

Pascal Covici:

An Inventory of His Correspondence at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator	Covici, Pascal, 1888-1964
Title	Pascal Covici Correspondence
Dates:	1924-1966 (bulk 1938-1964)
Extent:	1 box, 1 oversize folder
Abstract	This collection of correspondence of editor and publisher Pascal Covici consists of typed and holograph correspondence and post cards, including enclosures such as photographs, a pamphlet, and drawings. Topics touched on include the publishing industry, the Covici-Friede publishing firm, and writers, such as Richard Aldington, Saul Bellow, M. F. K. Fisher, Radclyffe Hall, Victor Hugo, Arthur Miller, Iris Murdoch, Frederic Prokosch, Elmer Rice, John Steinbeck, Lionel Trilling, Mark Van Doren, and Rebecca West.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-00948
Language:	English.
Access	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition	Purchase, 1969 (Reg. no. 4810)
Processed by	Robert Kendrick, 1996
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Pascal Covici, publisher and editor, was born in Botosani, Romania, in 1888 and immigrated to the United States with his parents in 1896. He attended the University of Michigan and the University of Chicago. In 1915, he married Dorothy Soll. They had one son, Pascal Covici, Jr.

Covici's first publishing venture was undertaken with William McGee. Their first title, published under the Covici-McGee imprint in 1922, was Ben Hecht's *1001 Afternoons in Chicago*. In 1925, the Covici-McGee partnership dissolved, and Covici began publishing under his own imprint. Publications included Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly*, works by Richard Aldington, works by Remy de Gourmont as translated by Aldington, and translations of works by the Marquis de Sade and Joris Karl Huysmans. In 1928, Covici moved to New York to establish a partnership with Donald Friede. The Covici-Friede firm specialized in limited editions. Among their titles were the complete works of François Villon, the Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur play *The Front Page*, Aldington's *Collected Poems*, Mrs. Julia Moore's *The Sweet Singer of Michigan*, Wyndham Lewis's *The Childermass* (though only the first of the three planned volumes was published, due to poor sales), and Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*. After an indictment for obscenity, sales for Hall's novel doubled.

Despite such successes, however, the economic collapse of the Depression spelled the end of the market for limited editions; Covici-Friede was forced to publish what Friede described as "machine-made fiction," including Bobbie Meredith's *Speakeasy Girl*, George A. Bagby's *Bachelor's Wife*, and Grace Perkins's *Boy Crazy*. This period was followed by a return to more respectable titles, such as Horace Gregory's translation of *The Poems of Catullus*, Gene Fowler's *The Great Mouthpiece*, John Strachey's *The Coming Struggle for Power*, and *Three Plays* by Clifford Odets. Among the last titles published by the firm were John Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *The Red Pony* (1937). When the firm finally collapsed because of insolvency, all outstanding debts and authors' royalties were paid; Covici and Friede, however, lost their entire investment.

In 1938, Covici obtained the position of senior editor at Viking Press. In addition to Steinbeck, who followed him to Viking, Covici worked with writers such as Saul Bellow, Ludwig Bemelmans, Joseph Campbell, George Gamow, Shirley Jackson, Willy Ley, Arthur Miller, Marianne Moore, Lionel Trilling, and Covici's lifelong friend Gene Fowler. Steinbeck's *East of Eden* and Bellow's *Herzog* were both dedicated to Covici. Covici also held primary responsibility for the Viking Portable Library. Pascal Covici died in 1964.

Scope and Contents

The collection consists consists of typed and holograph correspondence and postcards, including enclosures such as photographs, a clipping, an exhibition catalog, a menu, a pamphlet, and drawings, 1924-1966 (bulk, 1938-1964). The material is arranged alphabetically by correspondent. The few carbon copies of outgoing correspondence are interfiled chronologically with the incoming correspondence of each recipient.

The correspondence is primarily from professional associates and friends. There are several congratulatory notes upon Covici's move to the Viking Press in 1938. Other topics touched on include the publishing industry; the Covici-Friede publishing firm; writers, such as Richard Aldington, Saul Bellow, M. F. K. Fisher, Radclyffe Hall, Victor Hugo, Arthur Miller, Iris Murdoch, Frederic Prokosch, Elmer Rice, John Steinbeck, Lionel Trilling, Mark Van Doren, Rebecca West, and their work; living in Italy; astrophysics; the physiology of the brain; Florida; and bourbon with branch water. Among the significant correspondents are Charles Beard, Marshall Best, Joseph Campbell, Monroe Engel, Donald Friede, George Gamow, Horace Gregory, Ben and Rose Hecht, B. W. Huebsch, Waldemar Kaempffert, Edwin Herbert Lewis, Marvin Lowenthal, Arthur Miller, Edita Morris, Jack Spivak, Adlai Stevenson, Diana and Lionel Trilling, and Roland Young. There is one folder of miscellaneous material, including a discharge notice and a certification of jury service, a carbon copy typescript of Eliezer Greenberg's poem, "In Memoriam--Isaac Rosenfeld (1918-1956)," translated from the Yiddish by Henry Gilfond, and a photograph of Stephen Crane.

Of special interest are the individual folders of correspondence from Ludwig Bemelmans, M. F. K. Fisher, and Gene Fowler. The Bemelmans material includes photographs of Bemelmans and his family; plans for a children's book, including sketches by Bemelmans; the catalog from the Bemelmans exhibition at Galerie Durand-Ruel in 1957; a letter from Gabriele Henkel, Bemelmans's wife, typed on the verso of a holograph Bemelmans letter; two letters written on the versos of the galleys for the German translation of *Are You Hungry, Are You Cold*; an undated letter in which Bemelmans amusingly recounts the various difficulties he has faced in his career; and, finally, frank discussion of the cancer, which was to end his life. In addition, many of the letters include drawings by Bemelmans. Topics touched on among the M. F. K. Fisher material include her husband Donald Friede, his mental health problems, and their subsequent divorce; her children; writing for magazines; her return to Aix-en-Provence; rumors of a sexual liaison with Marietta Voorhees; the death of her father, Rex Kennedy; the assassination of John F. Kennedy; and her decision to teach English in Piney Woods, Mississippi, in order to combat racism. Materials include photographs of Fisher and her family and a printed menu with commentary by Fisher for a banquet of the California Knights Templar. Among the Fowler materials are a typescript review of *Finnegan's Wake*; "The Cowboy's Lament," a typescript poem by Fowler; photographs of Fowler; and a memorial pamphlet, "Gene Fowler, 1890-1960: Recollections by His Friends on the Occasion of His Last Book 'Skyline,'" published by the Viking Press in 1960. Topics covered in the correspondence include the Hollywood studio system; "Alexander-the-Great Woolcott"; surgery's effect on Fowler's sex life; Hitler and Mussolini; Fowler's testimony in the National Labor Relations Board hearings concerning the Screen Writers' Guild; the adaptation of literature for the screen; Ben Hecht; the reporter Harold Denny; John Barrymore; the Soviet Union; Fowler's conversion to Catholicism; Covici's daughter's polio; and, finally, Jimmy Durante.

Most of the materials from the Covici Collection were separated at an earlier date and catalogued into individual author collections. Consult the card catalog for Covici materials in the following collections: Richard Aldington, W. H. Auden, Saul Bellow, *Contempo*, Walter de la Mare, Albert Einstein, William Goyen, Ludwig Lewisohn, Arthur Miller, Marianne Moore, Thomas Sturge Moore, Ezra Pound, Frederic Prokosch, Carl Sandburg, John Steinbeck, and Booth Tarkington.

Index Terms

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Trilling, Lionel, 1905-1975

Young, Roland, 1887-1953

Subjects

Steinbeck, John, 1902-1968

Covici, Friede Inc.

Authors--20th century

Fiction--20th century

Literature--20th century

Publishers and publishing--20th century

Document Types

Photographs

Postcards

Series I. Correspondence, 1924-1966

A-L

box 1 folder 1

Bemelmans, Ludwig (correspondence on verso of galleys and two drawings removed to Oversize Flat file)

**folder
2**

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folder 3

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M-Z

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