

Adrienne Kennedy:

An Inventory of Her Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator	Kennedy, Adrienne, 1931-
Title	Adrienne Kennedy Papers
Dates (Bulk):	circa 1954-1997
Extent:	12 boxes, 4 oversize folders (osf) (5.04 linear feet)
Abstract	The papers document Kennedy's evolution from an aspiring writer to a successful playwright, and include manuscripts for plays, short stories, memoirs, and novels, though film and television projects are also present. The papers also contain correspondence, manuscripts and publications about Kennedy, production materials from her plays, and sound and video recordings.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-02267
Language:	English.
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Administrative Information

Acquisition Purchases, 1992-1995 (92-05-009-P, 94-20-016-P, 95-07-013-P);
Gifts, 1996-1998 (96-07-010-T, 98-07-001-G)

Processed by Joan Sibley, 1994; Stephen Mielke, 2018

Repository: [Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin](#)

Biographical Sketch

Playwright and educator Adrienne Kennedy, the daughter of Cornell Wallace Hawkins and Etta Haugabook Hawkins, was born on September 13, 1931, in Pittsburgh, PA. Kennedy grew up in Cleveland, OH, where her parents moved four years after her birth. She received her B.A. from Ohio State University in 1952, and married Joseph C. Kennedy on May 15, 1953, with whom she had two sons, Joseph Jr. and Adam. After moving to New York, Kennedy studied creative writing at Columbia University (1954-1956), American Theatre Wing (1958), and later with Edward Albee at Circle-in-the-Square School (1962). She has also taught creative writing at Yale University, Princeton University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of California at Davis.

Kennedy is an African-American dramatist whose early works utilize a surrealist perspective. Though she has mentioned Tennessee Williams and Federico García Lorca as two of her favorite playwrights, at least one critic has noted a kinship with Jean Cocteau in certain of her works. Her richly symbolic plays deal with racial, sexual, and religious themes, and are often "disarmingly autobiographical." Kennedy calls her plays "states of mind," written while images "fiercely pound in (her) head." Frequently the characters and images that appear in her plays are drawn from the mythical and historical past, or from her own memories and dreams. The landscape of her plays has been peopled by figures as unlikely as Queen Victoria, Leonardo da Vinci, Jesus Christ, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Galileo, Beethoven, Charlie Chaplin, Bette Davis, Shelley Winters, and even rats (in *A Rat's Mass*, inspired by a particularly vivid dream). Powerful African and African-American figures in her work include Patrice Lumumba, Malcolm X, and sniper James Essex.

Kennedy's best known play, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, was begun in 1961 while traveling in Africa, and was the first of her plays to be produced. It opened off-Broadway in 1964 with great success and won an Obie Award. During the next several years, Kennedy was the recipient of numerous fellowships and grants (Guggenheim, Rockefeller, National Endowment for the Arts, etc.), writing a number of plays, most of which were professionally produced in major theaters in the United States and Europe. Among her plays are *The Owl Answers* (1963), *A Rat's Mass* (1966), *The Lennon Play: in His Own Write* (1967), *Lesson in a Dead Language* (1968), *A Beast's Story* (1969), *An Evening with Dead Essex* (1973), *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White* (1976), *She Talks to Beethoven* (1989), and *Ohio State Murders* (1990). In 1996, she co-wrote *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* with her son Adam P. Kennedy, and in 2018 she premiered *He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box* at Theatre for a New Audience. She has also written children's plays (*Black Children's Day* and *A Lancashire Lad*, both 1980), a novella (*Deadly Triplets*, 1990), and a memoir (*People Who Led to My Plays*, 1987).

Published collections of her works include *Adrienne Kennedy in One Act* (1988), *The Alexander Plays* (1992), and *The Adrienne Kennedy Reader* (2001).

For further information about the life and work of Adrienne Kennedy, see

Bryant-Jackson, Paul K. and Lois More Overbeck. *Intersecting Boundaries: The Theatre of Adrienne Kennedy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

Kennedy, Adrienne. *People Who Led to My Plays*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

Wilkerson, Margaret B. "Adrienne Kennedy", in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 38: Afro-American Writers after 1955*. Detroit: Gale, 1985.

Scope and Contents

The papers of Adrienne Kennedy, circa 1954-1997, document her evolution from an aspiring writer to a successful playwright. The collection has been arranged into two series, I. Works, circa 1954-1995 (8 boxes) and II. Career Papers, circa 1963-1997 (4 boxes). The dominant Works series consists of Kennedy's manuscripts for plays, short stories, memoirs, and novels, though film and television projects are also present. The Career Papers contribute to further knowledge of and understanding of Kennedy and her work through award certificates, biographical data, contracts, correspondence, manuscripts and publications about Adrienne Kennedy, production materials from her plays, publicity, reviews, royalty statements, and sound and video recordings.

All of Kennedy's plays through 1996 are represented in this collection, from her Obie Award winning *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964) to drafts of, *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* (1996). Additionally, manuscripts for several unproduced or incomplete plays are present: "Letters," "Starring Galileo," "Film Festival," "Manhattan Mystery Comedy," and an untitled play about George Jackson. Manuscripts dating from Kennedy's beginnings as a writer in the 1950s include the plays *The Pale Blue Flowers*, "The Tiger and the Tomboy," and "The Virgin Maggie." There are also several short story and novel manuscripts from this early period, plus two short stories from the 1960s. Other writings in the collection include the memoir *People Who Led to My Plays*, the essays "Letter to My Students on My Sixty-First Birthday by Suzanne Alexander" and "Secret Paragraphs about My Brother", and film treatments and screenplays (one of which is about Robert Johnson), as well as television ideas and proposals. The works exist as notebooks, hand written and typed notes, outlines, proposals, and drafts of manuscripts, playscripts, a film treatment, and screenplays, as well as galleys, page proofs, and photocopies of publications.

The correspondence, 1963-1997, generally concerns Kennedy's career as a playwright, writer, and educator, though some correspondence is of a more personal nature. Significant correspondents include Edward Albee, Imamu Amiri Baraka, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ed Bullins, Joseph Chaikin, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Gerald Freedman, Nikki Giovanni, Elizabeth Hardwick, James Earl Jones, Michael Kahn, Elia Kazan, Galt MacDermot, Theodore Mann, William Marshall, Mike Nichols, Joseph Papp, Harold Pinter, Ishmael Reed, Jerome Robbins, John Selby, Victor Spinetti, Fay Weldon, Edgar White, Audrey Wood, and others.

Documentation of various productions of Ms. Kennedy's plays, 1963-1992, is also present in the form of brochures, cast lists, clippings, contact lists, drawings, flyers, musical scores, photographs, posters, programs, publicity, rehearsal schedules, reviews, scripts, sound and video recordings, tickets, etc.

Beyond the study of Adrienne Kennedy, her work, and the production of her plays, the papers provide insight into broader topics such as African-American writers, 20th century drama, surrealism, racial identity and conflict, autobiography, and cultural influences on literary works.

The bulk of the Kennedy Papers were processed at the Ransom Center in 1994. Several smaller additions were added in 2018. The additional materials are physically housed in boxes at the end of the collection, but described within the container list in intellectual order with the previously processed materials.

Series Descriptions

Series I. Works, circa 1954-1995 (8 boxes)

Manuscripts of works by Adrienne Kennedy date from her earliest experiments with writing in the early 1950s to her most recent publications of the 1990s. These manuscripts consist predominately of plays, though short stories, novels, a novella, memoirs, film treatments and screenplays, and ideas and proposals for television are also present. Materials include hand written notebooks, hand written and typed notes, outlines, proposals, and drafts of manuscripts, playscripts, a film treatment, and screenplays, as well as galleys, page proofs, and occasional photocopies of items which appeared in various journals.

Among the earliest (and as yet unpublished) items in the collection are manuscripts for a play, "The Pale Blue Flowers," and notes and/or drafts for two untitled novels. The "Virgin Maggie," another early work, exists in both novel and play versions. Other early manuscripts include the novel "Ben Halfin," several short stories, a play "The Tiger and the Tomboy," and a writing exercise listing words from a favorite childhood story, "Blondine."

All of Kennedy's major works to 1996 are represented in the collection:

Funnyhouse of a Negro (including a screenplay version), *The Owl Answers*, *A Rat's Mass*, *The Lennon Play: In His Own Write*, *Lesson in a Dead Language*, *Sun*, *A Beast's Story*, *Boats*, *An Evening with Dead Essex*, *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, *A Lancashire Lad*, *Black Children's Day*, *Diary of Lights*, *People Who Led to My Plays*, *She Talks to Beethoven*, *Deadly Triplets*, *Ohio State Murders*, *The Film Club*, *The Dramatic Circle*. *Motherhood 2000*, *June and Jean in Concert*, and *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*. Several unproduced or incomplete

plays are also included, among them "Letters," "Starring Galileo," "Film Festival," "Manhattan Mystery Comedy," and an untitled play about Soledad prisoner George Jackson. Other works represented are short stories ("Milena's Wedding" and "Stones"), the memoir *People Who Led to My Plays* (including what appear to be earlier versions of this work), the essays "Letter to My Students on My Sixty-First Birthday by Suzanne Alexander" and "Secret Paragraphs about My Brother", film treatments and screenplays (one of which is about blues musician Robert Johnson), as well as television ideas and proposals ("Adventures of M. Kaiser V" and "Because of the King of France").

The manuscripts, frequently a mix of hand written and typed pages, are often heavily revised. Some, such as the manuscripts for *An Evening with Dead Essex* and the play about George Jackson, also include extensive paste-up clippings as part of the text.

The manuscripts are arranged alphabetically by title, with untitled manuscripts located at the end of the series. For each title, identifying information has been supplied in brackets to indicate the genre and date of first production (if a play) or publication. Terms and dates used to describe the individual manuscripts have been derived from Ms. Kennedy's own descriptions, variously supplied in a hand list which came with the collection, on manila envelopes which contained the manuscripts, or on the manuscripts themselves.

Series II. Career Papers, circa 1963-1997 (4 boxes, 4 oversize folders)

The remainder of the papers in this collection include award certificates, biographical data, contracts, correspondence, manuscripts and publications about Adrienne Kennedy, production materials from her plays, publicity, reviews, royalty statements, and sound and video recordings, dating from about 1963 through 1992. Most of the materials in this series were found in largely unorganized folders marked "Clippings," "Correspondence," "Letters," "Miscellaneous," or "Publicity." They have been arranged into the following subseries: Awards & Honors, 1963-1990; Biographical Information, undated; Contracts, 1963-1991; Correspondence, 1963-1997; Financial Information, 1969-1992; Lectures, Readings & Workshops, 1977-1990; Production Materials, 1963-1992; Publications, 1968-1992; Writers' Organizations, 1963-1976; and Writings about Adrienne Kennedy, 1966-1992. Only one folder of material represents each of these categories, with the exception of the following described subseries.

The Correspondence subseries is contained in six folders and has been arranged alphabetically by author. Significant correspondents include Edward Albee, Imamu Amiri Baraka, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ed Bullins, Joseph Chaikin, Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Gerald Freedman, Nikki Giovanni, Elizabeth Hardwick, James Earl Jones, Michael Kahn, Elia Kazan, Galt MacDermot, Theodore Mann, William Marshall, Mike Nichols, Joseph Papp, Harold Pinter, Ishmael Reed, Jerome Robbins, John Selby, Victor Spinetti, Fay Weldon, Edgar White, Audrey Wood, and others. Much of the correspondence concerns various productions of Kennedy's plays or publication of her work, though some letters are more personal in nature. Of note are two letters from Kennedy to Cathy Henderson at the Ransom Center: a 1996 letter describing events leading to the sale of her papers, and a 1997 letter describing

how she wrote her play *Funnyhouse of a Negro*.

An index of all correspondents appears at the end of this inventory.

The Production Materials, occupying one box, consist of all materials other than manuscripts or correspondence that concern various productions of Ms. Kennedy's plays. Included are such items as brochures, cast lists, clippings, contact lists, drawings, flyers, musical scores, photographs, posters, programs, publicity, rehearsal schedules, reviews, scripts, sound and video recordings, tickets, etc. These are organized alphabetically by the name of the play. For each play, the materials have been arranged chronologically insofar as possible. *Funnyhouse of a Negro* is the most fully documented play in this subseries, with several productions from 1963 to 1986 represented. The only play for which audio and sound recordings exist in this collection is *The Owl Answers*, as directed by Rhonda Ross in 1991. The materials for *A Rat's Mass* also include a music score by Cecil Taylor for a 1976 production. Only two plays are represented by production photographs, *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *Sun*.

The six folders of the Publications subseries are organized alphabetically by the title of the published work and contain book catalogs, book jackets, publicity, reviews, photocopies of title pages, etc., for several of Ms. Kennedy's works. The recent autobiographical *People Who Led to My Plays* is the most fully documented publication in this subseries.

Writings about Adrienne Kennedy, 1966-1992, includes manuscripts and photocopies of published articles, interviews, papers, and one thesis concerning Kennedy and her work. These works are arranged alphabetically by author in eleven folders.

Related Material

The Gerard Malanga Collection at the Ransom Center includes 22 letters from Kennedy to Malanga, 1962-1965, and a typescript draft of *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. Additional Kennedy correspondence is located in the Center's Mel Gussow Papers. Other Kennedy materials are located in the Center's Lois More Overbeck Collection of Adrienne Kennedy.

The New York Public Library also holds records relating to Kennedy's productions - especially within the collections of the New York Shakespeare Festival, Circle in the Square, and the papers of Lucille Lortel.

Separated Material

One audio tape of *The Owl Answers* was transferred to the Ransom Center Sound Recordings Collection.

One video tape of *The Owl Answers* and one video tape of "Adrienne Kennedy: Live at Brown University, 1991" were transferred to the Ransom Center Moving Image Collection.

Index terms

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- Agena, Kathleen (Creative Artists Public Service Program)--9.1
- Albee, Edward, 1928-2016 --7.9 (Pisces Productions); --9.1 (Theater 1964)
- Ardery, Ben B., Jr.--9.1
- Arkin, Alan--9.1
- Aschenberg, Bridget (International Creative Management, Inc.)--12.3
- Ash, Alan--9.1
- Atkinson, Clinton (Lucille Lortel)--9.1
- Atlee, Howard (Howard Atlee Associates)--9.1
- Axelrod, Elliot (William Morris Agency)--9.1
- Babbidge, Homer D. (Yale University. Timothy Dwight College)--9.1
- Balch, Marston (National Theatre Conference)--9.1
- Ball, David (The Guthrie Theater)--9.1
- Baraka, Imamu Amiri, 1934-2014 (Congress of Afrikan People)--9.1
- Barnett, Claudia (The Ohio State University)--12.3
- Barr, Richard (Theater 1964)--9.1
- Barrios Herrero, Olga, 1958- --9.1
- Ben-Zvi, Linda (The Samuel Beckett Society)--9.1
- Bentley, Paul (Margaret Ramsay Ltd.)--9.1
- Bill, Mary (Great Lakes Theatre Festival)--9.1
- Blassingame, John W., 1940- (Yale University)--9.1
- Blau, Herbert (The Repertory Theater of Lincoln Center, Inc.)--9.1
- Bond, Edward--9.1
- Bowen, William G. (Princeton University)--9.1
- Bridson, D. G. (British Broadcasting Corporation)--9.1
- Brooks, Gwendolyn, 1917-2000 --9.1
- Brustein, Robert Sanford, 1927- (Yale Repertory Theatre)--9.1
- Bullins, Ed--9.1
- Cahill, Elizabeth (*Who's Who in America*)--9.1
- Carlisle, Henry, 1926- (PEN American Center)--9.1
- Chaikin, Joseph, 1935-2003 (Performing Artservices, Inc.)--9.1
- Chambers, Henry, Jr. (Yale University)--9.1
- Channing, Susan R. (Massachusetts Arts And Humanities Foundation, Inc.)--9.1
- Christ, Carol T. (University of California, Berkeley)--9.1
- *Class Magazine*--9.1
- Cochran, Terry (University of Minnesota)--2.7
- Cummings, Scott T. (Theatre Three)--9.1
- Dash, Robert (Noonday Press)--2.2 [on verso of manuscript page]
- Davis, Ossie--9.2
- Dee, Ruby--9.2
- Dempster, Curt (The Ensemble Studio Theatre)--9.2
- Doares, Juanita S. (New York Public Library. Library & Museum of the Performing Arts)--9.2
- Domoff, Dan [AK to Domoff]--10.20
- Epstein, Helen, 1947- --12.3
- Fernandez, Isabelle (Creative Artists Public Service Program)--9.2
- Fielding, Claude E. (Crawley & de Reya)--9.2
- Flanagan, William--9.2
- Fleischer, Mary (Marymount Manhattan College)--9.2
- Freedman, Gerald (Great Lakes Theater Festival)--9.2

- Freeman, Lisa (University of Minnesota)--9.2
- Gardner, Bonnie Milne (Ohio Wesleyan)--9.2
- Gillis, Jeanne--9.2
- Giovanni, Nikki--9.2
- Grey, Joel--9.2
- Hacker, Marilyn, 1942- (The Kenyon Review)--12.3
- Halpern, Eric (Johns Hopkins University Press)--12.3
- Hanks, Nancy, 1927-1983 (National Council on the Arts)--9.2
- Hardwick, Elizabeth (PEN American Center)--9.2
- Harvey, Helen--9.2
- Henderson, Cathy, 1955- [AK to Henderson]--12.9-10
- Heyman, Susan--9.2
- [Hoffman], Dustin, 1937- --9.2
- House, Warren (Harvard University)--12.3
- Hovious, Jeanlee M. (University of Minnesota)--9.2
- Howard, Camille Cole--8.20
- Hunzinger, Stefani (S. Fischer Verlag)--9.2
- Jackson, Caroline B. (Oberlin College. Theater and Dance Program)--9.2
- Jackson, Paul K.--10.17
- Jones, Barbara Rice (PEN American Center)--9.2
- Jones, Derek--9.2
- Jones, James Earl--9.2
- Kahan, Robert (Samuel French, Inc.)--9.2
- Kahn, Michael (The Shakespeare Theatre at the Folger)--9.2
- Kaye, Phyllis Johnson (The O'Neill Theater Center)--9.2
- Kazan, Elia--9.2
- Kiely, Robert (Harvard University. Adams House)--9.2
- Kinsman, Clare D. (*Contemporary Authors*)--9.2
- Klein, Howard (The Rockefeller Foundation)--9.2
- Knowles, John H. (The Rockefeller Foundation)--9.2
- Kolin, Philip C. (University of Southern Mississippi)--12.3
- Kümmel, Britta (Danmarks Radio)--8.14
- Lennon, John, 1940- [AK to Lennon]--4.3
- Locklair, Wriston (The Julliard School)--9.3
- Los Angeles Festival--12.3
- MacDermot, Galt ("Hair: An American Tribal Love Rock Musical")--9.3
- MacDonald, Sandy (Performance & Scripts)--9.3
- Mann, Theodore [recommendation letter to John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation]--9.3
- Marion, John Francis (Chilton Book Company)--9.3
- Marshall, William, 1924-2003--9.3
- Maschler, Tom, 1934- [AK to Maschler]--4.2
- McCarter Theatre Center (Princeton, N.J.)--12.3
- McConathy, Dale--9.3
- Michalski, Kirsten (PEN American Center)--9.3
- Miles, Julia (The American Place Theatre)--9.3
- Moore, Honor, 1945- --9.3
- Morales, Donald M.--9.3
- Myers, Budd--9.3
- Nakamura, Joyce (Gale Research, Inc.)--12.1
- Nichols, Mike--9.3

- Oaks, Harold R. (Office for Advanced Drama Research. University of Minnesota)--9.3
- Okpaku, Joseph (The Third Press)--9.3
- Overbeck, Lois More--10.17
- Papp, Joseph (New York Shakespeare Festival)--9.3
- Parish, Elizabeth (W. W. Norton & Company)--9.3
- Parone, Edward (Center Theatre Group)--9.3
- Pearlman, Leslie (Massachusetts Arts and Humanities Foundation, Inc.)--9.3
- Peck, Seymour (*The New York Times*)--9.3
- Pennella, Florence (*The Poughkeepsie Journal*)--9.3
- Petchenik, Kenneth H. (*Who's Who in America*)--9.3
- Pinter, Harold, 1930-2008--9.3
- Qualls, Barry V. (Rutgers University)--12.3
- Rafalowicz, Mira (Performing Artservices, Inc.)--9.1
- Ramsay, Margaret (Margaret Ramsey Ltd.)--9.3
- Randolph, Leonard (National Council on the Arts)--9.3
- Reed, Ishmael, 1938- --9.3
- Rich, Frank (*The New York Times*)--9.3
- Richards, Lloyd (The O'Neill Theater Center)--9.3
- Richards, Stanley, 1918- --9.3
- Robbins, Jerome--9.3
- Robinson, Marc, 1962- (*Theater*)--9.3, 12.3
- Rosenstone, Howard (William Morris Agency)--9.3
- Schechter, Joel, 1947- (*Theater*)--9.3
- Schneider, Alan (The Julliard School. Drama Division)--9.4
- Schultz, Michael (TFD Company, Ltd.)--9.4
- Selby, John--9.4
- Shanahan, Eileen [secretary to Elia Kazan]--9.2
- Sharpe, David--9.4
- Short, Bobby--9.4
- Snyder, Richard E.--8.14
- Sollors, Werner--9.4
- Spinetti, Victor--9.4
- Sridharan, Anandavalli--12.3
- Stanley, Alma--9.4
- Stein, Howard (Yale University. School of Drama; Columbia University in the City of New York)--9.4
- Svendsen, Juris (School of Theater and Dance. Institute of the Arts)--9.4
- Taylor, Elizabeth, 1932-2018 --9.4
- Tenney, Margot (Hartman Regional Theatre)--9.4
- Topping, Tinka D. (The Hampton Day School)--9.4
- Tutton, Caroline M. (Longmans, Green & Co. Limited)--9.4
- Tynan, Kenneth, 1927- --9.3 (The National Theatre); 9.4
- Vinson, James, 1933- (St. James Press Ltd.)--9.4
- Wakeman, John (H. W. Wilson Company)--9.4
- Wallace, Lois (William Morris Agency)--9.4
- Watts, Richard (*New York Post*)--9.4
- Webster, Lu (William Morris Agency)--9.4
- Wegweiser, Roslyn (H. W. Wilson Company)--9.4
- Weintraub, Stanley, 1929- (Institute for the Arts and Humanistic Studies. Pennsylvania State University)--9.4
- Weldon, Fay--9.4

- White, Edgar, 1947- [note written on "Poem for Robeson"]--9.4
- Wilder, Clinton (Theater 1964)--9.1
- [Wilkerson], Margaret B. (Margaret Buford)--9.4
- Wilkins, Roger W., 1932- (Ford Foundation)--9.4
- Williams, Galen (Poets & Writers)--9.4
- Williams, Sam P. (New York Public Library. Library & Museum of the Performing Arts)--9.4
- Willis, Winifred--9.4
- Wood, Audrey, 1905-1985 (Ashley Famous Agency, Inc.)--9.4
- Woods, Alan (Ohio State University. Jerome Lawrence & Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute)--9.4
- Wright, Thomas H. (Princeton University)--9.4