

Pinter Archive saved

11 December 2007

Pinter archive saved for the nation: British Library acquires extensive collection of UK's greatest living playwright.

The archive of Britain's leading playwright and writer, the 2005 Literature Nobel Laureate, Harold Pinter, has been acquired by the British Library. This pre-eminent archive comprising over one hundred and fifty boxes of manuscripts, scrapbooks, letters, photographs, programmes, and emails offers an invaluable resource for researchers and scholars of Pinter's work for stage, cinema, and poetry.

The collection of correspondence completes the Pinter archive of playscripts that has been on loan by the playwright to the British Library since 1993. The entire archive has been purchased for the nation for £1.1million with the aid of a grant of £216,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) and generous grants from Dr Alice Griffin, American Trust for the British Library, Michael Marks Charitable Trust, other private trusts and donors in addition to British Library funds.

Highlights of the archive include an exceedingly perceptive and enormously affectionate run of letters from Samuel Beckett, letters and hand-written manuscripts revealing Pinter's close collaboration with director Joseph Losey; a charming and highly amusing exchange of letters with Philip Larkin; and a draft of Pinter's unpublished autobiographical memoir of his youth, *The Queen of all the Fairies*.

Together with material relating to the award of the Nobel Prize, cuttings books, and photographs, these papers amount to one of the most significant post-War literary archives of one of the greatest Anglophone playwrights of the twentieth-century.

Harold Pinter commented: "I am delighted that the British Library has purchased my archive and very pleased indeed that it will stay in this country.

Jamie Andrews, Head of Modern Literary Manuscripts said: "It is thrilling for the British Library to have acquired the archive of our greatest living playwright. This

is a wonderful collection that sheds new light on each stage of Harold Pinter's unparalleled career over the past fifty years, and we look forward to making the material accessible to researchers, and to playing our part in celebrating his life and work."

Carole Souter, Director of NHMF, said: "Harold Pinter is already an integral part of our dramatic and literary heritage. This National Heritage Memorial Fund grant is particularly special as it is the first time we have helped save works and papers of a living artist. This unique collection is now safe for future generations to enjoy and learn from."

This extensive collection of correspondence encompasses the personal, professional and political aspects of the legendary writer, whose career has covered directing, acting, screenwriting, poetry and journalism, as well as his original work for the theatre. His key role in post-War theatre and film is documented through his extensive correspondence with leading playwrights and literary figures such as Simon Gray, David Hare, David Mamet, Arthur Miller, John Osborne, and Tom Stoppard, as well as actors and directors including Sir John Gielgud and Sir Peter Hall. In addition to high profile correspondents, the archive documents all international performances of Pinter's plays, as well as exchanges with academics that highlight Pinter's engagement with the global scholarly community. There is also extensive material relating to Pinter's commitment to human rights, covering his journalism, poetry and direct action. Especially touching are letters from Pinter's early friends in Hackney, including his inspirational English teacher, Joe Brearley.

The archive is to be catalogued and will be completed at the end of 2008.

A small temporary display, 'His Own Domain: Harold Pinter, A Life in Theatre', featuring a range of unique manuscripts, letters, photographs, and sound recordings from the archive charting Pinter's life in the theatre as an actor, director, and writer of some of the most significant and celebrated plays of the twentieth-century will run from 11 January – 13 April 2008.

Notes to editors

The acquisition of the archive has been made possible thanks to the generosity of a number of donors: National Heritage Memorial Fund, Dr Alice Griffin, American Trust for the British Library, Michael Marks Charitable Trust, Friends of the British Library, Friends of the National Libraries, Royal National Theatre Foundation Old Possum's Practical Trust and the Charlotte Bonham-Carter Charitable Trust. In

addition, the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation has contributed towards the costs of a temporary cataloguer to ensure the whole archive will be made available to the public as soon as possible.

The British Library is the national library of the United Kingdom and one of the world's greatest research libraries. It provides world class information services to the academic, business, research and scientific communities and offers unparalleled access to the world's largest and most comprehensive research collection. The Library's collection has developed over 250 years and exceeds 150 million separate items representing every age of written civilisation. It includes: books, journals, manuscripts, maps, stamps, music, patents, newspapers and sound recordings in all written and spoken languages. Further information is available on the Library's website at www.bl.uk.

The UK Literary Heritage Working Group was established in March 2005 to develop and implement a national strategy to benefit the UK cultural and intellectual environment by ensuring that archives of pre-eminent modern and contemporary authors are retained and made accessible to UK audiences. Led by Lord Howarth of Newport, its members drawn from across the sector, including authors, publishers, dealers, funders, academics and collecting institutions, and other experts join as guests. <http://www.literary.org.uk/index.php>

Further information

Catriona Finlayson

Phone: 0207 412 7115 Email: catriona.finlayson@bl.uk.

Dervish Mertcan or Alison Scott NHMF press officers,

Phone: 020 7591 6102 / 6032 Mobile: 07973 613 820.