

University of Victoria Special Collections

Johnston, Denis, 1901-1984

SC063

Title

Denis Johnston collection

Dates

1926-1992

Extent

12 cm of textual records

Biographical Sketch

Denis Johnston was an Irish playwright and writer. He was born in Dublin and educated at Dublin, Edinburgh, Cambridge and Harvard Law School, receiving an M.A. and LL.M. from Cambridge in 1926. He became interested in playwriting while he was at Harvard. Upon his return to Dublin, he wrote "Shadowdance" (later called "The Old Lady Says No!") in 1926. After practicing law, both in Ireland and England, he joined the Dublin Gate Theatre and became its Director from 1931-1936. Next, he worked in various capacities for the BBC. After moving to America, he became head of the Department of Theatre at Smith College, Massachusetts in 1961 and subsequently held many academic posts in the United States until 1973. He authored numerous plays including "The Old Lady Says 'No'", "The Moon in the Yellow River", "The Golden Cuckoo", and "The Scythe and the Sunset". His autobiography, "Nine Rivers from Jordan", was published in 1953. This formed the basis for his later work "The Brazen Horn". He died in Dublin.

Scope and Content

The collection consists of Johnston's second typescript draft (as finally rejected) of "Shadowdance", later called "The Old Lady Says No!", with holograph corrections by W.B. Yeats and others. Also included are photocopies of several early drafts of this play, including the aforementioned. In addition, there is the author's proof copy, with corrections, of "The Brazen Horn, Lenaea 5" (1968) [probably for 2nd ed. 1969, amended to Lenaea 6]. The collection also consists of correspondence from Denis and Betty Johnston to Bill and Mary Harbold from 1973-1982; a signed photograph of Johnston; photocopies of book reviews and book chapters re Johnston; a copy of Nine Rivers from Jordan with final corrections; and a copy of the libretto of Nine Rivers from Jordan.

Finding Aids

Box list available.

Title Source

Title based on the contents of the collection.

(William) Denis Johnston

Accession 2002-046

4 cerlox bound volumes – early versions of "The Old Lady Says No!"

1. "Alpha" 1st script
photocopy of an edited tss with added holograph revisions and notes
untitled
[1], 72 l.
 - back of pg. 30 inserted
 - page of 'corrections for Beta' inserted as p.57a
 - 2 page nos. on 1 page (66 & 67)
2. "Odd Sheets – Alpha"
photocopy of an edited tss with added holograph revisions and notes
[85 l.]
 - pp. 17-82, plus some additional pages
3. "Beta" 2nd script (as finally rejected) – annotations by Yeats
photocopy of an edited tss with added holograph revisions and notes
original of this version in accession 97-115
titled here "Shadowdance"
55 l.
 - 10 pages of holograph comments from backs of pages included
4. "Delta"
photocopy of an edited tss with added holograph revisions and notes
titled here "The Old Lady Says No!"
78. l.
 - pagination 1-69, other pages inserted (mostly music) unpaginated

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Johnston, (William) Denis, 1901-1984
Acc No: 2009-006
1 Box

Box 1:

Correspondence

1.1 General correspondence from Denis and Betty Johnston to Bill and Mary Harbold, 1973-1982:

- TLS, 20 September 1973, 1 l.
- ALS, 9 December 1973, 1 l.
- TLS, 19 March [1974], 1 l.
- TLS, 26 March 1974, 1 l.
- ALS, 28 [April] 1974, 2 l., with envelope
- ALS, 28 September 1974, 1 l., with envelope
- ALS, 29 September [1974], 1 l.
- TLS, 30 January 1975, 1 l.
- ALS, [March 1975], 1 l.
- ALS, 29 September 1975, 5 l., with envelope and receipt
- ALS, 22 October 1975, 1 l.
- ALS, [1975], 1 l.
- ALS, 13 December 1977, 1 l.
- ALS, 13 September 1978, 1 l.
- ALS, 25 May 1980, 1 l.
- ALS, [December 1980], 1 l.
- ALS, [July 1981], 1 l.
- ALS, 5 September 1981, 1 l.
- ALS, 5 January 1982, 1 l.
- ALS, [March 1982], 1 l.
- ALS, [April 1982], 1 l.
- ALS, 21 December 1982, 1 l.

Photograph

1.2 Autographed b&w photograph of W. Denis Johnston. Found in book *Nine rivers from Jordan* (see 1.5)

Book Reviews

- 1.3**
- photocopy of book review of *Nine rivers from Jordan* from: O'Brien, Eoin. *Reading for pleasure*. *British Medical Journal*. 27 May 1978.
 - photocopies of pages from: Deane, S., Carpenter, A., & Williams, J. (1991). *The Field Day anthology of Irish writing*. Lawrence Hill, Derry, Northern Ireland: Field Day Publications.
 - photocopies of pages from: *Location register of twentieth-century English literary manuscripts and letters: A union list of papers of modern English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh authors in the British Isles*. (1988). Boston, MA: G.K. Hall.
 - photocopies of pages from: Jeffares, A. N. (1982). *Anglo-Irish literature*. *History of literature series*. New York: Schocken Books.

Nine Rivers from Jordan

- 1.4 Weisgall, H., & Johnston, D. (1968). Nine rivers from Jordan: An opera in a prologue and three acts. Bryn Mawr, Penn: Theodore Presser.
- 1.5 Johnston, D. (1953). Nine rivers from Jordan; The chronicle of a journey and a search. London: D, Verschoyle.
 - with final corrections
 - in ink on the inside front cover: "Master copy. Corrected in 1976. DJ."
 - on the verso of the title page is a typewritten note, pasted in, "As revised and cut for any further editions. Nov. 1969." and below in ink, "and Spring, 1974"