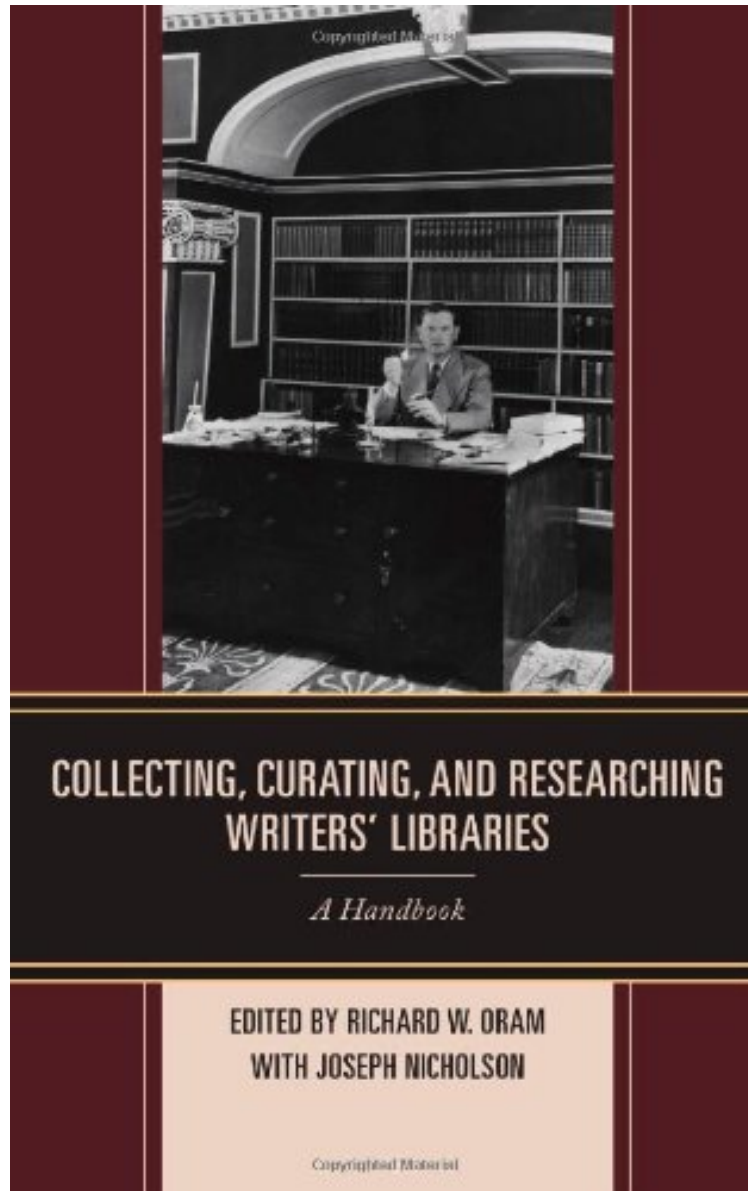


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Collecting, Curating, and Researching Writers' Libraries: A Handbook

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From Rowman Littlefield Publishers : Collecting, Curating, and Researching Writers' Libraries: A Handbook before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Collecting, Curating, and Researching Writers' Libraries: A Handbook:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An excellent handbook on a sexy subject
By Customer
The new book *Collecting, Curating, and Researching Writers' Libraries: A Handbook*, edited by Richard W. Oram and Joseph Nicholson (Rowman Littlefield, 2014) contains well-written and valuable essays on this understudied but worthy subject. Oram and Nicholson both contribute excellent and introductory pieces that provide an historical overview and curatorial considerations (Oram) and information on the process of cataloging writer's private libraries (Nicholson), replete with jargon that for many will be like a foreign language. Both, however, are easy to read and expert, and complement the other pieces contributed by booksellers, academics, librarians, and writers. A library and/or archive can house myriad items. For the purposes of this book, Oram states that a writer's library is "a set of books or other printed works owed by the author at a particular moment in time" (1-2). The use of books in a writer's library is expertly illustrated in Amanda Golden's chapter "Anne Sexton's Modern Library." In fact, it made me wish the volume contained more essays in this vein. Golden's scholarship is sound and well-presented. It shows how fascinating working with these books can be, and how illuminating it is to see the annotations and untraditional conversations Sexton had with author's and to consider their influence on her creative writing. Golden shows Sexton's reading reflects "a broader range of texts than critics may have previously assumed she had encountered" (66) and in consuming this chapter, I grew more eager for her forthcoming tome *Annotating Modernism: Marginalia and Pedagogy* from Virginia Woolf to the Confessional Poets to be published next year by Ashgate. It is bound to be a cornerstone work in this field. The next essay, by the Curator and Rare Books Librarian at Emory University David Faulds, "A Poet's Library Times Two: The Library of Ted Hughes at Emory University" was a letdown in some ways. It is a fascinating topic, but the absence of a bibliography and very weak notes were a curious and disappointing oversight. As well, there was a fairly heinous error made in discussing books Plath's received for Christmas in 1954 on pages 79-80. In discussing the importance of a book Aurelia Plath gave to her daughter in Christmas 1954, Grimm's *Fairy Tales* in German, Faulds writes "In August 1954 Plath had attempted suicide by taking a large overdose of sleeping pills and in October was moved from Massachusetts General Hospital to McLean Hospital This is where she was residing when her mother gave her this book as a Christmas present" (80). Faulds, who works at Emory and should have access to the correct information, gets the year Plath attempted suicide wrong. It was in August 1953. Aurelia Plath did give SP the book in Christmas 1954, which of course makes sense as in the summer of 1954 for this was after her daughter took German in Harvard Summer School and was enrolled in an Intermediate German course at Smith (as well as auditing a second German course) in the Fall of 1954. The gift of a German edition of Grimm's *Fairy Tales* makes much more sense contextually than to be so careless as to give her daughter a book in the midst of her recovery when, as part of the symptoms of her breakdown, it is reported that she lost some of her reading and writing capabilities. Even if you have never worked with a writer's library, this book will resonate and take hold of you. It makes you want to seek out and find where the books that belonged to your favorite (dead) writer are now held. Or, if you are on the fence about it, consider what Oram writes in the first chapter: "the sense of direct, even mystical, communion with a deceased creative individual through an item which once belonged to him or her" (13). This is exactly what it is like, in my experience, when I have worked with the books and other archival materials formerly belonging to Sylvia Plath. *Collecting, Curating, and Researching Writers' Libraries: A Handbook* includes a series of interviews with living writers with large libraries. About half the book is dedicated to a list of writers and the locations which hold their books. It is an indispensable resource guide to writers throughout many centuries. Overall, *Collecting, Curating, and Researching Writers' Libraries: A Handbook*, edited by Richard W. Oram and Joseph Nicholson, marks a significant publication on a largely ignored but hugely important aspect to archives and special collections. So often the focus of an archive is on the manuscripts, photographs, and other evidences of life. This may be right, but while we take much from written correspondence, it is sometimes the case that a person's library contains hidden conversations with a published author. There is value in this line of study, as this book makes unequivocally clear.

Academic collection practices in recent years have extended to the private libraries of notable individual authors. As a consequence, book historians have become more interested in the study of provenance of the contents of these libraries, while literary scholars have devoted more attention to authorial annotations. At the same time, the Internet has encouraged both scholarly and hobbyist reconstructions of private libraries (see, for example, the *Legacy Libraries* on Librarything.com). Although there are many bibliographies and reconstructions of the libraries of authors, this is the first general consideration of these libraries and serves as an introduction to best practices for academic libraries in their acquisition, cataloging and issues of access. This collection begins with principal editor Richard Oram's historical overview of writers libraries and institutional collecting, focusing primarily on English-language authors. The co-editor, Joseph Nicholson, has provided a definitive review of best cataloging and arrangement practices that facilitate scholarly access. The bookseller Kevin Mac Donnell discusses the marketing of these collections and obstacles to placing intact author libraries in institutions. Also included are case studies by Amanda Golden and David Faulds relating to the personal libraries of the poets Anne Sexton and Ted Hughes, indicating how these collections have the potential to enhance archival research. Fiction writers Iain Sinclair, Russell Banks, Jim Crace, poet Ted Kooser, and biographer Ron Powers describe their (sometimes passionate) relationship with books and their own personal libraries.

The concluding chapter, a location guide to over 500 individual libraries, will be invaluable to scholars and librarians who want to know where writers libraries are currently located, what happened to them (if they are known to have been sold or dispersed), and what has been written about them.

The preface points out that writers libraries are held by many, if not most, large literary special collections and that special collections librarians may well not have thought a great deal about how these collections are viewed . . . on the other hand, scholars may not have reflected very much about relevant access and cataloguing issues, or about how research in a writers private library might complement archival work. Encouraging both those constituencies to take more interest in books from these angles is a good thing, and as a flag-bearer for that campaign this book can be welcomed. (Library Journal)Collecting, Curating Researching Writers' Libraries: A Handbook . . . is a must-have for those with an interest in the private libraries of authors. (Fine Books Collections)The new book *Collecting, Curating, and Researching Writers' Libraries: A Handbook*, edited by Richard W. Oram and Joseph Nicholson contains well-written and valuable essays on this understudied but worthy subject. Oram and Nicholson both contribute excellent and introductory pieces that provide an historical overview and curatorial considerations (Oram) and information on the process of cataloging writer's private libraries (Nicholson), replete with jargon that for many will be like a foreign language. Both, however, are easy to read and expert, and complement the other pieces contributed by booksellers, academics, librarians, and writers. . . .Golden's scholarship is sound and well-presented. It shows how fascinating working with these books can be, and how illuminating it is to see the annotations and untraditional conversations Sexton had with author's and to consider their influence on her creative writing. . . .Even if you have never worked with a writer's library, this book will resonate and take hold of you. It makes you want to seek out and find where the books that belonged to your favorite (dead) writer are now held. . . .[This] is an indispensable resource guide to writers throughout many centuries . . . *Collecting, Curating, and Researching Writers' Libraries: A Handbook*, edited by Richard W. Oram and Joseph Nicholson, marks a significant publication on a largely ignored but hugely important aspect to archives and special collections. So often the focus of an archive is on the manuscripts, photographs, and other evidences of life. This may be right, but while we take much from written correspondence, it is sometimes the case that a person's library contains hidden conversations with a published author. There is value in this line of study, as this book makes unequivocally clear. (Sylvia Plath Info Blog)A collection of essays on this topic is a great idea, and its time is due! Authors' libraries are rich sources of information for literary scholars, and archival and curatorial strategies raise their own interesting sets of questions about such libraries and about institutional practices. As the first work of its kind, this will be a collection to look forward to. (Cristanne Miller, Edward H. Butler Professor of English and Chair of the Department at the University at Buffalo in New York)About the AuthorRichard W. Oram is Associate Director Hobby Foundation Librarian of the Harry Ransom Center. He received his B.A. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a Ph.D. in English from Cornell, and the M.L.I.S. from the University of Texas. Joseph Nicholson is Metadata Librarian at J. Murrey Atkins Library at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He previously worked as a cataloger at Louisiana State University Libraries. He holds an A.B. in Comparative Literature and Classics and an M.L.S. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as well as an M.A. in English literature from the College of William and Mary.