

# John Boland:

## Collection of Spalding Gray at the Harry Ransom Center

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### Descriptive Summary

<b>Creator:</b>	Boland, John
<b>Title:</b>	John Boland Collection of Spalding Gray
<b>Dates:</b>	1968-2008
<b>Extent:</b>	1 document box, 2 serial boxes, 1 oversize box, 1 oversize folder (2.18 linear feet)
<b>Abstract:</b>	The John Boland Collection of Spalding Gray contains materials covering much of Gray's career, consisting primarily of published works, interviews, reviews, videos, and sound recordings.
<b>Call Number:</b>	Manuscript Collection MS-05277
<b>Language:</b>	English
<b>Access:</b>	Open for research. Researchers must create an online Research Account and agree to the Materials Use Policy before using archival materials.
<b>Use Policies:</b>	Ransom Center collections may contain material with sensitive or confidential information that is protected under federal or state right to privacy laws and regulations. Researchers are advised that the disclosure of certain information pertaining to identifiable living individuals represented in the collections without the consent of those individuals may have legal ramifications (e.g., a cause of action under common law for invasion of privacy may arise if facts concerning an individual's private life are published that would be deemed highly offensive to a reasonable person) for which the Ransom Center and The University of Texas at Austin assume no responsibility.
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### Administrative Information

**Provenance Note** The Sam Shepard Papers were purchased by the University of Texas Libraries in 2006. Originally cataloged and opened for research by the Fine Arts Library, in December 2010 the collection was transferred to the Ransom Center, where recent additions to the papers were processed and the entire collection re-cataloged. In November 2011, the Ransom Center purchased material that was previously on deposit at the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia. Additional material was also acquired from Shepard at that time. This material was integrated into the existing arrangement in 2012.

**Preferred Citation** John Boland Collection of Spalding Gray (Manuscript Collection MS-05277). Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

**Acquisition:** Gift, 2010 (10-12-009-G)

**Processed by:** Stephen Cooper, 2018

**Repository:** NO

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## Biographical Sketch

Guy Mattison Davenport, Jr., was born in Anderson, South Carolina, on 23 November 1927, the second child of Guy M. Davenport, Sr., and Marie Fant Davenport. His father worked as an agent for the Southern Railway.

Davenport graduated from Anderson Boys' High School in 1945. One of his slightly younger classmates was Clarence Brown, who was later known for translating Osip Mandelstam into English and for many years taught comparative literature at Princeton University. Davenport and Brown had in common a talent for art, and they remained friends and frequent correspondents until Davenport's death.

After high school, Davenport attended Duke University, receiving an A.B. in English and Classics in 1948. At Duke he was encouraged in his literary aspirations by William Blackburn, a much-admired teacher of many successful writers. He also received encouragement for his artistic talent from the English artist Claire Leighton, from whom he took lessons.

He spent the next two years at Merton College, Oxford, on a Rhodes Scholarship. There he studied with J. R. R. Tolkien, among others. He received the degree of B.Litt., writing the first thesis on the work of James Joyce to be accepted by Oxford. He made two more lifelong friends at Oxford: the poet Christopher Middleton and the anthropologist Rodney Needham.

In 1950, Davenport returned to the U.S. and was drafted into the army. He spent two years as a clerk typist with the Army Airborne Corps at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, leaving active service with the rank of Corporal.

After his discharge, Davenport accepted a position as instructor at Washington University in St. Louis. While there he met Martha Emily Farrow, a student from New Orleans. They were married on 18 August 1956; the marriage lasted about two years and ended in divorce.

In 1955, Davenport left St. Louis and enrolled in the PhD program at Harvard, where he studied with Harry Levin and worked as a teaching assistant for Archibald MacLeish. He wrote his dissertation on "A Reading of I-XXX of the Cantos of Ezra Pound"; it was published in 1983 by UMI Research Press as *Cities on Hills*. At Harvard he was introduced to visiting lecturer Hugh Kenner, who took an instant liking to the younger man and offered help with his career. Kenner and Davenport remained friends until Kenner's death in 2003, frequently corresponding and occasionally collaborating.

After receiving his doctorate in 1961, Davenport's next teaching position was at Haverford College in Pennsylvania, at that time an all-male institution affiliated with nearby Bryn Mawr. Davenport was liked by both faculty and students, but not so much by the administration, which refused to offer him a permanent appointment after three years.

As a result, Davenport accepted a position at the University of Kentucky, where he taught for the rest of his working life, from 1963 until 1992.

Not long after moving to Lexington he made the acquaintance of Bonnie Jean Cox, who worked for the local newspaper at the time. Davenport and Cox entered a romantic relationship that lasted the rest of his life, although they never married and did not live together.

Davenport had written fiction and poetry since his childhood. By the time he moved to Kentucky, he had published a number of well-regarded translations from ancient Greek, a book on the scientist Louis Agassiz, and a book-length poem, *Flowers and Leaves*. In the 1960s he began writing fiction for the first time since he abandoned his youthful unpublished novel *Effie Garner*. His first published story, "The Aeroplanes at Brescia," appeared in *The Hudson Review* in 1970. *Tatlin!*, the first collection of his stories, was published in 1974 by Charles Scribner's Sons. He continued to write fiction, often publishing first in little magazines or in limited editions produced by small presses and then collecting the stories into volumes produced by his two main publishers, North Point Press and New Directions. He also continued to publish translations, poetry, art criticism, book reviews, and essays until near the end of his life.

In 1990, Davenport received a MacArthur Foundation Grant, which enabled him to retire from teaching. He continued to write and paint at his home at 621 Sayre Avenue in Lexington, Kentucky, keeping up a huge correspondence until his death from lung cancer on 4 January 2005.

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## Sources:

Most of the information in this biographical sketch has been drawn from material in the Davenport papers. Also helpful has been:

"Guy (Mattison, Jr.) Davenport." Contemporary Authors Online. Detroit: Gale, 2005. Literature Resource Center. Web. 13 Jan. 2016.

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## Scope and Contents

The John Boland Collection of Spalding Gray contains materials covering much of the actor/writer/performer's career, from a 1968 photograph of Gray in an off-Broadway production of *Tom Paine* to a *GQ* interview in late 2003 titled "Man Overboard." Additional items in the collection include short published works, playbills, advertisements and publicity photographs, interviews, reviews, videos, sound recordings, and books. The collection was created by and donated to the Harry Ransom Center by John Boland/NO.

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## Related Material

Additional Spalding Gray materials at the Ransom Center are located in the Spalding Gray Papers and the Spalding Gray Collection.

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## Separated Material

35 bound volumes, 13 VHS tapes, 10 commercial DVDs, 9 compact discs, 8 cassette tapes, 1 laser disc, and 1 LP record were transferred to the Ransom Center Library and will be cataloged online in The University of Texas Library Catalog. 3 noncommercial compact discs and 1 cassette tape were transferred to the Ransom Center Sound Recordings Collection and will be cataloged online in The University of Texas Library Catalog. Moving image material including 9 DVDs and 3 VHS tapes were transferred to the Ransom Center Moving Image Collection. Two gray Spalding headbands were transferred to the Ransom Center's Personal Effects Collection. See the index below for a complete list of transferred materials.

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## Selected Search Terms

### People

Brakhage, Stan.  
Brodkey, Harold.  
Brown, Clarence, 1929- .  
Davidson, Avram.  
Finlay, Ian Hamilton.  
Gajdusek, D. Carleton (Daniel Carleton), 1923-2008.  
Johnson, Ronald, 1935-1998.  
Kenner, Hugh.  
Laughlin, James, 1914-1997.  
Meatyard, Ralph Eugene, 1925-1972.  
Middleton, Christopher, 1926- .  
Needham, Rodney.  
Odlin, Reno.  
Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972.  
Quartermain, Peter.  
Williams, Jonathan, 1929-2008.  
Zukofsky, Louis, 1904-1978.

## **Organizations**

New Directions.

North Point Press.

University of Kentucky.

## **Subjects**

Artists, American--20th century.

Authors, American--20th century.

Fiction--20th century.

Poets, American--20th century.

Short stories.

## **Places**

Anderson (S.C.).

Lexington (Ky.).

## **Document Types**

Correspondence.

Diaries.

Essays.

Fiction.

Manuscripts.

Photographs.

Postcards.

**Series I. Works, 1979-2002**

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**Series II. Career Related, 1968-2000**

Adobe ColdFusion Developer/Trial Edition  
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**Series III. Interviews and Reviews, 1985-2008**

**Adobe ColdFusion Developer/Trial Edition  
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