Guide to the John Gardner Papers

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Guide to the John Gardner Papers, 1960s

Collection number: Mss 30

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Descriptive Summary

Title: John Gardner Papers,  
Date (inclusive): 1960s  
Collection Number: Mss 30  
Creator: Gardner, John E.  
Extent: .4 linear feet (1 document box)  
Repository: University of California, Santa Barbara. Library. Department of Special Collections  
Santa Barbara, California 93106-9010  
Physical Location: Del Sur  
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None.

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Undetermined.

Biography
John Edmund Gardner was born in Northumberland, England on November 20, 1926. He expressed a desire to be a writer at the age of eight, but his life would follow a circuitous path before he finally settled into that profession. A teenager during World War II, Gardner joined the Home Guard as a drummer boy. While waiting to come of age, he auditioned for the American Red Cross Entertainments Department and visited numerous military hospitals as a magician. Finally turning 18 at the end of 1944, he was able to join the Royal Navy. After a few months he was transferred to a Royal Marines...
commando unit and served in Asia and the Middle East. During the war, Gardner became an alcoholic. His addiction grew while he attended Cambridge University and then Oxford, where he received a degree in theology. He followed his father in becoming an Anglican priest, and, after marrying his wife Margaret, became the minister to a rural parish. After a few restless years, however, Gardner realized that he had become a priest solely in an attempt to escape from his chronic alcoholism. He resigned from the Church and renounced religion entirely. Gardner drifted into a job as drama critic for the local newspaper in Stratford-upon-Avon, just as the Royal Shakespeare Company was undergoing a major reorganization. He had finally realized his ambition to become a writer, but he was soon forced to face his debilitating addiction to alcohol. In 1959, he came under the care of Dr. Lincoln Williams, who had pioneered the use of hypnosis in treating alcoholics. Gardner’s struggle to overcome his addiction resulted in his first book, *Spin the Bottle*, which was published in 1964. A harrowing account of the mind of an alcoholic, the book was a success, and it inspired Gardner to try writing a novel. The first draft of Gardner’s novel, a pretentious indictment of governmental abuse of power, was a disaster, and his editor suggested he try treating the theme as a comedy. Gardner rewrote the story, creating the character of bumbling secret agent and squeamish assassin Boysie Oakes. Hitting at the height of the spy craze in the mid-1960s, the book, entitled *The Liquidator*, was a hit. The sequel, *Understrike* (1965), scored again, and was followed by six more Boysie Oakes adventures, including *Traitor’s Exit* (1970). Rod Taylor portrayed Boysie Oakes in the forgettable film version of *The Liquidator* (1965), directed by Jack Cardiff. Gardner proved to be a prolific author, branching out into thrillers and adventure stories, including two popular Sherlock Holmes novels that focused on the detective’s nemesis, Professor Moriarty. He also developed the character of police inspector Derek Torry, who appeared in two police procedurals, *A Complete State of Death* (1969) and *The Corner Men* (1974). Translated to the LAPD, Torry was brought to the screen by Charles Bronson in the 1973 flop *The Stone Killer*, directed by Michael Winner. Then, in 1980, John Gardner was offered the James Bond franchise by the publishing firm Glidrose, which owned Ian Fleming’s literary estate. His first attempt, *Licence Renewed* (1981), was successful, and he would go on to write fourteen Bond novels before giving it up in 1996. After a six-year bout with cancer, Gardner resumed writing, producing the spy thriller *Day of Absolution* (2000) and the detective novel *Bottled Spider* (2002). A widower and father of two, he lives in Basingstoke, England.

**Scope and Content of Collection**

The collection contains a typescript draft and printer’s proof of John Gardner’s autobiographical *Spin the Bottle* (London: Frederick Muller, 1964), as well as typescript drafts and other material relating to his Boysie Oakes stories *Understrike* and *Traitor’s Exit*, and introductory material for a proposed series featuring detective Derek Torry.

- **Box 1: 1** Derek Torry prospectus, 1967
- **Box 1: 2 - 6** *Spin the Bottle* (typescript with corrections, and printer’s proof), ca. early 1960s
- **Box 1: 7 - 8** *Understrike* (typescript with corrections, and sketches of cover design), ca. 1964 [published 1965]
- **Box 1: 9** *Traitor’s Exit* (typescript with corrections), ca. 1969 [published 1970]