

### Manuscripts

### Volumes

125 manuscript collections  
Over 5,600 linear feet

### Areas of collection

Contemporary literature  
Early manuscripts

## The Department of Special Collections'

manuscript holdings comprise more than a quarter million items. The majority of these fall within the Modern Literature Collection, a repository of materials that documents the histories of more than 175 authors, presses, and periodicals, and constitutes one of the most comprehensive resources for the study of contemporary Anglo-American literature in the United States. Other significant manuscript collections found within Special Collections include the Washington University Papyri Collection of ancient Egyptian manuscript fragments, the George N. Meissner Collection of manuscript items associated with various historical and literary figures, and a significant archive of ancient and medieval manuscripts. Together with the Modern Literature Collection, these holdings make Washington University's manuscript collections a premier research archive.

Front cover:  
Manuscript page of *Film*  
by Samuel Beckett, 1971.

Left and back cover:  
Journal passage by  
Michelangelo, 1530.

All photos by John  
Hodge except papyrus  
fragment, *Horae Beatae  
Mariae Virginis*, and  
Michelangelo journal  
passage.



## The Modern Literature Collection

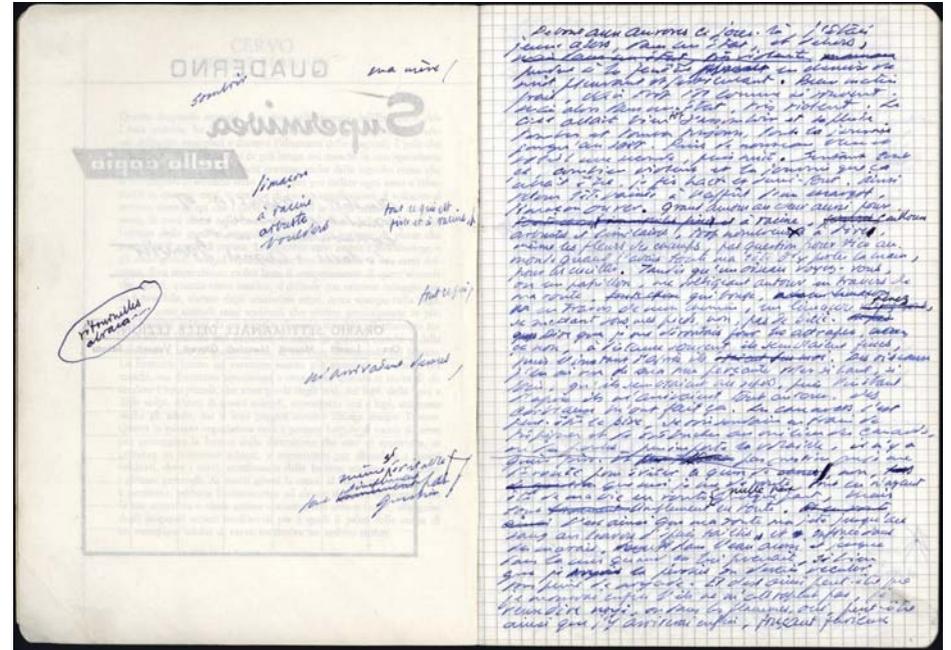
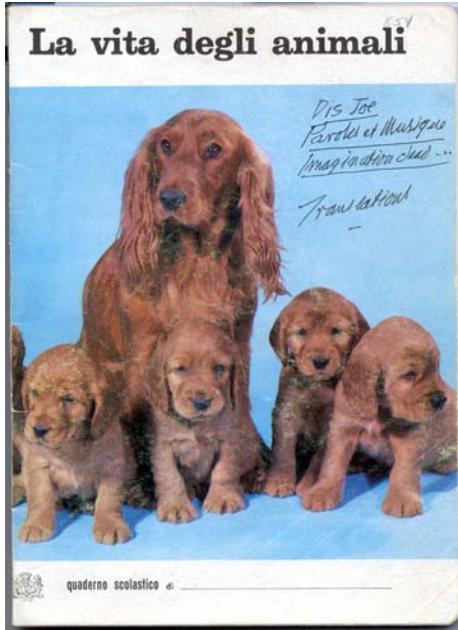
Inaugurated in 1964, the Modern Literature Collection was created as an archive of the work of contemporary English and American writers who were considered critically underappreciated and whose reputations might grow further in the years to come. A committee of five writers associated with Washington University met to compile a list of potential acquisitions. Headed by the award-winning poet Mona Van Duyn, this panel was charged with both recommending and contacting a select group of authors.

Special Collections then set about acquiring manuscript materials, such as personal and editorial correspondence, publishers' proofs, drafts, and ephemera, that reflected the writers' compositional processes and provided biographical information. This strategy created a set of unique literary archives that now forms the core of the Modern Literature Collection.

The Department complemented this important body of papers with definitive collections of the published work of these authors—appearances in periodicals, first editions, later editions, copies corrected or inscribed by the author, and books containing contributions, translations, biographies, and critical studies—in order to create a research archive of print material to accompany the manuscripts. In a few cases, Special Collections even collected this printed matter for authors whose papers they were not able to acquire. The result is a multi-layered and broad-reaching collection that provides scholars with meaningful perspectives on the authors' lives and work.

The work of 46 writers, all but 2 of whom were currently living, was reflected in the initial Modern Literature Collection. Today, the collection's list has grown to more than 175 authors, presses, and journals, with more than 125 of these represented by manuscript materials. Among these authors are Samuel Beckett, James Merrill, May Swenson, James Dickey, Sylvia Plath, Howard Nemerov,

*Left:*  
Death mask of  
James Merrill, 1995.



William Gass, Mona Van Duyn, and William Gaddis. The prescience and commitment of the original panel reaped great rewards, producing a set of printed and manuscript collections that are internationally recognized and accessed by scholars from around the globe.

### Samuel Beckett Papers

Probably the best-known figure represented in the Modern Literature Collection is Samuel Beckett (1906–89). Special Collections holds one of the world's foremost collections of the playwright's manuscripts, along with an extensive collection of his published texts and scholarship devoted to his life and work. No other repository of Beckett's work contains the depth and breadth of Special Collections' holdings of his writing from the 1960s, including a number of heavily revised variant drafts of his late work, along with publishers' proofs, notebooks, and translations.

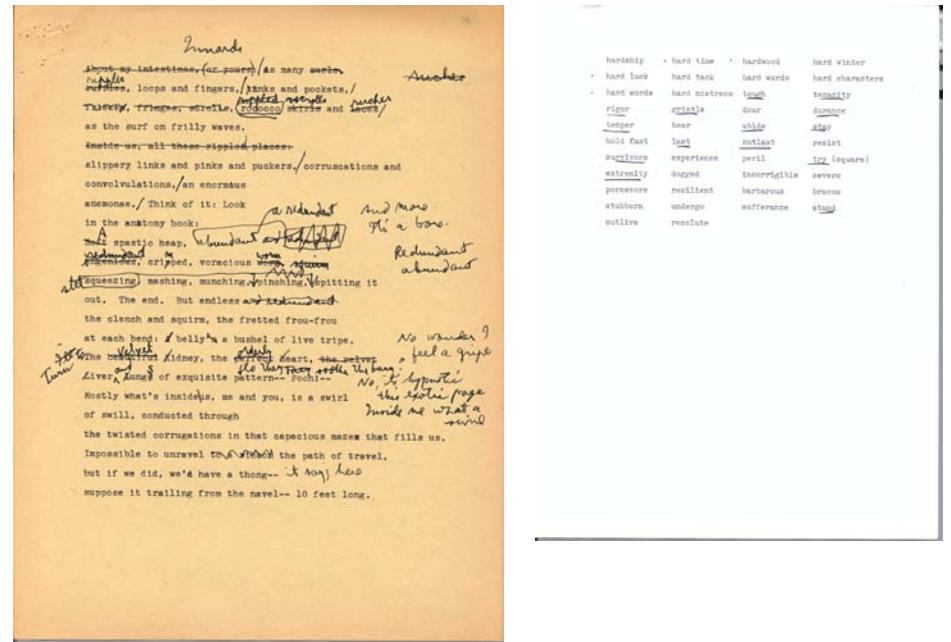
The first acquisition of Beckett's manuscripts was made by Special Collections in 1965, and subsequent gifts from scholar Ruby Cohn, along with an exchange of manuscript copies with the University of Reading, have added considerably to the collection, making it one of the foremost Beckett repositories in the world.

Above:  
Two of Samuel Beckett's notebooks, circa 1965 and 1966.

Right page top:  
Samuel Beckett's notebook circa 1967.

Right page bottom left:  
Manuscript page of "Innards" by May Swenson, circa 1971.

Right page bottom right:  
Manuscript page of Endurance by Donald Finkel.





# Other Manuscript Collections

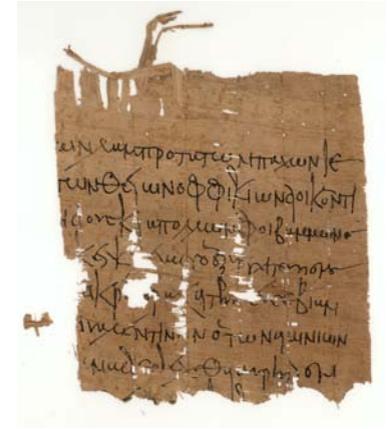
While much of what constitutes Special Collections' manuscript collections is related to the Modern Literature holdings, there are a number of substantial collections that exist independently. In addition to a collection of ancient and medieval manuscripts documenting aspects of the history of the book (including cuneiform tablets, books of hours, psalters, and missals), the Meissner Papers and Washington University Papyri Collection provide a range of research opportunities.

## George N. Meissner Papers

The Meissner Collection (part of which is also held in the rare books unit) is composed of items owned or created by important literary and historical figures, including manuscripts, correspondence, prints, and autograph signatures. The archive's subject areas vary considerably, from United States presidents to figures of the Italian Renaissance. George Washington and Abraham Lincoln are represented by multiple items, as is Samuel Clemens. Among the most notable pieces in the collection is a signed document in the hand of Michelangelo. A collection of illuminated manuscripts dating from the 14th and 15th centuries has proved a valuable resource to historians, artists, and students of the book.

## Washington University Papyri Collection

The manuscript collections hold more than 400 Egyptian manuscript fragments, dating from the 1st century BC to the 8th century AD. As is the case with a number of North American universities, Washington University initially acquired its papyri collection through a subscription to the Egypt Exploration Society, which raised operating funds through the sale of subscriptions. These fragments were excavated in 1923 by Sir William Flinders Petrie and the Egypt Exploration Society at the site of the ancient Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus.



## Modern Literature Recorded Multimedia Collection

The Modern Literature Recorded Multimedia Collection comprises audio recordings of readings, lectures, interviews, and discussions by some of the most important writers of our era. More than 500 recordings, from 1960 to the present, document events held by a wide variety of departments at Washington University; other recordings have come to Special Collections as part of authors' papers acquired by the University.

This archive was established in order to preserve the materials and make them available to a broader audience. The bulk of the collection has been converted to digital formats for easier access and to reduce wear on the original materials. The recordings are currently available for on-site listening and, in some cases, may be loaned to researchers who cannot visit the University. Among the authors included in this important collection are John Barth, Angela Carter, Salman Rushdie, and Iris Murdoch.

*Left:*  
*Horae Beatae Mariae*  
*Virginis, late 15th century.*

*Right:*  
Papyrus fragment,  
likely a deed of surety,  
425-450 AD.

Jo mi ch'lagniolo buonavroti o incasa barili o d  
diuino, e curcha dua barili di fo d'ighuoli  
e u mezzo barile d'aceto e bo ch' a uarro  
A d' s' dieci d'apulo

All units of Special Collections are open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday–Friday, except for University holidays.

#### To Visit

Researchers are not required to make appointments, but the Department recommends that anyone coming from out of town call in advance. Instructors should contact the Department to arrange class visits.

#### Location

Olin Library, Level 1  
(Olin Library is located in the center of the Danforth Campus.)

#### To Learn More

[www.library.wustl.edu/units/spec/manuscripts/](http://www.library.wustl.edu/units/spec/manuscripts/)

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