

Women Writers' Archives - Expanding Systems of Enunciability: An Introduction

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This inaugural issue of the journal, *The Women Writers' Archive*, grew out of and was the culmination of a graduate course offered through the English Department at Simon Fraser University on the territories of the Coast Salish peoples, including the səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh), kʷikwəʔləm (Kwkwetlem), Skw̓xwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations. The course, titled *Books, Bodies, and Borders: Women Writers' (Trans)national Archives & Practices*, took place in the winter of 2022 and featured four female authors as the focus of study: Pauline Johnson (Kanyen'kehà:ka, 1913-1861), Emily Carr (1871-1945), Jane Rule (1931-2007), and Sheila Watson (1909-1998).

The starting point for discussion was Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, in which he argues that one's literary contributions are provisional, dependent upon the discourses of the period that inform one's texts. Archives, he posits, are not "the sum of all texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past," but rather "the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events" (1972, 128-9). An archive defines "at the outset the system of its enunciability" (129). What is included within a repository—and the shape of the repository itself—determines and limits potential enunciations of personhood. As discussions evolved in the course, it became clear that a woman writer could only uneasily make claims to authorship, if discourses of a given period or the "law of what can be said" would not recognize her as such. These limitations would certainly apply to women writers' archives and literary exchanges in Canada, as they also characterize the socio-political contexts that undergird them; they also affect the incarnations that these archives and literary papers may assume at different epochs and how socio-political archival representations of women evolve over time in response to structures of power. Exploring critical work of the last twenty years that addresses archival theory demonstrates how women's archives may be seen as an extension of their literary lives and characterized multiply—as feminist, queer, activist. Archives, therefore, may be called upon to generate collective action; to go against a patriarchal, sexist, racist, or imperial grain; or to develop networks and alliances that supersede political or national borders.

Members of the course—Pantea Fard, Robin Mitchell Cranfield, Linda M. Morra, Donald Shipton, Olivia Visser, and Angela Wachowich—thus entered Simon Fraser University's Special Collections and Rare Books, and, with the assistance of one of its archivists, Alexandra Wieland, consulted its extensive holdings related to women writers in Canada before selecting an author of their choice for their individual projects. The scope of the project may have been vast in view of the extensive holdings of this institution, but each of the six responses was crafted in response to a more narrowly focused archival specimen. The materials selected consistently emerged from a

woman writer's archive from the late twentieth century up to a more recent moment and included Lisa Robertson, Eden Robinson (Haisla/Heiltsuk), Anita Rau Badami, Ann Diamond, and Shani Mootoo. Developed conjointly with Simon Fraser University's Special Collections and Rare Books, the research was highlighted in an exhibit that extended from March to April of 2022, called *Writing Canadian Women [Write] Out of the Archive*.

The archival materials selected for *Writing Canadian Women (Write) Out of the Archive* render clear how its holdings may extend and shape our understanding—about a woman writer's writerly aspirations, literary strategies, and oeuvre; about the political commitments and contexts that inform and give rise to the very form the materials assume; and about the kinds of private contradictions that might not otherwise be visible to public readers of their books. Being in the archives allows for a more privileged appreciation, which this exhibit means to share with a wider audience. These archival materials enrich our understanding of the range of and limits to literary practices and to fomenting political contexts that render authorial intentions more clear—or, at times, more complex.

Using several different female writers (their books and/or their archival materials), and working with the archives at Simon Fraser University and the Special Collections of the University of British Columbia, among others, these papers read how women's literary lives were forged, contested, and negotiated. At times, the contributors to this volume explain how race, gender, and sexual orientation intersect with, affect, and/or supersede national interests and claims to nation, through the very means by which women's archives (institutional and other) are forged and preserved over time, and by the materials that are selected for preservation therein.

Four papers were accepted for publication in this peer-reviewed volume. The first of these, “‘Canada,’ did you say? Was that a Fictional Country Based in Toronto?": Ann Diamond's 'Terrorist Letters' and the League of Canadian Poets" by Angela Wakowich, begins with an encounter in the archive, where she finds the "Terrorist Letters" (1988) of the Canadian writer, Ann (McLean) Diamond. Wakowich links these letters to the methods and devices of Canadian literary capitalism, and argues that the ambivalent emotional response the letters produce(d) in their readers is directly related to the way they trouble the distinction between work and play, thereby appearing to abbreviate artistic and political labour. She reads the League of Canadian Poets' dismissal of Diamond's campaign in 1988 alongside the League's famous rejection of De Dub Poets in 1984 (which Diamond's campaign references). Doing so allows the researcher to understand the League's dismissal of alternate forms of artistic expression as a judgement about their potential to cheapen literature by reducing the time and labour necessary for its production. This comparison also provides necessary insight into the central failing of Diamond's protest—the poet's insouciant independence from the communities she claims to represent.

In the second contribution, "Daisy Turner's *Moose Factory Cree*," Robin Mitchell Cranfield shifts the focus of her research to a subject outside Simon Fraser University's Special Collections and Rare Books: Daisy Turner's *Moose Factory Cree*, an ililimowen (Moose Cree) syllabic primer published in 1974 and illustrated by children from Moose Factory Ministik Elementary school. The essay offers an assessment of Turner's contribution to children's literature published in Canada and consider her contributions to Cree language, Indigenous print cultures, and Moose Factory history through her work translating and recording her community's histories. The third essay by Olivia Visser, "Writing Selfhood': Emily Carr, Lawren Harris, and *their* 'Great Canadian West,'" mines the archive to show to what extent Group of Seven member, Lawren Harris, influenced modern writer and artist, Emily Carr—but how, simultaneously, Carr judiciously chose to mediate only select features of that influence in her

posthumously published autobiography, *Growing Pains*. Visser highlights that Carr deliberately depicted as being championed by Harris in their private correspondence, select elements of which she then integrated into her autobiography as a means of legitimating the writerly text—a tactic that is both a shortcoming of and contribution to her literary success. The final contribution, “Karl Marx, Lucretius, and the Other Residents of Lisa Robertson’s Archives” by Donald Shipton, charts his discovery in Lisa Robertson’s archive, specifically related to the typescript of *R’s Boat* (2010). The endnotes to Karl Marx’s dissertation are on the flipside of the manuscript. Reading “along the grain,” as he suggests, invoking the scholarship of Ann Laura Stoler, allows for the “sociality of papers as well as the literary relationships they demarcate, to be better understood.” Collectively, these essays show the fascinating elements to women’s publications—the impediments to finding publication, the crucial interactions that informed their publications, the socio-political contexts that shaped what they produced and why they did so. They demonstrate how meaningfully archives shape our understanding of women writers—their lives, their contexts, and their contributions to the field of literature in Canada.

Works Cited

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, Pantheon Books, 1972.

“Writing Canadian Women (Write) Out of the Archive.” Eventbrite description. Accessed 17 November 2022. [eventbrite.ca/e/writing-canadian-women-write-out-of-the-archive-tickets-305797577787?fbclid=IwAR2rF7QdhBCovjREi4k6dzbeODLnKggpxJbZ-P2C3L6vucw9id1gvoGu1VI](https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/writing-canadian-women-write-out-of-the-archive-tickets-305797577787?fbclid=IwAR2rF7QdhBCovjREi4k6dzbeODLnKggpxJbZ-P2C3L6vucw9id1gvoGu1VI)