



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**Langdon Mitchell papers**

1876-1936

\*T-Mss 1975-003

Compiled by Diana Bertolini, 2012

## Summary

**Creator:** Mitchell, Langdon Elwyn, 1862-1935

**Title:** Langdon Mitchell papers

**Date:** 1876-1936

**Size:** 12.4 linear feet (29 boxes, 1 volume)

**Source:** Donated by Eleanor F. Johnson and David Price in 1975.

**Abstract:** Langdon Elwyn Mitchell (1862-1935) was an American playwright, poet and professor of playwriting. The Langdon Mitchell papers consist of drafts of Mitchell's plays, journals and diaries and notes and texts for his lectures.

**Preferred citation:** Langdon Mitchell papers, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

**Processing note:** Compiled by Diana Bertolini, 2012 This collection was re-folded and original folder titles were retained where possible. Portfolios of loose journal writings were broken down into folders.

### Related Materials:

Langdon Elwyn Mitchell papers, 1883-1936. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Langdon Mitchell letters to Dorothy Thomas, 1917-1935. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

## Creator History

Langdon Elwyn Mitchell (1862-1935) was an American playwright, poet and professor of playwriting. Mitchell also wrote poetry, under the pseudonym John Philip Varley. The son of neurologist and author, Silas Weir Mitchell, Mitchell was born in Philadelphia. After studying law at Harvard and Columbia Universities, Mitchell was admitted to the New York Bar in 1886. He traveled abroad for some time and eventually returned to Philadelphia where he went into law practice.

He began his writing career with poetry, publishing collections such as *Sylvian and Other Poems* (1884) and *Poems* (1894). He also published a collection of short stories in 1896, *Love in the Backwoods*. When Mitchell turned his focus to playwriting, he achieved more success. His first produced play, *In the Season*, premiered in London in 1893 and on Broadway in 1895, but he wasn't acknowledged as an important playwright until his 1899 success with *Becky Sharp*.

An adaptation of William Makepeace Thackeray's classic novel, *Vanity Fair*, *Becky Sharp* starred Mrs. Minnie Maddern Fiske, the leading actress of the day. The 1935 film adaptation of *Becky Sharp*, starring Miriam Hopkins, was the first full-length Technicolor film.

Other notable plays by Mitchell include *The New York Idea*, an examination of the emerging phenomenon of casual divorce; *A Kentucky Belle*; *Step By Step*; *The New Marriage*; another Thackeray adaptation, *Major Pendennis*; and an adaptation of Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*.

In 1928, Mitchell joined fellow playwrights Jesse Lynch Williams, Lord Dunsany, Gilbert Emery and Rachel Crothers to create a playwriting course at the University of Pennsylvania, where he lectured for two years. Some of their lectures were published in *The Art of Playwriting: Lectures Delivered at the University of Pennsylvania on the Mask and Wig Foundation* (1928).

In 1892, Mitchell married actress Marion Lea, with whom he had one son and two daughters. Mitchell died at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia on October 21, 1935.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Langdon Mitchell papers consist mainly of drafts and outlines of plays and screenplays written by Mitchell. Some of these plays were produced on Broadway, such as *Becky Sharp*, *The New York Idea*, *In the Season*, *Major Pendennis* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*. While the majority of the material in the Plays series is made up of drafts, occasionally other items pertaining to the plays are included, such as programs, correspondence, agreements, clippings, flyers and various publicity materials.

Series II: Other Writings has extensive journals and diaries that Mitchell kept for over several decades. Many of them pertain to drama and poetry and were partially indexed by Mitchell. The texts, notes and extracted quotations for Mitchell's lectures on playwriting at the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught from 1928 to 1930, are also included here.

Series III: Correspondence dating from 1876 to 1935 contains letters between Mitchell and friends such as Robert Carter Jett, Benjamin Haden, Vinton Freedley, and N. W. Planck. There are also letters from Mitchell's students at Princeton University and from fans of his writings. Correspondents of Mitchell's during his youth include Chapman Mitchell, Charles Knox, Ernest Coleridge, and Charles Lowry. There is also extensive correspondence between Mitchell and his family members, including his father, S. Weir Mitchell; his brother, John K. Mitchell; and his sister-in-law, the painter, Anna Lea Merritt.

Materials on Mitchell's poetry and his correspondence with Dorothy Thomas are held in the Manuscripts and Archives Division. See related collections.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

American drama  
American poetry

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Clippings  
Diaries  
Journals  
Lecture notes  
Lectures  
Manuscripts  
Programs  
Screenplays

**Occupations**

Dramatists  
Poets, American  
Professors

## Container List

### Series I: Plays 1883-1936

Includes screenplays and scenarios. Arranged in alphabetical order by title

- b. 1 f. 1 *The Abyss-Scenario* undated  
Alternate title, *Country Boy*.  
*The Adventures of Francois*  
Alternate title, *The Adventures of Chibo*.
- b. 1 f. 2 Correspondence and Synopsis 1935-1936
- b. 1 f. 3-4 Scripts 1902, undated
- b. 1 f. 5 *Affairs of Anatol-Scripts* undated  
Alternate title, *Ask Me No Questions*.  
*Becky Sharp*
- b. 1 f. 6-7 Correspondence 1899-1934  
Film Version
- b. 2 f. 1 Clippings and Publicity Materials 1935
- b. 2 f. 2-6 Screenplays 1931-1935
- b. 3 f. 1 Screenplay 1934-1935
- b. 3 f. 2 Obituaries-Mrs. Fiske 1932
- b. 3 f. 3-4 Players' Club Revival-Publicity Materials 1929
- b. 3 f. 5-7 Scripts undated
- b. 4 f. 1-4 Scripts 1899, 1935, undated
- b. 4 f. 5 Tour-Financial Statements 1931
- v. 1 Scrapbook of Clippings 1906-1910
- b. 4 f. 6 *Bija-Script* undated
- b. 5 f. 1 *City Romance-Notes and Scenario* 1923
- b. 5 f. 2-3 *The Colonial Girl-Scripts* undated
- b. 5 f. 4 *Coney Island Cannibal-Sketch* undated  
*Deborah*
- b. 5 f. 5 Reviews and Programs 1892
- b. 5 f. 6-7 Scripts undated
- b. 6 f. 1 *Don Pedro-Script* undated
- b. 6 f. 2-3 *The Explorer-Scenarios* 1907, undated
- b. 6 f. 4 *Fincastle Play-Fragment* 1910
- b. 6 f. 5 *Florry's Homecoming-Script* undated  
Alternate title, *Eva's Homecoming*.
- b. 6 f. 6-7 *Georgiana Rutledge-Scripts and Scenarios* undated
- b. 6 f. 9-10 *Godfrey Tresillian-Script and Excerpts* undated  
*High Mount*
- b. 7 f. 1-3 Notes 1933-1935
- b. 7 f. 4-6 Scripts 1933-1934, undated
- b. 8 f. 1-3 Scripts 1933-1934, undated

Series I: Plays (cont.)

- b. 8 f. 4-5 *The Hold-Up-Scripts* undated
- b. 8 f. 6 *Home Sweet Home-Scenario* undated  
*The Honorable John Grigsby* undated
- b. 9 f. 1 Scripts
- b. 8 f. 7 Scripts
- b. 9 f. 2 *Hugh Wayne-Script and Correspondence* 1920-1935  
*In the Season*
- b. 18 f. 2 Reviews 1892  
Also includes reviews of *Ruth* and *Don Pedro*.
- b. 9 f. 3 Scripts undated
- b. 9 f. 4 *Kentucky Belle-Scripts* undated  
*The Kreutzer Sonata* 1894  
This play opened on Broadway in 1906.
- b. 9 f. 5 Notes and Drafts
- b. 10 f. 1 Notes and Drafts
- b. 10 f. 2 *Last of the Mohicans-Sketch* 1908  
*Major Pendennis* 1916, undated
- b. 10 f. 3-6 Scripts
- b. 11 f. 1-2 Scripts
- b. 11 f. 3 *Make Me Young, Willie-Scripts* undated  
*Marriage*  
Alternate titles, *Olive, Before Dawn* and *He Chooses*.
- b. 11 f. 4-6 Scripts 1894, 1931
- b. 13 f. 4-6 Scripts 1931, undated  
*Men Dream of Gold*  
Alternate titles, *Tovar, Mexican Gold* and *El Tovar*. Alternate titles, *Tovar, Mexican Gold* and *El Tovar*.
- b. 12 f. 1 Correspondence 1926-1935
- b. 12 f. 2 Notes/Drafts undated
- b. 12 f. 3-5 Scripts 1932, undated
- b. 13 f. 1-2 Synopses undated
- b. 13 f. 3 *Mind-Cure-Script* undated  
Alternate title, *The Strong Hand*.  
*The New Marriage*  
Alternate titles, *Making Harry Happy* and *Happy New Year*.
- b. 13 f. 7 Scripts undated
- b. 14 f. 1-5 Scripts undated
- b. 15 f. 1 Scripts undated  
*The New York Idea*
- b. 15 f. 2 Correspondence 1931-1936
- b. 15 f. 3 German Adaptation 1918
- b. 15 f. 4 Motion Picture Rights 1917-1935
- b. 15 f. 5 Scripts undated

Series I: Plays (cont.)

- b. 22 f. 4     *The Orator-Incomplete Play* 1883  
                  *The Picnic*  
                  Alternate title, *Secret Engagement*.
- b. 15 f. 6     Notes 1909
- b. 15 f. 7     Script 1912
- b. 16 f. 1-5    Scripts 1919, undated
- b. 17 f. 1-4    Scripts undated
- b. 17 f. 5-6    *The Pickets-Scripts and Outlines* undated
- b. 18 f. 1     *The Prince of Portugal-Scenario* 1905
- b. 18 f. 3     *Rosemary-Scenario and Script* 1933
- b. 18 f. 4     *Ruth Underwood-Scripts* undated  
                  *Second Generation*
- b. 18 f. 4-6    Scripts 1917, 1918
- b. 19 f. 1-3    Scripts undated
- b. 21 f. 1     *The Spendthrift-Script* undated
- b. 19 f. 4-5    *Step by Step-Scripts* 1909, undated  
                  *The Storm Cloud*  
                  Alternate title, *The Two Kings*.
- b. 20 f. 1     Correspondence, Notes and Synopses 1921-1932
- b. 20 f. 2     Scenes 1903
- b. 20 f. 3-6    Scripts 1925, undated
- b. 21 f. 2     *The Trusty-Script* undated
- b. 21 f. 3     *Ulysses-Scenario and Excerpt* undated
- b. 21 f. 4     *Virgilia-Scripts* undated
- b. 21 f. 5-12   Various and Unidentified Scenarios, Scenes and Fragments undated
- b. 22 f. 1-3    Various and Unidentified Scenarios, Scenes and Fragments 1907, 1908, undated
- b. 28 f. 7     Various Stories and Sketches for Plays 1907

Series II: Other Writings 1888-1934

Arranged in alphabetical order by type.

Journals and Diaries

- b. 22 f. 5-6    Dramatic Diaries 1889-1895  
                  Mitchell excerpted these diaries from his general diaries because they pertained to drama and playwriting.
- b. 23 f. 1-6    Dramatic Diaries 1895-1928, undated
- b. 24 f. 1-6    Dramatic Diaries undated
- General Diaries and Journals
- b. 25 f. 1-5    1888-1905
- b. 26 f. 1-7    1905-1925
- b. 27 f. 1-8    1927-1934
- b. 27 f. 9-10   Indices of Journals undated

Series II: Other Writings (cont.)

b. 28 f. 1-6     **Lectures 1913-1930**

These folders contain texts of Mitchell's lectures as well as his notes on them and quotations extracted for them.

b. 29 f. 1-9     **Series III: Correspondence 1876-1935**