Lilly Library Acquires a Major Collection: The Papers of Athol Fugard

In 1994, William Cagle, the former librarian of Indiana University’s Lilly Library of rare books and manuscripts, purchased the papers of South African novelist Nadine Gordimer, who in 1991 was named the Nobel Prize winner in literature, the first from South Africa. Since then, scholars from around the world have come to the Lilly to examine the materials in the extensive Gordimer collection.

IU has been fortunate that it was able to replace Cagle with an equally astute successor, Lisa Browar, who has just added another major South African treasure to the Lilly’s holdings: the drafts, typescripts, working papers, production notes, and other effects of South African playwright, Athol Fugard. If one were to name the five most important English language playwrights alive today, the list would likely include American playwrights Arthur Miller and Edward Albee, British playwrights Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard, and South African playwright Athol Fugard. For many, Fugard would head the list.

A white playwright of Afrikaner heritage on his mother’s side and Irish heritage on his father’s, Fugard writes dramas that have brilliantly captured the life and political issues in South Africa from the 1960s to the present, under apartheid rule and since its abrogation. At the same time, however, his plays touch the larger universal issues of race, the artist, political commitment, and prejudice far beyond their South African geography. One might say that although his plays are set in a very real contemporary South Africa and deal with very real South African matters, they are, from another point of view, about the human condition in the late twentieth century and, finally, no more about South Africa than Shakespeare’s Macbeth is about Scotland or Julius Caesar about ancient Rome.

Many of the plays also have starred Fugard himself, for he is not only a playwright but also an actor and a director. That is precisely what makes his papers so rich and valuable. For example, Fugard’s attitude toward his father is complex, and no play shows that complexity more clearly than “Master Harold”... and the Boys. In part, Master Harold is based on Fugard’s own relationship with a black servant, Sam Semela, who had worked in the tearoom owned by Fugard’s mother. But the play also is based on Fugard’s mixed feelings about his father. On the first page of the “Master Harold” typescript, Fugard types in “for Sam.” He then adds in pen, “and my father,” that he then crosses out and instead pens in “and H.D.F.”, his father’s initials. The addition of his father as a seeming afterthought, followed by the

please see FUGARD, p. 21
Mellon Fellow in African Studies Appointed

In 1998, Indiana University Libraries received a three-year grant from the Mellon Foundation to support the training of a successor generation of area studies specialists in research libraries. Last year's first Mellon Fellow was a specialist in Slavic Studies. This year, Patricia S. Kuntz has been appointed the second Mellon Research Library Fellow in African Studies. IU Bloomington's African Studies collection, considered by many to be among the top five collections nationally, is particularly strong in anthropology, folklore, linguistics, literature, history, and political science. It also includes materials in or on more than 700 African languages.

Kuntz received her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1996, with minors in five other departments, including African Languages and Literature, African Studies, and Educational Policy Studies. Previously, she worked as African Studies outreach director at Stanford University, the University of Florida, and Wisconsin. She has experience in French, Portuguese, and Spanish and has studied four African languages, Swahili, Twi, Yoruba, and Arabic. In addition, she recently completed a certificate in distance education from the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Kuntz has actively promoted African content in the curricula and facilitated international communication as the co-founder of the “Electronic Technology Group” of the African Studies Association. She has a special interest in African children’s literature and the preservation of Africana materials. While here, she will work closely with Marion Frank-Wilson, librarian for African Studies.

FUGARD
from p. 9

reduction of his father to mere initials, speaks volumes. The published edition of the play, simply inscribed “for Sam and H.D.F.” does not, of course, reveal the dilemma Fugard apparently faced concerning a dedication to his father. More generally we see on the typescripts Fugard’s penned notations on texts, not merely as he revises his playwriting, but also as he directs his own work and as he amends or documents his own role as an actor in the work he has written.

For the past ten years, I have been writing a study of Athol Fugard’s plays and have been traveling regularly to South Africa to work with the materials that have now come to the Lilly. I know only too intimately how rich an archive that is. Until a few months ago, Fugard had housed his papers at the National English Literary Museum (NELM) in Grahamstown, South Africa. NELM is a national repository for the papers and other effects of South African English-speaking writers of all races. There is a separate repository in Pretoria for the works of Afrikaans writers. Unfortunately, the funds NELM receives are meager and do not allow for the sort of state-of-the-art storage, preservation, and security we take for granted at the Lilly. Largely for those reasons, Fugard decided to remove his papers from NELM and put them up for sale. Browar acted swiftly and forcefully, so now those valuable papers are in Bloomington.

When I spoke with Fugard about his papers coming to the Lilly, he said, “If it’s good enough for Nadine, it’s good enough for me.” It is very likely that other South African writers will now echo Fugard’s comment, and thus the Lilly has an opportunity to become the premier research center for South African studies. Certainly the acquisition of both the Nadine Gordimer and Athol Fugard papers makes IU’s Lilly Library the foremost research library in America for contemporary South African literature.

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