



The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Owen Dodson collection

1943-1984

Sc MG 437

Schomburg NEH Automated Access to Special Collections Project

Processed by Janice Quinter, May 1991.

Summary

Collector: Gordon, Sol

Title: Owen Dodson collection

Date: 1943-1984

Size: 0.02 linear feet (2 folders)

Source: Gift of Sol Gordon, May 1991.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: The Owen Dodson collection consists principally of printed matter describing Dodson's career as a poet, playwright, and novelist. There are programs, obituaries and a memorial, a few of his poems, and an extensive bibliography. Additionally, the collection contains a handwritten poem (ca. 1940s), postcards written to his friend Sol Gordon, court documents, and correspondence regarding Dodson's estate and his will.

Preferred citation: [Item], Owen Dodson collection, Sc MG 437, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Janice Quinter, May 1991.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio materials. For more information, please contact the division at schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

Creator History

Owen Dodson was a poet, novelist, playwright, and educator who influenced the course of African American drama. Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1914, he received a Bachelor's degree from Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, and earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from Yale University with the writing of the play *Divine Comedy* (1938).

Dodson wrote the novels *Come Home Early, Child* (1977) and *Boy at the Window* (1951), and books of poetry including *The Harlem Book of the Dead* and *Powerful Long Ladder*. His plays, totaling fifteen and including *Divine Comedy*, *Garden of Time*, and *Bayou Legend*, among others, were more akin to poetic dramas than to plays. His short story, "The Summer Five", won a Paris Review award.

Teaching at Atlanta University, Hampton Institute, and Spelman College, as well as serving in the U.S. Navy, helped prepare Dodson for the task that lay before him at Howard University in 1944, where he taught or worked with many contemporary successful African American actors. With two fellow professors, Dodson established Howard University as a primary source in African American theater. He remained at Howard as chairman of the Drama Department and poet in residence until he retired in 1969. Dodson lectured at colleges throughout the country and directed various colleges and repertory groups in major cities. In 1964, he was an advisory board member for the Harlem School of the Arts Community Theater. Dodson's death occurred in 1983.

Scope and Content Note

The Owen Dodson collection consists principally of printed matter describing Dodson's career as a poet, playwright, and novelist. There are programs, obituaries and a memorial, a few of his poems, and an extensive bibliography. Additionally, the collection contains a handwritten poem (ca. 1940s), postcards written to his friend Sol Gordon, court documents, and correspondence regarding Dodson's estate and his will.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American authors
African American dramatists
African American novelists
African American poets
African American teachers
African Americans in the performing arts
Authors, Black

Names

Dodson, Owen, 1914-1983
Gordon, Sol