

Search yields Christie manuscript collection

By STEVE POKIN
Of the Emerald

About four years ago Martin Schmitt, curator of special collections at the University library, and Edward Kemp, head of gifts and exchange, went on one of their frequent pilgrimages in search of manuscripts. This time, the University's dynamic duo hoped to claim some Allan Vaughan Elston manuscripts. Schmitt and Kemp not only obtained the Elston manuscripts, but Elston put them on a course that would lead to a prize collection of Agatha Christie manuscripts and a manuscript of Winston Churchill's autobiography, published in 1935.

Elston, a writer of American western stories, had his work serialized by the Chicago Tribune-New York News newspaper syndicate between 1953 and 1963. He had sent his manuscripts to Mary King, who had been the fiction editor for the syndicate since 1930, and suggested that Schmitt and Kemp look up King. Authors on the Tribune fiction list included F. Scott Fitzgerald, Booth Tarkington, Ring Lardner, Christie, William MacLeod Raine, Sax Rohmer, Philip Wylie and many now forgotten detective, western and gothic writers. Schmitt and Kemp hurried out the door.

"We wrote to Miss King," says the silver-haired and silver mustachioed Schmitt, University curator since 1947. "We weren't really sure what we were getting, but she said we could have her manuscripts."

"Miss King was very good about it. Sometimes it'll happen that we'll

submitted for serialization by F. Scott Fitzgerald), the University now had Agatha Christie manuscripts of nine full-length mystery novels and four short stories. Also, Churchill's autobiographical manuscript was found.

Ring Lardner's "Via the Canal" was the only other work written by an author with a sustained notoriety, to fall into the University's hands.

"It was like looking at a history of the ordinary reader," says Schmitt. "The serialized stories were a common denominator of what people were reading in this country. A lot of the writers are now forgotten."

The Christie collection does not contain original manuscripts. Christie created the work and then sent it to a typing service for preparation. Then, she went over the typed manuscript and made corrections before mailing it to King and others. Some of the Christie manuscripts owned by the University have, what are believed to be by Schmitt, handwritten corrections by Christie.

Because they are not the author's original manuscript, but only the first copy by a typist (with the author's corrections), the value is not astronomical. But the Christie collection is valuable enough for Schmitt to say, "I don't know what the value is... even if I did know I wouldn't say."

The Christie collection was appraised with the entire bulk of manuscripts obtained from King. Schmitt was leary of talking dollar figures because of security reasons.

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contact someone and then they'll think, 'Gee, if this stuff is so valuable, maybe I should donate it to the Harvard library.' That can be very aggravating. This wasn't the case with Miss King."

Schmitt and Kemp discovered they had hit a gold mine when they went to relieve King of correspondence with literary agents and authors from 1919-1969 and manuscripts from 1934-1969. Although the syndicate had destroyed all manuscripts prior to 1926 (including manuscripts

"Their worth isn't in dollars and cents. The value is in research purposes."

Generally, the Christie manuscripts are available to graduate students.

"We don't want undergraduates coming in just to be able to touch one of the manuscripts, or somebody coming in saying, 'I need to look at the Christie manuscripts because I have a term paper due in two days,'" Schmitt says. "But if an undergraduate has a genuine

need to see them for research purposes, he can come see me."

When Christie died Jan. 12 at the age of 85, after a prolific writing career which encompassed over 100 works, the University put its Christie collection on display.

By reading the correspondence between King and Christie's literary agent, Harold Ober, it is possible to tell how much the author received for serializing her work in America. The news syndicate bought serialization rights and stipulated that the work could not appear in book, digest, moving picture, radio, television or dramatic form until 30 days after the final serial publication.

The University has the following Christie manuscripts (Ober's price is in parenthesis): The nine full-length mysteries are *Destination X* (\$7,000), *A Pocket Full of Rye* (\$7,000), *A Murder Is Announced* (\$7,000), *A Caribbean Mystery* (\$5,000), *The Mirror Crack'd* (\$7,500), *Eyewitness to Death* (\$7,500), *The Innocent* (\$7,500), *Blood Will Tell* (\$7,000) and *After the Funeral* (\$7,000).

The four short stories are "Yellow Iris" (\$600), "The Regatta Mystery" (\$600), "The Case of the Caretaker" (\$750) and "The Case of the Perfect Maid" (\$750).

King reserved the right to change any of the titles. *Eyewitness to Death* was titled "4:54 from Paddington" in England. The 4:54 from Paddington was a specific train run in England.

AFTER THE FUNERAL
BY
AGATHA CHRISTIE

Chapter I.

Old Lamscombe moved tottering from room to room, pulling up the blinds. Now and then he peered with screwed up rheumy eyes through a crack in the window.

Photo by Kim Smith

"We specialize in collecting manuscripts from conservative political figures, missionaries and notebooks and original material, including illustrations, of children's books," says Schmitt in his office on the library's third floor. "In these areas, we have as good of a collection as any library."

Kemp keeps informed on the whereabouts and status of manuscripts which he and Schmitt would like to have at the University. Since any piece of creative work may be used as a tax write-off by a survivor (whether it be a widow, widower or offspring) and not by the creator himself, according to Schmitt, Kemp and Schmitt frequently appear at a bereaved household.

"It takes two of us," Schmitt says, "mainly because there is a lot of work to do. One of us will keep talking while the other cases the place. You have to be a combination of a psychologist,

psychiatrist and minister.

"Kemp has all the attributes — including a cast iron conscience," Schmitt says as he smiles.

"I've been going to New York for the last 15 years," he adds. "And I've been so busy while in New York, I've never had the time to see either a show or a play."

Although the serial writers of an earlier day are not of that much interest to literary persons today, they were skilled in their craft and more importantly, they appealed to the ordinary reader.

"I really find this stuff interesting," Schmitt says in reference to the serial writers as he unlocks doors enroute to the Christie manuscripts.

Perhaps that's why Schmitt and Kemp are able to outmaneuver other libraries in the search for manuscripts with the stealth and cunning of a Monsieur Hercule Poirot, one of Christie's famous detectives.

Baroque trio debuts

A baroque trio called "La Chanterelle" will make its debut tonight with a concert of 17th and 18th century music, at Beall Concert Hall.

The 8 p.m. concert will feature Nancy Possman, former Eugenean currently residing in Amsterdam, Holland, baroque flute; Russell Paige, Seattle, viola da Gamba; and Margaret Irwin-Brandon, Portland, harpsichord.

General admission is \$3; \$2 for

students and senior citizens.

Music of France will be featured, along with Bach's "Flute Sonata in B Minor" and harpsichord works from Italian masters.

"La Chanterelle," the group's name, was taken from the name of the highest string of the gamba, lute or violin. It refers to the melody line and means literally, "the singing one."

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