ARCHIVING AUTHORS: RETHINKING THE ANALYSIS AND REPRESENTATION OF PERSONAL ARCHIVES

by

Jennifer Lynn Douglas

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Faculty of Information
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Personal archives are those created by individuals for their own individual needs and purposes. As a category of archive, personal archives are under-studied and under-represented in the archival literature. This dissertation seeks to fill some of the gaps identified by archival theorists by investigating the nature of personal archives and the application of foundational principles of archival theory to them. Focusing on the archives of a particular sub-set of creators, literary authors, I question both recent and persistent trends toward a psychological or character-based approach to personal archives, and call attention to the limitations of past and current interpretations of the principle of provenance (and its sub-principles, the principle of respect for original order and the principle of respect des fonds) as it is understood in relation and applied to writers’ archives. I argue that archival theory is too strongly oriented toward the creator of archives as referent rather than to the archive itself as referent, and propose the need for a stronger focus, both in theory and in practice, on the various individuals and processes that shape an archive. Finally, I call for more candid descriptive practices that better convey to researchers the complicated life histories of the archives they consult and that admit the degree to which archives are the self-conscious constructs of a variety of archival agents.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

I have sensed some silences concerning personal archives in mainstream archival theory. Most such theory has been articulated by writers working for or experienced in national and, more recently, other institutional archives, where the emphasis is on the corporate and the collective, as opposed to the individual and idiosyncratic. While there may be good reasons for this, I believe that archival theory needs to be elaborated with more nuance for personal archives. Indeed, there is a need to put a consideration of the ‘personal’ back in the personal archive.¹

A record, as defined in traditional archival terms, is any document that is made or received by a juridical or physical person in the conduct of regular affairs, and preserved for future action or reference purposes. An archive or a fonds comprises all the records of a single creator that are set aside together and then taken into archival custody. Because they are understood to be the naturally occurring by-products of the activities of their creators, archival fonds and the records within them are presumed to provide reliable evidence of those activities, and the archival mission is to preserve records in such a manner that they continue to provide reliable evidence over time. As such, records taken into archival custody are submitted to a process of arrangement and description whereby the relationships between the records and their creators, and between records participating in the same actions are preserved and explicated. The archivist’s adherence to the principle of respect des fonds, which stipulates that the records of a particular creator must not be mixed with those of any other creator, and to the principle of respect for original order, which further directs that records must be preserved in the order in

¹ Catherine Hobbs, “The Character of Personal Archives: Reflections on the Value of Records of Individuals,” Archivaria 52 (Fall 2001), 127.
which they were maintained by their creator, ensures that these relationships are respected.

Archival theory has largely developed based on archivists’ understanding of and experience with the archives of government and other organizations, where structured (or at least semi-structured) record-keeping systems are frequently in use and where records are created as part of business or service transactions and retained as evidence. However, many archives are created outside of these types of organizations, including those created by individuals and families and most often referred to as personal archives. This dissertation finds its roots in my fascination with this latter category of archives.

As a category, personal archives have been only loosely defined. A very simple definition describes personal archives as “those created by an individual during his or her lifetime.” Other definitions add more nuance, usually by comparing personal archives to organizational archives. For example, Catherine Hobbs explains that instead of deriving from “an administrative purpose or because of a legal requirement,” personal archives develop out of “the needs, desires, and predilections” of the individuals who create them. Making a similar comparison, Tom Hyry and Rachel Onuf define personal archives as those created by an individual in a private capacity and for “personal reasons, be they

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communication, artistic endeavor, or other activities not necessarily linked to the production of commodities and services.\textsuperscript{4}

As a particular type of archive, personal archives have been under-studied and under-represented in the archival literature as archival theorists and practitioners remain largely preoccupied with the undeniably enormous challenges posed by the proliferation of records – and more recently, of digital records – in government departments and other organizations. Noting that traditional archival theory rarely refers directly to personal archives, archivists who work with them have begun to assert that there are differences between records created by administrative bodies and those created by individuals in a personal capacity; these archivists further contend that archival theory does not always account for these differences and that it is not necessarily suited to the particular needs of personal archives.

My initial work toward the completion of this dissertation was prompted by my interest in this proposition: that personal archives are different from and require different treatment than organizational archives. I quickly grew less interested in comparing personal and organizational archives, however, and more interested in understanding personal archives on their own terms; I wanted to know how both the individuals who create them and the archivists who eventually care for them understand and treat them, and I wanted to better understand how archival principles are or are not suited to their particular needs. This dissertation, therefore, follows two general lines of inquiry. First, it asks how archivists might best understand the nature of personal archives and second, it

questions the application of the primary principles of archival theory to them. Broadly speaking, this dissertation attempts to begin the process of developing a more nuanced and defensible understanding of personal archives both on their own terms and in connection with contemporary discourses related to their creation and treatment.

**Writer’s archives**

Because the category of personal archives encompasses a large number of types of records and record creators, I chose early on in my research to focus on a particular sub-set of personal archives creators: literary authors. Writers’ archives offer a propitious starting point for the study of records created by individuals because, in the first place, they are ubiquitous in archives, libraries, and the cultural imagination. Adrian Cunningham points out that by virtue of their occupation “creative writers create more records and are better recordkeepers” than many other types of record creators, and writers’ archives are quite likely to be preserved in large quantities in archival repositories and special collection libraries. As well, there is in the archival literature on personal archives a slant towards writers’ archives, since many of the archivists who have written on the topic work with literary archives. Writers’ archives have also captured the

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5 Fran Baker et al note that “a major feature of literary archives is their sheer ubiquity. Writers are among our most voluminous correspondents and by their very nature their letters and papers scatter to the winds; these literary papers therefore proved a common link between many archival institutions that are otherwise very different as well as geographically dispersed.” Fran Baker et al., “Magical and Meaningful: Thirty Years of Literary Manuscript Collecting in the UK and Ireland, 1979-2009,” *Archives* 35 (April 2010), 24.

6 For example, literary archives have been the subject of or inspiration for numerous novels in various genres (e.g. literary fiction, mystery, young adult, etc.). As a small sample see: Martha Cooley, *The Archivist* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1998); A.S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance* (London: Vintage, 1990); Travis Holland, *The Archivist’s Story* (New York: Dial Press, 2007); Kate Moses, *Wintering: A Novel of Sylvia Plath* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003).

interest of literary scholars, who have edited volumes of writers’ diaries, correspondence and workbooks and have published extensive commentary on these and other types of writers’ materials. Based on the prominence of their status and on the availability of information about them, it seemed sensible to select this particular type of archives as a focal point for exploratory research in an understudied area.

**Framing the research**

Literary scholar Wolfgang Iser distinguishes between two types of theory: hard theory and soft theory. Hard theory, as practiced in the sciences, “makes predictions” and attempts to establish replicable results using carefully laid-out research protocols; soft theory, as practiced in the humanities, is more “an attempt at mapping,” and attempts to distinguish patterns and establish metaphors. Humanities scholars draw from “different frameworks,” piecing together different elements of these to create a kind of “bricolage,” and aiming not so much to solve a problem or discover a new law, but rather to enhance understanding of a particular concept or phenomenon. While in recent years, the archival research community, and more broadly, the information research community, have moved determinedly toward social scientific research models and methodologies, my own research takes a more humanities-based approach. It is

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exploratory research in an under-studied area and should be seen as an initial attempt to map a domain, to identify patterns and to propose new concepts and ideas that can be further investigated in future research and from different perspectives.

Two distinct interpretive frameworks shape and inform this dissertation. The first, necessarily, is the literature on archival theory, from which I have formed my understanding of the origins and evolutions of archival principles. The second is the critical literature on life writing. Because I was interested in both the nature of personal archives and in the history and application of archival principles to them, I developed my two second-year doctoral reading courses around these topics. Accordingly, for my major area of study, I focused on locating, gathering and analyzing literature related to personal archives and archiving practices; however, I quickly encountered a problem, one which I have already hinted at in this introduction and one which is readily acknowledged by other archivists working in this area: the archival literature on personal archives is unfortunately significantly limited in both quantity and scope.

As a result, I looked toward another body of literature related to the types of materials frequently found in personal archives. Within the broader discipline of literary

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A third framework that might usefully be applied, but which fell outside the scope of this research, is found in the connections between archival theory and textual theory. Heather MacNeil has highlighted many of these connections in several different articles. See, for example: “Picking Our Text: Archival Description, Authenticity, and the Archivist as Editor,” *American Archivist* 68 (Fall/Winter 2005), 264-278 and “Archivalterity: Rethinking Original Order,” *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008), 1-25. “Picking Our Text” in particular explains the parallels between textual theory, concepts of intentionality and textuality, and archival theory and work. Useful starting points in the literature on textual theory include: D.C. Greetham, *Theories of the Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Joseph Grigely, *Textualterity: Art, Theory, and Textual Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).
criticism, scholars of the genre of writing commonly termed “life writing”\textsuperscript{11} have discussed the nature of diaries, letters and other types of personal writing. Although these scholars necessarily adopt a different perspective than the archivist, I have found their ideas to be germane to the further development of theory for personal archives; these ideas are discussed at length in chapters 2 and 3 and they inform the conclusions I reach throughout the dissertation.

**Archival research and expert interviews**

Before moving into the next chapters and the core of this dissertation, I will briefly describe the research process that informs the analysis therein. Much of the discussion in the archival literature about the nature of personal archives and the application of traditional archival theory and methodology to them has been anecdotal in nature and based on the general experience and impressions of the archivists who work with them. To date, there have been few focused, empirical research studies in this area. The ideas discussed in the chapters that follow develop out of my reading of and reflection on the two bodies of literature mentioned above. They are also based on research in the archives of eight well-known Canadian and American writers and on qualitative expert interviews with thirteen Canadian archivists and librarians who regularly work with writers’ archives. In this section, I will briefly outline the selection

\textsuperscript{11} Life writing is defined simply as any kind of writing that “takes a life as its subject” or that is “about the ‘self,’” and is discussed in detail in Chapter 1 of this work. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2001), 3; Marlene Kadar, “Coming to Terms: Life Writing – from Genre to Critical Practice,” in *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, ed. Marlene Kadar (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 4-5.
criteria I employed to choose which archives to study and whom to interview and describe the archival research and interview processes.

*Selecting archives*

I employed three main criteria for selecting archives for study. First, I selected archives based on their size and comprehensiveness; the fuller and more complete an archive, the more likely it will be broadly representative of its creator’s activities over time and the more information it will provide about the processes that shaped it. Most often, the archives of writers who have passed away or who are in the later stages of their careers are more complete than those of younger or early- to mid-career writers. To be selected for this study, archives had to include a number of series relating to a variety of writing projects, as well as to a variety of stages in the writer’s career and personal life. All of the writers listed below except for Douglas Coupland are either deceased or can be considered to be in the late stages of their careers. Although Coupland is still relatively young, his archive is large and contains a wide variety of materials related to a range of writing and visual arts projects and also includes significant series of personal materials and correspondence.

The second criterion was the availability of a secondary literature related to the archives that could provide additional information about the creator and about the archive itself. For each archive listed below, a variety of sources of information, including
literary biographies, literary studies related to materials found in the archive, institutional documentation about the archive, etc., was available for consultation.\(^{12}\)

Finally, archives were also selected on the basis of the evidence they provided – or that existed outside of the archive – of the processes that led to their creation. For example, the papers of Sylvia Plath reveal a great deal about the battle for control over Plath’s legacy in which Plath’s mother and estranged husband were engaged following her early death, making it a rich example of the effect interested parties other than the creator might have on an archive’s final shape and nature. Similarly, in the fonds of Alice Munro and Dorothy Livesay, respectively, there are numerous files of correspondence related to the negotiations between the authors, executors or agents and the repositories that acquired the archives.

Based on these three criteria, the following archives were selected for study:

- the Sylvia Plath Collection at the Mortimer Rare Book Room at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts;
- the Sylvia Plath Collection at the Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana;

\(^{12}\) The secondary literature related to the contents and construction of particular archives tends to focus more on the archives of women writers than on men’s; in the 1980s and 1990s, one way of calling attention to overlooked women’s writing was to study unpublished writings, often found in archives or in private collections. A number of books and articles were published focusing on women’s private writings, including *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents*, edited by Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar in 2001, and *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*, edited by Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff in 1996. Because I hoped to make use of secondary literature on the different archives I studied, and because a secondary literature on archives was more often available for the archives of women writers, the list of selected archives presented on the following page is skewed toward women writers. As I will discuss in Chapter 7, I do not believe that there is a fundamental difference between the archives of male and female writers, but there is no doubt that this study reports more heavily on the archives of women, and further research employing additional archives of male writers may be required.
• the Marian Engel fonds at The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario;

• the Alice Munro fonds at Archives and Special Collections, at the University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta;

• the L.M. Montgomery Collection at Archival and Special Collections at the University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario;

• the Dorothy Livesay fonds at Archives and Special Collections at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba;

• the Douglas Coupland fonds at Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia;

• the Margaret Atwood papers at Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario;

• the Margaret Laurence fonds at Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections, at York University, York, Ontario.

*Examining archives*

Archives are accumulations of individual records and files. As such, their nature depends on how they accumulate and how they are shaped over time. In the archives I selected for study, I focused on finding evidence of these processes of accumulation and shaping; I studied each archive to determine what could be discovered about the processes by which they accumulated – both prior to and following their transfer to archival repositories – and how these processes were represented through archival arrangement and/or description.
In considering how each archive was shaped prior to its transfer to a repository, I looked for evidence of the creator’s attitude toward making and keeping a record of his or her life or career and of the decisions and actions that resulted in the accumulation of the archive. In considering how each archive was shaped following its transfer to a repository, I looked for evidence related to the archivist’s acts of appraisal and selection and of arrangement and description, as well as of any other type of archival intervention that might have affected the final shape of the archive as it exists and is presented to researchers today. Finally, I considered the specific way in which each archive is arranged and described – i.e., represented – and the degree to which descriptions of the archive account for the various decisions and actions that shaped it over time.

Each of the archives I consulted was of considerable extent. The Margaret Atwood collection at the Fisher Rare Book Library, for example, consists of over 500 bankers boxes of records. It was not possible for me to study every document, let alone every file or even every box in each of the archives selected, so I had to devise a plan for how best to approach and gain an understanding of each fonds. The first archive I consulted was the Sylvia Plath collection at Smith College. In some ways, I used my experience with this archive as a kind of ‘pilot’ research project; my experience in Northampton informed the way I approached the remainder of the archives.

Before travelling to Smith College to physically examine the Plath archives, I read as much as I could about Plath and her papers in the secondary literature and studied the finding aids available for them. I determined that the best approach was to begin by ordering a sample of files from each series in order to get a general overview of the types of materials the archive held and how they were organized. Next, I decided to focus my
attention on Plath’s journals and the correspondence series to determine whether there was any discussion therein concerning her attitude and the attitudes of others toward her archive. In the case of the Plath collection, considerable correspondence can be found regarding the treatment of Plath’s writings and records following her death, and the various correspondence series therefore proved to be a valuable source for explaining some of how the archive was formed and evolved over time. By studying Plath’s own correspondence and journals, I was able to come to some tentative conclusions about her record-keeping habits and attitudes.

Based on my experience with the Plath papers at Smith, I tended to approach each additional archive I studied in a similar way: I read as much as I could about the archive prior to consulting it; I studied all available finding aids in order to understand how the archive was structured and to determine whether there were particular series or files of interest (for example, files related to the negotiations between the writer and the archival repository); I ordered a sample of files from each series and from different time periods so that I could gain a general overview of the archives; and I focused particular attention on the writer’s personal writing, if it existed, and on correspondence series. While I feel I developed solid understandings of each archive I studied, I have no doubt there are many interesting things I missed in the files I was unable to include in my research. I look forward to continuing this research and/or to having others continue it so that deeper knowledge of these archives might contribute to the findings of this particular research effort.
Selecting interviewees

Research in the archives of writers was supplemented through qualitative interviews conducted with archivists and librarians who work with literary archives. Between May 2010 and October 2010, I spoke with thirteen archivists and librarians who could be considered experts in the field of literary archives.\(^\text{13}\) Gretchen B. Rossman and Sharon F. Rallis describe experts as “individuals considered influential, prominent or well-informed, or all three, in an organization or community, [who] are selected on the basis of their expertise” to answer specific research questions.\(^\text{14}\) In the context of this research, experts were defined as archival or special collections professionals or scholars with significant knowledge about and experience with literary archives. The criteria for selecting such qualified individuals were: (1) recognized expertise as demonstrated by published scholarly writings in the area, and/or (2) recognized expertise as demonstrated by appointment to a senior position at an archives or library with responsibility for writers’ archives.

Conducting and analyzing the interviews

Interviews were conducted in-person and on-site at the expert’s place of employment\(^\text{15}\) and each individual was asked to speak with particular reference to one or

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\(^\text{13}\) Prior to commencing the interview process I applied for and received ethics approval through the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics. The original approval letter is included here as Appendix I.


\(^\text{15}\) Excepting my interviews with Heather Home and Michael Moosberger, which were conducted separately during the 2010 Annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists in Halifax, Nova Scotia.
two fonds with which he or she had worked. In the interviews, discussion centered on how each interviewee understands the nature and treatment of writers’ archives: what they consider to be part or not part of the archive; what types of negotiations are involved in the acquisition of writers’ archives; how decisions about archival representation are made and documented; and how traditional archival principles are interpreted. The interview guide included as Appendix 2 lists a variety of questions intended to solicit this type of information (Appendix 2). During the interviews, I sometimes altered the order of these questions and often asked additional questions; I tried as much as possible to be flexible in response to the answers I received and to follow where interviewees led me, returning eventually to the more formal structure of the interview guide. My intention throughout the interviews was to provide the interviewee with a topic area to speak about and then to elicit from them whatever it was they felt was most important to say about that topic.

After conducting the interviews, I transcribed them and prepared ‘clean’ copies of the transcriptions to return to participants for review. Interviewees were permitted to add or remove from the transcript any information they desired and were also asked to consent to be identified by name in any published findings or to choose to remain anonymous. All interviewees consented to be identified and are listed in Appendix 3. Once the reviewed transcripts were returned to me, I analyzed them by identifying what appeared to be significant concepts and recurring themes or patterns (for example, I noted recurring concepts such as ‘character’ and ‘original order,’ and identified emerging concepts such as ‘first sight physical order,’ ‘archiving ‘I’,’ and ‘the life of the archive’). This was an iterative process; I read each transcript numerous times, considered each
separately, compared it to others and adapted and refined the categories I devised as needed. The data I collected through these interviews were used to supplement and corroborate data collected through archival research and my interpretation of the two relevant bodies of literature. In particular, I refer to the interviews in my discussion in Chapter 4 of original order in writers’ archives. Original order was a prominent topic of each interview, and as I analyzed the transcripts, I noted each instance where participants’ spoke of order of any kind in writers’ archives, identified the type of order to which they referred and their attitudes toward different types of order, and considered their responses in relation to traditional archival theory and to emerging critiques of that theory.

**About the research methods**

As mentioned above, this research is undertaken from a humanities-based approach. Though I consulted sources on interviewing methods usually associated with qualitative research in the social sciences\(^\text{16}\) to assist me in determining selection criteria for choosing interviewees and in developing an interview guide, I have primarily attempted the kind of “bricolage” referred to by Iser. I have drawn from different bodies of literature and from empirical research in the archives of writers and with working archivists and librarians to make an initial attempt at describing a currently under-described type of archive. As primarily exploratory and descriptive research, this dissertation is envisioned as an initial step in the development of empirically-based approaches.

theory for personal archives, and I hope that it will raise several new research questions and suggest additional research projects.

**A word about the digital**

Before I move into the substance of this dissertation, I feel compelled to explain that my research is nearly exclusively focused on non-digital archives. Increasingly, personal archives are being created using digital technologies, including personal computers, smart phones, tablet devices, and digital cameras, video and audio recorders, and a growing body of literature is beginning to address the particular challenges that these digital personal records pose to archivists.

However, while archivists are aware that more and more personal records are being created in digital format, many are still working primarily with archives in analogue forms. Of the archivists I spoke with over the course of this project, most indicated that they had had very little experience acquiring and processing records in digital format. Although some high profile digital archives have been acquired and are in the process of being made available to researchers in places like Emory University in Georgia and at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, in most archival institutions, the bulk of the material being acquired from writers continues to be paper. Sometimes, as Michael Forstrom explains, writers include “fugitive” collections of floppy disks (in various sizes and formats) with their paper records, but to date, the digital wave has not fully washed over literary archives.

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17 Michael Forstrom, “Managing Electronic Records in Manuscript Collections: A Case Study from the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library,” *American Archivist* 72 (Fall/Winter 2009), 461.
In the archives I studied there were either no or very few digital records. Douglas Coupland has a large collection of digital materials, but he has yet to include them in his archive at the University of British Columbia; the archivist at Rare Books and Special Collections informed me that he has several concerns about parting with his digital archive and she does not know when he might consider incorporating them into his fonds. In each of the interviews I conducted, I inquired about digital records. In every case, the archivist or librarian I spoke with admitted that they currently possess a very limited amount of digital materials, that these are usually old floppy disks, and that they are often unable to be opened due to software or hardware incompatibility issues. In most cases, interviewees also admitted that within their institutions no firm policies or procedures have been established for dealing with digital records and that there is a tremendous amount of uncertainty related to how these institutions will cope with the presumably unavoidable influx of huge quantities of digital material in the near future.

For this very practical reason, my research has focused on paper records, and the conclusions I reach are based on my experiences with non-digital archives. I believe that many of the ideas discussed in this dissertation will remain relevant in the context of digital archives, and the final chapter includes a section that links my study to the digital turn in personal archives creation and preservation; however, it will remain for future research to study the specific parameters of writers’ digital recordmaking and keeping, and of the application of archival principles to digital collections.
Chapter outline

As the second chapter of this dissertation will show, leading writers on the topic of personal archives within the archival discipline tend to focus on concepts such as “character,” “psychology,” and “intention.” The newest literature on the nature and treatment of personal archives advises archivists to consider the character of the archive creator as the key to understanding his or her archive, and to value the archive for what it may reveal about its creator. Such an approach, i.e., a focus on personal psychology and character, is contrasted with the traditional focus on the transactional and evidentiary qualities of organizational and institutional archives. Looking through the lenses of the two interpretive frameworks mentioned above, chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation focus on the nature of personal archives – and more specifically, writers’ archives – and question whether a psychological approach is appropriate. These two chapters study the ways life writing theorists and archival theorists have, separately, understood notions such as character and psychology, and set these alongside empirical research on specific writers’ archives to show how an overly psychological understanding of the nature of writers’ archives can be misleading. Together, these chapters explore the variety of ways in which writers’ archives form and evolve over time and demonstrate how they are often shaped by the intentions and efforts of individuals other than the writers themselves.


In chapters 4 and 5, my perspective shifts toward traditional archival theory to examine how the foundational principle of provenance and its sub-principles, the principle of respect des fonds and the principle of respect for original order, are understood and implemented in personal archives. In these chapters, I identify several gaps and inconsistencies in the ways archivists think and talk about archival principles and writers’ archives. These inconsistencies derive largely from underdeveloped or (as discussed in the chapters previous to these two) overly psychological understandings of the nature and origins of writers’ archives, and in each chapter, I suggest that it is time to re-think how we interpret both the meaning and application of these foundational archival principles.

In each of chapters 2 through 5, the conclusions I reach suggest that the close attention that archivists pay to the lives of the creators of archives often comes at the expense of attention to the lives of the archives themselves. In Chapter 6, I focus specifically on archivists’ descriptive practices to determine how effectively the finding aids for the archives to which I refer reflect their own ‘life stories.’ The chapter explains how conventional means of describing archives tend to hide the ‘constructedness’ of the fonds, choosing instead to adhere to traditional notions of the archive as an unselfconscious and more or less spontaneous creation of the writer. In this chapter, I argue that both the new focus on the psychological context of personal archives and the traditional emphasis on the impartiality and naturalness of an archive need to be accompanied – if not replaced – by an equal attention to the many ways in which archives are formed and shaped over time.
The final chapter of this work brings together the various conclusions reached in each of the preceding chapters. It argues that the discussion in each of the earlier chapters strongly suggests the need for a more explicit focus in theory and in practice on the nature of the archive itself, on its story and its story in the fullest knowable detail. In both the theories archivists espouse and in the descriptions we create for archives there is a certain amount of disingenuousness; there are things archivists know about archives that we do not share with researchers but that contribute to a fuller knowledge of archives. This dissertation suggests that both the more contemporary attention to the psychological context of archive creation and traditional archival notions about the nature of archives encourage – and perhaps even require – archivists to be disingenuous in our descriptive work. It ends, finally, by calling for a new candour in our theory and practice, a new honesty about what we know about and do to the archives in our care.

Addressing the “silences” in archival theory

In 1996, Sue McKemmish acknowledged a gap in archival theory and literature when she published “Evidence of Me,” in which she speculated on the relationship between personal recordkeeping and society’s collective memory. McKemmish’s article was part of a special issue of Archives and Manuscripts devoted to personal archives, and since then an increasing number of articles and books on personal archives have begun to appear. Still, many of the research areas identified by McKemmish more than 15 years ago remain unexplored by archivists and there continue to be what Hobbs has called “silences concerning personal archives in mainstream” archival theory. The

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research described in this dissertation was begun in an attempt to rectify this situation, to help fill, at least in part, some of the gaps in archival theory. It responds to calls made by McKemmish and others\textsuperscript{22} for sustained inquiry into the particular characteristics and challenges of personal archives, and in so doing, seeks to shed additional light on both the nature of a particular type of personal archive and on the implications a deeper understanding of this nature has for the interpretation of foundational archival concepts. My hope is that this dissertation will both enrich archivists’ knowledge of personal archives and provoke further discussion and research on the topic.

\textsuperscript{22} See, for example: Hobbs, “The Character of Personal Archives,” 127; Riva Pollard, “The Appraisal of Personal Papers,” Archivaria 52 (Fall 2001), 137; Cunningham, 131; Barbara Craig, “The Archivist as Planner and Poet: Thoughts on the Larger Issues of Appraisal for Acquisition,” Archivaria 52 (Fall 2001), 181.
CHAPTER 2
LIFE WRITING AND PERSONAL ARCHIVES

In this chapter, I review the archival literature on personal archives and the critical literature on life writing to determine how each discipline views the nature of personal archival material, to identify the points where the two bodies of literature converge and diverge, and to consider how the interpretive framework suggested by the literature on life writing might help archivists to adjust and refine their understanding of literary archives in particular.

The archival literature on personal archives

As mentioned in Chapter 1, personal archives are frequently defined in ways that contrast them to archives created by public and/or corporate bodies in the pursuit of mandated aims. Indeed, a long tradition of archival theory and practice has considered personal archives separately from the official and administrative records created by government and by business. In the Dutch *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, first published in 1898 and “usually regarded as the starting point of archival theory and methodology,”¹ Samuel Muller, J.A. Feith, and R. Fruin stress that one of the

defining characteristics of an archival fonds² is its official nature. The Dutch authors decreed: “Only official documents, i.e., those received or produced by administrative bodies or officials in their official capacity, belong to the [fonds].” While they conceded that private civil bodies such as hospitals, monasteries, societies and associations could create fonds, Muller, Feith, and Fruin cautioned against identifying a group of “so-called family archives” as a fonds; these types of materials were thought to be collected artificially and in a piecemeal fashion, and, therefore, lacking the “organic bond” that creates the fonds.³ Sir Hilary Jenkinson, author of the first English-language manual for archive administration, was similarly adamant about the “official character” of archives, insisting that “Archives are documents which formed part of an official transaction and were preserved for official reference.”⁴ With these pronouncements about the nature of archival material, early – and influential – theorists endorsed a narrow view of archives as the records of administrations, and, as Terry Cook points out, “dismissed” personal papers “to the purview of libraries and librarians.”⁵

² The Dutch archivists used the term “archief” to describe the whole of the records of an administrative body, which the American translator, Arthur H. Leavitt, translated as “archival collection.” I am using the term “fonds” as a more accurate representation of the Dutch concept.


Since the publication of Muller, Feith, and Fruin’s *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* and Jenkinson’s *A Manual for Archive Administration*, many archivists and manuscript librarians have come to recognize that large, modern accumulations of personal records “share integral records characteristics with public archives,” and can therefore be considered “amenable to essentially the same kind of treatment.” In Canada, the ‘total archives’ tradition has meant that most archival institutions acquire both the records of government and the private papers of prominent individuals (politicians, writers, artists, etc.), and both types of accumulations are managed according to the same rules for archival arrangement and description.

Nevertheless, the continuing influence of the focus in archival literature on documents of an “official” nature combined with the enormous stress placed on archival institutions by the proliferation of public records in modern governments has, for a long time, relegated personal papers to the back shelf of archival theory.

In recent years, however, there has been an augmented focus on personal archives in the archival literature, beginning with the dedication, in 1996, of a special issue of the

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Australian journal *Archives and Manuscripts* to the topic. Although a small number of articles related to the treatment of personal archives were published prior to 1996, the number since then has risen significantly. Some of these more recent articles adopt a primarily practical viewpoint, discussing particular arrangement and description projects or assessing the collection of personal and private records by libraries and archives in a particular area. Others, however, have delved more deeply into the theoretical issues surrounding the treatment of personal archives by attempting to describe the nature of personal records and of personal record-keeping behaviours.

Key among the articles that turn a more theoretical eye to the topic of personal archives is Sue McKemmish’s “Evidence of Me.” At the time McKemmish was writing her essay, she was deeply involved in developing the Australian records continuum model, and her thoughts about the nature of personal records reflect the focus that continuum thinking places on the record as both evidence of social activities and as a social agent in its own right. Understanding the act of record keeping as a kind of “witnessing,” McKemmish insists that the “functionality” of a personal archive is equal

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10 For a discussion of the records continuum model see, for example, Frank Upward, “The Records Continuum,” in *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, eds. Sue McKemmish et al. (Wagga Wagga, New South Wales: Charles Sturt University, 2005), 197-222.
to “its capacity to witness a life” and is “dependant on how systematically we go about the business of creating our records.” McKemmish does not question the commonly accepted definition of a record as a document made or received by a juridical or physical person in the course of practical activity and set aside for future use or reference, and she asserts that archivists can “analyse what is happening” in personal record keeping in the same way they analyze corporate record keeping. She writes:

Just as they can identify significant business functions and activities and specify what records are captured as evidence of those activities, so they can analyse socially assigned roles and related activities and draw conclusions about what records individuals in their personal capacity capture as evidence of these roles and activities. They can also define individuals in terms of their relationship with each other…Such relationships carry with them socially conditioned ways of behaving and interacting that extend also to recordkeeping behaviour.

As they do with corporate records, archivists working with personal records can ask questions related to “issues of competencies and related rights, obligations, responsibilities, [and] the need to continue to function effectively in a particular role.”

McKemmish’s efforts to liken personal record keeping to corporate or public record keeping are echoed in the same issue of Archives and Manuscripts by Chris

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11 McKemmish, 29.

12 Ibid., 30-31.
Hurley and Richard J. Cox. Cox, especially, focuses on the ways in which personal records are the same as organizational records, arguing that:

An individual maintains records for generally the same reasons as does an organisation – to meet the needs of accountability, evidence and corporate memory. Personal records are created out of the same needs to capture transactions, document activities, serve legal and administrative functions, and provide a basis for memory. We maintain records to create our own evidence of crucial work, to protect ourselves, and to provide a kind of corporate memory of home, work, and family.

Hurley had long since expressed his belief that there is no essential difference between the documents created and kept by an individual in a personal capacity and those created in an organizational context in his 1977 rebuttal to Graeme T. Powell’s suggestion that perhaps traditional archival theory did not apply to collections of personal material. Although in 1996 Hurley admits the need for an expanded understanding of the concept of archival evidence that would better accommodate personal archives, he still insists that there should be little or no difference in the way personal and organizational archives are treated by archivists.

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14 Cox, 52. Cox’s perception of the similarities between personal and organizational records persists throughout his most recent publication on personal archives. He states, for example, that “…personal papers have an inherent structure and purpose much as any other form of records system,” and explains that the purposes for which we keep and “consult regularly many of our personal archives…are not that dissimilar from what happens in corporations, civic groups, churches, cultural organizations, and other institutions.” Cox, Personal Archives and a New Archival Calling: Readings, Reflections and Ruminations (Duluth, Minnesota: Litwin Books, LLC, 2008), 21, 139-40.

Both Hurley and Cox refer to contemporary discussions in the archival literature on the nature of electronic records and the ways in which these discussions have caused archivists to confirm traditional definitions of the record that highlight its role in mandated functions, activities and transactions. Adrian Cunningham likewise acknowledges this trend but suggests that to define a record “in transactional terms” is “counter productively [sic] narrow” and cannot account for the particular qualities of non-organizational records.\textsuperscript{16} Other archivists have shared Cunningham’s view, and although McKemmish’s article has been hailed as “seminal”\textsuperscript{17} and “groundbreaking,”\textsuperscript{18} it has also been fairly heavily critiqued for its perceived emphasis on the transactionality and functionality of personal archives.

In 2001, for example, Verne Harris attempted to deconstruct McKemmish’s arguments, asking, “Why should the capacity to witness through personal records depend on the degree of ‘functionality?’” He proposes that “anti-functionality” or “dysfunctionality” might be equally legitimate “mode[s] of witnessing,” and suggests that McKemmish has neglected to consider how personal record keeping is characterized by “resistance to functionality.”\textsuperscript{19} Like Cunningham, Harris warns that archivists interested in stepping into the discussion on personal record keeping must be careful to “avoid

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Adrian Cunningham, “Beyond the Pale? The ‘flinty’ relationship between archivists who collect the private records of individuals and the rest of the archival profession,” \textit{Archives and Manuscripts} 24 (May 1996), 22.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Verne Harris, “On the Back of a Tiger: Deconstructive Possibilities in ‘Evidence of Me,’” \textit{Archives and Manuscripts} 29 (May 2001), 9.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Harris, 12.
\end{itemize}
narrow conceptualizations of ‘recordness.’”

Ultimately, he finds in McKemmish’s article an instinct “to tame, to destroy” the “wilderness area” of personal archives. Catherine Hobbs similarly chides McKemmish for her focus on functionality and transactionality in personal records. In an article published the same year as Harris’s, Hobbs laments McKemmish’s focus on the “public or formal roles of the individual” and on the individual’s interactions with other members of his or her society. Arguing that archivists place too much emphasis on the “outer transactional context of records,” Hobbs asks: “Must ‘evidence of me’ always be interpreted as ‘evidence of me interacting with persons and institutions in the conduct of affairs’?”

Hobbs finds that within traditional archival theory there is too great a focus on “the corporate and the collective” and believes that such theory cannot account for the individuality and idiosyncrasy that characterize personal archives. Like Harris, she believes that personal archives “represent a departure from the collective formality and systemic organization found in other types of records.”

In “Reenvisioning the Personal: Reframing Traces of Individual Life,” Hobbs addresses this lack of “formality” in more detail. Personal archives, she explains, are “controlled entirely by private individuals” before they enter an archivist’s care; they are not subject to administrative regulations, contexts and structures, and what is created and

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20 Ibid., 15.
21 Ibid., 20.
23 Ibid., 130.
24 Ibid., 127.
kept, and how this is organized, is at the individual’s discretion.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore, archivists cannot expect to encounter in the archives of individuals fully-formed and functional record-keeping systems, but must instead remain “open to consider the less tangible and less permanent arrangements (of whatever sort) that might exist within people’s lives.” Such openness is essential because of the “freedom” individuals have to “form and reform original orders each day,” and Hobbs warns archivists who arrange and describe personal fonds not to confuse original order with “administrative order” but to respect a fonds’ existing order no matter how disordered or chaotic it may initially appear.\textsuperscript{26}

At one level, Hobbs’ arguments address archivists’ desire to achieve what Brien Brothman refers to as “a condition of positive order in their domain.”\textsuperscript{27} Elizabeth Yakel has noted that “archival representation,” or arrangement and description, frequently involves the imposition of “socially constructed schemas on records to provide intellectual coherence,”\textsuperscript{28} and personal fonds are often arranged along similar patterns. For example, the fonds of writers frequently each consist of a series of correspondence organized in files according to recipients’ names and within files chronologically, a series of journals or notebooks, and series of draft materials organized by genre and chronologically. Hobbs draws attention to this practice as an effort to “regiment personal archives…within the confines of records management,” disturbing what is in fact an

\textsuperscript{25} Hobbs, “Reenvisioning the Personal,” 213.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 228-229.

\textsuperscript{27} Brien Brothman, “Orders of Value: Probing the Terms of Archival Value,” \textit{Archivaria} 32 (Summer 1991), 81.

\textsuperscript{28} Elizabeth Yakel, “Archival Representation,” \textit{Archival Science} 3 (2003), 9.
‘original’ order and removing records from their “setting of complete context.”²⁹

However, Hobbs’ arguments also speak to another concern of hers, and that is her belief that records and the order in which they are kept must be understood as reflective of the “character” and “personality” of their creators.³⁰

When she argues that personal archives should not be assessed based on their “transactionality” and “functionality,” Hobbs suggests that archivists instead value personal archives for their “psychology” and “character.” In personal archives, what is recorded is not “just the facts and acts,” but also the individual’s “views, opinions, prejudices, and emotional reactions.” Personal records document not only activities and transactions, she explains, but also “individual character” and “personality;” they “reflect not only what a person does or thinks, but who they are, how they envision and experience their lives.”³¹ Personal arrangements, which develop out of the “mental life of the individual,” are thought to be similarly indicative of “thoughts and actions,” “personal values” and a creator’s “psychology.”³² Hobbs acknowledges that the orders individuals give to their archives may be fleeting and difficult to discern, and she also recognizes that the creation of personal record forms such as diaries and letters, which involve “issues of choice” and “personal memorializing,” can also involve “forgery, fiction [and] self-projection.” However, she nevertheless intimates that records found in personal fonds are capable of revealing (to at least some degree) their creator’s “inner soul” and “private

²⁹ Catherine Hobbs, “The Particular Case of Personal Archives: Documents Unbound,” unpublished, used with permission of the author. These ideas are further explored in “Reenvisioning the Personal.”


³² Hobbs, “Reenvisioning the Personal,” 228-229.
personality.” The archivist who works with the creators of personal records does not view the donor as a “witness in court” (as, she suggests, the corporate or governmental donor is viewed), but rather as “a patient on the psychiatrist’s couch,” and the creator, by transferring records to an archive, is transferring “part of his or her very own life.”

Thus, while acknowledging postmodern ideas about the performative nature of self-construction and self-presentation, Hobbs still sometimes seems to subscribe to a view of personal archives similar to that described by curator Stephen Enniss, who believes that the value collectors (amongst whom he includes archivists and librarians) attach to the archives of writers and poets, in particular, is related to a desire to “touch that which is beyond our reach,” to make an author present at his or her “most vital moment.” Enniss characterizes this desire as quasi-erotic and notes its roots in Romanticism, associating it with both the Romantic poets’ quests for the source of artistic inspiration and the antiquarianism that spurred authors like Thomas Percy and Sir Walter Scott to collect and preserve ancient songs, poems and stories. Collectors and researchers alike, he argues, are compelled by “mystery” – the mystery, that is, of the “writer’s solitary struggle with his own solitary muse” – and the value of the literary archive is its

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34 Ibid., 132.

35 Stephen Enniss, “In the Author’s Hand: Artifacts of Origin and Twentieth-Century Reading Practice,” *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts and Cultural Heritage* 2 (Fall 2001), 120, 119. In an article on Carol Shields’ fonds, Hobbs acknowledges that there is “irony” inherent in the idea that the fonds could capture the whole of an author’s personality. She notes that in her fiction Shields “has explored the sense that the documents of an individual’s life will not deliver any real, full-fledged understanding of the subject of research.” At the end of the article, Hobbs suggests that “the archive is that much more alluring” as a result of its partialness and its tendency to tease the researcher who seeks in it access to the inner mind of its creator.” Catherine Hobbs, “Voice and Re-vision: The Carol Shields Archival Fonds,” in *Carol Shields and the Extra-Ordinary*, eds. Marta Dvorak and Manina Jones (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 51, 55.
ability to make present the author “at her most vital moment.” In an article published in a special issue of *The Journal of Canadian Studies* dedicated to the topic of literary archives, Hobbs similarly argues that what makes a manuscript found in a writer’s fonds unique and valuable is “its proximity to the act of creation, its closeness to the spark or intention of the creative author.” She describes the archivist’s work in the arrangement and description of an author’s fonds as an attempt to reflect or recreate the author’s “thinking space.”

Enniss’ discussion of the auratic qualities of authors’ papers, Harris’ emphasis on the “wildness” of personal archives, and Hobbs’ focus on “character” and “psychology” are echoed by other archivists working with personal archives and appear to have gained a certain amount of currency in the archival discourse. For example, in a Master’s thesis entitled “Collecting Our Thoughts and Re-collecting Our Stories: The Collection of Personal Records in Archival Institutions,” Leah Sander calls for a recognition of the “human factor” that “renders personal records so distinct from corporate ones,” and looks for evidence of character and personality in the fonds she examines. Sara S. Hodson, writing about the privacy rights and expectations of authors and celebrities, suggests that most of the value of a collection of personal papers is located in those papers that are the most “intimate,” “sensitive” and revealing of their creator’s personal

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36 Enniss, 117-118. The poet and librarian Philip Larkin also referred to this quality of literary archives, which he called their “magical value.” Quoted in Baker et al., 24.


38 Ibid., 114.

39 Sander, 70.
life, and Amy Tector cites Hobbs’ ideas about the importance of personal archives as evidence of character and attitude as an influence on her decision to acquire the papers of Magdalena Rasekvich, the wife of a well-known Canadian literary figure. Archivists are also using ideas about the connections between character and archival order to make judgements about personality based on the degree of order or disorder in a collection; in an article describing the cataloguing of three English poets’ archives, Jo Klett argues that the poets’ personalities were “very much apparent” from the manner in which materials were packed for transfer to the archive, whether they arrived organized in folders and boxes, or merely stuffed into plastic bags and suitcases. Emerging studies in the field of specifically digital personal archives also tend to link personal archives to the personality and psychology of their creator, and are exploring acts of “personal digital archiving” in relation to concepts borrowed from social psychology such as “self-extension”.

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40 Hodson, 206.


42 Jo Klett, “From Private Horde to Public Collection: Cataloguing the Archives of the Liverpool Poets,” ARC Magazine 249 (May 2010), 22-23. In an article on British literary archives, Jennie Hill and Will Slocombe note that “numerous literary archivists” hold to the belief that “we gain access to an author’s life through his or her papers.” Jennie Hill and Will Slocombe, “No Larkin Around: The Challenges of Contemporary Literary Archives,” Archives 35 (April 2010), 7.

“self-reflectivity”\textsuperscript{44} to determine the ways in which building an archive contributes to an individual’s identity and sense of self.\textsuperscript{45}

The ideas about personal records and record keeping expressed by Hobbs and Harris and supported by the archivists who cite them rest on several suppositions, including the beliefs that personal records are different in nature than other records, that concepts such as “character,” “personality,” and “intention”\textsuperscript{46} can be revealed – to varying extents – in archival material, and that archivists can properly interpret these concepts based on the content and physical order of the materials they acquire. Hobbs casts the archivist as a kind of psychiatrist with the “closest to an all-seeing view” of a creator’s “documentary output” – a view more “all-seeing,” in fact, than the creator’s own.\textsuperscript{47} The archivist is presumed to be able to correctly identify aspects of “character,” “personality,” and “intention” in the archives of individuals and is advised to use these concepts to help her determine how to appraise, arrange and describe personal materials. The personal archive is viewed not only as a reflection of the life of its creator, but also as an extension of that life, and Hobbs describes the creator donating records as “exporting their own life.”\textsuperscript{48} In a similar fashion, Harris cites Tolstoy who claimed “[my] diaries are me,” adding, “My ‘traces’ are not merely ‘evidence’ of ‘me,’ they are part of


\textsuperscript{45} Both Cushing and Kim study the personal digital archiving practices of creators during the period that the archives are being formed by the creators, i.e., before they are taken into archival custody.

\textsuperscript{46} Hobbs, “New Approaches to Canadian Literary Archives,” 113.

\textsuperscript{47} Hobbs, “The Character of Personal Archives,” 132.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 133.
who I am.” In these statements, Hobbs and Harris imply that the life, and indeed, the inner life, of the creator is somehow mirrored in the documents her or she creates, keeps and eventually donates to an archival repository; the archive is believed to provide a window that might open into the mind of the individual that lived and breathed outside the archive.

But is the idea that personal archives can reveal the “character,” “personality,” or “intention” of their creator supportable? Although there has been a long-standing tendency within the archival tradition to assume that there is a natural and obvious correlation between a group of records and their creator, in other disciplines the notion that “character,” “personality” or “intention” can be relayed through text has been disputed, and in the following section of this chapter, I turn to one such discipline to provide an additional perspective on the making and keeping of personal archival material. Since the late 1980s especially, literary scholars have engaged in the study of various forms of personal writing. Using the term “life writing” to cover a wide range

49 Harris, 17.

50 Classical theorists like Muller, Feith, and Fruin argued that the arrangement of a group of records acted as a kind of mirror of the administrative body that produced it, and Italian archivist Giorgio Cencetti believed that “the original order given to the archive by its creator was the manifestation...and in some ways the very ‘essence’ of the records creator.” This is an idea to which I will return. For Cencetti’s quote see: Maurizio Savoja and Stefano Vitali, “Authority Control for Creators in Italy: Theory and Practice,” Journal of Archival Organization 5 (2007): 123.

51 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, leading scholars of the genre, define life writing as “writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject.” Marlene Kadar identifies as life writing various forms of writing “about the ‘self,’” including such forms of autobiography, letters and diaries. Most recently, life writing scholars have expanded the definition to include such forms as Web pages and blogs, ethnography, case studies and personal interviews, photograph albums and home movies, etc. See: Smith and Watson, 3; Kadar, 4-5; Paul John Eakin, “Introduction: Mapping the Ethics of Life Writing,” in The Ethics of Life Writing, ed. Paul John Eakin (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1; Claire Lynch, “Trans-genre Confusion: What Does Autobiography Think It Is?” in Life Writing: Essays on Autobiography, Biography and Literature, ed. Richard Bradford (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 210.
of personal texts, including diaries, letters and other forms often found in personal archives, these scholars complicate – when they do not outright reject – the idea that such texts are capable of revealing the inner self or adequately reflecting the lives of their creators. Their perspectives offer archivists a new lens through which to understand the creation process, and suggest the need to think more critically about personal archives.

The literature on life writing

The critical literature on life writing ranges across a broad number of personal writing forms, including autobiography, biography, memoirs, diaries, letters, blogs, photographs, scrapbooks, personal testimonies, interviews, ethnography, case studies, medical files, etc. Scholars from numerous disciplines have studied life writing and considered how personal experience and personal writing work in their areas: for example, the use of life writing by patients suffering from disabilities or illness has been studied by sociologists;\textsuperscript{52} psychologists have explored the connections between life writing and trauma;\textsuperscript{53} and anthropologists have discussed how life writing texts can inform the study of stereotyping and identity formation.\textsuperscript{54} Life writing is now “widely taught” in universities and colleges across disciplines from “literary, philosophical,


psychological, and cultural perspectives.” Here, I focus on life writing as it has been studied by literary scholars both because it is the most well-established disciplinary perspective on life writing – literary scholars having been the first to begin an investigation of the nature of autobiography, diaries, letters and related genres – and because, as has been explained, my research focuses on the archives of literary authors.

In their book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, leading life writing scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson discuss the history of life writing criticism, identifying in it three “waves,” which each correspond to evolving “notions of personhood,” and which I will briefly summarize as context to the discussion of specific life writing forms that follows. The first wave of life writing criticism focused particularly on works formally identified as autobiography and early critics took for granted that the autobiographer was autonomous and enlightened, exercising agency and free will. The accepted canon of autobiographical texts during this period included the autobiographies of so-called ‘Great Men,’ which followed teleological patterns of development and which were unquestioningly considered to be broadly representative of both the man and the period during which he lived and wrote. Second-wave critics, influenced by new ways of understanding concepts such as “self” and “truth” suggested by Marxism, by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and by the linguistic theories of de Saussure began to conceive of autobiography not so much as a “transcription” of the past life of its author, but as a “process through which a narrator struggles to shape an

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56 Smith and Watson, 112, 121.
‘identity’” as he reflects on his experiences and emotions. These critics questioned the “simplistic notion that writers could ‘intend’ what they say” and argued that the “project of self-representation could no longer be read as direct access to the truth of the self.” In the third wave of life writing criticism, which is ongoing, critics continue to focus on the “selected” and constructed ‘I’ and to respond to the critiques of notions of self and truth that have attended the growth of postmodern, poststructural and postcolonial thinking. As well, they attempt to place the autobiographical act within its historical and cultural moment, emphasizing its situated and dialogic nature. In the following sections of this chapter, I review some of this second- and third-wave criticism, particularly as it relates to two specific genres – the diary and the letter – both of which make frequent appearances in personal archives.

“Private theatres for an audience of one:” Performing the self in letters

In a much-cited book that claims to consider the “flawed” nature of biography as a genre, Janet Malcolm describes private letters as “the true cross” of the biographer, the searched for key to the private mind of the public individual:

Letters are the great fixative of experience. Time erodes feeling. Time creates indifference. Letters prove to us that once we cared. They are the

57 Ibid., 124-125.
58 Ibid., 143-145.
fossils of feeling. This is why biographers prize them so: they are biography’s only conduit to unmediated experience.\textsuperscript{60}

Compare this statement with Janna Malamud Smith’s description of her own letter-writing practice:

I make order by at once evoking and creating a persona…through which I interpret and organize experience. While this might sound like a disingenuous enterprise, I am only highlighting how the self is rather a vast archives of selves, each one an internalized two-persona relationship expressive of a slightly different nuance of psyche and experience.\textsuperscript{61}

Smith’s description implies that the experience conveyed in private letters is hardly unmediated: as a form of communication in writing, the private letter is mediated both through the writer’s understanding of his or her relationship with the addressee and by the writer’s rhetorical intent. Smith focuses on the effect of the relationship between the writer and addressee on the letter written, describing the different letters she might write to her husband and to a close female friend while on holiday. In each case, the tone and content of the letter are fashioned according to her “sense” of the recipient and of the nature of their relationship. The self that Smith constructs in each letter reflects not only her own sense of self, but also her sense of how that self exists in relationship with the letter’s addressee.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 110.


\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 153-154.
Catherine Stimpson, writing about the letters of Virginia Woolf, coins the term “sociograph” to describe the way letters “form an autobiography of the self with others,” inscribing the writer as a “citizen/denizen of relationships.” Warning readers that they should not expect to find in Woolf’s letters a wholly “intimate and honest” expression of the self, Stimpson instead characterizes Woolf’s letter-writing voice as “consistently undependable.” The unreliability of Woolf’s voice is largely due to the way her letters take shape in response to her sense of audience. Like Smith, Woolf tailors the tone and content of her letters to her perception of their particular recipients. In a letter to her friend Gerald Brenan, Woolf remarks, “Writing to Lytton [Strachey, another friend] or to Leonard [Woolf, her husband] I am quite different from writing to you.” This is a characteristic of her letter-writing which Nigel Nicholson, editor of the several volumes of her correspondence, also remarks on, noting that: “In writing to Lytton Strachey, she gave rein to more malice; to Roger Fry, more deference; to Saxon Sydney-Turner, more affection; to Margaret Llewelyn Davies, more teasing respect.”

Stimpson compares Woolf’s letter-writing process to the creation of “a series of private theatres for an audience of one;” in each letter Woolf enacts a drama based, at least in part, on her awareness of the “needs and nature” of her audience, and as a

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64 Quoted in Stimpson, 169.

dramatic act, letter writing involves her in a type of role playing. In a letter to Jacques Reverat, Woolf describes the kind of performance letter writing demands:

The difficulty of writing letters is, for one thing, that one has to simplify so much, and hasn’t the courage to dwell on the small catastrophes which are of such huge interest to oneself; and thus has to put on a kind of unreal personality; which, when I write to you for example, whom I’ve not seen these 11 years, becomes inevitably jocular… [italics added]

The performative nature of letter writing is recognized also by other scholars of the genre. For example, Nicky Hallett describes the way that letter writers frequently convey different moods and desires and reveal different aspects of their personality and psyche to different correspondents, even in letters written on the same day and treating the same subjects. Letter writers, she argues, are able to strategically arrange the self they wish to project to their reader(s). Margareta Jolly argues that this tendency for letter writers to perform different personae complicates discussions of the letter’s truth status. Readers, she warns, must “be suspicious of the assumption that [letters] are the spontaneous outpourings of the true self.” Instead, they need to recognize the “subtle interchange between fantasy, writing and relationship” that characterizes the genre.

Agreeing with Charles A. Porter that the “I” in the letter is “to some extent a fabrication

66 Stimpson, 169.

67 Quoted in Stimpson, 170.


or ‘fiction’ not necessarily identical to its author,“\textsuperscript{70} Jolly suggests that the ‘truth’ of the letter is not to be found in a correspondence between the letter and its writer, but is located rather in the performance of the relationship between writer and addressee.

Janet Malcolm’s understanding of letters as “conduit[s] to unmediated experience” is repudiated in these other scholars’ characterizations of letter writing as a self-conscious and self-constructing act. In an interview on the subject of letter writing and biography, Thomas Mallon and Hermione Lee discuss the way that writers’ letters in particular are always in some ways performative: deliberate works of self-presentation intended to project a particular image or writerly persona. Mallon observes that once a writer has achieved a certain level of success and recognition, his letters “stiffen” and “a certain self-consciousness comes over them;” the letter is no longer “just a friendly communication,” but also a record for posterity, written in the knowledge that someday it will be used to help write biography.\textsuperscript{71} In a similar fashion, in an article recounting her experience editing Australian writer Marjorie Barnard’s correspondence, Maryanne Dever notes Barnard’s keen awareness of the value of her letters and argues that these letters must not be viewed as “transparent expressions of the private being;” letters, she suggests, offer their writers the opportunity to don in the moment of writing – as Virginia Woolf wrote she did – “fleeting – or flirting – masks,” and writers who are aware of the


literary and biographical value of their letters often recognize this opportunity to present
and preserve an ideal version of themselves.72

“A very imperfect picture”: The self and its variants in the diary

Diary scholar Irina Paperno believes the diary73 has been granted “a peculiar
status” as an “as-if text.” “We write and read the diary as if it is a private text capable of

72 Maryanne Dever, “‘A Friendship That is Grown on Paper’: Reflections on Editing Marjorie Barnard’s
Letters to Nettie Palmer,” Antipodes 19 (June 2005), 16. In Chapter 3, I will have more to say about self-
consciousness and awareness of posterity in writers’ letters and diaries. It is not uncommon to read in
writers’ correspondence of their concerns regarding the eventual publication – with or without their consent
– of their personal letters. Margaret Laurence, whose archives will be discussed throughout this
dissertation, and frequent correspondent Al Purdy referred often to the future publication of some or all of
their letters. Ted Hughes, knowing that his lover Assia Wevill was saving the letters he wrote to her,
explained that this knowledge “oppress[ed]” him so that he was unable to “write freely.” While the anxiety
over the eventual fate of their letters led writers like Hughes and Muriel Spark – who considered the sale
of letters written by her to a former lover the utmost betrayal – to avoid writing personal letters or to beg their
correspondents to destroy their letters, other writers have recognized the opportunity the letter genre
provides to project what Dever calls an “ideal self:” L.M. Montgomery, another writer whose archives will
be explored in later chapters, aware of her letters’ eventual biographical and literary value used them to
help fashion a particular view of her life and work. See: Margaret Laurence and Al Purdy, Margaret
Laurence – Al Purdy: A Friendship in Letters: Selected Correspondence, ed. John Lennox (Toronto:
McClelland & Stewart, 1993); Ted Hughes, Letters of Ted Hughes, ed. Christopher Reid (London: Faber
and Faber, 2007); Martin Stannard, Muriel Spark: The Biography (New York and London: W.W. Norton
and Company, 2009), 308; Paul Tiessen and Hildi Froese Tiessen, “Epistolary Performance: Writing Mr
[sic] Weber,” in The Intimate Life of L.M. Montgomery, ed. Irene Gammel (Toronto: University of Toronto
Press, 2005), 222-238.

73 In this dissertation, I use the terms “diary” and “journal” interchangeably. Robert Fothergill points out
that the two terms have been used interchangeably in the English tradition of diary writing, but concedes
that if there is a “shadowy difference in connotation,” it is that the term “journal” may sometimes be used
to suggest a “more formal, slightly more serious” endeavour, while the term “diary” suggests “something
more user friendly.” The “journal” might be more publicly oriented and the diary more confessional.
However, diarists themselves frequently confound the question of terminology; Fanny Burney, who
professes to write a strictly private text and whose approach is certainly “user friendly” calls her book a
journal, while Virginia Woolf, who vows to “banish the soul” from her text in an effort to maintain her
privacy when it is eventually read (as she seems to know it must be), calls her book a “diary.” In the entry
on “Diaries and Journals” in The Encyclopedia of Life Writing, Rachel Cottam explains that both terms are
regularly used to name a type of text that has proven to be difficult to define generically, characterized as it
is by “hybridity and diversity.” See: Robert A. Fothergill, “One Day at a Time: The Diary as Lifewriting,”
a/b: Auto/Biography Studies 10 (Spring 1995), 81-91; Judy Simons, Diaries and Journals of Literary
and Journals: General Survey,” in The Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical
communicating an ‘authentic’ self and an ‘immediate’ experience.” As Paperno’s words suggest, the idea that the diary reveals an ‘authentic’ self rests on assumptions about the privacy of the diary text and the immediacy of the writing moment. Steven Rendall associates immediacy with the “well formulated…classical topos – often invoked by diarists – of non-selectivity…whatever comes into the mouth goes onto the page, without premeditation…without guile.” As a spontaneous text, the diary is presumed to be written at the same time as or shortly after the experiences and emotions it describes occur or are felt. The narrative that is produced is composed without the benefit of hindsight and the diary writer, “caught up in the imperative of events” is unable to “impose a unified pattern on the immediacy of day-to-day life.” This immediacy of the diary is often compared to the retrospection inherent in more formal autobiographical genres. The promise that the diary is written in the moment is tantamount to a claim that “the evidence has not been tampered with.” As Robert Fothergill points out, the “relatively unmanaged nature of the final text, free from the master-minding of the autobiographer, becomes a promise of a particular kind of authenticity.”

The diary is also presumed to have a “special relationship to privacy, intimacy, and secrecy.” Although diary scholars have shown that diary writing was not always a

78 Paperno, 562.
solitary and secret activity, there is nonetheless a common perception that one of the most important generic features of the diary is its lack of an audience other than the diarist herself. Andrew Hassam explains that typically the degree to which diarists write only for themselves is considered an “index of the sincerity of the diarist;” jointly-written or public diaries are “devalued” as documents of “self-revelation.” Similarly, diary scholar Harriet Blodgett insists it is “common sense” to realize that the diarist who writes for a known audience must “adulterate her self-expression considerably.” In contrast, the diarist who writes in private and only for herself is thought to be able to represent herself and her feelings truthfully, to speak in an authentic voice. Interestingly, popular beliefs about the diary’s immediacy and sincerity seem to persist even in the ever-mounting presence of publicly-oriented diaries. In an article about online diaries, or blogs, Laurie McNeill demonstrates that blog readers continue to expect and demand “unmediated honesty” from the bloggers who write them, despite the fact that blogs are generally written specifically to be read by a known and unknown public. McNeill muses that the “faith” blog readers have in bloggers’ “identity claims” is a result of continuing “popular

79 Judy Simons notes, for example, that during the nineteenth century diaries were frequently shared between family members or close friends and explains that women often kept diaries in order to provide a “communal chronicle of domestic life.” Examples of communal or shared diaries are described by, among others, Jane H. Hunter and Simon Marsden. Hunter explains that young girls who kept diaries in the nineteenth century frequently did so under the guidance of their parents and/or tutors, who supplied advice about subject matter and style, and who expected access to the texts. Marsden describes how sisters Emily and Anne Brontë joined together in the production of a unique type of diary for which they established at the beginning of their joint enterprise a number of dates, spread out over many years, on which they would each compose entries. See: Simons, 5-6; Jane H. Hunter, “Inscribing the Self in the Heart of the Family: Diaries and Girlhood in Late-Victorian America,” American Quarterly 44 (March 1992), 51-81; Simon Marsden, “Imagination, Materiality and the Act of Writing in Emily Brontë’s Diary Papers,” Nineteenth-Century Contexts 28 (March 2006), 35-47.

80 Hassam, 24.

conceptions of the diary as unmediated, artless, and therefore honest, and somehow less
manipulative than other autobiographical forms.”

Despite these popular beliefs about the diary’s nature, diary scholars challenge the
idea that an ‘authentic’ self is necessarily represented in diaries, even in cases where they
are written in the moment and in secret. As with scholars of the letter genre, the focus of
many diary scholars is on the degree to which self-representation involves self-projection
and -construction. Rather than mirroring an authentic self, the diary involves the diarist in
the construction of a “fictional persona, a version of the self that the diarist wishes to
project, however unconsciously.” Rejecting what Rendall called the “classical
topos…of non-selectivity,” many diary theorists instead emphasize the decision processes
inherent in composition, and Fothergill explains that in the same way the diarist selects
from the ‘material’ of his life what events and feelings to record, so he adopts a
“particular stance, posture, self-dramatization,” selecting, consciously or not, a particular
representation of himself in the “diary persona.”

Diarists themselves frequently comment on the disparity between the images of
themselves exposed in their diaries and their sense of themselves outside the text, often
observing that the diary provides only a partial or one-sided view. For example, Mary
Shelley, who tended to write in her diary primarily during times of difficulty, recorded
the following in her diary:

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83 Simons, 12.
84 Fothergill, 86.
It has struck me what a very imperfect picture (only no one will ever see it) these querulous pages afford of me. This arises from their being the record of my feelings, and not of my imagination.85

Concerned that her diary presented too dark and depressing a version of her sensibility, Shelley on one occasion purposefully recorded happier feelings in an effort to balance the diary’s presentation:

As I have until now recurred to this book to discharge into it the overflowings of a mind too full of the bitterest waters of life so will I tonight...put down some of my milder reveries; that when I turn it over, I may not only find a record of my most painful thoughts.86

Virginia Woolf noted a similar imbalance in her diaries, stating: “It is unfortunate for truth’s sake that I never write here except when jangled with talk. I only record the dumps & the dismals & then very barely.”87 For artist and writer Cynthia Asquith, recognition of the manner in which her diary reflected only certain aspects of her life and character prompted her to wonder “if all diaries are as unrepresentative of their writers as this is of me.”88

Other diarists purposefully embark on the diary-writing project with the aim to discover and describe their true or full selves, but often find themselves commenting on the impossibility of their efforts. For example, although Katherine Mansfield associated

85 Quoted in Thomas Mallon, A Book of One’s Own (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1984), 129.
86 Quoted in Simons, 11.
87 Quoted in Simons, 10.
88 Quoted in Blodgett, 42.
her journal with the “search for an authentic personality,” she also acknowledged the difficulty in confronting herself directly: “I must start my Journal and keep it day by day. But can I be honest? If I lie, it’s no use.” Despite frequently admonishing herself along these lines, Mansfield recognized her inability to “lower [her] mask” until she had “another mask prepared beneath.” Eventually, she concluded that all writing involved the writer in a kind of acting or performance. As Simons notes, Mansfield’s journal-writing efforts expose “the paradox that self-projection inevitably involves personification.”

Simons calls attention to what she describes as a “fundamental difficulty besetting all diarists.” Although the diary might be begun in an attempt to “affirm” the self, the act of writing the self objectifies it and constitutes an “active demonstration of its split nature.” This sense of a fragmented self is exacerbated by the diarist’s awareness of the difference between the self that writes in the present, the self that is read in past entries, and the self of the diary’s future. The painter Ivy Jacquier highlights the fleeting nature of the diary persona as it evolves and changes over time, noting “One never is, one has been or is becoming.” Woolf, too, remarks on the discontinuity that the passage of time in the diary emphasizes, and exclaims: “How queer to have so many selves! How

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89 Quoted in Simons, 159.
90 Simons, 12.
91 Quoted in Simons, 12.
bewildering!"  

As an avid re-reader of her own journals, Woolf was frequently struck by the “natural fragmentation of the personality through time.”

Writers’ diaries often expose an additional type of ‘split’ that between the public self and the private self. Within the private space of the diary, the persona (or personae) that materializes may differ significantly from the self that the writer projects in more formal writing and in public life. Simons shows that this is especially true in diaries of nineteenth-century women writers such as Louisa May Alcott, whose diary reveals the ways in which she railed against the traditional view of womanhood that many felt she idealized in her most famous novel, *Little Women*, but suggests that it remains true, too, for modern diarists. As we shall see in the next chapter, the difference between the public face of beloved children’s author L.M. Montgomery and the persona divulged in her lengthy journals surprised and disturbed many who had known her during her lifetime.

The comments of writers like Shelley, Woolf and Mansfield point both to the dangers involved in assuming that a diary is capable of revealing the ‘real’ life and character of its writer and to the tendency of the diary to contain multiple versions of the self. Rather than presenting readers with a coherent and unified portrait of its writer, the diary emphasizes discontinuity, fragmentation, and multiplicity. This fact encourages

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92 Quoted in Simons, 183.

93 Simons, 183.


95 In an article in which she describes the process of editing Montgomery’s journals, Mary Rubio describes her encounters with some of these bewildered and disappointed acquaintances and fans. Mary Rubio, “‘A Dusting Off’: An Anecdotal Account of Editing the L.M. Montgomery Journals,” in *Working in Women’s Archives: Researching Women’s Private Literature and Archival Documents*, eds. Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001), 51-63.
Felicity A. Nussbaum to view the diary as a “site of contest between ideologies of the unitary self and the more discontinuous subject.” 96 Tracing the diary to its seventeenth-century roots, Nussbaum argues that it was always “tolerant of multiple subjectivities and discourses” even at a time when contemporary philosophical thought posited the “unified” and “rational” subject as the centre of all meaning. 97 Contrasting the diary genre to more formal autobiographical genres, Nussbaum conceives of it as a narrative form that necessarily calls into question dominant ideologies of the self as a “coherent and continuous identity.” 98 Kay K. Cook describes a similar contrast between traditional autobiography and the diary, arguing that whereas conventional autobiographical narratives function to construct a harmonized and linear view of the self, the “immersed” perspective that is characteristic of the diary inherently reflects a self that is multiple, decentred, paratactic and resistant. 99

The ‘self’ in life writing, theorized

This discussion of the self in letters and diaries indicates the ways in which scholars of both genres question the popular belief that private documents provide a window into the hearts and minds of their creators. Instead, life writing theorists tend to believe that both letter writing and diary writing involve writers in what Sidonie Smith refers to as a “performatve act.” Smith rejects the notion that any type of

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97 Ibid.

98 Ibid., 134.

autobiographical telling is a “self-expressive act” in which a writer’s “psychic interior” – “ontologically whole, seamless, and ‘true’” – is transmitted through the autobiographical text. Instead, Smith argues that “narrative performativity constitutes interiority.” In other words, rather than accepting that a unified interior ‘self’ waits to be revealed in autobiographical texts, Smith asserts there is “no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating.” Instead, in the act of creating the autobiographical text, the narrator performs interiority, assembling and arranging the performance from a variety of ‘scripts’ available to her that include her own experiences, thoughts and feelings, as well as more communal cultural and socio-historical scripts. Interiority is, in this view, an effect of the text rather than its source.100

Smith’s discussion of the performative nature of broadly autobiographical narratives reflects the shift in theories of life writing and autobiography away from a view of identity as unchanging and essential, as “something that either guides, or must be discovered” by the life writer, to a view of identity as multiple and of the self as consisting of diverse “local or temporary” selves that can and do “exist simultaneously and independently” from each other.101 Her discussion also emphasizes the complicated relationship between the self that writes and the self, or selves, performed in the text. As she puts it, “the narrator is both the same and not the same as the autobiographer, and the narrator is both the same and not the same as the subject of narration.”102


102 Sidonie Smith, “Performativity,” 18.
The difference between autobiographer, narrator, and subject is the topic of Barry N. Olshen’s essay “Subject, Persona and the Self in the Theory of Autobiography.” Olshen begins by noting that although the terms “self” and “subject” are frequently interchanged and confused in the literature on life writing, they must be considered as distinct from each other. He proposes also a third term to be considered: “persona.” In Olshen’s view, only the “subject” is capable of speaking or writing autobiographically. The “self,” which he admits is the most difficult term to define, is a “kind of subjective structure (that is, one belonging to the subject)” that corresponds to the subject’s “conscious and unconscious, psychological and somatic sense of his or her own identity.” The self, in other words, is really the subject’s “sense of self,” and it is this sense of self that the subject attempts to express. However, Olshen suggests, it is more accurate to describe the subject as creating a “persona.” This persona is “entirely constituted through discourse,” existing only in the text itself. According to Olshen’s conceptualization then, the “subject” who writes, the “persona” who is written and the “self” are three distinct entities. Life writing, therefore, involves the investigation of the “subject” into the nature of the “self,” and it results in the creation of the “persona;” however, the “self” is only ever partially reconstructed by the “subject” and only ever partially represented by the “persona.”

The relationship between the writer and the written is also discussed in the work of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Like Olshen, Smith and Watson distinguish between different entities involved in “autobiographical acts,” although they classify them

somewhat differently. In the first place, Smith and Watson acknowledge that there exists a “‘real’ or historical ‘I’.” This is the person who writes; however, while the existence of the “‘real’ or historical ‘I’” can usually be verified, this “I” is ultimately “unknown and unknowable” through the life writing text because his or her life and experience are always “far more dispersed” than they appear in any written text. The “narrating ‘I,’” on the other hand, is knowable and accessible to the reader. Smith and Watson distinguish between the “historical ‘I’” and the “narrating “I” in this way: “While the historical ‘I’ has a broad experiential history extending a lifetime back into the past, the narrating ‘I’ calls forth only that part of the experiential history linked to the story he is telling” or to the moment of its recording. Finally, Smith and Watson describe an additional ‘I’ that is entirely constructed through discourse (like Olshen’s “persona”) and that therefore exists only in the text. This ‘I,’ the “narrated ‘I,’” is defined as “the version of the self that the narrating ‘I’ chooses to construct” in the text at hand. As this schema makes clear, the correspondence between the “narrated ‘I’” and the “‘real’ or historical ‘I’” is not exact; the written text does not provide direct access to the person who produces it.

Life writing scholars use these ideas about the nature of the ‘selves’ involved in acts of self-representation to argue that there is a textual self that is distinct from the so-called real-life self, and to remind readers of the dangers involved in assuming that they can know the person behind the text. Olshen warns readers that

The relationship of autobiography to the experiencing subject may find an analogue in the trope of the synecdoche, in that the part of the life appears to signify or may mistakenly be used as substitute for the life itself.

104 Smith and Watson, 59-60.
According to such an analogy, autobiography appears to be the ultimate existential synecdoche in which there is continual danger that the part will be perceived as the whole and the whole reduced to its part.\textsuperscript{105}

Olshen’s warning is one that archivists working with personal fonds might do well to keep in mind. Claims that personal archives might reveal the “character” or “personality of the ‘real or historical ‘I’” described in a biographical sketch need to be tempered by the knowledge that the documents within an archive provide only partial representations of their authors.\textsuperscript{106} Furthermore, as archivists are well aware, the archive itself is most often only partial, resulting from the selection activities of archivists and frequently winnowed prior to the archivist’s appraisal by the creator and/or his relatives, executors or friends. Smith and Watson recognize the roles that can be played by ‘outsiders,’ and in addition to considering the variety of ‘I’s involved in life writing, they discuss the impact of individuals who they call “coaxers” or “coercers” on life writing texts. Coaxers and coercers are defined as “any person or institution or set of cultural imperatives that solicits or provokes people to tell their stories.” Coaxers and coercers “are everywhere” and may act overtly or in a more subtle fashion. An editor who helps a writer refine and shape a text, a family member whose influence is felt by a diary writer, or the recipient of a letter being written: each of these is an example of a coaxer or coercer. However it occurs, the concept of coaxing reminds us that the writer does not

\textsuperscript{105} Olshen, 15.

\textsuperscript{106} Hill and Slocombe argue that the only certain characteristic of literary archives is their partialness: “Partiality reigns supreme.” Hill and Slocombe, 9.
write in a vacuum, but is influenced by the advice and opinion of others as well as by broader trends and cultural movements.

**Implications for archival theory: A renewed focus on the life of the archive**

The literature on life writing challenges several common perceptions of personal archives. In the archival literature on personal archives, there is a (perhaps sometimes unconscious) tendency to adopt a Romantic tone, to envision the archival creator as solitary and inspired and the archive itself as an intimate site of revelation. Leading writers on the topic of personal archives focus on concepts such as “character,” “psychology” and “intention” and value the archive for what it may reveal about the creator. Although attempts have so far remained tentative, efforts are being made to reconceptualize the archival work of appraisal and arrangement and description using the notions of “character” and “intention” as guides. In the literature on life writing, on the other hand, theorists view personal writing genres such as diaries, letters and more formal types of autobiography as sites of self-construction and warn readers that it can be difficult to arrive at an accurate assessment of the correlation between the person who writes and the person who appears to take shape in the text. This literature suggests, therefore, that the idea that the archive or the records within it can reliably reflect the personality, character or intentions of its creator may be somewhat naïve. Although an archive might contain a significant amount of personal information about its creator, it is nevertheless, as Olshen points out about autobiographical writing, a “part” and not the “whole;” what the archivist possesses is a creation of the author, and as with any type of
authorial creation (for example, a book or a poem) we must be careful not to presume that it can speak directly to the lived and felt experience of its creator.

However, I would suggest that as an authorial construction, the archive itself is as worthy an object of study as is its primary creator. This is an approach that is beginning to be explored by some archivists. At the Third International Conference on the History of Records and Archives (I-CHORA3) in September 2007, Peter Horsman and Geoffrey Yeo both delivered papers that recounted the history of particular groups of personal papers. In the case discussed by Yeo, a group of papers is dispersed over time and then re-collected in a repository; the original order of the papers has been disturbed, the papers have passed through several hands, and papers that were not part of the original group have been added. Horsman’s paper described the history of the Vriesendorp family archive, an archive that grew out of the efforts of a self-appointed family archivist who determined what the archive should contain and how it should be arranged. Both presentations intimated that traditional archival concepts and principles that encourage archivists to organize archives to reflect the lives of their creators have led to misrepresentations of the archival body at hand. In each case, the archival body (or bodies), despite conforming poorly to traditional preconceptions, was deemed to possess an integrity that ought to be represented through archival description.


Both Horsman and Yeo advocate an attention to the history of a group of records’ accumulation that is not subordinate to its original context of creation. This is a recurring theme in recent archival literature, but is not necessarily new. In the late 1980s, Debra Barr called for greater significance to be placed upon the history of a record’s use and transmission over time. Respecting provenance, she believed, entailed “reflecting more than one aspect [i.e., the record’s original context of creation only] of the complex history of many records.” Since the late 1990s and 2000s, and especially with the emergence of a postmodern strain in the archival literature, the significance of the history of an archive’s accumulation has been acknowledged by many more archivists. Laura Millar, for example, suggests that the archival concept of provenance should be expanded to include not only creator history, but also records history and custodial history, while Tom Nesmith has argued that “archiving” is an “ongoing process” that is affected by


110 The postmodern turn in archival theory has had a profound impact on archivists’ thinking about how archives are shaped and reshaped over time. Although I do not include an account of the precise effect of postmodernism on archival thinking, my discussions in this section on increasing awareness of the significance of the history of a body of records, and in chapters 4 and 5 on current interpretations of the principle of provenance draw on the insights of the archivists who have been part of the postmodern turn. See, for example: Terry Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts,” Archival Science 1 (March 2001), 3-24; Terry Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives,” Archivaria 51 (Spring 2001),14-35; Cook, “What is Past is Prologue,” 17-63; Tom Nesmith, “Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives,” American Archivist 65 (Spring/Summer 2002), 24-41; Tom Nesmith, “Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate: Some Thoughts on the ‘Ghosts’ of Archival Theory,” Archivaria 47 (Spring 1999), 136-150; Verne Harris, “Claiming Less, Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations of Archives in South Africa,” Archivaria 44 (Fall 1997), 132-141; Verne Harris, “On (Archival) Odyssey(s),” Archivaria 51 (Spring 2000), 2-13; Preben Mortensen, “The Place of Theory in Archival Practice,” Archivaria 47 (Spring 1999), 1-26; Brien Brothman, “The Limits of Limits: Derridean Deconstruction and the Archival Institution,” Archivaria 36 (Autumn 1993), 205-20.

various actions over time and by the different social and historical contexts in which records are created, used, and preserved.¹¹²

This emphasis on record creation as an ongoing process requires archivists to pay more attention to a variety of agents and actions that shape the structure and meaning of an archive. This point of view, which is compatible with the view of personal writing presented in the literature on life writing, suggests that by studying, describing and accounting for the decisions and actions that have led to an archive’s construction and evolution over time, archivists can provide a fuller picture of the nature of the archive than they may be able to do by focusing more exclusively on the life and character of the individual responsible for its primary creation.

The literature on life writing reviewed here alongside the recent trends in the theoretical discussion concerning archival creatorship and the historical evolution of the shape and meaning of an archival fonds or collection suggest that more or less purely psychological approaches to personal archives may be too limited in scope; what might be needed is a greater focus on the various processes and agents that shape an archive over time, and on the archive as more of a social and collaborative text, a genre of life writing in itself. In the chapters that follow, these ideas are explored in further detail, within the context of the writers’ archives I studied, with reference to the opinions expressed by the experts I interviewed and in relation to traditional and contemporary interpretations of archival theory.

CHAPTER 3
IN THE ARCHIVES OF WRITERS

In the previous chapter, I explained how the critical literature on life writing points to difficulties archivists might face if they adopt a primarily psychological approach to personal archives. In this chapter, I want to explore in more detail the ways in which a particular category of personal archives’ creators – literary authors – use, consciously or not, their personal writing and their archives to reveal and conceal aspects of their character and personality. The chapter will explore how ideas about the nature of the ‘self’ in life writing texts, the potential discrepancy between the textual ‘I’ and the ‘real-life ‘I,’” the performative nature of life writing, and the influence of others in the shaping of personal texts complicate a psychological approach to personal archives. The chapter begins with a close reading of one particular writer’s life writing and record-keeping practices: L.M. Montgomery’s diary and archive are used as an initial example of the difficulties involved in determining with any certainty who the person behind the archival text might be. With Smith and Watson’s roster of the ‘I’s involved in life writing in mind, and influenced by Montgomery’s example, I posit the existence of two additional ‘I’s – the archiving ‘I’ and the archived ‘I’ – and then look to the archives of other writers to see how these manifest in additional cases. In the second half of the chapter, I consider how – using Smith and Watson’s terms again – “coaxers and coercers” affect the shaping of an archive, and thereby further exacerbate the difficulties inherent in the psychological approach to archival fonds.
L.M. Montgomery’s diary: a private/public record of a life

On September 21, 1889, at the age of fourteen, L.M. Montgomery penned the first entry of the diary that she kept until just before her death fifty-three years later. In this first entry, Montgomery confesses that she had kept a diary “of a kind” since the age of nine but that she had burned it that day because it was “silly” and “very dull” and she was “ashamed of it.” She intends for her new diary to be more interesting, promising that she will write only when she has “something worth writing about.” She also insists that “last but not least – I am going to keep this book locked up!!”¹

Montgomery’s stated intentions reveal that she originally conceived of her diary as a completely private document. In later years, too, she noted that she kept her diaries locked up in a trunk for which only she possessed a key and explained that she did not want “anyone…[to] have access to those diaries.”² As numerous diary scholars have pointed out, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, the presumed privacy of the diary is one of its distinguishing generic features. Traditionally, diary writing has been

¹ Montgomery, The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery: Volume I, eds. Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 1. Throughout this chapter, I refer to the published selected journals. In their introductions to the various volumes, Rubio and Waterston explain that the selected journals include some omissions but that these are of “entries that are either repetitive or non-essential to the unfolding drama of Montgomery’s life.” During my research visit to Guelph, I was able to confirm that this was largely the case; for the most part, the overall tenor of the selected journals is true to that of the originals in the L.M. Montgomery collection and material omitted is primarily descriptive or reflective in a similar vein to included entries. Some of the material that is omitted in the published journals seems also to have been removed in an attempt to protect individuals named and discussed by Montgomery. For example, Montgomery’s accounts of her friendship and falling out with a female fan are curtailed in the published version (see f.n.43). In 2012, a complete volume of the journals from the years 1889 to 1900 was published, which includes earlier, omitted entries. See: L.M. Montgomery, The Complete Journals of L.M. Montgomery: The PEI Years, 1889-1900, eds. Mary Henley Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, “Introduction,” in The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery: Volume I, eds. Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), xxiii.

understood as a private activity and the diary as a place where intimate thoughts and feelings are recorded. Nevertheless, many diary scholars call attention to the paradoxical fact that by virtue of having been written diaries invite reading and have found a number of ways to challenge the conceptualization of diaries as a completely private type of text.

Lynn Z. Bloom, in an often cited article titled “‘I Write for Myself and Strangers’: Private Diaries as Public Documents,” insists that “it is a mistake to think of diaries as a genre composed primarily of ‘private writings’ even if they are – as in many women’s diaries – a personal record of private thoughts and activities, rather than public events.” Bloom distinguishes between what she calls the “truly private diary” and the “public private diary.” “Truly private diaries” are those that make no concession to an outside reader. These are “written with neither art nor artifice” and are “so terse they seem coded.” The authors of “truly private diaries” do not introduce ‘characters’ or analyze them in depth, and nor do they provide background information to explain events or feelings described. Because of these characteristics of “truly private diaries”, “no reader outside the author’s immediate society or household could understand them without extra-textual information.” Bloom defines the “public private diary” in almost binary opposition to the “truly private diary.” “Public private diaries” are more artfully composed than “truly private diaries” and provide contextual details that allow them to be

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read by outsiders with little or no difficulty. They are “essentially freestanding public
documents, artfully shaped to accommodate an audience.”

Bloom’s conceptualization of the private and/or public nature of the diary
develops out of her desire to claim the diary as a literary genre. The distinctions she
makes between the two types of diary are in fact distinctions between artfully and
artlessly composed texts, and she assumes that the diarist who explains herself and who
writes with an awareness of the literary quality of her work invites an audience and
expects to be read. Other diary critics adopt a more nuanced understanding of the type of
audience for whom diaries are composed. Simons acknowledges that “by their choice of
mode as written documents all diaries imply readership,” but recognizes also that the
reader and writer may simply be “one and the same.” Indeed, Simons suggests that
reading the journal can be as important to its author as writing it:

…both activities validate personal experience, attach importance to the
daily round of mundane events, and by so doing establish the diarist’s own
sense of worth. Many diarists consequently write knowingly to
themselves, verifying the fact of their own identity in the habitual dialogue
they conduct with themselves.6

Reflecting on her own diary-writing habits, Gail Godwin describes this type of dialogue.
“I write,” she notes, “for my future self, as well as my present mood. And sometimes, to
set the record straight, I jot down a word or two in my old diaries to my former self – to

5 Ibid., 28.
6 Simons, 10.
encourage, to scold, to correct, or to set things in perspective.”\(^7\) Wendy J. Wiener and George C. Rosenwald have similarly highlighted the “peculiar relationship of the diarist to time;” diarists may use their diaries to “hoard up the past” as well as to allow “past and present selves” to converse with each other, at the same time as they write for or to their future selves.\(^8\)

Montgomery was an avid reader of her own diaries. Throughout the journals, there are many descriptions of afternoons and evenings spent reading over old journals, and the most obvious of Montgomery’s imagined readers is her future self. Reflecting on the contents of the first volume of her diary, Montgomery states that she had kept it “as a record of [her] doings which might be of interest to [her] in after years,”\(^9\) and in her “after years” Montgomery found that the journals were not only interesting, but were capable of transporting her back to happier days. In 1904, Montgomery notes that she has been reading over the part of her diary written while she lived in Prince Albert with her father and enjoyed the company of exceptionally close friends she made at school there. She writes: “It brought back those days and sensations with almost startling vividness. That is what I like best in diary keeping – its power to reproduce past scenes and feelings and emotions.”\(^10\) Again, in 1909, Montgomery describes another day spent reading the journals of her “schooldays.” At this time, Montgomery was suffering from nervous

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unrest and anxiety and she found it impossible to look “hopefully forward to the future.” Instead, she chose to “look backward to sunny spots in the past,” which the diary could bring vividly back to her.¹¹ In later years, she turned with increasing frequency to her carefully preserved journals, willing herself to be “bewitched back into the past,”¹² and although she found the contrast between the happiness of her young girlhood and the wretchedness of many of her later years to be “very very dreadful,”¹³ she also clearly found in her re-reading a source of sustenance and fulfillment.

Montgomery’s future self is not the diary’s only addressee, however; in a sense, Montgomery perceived the diary itself as an audience. Wiener and Rosenwald describe the way that diary writers can use their diaries to objectify the self. The diary becomes a mirror in which the writer observes her “objectified self,” whether for purposes of surveillance or for developing self-awareness. Although this impulse can be observed in Montgomery’s journals – particularly in those entries where she analyzes her mental state – she reveals an equally strong impulse to personify the diary. Especially after she gave up teaching to care for her grandmother following her grandfather’s death, Montgomery addresses her journal as a friend and confidant. She explains a change in tone and content between the first and second volumes of the diary, noting that while the first volume seems to have been written by “a rather shallow girl, whose sole aim was to ‘have a good time’ and who thought of little else than the surface play of life,” the second volume

¹¹ Ibid., 364.
“gives the impression of a morbid temperament, generally in the throes of nervousness and gloom.” The difference between the two volumes is due largely, she believes, to the fact that the first volume was not required as a confidant but, as mentioned above, was conceived of primarily as an interesting record for her future self. The later volume, written at a time when Montgomery felt she had outgrown old friendships and was becoming increasingly isolated, became “the refuge of [her] sick spirit,” a friend to whom she could turn “when loneliness and solitude had broken down [her] powers of endurance.”

Throughout the many years during which she writes, Montgomery refers frequently to her diary as a much-needed friend and as her “only safe outlet.” On January 3, 1904, she reflects on her reasons for keeping a diary:

The other day I came across this sentence in a magazine: - “It is the unhappy people who keep diaries. Happy people are too busy to keep diaries.”

At the time it rather impressed me as clever, but after thinking it over I have decided that it may be epigrammatic but it is not true. To be sure, I am not exactly a happy person; but I kept a diary and enjoyed doing so when I was quite happy. Besides, if being busy made people happy I ought to be a very happy mortal. No, the epigram should have read, “It is the lonely people who keep diaries” – people who are living solitary lives and have no other outlets for their moods and tenses. When I have anybody to

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15 Ibid.
‘talk it over with’ I don’t feel the need of a diary so strongly. When I haven’t I must have a journal to overflow in. It is a companion – and a relief.\textsuperscript{16}

In 1910, when she is nearing the end of the particular notebook in which she was writing, she confesses that she feels a “curious regret as if I were parting from some real old friend and confidant. This book has been a friend to me. Without it I verily believe I should have gone under.”\textsuperscript{17} Eleven years later, coping with her husband’s mental illness and mourning the death of her closest friend, Montgomery turns to her journal as the only friend to whom she can pour out her problems:

There is nothing to write concerning today. It was just the ordinary one of ceaseless work. But I feel so lonely and sick at heart tonight that I come to my old journal for comforting, as many times of yore. There is no one else I can go to. I have no friend near me to help me in any way. And if I had I could not go to her and say, ‘My husband is in the throes of one of his attacks of recurrent melancholia…’ I cannot say this to anyone.\textsuperscript{18}

From its first pages, Montgomery’s diary defies Bloom’s definition of the “truly private diary.” In her second entry, Montgomery notes that “Pensie came up and asked me to go down and stay all night with her.” This sentence is followed by several sentences describing Pensie and explaining her relationship to Montgomery. Throughout the journals Montgomery provides descriptions of the friends and relatives who people its


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 393.

\textsuperscript{18} Montgomery, \textit{The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery: Volume II}, 399.
pages and explains past incidents that lead to the events of a particular day. Thus, the
diary is easily read and understood by outside readers. It is, in other words, publicly
accessible and therefore, according to Bloom’s understanding, publicly oriented.

However, as we have seen, Montgomery considered her diary (at least during the
first thirty years of its existence) a private text. She took pains to keep it locked and
hidden, and she wrote in its pages of feelings that she felt she could not reveal even to her
closest friends and family. Although she employs literary techniques identified by Bloom
as hallmarks of the “public” diary, she may have done so not in order to make the diary
understandable to outsiders but because she was a writer with an interest in language and
storytelling. Bloom’s categorization of diaries as either “terse,” “coded” and difficult to
read or as “essentially free-standing” carefully-crafted texts requires that any well-
written, descriptive diary be viewed as a publicly-oriented document, but the excerpts
cited above indicate that Montgomery frequently envisioned her diary primarily as a
private text that could provide her with comfort, ease her loneliness and allow her to re-
experience happier times.

The last fact established, however, there is no doubt that in later years
Montgomery grew to view the diary as a potentially public document. Robert Fothergill
suggests that when a diary “grows to a certain length and substance, it impresses upon the
mind of its writer a conception of the completed book it might ultimately be.” From this
point on, the diarist becomes committed not only to the practice of keeping the diary, but
also to the diary as the “book of the self” and a major *oeuvre* in its own right. He points
out that writers will often express the diary’s “importance as an *oeuvre*” by taking
“considerable care over [its] physical condition, transcribing it, making an index, [and] having it handsomely bound.”  

Sometime in the winter of 1918-1919, Montgomery began the arduous task of copying by hand her entire diary, composed in “various ‘blank books’ of equally various shapes and sizes,” into uniform ledgers. She admitted the hard work involved and accepted that it would take her a long time to do, being able to spare only fifteen minutes a day, but felt it would be “a satisfaction when done.” When she decided to recopy the diary, she also decided to illustrate many of the entries by pasting in photographs of the people and scenes she wrote about. In 1930, Montgomery embarked on another copying project; realizing that she could only leave the handwritten journals to one of her sons, she resolved to make a typewritten copy for the other. Montgomery is presumed to have destroyed the original diaries she wrote between 1889 and 1918, and today what survives of her efforts are ten handwritten volumes in legal-sized ledgers, and a heavily marked typescript version of these which she is thought to have been preparing for publication.

Several Montgomery scholars recognize in Montgomery’s decision to copy her journals a concomitant acknowledgement on her part of the journals’ future literary interest and value. In April 1922, when she finishes copying the older journals, Montgomery writes: “This journal is a faithful record of one human being’s life and so


21 Ibid.


should have a certain literary value.” Further, she conceded that her heirs “might publish an *abridged volume* after [her] death” if she has not already done so herself.\(^2^4\) Beginning in early 1917, an awareness of these heirs had started to make itself felt in the diary. On January 5, 1917, Montgomery objects in the diary to comments made by the editor of *The Alpine Path*,\(^2^5\) her autobiographical account of her writing career. This editor had complained that the book contained no accounts of her “love affairs.” Montgomery insists that the “dear public must get along without this particular tid-bit,” but decides that for her own “amusement” she will write a “full and frank – at least as frank as possible” account of her affairs. She adds:

> Possibly my grandchildren – or my great grandchildren – may read it and say, “Why, we remember grandma as a thin, wrinkled, little gray-haired body, always sitting in a warm corner, with a hug-me-tight on, reading a book (If I am ever a grandmother I am going to do nothing but read books and do filet crochet!). Surely she couldn’t really have lived these love stories.”

> Yes, dear unborn grandchildren, I did….\(^2^6\)

Throughout the next few years, Montgomery refers several times to her “descendents” as a future audience for her journals. On January 31, 1920 she writes: “…I have not found anything much pleasanter than talking with the right kind of man – except – but I won’t


write it. My descendents might be shocked.”27 The next year she jots down “a detailed account” of her “doings through the whole week,” suggesting that her “great-great-grandchildren may use it as a peg on which to hang compassionate opinions as to what country ministers’ wives did back in the old-fashioned days a century ago.”28

In 1917, when she first begins to refer to her heirs and descendents, Montgomery was in her early forties and had recently become a mother to two young sons. As she matures and revels in the joy of her own family, Montgomery begins to view her diary as a potentially interesting family document. While copying older entries, she reflects on the memories they recall and uses newer entries to follow up on older stories or to add information and detail. Similarly, if an earlier entry mentions a relative or friend who has not been fully described in the diary, she provides in a new entry a complete character sketch. Occasionally, she seems to directly address her two sons. In one such entry, she writes:

It has just occurred to me that when my sons read this journal after I am dead, if they ever do, they may possibly be inclined to blame their father for not telling me before our marriage that he was subject to recurrent constitutional melancholia. I do not want them to do this, I have never done so….29

In 1922, after allowing that her heirs might publish the diaries, Montgomery begins to refer not only to her descendents, but also to her “readers.” On a train trip to

27 Ibid., 369.

28 Ibid., 395.

Saskatchewan, for example, she records that she bought “a magazine and a box of [her] favorite candy (pecan roll, for the information of readers two hundred years hence!).”\(^\text{30}\)

Montgomery scholars have understood these periodic references to readers and Montgomery’s concession to the future publication of her journals as evidence that she intended her journals to become the public record of her life. Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston argue that as Montgomery “became an increasingly public person, she needed more than ever a secret release for her thoughts.”\(^\text{31}\) However, they also acknowledge that Montgomery eventually came to “think of her handwritten journals as documents that would be read by posterity.”\(^\text{32}\) Margaret E. Turner finds in the journals the “articulation” of a deliberate “separation of [Montgomery’s] public and private lives,”\(^\text{33}\) but believes that Montgomery nevertheless conceived of them as an essentially public record. The fact that she intended them to be made public only after her death allowed her to reveal a more representative self to her eventual readers; Turner argues that Montgomery “recognized with clarity and irony” that her image as a popular writer and minister’s wife “was not the whole of L.M. Montgomery,”\(^\text{34}\) and suggests that by confining her “heretical statements” to her diaries Montgomery kept herself “safe during her own lifetime” while still allowing for the possibility that someday readers would know her better.

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\(^{30}\) Ibid., 112.


\(^{32}\) Ibid., xx.

\(^{33}\) Margaret E. Turner, “‘I mean to try, as far as in me lies, to paint my life and deeds truthfully’: Autobiographical Process in the L.M. Montgomery Journals,” in *Harvesting Thistles: The Textual Garden of L.M. Montgomery*, ed. Mary Henley Rubio (Guelph, Ontario: Canadian Children’s Press, 1994), 93.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 98.
Cecily Devereux also remarks on the ways in which Montgomery addresses a future public in her diaries. Montgomery, Devereux argues, exploits the “paradoxical nature” of the diary genre, “addressing the reader while appearing to address only herself” and “making private revelations while editing and preparing the text for publication.”35 Devereux views the diaries as a means by which Montgomery was able to control the public’s perception of her and of her fiction after her death. She reminds us that Montgomery destroyed the early versions of her diary after she had copied them and that she was known to have “regularly burned letters and papers.”36 In so doing, Montgomery ensured that only what she consciously preserved would survive to represent her posthumously.

According to this view, Montgomery uses her journal not only as an outlet in times of need, but also as a means of establishing a record of her life written from her own point of view. In the diaries, Montgomery frequently scoffs at biographers and critics who “generally imagine a good deal of nonsense,”37 and on reading a biographical sketch of herself in which it was reported that she “lived as a girl in Saskatchewan where [her] grandfather was the postmaster of Avonlea,” she remarks, “Truly, I have come to believe that ‘history is a narrative of things that never happened.’”38 By keeping her


36 Ibid., 245. Stuart MacDonald, Montgomery’s son and literary executor, revealed to Mary Rubio that during Montgomery’s last years she burned a large quantity of papers that she considered unimportant. See Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, “Introduction,” in The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery: Volume I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), xxiv. In her journals, Montgomery frequently refers to burning old letters and papers, especially during the late 1930s.


38 Ibid., 252.
journal, Montgomery may have been hoping to circumvent biographers who would try to
tell her story for her. In a letter to Ephraim Weber she rejects his offer to write her
biography and insists that “Nobody shall.” “Biography,” she claims, “is a screaming
farce. No man or woman was ever truly depicted.”

Devereux calls attention also to a codicil to Montgomery’s will in which she lists
items to be inherited by her son Chester. In the codicil, Montgomery advises her son to
consult her journal for the “full story” of various items on the list. Devereux argues that
these instructions indicate that Montgomery “wanted her journals to be seen as truthful
and accurate sources of information on certain aspects of her life.” In a letter to her
friend G.B. MacMillan, Montgomery similarly suggests that the diary contains the truth
on certain matters. Referring to the lawsuit she brought against the publishers of Anne of
Green Gables after they published a book against her wishes, she writes:

When the suit is finally wound up I will write a special letter telling the
whole weird tale and I’ll send you a copy of the book as well. It may well
be valuable as a ‘curiosity’ in a generation or so, when my ‘diary’ is
published with a full account of the whole transaction. So hang on to it
when you get it!!

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40 L.M. Montgomery, Codicil to her will (copy), June 24, 1941, L.M. Montgomery Collection, XZ1 MS A098008, University of Guelph Library Archival and Special Collections, Guelph, Ontario.

41 Devereux, 241.

Following her stated intention that her journals eventually be published, Montgomery often seems to use the diary not only as a means of establishing a record of her life but also as a means of setting the record straight. In the 1930s, she begins to be bothered by an overly affectionate and demanding fan, who lives nearby and whom she initially befriends, but who begins to disturb and upset her. As she grows increasingly concerned about this friend’s behaviour, Montgomery starts to transcribe into the journal the letters she receives from her as well as her own replies “as proof to my descendentsthat I have not exaggerated my problems.”\(^4\) Similarly, accounts she writes about the reasons her husband felt he had to leave the ministry in Norval read like testimony submitted as evidence in court.\(^4\)

Montgomery also begins to treat her diary as a repository for a variety of documents and mementos that she wishes to keep forever. In the same entry in which she gives permission for her heirs to publish the journals, she adds:

> I desire that these journals never be destroyed but kept as long as the leaves hold together. I leave this to my descendents or my literary heirs as a sacred charge and invoke a Shakespearean curse on them if they disregard it. There is so much of myself in these volumes that I cannot

\(^4\) Montgomery, *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery: Volume IV*, 164. In the published version of the diary, a number of these transcriptions are redacted or omitted entirely; the original diaries include many long entries detailing Montgomery’s problems with this friend. L.M. Montgomery collection, XZ5 MS A001.

\(^4\) See for example *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery: Volume III*, 253-255. Montgomery was quite familiar with court proceedings, having participated as a witness in the many trials involving the L.C. Page Company, publisher of *Anne of Green Gables*, and having observed proceedings against her husband in a local court after a car accident in which he was involved.
bear the thought of their ever being destroyed. It would seem to me like a kind of murder….

Having stated her determination to see the diary preserved, Montgomery begins to add to it other records and souvenirs she has saved. Her habit of using the journal for preservation purposes increased in the last few years of her life, and Montgomery filled the journal with cards, letters and photographs that she found as she rummaged through boxes in her attic or removed from the several scrapbooks she had kept since she was a teenager. Montgomery’s practice of saving special items within the pages of the journal volumes combined with her tendency to burn other types of documents strongly suggests that she intended the journal to stand as the definitive record of her life, the “book of the self” that preserves her image on her own terms.

What, then, was the image Montgomery portrayed of herself in her diary? Mary Rubio, one of the editors of the published journals, remarks on the stir caused by their publication, when people who had known Montgomery during her lifetime as the popular author, devoted mother, cousin and aunt, and cheerful minister’s wife were confronted by an entirely different image of Montgomery as depressed, irritated by her “endless responsibilities,” and almost completely pessimistic. Rubio describes the disappointment felt by former friends and neighbours in the Zephyr-Leaskdale area; to some, Montgomery, a “gracious, generous, indefatigable community worker in life…seemed to have turned into a monster in death.” Rubio also notes Montgomery’s son Stuart Macdonald’s feelings of surprise after reading his mother’s journals and realizing that he

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“hadn’t known the depth of her unhappiness in later life, nor had he ever known the
carefree girl of the early journals.”

The discrepancy between the Montgomery that people thought they knew and the
Montgomery in the journals was so perplexing that Alexandra Heilbron felt compelled to
interview family members, neighbours, former employees and students of the famous
author in the hopes of arriving at a ‘truer’ picture. In her introduction to the book she
wrote based on these interviews, Heilbron explains her motives:

Most of L.M. Montgomery’s books were so sunny and bright that her
readers assumed that the author’s life was exactly like that of the Anne of
Anne of Green Gables, but when her journals were published, a darker
side of L.M. Montgomery emerged. Naturally, this raised questions.
Which L.M. Montgomery was the real Maud (as she preferred to be
called) Montgomery? What was she really like?

Certainly, Montgomery appears to have revealed in her journals a much darker
side of herself than she let show in her daily life. In fact, Montgomery acknowledges in
the journal the differences between how others see her and how she sees herself. As early
as 1903, five years before the publication of Anne of Green Gables, Montgomery
remarks, “To those around me, even my most intimate friends, I am known as a ‘very
joly [sic] girl’, seemingly always light-hearted ‘good company’ and ‘always in good
spirits.’ It makes me laugh rather bitterly to hear people say this.” Montgomery vowed

46 Rubio, 65.

47 Alexandra Heilbron, Remembering Lucy Maud Montgomery (Toronto and Oxford: Dundurn Group,
2001), 13.
not to let her darker side show, not wanting to be pitied by anyone, and was grateful to
her journal for serving as the “one outlet for [her] dark moods,” the depository for “the
bitterness which might otherwise overflow and poison other lives.” As mentioned
above, Montgomery initially valued the privacy of the diary, and even as she began to
conceive of it as a more lasting record of her life, she continued to refer to it as her
“grumble book,” and found comfort and relief in pouring out troubles she felt she could
not share with anyone she knew in her family or public life.

At times Montgomery worries that her habit of treating the journal as “the refuge
of [her] sick spirit” engenders a lopsided view of her personality, “all moans and
groans” and no “summer pleasantness,” but at other times she suggests that the journals
provide the “only key” to the “real me.” The reactions of those who knew Montgomery
in person or by reputation to the publication of her diaries – and Montgomery’s own
acknowledgement of the imbalances evident in her own depictions of her self and her
moods – speak to the kinds of difficulties involved in determining the degree of
correspondence between what Smith and Watson call the “‘real’ or historical ‘I’” and the
“narrated I.” We may be tempted to accept Montgomery’s assertion that the “real me” is
the textual “me” narrated in the diary. However, if the journal does contain the key to the
“real” Montgomery, readers continue to encounter in it many locked and barred doors. If
the journal permits Montgomery to reveal a side of herself she felt unable to show during


51 Ibid.
her lifetime, it also, conversely, allows her to conceal as much as she chooses, and such concealment is a marked feature of the diaries.

Several Montgomery scholars, for example, have remarked on her silence around what seem to be extremely significant events in her life. She makes almost no reference to *Anne of Green Gables* before it is accepted finally for publication, and does not introduce Ewan Macdonald as her fiancé until several years after their courtship had begun. Her omissions become much more marked in the 1920s and 1930s, after she has decided that the journals should be preserved and possibly even published after her death; although she continues to find relief through venting in the journal, there are limits to what she will confess and she begins referring only obliquely to certain types of problems. For example, on July 22, 1928, Montgomery mentions “something nasty and worrying” of which there is “no use to write much about.”\(^{52}\) Entries such as this one increase in frequency, and by the mid-1930s phrases such as “It is too cruel and hideous and unexpected to write about,”\(^{53}\) and “I can’t write it,”\(^{54}\) punctuate many, if not most, of the entries. The last words she scribbles in the diary, very near the end of her life, highlight her efforts to conceal the ‘truth’ of her life and confirm the elusiveness of the ‘real’ Montgomery: “Nobody dreams what my awful position is.”\(^{55}\)

Throughout my discussion of Montgomery’s diary writing, I have focused on the extent to which the journal might be understood as private text or public record, arguing

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that its status changed over time; what was initially intended as a completely private text
to be seen only by its author was later reconfigured as a type of public testimony and
literary record, as Montgomery’s “book of the self,” and as a sort of posthumous address
to future readers of both her fiction and her life. Readers of Montgomery’s journals may
wonder why she would wish to leave as her legacy such a dismal record. Addressing this
question, Janice Fiamengo considers the discourse of depression as a “representational
strategy.” She suggests that while “Montgomery’s suffering was a lived experience,” in
her journal it also became an “enabling fiction, a trope of self-presence and authenticity.”
Fiamengo observes how Montgomery was comforted by the thought that her true self was
hidden from her friends and neighbours and could only be found in the journal. She “took
pride in the depths of her reserve,” believing her ability to keep her troubles secret
signaled her “complexity and multi-facetedness.” Recognizing the somewhat false role
she often had to play in public, Montgomery began to view the depression in her journal
as the “guarantor of the real.”

Fiamengo further suggests that “in addition to marking the ‘real me’ of the
journals, depression came to signal artistic creativity.” Montgomery adhered to the
Romantic belief that great genius and talent come at a price, and her anxiety and nervous
suffering differentiated her from non-writers and those with less imagination and
appreciation for beauty. Fiamengo concludes that by employing the discourse of
depression as a representational strategy, Montgomery was able to create a “compelling

56 Janice Fiamengo, “‘…the refuge of my sick spirit…’: L.M. Montgomery and the Shadows of
Depression,’ in The Intimate Life of L.M. Montgomery, ed. Irene Gammel (Toronto, Buffalo and London:
University of Toronto Press, 2005), 180-181.

57 Ibid., 181.
and troubling personal myth." Fiamengo’s argument repeats Sidonie Smith’s observation that interiority is performed; Montgomery’s ‘secret self’ is as much created through the writing of her journals as it is reflected in them. Although Montgomery’s secret suffering may have caused her to need an outlet, the text she creates as she unburdens herself simultaneously creates a secret and suffering ‘I’ that lives only in the journals.

As mentioned above, the secret ‘I’ that lives only in the journals is analogous to the “narrated ‘I’” in Smith and Watson’s taxonomy: the ‘I’ that is the result of the “narrating ‘I’”’s self-selection and representational strategies. In many ways, though, Montgomery’s acts of self-selection and -representation are more complicated than those of a “narrating ‘I.’” Although Montgomery is narrating a life story through the crafting and writing of her diary entries, she is also using the diary as a repository for other types of life writing texts and personal mementos: letters she’s written or received, photographs of places and people that have been important to her, family histories, etc. This type of gathering together is analogous to the acts of selection and retention that shape an archive and, in essence, what Montgomery is doing with her “book of the self” is creating the archive that will stand beside her works of fiction (and other writing) as her legacy and monument. The work of recopying the journals, of copying or pasting into them other material, and of destroying the original diaries as well as other letters and papers might best be understood as having been carried out by an ‘I’ distinguishable from the “narrating ‘I,’” whose main function is to write the more ‘typical’ diary entries. This new ‘I’ is the archiving ‘I,’ an ‘I’ who makes decisions about what will represent the “‘real’ or

58 Ibid., 184.

Just as diary scholars have tended to view a diary written specifically to be published or read as less sincere than one understood to have been written in the expectation of complete privacy, archivists have tended to view the consciously constructed archive as tainted and untrustworthy. Hilary Jenkinson, the forefather of English-language archival theory, identified “impartiality” as one of the most important features and values of archives. To be impartial, a document must have been created as part of the ordinary course of business or administration; as a natural by-product of regular activity, the document is, according to Jenkinson, therefore, “free from the suspicion of prejudice in regard to the interests in which we now use them.” Only documents created in this manner can form a trustworthy archive. Documents created “in the interest or for the information of Posterity,” on the other hand, can never be accorded the same status.59

This point of view, however, has been challenged on several levels in recent years, particularly with respect to archives created not by governments and other administrative bodies, but by individuals. In “The Mysterious Outside Reader,” Adrian Cunningham argues that “all records are purposeful,” and that many are “consciously created for audiences” – for an “outside reader” – that may or may not be “immediately

apparent” to subsequent readers. However, Cunningham does not think archivists should be required to ignore or reject archives that bear indications of having been created with such an awareness. He argues instead that a creator’s awareness of posterity does not “devalue” the “recordness” of his records, and suggests that the posterity dimension of personal archives in particular highlights the importance of the preservation of an archive’s context that is the goal of all archivists: only when records are preserved in their full record-keeping context can researchers make informed decisions about their interpretation.60 It is with this emphasis on record-keeping context in mind that I suggest that archivists begin to pay more attention to the work of the archiving ‘I’ and to its effect on the nature of the archived ‘I.’ In the following sections, I turn to the archives of several other writers to study how the archiving ‘I’ has shaped them.

**The archiving ‘I’ at work**

In an article published in *The Globe and Mail* in November 1984 and titled “A Plea to Stop Turning the Knobs on Writers’ Closets,” Marian Engel declares, “As a writer who has sold her papers, I hope to be found uninteresting until I’ve been dead as long as Boswell.”61 The article was published not long after Engel had sold her archive to McMaster University and it reveals her concerns about how the material within it might be read. In particular, Engel objects to the type of psychological criticism of literary works that seems inevitably to occur when critics have access to more private or personal

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papers. She describes psychological criticism as the “fundamental argumentum ad hominem,” explaining:

Leon Edel, the biographer of Henry James, doesn’t like James Joyce and finally, encountering in his correspondence with his wife what can only be called coprophilia, cries out in the most unscholarly fashion, “Pathological!”

Engel resents the idea of graduate students attempting to “dig…out” her neuroses in her archive, and fervently wishes that writers could be known entirely by their published works. At the same time, Engel warns that the graduate student or researcher who does go ‘digging’ in her papers will not find what she is looking for; “I’m not telling,” Engel avers, knowing she has done what she could to keep the personal out of her archive.

Margaret Laurence, Engel’s fellow writer and colleague in the Writer’s Union, wrote to her after the article appeared in the newspaper:

I, too, have sold my papers and will continue to do so, but with very stringent conditions attached re: access to letters to and from other writers. I sure as hell don’t want M.A. students poking around, even though in fact all the letters are innocuous. I sorted through them very carefully and took out any that were of a too personal nature. I agree totally…I would rather have people read my work than be entertained by me in person or pore over the details of my life, which has actually been pretty sedate, when I come

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62 Marian Engel, “Public Psychologising,” draft, Marian Engel fonds, Second accrual, Box 33, File 102, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, Hamilton, Ontario. This text is a draft of the article published in The Globe and Mail.
to think of it, although it has always seemed very dramatic to me. A good article yours…\(^{63}\)

In this passage, Laurence claims her power over the “M.A. students” who wish to “pok[e] around” in her life, describing the ways in which she controls what they can see. In the archives I studied, this seems to be one of the most common ways for the archiving ‘I’ to operate: cleansing the archive of its more personal elements by carefully controlling what enters it. Throughout Laurence’s archive – and in her published correspondence – there are frequent references to her attempts to ensure that the letters to be included in the archive could be described as “innocuous.” In one letter to her close friend Adele Wiseman, Laurence signals her awareness of the archive and of her letter’s eventual fate, writing:

Cognizant, old buddy, of my numerous lengthy phone calls to you..and

cognizant (I like that word) of not only the $$$ but also taking up

hundreds of hours of your time..and cognizant (hem hem) of the fact that

we neglect the..you should excuse the dreadful word..archives, I am

herewith writing, not phoning, how’s that for preamble?\(^{64}\)

\(^{63}\) Margaret Laurence, letter to Marian Engel, November 17, 1984, Marian Engel fonds, Second accrual, Box 31, File 55. Laurence kept a carbon copy of the letter as part of her own papers, which can now be found in File 143, Box 1986-006/004, Margaret Laurence fonds, York University Archives and Special Collections, Toronto, Ontario.

\(^{64}\) Margaret Laurence, letter to Adele Wiseman (carbon copy), March 20, 1985, Margaret Laurence fonds, File 298a, Box 1986-006/007. Ellipses are in original letter and do not indicate omissions; a particular trait of Laurence’s typewriting was to use a two-dot ellipses.
Knowing that the letters she wrote to her literary colleagues and friends would likely end up in an archive, Laurence was careful to conceal certain details. In another letter to Wiseman, Laurence writes: “…it amuses me to think of code ways (so to speak) of saying some things. If anything at all is left by the time you and I depart this vale of tears, it may amuse some student or researcher to try to unlock the meaning (ha ha..just let’em try!)”

Although Laurence adopts a cavalier tone in these remarks to Wiseman, her correspondence with Al Purdy shows her to be, initially, at least, fairly anxious about her letters being made publicly available. In a letter to Al Purdy written on December 11, 1967, Laurence adds the following postscript:

…p.s.2. probably unjustified curiosity, but why do you put Margaret Laurence at the top of your letters to me? Do you make carbons and stash them all away? I hope to Christ nobody keeps my letters to them – they are not for keeping.

In her next letter to Purdy, written after he has explained that he saves all the letters he receives so that he can eventually “peddle them to a univ.,” Laurence jokingly includes a full reference in the top left-hand corner: “TO: AL W. PURDY/ REF: ML/  

65 The published and unpublished correspondence between Laurence and Wiseman, as well as between Laurence and Clara Thomas suggest also that numerous letters were destroyed to ensure they would never find their way into their archive.

66 Margaret Laurence, letter to Adele Wiseman (carbon copy), April 27, 1981, Margaret Laurence fonds, File 69, Box 1982-002/004.


Elmcott/ 1/ 68.” She also includes a fairly lengthy account of her feelings regarding her letters:

…I feel kind of like a louse about the comment I made to you in my last letter about letters. It was only after I had posted my letter that I realized the remark sounded churlish, although I didn’t mean it to. No, don’t return my letters – I am not concerned about them, and if you can ever flog them to a university, more power to you – have a drink for me. Actually, I keep my friends’ letters when they’re about writing, too, because I like to look back from time to time and read about other writers’ problems and comments on my work, especially if I am feeling low myself. I suppose when I last wrote to you I was probably in a phase of thinking what a lot of drivel I was writing, in novel, etc., but it was only a phase. That is the only trouble with letters – you write some remark like that, and next day you feel differently. I think, also, that I tend to fight the current tendency of many people (especially academics) to be more interested in a writer’s methods and personal life than in the writing itself, so I don’t really like to believe that any university would want my letters – I want to shout in fury, “Read my goddamn books and never mind the scribblings on the margins of old manuscripts.”

Despite its reassurances to Purdy that he can keep her letters, the passage quoted above also shows Laurence’s reservations, and in her letters to Purdy over the following several

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years, she continues to probe at Purdy’s intentions regarding the letters. In October 1969, she asks him not to sell “or even give away” her letters until after she is dead, and in February 1970, Purdy writes her a note apparently in response to a phone call from Laurence in which she had expressed great anxiety over the fate of the letters.

Although she remains uncomfortable at the prospect of “future students or gossips or whatever” reading her private correspondence, Laurence comes around to Purdy’s way of thinking and begins to carefully set aside all of his letters to her, envisioning a collection of their letters that could be published at a much later date. She jokes in different letters about particular passages and how they will later be read by academics and suggests parts of letters that might be cited in the introduction to an eventual collection. In July 1980, she writes to Purdy to tell him that she has recently gone through all her papers and has put a large number of them on deposit at York University.

Laurence’s attitude is interesting for its simultaneous recognition of the value of her literary papers and its revulsion at the idea of people actually reading many of them. As she indicated to Engel in her letter (quoted above), Laurence was careful to remove anything “that seemed of a too personal nature” as she sorted through her papers prior to depositing them at York, and she imposed strict access conditions on the papers, particularly on the files of letters from and to other writers. In her case, then, it is not hard to see the archiving ‘I’ at work, shaping the archive she wishes to leave behind – or, at

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70 Margaret Laurence, letter to Al Purdy, October 1969, in Margaret Laurence – Al Purdy: A Friendship in Letters: Selected Correspondence, 159.


72 Ibid.
least, the archive she feels comfortable leaving behind. As she works with York on the
deposit of her papers, she becomes savvier about the process of donating and about the
business side of doing so. She explains to Purdy how the archivist at York had informed
her that the letters she had from other writers were not worth nearly as much as they
would have been had she kept copies of her letters to them. She commends Purdy on his
foresight and advises him to continue his practice of making and saving carbons, showing
herself to have moved beyond her fear of exposure to an awareness of her power and
control over the process and the outcome of building her archive.

In the literature on personal archives little attention has been paid to the knowing
and controlling role of the donor, but in the archives I examined for this project, that role
is almost always evident. Like Laurence and Engel, Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro
have both made efforts to keep more personal material out of their archives. In Reading
In: Alice Munro’s Archives, JoAnn McCaig describes the “two filtering processes” by
which the archive that now sits at the University of Calgary Library Special Collections
and Archives has been shaped:

First, the Munro collection was edited and selected by the author herself.

Munro was very careful to include only documents pertaining to the
business of writing; there are no personal letters or journals or diaries in
the collection. The second filter was provided by the archival staff who
catalogued the material. One library staff member I spoke to explained that
the contract obliges the removal or restriction of any financial or extremely personal information unearthed in the cataloguing process.  

Two of the archivists involved in the acquisition and arrangement and description of Munro’s archives, Appollonia Steele and Jean Tener, suggested to me that McCaig might have overstated the formality of the “filtering processes” she describes, but they acknowledge that Munro has allowed very little personal material into the fonds at the University of Calgary and accept that this is the prerogative of the donor; as Steele says, “there’s no doubt [the donor] can say, this is what I’m sending, this what I’m not sending, regardless of what we say in our agreement with them…or [what material] we believe should be included.”

Margaret Atwood has personal assistants who maintain a somewhat ad-hoc office record-keeping system and prepare files they no longer need for transfer to the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto. According to John Shoesmith, the archivist responsible for processing the most recent accessions to Atwood’s archives, there are some kinds of materials that Atwood and her assistants will “never give us,” especially those related to financial matters and contracts. “That stuff never, ever comes through our doors,” he stresses. Like Munro, Atwood has also chosen to restrict the amount of personal material she donates. “Atwood,” Shoesmith explains, “is very clear about making sure that she doesn’t have any – or not too much – personal [material in her collection,]” and she is very protective of her family and friends.  

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73 JoAnn McCaig, Reading In: Alice Munro’s Archives (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002), xiii. In fact, there are personal letters in the Alice Munro fonds, but these have been restricted by Munro during the lifetimes of her correspondents.

74 Appollonia Steele and Jean Tener, interview by author, digital recording, Calgary, Alberta, July 9, 2010.
received an accrual to the collection that included approximately 400 letters that Atwood had written to her parents “from about 1950 and then through her years in university and up until her mother died.” At first, Shoesmith wondered whether Atwood would actually want the letters to be made publicly accessible – knowing (and respecting) her reticence – but after reading through the letters he realized they were not very personal after all: “she withheld a lot; she’s writing to her parents,”

he explained. Jennifer Toews, the librarian with responsibility for Personal and Literary Papers at the Fisher Library, understands Atwood’s efforts to control what does or does not make it into the archive: “She’s a woman of her generation and she’s had to fight a lot of battles, and [has had people say to her] you’re this, you’re that. She’s used to being misinterpreted, so I don’t blame her for being so private.”

In the correspondence between Atwood and two of her biographers, Rosemary Sullivan and Nathalie Cooke, we sense Atwood’s resistance to a psychological or autobiographical reading of her archive. “I’m the expert on me. You’re the expert on you…I am familiar with my daily habits. You are not familiar with them,” Atwood writes to Sullivan, warning her to be careful about what she assumes about Atwood’s character based on what she finds in the papers. Atwood objects to what she sees as Sullivan’s dependence on letters exchanged between her and artist Charlie Pachter for

78 Margaret Atwood, letter to Rosemary Sullivan (copy), March 10, 1998, Margaret Atwood collection, MSS 335, Box 93, Folder 2, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.
Sullivan’s depiction of Atwood’s state of mind during the mid-1960s to early 1970s. In an email, Atwood reminds Sullivan that “His are the letters you HAVE, but they sure ain’t all the letters I wrote,”79 implying her awareness of what she has and has not included in the archive. She also asks Sullivan, “How do you know I was telling the truth?”80 Her letters to Pachter are unreliable in the same way Stimpson suggests Virginia Woolf’s letters were; the letters are tailored for their recipient, and Atwood performs a particular dramatic role based on her sense of what Pachter expects of her and of their relationship. Referring to the series of letters as the “Propping Up Charlie letters,” Atwood complains of them being overly full of “whimsey + cuteness” and warns Sullivan that she “shouldn’t put too much of him in as it misrepresents the balance of what was in my life;”81 in other words, the archive does not, to Atwood’s mind, provide an accurate reflection of either her life or feelings at the time.

In the Montgomery, Engel, Laurence, Munro and Atwood archives there are clear indications that their creators made efforts to shape the archive and to conceal aspects of their personal lives, that they were aware of the archive and its public status and were making conscious decisions about what to include and exclude from it. This work of the archiving ‘I’ makes it difficult to assess the extent to which an archive is reflective of the character or personality of its creator if the archive is cleansed of personal information, or, as with Montgomery’s, serves mostly to highlight the incongruity of the various versions of its creator’s life. Unlike Laurence, Atwood, and the others, Douglas Coupland

79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
appears to have been less concerned about what people might find in his archives.\textsuperscript{82} Sarah Romkey, the archivist at Rare Books and Special Collections, explains “There [has been] very little, if any, self-censoring” on Coupland’s part. In fact, when archives staff asked Coupland “if he had any privacy concerns about some subjects, like prescriptions, personal relationships, etc.,” he replied, “but isn’t that what people are interested in?”\textsuperscript{83} We might expect, then, that Coupland’s archive will tell us more about his character and personality than the other examples discussed thus far.

Certainly there is a large amount of material to which we might look for clues. The first piece of paper in the first file folder in the first box of the Douglas Coupland fonds is a small piece of notepaper, on which the following words are written: “There are few things that are important to hang onto.”\textsuperscript{84} The note is from a fan at a book signing, and it is a piece of advice to which Coupland appears to have paid little heed; the fonds is packed with things Coupland has hung onto, consisting as it does of nearly one hundred boxes of diverse materials\textsuperscript{85} including: drafts of novels, short stories and works of non-fiction; visual art works and materials; fan mail; promotional material; personal and administrative correspondence; research materials; and notebooks. The fonds also contains scattered throughout it a considerable amount of personal ephemera, including


\textsuperscript{83} Sarah Romkey, personal email to the author, March 24, 2010. Quoted with permission.

\textsuperscript{84} Unknown author, note to Douglas Coupland, [ca. 1999-2000], Douglas Coupland fonds, Box 1, File 1, Rare Books and Special Collections, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia.

\textsuperscript{85} At the time I conducted my research, Coupland’s archive consisted primarily of non-digital material; in 2012, Rare Books and Special Collections were in the process of acquiring and processing the second accrual to the fonds, which has not yet been made available to researchers.
to-do lists, doodles, grocery lists and receipts, airline boarding passes, movie and concert ticket stubs and short notes to his partner, David Weir, whom he calls Glü.

Some of these many items do tell us something about the kind of person their creator might be. From packing lists for reading tours, we learn what types of clothing Coupland favours and what sorts of medications he takes. The many notes to Weir, or Glü, provide details of their domestic life together, while notes from friends addressed to Weir and Coupland suggest that the two enjoy a busy and satisfying social life. The movie and concert ticket stubs, along with the grocery lists and restaurant receipts, might tell us something about Coupland’s tastes in food and entertainment.

However, it is not always apparent who went to which movie or ate which meal. Numerous items included in the fonds are addressed to Weir, and it is clear that, to some extent at least, the records of the two men have become intermingled. In some cases, it is difficult to say which records belong to whom and as a result, equally difficult to determine how or what they evidence about their creator. However, even when it is clear that records were created by Coupland, it is not easy to infer his character or psychology. The Douglas Coupland fonds is a testament to Coupland’s diverse interests and immersion in pop culture, to his ability to work on numerous creative projects at a time and to his public role as artist and writer. However, in many ways, the “multiple but scattered pieces of personal writing and ephemera remain largely inscrutable.”

Marian Engel wrote in several different notebooks (which she referred to as *cahiers*) at any given

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86 Douglas Coupland, packing list, [ca. 2007], Douglas Coupland fonds, Box 5, File 5.

87 See for example notes in Box 6, File 1.

88 Douglas, “Original Order, Added Value.”
time, so that the little personal details that are recorded are difficult for the researcher to piece together, to order and interpret. In one *cahier* she writes: “Scrambled journals indeed – always untraceable.” The Douglas Coupland fonds feels similarly “untraceable.” Faced with the abundance of dispersed and miscellaneous receipts, notes, ticket stubs and other personal ephemera, how does the researcher piece a story together, or determine with any certainty what these pieces reveal about Coupland as a writer, artist or man?

**Coaxers and Coercers**

In the Coupland archive, Coupland’s role as the archiving ‘I’ seems to be a relatively passive one; papers accrued in folders and boxes until eventually Coupland determined to try to find a permanent home for them. Material in the accession file for Coupland’s fonds, however, suggests that it was not Coupland himself, but rather Weir, who prepared the boxes for transfer to Rare Books and Special Collections. The box list that accompanied the first accession includes a handwritten note signed “David Weir” and throughout the list Coupland is referred to in the third person. In this case, then, some of the work of the archiving ‘I’ may have been undertaken not by Coupland, but by Weir. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is in the literature on personal archives a tendency to perceive the creator of personal records as working in solitude. However, if we look to Coupland’s archive – and to the other archives cited here – we can observe

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90 The packing box list for the Douglas Coupland material and the accompanying notes were made available to me by the staff at Rare Books and Special Collections. They are part of the accession file for the Douglas Coupland fonds and are available to researchers upon request.
that, while the creation of particular documents within the archive might be understood as having taken place in a more or less individual context, the formation of the archive itself often involves the participation of individuals other than the writer; although it is difficult to know the extent of Weir’s involvement in the formation of the Douglas Coupland fonds, it is nevertheless clear that he had a helping hand.

Smith and Watson refer to the impact of “coaxers and coercers” on life writing texts, and we might see Weir as occupying this type of role. Certainly, in the Alice Munro fonds evidence exists of the role of “coaxers and coercers” in its shaping.91 The first accession of the fonds was acquired by the University of Calgary in the mid-1980s. In the inventory to this accession, Jean M. Moore and Jean F. Tener, the processing archivists, explain that Munro had first been approached about donating her archives in 1974.92 In the fonds, there is a letter from Mordecai Richler to Munro, sent in 1974, in which Richler explains that when he was donating his own papers to the University of Calgary, he had suggested Munro’s archives as another possible acquisition. In the letter he tells Munro to “Stop throwing thgs out,” explaining that “there’s a market for yr detritus and mine.” At the same time, he suggests that unless she is “desperate for cash,” she ought to wait to sell her papers as their value will increase over the next several years.93

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91 The discussion of the role of “coaxers and coercers” in the Munro fonds that follows expands on the discussion of the same topic in Jennifer Douglas and Heather MacNeil, “Arranging the Self: Literary and Archival Perspectives on Writers’ Archives,” Archivaria 67 (Spring 2009), 38.


93 Mordecai Richler, letter to Alice Munro, May 14, 1974, Alice Munro fonds, MsC 37, Box 1, File 21, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary Libraries, University of Calgary.
Munro does appear to have waited at least a few years. She also appears to have allowed negotiations for the sale and transfer of her papers to be overseen by her literary agent in New York, Virginia Barber. A series of letters sent between Barber and Alan H. MacDonald, Director of Libraries at the University of Calgary at the time, is included in the second accession of the Munro fonds but is restricted to researchers, so that the details of the negotiation and transfer are unavailable. However, reading through letters in this file from Barber to Munro, we find several references to the negotiations with the University of Calgary. At times, Barber assures Munro that she is working with lawyers to negotiate the terms of the sale and at other times she asks Munro to relay to her details of talks that appear to have taken place between Munro and MacDonald directly. On January 29, 1979, Barber adds the following postscript to a letter regarding an option to publish Munro’s next book in French: “Important: tell me about the sale of papers to Calgary.”94 Later that same year she urges Munro to “Please let me know what happened between you & Calgary?”95 In subsequent letters, however, Barber clearly takes charge. At one point, she acknowledges that it is Munro’s decision as to whether she wants to sign the agreement with the library, but continues: “I would definitely like to see the Alice Munro Archive established, and I’m just as sure that Calgary’s offer is generous.”96

Although it is difficult to say with certainty without access to Munro’s replies, it appears as if Barber adopted a prodding role, encouraging Munro to work with Calgary in

94 Ginger [Virginia] Barber, letter to Alice Munro, January 19, 1979, Alice Munro fonds, MsC 38, Box 2, File 63.
95 Ginger [Virginia] Barber, letter to Alice Munro, October 3, 1979, Alice Munro fonds, MsC 38, Box 2, File 63.
96 Ginger [Virginia] Barber, letter to Alice Munro, April 22, 1980, Alice Munro fonds, MsC 38, Box 2, File 63.
a timely fashion and overseeing the business side of the negotiations. As her literary agent, Barber “would have recognized not only the financial gain for Munro in selling her papers, but also the prestige and recognition that such a sale would entail.”

Barber’s preoccupation with the establishment of the “Alice Munro Archive” and her apparently instrumental role in securing a profitable deal with the University of Calgary call attention to the fact that it is not only Alice Munro’s intentions that shape the nature of her fonds.

Similar forces are seen at work in the archives of Marian Engel. Engel sold her papers to McMaster University in 1982. In September 1977, she received a letter from Bob Brandeis at the University of Toronto in which he suggested that “the time might be propitious for [her] to start selling some manuscripts and papers.” At around the same time, Engel was a member of the Archives Committee of the Canadian Writers’ Union and worked with Robin Skelton to survey Canadian writers to determine what provisions (if any) they had made for the disposal of their papers and to collect and distribute to writers information about who acquired papers, how much they paid, and what types of negotiations were involved. Engel evidently had some idea of how much her papers might be worth, and although her letter in response to Brandeis’ suggestion is not included in the fonds, in his next extant letter to her he exclaims, “I only wish I had

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97 Douglas and MacNeil, 38.
98 Bob Brandeis, letter to Marian Engel, 12 September 1977, Marian Engel fonds, Second accession, Box 1, File 39.
99 See, Marian Engel fonds, Second accession, File 2, Box 32.
$25,000 to offer you for your papers, but I don’t even have $2,500.” By November 1982, the Division of Archives and Research Collections at McMaster University was prepared to offer Engel $25,000, on the condition that she include two series of letters from Pauline McGibbon and Hugh McLennan. Although Engel had misgivings about selling her more personal papers, as a single mother with a terminal illness and a small writing income, the prospect of benefitting financially from the sale helped soothe some of her discomfort; in one of her many notebooks, Engel notes that “A cheque for $25,000 is therapeutic.”

After Engel’s death in 1984, Bob Brandeis became literary executor of her estate. A file included in the second accrual of her papers and titled “Estate Correspondence” contains letters sent from Michael Kainer of Sack, Charney, Goldblatt and Mitchell, Barristers and Solicitors to Bob Brandeis and others in which he enquires about the sale of the remainder of Engel’s papers to McMaster. Eventually, the papers were transferred to McMaster; the second accrual contains many more personal letters to friends and other writers than the first, as well as a number of notebooks that Engel had apparently withheld from the first accession and that, in some cases, contain much more personal information than do those that were sold initially. As with the Virginia Barber correspondence in the Alice Munro fonds, the Estate correspondence in the Marian Engel

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100 Bob Brandeis, letter to Marian Engel, 3 April 1978, Marian Engel fonds, Second accession, Box 1, File 39.

101 Marian Engel, [Dark green notebook,] [ca. 1982-1983], Marian Engel fonds, Second accession, Box 34, File 11.

102 See Marian Engel fonds, Second accession, File 12, Box 32.
fonds alerts researchers to intentions and actions other than Engel’s that have contributed to the shaping of her archive.

One of the most interesting cases of the involvement of coaxers and coercers in the form of literary executors and family members is that of the Sylvia Plath archive. Split between two repositories in the United States – the Mortimer Rare Book Room at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts and the Lilly Library at the University of Indiana – the archive consists of Plath’s journals, drafts of poems, articles and bits of novels, personal and professional correspondence, scrapbooks and juvenilia, etc. After Plath’s suicide in 1963, her estranged husband, Ted Hughes, Hughes’ sister, Olwyn Hughes, who became Plath’s literary executor, and her mother, Aurelia Plath engaged in a lengthy battle over the materials she left behind and control of her posthumous image.

Plath died when she was only thirty-one. Her best-known and most critically-acclaimed book of poetry, Ariel, was not published in her lifetime, and her novel, The Bell Jar, had been published under a pseudonym. The success of the posthumous publication of Ariel drew attention to Plath’s earlier works, and, once details about the nature of her death began to circulate, interest grew in both her work and her personal life. At the time of her death, she and Hughes were living separately, but they had not yet divorced. Since Plath died intestate, Hughes was automatically named her literary executor and took possession of the papers in her London flat and those that remained in the house they had shared before their separation.

Hughes is widely criticized for his handling of the unpublished material Plath left behind. In his foreword to The Journals of Sylvia Plath, Hughes admits that he destroyed Plath’s final journal volume because he “did not want her children to have to read it,” and
explains that another volume written immediately before the last “disappeared.”

Because of his actions, readers and scholars have been left without access to the journals Plath wrote between 1959 and 1963, the period during which she and Hughes returned to England, their two children were born, their marriage disintegrated and Plath’s best poems were written. Hughes has also been criticized for his reordering of the poems contained in the posthumous edition of *Ariel*. When Plath died she left a typescript of *Ariel* on her desk. Despite the fact that the typescript included a table of contents, Hughes altered the sequence of the poems, removed several of them, and added other poems that Plath had written after the *Ariel* poems.

The handling of Plath’s unpublished material after her death is the subject of a chapter titled “The Archive” in Jacqueline Rose’s influential and controversial book *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*. Rose describes Hughes as an “editing, controlling and censoring presence which one encounters, of necessity, as soon as one even attempts to approach the body of Plath’s work.” Like many other Plath scholars, Rose accuses Hughes of attempting to control the ways in which Plath’s work and life can be interpreted; however, she also acknowledges that Hughes is not the only person who tries to do so. Plath’s mother and Hughes’ sister, who eventually took over her brother’s

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105 It should be noted that Rose uses the term ‘archive’ to refer to the entire body of Plath’s published and unpublished writing, rather than in the sense that an archivist would use the word. i.e., to refer to an aggregation of records held in an archival repository.

position as literary executor, have also assumed controlling roles with regard to Plath’s reception and reputation. Rose believes that Aurelia Plath’s publication of the letters Plath sent home to her over several years\(^{107}\) was intended as a “corrective”\(^{108}\) to the image of Plath in circulation after her death and the publication of *The Bell Jar* and *Ariel*. Aurelia Plath edited her daughter’s correspondence by omitting letters, removing parts of others, and inserting notes to instruct and guide the reader. She also included a long introduction, in which she provides a rather lengthy autobiography as well as a description of Plath’s childhood and development as a writer, their relationship with each other and her motivation for publishing the letters. As Rose notes, Aurelia Plath promotes a “specific image” of her daughter, and her omissions and annotations shape the “body” and “psyche” presented.\(^{109}\) Aurelia Plath used the opportunity the publication of *Letters Home* provided her to portray Plath as a loving, dutiful daughter who, contrary to her reputation as a sort of high priestess of suicides, had a sunny disposition and was capable of great highs as well as of the great lows for which she had become more known.\(^{110}\)

In the same way that she understands *Letters Home* as a “corrective” to the image of Plath circulating after publication of *The Bell Jar* and *Ariel*, Rose argues that the publication of the abridged *Journals of Sylvia Plath* by Ted Hughes was intended as a

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\(^{108}\) Rose, 75.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 78.

\(^{110}\) In a letter she drafted to Ted Hughes, Aurelia Plath explained that she felt “an intense obligation to dispel many of the incorrect statements that have been in the press about [Sylvia Plath], about her relationships to members of her family (where she was loved and well served and knew it all her life long.” Aurelia Plath, draft letter to Ted Hughes, March 11, 1973, Sylvia Plath collection MSS II, Box 6a, File 17, Lilly Library, Indiana University Libraries, Bloomington.
“corrective” to the portrayal of Plath and her writing presented in *Letters Home*. Indeed, in his essay “Sylvia Plath and Her Journals,” Hughes justifies his motivations for publishing Plath’s private papers. The journals, he suggests, might provide a “ballast” against both the “errant versions” of her life propagated by her biographers and “the account she gave of herself to her mother” in her letters. Hughes believes this account often rings false, tainted by Plath’s desire to please her mother and her need to conform to certain familial roles. While Aurelia Plath focused on presenting a cheery, hardworking, ambitious and loving daughter in *Letters Home*, Hughes concentrates on depicting Plath involved in what he refers to as an “obscure [psychic] process,” taking place in a “deeply secluded mythic and symbolic theatre,” and leading to “the birth of her new creative self.” According to Hughes, the value of the diaries is in the way they evidence this process, and in his assessment of them, he inscribes upon them a particular type of narrative – that of the struggling artist battling her inner demons. In Rose’s opinion, Hughes’ emphasis on Plath’s “inner drama” is intended not only to promote a mythic view of the creative artist, but also to deflect attention away from his own role in the drama of Plath’s life; by focusing on Plath’s psychic struggles, Hughes shifts the blame for Plath’s depression and suicide away from himself and suggests that it was an almost inevitable outcome of her efforts to find an authentic poet’s voice.

The battle over Plath’s posthumous reception and reputation spills over into the archives at Smith College and at the Lilly Library. The initial collection of Plath

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112 Ibid., 154, 155, 156 and passim.
materials at Smith College was deposited by Ted Hughes, while the collection at the Lilly Library was deposited by Aurelia Plath. At each repository, the donors’ intentions influence the shape and interpretation of the collections. In particular, researchers in both collections are struck by the frequency with which Aurelia Plath’s voice asserts itself. In the introduction to *Letters Home*, Aurelia Plath confesses to “pack-rat tendencies.” She saved every letter her daughter wrote to her and kept them in packets, hoping that Sylvia could some day “make use of them in stories, in a novel, and through them meet herself at the varied stages in her own development.” Aurelia Plath was not only keeping the letters, however; she was also adding to them, and Sylvia Plath’s letters in both the Smith and Lilly collections are replete with Aurelia Plath’s annotations. Many of these annotations appear to have been added soon after she received her daughter’s letters. Tracy Brain suggests, rightly I think, that these annotations may have been used by Aurelia Plath “to make quick notes of any questions or points she wanted to raise in response,” and cites an example where Aurelia Plath seems to be thinking of financial advice to pass directly to Sylvia. Other annotations seem to have been made as Aurelia Plath prepared letters for publication. Sometimes these annotations consist of lists of a

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114 Ibid., 3.

115 Although I do not discuss these here, in addition to annotating her daughter’s letters, Aurelia Plath annotated several of the various diaries and notebooks she eventually donated to the Lilly Library. See Sylvia Plath collection MSS II, Box 7, Lilly Library.

116 Tracy Brain, “Sylvia Plath’s Letters and Journals,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Sylvia Plath*, ed. Jo Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 147. Aurelia Plath’s habit of annotating the letters she received in order to help her draft responses is evident in letters she receives from a number of different correspondents and may result partly from her training and many years of work as a secretary.
letter’s contents on its envelope or of explanations for references made by Sylvia Plath to people and places.

In addition to these practical annotations, there are annotations that show Aurelia Plath reacting to the contents of the letters in a more reflective manner. Shortly after Sylvia Plath died in February 1963, her mother made and dated annotations to a number of her daughter’s letters. In one of these letters, from February 1961, Plath worries that her recent miscarriage would cause her mother disappointment; Aurelia’s annotation reads: “My Sylvia!”\(^{117}\) In another letter, written in November 1962, Sylvia Plath takes her mother to task for identifying too closely with her own happiness. “That sort of statement only makes one chary of confiding any sort of difficulties in you whatsoever,” the daughter writes. Aurelia Plath’s note says simply: “I regret this.”\(^{118}\)

Aurelia Plath inserts her point of view into the letters in other ways too, often underlining negative comments about Hughes and in some places blacking out Plath’s lines with a heavy marker so that they cannot be read.\(^{119}\) She makes attempts to read backwards the failure of her daughter’s marriage, identifying incidents described by Sylvia as steps on the way to its demise. She notes, for example, the first mention of Assia Wevill, whose affair with Hughes forced his separation from Plath,\(^{120}\) and she

\(^{117}\) Aurelia Plath, annotation dated February 14, 1963 on letter received from Sylvia Plath, February 6, [1961], Sylvia Plath collection MSS II, Box 6, File 21, Lilly Library.

\(^{118}\) Aurelia Plath, annotation dated February 14, 1963 on letter received from Sylvia Plath, November 29, [1962], Sylvia Plath collection MSS II, Box 6a, File 4, Lilly Library.

\(^{119}\) See for example letters in Box 6a of the Sylvia Plath collection MSS II, Lilly Library. Brain also discusses this type of treatment by Aurelia Plath, “Sylvia Plath’s Letters and Journals,” 148.

\(^{120}\) Sylvia Plath, letter to Aurelia Plath, May 14, 1962, annotated by Aurelia Plath, annotations undated, Sylvia Plath collection MSS II, Box 6a, File 3, Lilly Library.
writes on the back of a letter sent to her in June 1962: “The last happy letter!” She adds statements about the character of Hughes and of his sister, Olwyn, and about their motivations with respect to Plath’s financial and cultural legacies, and included in each collection of Plath material – at the Lilly Library and at Smith – are series of letters written to and by Aurelia Plath following Plath’s death and detailing her continuing struggle to portray Sylvia as more than a death-driven, slightly mad poet, and their mother-daughter relationship as healthy, loving and supportive.

Brain describes Aurelia Plath’s treatment of her daughter’s letters as an effort to “build[] up her own narrative upon them.” Considering the question of to whom Aurelia Plath’s annotations were directed, Brain allows that some of the annotations were meant for her daughter or as reminders to herself, but suggests that many of them were “written specifically for other people’s eyes: those of the researchers who use the archive.” Several of these annotations are reminders to keep particular letters safe, and in a note Aurelia Plath added to a letter in which Sylvia described an argument she had had with her sister-in-law, Olwyn Hughes, Aurelia declares that she must take steps to ensure that

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121 Sylvia Plath, letter to Aurelia Plath, June 15, 1962, annotated by Aurelia Plath, annotations undated, Sylvia Plath collection MSS II, Box 6a, File 3, Lilly Library.

122 Stuart MacDonald, L.M. Montgomery’s son and literary executor, worked in a similar way in his mother’s archive, though to a lesser extent; the collection at Guelph includes numerous newspaper clippings about Montgomery and her works and some of these have been annotated by MacDonald to correct what he sees as false impressions of his mother’s character or to protest poor reviews. See Chapter 5, 16-17.


124 See for example, letters in Box 6, File 21; Box 6a, File 17; Box 15, File 68, Sylvia Plath collection MSS II, Lilly Library.
Sylvia’s letters are sold to a repository where the public might read them. In 1977, Aurelia Plath sold the papers she possessed to the Lilly Library. These include not only writings by Plath, but also files of correspondence received by Aurelia after Plath’s death. Four years later, Hughes sold all the Plath papers in his possession to Smith College.

Like the collection at the Lilly Library, the collection at Smith College also includes a number of letters that have been heavily annotated by Aurelia Plath (received in separate accessions subsequent to Hughes’ original deposit), as well as correspondence received by Hughes and his sister after Plath’s death. In much of this correspondence researchers can observe the battle for control over Plath’s image and work being fought by Aurelia Plath, Ted Hughes and Olwyn Hughes. Letters sent between them outline the fraught negotiations over what to publish and when and how to deal with various Plath biographers, while Aurelia Plath’s annotations continue to attempt to guide future readers’ understanding of these debates. Ted Hughes’ voice is also heard in the collection at Smith explaining many of Plath’s poems. When Plath’s papers were handed over, several of the poetry manuscripts were arranged in bundles and around each bundle was attached a page of Hughes’ notes. These notes indicate mostly the number of pages of draft for each poem and whether the poem was heavily or lightly corrected, as well as identifying the scrap material on which the draft was composed, but occasionally they also consist of interpretive or explanatory notes concerning their composition or references in the poems to real-life objects or events. In the archives, as in his forewords

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125 Sylvia Plath, letter to Aurelia Plath, January 1, 1961, annotated by Aurelia Plath, annotations undated, Sylvia Plath collection MSS II, Box 6, File 21, Lilly Library. On a copy she made of this letter, Aurelia Plath writes “Sell or donate all letters + have public access.” In a letter to Olwyn Hughes, Aurelia Plath assures her that “My papers and letters will not disappear when I go; I have secured them and assigned them.” Aurelia Plath, “Passages from letter to Olwyn, March 7, 1966,” [1966], Sylvia Plath collection MSS II, Box 6a, File 9, Lilly Library.
to *The Journals*, Hughes can be seen attempting to impose a particular reading on Plath’s work.\(^{126}\)

That the ‘real’ Sylvia Plath is hard to locate amidst the mixed intentions of her husband’s and mother’s editorial efforts is roundly acknowledged by Plath scholars. Rose implies that more important than the question, ‘Who was Plath?’ is the question, ‘Who speaks for Plath, and why?’\(^{127}\) Since her death, Plath has been spoken for by biographers and critics as well as by her husband and mother, who used her words in ways that allowed them to speak *through* her. Rose uses the metaphor of “*le corps morcelé,*” or “the-body-in-pieces”\(^{128}\) to describe the Plath archive, as it is composed of the fragmentary textual remains of the dead poet which are then manipulated by interested parties to produce ‘readings’ of her life and self. In a more recent article, Anita Helle notes that while the popularity of Rose’s style of psychoanalytic criticism has waned, Rose’s “broader insight that Plath’s legacy provides an absorbing instance of archive formation as a cultural process, occurring through a variety of means…and engaging a range of public interests” has continuing relevance.\(^{129}\)

Although scholars like Rose, Helle and Brain have focused on the Plath archive to tell the many tales of intention and intervention that have formed it, they have each overlooked a significant aspect of “archive formation:” the role of the archivist, herself.

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\(^{127}\) Rose, passim.

\(^{128}\) Ibid., 72.

This is a topic which will be discussed in some detail in the next two chapters, but which merits discussion here as well, since the archivist functions in many ways as a particular type of “coaxer” or “coercer,” helping to determine the archive’s boundaries, contents and contexts. In recent years, the impact of archival intervention on the nature and shape of an archive has increasingly been recognized and examined. The postmodern turn came late to archival theory, but when it did, archivists such as Terry Cook, Tom Nesmith, and Brien Brothman, among others, made frequent reference to the creative role of the archivist who, ultimately, decides which records will be kept or destroyed and who, through arrangement and description, creates the representation of the archive by which researchers first encounter and access it.\(^{130}\)

The arrangement and description of archives are guided by the principles of respect des fonds and respect for original order. Archivists believe, in accordance with the first principle, that the records of one creator must not be mixed with the records of another but must be maintained as separate fonds, and, in accordance with the second principle, that within each fonds, records must be kept in their original order, that is, the order in which the creator himself maintained them. Michelle Light and Tom Hyry describe an interesting paradox inherent in the adherence to these principles:

> At their heart, respect for original order and [respect des fonds] address our mediating role in arrangement and description. They strive to reduce the archivist’s meddling impact and influence on the records, so that the

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context of the records’ creation and use is preserved and the authenticity of
the records’ evidence is maintained. Yet even strict adherence to these
corcepts does not prevent the archivist from significantly influencing the
transmittal of information through different steps of the records’ life cycle.131

Light and Hyry explain that even in cases where arrangement and description involves
minimal processing – perhaps just the transfer of material from original containers to
archival folders and boxes – significant original context is lost.132

In many other cases, this type of loss is intensified when archival processing is
more complicated. In “Arranging the Self: Literary and Archival Perspectives on Writers’ Archives,” Heather MacNeil and Jennifer Douglas describe the efforts made by
processing archivists at McMaster University and at the University of Calgary to attempt
to restore a sense of ‘original’ order to the Marian Engel and Alice Munro fonds,
respectively. Both fonds arrived at repositories in considerable disorder and processing
archivists at each institution used physical clues and close reading to try to reconstruct
what they believed to be each writer’s creative process, to recreate for researchers the
writer’s process of composing particular works.133 The processing archivists in each case

131 Michelle Light and Tom Hyry, “Colophons and Annotations: New Directions for the Finding Aid,”
*American Archivist* 65 (Fall/Winter 2002), 219-220.

132 For more on the transformative effects of archivist’s processing see also: Brothman, “Orders of Value;”
Ala Rekrut, “Material Literacy: Reading Records as Material Culture,” *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005), 11-37;

were keenly aware of their impact on the way the materials would later be viewed and interpreted. In the inventory to the Alice Munro fonds, researchers are warned that processing efforts resulted in a “tentative sort only,” and Jean Tener describes “wak[ing] up at night wondering if I were putting pages of manuscript together to create versions [Munro] had never written.” She felt, she explained, as if she were “an interloper in her literary imagination. And I was! I was moving [things around].” In an interview during which she spoke of the experience of processing Engel’s papers, Kathy Garay describes how her initial attempts to account for having put her “interventionist paws all over” the archive were met with fury by Engel, who felt she was being criticized for not having kept her papers in good order in the first place. Garay was devastated, having only wanted to show good archival faith by explaining her own actions in shaping the fonds, and rewrote her original introduction to the inventory to appease Engel.

Heather MacNeil has described the archivist’s efforts at arrangement and description as akin to those of the textual critic or editor, who aims “to restore a text as closely as possible to its original, authentic form.” Archival description, she argues, “involves conscious and deliberate decisions about the representation of archival documents,” that inevitably affect the way those documents will later be encountered and understood. Certainly, in the cases of Munro and Engel, the archivists’ decisions about

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134 Moore and Tener, xxx.
135 Tener, 40.
136 Steele and Tener, interview by author.
where to place particular pages of draft materials have an impact on the way they will be interpreted and on researcher’s sense of the nature of the materials. In each fonds, for example, pages from uncompleted manuscript novels are brought together, presenting them to readers as a sort of ‘whole’ that never really was. Similarly, the compilation and arrangement of correspondence series into files by name of correspondent and/or chronologically necessarily imposes a particular kind of narrative arc over the material; in the Margaret Laurence fonds, letters have been maintained physically in their original order, which is loosely chronological with letters from numerous different correspondents – professional and personal – jumbled together in single files, but listed in series based on a more intellectual ordering by correspondent. The effect of reading the letters in the order they are found in the file or in the order they are listed in the inventory is quite different. Although the received physical order of the material is intact for the researcher to study, the archivist’s intellectual ordering suggests a particular way of seeing one’s way through the jumble; since it is by means of the finding aid that most researchers will access individual files or letters, the archivist’s ordering will also take a certain amount of precedence over any other type of order that might be present.

The limitations of a psychological approach to writers’ archives

Although the archivist is able to view records in their ‘original’ state – that is, in the state in which they arrive at a repository before they are refoldered, reboxed and

\[\text{139}\] Maryanne Dever discusses the “alien continuity” that is imposed on letters arranged in orderly series in her article, “Reading Other People’s Mail,” Archives and Manuscripts 24 (May 1996), 121. She suggests that when letters that were once “scattered” to different recipients and at different times are organized in careful sequence, a “plot of which the letters themselves could not be aware” tends to emerge.
described using archival concepts and language (e.g., fonds, series, sub-series, etc.) – the researcher who later uses these records does not have this privilege and is therefore always viewing the archive through the archival filter.\textsuperscript{140} This filter adds one more barrier between the researcher and the “‘real’ or historical ‘I,’” to whom the researcher may be hoping – or expecting – to be granted access. However, even before the archivist gets her “interventionist paws all over” the archive,\textsuperscript{141} such access is problematic. In the final section of this chapter, I want to review the various reasons why I believe that a psychological approach to archives is potentially misleading. By psychological approach I here mean any view of archives that accords primary value to an archive’s ability to reveal or reflect aspects of its creator’s personality or inner mind and that suggests conducting archival work based on an interpretation of these aspects. In the first place, we have seen in this chapter how various authors have made deliberate and extensive efforts to control what enters their archive. The archiving ‘I’ selects or withholds materials and is aware of the archive and its legacy. Often, the archiving ‘I’ makes the conscious decision to keep the personal out of the archive, and in such cases, the ability to assess aspects of character and personality in the archive is largely impeded; in the Alice Munro archive, for example, as McCaig points out, researchers can learn a great deal about the cultural business of writing fiction, but only very little about the person behind the writing. McCaig recalls meeting Munro and explaining that she was working on the archive: “‘Oh my God,’ [Munro] said, laughing, ‘you know everything!’” On the

\textsuperscript{140} As mentioned above, even when an archive is maintained in the order it was received in, materials are still rehoused in archival folders and boxes, and intellectual schemas are constructed over them; the archive that the researcher sees after it has been processed – no matter how minimal that processing – is not the same as the archive at the moment it arrived at the repository.

\textsuperscript{141} Garay, interview by author.
contrary, McCaig explains that “despite countless hours in the archive, I often feel that I know nothing at all.” As the examples of Montgomery’s and Coupland’s archives demonstrate, even when personal details are included in the archive, it can remain difficult to assess character. Montgomery’s diaries conceal a great deal, but they also reveal much about Montgomery’s private experience and feelings that was previously unknown to her readers and critics. Nevertheless, as Rubio, Heilbron and others have pointed out, readers and critics remain uncertain about how to interpret many of the details in Montgomery’s diary, how to accommodate and reconcile the various ‘Montgomeries’ now in circulation. The self is shown with certainty to be, as Janna Malamud Smith wrote, “rather a vast archive of selves.”

The work of “coaxers and coercers” – the presence of other voices and intentions – in writers’ archives further complicates psychological reading. In Coupland’s fonds there are many items whose original source is difficult to determine without access to the source himself; certainly most – if not all – of the creative work originates with Coupland, but what about the many receipts, notes, travel itineraries, and ticket stubs? As we saw in the case of Sylvia Plath, the work of coaxers and coercers can also have a more profound effect on the shape of the archive and its eventual interpretation. Any researcher working with the Plath material will find it impossible, I should think, to avoid being influenced by the voices of Plath’s mother, husband and sister-in-law. Even those researchers who avoid the sections of the archive in which these voices are most prominent will not be able to escape them as they have already so deeply infiltrated Plath

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142 McCaig, 15-16.

143 Janna Malamud Smith, 153.
criticism; the archive of Sylvia Plath can no longer – and perhaps has never been able to – be read solely on its own terms.

In addition to the effect on the archive of the archiving ‘I’ and of “coaxers and coercers,” there are other factors that hinder the psychological approach. First, there is the fact that the bulk of personal material that does exist in writers’ archives often consists of letters written by others. Although Purdy might have saved carbons of all his letters for his own archive, he was not typical. Most of the letters in a writer’s archive are usually addressed to them and while they may contain details that help to illuminate aspects of the writer’s character, these are obviously filtered through the letter writer’s point of view and relationship to the writer. In a review of an exhibit of artist Isabel McLaughlin’s archive Rodney G.S. Carter notes the odd effect of ‘reading’ McLaughlin through her archive:

McLaughlin did not keep copies of her correspondence, so while the viewer is given a great deal of insight into the activities, thoughts, and feelings of her correspondents, they can grasp very little of who McLaughlin herself was. What can easily be inferred from the documents on display is that she was a good friend, that she was passionate about art, and that she was selfless in her support of the people and things she loved. The viewer, however, is left wondering what McLaughlin thought, how

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144 Neither was he necessarily unusual; several other examples of writers saving copies of their letters to increase the financial value of their archives might be cited. Dorothy Livesay is an example, while Earle Birney was famous for his habit of saving things for his archive at the Fisher Library. Richard Landon, interview by author, digital recording, Toronto, Ontario, August 26, 2010.
she viewed her activities, and what she was trying to accomplish in undertaking them.\textsuperscript{145}

The effect Carter describes is similar to the effect I experienced as I worked through the fonds I discuss in this chapter and throughout the dissertation. Often, the most vibrant voices and the most revealing stories in the archive belong not to the creator of the archive but to his or her correspondents; to find the voice of Laurence or Atwood one often has to turn instead to Al Purdy’s fonds or to one of the numerous other writers with whom each corresponded. To an extent, the archive is less a reflection of what its creator thought than it is of what others thought of her.

Another arresting feature of the writers’ archives I studied is the degree to which they reflect the \textit{professional} rather than the \textit{personal} life of the writer. In particular the fonds of Munro, Atwood, and Laurence attest to the various different types of work that go into becoming and remaining a critically-acclaimed, best-selling author. In each fonds, file after file after file attests to the amount of time each writer spends publicizing her work (sometimes willingly, and sometimes not) through readings and tours, giving interviews, attending literary events and mentoring students and other writers. Obviously there is also the work of writing itself, and the bulk of each of the archives I studied for this project is made up of files of drafts made at various stages of composition and editing, research and notes. In an interview, Catherine Hobbs explained to me that she finds it extraordinarily difficult to separate the personal life from the professional life in the archives of writers, and suggests that in the fictional writing “there is always the

possibility there that it is a working through, a creative working through...of the
[writer’s] own personality and private life.” Jean Tener, on the other hand, argues that
it will always be difficult to determine in fictional writing what details coincide with the
writer’s biography and the extent to which the writer has fictionalized them. She worries,
therefore, about looking to Munro’s archive for evidence of her “personal character”:

I wouldn’t deny that if you read Dickens you can tell a lot about the man,
or if you read any author, clearly, what they’re writing comes out of their
experience...but I don’t necessarily think that you can get very much more
of that any more from personal papers than you can from published books,
and if that’s what [researchers] are looking for, I’m very skeptical: it’s too
easy to make up personality.

Possibly with other types of personal archives there exists less of the professional
dimension of the creator’s life, but writers’ archives are collected and preserved primarily
because of the writer’s work, and fonds or collections made up primarily of work are
perhaps not best served by attempts to read them as expressions of character or
personality.

There is one final aspect of the writers’ archives I studied that I think must be
discussed as a hindrance to the psychological approach and that is the prosaic nature of
some writers’ intentions for and attitudes toward their archives. In many of the fonds, I
found statements from the writer concerning his or her thoughts about the archive,
usually in correspondence with other writers or with the agents and archivists who

147 Steele and Tener, interview by author.
coordinated negotiations for its transfer to a repository. Often, writers express surprise that anyone would be interested in what they frequently refer to as “junk.” Munro, in a letter to Mordecai Richler about the University of Calgary, asks him, “And what are ‘papers’? I throw out most first drafts but I do have a fair amount of revolting stuff around.” Similarly, in an exchange with Laurie Larew, an agent who helped authors sell their manuscripts, Atwood referred to piles of “junk” she had at home in Toronto; “Is that what you want?” she asks. As we have seen, Atwood cautioned her biographers about the kind of story they might tell based on the material in her archive and she seems at times in her correspondence with Sullivan and Cooke to suggest that the archive includes a certain amount of worthless castoffs. When Sullivan asks her about the significance of something she wrote while she was at Harvard as a graduate student, Atwood replies: “I don’t remember it. It sounds kind of stupid.” She also warns Sullivan about drawing conclusions about the composition of a very early unpublished novel, explaining that she “continuously saved and mixed up various kinds of paper + notebooks,” and suggesting that Sullivan will have a difficult time developing a chronology for the novel’s development; her cavalier treatment of parts of the archive – both before and after it is transferred to the Fisher Library – has, she herself argues, made it difficult for conclusions to be drawn from it.

148 Alice Munro, letter to Mordecai Richler, May 8, 1974, Mordecai Richler fonds, Second accession, Box 30, File 82, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary Libraries, University of Calgary.

149 Margaret Atwood, letter to Laurie Larew, draft, January 6, 1967, Margaret Atwood papers, MS COLL 200, Box 92, File 2, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto Libraries, Toronto, Ontario.

150 Margaret Atwood, email to Rosemary Sullivan, copy, March 9, 1998, Margaret Atwood papers, MSS COLL 335, 2002 accession, Box 93, File 2, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto Libraries, Toronto, Ontario.
In the letter that Richler writes back to Munro about her ‘papers,’ he advises her, as mentioned previously, to stop throwing them out because one or more university libraries will no doubt be interested in buying them from her. He adds: “It’s mistaken, I mean as far as I’m concerned the only thg of value (hopefully) is a writer’s published work, but if others see it differently, and are willing to pay…..well, hell.”¹⁵¹ For most of the writers studied here, money was a significant incentive to sell. Engel explained in a letter to Pauline McGibbon that she felt “very exposed” selling her papers “but one has to survive somehow,”¹⁵² and in the exchanges between Atwood and Larew, Atwood states: “My motive of course was money, as I am squeezing along on dribs + drabs from CBC, Tamarack, etc…”¹⁵³ Dorothy Livesay deliberately spread her archives amongst several university libraries hoping to earn as much money as possible. These days, of course, few archives or libraries buy writers’ records. Instead, writers’ receive a tax receipt for donating. As Richard Landon, formerly Director of the Fisher Library, observes “there is no point in having tax receipts when you have no income,” but for writers like Atwood and Lawrence Hill the tax receipt is very useful.¹⁵⁴ Shelley Sweeney, Head of University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections, where Dorothy Livesay’s fonds is housed, suggests that writers are savvy about tax receipts, that they know when they can best

¹⁵¹ Mordecai Richler, letter to Alice Munro, May 14, 1974, Alice Munro fonds, MsC 37, Box 1, File 21.
¹⁵² Marian Engel, letter to Pauline McGibbon, November 2, 1982, Marian Engel fonds, Second accrual, Box 31, File 62.
¹⁵³ Margaret Atwood, letter to Laurie Larew, draft, January 6, 1967, Margaret Atwood papers, MS COLL 200, Box 92, File 2.
¹⁵⁴ Landon, interview by author.
make use of them and plan donations accordingly. Atwood donates every year, but other writers with smaller incomes might wait to donate until a particularly lucrative year makes the tax receipt more useful to them.

I do not mean to criticize writers for understanding how best to make the archive serve them financially, but rather to point to the banality of some of the intentions that shape the archive. Archivists and researchers assign a tremendous importance to writers’ archives. If writers are donating what they consider to be castoff materials of little worth to themselves, and if they are timing different donations primarily based on financial calculations and not on some value inherent to the materials, then perhaps some caution is necessary in our evaluation of their significance. Certainly, it seems that in some of the cases discussed here to read too much into the type of material the archive contains and the way in which the archive develops over time would be problematic.

It is one thing, I think, to suggest that an archive might tell us something about its creator’s character; it is another thing to advise the archivist to try to identify the links between orders found in records and their creator’s “mental life.” When Hobbs argues that personal archives should be valued for the ways in which they evidence character or personality she makes the important point that if we fail to look for the personal in some types of documents we might erroneously assume they are valueless; scraps of paper in a writer’s fonds may appear to tell us little about the business of writing or the composition

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155 Shelley Sweeney, interview by author, digital recording, Winnipeg, Manitoba, May 19, 2010. Though I do not discuss the Plath archive specifically here, its “marketability” is discussed by Rose and by Lynda K. Bundtzen, who notes how well the collections at Smith and at the Lilly reflect the “wrangling over what, when, and by whom parts of it will be published or made available to scholars, and who will profit thereby.” Bundtzen, *The Other Ariel*, 12.

156 Hobbs, “Reenvisioning the Personal,” 228.
of a particular work, but it is possible that they will help to illuminate some aspect of the
writer’s life, work or self to a researcher with the missing pieces needed to interpret them.
As an appraisal value, the concept of character indeed has worth. However, as a
foundation for re-thinking archival principles such as original order or for guiding
arrangement and description decisions, the concept of character is more problematic. Can
the archivist be expected, faced with all the challenges described in this chapter, to be
able to properly interpret character in a writer’s papers? Hobbs argues that the archivist
has the “closest to an all-seeing view” of the fonds,\footnote{Hobbs, “Character of Personal Archives,” 132.} but I do not think this can be true.
The writer herself knows more than we do. As Atwood points out to Sullivan, Atwood is
the expert on Atwood; she is the only person who really knows her own life and
experience.

In an article describing her research in Natalia Ginzburg’s archive, a Harvard
undergraduate wonders about the ethics of telling the story of another person’s life. She
asks:

When you write a thesis about someone’s life, you are in a sense taking
ownership of a past that is not your own, but what qualifies you to judge
what matters, especially when what you’re getting is only pieces of the

Ginzburg’s question – “what qualifies you to judge what matters?” – has significance in
the context of the archivist’s work with personal archives as well. Archivists need to
recognize the limitations of a primarily psychological approach to analyzing and representing records when, as this chapter has shown in the cases of the writers’ archives examined, such an approach is frequently misleading for a number of reasons: writers can work to craft a particular record of their life and/or can subvert or remove the more personal parts of their archive; this work of crafting and subverting can be carried out also by people other than the creator; while at the same time, the partialness of the archive, its tendency to relate to particular parts of a writer’s life, and its frequent banality can skew our reading of it. I do not want to argue that there is no psychological context to a personal archive or that character is not evident to some extent in it, but rather to advise archivists to use caution when it comes to the claims they make and the foundation on which they try to build theory for personal archives. While we may agree that archives have a psychological dimension, we also need to recognize the significant constraints we face in understanding and interpreting that dimension.

In the last chapter, I intimated that it is not only personal archives theory that rests on ideas of the archive as a reflection of its creator; traditional archival theory is also built on this premise. Classical theorists like Muller, Feith, and Fruin insist that a fonds “is always the reflection of the functions of [the] body or [the] official” that created it, while Giorgio Cencetti equated the original order of a fonds with the “essence” of its creator. In the next two chapters, my attention is directed toward the foundational principle of archival theory: the principle of provenance and its sub-principles, the principle of respect des fonds and respect for original order. In these chapters, I will

159 Muller, Feith and Fruin, 19.

160 Savoja and Vitali, 123.
examine how inconsistencies in archivists’ understanding and application of these principles develop in part out of this tendency to interpret archives psychologically. Building on the findings of this chapter, the next two suggest the need to reconsider not only the developing theory for personal archives, but also more traditional archival theory.
CHAPTER 4
ORIGINAL ORDER AND WRITERS’ ARCHIVES

In the previous two chapters, I have explored how ideas from the critical literature on life writing complicate a psychological reading of personal archives generally, and of writers’ archives specifically. In this chapter and the next, I turn to the foundational principle of archival theory – the principle of provenance, which includes the sub-principles of respect des fonds and of respect for original order – and examine it in the context of this discussion and in relation to both the archives I have studied for this research and my discussions with the archivists and librarians I interviewed. In the first of these two chapters, I begin with a brief outline of the historical origins and evolution of the principles of respect des fonds and the principle of respect for original order. This introduction is followed by an analysis of how the principle of respect for original order in particular has been and continues to be critiqued by archival theorists, and next, of its interpretation within the context of the interviews and archives that inform my own research. The chapter highlights the contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in the concept of original order and ends by suggesting that it is time to more fully admit the extent of its limitations and to acknowledge the type of disingenuousness¹ it fosters in archival description.

¹ The kind of disingenuousness I am referring to is discussed near the end of this chapter and in the next chapter. By disingenuousness, I do not necessarily mean to suggest that there is a clear intention to lie or deceive, but rather that description is not always as forthcoming as it could potentially be; as will be discussed in this chapter and in the next, and has been implied in previous chapters, archivists often know more about a group of records than they share with researchers. In this chapter and in Chapters 5 and 6, I will argue that, at least in part, archivists’ reluctance to share is correlated with their desire or need to adhere to archival principles.
A brief history of the origins of the principles of respect des fonds and respect for original order

Archivists are guided in the work of arrangement and description by two complementary principles: the principle of respect des fonds and the principle of respect for original order. In “Taming the Elephant: an Orthodox Approach to the Principle of Provenance,” Peter Horsman suggests that it is important to view these two principles as component parts of the more encompassing principle of provenance. The principle of provenance, he argues, should properly be considered as “the only principle of archival theory.” He explains:

The principle [of provenance] may have an outward application, which is to respect the archival body as it was created by an individual, a group or an organization as a whole. We call this Respect des fonds. The Principle of provenance may also be applied inwardly, respecting the original order given to the documents by the administration that created them.²

In much of the archival literature, the term “provenance” is used interchangeably with the term “respect des fonds.” For example, in the glossary to Rules for Archival Description (RAD), the Canadian descriptive standard, the entry for the principle of provenance directs readers to see the entry for respect des fonds.³ Similarly, in the Society for American Archivists Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology, the entry for

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³ Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, Rules for Archival Description (Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1990; Revised, 2008).
respect des fonds provides only a reference to the term provenance, the definition of which implies that the two terms can be used interchangeably. Occasionally, the term respect des fonds is used as the larger umbrella term. For example, in the entry for “Archival Arrangement and Description” in the Encyclopedia of Library and Information Studies, Third Edition, Joanne Evans et al. use the term respect des fonds in the way that Horsman uses the term provenance. They explain that the principle of respect des fonds has both “interior and exterior dimensions,” which in English-speaking countries have been termed the principles of respect for original order and provenance, respectively.

The lack of consistency in the way the terms are used in the archival literature can be confusing, and for the sake of clarity, I am adopting Horsman’s point of view. His use of the terminology is most accurate, I would suggest, since the term respect des fonds in its origins (as will be seen below) had little to do with the original order of materials but was instead meant to stress the importance of organizing archival materials according to the body that created them; it should, therefore, properly be seen as the narrower term, so that the term provenance can then be used to denote the broader sense of record origins.

Although the principles of respect des fonds and respect for original order are understood as component parts of the overarching principle of provenance, it must be recognized that the principle of respect des fonds developed prior to the principle of respect for original order. In Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques, T.R.

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Schellenberg outlines the development of principles for the arrangement and description of archival materials in France, Prussia, the Netherlands, and England. He explains that the first full articulation of the principle of respect des fonds occurred in France in a circular issued by Count Duchatel in 1841, which elaborated on regulations issued two years earlier by François Guizot. The circular was titled “Instructions pour la mise en ordre et le classement des archives départementales et communales,” and it instructed archivists at the departmental branches of the Archives Nationales to begin grouping records in fonds, so that “all records which originated with any particular institution, such as an administrative authority, a corporation, or a family” would be kept together and separate from the records of any other particular institution. Although the circular ordered respect for the origins of records in this sense, it did not require archivists to respect the original order of records within fonds; instead, it stipulated that records within the fonds should be arranged first into “subject-matter groups” and then, within the

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6 Schellenberg, Modern Archives, 170. Horsman asserts that the principle of respect des fonds is “not an invention of the French.” He argues that the concept had been “anticipated” in many different European countries in the early part of the nineteenth century. However, he also acknowledges that it was the French articulation of respect des fonds that influenced the Dutch authors of the Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives. In the English-language archival literature the French origins of the principle are generally stressed and there is a general lack of detailed information in English concerning archival traditions in countries other than France, Prussia and the Netherlands, although Luciana Duranti states that the principle of respect des fonds was first articulated “in Naples in 1812, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in 1822, the Papal State in 1839” prior to its articulation in France. The history of the principles presented here is meant to be a brief overview and focuses primarily on the development of the principles in France, Prussia and the Netherlands. For a more detailed discussion of their development in other parts of Europe see: Peter Horsman, “The Last Dance of the Phoenix, or the De-discovery of the Archival Fonds,” Archivaria 54 (Fall 2002), 6; Luciana Duranti, “Origin and Development of the Concept of Archival Description,” Archivaria 35 (Spring 1993), 50; Stefano Vitali, “The Archive at the Time of Its Institution: The Central Archive of Francisco Bonaini,” in The Florence State Archive: Thirteen Centuries of Historical Records, eds. Rosalia Manno Tolu and Anna Bellinazzi (Florence: Nardine Editore, 2002), 19-21; Arnaldo D’Addario, “The Development of Archival Science and its Present Trends,” in Archival Science on the Threshold of the Year 2000. Proceedings of the International Conference, Macerata, 3-8 September 1990, ed. Oddo Bucci (Ancona: University of Macerata, 1992), 167-192; Donato Tamblé, “Archival Theory in Italy Today,” Archival Science 1 (2001), 83-100.
subject-matter groups, “as circumstances might dictate, either chronologically, geographically, or alphabetically.”\(^7\)

On June 8, 1841, two months following Duchatel’s circular, Natalis de Wailly “justified” the principle of respect des fonds at a meeting of the French Archives Commission. De Wailly argued that “a general classification of records by *fonds* and (within *fonds*) by subject matter is the only way properly to assure the immediate realization of a regular and uniform order.”\(^8\) Nancy Bartlett has argued that de Wailly’s statement was more practically than theoretically significant; she suggests that rather than proposing a principled new model for arrangement, de Wailly intended only to ensure that archivists working in the departments and away from the direct supervision of the central *Archives Nationales* be provided with a simple and practical methodology such that they “might not cause too much intellectual damage to vulnerable records in their care.”\(^9\) However, both Schellenberg and Ernst Posner identify in de Wailly’s full statement a new theoretical stance. Posner contrasts the principle of respect des fonds with the methods used in the years immediately following the French Revolution when, “conforming to the general trends in historiography,” archivists “devoted most of their time and work…to arranging and cataloging medieval documents.” The holdings of archival repositories tended to resemble, at least in terms of their organization, manuscript collections found in libraries, and archival documents were “pressed into”

\(^7\) Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 170.

\(^8\) Quoted in Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 172.

pre-determined classification schemes “regardless of their original connection.” The enunciation of the principle of respect des fonds represented a new conviction about the nature of archives and of historical research: that “archives bodies correspond to a former or existing administrative unit and should be preserved accordingly.”

It is generally argued in the English-language archival literature that the principle of respect for original order was first clearly articulated in 1881 in the “Regulative für die Ordnungsarbeiten im Geheimen Staatsarchive,” regulations drafted by Max Lehmann and issued by Heinrich von Sybel for the treatment of materials at the Prussian Privy State Archives. In these regulations, Lehman advises archivists to follow two principles: the Provenienzprinzip, which called for all the records of one administration to be kept together and separate from the records of any other administration, and the Registraturprinzip, which called for the records of each administration to be maintained in the order in which the administration had kept them during their active life. The Registraturprinzip thereby “extended respect for creators by respecting also the manner in which creators conducted their affairs and maintained the records of such conduct.”


11 Although Posner and Schellenberg both attribute the development of the principle of respect for original order to the Prussians and then to the Dutch, Duranti argues that the concept of original order had already been explored by Francesco Bonaini in the archives of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in the late 1860s. Tamblé credits Bonaini with providing “a more clear definition and conscious exposition” to what became known as the metodo historico, which involved arranging archival documents to reflect the organization of the administrative body that originally created them. See: Duranti, 50; Tamblé, 87.


In 1898, the Dutch *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* was published and ideas about the principles of respect des fonds and of respect for original order that were, as its authors acknowledged, “in the air”\(^\text{14}\) throughout Europe were codified and provided with a “theoretical justification.”\(^\text{15}\) Samuel Muller, J.A. Feith and R. Fruin, the compilers of the manual, advocated a view of the archive as an “organic whole,” that “comes into being as the result of the activities of an administrative body or of an official,” and that is therefore “always the reflection of the functions of that body or of that official.” They further explained that the archive:

…grows, takes shape, and undergoes changes in accordance with fixed rules. If the functions of the body change, the nature of the [fonds] changes likewise. The rules which govern the composition, the arrangement and the formation of a [fonds], therefore, cannot be fixed by the archivist in advance; he can only study the organism and ascertain the rules under which it was formed. Every archival collection has, therefore, as it were, its own personality, its individuality…\(^\text{16}\)

The archivist’s task, then, is to respect this “personality” and “individuality” by maintaining fonds as fonds and by preserving or restoring their original order. As Horsman points out, the Dutch manual was fairly quickly “elevated…into the bible of archival theory.”\(^\text{17}\) At the International Congress of Archives in Brussels in 1910, “the

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\(^{14}\) Quoted in Horsman, “The Last Dance of the Phoenix,” 5.

\(^{15}\) Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 175.

\(^{16}\) Muller, Feith and Fruin, 19.

\(^{17}\) Horsman, “The Last Dance of the Phoenix,” 5.
first world-wide gathering of librarians and archivists,” a definition of the principle of provenance that was “essentially a condensed summary of the most important sections of the Dutch Manual” was unanimously accepted and the Manual’s methods became a de facto international standard.

Archival principles and personal archives: Original order

The principles for the treatment of archives developed in mid- to late-nineteenth century Europe were not intended to apply to collections of records created by individuals. As I mentioned in the first chapter of this work, Muller, Feith, and Fruin did not accord archive status to records created by families or individuals acting in a private capacity, believing that collections of such records lack the “organic bond” that, essentially, creates the fonds,\(^{18}\) and insisting, as Jenkinson would, too, that only archives created by officials in their official capacity qualified as bona fide archives. As a result of this early categorization of archives, there has been – and continues to be – discussion in the archival community about the applicability of archival principles to personal materials.

The most pointed discussions about archival principles and personal archives have had to do with the principle of respect for original order. The two most direct critics of the application of the principle to personal records have been Graeme Powell and Frank Boles, in articles published in 1976 and 1982, respectively. In “Disrespecting Original Order,” Boles concedes that “[h]istorically, the ordering of documents by their creator reveals information about the character and organization of the creator independent of the

\(^{18}\) Muller, Feith and Fruin, 20.
documents’ content,” but he argues that the principle of respect for original order can only be applied to records that were maintained in a meaningful and deliberate order in the first place; he explains that while the records of government may be organized in clear series and files, individuals rarely employ sophisticated record-keeping systems. Suggesting that most sets of personal archives “arrive in almost complete disorder,” Boles argues that instead of a strict adherence to the principle of respect for original order, archivists should focus more on “useability” and “simplicity” in arrangement to facilitate researchers’ access to records.\footnote{Frank Boles, “Disrespecting Original Order,” \textit{American Archivist} 45 (Winter 1982), 29.}

Powell voices similar objections. Like Boles, he argues that personal archives are “often no more than an agglomeration of loose papers.” In cases where there is a discernible arrangement, Powell points out that this could be an arrangement imposed on the records by someone other than the creator; for example, a creator’s relative may have selected and compiled the papers from a larger accumulation and then donated the selection to the repository.\footnote{Ibid., 30-31.} Powell also argues that because creators often rearrange their own papers during the long period of their use and accumulation, the order in which the archive arrives at a repository is not necessarily indicative of its primary arrangement. For these reasons, Powell advises archivists that they need not worry about original order in personal archives except in the “few cases where [it] has been preserved,” and even then only “if it reveals or suggests the thoughts and ideas” of the records creator.\footnote{Powell, “Archival Principles and the Treatment of Personal Papers,” 134.}\footnote{Ibid., 136.} An
original arrangement, he argues, is only likely to be “really interesting if a man had a deep interest in classification,”\textsuperscript{23} and in any case, “[t]he relationship that is revealed [by an original arrangement] may not be as significant as the relationship that is obscured.”\textsuperscript{24}

Ultimately, Powell advocates the rearrangement of records based on the perceived needs of researchers who he believes are searching not for evidence of recordkeeping activity, but for information related to specific subjects or people.

Although the articles by Boles and Powell are both decades old, the problems they identify as characteristic of personal archives continue to be discussed today. These days, few archivists would recommend reorganizing a personal archive on the basis of perceived researcher interests, but many would acknowledge the range of orders and disorder apparent in personal archives at the time of their donation, as well as the effect individuals other than the creator might have on such orders. At the Invitational Meeting of Experts on Arrangement held in Ottawa in 2004, for example, participants agreed that the “interpretation of ‘original order,’” continues to “present problems for archivists attempting to arrange personal fonds” for some of the same reasons identified by Boles and Powell.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 135.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 136.

\textsuperscript{25} Heather MacNeil [compiler], \textit{Invitational Meeting of Experts on Arrangement Final Report and Recommendations} (April 15, 2005), 9. Available at: \url{http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/IMEAreportEN.pdf} [last accessed August 7, 2012].
Contemporary critiques of original order

A more sophisticated discussion about the difficulties of applying the principle of respect for original order – and of the contradictions inherent to the principle – has begun to emerge over the last three decades, especially with and since the advent of the postmodern turn in archival theory. In 1991, Brien Brothman published an influential article titled “Orders of Value: Probing the Terms of Archival Value.” In the article, Brothman argues that there is nothing natural – or original – about original order. He suggests that archivists and archival theory overemphasize the organic nature of record groups (or fonds) and argues instead that order in archives results from a complex “social” process. Archivists themselves are a part of this social process and while they might make proclamations about a natural, organic order, they are in fact involved in the business of creating the illusion of such an order. Brothman believes that for many archivists “the principal aim is to achieve a condition of positive order in their domain.” To do so, archivists try to suppress or negate the existence of what he calls “dirt” or “rubbish,” of “things that are out of place.” Removing “dirt” from archives might involve weeding ephemera and duplicates, as well as items that do not fit into neat classification schemes, and, obviously, is a significant departure from the ‘original’ state of the archive.

Brothman also suggests other ways in which archivists “upset” ‘original order’ during the course of normal archival practice. For example, some records in a group will

27 Ibid., 84.
28 Ibid., 81.
almost inevitably be destroyed because they are not deemed to have permanent archival value. Furthermore, archivists remove records from the site at which they were created and accumulated and re-house them in acid-free folders and boxes, an act meant to preserve documents for the long term, but one which also obscures aspects of the records’ ‘original order.’

29 This is a point that is also made by Ala Rekrut, who convincingly describes the effect of archival work on records’ original contexts:

Improving preservation and accessibility may motivate archives to physically change records, but these interventions also actively change the context of the record, as evidence of the previous custodians’ relationships to the record may be discarded and the archives’ values take precedence.

Like Brothman, she calls attention to archivists’ desire “to project an image of competent stewardship to our clients” through the use of careful organization schemes and “uniform boxes and folders.”

30 Brothman’s central argument against the principle of respect for original order is related to the argument against the positivist historian’s belief in an “accessible past,” and he stresses that “it is as problematical for an archives to maintain that it is remaining faithful to original order…as it is for historians to claim that their work somehow captures and represents the past.”

31 Peter Horsman investigates a different sort of problem with the principle. In “Dirty Hands: A New Perspective on the Original Order,”

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29 Ibid., 85.
30 Rekrut, 25.
31 Brothman, 83.
he argues that the Dutch manual encourages archivists to neglect an original physical order in favor of a logical order based on the administrative structure of an organization.

The treatment of archives suggested by Muller, Feith, and Fruin derives from their belief that there should be a natural correspondence between the organization and functions of an administrative body and the records it creates. However, Horsman argues that in many organizations, there is an “a-synchronicity of the business processes and the recordkeeping processes,” so that the “structure of a fonds is determined by the secretaries (records managers), rather than by the administration.”³² Horsman suggests that by attempting to follow the advice of the Manual, archivists have frequently had to disrupt the record keeping order in which they find records and then attempt to reproduce imagined – and ideal – orders that more accurately reflect administrative structures and functions. In the article, Horsman uses the example of the Dordrecht town archives to show how the manner in which records are stored might reveal more than was previously believed about their purpose and importance. Since emerging technologies are capable of reflecting the changes in record keeping structures that occur over time and of describing the various relationships between records and their multiple contexts of use, Horsman believes that archivists should be able to represent to users the different physical and intellectual orderings that records assume during their life cycle.

One of the key points made in Horsman’s article is that an administration’s record keeping system is bound to change as the structure of the administration changes, as its mandate, functions, and activities change, and as technology and record keeping

knowledge change. While the Dutch manual, which prescribes a “Ptolemaic archivology,”\textsuperscript{33} insists on the choice of one original order usually corresponding to the last surviving order of a group of records, during its active period and as it is cared for by different custodians, a body of records might assume any number of different orders. Heather MacNeil uses the term “archivalterity” to refer to “the acts of continuous and discontinuous change that transform the meaning and authenticity of a fonds as it is transmitted over time and space.”\textsuperscript{34} Like Horsman, MacNeil describes a number of different orders a body of records may assume over time. In particular, MacNeil considers orders that are shaped by what she calls a “custodial bond.” Whereas traditional archival theorists tend to view the imposition of intentions of subsequent custodians on a body of records as “a contamination to be eradicated,” MacNeil proposes that custodial interventions should instead be seen as “simply part of the history of the records.”\textsuperscript{35}

Using the Bakunin family archive as an example, MacNeil shows how it was ordered and re-ordered by various custodians to serve different purposes. Instead of suggesting that one of these orders is particularly ‘original’ and should therefore take precedence over others, MacNeil argues that:

Each order is an embodied argument about the changing meaning of the archive as it was re-territorialized and recontextualized in different custodial environments, and by different authorities. Each order attests to the intentions of these custodians to memorialize, to monumentalize, and

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 46.

\textsuperscript{34} MacNeil, “Archivalterity,” 14.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
to shape the memory of the Bakunin family. The orders given to the records by their various custodians – or at least what survives of these various orders – are as relevant to the present meaning and authenticity of the archive as the order given to the records by its creator.36

MacNeil concludes that records are “in a continuous state of becoming as their physical and intellectual orders are shaped and reshaped, contextualized and recontextualized”37 by both their creators and by subsequent custodians. Original order, she suggests, is only “one of many possible orders a body of records will have over time,”38 and, importantly, the archivist’s version of original order is necessarily always a construction or reconstruction based on archivists’ “understanding of the nature of records and current conventions for arrangement and description.”39 For these reasons, MacNeil ends by suggesting that it is time for the “privileged status” of original order to be “reconsidered” by the archival community.40

In the literature on personal archives in particular, there have also been more recent discussions about original order. Catherine Hobbs emphasizes the “tenuous and provisional nature” of personal arrangements, arguing that individuals “form and reform original orders each day as a result of the freedom they have with their documents and their changing ideas of themselves, their activities, and their use and reuse of

36 Ibid., 17.
37 Ibid., 21.
38 Ibid., 24.
39 Ibid., 21.
40 Ibid., 24.
documentation.” Finding personal arrangements meaningful because they evolve “out of
the mental life of the individual,” Hobbs sees arrangement as part of the “psychological
context of the archive;” at the “minutest level,” she suggests, the placement of documents
“can indicate personal values” and archivists are advised to “be open to consider the less
tangible and less permanent arrangements (of whatever sort) that might exist within
people’s lives.”

In “Rethinking Original Order and Personal Records,” Jennifer Meehan proposes
that archivists learn to understand the principle of respect for original order as a
conceptual framework rather than “as an ends [sic] to be achieved.” Both Hobbs and
Meehan acknowledge the “original disorder” in which personal archives frequently
arrive at a repository, but whereas Hobbs emphasizes the value inherent in any type of
personal arrangement or lack thereof, Meehan offers a more pragmatic approach to
restoring or creating order in the archives of individuals. Meehan relies on a classic
definition of original order that stresses the relationships between records and activities,
“the assumption being that the internal relationships of a body of records bear a direct
relation to the development of the specific activity or activities that give rise to the
records.” However, Meehan suggests that as it has traditionally been interpreted, the
principle of respect for original order “serves, more or less, as a bottom-up approach to
interpreting and representing a body of records” that necessarily begins with the records’

41 Hobbs, “Reenvisioning the Personal,” 228-229.
42 Jennifer Meehan, “Rethinking Original Order and Personal Records,” Archivaria 70 (Fall 2010), 33.
43 Hobbs, “Reenvisioning the Personal,” 228.
44 Meehan, 35.
internal relationships and then moves outward to their external relationships. This approach works when records have a discernible order, but where records lack “a meaningful internal structure,” Meehan argues that archivists will instead need to adopt a “top-down approach:”

Rather than being concerned with identifying and preserving the existing relationships between and among records, archivists should analyze and imagine the possible relationships between records and activities. Based on an understanding of these external relationships, archivists then effectively create the internal relationships of a fonds by putting the records in the most appropriate place(s) to reflect the development of the specific activities that gave rise to them and/or the subsequent activities in which they were involved.45

In other words, Meehan asks archivists to imagine what the original order of the records ought to be based on knowledge of the creator and his or her professional and personal roles and activities.

Each of the critiques of the principle of respect for original order examined in this section and in the last takes a slightly different view of the problems associated with its interpretation and application; together they call attention to several contradictions or inconsistencies that seem to be inherent to the principle. First, we notice the difficulty in determining whether the concept of original order is meant to refer to an original physical order or to an original logical order. Writing about the evolution of the concept of respect for original order leading up to its codification in the Dutch Manual for the Arrangement

45 Meehan, 36.
and Description of Archives, Horsman explains that prior to the compilation of the Manual there had been “intense discussions” about how and what kinds of rules to implement for the inventorying of state archives. Samuel Muller and another state archivist Th.H.F. van Riemsdijk swapped experience and opinions in a series of letters which show their differing perspectives on what constituted an original order. For van Riemsdijk, “the original physical arrangement as established by the original registry [system] was the key defining criteria.” Muller’s understanding of original order, however, was “more conceptual than physical,” and was based on his belief that the original order corresponds to the administrative structure of the creating body and not always necessarily to the structure of its filing system. Muller’s point of view prevailed and in Section 16 of the Manual it is written that “the original organization of an archival [fonds] must naturally correspond in its main lines to the old organization of the administrative body that produced it.” From its very beginnings then the principle has confounded archivists on this point, and in spite of the codification of the primacy of logical order, discussion continues regarding the significance of physical order to the overall meaning of a body of records where the two orders do not coincide.

The second major difficulty involved in the interpretation of the principle involves determining what order is – or should be represented as – original. Traditionally, the original order of a body of records is understood to be “the last arrangement the documents had before finishing their usefulness for the last administrative body which

47 Muller, Feith and Fruin, 56-57.
actively used them.” However, as each of the authors cited above notes, a body of records may assume a number of different orders during its active life and then again in the hands of subsequent custodians; whereas many of these orders might previously have been disregarded in favour of the last active creator order, archivists are now beginning to contemplate the significance of different orders over time to the overall meaning and context of a fonds. The notion of originality is complicated by the recognition of a variety of significant orders, and the decision to name the last useful order as the ‘original’ one appears somewhat arbitrary.

In the interviews I conducted and the archives I consulted, I encountered archivists struggling with these same questions and inconsistencies. For the most part it seems that the archival community has come to an agreement that the principle of respect for original order should apply to personal archives, that personal archives – like any other archives – have a nature and an integrity that need to be recognized and protected and that respecting their original order is the best way to do so. Nevertheless, considerable confusion lingers concerning both the meaning of the principle – what constitutes an original order – and its significance – what it is that an original order is supposed to communicate.

How working archivists and librarians talk about original order: Original order as discussed in expert interviews

Between May and October 2010, I conducted interviews with thirteen individuals across Canada who can be considered experts in the field of literary archives. Of these,

48 Horsman, “Taming the Elephant,” 58.
nine identified primarily as archivists, whereas four were trained as librarians and considered themselves to fit more comfortably into that profession. These four were less likely to stress the importance of original order, although each of them recognized value in an existing creator order and explained that they would preserve discernible order in received collections unless they believed that order would hinder access for researchers (i.e., if the order was particularly idiosyncratic and/or difficult to navigate). From the nine archivists I interviewed, considerable support for the principle of respect for original order was voiced; at the same time, however, the majority of the nine also identified difficulties involved in interpreting and applying the principle to the archives of authors.

As I conducted the interviews, listened to, and transcribed them, and studied them to identify trends, themes, and concepts, I was struck by the number of different types of order that were identified, and by the number of these orders that were described as being in some way original. Interviewees spoke of the order found in filing cabinets in home offices, of order corresponding to the writer’s creative process, of packing and shipping orders, of custodial orders, of the order they believed was the creator’s original order, of original disorder (of varying degrees), and of multiple types of order and disorder overlapping each other. The big questions that emerge from my iterative analysis of the interviews correspond to the questions raised by archival theorists’ critiques of the principle. First, should original order be understood as a physical order or as a more logical or intellectual order? Second, if original order is understood as a physical order, which physical order – or orders – should be considered original, and which should be preserved? Finally, what is it that we believe is captured in an original order and how do we articulate that to researchers and to ourselves?
As explained in the previous section, archivists’ difficulties in distinguishing between the primacy of a physical or logical order are long-standing. Logical order is primarily determined based on an understanding of the external structure of the fonds. Terry Eastwood distinguishes between the external and internal structure of a fonds in the following way:

On the one hand, archival documents are systematized according to the way their agent of provenance organizes or structures its activities. This external structure of provenance identifies and explains the various administrative relationships governing the way organizations and persons conduct their business, which in turn governs the way they create and maintain their archives. On the other hand, every archival fonds also has a documentary structure established by the way the documents are ordered during the conduct of affairs. This internal structure of provenance identifies the relationships among the documents as they were organized by the agent accumulating them.49

In accumulations of records where the internal structure has not been carefully preserved, efforts can be made to reconstruct original order based on an understanding of the records’ external structure. With institutional records, the external structure of the fonds is understood in relation to an institution’s mandate, its reporting structure, its delegation of authority and competences, and its functional responsibilities.50 With personal records,

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external structure has tended to be understood in terms of the types of roles the creator occupies both professionally and socially, and the various professional and social activities in which she engages.\footnote{Meehan, 38. See also: Jennifer Meehan, “Making the Leap from Parts to Whole: Evidence and Inference in Archival Arrangement and Description,” \textit{American Archivist} 72 (Spring/Summer 2009), 79-85.} Where personal records arrive disorganized, their ‘original order’ is often reconstructed along these lines, in much the same way that Meehan advocates: the archivist uses her understanding of the records’ external structure to help her to infer and/or imagine the relationships between records and activities and to delineate series accordingly.

It is not difficult to find examples of writers’ fonds whose arrangements reflect an inferred or imagined logical order. For example, writers’ fonds are often arranged into series according to the genre of the record, with separate series designated for correspondence, writings, notebooks, diaries, etc. Series, or sub-series, might also be designated for genres of writing (novels, short stories, poetry, etc.),\footnote{When archivists arrange writers’ material by genre of writing (e.g., novels, short stories, poetry, research, notes, journals, etc.), it is often because they understand writing in different genres to be akin to performing different activities, i.e. writing poetry is considered to be a different type of activity than writing in a journal or writing a short story.} and in relation to other roles the writer fulfilled or activities he engaged in; for example, for a writer who was also a university professor and who participated actively in the Writers’ Union, there may be specific series related to each of these roles. Of course, it is possible that the writer maintained his records in this order as he used them, but some archivists I spoke with explained that this type of arrangement scheme has typically been used in cases
where material received is in considerable disorder, or where a writer’s own order is not thought to be helpful for research purposes.  

Where archivists or librarians arrange writers’ records in these types of logical schemas, they will usually begin by assessing the physical order of the materials received, gleaning what they can about the internal structure of the records and comparing this to what they know about their external structure, i.e. the activities and roles of the creator. If the received physical order of the materials corresponds to their understanding of external structure, they will determine that the archive arrived in its original order and will preserve it; if the received physical order of the materials does not correspond to their understanding of external structure, it is that understanding that is identified as the original order and the materials are physically rearranged to reflect it. In either case, the identification of original order depends on the archivist’s knowledge and beliefs about the life of the creator.

A second type of original order identified by interviewees is original creative order. Rather than focusing on the kind of logical order described above, many archivists spoke to me about trying to recreate a writer’s creative process through arrangement and description. For these archivists, original order in a writer’s fonds corresponds most closely to the original order in which individual notes, sketches and drafts were created during the process of writing a poem, a short story or a novel. Some writers’ papers arrive

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54 Meehan, “Making the Leap from Parts to Whole,” 79-85. Several interviewees acknowledged this process: Shoesmith, interview by author; Spadoni, interview by author; Toews, interview by author, Garay, interview by author.
at the repository in this order, and interviewees provided me with examples of writers whose archives clearly reflect their creative process, either because it seemed natural to them to store their records that way or because they had a sense of the value of their papers and assumed that it was the creative process which future researchers would hope to find in them.\(^{55}\) However, many of the interviewees also spoke of writers’ papers arriving in trunks or garbage bags with very little or no discernible order. In other cases, the materials might arrive packed in boxes and files but in such a way that it was obvious to the archivist that she was looking at a packing or shipping order rather than at a creative order.

As reported in the discussion of coaxers and coercers in Chapter 3, both Kathy Garay and Jean Tener had to do considerable rearrangement work – both physical and intellectual – in order to reconstitute what they believed to be original creative order in the archives of Marian Engel and Alice Munro, respectively. The first accession of Munro’s archives arrived at the University of Calgary in a trunk and a suitcase.\(^{56}\) In a letter accompanying these, Munro warned Tener: “The disorder is total.”\(^{57}\) Tener found, after going over the material several times, that the disorder was not as complete as Munro made it out to be; however, though some complete manuscripts were found together, a lot of the material was “scattered” and “disorganized,” and Tener explained that she “had the sense that [Munro was] sort of going through the house and saying, ‘oh,

\(^{55}\) Heather Home, interview by author, digital recording, Halifax, Nova Scotia, June 10, 2010; Monique Ostiguy, interview by author, Ottawa, Ontario, July 7, 2010; Toews, interview by author; Hobbs, interview by author; Power, interview by author.

\(^{56}\) Moore and Tener, xxix.

\(^{57}\) Quoted in Tener, 38.
yes, they’d like that,’ and that went in [the trunk]; ‘oh, oh,’ and that went in [too].”

Tener spent more than a year “going over and over and over” Munro’s manuscripts and correspondence, using any physical clues such as pagination and type of paper, ink or font, as well as any available dates and internal clues such as names of characters and story lines to attempt to reconstruct the order in which she believed Munro had written and accumulated different drafts.

Garay describes following a similar process to bring order to Engel’s archive, which arrived at McMaster University in boxes and garbage bags, and which Garay described as having no discernible prior order. In both these cases, the archivists determined that the order of the material as it was received was not original and did not need to be preserved. The physical order of the material was deemed to be of little significance (except for the clues it provided of the lost creative order), and the task of the archivist was to attempt to re-create – both physically and intellectually – the original creative order.

Other archivists I spoke with placed more emphasis on the significance of the physical order of the archive at the moment they first encountered it, believing this order to correspond more closely to their understanding of original order. In some cases, this first-sight physical order is necessarily a packing or shipping order; in other cases, archivists have access to a writer’s work space and are able to view documents in shelves and filing cabinets, on desktops and floors, as the writer uses and accesses them. This

58 Steele and Tener, interview by author.
59 Ibid.
60 Garay, interview by author.
type of original physical order, Catherine Hobbs explained, is “the locus of our being able to interpret work patterns. Original physical order retains physical evidence of how an individual lived and worked,” and needs therefore to be preserved and contextualized rather than re-imagined. Whereas several interviewees explained that they believed it necessary to “separate and sort” the archives of “people who mix everything together: a few pages of their draft, some grocery receipts, some letters,” those who equated original order with a first-sight physical order identified something valuable in the mix.

The archivists I spoke with who held this view of original order tended to preserve the physical order of the archive as they received it and to lay over this order what we might call an archival order. The Douglas Coupland fonds is a good example of this approach. In the finding aid to the fonds, the processing archivist explains that he has maintained the original physical order as closely as possible and alerts researchers to the presence in the accession file of an original inventory that arrived with the first accession of material as well as a record he made of each file’s location within the original Coupland boxes. In this way, the archivist explains, the researcher has access to the “original order” of the fonds. The material is listed in the inventory both physically (through a box-file list) and intellectually, in series determined by the archivist and “based loosely on the arrangement of Coupland’s projects” on his personal website.

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61 Hobbs, interview by author.

62 Toews, interview by author.

63 I will have more to say about archival order later in this chapter.

finding aid reflects an understanding of original order that is based on the physical placement of records, on the final spot at which they came to rest before arriving at the archives rather than on a more logical or intellectual understanding of the processes that led to the creation of Coupland’s works. These processes are nevertheless represented by the archivist in the series he has created to help provide access to the varied materials; however, these series are not identified as a recovered original order, but are explicitly represented as the archivist’s creation and the physical order of the materials as they were received is repeatedly identified as the *original* order.

Although it might seem as though these two views – of original order as an encountered physical order or as an imagined or inferred logical order – exist in opposition to each other, during the interviews I conducted I noticed a regular slippage from one position to the other and back again. In particular, it seemed almost impossible for the encountered physical order *not* to be described using the word ‘original’ even when the archivist doing so leaned overall toward the idea of original order as logical. A further complication arose when archivists discussed the different types of physical orders they might come across: a more-or-less intact and organized filing system packed in bankers boxes for shipping; a snapshot of a workspace at the time of the archivist’s appraisal visit; a seemingly disordered or randomly ordered bunch of files and loose papers packed haphazardly in boxes and bags; a secondary order imposed by a subsequent custodian of the material; etc. All of these were described as being in some way ‘original.’ A packing order is, after all, an original outcome of the creator’s packing activities, and a custodial order is an original outcome of an interested relative’s, friend’s, executor’s or previous archivist’s handling of the archive. Each of these so-called
‘original’ orders was thought to carry with it its own particular significance; each was, to use MacNeil’s phrase, “an embodied argument about the changing meaning of the archive.”

Problems also arose when interviewees attempted to explain the significance of different orders, and in particular, the significance of the first-sight physical order. As I mentioned earlier, some of the archivists and librarians I interviewed did not actually accord very much significance to the physical order of records, except in the apparently rare cases where the received physical order obviously corresponded to the writer’s own filing systems, and for the fact that the received physical order might provide clues that would help recover the lost creative order. On the other hand, several interviewees spoke assuredly of the primary significance of the encountered physical order; interestingly, however, while these archivists were convinced of significance, they could not always articulate what or how physical order signified. I heard explanations such as: “You may not be able to really explain it in a sentence but it’s something kind of intangible,” or, “[it’s] how the mind works. Maybe.” My intention in repeating statements such as these is not to criticize the professionals who made them, but to call attention to the difficulty we still have in expressing what we think order – of whatever type – means.

In classical archival theory, arguments in favour of respect for original order enforced the connection between the order of records and the nature of their creators. Because Muller, Feith, and Fruin viewed the archive as “an organic whole, a living

66 Toews, interview by author.
67 Ostiguy, interview by author.
organism, which grows, takes shape and undergoes change” in accordance with the growth, development and change that takes place within the administration that creates it, they understood the archive to also be “always the reflection of the functions” of that body. Giorgio Cencetti makes similar and explicit claims about the very close connection between an archive and its creator:

The archive reflects its creator or, more exactly, is the creator itself, in the sense that the original order of the archive…is the manifestation of the administrative structure, the history, and in some way, the very ‘essence’ of the records creator.

Although many archivists who write about personal archives stress the differences between them and organizational archives, the arguments that are made in favour of respecting found orders in personal archives are very similar to those made by Muller, Feith, and Fruin and other classical theorists. The classical archival idea that the original order of a body of records is significant because of the way it reflects the “essence” of its creator is reinforced when it is argued that the order of an individual’s records is significant because it reflects the ‘intention,’ ‘values,’ ‘thoughts’ and ‘psychology’ of that individual. In Chapter 2, I referred to Stephen Ennis’s discussion of the influence of Romanticism on scholars’ work with literary papers. Ennis argues that for many researchers, having access to an original manuscript is akin to having access to the spark of the author’s inspiration. In some of the recent literature on personal and literary

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68 Muller, Feith, and Fruin, 19.


70 Ennis, 117-119.
archives, it is implied that such access is provided not only by the individual documents, but also by the manner in which their creator organizes them.\textsuperscript{71}

This is a position that was echoed by several of the archivists and librarians I interviewed. In her interview with me, Hobbs cautioned me against reading into her articles on personal archives a “categorical” statement about the ability to access personality through the fonds:

[In my articles, what I’ve said is] that personality will affect, the individual will affect their recordkeeping, will affect their archives; it’s not the same thing as saying you’re going to get the personality out, [that] if you squeeze the fonds, you’re going to understand personality….\textsuperscript{72}

Hobbs also explained that she understands arrangement and description as “an act of interpretation of how I see that individual’s life,…as a narrative about that individual’s life,” and one of her primary focuses in working with donors and with their archives is to discover how the archive “relates to the psychology or development of the individual.”\textsuperscript{73}

Hobbs’ colleague at Library and Archives Canada, Monique Ostiguy, takes a similar view. She described for me her work on the Gérard Leblanc fonds, explaining that his was a fonds that at first seemed to her to be extremely disorganized and which, therefore, offered a “good example of the challenge of keeping the original order of a fonds in order to show his writing process [and] the creative evolution of his writing.” As Ostiguy worked her way through the disorder, she began to find connections between

\begin{footnote}{71} These ideas are discussed also Douglas, “Original Order, Added Value? Archival Theory and the Douglas Coupland fonds.”\end{footnote}

\begin{footnote}{72} Hobbs, interview by author.\end{footnote}

\begin{footnote}{73} Hobbs, interview by author.\end{footnote}
materials and to feel that there was in fact “some kind of order” present. The order she found was, she explained, “very close to his mind, which was really eclectic: he was gay, he smoked a lot of pot, he did drugs, he lived in Moncton, but also Montreal, New York, and Europe, he lived everywhere…”74 I asked Ostiguy whether she felt that because as archivists our focus is on recordkeeping, we might be according too much significance to order or disorder and what it reveals about an individual. Although she thought there was potentially some merit to this idea, Ostiguy also felt that “people have different mindsets” and that these are “reflected in the organization or disorganization of their archives.”75

On the other hand, there were interviewees who expressed skepticism concerning the ability of the archive to reflect – to whatever degree – its creator. Jean Tener, for example, stated that she would be “very wary about trying to draw conclusions about…the writer’s personality from the papers;” “it’s too easy to make up personality,” she added as a warning.76 Several interviewees suggested – echoing Powell’s early speculations about the value of original order in personal archives – that the order of the archive might indicate whether a writer tended to be tidy or not, but reiterated that the order of the archive as first encountered by the archivist may bear little resemblance to the archive as it was used by the writer.77 It also must be asked to what degree tidiness (or lack thereof) correlates to other personality traits; in other words, how much can we infer about a writer’s personality or “mindset” based on the degree of order or disorder in their

74 Ostiguy, interview by author.

75 Ostiguy, interview by author.

76 Tener, interview by author.

77 Sweeney, interview by author; Power, interview by author; Steele and Tener, interview by author.
papers? Garay described to me the archives of poet Susan Musgrave, who, Garay says, “gives the impression of being sort of a woodland sprite, a bit of a witch,” and who, on the “About” page of her personal website emphasizes the unconventionality and rebelliousness of her past and development as an artist.\(^78\) Musgrave’s archives, however, arrive at McMaster “totally pristine…in bright red folders, neatly labelled, first draft, second draft, etc.” Garay explains that while the archive “tells us” that Musgrave is “well-organized, that she has time to be well-organized, [and] that she has a fairly firm sense of her own importance, or at the least, of the value of her papers,” there is a “nice contradiction” between its tidiness and what Musgrave’s public knows of her life and personality.\(^79\)

**Implications for archival theory**

The discussion of original order in the interviews I conducted for this research project reveals a lack of consensus in the archival community on the interpretation and significance of the principle of respect for original order in writers’ fonds and, perhaps, in other types of fonds as well. We are indeed in need, as one interviewee suggested, of a “good philosophical discussion”\(^80\) about our understanding of the principle: of its strengths and limitations, of what we think it represents, or should represent, and of how we want to communicate that to researchers.

\(^78\) Susan Musgrave, “About the Author Susan Musgrave,” [www.susanmusgrave.com/aboutsusanmusgrave.html](http://www.susanmusgrave.com/aboutsusanmusgrave.html) [last accessed September 26, 2011].

\(^79\) Garay, interview by author.

\(^80\) Tener, interview by author.
As noted in the previous section, the archivists and librarians I interviewed identified a wide range of orders as original, sometimes even describing more than one order in a single fonds as being in some way the original order. An obvious problem presents itself here: while we may agree that the different orders a body of records assumes over its lifetime are all significant, we cannot logically conclude that each is original. Furthermore, as critics of the principle such as Brothman and MacNeil have pointed out, to pinpoint the one order that could be called original is a task fraught with difficulty. The order in which materials are received by a repository may provide evidence of a certain phase of records creation, but, as many of the interviewees noted, received order often reflects a packing order and a packing order is rarely original in the sense that archivists intend that term: “Quite often,” one archivist explained, “[writers] just dump things into boxes….There is so much dislocation in sending materials.” The reconstruction of a creative process by an archivist, even when it is based on internal evidence and completed with the utmost attention and caution, is not original either. Even the snapshot order taken by an archivist lucky enough to visit a writer’s study and see the work in situ is only original for a moment.

What archivists need are more ways to talk about order in records. We need to admit the possibility of moving beyond original order, to not only acknowledge that a group of records will assume different arrangements over time, but also to name and theorize these orders, and to make them more explicit in our descriptions for our users. Original order is like the Holy Grail to archivists: we feel compelled to seek it and it consistently eludes us. Worse, our compulsion – and professional responsibility – to

81 Sweeney, interview by author.
identify original order is leading us to identify as original a variety of other orders that we sense are significant but for which we have no language or theory to name or describe. We must begin to question in earnest what kind of information about a fonds – information that might help researchers better understand the total context of the records within it – is lost as a result.

Tom Nesmith has recently suggested that it “seems time to dispense with the traditional concept of original order,” and to focus on what he calls “received order.” Because it is difficult for anyone to identify with certainty the original order of a group of records, Nesmith argues that it is better to represent the records in the way in which they are received at the archives.82 A focus on “received order” acknowledges, therefore, the common difficulty of interpreting and applying the principle of respect for original order, but it does not necessarily solve the problem of identifying and describing the type of received order the archivist encounters, and nor does it account for situations where, as Hobbs and Ostiguy described in interviews, the archivist has privileged access to a writer’s work space and habits and, therefore, a closer view of what we still might want to call original order. An alternate approach might be to work as a community to more carefully identify and designate the range of orders we either encounter or create. For example, for a case like the Douglas Coupland fonds, we might want to indicate to researchers that the fonds has been maintained in its received order, which reflects the order in which it was packed by its creator’s partner, and that an archival order, corresponding to the archivist’s understanding of the creator’s activities and work patterns is also represented in the finding aid.

82 Nesmith, “Reopening Archives,” 264.
Just as we need more ways to talk about order, we need also to better articulate what we think – or hope – different orders communicate and why they are significant. The safest approach here, however, might be to admit our limitations, to accept the inevitable gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the relationship between archives and creators. As archivists, we may feel that there is, in the order we find in an individual’s archive, something personal, something revealing of that author’s character or psychology; however, we must also be careful not to overstate our abilities to know a creator and to show what we know through arrangement and description. While it is certainly true to some degree that “personal archives arrangements are meaningful because their physical and intellectual arrangement can demonstrate thoughts and actions,” the difficulties of interpreting the psychological context of recordkeeping must also be acknowledged. In the two previous chapters, I outlined some of the difficulties involved in determining an author’s character from her archive: the active, often controlling and sometimes nearly deceptive role of the archiving ‘I;’ the effect of other interested parties on the eventual contents and shape of the archive; the banality of some of the intentions that form the archive; and the archivist’s limited view of the creator’s life. Each of these factors affects also our ability to read and interpret order in archives.

For example, in the Margaret Atwood archives, what archivists might want to call original order, i.e., the final order the papers assume before being transferred to the archive, is not solely a product of Atwood’s efforts; her personal assistants play an important role in opening files and determining what belongs in each one. In this case, then, it would be difficult to draw firm conclusions about Atwood’s thinking or

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83 Hobbs, “Re-envisioning the Personal,” 228.
psychology based on the order of her archives. A similar problem arises in the Douglas Coupland fonds where, as discussed, boxes to be sent to the archives appear to have been packed by Coupland’s partner, David Weir, to whom belong also many of the items found in the fonds.

In the Dorothy Livesay fonds at the University of Manitoba, and in the various other Livesay fonds and collections scattered across the country, a different type of complication reveals itself; in the same way that Atwood donates to the Fisher Library every year for financial reasons, Livesay timed many of her donations to the University of Manitoba and to other repositories – and determined the contents of different donations – in order to maximize the financial return she would receive. While Livesay’s pecuniary motives might provide insight into her psychology, they might just as well be understood as practical indications of financial need; to read too much into Livesay’s motives might be to do injustice to her character.

Another significant factor complicating the ability of the ordering of an archive to attest to its creator’s psychology or character is the common and perhaps, in the case of well-known literary figures, almost inevitable, archival effect: the creator’s knowledge that their papers will one day be housed in a public repository affects the way the creator treats them. Tony Power, the librarian with responsibility for the Contemporary Literature Collection at Simon Fraser University’s Special Collections and Rare Books, suggested to me that in the literary archives he works with there is “no pure creator’s order,” that order is always influenced by contact with or awareness of the archival repository and its practices. For this reason, Power was wary of drawing too many conclusions about the nature of the relationship between the creator and the arrangement
of his papers. In his case, Power was referring to writers’ awareness of how archives are typically treated at Simon Fraser University and of what the archivist is looking to preserve from among the larger bulk of papers the writers accumulate over time. Two authors whose papers reside now at Simon Fraser have taken to producing finding aids for each accession they ship, and have learned how to do so through familiarity with the shape earlier accessions assumed under archival care; certainly in these cases the ‘coaxing’ effect of the writers’ knowledge of archival principles and practice has had a profound impact on the ‘original order’ of their work.

As discussed in the previous chapter, awareness of the archive has caused several authors to carefully review their archival material and to separate more personal items from the material they send to a repository; this type of removal not only disturbs the order of the records but also renders more difficult a personal reading of them and of their subsequent order. Awareness of the archival value of their papers may also cause some individuals to order them specifically for the repository. Several interviewees referred to cases where writers had embarked on reorganization projects (or, sometimes, made first attempts at organization) prior to donating or selling their archives. Tracy Brain describes a particularly interesting example of a writer’s awareness of the archival value of her manuscripts in a study of Sylvia Plath’s poetry drafts. Brain argues that Plath was “shrewd about the fact her papers could end up in literary archives,” and suggests that Plath understood the way in which the dates inscribed on her papers, as well as their

84 Power, interview by author.

85 Ostiguy, interview by author; Shoesmith, interview by author; Steele and Tener, interview by author; Sweeney, interview by author.
physical order, could “tell a compelling story” about the way she wrote her poems. Plath was, Brain argues, manipulating the drafts of her *Ariel* poems to “create an impression of concentrated intensity” surrounding their creation.86

There is another type of archival effect whose significance cannot be overlooked, and that is the kind of effect described by Brothman, Rekrut and others; whether or not the archivist engages in extensive physical and intellectual arrangement of an archive, his effect on its found order cannot be avoided. In addition to the types of physical alterations noted by Rekrut and Brothman – the transfer of materials to uniform-looking acid-free folders and boxes, etc. – one of the most obvious archival interventions is the archivist’s creation of the hierarchical fonds-series-file archive structure. A fairly standard definition of the archival series is provided in the “Select List of Archival Terminology” compiled by the School of Library, Archival and Information Science at the University of British Columbia, which states that a series is comprised of “documents arranged systematically or maintained as a unit because they relate to a particular function or subject, result from the same activity, have a particular form, or because of some other relationship arising from their creation, receipt, or use.”87 Michael Cook provides a similar definition of series. He notes that while all definitions of the term are “rather abstract,…in actual


practice, it is usually fairly easy to recognize a series of records because of its unitary character.”

In many of the interviews I conducted, participants described the process of identifying series. In most cases, interviewees seemed to agree with Cook’s assessment that series can be identified on the basis of several different kinds of similar characteristics and that the archivist will know a series when she sees one. Ostiguy explained that often when she begins to work with a fonds she has difficulty identifying series, but that as she develops a greater degree of familiarity with the material, series will “emerge by themselves.” “Sometimes,” she adds, “I am completely amazed.” Ostiguy also admitted that another archivist might not see the same series she sees; although she emphasized the natural way that series appear to her out of accumulations of records in varying degrees of order or disorder, Ostiguy nevertheless understands the series as “an invention of the archivist,” and she therefore appreciates that the same series might not appear to different archivists.

Ostiguy’s view of the series is somewhat contradictory: she believes that the series is both a naturally occurring phenomenon and an archivist’s creation. Interestingly, several other interviewees held similarly contradictory views. For example, Shelley Sweeney, Head of Archives and Special Collections at the University of Manitoba, stressed that the series is “completely artificial,” but went on to say that while in very rare cases a writer might identify large sub-divisions of records in his or her own archive,

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89 Ostiguy, interview by author.
more often the series is “just something that you recognize in the papers, that’s inherent in the papers – or, you create your own series.”¹⁰ Heather Home, Public Services Archivist at Queen’s University Archives, described the series as “somewhat natural” to the records, but added that “that’s the structure that we’re putting on top of records;” identifying series involves “creating a structure above what the record is and trying to place [the record into that structure.]”¹¹

The sense of the series as both natural and artificial speaks, I think, to the normalization of the idea of the series within archival discourse. To the archivists I spoke with series appear naturally in writers’ fonds at least in part because they are looking for them. Series are a fundamental component of archival arrangement schemas and archivists have grown accustomed to identifying and describing them. Furthermore, and in a circular kind of argument, series have to be understood as emerging organically from larger aggregations because they are believed to reflect the creator’s original order. In recent years, however, several archival theorists have pointed out that identifying series is less an act of recognition than it is an act of invention.¹² Series sit “behind the materials;”¹³ they only assume their full form in the hands of the archivist, and must therefore be more accurately described as being not merely found, but formed and shaped by the archivist. The structure that is created above the records is informed by the archivist’s knowledge of the records, but it is equally informed by the archivist’s

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¹⁰ Sweeney, interview by author.

¹¹ Home, interview by author.


¹³ Home, interview by author.
expectations of what an archive should look like and how it ought to be represented to researchers. Often then, instead of reflecting an original order, the arranged and described fonds reflects what should perhaps more accurately be called an archival order.

In her interview, Hobbs described the series as “an imposition,” explaining that she does not think the fonds of individuals are “so discretely” arranged in aggregations that meet the archival definition of series. “I’m much clearer that I know what’s in the file versus what the series is,” Hobbs explains and adds that, while she has “an aptitude” for making series, she is “not sure that [to do so] is entirely honest about people.”94 It is this question of honesty that interests me in particular. As an organizing principle, the series undoubtedly helps archivists make sense of and provide access to larger aggregations of records. It must be recognized, however, as Hobbs does, that that is the primary function of the series, and of intellectual arrangement more generally. Brothman is right to argue that original order cannot reflect the past back to us, and one of the reasons this is so is that original order is in large part the archivist’s invention. What honesty is there, then, in the claims archivists make about original order? Perhaps the most ethical route for archivists engaged in arrangement and description is to admit that the concept of original order is an archival construct, that the order in which we present material to researchers is always necessarily an archival order. Honesty requires that we call an archival order an archival order and account for what we have done to make it so.

94 Hobbs, interview by author.
Accepting the limits of archival theory and understanding

The discussion in this chapter demonstrates how tenuous one of archival theory’s most carefully defended principles appears under close examination. It suggests that archivists must begin to admit more openly and widely the limitations of both the intellectual premises on which the principle of respect for original order is founded and our own abilities to meet the expectations the principle sets up for us. The promise of original order is overshadowed by so many factors: the difficulty of determining when an order is original or which of several orders should be identified as original; the difficulty in expressing what original order can communicate about personal archives’ creators; and the impossibility of preserving an original order intact – should we succeed in identifying one – as we carry out our archival functions.

In “Archivalterity,” MacNeil stresses that she is “not suggesting the principle of respect for original order should be abandoned,” but rather that archivists learn to see it as “one of many possible orders a body of records will have over time:” the “privileged status of original order needs to be reconsidered,” she argues. Part of this reconsideration must involve more precise identification and definition of the different types of order that manifest in archives over time and the development of means for explaining these to researchers. Another part of this reconsideration consists in recognizing the ways in which archivists’ efforts to adhere to archival principles can impede their ability to represent the full and varied histories of archives. In this chapter, I have shown how a preoccupation with original order and with its supposed correlation to the nature of the creator of a fonds cause archivists to confuse significant orders with

original ones and to ignore or downplay the extent to which original order is, in fact, an archival construct; as a result, certain types of information about how archives are shaped over time are potentially overlooked and under-valued. In the next chapter, I continue this line of inquiry (i.e., the extent to which the ‘ideals’ of archival theory account for the ‘realities’ of individuals’ archives), but shift my focus from the orders in archives to their creators.
CHAPTER 5
ARCHIVAL CREATORSHIP AND WRITERS’ ARCHIVES

The previous chapter introduced into the discussion of the nature of writers’ archives the topic of archival principles and looked, in particular, at the interpretation of the principle of original order in classical and contemporary archival theory and in the specific research context of this dissertation. In this chapter, I continue to focus on the principle of provenance by looking specifically at how notions of archival creatorship have been understood in archival theory and how archivists are currently advocating for their expansion. In Chapter 4, I noted the confusion that arises in archival terminology, where the terms “provenance” and “respect des fonds” are often used interchangeably. In the discussion about expanding notions of creatorship, the term “provenance” is frequently used to refer to the agent or agents who contribute to records creation at various stages. To avoid further terminological confusion, I will use the term “archival creatorship” or “archival creation” to refer specifically to such acts, and will continue to use the term “provenance” as Horsman does, i.e., to denote the primary principle of archival theory, except in cases where I am quoting another author who uses the term differently. In this chapter, the concept of archival creatorship is considered with respect to its past and present interpretations and to its interpretation in the context of the writers’ archives I have studied.

Notions of archival creatorship in the archival literature

Archival theory strenuously emphasizes the significance of archival creatorship. The creator of an archive provides both the archive’s primary organizing principle and
the most common interpretive framework through which it is approached. The focus on
the creator is clearly evidenced in archival description, where the administrative history
or biographical sketch is prominently placed and is frequently the longest, most well-
developed, and well-researched element of a finding aid. Traditionally, the archival fonds
is understood to have a single creator, the individual (or corporate body) who created
(i.e., made, received and/or set aside) the materials that make up the fonds and who is
identified in the title of the fonds;¹ while it is recognized that numerous different people
may have authored individual documents within a fonds (in the case, for example, of
correspondence received by the creator), the archivist adopts, and subsequently represents
to researchers, a singular perspective focused on the individual identified as the fonds’
creator.

In recent years, however, some archival theorists – and especially those associated
with the postmodernist turn in archives – have suggested that the traditional view of
archival creatorship is overly narrow, that the focus on a single creator obscures aspects
of the records’ context that deserve archivists’ attention. This discussion could be said to
have begun – at least in the North American context – in the late 1980s with Debra Barr’s
reminder to the Canadian Working Group on Descriptive Standards to focus not only on
the generation of a body of records, but also on its ongoing accumulation and use.² Barr
argued that the definition of the principle of provenance as respect des fonds and respect

¹ Chris Hurley, “Problems with Provenance,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 23 (November 1995), 236;
“Parallel Provenance: (2) When Something is not Related to Everything Else,” *Archives and Manuscripts*
33 (November 2005), 70.

² See: Barr, “The Fonds Concept in the Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards Report,” 168,
and Debra Barr, “Protecting Provenance: Response to the Report of the Working Group on Description at
the Fonds Level,” *Archivaria* 28 (Summer 1989), 141-145.
for original order is “inadequate” if “documents should always be treated with respect for every aspect of their context;” in her view, respect for the principle of provenance must also include consideration of the “entire history of a [body of records’] origin, use and custody.”3 This point of view is echoed by Laura Millar, who argued in 2002 for an expanded concept of provenance that would include “the story of who created, accumulated, and used the records over time;” “the story of the physical management and movement of the records over time;” and the “explanation of the transfer of ownership or custody of the records from the creator or custodian to the archival institution and the subsequent care of those records.”4

Barr and Millar each recognized that during both the active and inactive phases of a fonds’ life cycle, numerous agents might interact with it in a variety of ways; Barr in particular countered traditional hierarchical thinking to argue that a series may belong to more than one fonds5 by virtue of circumstances related to its custody or use. At the time Barr was writing, Australian archivists had already developed – and were continuing to refine – a new descriptive system that they believed would manage this sense of the variable provenance of records and of the multiple relationships that exist between records and record agents.6 Most often referred to as the series system, the Australian

3 Barr, “Protecting Provenance,” 141.
5 Several classical theorists have argued this point and fonds-based descriptive standards and models are based on the assumption that a series will belong to one – and only one – fonds. See, for example: Michel Duchelin, “Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems of Respect des fonds in Archival Science,” Archivaria 16 (Summer 1983), 72; Oliver W. Holmes, “Archival Arrangement: Five Different Operations at Five Different Levels,” American Archivist 27 (January 1964), 27.
system abandoned the fonds as the highest level of archival arrangement and description and focused on naming and identifying these different kinds of relationships. However, the series system has not been widely adopted in the North American archival context, and North American archivists have tended to follow the lead of theorists like Barr and Millar by focusing instead on re-defining the archival principle of provenance to accommodate different types of creation.

One of the first steps in the re-evaluation of creatorship was for archivists to consider their own complicity in archive creation. In Chapter 3, in the discussion about coaxers and coercers in writers’ archives, I began to outline the ways in which the archivist who acquires and processes an archive must also be viewed as a creator of that archive. Archivists decide which of the materials offered to them by a donor will be acquired and which will not, and archival theorists have made much of the creative aspect of appraisal and selection. Eric Ketelaar states, simply, that the “archive reflects realities as perceived by the ‘archivers.’” Archivists select records based on their understanding of the records’ historical value and of the degree to which they might be representative of a society or period of time. However, no matter how objective an archivist strives to be in his selection activities, he must eventually choose what to keep and what to return or destroy, and these decisions are always to some extent subjective ones. Furthermore, as


7 There are, however, notable examples of archival institutions that have adopted the series system for records created by governmental departments. See, for example: Bob Krawczyk, “Cross Reference Heaven: The Abandonment of the Fonds as the Primary Level of Arrangement for Ontario Government Records,” Archivaria 48 (Fall 1999), 131-153.

Tom Nesmith explains, the act of selection places “records on the pedestal of national progress, sacred memory, civilization, history, [and/or] culture,” and thereby “raises records which were once thought quite ordinary to this new special status as ‘archives’ or, for some records, even higher yet, as archival ‘treasures.’” This change in the records’ status changes also “what they are.” Additionally, the process of selection highlights relationships among the selected records that “did not necessarily exist before archivists created them,” which then “foster particular interpretive possibilities…and diminish others.” In these ways, the archivist’s acts of appraisal and selection have considerable impact on both the nature and the meaning – and potential meanings – of the archive in the repository.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the archivist’s work of arrangement and description has a similar creative effect on archives. Arrangement and description are representational activities and are, therefore, inevitably subjective. As they process a fonds, archivists make decisions about how to structure both the physical materials and the representations in the form of finding aids that they make of these for researchers’ use. Description “constitutes the frame of reference that shapes the meaning and

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9 Judy Dicken provides an interesting example of how an archive can achieve the status of “treasure” as a result of being acquired by a repository. She explains how before Barbara Pym’s archive was deposited by her sister at the Bodleian Library, Pym had been “regarded as a second-rate novelist by critics,” but that “once her working manuscripts could be studied in the hallowed surroundings of the Bodleian, with the library’s metaphorical stamp of approval” Pym’s work was granted more attention and “critical favour.” Dicken, “Twentieth-century Literary Archives: Collecting Policies and Research Initiatives,” in New Directions in Archival Research, eds. Margaret Proctor and C.P. Lewis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Centre for Archives, 2000): 57.

10 Nesmith, “Seeing Archives,” 33-34.

significance” of documents in an archive, and some archivists have recently begun to argue that “each story we tell about our records, each description we compile, changes the meaning of records and re-creates them.”

In the late 1990s and 2000s, and increasingly influenced by trends in postmodern scholarship, several theorists began to argue that the contexts of records creation were broader still. In 1999, Tom Nesmith provided the following “statement of provenance:”

The provenance of a given record or body of records consists of the social and technical processes of the records’ inscription, transmission, contextualization and interpretation which account for its existence, characteristics, and continuing history.

Several archivists, including Nesmith himself, have identified different types of provenance that pick up on the various phases of creation identified in his definition. For example, Nesmith calls attention to “societal provenance,” arguing that although individuals “make and archive records in social settings and for social purposes,” the “societal dimensions of record creation and archiving” have been largely ignored in archival description.

13 Duff and Harris, 272.
In Nesmith’s article on societal provenance, he uses as an example a journal created by Johann Steinbruck, a fur trader operating in the “far North of what is now Canada.” The journal, written in the winter of 1802-1803, contains a great deal of information about the First Nations society in which Steinbruck finds himself as Steinbruck “quotes Aboriginals, describes their day-to-day actions, and information he receives from them.” Nesmith argues, therefore, that the journal “originates” at least in part from “this Aboriginal information.” Steinbruck’s use of birchbark as a medium for his journal is also offered as evidence of First Nations’ influence, and Nesmith considers the impact having a First Nations wife and children might also have had on Steinbruck’s general outlook. Concluding that it is the “complex interaction of the European…with Aboriginal society [that] creates this extraordinary document,” Nesmith argues that a “record created by a man of European origin who is being absorbed into Aboriginal society conveys far different evidence from one made simply by a European.”

Focusing on a different phase of creation, Lori Podolsky Nordland emphasizes the significance of the interpretation of archives to their continuing meaning, and coins the term “secondary provenance.” Suggesting that archivists have paid too little attention to the “use and re-use” to which records are put (and which provide records with their “particular value”), Nordland stresses the significance of the “additional layers of context” that are added to a record as it is consulted and interpreted for different reasons and by different actors, including archivists and researchers. This is a point that is made

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17 Ibid., 354.

also by Ketelaar, who argues that “every interaction, intervention, interrogation, and interruption” by a user is “an activation of the record” that “leaves fingerprints which are attributes to the archive’s infinite meaning.” Each interpretation of a record or an archive is affected to some extent by previous interpretations, and later interpreters cannot hope to access the same record or archive as earlier interpreters: the first interpretation alters the meaning of the record so that “we can no longer read the record as our predecessors have read [it].”

In several different articles and research contexts, Jeannette Allis Bastian extends the definition of provenance to include the “provenance of place” and of community. In her view, because records are created in and by communities, a kind of feedback loop operates whereby the community functions “both as a record-creating entity and as a memory frame that contextualizes the records it creates.” Bastian uses the term “community of records” to refer to the “dynamic synergy between a community and its records,” and argues that within a “community of records,” it must be recognized that a record is created not only by its literal inscriber, but also by the community in which that inscriber exists and acts. To Bastian, place can function similarly to community, so that, for example, at the MacDowell Colony, an artists’ retreat in New Hampshire, the

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20 Ibid., 138.

contribution of each individual creator to the colony’s archives is shaped by his or her relationship to the colony and then subsequently performs a shaping role by becoming part of the collective memory of the colony and thereby influencing the contributions made by the artists who follow. It is with a similar synergistic pattern in mind that Joel Wurl suggests archivists might also begin to view ethnicity as an important dimension of provenance.  

Elsewhere I have written about what I see as the problems associated with incorporating all of these different types of archival creatorship under the umbrella of provenance. In “Origins: Evolving Ideas About the Principle of Provenance,” I argued that when “provenance grows to include any and all type of action or relationship that impacts the nature of a record or a body of records, its boundaries become infinite,” and there is no clear-cut way to distinguish between the different types of creation that might occur. For example, despite the significance of a custodian’s role in the creation of an archive, we must admit that that role is different in nature than the role of the original archive creator; the role played by an archivist is different in nature from both the custodian’s and the creator’s, and the role of the researcher is different from all of those that came before her.

In “Origins,” I acknowledged that the trend toward expanding the definition of provenance began as a response to perceived gaps in descriptive practices, but suggested that instead of accepting under the loose banner of provenance “every contextual aspect

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of record creation,” it might “make more sense to differentiate and delineate between different types of context.”\textsuperscript{24} In the next section of this chapter, I attempt to distinguish between six different types or layers of archival creation suggested by the literature reviewed above and to consider each of these layers in relation to the various writers’ archives referred to previously in this work.

**Layers of archival creation in writers’ archives**

The various conceptualizations of archival provenance discussed above highlight six layers of archival creation: 1) contributions made by the individual traditionally identified as the creator of a fonds, i.e., the archiving ‘I’; 2) contributions made by communities to which creators belong; 3) contributions made by custodians (here excluding archivists) of the archive, typically following the end of the archive’s active phase; 4) contributions made by archivists as they appraise, acquire, arrange, describe and make records available; 5) contributions made by subsequent researchers and interpreters of the archive; and 6) contributions made by society, broadly interpreted. Each of these layers is discussed below in the context of the writers’ archives I examined.

*Type 1: Creator contributions – the Archiving ‘I’*

In Chapter 3, I wrote at some length about the archiving ‘I’: the ‘I’ who makes decisions about what will represent the “‘real’ or historical ‘I’” as part of his or her archive. Different individuals take on this role to varying extents. The archivists and librarians I interviewed for this project spoke of a range of archiving activities in which

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 38.
writers may or may not engage. For example, some writers packing up their material for transfer to a repository simply throw things in a box as they move around a room, worrying very little about their privacy or the privacy of others or about the order in which they send material. Others, as we saw in Chapter 3 with the examples of Atwood, Munro, Engel, and Laurence, are careful not to ‘archive’ some types of material, including material that is too personal in nature or that reveals details of the author’s finances. Some writers exert so much control over their records that they have resorted to making their own finding aids with each accession they send;25 others are happy to let the archivist, whom they presume knows more about the organization of archives than they do, arrange the material as they see fit.

In traditional archival theory, the creator, although he is the centre of the archival universe, is most often envisioned as a passive accumulator of records. Classical theorists like Muller, Feith, and Fruin and Jenkinson stress the natural accumulation of archives and their impartiality and protest that conscious curation of the archive by its creator (or by anyone else) destroys its ability to reliably attest to the acts and facts it preserves as evidence. In more recent years, archivists influenced by trends in postmodernism have questioned the ability of the archive – of any archive – to faithfully reflect the past, and have grown more accommodating of the notion of an actively created archive. For example, as mentioned in Chapter 3, Adrian Cunningham has argued that archivists must consider the creator’s active role in fashioning his archive. Instead of attempting to adhere to a myth of archival purity by either ignoring such fashioning or by treating it as

25 Power, interview by author. The writers Power refers to are Christian Bök and Frank Davey. Bök taught himself the rudiments of the Canadian descriptive standard and produces finding aids that adhere roughly to it.
a corruption, the archivist should seek to explain it so that the researcher is capable of making more informed interpretations.\textsuperscript{26} The notion of the archiving ‘I’ proposed in this dissertation supports Cunningham’s arguments regarding the significance of an awareness of posterity – or at least of the eyes of others – in the creation of writers’ archives and suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the creator’s active archiving role.

Type 2: Community contributions

Some of the writers whose archives I studied could be said to have belonged to a community that impacted their archiving practices. This is perhaps the case for those writers like Margaret Laurence, Marian Engel and Margaret Atwood who were active in the Writers’ Union of Canada during the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1970s, Engel worked with Robin Skelton on the Archives Committee of the Writers’ Union; together they surveyed Canadian writers and collecting repositories to report on the treatment of archives by the latter and on writers’ awareness of archival options. A draft section of their report included in the Marian Engel fonds notes that the majority of authors who responded to their survey seemed to “be ill informed as to the value of their archival material and the best way to turn it to their advantage,” either by selling it or by donating it in exchange for a tax receipt. The report proposed that guidelines be drawn up for writers and for “people who inherit the personal archives of writers.”\textsuperscript{27} Skelton proceeded

\textsuperscript{26} Cunningham, “The Mysterious Outside Reader,” 133-4.

\textsuperscript{27} Robin Skelton, “The Experience of Authors with Regards to the Disposal of their Archival Materials,” draft manuscript copy, [1978], Marian Engel fonds, Second accrual, Box 32, File 2.
to draft exactly such a set of guidelines, titled “Authors and Archives: A Short Guide.” In it, he explains to writers what types of material should be included in an archive (anything “that can shed light, however obliquely, upon the subject of the archive”); advises writers to request that correspondence to publishers be returned to them for their archive; outlines the valuation process of literary archives; explains the best ways to “make some financial profit” from an archive; discusses copyright in archives; and provides some cautionary “horror stories,” while maintaining that “most librarians and archivists are both efficient and understanding.”

It appears from correspondence in the Marian Engel archive that the reports of the Archives Committee were presented at the 1979 annual meeting of the Writers’ Union and, possibly, also distributed to members; thus, members of the Writers’ Union at the time were made aware of the value of their archives and of their ability to use their archives to their advantage.

Writers’ awareness of archive potential was also fuelled by correspondence with other writers who had already sold or donated their papers and shared their experiences. In a letter to Alan Crawley regarding the sale of his correspondence, Dorothy Livesay advises him, based on her own experience, to seek “the highest offer. I.e., tell UBC what Queen’s offer is, to see if they will meet or better it. Or U.Vic? …UofA (here) is also

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29 In an article about the history of collecting literary archives in Britain, Jamie Andrews describes the effects the operations of the National Manuscript Collection of Contemporary Poets (founded in 1963 and later renamed the National Manuscript Collection of Contemporary Writers and then the Collection of Contemporary Writers) had on the formation of British literary archives. He notes also Philip Larkin’s involvement with the Poetry Panel of the Arts Council in the early 1960s and his efforts to advocate for keeping British literary archives in Britain. Finally, Andrews mentions the effects that pre-custodial intervention in the digital archives of contemporary writers has on their preservation and shape. These types of “community” contributions might be important to consider in a description of British archives created with knowledge of the different initiatives. Jamie Andrews, “‘Laid Aside’?: Collecting Contemporary Literary Archives and Manuscripts,” Archives 35 (April 2010), 11-20.
busily seeking for ‘buys.’” Al Purdy proposes in a letter to Patrick Lane that he might consider selling his drafts in order to help support his writing life: “Okay, one suggestion,” he writes, “what about your work sheets? I mean all the crap you’ve accumulated over the years. I sold to Queen’s last time, and could inquire if you have enough to make a bonfire.” Earlier I mentioned how Mordecai Richler urged Alice Munro not to throw anything away, to save everything to sell with her archive, and in the correspondence in the Margaret Laurence fonds there is frequent reference from her and from her correspondents about various writers and the negotiations they were making for the disposition of their archives. Many of these writers’ comments reveal that they viewed the material coveted by archivists and researchers as “junk” or as worthless castoffs, and were surprised and sometimes even offended that it was considered valuable, but were in need of some financial support and learning from their friends and colleagues how they could best profit from the market for writers’ archives.

In more recent times, literary archives are widely recognized as cultural treasures, and it is conceivable that writers, as a category of cultural producers, have grown more aware of the value of the materials they generate as part of their creative process and in the conduct of their personal and professional lives. Knowledge of other writers’ archives may contribute to writers’ understanding of their own archives, and awareness

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30 Dorothy Livesay, letter to Alan Crawley, September 19, 1970, Dorothy Livesay fonds, MSS 37, Box 50, Folder 37, Archives and Special Collections, University of Manitoba Libraries, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

31 Letter Al Purdy to Patrick Lane, April 11, 1976, in Purdy, Yours, Al: The Collected Letters of Al Purdy, 265.

32 This point was made by Jennifer Toews in her interview with me. She noted that while in the past many writers “would’ve thought, ‘oh, why would anyone want to collect my old scribblings,’” writers in general are “becoming much more aware that their work is valuable – in a monetary sense, but also that researchers would like to look into their lives.” The same point was echoed by John Shoesmith, Richard Landon, Michael Moosberger, Jean Tener and Appollonia Steele in their interviews with me.
of the market – whether it has to do with financial capital or cultural capital – for literary archives can affect individual archiving practices. In this sense, individual writers’ record-making and -keeping habits may be shaped in part by their participation in a community of writers.\footnote{Communities of writers might work in other ways, as well, to ‘create’ archives. Christine Faunch, an archivist at the University of Exeter, explains how because the library at Exeter collects the archives of writers working in a relatively small region, many of them know each other well and correspond regularly, “sharing ideas, comment and encouragement; forming a network of authors, reviewers, agents and friends all involved in shaping a final product.” In this way, the authors’ participation in a community of writers affects not only the shape of each of their individual archives, but also the collective shape of all of their archives in the repository at Exeter. Christine Faunch, “Archives of Written Lives: A Case Study of Daphne Du Maurier and her Biographer, Margaret Forster,” \textit{Archives} 35 (April 2010), 30.}

\textit{Type 3: Custodial contributions}

In Chapter 3, I described the various interventions made by Ted Hughes and Aurelia Plath in the archives of Sylvia Plath. Plath was a conscientious record keeper during her lifetime. She kept diaries, created scrapbooks of personal memorabilia and of her professional achievements, and was careful to select and preserve drafts of her poems as she composed them.\footnote{Brain, “Unstable Manuscripts,” 27.} However, the shape her archive has assumed over time has much more to do with the archival work of her mother and estranged husband than it does with her own record-keeping habits. In the case of the Plath archives, the kind of coaxing that takes place has to do with control over the posthumous reception and reputation of the writer; both Ted Hughes and Aurelia Plath struggle to assert their own views of Plath as artist and as person as the correct view, and any researcher who works with the Plath archive will find it difficult to avoid the imposition of their voices on it.
There are full series devoted to both Ted Hughes and Aurelia Plath in the collection at Smith College, as well as a series related to Hughes’ sister, Olwyn Hughes, whom Hughes appointed literary executor of Plath’s estate. The Ted Hughes series documents Hughes’ work as editor of *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* and of *The Collected Poems of Sylvia Plath*, and also includes notes made by Hughes about some of the poems included in *Ariel*. The Aurelia Plath series includes a significant amount of her correspondence, much of it sent or received following Plath’s death, and discussing aspects of her efforts to edit her daughter’s letters and to attempt to stop various biographers and literary scholars from publishing what she viewed as erroneous interpretations of Plath’s life and/or work. Aurelia Plath also saved letters sent to her by family, friends and readers who wrote kindly of her daughter; usually these sections of the letters are underlined by Aurelia Plath, who might also add comments of her own in support of the letter writers’. Trained as a secretary, she also saved typescripts of the letters she sent to others, and the primary voice heard in this substantial series belongs to her as she tries, over and over, to control her daughter’s legacy.

On a much smaller scale, Stuart Macdonald plays a similar role in the archive of his mother, L.M. Montgomery, who willed him her journals and appointed him literary executor. Macdonald originally intended to prepare a version of the journals for publication himself, but he quickly determined that the task was too large for him. After meeting and befriending Mary Rubio, then a professor at the University of Guelph who was hoping to write a biography on Montgomery, he decided to allow Rubio and her colleague, Elizabeth Waterston, to edit the journals for publication. Macdonald and Rubio
developed a “close relationship,” and in a decision based at least partly on his regard for Rubio, Macdonald determined in 1981 to donate his mother’s scrapbooks and diaries to the University of Guelph Archival and Special Collections. Following Macdonald’s death, his widow added to the first donation a collection of Macdonald’s “Montgomery memorabilia” and a small amount of material created by Macdonald himself. Some of the material created by Macdonald included reviews of Montgomery’s work annotated by him and copies of letters he wrote to the newspapers which published the reviews. In the same way that Aurelia Plath worked to shape the legacy of her daughter, Macdonald strove to correct what he viewed as erroneous or even disrespectful opinions of his mother’s work. For example, in a draft of a letter to the editor of The Globe & Mail, Macdonald objects to a review of The Road to Yesterday, a collection of stories published in 1974. He describes the review as “vicious” and as bordering on “abuse” and accuses the reviewer of failing to check facts; he corrects her on a number of points and ends by highlighting the continuing pleasure his mother’s books have given Canadians of all ages, as attested by the large amount of correspondence he continues to receive from fans.

In both the Plath and Montgomery collections, then, relatives who have custody of the archive at some point act as “keepers of the flame,” working not only to keep the memory of the beloved or revered author’s life and work alive, but also to determine its

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35 Judy McVittie, “Anne’s creator finds a biographer,” The Star January 6, 1985, L.M. Montgomery collection, XZ1 MS A098 064B.


37 Stuart Macdonald, draft letter to Editor [copy], Globe & Mail, August 1, 1974, L.M. Montgomery collection, XZ1 MS A098.

38 Ian Hamilton, Keepers of the Flame: Literary Estates and the Rise of Biography from Shakespeare to Plath (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994).
shape and substance. Custodians may act in different ways, too, of course. In “Archivalterity,” MacNeil outlines the custodial history of the Bakunin family archive, which was sorted first by the Bakunin family women who painstakingly numbered each document before sewing them into notebooks, and subsequently re-ordered by a succession of scholars and archivists, each of whom organized the archive to suit their particular research needs. In Geoffrey Yeo’s article on custodial history and provenance, he outlines the “long process of gradual depletion” which forever altered the nature of the seventeenth-century English royalist and diplomat Sir Richard Fanshawe’s archive; letters and other papers were given away and sold by family members and then by collectors and antiquarians, then re-collected by another family member, annotated, mixed with papers related to Fanshawe but not created by him, and then donated to a museum. In both the Fanshawe and the Bakunin archives, as in the Montgomery and Plath archives, custodial actions significantly affect the contents, the shape and, as a result, the meaning of the archive that exists now and is available to researchers.

Type 4: Contributions made by archivists

The effect of the archivist on the archives of writers has already been discussed in both Chapter 3, in relation to the effect of coaxers on archives, and in Chapter 4, in relation to archivists’ ordering activities during the processing of an archive. The work of


40 Yeo, “Custodial History, Provenance and the Description of Personal Records,” 50.
archivists to reconstruct the archives of both Alice Munro and Marian Engel to reflect their creative processes was clearly also an act of archival creation; the archives reflect the archivists’ interpretations and their best efforts at recreating a lost moment in time, but it is highly likely that the archivists’ renderings of the archives differ in significant ways from their ‘original’ states.\footnote{This fact is readily acknowledged by the archivists who arranged the archives.}

In the Engel and Munro archives, archivists engaged in physical reordering of the individual files and documents. One might think that in cases where the archivist maintains the physical order of materials as received, he also mitigates the creative effect of archival processing. However, in most cases where archivists maintain the physical order of files and boxes more or less intact, they lay over the physical order an intellectual order – the archival order discussed in the previous chapter. Archivists do this for two primary reasons. First, the archival order helps researchers find and access particular files within what are sometimes enormous archives; it is easier, for example, if you are looking for a draft of Coupland’s \textit{Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture} to find it by looking under the series heading “Literary Projects” than it is to comb through the box-file list. The second reason is that archivists believe that the intellectual order they create through the demarcation of series provides the context necessary to understand any of the files or documents within those series. In the interviews I held, archivists admitted that while they were not completely inventing series (since series are developed based on something the archivist sees in the records), there was a sense in which series were nevertheless largely the archivist’s creation. Once created, the series
determines how researchers approach an archive by imposing a particular organizational structure on it.\footnote{Wendy M. Duff, Emily Monks-Leeson and Alan Galey describe how archival arrangement and description can be a “factor in the interpretation of meaning” in archives, explaining that the organization of material suggested in a finding aid does indeed encourage researchers to approach an archive in a predetermined way. Wendy M. Duff, Emily Monks-Leeson and Alan Galey, “Contexts Built and Found: A Pilot Study on the Process of Archival Meaning-Making,” \textit{Archival Science} 12.2 (2012), 85.}

For example, in the Coupland fonds, the series structure decided upon by the archivist who processed it emphasizes genres of production (e.g., dramatic projects, visual projects, literary projects, digital projects, journalism, etc.), whereas the order of the material in the boxes reflects more of a chronological ordering or approach to the archive. In the note that Coupland’s partner Weir sent with the shipment of boxes to the University of British Columbia, he noted that while the boxes were not numbered in any particular order, most of the boxes each reflected a specific point in time.\footnote{[David Weir], note to Rare Books and Special Collections staff. This note is in the accession file for the Douglas Coupland fonds and will be made available to researchers upon request.} Knowing this, a researcher might focus more closely on how projects Coupland worked on simultaneously are related to each other. At least in his record-keeping habits, Coupland does not seem to have carefully distinguished between generic categories of work, and any single box in the fonds can contain a huge variety of items. For example, Box 6 contains among many other things: notes from friends or to or from his partner, David Weir; articles Coupland clips from newspapers or magazines on subjects that, presumably, are of interest to him personally or for literary or artistic purposes; ticket stubs to movies or events; to-do lists; fan mail; research notes; sketches and a mock up for a contribution to \textit{Walrus} magazine; sketches for a public art project; correspondence from editors and publishers; a cover mock up for the novel \textit{Eleanor Rigby}; and an
original Polaroid of Terry Fox’s prosthesis for the non-fiction book *Terry*. In this one box files are assigned to seven different series: Fan correspondence and related material; Personal and administrative affairs; Visual projects; Dramatic projects; Lectures, speeches and interviews; Literary projects; Press clippings. This division of material into separate spheres of activity and genre suggests a different way of reading Coupland’s work habits and process. Although a context exists for the contents of the box (i.e., a chronological context, wherein we see Coupland working on several projects simultaneously), the archivist creates a new context, one that is more in line with traditional archival ideas about how people organize the records of their activity and how researchers want to access them.

As previously mentioned, archivists also act as creators of the archive to the extent that they determine what – of the material offered by a creator or his successors – will or will not be acquired. The decision to acquire the particular materials that will make up the fonds establishes the boundaries of the fonds, and it also creates a new kind of relationship or bond between the materials. Robert McGill, a literary scholar who has written about his research in writers’ archives, notes that:

> The archive arranges a chaotic and disparate range of materials into a single, homogenous text under the auspices of a single authorial name, reifying and delineating a textual corpus that substitutes for the living body, making autobiography both a pretext and effect of bibliography.\(^4^4\)

In other words, all of the material acquired and described under the name of the creator of the archive necessarily acquires a common bond; all of the material – by virtue of being included in the archive – is necessarily read as indicative of some aspect of the creator’s life and work, and as significant in some way to a full and proper understanding of both.

This sentiment is frequently reflected in archival finding aids, where the convention in the scope and content sections of different descriptive standards is to state that the records in the fonds document the different aspects of the creator’s life and work. In the extensive paper finding aid for the Dorothy Livesay fonds, Kristjana Gunnars, one of the research assistants responsible for its compilation, states that while “[o]ver half of the Dorothy Livesay Collection, correspondence excepted, consists of papers that are strictly non-literary” they nevertheless “directly relate to Dorothy Livesay’s life and work.”45 With this statement, Gunnars suggests that every scrap of material in the fonds is significant to a reading of Livesay’s work and of her life; each scrap of paper is also thereby invested with a new importance it might not be accorded outside of the archive.

In the L.M. Montgomery collection at Guelph University, a different type of contribution to the archive has been made by archivists and librarians who have built up around the original material received from Macdonald a large collection of material related to Montgomery and/or to the *Anne of Green Gables* series of novels. As explained in Chapter 3, Montgomery seems to have intended for the journals to stand as the definitive archive of her life and work. The L.M. Montgomery collection consists of a far more vast array of material. Montgomery memorabilia received from Macdonald

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includes baby books for each of her sons, samples of her quilt and crochet work, and the Gog and Magog china dogs, which were the models for the China dogs of the same name acquired by Anne Shirley in *Anne’s House of Dreams*. Since Macdonald sold the diaries, scrapbooks and memorabilia to the University of Guelph a considerable amount of material has been added to the collection, including a substantial number of newspaper clippings related to the collection, to the posthumous publication of Montgomery’s works and to the publication of her edited journals; *Anne of Green Gables* dolls and board games; correspondence related to the posthumous publication of Montgomery’s work and to scholarly studies of it; copies of theses and dissertations related to Montgomery and/or to *Anne of Green Gables*; and records related to the management of her estate. As MacNeil and Douglas note in “Arranging the Self: Literary and Archival Perspectives on Writers’ Archives,” the collection has “grown as a kind of shrine or monument to Montgomery.” As a shrine, it “tells us as much about the archives’ need to monumentalize and memorialize her life as it does about Montgomery herself.”

In the cases discussed here, archivists clearly play a creative role in the formation of the archive researchers will eventually encounter. Whether it is by determining what material to keep, how kept materials relate to each other, or how to represent materials in finding aids, archivists affect the way archives are read. While traditional archival theory

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46 A photocopied newspaper article included in the L.M. Montgomery Collections describes how Gog and Magog were acquired; Mary Rubio was visiting the Macdonald home while Stuart’s wife Ruth was cleaning the basement. She came upstairs with the broken pieces of the china dogs and asked Stuart if she could throw them in the garbage. It was Rubio who “gasped – and begged the Macdonalds not to even considering discarding them.” The broken pieces were returned to the basement until they were sold to Guelph along with Macdonald’s other Montgomery memorabilia and were glued back together once they were safely housed at Guelph. Andrew Vowles, “From the Archives: It’s Been a Dog’s Life for Gog and Magog,” *At Guelph*, September 13, 2006, L.M. Montgomery collection, XZ1 MS A098 63.

47 Douglas and MacNeil, 32.
insisted on the neutrality of the archivist, the examples of the writers’ archives examined above show that more recent critiques of the archivist’s objective stance are justified: the archivist acts subjectively, cannot avoid affecting the nature of the archive and should be viewed as one of its creators.

Type 5: Contributions made by subsequent researchers and interpreters of the archive

Contributions of the fifth type involve the effect of previous interpretations and readings of an archive on subsequent interpretations and readings of the same archive. The Sylvia Plath archives provide a good example of how certain readings can affect the readings that can come next: Plath’s husband’s reading of the archive is to a great extent a direct reaction to Plath’s mother’s reading of it, and over the years, scholars have reacted to both Hughes’ and Aurelia Plath’s interpretations to produce their own. As I suggested in Chapter 3, it is perhaps now impossible to approach the Plath archives without being influenced by the array of biographical and psychological readings of it available to researchers. In a recent book, editor Anita Helle and various contributors seek to re-read the Plath archives. Helle explains in her introduction that the essays in the book “refus[e] totalizing narratives of suicidal extremity” and that they seek to expand the contexts in which Plath’s work is read and interpreted. Helle suggests that the essays “mark a second stage of debate around Plath’s canonicity” and a reappraisal of her life and work as it is represented in and through the archive (broadly defined).48 However, even as they seek to expand the number of ways Plath’s archives can be read, the essays

exist as part of an effort to counter the perceived narrowness of past readings; the new interpretations are inevitably influenced by the old ones.

Just as previous scholars’ work in the Plath archive affects the work of future scholars there, McCaig’s study of Munro’s archives will likely impact how others approach the Alice Munro fonds at the University of Calgary. McGill focuses on McCaig’s reading of Munro’s archive in an article on what he calls “biographical desire” in the archives of living authors, arguing that there is a “melancholic sense of loss created by living authors’ absence from the archive.”

McGill describes McCaig’s feelings of having been “spurned” by Munro, who did not provide McCaig with the necessary permissions to publish excerpts of letters in the book she was writing based on her dissertation research. McGill suggests – as does McCaig – that the critic’s relationship to the author she studies is a kind of love relationship, where the author exists as an object of desire. In McCaig’s book, the object of desire thwarts the critic and controls the story; a researcher reading McCaig’s account, and McGill’s recounting of it, might form an image of Munro as an imposing gatekeeper to her archive, and, reading the archive with this view of Munro strictly controlling its composition and use, might form a particular sort of impression of it.

McGill argues that when a literary archive exists, its text stands in in some ways for the author, but when the author is living, he or she can also intervene in the work of

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50 Ibid., 132.

51 Interestingly, Tener and Steele, archivists at the University of Calgary with responsibility for the Munro archive, have both had contact with Munro and discussion with her regarding the archive and both would refute this view of Munro’s attitude toward her archive. Steele and Tener, interview by author.
the critic, as happened in McCaig’s case. Interestingly, he further suggests that archival research has an inevitable effect on the nature of the living author’s archive:

Archival scholars…cannot study a living author without affecting the life and even the writing of that person. Living authors read criticism and respond to it, they give interviews or refuse to give them, they defend or relinquish their right to privacy, they create archives in anticipation of critical interest, they support themselves through selling archival materials in a market made buoyant by biographical desire, and they destroy materials they do not want critics to view.\(^{52}\)

McGill cites novelist Jonathan Franzen, who states that he does not see how an author, knowing that his archive will be of immense interest to scholars and critics, could “resist the temptation to select material that suggests the most flattering possible narratives. And not just select but actively create!”\(^{53}\)

It seems from the examples of the Plath and Munro archives that interpretations made by researchers or critics can have an effect on the nature of the interpretations that follow, and therefore, on the way future researchers approach and understand the archive. McGill’s assertion that a writer’s awareness of possible future interpretations of her archive will affect how she treats it is also supported in the examples provided in Chapter 3 of authors who are careful to avoid including certain types of materials in the archives they sell or donate to repositories. In these ways, then, research in and interpretation of an

\(^{52}\) McGill, “Biographical Desire,” 142.

\(^{53}\) Quoted in McGill, 142.
archive can affect its shape and/or our understanding of its shape both before and after its acquisition by an archival repository and can, therefore, be seen to play a creative role.

**Type 6: Contributions made by society broadly interpreted**

The “societal dimensions of record creation and archiving” referred to by Nesmith\(^\text{54}\) will necessarily be many and various. Consider the Douglas Coupland fonds and the variety of societal influences that might have had an effect on its nature. Critics and journalists have noted the significance of Coupland’s ‘Canadianness’ on his writing, and, more specifically, his upbringing in the city of Vancouver: its newness as a city; its proximity to nature; the Asian influences in its physical and cultural development. They have also asserted the significance of his age and of the period of time during which he came of age (and which he made the subject of his most well-known work, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*).\(^\text{55}\) His training as an artist, his submersion in different art cultures, his role as a public intellectual, and his sexuality point to other potential societal influences on his work and life.

The Margaret Laurence fonds at York University contains a significant number of files related to Laurence’s interest and involvement in various social and environmental causes. Laurence was active in the nuclear non-proliferation movement, advocated against censorship, and lent her name to a number of charitable organizations, especially if they supported women in need, education or culture, the environment or the peace

\(^{54}\) Nesmith, “The Concept of Societal Provenance,” 352.

movement.\textsuperscript{56} Early in her married life, Laurence moved with her husband to Somaliland and then to the Gold Coast (now Somalia and Ghana) with her husband, who worked in each place as an engineer. In each of these countries, Laurence developed an interest in traditional tribal forms of storytelling and poetry. Laurence lived in England for many years after leaving Africa and eventually divorced her husband. As with the Coupland archive, then, there are numerous social and cultural factors which might have influenced the way Laurence’s archive formed and this is equally the case for each of the other archives I have studied.

\textbf{Implications for archival theory}

One of the reasons for seeking to expand the concept of provenance is to acknowledge the complexities of archives and to reflect new understandings of “archiving” as “an ongoing \textit{process}” that is affected by various actions and actors over time.\textsuperscript{57} The examples cited above of different types of archival creation confirm that the archive is created not only by the person whose name is attached to it in traditional archival theory and practice, but also by a number of other interested parties. In Chapter 3 of this work, I referred to life writing theorists Smith and Watson’s notion of “coaxers and coercers.” While they refer primarily to co-authors, ghostwriters, editors and publishers, in the context of archives we might view acts of creation undertaken by someone other than the traditional archival creator as another example of coaxing:

\textsuperscript{56} In each accession of the Margaret Laurence fonds at York there are numerous files related to Laurence’s involvement with and support of these causes.

\textsuperscript{57} Nesmith, “Reopening Archives,” 261.
contributors at each additional phase of archive creation have an impact (whether concrete or abstract) on the shape that an archive assumes and on its meaning over time.

However, the concept of coaxing runs the risk of becoming equally as all-encompassing and vague as an overly expanded concept of provenance if specific types of contributions are not distinguished from each other. In “Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings,” Wendy Duff and Verne Harris argue that:

We need to move the debate beyond discussions of what provenance really is by problematizing the word ‘provenance’ and the concepts archived in it, and by accepting that there always have been and always will be many provenances, multiple voices, hundreds of relationships, multiple layers of context, all needing to be documented.58

This is an admirable goal, but to ask the archivist to document all the “hundreds of relationships” and “multiple layers of context” that could potentially be associated with an archive is to set him a task at which he can hardly hope to succeed. At a certain point, the archivist must determine which types of relationships are most important to the nature of the archive in his care and focus on those.

**Implications: Type 1 through Type 4**

While all six types of contributions outlined above were shown (in the examples cited) to have an effect on the creation of archives, it seems to me that the first four types are the most useful and pertinent to archival theory and work. With each of the first four

58 Duff and Harris, 274.
types, tangible effects of creation can be identified: the effect of the archiving I’s awareness of the archive; the effect of archival consciousness in a particular community; the effect of custodians who determine the content or order of archives; the effect of the archivist who rearranges material to suit a particular conceptualization of the archive; etc. In these cases, acts of creation by actors other than the traditionally-named creator have a significant impact on the nature of the archive and to ignore these in archival description is to misrepresent that nature. Furthermore, the examples of the work of the archiving ‘I’ suggest that the notion of archival creation by the traditionally-named creator also needs to be reassessed and more accurately presented as a set of potentially self-conscious and deliberate actions. It seems, therefore, that there is indeed a need to include in the description of archives a fuller representation of different types of creators and creation.

In “Authority Control for Creators in Italy: Theory and Practice,” Maurizio Savoja and Stefano Vitali wonder how to distinguish between “former custodians” and “creators,” demonstrating that there are situations where custodians act merely as custodians, preserving material as it was created, and others where they take on more of a creative role themselves, rearranging material, adding to it or mixing it with material from another creator. While many archival descriptive standards provide an area to record a description of the creator of the records in an aggregation (i.e., the biographical sketch or administrative history) as well as an area to outline the custodial history of the records, Savoja and Vitali suggest that perhaps these two options are insufficient to allow for proper description of custodial creation of archives. They explain that the

59 For example, the Canadian Rules for Archival Description instructs archivists to record in the custodial history field “the successive transfers of ownership and custody or control of the material, along with the dates, thereof, insofar as it can be ascertained,” and includes a footnote advising archivists not to “confuse
distinction between creators and custodians is not necessarily “clear-cut, especially for private records and personal papers,” and suggest that “the problem needs to be debated, examples analyzed, and possible solutions tested.”

In addition to debating the extent of the creative role of custodians and methods for representing it through description, archivists should also begin to discuss how best to account for the other types of creation discussed in this chapter. What is the best way to describe community influence? Or the creative impact of archival intervention? As well, it is likely that still further types of archival creation may exist. For example, in the Margaret Atwood fonds it is difficult not to view the filing activities of Atwood’s personal assistants as a creative activity. The fonds assumes a particular shape based at least in part on their decisions; though they are often guided by Atwood, they are also making independent assessments about what to file and where. Even if it were maintained at the Fisher Library in the precise order it was maintained in Atwood’s offices, the fonds would not reflect merely her own work habits and organizational patterns, but also those of her assistants.

Accepting the creative role of individuals not typically viewed as the creator of the fonds poses problems, not only in the area of descriptive standards and practices, but also for our understanding of the concept of the fonds. A typical definition of the fonds states that it is “the entire body of records of an organization, family, or individual that have been created and accumulated as the result of an organic process reflecting the information given in the Administrative history/Biographical sketch of the creator of the unit with the history of its custody.” See: Rules for Archival Description, Rule 1.7C.

60 Savoja and Vitali, 142.
functions of the creator.”61 If we admit the creative role of others can we still call what we describe a fonds? Geoffrey Yeo advises that in cases where custodians in particular have had an impact on the contents or shape of an archive, we need to be careful not to confuse the context of creation with the “custodial development” of the archive, or to privilege one over the other. He suggests that we describe as fonds only those “grouping[s] determined by context of creation,” and that groups of records whose context is instead “determined by custodianship” should be identified as collections. A fonds develops over the course of the life of its creator and “its conceptual boundaries” are necessarily “stabilized when the creator dies.” The physical collection (or collections) that remains after the creator’s death is potentially “fluid and subject to continuing evolution,” and must not be conflated with the fonds. Instead, archivists must learn to describe “conceptual fonds” and “physical collections,” where the “conceptual fonds” might be “distributed across more than one collection” and/or “may move from one collection to another.”62

This categorization has the advantage of distinguishing between different types of context (creative and custodial), and it recognizes that the whole of a creator’s records, while they may not remain physically together, retain a conceptual bond. That the fonds should be regarded as fundamentally a conceptual construct has been prominently argued by a number of archival theorists in recent decades. In 1988, for example, Debra Barr, reproached the Canadian Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards for not


indicating that “a fonds can be an abstraction rather than a physical entity.”63 Four years later, Terry Cook counseled archivists to conceive of the fonds “primarily as ‘an intellectual construct.’”64 Cook argues that the fonds is not a physical entity, but rather results from the archivist’s efforts to describe the various relationships that exist between records and their creator(s). His view, like Yeo’s, allows for parts of the fonds to be physically dispersed and it is the job of archival description to bring them together, effectively creating the fonds in the process.

According to Yeo’s view, the Margaret Laurence fonds at York University is not in fact the fonds; the fonds – the conceptual fonds – should consist not only of the records at York University, but also of the collection of manuscripts, diaries and other personal memorabilia held at McMaster University. Prior to accepting the idea that her correspondence and other more ‘personal’ records might one day reside in an archives, Laurence had agreed to sell early draft manuscripts to McMaster and developed a relationship with Will Ready, the Head Librarian at the time. After Laurence’s death and following the publication of James King’s biography,65 where it was revealed that Laurence had sporadically kept personal journals, her children decided to donate these, along with a small amount of other personal memorabilia, to McMaster. The conceptual fonds, then, should include all of the material at York and at McMaster; in addition, it


65 James King, The Life of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: A.A. Knopf Canada, 1997). King’s biography revealed, for the first time publicly, that Laurence had committed suicide and was candid about her alcoholism. Carl Spadoni explained that once the existence of the diaries was made public, Laurence’s children preferred to have them safely stored and administered in an archive, where access to them is restricted to scholarly researchers. Spadoni, interview by author.
would include any material in the custody of other institutions or of Laurence’s family and friends or other private individuals.

The notion of the conceptual fonds brings together the various pieces of fonds that have been dispersed to different repositories for a variety of reasons and provides researchers with a fuller view of the complete archival output of a single creator; it also continues to emphasize the notion of a singular creator and by emphasizing the conceptual, downplays the significance of any particular physical aggregation of material. One way of drawing more attention to the significance of dispersal might be to focus more specifically on the physical archive (or in Yeo’s terms, “collection”) rather than on the conceptual fonds. In a recent article on Daphne Du Maurier’s archive, Christine Faunch argues interestingly in favour of highlighting the physical dispersal of literary archives; the “fragments” of dispersed archives are, she explains, “all part of a complicated web of relationships between writers, their works, and their audiences. In this way, dispersal of a literary archive is part of what renders it so fascinating.”

Faunch’s comments suggest the significance of the physical location of different parts of an author’s archive.

In this vein, Italian archivist Filippo Valenti argues that instead of looking for the “ideal-typical archive,” archivists need to acknowledge that what they most often encounter is an “aggregazioni archivistiche” (archival aggregation), “shaped by complex processes of transmission” throughout records’ active phases and under the care of custodians and archivists. In other words, Valenti proposes that archivists take archives

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66 Faunch, 29.

67 Savoja and Vitali, 123.
as they come and recognize the significance of the processes that create the final aggregation, whether that aggregation resembles a traditional fonds, or not.

Tom Nesmith makes a similar suggestion in “Reopening Archives,” where he argues that “the fonds archivists make are not the fonds they say they are making in their theoretical statements.” Like Valenti, he suggests that the pure fonds of archival theory does not exist and, echoing Peter Horsman, argues that we might instead focus on what he calls “a defensible grouping of records” resulting from “a series of recordkeeping activities and archival interventions.” This type of approach places “the history of records and archiving…at the forefront of our work” and requires that we focus our attention on representing what we have in front of us and how it arrived there rather than on attempting to represent – or, more accurately, to create – the idealized fonds of archival theory.

The Sylvia Plath collections at the Lilly Library and at Smith College illustrate the differences between seeking the idealized fonds and focusing on archival aggregations. An idealized Sylvia Plath fonds would consist of Plath’s records in both repositories, but not those contributed by Plath’s mother, ex-husband or literary executor. Removing those records from a description of the Plath fonds would obscure a considerable amount of information about the records, however, and, at this point, would be impossible to do except in a virtual capacity, i.e., by maintaining the physical

68 Nesmith, “Reopening Archives,” 265.
69 Ibid., 266.
71 Nesmith, “Reopening,” 266.
collections and creating a virtual representation of the Sylvia Plath fonds. This type of virtual solution is what is usually advocated in any event, but I wonder what is gained by it and, conversely, how much contextual and historical knowledge of the records would be lost for those researchers who chose to limit their attention to the conceptual fonds?

While a focus on the conceptual fonds maintains the creator as the centre of the archival universe, a focus on recordkeeping history shifts attention to the archive itself; instead of focusing on the life of the creator to help us explain the nature of the archive, we can view the two things separately, allowing us to account for peculiarities of the archive such as the interventions of custodians, communities or archivists without fearing that we are veering in the wrong direction. In the case of the Plath archive, archivists could considerably improve their representation of it by making more evident the roles that Aurelia Plath and Ted Hughes played in its construction. For example, a narrative account of the history of the acquisition of the various parts of the collections would help researchers understand why some of the Plath materials are held at Smith College and others at the Lilly Library, and how different Plath materials ended up in the custody of Hughes or Aurelia Plath. Some of this information can be gleaned from a study of the records themselves, but not all researchers will read through the Ted Hughes and Aurelia Plath series; nevertheless, the history of the accumulation of the records affects the way researchers now approach them and a better accounting of this history might permit more informed interpretations of the archive and of items within it.
Implications: Types 5 and 6

The creative effects of the archiving I, of certain types of communities to which a writer might belong, of subsequent custodians, of archivists, and of other individuals directly involved in the shaping of the archive are relatively easy to identify as compared with the creative effects of interpretive communities and societal forces. Contributions made by researchers and subsequent interpreters of the archive (Type 5) and/or by society broadly interpreted (Type 6) are in many ways harder to measure. In the discussion of Type 5 contributions above, I conclude that different interpretations of the Plath and Munro archives have affected subsequent interpretations and therefore our understanding of the nature of these archives; however, I think that accounting for contributions of this type is substantially more difficult for the archivist to do successfully than it is for Types 1 through 4.

First of all, the effect of any particular interpretation on another is difficult to assess. While the conclusions reached by a researcher approaching Munro’s archive after reading McCaig’s and McGill’s interpretations of it might be affected by those previous readings, they will also be affected by the new researcher’s subjective point of view, and by his or her previous research and experience. As Wendy Duff et al. show in their recent review of literature on interpretation in the context of literary and book history studies, meaning-making is a complicated process and the various strands of which it is composed are not easily separated and analyzed independently.\textsuperscript{72} How are archivists to determine the precise effect of the earlier interpretations, and how are they to determine the precise effect of any interpretation on the physical archive?

\textsuperscript{72} Duff, Monks-Leeson and Galey, 9.
It also needs to be asked whether it is the archivist’s responsibility to keep track of and represent to researchers the discourse that surrounds the archive after it has been arranged and described and made available. Archivists can recognize that their interpretation of the fonds is not the final one, but whether they should have to then attempt to incorporate subsequent interpretations into existing description is a different matter. I suspect that the interest in expanding our understanding of archival creatorship to include different interpreters of the archive has to do with archivists’ desire to acknowledge in discussions about records and power that, contrary to postmodern conceptualizations from outside the archival discipline of the archivist as a totalizing force, they are aware of the limitations of their point of view and work. This is an understandable – and wise – course of action, but pushed too far, it creates problems for the archivist, who must then ensure that she tracks all use of each archive in her care. Such surveillance should instead be the responsibility of the researcher using the archive and is already part of scholarly practices and expectations.73

A similar set of problems arises when we consider contributions of the sixth type, i.e., those made by society, broadly conceptualized. In defining “societal provenance,” Nesmith insists that it is “not just another layer of provenance information to add to other ones” (e.g. creators, functions, etc.), because the “societal dimension infuses all the others.”74 In Nesmith’s view, societal factors influence how, when, why and what individuals record and preserve, and determine what will be valued by society as a whole.

73 The potential for researchers to contribute this kind of knowledge to archival description exists through the use of annotations, tags and comments on online finding aids. The possibility of user-contributed content is discussed in Chapter 6, which looks more specifically at the topic of archival representation.

Nesmith is no doubt correct that every aspect of record making and keeping is influenced to some degree by societal factors; however, just as it is difficult for the archivist to track different interpretations of the archives they care for, it must be nearly impossible for the archivist to note, understand and report the huge variety of social factors that can impact the shape and meaning of an archive. Here is a situation where context becomes potentially boundless. Considering the relationship between context and the trustworthiness of description, Heather MacNeil asks, “where is the balance to be struck between an indigestible feast and a famine?” How much information about the society and culture in which an author lives and writes is sufficient and conducive to a fuller understanding of his or her work? As the archivist moves outward from a writer’s immediate environment, choices will have to made about where to draw the boundaries of influence, and as MacNeil points out, “no matter how much archivists try to include within the frame, something will always remain outside of it.” But Context is “boundless and susceptible to infinite regress,” and therefore difficult to manage successfully.

In the section above on Type 6 contributions, I listed some possible societal and cultural factors that might have impacted the creation of Douglas Coupland’s archive. The archivist who described the Coupland fonds alludes to some of these influences in the biographical sketch that heads the finding aid, but would need considerably more space and time to do justice to them; it is not an exaggeration to suggest that a study of societal influences on Coupland’s record making and keeping might extend to book

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length and consume an enormous amount of an archivist’s time and effort. The same is true for any of the other writers discussed in this dissertation. In the face of this reality, archivists may need to accept – and acknowledge – their limited capabilities to adequately document the ways in which societal forces contribute to the creation of an archive.

**Continuing to define archival creatorship in the archives of writers**

The reflections in this chapter on notions of archival creatorship and on the nature of the fonds suggest that there is indeed a need to expand our understanding of archival creation and that by doing so, we challenge also traditional conceptualizations of the idealized fonds. Currently, descriptive standards tend not to have a field for “provenance.” Instead, the principle of provenance is assumed to provide the theoretical underpinning for the representational decisions archivists make when they decide who to name as an archive’s creator and how to craft a biographical sketch, custodial history and/or scope and content. Therefore, to call for the concept of provenance to be expanded to include acts of creation by communities, by custodians, by interpreters and by society does not directly translate into solutions for description. Previously in this chapter, I suggested that to collapse all types of creation under the term “provenance” risks obscuring distinctions between types of creation. Furthermore, I argued that there is a worrying tendency to allow the record-keeping and -making context to become completely boundless; while there is merit to the

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77 In Chapter 6, I suggest the possibility of including information about the ongoing interpretation of archives and of their societal influences and contexts through the use of user-contributed content. In online environments, additional information about archives gathered by researchers and users can be added to the more formal archivist’s description using tagging and annotation functions.
idea that context is inherently boundless, it leaves the archivist struggling to decide what must be included in description and what can safely be excluded. At the close of this chapter, I want to suggest that archivists need to continue to work at defining types of creation and determining which are most significant to archive formation. My research suggests that – in some cases and to some extent – community, custodial, and archival interventions need to be viewed as creative acts, but my research is focused on a small group of a particular type of record creators and needs to be supported by studies both of other writers and of other types of creators.

By focusing on the contributions to archive formation of those other than its traditionally-named creator, we necessarily must adopt a more historical view of the archive and report, as Nesmith suggests, on the nature of the different processes that cause it to assume the shape it takes in front of the researcher in the reading room. This conclusion resonates with the conclusions in the previous chapter, where I argued that original order must be recognized as an archival construct and that better ways to describe how an archive achieves its final resting order need to be developed. In that chapter, I stated that it is time for archivists to find a more honest, candid means of representing to researchers the nature of the accumulation of records for which they assume responsibility. This chapter provides further support to that assertion. Archivists require more and better ways of talking about the acts that shape an archive, whether these are performed by the traditionally-named creator herself or by the numerous other contributors who have concrete and/or diffuse impacts on archival creation. Current archival theory and practice both appear to fall short in this respect. In the next chapter, I turn to the finding aids prepared for the writers’ archives I have studied to examine more
carefully how archival creation and accumulation are represented to researchers and to determine the extent to which the various shaping processes described in this chapter and the last are acknowledged by archivists in their descriptive work.
In the previous chapters I have explored ideas about the nature of personal archives, and more specifically, writers’ archives, and about the application of archival principles to them. In chapters 2 and 3, I looked to the archival literature on personal archives and to the critical literature on life writing and considered the appropriateness of recent trends toward reading the archives of individuals in relation to the personality or psychology of their creators. In chapters 4 and 5, I examined the foundational principle of archival theory (the principle of provenance) and its sub-principles (the principle of respect for original order and the principle of respect des fonds) as they have been traditionally understood by archivists, as they are being re-interpreted by archivists, and as they manifest in the archives I have studied.

In these four chapters, I have reached three broad conclusions. First, in chapters 2 and 3, I conclude that to take a psychological approach to understanding and handling an archive is potentially misrepresentative for a variety of reasons, including that archives are shaped and re-shaped in a variety of ways by a variety of agents; that they are often carefully controlled by creators who seek to highlight certain aspects of their life or career and to conceal or downplay others; and that, in the case of writers’ archives in particular, they often reflect the professional life of the writer which cannot necessarily be equated with his or her personal life. The second broad conclusion I reach in chapter 4 is that archivists must begin to admit that original order is an archival construct and to address more openly the variety of types of orders that are found in archives and that
need to be better explained to archival users. Finally, in chapter 5, I conclude that just as archivists need more and better ways to talk about order in archives, they also need more and better ways to talk about archival creatorship in order to acknowledge and explain the different kinds of creation that form an archive.

In this chapter, I proceed from the study of principles and concepts and their manifestation in the writers’ archives I have examined to look at how they are embodied in archival description. The chapter examines how – and how effectively – concepts identified in earlier chapters such as the archiving ‘I,’ coaxers and coercers, original order, and archival creatorship are represented in the finding aids I have consulted.¹ In so doing, the chapter focuses on three different types of shaping: shaping by the archiving ‘I,’ shaping by the archivist, and shaping by other interested parties. The chapter will show that the tendency of archival description is to hide the ‘constructedness’ of the fonds, and it will conclude by arguing for a more honest description of archives that acknowledges archivists’ limitations and puts greater emphasis on the archival history of a body of records.

It should be noted that while I refer to certain descriptive standards, such as the Canadian Rules for Archival Description (RAD), the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)),² and the American Describing Archives in Context

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¹ These finding aids are listed in Appendix 4. The list includes the finding aids for the fonds and collections I consulted as well as finding aids referred to by interviewees.

in different parts of the chapter, my purpose here is not to critique particular standards or to propose solutions specific to any particular standard; rather, my aim is to call attention to what is typically lacking from archival description, and I focus on the gap between what is done and what could be done by archivists to more fully represent the nature of the archives with which they work.

**Shaping by the archiving ‘I’**

In Chapter 3, I defined the archiving ‘I’ as the ‘I’ who makes decisions about what will represent the “‘real’ or historical ‘I’” as part of her archive. The archiving ‘I’ might choose to include only certain types of material in her archive, or to arrange the archive or parts of it to tell a particular kind of story. She might make efforts to place her archives in one repository or another, or to keep her records from ever entering a library or archives. In some cases, the decisions the archiving ‘I’ makes might be less self-conscious in nature, and may simply involve the work of packing up the archive and engaging in the usual negotiations with an archival institution. In any case, the actions taken by the archiving ‘I’ affect the nature of the archive that is acquired and eventually made available to researchers. In this section, I look to the descriptions of the archives I studied and to the finding aids provided to me by the archivists and librarians I interviewed to discover in what ways the work of the archiving ‘I’ is indicated in archival description.

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4 Smith and Watson, 59-60.
L.M. Montgomery, whose actions as archiving ‘I’ I discussed at length in Chapter 3, clearly intended for her journals to stand as the definitive record of her life and carefully managed both their contents and their appearance. In the online description of the L.M. Montgomery Collection, the journals are described as being at the “center” of the larger collection that has grown up around them, but there is no more detailed description of their contents or of their creation. On the University of Guelph’s L.M. Montgomery Research Centre website, researchers can access digitized copies of photographs pasted into the journal and will, presumably, eventually be able to access digitized pages; again, however, there is no description of the type of recordkeeping activities that Montgomery engaged in and that shaped the documents we consult today. While evidence of the journals’ complicated genesis can be found in the diaries themselves and in the scholarship around them, the actions of the archiving ‘I’ remain hidden in the library’s representations of them.

The archiving ‘I’ achieves slightly more presence in the finding aids for the Alice Munro fonds, the Marian Engel fonds and the Douglas Coupland fonds. In online finding aids for the Engel and Munro fonds the only significant mention of either author’s role in the formation of the archive is as the source of acquisition, but in the older, paper-based finding aids for each fonds, the authors are invoked in discussions about the state of the materials when they were received by the University of Calgary and McMaster University, respectively. In the introduction to the paper inventory for the Marian Engel fonds compiled by K.E. Garay and Norma Smith, Garay notes that when the fonds

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arrived at McMaster, it “was not in good order.” She explains that while “certain segments of it had been kept together…the very important book manuscripts were in disarray, with rejected pages from one book intermingled with castoffs from another and no indication of the order in which drafts, or sections of drafts, had been written.” In the inventory for the first accession of the Alice Munro fonds, Jean M. Moore and Jean F. Tener explain that Munro initially indicated she “had not retained ‘that many’ manuscripts,” but add that “[f]ortunately, this proved not to be the case.” Material arrived at the repository in “a trunk and a suitcase,” and, like the Engel material, was in fairly significant “disorder.” In the finding aid for the Douglas Coupland fonds, the archivist makes similar observations about disorder at the time of acquisition, noting that “much of the material had little arrangement,” and that there was “no apparent order within each [original] box.” These comments about the lack of order in the received materials provide readers with some sense of their creators’ attitudes toward recordkeeping.

In the finding aid for the Alistair MacLeod fonds, referred to by Catherine Hobbs in her interview with me, considerable effort is made to represent MacLeod’s record-keeping practices. In the fonds-level scope and content, Hobbs explains that “the majority of the documents were created and amassed” at MacLeod’s university office and home in Windsor, Ontario, but that a significant amount of material was also created in Cape

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6 K.E. Garay and Norma Smith [compilers], “The Marian Engel Archive,” ([Hamilton]: Archives and Research Collections McMaster University Library, 1984,) vii-x.

7 Tener and Moore, xxix.

Breton, where MacLeod spent summers writing (Figure 1). Hobbs records, too, that MacLeod “reused” files at different times and, where MacLeod made notes on original folders, Hobbs transcribes these for the researcher.

Figure 1 Portion of fonds-level description, Alistair MacLeod fonds

Scope and Content: The fonds reflects Alistair MacLeod’s activities as a prominent Canadian writer and professor of Creative writing and English. Contains Alistair MacLeod’s notes and drafts, typescripts, proofs for his work (in particular the working files for each of his short stories and research for the novel as well as drafts of poetry as well as non-fiction essays); editorial correspondence and correspondence with publishers concerning book production and royalties; correspondence with friends, colleagues, other writers, students, institutions organizing readings and appearances, and foreign publishers. Also includes teaching material, Windsor Review editing files, jury notes and correspondence, reviews, as well as graduate school records and family memorabilia. The Alistair MacLeod fonds contains the following series: Series 1. Literary Works Series, 2. Editorial/Publisher Correspondence, Series 3. Correspondence and Events files, Series 4. Non-Fiction Essays, Series 5. The University of Windsor (Subseries 5.1 University Teaching Subseries 5.2 Windsor Review Subseries 5.3 Special Projects), Series 6. Workshop Teaching, Series 7. Jury Work, Series 8. Adaptation and Translation, Series 9. Works of other writers for review or blurb, Series 10. Graduate School, Series 11. Reviews and clippings, Series 12. Youth and Family Life. The majority of the documents were created and amassed in Windsor, Ontario with the exception of the material in Boxes 13b onward which was brought by MacLeod from Cape Breton.

Arrangement Note: The material from Windsor reflects the filing system of MacLeod’s university office, in other cases the origin of material is noted. Researchers will note that the original filing order is reflected in the series but that additional files were composed of loose material which was brought together: these are noted.

Hobbs also includes notes at the series level about MacLeod’s filing habits. For example, a note with Series 3 – Correspondence and Events, explains:

Typically, MacLeod arranged correspondence and event material in files beginning in the Fall of a given year marking his return to the academic

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setting. Files were arranged with separate correspondence and events files for each year, though later these types of documents were merged in combined files. Usually files were titled with a start date and a symbol indicating the records are from that point forward (e.g. “>”). Some material was sent to Scotland or created in Scotland during the 1984-85 Canada Scotland Writers Exchange. Additional material was added from Cape Breton (Boxes 13a, 14a and 14b), which, though it displays similar interest to the balance of the series, was not kept in formal files.¹⁰

These descriptions allow researchers an idea of how MacLeod used and organized his records while they were in active use and before they were prepared for transfer to the archives. Because Hobbs visited MacLeod at his office to conduct her appraisal and because she chose to preserve the arrangement of “files,” “piles” and “swaths” that she found there,¹¹ we can assume that MacLeod did not engage in any further preparation of his files for the archive.

In these discussions about the state of the archives when they were acquired, the involvement of the authors in the formation of the archive is, if not fully explicated, at least acknowledged, and researchers are provided with some sense of the authors’ attitudes toward their records.¹² In none of the cases cited above, however, is the full role of the author made explicit; for example, the researcher does not gain any insight into the

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¹⁰ Ibid., 8.


¹² Unfortunately, the paper-based finding aids for the Alice Munro fonds and the Marian Engel fonds appear to have been largely superseded by web-based finding aids which do not include the discussions about the physical state of the material prior to its processing.
decisions made by the authors regarding the types of material to include in or withhold from the archive. As discussed in Chapter 3, Alice Munro, Marian Engel, Margaret Atwood, and Margaret Laurence shared similar aversions to their archives being read as windows into their personalities and psyches and made efforts to restrict the amount of personal material that they included. These aversions are not made evident in the finding aids to their fonds. In the Munro, Engel and Laurence fonds, respectively, no mention is made of the authors’ efforts to control the contents of their archives and/or to limit the amount of personal material in them. In the finding aid for the first accession of Atwood material at the Fisher Library, the introduction notes that there is very little of biographical nature and that the “focus of the collection is almost completely on Atwood’s literary work,”¹³ (Figure 2) but there is no further mention of Atwood’s specific intention to keep personal material out of what is essentially a professional archive.

Figure 2 Portion of collection-level description, Margaret Atwood papers, MS Coll 200

Most of the correspondence in the collection relates to the editing and publication of literary works. Some personal letters are included in the earlier correspondence. Personal correspondence after 1967 is restricted. There is very little memorabilia or printed material documenting Atwood's career. The focus of the collection is almost completely on Atwood's literary work. Biographical material exists only for the pre 1967 years.

In her interview with me, Monique Ostiguy referred to the finding aid for the fonds of the Québécois writer, Suzanne Jacob. In this finding aid, Ostiguy records in a fonds-level conservation note that prior to the establishment of the Suzanne Jacob fonds

at Library and Archives Canada, Jacob had lost or destroyed several manuscripts. Similarly, in a finding aid referred to by Tony Power, a fonds-level arrangement note explains that several items were removed from the fonds for “privacy reasons” and returned to the author; the finding aid includes a list titled “Folders Removed During Appraisal” that gives researchers an idea of what type of information has been withheld from the fonds at the behest of the author.\(^\text{14}\) In the majority of the finding aids I consulted for this project, however, this type of information related to the author’s own appraisal decisions is notably absent.

Some descriptive standards include an element where archivists can record information about appraisal,\(^\text{15}\) but these tend to focus on the archivists’ appraisal acts, rather than on the creators’. Elements that are used to record custodial history can be used to describe some of the history of the archive prior to its acquisition, but as the term ‘custodial history’ indicates, the intention of this element is to capture the history of the archive after it has passed out of a creator’s hands and into the care of subsequent custodians. In the Canadian descriptive standard, for example, the custodial history element of the archival description area is intended to provide “information about the chain of agencies, officers, or persons, if different from the creator(s), that have exercised custody or control over the records at all stages in their existence.” (emphasis added)\(^\text{16}\)


\(^{15}\) In *ISAD(G)*, rule 3.3.2 provides guidelines for recording Appraisal, destruction and scheduling information. In *DACS*, information about appraisal decisions can be optionally recorded in accordance with rule 5.3, Appraisal, destruction and scheduling information.

\(^{16}\) *RAD*, Rule 1.7A1.
The immediate source of acquisition element in the notes area allows archivists to record the “immediate prior custodian” from whom records have been acquired and suggests the inclusion of information about “date and method of acquisition, as well as the source/donor’s relationship to the material,” but this data element is neither required as part of description nor widely used to state more than the name of the source or donor.

In the international descriptive standard, ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description, the rule for the archival history element (3.2.3) in the context area instructs archivists to:

- Record the successive transfers of ownership, responsibility and/or custody of the unit of description and indicate those actions, such as history of the arrangement, production of contemporary finding aids, re-use of the records for other purpose or software migrations, that have contributed to its present structure and arrangement.

The rule also provides archivists with an option:

- When the unit of description is acquired directly from the creator, do not record an archival history, but rather, record this information as the Immediate source of acquisition.17

The wording of this option implies that records maintained by their original creators until the time they are transferred to a repository have no archival history. This implication is in line with one of the most traditional tenets of archival theory: that archives are the natural by-products of their creators’ activities and are formed without deliberation or a view to their future as archives. In traditional theory, archives are not archives if they

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17 ISAD(G), Rule 3.2.3.
result from the self-conscious archiving activities of their creators; as a result, perhaps, archival description most often seems to ignore or efface the active role that creators can – and often do – play in determining the final shape an archive takes.

**Shaping by ‘coaxers and coercers’(1): Custodians and other interested parties**

In Chapter 2, I introduced Smith and Watson’s notion of “coaxers and coercers,” individuals other than the writer who participate in and influence life writing narratives. Using as a primary example the ways in which Ted Hughes and Aurelia Plath have affected the shape of the Sylvia Plath collections, I argued in Chapter 3 that individuals other than those traditionally understood to be the creators of writers’ archives can have a significant impact on the nature of the archive left to posterity. In this section, I look again to the descriptions of the archives I studied and of those referred to by participants in interviews to determine whether and how the actions of other interested parties are represented in finding aids. For the moment, I will leave aside the actions of archivists; these will be considered in the following section.

The Sylvia Plath collection at Smith College consists of multiple accessions from different sources. The primary finding aid indicates that the “bulk of the collection was purchased from the Estate of Sylvia Plath in 1981,” that additional material was donated by Aurelia Plath in 1983, and that “the rest of the collection was donated or sold to Smith College by friends of Sylvia Plath.”18 Throughout the finding aid, notes are made when material has been donated either by Aurelia Plath or by other individuals, although these

are not consistent. For example, a number of letters listed in the correspondence series are described as having been annotated by Aurelia Plath; the researcher assumes that these must have been in the custody of Aurelia Plath, but she is not mentioned as the donor of the material. Material donated from different sources is mostly inter-filed with material attained through Hughes and the Plath Estate, and series of material generated by Plath sometimes also include letters written by others following her death in February, 1963. For example, in the Correspondence series there are letters listed from Ted Hughes to Ann and Leo Goodman in May 1963, in 1965 and 1966; the finding aid notes that in the letter from 1963, Hughes offers congratulations on the birth of the Goodman’s’ son and thanks them for their condolences following Plath’s death. In a letter from 1966, he inquires about the Goodman’s’ dealings with Lois Ames, a Plath biographer of whom Hughes did not approve.

As mentioned in Chapters 3 and 5, the Sylvia Plath collection at Smith College has been arranged to include separate series of materials created by Aurelia Plath and Ted Hughes. Items listed in the Aurelia Plath series include letters to and from friends of Aurelia Plath’s and students of Plath’s poetry or her biographers. The letters are all about Sylvia Plath. There are several written by Aurelia Plath to friends prior to her daughter’s suicide and discussing the state of the Plath-Hughes marriage and her concern for her daughter, as well as condolence letters received after Sylvia Plath’s death and letters where Aurelia Plath is clearly trying to ‘set the record straight’ on matters concerning both Plath’s life and death. A substantial number of letters to and from Olywn Hughes provide an account of the complicated and contentious publication history of Plath’s posthumous works and of the battle over her representation in different biographies. Each
of these letters is briefly abstracted in the series list. The Ted Hughes series is less fully described in the collection finding aid; items are listed but not as consistently abstracted. The series includes partial drafts of two plays, drafts of several poems, two envelopes in which were sealed typescripts of sections of Plath’s journals (these were unsealed by Hughes in 1998), and an undisclosed number of “Notes (personal) (about SP collection).”

Describing this material in separate series helps researchers see how certain material within the collection was authored by individuals other than Plath, but it does not fully illustrate the ways in which the collection – rather than just some of its contents – was also ‘authored’ by others. In Chapter 3, I explained how Plath scholars tend to see Aurelia Plath’s publication of *Letters Home* as a means of presenting to the public a more wholesome view of her daughter than readers found in her writing, and Hughes’ publication of *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* as an attempt to further a more mythic portrayal of Plath’s “creative self.” In that chapter, I suggested that the efforts of Aurelia Plath and Ted Hughes to control how Plath is represented extend into the archive. Their efforts can be read in many of the letters contained in the Aurelia Plath series and in the personal notes in the Ted Hughes series, but they can also be read into the development of the collection at Smith, which began with Hughes’ sale of Plath’s journals, letters and poetry and novel manuscripts and which grew through the addition of letters and juvenilia donated by Aurelia Plath. Through the piecemeal addition of letters written and received after Plath’s death and of notes to her draft manuscripts, Hughes inserts his particular point of view regarding both the arresting qualities of her writing and his role in her death and its aftermath. Similarly, Aurelia Plath asserts her version of

19 Hughes, “Sylvia Plath and Her Journals,” 156.
Plath as a stable and hard-working daughter, mother and artist by adding to the archive her own letters, mementos of Plath’s apparently happy childhood and successful school career, and clipped magazine articles reinforcing her assessment of Plath’s character.²⁰

In the Plath Collection at the Lilly Library there is a letter from Sylvia Plath to her mother in which she describes an argument she had with Olwyn Hughes, who later, as executor to the Plath Estate and as someone substantially involved in raising Plath’s two children following her suicide, was often in conflict with Aurelia Plath. Aurelia Plath made a note in the margin of this letter to remind herself that she needed to make Plath’s version of the story public by selling or donating her letters. Traditional archival theory defines an archive as resulting from the activities of its creator; if this is so, the Plath Collection at the Lilly Library might best be seen as the archive of Aurelia Plath’s efforts to tell the story she wants told. The short introduction to the collection in the online finding aid indicates that the collection titled “Plath Mss. II” includes “the correspondence, writings and memorabilia of Sylvia Plath and her family” and that it was purchased from Aurelia Schober Plath in 1977.²¹ A large number of items in the collection date from Sylvia Plath’s adolescent and young adult years, including school memorabilia and early diaries, and were likely saved by Aurelia Plath in the family home. The collection also includes many of the letters collected by Aurelia Plath to use in *Letters Home*, as well as the manuscript for her book and correspondence related to it.

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²⁰The description for the Personal Papers series and for the School Papers series indicates that several items contained within them have been annotated by Aurelia Plath, and though the finding aid does not indicate that these were donated by her, it seems likely that they were in her possession rather than in Hughes’ prior to becoming part of the collection at Smith since the majority are annotated in her hand. Kukil, *Guide to the Sylvia Plath Collection*.

Although the collection at the Lilly is about Sylvia Plath, it seems to have been largely created by her mother.

In the finding aids available for the collections at the Lilly and at Smith there is little explicit indication of the processes that led to their establishment. Both sets of finding aids indicate from whom material has been bought or gifted, but this is the extent of description related to the custodial history of the collections or to the record-keeping practices by which they accumulated. The work of discovering how the collections have developed, at least in part, out of Hughes’ and Aurelia Plath’s efforts to bolster their contesting views is left largely to the researcher.

In Chapter 3, I also discussed David Weir’s role in the formation of the Douglas Coupland fonds; based on evidence in the accession file for the fonds, it appears that it was Weir who prepared and packed material for transfer to RBSC at UBC. His name is signed to the cover sheet for the box list sent to RSBC and throughout the cover sheet, Coupland is referred to in the third person. However, Weir’s name does not appear anywhere in the finding aid to the Douglas Coupland fonds. Similarly, in the Margaret Atwood fonds there is no indication of the role played by her personal assistants in maintaining records in her office or in preparing them for transfer to the Fisher Library.

The online finding aid for the Marian Engel fonds at McMaster University lists the various sources of acquisition for the eight different accessions that make up the fonds:

The first accrual was acquired from Engel in 1982. The second accrual was acquired from the estate of Engel in 1992. The third accrual was acquired from James P. Carley in August 1995. The fourth accrual was acquired from
Alphabet Bookshop, Port Colborne, Ontario in August 1996. The fifth accrual was also acquired from Alphabet Bookshop in 1997. The sixth accrual was acquired from Ruth Grogan in May 2000. The seventh accrual was acquired in April 2001 from Sara Sutcliffe, who purchased Engel’s house after her death in 1985. The eighth accrual (01-2005) was acquired from Bob and Barbara Beardsley in February 2005.

Although this description provides researchers with the names of the sources, it does not help us to understand either who the named individuals are, what their relationship was to Engel, or how they came to be in possession of parts of her archive. In his interview with me, Carl Spadoni explained that the material acquired from Sara Sutcliffe was found by her in garbage bags that Engel left at the house:

> When Engel sold the house, close to the time of her death, she threw out a lot of her papers, put them all in garbage bags and the woman who bought the house actually looked in the garbage bags and found the archives and contacted us. I don’t know whether Marian Engel did that consciously or not. There were all sorts of wonderful letters from Timothy Findley, Robertson Davies, who, for example, commented on the *Bear* book. I [don’t know why Engel wanted to throw the material out.] That’s one of the fortunate accidents where we acquired the material as a donation. Engel’s garbage became our treasure.\(^{22}\)

Correspondence in the first accession, i.e. the accession acquired directly from Engel, is primarily to or from literary agents, publishers and associations with which

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\(^{22}\) Spadoni, interview by author.
Engel was involved or which solicited her involvement. In other words, correspondence
in the first accrual is primarily professional and business-oriented. In the seventh accrual,
described above by Spadoni, there are letters from numerous well-known Canadian
writers in addition to Robertson and Findley.23 Earlier, I explained that Engel had wished
to keep her personal correspondence out of her archive at McMaster. Although Spadoni
gently implies that Engel might have wanted her letters to be found, it is equally plausible
that she had indeed intended to destroy these. Ultimately, we cannot know what Engel’s
intentions were, and since the additional information about the Sutcliffe accrual (as
relayed by Spadoni) is not made available in the description of the fonds, the researcher
will have very little context for understanding why the letters from writers are separated
from Engel’s other correspondence, who Sara Sutcliffe was, and why the letters were in
her possession prior to being donated.

Although descriptive standards frequently include elements to record custodial
history, these are often “woefully underused,”24 and/or are understood as providing
“added value” to the description rather than as essential elements of it.25 Further, the
custodial history element, when it is included in description, does not encourage or
require archivists to record the kind of shaping undertaken by coaxers like Weir and
Atwood’s assistants whose decisions and actions affect records while they remain in the

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23 These include: Margaret Atwood, Graeme Gibson, Margaret Laurence, Dennis Lee, Gwendolyn
MacEwen, Hugh Maclennan, Farley Mowat, Alice Munro, Jane Rule, Aritha van Herk, Phyllis Webb,
Rudy Wiebe, Adele Wiseman, and George Woodcock.


25 See the recent proposed revisions to the American descriptive standard Describing Archives: A Content
Standard where the custodial history element (5.1) is identified as a “value added” option. Available at:
http://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/DACS%20Revision%20(July%202012).pdf. [Last accessed
August 20, 2012]
custody of their primary creators. In both descriptive standards and practice, valuable information about how archives are formed over time and about the roles of individuals other than the primary creator named in a finding aid often seems to be treated as an afterthought and excluded from description.

Shaping by ‘coaxers and coercers’ (2): The archivist

The many ways in which archivists shape archives have been touched on in previous chapters. From beginning to end – from appraisal and acquisition, to arrangement and description, to reference and reproduction – the archivist’s work mediates the fonds. In recent years, several calls have gone out for increased transparency in archival work, largely through better documentation of that work and its impact on records. In 2001, Terry Cook noted that “the profession preaches the merits of accountability through good records to any who will listen,” but wondered, “how accountable are archivists willing to be through keeping good records about themselves about what they do and making these records readily available?”

Cook suggested that archivists should make appraisal decisions more obvious to researchers by linking appraisal reports to finding aids. In addition, he recommended that the appraiser’s full curriculum vitae and a statement of the values on which he or she based appraisal decisions should also be linked to the appraisal report and to the archival description.

Other archivists have suggested various means of adding information about the archivist’s processing work to archival description. For example, Michelle Light and

26 Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth,” 35.

27 Ibid., 34.
Tom Hyry suggest the addition of colophons to finding aids. As well as information about the “history and provenance of a collection,” the colophon could include information related to decisions made during appraisal, arrangement and description and preservation processes, and to the biography of the processor. The colophon, they suggest, “represents a certain self-conscious perspective that acknowledges the processor’s role in shaping a collection and presenting a specific view of it to patrons.”

In “Reopening Archives,” Tom Nesmith suggests that archivists could supplement their finding aids with essays that would discuss, among other things, descriptive practices and their impact on particular record groups. More recently, Heather MacNeil has suggested ways that the ISAD(G) might be adapted to include areas where archivists could better describe the custodial history of a body of records and account for the impact of their conservation and reproduction activities.

The finding aids for the archives I studied or which were referred to by interview participants employ various means for discussing the impact of the archivist’s work on the shape of the archive. Interestingly, two of the oldest finding aids were the only ones to include in-depth discussion of archival processing and its impacts. I have discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 Kathy Garay’s efforts to reconstruct the original creative order of the Marian Engel fonds, using internal evidence and physical clues to combat the disorder she encountered in the first accession received from Engel. In her introduction to the original inventory for the fonds, Garay provides a fairly detailed account of this process.

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28 Light and Hyry, 226.
In her interview with me, Garay explained that she felt compelled in her introduction to explain how the final order of the fonds was entirely the result of her intervention. “What I was trying to say,” Garay explains, “was that I’ve put my interventionist paws all over this; it’s not a reflection of Engel’s own ideas about her collection [because] there was no discernible way of trying to figure out what her ideas were.” In a similar way, Jean Tener and Jean Moore use the “Archival Introduction” to the inventories for the first and second accessions of the Alice Munro fonds to provide researchers with a sense of the original disorder of the material and of the types of decisions made and actions taken to establish new order in the fonds.

The introductions to the Marian Engel fonds and to the Alice Munro fonds function in some of the ways envisioned by Cook and Nesmith; they explain archival principles, discuss the nature of the materials included in the archive and provide an outline of the archivist’s work. In some of the other finding aids I consulted, the work of the archivist – particularly as it pertains to arrangement – is mentioned within the description of specific levels. In finding aids compiled according to the Canadian Rules for Archival Description, the archivist’s comments on their own arrangement activities tend to appear in the Arrangement note (Rule 1.8B13) at whichever level is being described. For example, in the finding aid for the Alistair MacLeod fonds, Hobbs explains in the Arrangement note at the fonds level that while “the original filing order is reflected in the series,” some “additional files were composed of loose material which was brought together.” Hobbs adds that these files “are noted” throughout the finding

31 Garay, interview by author.
Stephen Russo also uses the fonds-level Arrangement note in his finding aid to the Douglas Coupland fonds to very briefly describe the state of the material when it was received and the decisions he made during its arrangement, including how he determined series and the steps he took to ensure that both the ‘original’ order and an archival order would be represented to users.

In the finding aid for the Michael Turner collection, held at Special Collections and Rare Books at Simon Fraser University, Courtney C. Mumma, the archivist who prepared the finding aid, uses the Arrangement note to provide a fairly detailed explanation of the arrangement of the fonds:

The files are arranged physically by accession, based on Turner’s own arrangement of the records. Wherever possible, files have remained as they were when they were acquired. In some circumstances where chronological order would facilitate access, order has been imposed where there was none upon acquisition. For instance, files consisting of photocopied press clippings or correspondence have been rearranged to reflect rough chronological order. Some large files have been separated into components to ensure proper storage. Because of the efforts to maintain original order wherever possible, some press clippings, correspondence, and other materials related to one series may be located within another series to which they also belong.33


33 Courtney C. Mumma [compiler], An Inventory to the Michael Turner Collection in Special Collections and Rare Books, Simon Fraser University MsC 107 (2009), page 4. Available at: http://www.lib.sfu.ca/sites/default/files/8910/TurnerMFonds.pdf [last accessed September 1, 2012].
In some cases, archivists who use the Arrangement note this way, i.e., to provide a sense of how the archivist either respects or adapts the found order of materials, also use it to indicate the uncertainty of some of their arrangement decisions. For example, in her finding aid for the Carol Shields fonds, Hobbs explains that manuscripts “are arranged to approximate the order of their creation;” however, she advises researchers that “this order is not infallible but by and large represents the order they assumed during un-boxing.”34 Tener and Moore also alert researchers to the uncertainty of their arrangement in their introduction to the inventory for the first accession of the Alice Munro fonds, where they note that their arrangement of manuscripts of *Who Do You Think You Are* is necessarily “tentative.” They leave it to the “responsibility of the researcher to verify the arrangement.”35

Although several of the finding aids I consulted included either an arrangement note or a sentence or two about arrangement in an introductory text, such as those written for the Marian Engel and Alice Munro fonds, in some of the finding aids there was no discussion whatsoever about arrangement. For example, in *The Papers of Dorothy Livesay: A Research Tool*, the comprehensive inventory to the first several accessions of the Dorothy Livesay fonds prepared under the SSHRC Research Tools Grant program and numbering 418 pages, there are long sections describing the contents and value of each series of material, but no account of how the archive was processed. In the Preface to the inventory, Dr. Richard E. Bennett, the Head of the Department of Archives and


35 Tener and Moore, xxxii.
Special Collections at the University of Manitoba, alludes to the “overwhelming size and intimidating disorder” of the material received from Livesay, and explains that “sufficient archival processing had already gone into the collection” prior to the compilation of the finding aid.36 Because the intellectual order of the material as listed in the finding aid matches its physical order (i.e., its box-file listing), we can assume that archivists engaged in at least some degree of physical rearrangement of files and papers, but nowhere is this arrangement work discussed in the finding aid.

The Livesay fonds aside, the examples cited above show different ways in which archivists attempt to account for their own influence on the shape of the fonds they acquire and process. Despite these efforts, and even in the most self-conscious and reflexive of the finding aids I consulted for this research, the general tendency of archival description seems to be to downplay – or even to hide – the role of the archivist in the shaping of the archive. In a recent article about the relationship between historians and archivists, Terry Cook suggests that the “need by historians, for methodological [and] epistemological reasons, to have a nonproblematic, pure, virginal archive, ready for the historian to discover and exploit, almost by definition required the archivist to be an invisible caretaker.”37 For history to be objective, “the archive could certainly not be acknowledged as the product of the subjective process of archival appraisal, or of active interventions by archivists to shape and reshape the meaning of records in all the other

36 Staff of the Department of Archives and Special Collections [compilers], The Papers of Dorothy Livesay: A Research Tool (University of Manitoba Libraries, 1986), xi.

subsequent archival activities.”³⁸ Cook argues that archivists have been complicit in the silencing of their own voices, that they have been content to accept the myth of the archivist’s objective stance, and that they have historically been more comfortable with the technological and methodological aspects of their jobs than with the theoretical and abstract ones.

Some of the conventions of archival description directly contribute to the silencing of the archival voice and the effacement of the archivist’s impact on the shape and meaning of archives. A striking feature of most finding aids is their neutral tone and the use of a passive-voiced, third person omniscient narrator. For example, a common means of describing the arrangement of a fonds in the scope and content sections of a finding aid is to note that ‘the fonds is arranged in four series,’ or ‘the fonds has been arranged in four series.’ Both of these sentence constructions use the passive voice and therefore do not convey who did the arranging: was it the creator of the archive or the archivist? In the finding aid for the Don McKay fonds at the Fisher Rare Book Library, the description for Box 4 notes that “folders have been arranged individually and alphabetically by poem title.”³⁹ Correspondence is “arranged alphabetically by sender,” and reading and lecture notes are “arranged alphabetically by writer/artist.”⁴⁰ Because I spoke with John Shoesmith about his work on this fonds, I know that the arrangement of McKay’s research files is his own, but that Shoesmith is responsible for the order of the

³⁸ Ibid., 610.
³⁹ [John Shoesmith, compiler], Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, McKay (Don) Papers, MS Coll 00518, page 5. Available at: www.library.utoronto.ca/fisher/collections/findaids/mckay518.pdf [last accessed July 17, 2012].
⁴⁰ Ibid., page 21, page 25.
other two series; however, based on the description alone it is impossible to know whether it was the archivist or McKay who did the arranging, or to know that the answer is different for different boxes.

By using the passive voice, archivists do not have to take responsibility for the acts of arrangement in which they engage, but can instead maintain the illusion that they are not actively shaping the fonds. While the use of the passive voice in description might be attributed to convention, i.e., to one archivist following a previous archivist’s example, it might also be argued that by using the passive voice archivists are able to allay or disguise any anxiety they might feel over the disturbances they inevitably provoke as they carry out their work. In cases where archivists are aware of and concerned about their impact on a fonds, the use of the passive voice dilutes this concern by leaving the question of agency as related to arrangement unresolved in the finding aid. It rests with the researcher to decide – or rather to presume – who is responsible for arrangement or to ask the archivist outright.

The typically neutral tone of finding aids can also be attributed to the standardization of description. In an article about the archives of visual artist John Latham, Athanasios Velios suggests that the effect of descriptive standards on the representation of archives is to make “the individuality of archives disappear in the unified approach to archiving.” Wendy Duff and Verne Harris make a similar assertion, arguing that standards tend to force complex and “wild realities” into uniform and

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sterilizing “boxes;” the sterilizing effect of descriptive standards contributes to the sense that both the finding aids and the archives they represent are pure and impartial and works to hide the fact that “in every case” and at every stage, “the aggregation is determined by decision-making on the part of human beings.”

Standardization also affects file titling, an issue which Hobbs identifies in both her interview with me and in a forthcoming article about the personal ethics involved in being an archivist of writers’ archives. In the article and in her interview, Hobbs spoke of the difficulties inherent both in choosing a file title for an originally untitled file or for a file created by the archivist, and of applying RAD’s rules for capitalization and punctuation to an original title. Arguing that a writer’s choice of capitalization and/or personal titling idiosyncrasies can be significant to an understanding of the contents of the file and of the writer’s working process or creativity, Hobbs concludes that rules for description lend a “deceptive simplicity” to completed file lists and run the risk of “formalizing something that didn’t exist or misinterpreting it.”

In the interviews I conducted for this project, I asked participants first what they thought the impact of archival processing was on the shape of the fonds, and then how or whether they account to researchers for the processing decisions they make (Appendix 2). While interviewees sometimes seemed to have difficulty articulating the precise nature of

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42 Duff and Harris, 282.


45 Hobbs, interview by author.
the effect of archival processing, they all admitted that an aggregation of records does not look the same after it has been worked on by archivists. “There’s no doubt about it. We do affect the records in the way that we arrange them,” Jean Tener told me. Tener suggested that “the less they are organized, the more we affect them,” but acknowledged also that any archival processing changes an aggregation to some degree.46

Heather Home discussed the impact of the physical changes wrought on a collection, noting that “We do alter the record by putting it all into nice neat folders and the consistency of labelling; it changes the aesthetic of it, how people approach it.” Home suggested that this type of archival effect is inevitable:

What do you do? Leave it at the writer’s house? Just send the researcher over to the writer’s house and tell them it’s in drawer 3? Every remove is a remove from that whole, or that place where it’s created, that site of creation, so it is just a question of where do we draw that line.47

Focusing more on the impact of archivist’s intellectual arrangement, Monique Ostiguy wondered if different archivists could potentially see different series in the same aggregation. Thinking that they likely could, Ostiguy suggested that the archivist’s primary impact on the eventual shape of a fonds is through the identification and labelling of series.48

Whether they spoke of the intellectual or physical effect of archival processing on the archive, there was unanimous support for the idea that the processed archive is

46 Steele and Tener, interview by author.
47 Home, interview by author.
48 Ostiguy, interview by author.
different in significant ways from the unprocessed archive; however, for the most part, interviewees also admitted that they did little to record for researchers their processing decisions and how they impacted the shape of the fonds. As mentioned in Chapter 4, there were some interviewees who did not attach a great importance to the principle of respect for original order; typically, these archivists and librarians explained that a significant amount of rearrangement was usually required to make writers’ archives readily accessible to researchers and that they were unlikely to document any of the changes made during rearrangement or to make information about the rearrangement available to researchers.49

Even for interviewees who were more sympathetic to archival principles, documentation of processing decisions is sparse. Attempts to document processing effects tended to be correlated to options provided in RAD; for example, interviewees referred to the use of arrangement notes (as discussed above) and of the note for the source of supplied title proper. Hobbs explained to me that she makes an attempt to indicate where any file or file title has been created not by the writer but by her during the processing of the fonds, but also admits that she is sometimes not completely consistent in this practice.50 Where a file or file title is composed by her, she records in the finding aid that the file title is “based on the contents” of the file. This type of wording is typical in RAD-based finding aids, but as with the use of the passive voice to convey arrangement, it is rather too vague; a researcher unversed in the conventions of archival

49 Spadoni, interview by author; Moosberger, interview by author; Landon, interview by author.

50 Hobbs, interview by author.
descriptive language might easily interpret this statement to mean that the writer herself titled the file based on its contents.\textsuperscript{51}

Home explained to me that she tries to “put arrangement into scope and content as much as [she] can,” but adds that she “find[s] that we don’t do enough of that in our descriptions.” The emphasis, she suggests, is on the content of the material at a particular level rather than on how that content has been shaped or structured over time.\textsuperscript{52} Several archivists described extensive rearrangement projects, intended to reconstruct what was believed to be an original order, and admitted that they often did not keep records – or only kept very poor records – of the received state of the material or of any processing decisions taken. “To be perfectly frank,” Tener told me, “I’m sure I didn’t make notes of how I moved this from here to there [in the Alice Munro fonds]. I would be suddenly able to make things fit together, and realize this and do a big ‘swoop.’”\textsuperscript{53}

Admitting and embracing the ‘constructedness’ of the fonds through more honest description

At the beginning of this chapter, I listed three broad conclusions reached in previous chapters: 1) that the psychological approach to understanding the nature of an archive diverts attention from the many different ways that archives are shaped; 2) that the importance placed on original order in archival theory diverts attention from the many different types of orders that archivists encounter in archives; and 3) that the focus on a single archival creator diverts attention from other types of creation that contribute to the

\textsuperscript{51} I do not mean to single out Hobbs here; this type of wording is widespread in finding aids.

\textsuperscript{52} Home, interview by author.

\textsuperscript{53} Steele and Tener, interview by author.
shape of an archive. In each of the three previous chapters, I emphasized the need for a stronger focus on the different processes that determine the eventual boundaries, orders and contents of an archive.

The discussion in this chapter concerning how the shaping of archives by various individuals including creators, custodians and archivists is represented in archival description highlights the tendency of archival description and of archivists’ representational activities to downplay or hide what we might call the ‘constructedness’ of the fonds. Instead of openly acknowledging the different shaping processes that archivists know contribute to the final (or evolving) form an archive achieves, finding aids more often sidestep or obscure them, requiring researchers to either infer or ignore the history of a body of records. In the section that follows, I consider some possible means by which archival description might better account for this history. I do not claim to be exhaustive; I simply wish to call attention to the possibilities that exist for creating a more honest descriptive practice.

Honest description requires that archivists acknowledge the different types of shaping that form an archive over time. It requires that archivists disclose all that they know and can responsibly share about a group of records. In previous sections of this chapter, I allude to a number of suggested means for improving archival description by

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54 Certainly, there is information about the shaping of an archive that an archivist cannot legally or ethically disclose, including financial details and any information a creator or donor insists remain confidential. For example, Kristan Cook and Heather Dean discuss how the researchers’ needs for access and donors’ needs for privacy are balanced in both the public and private sphere in the United States and Canada. See: Cook and Dean, “Our Records, Ourselves: Documenting Archives and Archivists,” in Archival Narratives for Canada: Re-Telling Stories in a Changing Landscape. Eds. Kathleen Garay and Christl Verduyn (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2011), 65-69.
making it more transparent and accountable: the addition of colophons\textsuperscript{55} or footnotes\textsuperscript{56} to finding aids in order to account for processing decisions and to acknowledge the archivist’s interpretive role; the use of essays\textsuperscript{57} to describe institutional policies and practices surrounding description and to allow for more space to trace the history of a fonds; and an increased emphasis on custodial history.\textsuperscript{58} Although several different solutions – or partial solutions – have been proposed, archivists have been slow to adopt them.

One of the first steps toward creating more honest descriptions should involve admitting a more active role for the primary creator of an archive. An interesting feature of several of the finding aids I consulted at the Fisher Rare Book Library was the inclusion of the creator’s voice in the finding aid. During her interview with me, Jennifer Toews referred frequently to the finding aid for the Malka Marom manuscript collection. Throughout the finding aid, information provided by Marom herself is conveyed in quotation marks. This information includes detailed file titles that provide precise and descriptive indications of content, as well as additional notes included by Marom with particular files. For example, Box 10 contains various drafts of “Arik’s Section” of Marom’s novel \textit{Sulha} and a note from Marom explains that this material provides “an example of work on one section. (most of the novel was composed section by section.)

\textsuperscript{55} Light and Hyry, 223.

\textsuperscript{56} Meehan, “Making the Leap from Parts to Whole,” 88.

\textsuperscript{57} Nesmith, “Reopening,” 271-272.

\textsuperscript{58} MacNeil, “Archivalterity,” 14 and “Trusting Description,” 100; Yeo, “Custodial History, Provenance, and Description,” 57-61.
This section is the first version of the Israeli part of ‘Sulha,’ and was meant to be the start of the novel.”

Another of Marom’s notes, this time for Draft Nine of Sulha, directs the researcher through the archive:

This is the first completed and clean draft. It was sent to – and accepted by – Wayne Kabak, literary agent at ICM, then William Morris, New York. He subsequently sent it to a few Editors who liked the writing, the story, but – too long…(look at Kabak file for their letters). Therefore Kabak advised to edit a shorter version of Sulha. (which I did – look drafts 10, 11, 12.)

Although these notes do not exactly describe Marom’s archiving activities, they do permit her particular perspective on the contents of her archive to be included in the official description of the collection. The Fisher Library does not use RAD and in this case, the finding aid is simply a box and file list with Marom’s notes transcribed directly.

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[60] Ibid., 12.
into the file description. In several of the finding aids for different accessions of material from Margaret Atwood a similar method is used, and Atwood’s own description of some material is included in quotation marks in the file-level description. For example, the description for Box 119 of Manuscript Collection 335 includes the following note:

An envelope sent to me by my Aunt Kae in 1979, containing items she found after my grandfather died. 1. Picture of fairy @ age 4 or 5; the writing on the back is my mother’s. 2. Two letters to my grandfather, written when I was 13. One contains a description of early puppet show activities – these were marionettes, not to be confused with a later hand-puppet show – plus a comic poem, and the other an account of a novel I was at work on – I’d forgotten this – called Happy the Hog. (Morphed into Pigoons, in later life…).\textsuperscript{61}

Several notes from Atwood in this part of the finding aid provide context for juvenilia and sometimes explain the connection between early works and later ones. For example, a note with the description of Folder 9 in the same box mentioned above indicates that a draft contained therein was Atwood’s “first attempt at what would later become Cat’s Eye, probably 1959.”\textsuperscript{62} One interesting effect of these notes is that they inject into an otherwise fairly sterile and neutral listing of material Atwood’s own wry voice. A note describing three school essays explains that they were written for “Miss Smedley, who once said I showed no particular promise in her class.” Atwood adds:

\textsuperscript{61} Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, \textit{Atwood (Margaret) Papers}, Ms Coll 335 finding aid Atwood 335, page 82, available at: \url{http://fisher.library.utoronto.ca/sites/default/files/atwood335.pdf} [last accessed September 12, 2012].

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 83.
“Evidently I did show some.”

Another note describes the draft of a short story as “A not altogether intentionally hilarious story about a girl who ends up strangling her hamster.”

Figure 4  Description of Box 119, Margaret Atwood Papers, MS Coll 335

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 119</th>
<th>Juvenilia, Early Writing and Artwork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Atwood: “Two booklets made for Brownies. These are some of the booklets mentioned at the end of Chapter 5 of <em>Negotiating With the Dead</em>, and returned to me by Katy Firstbrook, my Brown Owl, when she was 95 and I visited her in her retirement home (I think some of the seed pods fell off one of these).”]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each archivist and librarian I interviewed reported having discussions with donors about their archives; these discussions address topics such as the donor’s record-keeping habits, his or her writing and editing practice, attitudes toward keeping and/or destroying material, and the significance of particular material within a collection. This type of information aids archivists in making informed appraisal decisions and in determining the arrangement of the fonds as it is processed, and it can provide valuable contextual details for researchers. Most of the time, however, the information gathered from donors during these interviews is not fully recorded or formally documented, and/or is not made available to researchers either in the finding aid or through any other means. Since this type of information is already being gathered by archivists and used to inform their decisions about the treatment of fonds, a fairly simple and not too onerous additional step

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63 Ibid., 82.
64 Ibid., 84.
65 Interviewees explained that not all of the information they gather through donor interviews is captured in writing and that when it is, it is typically kept in note form in either an accession file or a processing file, neither of which are commonly made available to researchers.
would be to plan for more formal capture of the information and for its inclusion in finding aids, either through excerpts included in the appropriate descriptive element or as available appendices to more standardized description.

In a recent article, Kristan Cook and Heather Dean make a related suggestion to open accession and processing files to researchers. Noting that these files often contain important information about “provenance and custodial history,” “details about how a repository acquired and manages a fonds,” “historical and biographical information relating to [sic] the records to more extensive investigations into the people, places and organizations represented in the records,” and “consultations with donors,” 66 Cook and Dean argue that providing researchers access to these materials allows for greater contextualization of a fonds and better understanding of the various negotiations and processes that form it.

The accession file for the Douglas Coupland fonds is open to researchers (although it is reviewed first to ensure that no confidential material is released), and it was information in that file that led me to question the degree to which Coupland was responsible for the ‘original order’ of his archive. However, I would argue that while it is certainly helpful to have accession and processing files available for researchers, it might be easier – and certainly more forthright – to include pertinent information from the files directly within or attached to finding aids. If the type of information these files provide is as critical as Cook and Dean suggest to an understanding of the fonds – and I agree with

then surely it should also be considered a critical component of a good finding aid.

Opening up information gathered from the donors of archives and related to their decisions regarding the contents and shape of the archive as well as information related to its acquisition and processing would help to call attention to the roles of the archiving ‘I,’ of subsequent custodians and of archivists in the formation of the archive researchers eventually encounter. Better use of particular descriptive elements would also help in this regard. In “Trusting Description,” MacNeil advocates for a stronger emphasis in description on archival history. She suggests that the archival history element of ISAD(G), which is currently located in the Context area, be established as a separate and distinct area of its own in order to “give archival history more prominence”\(^{67}\) and draw “users’ attention to the journey the records have taken before their arrival in an archival institution.”\(^ {68}\) As a distinct area, Archival history would be broken down into three elements: name(s) of custodian(s); custodial history; and history of the records’ arrangement and associated finding aids. The custodial history element “would focus on the sequence of ownership and custody of the records from their original owners up to the point of transfer to the archives, the sequence of places of custody from origin to transfer and any known losses or additions to the records while in a particular custody,” while the third element “would explain the ways in which the records have been structured and restructured over time by creators, collectors, and custodians prior to their transfer to the

\(^{67}\) MacNeil, “Trusting Description,” 99.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 101.
archives, identify any associated finding aids, and indicate the time frame(s) within which the rearrangement(s) of the records took place."\(^{69}\)

The creation of a separate and distinct archival history area in descriptive standards could provide archivists with a space in which to record the different types of creation that lead to the formation of an archive. For example, the additions made to the Sylvia Plath collection by Aurelia Plath and by Ted Hughes could be briefly, but explicitly, recounted in a custodial history element, as could the long process of accrual in the L.M. Montgomery collection. A distinct archival history area could also provide a space to record the variety of orders archivists encounter in archives and/or to specify the type of order they identify in any instance as ‘original.’ In Chapter 4, I showed how archivists refer to several different types of order as original or significant and suggested that we need to begin to more carefully identify and name these different orders. Using the history of the records’ arrangement element in an Archival History Area, archivists might identify and describe the order in which materials arrived at the archive (received order or packing order), the order in which they believe the creator used the archive (creative order for writers), and/or the order they encountered during site visits, along with any other orders that appear to be significant to an understanding of the archive.

Also in Chapter 4, I argued that the usual archival hierarchical series structure – the intellectual order of an archive – is more an archival construct than it is an original order since the archivist’s inference of intellectual order is necessarily based on limited knowledge of original contexts and because the identification of intellectual order is inevitably influenced by how archivists understand the ideal structure of a fonds. I

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 100.
suggested that instead of presenting the archivist’s intellectual ordering as a kind of resurrection of the creator’s original order it would be more honest to call it the archival order and admit our role in determining it. This role and our unavoidable rearrangement (physical or conceptual) of the material could then be acknowledged and described within the elements of descriptive standards that ask archivists to account for their arrangement activities.

In *ISAD(G)* the archivist’s arrangement activities are meant to be included in the System of arrangement element (3.3.4) within the Content and Structure Area; the standard advises archivists to “specify” in this element “the internal structure, order and/or system of classification of the unit of description,” and to “note how these have been treated by the archivist.” In both *RAD* and *DACS* archivists’ arrangement activities can be included in notes. Neither of these options is entirely satisfactory. As MacNeil suggests, the instruction to “note archivist’s treatment” in the System of arrangement element in *ISAD(G)* should be “parsed to make clear that the history of the records’ arrangements since their transfer to archival custody…and the rationale for the records’ current arrangement are part of the scope” of the element.\(^70\) If the possible ways in which the System of arrangement element could – and should – be used were made more explicit, archivists might begin to include more extensive accounts of their treatment of archives and of their impact on them.

In both *RAD* and *DACS* the inclusion of information about archival processing in a note area rather than in a content and structure area suggests that such information is of secondary importance or stature; adding an archival processing area or element to these

\(^{70}\) MacNeil, “Trusting Description,” 100.
standards might encourage archivists and researchers alike to accord more significance to the impact archival treatment has on a body of records. A related solution could be to create a new element of description that would focus specifically on the different orders found in archives. While most information of this type could potentially be included in Scope and content, Custodial history, and Systems of arrangement elements, it might nevertheless be helpful to include an element in which archivists can list and describe the different types of order they encounter, infer and create.

Alternately, a discussion of different physical and archival orders may need to be compiled in a separate document and appended to standardized description. Gabrielle Dean suggests the addition of “parallel texts” to standardized description. These texts would “address not just the ‘what’ and ‘where’ but the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of sources.” Velios makes a similar suggestion in his article on artists’ archives, where he argues that archivists “have a unique understanding of the history that the archive holds.” He envisions an “additional layer” of description that would be more “creative” than standardized descriptive forms and that would embrace the archivist’s inevitable partiality, admit his interpretive role, and provide a detailed account of his work on the archive.

This proposal is similar to Nesmith’s and Cook’s suggestions that archivists write essays to append to traditional finding aids. Appending “parallel texts” to standardized description...

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72 Velios, 260.

73 Ibid., 261.
description allows archivists to retain the benefits of well-established descriptive standards while also providing an extra space in which to include the types of knowledge that archivists have about records but that have not traditionally been included in finding aids. In times of increasingly tight budgets and staffing cutbacks, some archivists might argue that more description is simply not feasible; however, since the information that I am suggesting should be included for researchers in description is information that is typically gathered by archivists during their appraisal, acquisition and processing activities, I would argue that what is required is more the formalization of documentation procedures and the redirection of the information gathered to researcher-accessible forms.

Another means of incorporating information about the history of an aggregation into description is to provide opportunities for researchers to contribute their own knowledge to finding aids. The potential of user-contributed content to enhance archival description is a topic of increasing interest in the emergent literature on archives and the World Wide Web. In two recent essays, Elizabeth Yakel argues that archivists need to move “from a model of mediation and controlled descriptions to one of collaboration and shared authority,”74 and she suggests that allowing user contribution to description through commenting, tagging and/or annotation is one means of achieving such a move. Projects like Project Naming at Library and Archives Canada (http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/inuit/index-e.html) and the Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections (http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/polaread/about.html) at the Bentley

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Historical Library at the University of Michigan demonstrate how users are able to enhance the description of individual items by contributing knowledge of their content or creation.

During her interview with me, Jennifer Toews explained that she hopes researchers will come to her with information they have about collections that is not represented in finding aids: “That’s a part of the process, too,” she say. “You do what you can to make it public and then often people come and tell you all sorts of interesting things…We obviously don’t know everything about everything and often [researchers] are specialists in that person or in that subject.” Toews added that when she is fairly certain that information provided by researchers is correct she adds it to the finding aid.\textsuperscript{75} The development and evolution of online finding aids is facilitating the addition of user-contributed content to description, and though, as Yakel observes, allowing user-contributed content requires archivists to yield some of their authority over description, it also takes the onus off them to create a definitive description. Instead of description being the final product of the archivist, it can be seen as a fluid and evolving practice that is able to continuously incorporate new knowledge about archives as it becomes available from different sources.\textsuperscript{76}

The addition of user-contributed content to archival description is greatly facilitated in online environments. An additional online tool that might go some way to providing researchers with knowledge about how archives are formed – and particularly

\textsuperscript{75} Toews, interview by author.

\textsuperscript{76} As suggested in Chapter 5, content contributed from other sources, including researchers, is one way of incorporating knowledge of the effect of interpretation on archives and of their societal context.
the archivist’s role in forming them – is the processing blog. Several repositories have experimented with blogging about the processes involved in arranging and describing specific collections. The British Library at one point hosted blogs on the processing of the Harold Pinter collection and of the Ted Hughes collection, though at the time of writing both of these seem to have gone offline. The Archives2.0 wiki

(available at: http://archives2point0.wetpaint.com/) provides a list of archival processing blogs\(^\text{77}\), most of which focus on personal archives. As with the now-defunct Pinter and Hughes blogs, the listed processing blogs tend to emphasize interesting items uncovered during processing rather than the actual work of processing, and as such, they do not meet the full promise of a processing blog; with an increased focus on the decisions archivists make as they survey the materials, identify or create series and transform archives into the relatively polished product encountered by researchers in the reading room these types of blogs could function as an explanatory text alongside more formal finding aids.

As mentioned, this section does not claim to be exhaustive, but only suggests some of the many possible ways that description could be made more representative of the processes by which an archive forms. Even without revising existing standards and/or creating additional descriptive tools, better and more consistent use of custodial history elements and arrangement notes, as well as the use of the active voice in scope and content elements and throughout finding aids could go a long way toward making description more honest. Of the writers’ archives I discuss, not one conforms to the idea of the fonds as a ‘pure’ and unselfconscious by-product of a single creator. The finding

\(^{77}\) Available at: http://archives2point0.wetpaint.com/page/Processing+blogs. I last accessed the list on August 26, 2012. At that time the last update to the list was on March 9, 2011.
aids prepared for them, however, mostly fail to convey precisely how they have come into being. This is not a fault of the archivists who processed the fonds and compiled the descriptions necessarily, but rather of conventions in archival theory and practice that encourage archivists to present a more perfect picture of fonds, one that is consistent with traditional notions of archives as impartial and natural and of archivists as objective and neutral. More recent arguments about the personal archive as reflective of the character and psychology of its creator can also obscure the complicated histories of archives; as we have seen with the Plath and Montgomery archives, for example, an emphasis on the personality of the writer often works to conceal the role(s) of other individuals in forming archives.

The archives I consulted are more complex and their histories more richly varied than the finding aids prepared for them let on and the failure of the finding aids to accurately represent these histories does a disservice both to researchers and to the archives themselves. Whatever methods archivists choose to incorporate into their descriptive practices, it is imperative that they start to more openly acknowledge – in both their theoretical statements and the embodiment of these in archival description – that the archive is a construction built by many hands and formed over time. Instead of hiding the ‘constructedness’ of the fonds, they must begin to embrace it.
Throughout this dissertation I have reached several separate, yet related, conclusions. First, I have argued that recent trends in the literature on personal archives toward a psychological or character-based approach to personal archives are potentially misrepresentative. Character is difficult to assess in archives where creators have taken purposeful steps to highlight certain aspects of their lives or careers and to conceal others, and where the shaping effects of a variety of other interested parties, including custodians, community members, and archivists help to determine the contents and form of the archive. The interpretive framework suggested by the literature on life writing emphasizes a healthy skepticism of the ‘truth’ in life writing forms such as diaries and letters and calls attention to the performative nature of these forms; life writing scholars suggest that personal writing results in the creation of a persona, a “narrated ‘I,’”\(^1\) and argue that the correspondence between this persona and the historical person who writes is ambiguous and imperfect. As well, contemporary life writing theory stresses the idea that life writing is not a purely individual act: it is directed toward an audience of some kind and is inevitably influenced by the writer’s awareness of or collusion with different coaxers and coercers. These ideas can be contrasted with the notion common to both traditional archival theory and emerging theory for personal archives that the archive reflects its creator. As far back as the first manual for arrangement and description,

\(^1\) Smith and Watson, 59-60.
archivists have claimed that the archive mirrors the “personality” of its creator;\(^2\) however, the examples of the archives I discuss in chapters 2 and 3 underscore the ways in which this assertion is problematic.

The idea that the archive acts as mirror to its creator underpins the development of the archival principle of provenance; archivists adhere to the sub-principles of respect des fonds and respect for original order in order to protect the origins of records, to preserve them so that the archive can reliably reflect its creator in perpetuity. It can be said then that these principles also rely on a psychological or character-based approach to archives. If such an approach is considered to be misrepresentative of the reality of archives, then it follows that the principles of respect des fonds and of original order might be as well. In chapters 4 and 5, this is indeed the conclusion I reach. In chapter 4, I explore the confusion that continues to exist around the meaning and significance of original order and discuss the variety of different types of order that archivists encounter and identify as original. I argue that archivists need to acknowledge the limitations of the concept of original order and that they need to find new ways to talk about the many different types of order that exist in archives.

In chapter 5, I reach similar conclusions about the concept of archival creatorship. Until recently, archivists’ understanding of archival creatorship has been too narrowly focused. Now, some archivists are beginning to explore non-traditional ideas about archive creation as it is affected by place, community and even ethnicity. While some of these new ideas about archival creation seem to me to be somewhat difficult to assess and/or outside the realm of the professional archivist, the examples of the archives I cite

\(^2\) Muller, Feith and Fruin, 19.
in chapter 5 clearly show how archives are not only created by the single individual typically named as creator; instead, many different ‘archival agents’ affect the shaping of the archive, including the creator’s family, friends or executors, subsequent custodians of the archive, and the archivists who acquire, process and preserve it.

Chapter 6 turns from the archives I studied to their representations in finding aids. It sets out to examine how concepts identified and explored in earlier chapters, such as the archiving ‘I,’ coaxers and coercers, original order and archival creatorship are represented in finding aids and finds that for the most part they are not. I argue that instead, the convention of archival description is to hide the ‘constructedness’ of the archive, to gloss over or ignore both the conscious acts of the individuals named as creators and the contributions of other unnamed creators (e.g. custodians, archivists, etc.). I conclude the chapter by calling for a more honest approach to archival description, one that admits the limitations of archivists and that better emphasizes the archival history of a body of records.

The most promising means of achieving a more honest description might be to focus more explicitly – both in theory and in practice – on the archival aggregation itself as a referent, rather than interpreting the archive primarily as a referent to something else, i.e., to the creator or to the creator’s activities. In Chapter 5, I alluded to Valenti’s concept of the “aggregazioni archivistiche;” the notion of the archival aggregation is set in contrast to the “ideal-typical archive” and recognizes the “complex processes of transmission” that shape the aggregation throughout its active life and later, in the hands of custodians and archivists. A recent case study by Peter Horsman of the Vriesendorp

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3 Savoja and Vitali, 123.
family archive highlights the distinctions between a focus on the aggregation as referent and a focus on the archival creator as referent. Horsman describes the history of the Vriesendorp family archive, an archive that grew out of the efforts of a self-appointed family archivist, Jacob Vriesendorp, who determined what the archive should contain and how it should be arranged. The resulting archive cannot be defined in traditional archival terms as a family fonds, Horsman argues, because it results not from the activities of a number of different family members, but from the efforts of one individual to gather together the family memory. Neither can it be described as the Jacob Vriesendorp fonds because it contains business records and other papers that ought, according to strict archival theory, to belong to or form separate fonds. The Vriesendorp family archive, Horsman shows, in no way fits with the definition of a fonds as provided in the Dutch manual.

Nevertheless, Horsman argues that although the archive as compiled by Jacob Vriesendorp is not a traditional fonds, this “does not mean that it is not an archive:” “there are broader views and definitions…that are valid as well and apply to archives like this one,” he suggests. What makes the Vriesendorp family archive an archive, Horsman argues, are the bonds the materials within it have acquired as a result of their “original way of accumulation.” Implied in his argument is the idea that even aggregations that do not accrue naturally and impartially possess a kind of “integrity” and that it is this integrity that makes the archive.4 Horsman’s position is set in opposition to traditional archival theory, but is nevertheless animated by the same spirit; he respects the origins of

an accumulation, but he also accepts that these origins may deviate from those imagined – and codified – by early archival theorists.

There is a disingenuousness to both conventional archival description and the traditional theories that underpin it, a disingenuousness that results, I think, from our sincere efforts to conform to archival principles. These principles were developed with an ideal archive in mind, an archive that was unselfconsciously formed by a single creator and that can reflect back to us the true nature of that creator, an archive that is rarely encountered in the ‘real world.’ The origins that traditional archival theorists posited for archives are overly idealistic, and the principles they developed therefore difficult to apply. However, if we take a broader view of the origins of an archive and of its “original way of accumulation” we might find room to admit the active roles of the creator(s) of the archive, of the archivists who acquire, arrange, describe and preserve it, and of any other interested parties whose actions and decisions affect its nature as an aggregation. If we treat the archive as a thing in itself, rather than as a reflection of another thing, and if we try to tell its story instead of – or at least in addition to – its creator’s, we might be freed from some of the limits that adherence to traditional archival theory places upon us. Rather than feeling compelled to identify a single creator of a body of records or to guess at its original order, we could identify and describe different types of creators and different types of orders. Rather than pretending that an archive springs unbidden to life for a researcher, we could acknowledge the significant history of its growth.

My suggestion here to focus on the history of a body of records is not a new or revolutionary one. I have mentioned already the works of several archivists, including MacNeil, Millar, Nesmith, Horsman and Yeo, who have called for better reporting of the
complex lives of archives. What is new in this dissertation, I think, is that these calls are supported by empirical research, by examples drawn from actual archives that show clearly how poorly the history of archives is represented in traditional description and how these histories complicate our interpretation of long-held archival principles.

Also new in this dissertation is my exploration of the connections between life writing theory and archival theory. At the end of Chapter 1, I suggested that archivists might begin to think of the archive as a social and collaborative text and as a genre of life writing in itself. Compiling an archive in someone’s name constitutes an effort to memorialize and represent that person’s life or some particular aspect of it (however imperfectly that effort can be achieved), and in this sense, the act of archiving could be viewed as a kind of writing that “takes a life as its subject.” The important thing, however, is to focus, as life writing theorists have in recent years, on archiving as a complex and collaborative process, one that involves numerous subjects, perspectives, and acts. If we understand the archive as the text that results from this process of archiving, we must strive to represent it to researchers in all of its complexity. We must explain, to the best of our knowledge, who has had a hand in forming it, how and why. We must tell the most complete story we are able to of the life of the archive.

Moving into the digital

As I explained at the outset of this dissertation, the archives I studied for this project were largely made up of analog material and the archivists and librarians I spoke with were not yet accustomed to working with large-scale digital collections. However, as all archivists

5 Smith and Watson, 3.
must now be aware, writers’ archives of the future – and personal archives more
generally – are bound to be increasingly digital in nature. Archivists have begun to study
the impact of digital technologies on the archives of individuals, focusing in particular on
what types of digital records are made and kept, and what challenges they pose in terms
of their long-term preservation.\(^6\)

Many of the recent studies and articles or book chapters on digital personal
archives reach similar conclusions or cover similar ground. Particular challenges
discussed include: the haphazard preservation efforts of records creators; the hybrid
quality of archives that are both paper and digital and the difficulties of bringing these
together; the obsolescence of older media formats; the loss of information as content is
migrated from one format to another; problems associated with content stored on
distributed networks and in ‘the cloud;’ the need for and development of tools created
specifically for the preservation of authentic digital archives; and the need for archivists

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\(^6\) For example, researchers involved in projects such as the Personal Archives Accessible in Digital Media
(PARADIGM) project and the Digital Lives Research Project have interviewed the creators of digital
personal archives in order to gain some initial understanding of how and why archives are created; what
measures creators take for the preservation of their archives; how these archives are transferred from the
homes of their creators to archival repositories; and what challenges arise at each stage of these related
processes. Catherine C. Marshall has also undertaken several studies on personal digital archive creation
and its challenges. In 2011, personal digital archives were the subject of a book of collected essays that
looked at personal digital archives from both conceptual and more practical case-study based approaches.
The digital archives of writers in particular are also being discussed; for example, the treatment of the
digital portion of Salman Rushdie’s archive at Emory University is recounted in a recent Archivaria article.
See: Susan Thomas and Janette Martin, “Using the Papers of Contemporary British Politicians as a Testbed
Peter Williams, Jeremy Leighton John and Ian Rowland, “The Personal Curation of Digital Objects: A
Personal Digital Archiving, Part 1: Four Challenges from the Field,” *D-Lib Magazine* 14 (March/April
Marshall, “Rethinking Personal Digital Archiving, Part 2: Implications for Services, Applications, and
Institutions,” *D-Lib Magazine* 14 (March/April 2008), available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1045/march2008-
marshall-pt2 [last accessed August 26, 2012]; I, Digital: Personal Collections in the Digital Era,
Christopher A. Lee, ed. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011); Laura Carroll et al., “A
Comprehensive Approach to Born Digital Archives,” *Archivaria* 72 (Fall 2011), 61-92.
to work more closely with creators while archives are in formation, long before they are taken into a repository’s custody.

Many of the findings of this dissertation, though they are based in research on paper archives, will be important, I believe, in the digital realm. In my final paragraphs, I want to focus on three particular areas where I think findings from this dissertation will be applicable – and will need further examination – in the context of writers’ digital archives. The first area relates to the tendency to imbue writers’ archives with a psychological character or to interpret them in relation to the writer’s personality. In the last five years, several newspaper, popular magazine, and review articles have speculated on what the writers’ archives of the future will contain and how they will be accessed. In these articles, the digital archive is frequently described as an extension of the writer’s self and/or as a window opening into his or her life and mind. For example, writing for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Steve Kolowich quotes Matthew G. Kirschenbaum who asserts that, “since a laptop logs basically everything its user does, preserving these data environments will allow the scholars of the future unprecedented insight into the minds of literary geniuses. It’s basically like giving someone the keys to your house.”

Kolowich goes on to “imagine how mapping the content of an author’s Facebook profile,

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8 Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, quoted in Kolowich.
MySpace page, Flickr account, or Twitter feed might help scholars dissect that author’s life and letters.”

In these and similar statements, the reader has the sense that the computer, along with all the data it holds and the distributed networks it links to, provides a kind of universal access to the writer’s life and work – that, in essence, the writer is contained in the computer. The following statement by Naomi Nelson of MARBL at Emory University shows how the computer is often considered to provide a special kind of access:

It is really quite powerful…Instead of having just Bronte’s [sic] letters, with the computer you have the whole environment in which the writer worked. It is quite remarkable to open up someone’s desktop to see how they left it, look through its file directory system and see how they organized things and how their creative life related to the rest of their life, which is also on the computer. In a recent article on the archives of contemporary British authors, Jamie Andrews notes that despite some speculation that digital archives would not be fetishized to the same degree as paper manuscripts, users continue to have “affective” responses to digital media; citing the examples of Norman Mailer’s computer, exhibited at the Harry Ransom Center in Texas and the “excitement” in the press over Barack Obama’s Blackberry, Andrews implies that material created by writers (and other celebrity figures) on digital media is still perceived as somehow unique and significant.

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9 Kolowich.
10 Naomi Nelson, quoted in Corbyn.
media are imbued with the same auratic qualities with which analog materials have traditionally been credited.

However, for the same reasons that the equation of archives with character is problematic in paper-based archives, archivists should be careful when making any claims about the extent to which digital media and systems can fully and accurately reflect their creators. Hill and Slocombe insist that “partiality” is a crucial trait of literary archives and I think this will continue to be the case with digital literary archives; despite Nelson’s suggestion that the writer’s computer holds his or her “whole environment,” I think we must recognize that even the digital archive, with its capacity to store ever-increasing amounts of data, will only be truly comprehensive in exceedingly rare cases, if at all. These assertions of mine are only conjecture, however, and this is an area where further research should be undertaken. Questions that might be asked include: how are the digital archives of writers different than their paper archives? Is the archiving ‘I’ more or less active in the digital realm and in what ways does its activity affect the nature and shape of the digital archive? Are there coaxers and coercers in the digital realm who further complicate a psychological approach to writers’ digital archives and if yes, who are they and how are they operating? For example, archivists frequently assert the urgent need for pre-custodial intervention in the creation and preservation of personal digital archives; what impact does the archivist’s intervention have on the nature of the archive and how does that affect a psychological reading of digital archives?

[11] In Carroll et al.’s article on the Rushdie digital archive, Rushdie’s high level of control over how much of his digital archive will be made public is evident.
A second area of inquiry that will require more attention in the digital environment relates to notions of order in digital archives. Much has been made of the impermanency of the digital and of the ease with digital files can be changed. The same is true of file orders in digital environments. Individuals can easily create, name, overwrite and re-name files and file folders, and can shuffle these around from place to place on their computer desktops, on internal and external hard drives, on flash storage devices, and in ‘the cloud.’ What does order mean in the digital environment? What will constitute original order and what other orders might we want to identify? How do we correlate – or do we need to correlate – the order of materials in digital media with the order of paper materials still being created? In her interview with me, Catherine Hobbs suggested that in the digital environment archivists have a unique opportunity to preserve creator file structures in a way that is not fully possible with paper archives, which by necessity have to be disturbed in order to be moved from the creator’s home to the archival repository. She proposed emulation as an interesting means of preserving rich context in the digital environment and, in fact, this was the approach taken by the team at Emory University that recently processed Salman Rushdie’s archive. The prospect of emulation raises additional questions: What does emulation reproduce? Is it really an original order? To what extent are we associating the emulated order with the creator’s psychology or personality? Is this an acceptable association?

The final area of inquiry I want to suggest concerns the nature of the archival aggregation in the digital environment. Digital archivists emphasize the challenges associated with acquiring and providing access to archives in distributed networks.

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12 Hobbs, interview by author.
Questions of ownership also arise; who owns the information a writer uploads to his Facebook profile? To whose archive does that profile belong? The same questions can be asked about email on Hotmail servers, blog posts on commercial blogging platforms, digital photos stored on photo sharing websites such as Flickr and files of any format stored on ‘cloud’ servers. Should all of this material be brought together under the name of the primary creator, and if so, how will archivists manage to do so? If not, what will we be describing and to what will we be providing access? Will archivists become cataloguers of individuals’ digital lives as Catherine Marshall suggests?13 Where is the individual’s archive in all of this distributed material?

Looking at other archives

In addition to studying how the archiving ‘I’ and other concepts discussed in this dissertation function in digital personal archives, future research in this area will have to investigate how the findings here apply to other types of archives, both personal and organizational. Writers constitute a specific group of personal archives creator; they are often aware of the value and future use of their archives; they produce a good deal of archival material as part of their work; and their archives are often composed of both professional or semi-professional material and personal material. The archives of other types of personal archives creators may exhibit different characteristics and qualities, and there is broad scope for further exploration: in what ways do the archives of artists, scientists, politicians, actors, families, etc., conform to or contradict the findings in this

dissertation? Similar questions can – and should – be asked of organizational archives, especially as they relate to the principles of original order and archival creatorship. Are the concepts of original order and archival creatorship as unstable in different types of organizational archives as they appear to be in writers’ archives?^{14}

In Chapter 2, I list the archives I studied for this research. Seven out of eight of these were created by women authors. I explain in that chapter that because I hoped to be able to make use of a secondary literature on the nature of the archives and the materials within them, and because the secondary literature on archival materials tends to focus on women’s unpublished writing in archives and private collections, I was predisposed to select women’s archives to study. Although I studied only one male writer’s archive (the Douglas Coupland fonds) in detail, the archivists and librarians I interviewed frequently referred to the archives of male writers as examples. Based on my research experience, I am not inclined to believe that there is a gendered quality to writers’ archives; however, this feeling needs to be properly investigated to be supported and an additional area of research that suggests itself here is to conduct a comparative study of the archives of male and female writers. As well, researchers may want to study whether there are other factors that affect the production of personal archives: factors based on ethnicity, socio-economic background, education, religion, etc.

^{14} It should be noted that there are some archivists who have called attention to the ways in which organizational records exhibit some of the characteristics more commonly associated with personal records. Useful starting points for exploring these similarities can be found in: Barbara L. Craig, “Rethinking Formal Knowledge and Its Practices in the Organization: The British Treasury’s Registry Between 1900 and 1950,” *Archival Science* 2 (March 2002), 111-136, and Ciaran B. Trace, “What Is Recorded Is Never Simply ‘What Happened’: Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture,” *Archival Science* 2 (March 2002), 137-159.
Filling the “silences” / telling the whole story

In Chapter 1 stated my intention to address some of the gaps in archival theory for personal archives, to speak to some of the “silences” identified by Hobbs and others in archival theory as it relates to personal archives. Through my examination of the various writers’ archives I studied and from my discussions with experts in the area, I have concluded that filling silences is exactly what is required. Traditional archival theory has for the most part projected an idealized view of the archive that emphasizes an unselfconscious body of records, a single creator and the presence of an original order that will reflect that creator. This projection ignores – or suppresses – the intentional acts of creators, the numerous contributions that help to create archives, and the impossibility of capturing a truly original order. The archivists and librarians with whom I spoke know that the archives they care for rarely fit the model of the pure archival fonds; they know that a single writer’s archive may result from the archiving activities of different contributors (e.g., other writers, family members, editors, publishers, agents, executors, etc.); they know that the order they find in an archive is never truly original; and they know that their own actions have an enormous effect on the way the archive eventually appears to researchers.

What the findings from this dissertation suggest, however, is that archivists’ full knowledge of archives is inadequately captured in the finding aids they prepare: the story of the archive is lost in the conventions of archival description, which encourage archivists to focus on the lives of creators rather than the lives of archives, and which tend to work to hide archives’ ‘constructedness.’ The silences that need to be filled are
not only the silences in our theory, but also the silences in our finding aids. Addressing these will go a long way toward providing more honest description to users of archives.

In Chapter 6, I suggested several means by which silences in description might be addressed. For example, I suggested that archival description needs to admit the active role of the archiving ‘I’ in the creation of archives; that certain kinds of accession information (i.e., information that is not confidential) should be incorporated directly into primary finding aids; that custodial history should be recognized as a crucial element of description; and that more attention should be paid to the history of an archive’s arrangements and orders over time. Some of these changes can be made by archivists making better use of existing elements in descriptive standards, such as the custodial history element, which is frequently treated as an ‘add-on’ rather than as a vital component of description, or the System of arrangement element (ISAD(G)) or arrangement note in RAD, which are also often accorded less significance than they should be. Some changes may be better dealt with through revisions to existing descriptive standards. For example, it might be helpful to create a new descriptive element that could be used specifically to discuss the different orders an archive assumes over time and in different hands. A new element might likewise be required to allow archivist’s to include the work of the archiving ‘I.’ In Chapter 6, I also referred to the potential of “parallel texts,”15 “creative”16 and/or narrative texts appended to standardized forms of description that allow inclusion of the types of information typically excluded

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15 Dean, “The Archeology of Archival Practice.”

16 Velios, “Creative Archiving,” 261.
from such description, of user-contributed content and of archivists’ use of processing blogs.

In addition to addressing the research questions outlined in the preceding sections on digital writers’ archives and other types of archives, future research stemming from this dissertation should include investigations into the most effective means of making the changes outlined in the above paragraph and in Chapter 6. Do descriptive standards need to be revised, or can archivists make valuable and efficient use of parallel texts to communicate knowledge about records that is currently typically excluded from standardized description? Future research might also uncover unforeseen constraints – for example, unanticipated donor restrictions on accession information or the creator’s reticence toward sharing his or her archiving decisions – that might affect archivists’ ability to tell fuller stories. Can constraints such as these be overcome, and if so, how?

This dissertation has posited that archival origins are often more complex than archival theory suggests. It has argued for a stronger focus on the life story of the archive, and for a better representation of that story in description. I conclude here by urging archivists to work together to determine how we can best communicate our whole knowledge of the archives for which we care. By telling more of what we know, we will do a valuable service not only to those users, but also to the archives themselves, whose stories deserve our full attention and a complete description.
APPENDIX 1

UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT, RESEARCH

PROTOCOL REFERENCE #25005

March 23, 2011

Dr. Heather MacNeil
Faculty of Information
University of Toronto
140 St. George St.
Toronto, ON M5S 3G6

Ms. Jennifer Douglas
Faculty of Information
University of Toronto
140 St. George St.
Toronto, ON M5S 3G6

Dear Dr. MacNeil and Ms. Douglas:

Re: Your research protocol entitled “The Development of an Interpretive Framework for the Analysis and Representation of Writers’ Records” by Dr. H. MacNeil (supervisor), Ms. J. Douglas (PhD candidate)

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: March 2, 2010
Expiry Date: March 1, 2012
Continuing Review Level: 1
Renewal 1 of 4

We are writing to advise you that you have been granted annual renewal of ethics approval to the above-referenced research study through the REB’s delegated process. Please note that all protocols involving ongoing data collection or interaction with human participants are subject to re-evaluation after 5 years. Ongoing projects must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your study. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry as per our guidelines.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible. If your research has funding attached, please contact the relevant Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Marianna Richardson
Research Ethics Coordinator
APPENDIX 2

Interview Guide

The Development of an Interpretive Framework for the Analysis and Representation of Writers’ Records

INTERVIEW GUIDE – Outline for Participants

I. Sample fonds and finding aid

Participants are asked to select one archival fonds that they feel particularly represents the type of fonds with which they typically work, and which can be discussed as an example throughout the interview. Participants are asked to provide a finding aid for the records. Where possible, participants may send an electronic version of the finding aid to the Principal Investigator prior to the interview.

II. Interview process

Before beginning the interview questions, some time will be taken to discuss the sample fonds and finding aid. The Principal Investigator will review the finding aid provided by the interviewee, and ask the interviewee to briefly describe the fonds s/he has selected.

The interview focuses on three main topics: the acquisition of writers’ archives; the arrangement and description of writers’ archives; the nature of writers’ archives. Questions are open-ended and flexible so that while participants are provided with a topic area to speak about, the focus is on whatever they feel is important to say about the topic. During the interview, the order of topics/questions may be altered, some questions may be omitted if it seems reasonable to do so, and additional questions may be posed when appropriate and necessary (i.e., to encourage a participant to expand on his or her answer, to request clarification, or to follow an interesting line of thinking).

III. Interview questions

Below is a sample of the types of questions that will be asked.

*Whenever necessary refer to the sample fonds/collection.*

1. Questions related to acquisition of writers’ archives:
Describe a typical acquisition process.

a) What sorts of appraisal criteria are used on writers’ records? Are there standard criteria used for different writers, or are there unique criteria in each case?

b) Do you actively seek out writers’ archives or does the writer usually come to you? Is there a third party involved?

c) What kind of negotiations typically take place and who is involved in these?

d) Are writers provided with instructions for preparing materials for transfer? Are they assisted by an archivist?

e) What kind of documentation is created at this stage? Or, in other words, what do you record of the acquisition process?

f) What of this documentation is eventually available to researchers? In what form? (e.g. accession record, finding aid, etc.)

g) When you think about the acquisition of writers’ archives are there any particular challenges that are common to writers’ archives? In your experience, are these challenges unique to writers’ archives or do they arise for other types of records?

2. Questions related to the arrangement and description (processing) of writers’ archives:

a) Are there institutional guidelines or unwritten rules that determine how you make decisions about the processing of writers’ archives?

b) Do you follow any standard arrangement schemas for writers’ records (e.g. series for correspondence, for each genre, for notebooks, etc.)?

c) To what extent is the order in which records arrive at the repository typically respected?

d) To what extent are records typically physically rearranged and/or tidied and weeded?

e) How would you describe the impact of the archivist’s processing work on the processed archive? (i.e. compare before and after processing)

f) To what extent do you document the decisions made and actions taken during processing? (i.e. what do you record of the process?)
g) Is this documentation made available to researchers? If so, in what form? (e.g. through a finding aid)

h) Do institutional finding aids provide space for the documentation of processing decisions and actions? Where?

i) Does the finding aid also provide space to alert researchers to what is known about the history of the records custody and about the acquisition process?

The following questions also relate to the nature of writers’ archives as a generic category of archive.

j) When you think about the arrangement and description of writers’ archives are there any particular challenges that are common to writers’ archives? In your experience, are these challenges unique to writers’ archives or do they arise for other types of records? Discuss.

k) Do you think that writers’ records have a particular nature that needs to be respected and/or represented through archival arrangement and description? If yes, do you think that current models for arrangement and description are successful? Discuss.

3. Final thoughts and comments:

The participant will be provided with an opportunity to make any additional comments and/or to ask questions.
APPENDIX 3

List of Interviewees

Kathy Garay, previously Archivist, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections at McMaster University, currently Adjunct Professor, Arts and Science Programme, McMaster University

Catherine Hobbs, Literary Archivist (English language), Library and Archives Canada / Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

Heather Home, Public Services Archivist, Queen’s University Archives

Richard Landon, previously Director, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at University of Toronto

Michael Moosberger, University Archivist, Dalhousie University

Monique Ostiguy, Literary Archivist (French language), Library and Archives Canada / Bibliothèque et Archives Canada

Tony Power, Contemporary Literature Collection Librarian, Special Collections and Rare Books at Simon Fraser University

John Shoesmith, Archivist, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at University of Toronto

Carl Spadoni, Director, The William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections at McMaster University

Appollonia Steele, Librarian Emeritus, previously Head of Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary

Shelley Sweeney, Head, Archives and Special Collections at University of Manitoba

Jean Tener, University Archivist Emeritus, University of Calgary

Jennifer Toews, Librarian, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at University of Toronto
Listed below are the finding aids I consulted to gain access to the fonds I examined, as well as finding aids referred to by different interview participants. Some of these are published, some are available online, and some are only available in on-site reading rooms.

Where a compiler is named on the finding aid, this is indicated. In all other cases, authorship is attributed to the library or archive holding the material. Dates for the compilation of finding aids are provided in all cases where they are indicated on finding aids.

**Margaret Atwood papers:**


**Douglas Coupland fonds:**

Marian Engel fonds:


Margaret Laurence fonds:

Archives and Special Collections. York University. *Margaret Laurence fonds – FO341*.

Dorothy Livesay fonds:


L.M. Montgomery collection:


Items within the collection can be accessed through the main library catalogue. Many of these are linked to through the webpage listed above.

Alice Munro fonds:


**Sylvia Plath collections:**


**Additional fonds referred to by interviewees:**


Home, Heather [compiler]. Queen’s University Archives. *Helen Humphrey fonds*. 


Power, Tony [compiler]. Special Collections and Rare Books Simon Fraser University. *Robin Blaser fonds*. In progress.


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Interviews by author:


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Moore, Jean M. and Jean F. Tener [compilers]. “Archival Introduction.” In *The Alice Munro Papers First Accession: An Inventory of the Archive at the University of


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