

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) and 134 electronic files (454 MB)
- Abstract:** John Russell Brown (1923-2015) was a Shakespeare scholar, author, and director who headed the Script Department at Britain's National Theatre from 1973 to 1988. The John Russell Brown Papers consist of business documents, production materials, typescripts, press releases, clippings and scrapbooks, loose notes and notebooks, appointment books, photographs and slides, and correspondence, ranging in date from 1948 to 2003.
- Call Number:** Performing Arts Collection PA-00185
- Language:** English and French
- Access:** Open for research; one work restricted until 2050. Researchers must create an online Research Account and agree to the Materials Use Policy before using archival materials. **Part or all of this collection is housed off-site and may require up to three business days' notice for access in the Ransom Center's Reading and Viewing Room. Please contact the Center before requesting this material: reference@hrc.utexas.edu** To request access to electronic files, please email Reference.
- Restrictions on Use:** Certain restrictions apply to the use of electronic files. Researchers must agree to the Materials Use Policy for Electronic Files before accessing them. Original computer disks and forensic disk images are restricted. Copying electronic files, including screenshots and printouts, is not permitted.

Administrative Information

- Acquisition:** Purchase, 2005 (R 15373)

Processed by: Ancelyn Krivak, 2011 Born digital materials processed, arranged, and described by Chance Adams and Brenna Edwards, 2015-2022.

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

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.

A Shakespeare scholar, Brown is the author of many books and articles on the theatrical production of Shakespeare's works, including *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance* (1966), *Free Shakespeare* (1974), *New Sites for Shakespeare: Theatre, the Audience, and Asia* (1999), and *The Routledge Companion to Directors' Shakespeare* (2010). He also edited individual titles for various editions of Shakespeare's works, including those of Methuen Publishing (1957), New American Library (1965) and Applause Books (1996). Brown edited editions of John Webster's *The White Devil* (1960) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1965) for Methuen and Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great: Parts One and Two* (1976) for Collins. He is the author of a survey text, *What Is Theatre?* (1997) for Focal Press, and edited *The Oxford Illustrated History of Theatre* (1997).

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.

John Russell Brown married Hilary Sue Baker in 1961. They had three children, Alice Amelia, Sophia Clemence, and Jasper James Mallord. Brown died in August, 2015 at the age of 91.

Sources:

Hail, Lyn. *In Rehearsal at the National*. London: Oberon, 2001.

"John Russell Brown." *Contemporary Authors Online*, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed 1 March 2011).

Scope and Contents

The John Russell Brown Papers consist of business documents, production materials, typescripts, press releases, clippings and scrapbooks, loose notes and notebooks, appointment books, photographs and slides, and correspondence. The material is arranged in five series: I. National Theatre Files, 1962-1988; II. Theater Productions, 1948-1999; III. Writings, 1955-2002; IV. Professional and Personal Papers, 1956-2003; and V. Works by Others, 1949-1976, undated.

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.

Series III. consists of typescripts, research materials, notes, correspondence, and publishing agreements related to Brown's writings. Subseries A. contains materials related to monographs published by Brown. Subseries B. contains materials related to articles, other short pieces, and lecture notes.

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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