Charles R. Larson:

An Inventory of His Papers in the Manuscript Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Larson, Charles R.

Title: Charles R. Larson Papers

Dates: 1894-2008 (bulk 1967-2002)

Extent: 34 boxes, 2 oversize boxes, 1 galley file (14.28 linear feet)

Abstract: The papers of American writer, editor, and teacher Charles R. Larson

consist mainly of his notes, correspondence, and research material, as well as drafts and proofs of his reviews, essays, and novels. Included are typescript and handwritten notes and drafts; clippings, tearsheets, and photocopied excerpts of published works; correspondence; photographs; theater programs; newsletters, catalogs, flyers and brochures; agreements; page proofs; course assignments and syllabi; and curricula vitae. Also present is some original manuscript material

by African and Native American writers.

Call Number: Manuscript Collection MS-051217

Language: English, French, and Shona

Access: Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition: Purchase (2009-001-002-P), 2009

Processed by: Katherine Mosley, 2009

Repository: Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Charles Raymond Larson was born to Ray Olaf and Miriam Kamphoefner Larson on January 14, 1938, in Sioux City, Iowa. Larson graduated from the University of Colorado with a B.A. in English Literature in 1959 and an M.A., also in English Literature, in 1961. He received a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Indiana University in 1970.

Larson taught at high schools in Burlington, Iowa (1959-1960) and Englewood, Colorado (1961-1962) and was a part time instructor in the English Department of the University of Colorado (1961-1962) before joining the Peace Corps in 1962. Larson was sent to southeastern Nigeria, where he taught English at Oraukwu Grammar School for two years. While in Nigeria, he developed a strong personal interest in African literature. At the time, courses in African literature were not available in the United States.

Upon returning to the United States, Larson taught at the University of Colorado (1965) and American University in Washington, D.C. (1965-1967) and was a lecturer at Indiana University (1967-1970) while earning his Ph.D. His course in African Literature at the University of Colorado was the first one taught in the United States. When Larson became an associate professor in the Department of Literature at American University in 1970, he began a long career there, becoming a full professor in 1974 and chair of the department in 2002. He continued to develop and teach new courses in the area of African literature.

Larson served as general editor of Collier's African/American Library from 1968-1972, producing thirty-eight volumes of works by African, African American, and West Indian writers. He became a fiction and book review editor at *Worldview* in 1996. As a promoter of African literature, Larson has edited short story anthologies, including *African Short Stories: A Collection of Contemporary African Writing* (1970, published as *Modern African Stories* in 1971), *Opaque Shadows and Other Stories from Contemporary Africa* (1975, reprinted as *More Modern African Stories*), and *Under African Skies: Modern African Stories* (1997). Larson's book *The Emergence of African Fiction* (1972) examined the works of African novelists, while *The Ordeal of the African Writer* (2001) addressed publishing challenges and other issues facing African writers. Larson has published numerous essays, reviews and articles about African literature.

Larson has also edited, written, and taught about works by Native American, African American, and Third World authors. *American Indian Fiction* (1978) offers literary criticism of novels by Native American writers. Larson's extensive research on Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen resulted in the publication of *Invisible Darkness: Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen* (1993). He also edited *An Intimation of Things Distant: The Collected Fiction of Nella Larsen* (1992) and *The Complete Fiction of Nella Larsen* (2001). Other works by Larson include *Prejudice: Twenty Tales of Oppression and Liberation* (1971), *The Novel in the Third World* (1976), and *Worlds of Fiction* (1993).

In addition to the numerous articles, reviews, essays, poetry, and stories he has had published in various periodicals and newspapers, Larson has written several novels. Of these, *Academia Nuts* was published in 1977, *The Insect Colony* in 1978, and *Arthur Dimmesdale* in 1983.

Larson married Roberta Rubenstein on May 2, 1971, and they have two children, Vanessa and Joshua. Rubenstein is also a professor of literature at American University, teaching courses on modernism, modernist and contemporary women writers, and feminist literary theory. She has assisted Larson with his work and was coeditor of the anthology *Worlds of Fiction*.

Sources:

Contemporary Authors Online, http://galenet.galegroup.com (accessed 2 July 2009).

Kwakye, Benjamin. "Writers' Showcase: Charles Larson," http://theafricannovel.wordpress.com/, 1 December 2008 (accessed 2 July 2009).

Larson, Charles. "A Hunger For Words: The African Writer's Quest," manuscript located in the Ransom Center's Larson Papers.

Scope and Contents

The papers of American writer, editor, and teacher Charles R. Larson consist mainly of his notes, correspondence, and research material, as well as drafts and proofs of his reviews, essays, and novels. Included are typescript and handwritten notes and drafts; clippings, tearsheets, and photocopied excerpts of published works; correspondence; photographs; theater programs; newsletters, catalogs, flyers and brochures; agreements; page proofs; course assignments and syllabi; and curricula vitae. Also present is some original manuscript material by African and Native American writers. The materials date primarily from 1967-2002 and are organized in three series: I. Novels and Autobiographical Piece (1974-1982 and undated, 2.5 boxes); II. Critical and Editorial Work and Lectures (1894-2008, 27.5 boxes); and III. Works by African Writers (1959-2002 and undated, 4 boxes, 1 galley file). Most of the papers are in English, although some letters are in French and poems by Chiedza Musengezi are also in Shona. Indexes of works and correspondents at the end of this finding aid list locations for all works and correspondence in the collection.

Series I. Novels and Autobiographical Piece includes page proofs of Larson's novel *Arthur Dimmesdale* (1983); handwritten and typed drafts of *The Insect Colony* (1978); and drafts of several unpublished novels and an essay.

Series II. Critical and Editorial Work and Lectures is subdivided into three subseries: A. African Literature, B. African American Literature and Film, and C. Native American Literature. As Larson stated in his book proposal for *The Ordeal of the African Writer*, he has spent "a professional lifetime of studying, evaluating, writing about, and teaching African literature," and his papers reflect this. Larson's numerous files on African writers contain his research material, such as clippings and photocopies of works by African writers, and his notes on their works, along with some correspondence and drafts of Larson's reviews. Similar files relating to Larson's work on African American and Native American writers make up Subseries B. and C.

Of particular note are files relating to Larson's extensive research for his books *The* Ordeal of the African Writer and Invisible Darkness: Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen. In writing The Ordeal of the African Writer, Larson interviewed and corresponded with writers and publishers about challenges faced by African writers; his notes, correspondence, and other research material are present, along with drafts and page proofs of the book. For *Invisible Darkness*, Larson corresponded with individuals who had known African American writers Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen, and he gathered documents and other evidence of their lives along with articles and other works about the writers. An unpublished autobiography by Nigerian writer Cyprian Ekwensi and correspondence with writer Bessie Head (South Africa, Botswana) are included in Larson's files on those writers. Files relating to Zimbabwean writer Yvonne Vera contain a draft of her unfinished work Obedience, which Larson hoped to ready for publication. Also of interest are files relating to the Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZIBF) from 1996 to 2001 and the 2005 International Conference on African Literature and the English Language (ICALEL) which include correspondence, brochures and flyers, publisher catalogs, clippings, programs, and papers presented. Larson's copy of Richard Wright's FBI file is located with the files on African American writers. Among the files on Native American writers is a file containing a typescript of Idunne by Hyemeyohsts Storm, press packets, and correspondence with the author.

While a few original works by African writers are present in Larson's files for his short story anthologies and in submission files for *Worldview* and *Kalahari Review*, most of the original manuscripts by African writers are located in Series III. Among these are galley proofs of Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*; typescripts of short stories by S. Henry Cordor; an inscribed typescript of Solomon Deressa's Some Poems Finished and Unfinished; signed photocopy typescripts of Wole Soyinka's *Camwood on the Leaves*, *The Invention*, and *Madmen and Specialists*; and typescripts of Sindiwi Magona's Last and *Mother to Mother*. An index of works at the end of this finding aid lists all authors and works represented in the collection.

Series Descriptions

Series I. Novels and Autobiographical Piece, 1974-1982, undated (2.5 boxes)

Series I. includes page proofs of Larson's novel *Arthur Dimmesdale* (1983), written from the point of view of the character from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, and one handwritten manuscript and two typescripts of *The Insect Colony* (1978), a novel about Europeans living in Africa. Also present are typescripts of Larson's unpublished novels Gridlock, The Ice King, Journal of the Plague Years, Last Rights, and Reach Out. "Sliding through the Sixties", a reflection on Larson's experiences during that decade, is represented by one handwritten manuscript and a page of notes. Manuscripts in Series I. are arranged alphabetically by title.

Series II. Critical and Editorial Work and Lectures, 1894-2008 (27.5 boxes)

Series II. consists of Larson's research, writing and teaching files. It is composed of three subseries: A. African Literature, B. African American Literature and Film, and C. Native American Literature. Larson's files have been kept in the general groups in which they were received, but within those groupings the files have been arranged alphabetically by file title.

African Literature files include subject files on African writers and manuscripts; files relating to Larson's books More Modern African Stories (Opaque Shadows and Other African Stories), Ordeal of the African Writer, and Under African Skies: Modern African Stories; files of The International Conference on African Literature and the English Language (ICALEL) and Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZIBF) materials; and files related to writer Yvonne Vera. Among the African writers represented in the subject files are Leila Aboulela, Chinua Achebe, André Brink, Cyprian Ekwensi, Ernest Emenyonu, Nuruddin Farah, Athol Fugard, Bessie Head, Wahome Mutahi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Alan Paton, Lenrie Peters, Richard Rive, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Ousmane Sembéne, and Wole Soyinka. The files contain clippings and tearsheets; Larson's notes, review typescripts, and course material; photocopies of works by African writers; correspondence; theater programs; and similar material, all dating from 1953-2008. The bulk of the correspondence in the series is from Bessie Head and Nuruddin Farah. Also present are a limited number of letters from other writers, such as Leila Aboulela, Mark Mathabane, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ben Okri, and Wole Soyinka. An index of correspondents at the end of this finding aid provides locations for all correspondence in the collection. Although there are few original manuscripts by African writers in the subject files, there is a photocopy typescript of "Khama, the Great" by Bessie Head, a photocopy printout of Cyprian Ekwensi's autobiographical In My Time, and typescripts of "My Father, the Englishman, and I" and "Sagal" by Nuruddin Farah. In addition, original typescripts of works submitted to *Kalahari Review* and *Worldview* are present; notable among these are short stories by Leila Aboulela, Ama Ata Aidoo, Steve Chimombo, Solomon Deressa, Cyprian Ekwensi, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Sindiwe Magona, and William Saidi. A file of photographs of African writers includes images of Leila Aboulela, S. Henry Cordor, Nuruddin Farah, Camara Laye, Véronique Tadjo, and Wole Soyinka; a file of photographs of Chinua Achebe is also present.

Files for Larson's anthologies of short stories contain correspondence, permissions, and agreements, as well as his notes and typescripts of his introductions. In addition, page proofs of *Under African Skies: Modern African Stories* are present, and a file of material relating to Larson's anthology *African Short Stories: A Collection of Contemporary African Writing* includes a corrected typescript of "Mulyankota" by Nuwa Sentongo. Larson's book *The Ordeal of the African Writer* is represented by numerous files, including extensive research files; responses Larson received to a writer's questionnaire he sent to African writers; correspondence with James Gibbs, Bernth Lindfors, publishers, and others; typescript drafts; page proofs; and more.

The International Conference on African Literature and the English Language (ICALEL) and Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZIBF) files include correspondence, brochures, flyers, publisher catalogs, clippings, programs, and papers presented, covering ICALAL 2005 and ZIBF 1996-1997 and 2000-2001. ZIBF 1998 and 1999 materials are located in Larson's *The Ordeal of the African Writer* files.

Files pertaining to Zimbabwean writer Yvonne Vera contain correspondence with her, her husband John Jose, and others; articles about Vera and tearsheets of her stories; drafts, proofs, and tearsheets of Larson's article "Vera Yvonne: Sorting It Out"; and material from Larson's work on Vera's unfinished typescript Obedience, which he hoped to ready for publication. These files date from 1996 to 2008.

Subseries B. African American Literature and Film is comprised of Larson's lecture files; files created by Larson for an unrealized work on black films; material from another unrealized project on Richard Wright's *Native Son*; and numerous files from Larson's work on Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen, Invisible Darkness: Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen (1993). African American lecture files include Larson's notes, course assignments and syllabi, clippings, tearsheets, and typescripts of Larson's reviews. Among the subjects are James Baldwin, Sterling A. Brown, Charles Chesnutt, Countee Cullen, Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, Marita Golden, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Charles Johnson, James Weldon Johnson, William Melvin Kelley, Gayl Jones, Leroi Jones, Nella Larsen, Claude McKay, Malcolm X, Toni Morrison, Paul Robeson, George Schuyler, Jean Toomer, Alice Walker, Booker T. Washington, Phillis Wheatley, John Wideman, and John A. Williams, as well as the Harlem Renaissance, Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemmings, Richard Wright's FBI file, and other topics. A photocopy of the published translation by Mariano J. Lorente of Cirilio Villaverde's Spanish novel The Quadroon or Cecilia Valdes, about interracial relationships in slaveholding nineteenth-century Cuba, is included with the African American files.

Among African American Film files are Larson's notes and research material he gathered for a proposed book on black film. Files pertaining to another unrealized project for which Larson intended to examine differing versions of Richard Wright's *Native Son* contain Larson's research proposal, travel information, clippings, notes by Larson, and Larson's typescript reviews. Toomer/Larsen files are those resulting from Larson's extensive research on writers Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen for his book *Invisible Darkness: Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen* (1993). Correspondence, documents, photographs, clippings, tearsheets, notes,

outlines, drafts, reviews, advertisements, and a publishing agreement are all present.

Subseries C. Native American Literature includes files created by Larson on Native American authors, some a result of his critical work on novels by Native Americans, *American Indian Fiction* (1978), and one general file created while working on the book. Among the authors represented are Denton R. Bedford, Dallas Chief Eagle, D'Arcy McNickle, John Joseph Mathews, Jon Mockingbird, N. Scott Momaday, Mourning Dove, Nas'Naga, John M. Oskison, George Pierre, Leslie Silko, Hyemeyohsts Storm, and James Welch. The files contain clippings, tearsheets, notes by Larson, reviews by Larson, correspondence, course assignments, press releases, and similar material, all dating from 1933 to 2003. A typescript of Storm's Idunne with corrections and notes by Larson and a corrected typescript of Leslie Silko's "Introduction to Yellow Woman" are also present. A file on Mexican American writer Rudolfo Anaya containing notes by Larson, tearsheets, correspondence, and course assignments is included as well.

Series III. Works by African Writers, 1959-2002, undated (4 boxes, 1 galley file)

Series III. consists primarily of original manuscripts by African writers, along with some tearsheets, clippings, and other materials. Arrangement is alphabetical by author. Of special note are galley proofs of *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) by Ayi Kwei Armah and a typescript from a stage adaptation by James Gibbs of Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, dating from around 1970; typescripts of Syl Cheney-Coker's In the Silence of Memory (undated) and "Sierra Leone: How Long the Betrayed Country?" (1998); typescripts of short stories and anthologies by S. Henry Cordor, as well as his essay "Triumph and Tribulation of an African Writer from Liberia" (1997); an inscribed typescript of Solomon Deressa's Some Poems Finished and Unfinished (1972); an undated typescript of *Redemption Road* by Elma Shaw; and typescripts of Wole Soyinka's *Camwood on the Leaves* (undated), *The Invention* (1959), *Madmen and Specialists* (undated), and "Ethical Images for the Millenial [sic] Writer" (1997), as well as a signed copy of Soyinka's poem "Telephone Conversation" with a postage stamp depicting the author affixed to it.

Other significant materials include an undated typescript of "The Two Villages" by Innocent Banda, a photocopy of a corrected typescript of Blind Adventure by Sly Edaghese, typescripts of Sindiwi Magona's *Mother to Mother* (undated) and its precursor Last (1997), and typescripts by Bai T. Moore of "Categories of Traditional Liberian Songs" and "The Woman with the Black Snake," both from 1969. Undated typescript poems by Omodele (Alice Perry Johnson), a typescript of Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1966), photocopy corrected proofs of *Worl' Do for Fraid* (1984) by Nabie Yayah Swaray, an undated typescript of *Black Justice* by David O. Umobuarie, and a photocopy of a printer's copy typescript of *The Corpse's Comedy* (1974) by Nanabenyin Kweku Wartemberg complete the series.

Related Material

The Ransom Center's collection of *Research in African Literatures* Records also contains Larson-related materials.

Separated Material

Larson's extensive collection of books by African, African American, West Indian, and Native American authors, including first editions and proof copies, some of them signed or inscribed, has been transferred to the Ransom Center's Book Collection and cataloged separately. Many of the books were reviewed by Larson and contain his annotations. Those books bearing Larson's annotations may be identified by searching "Larson, Charles R., annotator" in the Former Owner, Printer/Press, Binder module of the UT Libraries' online catalog. Press releases, publishers' advertisements and other promotional material, correspondence, clippings, purchase receipts, Larson's notes, drafts of Larson's reviews, and similar materials found in the books have been withdrawn from the books and are located in box 34. Also cataloged separately are over a hundred Onitsha Market pamphlets, issues of *Black Orpheus* and other literary journals, and reference books.

Two VHS videocassette tapes of the PBS programs *Richard Wright: Black Boy* and *Malcolm X* and one VHS videocassette, one Beta videocassette, and one DVD of *Things Fall Apart* have been transferred to the Ransom Center's Moving Image Collection.

Index Terms

People

Farah, Nuruddin, 1945-

Gibbs, James

Head, Bessie, 1937-1986

Lindfors, Bernth

Storm, Hyemeyohsts

Subjects

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Afro-American authors

Authors, African

Authors, American

Authors and publishers--Africa

Indians of North America--Fiction

American literature--Indian authors.

Document Types

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Newspaper clippings

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Photographs

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Subseries A. African Literature, 1953-2008, undated

African writers and manuscripts [subject files]

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[Wole] Soyinka – treason, etc., notes by Larson, clippings, press releases, *Death* and the King's Horseman flyer, and typescripts of Larson's "When Is a Nation?" 1997 (*oversize flyer removed to box 35)

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International Conference on African Literature and the English Language (ICALEL) and Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZIBF)

ICALEL

ICALEL 2005, programs, transcript of Chris Nwamuo's welcome address, paper presented by Maikudi Zukogi, citation for Larson's Award of Excellence, and whole issues of Nigerian newspapers, May 2005 (*oversize newspapers removed to box 35)

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E-mails, correspondence and articles, 2000-2002

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Zimbabwe Book Fair 1996, correspondence, program, map, catalog, newsletters, and notes by Larson, 1996

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ZIBF 2000, program information, brochures, catalog, and correspondence, 2000. With typescript of interview with Yvonne Vera, 1 August 2000, tearsheet of Larson's "Letter From...Harare," and Caine Prize 2000 and 2001 information packets

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