

Stanley Burnshaw:

An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Burnshaw, Stanley, 1906-
Title:	Stanley Burnshaw Papers
Dates:	1927-1987 (bulk 1945-1987)
Extent:	29 document boxes, 1 oversize box (24 linear feet), 14 galley folders
Abstract:	The papers of American poet and literary critic Stanley Burnshaw primarily consist of notes, outlines, research materials, and drafts associated with his numerous literary pursuits. A quantity of correspondence is also present containing often detailed exchanges between Burnshaw and other writers, editors, publishers, scholars, and critics.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-00620
Language:	English
Access	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Purchase and gift, 1987-1989 (R11339, G8261)
Provenance	This collection was purchased from Mr. Burnshaw in 1987, and was supplemented by a 1989 gift from Paul Rogers, consisting of correspondence which Rogers received from Burnshaw.
Processed by	Melissa Truitt-Green, 1993; revised Joan Sibley, 1994; revised by Kris Kiesling, 1997
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Stanley Burnshaw, born in New York City on June 20, 1906, is a poet, critic, novelist, playwright, publisher, editor, translator, and scholar recognized primarily for his poetry and literary criticism. Burnshaw is probably best known as the author of *The Seamless Web* (1970), a study of the ontology of poetry and an analysis of its role in human life. Burnshaw's father served as the director of a home for Jewish orphans that attracted nationwide attention and a visit from President Taft. Both of his parents had immigrated to the United States from eastern Europe. Burnshaw movingly tells his father's story in "My Friend, My Father," Book III of *The Refusers* (1981). This is the best source for information on Burnshaw's early life, presented through the eyes of his father. *My Friend, My Father* was published as a paperback in 1986 by Oxford University Press. Burnshaw's mother's flight is recounted in his poem "House in St. Petersburg" (collected in *Caged in an Animal's Mind*, 1963).

Burnshaw enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh in 1922, transferred to Columbia University in 1924, and transferred back to the University of Pittsburgh, where he earned his B.A. in 1925. He had planned a career as a teacher and writer; however, he took a job as an advertising copywriter with the Blaw-Knox Steel Corporation in Blawnox, Pennsylvania, to support himself and to save the money for a year of graduate study in Europe. During this period Burnshaw wrote poetry, some of which was published in little magazines, such as the *Midland*, *Voices*, and in volume one of *The American Caravan* (1927), an influential anthology of avant-garde writing edited by Van Wyck Brooks, Alfred Kreymborg, Lewis Mumford, and Paul Rosenfeld. Burnshaw started his own magazine, *Poetry Folio*, in 1926, setting the type himself. During the late Depression era, Burnshaw's poetry and literary criticism reflected Marxist ideas; however, his political works never reflected a doctrinaire rigidity--merely a desire to better the lot of those most degraded by poverty and industrialism by portraying them honestly.

In 1927 Burnshaw went to Europe to study at the University of Poitiers and later at the Sorbonne. During this period he met and began a long association with the French poet André Spire--his *André Spire and His Poetry* appeared in 1933. The essays and translations in this book reveal Burnshaw's knowledge of European literature and languages as well as Spire's influence on Burnshaw. In 1928 Burnshaw returned to America and worked as the advertising manager for the Hecht Company in New York and continued his graduate studies at New York University. During this time he also wrote some free-lance literary criticism. In 1932, he resigned from the Hecht Company to begin a year's post-graduate work at Cornell University, from which he graduated with a Master's Degree in 1933.

From January 1934 until July 1936, Burnshaw was co-editor, drama critic, and occasional book reviewer for the New York weekly *The New Masses*. Burnshaw's writings continued to focus on social injustice throughout the 1930s. Two works that exemplify his thematic focus during this period are *The Iron Land* (1936), which depicts poetically the lives of steel mill workers, and the verse play *The Bridge* (1945), which explores the consequences of technology distorted by greed. During the late 1930s

Burnshaw became increasingly involved in publishing, first as editor-in-chief for the Cordon Company in New York, then as president and editor-in-chief of his own firm, the Dryden Press, which merged with Holt, Rinehart and Winston in 1958. He remained a vice-president and consultant to the house until 1968.

The Revolt of the Cats in Paradise (1945), a satiric, book-length poem, marks his rejection of Marxism as a solution to socio-economic problems. He lectured on Studies in World Literature at New York University's Graduate School of Book Publishing from 1958-1962. During this period, his work reflected a scholarly frame of reference rather than a political agenda; however, he remained politically active and aware of political issues. In 1960 he edited *The Poem Itself*, a book that imparts an understanding of modern poems in other languages without recreating the poem in English verse; instead, the poems are translated literally and accompanied by an analytical essay that explicates the nuances, idioms, and allusions unique to each work. *The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself* (1965) uses the same format (literal translation accompanied by an essay) to explicate Hebrew poems for English language readers. He also edited *Varieties of Literary Experience* (1962), an anthology of literary essays including his own "The Three Revolutions in Modern Poetry." His next collection of poetry, *In the Terrified Radiance* (1972), includes "The Hero of Silence," a sequence of poems on the life of Mallarmé. *The Hero of Silence* was originally published in 1965 in *The Lugano Review* and subsequently issued as a pamphlet. *Mirages* (1977), is a collection of poems dealing with modern Israel. It was later included as an epilogue to *The Refusers* (1981).

Stanley Burnshaw now divides his time between New York and his home in Martha's Vineyard. He received an award for creative writing from the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1971, and in 1983 he was awarded an honorary doctor of humane letters degree by Hebrew Union College--Jewish Institute of Religion. The distinguished London poetry magazine *Agenda* honored him with a "Special Stanley Burnshaw Issue" with the Winter-Spring 1983-84 issue. In 1986, he published a biography of Robert Frost entitled *Robert Frost Himself*. *The Stanley Burnshaw Reader* (1989), provides an excellent overview of his work in poetry, translation, literary criticism, and biography. Three weeks before his ninetieth birthday, the City University of New York awarded him an honorary doctor of letters degree.

Scope and Contents

The Stanley Burnshaw Papers consist of notes, outlines, research materials, typescript drafts, galleys, page proofs, clippings, and correspondence, 1927-1987 (bulk 1945-1987). The material is arranged in two series, Works, 1933-1987 (22.5 boxes) and General Correspondence, 1927-1987 (6.5 boxes).

Burnshaw's post-1945 poetry, translations, and criticism are particularly well represented in this collection. Extensive files are present for *The Poem Itself* (1960), *Robert Frost Himself* (1986), and *The Seamless Web* (1970). Other works represented in this collection include *Caged in an Animal's Mind*, *The Hero of Silence*, *Mirages*, *The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself*, *The Refusers*, *The Revolt of the Cats in Paradise*, and *Varieties of Literary Experience*. Burnshaw's creative processes can be followed through

the extensive notes, correspondence, and research information he kept for each of his projects, and the revision and refinement of his works can be traced from typescript drafts through page proofs. His considerable input into the styling, production, and promotion of his books is also evidenced in extensive comments and letters to authors, editors, publishers, printers, and critics. Published reviews and essays show the critical response to his works. Additionally, Burnshaw's own activities as an editor and publisher (in conjunction with projects involving Edward Dahlberg, Nahum Goldmann, David Ben-Gurion, Laura (Riding) Jackson, Christina Stead, Lionel Trilling, and Louis Untermeyer) are documented, as are his relationships with numerous other writers and scholars in various intellectual fields.

The papers also contain information about Burnshaw's childhood and family heritage in letters, notes, and papers of his father and other family members, which were gathered as source material for *The Refusers* and *My Friend, My Father*. In addition there is valuable information about his family relationships, especially with his wife Lydia "Leda" Powsner Burnshaw and his daughter Valerie, in both series.

Burnshaw's correspondence frequently consists of detailed exchanges about work-in-progress with other writers, editors, publishers, scholars, and critics. There are substantial files of correspondence, sometimes reflecting personal relationships as well as professional ties, with such varied figures as T. Carmi, Edward Dahlberg, James Daly, James Dickey, Dudley Fitts, Robert Frost, Norman Fruman, Nahum Goldmann, Josephine Herbst, Laura (Riding) Jackson, Haniel Long, John Frederick Nims, Paul Rogers, Gregor Sebba, Karl Shapiro, André Spire, Christina Stead, Lionel Trilling, Louis Untermeyer, Wade Van Dore, and others. A list of all correspondents in the papers can be found at the end of this inventory.

The collection contains substantial information concerning the topics of modern literature (especially poetry) and its practitioners, the translation of poetry (from French, German, Hebrew, Italian, and Spanish), literary criticism, publishing and editing (including Burnshaw's activities with the Dryden Press and Holt, Rinehart and Winston), and the Jewish experience.

Series Descriptions

Series I. Works, 1933-1987

The first series includes working notes, outlines, correspondence, research material, typescript drafts, galleys, page proofs, publicity, and reviews. Materials dealing with specific titles have been filed together and are arranged alphabetically by title of the work. Other than arranging this series into alphabetical order by title, every effort has been made to preserve the original order established by Burnshaw. Long galleys and oversize page proofs have been removed to oversize storage. These files frequently include extensive correspondence generated during research, writing, editing, and publication of his works, and all correspondents are included in the list of correspondents at the end of this inventory. Mr. Burnshaw sometimes provided explanatory notes in his files, which explain the significance or background of various materials. *The Seamless Web* (1970), *The Poem Itself* (1964), *Robert Frost Himself* (1986), and *The Refusers* (1981) respectively comprise the greatest bulk of the material in the series. *The Refusers* material includes an unpublished verse play entitled *Uriel da Costa* that Burnshaw converted into Book I of *The Refusers* (1981) and *My Friend, My Father* (1986), which originally appeared as Book III of *The Refusers*. This group also includes

copious notes about Burnshaw's early life and family background via family notes and correspondence. It also contains clippings and notes that highlight his interest in the impact of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and fascism on the Jewish people in general as well as on his family specifically. Notes, correspondence, and clippings filed with *The Seamless Web* (1970) material reveal the diversity of his interests as a scholar and critic as well as an extensive and eclectic group of correspondence with scientists, linguists, and psychologists. The *Robert Frost Himself* files include extensive research materials (a typescript of Wade Van Dore's book about Frost and copies of Wade Van Dore's and Louis Untermeyer's correspondence with Frost) and correspondence which relate to Frost's personality and friendships with Burnshaw and many others in his circle.

Series II. General Correspondence, 1927-1987 22.5 boxes

This series includes correspondence which was maintained alphabetically by the last name of the correspondent. Carbon copies of Burnshaw's letters and responses are interfiled alphabetically with their respective correspondents. Burnshaw's correspondence frequently consists of detailed exchanges about work-in-progress with other writers, editors, publishers, scholars, and critics, and personal relationships are often evident as well. Correspondents include Conrad Aiken, Robert Alter, Saul Bellow, David Ben-Gurion, Robert Bly, Calvin S. Brown, T. Carmi, John Ciardi, E. E. Cummings, Edward Dahlberg, Peter Dale, James Daly, James Dickey, Denis Donoghue, Leon Edel, Alfred Conway Edwards, Clifton Fadiman, James Kern Feibleman, Dudley Fitts, Robert Fitzgerald, Eugenio Florit, Robert Frost, Norman Fruman, John Gassner, Nahum Goldmann, Josephine Herbst, Howard E. Hugo, David Ignatow, Laura (Riding) Jackson, Randall Jarrell, James Laughlin, Haniel Long, Robert Lowell, Andrew Nelson Lytle, Archibald MacLeish, Jacques Masui, Eugenio Montale, Marianne Moore, John Frederick Nims, Kenneth Patchen, Octavio Paz, Henri Peyre, Philip Rahv, Sir Herbert Edward Read, Kenneth Rexroth, Paul Rogers, Gregor Sebba, Karl Shapiro, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Ezra Spicehandler, André Spire, John Louis Spivak, Christina Stead, William Alfred Sutton, Allen, Tate, Lionel Trilling, Louis Untermeyer, Wade Van Dore, Mark Van Doren, Robert Penn Warren, Elie Wiesel, Richard Wilbur, Wendell L. Willkie and many others. A list of all correspondents in the papers can be found at the end of this inventory.

Related Material

Several other collections at the HRHRC include further Burnshaw materials: James Donald Adams, William Burford, *Contempo*, Edward Dahlberg, John Gassner, Robinson Jeffers, Willard Maas, Kenneth Patchen, and Idella Purnell Stone.

For information concerning books acquired by the HRHRC from Burnshaw's library, see the Collections File and/or the online catalog, UTCAT.

Index Terms

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- Yager, Ellen (George Braziller, Inc.)--22.4
- Yoken, Mel B.--10.4
- Zahand, Terry (Cornell University Press)--20.12
- Zaller, Robert (University of Miami)--29.10
- Zelazny, Raymond P. (New York University)--23.6
- Zigmund, Maurice L.--11.8
- Zimmer, Paul--29.10
- Zoerner, Louise (Holt, Rinehart & Winston)--20.12