

Common Crow Books

PO Box 81095

Pittsburgh PA 15217

(412) 242-4148

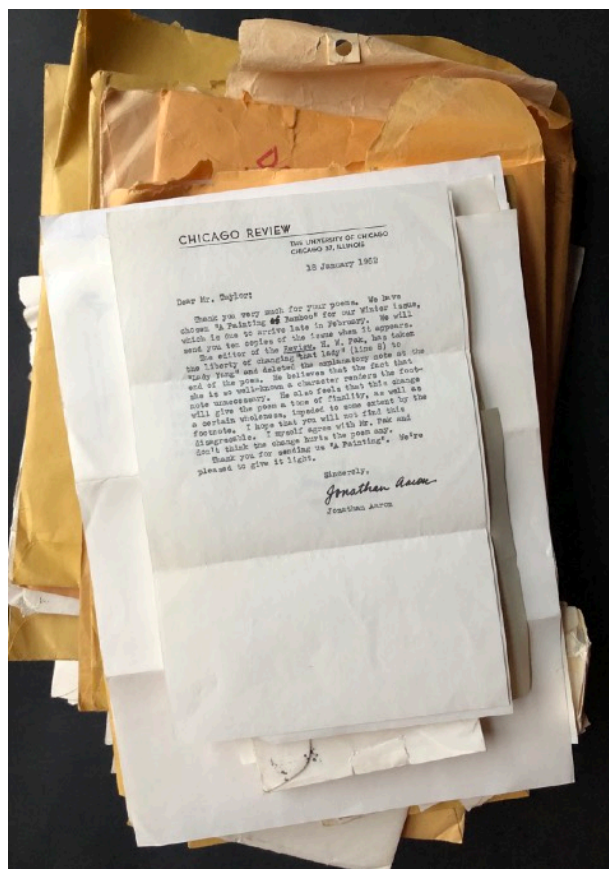
info@commoncrowbooks.com

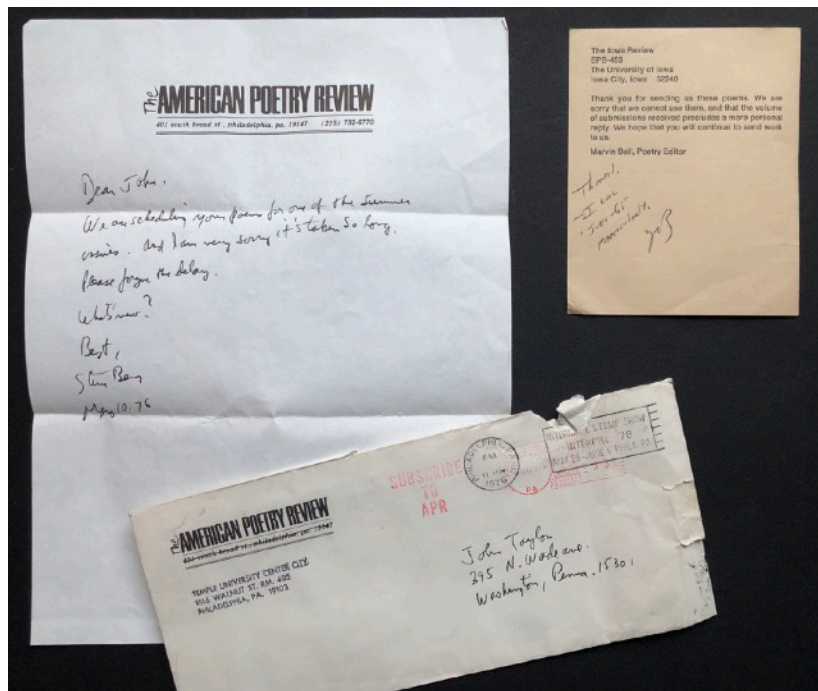
We offer for sale an archive of correspondence from the estate of poet and horror-story author John Alfred Taylor, mostly from editors of literary journals from the 1960s to the 1990s. These are mainly notes and sometimes letters in response to Taylor's submissions, but we have also included sub-archives of letters from colleagues and fellow writers, notably the novelists Joseph McElroy and Thomas Williams, author and editor Tim Hildebrand, poet-editors Robert Bly and David Wagoner, et al., which shed light on Taylor's professional, academic and creative life. In all, there are about 200 individual notes and letters, as well as a goodly sampling of the journals Taylor appeared in.

Taylor was an indefatigable sender-out of poetry and eventually published over 400 poems in some of the leading literary journals. He kept a file card for each poem, would write down the journal and date for each submission, and if it was rejected, he would send it right back out again to another journal. On the third floor of his house in Washington, PA, he would toss the rejection and acceptance notes into a box that was filled to overflowing. We have gathered the best of these — the most well-known editors and most interesting notes — to create an archive of Taylor's activities as an active poet and to craft a portrait of the personalities that oversaw that part of the literary scene back then.

Taylor (1931-2023) first began writing verse as a student at the University of Missouri, where he studied with John G. Neihardt. He did graduate work at the University of Iowa and at the famous Iowa Writers' Workshop, getting a MA in 1957 and a PhD in 1959. He was an instructor at the University of New Hampshire, 1959-62, where he met Thomas Williams and Joseph McElroy, Assistant Professor at Rice University, 1962-64, Assistant Professor at Buffalo State College, 1964-66, and from 1967 to his retirement an Associate Professor at Washington & Jefferson College in Washington, PA. The Soap Duckets came out in 1965; Waking at Night appeared in 2009. A volume of supernatural fiction, Hell is Murky, was published by Ash-Tree Books in 2008.

Price for the collection is **\$3,000**. Trade discounts given to established dealers, institutions easily accommodated as to their particular needs.





AARON, Jonathan.

- 4 notes from The Chicago Review, signed. 1/31/61 note rejects a poem but comments favorably; 1/18/62 accepts "A Painting of Bamboo" and has an editorial suggestion that he and the chief editor think makes the work stronger; 6/11/62 is a rejection note but Aaron writes that the second stanza of "Zeno" contain lines that "are among the most nearly perfect I've ever seen," and finally an undated impersonal note of rejection.

BELL, Marvin.

- Rejection note but with short handwritten note initialed by Bell: "Thanks. — I like 'Judo-Gi' particularly. M B"

BERG, Stephen.

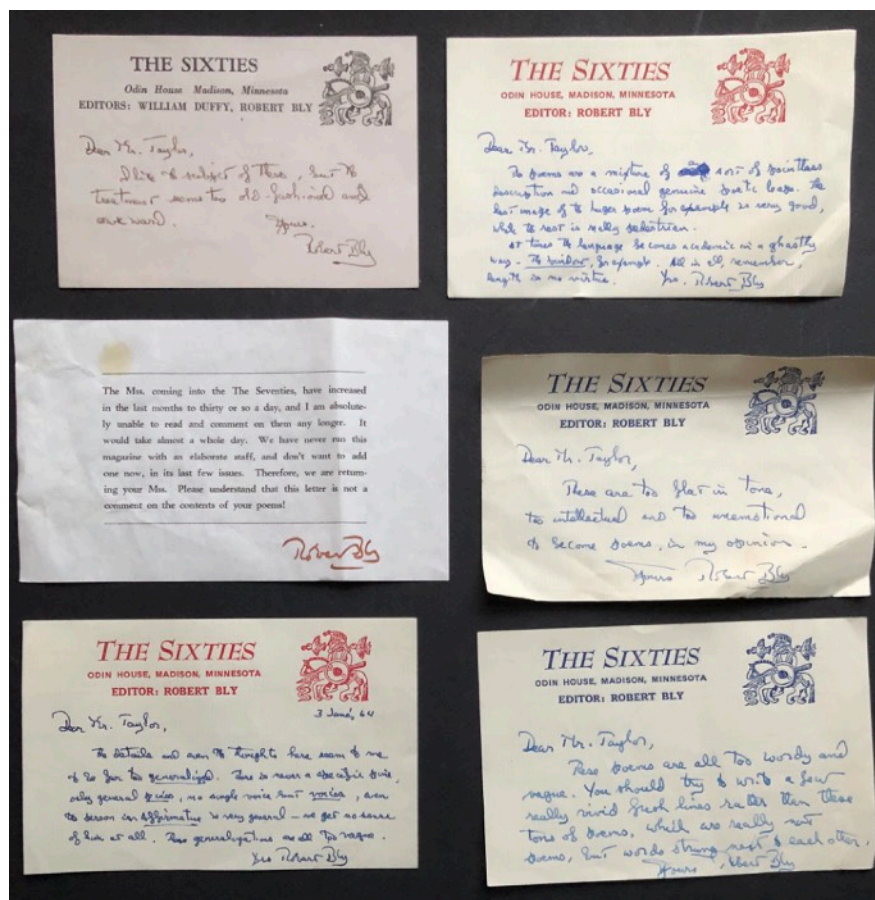
- Short handwritten note on American Poetry Review letterhead, in envelope postmarked May 11, 1976. "Dear John, We are scheduling your poems for one of the summer issues. And I am very sorry it's taken so long. Please forgive the delay. What's new? Best, Steve Berg, May 10.76."

BLY, Robert.

- 5 handwritten rejection notes on "The Sixties" post-card sized slips, none dated but each handwritten, and each somewhat dismissive and nasty, plus a 6th signed printed rejection notice from The Seventies. 1) "Dear Mr. Taylor, I like the subject of these, but the treatment seems too old-fashioned and awkward. 2) "These are too flat in tone, too intellectual and unemotional to become poems, in my opinion." 3) "These poems are all too wordy and vague. You should try to write a few really vivid fresh lines rather than these tons of poems, which are really not poems, but words strung next to each other." 4) "The details and even the thoughts here seem to me to be far too generalized. There is never a specific pine, only general pines, no single voice but voices, even a person in affirmative is very general — we get no sense of him at all. Those generalizations are all too vague." 5) "The poems are a mixture of a sort of pointless description and occasional genuine poetic leaps. The last image of the Luger poem for example is very good, while the rest is really pedestrian. At times the language becomes academic in a ghastly way - The Window for example. All in all, remember, length is no virtue."

DACEY, Philip.

- 8 notes, acceptances, rejections, invitation to submit to an anthology, all from around 1971-1972. 1) April 27, 1971. Taking "The Devil's Printer" for issue number 8 and asking for



biographical/bibliographical information. "I've been re-reading your poems every week or so since I got them, checking to see if "Devil's Printer" stayed as good as it seemed when I first read it, shortly after your poems arrived. It holds up, time after time. It'll help #8 be a solid issue." 2) 7-4-71 handwritten note on a Crazy Horse ditto: "I like 'Seance' a good bit tho not quite enough. Do send more though." 3) Note probably enclosed with issue no. 8 on Crazy Horse subscription form, hoping John will like the issue. 4) Undated note on Crazy Horse ditto thanking Taylor for two batches of poems, which although he likes some of them, were not strong enough to publish. 5) On small green Crazy Horse slip, "John — Ukiyo-e comes close. Phil." 6) Undated, on Crazy Horse xerox: "John — sorry. Phil." 7) Undated, on Crazy Horse xerox, "John — Sorry, no, but I like 'Men Burying a Cable' a good bit. Best wishes, Phil." 8) Form letter inviting Taylor to submit work for an anthology of American poets under 35 that Dacey is editing with David Allan Evans. Signed by Dacey.

ENGELS, John.

- Typed note, signed, in envelope postmarked Jan. 21, 1977, from Saint Michael's College in Winooski VT. Engels got an MFA at the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1957, at the same time Taylor was there. "Dear John: Strange week. Mss from Paul Petrie in the same mail with yours, letter from Justice with news of Coulette, with whom he stayed for a couple of weeks this fall in England. I have often wondered what happened to you after you left New Hampshire, and to Julia Morrison, and one or two of the others who remain evident in my memory. Last March I read at Cooper Union with Connie Urdang; Finkel was along, and there was a brief moment of old-grad stuff. I'm sorry about the troubles you hint at. I like the mss., and have forwarded it to Beacham to go on to some second reader. I was struck by your Scott poem. That rotten manly dying of his. Still, I'm afraid I would have done worse, been found with my mouth full of shoe leather and froth on my lips. Best, John."

FARLEY, Jean.

- 3 notes on Kenyon Review slips, only one dated (Feb. 19, 1967) — accepting the poem "Speech Out of the Dark" and discussing at some length Taylor's poems; the other two notes

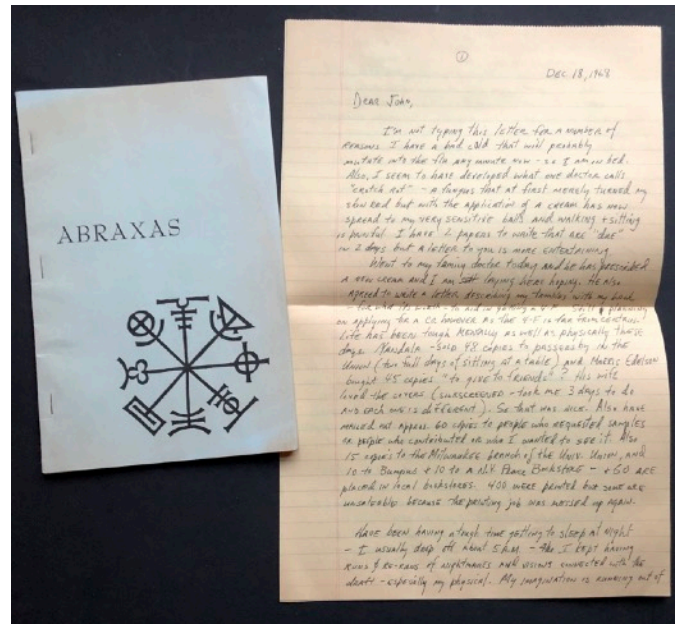
are rejections with some reservations, and there is a 4th slip with a list of poems Farley is still considering.

FIEDLER, Leslie.

- Short typed note from April 30, 1979 on SUNY Buffalo letterhead. "Dear Mr. Taylor, Your note interests and puzzles me. Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith are English publishers, as far as I know. I will have to check and try to straighten this out."

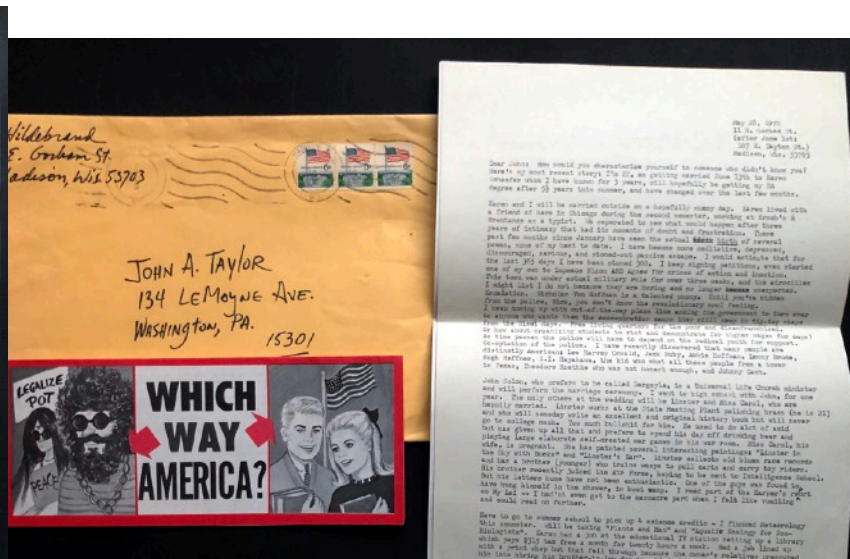
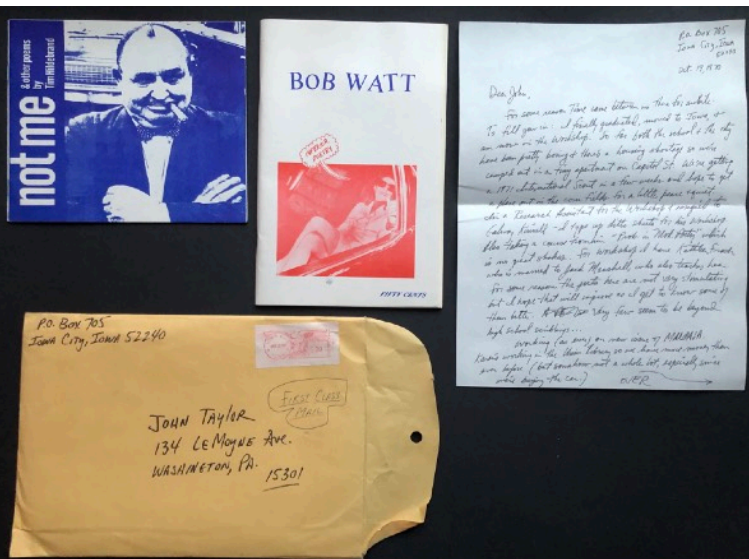
HALL, Donald.

- Paris Review reject slip, signed "Thank you, D. Hall"



HILDEBRAND, Tim.

- A substantial group of about 60 letters, most with their envelopes, starting October 24, 1967 and ending in early January 1973. Hildebrand (b. 1948) begins his correspondence as a 19 year old on the verge of embarking on the publication of a literary journal, MANDALA. The journal lasted at least 6 issues and Taylor contributed to some or all of them. At the same time, Hildebrand was a student at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and heavily involved



in student activism and anti-war protests. His letters to Taylor are sometimes accompanied by newspaper clippings and other publications, including chapbooks and poetry (includes a copy of Hildebrand's chapbook, "Not Me and other poems"). The correspondence ends in early 1973 when Hildebrand is at Iowa, taking classes at the Writers' Conference there. We have tried to trace his career after that and think he was in Berkeley for a while, and he seems to have returned to his native Wisconsin: there is a bookseller with his name on ABE in Janesville. The correspondence concerns politics, activism, drugs, music, poetry, other publications and Hildebrand's wide and precocious reading habits. It is one of the more compelling parts of this archive.

HITCHCOCK, Georg.

- 2 notes from Kayak, one a typed note from Nov. 9, 1967, accepting two poems for publication and asking some questions, the other a simple "Alas! George Hitchcock" on Kayak letterhead, presumably rejecting a submission, undated.

JEROME, Judson.

- 2 kind rejection notes, one dated January 27, 1962, which includes, "I like what you're saying so much, and the frequent good phrases, I'm disappointed when a line seems to go to seed, usually with a string of little, prosaic words. It's a familiar trouble; I have it myself. Anyway, I regret I can't take one or more, but must be severe with myself." The other is on an undated green slip, with handwritten note, "None quite makes it— but all are good — J. J."

JOHNSON, Curt.

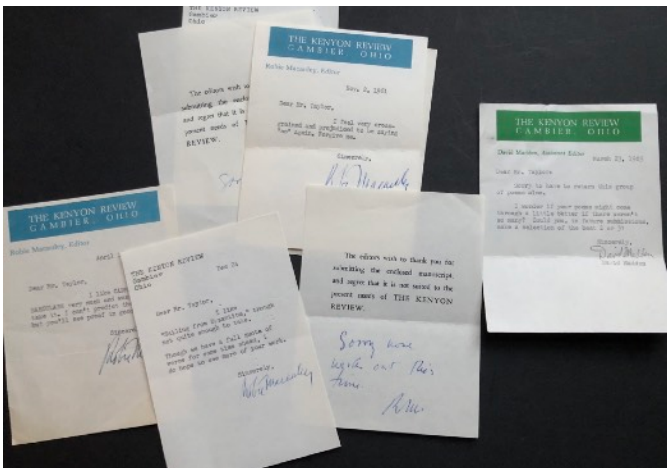
- Acceptance postcard from 9-19-67 from Curt Johnson, the editor of DECEMBER, taking 4 poems. December was a very good, active, literary journal and we'll include a few sample issues with this archive.

LANNING, George

- 2 rejection slips on Kenyon Review letterhead, both signed in pencil by Lanning, probably ca. 1970.

LUNDAHL, Gene.

- Typed letter on University of Denver letterhead, 12-5-66. Gives news of the magazine VERB Lundahl was heavily with, along with Charles Waterman and John Williams, including that publication has been suspended at Verb, Waterman was "removed" and funding is an issue, also gives news of fellow Colorado author and editor Alan Swallow's "sudden death." And other newsy stuff. In envelope.



MACAULEY, Robie.

- 8 notes on KENYON REVIEW letterhead, 1960-62, 2 are acceptance notes, the others are rejections. The first, March 11, 1960 accepts "The Death of Arthur Flegenheimer" for publication. The other acceptance is for "Carmen Saeculare" from April 16, 1962. The others are rejection notices, some with short notes by Macauley, all signed.

MADDEN, David.

- On KENYON REVIEW slip dated March 23, 1965, rejection note, typed, signed. "I wonder if your poems might come through a little better if there weren't so many? Could you, in future submissions, make a selection of the best 2 or 3?"

MALONE, Marvin.

- 2 acceptance notes and a rejection. The rejection, although undated, has printed text referencing issue 17, which was published in 1965. The two acceptances are for work to appear in issue 15 (1964), and for a poem that appeared in issue 8 (1962).

MATTHEWS, William

- 2 rejection notes from Matthews for the magazine LILLABULERO that he edited with Russell Banks, the first from March 15, 1968, rejects the submissions but says "C2H5OH seems to me the most interesting poem here; the rest are somehow pat." The second note, May 15, 1969, says "Not these. I've got some of yours here I'm still looking at; word on them within a week." Both signed.



McELROY, Joseph P.

- 7 letters or notes, 1962-1970, 1985. McElroy (b. 1930) authored several well received novels, starting with "A Smuggler's Bible" (1966) and including his magnum opus, "Women and Men" (1987). He is compared favorably with Gaddis, DeLillo, Vollmann and Pynchon. He taught at the University of New Hampshire in the late 1950s to early 1960s, and his time there overlapped with Taylor's. The first letter, handwritten from England in 1962, just after he left New Hampshire, reflects nostalgically on his time there. "I have to remind myself of friends 'I left behind,' also, the lawns, the icy driveways, the plastic waste baskets, mad cats and Irishmen. But this means only that Joan and I having turned around 3 times, are welcoming London and leisure and, simply change – into our lives." Further, "when the winds of the new

Bellow and Robert Penn Warren were among the group of final judges. McElroy gossips about fellow writers, including Richard Howard, Hortense Calisher, Jean Satafford, Lore Segal, and Frank McShane, about academia, and salaries, publishers and his own receipt of a Rockefeller. The 5th letter is actually more a postcard, from Jan. 4 1970 also discussing editors, David Segal in particular, and also Wesleyan and Athenaeum. The letter from April 23, 1970, expresses regret that David Segal didn't pan out, mentions another editor, Harry Ford, tonsillitis, kids, travel. The final letter is from October 18 1985, a page long, thanking John for poems he's sent along and commenting closely on some of them, discusses teaching in Paris in 1981-82 when his life was an utter mess, and discusses how his "huge novel" *Women and Men*, is finally coming out and all the complications in his life.

MEREDITH, Scott

- Typed note from August 29, 1978 from the legendary literary agent, enclosing his agency brochure for the services they offer to writers. "if, as I hope, we are going to have the opportunity to consider your work, however, I'm afraid it will have to be on our standard fee basis. Clearly, you've gotten off to an impressive start with your story sales, but you've not yet demonstrated the ability to make it in the truly major markets -- something that, if possible, we'd like to help you do."

MEZEY, Robert.

- August 13, 1971 letter from Antioch College, regarding being the new editor for Antioch Review: "I seem to be the new picker and chooser for this mag and wish I could pick and choose this poem, seeing as how this is the first communication with you since Iowa days. But it seems pale and sluggish to me, nowhere near your best work. One of my pleasures these last 10 years has been seeing poems of yours here and there and liking many of them. Including at least one I remember in Transpacific. It goes without saying that I hope you will keep sending us stuff. Can't think of any way to sum up what's happened in my life over the last decade, and I have no idea what yours has been like. It's good to speak to you again, even in a letter, which is a form I have no fondness for. In any event, I'll be looking for your poems. I'll be looking from Spain, where we are bound for in a few days."

NIMS, John Frederick.

- Pencil note on POETRY slip, undated, thanking Taylor for submissions.

RAY, David.

- Born 1932, author of 22 volumes of poetry, knew Taylor from being at Iowa together; Ray also edited the Chicago Review and was on the editorial board of Epoch. 3 letters from 1970 from David's wife and apparently manager, Judy Ray, trying to drum up readings for David Ray and setting up one at Washington & Jefferson through Taylor, enclosing brochures promoting David's work. And a 1980 note from David on the back of a brochure advertising Judy's book and including a couple new brochures promoting his own works.

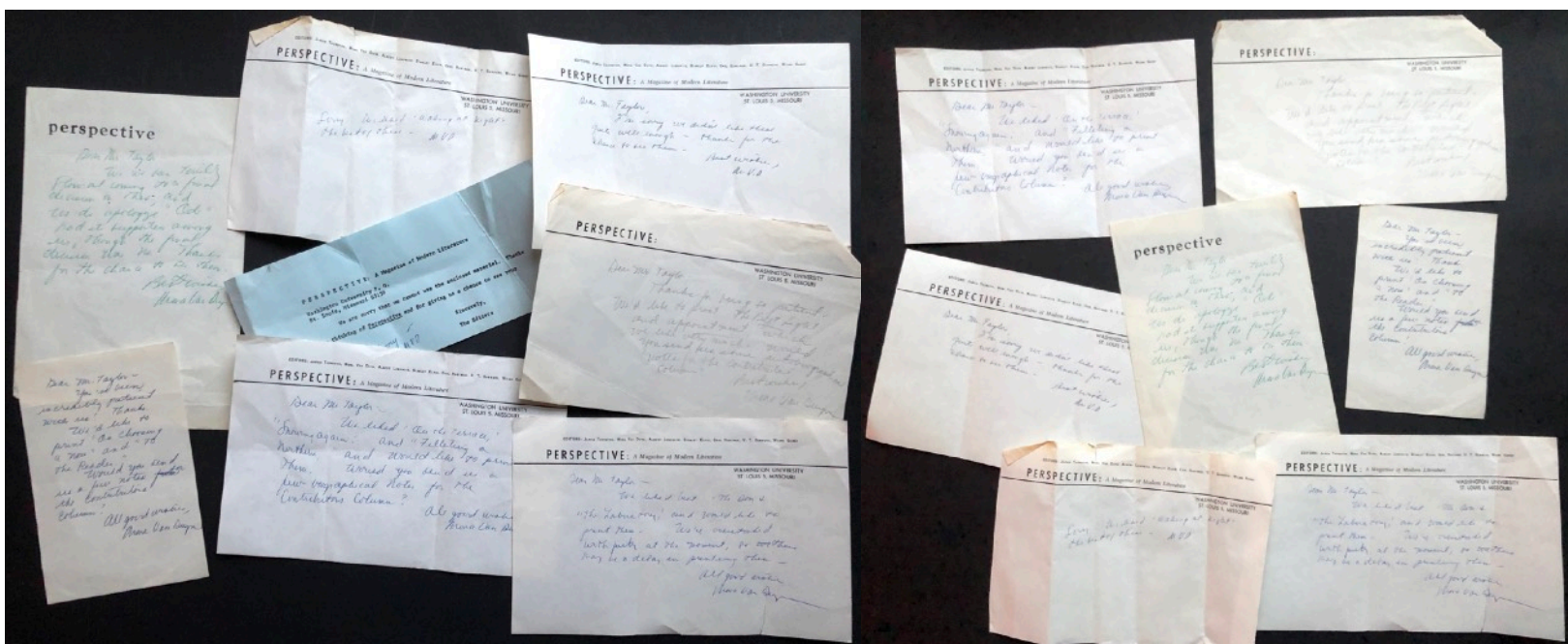
RUTSALA, Vern.

- 2 handwritten one page letters. The first is dated Jan 26, 1965. "Dear John -- Curt Johnson sent your poems to me -- I will be editing poetry for the next issue -- and I'm sorry I didn't find anything in this batch, or the other bunches. I would like to see more, though. OK? Iowa City is a long way away and moving farther off all the time, joining all the other partial nightmares, I've been in Portland since '61, teaching at Louis and Clark and trying to keep some hold on sanity. How has it been with you? I've seen your poems all over the place and I was pleased by this, best, Vern." Johnson and Rutsala edited DECEMBER. The second letter, on Lewis and Clark letterhead, is undated, but presumably later. "Dear John, the enclosed poem is a good one, I think. Pertinent to the contemporary situation, etc. It was good to hear from you -- after long years of silence. Where can I get your book? What happens in Pennsylvania, aside

accepts 4 more poems for issue no. 4. Smith also writes, “by the way, in the unlikely — at least now — event some money should turn up, would you be interested in putting together a chapbook roughly equal in size to the ones I sent you? In any case hope things go well in Washington PA, someday I'd like to meet you. My wife is from Oil City and Meadeville and persists in believing I ought to meet the relatives. One never knows. Good holidays, Dave Smith.” The final letter from March 26, 1971 expresses some comic annoyance at Taylor’s tendency to inundate editors with his work.

TAYLOR, Alexander.

- Rejection slip from the co-editor of the WORMWOOD REVIEW, pencil note signed: “Don’t like these anywhere near as much as the one we printed before. Hope you will send us more soon though.”



VAN DUYN, Mona

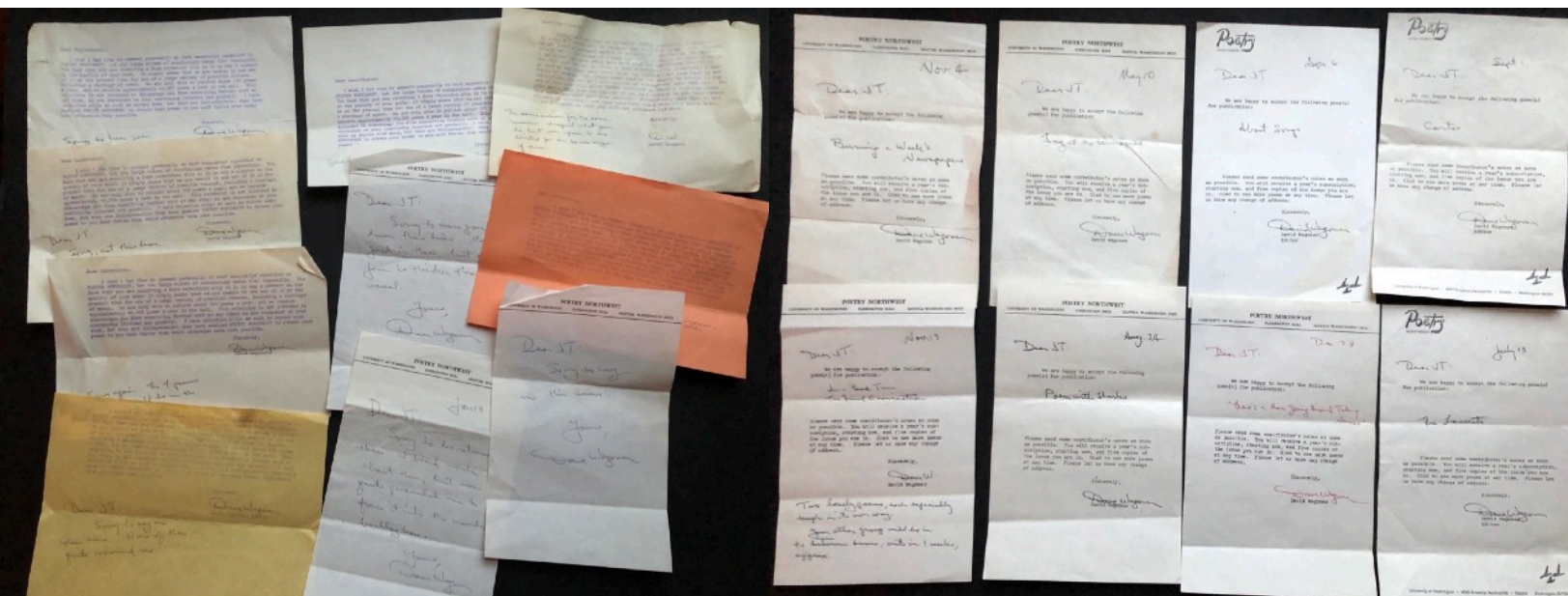
- 16 signed or initialed notes as editor of PERSPECTIVE at Washington University in St. Louis, mainly on half-sheets of PERSPECTIVE stationery and none is dated, probably from the late '60s to early '70s. The first is a handwritten note, apologizing for delays and accepting 4 poems. “We’ve had reservations about the handling of meter in some of these, but decided their verbal power overcomes the handicap.” There are 4 other acceptance notes and 4 rejection notes.

WAGONER, David.

- 23 acceptance notices and 10 rejections, all signed, none dated, ca. 1960s-70s, on POETRY NORTHWEST letterhead, sometimes with short notes, but Wagoner was not an effusive or verbose correspondent.

WATERMAN, Charles.

- 2 long letters, plus publisher’s contract, from 1965, on the publication of Taylor’s book, “The Soap Duckets” by Verb Publications in Denver, which was under the direction of Charles Waterman, Gene Lundahl and John Sherman, with some input by John Williams as well. A 4 pp. publication contract, partly filled out, is enclosed, along with a 3 pp. handwritten letter



regarding the contents, publication details, set-up, sequencing, title choice, etc. Plus another 8 pp. letter with some proof sheets, dated September 30, 1965, with many more details, observations, suggestions, etc., regarding the production of the book. Taylor was also a contributor to their journal, also called VERB, which went defunct in 1966 when John Williams turned his energy and focus to the newly founded Denver Quarterly.



WAYMAN, Tom.

- 8 letters from 1968-1969 on COLORADO STATE REVIEW letterhead and later TRANSPACIFIC Review letterhead. Wayman (B. 1945) is a prolific Canadian author of poetry, essays and at least one novel, with an emphasis on workingclass themes and culture. His contract at Colorado State University in Fort Collins was not renewed in the spring of 1969 because of his activism and anti-Vietnam war actions. These were all written before Wayman's own books were published. The first note from August 21, 1968, rejects Taylor's submissions but asks for more, and provides some incisive criticism. The second accepts a poem after some

revisions and asks for more revisions of another poem, with some specific suggestions; the third details the two acceptances they've made and rejects another poem apologetically, since they had asked for revisions of it. The 4th, handwritten from Nov. 24, 1968, because they are temporarily out of letterhead, and like the other letters, offers some very observant critiques; the 5th is a soulful rejection note from Feb. 16, 1969, likewise the sixth note from March 29 and the seventh from March 30, and the final letter on TransPacific letterhead from June 6, 1969 is a long handwritten critique of one of Taylor's poems, ultimately rejecting it, but suggesting ways to make it better. Impressive group from a truly attentive editor for such a young man (he would have only been 23 or 24 years old then).

WEISS, Theodore.

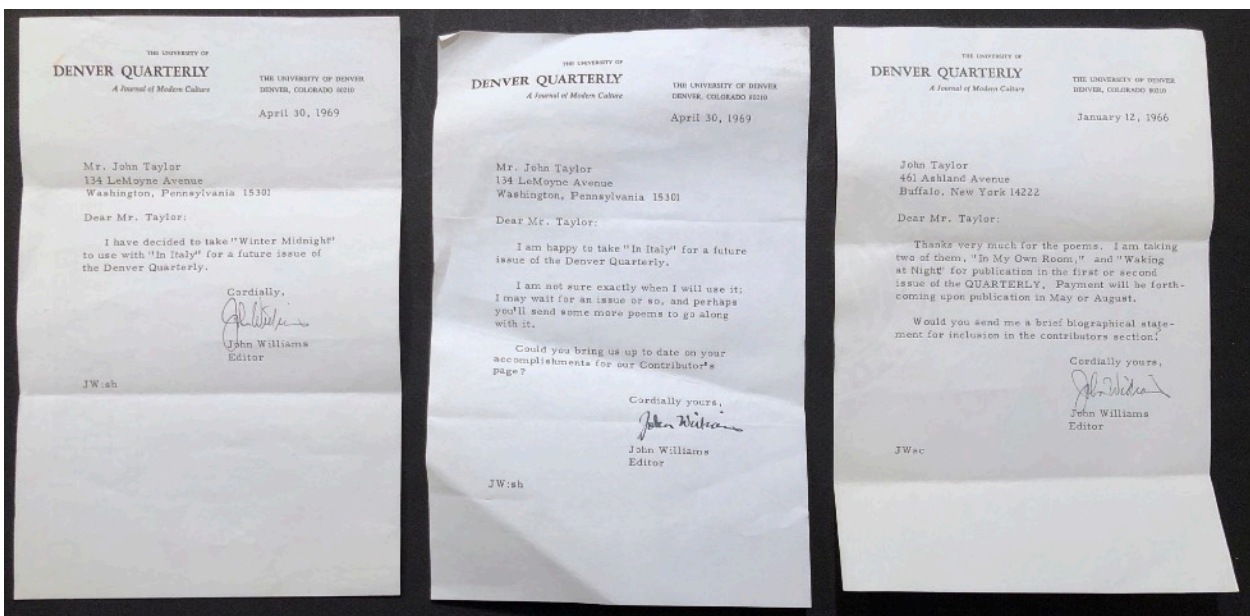
- Undated note on the back of a Quarterly Review of Literature rejection notice. "Dear JT, there is much here that is striking, original, accomplished. But for us the collection has too many short, equivocal poems, ones too easily satisfied. We'd like to see you put your talents to more ambitious, more extended, more exacting work. So many similar poems become monotones, even condensing each other. Your gifts, we feel, save the right to ask more of you, yours TW."

WHITTEMORE, Reed.

- 2 1961 typed notes of acceptance for THE CARLETON MISCELLANY and one slip with handwritten rejection note. "Though our decision was against these, and I can't offer up any criticism of consequence to justify us, we do hope you'll send us some others."

WILLIAMS, C. K.

- 1972 typed short letter, signed, from Philadelphia, asking if Taylor could set up a reading for him at Washington & Jefferson. "I'm looking pretty desperately for readings, for either now through February, (preferably), or for the next school year." Mentions Gerry Costanzo at CMU.



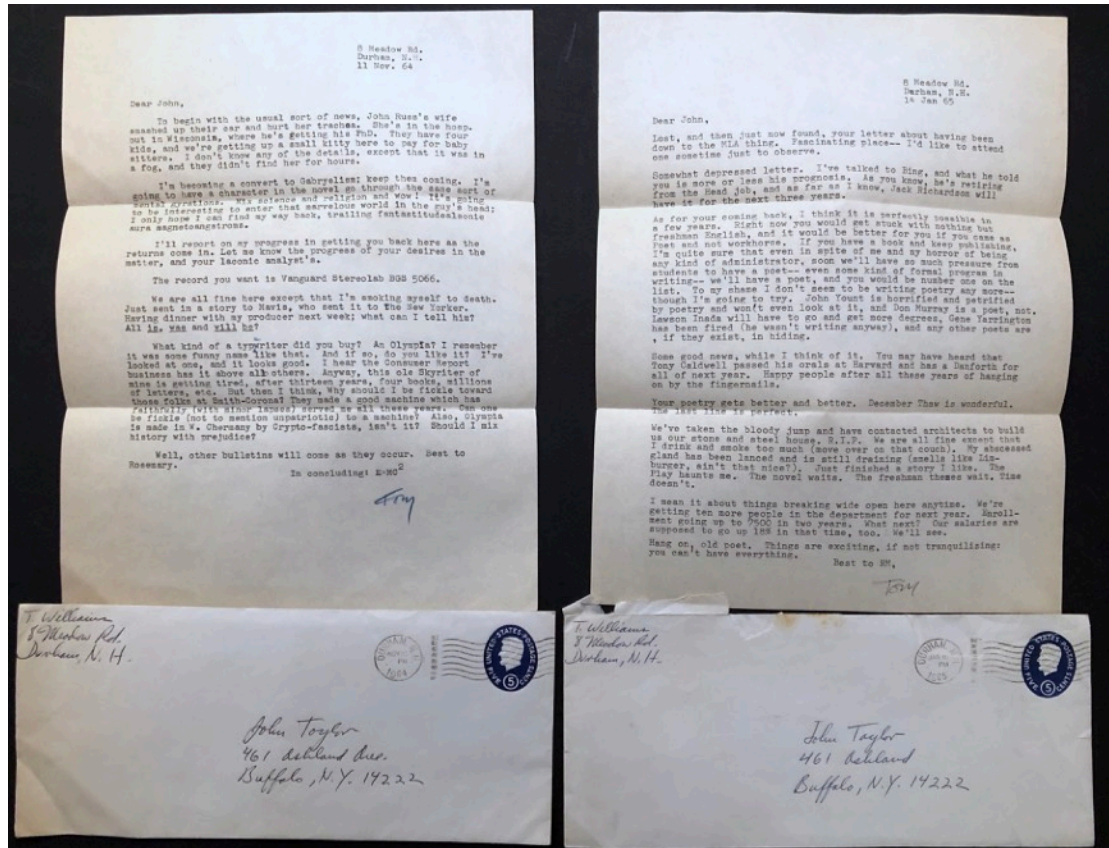
WILLIAMS, John.

- 3 typed notes on DENVER QUARTERLY stationery, 1966 & 1969. Williams was an editor and well regarded author, including of the cult novel "Stoner" and the award winning "Augustus." The 1966 note takes two of his poems, the April 30 1969 letter accepts the poem "In Italy"

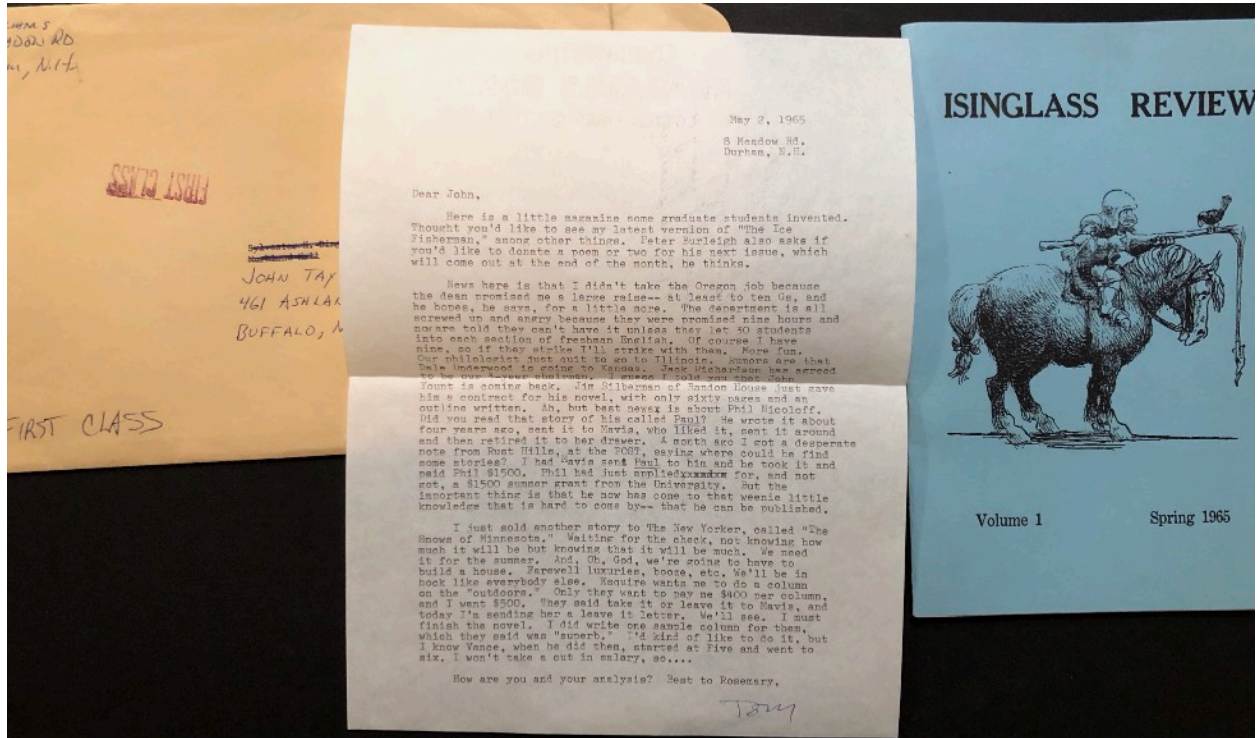
and another note from the same day takes “Winter Midnight” along with “Italy.” All three signed.

WILLIAMS, Thomas.

- 26 letters and postcards, 1964-1977. Well regarded novelist, he split the National Book Award with Robert Stone in 1975 for his novel “The Hair of Harold Roux.” A long-time



resident of New Hampshire, Williams was on the faculty of the University of New Hampshire at the same time as John Taylor and the two grew to be close friends. Williams also taught John Irving and Alice McDermott. The letters tend to be newsy, personal, gossipy, about fellow writers and teachers at UNH, about John's poetry and Tom's novels. One enclosed an issue of The Isinglass Review, Vol. 1, Spring 1965, with a poem by Williams, with letter talking about writing and teaching and selling a story to the New Yorker. Another letter from 1965 discusses the troubles of writing a play called “The Old Dancers” and about publishing in Esquire. One of the persistent themes of these letters from the 1960s are Williams' money woes. 1966 brings praise of Taylor's first full length poetry book, “The Soap Duckets.” “Dear John, your book is very impressive (the poems, I mean — I don't like the jacket or the name too much).” Williams writes quite a bit about academic politics, including the firing of a couple of the English instructors. Also, “Went down to Brandeis to hear Rahv, Kramer and Alvarez talk about the state of criticism. Conclusion: all fucked up, as usual. So I go back to the novel with renewed confidence.” 1967 brings continued work on novels, discussion of Joseph McElroy and a surprising appearance of Jack Hanrahan as a teacher in New Hampshire (he and his wife, Joyce, who wrote the standard bibliography of Maurice Sendak and was herself a private school administrator, were also antiquarian booksellers of some note). A letter from March 18, 1968 mentions he's working on a novelette, “The Hair of Harold Roux” — “about toupees, by the way” plus some ideas for



bumper stickers: "If you don't understand it, KILL IT!" "BOMB EARTH," "PARANOIA IS LEGAL" and "PRAY FOR PEACE (MAYBE LBJ IS GOD)" and by August 23, 1968, Williams notes that "Harold Roux" is turning into a novel. Mentions the publication of other books of his in paperbacks or in translations. By 1969 he is concerned about the quality of the

reviews of his latest books, especially the Times, which had a review buy Lehmann-Haupt. Williams thinks that Taylor's next book should be "published by a less raggedy publisher than your last. Will you let me use whatever heft I have left, after the critics gut me, to help in this matter? Please don't give it to Verb Press, or Noun Press, or Gerund Press this time. The book was too good to be handled so." Williams responds in 1969 to Taylor's reportage on his problems with the administration at Washington & Jefferson: "Dear John, Your President does sound like the original pinkyfrick, and it's okay if you tell him I said so." The remaining notes and letters apologize for being a



bad correspondent, mention health problems, says that he's told Charles Simic about Taylor's poetry. A note from April 28, 1975, thanks Taylor for his note of congratulations on the National Book Award. "It was a shock still 1/4-believed. After a long, long season of depression, doubt, 4:00am awakenings, etc. Did I actually exist?" The final letter from June 22, 1977, discusses some pronouncements that John Gardner made about fiction in the NYT Book Review that Williams disagreed with; "and fuck it all, I'll keep on writing." He reports progress on his latest novel: "I am writing THE FOLLOWED MAN [which was published in 1978]yh, though — to page 93 today. Just preachin' and entertainin' along..."

END OF LIST