Abstract: English novelist Stephen McKenna (1888-1967) published forty-seven novels and six nonfiction books about English upper-class life before and after World War I. The collection spans from 1917 to 1966, with the bulk of the materials dating between 1917 to 1935, and includes correspondence to the author, manuscripts of short stories and lectures by McKenna, excerpts from other authors' works, newspaper clippings from McKenna's 1921 promotional tour in Sweden, and a volume of photographs featuring McKenna in his home.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 625
Creator: McKenna, Stephen, 1888-
Title: Stephen McKenna papers
Inclusive Dates: 1917-1966
Bulk Dates: 1917-1935
Extent: .3 linear feet and 2 oversize boxes (3 boxes)
Language: Materials in English and Swedish.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 625, Stephen McKenna papers, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

Shelving Summary: Box 1: Shelved in SPEC MSS manuscript boxes; Box 2: Shelved in SPEC MSS oversize boxes (17 inches); Box 3: Shelved in SPEC MSS oversize boxes (18 inches)

Location: Special Collections Department, University of Delaware Library Newark, Delaware 19717-5267 Phone: 302-831-2229 Fax: 302-831-6003 URL: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/

Source: Purchase, July 2010.

Processing: Processed and encoded by Julia Pompetti, October 2010.

Access Restrictions: The collection is open for research.

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Biographical Note

English novelist Stephen McKenna (1888-1967) published forty-seven novels and six nonfiction books during his lifetime. Most of his fiction focuses on English upper-class society drama interwoven with themes of politics and morality.

Of Irish heritage, McKenna was born February 27, 1888, in Beckenhem, Kent, England. McKenna’s uncle, Reginald McKenna (1863-1943) was a politician, banker, and Chancellor of the Exchequer under Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith (1852-1928). Stephen McKenna was educated at Westminster School, London and Christ College, Oxford, where he received a B.A. in 1909 and an M.A. in 1913. He published his first novel while at Oxford, a sentimental romance titled The Reluctant Lover (1912). His family’s wealth and social and political connections gave McKenna access to the English aristocracy of which he wrote.

Exempted from military service during World War I due to poor health, McKenna taught at Westminster from 1914 to 1915 and worked for the British War Trade Intelligence Department from 1915 until 1918. He also participated in the Balfour Mission to the United States in 1917, a political delegation sent to establish friendships and coordinate war efforts between England and America prompted by America’s imminent declaration of war on Germany. During World War II, McKenna again served his country as secretary of Enemy Exports Committee of Ministry of Economic Warfare between 1939 and 1940. Throughout his life, McKenna maintained an interest in politics and the future of England’s national character, a concern he attempted to address in his fiction as well.

In 1917, towards the end of World War I, McKenna published his fifth and best-known novel, Sonia: Between Two Worlds, which sold through twelve editions by the end of the year. Sonia’s plot follows the political and social adventures of three young Oxford men from 1890 to 1917 and was lauded for its depiction of the changes in English governing class society brought on by World War I. Following the success of Sonia, McKenna continued to publish books, sometimes two a year, in England and America, although he remained most popular in England due to his focus on the particularities of English society. Other notable publications include Ninety-Six Hours’ Leave (1917), Midas and Son (1919) and Sonia Married (1919).

The majority of McKenna's fiction can be characterized as sentimental romances and morality tales known for their meticulous detailing of pre-war upper-class life. However, he also wrote several nonfiction works, including an autobiography titled While I Remember (1921), a biography of his friend the translator Alexander Teixeira de Mattos titled Tex: A Chapter in the Life of Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (1922), and a biography of his uncle titled Reginald McKenna, 1863-1943: A Memoir (1948). McKenna continued to write until his death on September 26, 1967.

Sources:


The Stephen McKenna papers includes correspondence to the author, typed manuscripts of short stories and lectures by English novelist Stephen McKenna, typed manuscripts of excerpts from other authors' works, newspaper clippings from McKenna's promotional tour in Sweden, and a book of photographs featuring McKenna and his home. The collection spans 1917 to 1966 with the bulk of the material dating between 1917 and 1935. The collection documents reader responses to McKenna's novels found in fan letters and provides evidence of his public persona documented in newspaper and magazine articles, as well as manuscripts of several of his lectures. The collection is organized in four series: I. Correspondence; II. Manuscripts; III. Clippings and ephemera; and IV. Photographs.

Series I. consists of two scrapbooks containing 75 letters and 15 letters, respectively, and approximately 60 items of loose correspondence. The letters are from authors, fans, and a few family members organized in two scrapbooks presumably maintained by McKenna. The first scrapbook consists of 75 letters dating from 1917 to 1921 organized chronologically on numbered pages; the volume is completely filled, although some pages have been removed. Letters from readers in England and America, but also from various European countries as well as South Africa and Australia, indicate the wide readership of McKenna's works. Literary correspondents include English author Lewis S. Benjamin, pen name Lewis Melville, (1874-1932) on page 15; American novelist Winston Churchill (1871-1947) on page 55; English museum curator and collector Sir Sydney Carlyle Cockerell (1867-1962) on page 65; and American Rhodes scholar and attorney Addison White on page 76.

Many letters from readers offer impressions of McKenna's fictional characters or questions about their motives, especially those in Sonia: Between Two Worlds (1917). The readers offer their insights about and frustrations with his characters and sometimes dispute the historical accuracy of plot details. Also included are requests for autographs for personal collections and to be used in charity fundraisers.

The second scrapbook is only partially filled, containing 15 items, and covers the dates 1934 to 1939. The content of the correspondence is similar to the first scrapbook. Noted correspondents include English writer J.D. Beresford (1873-1947); author and president of the Mark Twain Society Cyril Clemens (1902-); and English author and actress Naomi Ellington Jacob, pen name Gray Ellington (1889-1964).

The scrapbooks are followed by loose correspondence from 1917 to 1939 and one letter from 1966. The letters are organized chronologically followed by undated material. Several of the letters mention McKenna's trip with the Balfour Mission to the United States. Notable correspondents include English publisher Algernon Methuen (1856-1924); English author A.H. Sidgwick (1882-1917); English author, journalist and broadcaster S.P.B. Mais (1885-1975); English journalist and politician Sir Henry Norman (1858-1939); English author Marie Belloc Lowndes (1868-1947); American book collector Paul Lemperly (1858-1939); English author T.I. Fytton Armstrong, pen name John Gawsworth (1912-1970); American publisher Alfred A. Knopf (1892-1984); and English author W.L. George (1882-1926). There is also a letter from literary agent Paul R. Reynolds to English translator Teixeira de Mattos which mentions McKenna.

Series II. contains typed manuscripts divided into two subseries. Subseries II.A. consists of unsigned manuscripts presumed to be by McKenna. There are three typescripts of lectures given by McKenna between
1919 and 1930 arranged chronologically followed by two undated short stories titled "The Battle of Blindheim" and "The City of Hopeless Dawn," arranged alphabetically by title. Subseries II.B. comprises three manuscripts of other writers, C.V. Wedgwood (1910-1997), the Marquis of Tombelaine, and a woman named Iris, which may have been used by McKenna as research material for his fiction. Material in this subseries is arranged chronologically followed by undated items.

Series III. contains clippings and ephemera. It includes a collection of Swedish newspaper articles documenting McKenna's November 1921 book tour in that country as well as several interviews he did with various papers. Most of the newspaper articles are followed by typed English translations. A magazine article attributed to Home and Garden provides descriptions and photographs of McKenna's English estate home. There are also several advertisement postcards for McKenna's novel Sonia. There is a hand drawn map of Europe with a quote from Sonia, perhaps done by a fan and a watercolor of a domestic scene that have both been cut out of scrapbooks.

Series IV. is comprised of a photograph album, containing black and white photographs of an older McKenna in his home, along with interior shots of the home and his collection of china. There is also a small mounted portrait of McKenna holding a doll.
Selected Search Terms

Personal Names

McKenna, Stephen, 1888-

Topical Terms

Authors, British--20th century--Correspondence.


Form/Genre Terms

Correspondence.

Manuscripts.

Photographs.

Printed ephemera.

Scrapbooks.

Occupation

Authors.
Arrangement

I. Correspondence

II. Manuscripts
   A. Works by Stephen McKenna
   B. Works by others

III. Clippings and ephemera

IV. Photographs
Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I. Correspondence, 1917-1966, undated

This series includes two scrapbooks presumably maintained by McKenna containing 90 letters to McKenna from authors, family and fans of his novels. There are also approximately 60 items of loose correspondence arranged chronologically followed by undated material. Correspondence largely pertains to readers' reactions to the quality of McKenna's fiction and his characters.

- Scrapbook, 1917-1921 [Box 2 F1] (Removed to SPEC MSS oversize boxes (17 inches))
- Scrapbook, 1934-1939 [Box 3 F2] (Removed to SPEC MSS oversize boxes (18 inches))
- Loose correspondence, 1917 [Box 1 F3] (Removals to SPEC MSS oversize boxes (18 inches))
- Loose correspondence, 1934-1939, 1966 [Box 1 F4]
- Loose correspondence, undated [Box 1 F5] (Removals to SPEC MSS oversize boxes (18 inches))

Series II. Manuscripts, 1919-1935, undated

This series contains typed manuscripts divided into two subseries. Subseries II.A. consists of unsigned manuscripts presumed to be by McKenna. There are three typescripts of lectures given by McKenna between 1919 and 1930 arranged chronologically followed by two undated short stories titled "The Battle of Blindheim" and "The City of Hopeless Dawn," arranged alphabetically. Subseries II.B. comprises three manuscripts of other writers, C.V. Wedgwood (1910-1997), the Marquis of Tombelaine, and a woman named Iris, which may have been used by McKenna as research material for his fiction. Material in this subseries is arranged chronologically followed by undated items.

Subseries II.A. Works by McKenna, 1919-1930, undated

This subseries consists of unsigned manuscripts presumed to be by McKenna. There are three typescripts of lectures given by McKenna between 1919 and 1930 arranged chronologically followed by two undated short stories titled "The Battle of Blindheim" and "The City of Hopeless Dawn," arranged alphabetically by title.

- "The Battle of the Repertory Movement During the War: A Lecture Delivered to the Manchester Playgoers' Society", 1919 February 16 [Box 1 F6]
- "Some Aspects of Social Reconstruction After the War: A Lecture Delivered to the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society", 1919 February 17 [Box 1 F7]
- [Lecture given at Censors' Dinner], 1930 [Box 1 F8]

A lecture given at Oxford regarding the state of English literature after World War I dealing with the war and its aftermath.
Series II. Subseries II.A.

"The Battle of Blindheim", undated [Box 1 F9]

"The City of Hopeless Dawn", undated [Box 1 F10]

Subseries II.B. Works by others, 1931-1935, undated

This subseries comprises three manuscripts of other writers, C.V. Wedgwood (1910-1997), the Marquis of Tombelaine, and a woman named Iris, which may have been used by McKenna as research material for his fiction. Material in this subseries is arranged chronologically followed by undated items.

"Jettons" by C.V. Wedgwood, 1931 [Box 1 F11]

"The Cocks of Watches and their Historical Classification at the Museum" from St. Michael's Mount and Its Marvels' from the notes of the Marquis of Tombelaine, 1935 [Box 1 F12]

Letter from Iris about Russian Trip, undated [Box 1 F13]

A retyped letter from an unidentified woman named Iris about the poverty and disorder witnessed on a post-communist revolution trip to Russia which may have informed McKenna’s “The City of Hopeless Dawn.” (See II. A., F10)

Series III. Clippings and ephemera, 1921-1942, undated

This series contains clippings and other ephemera. It includes a collection of Swedish newspaper articles documenting McKenna’s November 1921 book tour in that country as well as several interviews he did with various papers. Most of the newspaper articles are followed by typed English translations. A magazine article attributed to Home and Garden provides descriptions and photographs of McKenna’s English estate home. There are also several advertisement postcards for McKenna’s novel Sonia. There is a hand-drawn map of Europe with a quote from Sonia, perhaps done by a fan and a watercolor of a domestic scene that have both been cut out of scrapbooks.

Swedish newspaper clippings, 1921 [Box 2 F14] (Removed to SPEC MSS oversize boxes (17 inches))

Swedish newspaper articles documenting McKenna’s November 1921 book tour in that country as well as several interviews he did with various papers.

"Mr. Stephen McKenna at Home" Home and Gardens, 1940 [Box 1 F15]

A magazine article attributed to Home and Garden that provides descriptions and photographs of McKenna’s English estate home.

Ephemera related to Sonia, undated [Box 1 F16]

Three advertisement postcards for McKenna’s novel Sonia and an autograph quote from Sonia illustrated with hand-drawn map of Europe.

Watercolor, circa 1942 [Box 1 F17]
A watercolor of a domestic scene removed from McKenna's scrapbook.

**Series IV. Photographs, 1940-1967**

This series contains an album of black and white photographs of an older McKenna in his home, along with interior shots of the home and his collection of china. There is also a small mounted portrait of McKenna holding a doll.

Photograph album, 1940-1967 [Box 2 F18] (Removed to SPEC MSS oversize boxes (17 inches))