Certainly I would never claim that *Les archives au XXᵉ siècle* is perfect. The authors themselves do not hesitate to recognize its shortcomings in their foreword ("avant-propos"). This said, it does not deserve the harsh criticism of the review published in *Archivaria.*

The book was meant to be and is a successful manual. It ought not to be evaluated according to criteria which do not apply to the genre. It was meant to be comprehensive, describing as many of the areas and tasks implied in archival activity as possible. That is why there is a terminology section which, by the way, can only be considered a quick reference tool. Maybe there is a need for a separate more complete list of this kind, but to contend as much does nothing to take away from the inherent value of the one proposed.

Mr. Dodds finds the book "dour and dry ... clogged with sections and sub-sections." The plan of the work is logical and coherent. The writing style is correct, straightforward, and concise as it should be in a manual. After all, how thrilling can one be writing about fumigation! I was looking at Schellenberg's classics the other day and thinking that they do not read like novels either. The *Manuel d'archivistique* (Direction des archives de France, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1970) had its sections and sub-sections too and that format did not affect either its fame or its usefulness as a reference work. And I fail to see anything in the book or in Mr. Dodds' review of it for that matter that justifies the use of so strong and so highly pitched a word as "perversity"!

The present state of technology being what it is, a small format is no longer harmful to graphic presentations. *Canadian Archives* is only fractionally larger and is full of easily consulted graphic material. The authors of *Les archives au XXᵉ siècle* chose to include a few appropriate "tableaux."

If, as Mr. Dodds claims, the book could have come out in the mid-1970s, the obvious fact is that it did not and therefore there is still room for it. The fact that this is the first Canadian book of such comprehensive scope devoted to archives cannot be overlooked. Its authors deserve a great deal of credit for bringing the task to fruition. What flaws the book has are easily excused when one remembers how desperate was the need of such a publication. The book is selling well and there can be little doubt that it is fulfilling its objectives successfully.

A lot of room is left for archivists to publish other books and articles exploring particular areas, analyzing principles and "philosophical" aspects of archival work. Still I hope that archivists who might want to publish will not be hampered by the fear they might come out with a product which will not be absolutely perfect, or that they might be hit with harsh criticism.

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The Reviewer Responds

If Canada's archivists are to be intimidated, as Ms. Boulet-Wernham seems to fear, by the likes of my review of the Couture-Rousseau manual, the future of archival

writing would indeed be bleak. A sharper reading of what I wrote will reveal the exact opposite of her claims of harsh criticism and unsuitable evaluative criteria. Nowhere did I ask for perfection, nor would I of any book. Apart from some concerns I had of a technical nature, which I thought disserved the manual's purpose, my chief observation was that it generally needed livening up. I found it heavy and dull in style and presentation — as I do the *Manuel d'archivistique* and Schellenberg's classics. As for "perversity," Ms. Boulet-Wernham might note that the term was being applied, not to the book, but to the reviewer's own naughtiness in requesting a lighter, spritelier treatment. Her citation of recent sales success hardly depresses that wish. I see no good reason for not expecting archival writing (manual or otherwise) to be engaging *and* useful, though I would probably draw the line at so strong and highly pitched a word as "thrilling."

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Data Base Management Sytems to Access Archives

The article "Toward Intelligent Databases" by Sunden and Winchester in *Archivaria* 14 was a welcome sight for two reasons. Not only does it demonstrate the increasing interest in the use of the computer as an historical tool, but it will perhaps also serve to stimulate greater interest.

The distinction between databases and other conglomerations of computerized data is well made. Differences of terminology can be a rich source of misunderstanding in communication between humanists and computer scientists. However, it should perhaps be pointed out that the technical people tend toward a range of definitions for the term "database" even more restricted than that sketched by the authors. Although there are many definitions, the concept of "database" is broadly held to refer to a fairly large and complex quantity of data stored on-line (i.e., upon a storage device which can be accessed by the computer without having a human move something) and managed by a complex and sophisticated "software" package called a Data Base Management System (DBMS).

It is in the DBMS that we shall see increased "intelligence" and more powerful and easily used tools to access the databases of interest. Since Data Base Management Systems are used for many administrative purposes, historians need not fear that the development of such improved tools will depend solely upon the budgets of History Departments and special grants. Of course, there have also been efforts to develop software especially for the historian. A good example of this is provided by CLIO, a DBMS developed at the Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte. A noteworthy feature of this DBMS is a command language based upon Latin.

This brings us to the potential of being able to address the DBMS using "natural" language. Recent research suggests that the great inconsistency with which people use words makes this an elusive goal. Not only will people use different words for one particular thing, but one word to mean several different things. People seem to find it easier to remember commands if the words have existing meanings which appear related to the several tasks. However, the need for precision would discourage the use of words which would have such broad meanings as to encourage inappropriate use. The result of all this is that the historian, at least in the short term, will find