

ПРАКТИКА И ОПЫТ  
PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE

**ON THE PUBLISHER'S TRACKS: PRESENTATION  
OF A PARTNERSHIP RESEARCH PROJECT  
ON FRENCH-LANGUAGE PUBLISHING ARCHIVES**

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims to present the research partnership project of francophone publishers' archives, which made the platform possible. This project gathered archivists and researchers from various institutions (universities, archives centers, publishers' associations) and various regions (Belgium, Canada, France, Switzerland) in the francophone world, with the main objectives to advance and to study archives of the publishing world. The article focuses on the birth of the partnership project, on the internet platform Archives éditoriales, and on other outcomes of the project. It also addresses the questions of why, how and when publishing houses tend to donate their archives to public institutions.*

**Keywords:** *partnership; french-speaking world; publishers' archives; preservation of archives*

Our societies have never produced as many archives as they do today. To be sure, the development of digital technologies that allow for massive and delocalized archiving has contributed to this archive inflation. Preservation no longer only concerns institutional documents, but also the archives of corporations and individuals. Not only have the habits of preserving and donating archives spread to many professions and types of activities, but we all participate in the production and sharing of information (blogs, articles, social network posts) that requires archiving.

At the same time, historical research has become more interested in various issues surrounding archives. Reflections have developed, for example, on the uses of archives in the contemporary era and on new archivable media. These reflections are of particular interest to those of us studying publishing archives and publishing practices.

If some writers began to bequeath their archives to libraries as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, publishing companies only entered into this practice in the

middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and then only in sporadic fashion. In the French-speaking world, it was only in the 1980s and 1990s that the question of the preservation of publishing institutions' materials began to be discussed in France, Switzerland, and Quebec. The creation of l'Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine [Institute for Contemporary Publishing Archives] (IMEC), near Caen, in France, in 1988, and its success in archiving and promoting its collections, are evidence of the collective awareness that publishing archives are a fundamental source of historical knowledge and collective memory. The Institute for Contemporary Publishing Archives serves as a model that is unique in the sheer volume and value of its collections, both for researchers and the public, as well as the vigour of its public outreach and the extent of indexing and classification carried out in its holdings. However, measures to preserve publishing archives have been initiated at different times and in different ways in each community (national, provincial, municipal) and thus certain initiatives have been limited to specific collections, while others have been broader and more systematic.

By “publishing archives” we understand objects and discourses (e.g., written documents, images, films) produced by publishing houses and preserved by dedicated institutions, such as universities, libraries, and archive centers. It is worthwhile noting that other archival resources, such as publicly available judicial and administrative records, for example, are also rich in materials relevant for publishing history research. The very existence of publishing archives depends on a series of decisions on the part of publishers, such as decisions to: preserve their archives, archive records of their ongoing activities, and deposit all or part of their archives in a preservation center. Any number of obstacles may stand between the donor and the acquiring archive service. The poor organization of private archives is one such obstacle: publishing houses are most often small organizations whose archives are either not preserved (much is discarded over time) or not well classified. Unfortunately, the very limited resources of most archive services also prevent them from processing as many donations as they would like.

Between 2017 and 2021, a partnership research project, financed by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), was devoted to studying publishing archives in Canada, France, Belgium, and Switzerland. The project's aims were to study, compare, demonstrate, present, and publish its findings on the archive holdings of various publishers, as well as to establish international collaborations between organizations (e.g., university libraries, preservation institutions, publishers' associations, research groups) whose preservation mandates, practices, and capacities were diverse. The following pages seek to describe and explain the project from its elaboration, through its evolution, to its results and ongoing outcomes.

### **Publishing archives**

At the risk of stating the obvious, literary history has always accorded a preeminent position to writers. Their works are examined with a fine-toothed comb, their lives carefully documented, their relationships thoroughly scrutinized. The thoughts, experiences, and reflections of other actors in the literary life, publishers chief among them, are not studied as a subject unto themselves (when they are studied at all), but rather as a corollary to the broad selection of materials that document our understanding of writers and their works.

In the French-speaking world, however, developments in the writing of literary history over the course of the 1950s upended this long-standing status quo. Specifically, studies of influential publishers as central figures in the literary sphere proliferated. Under the impetus of researchers such as Jean-Yves Mollier on one side of the Atlantic and Jacques Michon on the other, publishers' archives acquired the status of important documentary sources for national publishing histories. It is in these histories, in large part, that the hidden side of book production and, by extension, literature is revealed. To date, however, researchers in literary and cultural history who mine publishing archives (particularly in the course of research towards the production of collective reference works, such as "Histoire de l'édition française", "Histoire de l'édition littéraire au Québec", and The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain) have done so in order to retrieve discrete elements of information, casting aside much of what they consider of secondary importance.

Our project aimed to conceive of archival holdings as significant wholes and, in so doing, to more fully understand their development, configuration, and classification schemes. The project also sought to further encourage the acquisition of archival materials by institutions, keeping in mind that organizational capacities for acquisition can vary widely among distinct national contexts.

Publishing archives bring to the fore the multifaceted role of the publisher. The publisher shares with the author the moral and legal responsibility for the published work and, in most cases, assumes also its financial responsibilities as well. But the publisher's work is not confined to this relationship and is far more varied. Provided with the author's raw material of words, it is the publisher who performs the multifarious operations necessary to transform that raw material into the finished good of marketable books. Thus the publisher must prove skillful at a variety of tasks: the selection of books according to one's specialization and position within the publishing field; editing work; book production (e.g., manuscript preparation and choices of format, illustrations, and cover art); and finally marketing, which involves overseeing advertising, media relations, and sales. Maintaining close collaborative ties with authors, publishers must nevertheless keep their attention equally riveted on readers. In choosing a particular medium, format, and layout, and in appending the text with elements of editorial paratext, the publisher fashions a certain reading of the text addressed to specific audiences. Thus

molded by the publisher, the very materiality of the text and the book-object is imbued with meanings. And it is the materiality of the book-object that best testifies to the publisher's central role among other actors throughout the book publishing chain: from the printer to the bookseller, by way of the translator, the illustrator, and the distributor.

Publishing house archives represent collections of memories produced by organizations concerned with works from such diverse domains as reference works, literature, social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, and self-help books. These archives contain correspondence, textual paratexts (e.g., prefaces, back covers), promotional copy, administrative documents, press kits, and reports – in short, all the “grey literature” that is both difficult to trace and replete with a wealth of information. And while they most obviously testify to what has been, they also denote what might have been, since they retain traces of the rejected manuscripts, abortive projects, and unsold books that literary history has left unnoted. Finally, they also retain mock-ups, photographs, books, and promotional materials among other non-textual objects specific to publishing – many of which have been too frequently considered ancillary, but whose true value becomes evident when brought together within the archive. These are the disparate pieces and diffuse fragments of the fascinating puzzle (which researchers also must come to view as an integral whole) that forms the subject of the present article.

### **The publishing archives at Université de Sherbrooke**

It is not an accident that a research project concerned with publishing archives saw the light of the day in Sherbrooke (Québec, Canada). The city and its French-language university have been the hub of Québec literary and publishing research for the past four decades, i.e., since the creation of the Groupe de recherche sur l'édition littéraire au Québec (GRÉLQ) [Research Group on Literary Publishing in Québec] in 1982. In 2003, Université de Sherbrooke (UdeS) doctoral student Frédéric Brisson authored a report intended to “take stock of the condition of publishing archives in Québec and French Canada” under the supervision of Jacques Michon, at the time director of GRÉLQ, which has since become the Groupe de recherches et d'études sur le livre au Québec [Research and Study Group on Books in Québec]). At the same time, an archival protocol specifically addressing publishing archives was adopted by the Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec [National Library and Archives of Quebec]. These initiatives were temporarily deferred, however, since available energie was devoted to the compilation of the three-volume *Histoire de l'édition littéraire au Québec* (Michon 1999–2010) [The History of Literary Publishing in Québec], under the direction of Jacques Michon, and the “*Dictionnaire des gens du livre au Québec*” (2022) [Dictionary of Québec's Literary Personalities], directed by UdeS Professors Marie-Pier Luneau and Josée Vincent. In the wake of this momentum, UdeS began

acquiring some publishers' documentary holdings, which today continue to provide the raw material of the ongoing collective reflection fuelling our project.

At present, Université de Sherbrooke holds six distinct publishing archive fonds. The first of these contains materials originating from Éditions de l'Hexagone, established in 1953 by a collective of Montreal poets and visual artists and centred on the central figure of Gaston Miron. Miron directed the publishing house, intermittently in collaboration with Alain Horic, until 1981, after which Horic took over the reins until the company's buyout by a publishing conglomerate. Closely linked with the Quiet Revolution (a period of rapid sociopolitical change in Québec during the 1960s), Éditions de l'Hexagone published some of Québec's most important poetry collections in the years 1950 to 1990. The fonds includes author files, manuscripts, page proofs, financial and administrative documents, as well as a multitude of books produced by the publishing house.

The second fonds is that of XYZ éditeur, established in 1985 by Gaëtan Lévesque and Maurice Soudeyins, and joined in 1990 by André Vanasse. The fonds contains correspondence, contracts, and promotional materials that attest to the vibrant activities of a press publishing approximately 30 titles a year throughout the 1990s. The fonds of Éditions du Lévrier, for its part, documents the history of a publishing house founded by the Dominican Order in 1937, and headed by Rev. Luc Lacroix until its closure in 1966. Éditions du Lévrier released approximately two hundred titles in the course of its operations, consisting for the most part of religious works, youth literature, and scholarly studies. Its fonds consists of correspondence between authors and publishers (notably publishers in France, some of whose publications Éditions du Lévrier reprinted during the Second World War), as well as contracts and financial documents. The contents of the Éditions France-Livre fonds are, in turn, of modest size, consisting solely of an accounts book for the years 1946–1952, which nevertheless records the publishing activities of bookseller Alfred Dorval during a period when he produced reprints of titles from European collections destined for sale in Québec bookshops, small businesses, and kiosks. The fonds of publisher Fernand Pilon is another element of our documentary record of literary publishing in Québec in the immediate post-war period. A bookseller, Pilon also published a number of works by French authors and Québec poets, notably the poetry of Jean Narrache.

Finally, the fonds of Éditions Fides, containing some 41 linear metres of documents, takes up the lion's share of the UdeS publishing archives holdings. Established in 1941 by Rev. Paul-Aimé Martin, Fides remains the oldest general interest publishing house still in operation in Québec. A religious publisher in principle, funded by the Congregation of Holy Cross, but employing mainly lay workers, Fides has left an indelible imprint on over three quarters of a century of Québec's cultural history. The rapid secularization of Québec society during the 1960s made obsolete a large part of Fides' catalogue, which at the time had been dominated by religious works. In response, the publishing house reoriented

its activities towards preserving the heritage of Québec literature through collections such as “Nénuphar” [Water Lily], “Écrivains canadiens d’aujourd’hui” [Canadian Writers Today], and “Bibliothèque canadienne-française” [French-Canadian Library], which would later become Bibliothèque québécoise [Québec Library]. Thus the archives preserved in Sherbrooke offer a sound documentary basis, notably for teaching purposes. Our vision, however, required greater breadth.

### **The birth of a partnership project**

In 2016, Josée Vincent, then GRÉLQ director, set out to reinvigorate research on publishing archives, as well as to elaborate an acquisition project aimed at enriching UdeS’ archival holdings. At the time occupied with co-directing, along with Marie-Pier Luneau, the “Dictionnaire des gens du livre au Québec” (Luneau, Vincent 2022), and having laid the project’s foundations, she entrusted me with the responsibility of seeing it through. The concept matured for a year. During this time, Marie-Pier Luneau delved deep into research in the Fides fonds, the centrepiece of UdeS’ holdings, while Lucie Hotte, professor at University of Ottawa and director of the Centre de recherche sur la civilisation canadienne-française (CRCCF) [Centre for Research on French Canadian Culture] (since then renamed as Centre de recherche sur les francophonies canadiennes [Centre for Research on Canada’s Francophone Communities]) joined the GRÉLQ team and opened our eyes to the wealth of research carried out in publishing archives by her team at CRCCF in Ottawa. That is when my work started apace. I hoisted the pilgrim’s staff and undertook a journey that took me through Belgium, France, and Switzerland. In the course of colloquium participations and invitations extended to fellow researchers to attend conferences at UdeS, I retold the same story to many colleagues, expounding on the project’s and the partnership’s underpinnings, allaying concerns, sending many, many emails, repairing errors where I had made them – in short, the usual necessities of building a grant application, yet one that concerned a project that was doubly specific: in its partnership between researchers (literary scholars, historians, sociologists) and archivists; and in its partnership between institutions spanning the French-speaking countries of the Global North (with the hope of eventually integrating the French-speaking world of the South).

The partnership research team consists of the GRÉLQ core (Marie-Pier Luneau and Josée Vincent) and Lucie Hotte in Canada, as well as Pascal Durand in Belgium and François Vallotton in Switzerland, both specialists of publishing history and relevant archival holdings in their respective countries. In addition, among the project’s collaborators in Canada are archivists Julie Fecteau in Sherbrooke and Geneviève Piché in Ottawa. In France, four more collaborators have joined the project: André Derval (representing IMEC), Sylvie Ducas, Bertrand Legendre, and Hervé Serry. Other collaborators in Canada include Marie-Andrée Bergeron, Julien Lefort-Favreau, and Dominique

Marquis. In addition, the project benefits from the contributions of Laurence Boudart, director of Archives et Musée de la littérature [Archives and Museum of Literature] in Brussels.

Yet another specificity and significant asset of this partnership research program, financed from 2017 to 2021, lies in its integration both of individuals and of institutions. Thus, aside from the involvement of IMEC and the universities of Sherbrooke, Ottawa, Liège, and Lausanne, our institutional partners also include l'Association nationale des éditeurs de livres (ANEL) [National Association of Book Publishers] in Québec and Archives et Musée de la littérature in Belgium. Insofar as the partnership's multifaceted composition provides it with a wealth of resources, it also requires working out how best to integrate the variegated contributions and resources of a disparate array of collaborators. Thus a series of thorny questions. How do we bring together various archival holdings and distinct research practices? How do we preserve, analyze, and inventory publishing archives at a time of permanent budget crises that chip away at the possibilities for archivists to carry out thorough inventories? How do we facilitate collaboration between institutions working with highly varied missions and preservation capacities (university libraries, preservation institutions, publishers' associations, research groups), and in different countries, each with its own archival preservation traditions and institutional mandates?

It appeared to us that the development of a digital platform dedicated to publishing archives was the best way to make things gel, so to speak.

### **Outcomes**

Using the Wordpress architecture, we developed an online platform<sup>1</sup> to serve as the collaborative hub of our initiative. The website offers a selection of open access resources: a geolocated database of publishers' archives throughout the French-speaking countries of the Global North; a database containing some 1000 interviews (audio-visual recordings, for the most part) with publishers, as well as a selection of especially significant video recordings and transcripts of additional interviews conducted specifically within the scope of the project; webpages dedicated to Québec and French-Canadian archival fonds; and, finally, blog posts, penned by researchers and students involved in the project. Below, I describe a few of these resources in more detail.

The medium of a digital platform allowed us to provide open access to searchable databases. As mentioned above, one of them contains close to a thousand interviews with French-language publishers. Its composition is, admittedly, characterized by significant disparities: in France, the archives of the Institut national de l'audiovisuel [National Audiovisual Institute] and of Radio-France are highly developed; In Belgium, the archives of Radio-télévision belge de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (RTBF) accessible from abroad are almost non-existent and Radio-Canada's archives are also highly lacunar; for Radio Télévision Suisse the situation is intermediate. Our

repository of interviews consists mainly of audiovisual recordings, with comparatively few records of interviews published in print. Moreover, we commissioned French journalist Amandine Glevarec to carry out original interviews with publishers from such printing houses as 400 coups, Alire, Zoé, and Christian Bourgois, thus, in some measure, creating archives in our turn.

As well, the Archives Editoriales platform features a collaborative blog sustained by project members' contributions. To offer but a glimpse of entries that may be found therein, Camélia Paquette offers a study of the newspaper advertising strategies of Éditions Fides<sup>2</sup>, Selina Follonier provides an overview of audiovisual repositories in literary publishing archives<sup>3</sup>, and I, too, have personally committed a blog entry on a France-Culture radio broadcast devoted to touring of the archives of Éditions Casterman in Tournai, Belgium.

A reflection on publishers' discourses was the project's first collective endeavour. Whether reproduced in newspapers or memoirs, on television or online, whether preserved in archive repositories (private or public) or digitally, their discourses occupy a singular position: publishers are people of letters, keen to participate in literary life; yet they are also numbers people, entrepreneurs concerned with running a business and, ideally, steering it to prosperity. Thus the entirety of a publisher's public discourse is inflected by the duality of their position. Connecting authors and publics, the publisher inhabits an in-between that makes their word respected yet, because specific to their social position, also potentially suspect. An issue of the journal "Mémoires du livre. Studies in Book Culture" (Glinoyer, Lefort-Favreau 2019)<sup>4</sup>, directed by myself and Julien Lefort-Favreau, addresses publishers' discourses through such varied cases as those of Bertil Galland in Switzerland and Éric Hazan in France, as well as feminist publishers in Québec and independents in the United States. The second phase of this collective reflection culminated in the collective publication "Les maisons d'édition francophones au prisme de leurs archives" (Glinoyer 2022). The book delves into publishers' archives, analyzing the activities of French-language publishing houses and exploring their mutual relationships.

Our archival research uncovered its share of unexpected treasures. It seemed only natural to group them thematically and open them up to public discovery in thematic exhibitions. We organized two physical exhibitions, both of which provided us with the material to subsequently launch an online exhibition.<sup>5</sup> The first of these was held at CRCCF in Ottawa, from May to October 2019. Entitled "Au cœur du marché du livre. Les archives d'éditeurs au Canada" [At the Heart of the Book Market: Publishing Archives in Canada] the exhibition brought together archival materials from various Québec and French-Canadian fonds held by the UdeS library and archives services, and by the CRCCF. The second physical exhibition was presented at Université de Sherbrooke's Bibliothèque Roger-Maltais and focused on the Éditions Fides archives. Both exhibitions addressed the same question: what is it that makes a book sell? In order to provide answers, the exhibitions presented a



wealth of archival holdings, specifically those demonstrating the assorted strategies and tools developed by publishing houses to bolster their brand image, such as newspaper advertisements, catalogues, photographs, and commemorative publications, to name but a few. French-Canadian and Québec publishing house archival holdings, from the 1940s to today, testify to the diversity and persistence of advertising techniques exercised within the bookselling domain. They also paint a portrait of the working publisher as entrepreneur and as the protagonist of a publishing endeavour.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Archives Editoriales Platform. [online], [accessed 02.05.2024]. Available at: <http://archiveseditoriales.net>.

<sup>2</sup> PAQUETTE C., 21.05.2019. Stratégies éditoriales, stratégies marketing : fides et les journaux. In: Archives Éditoriales Project. [online], [accessed 02.05.2024]. Available at: <https://archiveseditoriales.net/strategies-editoriales-strategies-marketing-fides-et-les-journaux-par-camelia-paquette/>.

<sup>3</sup> FOLLONIER, S., 28.11.2019. Archives audiovisuelles de la littérature. In: Archives Éditoriales Project. [online], [accessed 02.05.2024]. Available at: <https://archiveseditoriales.net/archives-audiovisuelles-du-litteraire-par-selina-follonier/>.

<sup>4</sup> All issues of this publication and the full-text articles. See: Mémoires du livre/Studies in Book Culture [online], [accessed 02.05.2024]. Available at: <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/memoires/>.

<sup>5</sup> GLINOER, A., HOTTE, L. Au cœur du marché du livre. Les archives d'éditeurs au Canada: online exhibition. In: Littératures mode d'emploi. [online], [accessed 02.05.2024]. Available at: online exhibition.

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