

Drama Deposits Include Hidden Gems

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“Eye-opening” is how Brittany Blanchard, an intern with the Library’s 2010 Junior Fellows Program, described her work with the Copyright Drama Deposit Collection this past summer. Now housed in the Library’s Manuscript Division, the collection consists of drama deposits registered as unpublished with the Copyright Office between 1901 and 1977. “I’ve been amazed by the richness of the collection,” she said. “This internship has been a great opportunity for me to expand my knowledge of drama and authors.”

Following implementation of the 1976 Copyright Act, the Copyright Office saw an influx of new kinds of deposits, among them cassette recordings of musical compositions, holograms, digital works, and, for the first time, unpublished literary materials. This influx soon strained storage facilities, leading to a decision in the 1980s to transfer collections of some deposits to other divisions within the Library of Congress. That is how the Copyright Drama Deposit Collection made its way to the Manuscript Division.

The collection contains an estimated 270,000 scripts ranging from early vaudeville drama, unproduced plays, and major theatrical texts to radio and television scripts dating from the beginning of broadcasting, explained Alice Birney, curator of the collection. “The drama deposit collection documents the social and political history of the United States, holds rich sources for the study of women’s issues, and reflects changing ethnic influences and creative styles for the major part of the 20th century,” Birney said.

Among the plays included in the collection are thousands of little-known plays by writers who later became major authors as well as plays by those who are famous for other reasons:

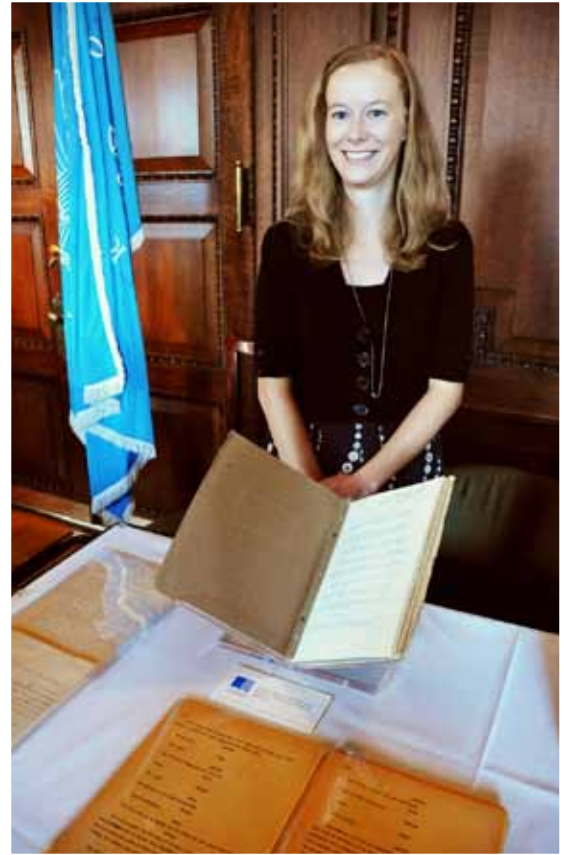


PHOTO BY CECILIA ROGERS

Intern Brittany Blanchard displays a script from the Copyright Drama Deposit Collection at an August 5 Junior Fellows exhibition.

painter Pablo Picasso, actress Mae West, and U.S. president John F. Kennedy.

The Manuscript Division has been microfilming the collection on an ongoing basis since 1993, following an earlier special project in the Copyright Office that microfilmed plays from 1900 to 1909. As each year is filmed, Birney and other subject matter experts review the manuscripts involved and identify about 10 percent to retain in paper form in the division’s permanent collection; the others are preserved only on microfilm.

For the past six years, interns from the Junior Fellows Program have helped to process the plays to be integrated into the Manuscript Division’s collection. This year, Blanchard, a library science student at McGill University, added entries to an electronic finding aid for plays deposited from the 1940s through 1977 and selected for retention on paper. Thanks to her work, these valuable copyright deposits will soon be more accessible to researchers. ©