Val Lewton Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2019

Contact information: http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact

Catalog Record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm92081531

Additional search options available at: https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms004005

Prepared by Manuscript Division Staff
Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2004
Revised 2019 December
Collection Summary
Title: Val Lewton Papers
Span Dates: 1919-2007
Bulk Dates: 1926-1951
ID No.: MSS81531
Creator: Lewton, Val
Extent: 175 items
Extent: 4 containers plus 4 oversize
Extent: 6.4 linear feet
Extent: 5 microfilm reels
Language: Collection material in English.
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LC Catalog record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm92081531
Summary: Motion picture producer, screenwriter, and novelist. Correspondence, film scripts, scrapbooks, and other papers pertaining chiefly to Lewton's career as a publicity writer and as a story editor for David O. Selznick at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (1928-1942); as scriptwriter and producer of Cat People and other horror films for RKO Radio Pictures (1942-1947); and as novelist, especially as author of No Bed of Her Own (1932).

Selected Search Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People
Keith, Carlos. Carlos Keith papers.
Lewton family--Correspondence.
Lewton family.
Lewton, Val.
Lewton, Val. No bed of her own. 1932.
Nazimova, 1879-1945--Correspondence.

Organizations
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
RKO Radio Pictures.
Vanguard Press.

Subjects
American literature.
Horror films.
Motion picture industry--United States.
Motion picture plays, American.
Novels.
Publicity.

Titles
Cat people (Motion picture : 1942)

Occupations
Motion picture producers.
Novelists.
Screenwriters.
Provenance

The papers of Val Lewton, motion picture producer, screenwriter, and novelist, were given to the Library of Congress by his son, Val Edwin Lewton, in 1992 and 2007.

Processing History

The papers of Val Lewton were arranged and described in 1995 by Mary A. Lacy. The finding aid was revised in 2003 by Mary A. Lacy with the assistance of Michael W. Giese. The addition was processed by Andrea J. Briggs in 2019, and the finding aid revised to reflect the addition.

Transfers

Some photographs have been transferred to the Library's Prints and Photographs Division where they are identified as part of these papers.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Val Lewton is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Val Lewton are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on five reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition as available.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Val Lewton Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1904, May 7</td>
<td>Born Vladimir Ivan Leventon, Yalta, Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Mother, Nina Leventon, and children (Val and Lucy) emigrated to America and took anglicized name of Lewton; Nina Lewton employed by her sister, actress Nazimova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>circa 1922</td>
<td>Columbia School of Journalism, New York, N.Y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Married Ruth Knapp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928-1932</td>
<td>Publicity writer, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, under the supervision of Howard Dietz</td>
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</table>
Published *No Bed of Her Own*. New York: Vanguard Press

Contracted with Vanguard Press for five novels per year

Wrote script for *Taras Bulba* for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Story editor, David O. Selznick unit at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Head of horror unit, RKO Radio Pictures

Produced *Cat People* (motion picture)

Produced *Bedlam* (motion picture)

Contract with Paramount Pictures

Hired by Louis B. Mayer, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Produced *Apache Drums* (motion picture), Universal-International

Died, Hollywood, Calif.

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**Scope and Content Note**

The papers of Val Lewton (1904-1951) span the years 1919-2007, with the bulk of the items concentrated in the period 1926-1951. The collection contains film scripts, scrapbooks, and other material documenting Lewton's career as a novelist, screenwriter, and motion picture producer, and is arranged into family papers, writings, miscellany, and oversize materials.

Family papers, 1927-1982, include letters received by Lewton's wife Ruth, his sister Lucy Olga, his mother Nina, and his aunt, silent film actress Alla Nazimova. His mother and aunt both influenced his choice of career and early contacts. In 1928 Nina Lewton, as head of the story department at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, got her son a job writing publicity for M-G-M, training him in story analysis and synopsis writing. In 1933 she was approached by David O. Selznick to discover a Russian-born writer who could do a script of *Taras Bulba*. Lewton was hired to do the treatment (never filmed) and moved to California, working as Selznick's story editor and assistant until 1942, when he was offered a position as head of the new horror unit at RKO Radio Pictures. Letters include Selznick's condolences on Lewton's death and a copy of a telegram of congratulations he sent on the success of *Cat People*. Also contained among the family papers are a family history and eulogies written for Lewton, his mother Nina, and aunt Nazimova, whose papers the Manuscript Division also holds. Nazimova, a silent film actress, employed her sister Nina during their passage to America and upon their arrival.

Writings, 1924-1946, and scrapbooks, 1927-1934, document the publicity practices of Hollywood studios of the era. The writings include scripts of three of Lewton's dramatized radio reviews and a serialization in the *Daily Mirror* of his best-known novel, *No Bed of Her Own* (1932), which told the story of a girl victimized by Depression poverty. Paramount Pictures bought the rights and produced the film *No Man of Her Own*, starring Clark Gable and Carole Lombard; related material is found in the scrapbooks.

Lewton left M-G-M in 1932 and Vanguard Press signed him to a contract producing five novels per year, several of which he wrote under the pseudonym Carlos Keith. Lewton's journals for 1933-1934 document his writing and domestic activities. Brief entries for 1937 record frustration with his “despised role of story editor-censor” and with his inability to return to his own writing. Lewton's writings are also found in the scrapbooks in the form of printed articles; news features, including several on Greta Garbo, some published under pseudonyms; and fiction, including novelizations and serializations of M-G-M feature films, most of which he wrote in various capacities during his years at M-G-M. A sampling of press releases, all dated 14 January 1929, are found with the scrapbooks. The scrapbooks also contain dust jackets, reviews, and other material relating to books written by Lewton.

Lewton's output as head of the horror unit of RKO is represented primarily in the writings by a bound set of final scripts of the eleven films he produced at that studio with directors Jacques Tourneur, Robert Wise, and Mark Robson, beginning with *Cat People* in 1942. These scripts were presented to him when his production unit was disbanded on his departure from RKO. Lewton contributed to the screenplays from the original story-lines through the various drafts and revisions. He wrote the final shooting scripts himself, although he took screen credit for writing only on *The Body Snatcher* and *Bedlam*, using his old pseudonym Carlos Keith. The writings also include journal entries for January-February 1946 touching on the reception of *Bedlam*; work on *Blackbeard*, an abandoned RKO project; and exploration of leaving that studio. An undated screenplay written with Mark Robson, “The Fact of Murder,” probably dates from these years as well.

Miscellaneous and oversize material in the collection, 1926-1973, includes a scrapbook largely containing reviews for the years 1942-1950, a cast photograph of *My Own True Love*, produced at Paramount Studios in 1947, and clippings related
to *Apache Drums*, produced at Universal-International in 1950. Other material includes a typescript of the opening pages of Joel E. Siegel's biography, *Val Lewton: The Reality of Terror*, printed matter, such as film program books from 1926 and 1927, a four-page spread in *Life* magazine on Lewton's final RKO film, *Bedlam*, 1946, as “movie of the week,” other clippings and reviews, a poster promoting *No Bed of Her Own*, and the scrapbooks for the years 1927-1934. A group of forty-five photographs transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division include portraits of Lewton, family pictures with Nazimova and Nina and Ruth Lewton, a photograph of his mother's family, the Leventons, circa 1881, and of Lewton with associates Mark Robson, Robert Wise, and Verna de Mots.

The Addition expands upon the material within the collection, consisting primarily of letters written by Lewton to his mother and sister between the years 1931 and 1943. These letters document Lewton's work and personal life; included in the addition is an index of the letters created by the donor which provides estimated dates and brief summaries of their contents. Two prominent individuals mentioned in the letters include Alla Nazimova (as "Aunt Alla") and David O. Selznick. Also included is one letter from Jim Farrell to Nina Lewton.

**Arrangement of the Papers**

This collection is arranged by type of material.
## Container List

Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 21,993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Contents</th>
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| **BOX 1 REEL 1** | Family papers  
Lewton, Lucy Olga (sister), 1982, undated  
Lewton, Nina (mother), 1938, 1967, undated  
Lewton, Ruth (wife), 1927-1931, undated  
Lewton, Val, death of, 1951  
Miscellaneous correspondence, including David O. Selznick, 1942-1951, undated  
Nazimova (aunt), 1944-1945  
Writings  
Dramatized radio reviews, 1928  
“The Big City”  
“Bringing Up Father”  
“The Patsy”  
Film scripts (RKO)  
1942  
*The Cat People*  
*I Walked with a Zombie*  
1943  
*The Leopard Man*  
**BOX 2 REEL 2**  
*The Seventh Victim*  
The Ghost Ship  
The Curse of the Cat People  
Youth Runs Wild  
1944  
*Mademoiselle Fifi*  
**BOX 3 REEL 3**  
*The Isle of the Dead*  
The Body Snatcher  
1945  
*Bedlam*  
Journals, 1933-1937, 1946  
(3 folders)  
Newspaper serialization, *No Bed of Her Own*, 1932  
Parody, circa 1930  
Poems, 1924-1928, undated  
Screenplay, with Mark Robson, “The Fact of Murder,” undated  
Miscellany  
Printed matter  
Film program books, 1926-1927, undated *See also Oversize*  
(2 folders)  
Newspaper and magazine clippings, 1932-1933, 1967, undated  
Poster, 1932 *See Oversize* |
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<thead>
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<th>Container</th>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 4</td>
<td>Not filmed</td>
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<td>ADDITION</td>
<td>Index of letters, 2007</td>
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<td>Correspondence</td>
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<td>1919, 1929</td>
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<td>1931-1943</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Undated</td>
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<td>1942, Letter, Jim Farrell to Nina Lewton</td>
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<td>BOX OV 1</td>
<td>REEL 4 Oversize</td>
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<td>Printed matter</td>
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<td>Film program book, undated (Container 3)</td>
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<td>Poster, <em>No Bed of Her Own</em> serialization, 1932 (Container 3)</td>
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<td>Scrapbooks (Container 3)</td>
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<td>1930-1931, 1942-1950</td>
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<td>1931-1934</td>
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Scrapbooks, 1927-1950 *See Oversize* (5 vols.)
Siegel, Joel E., *Val Lewton*, manuscript of opening pages, 1973