
Kirby Doyle Papers

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spcoll@ucsd.edu

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Descriptive Summary

Contributing Institution: Special Collections & Archives, UC San Diego

9500 Gilman Drive

La Jolla 92093-0175

Title: Kirby Doyle Papers

Creator: Doyle, Kirby

Identifier/Call Number: MSS 0757

Physical Description: 0.8 Linear feet(3 archives boxes)

Date (inclusive): 1960 - 2003

Abstract: Papers of American poet and novelist Kirby Doyle, who was associated with the San Francisco Renaissance poets and the Beat Generation. Doyle's papers include biographical information, correspondence, photographs, and published and unpublished writings.

Languages: English .

Acquisition Information

Acquired 1995, 2013, 2021.

Preferred Citation

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Publication Rights

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Biography

Poet and novelist Kirby Doyle was born on November 27, 1932 in San Francisco. At the age of 16, he left school and, with a bogus birth certificate, joined the U.S. Army where, he later claimed, he "learned poetics operating electrical power generators." After a brief stint working as a laborer in Europe, he returned to live in the Fillmore district of San Francisco, where he eventually enrolled at San Francisco State College (now University) to study art. A course with Kenneth Rexroth inspired him to try writing poetry, some of which was published in the college's literary magazine. At both the college's Poetry Center and his wife DiDi's new bookstore The Golden Bough, he met other poets of the San Francisco Renaissance, including Michael McClure, Lew Welch (his 'best bro,' according to McClure), and John Wieners, each of whom helped him publish poems, and, along with Blake and the ancient Greek lyric poet Sappho, became major influences; Wieners introduced him to the work of Charles Olson, whose work inspired Doyle's "After Olson" (1984). Doyle's life in "the Fill" during the 1950s and 60s was an almost stereotypical example of the Beat generation lifestyle. "We were all thieves and outlaws," wrote McClure, "but gentle souls."

On his immersion in contemporary poetry, Doyle later wrote that "the doors of plausibility swung wide open, for the first time in my life." The thirty-six Sappho-influenced lyric poems that became *Sapphobones* were written during the years 1957-59, but not published until 1966 (by Diana di Prima's Poets Press); they are marked by sexual passion but also a tone of anger and perhaps misogyny. His work and reputation were given a boost by his appearance in the special San Francisco Renaissance (Spring 1958) issue of *Chicago Review* and the inclusion of one of his poems two years later in Donald Allen's highly influential anthology *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*.

He considered his first novel, *Happiness Bastard*, written in New York City in 1959-60 but not published until 1968, to be a poetic novel and "a Romantic fallacy"; it reflected the drug abuse and poverty with which he was very familiar by this time and that only worsened after his return to San Francisco in the early 1960s. The composition, typed on a continuous roll of teletype paper (now at the Houghton Library at Harvard), is reminiscent of Jack Kerouac's manuscript for *On the Road*. McClure has described it as "the most grotesque and hilarious novel I'd ever seen." A short sequel, *Angel Faint*, also appeared in 1968. A collection of poems entitled *Crepescule [sic] for th' Coast*, with a more ironic tone than *Sapphobones*, was written in the early 1960s but not published until they appeared in his *Collected Poems* (1983).

From 1968 until 1980, Doyle lived alone, mostly in communes and remote wilderness areas of northern California such as Mt. Tamalpais and Olema. He wrote little if any new poetry or fiction during those years. Peter Coyote, who lived "on and off for years" with Doyle, called him "Radio Doyle, because his 'transmissions' of insights, jeremiads...and epiphanies were like broadcasts from another realm." In the late 1970s, back in San Francisco, Doyle had a relationship with the poet and photographer Tisa Walden, who inspired the "Poems for Lithe Tisa" in the *Collected Poems*. His addiction to drugs and alcohol led her to end the relationship; she also recognized that the addictive behavior was "clearly an attempt to 'self-medicate' a severe mental illness."

Doyle published no books of poetry longer than 40 pages after the *Collected* appeared in 1983. He was working, on and off, on a quite large poem sequence "Pre American Ode" (the extant manuscripts for which are in this archive) in which "Pre," inspired by a photograph of a Victorian girl, becomes the "prime matter that existed before man...a genius in nature" in Raymond Foye's words. The text interweaves references to world history, classical poetry, Norse law and horticulture among many other subjects. Also left unfinished is the manuscript for another novel, *White Flesh*.

Doyle continued to give occasional readings and edit little magazines, but interrelated addictions, poverty, and poor health lead to a continual decline over the last two decades of his life. He died on April 5, 2003 in Laguna Honda Hospital in San Francisco. He was one of the few writers of the San Francisco Renaissance who were both born and died in the city.

Scope and Content of Collection

Papers of American poet and novelist Kirby Doyle, who was associated with the San Francisco Renaissance poets and the Beat Generation. Doyle's papers include biographical information, correspondence, photographs, and published and unpublished writings. Four folders of letters Doyle wrote to Sheri Mignano Crawford in the mid-1980s were added in 2021. Arranged in four series: 1) BIOGRAPHICAL, 2) CORRESPONDENCE, 3) WRITINGS BY DOYLE and 4) PHOTOGRAPHS.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Doyle, Kirby -- Archives

BIOGRAPHICAL

Scope and Content of Series

Series 1) BIOGRAPHICAL: Biographies and news clippings regarding Doyle; a review of two of his published works; and flyers for readings by Doyle and other poets in the San Francisco area. Arranged alphabetically.

- Box 1, Folder 1 **Clark, Tom. "From a Beat and Hip Survivor." Review of *The Collected Poems of Kirby Doyle (1983)* and *After Olson (1984)* for *San Francisco Chronicle Review* 1984 October 28**
- Box 1, Folder 2 **Coyote, Peter, Michael McClure and Jack Foley. Essays on Kirby Doyle in *Beat Scene* 43 2003 Summer**
- Box 1, Folder 3 **Ephemera 1993-2003 and undated**
- Box 1, Folder 4 **Foye, Raymond. "Kirby Doyle: 'That Which Brings the Heart to Vocal.'" *Poetry Project* 109 1984 November**
- Box 1, Folder 5 **Obituary. *North Beach Journal* 2003 June**

CORRESPONDENCE

Scope and Content of Series

Series 2) CORRESPONDENCE: Incoming correspondence primarily from Doyle's mother and from poets Roderick Iverson and Tisa Walden, and one letter from Doyle to his mother. Four folders of letters written by Doyle to Sheri Mignano Crawford were added in 2021.

- Box 1, Folder 6 **Doyle, J. (Kirby Doyle's mother) 1992-1994**
General
Incoming and outgoing correspondence.
- Box 1, Folder 7 **Iverson, Roderick 1993-1994**
- Box 1, Folder 8 **Walden, Tisa 1992**
- Box 1, Folder 9 **Miscellaneous correspondence 1990-1994**
- Box 3, Folder 1-4 **Doyle to Sheri Mignano Crawford 1983-1985**

WRITINGS BY DOYLE

Scope and Content of Series

Series 3) WRITINGS BY DOYLE: Published and unpublished writings by Doyle, including "Coup in an Etude," a handwritten booklet of poetry; "A Few Lines to my Uncle," an epistolary essay; *Hand o' Man*, a collection of poetry drafts, both handwritten and typescript, with a letter from Doyle to publisher Raymond Foye; *Pre American Ode*, Doyle's poetic opus, with a flyer depicting the photograph that inspired Doyle; poetry transcripts from *The Floating Bear*; and a notebook with handwritten poetry and essay drafts. Arranged alphabetically.

Box 1, Folder 10
 Box 1, Folder 11
 Box 1, Folder 12

Coup in an Etude undated
A Few Lines to My Uncle undated
The Floating Bear poetry typescripts 1960-1969

General

5 leaves. Includes: The sun strikes my house, What the voices said to me, Your word finder is yourself, Poem to a mountain girl, Letter to Freddy Herko.

Box 1,
 Folder 13-15

Hand o' Man ca. 1993

General

Handwritten and typescript drafts, and correspondence.

Box 1,
 Folder 16-18

Pre American Ode, Book One 1982

Odes First - Eleventh

General

Typescript drafts.

Box 2, Folder 1-2

Odes Twelfth - Seventeenth

General

Typescript and handwritten drafts, and ephemera.

Box 2, Folder 3
 Box 2, Folder 4

Notebook undated

Poems - Miscellaneous drafts 2003 and undated

PHOTOGRAPHS

Scope and Content of Series

Series 4) PHOTOGRAPHS: Photographs of Kirby Doyle and other San Francisco poets, including Gregory Corso, John Mueller, John Wieners, and Kaye McDonough. Photographers' names are given when known. Arranged alphabetically.

Box 2, Folder 5
 Box 2, Folder 6
 Box 2, Folder 7
 Box 2, Folder 8
 Box 2, Folder 9
 Box 2, Folder 10

Portraits

Chris Felver, photographer ca. 1980

Raymond Foye, photographer 1984

Kirby Doyle and Gregory Corso undated

Kirby Doyle and John Mueller undated

Kirby Doyle and John Wieners 1980

Kirby Doyle and Kaye McDonough at City Lights book party 1984 May