

Joseph Blotner collection on Thorne Smith

Ms. Coll. 992

Finding aid prepared by Justin A. Bortnick.

Last updated on April 14, 2017.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

27 May 2014

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Summary Information

Repository	University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts
Creator	Blotner, Joseph Leo, 1923-
Creator	Smith, Thorne, 1892-1934
Title	Joseph Blotner collection on Thorne Smith
Call number	Ms. Coll. 992
Date [inclusive]	1926-1955
Extent	1.6 linear feet (4 boxes)
Language	English
Abstract	Thorne Smith (1892–1934) was an American author of comedic supernatural fiction. His best-known work is the two <i>Topper</i> novels, published between 1920 and 1930. The collection consists of correspondences between Joseph Blotner, a then-Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pennsylvania writing his dissertation on Smith, and various associates of Thorne Smith; and typescripts and manuscripts of Smith's novels, including <i>Topper</i> , <i>The Night Life of the Gods</i> , and <i>Rain in the Doorway</i> .

Cite as:

Joseph Blotner collection on Thorne Smith, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and

Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

Thorne Smith (1892–1934) was an American author of comedic supernatural fiction. His best-known work is the two *Topper* novels, published between 1920 and 1930. Smith was born in Annapolis, Maryland as James Thorne Smith, Jr., and as a result of the death of his mother in 1896 and his father's career in the Navy, he was raised by relatives and educated in boarding schools in Virginia and Pennsylvania. He attended Dartmouth College, though he left two years into his degree to take a job writing advertising copy in New York. In 1917, Smith joined the Navy and was stationed at Pelham Bay Naval Reserve Training Station in New York City where one of his chief tasks was editing the camp's journal, *The Broadside*. According to Blotner's dissertation, it was at Pelham Bay that Smith realized "that writing was his career, but not the type he had done at the advertising agencies," (Blotner, page 14). Smith was released from the Navy in early 1919, and later that same year, he married Celia Sullivan and returned to working for advertising agencies. Struggling to support a wife and two children while living in Greenwich Village, he achieved sudden bestseller status in 1927 with the publication of *Topper*. Smith's work was filled with sex, drinking, and shapeshifting. He died suddenly of a heart attack while vacationing in Florida at the age of 42.

Joseph Leo Blotner (1923-2012) was an American scholar, professor and biographer. He earned his undergraduate degree from Drew University and his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, where he wrote his dissertation, *Thorne Smith: A study in popular fiction*. He went on to befriend William Faulkner, writing what is considered to be the definitive biography on the author. He contributed to at least a dozen works on Faulkner, and also wrote on authors such as J. D. Salinger and Robert Penn Warren. He taught at the University of Idaho and the University of Virginia, and was integral to Faulkner's appointment as writer-in-residence at Virginia in 1957.

Works cited: Blotner, Joseph Leo. *Thorne Smith: A study in popular fiction*. 1951.

Scope and Contents

The collection is organized into two series. The first is comprised of correspondences between Joseph Blotner, a then-Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pennsylvania conducting research for his dissertation entitled *Thorne Smith: A study in popular fiction*, and various associates of Smith. Blotner corresponded with a range of figures from publishing houses and advertising agencies for which Smith worked to Ogden Nash and H. L. Mencken. Some of these letters appear to have resulted from an announcement in the *New York Times* in which Blotner requested information about Thorne Smith; other letters appear to be responding to specific enquiries from Blotner. The resulting letters provide first-hand accounts of the

letter-writer's impressions of and experiences with Thorne Smith. Of note is a biography of Thorne Smith by Roland Young which was published in 1934.

The second series consists of typescripts and manuscripts of Smith's novels, including *Topper*, *The Night Life of the Gods*, and *Rain in the Doorway*.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

27 May 2014

Finding aid prepared by Justin A. Bortnick.

Access Restrictions

This collection is open for research use.

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Custodial History note

Gift of Mrs. Floyd Delaney, Marion Smith Canner, and Joseph Blotner.

Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Correspondence
- Writings (document genre)

SUBJECT(S)

- Authors
- Authors, American--20th century
- Fantasy fiction
- Literature

Collection Inventory

I. JOSEPH BLOTNER CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING RESEARCH FOR DISSERTATION.

	Box	Folder
Aster, Donald, 1950.	1	1
Berau, Frances Hoffman, 1951.	1	2
Coleman, Elizabeth B., 1950.	1	3
Cotter, Arundel, 1950.	1	4
Crosby, Helen, 1950.	1	5
Goldthwaite, Lucy, 1950.	1	6
Goodfellow (né Kase), Frances, 1950.	1	7
First, Elsa, 1950.	1	8
Ford, Charlotte E., 1950.	1	9
Frank, Lewis E., 1950.	1	10
Henry, Frank C., 1950.	1	11
Johnson, Malcom, 1950.	1	12
Jones, Robert Haydon, 1950.	1	13
Loving, Pierre, 1950.	1	14

Madden, John, 1950.	1	15
The Magazine Institute, Inc. Editors Pamphlet, 1948.	1	16
Moran, Helen, 1950.	1	17
Matson, Norman, undated.	1	18
McMaster, John D., 1950.	1	19
Medill McBride Company, 1950.	1	20
Mencken, H. L., 1950.	1	21
Moritz, Frank L., 1950.	1	22
Nash, Ogden, 1950.	1	23
Provost, D. L., 1952.	1	24
Smith, Thorne: photograph, undated.	1	25
Taylor, George, undated.	1	26
Thompson, Elizabeth, 1955.	1	27
Van Dusen, William, 1950.	1	28
Watkins, Armitage, 1950.	1	29
Wollheim, Donald A., 1950.	1	30
Young, Roland (extracts of letters), undated.	1	31
Young, Roland, <i>Thorne Smith: His Life and Times with a Note on his Books and a Complete Bibliography</i> (published by Doubleday, Doran, & Company), 1934.	1	32

Unidentified, 1950.	1	33
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II. THORNE SMITH WRITINGS.

	Box	Folder
<i>The Bishop's Jagers</i> , manuscript fragment, circa 1932.	1	34
<i>Did She Fall?</i> manuscript fragment, circa 1930.	1	35
<i>Did She Fall?</i> typescript fragment [The Removal of Emily-Jane], circa 1930.	1	36
<i>Lazy Bear Lane</i> , typescript, circa 1931.	1	37
<i>The Night Life of the Gods</i> , manuscript, circa 1931.	1	1-2
<i>The Night Life of the Gods</i> , typescript, circa 1931.	2	3
<i>Rain in the Doorway</i> , manuscript, circa 1933.	2	4
<i>Rain in the Doorway</i> , manuscript, circa 1933.	3	1
<i>Topper</i> , manuscript, circa 1926.	3	2-3
<i>Topper</i> , typescript, circa 1926.	3	4-5
<i>Topper Takes a Trip</i> , typescript, circa 1932.	3	6
<i>Turnabout</i> , manuscript fragment, circa 1931.	7	1
<i>Turnabout</i> , typescript, circa 1931.	4	2-4
<i>Yonder's Henry</i> , circa 1934.	4	5

Manuscript notebook, undated.

4

6

Typed story outlines, undated.

4

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