Jean Malaquais:
An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Malaquais, Jean, 1908-1998
Title: Jean Malaquais Papers
Dates: 1917-2010
Extent: 11 document boxes (4.62 linear feet), 2 oversize folders (osf)
Abstract: The Jean Malaquais Papers consist of manuscript drafts, correspondence, notes, clippings, scrapbooks, photographs, journals, and bound volumes belonging to the French writer and translator Jean Malaquais.
Call Number: Manuscript Collection MS-05185
Language: English, French, Spanish, German, and Russian
Access: Open for research. Researchers must create an online Research Account and agree to the Materials Use Policy before using archival materials.
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Administrative Information
Jean Malaquais was born Wladimir Malacki into a non-practicing Jewish family, in Warsaw, Poland, on April 11, 1908. His intellectual father taught Classics; his mother had been active in the Bund, a Jewish socialist organization. All of his family was exterminated during World War II.

Young Malacki left Poland in 1926 and, after extensive traveling, notably in the Middle East, ended up in France, the "country of liberty" he had dreamed of as he was growing up. Upon the expiration of his Polish passport, he became stateless and for years eked out a precarious living in a succession of jobs, from deckhand in the merchant marine to miner in Provence. He first married a Polish sweetheart, Alina Eisenberg, with whom he had a son (known as "Jeannot") and went on to share his life with a Russian painter, Galina "Galy" Yurkevich.

By 1935, he had settled in Paris, working nights unloading crates in Les Halles central market, and spending his days in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, perfecting his French and imbibing culture, especially literature. After reading a statement in which André Gide speculated that the experience of poverty might have enriched his writing, Malacki addressed an angry letter to the famous author, who responded by encouraging him to write and included a 100 francs postal order. Irate and humiliated, Malacki returned the postal order torn into pieces. The two men finally met and there developed between them a friendship which endured until Gide’s death in 1951. Gide exerted a profound literary influence on his friend in the early days of their relationship and, later on, actually helped save his life.

In 1938, Malacki completed a draft of the novel Les Javanais, published in 1939 under the pseudonym Jean Malaquais. Based on the author’s experience of living and working amongst stateless people from all corners of the world in a lead and silver mine in Provence, the novel drew critical acclaim and was awarded the prestigious Prix Renaudot. Trotsky, for one, wrote a lengthy article about it. Malaquais had strong leftist convictions. He never, however, officially joined any political party.

After the war broke out, Malaquais, albeit stateless, was conscripted into the French army and captured by the Nazis. He managed to escape to Marseilles and, in 1943, thanks to the efforts of Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee, he was able to flee occupied France. Gide had interceded with Consul Gilberto Bosques to secure him a visa to Mexico, where he stayed until 1945. While there, he had two books published by a French firm established in New York: Coups de barre, a collection of short stories, and Journal de guerre, a diary he had managed to salvage from destruction. A blunt critique of France during the phony war, the book was not published in France until 1997, together with a sequel, Journal du métèque.

Malaquais was granted a United States visa in 1946 and became an American citizen in 1952. Nonetheless, he never ceased to consider himself an alien, wherever he was living. The novel Planète sans visa, often considered his masterwork, came out in France in 1947 and in the U.S. in 1948.
In 1949, Malaquais met Norman Mailer, whose novel *The Naked and the Dead* he undertook to translate into French. They became lifelong friends and Mailer was later to credit Malaquais with being his mentor and having exerted the greatest influence on his mind and writing. Malaquais’ next novel, *Le gaffeur* was published in 1953 and Mailer wrote an introduction to it when *The Joker* its American title, was reprinted in paperback.

Malaquais spent the next decades between France, Australia, and the United States, writing and teaching French literature. In 1960, at the Sorbonne, he defended a dissertation on Danish philosopher Sören Kierkegaard, which led to the publication, in 1971, of *Sören Kierkegaard: Foi et paradoxe*. In 1963, he married a French university professor, Elisabeth Deberdt. The couple had one daughter, Dominique.

Malaquais spent his last years in Switzerland, where his wife held a post at the Office of the United Nations in Geneva. He died there on December 22, 1998.

Sources:

In addition to material found within the Jean Malaquais Papers, the following sources were used:


Scope and Contents

The Jean Malaquais Papers consist of manuscript drafts, correspondence, notes, clippings, scrapbooks, photographs, journals, and bound volumes belonging to the French writer and translator, Jean Malaquais. The papers are organized into three series: I. Works, 1936-2001, undated; II. Correspondence, 1917-2010, undated; and III. Personal and Professional Files, 1939-2009, undated.

Series I. Works includes drafts of Malaquais' stories, novels, essays, poems, play scripts, and other writings. Malaquais wrote in both French and English and occasionally in Spanish. Works are arranged in alphabetical order by title, with shorter works combined into folders within specific alphabetical ranges. Because publication information is difficult to verify for many of the French and Spanish essays and shorter works, the publication information provided reflects what is believed to be the date of first publication.
Of particular interest is a heavily annotated edition of *Les Javanais* that also contains many handwritten notes and emendations taped over the original published text. Similarly, a heavily annotated first edition of *Planète sans visa* is also contained within this series. Due to the fragility of both of these bound volumes, each has been restricted and a digitized version is available for use.

Also noteworthy is a carbon typescript draft of the preface to *Le gaffeur* written by Norman Mailer. Series III. Personal and Professional Papers contains additional material related to Mailer.

Series II. Correspondence makes up a considerable segment of the papers and it is arranged into two subseries: A. Personal and B. Professional. Correspondents include Nelson Algren, James Baldwin, Roland Barthes, Samuel Beckett, Charles Boyer, Michael Fraenkel, Varian Fry, André Gide, Norman Mailer, Granger Ryan, Leon Trotsky, and other American, French, and Australian writers, artists, intellectuals, publishers, translators, and admirers. Most letters are either in French or English, but some are in Spanish. Carbon copies of Malaquais' outgoing letters are found throughout the correspondence.

Subseries A. Personal correspondence contains a large volume of letters with French writer André Gide. Contents include original handwritten letters from Gide to Malaquais and Malaquais' typed transcriptions of these letters. In addition, there are a few of Malaquais' outgoing typed carbon copies and hand-transcribed copies of Malaquais' letters housed with Gide's papers at Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris. This collection of letters was published in France as *André Gide-Jean Malaquais: Correspondance, 1935-1950* (Phébus, 2000) and edited by Geneviève Millot-Nakach and Pierre Masson. Series III. Personal and Professional Papers contains page proofs of this manuscript. Filed separately in this subseries are letters from Gide's secretary, Yvonne Davet.

Of significant importance is personal correspondence between Malaquais and American writer, Norman Mailer from 1948 to 1992. Interfiled within these original letters are Malaquais' letters photocopied from the Ransom Center's Norman Mailer Papers. Scattered among these letters are several letters from Mailer's first wife, Beatrice (Bea), and in later years from his sixth wife, Norris. This collection of letters was published in France as *Correspondance: Jean Malaquais et Norman Mailer* (Le Cherche Midi, 2008) and edited by Geneviève Millot-Nakach and Elisabeth Deberdt-Malaquais. Series III. Personal and Professional Papers contains Mailer's edits of this manuscript. A small segment of letters in which Mailer discussed the mental health of Malaquais' son, Jeannot, is restricted until Jeannot's death.

Related to Mailer is a large volume of lengthy letters from convicted murderer Jack Henry Abbott. Abbott contacted Mailer in 1977 upon learning that Mailer was writing about convicted murderer Gary Gilmore for his book, *The Executioner's Song*. Abbott offered to write about his own prison experiences and Mailer ultimately assisted Abbott in publishing *In the Belly of the Beast* (1981). Malaquais became acquainted with Abbott after Mailer and other notables petitioned to have Abbott released from prison in 1981 and Malaquais frequently hosted Abbott in his home. Six weeks after his release, Abbott fatally stabbed a man and was convicted and returned to prison. In his letters, Abbott recounts details of the stabbing, discusses philosophical topics, and often mentions...
Mailer's writings and other attachments accompany some letters. Also of interest are letters from Eiichi Yamanishi, Japanese translator of Mailer's _The Naked and the Dead_. Though his letters mention Mailer, they often focus on the political situation in Japan and his admiration for Malaquais' work and his attempt to get his writings published in Japan. Also present are letters from one of Malaquais' translators, Mary Guggenheim.

Subseries B. Professional correspondence contains letters from French, American, English, Mexican, and other publishers; agents including Madeline B., Franz J. Horch, Scott Meredith, and Russell & Volkening; and other translators, editors, and admirers. Contracts, royalty statements, and other attachments are frequently interfiled with this correspondence, such as the contract between Mailer and Malaquais for his French translation of _The Naked and the Dead_ filed with the Albin Michel correspondence.

Also included is a file of letters associated with Malaquais numerous university appointments and files of letters associated with various works. In 1967 to 1968, Malaquais and his wife, Elisabeth, collaborated on an English translation of an anthology of contemporary French literature that was never published. A file includes letters to many notable writers, including Samuel Beckett, in order to secure rights to republish their work.

Series III. Personal and Professional Papers contains documents related to Malaquais' life as a writer. Biographical papers, contracts, film project material, journals, manuscripts written by other authors, notes and research material, photographs, scrapbooks, and material related to his university appointments are found in this series.

Of primary interest is material related to writer Norman Mailer. This only item associated with Malaquais' translation of Mailer's _The Naked and the Dead_ is a first edition of the novel inscribed to Malaquais in December 1948. The volume contains remarkable annotations and translation notes made by Malaquais. As Mailer admits, Malaquais wasn't fond of the novel and this copy contains numerous pages with words underlined and lines connecting words suggesting Malaquais' disapproval of ideas and word repetition. Manuscript drafts for Mailer's introduction to Malaquais' _The Joker_ (published in France as _Le gaffeur_) and a 1996 essay entitled "War of the Oxymorons" are also among the materials. In addition, are two edited manuscript drafts for _Correspondance: Jean Malaquais et Norman Mailer_ (Le Cherche Midi, 2008) edited by Geneviève Millot-Nakach and Elisabeth Deberdt-Malaquais and published in France. The personal correspondence in the second series includes the original letters between Mailer and Malaquais that were used for this manuscript. Also present is a small amount of photographs of Malaquais and Mailer taken between 1982 and 1997; Elisabeth Malaquais and Norris Mailer also appear in some of the photos.

In addition to fiction and prose, Malaquais explored film-making particularly while living in Mexico in the early 1940s. He wrote several scripts and treatments and this series contains a small sample of this work. Within this segment is research and grant applications for a documentary film Malaquais wanted to make about the native Indians of Peru. French cinematographer Edmond Séchan was considered for the project and the material includes letters from Séchan and several film stills from the set of _Crin-Blanc_ (_White Mane_).
Also of importance are five incomplete journals written in French, particularly the journal dated 1943 to 1954 that was apparently buried and kept by his wife for safe-keeping.

Reviews and clippings in English, French, and other languages are also included in this series. In addition, two scrapbooks contain clippings from 1944 to 1960. Due to the fragility of these scrapbooks, each has been restricted and a digitized version is available for use.

Access Note: Based on restrictions imposed by the donor, any material related to Jean (Jeannot) Malaquais' health is closed until Jeannot's death. Some letters from Joseph Church, Norman Mailer, and all letters from Bethsabee de Rothschild were removed and are restricted until that time.

Related Material

The Norman Mailer Papers, the Hilary Mills Loomis Collection of Norman Mailer, and the Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Records at the Ransom Center contain additional material related to Jean Malaquais.

Separated Material

Two reel-to-reel tapes, one in which Malaquais recounts his memories of André Gide (1963) and the other conference proceedings at Monash University (1966), as well as an audio cassette tape of France Culture Radio (undated) were transferred to the Ransom Center Sound Recordings Collection and are described individually in a list at the end of this finding aid and in a searchable database.

Three VHS tapes containing various segments about Malaquais televised on French television (1995-1996, undated) were transferred to the Ransom Center Film Collection.

Index Terms

People

Gide, André, 1869-1951.
Mailer, Norman.

Subjects

Authors, American--20th century.
Authors, French--20th century.
Literature--20th century.
Novelists, French--20th century.
Politics in literature.
Translators.

**Document Types**

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Art, Experience, and Reality, English typescript, undated

Avant-Propos: contre les mouvements de libération nationale, French typescript, 1968


The Day One / Le jour un / El Dia Uno (published in Town and Country, 1948), English, French, and Spanish typescripts, undated

Dialogue à l'envers (published in La France Libre [New York], 1944), French typescript, undated

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Le nommé Louis Aragon ou le patriote professionnel (published in Masses [Paris], 1947), French typescript, 1945

Le sens de la rébellion dans l'œuvre de Gide / The Spirit of Rebellion in Gide's Work (published in La revue de l'IFAL [Mexico], 1945), French and English typescripts, 1945

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The Modest Reward, outline, undated

Gide, André, André Gide - Jean Malaquais: Correspondance, 1935-1950 (Phébus, 2000), manuscript proofs, 1999

John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, application and material photocopied from collection, 1949-1950, 2001

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Les hors-la-loi introduction by Laurent Jeanpierre, draft and email correspondence, 2002
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Clipping inscribed and signed by Mailer, 1998

Correspondance: Jean Malaquais et Norman Mailer (Le Cherche Midi, 2008), 'Mailer revision' of manuscript, 2008

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