

[Written by Joel Minor, Curator of Modern Literature Collection]

Hello everyone. I am Jeffrey Trzeciak, University Librarian, and on behalf of the Washington University Libraries it is my pleasure to welcome you to the James Merrill Symposium. Please silence your electronic devices before we begin. [Acknowledge anyone you wish to here.]

It's been over 50 years now since Washington University Libraries Special Collections, with the help of Mona Van Duyn, Donald Finkel, Constance Urdang, Stanley Elkin, among others, started the Modern Literature Collection. Van Duyn, Finkel and Urdang were in charge of identifying 15 promising poets who might be willing to donate their literary manuscripts as founding collections of a contemporary literature research library.

In the case of James Merrill, we got to him just in time. Other universities were starting to ask him about his papers too. Luckily for us, Merrill was already a friend of Mona Van Duyn's, and her personal letter of inquiry to him was enough to convince him to choose Washington University over the others. For the next thirty years, Merrill would regularly send us his latest manuscripts, or deliver them in person when he was on campus.

And now, twenty years after his death, we are still collecting James Merrill manuscripts and other research material. Just this past month alone we have purchased Merrill letters to William Meredith and William Packard; Harold Bloom's personal copy of Merrill's book *From the First Nine*, annotated by Bloom; and a copy of *The Changing Light of Sandover* that Merrill used to identify excerpts for adapting the book into a stage play.

Purchases like these are possible in part because Merrill's generosity went beyond his rich personal archive. He left us an endowment for acquiring and processing not just his manuscripts, but those from other poets and writers. And he left proceeds from his copyright to us as well. All of these gifts have helped turn the Modern Literature Collection into a center for international literary research, which is exactly what its founders had envisioned.

The James Merrill Papers now measure over 175 linear feet—or 310 boxes. It is a cradle-to-grave archive that includes such curiosities as his christening gown, Ouija board and death mask, along with the thousands of pages of correspondence and drafts that scholars and students come to pore over every year. And this is not counting the related manuscript collections and the hundreds of cataloged James Merrill items also in our holdings.

In the Olin Library right now you will find the exhibit "James Merrill: Life and Archive," which curator Joel Minor will lead you through tomorrow afternoon. You will also hear tomorrow about Merrill's lasting influence and importance, from friends who knew him, poets who have been inspired by him, scholars who study his work, and others. Check your program for more details on this exciting symposium. We are pleased you all could join us and hope you enjoy yourselves.

After the keynote address tonight, please stay for a reception and book sales. Now to introduce Langdon Hammer for the keynote address, please join me in welcoming to the podium his good friend—and James Merrill's good friend—J. D. McClatchy.