

# Guide to the Sondra Spatt Olsen Papers, 1940-2013

## Biographical Note

Sondra Spatt Olsen (1936-2013) was born in Brooklyn, NY. She received her BA from Vassar College in 1957, and MA from Radcliffe College in 1958. She went on to teach at Brooklyn College from 1958-1961, and Queens College from 1958-1985. Olsen's first collection of fiction, *Traps* (1991) won the Iowa Short Fiction Award. Later in her career (2004), she published *Lauren's Line*, a satirical novel about the life of a university English department professor on an urban campus.

Works by Sondra Spatt Olsen have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Redbook*, *Mademoiselle*, *Seventeen*, *Iowa Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Ontario Review*, *Yale Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*. In 1984 she was named a B. Dalton Fellow, and in 1985 she was named a winner in a PEN Syndicated Fiction Competition.

Olsen lived in New York City with her husband and two children, where she worked and wrote, drawing much of her subject matter from the Manhattan life that surrounded her.

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## Scope and Content Note

The majority of the collection contains manuscripts and typescripts, many in draft form, with notations by the author, as well as commentary by colleagues, friends, and editors. Collected writings include essays from grade school, through the author's college years at Vassar, as well as published and unpublished works spanning her career as a writer for over five decades. Writings from the mid 1950s provide insight into life on Vassar's campus and includes the author's reflections on her own identity while attending a women's college at that time. Drafts of an unrealized epistolary novel include extensive correspondence from young friends of the author, which Olsen collected as potential subject matter. Manuscripts written later in her career frequently include correspondence from publishers and editors, with commentary on works in draft form.

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Journals and notebooks document Olsen's writing from a young age (elementary school). Journals from later years (1986-1989) document the author's insights into the writing life following her teaching career, and include several character sketches, plot outlines, and general observations collected for possible subject matter.

Personal and professional files includes correspondence with publishers, editors, and peers. These files also contain documentation of the author's management of her writing career, including hand written logs documenting the submission of manuscripts for potential publication. Eight folders (1956-2012) contain acceptance and rejection letters from a variety of publications, as assembled by the author.

Correspondence includes letters from her undergraduate years at Vassar (1953-1957), graduate studies at Radcliffe College (1957-1958), and teaching career both at Brooklyn College (1959-1961), and later, at Queens College (1959-1985). One folder (1956-1965) contains correspondence between Olsen and fellow writer, Joan Jaffe Hall, who co-founded the women's study program at the University of Connecticut.

Correspondence also includes letters from editorial staff from: *Mademoiselle*, *The Nation*, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., *Redbook*, *The New Yorker*, *Seventeen*, *Ontario Review* (Joyce Carol Oates), Houghton Mifflin Co., Charles Scribner's Sons, publisher, Nat Sobel, author Nancy Means Wright, *Mademoiselle* editor, Cyrilly Abels, and members of the Society for the Study of the Short Story.

Notebooks and journals in the collection contain both school work and study notes from Vassar, and in later years (1990s) include editorial commentary from peers with whom she collaborated at various writing workshops.

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## **Series 1. Correspondence**

### **From Sondra Spatt Olsen**

1.1 From SSO, 1957-2010 1.2 To Hall, Joan Jaffe, 1956-1965 1.3 To publishers, 2007-2009

### **To Sondra Spatt Olsen**

1.4 - 1.7 From friends, colleagues, undated 1.8 From editors, 1961-1982 1.9 *Seventeen Magazine*, regarding *An Older Man*, 1979-1980 1.10 Acceptance letters, 1956-1984 1.11 Acceptance letter, Oates, Joyce Carol, 1987 1.12 - 1.17 Rejection letters, 1955-2012 1.18 - 2.27 General correspondence, 1953-2013

## **Series 2. Personal Files**

2.28 Certificate, G. Dalton Bookseller Fellowship, 1983 2.29 Flyers, programs, SSO-related, approximately 1990s 2.30 News clippings, approximately 1960s-1970s 2.31 Receipts, 1954-1959 2.32 Report cards, identification cards, 1950-1957 2.33 Vassar College receipts, 1953-1957 2.34 Vassar College ephemera, 1954-1957 2.35 Vassar, script, *From Here to Maternity*, Founders Day, 1957

### **Series 3. Professional Files**

2.36 Applications to writing programs, includes resume drafts, 1985-1997 2.37 Copyright, Hoods I Have Known, 1985 2.38 Lauren's Line, correspondence, event planning logistics, 2004 2.39 Lauren's Line, publicity, 2004 2.40 - 2.41 Manuscript submission logs, approximately 1970-2010 2.42 Mary Ingraham Bunting Institute Fellowship, proposal, 1983 2.43 Reviews, Trap, 1992 2.44 Reviews, misc., web-based, 2012 2.45 The Southern Review, correspondence, 2012 2.46 Writer's Community, West Side YMCA, Peer Studio, 1984-1996

### **Series 4. Notes/Notebooks**

3.1 Grade School writing samples, approximately 1940-1949 3.2 Highschool composition, essays, notes, 1951 3.3 Vassar coursework, American Literature, 3.4 - 3.5 Vassar coursework, Art, 3.6 - 3.7 Vassar coursework, Art History, 3.8 - 3.9 Vassar coursework, Chemistry, 3.10 Vassar coursework, Creative Writing, 3.11 - 3.12 Vassar coursework, English, 3.13 Vassar coursework, French, 3.14 - 3.15 Vassar coursework, German, 3.16 Vassar coursework, History, 3.17 Vassar coursework, Literature, 3.18 Vassar coursework, Narrative Writing, 3.19 - 3.20 Vassar coursework, Philosophy, 3.21 Vassar coursework, Psychology, 3.22 Journals, (2 items), undated, Circa 1950 3.23 - 3.25 Journals, (10 items), 1955-1979 3.26 Journal, The Writer's Room, 1992-1993

### **Series 5. Writings**

#### **General**

4.1 44-28, (TS, author's proof), includes correspondence from The New Yorker, 1980 4.2 44-28, (TS, with edits from The New Yorker), 1983 4.3 44-28, (TS) 4.4 Alex, (TS, with revisions) 4.5 Another Traveller, (TS, variants and revisions), 2001 4.6 Archie, (TS, with revisions), approximately 1960 4.7 An Attic Tale, (TS, with revisions) 4.8 - 4.10 Before the Sexual Revolution/When We Were Virgins, (TS, with notes, drafts), includes associated correspondence used as subject matter for essay, Circa 1956 4.11 [Boredom is] My Only Desperate Feeling, (TS) 4.12 The Boyfriend Snatcher, (TS, notes) 4.13 Boyfriend Snatching, (TS) 4.14 - 4.15 Brooklyn, Love and Bewilderment, (TS, variants), 1951 4.16 - 4.23 Butcher's Girl, A Rent Stabilized Romance, (TS, variants) 4.24 Children's Book, text for picture book (including notes) 4.25 Children's Book, (TS, draft, notes) 4.26 - 4.27 Closets, Shrink (TS, revisions) 4.28 Contingencies, (TS, variants, with revisions) 4.29 Cookies, (TS), 1999 4.30 Cookies, (TS, with revisions, editorial notes, correspondence), 1978 - 1995 4.31 Epistolary novel, draft, excerpt, 2003 4.32 - 4.39 Epistolary novel, based on correspondence between, SSO, Ilse Goldfarb, Emma Grossbart, Nora Green, (TS, draft, with revisions), 1950 - 1974 4.40 Destiny, (original TS, with revisions) 4.41 Destiny, (TS, variants, with revisions and editorial commentary) 4.42 Doctor of Philosophy/Sorting the Soiled, (TS) 4.43 Europe on Five Dollars a Day, (TS, with revisions) 4.44 Faithful Friends/Desperate Feeling, (TS, with revisions) 4.45 False Promises, (TS, with commentary from Writers' Workshop members) 4.46 - 4.47 False Promises, (TS, variants, with revisions) 4.48 Fear of Driveling, (TS) 4.49 Fidelity, (TS, with revisions) 4.50 Fire in Jersey, (TS, with revisions) 4.51 The Flesh and Mrs. Devil, (TS, with revisions) 5.1 - 5.15 Forbidden Games, (TS) 5.16 Free Writing, (TS) 5.17 - 5.18 Free Writing, (TS, variants, with notes) 5.19 Grass, (TS, with revisions), 1998 5.20 - 5.21 Green is Old-Fashioned, (TS, draft with revisions)

5.22 - 5.23 Guilt Is A Very Strong Feeling, (TS, draft with revisions), 1996 5.24 The Happiest Day, (TS), Circa 1950 5.25 Happy as a Clam, (TS) 5.26 Handbag, (TS, variants) 5.27 - 5.29 Harmony, (TS, first draft, with revisions), 1988 5.30 - 5.31 Have You Looked in the Closets, (TS, variants), 2000 5.32 - 5.33 Henny, (TS, variants, with revisions, editorial notations), Circa 1960 5.34 Hoods I Have Known, (TS, variants with revisions and correspondence) 5.35 How Amelia Devoted Her Life to Her Son, (TS) 5.36 How Lois Said Goodbye, (TS) 5.37 Hy's Eulogy, (TS), 5.38 - 5.39 Hy's Eulogy, (TS, variants, with revisions), 1995 - 2002 5.40 The Ice Cream Parlor, (TS) 5.41 The Ice Cream Parlor, (TS, with revisions), 1958 5.42 Ilse, (TS), 1950 5.43 - 5.44 In Edward's Closet, (TS, variants, with revisions), 1998 - 1999 5.45 In the Snow, (TS, variants, with revisions) 5.46 Ina In Love, (TS, variants, with revisions) 5.47 Ina in Second Grade, (TS, variants, with revisions) 5.48 - 6.6 The Jewish Bride, (TS, draft, with revisions, editor's notes), 2008 6.7 Just For Fun, (TS) 6.8 - 6.47 Lauren's Line, (TS, draft with edits, editorial notes, final draft), 1993 - 1994 7.1 A Loaf of Bread, A Jug of Wine, (TS, draft) 7.2 Lois, (TS, original draft) 7.3 Looking Glass House, (TS) 7.4 - 7.12 Love and Bewilderment, (TS: first draft), 1975 - 1976 7.13 Man Against Nature, (TS) 7.14 - 7.15 Manhattan Couple; Old Fashioned Women, (TS: with revisions and editorial notes), 1980 7.16 Marilyn and Celia, (TS: drafts, notes), Circa 1960 7.17 Morphine, (TS: variants), 1999 - 2000 7.18 The Morning Bugle, (TS: with revisions), 1985 7.19 My Only Desperate Feeling, (TS) 7.20 A New Yorker Story Full of Childhood Nostalgia, (TS: draft) 7.21 - 7.24 New York Couples, (TS) 7.25 Non-fiction writing, (TS: includes correspondence from publishers), Circa 1970 7.26 Not Only That, Miss Petersen, (TS) 7.27 Nursemaid, (TS: first draft) 7.28 Nursemaid, (TS: including correspondence) 7.29 The Odd Woman, (TS) 7.30 An Old Fashioned Woman, (TS) 7.31 Old Timers, (TS) 7.32 - 7.33 An Older Man, (TS: including editorial correspondence) 7.34 - 7.37 An Older Man/Cookies/Once Bitten/Nursemaid, (TS), 1955 - 1980 7.38 On the Subway, (TS, MS: drafts, notes), Circa 1960 7.39 Once Bitten, (TS: with revisions), 1998 7.40 - 7.41 The Open House/Conviction of Innocence/Alex, (TS: with revisions), 1957 - 1958 7.42 Our Wedding, (TS: variants, with revisions) 7.43 A Perfectly Good Writers Group, (TS) 7.44 A Pool of Chocolate Syrup, (TS) 7.45 Pool, (TS) 7.46 A Pool of Chocolate Syrup/My Only Desperate Feeling, (TS: include publisher's correspondence) 7.47 - 7.48 Quarreling, (TS: variants, with revisions) 7.49 Quintessence of Zoe, (TS) 7.50 A Rent Stabilized Love (Difficulties of Urban Love), (TS: drafts, with revisions) 7.51 Restricted (Survivor), (TS) 7.52 - 7.53 The Rovers, (TS: first draft, with revisions) 7.54 - 7.55 A Russian Soul, (TS), Circa 1960 7.56 A Salt Free Diet, (TS) 7.57 - 7.58 Secrets of the Imperial Crown, (TS: with revisions), Cica 1960 8.1 September 30, 1979, (TS) 8.2 Sequestered, (TS: with revisions) 8.3 Shiksha - Your Fault, (TS: drafts, notes), 1984 - 1994 8.4 - 8.6 The Sigh of the Hard Pressed Creature, (TS: variants, with revisions), 1986 - 1989 8.7 Something From the Forties, (TS) 8.8 Something to Read on a Trip, (TS), 1978 8.9 - 8.10 Sorting the Soiled, (TS: early drafts), 1998 8.11 - 8.12 Spiegelmensch, (TS) 8.13 - 8.14 Submarine Races, (TS: variants, with notes and revisions), Circa 1990 8.15 Surfaces, (TS) 8.16 Survivor, (TS: variants with revisions) 8.17 Sweethearts, (TS: variants, with revisions) 8.18 - 8.21 Stories from Tickets Home, (TS:) 8.22 Taking Care, (TS: variants, with revisions) 8.23 - 8.43 Tickets Home, (TS: variants, notes, edits), 1963 - 1992 8.44 - 8.45 To Forget August, (TS: including editorial correspondence), 1985 8.46 - 9.1 Tom's Folly, (TS: revisions, and editorial correspondence) 9.2 Topaze, (TS) 9.3 - 9.19 Traps, (TS: variants, drafts, correspondence) 9.20 - 9.21 A Trip for Pleasure, (TS), 1977 9.22 - 9.23 A Well Behaved Child, (original TS; with revisions) 9.24 - 9.25 What the Doorman Saw, (TS: drafts) 9.26 When We Were Virgins, (TS), 1998 9.27 Where are the Peplums of Yesteryear?, (TS) 9.28 Why I Stopped Writing Poetry, (TS: with editorial notes)

9.29 - 9.30 Without Mercy, (TS), 1980 9.31 Yum Daddy, (TS: variants, with revisions), 1996 - 1999 9.32 Zoe's Zeitgeist, (TS: with revisions and editorial notes), 1986

## **Writings**

### **Juvenilia**

9.33 - 9.36 Schoolwork, 1947 - 1953 10.17 The House of Juke, (TS), Circa 1950 9.37 The Beautiful Roxanne, (TS: drafts), Circa 1950 9.38 An Educational Trip, (TS), Circa 1950 9.39 Essays, (high school), 1949 - 1950 9.40 Family Circle, (TS: first draft), Circa 1950 9.41 The Flesh and Mrs. Devil, (TS: draft) 9.42 The Happiest Day, (TS: drafts), Circa 1950 9.43 Hoods I Have Known, (TS), Circa 1950 9.44 The Ice Cream Parlor, (TS), Circa 1950 9.45 Ilse, (TS: drafts), Circa 1950 9.46 Jean-Philippe, (TS), Circa 1950 9.47 The Last Love, (TS), Circa 1950 9.48 The Princess, (TS: with revisions), Circa 1953 9.49 Wedding by Candlelight, (TS), Circa 1950 9.50 A Writer's Journal, (TS: draft), Circa 1950

### **Writings - Vassar**

9.51 Essays, (TS: drafts) 9.52 Fragments, (TS: drafts), Circa 1955 9.53 - 9.55 English class writings, 1954 9.56 - 9.57 English class writings, 1954 9.58 The Escape of Mr. Toad, (TS) 9.59 Jean Philippe Deltour, A Writer's Journal, first reprise (TS: with revisions), 1955 9.60 Yeats, The Playwright as Dreamer, (TS: with revisions), 1954 - 1956

### **Writings - Fragments, Poetry, Other**

9.61 - 9.65 Fragments, drafts, (TS), Circa 1970 10.1 - 10.13, 10.18 Fragments, drafts, (TS) 10.14 Poetry, misc., (TS) 10.15 - 10.16 Works submitted to SSO

### **Writings - Published Works, Periodicals**

11.1 Confessions of Monotone, (James Madison High school) Madisonian, 1950 11.2 From Here to Methuselah, Farewell to the Artist as Bohemian, Consider Sir Lawrence, (James Madison High school) Madisonian, 1952 11.3 On Being Asked, (James Madison High school) Madisonian, 1952 11.4 Untitled essay, (James Madison High school) Madisonian, 1952 11.5 The Great Basketball Game, Portrait, Dedication, (James Madison High school) Madisonian, 1953 11.6 Hoods I Have Known, Mademoiselle, August, 1956 11.7 Not Only That Miss Peterson, Epoch, Volume XII, Number 3, 1963 11.8 Something to Read on a Trip, Outerbridge, Number 3, 1978, 1979 11.9 Free Writing, The Iowa Review, Volume 10, Number 4, 1979 11.10 In the Sun, The South Carolina Review, Volume 11, Number 2, 1979 11.11 The Flesh and Mrs. Devil, Wellspring Magazine, Volume 1, Number 2, 1980 11.12 Working Nights as a Pickle, Redbook, Volume 155, Number 4, 1980 11.13 Topaze, The Ontario Review, Number 16, 1982 11.14 Nursemaid, An Gael, Volume 2, Number 1, 1983 11.15 Who Could Love a Fat Man, Quarterly West, Number 20, 1985 11.16 Harmony, Boulevard, Volume 3, Number 1, 1988 11.17 The Butcher's Girl, The Yale Review, Volume 78, Number 3, 1989 11.18 The Sigh of the Hard-Pressed Creature, The Yale Review, Volume 78, Number 4, 1989 11.19 Ruby Red Shoes, Pleiades, Volume 19, Number 2, 1999 11.20 Tom's Folly, Indiana Review, Volume 21, Number 1, 1999 11.21 A Loaf of Bread, A Jug of Wine, Antioch Review,

Volume 59, Number 3, 2001 11.22 Shrink, The Iona Review, Volume 31, Number 1, 2001 11.23 Why I Stopped Writing Poetry, The Carolina Quarterly, Volume 54, Number 3, 2002 11.24 Handbag, Hawaii Review, Issue 60, Volume 26.1, 2003 11.25 In Edward's Closet, Notre Dame Review, Number 24, 2007 11.26 When We Were Virgins, Antioch Review, Volume 65, Number 4, 2007 11.27 Hy's Eulogy, Notre Dame Review, Number 33, 2012 11.28 My Only Desperate Feeling, Epoch, Volume 61, Number 3, 2012 11.29 A Pool of Chocolate Syrup, Notre Dame Review, Number 35, 2013 11.30 Europe on Five Dollars a Day, The Southern Review, Volume 49, Number 3, 2013

**Writings - Published Works - Vassar**

11.31 - 11.32 The Man on the Raft, The Party, On Magazine Heroines, The Final Hour, Ilse - Parts 1 & 2, Hoods I Have Known, Yeats, The Playwright as Dreamer, The Flesh and Mrs. Devil, Vassar Review, 1953 - 1957