

'Fictional Biographies': Creative writing and the Archive

Rebecca Taylor and Dr Craig Jordan-Baker

Abstract

This article considers the archive as a source of inspiration for creative writers, specifically focusing on how writing can highlight and expose silences within the archive. This is developed through a case study of a collaborative creative writing project at the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), where students developed 'Fictional Biographies' from archive research and resources. The article looks at the history of creative writing in the context of archives; the article then focuses on the case study, drawing in theories of archival silences, after which we conclude by reflecting on outputs and learning outcomes of the project.

Keywords: Archives in Higher Education, Archives in Creative Writing, Archives and activism, Creative writing pedagogy

Background to authors and authorial contribution

This article is co-written by an archivist and creative writing lecturer. The introduction and sections on the case study and silence with archives have largely been developed by the archivist, while sections of the history of creative writing in the context of archives, and reflections and conclusions through the creative writing lecturer. The archivist's perspective includes looking at how archival theory can be applied to creative writing, and the creative writing lecturer's perspective makes an argument for how an archive can be a resource for creative writing students.

Introduction

In the act of cataloguing, the archivist reinterprets the story of the creator/s of the materials in the archive in one of any number of possible ways. When archivists catalogue they are offering one of many views of that collection by determining how the archive is ordered (or whether there is a meaningful order), what keywords are used, as well as recognising that a particular order is not necessarily what the creator intended.¹ There is no one transparent

and unproblematic truth. All archives will reflect the concerns and opinions of the archivist as ‘archivists themselves are storytellers and...archival functions inherently involve elements of narrative creation.’² A living creator of an archive could, at any point, change their mind regarding the order of the archive; hence there are different ways of interpreting and re-arranging the collections, according to creators’ objectives.

Individuals may see and describe collections differently from the creator and this confirms Athanasios’ point that, ‘original order... is not always clear, especially in artists’ archives or private papers’³. Individuals will access records at different historical times, with their own cultural perceptions and research interests, which impacts on how a record is viewed; meaning changes ‘in the field within which it is situated for the spectator or the reader’⁴. As ‘any storyteller is selective, including some facts while excluding others, emphasizing some events at the expense of others’⁵, this is also true of archivists.

The idea that the archive will have different interpretations depending on who accesses it serves to highlight how understanding the archive catalogue, archival theory, and archives can provide inspiration for the creative writer. When understanding arrangement and order, the creative writer can consider differences in the story that the artist could be telling and the impact on any difference in arrangement or order. Creative work that re-interprets the catalogue is not new and examples of this include the curation work *Pleased to Meet You: Introductions by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott*, which places material together in varied ways, in order to highlight different ways of arrangement. As the artist describes it:

The pieces are not placed within any historical or cultural context; rather they are grouped to illustrate that, regardless of social or cultural background, makers share similar aesthetic choices when making decisions about the creation of their work.⁶

Story telling skills then are vital both within curation and creative writing. In ‘Crafting a Curatorial Stance’ within *Creative Composition: Inspiration and Techniques for Writing Instruction*, skills a creative writer might learn from a curator are discussed. These skills involve research, understanding the collections and generating knowledge through exhibition. This in turn raises a variety of concerns: ‘Will students see the arrangement

choices in these exhibits? Can they translate their choices into different textual arrangements for their writing?'⁷. Creative writers can learn from curators then because both are interested in linking objects together and finding the causal and conceptual connections that make stories.

The idea of creating various arrangements is also explored by Athanasios Velios, in 'Creative Archiving'⁸, where there is a specific focus on the artistic records of artist John Latham. With the archivists' knowledge of archival classification systems, the arrangement developed was to match classification systems in the artists' own works:

You can search the online archive through three different tools: MA, IA and AA. These are inspired by the three Karamazov brothers (Mitya, Ivan and Alyosha) in the Dostoyevsky book which was one of Latham's references, often in relation to the Observer series of works (e.g. Observer IV) Enter the archive as Mitya (MA) for a careless browse of the material. Enter the archive as Ivan for systematic research... Enter the archive as Alyosha (AA) if you believe you are an intuitive character⁹

The creative writer can learn from creative archiving principles as such an approach encourages the understanding that the same archive can be approached, accessed and arranged in different ways, depending on the perspective and interests of the person approaching it.

History of creative writing in the context of archives

Archives then are a resource for creative writers which can help to develop ideas and an understanding of narrativity in that all archives allow for some process of interpretation, reinterpretation and creative adaptation. This though may ostensibly seem too broad an observation as, different archives are liable to produce different responses and reflect different potential for creative interpretation and reinterpretation. For example, an archive of 1980s political fanzines is likely to vary in significant ways from, say, an archive of financial university records.

Though we can get clearer about the characteristic potential of archives for creative writers by first giving some historical and conceptual background to creative writing as a subject, as the present audience is likely to be unfamiliar.

So, where does creative writing as a discipline come from? The answer is a complex one and has been the subject of book-length study¹⁰, though roughly creative writing can be seen emerging from American universities as an anti-philological strain within English departments in the late nineteenth-century. By the 1920s the subject was being called 'creative writing' in a pedagogic context as 'an experiment to replace traditional English'¹¹ and by the 1940s, it was established within higher education in American universities. Once established, the subject continued to grow throughout the twentieth century and by the mid-60s was an increasingly common feature of the academic topography of the US. It is also significant that the subject did not arrive in the UK until Malcolm Bradbury and Angus Wilson set up the now famous MA in creative writing at UEA in 1970. Perhaps more surprisingly, creative writing was not developed as an undergraduate degree until early this century in places like Bath Spa University and the University of Luton (now Bedfordshire).

Linguistically though (as opposed to institutionally), the first appearance of the term 'creative writing' came from Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1837 when he claimed, '[t]here is then creative reading as well as creative writing'¹². This is not only historically important, but points to some of the problems and processes that studying creative writing implies, problems that are relevant to writers' engagement and work in the archive. Indeed, as Myers goes on to point out when discussing Emerson's claim, 'the famous remark is building a case for creative education'¹³. This idea of 'creative education' contrasts with how some see creative writing as 'training' for writers aiming at commercial success¹⁴ as opposed to education for students aiming at the rounding and developing of character and ability¹⁵.

What is interesting about Emerson's flagship remark is that he appears to regard the making of meaning as a non-linear act which is not identical with the intention of the speaker or writer. Rather, it is a process of meaning-making that exists between writer and reader. This emphasises that works themselves and their meanings do not exist in isolation from communities of interpretation, the canon, social expectations and interpretive ingenuity. Here then, we can see a clear analogy with the interpreting and re-interpreting of archives

and catalogues. For Emerson, reading and understanding requires creativity as well as the production of those marks and sounds which are sometimes characterised as the 'message', where an active 'message' contrasts with a passive 'recipient' of that message¹⁶. This of course emphasises that in the production of final work, there is no absolute distinction between creative reading and creative writing, or what Graeme Harper has called 'the acts and actions of creative writing'¹⁷.

For the student of creative writing then archives are a powerful tool for creative writing *and* reading and here we must not only understand the creative writer as a *writer*, but also as a creative *reader*. To emphasise just how applicable this idea is to the realm of archive theory and the acts and actions of archiving itself, we might consider the following definition of an archive by the Society of American Archivists (SAA):

Materials created or received by a person, family, or organization, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of the enduring value contained in the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator, especially those materials maintained using the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control; permanent records¹⁸.

Of particular importance here is the phrase 'the enduring value contained in the information'. The point is that the information contained in an archive is often not ostensible and immediate to the public, archivists, researchers, etc. The information characteristically requires a process of link-forming and (re)conceptualisation on the part of the archivist or researcher who, in the process of this, enriches the informational value of the materials and generates new information. With this in mind, we might return to Emerson's notion of 'creative reading' and see that in both cases, whether dealing in fact or in fiction, a process of creative reading is required in engaging with archives and archival material. These processes are, cognitively speaking, not dissimilar and in engaging in a task based around 'make believe', there is also a clear need to understand the materials in such a way that there is actual belief in and knowledge of their context, significance and meaning. That is, students have to first and foremost be creative readers before they become creative writers. In having to find voices in the archive and/or create voices and narratives from materials found in the archives, the

connection between research and artistic output is made unequivocal. It is this that makes the 'Fictional Biographies' project an interesting case in point.

Silence in the archives

Another important consideration in archival theory which relates to the 'Fictional Biographies' project is the notion of silence. Michelle Caswell highlights different kinds of silences within 1970s Tuol Sleng mug shots, produced by the Khmer Rouge prison system in Cambodia, through her book *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory and the Photographic Record in Cambodia*. She focuses on Michael Trouillot's moments of silence, which are 'silences encoded at the creation of documents, archives, narratives and histories'¹⁹ and also on the records continuum model 'highlight[ing] the circular nature of the archive'²⁰ where 'records are created as the byproduct of activity, captured as evidence...organized into personal and institutional archives as memory...and pluralized as collective memory'²¹. Caswell notes that Trouillot has a linear approach²², whereas the record continuum model has a circular approach²³ highlighting how the archive is repurposed, used for different narratives. In those terms, the record continuum is more appropriate for developing creative writing than Trouillot's.

Silences within these archives exist within the actual absence of records at initial creation. Caswell highlights how not all victims from the Khmer Rouge were represented through documentation, but rather,

a host of silences marks the Tuol Sleng mug shots at the moment of their creation...not every Khmer Rouge victim was processed through a prison system...for these victims the Khmer Rouge left no written records...bones serve as their only material trace...to focus solely on the iconic images from Tuol Song is to render silent all of the nameless victims who died in other ways²⁴.

Authors looking at marginalized groups specifically, emphasize that archives of more marginalized groups may not be created in the first place and more formal institutional

archives might speak about marginalized groups only in statistics and diversity monitoring. In *Rukus: A Black Queer Archive for the UK*, from Ajamu X, Topher Campbell and Mary Stevens talk about the need to ensure marginalized groups' voices are heard:

“Sifting” the past to recover “what isn’t there but was” is not just a solitary reflective endeavour for individuals from disinherited groups, it can also be an act of collective rebellion.²⁵

In a similar way, Andrew Flinn also looks at the challenges community archives represent to the mainstream sector, arguing that what is fundamental is,

...the sense in which the very existence of community archives, by documenting and recording the lives of those hidden or marginal to formal archives, challenge the legitimacy of the mainstream sector. In effect, their existence is testament to the absences within the official record and the national story²⁶

Creative writers can use this silence to provide a voice for the person who is not there. An example of how creative writing can be used to highlight gaps in history includes a photographic series called ‘The Fae Richards Photo Archive’. This documents a fictional character Fae Richards, an African-American actress, better known as ‘The Watermelon Woman’. The work was a response to ‘the real lack of any information about the lesbian and film history of African-American women. Since it wasn't happening, I invented it.’²⁷ This example is particularly significant as is of a marginalized group, within a marginalized group (lesbian and African-American). Students still need to be aware that there may be silences within community archives. As Flinn points out,

[I]t is important to remember that many community histories and community identities can be as exclusionary as mainstream histories in that they may marginalise or exclude other groups (on the basis of class, gender, sexual orientation or transgression from community orthodoxies). The same question might be asked of community histories as asked of mainstream histories: on whose authority do they speak?²⁸

Caswell, through the mugshots, also brings to attention the missing voice within the archives themselves: 'They stare at us, unable to fully voice the horrors they are about to experience'²⁹. Photographs and visual material are different from records such as correspondence, or diaries, but even so we don't necessarily know the true agenda of why these written records were developed. This also relates to records where a person is talked about, but isn't provided a voice. The creative writer's interpretation will change, depending on the political climate of the time, the writer's own experience, and how the records have been previously used and written about.

New narratives with these mugshots had been produced by photographs being taken of viewers looking at the mug shots: '[T]he witnessing engendered by these photographs reintroduces an active voice into the archive of mug shots...the new records then become incorporated into archives...and are used to create new narratives'³⁰. Similarly, when a creative writer develops a story through being inspired by archives, readers are witnessing those archives through the writer's own perspective. We can't know the person's thoughts within the records, but the writer can repurpose the records to show them in a new light, or as Caswell puts it, 'they can simultaneously be tools for legal accountability, witnessing, memorialization, personal and collective identity, and other aims we cannot yet anticipate'³¹

Rodney G.S. Carter also notes:

The power of the archive is witnessed in the act of inclusion, but this is only one of its components. The power to exclude is a fundamental aspect of the archive. Inevitably, there are distortions, omissions, erasures, and silences in the archive. Not every story is told.³²

These silences can be powerful. Carter claims they 'offer a wider definition of power and...invoking silence can be a strategy used by the marginalized *against* the powerful.'³³ He highlights 'silence implies voice. It does not equal muteness, that is, it is not a negative phenomenon, simply the absence of sound, speech, text or other sign. Silence can be actively entered into'³⁴. Carter distinguishes between natural silences and unnatural silences, where,

‘[u]nnatural silences must be combated by the archivist, but natural silences, those where the marginalized can assert their own power, must be respected’³⁵. Relating this to creative writing and the consideration of where silences can be combatted, it is possible that the donor and individuals within the archive can be consulted. They may, for example, provide further clarification, or choose to let that silence remain. Whatever the case, the recognition of silences carries with it ethical questions for the creative writer.

Carter also looks at the creation of a record by an archivist, noting ‘we must question, ...whose will is it being served: the interviewer or the interviewed, the silenced speaker or the archivist?’³⁶ Similar to Flinn, who looks at the authority to speak in the context of community archives, Carter asks whether the ‘silenced’ would actually prefer the ‘fragment’ that remains³⁷ rather than being given words that aren’t their own.

Creative writers however, when developing stories based on the archive, are not creating new archival records themselves as with oral history. In ‘Fictional Biographies’, by definition, the writing produced is fictional, and therefore necessarily partial. The writer can’t attempt to show an objective viewpoint. Although in one way the creative writer can seek to address silences, given these are fictional accounts, the silence can never be completely filled. If silences are present the creative writer needs to investigate this and understand the context of the silence- for example ‘silence also forces active participation by the readers/listeners. The audience cannot be passive in the face of an active silence: they must investigate, interrogate, and attempt to understand the contexts that gave rise to the silences.’³⁸

‘Fictional Biographies’ Case Study

These concepts of silence are highly relevant and reflected in the work produced by UCA students in the ‘Fictional Biographies’ project, which came from the Creative Writing unit, ‘Writing into the Landscape’. According to the brief, it aimed to work with ‘University for the Creative Arts [UCA] archives (physical and online) and staff to develop a fictional biography or autobiography of approximately 3000 words.’³⁹

The writing itself focused on marginalized groups, and silences within the records which students worked with. The students produced work in a mixture of formats – first

person perspective, third person perspective, epistolary – and with text and image combinations and were to work within groups to create a piece of creative writing, but also produce an ‘individual reflective commentary of 750 words’⁴⁰ to explain their response to and engagement with the brief. Students were encouraged to actively integrate the archival records into the work and include photographs, copies of documents and multimedia elements. The students were also able to learn digitization skills with the Digitisation Unit, and care and handling of these records. The material students were given to work with also reflected the type and range of records/formats an individual might keep in their lifetime.

The central purpose of this project was to encourage students to think about how creative writing within archives can highlight, and even challenge, silence within the archive. On one level, the silence within archives can simply be understood in terms of lack of attention: Researchers, artists, or creatives not looking within a particular archive. Of most importance to this project however, students thought about the silences within the records that *aren't there*, such as the one-sided letters. They thought about the silences within the archives themselves, including the idea we do not know what subjects of photographs or documents are thinking. Finally, they looked at the silence of the archivist’s voice, as we do not necessarily know why they selected the material they did, and why they chose to describe material the way they did.

To assist students in what was an unfamiliar task and set of considerations, groups were guided in how they might approach the project. The first stage was ‘isolating material’- selecting the archival material they wished to engage with. To limit the scope and provide context for the students, the archivist and lecturer selected a range of material and themes for students to work on, with records ranging from the 1960s-1990s.

Both institutional records from UCA, and more informal, or personal records (for example letters from activists and ‘ordinary individuals’), were included. Acting as a counterpart to institutional archives of UCA, other work shown to the students includes records of less mainstream subjects, including class politics, race and letters by and relating to both known and unknown individuals, voices that may be silenced in more official, institutional records. These records also looked at documented groups within marginalized groups. Three themes were chosen and material selected to correspond to these themes: student life and activity,

art activism, and historical characters. These themes were also selected due to links between the different collections. Below are the details of the themes and material which were chosen.

Student life and activity (within the 1960s/70s/80s): records from the institutional archives of UCA, including official records, such as prospectuses, course descriptions, somewhat more 'personal' records, such as student statements in degree show catalogues, and the student voice, through student statements from the Guildford School of Art protest⁴¹.

Art Activism: Collections (1980s/90s) – these records included examples from a photographer, who specialized in sex and sexual fantasy, particularly in regard to LGBTQ (lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer) theory in the 1980s/90s⁴². This had particular references to historical events/acts at the time. We also selected material from the Working Press archive⁴³, books by and about working class artists, 1980s-1990s, looking at intersections, between class, race, sexuality, disability, which included letters from writers seeking to be published, often one sided, with no corresponding voice.

Historical characters: Records relating to historical characters, and how they had been fictionalized within the archives were selected, including records from the Roland Frederick Godfrey archive⁴⁴.

The number of records within the archive catalogue and the depth of knowledge required can be overwhelming for someone unfamiliar with archive catalogue structure. Tutors selecting records meant that students will still be exposed to the way the archive is organised, as they are able to easily access the records on the catalogue after. Having students use the same records was also allowed individuals to reactivate the materials in different ways. However, that would mean students did not have the element of choice, so different topics/records were selected, and students had the option to pick as many or as few records as they wished.

The next stage of the project was 'researching the material'. This involved selecting 'Primary materials (that will feature specifically), secondary materials (that may be partly

included or included as background) and tertiary materials (which help in the imaginative process but may not be included in your final submission)⁴⁵. Students needed to realize the importance of engaging with secondary and tertiary sources for contextual understanding of the material, and understanding why these records came into existence in the first place.

For example, with the personal records, such as letters from the Working Press which relate to political and historical events in the 1980s and 90s, students need to be aware that this was the individual's perspective of the time. Similarly, although the characters featured are individuals in history, depending on someone's political agenda or beliefs, they can be molded as the re-interpreter wishes. Research would need to be conducted on the historical background to understand the individual's view, and students needed to realize the importance of engaging with secondary and tertiary sources for contextual understanding of the material for this reason.

Research within the structure and cataloguing arrangement of the archive was also designed to be carried out. Records picked out included material at file and series level, as well as individual items. This gave students the opportunity, for example, to question why particular records from the Working Press archive were located within the series 'Working Class Women', when there may not have been obvious connections: Did the artist group these records to make a specific point, or, was that the order that the archivist felt they should be in? Indeed, the (deliberate) lack of information the students were given about the background of the archivist, highlighted the archivist's silent voice.

As this was a group project, the third stage involved 'delegating roles'. The following roles were suggested for students to consider:

- a) Project leader/Editor. This is the person who organises people, makes sure they are keeping to their specified roles and are producing work. This needs to be a person all can trust and a person who is comfortable in helping others in their roles. The person in this role will likely do a little of everything.
- b) Writer. For this project, you will likely need more than one writer. The writer provides the main text-content for the project, though will need to liaise and understand how their contribution might fit into the work of other team-members.

- c) Sub-editor. This person checks the work of others for accuracy in terms of fact, fiction, spelling, punctuation, grammar and formatting. This person needs to have a close eye for detail and an ability to make suggestions about how work can be improved.
- d) Multi-media/graphics manager. This project actively encourages the integration of other media forms: photographs, drawings, letters, video etc. To achieve this, you will need an individual who is familiar with current multi-media technology to help make text come alive and to show your innovative use of the materials you have selected.⁴⁶

Guiding students through these stages involved an initial seminar with the Archivist and Lecturer. The initial seminar explored reasons why creative writers would engage with archives, giving examples of writers working with archives and their strategies chosen in terms of engaging with archives. Students started to select material to explore and then individually organized sessions with the archives to undertake their own work before having a follow up session. The methodology for analyzing this case study included observation of the creative writing participants taking part within the module, including noting down questions asked, observing collections they chose, and asking reasoning behind the choice of collections. Work produced by the students was then analyzed by the creative writing lecturer in terms of how well they had understood the brief.

The support and advice on offer allowed students to develop their pieces of writing. For example, one piece of work written by three students from the 2015/2016 cohort focused on a rewrite of the history of records from the archive of the Working Press⁴⁷, which contained books by and about working class artists between 1986-1996. The Working Press was set up as a publisher for individuals who identified themselves as working class and who faced the challenges that working class artists had getting published, including the financial climate. The Working Press also looks at intersections between nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, race, sexuality. Records used included letters to one of the co-creators, records relating to working class women, pamphlets, and zines collected by one of co-creators of the Working Press. The writing piece utilized letters and zines from the Working Press, and also incorporated the images within the text.

Giving the protagonist the co-creator's own name, and his background of being Polish, working class and based in the 1980s, the writing piece focused on the Working Press itself. This piece gave an alternative telling of the motivations behind the Working Press being set up, and reactions towards the Working Press. As there were silences within the records themselves, including are no records relating to why the Working Press ended, then an alternative backstory was written. Themes including xenophobia, class politics are explored throughout.

The creative writing piece was written about Stefan from the perspective of an unnamed narrator, rather than by Stefan himself. This allowed for the development of a backstory of 'Stefan' and his involvement with the Working Press, starting with his upbringing (not present within the archive), to the creation of the Working Press, to its decline. The third person piece was written in the style of a biography, a retrospective of Stefan and the working Press, which could have potentially been placed in a newspaper setting. The narrator of the piece for example uses the word 'we', when hoping that the protagonist is well, for example stating 'with no news of return, we can only help that Stefan is doing well'⁴⁸. As with a real biography, you would speak to the individual (if possible), speak to others that knew him, undertake research into the archives, investigate the silences as Carter refers to— it could not be completely impartial, and silence could not be completely filled.

In this student piece, hidden agendas are not necessarily clear within the records and the motivation for developing written records and letters was also explored. An example of the benefits of looking at hidden agendas as a strategy is described in Amy Cummins' 'Effective Use of Creative Writing Assignments in College Literature Courses', where she discusses a strategy of having students using classic novels to write characters' hidden agendas, to provide alternative meanings and complex characters'⁴⁹.

As well as engaging with the Working Press archive, the group looked at the history of the Soviet Union in 72, and how this may have influenced why Stefan's family left Poland. For the motivations in regarding why the Working Press was set up, they utilized a zine in the archive, 'Nihilistic Vices' on which he was first introduced to concepts on 'anarchy' or alternatives to capitalism.

Letters and records were also taken out of the context that they were originally arranged into. For example, within the Working Press letters were arranged in various folders, including a folder on 'Finance', files entitled simply 'correspondence', and files entitled 'Working Class Women', plausibly to highlight the Working Press' strength in promoting and representing women artists. As the piece often focused on financial difficulties, letters within the correspondence file were used to highlight such problems. The records within the 'correspondence' file are in this context as important to an understanding of the financial situation of the 80s/90s for the Working Press, as are the records in the 'finance' file itself.

Another example within the Working Press archive, is the 'Working Class Women' file, which relates to women published in the Working Press. This includes a publicity section, such as invites to book launches and description of the publications offered. Within the fictional student writing, the amount of book launch publicity, such as an invite to a book launch of Greenham Women's Peace Camp was used to suggest the post at Stefan's house was piling up as he is unreachable. In such a case, a new context to this letter is being formed by the fictional work, encouraging the reader to conjecture. If there was a response to this letter, it would be likely to be with the individual the co-creator corresponded with; there is no response to this letter in the archive – hence another silence.

A further piece of work from the following cohort (2016/17) produced by four students, took as their basis for their work pamphlets from the archives which were largely again from the Working Press archive. A reflective commentary noted they looked at the archive that 'featured pamphlets about Polish artists, Nazi Propaganda and stories about frustration and madness. This led us to create our character, our time setting, and theme of the work respectively.'

This work took place within a diary format of the protagonist, 'The diary of DP', detailing the story of a gay Polish artist fleeing Poland during World War II, while Poland was being invaded. The Polish artist also left his lover behind, so is concerned regarding the fate of his lover. Although using similar material, the work produced was different than the previous Working Press archive example – the format being an epistolary style, rather than third person, and rather than basing the creative work within the 1980s, the abstract themes that the students found in the archive were moved to a different time period, to see how they

would play out there. Although the archives are based largely in the time frame of the 80s and 90s, students were able to use these themes and place them in a different timeline—for example, experiences of being gay in World War II, experiences of xenophobia. This is reminiscent of *Pleased to Meet You: Introductions by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott* referred to previously, which places material together in varied ways. For the name, rather than using the co-creator's name 'Stefan', the individual doesn't have a specific name which was noted in the commentary was chosen as it could stand for 'Dirty Polak' or 'Displaced Person')

One reflective commentary of a student noted that the diary style was also chosen as a link to the archive, to create an illusion that this document would be something that could be found within the archive, for researchers. The diary also included drawings and doodles in the diary, as the students felt that it that it would be more authentic for an artist to hand-draw and doodle in the handwritten diary; image and text were also linked together through the protagonist attempting to draw his lover.

To enhance the authenticity of the work with respect to the language of a Polish writer, non-standard English syntax and tense usage was employed, as well as including Polish phrases and words in contexts where the character didn't know the English word with which to describe their experience. Justification for writing in English was also provided by the character the piece noting that the diary was good for practicing English.

Student reflections on their fictional work also noted the challenges of undertaking group work. These included challenges of combining different individual writing styles into a unified piece, one solution being the development of diary entries reflecting different points in the character's life: 'the diary entries allowed us to write in our styles to an extent, each writer showing a different part of our character's mind set'⁵⁰. Additionally, two students also worked on editing to ensure continuity and consistency throughout the piece, and two students worked on creating doodles and sketches for the handwritten diary, to add authenticity to it as a 'document'. Such an approach reflects how the restrictions of archival and group work can lead to innovative creative solutions.

Reflections and Conclusions

What was the gained and learned from the 'Fictional Biographies' project? The results speak as much about the pedagogy of creative writing as they do about archives as a pedagogical and creative resource. In general, students' work showed a clear relation between the fictional and non-fictional elements and the work integrated, to varying degrees, the selected archival material with the imaginative development of those materials.

Silences, such as the actual agenda and thoughts of both subjects and creators in archival material, as well as silences within missing archival material, were highlighted by students within their work. Additionally, the narrative produced by the archivist in terms of the structure of the cataloguing was played with, recognizing the voice of the cataloguing archivist is one voice among many.

More specifically though, there were several characteristic issues which emerged from working with students and marking their work:

Reportage. In the creative writing lecturer's experience of teaching creative writing, when students approach factual subjects and materials, there can be an overreliance on reportage as a narrative device. Reportage typically fails to weight events in terms of their dramatic or psychological importance (eating breakfast may be treated similarly to a bereavement) and there can be a lack of imaginative development of events in terms of setting, dialogue and use of non-literal devices (metaphor, metonymy etc.) and phonoaesthetic effects (alliteration, consonance etc.). It is plausible that this is influenced by the central need for students to manage factual sources and, at least initially, make a narrative out of disparate events⁵¹. This can lead to a linear list of events-and-causes that are the backbone of a narrative, but are ultimately underdeveloped.

The Importance of source taxonomy. Another feature the lecturer found in marking the fictional biographies and the accompanying critical commentaries was an inability to clearly

articulate a distinction between primary, secondary and tertiary sources that formed the basis of the fictional biographies. This not only suggests that the practical as well as theoretical distinction between sources was not sufficiently understood and stressed, but more importantly, that the *imaginative value* of the distinction was not grasped. What is meant by this is that in building up an implicitly richer understanding of the fictional environment one is attempting to create through understanding sources beyond the primary, there is a higher likelihood of opening creative possibilities and solving creative problems. This is not simply about getting the research factually correct, it is also about creating a framework of enhanced familiarity, familiarity that can contribute to the generation of new information. Within the Working Press creative writing piece, for example, further research into past political movements and activism could give insight into what individuals involved in the Working Press were inspired by; it could have brought to life voices and thoughts of different generations of activists.

Individualist culture of creative writing. As has been noted widely within creative writing literature by Dawson⁵² and others⁵³, creative writing and the students who come to study it at university are often imbued with Romantic notions of the contextless nature of creative genius, the sovereign importance of individual subjectivity and a corollary reluctance to be influenced by other writers or accept criticism of their work. Keats' dictum that 'if poetry not come as leave come to the tree, then it had better not come at all'⁵⁴ reflects to a significant extent the attitude of many students. All this is arguably sharpened by the increasing likelihood that students see themselves as consumers as opposed to learners. While the confluence of Romanticism and the increasing marketisation of education deserves greater attention than it is given here, it is mentioned because within the project, students have to produce a creative work alongside other writers and negotiate a work which is authorially shared. This is something which in a small way may challenge an individualistic attitude to their work. Additionally, the students of necessity work within a series of restraints concerning their material, its context and the possible ways the genre conventions of biography and autobiography. While all activities imply constraints, the project foregrounded them, something which can also work in a small way to encourage students to see constraint as by no means a limit to creativity, but in fact an aid in the creative process.

Plausibly for archives and archival material, part of what makes their information enduring is not reducible to the fact that it is kept within a safe and accessible place (though this is important). Beyond safety, there is the potential for archives to endure culturally: In remaining a focus of artistic, public and academic interest, in responding to changes and new social circumstances and indeed in expanding to further these aims and the potential for informational enrichment. The fictional biographies project set for UCA creative writing students is one very modest example of how this enrichment can take place, though despite its modesty, it points to an avenue that might be explored further.

Notes

¹ A discussion of the history of archival principles, including Terry Cook's text 'What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift', 17–63, can be accessed in Athanasios' article on Creative Archiving. Athanasios Velios 2011 Creative Archiving: A Case Study from the John Latham Archive, p256-258

² Ibid p.13

³ Ibid p.256

⁴ Eichhorn, Kate 2013 'Redefining a movement: The Riot Grrl collection at Fales Library and Special Collections' p.88

⁵ Caswell, Michelle 2014: Archiving The Unspeakable Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia p.99

⁶ MOA 2013: Pleased to meet you: Introductions by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott source: http://moa.ubc.ca/portfolio_page/pleased-to-meet-you/

⁷ Harris, Rochelle L and Stuart-Nunez Christine 2015: 'Sough After Sophistications: Crafting a Curatorial Stance in the Creative Writing and Composition Classrooms' p.64

⁸ Athanasios Velios 2011 Creative Archiving: A Case Study from the John Latham Archive, , p260-268

⁹ Ligatus and University of the Arts London: John Latham, Archive As Event <http://www.ligatus.org.uk/aae/#>

-
- ¹⁰ Myers, D.G. 2006. *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880*
- ¹¹ Ibid p.101
- ¹² Emerson, R.W. 1964. *The Early Lectures: 1836-38.*, p.51
- ¹³ Myers, D.G. 2006. *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880*, p.30
- ¹⁴ see Jordan-Baker, C. 2015. "The Philosophy of Creative Writing."
- ¹⁵ See Peters, R. S., ed. 1973. *The Philosophy of Education* and Jordan-Baker, C. 2016 'The Philosophy of Creative Writing' in *New Writing*, 12:1:2015, 238-248.
- ¹⁶ Robins, R.H. 1997. *A Short History of Linguistics*.
- ¹⁷ Harper, G. 2010. *On Creative Writing*, p.1
- ¹⁸ Society of American Archivists 2016
- ¹⁹ Caswell, Michelle 2014: Archiving The Unspeakable Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia p.132
- ²⁰ Ibid p.132
- ²¹ Ibid p.13
- ²² Ibid p.13
- ²³ Ibid p.13, p.132
- ²⁴ Ibid p.10-11
- ²⁶ X, Ajamu, Campbell Topher Campbell & Stevens, Mary 200: Love and Lubrication in the Archives: 'Love and Lubrication in the Archives or rukus! A Black Queer Archive for the UK' p.272
- ²⁶ Flinn, Andrew 2007: Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges p.167
- ²⁷ Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Duayne The Fae Richards Archive
In www.archivesandcreativepractice.com Birmingham City University and Art Design Archives
- ²⁸ Flinn, Andrew 2007: Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges p.165
- ²⁹ Caswell, Michelle 2014: Archiving The Unspeakable Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia p.11
- ³⁰ Ibid p.132
- ³¹ Ibid p.133

³² Carter, Rodney G.S. Spring 2006 *Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and power in Silence* *Archivaria* 61 p.216

³³ Ibid p.217

³⁴ Ibid p.219

³⁵ Ibid p.228

³⁶ Ibid p. 226

³⁷ Ibid p.226

³⁸ Ibid p.230

³⁹ Jordan-Baker, Craig 2016: 'Fictional Biographies' assessment from Creative Writing.

University for the Creative Arts [Unpublished]

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ See University for the Creative Arts, Guildford School of Art archive

<http://archives.ucreative.ac.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=GCOL&pos=1> [accessed 10 June 2016]

⁴² See University for the Creative Arts, Tessa Boffin archive

<http://archives.ucreative.ac.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=BOFF&pos=1> [accessed 29 July 2016]

⁴³ See University for the Creative Arts: Working Press, books by and about working class artists archive, 1986-1996

<http://archives.ucreative.ac.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=WPA&pos=1> [accessed 10 June 2016]

⁴⁴ See University for the Creative Arts, Bob Godfrey archive

<http://archives.ucreative.ac.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=BG&pos=1> [accessed 10 June 2016]

⁴⁵ Jordan-Baker, Craig 2016: 'Fictional Biographies' assessment from Creative Writing.

University for the Creative Arts [Unpublished]

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ See University for the Creative Arts: Working Press, books by and about working class artists archive, 1986-1996

<http://archives.ucreative.ac.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=WPA&pos=1> [accessed 10 June 2016]

⁴⁸ Badillo, Cesar, Lee, Hayden, Bickerdyke Thomas 2016: Fictional Biographies Assessment from University for the Creative Arts [unpublished]

⁴⁹ Cummins Amy 2009: 'Tell Me a Story: Effective Use of Creative Writing Assignments in College Literature Courses' p.43

⁵⁰ Draper, Harry 2017: Fictional Biographies assessment from Creative Writing, Reflective Commentary from University for the Creative Arts [unpublished]

⁵¹ Porter, Abbot 2008: The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative.

⁵² (2005)

⁵³ Beck, Heather (ed) 2012: Teaching Creative Writing (Teaching the New English). Palgrave Macmillan. Basingstoke

⁵⁴ Keats, J. 2014. Letters of John Keats to His Family and Friends p.65

References

Badillo, Cesar, Lee, Hayden, Bickerdyke Thomas 2016: Fictional Biographies Assessment from University for the Creative Arts [unpublished] Beck, Heather (ed) 2012: Teaching Creative Writing (Teaching the New English). Palgrave Macmillan. Basingstoke

Carter, Rodney G.S. Spring 2006 *Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence* Archivaria 61

Caswell, Michelle 2014: Archiving The Unspeakable Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia, University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin

Cummins Amy 2009: 'Tell Me a Story: Effective Use of Creative Writing Assignments in College Literature Courses' in Currents in Teaching and Learning VOL. 1 NO. 2, SPRING 2009

Draper, Harry 2017: Fictional Biographies assessment from Creative Writing, Reflective Commentary from University for the Creative Arts [unpublished]

Birmingham City University and Art Design Archives: Zoe Leonard and Cheryl Duyn The Fae Richards Archive. Source <http://www.archivesandcreativepractice.com/zoe-leonard-cheryl-dunye/> [accessed 10 June 2016]

Eichhorn, Kate 2013: 'Redefining a movement: The Riot Grrl collection at Fales Library and Special Collections' in *The Archival Turn In Feminism*

Emerson, R.W. 1964. *The Early Lectures: 1836-38*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Flinn, Andrew 2007: *Community Histories, Community Archives: Some Opportunities and Challenges* in *Journal of the Society of Archivists* Volume 28, Issue 2

Harris, Rochelle L and Stuart-Nunez Christine 2015: 'Sough After Sophistications: Crafting a Curatorial Stance in the Creative Writing and Composition Classrooms' in *Creative Composition: Inspiration and Techniques for Writing Instruction*. Berg Danita and May Lori A (ed) *Multilingual Matters*.

Harper, G. 2010. *On Creative Writing*. London: Multilingual Matters.

Jordan-Baker, C. 2015. "The Philosophy of Creative Writing." *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*. 12:1:238-248.

Jordan-Baker, Craig 2016: 'Fictional Biographies' assessment from Creative Writing. University for the Creative Arts [Unpublished]

Keats, J. 2014. *Letters of John Keats to His Family and Friends*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. Ligatus and University of the Arts London: John Latham, Archive As Event. Source <http://www.ligatus.org.uk/aae/#> [accessed 10 June 2016]

MOA 2013: Pleased to meet you: Introductions by Gwyn Hanssen Pigott. source: http://moa.ubc.ca/portfolio_page/pleased-to-meet-you/ [accessed 10 June 2016]

Myers, D.G. 2006. *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Peters, R. S., ed. 1973. *The Philosophy of Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Porter, Abbot 2008: *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge

Robins, R.H. 1997. *A Short History of Linguistics*. London: Routledge.

Society of American Archivists. 'Archives'. Source:

<http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/archives#.VzxDzPkrl> 4

Velios Athanasios 2011: Creative Archiving: A Case Study from the John Latham Archive, *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 32:2, 255-271

X, Ajamu, Campbell Topher Campbell & Stevens, Mary 2009: 'Love and Lubrication in the Archives or rukus! A Black Queer Archive for the UK' in *Archivaria* 68 (Fall 2009): 271–294

University for the Creative Arts: Working Press archive, books by and about working class artists, 1986-1996. Ref WPA

<http://archives.ucreative.ac.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=WPA&pos=1> [accessed 10 June 2016]

University for the Creative Arts: Guildford School of Art archive. Ref GCOL

<http://archives.ucreative.ac.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=GCOL&pos=1> [accessed 10 June 2016]

University for the Creative Arts: Tessa Boffin archive. Ref BOFF

<http://archives.ucreative.ac.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=BOFF&pos=1> [accessed 29 July 2016]

University for the Creative Arts: Roland Frederick (Bob Godfrey) archive Ref BG

<http://archives.ucreative.ac.uk/CalmView/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=BG&pos=1> [accessed 10 June 2016]