

∞ The Ward M. Canaday Center ∞
for Special Collections
The University of Toledo

Finding Aid

➤ **Cleanth Brooks Papers 1-3 (1949-1977, 1963-1991, 1981-1985)**◀

MSS-092

Size: 1 ½ inches

Provenance: The Ward M. Canaday Center, University of Toledo Libraries, purchased the Cleanth Brooks Papers I, II, and III from H. E. Turlington of Carrboro, North Carolina in 1993 and 1995.

Access: Open

Collection Summary: Literary and personal correspondence, transcript of a radio interview, and typescripts of essays.

Subjects: [Literature](#)

Processing Note: None

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Completed by: Barbara A. Shirk August 1993, May 1995, and April 1996; revised and reformatted by Tamara Jones, August 2011; last updated: June, 2014.

Cleanth Brooks
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Biographical Sketch

Cleanth Brooks was born in Murray, Kentucky on October 16, 1906. He was the fifth of six children of a Methodist minister. He spent his youth in several small towns in Kentucky and Tennessee. He graduated from McTyeire School in McKenzie, Tennessee in 1924 and received a Bachelor's Degree from Vanderbilt University in 1928. The following year he earned a Master of Arts Degree from Tulane University and studied as a Rhodes Scholar at Exeter College, Oxford University, where he received a B.A. (Honors) in 1931 and B.A. (Lit.) the next year.

From Oxford, he accepted a position in the English Department of Louisiana State University, where he remained until 1947. On September 12, 1934, he married Edith Ann Blanchard. In 1935, Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and other scholars and critics founded *The Southern Review*, with Brooks as one of its editors. It was one of the most prestigious literary quarterlies in America until publication ceased in 1942.

After leaving Louisiana State University, Brooks served as a Fellow of the Library of Congress (1951-1962), cultural attaché at the American Embassy in London (1964-1966), and was selected as a Guggenheim Fellow in 1953 and 1960. From 1947 until his retirement in 1975, he was a member of the English Department at Yale University.

Brooks published a few poems early in his career but his real interest was in reading, not writing, poetry. His talents were displayed in critical essays that appeared in some very important literary journals. Some of these essays were revised and supplemented for publication as books. For example, his reputation as a respected, modern American critic is based primarily on three books: *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947) and *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (1963). Some of the other books written by Brooks include *literary Criticism: A Short History* with W. K. Wimsatt (1957); *The Hidden Gods: Studies in Hemmingway, Faulkner, Yeats, Eliot, and Warren* (1963); *American Literature: A Mirror, Lens or Prism?* (1967); *A Shaping Joy: Studies in the Writer's Craft* (1971); and *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (1978). Along with his books of criticism, Brooks co-edited four textbooks that revolutionized the way literature is taught and read in the classroom; they are: *An Approach to Literature*, with John T. Purser and Robert Penn Warren (1936, 1939, 1952, 1964, 1975); *Understanding Poetry* with Robert Penn Warren (1938, 1950, 1956, 1960); *Understanding Fiction* with Robert Penn Warren (1943, 1959); and *Understanding Drama*, with Robert B. Heilman (1945). In addition, he co-edited *Modern Rhetoric* with Robert Penn Warren (1949, 1958, 1972); *Fundamentals of Good Writing: A Handbook of Modern Rhetoric* with Robert Penn Warren (1950); *An Anthology of Stories from the Southern Review* with Robert Penn Warren (1953); *Tragic Themes in Western Literature* with others (1955); *The Scope of Fiction*, with Robert Penn Warren (1960); and *American Literature: The Makers and Making*, with Robert Penn Warren and R. W. B. Lewis, 2 vols (1973).

After his retirement, he served as visiting professor at various universities and continued his writing, including work on William Faulkner. In addition, he traveled and participated in literary conferences.

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Brooks died of cancer in New Haven, Connecticut in May 1994.

Scope and Content Note

Papers I cover the period from 1949-1977. They consist of twelve letters from Brooks to George Core, copies of the text of a 1949 radio interview, and two essays (1950 and 1958).

The letters were written to Core between 1972 and 1977 when he was a member of the faculty of the University of Georgia. Core has edited several books including *Regionalism and Beyond: Essays of Randall Stewart*, with M. E. Bradford; *The Southern Tradition at Bay* by Richard Weaver; and *Southern Fiction Today: Renascence and Beyond* with essays by Walter Sullivan, C. Holman, and Louis D. Rubin, Jr. (a Scholar's Library selection). Mr. Core served as editor of *The Sewanee Review* and has also written essays and reviews for a number of other journals including *The Southern Review* and *The Georgia Review*.

The correspondence between the two writers begins with the December 23, 1972 letter in which Cleanth Brooks tells Core, "thanks for, what is really the most handsome of Christmas presents, your essay on my work." Brooks goes on to say, "I would like to explore with you further, privately, some of my speculations about the literary and cultural scene." In this letter and the remaining letters in the collection, Brooks tells Core about his plans for submitting articles for publication to *The Sewanee Review* and his other projects which include writing an American Literature textbook and a second Faulkner volume. Other topics range from presenting a paper at the Allen Tate birthday celebration in Sewanee, Tennessee in 1974 to the politics at Yale University.

The text of the radio interview with Cleanth Brooks which aired on March 6, 1949 at Yale University is entitled, "Onslaught of Science and Technology May Lead to General Cultural Deterioration." The discussion centers on the future of the humanities and liberal education itself.

The first essay in the collection, "The Crisis in Culture," originally appeared in the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* on July 8, 1950. In it, Brooks discusses William Wordsworth's ideas on the standards of culture during his time and Brooks reveals his own thoughts on the significance of the arts, and especially the arts of language, in determining the health of a culture.

The second essay entitled, "Modern Poetry: Its Aim and Its Spirit" was presented by Cleanth Brooks at a Yale alumni seminar in June of 1958. In this paper, he presents examples of works by various poets, together with his interpretation, for the purpose of determining if modern poetry can be called poetry.

Cleanth Brooks Papers II consists of twenty-one letters to Professor Walter Laurence Sullivan which date from November 29, 1963 through October 10, 1991.

Cleanth Brooks Papers III contains eleven letters (eight from Brooks and three from his wife, Tinkham) to Stuart Wright at Palaemon Press Ltd. in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. They date from February 25, 1981 to November 23, 1985.

Cleanth Brooks
Papers 1-3 (1949-1977, 1963-1991, 1981-1985)

Folder Listing

Box	Folder	Description
		<u>Papers I</u>
1		Correspondence (To George Core)
	1	December 23, 1972
	2	February 10, 1973
	3	December 9, 1973
	4	June 4, 1974
	5	September 15, 1974
	6	October 22, 1974
	7	December 4, 1974
	8	December 13, 1974
	9	March 3, 1975
	10	March 27, 1975
	11	May 7, 1975
	12	July 24, 1977
		Text of Radio Interview
		"Onslaught of Science and Technology May Lead to General Cultural Deterioration," Yale University, March 6, 1949
		Essays
	14	"The Crisis in Culture," <i>Harvard Alumni Bulletin</i> , July 8, 1950
	15	"Modern Poetry: Its Aim and Its Spirit," Yale Alumni Seminar, June 1958

Papers II

1		Correspondence (To Walter Sullivan)
	1	November 29, 1963
	2	February 26, 1964
	3	April 9, 1964
	4	February 15, 1967
	5	June 17, 1971
	6	July 29, 1971
	7	August 5, 1971
	8	December 20, 1971
	9	February 15, 1972
	10	March 27, 1972
	11	October 22, 1975
	12	August 14, 1980
	13	November 16, 1980

Cleanth Brooks

Papers 1-3 (1949-1977, 1963-1991, 1981-1985)

- 14 February 13, 1981
- 15 February 16, 1981
- 16 February 27, 1981
- 17 November 22, 1987
- 18 January 3, 1990
- 19 November 30, 1990
- 20 October 10, 1991
- 21 n.d.

Papers III

- 1 Correspondence (To Stuart Wright)
 - 1 February 25, 1981
 - 2 March 26, [1981] (From Tinkham Brooks)
 - 3 January 22, 1982
 - 4 March 28, 1982
 - 5 April 10, 1983 (From Cleanth and Tinkham Brooks)
 - 6 October 16, 1983 (With Eudora Welty tribute enclosed)
 - 7 January 6, 1984 (With proof sheet of Eudora Welty tribute enclosed)
 - 8 February 23, 1984 (From Tinkham Brooks)
 - 9 May 22, 1984
 - 10 October 1, 1985 (From Tinkham Brooks)
 - 11 November 23, 1985
- Miscellaneous
 - 12 March 28, 1983 (Check to Cleanth Brooks from Palaemon Press, Ltd.)