Finding aid for the David St. John papers 5334

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USC Libraries Special Collections
2019 July
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URL: http://libraries.usc.edu/locations/special-collections
The David St. John papers consist of notes, drafts, and publication materials for all of St. John's collections of poetry, as well as for prose works, individual and unpublished poems, and collaborative works. The collection also contains drafts of introductions that St. John wrote for others' works, interview transcripts and recordings, scripts for and recordings of readings and lectures, notebooks, agendas and appointment calendars, and materials from various committees and professional activities. St. John's correspondence includes letters from Norman Dubie, Mark Irwin, Donald Justice, Galway Kinnell, R.B. Kitaj, W.S. Merwin, Howard Norman, Adrienne Rich, and Mark Strand, among many others. A unique feature of St. John's papers is a large amount of material by fellow poets Larry Levis and Philip Levine -- along with collaborative works involving St. John, Levis, and Levine.

Author David St. John has been honored, over the course of his career, with many prizes, including both The Rome Fellowship and The Award in Literature from The American Academy of Arts and Letters; the O. B. Hardison Prize (a career award for teaching and poetic achievement) from The Folger Shakespeare Library; and the George Drury Smith Lifetime Achievement Award. He is the author of twelve collections of poetry (including Study for the World's Body, nominated for The National Book Award in Poetry), most recently, The Last Troubadour: New and Selected Poems; as well as a volume of essays, interviews and reviews entitled Where the Angels Come Toward Us. St. John has written two libretti: for the opera based on his book, The Face, by Donald Crockett, and for the choral symphony, The Shore, by Frank Ticheli. He is also the co-editor of American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry. A chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, St. John is University Professor and chair of English at The University of Southern California (USC). He was born in Fresno, California, on July 24, 1949, and received his BA in 1974 from California State University, Fresno, and an MFA from the University of Iowa. He now lives in Venice Beach, CA.

David St. John's archive contains a wealth of notes, drafts, and publication materials for all of his collections of poetry, as well as for prose works, individual and unpublished poems, and collaborative works. These materials show both the breadth and depth of St. John's work—in each of the various genres of writing he produces, he repeatedly returns to individual pieces to revise, reshape, and improve them. This process is evidenced by the number of heavily annotated drafts and multiple versions of works present in this archive.

St. John has been active within the poetry community for his entire career. In addition to mentoring young poets as a professor at USC, St. John regularly gives readings and interviews, arranges and hosts readings by fellow poets, serves on a rotating slate of professional, journal, and prize committees, and maintains a lively correspondence with many poet and artist friends. In this collection, these relationships are perhaps most interestingly expressed in the series of introductions St. John has given for readings by others, in which he describes their personal connections to him and places them within the larger poetry community. The archive also includes interview transcripts and recordings, scripts for and recordings of readings and lectures, agendas and appointment calendars, and materials from various committees. His correspondence melds personal and professional, and includes letters from Norman Dubie, Mark Irwin, Donald Justice, Galway Kinnell, R.B. Kitaj, W.S. Merwin, Howard Norman, Adrienne Rich, and Mark Strand, among many others.

A unique feature of this archive, and further evidence of St. John's key role in the poetry community, is a large amount of material by fellow poets Larry Levis and Philip Levine. The three first converged in Fresno, California, where St. John and Levis were students and Levine was a professor at California State University, Fresno. After Fresno, both St. John and Levis went to the Iowa Writers' Workshop. They and Levine remained good friends and critics of one another's work until Levis's untimely death in 1996. St. John and Levine subsequently collaborated to publish four posthumous collections of Levis's poetry and prose, as well as a documentary about his life, A Late Style of Fire. Materials relating to the compilation of these five works are included in this archive; there is also correspondence from both Levis and Levine to St. John, poetry and prose by Levis, and works by St. John with constructive comments by Levine. Additional related materials are in the Philip Levine collection at the New York Public Library.
Advance notice required for access.

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**Preferred Citation**
[Box/folder no. or item name], David St. John papers, Collection no. 5334, University Archives, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California

**Immediate Source of Acquisition**
Purchased from Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, March 2019.

**Processing Information**
This collection is unprocessed. Glenn Horowitz, Bookseller authored two detailed inventories of the collection, which are available upon request. However, the Horowitz inventories do not specify box and folder location information for the material described.

Special Collections received the materials from this collection in two shipments: one from St. John's USC office and the other from his home. The boxes from St. John's home had handwritten labels indicating the contents of each box, while the boxes from his office were unlabeled. Other than the differences in box labeling and former storage, the degree to which the separation into these two categories (office vs. home) can serve as a meaningful distinction (in terms of grouping similar material) is unclear.

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**
American poetry -- 20th century -- Archival resources
American poetry -- 21st century -- Archival resources
Poets, American -- Correspondence
Poets, American -- Interviews
Poetry -- Introductions
Calendars (documents)
Correspondence
Drafts (documents)
Interviews
Notebooks
Publications
Levine, Philip -- Archives
Levis, Larry -- Archives
St. John, David -- Archives
University of Southern California. Department of English -- Archives

| Box 1, Box 2, | **USC office files** |
| Box 3, Box 4, |
| Box 5, Box 6, |
| Box 7, Box 8, |
| Box 9, Box 10, |
| Box 11 |

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Home files

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Box 12, Box 13, Box 14, Box 15, Box 16, Box 17, Box 18, Box 19, Box 20, Box 21, Box 22, Box 23