John Russell Brown:
An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Brown, John Russell
Title: John Russell Brown Papers
Dates: 1948-2003
Extent: 23 document boxes (9.6 linear feet)

Call Number: Performing Arts Collection PA-00185
Language: English and French
Access: Open for research; one work restricted until 2050

Administrative Information

Acquisition: Purchase, 2005 (R 15373)
Processed by: Ancelyn Krivak, 2011
Repository: The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center
Biographical Sketch

John Russell Brown was born September 15, 1923 in Bristol, England. After completing wartime service in the Royal Navy, he received M.A. (1949) and B.Litt. (1952) degrees from the University of Oxford and a Ph.D. in English literature from the University of Birmingham in 1960. Brown founded the Department of Drama and Theatre Arts at the University of Birmingham in 1963 and led the Department until 1971, teaching and directing student productions. Subsequent university positions include professor of English at the University of Sussex (1971-1982), professor of Theatre Arts at the State University of New York at Stony Brook (1982-1985), and professor of Theatre and Drama at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor (1985-1997). Brown has also been visiting professor, guest lecturer, and research fellow at a number of other institutions such as Columbia University, the University of Auckland, Victoria University (British Columbia), the University of Toronto, the British Academy, and the Folger Shakespeare Library.


Brown's work for prominent arts organizations in England is extensive. At London's National Theatre, Brown headed the Script Department from 1973 to 1982, and was an Associate Director from 1973 to 1988. Peter Hall, director of the National Theatre, hired Brown in 1973 to review scripts submitted to the Theatre, arrange for translations of foreign-language plays, and direct workshop and festival productions. Brown also directed two productions on the National's main stage: Barry Collins's *Judgement* (1977) starring actor Ben Kingsley, and a 1978 production of *Macbeth* co-directed with Peter Hall. Other productions directed by Brown at the National include an adaptation of Samuel Beckett's prose work *Company*, readings from the poetry of T. S. Eliot and Ben Jonson compiled and arranged for the stage by Brown, and the one-woman show *Irene Worth on Shakespeare's Women*. Brown was a member of the drama panel of the Arts Council of Great Britain, an agency that provides funding for the arts through grants and development funds, from 1978-1982. He was also a member of the advisory council for the Victoria and Albert Museum's Theatre Museum (now the V&A Theatre and Performance Collections) from 1973 to 1983.
After leaving the National Theatre, Brown directed theatrical productions at venues around the world, including the Highlight Theatre in Stony Brook, New York; the Project Theatre in Ann Arbor, Michigan; the Hartford Stage Company in Connecticut; the Fortune Theatre in Dunedin, New Zealand; Seattle, Washington's Empty Space Theatre; and the Grace Theatre in London. In the 1990s, Brown's interest in cross-cultural productions of Western plays, particularly Shakespeare, led to several trips to Japan, India, and other Asian countries. In 1997, Brown directed a Hindi translation of *King Lear* (Samrat Lear) for the National School of Drama in New Delhi. Brown also worked on various television programs, including a series on Shakespeare's plays in rehearsal for the BBC.


Sources:


Scope and Contents


Series I. consists of business documents produced by the National Theatre; correspondence with Peter Hall, other National Theatre staff, and playwrights; and production notes, press releases, and clippings. The materials are in chronological order, with two additional folders at the end of the series, one containing production materials for shows staged at London's Institute for Contemporary Art in summer 1975, and one of clippings on the National Theatre and Peter Hall that predate Brown's employment at the Theatre.

The materials in Series II. Theater Productions are organized into three subseries. Subseries A. contains typescripts, notes, and correspondence related to plays directed by Brown for the National Theatre. Materials related to plays produced at the National Theatre but directed by persons other than Brown are filed in Subseries B. Subseries C., Other Plays, contains typescripts, production materials, programs, and correspondence related to specific plays that are outside the date span of Brown's employment at the
National Theatre. In most cases, the theater and date the play was produced are listed in the finding aid; however, no production information is available for several of the plays in this subseries, and it is possible that they were never produced. Reviews of Brown's productions, in the form of a scrapbook and a folder of loose clippings, as well as various production photographs and slides, are also filed in Subseries C.


The four subseries in Series IV. Professional and Personal Papers contain materials related to Brown's professional activities, personal and professional correspondence, and journals. Printed materials, notes, and correspondence related to workshops, conferences, exhibits, and other events are located in Subseries A. Subseries B., Theaters and Theater Organizations, contains documentation of the planning and construction of the University of Michigan's Arthur Miller Theatre, correspondence and organizational documents from Brown's work on the Arts Council of Great Britain and the advisory council for the Victoria and Albert Museum's Theatre Museum, and materials related to the Theatre Writer's Union. Incoming correspondence files are located in Subseries C., as is a small amount of outgoing correspondence to Brown's wife, Hilary. Subseries D. contains Brown's daily appointment books, journals, and other notebooks. Brown's curriculum vitae and papers related to his academic appointments are located in Subseries E., Other Personal and Professional Papers.

Series V. Works by Others contains typescripts and manuscripts collected by Brown. Brown apparently had no professional involvement in the play and television scripts located in this series, and they may have been unsolicited submissions or scripts passed on to him by colleagues or friends. Included in the series are typescripts from Edward Bond, Howard Brenton, Marguerite Duras, Geoffrey Hill, and David Mamet.

A typescript of a work by another author is restricted from access until 2050 at John Russell Brown's request.

An index of selected correspondents is located at the end of the finding aid. Among the notable correspondents represented in the collection are writers Edward Albee, Samuel Beckett, Howard Brenton, Alan Drury, John Fowles, Michael Frayn, Athol Fugard, Geoffrey Hill, John Osborne, Harold Pinter, C. H. Sisson, Tom Stoppard, William Trevor, and Arnold Wesker; agent Margaret "Peggy" Ramsay; writer and actor Wallace Shawn; and actress Diana Rigg.

Related Material

The John Fowles Papers, the Tom Stoppard Papers, and the Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Records at the Harry Ransom Center contain correspondence from John Russell Brown.
Separated Material

Four computer discs were transferred to the Ransom Center's Electronic Records Collection. The discs contain materials related to a Richard II workshop and Brown's production of Samrat Lear.

Index Terms

People
Brown, John Russell

Organizations
Royal National Theatre (Great Britain)

Subjects
Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616--Dramatic production

Subjects
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Don Juan by Molière, Project Theatre, Ann Arbor, Michigan, typescript and notes, 1986

The Duchess of Malfi by John Webster, Huntington Theatre, Boston, correspondence and notes, 1992-1996

Faith Healer by Brian Friel, typescript and correspondence, 1980

Fortune Theatre, Dunedin, New Zealand, set photographs, correspondence, and clippings, 1989-1991

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The Marquis of Keith by Richard Nelson, correspondence and prospectus, 1991


The Mystery Plays, Hartford Stage, Connecticut, typescript, clipping, and program, 1984

Oedipus by Sophocles, Project Theatre, Ann Arbor, Michigan, two typescripts, 1986

Samrat Lear [William Shakespeare's King Lear in Hindi], National School of Drama, Delhi, program and correspondence, 1997 (three CDs transferred to Electronic Records Collection)

Tamburlaine the Great by Christopher Marlowe, adaptation by John Russell Brown, typescript, undated

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"A Month in the Country," draft of short piece, undated

National Theatre entry for *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre* (2003), notes and research material, 1977-2000

"Twelfth Night" article for *Program Guide 13*, January 1968


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