

Book Reviews

Elizabeth Bishop: An Archival Guide to Her Life in Nova Scotia. SANDRA BARRY for the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia. Hantsport, N.S.: Lancelot Press Limited, 1996. 226 p. ISBN 0-88999-628-8 (pbk.)

The John Metcalf Papers: An Inventory of the Archive at the University of Calgary Library. JEAN M. MOORE, MARLYS CHEVREFILS, comps.; APOLLONIA STEELE, ed.; LOUIS K. MacKENDRICK, biocritical essay. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1996. 45 p. ISBN 1-895176-71-9 (pbk.).

The Constance Beresford-Howe Papers: An Inventory of the Archive at the University of Calgary Library. MARLYS CHEVREFILS, comp.; APOLLONIA STEELE, ed.; LORRAINE McMULLEN, biocritical essay. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1996. 88 p. ISBN 1-895176-70-0 (pbk.).

There have been many guides and inventories to literary papers published in Canada in recent years, and the three publications under review are a welcome addition. The University of Calgary has devoted a great deal of time and resources to producing inventories for their impressive holdings of Canadian literary papers, while the Elizabeth Bishop Society of Nova Scotia should be commended for their efforts to gather archival material relating to poet Elizabeth Bishop. This guide is very detailed in the information it provides about Bishop's family connections in Nova Scotia, but it varies widely in format and presentation from the University of Calgary inventories. The latter's inventory series shows the value of having standardized formats, as well as the possibility of future online access through an automated database.

In her introduction to the Elizabeth Bishop guide, Sandra Barry writes, "The Canadian encounter with Bishop has been more understated and sporadic [than in the U.S.]" (p. 13). It is important to understand this at the outset, or the reader may be frustrated in his/her search for detailed listings of Elizabeth Bishop's papers. In fact, this is as much a guide to Bishop's ancestors, extended family,

and areas of Nova Scotia as it is to Bishop herself; as Barry says, the guide seeks to provide “not only a description of documents but also a contextual framework in which to position the documents” (p. 16). This guide is

primarily intended for use by Nova Scotian and Canadian researchers, scholars, critics and readers, as a handbook for future Bishop studies. It is hoped, however, that the guide will contribute to the critical discourse taking place in the United States. Thus the guide is offered as a complement and supplement to American archival sources. (p. 17)

Elizabeth Bishop was born in 1911 in Massachusetts. Her father died when Elizabeth was a baby, and her mother was confined to a mental institution a few years later. Young Elizabeth then lived with her maternal relatives in Great Village, Nova Scotia for two years, returning to her paternal grandparents' home in Massachusetts in 1917. She never lived in Nova Scotia again, but returned frequently for visits. She attended Vassar College in New York State from 1930 to 1934. She became a widely regarded poet, with the *New Yorker* publishing many of her poems. She corresponded with other poets, including the Americans Robert Lowell and Marianne Moore (p. 181), and at one time met Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye (p. 196). She died in 1979.

There is no biographical sketch as such in the guide, but the above information can be extrapolated with a little digging. A biographical sketch would have been extremely useful, as the guide pre-supposes a lot of knowledge about Bishop on the reader's part. The body of the guide is divided into three parts: I) “Family Reconstitution,” which includes a history of Bishop's maternal ancestors, the Bulmer-Bowers-Hutchinson-Sutherland families, and a brief history of Great Village, Nova Scotia; II) “Archival Heritage,” with descriptions of family fonds, institutional sources, and private sources for Bishop and her extended family; and III) a “bibliographic essay” followed by a select bibliography. Reading through the guide, I wished that the bibliographic essay had been placed first rather than last, as it sets the scene very nicely for Elizabeth Bishop's life and work. The first section, on the history of the Bulmer-Bowers-Hutchinson-Sutherland families, was a little difficult to wade through; I found myself awash in a sea of names, and I was eager to get to the archival descriptions themselves. A family tree would have been extremely helpful here, but none is provided. Nevertheless, this family background is useful for genealogists and does help to place Bishop's life in context, and the section on Great Village is interesting and very readable.

The guide also includes reproductions of nine black-and-white photographs of Bishop and her family, including the earliest known photographs of her as a baby with her parents; these are poignant images when one learns the tragedy of Elizabeth's early years. Most of these photographs are in private hands and provide a vivid picture of Bishop's family life.

The archival descriptions themselves, prepared in compliance with the *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)*, include three groups of *fonds*: 1) papers of the Bulmer-Bowers-Hutchinson-Sutherland families, which are now housed at Vassar College; 2) institutional sources at Nova Scotia Archives & Records Management, Acadia University, Dalhousie University, the Yarmouth County Museum and Historical Research Library, and the Colchester Historical Society Museum and Archives; and 3) sources still in private hands. The Bulmer-Bowers-Hutchinson-Sutherland family *fonds* are arranged in four series: textual records (broken down into family correspondence, family papers, newspaper clippings, and books), graphic materials, moving images, and artifacts. The next sections, on institutional sources and private sources, consist of straight narrative rather than lists, as the sources are rather sketchy on Bishop herself. However, Barry does her best to weave details of Bishop's "life and the memory of it" (p. 164) with descriptions of these sources, which include oral histories of Bishop family members.

Barry and the Elizabeth Bishop Society make a strong case for Bishop's Nova Scotia connections, but their guide is somewhat confusing in its organization and presentation. In addition to a biographical sketch, an index to names and titles of Bishop's works would also make the guide easier to follow. However, the bibliographic essay is excellent and should be the place to start; the select bibliography and endnotes that follow are also very comprehensive and point the reader to further research.

By contrast, the two University of Calgary inventories begin with "biocritical essays" on Constance Beresford-Howe and John Metcalf respectively. Neither essay provides a lot of biographical information, but there is enough for the newcomer to follow. Constance Beresford-Howe was born in 1922 and grew up in Montreal, and has written many novels, including *The Book of Eve* and *Prospero's Daughter*, short stories, and book reviews. John Metcalf was born in England in 1938 and moved permanently to Canada in the late 1960s; his books include the novel *Going Down Slow* and a collection of essays, *Kicking Against the Pricks*. The biocritical essays on each author are excellent and made me want to read more of their works, particularly the essay on Beresford-Howe, which discusses how her novels have changed over the years, becoming wittier, more innovative, and more intellectually complex (*Constance Beresford-Howe Papers*, p. xxx). Both essays convey the busy, complicated nature of writers' lives, as they work not only on their own writing but on editing and even publishing other people's works.

In each guide, the biocritical essay is followed by a general introduction to the archival inventory series, and an inventory of the specific author's papers. The compilers and editors do a good job explaining the criteria used to select and organize the material, which is particularly helpful to newcomers to archival research. Literary papers often have unique problems with arrange-

ment (someone once described them to me as a “hornet’s nest”), for they tend to reflect the complexity of an author’s overlapping careers, as mentioned above. For example, Jean Tener and Jean Moore explain, clearly and simply,

John Metcalf kept his correspondence relating to anthologies separate from his general correspondence. ... Because Oberon Press was acting as publisher of Metcalf’s fiction at the same time that Metcalf was editing anthologies for this press, letters discuss not only anthologies but also publication of Metcalf’s fiction, and separation of the correspondence would not have been feasible. (*John Metcalf Papers*, p. xxxviii)

Both inventories then offer detailed series descriptions, in compliance with AACR2 and RAD, of each author’s correspondence, manuscripts, photographs, and related material. Beresford-Howe’s correspondence includes letters from Hugh MacLennan, *Chatelaine* magazine, the Harbourfront Reading Series in Toronto, and International P.E.N. Canadian Centre; Metcalf’s papers include correspondence with Alice Munro, Al Purdy, and Mordecai Richler. The format of the inventories is consistent and easy to follow, with headers making it easy for the reader to track which series is being described; this is handy, as the series descriptions tend to go on for several pages, and without a header the reader could get lost, as is often the case with the Elizabeth Bishop guide. The accession numbers and main entry headings are printed in bold-face, which helps even more. Both inventories are enhanced by photographs of the authors and reproductions of the authors’ letters, manuscript pages, and artwork. At the end is an alphabetical listing of each author’s titles, followed by a general index of names of individuals and organizations which appear in the papers. Neither inventory has a subject index, due to constraints of space and resources.

One problem, however, is that each inventory includes a small series called “Miscellaneous,” a too-convenient, “catch-all” term. In both the Beresford-Howe and Metcalf papers, this material consists of newspaper clippings, posters, book lists, and similar items; this series could safely be called “Ephemera,” which is at least a little more descriptive.

Updating of all three guides could be time-consuming and expensive, given their printed, bound format. But in this age of automation, that may become less of a problem. The compilers at the University of Calgary have created a database for each inventory using INMAGIC® from which the published inventories were produced, with a view to forming part of a complete, automated database for all the Canadian authors’ papers at the University. Lorna Knight suggests in her *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995) review of the George Ryga inventory from the same series that in tough economic times, archives might eventually move towards “print-on-demand” finding aids, as more researchers gain access to online inventories and have less need for the hard-copy format: “If tough choices have to be made, the maintenance of the database should win hands down [over printed inventories].” I have some reservations about this, as

I hope there will always be a need for a printed book by someone, somewhere, and there are problems in becoming too dependent on sophisticated technology – what happens, for example, if the automated systems break down, as they do from time to time? However, there are certainly many advantages to online access for researchers across the country and around the world, and archivists (like everyone else) need to consider other publication options as costs continue to rise.

At present, the University of Calgary's individual databases are not accessible online, but bibliographical information on each published inventory is available through the University library's online catalogue. You can reach the university's home page at <<http://www.ucalgary.ca>> and from there follow the links to the library catalogue, or go through Telnet to library.ucalgary.ca and select terminal type vt100.

Deidre Simmons also discusses the possibilities of Internet access in her review of the guide to York University's holdings in this issue of *Archivaria*. Already, a number of archival institutions are turning to the Internet to reach patrons further afield. The University of Calgary's published inventories are an excellent step in that direction. An online database would also facilitate access to the widely-dispersed Elizabeth Bishop papers, but it is hard to say how far off that may be. In any case, the University of Calgary archival inventories have set an excellent example for other institutions to follow.

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Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts. LAURA B. COHEN, ed. New York/London: The Haworth Press, 1997. 215 p. Index. ISBN 0-7890-0042-3 (alk. paper). ISBN 0-7890-004802 (pbk.)

Volkogonov was an experienced politician, a general, and a respected historian. None of this extensive background prepared him for the ethical problems of archival reference service. (Elena Danielson, "Ethics and Reference Services," p. 108)

What does it take to provide good reference service, not to mention excellent, ethical reference service with all the information-age bells and whistles? As Elena Danielson points out, this work involves special skills and ethical issues which are hard for people outside the archival profession to comprehend. Dmitri Volkogonov, director of the Russian government's intelligence archives, came to appreciate this when public controversy arose over his 1992 reference letter asserting that a certain American civil servant had never served as a Soviet agent. (The dispersed nature of the records and the fact they were not made accessible to other scholars for corroborative purposes made his