James Tate:
An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Tate, James, 1943-2015
Title: James Tate Papers
Extent: 53 boxes, 33 periodical boxes, 1 galley folder, 1 oversize folder (30.66 linear feet)
Abstract: Correspondence, typed and handwritten manuscript drafts, galley proofs, page proofs, photographs, drawings, posters, and published works in serials document James Tate's literary work and personal life, from the early 1960s to the late 1990s.
Language: English
Access: Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition: Purchases, 1969 (R4825), 1998 (R14334)
Processed by: Suzanne Casey, Stephen Mielke, 2005
Repository: The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center
Biographical Sketch

James Vincent Tate was born James Vincent Appleby on December 8, 1943, in Kansas City, Missouri, to Samuel Vincent Appleby and Betty Jean Whitsitt. Tate's father, a B-17 co-pilot during the Second World War, was killed on a bombing mission over Germany on April 11, 1944.

Tate grew up with his mother in and around Kansas City, living with relatives until he was seven. Tate's mother remarried twice before he left for college in 1960, and he eventually took the surname of his second stepfather.

Tate attended Kansas State College and The University of Missouri, taking several breaks in his studies to travel in Europe and live in New York City and New Orleans. He received his B.A. from Kansas State College in 1965, and then enrolled in The University of Iowa's Writers Workshop where he received an M.F.A. in 1967.

Tate's first publication of collected poems, Cages (1966), was followed by The Lost Pilot, which won the 1966 Yale Younger Poets Award and was published by Yale University Press in 1967. Noted for surreal landscapes and eccentric use of language, Tate has received much critical acclaim for The Lost Pilot and for later works, including Absences (1972), and Constant Defender (1983). His many awards include Poet of the Year, Phi Beta Kappa, 1972; the National Institute of Arts and Letters award for poetry, 1974; the Pulitzer Prize for poetry for Selected Poems, 1992; the National Book Award for Worshipful Company of Fletchers, 1994; and the 1995 Tanning Prize from the Academy of American Poets.

Tate's poems have appeared in numerous magazines, including The American Poetry Review, Kayak, and The Seneca Review. In addition to writing, Tate has held teaching positions at the University of Iowa (1966-1967), the University of California at Berkeley (1967-1968), Columbia University (1969-1971), and Emerson College in Boston (1970-1971), and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (1971-2015).

Tate married Liselotte Jonsson in 1972. They separated in 1986 and he later married poet Dara Wier. Tate died July 8, 2015.

Sources:


Scope and Contents

Correspondence, typed and handwritten manuscript drafts, galley proofs, page proofs, photographs, drawings, posters, and published works in serials document James Tate's literary work and personal life, from the early 1960s to the late 1990s. The earliest item is a circa 1944 letter to Tate's father from an unidentified author, but the bulk of the materials date from 1962 to 1998.


Correspondence is the largest series and predominantly contains incoming letters to Tate from friends, other poets, and publishers. Also included is financial information, as well as correspondence related to Tate's literary activities and his employment at The University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Significant correspondents include Russell Banks, Marvin Bell, Michael Benedikt, Gerard Malanga, Charles Simic, Anne Waldman, and Charles Wright. The subject files in Series III. further document Tate's literary career and his personal life.

The Works series includes numerous single-page, typed drafts of individual poems, as well as manuscript and other prepublication forms of Tate's books. Published copies of single poems or prose works are located in the Published Materials series. Drafts, photocopies, and offprints of works sent to Tate by poets and writers such as John Ashbery, Carolyn Forché, and Leslie Wolf are located in the Works by Others series. Many contain Tate's handwritten comments.

The materials are generally in good condition, although some of the paper is yellowed and brittle.

James Tate Papers--Series Descriptions


The Works are arranged in rough chronological order reflecting the cumulative nature of Tate's writing and publishing. Many poems appeared in magazines and journals before publication in book form, therefore drafts and variants of poems were written and revised over a span of several years. Folder headings given in the container list include titles of published books, working titles of unpublished works, or indicate the type of material contained, such as "prose,""poetry,""journals," or "notebooks." The earliest materials date from 1962 and include class assignments from Tate's college courses, many with instructors' comments and grades. The bulk of the material consists of single-page, typed poems or prose fragments. Many of the poems contain notes indicating submission to, acceptance, or rejection from various serial publications. In addition, files containing materials for Tate's books can include notes, galley and page proofs, paste-ups, and offprints. Small amounts of correspondence and several photographs are also present. Tate's poetic development and success is well documented in numerous individual pieces, many never published, and materials from both his most successful and his lesser known books. Included are files for The Lost Pilot...


Tate's correspondence is divided into two subseries: A. Incoming and B. Outgoing, with incoming constituting the bulk of the material. Incoming letters are further arranged under the headings Family, General, Literary Business, and Unidentified. The majority of the Family correspondence comes from Tate's mother, Betty Sears, but also includes letters from his sister, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Also present is the oldest item in the papers, an unidentified letter to Tate's father written circa 1944. General correspondence, mainly from friends and other poets such as Gene DeGruson, Charles Simic, and Tom Lux, documents a wide variety of topics including Tate's work, travels, and personal relationships. Filed in alphabetical order by author, it includes fan mail, and a small amount of third-party correspondence. Literary Business correspondence is somewhat similar to General correspondence in content, but is marked by extensive correspondence with publishers relating to Tate's books and serial publications. Also present are requests for academic recommendations and attendance at poetry readings at literary festivals, and congratulatory letters sent to Tate for his 1992 Pulitzer prize and 1995 Tanning Prize. Outgoing correspondence consists mostly of typed carbon copies related to letters found in literary business correspondence. Small amounts of incoming correspondence or notes are present in all of the other series.

**Series III. Subject Files, 1964-1997, undated (6 boxes, 1 oversize folder)**

Subject files are arranged alphabetically by title and include large numbers of pamphlets, brochures, clippings, and other documentation of various poetry festivals, workshops, readings, and academic programs. In addition, clippings about Tate, interview transcripts, and a 1984 curriculum vitae provide particular insight into Tate's life. Other subject files include materials documenting Tate's 1992 Pulitzer Prize and 1994 National Book Award, unidentified photographs and drawings, and a file of administrative and classroom documents related to Tate's position at the University of Massachusetts. Several files reflect Tate's interests and activities, such as a World War II orphans organization, his high school reunion, a 1991 trip to Missouri, and memorabilia of other trips, sporting events, friends, and family.

**Series IV. Works by Others, 1966-1995, undated (3.5 boxes)**

The Works by Others series contains drafts or copies of works, predominantly poetry, sent to or copied by Tate. Materials are in alphabetical order by author. Many of the pieces include memos or correspondence from the author to Tate. Of note is the relatively large amount of materials from John Ashbery, Carolyn Forché, and Leslie Wolf.

**Series V. Published Materials, 1966-1997 (33 serial boxes)**

Over 550 magazines, journals, and other serial publications contain the published versions of Tate's prose and poetry. Many complement corresponding manuscript versions found in the Works series. The material is arranged alphabetically by the title of the publication. A more detailed listing of these works is available at the Ransom Center.
Separated Material

Two award plaques have been transferred to the Ransom Center's Personal Effects Collection.

Index Terms

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Organizations
Atlantic Monthly Press.
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Subjects
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Document Types
Diaries.
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"The Abominable Thugs of India," drafts and notes, 1979, undated

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"Scrap Pile (of Lost Chances)," drafts and notes, 1978-1981

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*Constant Defender*, drafts, page proofs, and correspondence, 1983, undated

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