



The New York Public Library  
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

**William Luce papers**

1946-2013 [bulk 1976-2003]

\*T-Mss 2015-002

Compiled by Kit Fluker, 2016.

## Summary

**Creator:** Luce, William

**Title:** William Luce papers

**Date:** 1946-2013 [bulk 1976-2003]

**Size:** 13.9 linear feet (34 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by William Luce, 2014 and 2016.

**Abstract:** William Luce is an American playwright and television writer best known for his theatrical studies of historical figures. His papers, dating from 1946 to 2013, primarily document his career as a writer from 1976 to the early 2000s. The collection contains scripts, notes, correspondence, clippings, photographs, programs, contracts, and other papers.

**Access:** Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult: <https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

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**Processing note:** Compiled by Kit Fluker, 2016.

## Creator History

William Luce (born 1931) is an American playwright and television writer. He studied piano and composition at university and worked as a songwriter and singer before he began to write for theater and television.

As a writer, Luce specializes in character studies of historical figures. His first stage work was a one-woman show about Emily Dickinson, *The Belle of Amherst*, written for Julie Harris. It was produced in 1976, and Harris received a Tony Award for her performance. A televised version was also produced by PBS. The same year, Luce wrote a radio drama for Harris about Charlotte Brontë, titled *Currer Bell, Esquire*, which won a Peabody Award. It was later adapted into a television film and a one-woman play, *Brontë*.

Luce wrote the solo shows *Zelda: The Last Flapper* about Zelda Fitzgerald (1984), *Lillian* about Lillian Hellman (1986), and *Lucifer's Child* about Isak Dinesen (1991). He wrote the book for a musical adaptation of James A. Michener's novel, *Sayonara*, first produced at the Paper Mill Playhouse in 1987. *Barrymore* was produced on Broadway in 1997, and its star Christopher Plummer received a Tony for his role as John Barrymore. *Baptiste*, about the life of Molière, was produced at Hartford Stage in 2001.

Two of Luce's plays, *Chanel* and *Nijinsky*, premiered in Tokyo in 1996 and 2000, respectively. Many of his other works, including *Barrymore* and *The Belle of Amherst*, also received Japanese productions.

Luce wrote the libretto for an opera, *Gabriel's Daughter*, with music by Henry Mollicone. The opera was produced by the Central City Opera in 2003.

In addition to adapting some of his plays for television, Luce wrote several original television films: *The Last Days of Patton* (1986), *The Woman He Loved* (about Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson, 1988), and *Lucy and Desi Before the Laughter* (1991). He lives in Depoe Bay, Oregon.

## Scope and Content Note

The William Luce papers date from 1946 to 2013 and document his career as a writer, primarily for theater and television, from 1976 to the 2000s. The collection contains scripts, notes, correspondence, clippings, photographs, programs, contracts, sheet music, and a small amount of personal papers.

Luce's produced works are traced from their commission to production to public reception. Production files include background research (sometimes including correspondence with subject experts); copies of the script (usually including multiple drafts); correspondence regarding script changes, contracts, and casting; and programs and clippings for Broadway, Off-Broadway, and regional productions, as well as productions in countries such as Japan, Denmark, Russia, and Finland.

Unproduced theater and television projects are represented by scripts and outlines. There is also a file for an unpublished children's book, written by Luce with illustrations by the actor Christian LeBlanc.

Luce's work as a lyricist in the 1950s and 1960s is represented by published sheet music for Christian hymns. There is also a score for *Beatitude Mass: For the Homeless*, with music by Henry Mollicone and words by Luce.

Personal papers include correspondence (some related to Luce's career), photographs of Luce, items inscribed to Luce by actors, awards and certificates, and clippings, among other papers.

**Arrangement:** Production files are listed alphabetically by title. Other papers are arranged in four categories: Programs, Unproduced Projects, Songs, and Personal Papers.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

Biographical drama

One-person shows (Performing arts)

Playwriting

Television scripts -- 20th century

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Clippings (information artifacts)

Correspondence

Programs (documents)

Scripts

### **Occupations**

Dramatists

Television writers -- United States

## Container List

### *Baptiste*

- b. 1 f. 1-8 2001  
Includes scripts.
- b. 2 f. 1-7 1999-2001
- b. 3 f. 1 *The Big Book of Molière Monologues* 2012

### *Barrymore*

- b. 3 f. 2-8 1993-1999  
Includes scripts.
- b. 4 f. 1-10 1989-1998
- b. 5 f. 1-8 US Tour and International Productions 1996-2000
- b. 6 f. 1-7 Press Clippings 1996-1998
- b. 7 f. 1-8 Press Clippings, Programs, and Publicity Material 1996-2011

### *The Belle of Amherst*

- b. 8 f. 1-8 Scripts, Contracts, and Scrapbook 1976-1991
- b. 9 f. 1-7 1976-2012
- b. 10 f. 1-5 1980-2002

### *Bravo, Caruso!*

- b. 10 f. 6-9 Scripts 1980, 1994, 1996  
Includes Spanish and Finnish translations.
- b. 11 f. 1-5 1980-1997

### *Brontë*

- b. 11 f. 6-10 *Currer Bell, Esquire Scripts and Notes* 1979-1980  
Radio and television scripts.
- b. 12 f. 1-10 1979-1998
- b. 13 f. 1-3 1987-1998
- b. 13 f. 4-8 *Chanel* 1993-1996, 2004

### *The Divine Orlando*

Written for the Western Wind Vocal Ensemble.

- b. 13 f. 9-10 Script and Movie Treatment 1986
- b. 14 f. 1-4 1982-1986

### *Gabriel's Daughter*

- b. 14 f. 5-13 2001-2004, 2008
- b. 15 f. 1-2 Vocal Score 2002

### *The Last Days of Patton*

- b. 16 f. 1-5 Scripts 1982-1985
- b. 17 f. 1 Script 1985
- b. 17 f. 2-7 1981-1988

### *Lillian*

- b. 17 f. 8-9 1985-2001  
Includes script.
- b. 18 f. 1-8 1985-1992

Lillian (cont.)

- b. 19 f. 1-4 1985-2000  
*Lucifer's Child*
- b. 19 f. 5-11 1983-1990s
- b. 20 f. 1-10 1989-2001
- b. 21 f. 1-5 1989-1992  
*Lucy and Desi Before the Laughter*
- b. 21 f. 6-8 Scripts and Outline 1990
- b. 22 f. 1-3 1987-1991  
*Nijinsky*
- b. 22 f. 4-11 Scripts 1997-2003
- b. 23 f. 1-10 1996-2001
- b. 24 f. 1-3 1997-2000  
*Sayonara*
- b. 24 f. 4-9 Scripts 1978-1983
- b. 25 f. 1-8 Scripts and Correspondence 1978-1996
- b. 26 f. 1-9 1980-1997
- b. 27 f. 1-3 1993-1994
- b. 27 f. 4-5 *William Shakespeare: A Portrait in Sound* 1978-1979  
Produced by National Public Radio.  
*The Woman He Loved*
- b. 27 f. 6-8 Scripts and Outline 1986-1988
- b. 28 f. 1-3 1986-1989  
*Zelda: The Last Flapper*
- b. 28 f. 4-6 Script and Notes 1979
- b. 29 f. 1-8 1979-1992, 1997
- b. 30 f. 1-9 1984-2013  
Programs
- b. 30 f. 10 1983-1986
- b. 31 f. 1-7 1987-2011  
Unproduced Projects
- b. 32 f. 1-11 Television and Theater 1976-1990
- b. 33 f. 1-5 Theater and Children's Book 1984-1999
- b. 33 f. 6-7 Songs 1950s-1960s, 2005  
Personal Papers
- b. 33 f. 8-10 Correspondence, Photographs, and Memorabilia 1966-2011
- b. 34 f. 1-4 Awards, Press, Photographs, Yearbook, and Passport 1946-2006
  - b. 15 f. 3 Photograph--Boston University Chorus 1950