

Guide to the Carl Van Vechten Letters to Saul Mauriber

YCAL MSS 1144



by Susan Brady

June 2018

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 1144

CREATOR: Van Vechten, Carl, 1880-1964

TITLE: Carl Van Vechten Letters to Saul Mauriber

DATES: 1943-1965

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 6.9 linear feet (17 boxes)

LANGUAGE: In English.

SUMMARY: The Carl Van Vechten Letters to Saul Mauriber date from April 1943 to December 1965, and include typed and manuscript notes, letters, greeting cards, postcards, and telegrams documenting their relationship over twenty years.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.vanvechtmaur>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.vanvechtmaur>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from Beverly Hill on the Edwin J. Beinecke Book Fund, 2018.

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

Boxes 16-17: Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

Conditions Governing Use

The Carl Van Vechten Letters to Saul Mauriber is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Carl Van Vechten Letters to Saul Mauriber. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

Envelopes not associated with letters were interfiled with chronologically-arranged letters. Postmark dates were assigned to letters (and appear in square brackets) when not dated by Van Vechten. Letters that were received sealed (or resealed) at the time of acquisition were opened by the library May, 2018, and noted as such on paper enclosure.

Carl Van Vechten (1880-1964)

Carl Van Vechten was a writer, photographer, collector, and patron of the arts. Born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on June 17, 1880, Van Vechten developed an early interest in literature and the fine and performing arts. He attended the University of Chicago, and wrote for several Chicago newspapers before moving to New York City in 1906. Over the next five decades he established himself as a journalist, critic, novelist, photographer, and cultural icon. He wrote music, dance, and theater reviews in New York and Paris for *The New York Times* and *The New York Press*, and for magazines and journals including *Trend*, *Vanity Fair*, *Crisis*, *New Republic*, and *Esquire*. He authored numerous books including, *Music After the Great War* (1915), *The Tiger in the House* (1920), *Peter Whiffle: His Life and Works* (1922), *The Blind-Bow Boy* (1923), *The Tattooed Countess* (1924), *Firecrackers* (1925), *Nigger Heaven* (1926), *Spider Boy* (1928), *Parties* (1930), and *Sacred and Profane Memories* (1932), most of which were published by Alfred A. Knopf.

His 1907 marriage to Ann Snyder, a friend since his youth in Cedar Rapids, ended in divorce in 1912. On October 21, 1914 he married Fania Marinoff, an actress who had immigrated to the United States as a child from Russia. They were married for fifty years. A family inheritance received in 1927 provided Van Vechten with the means to support himself and Fania, and freed him to pursue his interests without financial constraints. During the 1920s, Van Vechten was introduced to members of the artistic and cultural movement that would become known as the Harlem Renaissance. He enjoyed frequenting the clubs, restaurants, and salons of Harlem, and he began to develop friendships among members of the Black community. His 1926 novel, *Nigger Heaven*, was inspired by his visits to Harlem and its residents.

Beginning in the early 1930s Van Vechten devoted much of his time to photography. In his home studio he produced hundreds of photographic portraits of his friends and acquaintances, as well as other world figures whom he photographed by invitation and by recommendations from mutual friends. He and Fania developed a large multicultural network of friends and acquaintances in New York, throughout the United States, and abroad. The Van Vechten apartment became a meeting place for established and developing

writers, visual and performing artists, publishers, educators, social activists, and others. Throughout his life Van Vechten developed close friendships with women as well as intimate relationships with men.

As a collector, Van Vechten acquired important collections of books and manuscripts, particularly those relating to African-American arts and literature. In 1941, he established the James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of Negro Arts and Letters at Yale University, in honor of the writer and close friend who had died in 1938. In 1947, Van Vechten established the Anna Marble-Pollock Collection of Books about Cats at Yale. He also gave to Yale additional individual books and manuscripts, as well as a large group of his personal papers. He established and/or donated material to collections at other institutions including Fisk University, Howard University, the University of New Mexico, and the New York Public Library (including personal papers dating from 1833 to 1965). Carl Van Vechten died in New York City on December 22, 1964.

Saul Mauriber (1915-2003)

Saul Mauriber was born in New York City, and lived most of his life in Brooklyn. He worked as a clerk in retail establishments including Bergdorf Goodman department store. Mauriber also studied fashion, and for a time designed and made clothing for friends and acquaintances. Later in life he was a real estate investor. He met Carl Van Vechten in November of 1942, when both were volunteers at the American Theatre Wing's Stage Door Canteen for servicemen during World War II. At a gathering and photo session of Canteen volunteers at Van Vechten's home, Mauriber demonstrated an interest and ability in assisting Van Vechten with the photography. Shortly thereafter, he became Van Vechten's photographic assistant in his home studio, setting up lighting equipment and assisting with the printing and organizing of photographs. Their friendship grew into an intimate relationship which continued for twenty years. After Van Vechten's death Mauriber assisted with the organization of Van Vechten's photographs and the donation of them to various cultural and educational institutions.

Scope and Contents

The Carl Van Vechten Letters to Saul Mauriber date from April 1943 to December 1965, and include typed and manuscript notes, letters, greeting cards, postcards, and telegrams documenting their relationship over twenty years. Mauriber lived in Brooklyn with his mother, Sadie Mauriber, and as he had no telephone for many years, he and Van Vechten communicated by mail on a frequent basis. In his letters Van Vechten noted appointments with sitters for photographic portraits with which Mauriber was to assist; described his social activities and news of mutual friends; and commented on Mauriber's work, travel, and family issues. Van Vechten expressed his love for Mauriber often, and his messages included plans to meet him alone or to attend dinners or performances with Van Vechten's wife, Fania Marinoff, and friends. Enclosures include third-party letters from mutual friends and others; newspaper clippings regarding the arts, celebrities, fashion and other subjects; advertisements for performances and exhibitions; ticket stubs (which Mauriber collected); performance programs; postcards (many of which were photographic postcards by Van Vechten); and miscellaneous objects. The collection also includes postcards, greeting cards, and letters from Marinoff to Mauriber (in which she described her travels, thanked him for a gift, or sent birthday or holiday greetings), and greeting cards from the Van Vechten's to Saul's mother.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

Collection Contents

Letters, 1943-1965, undated

6.3 linear feet (15 boxes)

| | | |
|-------------------|--|--|
| b. 1, f. 1-9 | 1943 April 23-1945 December 30 | 1943 April 23-1945 December 30 |
| b. 2, f. 10-21 | 1946 January 23-1947 December 28 | 1946 January 23-1947 December 28 |
| b. 3, f. 22-30 | 1948 January 5-1949 July 31 | 1948 January 5-1949 July 31 |
| b. 4, f. 31-37 | 1949 August 1-1950 February 28 | 1949 August 1-1950 February 28 |
| b. 5, f. 38-46 | 1950 March 2-September 30 | 1950 March 2- September 30 |
| b. 6, f. 47-52 | 1950 October 1-December 31 | 1950 October 1- December 31 |
| b. 7, f. 53-60 | 1951 January 2-1951 June 4 | 1951 January 2-1951 June 4 |
| b. 8, f. 61-66 | 1951 June 9-December 23 | 1951 June 9- December 23 |
| b. 9, f. 67-76 | 1952 January 6-July 9 | 1952 January 6- July 9 |
| b. 10, f. 77-87 | 1952 July 10-December 28 | 1952 July 10- December 28 |
| b. 11, f. 88-97 | 1953 January 3-1954 January 9 Includes children's book, <i>Heads Bodies & Legs</i> by Denis Wirth-Miller and Richard Chopping (London: Penguin, 1951) in envelope postmarked December 16, 1952; third-party letter from "Dot," likely Dorothy Mauriber, Saul's sister-in-law (1953 December 29) | 1953 January 3-1954 January 9 |
| b. 12, f. 98-107 | 1954 January 11-1955 December 18 Includes third-party letters to CVV from George Kennedy, Christopher Isherwood, Bruce Kellner, Dick Wardell, Edward Donahoe, and Walter Burr Van Vechten enclosed with letters from CVV to Mauriber | 1954 January 11-1955 December 18 |
| b. 13, f. 108-116 | 1956 January 8-1958 December 18 | 1956 January 8-1958 December 18 |
| b. 14, f. 117-126 | 1959 January 9-1961 December 28 | 1959 January 9-1961 December 28 |

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|-------------------|---|---|
| b. 15, f. 127-135 | 1962 September 22-1965 December, undated Includes Christmas card containing a manuscript note from CVV to Mauriber dated "Christmas 1965"; and a folder of undated photographic postcards of CVV, Mauriber and others by CVV, some of which have manuscript notes from CVV on the versos | 1962 September 22-1965 December, undated |
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Restricted Fragile Material*0.63 linear feet (2 boxes)*

Restricted fragile material. Reference surrogates have been substituted in the main files. For further information consult the appropriate curator.

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| b. 16, f. 136 | Box 1, folder 6 |
| b. 16, f. 137 | Box 1, folder 9 |
| b. 16, f. 138 | Box 2, folder 10 |
| b. 16, f. 139 | Box 2, folder 12 |
| b. 16, f. 140 | Box 2, folder 15 |
| b. 16, f. 141 | Box 2, folder 17 |
| b. 16, f. 142 | Box 2, folder 18 |
| b. 16, f. 143 | Box 2, folder 19 |
| b. 16, f. 144 | Box 2, folder 20 |
| b. 16, f. 145 | Box 2, folder 21 |
| b. 16, f. 146 | Box 3, folder 22 |
| b. 16, f. 147 | Box 3, folder 24 |
| b. 16, f. 148 | Box 3, folder 26 |
| b. 16, f. 149 | Box 3, folder 27 |
| b. 16, f. 150 | Box 3, folder 28 |
| b. 16, f. 151 | Box 3, folder 29 |
| b. 16, f. 152 | Box 3, folder 30 |
| b. 16, f. 153 | Box 4, folder 31 |
| b. 16, f. 154 | Box 4, folder 32 |
| b. 16, f. 155 | Box 4, folder 33 |
| b. 16, f. 156 | Box 4, folder 34 |
| b. 16, f. 157 | Box 4, folder 35 |
| b. 16, f. 158 | Box 4, folder 37 |
| b. 16, f. 159 | Box 5, folder 38 |
| b. 16, f. 160 | Box 5, folder 39 |
| b. 16, f. 161 | Box 5, folder 41 |
| b. 16, f. 162 | Box 5, folder 42 |

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|---------------|-------------------|
| b. 16, f. 163 | Box 5, folder 43 |
| b. 16, f. 164 | Box 5, folder 46 |
| b. 16, f. 165 | Box 6, folder 47 |
| b. 16, f. 166 | Box 6, folder 48 |
| b. 16, f. 167 | Box 6, folder 49 |
| b. 16, f. 168 | Box 6, folder 51 |
| b. 16, f. 169 | Box 6, folder 52 |
| b. 16, f. 170 | Box 7, folder 54 |
| b. 16, f. 171 | Box 7, folder 55 |
| b. 16, f. 172 | Box 7, folder 56 |
| b. 16, f. 173 | Box 7, folder 57 |
| b. 16, f. 174 | Box 7, folder 59 |
| b. 16, f. 175 | Box 7, folder 60 |
| b. 16, f. 176 | Box 8, folder 61 |
| b. 16, f. 177 | Box 8, folder 63 |
| b. 16, f. 178 | Box 8, folder 64 |
| b. 16, f. 179 | Box 8, folder 65 |
| b. 16, f. 180 | Box 9, folder 67 |
| b. 16, f. 181 | Box 9, folder 68 |
| b. 16, f. 182 | Box 9, folder 69 |
| b. 16, f. 183 | Box 9, folder 70 |
| b. 16, f. 184 | Box 9, folder 71 |
| b. 16, f. 185 | Box 9, folder 72 |
| b. 16, f. 186 | Box 9, folder 73 |
| b. 16, f. 187 | Box 9, folder 74 |
| b. 16, f. 188 | Box 9, folder 75 |
| b. 16, f. 189 | Box 9, folder 76 |
| b. 16, f. 190 | Box 9, folder 77 |
| b. 16, f. 191 | Box 10, folder 78 |
| b. 16, f. 192 | Box 10, folder 79 |

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|---------------|--------------------|
| b. 16, f. 193 | Box 10, folder 80 |
| b. 16, f. 194 | Box 10, folder 81 |
| b. 16, f. 195 | Box 10, folder 82 |
| b. 16, f. 196 | Box 10, folder 83 |
| b. 16, f. 197 | Box 11, folder 89 |
| b. 16, f. 198 | Box 11, folder 90 |
| b. 16, f. 199 | Box 11, folder 91 |
| b. 16, f. 200 | Box 11, folder 92 |
| b. 16, f. 201 | Box 11, folder 93 |
| b. 16, f. 202 | Box 11, folder 94 |
| b. 16, f. 203 | Box 11, folder 95 |
| b. 16, f. 204 | Box 11, folder 96 |
| b. 16, f. 205 | Box 11, folder 97 |
| b. 16, f. 206 | Box 12, folder 98 |
| b. 16, f. 207 | Box 12, folder 99 |
| b. 16, f. 208 | Box 12, folder 100 |
| b. 16, f. 209 | Box 12, folder 101 |
| b. 16, f. 210 | Box 12, folder 102 |
| b. 16, f. 211 | Box 12, folder 104 |
| b. 16, f. 212 | Box 12, folder 105 |
| b. 16, f. 213 | Box 12, folder 106 |
| b. 17, f. 214 | Box 13, folder 108 |
| b. 17, f. 215 | Box 13, folder 109 |
| b. 17, f. 216 | Box 13, folder 110 |
| b. 17, f. 217 | Box 13, folder 111 |
| b. 17, f. 218 | Box 13, folder 112 |
| b. 17, f. 219 | Box 13, folder 113 |
| b. 17, f. 220 | Box 13, folder 116 |
| b. 17, f. 221 | Box 14, folder 117 |
| b. 17, f. 222 | Box 14, folder 118 |

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|---------------|--------------------|
| b. 17, f. 223 | Box 14, folder 119 |
| b. 17, f. 224 | Box 14, folder 120 |
| b. 17, f. 225 | Box 14, folder 121 |
| b. 17, f. 226 | Box 14, folder 122 |
| b. 17, f. 227 | Box 14, folder 124 |
| b. 17, f. 228 | Box 14, folder 125 |
| b. 17, f. 229 | Box 14, folder 126 |
| b. 17, f. 230 | Box 15, folder 127 |
| b. 17, f. 231 | Box 15, folder 129 |

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Names

Mauriber, Saul