of American Literature from Robert McAlmon beginning in 1949.

The manuscript of *Paris, 14th of July* is the gift of Richard Wayand, 1956.

The letters of Ernest Hemingway to Robert McAlmon are the gift of Donald Gallup in memory of Norman Holmes Pearson, 1976.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Robert McAlmon Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Robert McAlmon Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

Former call number: ZA McAlmon

Existence and Location of Copies

Microfilm available through Access Services.

Robert McAlmon, 1895-1956

Robert McAlmon, American author, was born in Kansas, one of ten children of an itinerant minister, and raised in several Midwestern states. After a brief stay in Chicago, where he met Emanuel Carnevali, he moved to New York in 1920 and quickly joined the literary circle active in Greenwich Village. With his friend William Carlos Williams, he founded *Contact* magazine; its four issues published work by Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, Glenway Wescott, and H. D.

It was through H. D. that McAlmon met and married her lover, the shipping heiress Annie Winifred Ellerman, who published under the name "Bryher." Their 1921 marriage inspired much gossip concerning McAlmon's own sexual preferences and Bryher's financial support of him: some referred to him as "Robert McAlimony." In the following year, McAlmon moved to Paris and founded the influential Contact Editions press. Its publications included Hemingway's first book, *Three Stories and Ten Poems* (1923), poetry collections by William Carlos Williams, Mina Loy, and Marsden Hartley, and the first complete edition of Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* (1925). He also provided James Joyce with financial support and assisted in the revision and typing of the Penelope section of *Ulysses*.

McAlmon's own published works from this period include the critically praised short story collections *The Hasty Bunch* (1922) and *Distinguished Air* (1925); the experimental "plotless novel" *Village* (1924); and a collection of poetry, *Portrait of a Generation* (1926). The McAlmons divorced in 1925, and McAlmon left Paris in 1929, after closing Contact Editions. Throughout the next fifteen years, he traveled widely in the United States, Mexico and Europe, drinking heavily and publishing little. *Not Alone Lost*, a volume of poetry, was published by New Directions in 1937 and became its worst-selling title. His bitter memoir of Paris in the Twenties, *Being Geniuses Together*, appeared in Great Britain to little notice in 1938.

McAlmon returned to the United States following the occupation of France in 1940. In ill-health and out of money, he settled in Arizona, where he worked as a salesman in his brothers' surgical supply company. His tuberculosis worsened in 1951, and his sisters bought him a small house in Hot Springs, California, where he died on February 2, 1956.

Scope and Contents

The Robert McAlmon Papers document portions of the life and work of Robert McAlmon and his decades-long connections with American and British members of the 1920s Paris expatriate community. The collection spans the years 1916-1956, but the bulk of the material is post-1930. The correspondence series includes substantive letters from many of the major literary figures of the period, including William Bird, Kay Boyle, T. S. Eliot, John Glassco, H. D., Hilaire Hiler, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Katherine Anne Porter, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and William Carlos Williams, and from the musician George Antheil and the artist Marsden Hartley. The collection also contains typescripts of two of McAlmon's critically acclaimed publications, *Distinguished Air* and *Village: Throughout Fifteen Years*, and of several other works, including the never-completed *Politics of Existence*; and several folders of photographs.

Arrangement

Organized into three series: I. Correspondence; II. Writings; III. Other Papers.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1920-1959

1.51 linear feet (3 boxes)

Series I, *Correspondence*, is alphabetically arranged by name of correspondent. One folder of general correspondence, also alphabetically arranged, is located at the beginning of the series.

McAlmon's correspondence consists almost entirely of letters from literary colleagues and friends. There are no letters from other members of the McAlmon family and none from Bryher, his wife for several years. In fact, while his correspondents are almost all writers McAlmon met in New York and Paris in the 1920s, most of their letters date from after McAlmon left Paris in 1929.

There are some 1920s letters from George Antheil, Djuna Barnes, T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Ken Sato, and Gertrude Stein. These often discuss Contact Editions business, particularly Hemingway's and Stein's. Antheil's letters offer vivid discussions of his love of music and his personal "philosophy" about the relationship between art and sex, while Pound's are a mix of literary analysis, exhortations to read, circulate or publish various authors, and oblique comments on the social scene.

Other major correspondents include William Bird, Kay Boyle, H. D., Marsden Hartley, Josephine Herbst, and James Stern. The letters of almost all the correspondents are a valuable source of information about the Paris expatriate circle and its "afterlife." Well into the 1950s, these writers and artists continued to follow each other's lives and careers, argue about the value of each other's works, and dispute each other's memories of Paris.

Their often long letters are filled with personal news; gossip about mutual acquaintances; and comments on each others' publications, sometimes highly negative. Those who returned to the United States often remarked on the high cost of living and the difficulties of readjusting to America after many years abroad. Marsden Hartley, back in Maine in August of 1941, complained that "I feel stuck here like a lobster trap washed up in the tide." Josephine Herbst wrote from Pennsylvania in June of 1949: "I can't tell you how I long to go back."

Postwar letters from correspondents who had remained in or returned to Europe, including H. D. and William Bird, contain descriptions of the difficult conditions there and news of European friends. Ken Sato's letters detail postwar changes in Japan as well.

Letters from the late 1940s and 1950s chronicle the writers' health and finances; the careers and marriages of their children; and their thoughts on current events in the United States. They also describe the authors' reactions to receiving questions about each other from biographers and historians and mention plans to donate or sell their literary papers. "Certainly sell Yale my letters, glad they can be turned into a little cash," advised William Carlos Williams in 1949.

Relatively few correspondents in this series had no direct association with 1920s Paris. They include the Western poet Norman MacLeod and his wife Vivian; Joan Churchill; the Joyce biographer Richard Ellmann; and the Joyce collector John J. Slocum.

b. 1, f. 1	A-Z general	1952-54, undated
b. 1, f. 2	Abbott, Berenice	1952-53, undated
b. 1, f. 3	Antheil, George	1920s
b. 1, f. 4	Barnes, Djuna	1920-52

b. 1, f. 5	Beach, Sylvia	1932-44
b. 1, f. 6-7	Bird, William Includes retained carbons of some letters from McAlmon to Bird	1934-54
b. 1, f. 8-10	Boyle, Kay	1934-53, undated
b. 1, f. 11	Charters, Jimmie	1952
b. 1, f. 12	Churchill, Joan	1951-52
b. 1, f. 13	Coates, Robert	1949
b. 1, f. 14	Coffey, Brian	1939-53
b. 1, f. 15	Cook, William Includes photograph of William Cook and friend, Paris, 1938	1932-53
b. 1, f. 16	Dahlberg, Edward	1953-54
b. 1, f. 17	Dawson, Mitchell	1952
b. 1, f. 18	Einstein, William	1942-52
b. 1, f. 19	Eliot, T. S. (Thomas Stearns)	1921-26
b. 1, f. 20	Ellmann, Richard	1953
b. 1, f. 21	Evans, Ernestine	undated
b. 1, f. 22	Gallup, Donald C.	1949-53
b. 1, f. 23	Garrigue, Jean Includes typescript carbon of <i>After the Three Bears</i>	undated
b. 1, f. 24-26	Glassco, John	1941-47
b. 1, f. 27-28	H. D.	1933-52, undated
b. 1, f. 29	Hall, Brian	1939-52
b. 1, f. 30	Hamnett, Nina	1940-55, undated
b. 1, f. 31	Harbord, Gordon	1952
b. 1, f. 32-36	Hartley, Marsden	1936-42, undated
b. 1, f. 37	Hemingway, Ernest	1923-25, undated
b. 1, f. 38-39	Herbst, Josephine	1949-54, undated
b. 1, f. 40-41	Hiler, Hilaire	1937-53, undated

b. 1, f. 42	Idlet, John Thomas	1952-53
b. 1, f. 43	Johns, Richard	1952-54
b. 1, f. 44-46	Joyce, James	1921-34, undated
b. 1, f. 47	Lanham, Edwin	1937, undated
b. 1, f. 48	Larsson, Raymond Ellsworth Includes manuscript copy of <i>Elegy on Receiving the News of Mary Widney's Death</i>	1935-42
b. 1, f. 49	Lewis, Wyndham Accompanied by typescript comment on letters by McAlmon	1922-27, undated
b. 1, f. 50	Lord, Martha	1953-54
b. 2, f. 51	MacIntyre, Carlyle Ferren	1937-53, undated
b. 2, f. 52	Macleod, Norman	1951-55
b. 2, f. 53	Macleod, Vivienne Koch Accompanied by annotated photocopies of letters	1946-49, undated
b. 2, f. 54	Mangan, Sherry	1945, 1946
b. 2, f. 55	Mannin, Ethel	1936-51
b. 2, f. 56	Marsh, Louise	1931, undated
b. 2, f. 57	Metcalf, Addison M.	1954
b. 2, f. 58	Moore, Marianne	1921-52
b. 2, f. 59	Morgan, Louise	1931-52
b. 2, f. 60	Morrison, Louise H.	1929, undated
b. 2, f. 61	Nordström, Ludvig Anselm	1923-38
b. 2, f. 62-63	Porter, Katherine Anne Includes 1959 photograph of Porter and N. Tatsumokuchi	1932-59
b. 2, f. 64-66	Pound, Ezra	circa 1925-59, undated
b. 2, f. 67	Prescott, Joseph	1953-54
b. 2, f. 68	Richardson, Dorothy	1929-52, undated
b. 2, f. 69-71	Sato, Ken Includes typescript carbon of "Samurai Tales, Saikaki Ibata [XVIIe]" and three photographs of Sato and his house, undated	1923-53, undated
b. 2, f. 72	Sinclair, May	1924
b. 2, f. 73	Slocum, John J.	1947, 1953

b. 2, f. 74	Spoerri, James F.	1950 October 25
b. 2, f. 75-77	Stein, Gertrude Includes signed copy of contract between McAlmon and Stein for Contact Editions publication of <i>The Making of Americans</i>	1925-1926
b. 3, f. 78-81	Stern, James	1936-54
b. 3, f. 82	Thirlwall, John Connop	1954
b. 3, f. 83	Ullman, Sara	undated
b. 3, f. 84	Vail, Laurence	undated
b. 3, f. 85	Varèse, Edward	1952 June 17
b. 3, f. 86	Werner, Morris	1935, 1937
b. 3, f. 87	Wetterau, Robert	1948-52
b. 3, f. 88	Widney, Willard Includes typescript copy of <i>Elegy on Receiving the News of Mary Widney's Death</i>	1952, undated
b. 3, f. 89	White, Tiny?	1946-47, undated
b. 3, f. 90-99	Williams, William Carlos Includes multiple copies and photocopies, some annotated by Norman Holmes Pearson and Donald Gallup	1921-48
b. 3, f. 100	Yale University Library	1948

Series II: Writings, 1916-1952*1.05 linear feet (3 boxes)*

Series II, *Writings*, is alphabetically arranged by title of work, with two folders of untitled clippings and short pieces located at the end of the series. All items are typescripts or typescripts carbon, mostly the latter. Contents include typescripts of McAlmon's most successful works, *Distinguished Air* and *Village*, as well as the typescript drafts of *Politics of Existence*. McAlmon described this unfinished work in a 1952 letter as "no autobiography, but a history of various encounters through many years."

b. 8, f. 174	<i>Being Geniuses Together</i> , galley proof, corrected Contains photographs of people and places mentioned in the text, including Bryher, Ernest Hemingway, William Carlos Williams, Nina Hamnet, Ethel Moorhead, and images of bullfighting in Spain.	circa 1938
b. 4, f. 101	<i>Distinguished Air</i> , typescript carbon, annotated	circa 1925
b. 4, f. 102	<i>The Nightinghousls of Paris</i> , typescript carbon, corrected	1929?
b. 4, f. 103	<i>Paris, 14th of July</i> , typescript carbon, corrected Autograph title page inscribed to Charles Demuth	undated
b. 4, f. 104-111	Politics of Existence, typescript carbon Also known as <i>History of Encounters</i> Prefaced by a letter to Norman Holmes Pearson, 1952 December 8, describing this project	1952, undated
b. 4, f. 112-114	<i>School for Unrest</i> , 1st Novel of the Twenties, typescript carbon	undated
b. 5, f. 115-125	<i>Some Take Their Moments</i> , typescript and typescript carbon, corrected	undated
b. 5, f. 126-127	<i>Too Quick for Life</i> , typescript carbon, two versions	undated
b. 5, f. 128	<i>Village: Throughout Fifteen Years</i> , typescript carbon	undated
b. 5, f. 129-130	Book reviews, drafts of brief articles, newspaper clippings, some annotated	1916-35, undated

Series III: Other Papers, 1969-1980

0.63 linear feet (2 boxes)

Series III, *Other Papers*, consists of six folders of photographs, a photocopy of a dissertation about McAlmon, and seven folders of transcripts, photocopies, and photonegative copies of letters in Series I.

The photographs are nearly all 5x7 portraits of people in black-and-white; most of them were probably taken in the 1920s and 1930s. Individual subjects include Kay Boyle mountaineering in the Swiss Alps; McAlmon’s wife Bryher; the bullfighter Quinito Caldentey; Ernest Hemingway; William Carlos Williams; and McAlmon himself. There are also several group portraits, apparently taken in Paris.

b. 6, f. 131-136	Photographs	undated
b. 6, f. 137-152	Smoller, Sanford, <i>Robert McAlmon: A Biographical Evaluation</i> Typescript photocopy	1972
b. 7, f. 153-173	Transcripts and photocopies	1969-80, undated

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

American fiction -- 20th Century
American literature -- 20th Century
Authors, American -- 20th Century -- Archives
Authors, American -- France -- Paris
Expatriate authors -- France -- Paris
Small presses -- France

Names

Antheil, George, 1900-1959
Barnes, Djuna
Bird, William, 1888-1963
Boyle, Kay, 1902-1992
Eliot, T. S. (Thomas Stearns), 1888-1965
Glassco, John, 1909-1981
H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), 1886-1961
Hartley, Marsden, 1877-1943
Hemingway, Ernest, 1899-1961
Herbst, Josephine, 1892-1969
Joyce, James, 1882-1941
Lewis, Wyndham, 1882-1957
Macleod, Norman, 1906-1985
McAlmon, Robert, 1896-1956
Moore, Marianne, 1887-1972
Porter, Katherine Anne, 1890-1980
Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972
Satō, Ken
Stein, Gertrude, 1874-1946
Stern, James
Williams, William Carlos, 1883-1963

Corporate Body

Contact Editions