**Skye:**
WELCOME to Digging Deep into Other Worlds: Archival Research in Science Fiction. My name is Skye Cervone, and I will be your moderator this morning. I’m going to introduce each of our panelists. They will speak with you briefly and then we will open it up to comments and questions from the audience.

Daniel Creed is a Ph.D. candidate at Florida Atlantic University where he also earned his MA in science fiction and fantasy literature. In addition, Daniel is the current shadow division head for fantasy literature here at ICFA and a member of the editorial board for the Eaton Journal. His current research investigates epistemological possibilities within the shared megatext of fantasy literature.

Next, we have Kathryn Allan. Kathryn Allan, Ph.D. is an independent scholar of science fiction and disability studies. She is editor of the interdisciplinary collection, *Disability and Science Fiction: Representations of Technology as Cure* and co-editor of *Assessing the Future*, an anthology of disability themed intersectional SF short stories.

She is the inaugural recipient of the Le Guin feminist science-fiction fellowship and her writing appears in both academic and creative publications, most recently in *Techno Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction History and Media, Letters to Tiptree* and *The Wiscon Chronicles*. Next, we have J.J. Jacobson, who holds an M.S. in Information from the University of Michigan School of Information. Since 2005, she has been a metadata librarian, cataloguer, director of the virtual library system, rare books librarian, and a collection curator. In 2015, she was appointed the J.K. and Doris Klein Science Fiction Librarian at UC Riverside, curating the Eaton Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy and other genres too numerous to mention. She has previously published and presented on metadata virtual environments, role-play as a contaminant of research, virtual world librarianship, and American cultural history. Last but certainly not least, we were lucky enough to have one of our guests of honor with us today, author Steven Erikson.

**Daniel:**
Most of what we’re talking about today is archival research into Science Fiction and Fantasy. My own experience with that was through my master’s thesis, where I did some work on fantasy author Charles Finney, most notably on *The Circus of Dr. Lao* and was blessed to have at my university the Jaffe Collection, which is mostly about book arts. The collection holds a number of works and features variant covers in different versions and illustrations, but I went through and did both a visual art and textual analysis comparison of eight different reprints of that novel, both looking for textual variations but also differences in layout and book art that informed an entire chapter of the master’s thesis. The experience of being able to compare multiple editions of the texts that I had in front of me at one time without spending what amounted to more than my yearly stipend was useful to me.

By comparing the original printing of the text and then the next two or three printings, which were decidedly darker and darker in their illustrative intent and then progressively softening images in the printings that were Post-Tolkien from the seventies forward, I was able to show how the reception of the text had changed...
over time. It became one full chapter of comparison in my M.A. thesis, and I’ve done more work in the Jaffe, which I’ll be happy to expand upon later.

Kathryn:

In 2014, I was honored and lucky to receive the Le Guin Feminist Science Fiction fellowship, and that enabled me to go to the University of Oregon where they have the feminist science-fiction archives for Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Sally Miller Gearhart, Susan Haden Elgin, James Tiptree Jr., and some other local feminist science-fiction writers. But those were the women that I mostly looked at. As Skye mentioned, one of my research interests is in disability studies. For my project, I was interested in going to the archives to look at the personal correspondences of these writers to see if they had any kind of disability awareness because I knew that they were, you know, feminists, and I knew that they’d be having that conversation. I spent ten days in the archives, so that was eight or nine hours every day for ten days in the archives going through hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of letters. One of the things that surprised me is I didn’t find what I was looking for, and I didn’t even know how to look for it because I didn’t have any training going into archival research.

So what I ended up doing is I had to draw on my day job. I do freelance copy editing for academics, so a lot of my clients are social scientists, and in social science research methodology one of the things that you do is that you take field notes. And, at the end of the day you write down your reflections on what you did. So, I adopted this social science practice of reflecting on my day and writing down what I thought were the key takeaways from the research because it was letters and not just manuscript drafts and stuff like that. It was very, very personal. And, I didn’t have any idea of what to do with all this personal information that I’m learning about these people; they’re gossiping about people, there’s like all this drama going on, and it was quite emotionally difficult to get through a lot of the material. If you read Joanna Russ or if you’ve read James Tiptree Jr., they’re not exactly happy go lucky people.

So, you can imagine what their personal correspondence was like. One of my struggles when I left was what do I do with all this information that I have where I really didn’t find what I was looking for. My research interests now is focused on the things that I have been able to pull out of it and publish. They’re scholarly personal reflections where I also let myself into the text because I feel like it’s not fair to the writers to take their personal journeys and their personal reflections and do a really weirdly objective thing. That’s not going to work. So, I’m still working through issues of ethics. What do I do with this information? How do I use it? And, I have also become very interested in the act of letter writing and what is lost in correspondence that we have in terms of writing a letter down by hand or typing it. They usually use typewriters and mailing it versus email correspondence because there was a very noticeable shift in terms of what they wrote in letters and what they wrote in email. So, that’s where I’m at with the archive right now is I’m trying to think through “what do letters give us?” in terms of these personal narratives.

J.J.:

I’m J.J. Jacobson. I was an American culinary history librarian for a long while and it was an obvious transition to being a science fiction librarian. The
assumption tends to be that collections like the Eaton collection are about text. And, while that’s predominantly what the Eaton has to offer, and certain other science fiction libraries and archives that I’m aware of, that’s a function of the history of science fiction and fantasy, which has, to a large extent, been written down, often on paper. Yet, the fantastic has always thrived in all sorts of other media, including digital media and performance. And so there’s a ton of current media not owned by or due to the speculative fiction world that’s fantastical anyway, right? People say, oh, I really like Harry Potter or yeah, I’ve been watching all of The Huntsman, but they never think of themselves as Science Fiction and Fantasy fans.

My first exposure to SF studies was the Sawyer seminar on alternate futurisms at Riverside a couple of years ago. There I learned, after having been a science fiction librarian for about three and a half minutes, that it’s not just text that science fiction scholars take as legitimate subjects of study in the fantastical. This was a bit of a surprise, and a happy surprise. It turned out not only media (tv, films, cartoons) but also playing games, virtual environments, performance, either planned, or improvisatory. And, even somewhere, sometime at the Sawyer Seminar, somebody mentioned out of body experiences. I thought I was walking into a world full of English majors who were going to disdain anything that wasn’t text. You can imagine my surprise, right?

From an archival point of view, or really even a librarian’s point of view, the routines for text, traditionally physical format that an archive owns, by virtue of the fact that they have the rights to it and it lives there. It is a physical thing that sits on the shelves. That routine is well worked out: how to apply metadata to it, how to make it accessible, how to describe it. For other formats, things are less clear. What if you have a copy and you have the right to share it, but the physical format lives elsewhere, or if you have access to both physical and digital, but the researcher has to ask the creator for access to it? All those sorts of things, we’re kind of making them up as we go along. For instance, we have Karen Lorde’s papers, but ultimately, the physical part is destined to go to a repository in the Caribbean because that’s where she feels it’s most important to have her papers. We’re digitizing them, and scholars will have access to the digital version, but in what sense have we collected her papers? Her papers include a map. That’s the sort of thing I’m most interested in right now.

Steve:
Well, I guess I’m here to represent the future nightmare for archivists. I’ll use an archaeological terminology for my collection of sourcing through continuous stratigraphic decomposition. Just boxes full of papers that come from most of the gaming that Cam and I conducted that became the foundation of the Malazan series. So, that includes maps, that includes character sheets, includes long sheets of NPC characters, descriptions, some illustrations, and it’s all a complete mess. I know I rely upon Cam a lot because I email him. He’s much more organized with the gaming stuff. Although I was talking to him, and he says a whole bunch of stuff was lost, as well. So, I feel sorry for whoever is going to take a look at this stuff.

Daniel:
Well that’s great news! Someone can go through and curate that.
Skye:  
Well, I heard that the process has begun.

Steve:  
Yeah, I kidnapped an Irish scholar, who spent say three months going through the papers and such. He did a good job. I’ve built a kind of a library because I get a lot of personal copies of books, sometimes in various languages, and so he emptied lots of space, which I’ve already since filled up. It piles up very fast, and if I got off my butt, I could start setting some books out, and clear some room, but I can’t do that.

Skye:  
Steve, have you given any conscious thought to a future archive?

Steve:  
No, the problem is so much of this is actually archived in the memory of two people. We have to engage in a conversation quite often to recollect episodes of things that happened in the campaign just to get our storyline straight, which we rarely succeed in doing. We work it out, but it’s an ongoing process. You could track some of it through emails. My g-mail account has thousands and thousands of emails. So, probably you could do that, but I mean the whole, this whole electronic revolution has really made it problematic for future archivists because it’s ephemeral right? It goes.

J.J.:  
Yes and no. We have a machine called F.R.E.D., which stands for Forensic Rubbed Recovery of Evidence Device, that can get usable, understandable information of an amazing variety.

Steve:  
That’s a scary thought.

Skye:  
Well, I do have another question before we open it up to the floor. This is more directed towards the researchers. Is there something you wish you had known going into the archival research process that you were surprised by or unprepared for? Something you would like to pass on to someone considering such an endeavor.

Kathryn:  
I wish I had known what to expect from looking at personal correspondence. I didn’t expect them to be so personal. I know that sounds really ridiculous, but I didn’t know that I was going to be reading such personal information. For example, when Russ is writing to Tiptree, there is an awareness, especially on Tiptree’s side, that her letters are being archived. They will be read in the future, but someone like Joanna Russ didn’t really start off with that idea that she was going to have an archive, so they only know that they are being read by each other. There’s some idea that they’re going to be read in the future, but that’s not their primary concern. So, they’re writing that they’re sick, they’re depressed, they’re having these problems,
their legs hurt. They were very intimately personal, and I didn't expect to be affected emotionally by the material. If it had just been drafts of novels, for example Le Guin’s process on writing *Earthsea*, then it would've been very different. But because I was looking for disability awareness, I had to read their private thoughts, and I cried in the archives several times because I was reading people who are very depressed. Tiptree’s life does not have a good ending, if you're not familiar with her work.

And, I didn’t really know what to do with that. So, I wish that I had somebody that I could have talked to beforehand, and even after, who had dealt with the material in that way. The archivists there were wonderful. I love them, but they didn't approach the material in that same way because their personalities are a little different. So, I just wish I had a better way of approaching the material when I started because I felt very lost. And when I got home, for like two weeks, I had like these women living in my head and being like, here’s all my problems. You're a bad feminist. And I felt like I was losing what I had gone there for. I had to leave the research for about six months before I could even touch it again because it was just so emotionally volatile and that was something that I was completely not prepared for.

So, it's one of those things that I'm still working through. What do I do with this information? I'm not a biographer. I have no desire to be a biographer. So, as an academic, where is the ethics line? How objective and subjective are you? So that's kind of the thing. If you're going to an archive and you’re going to be looking at personal materials, ask the archivist or try to find somebody who's been there before and go in with an idea of what you're going to read and have a system of debriefing yourself at the end of the day. Have somebody to talk to. I mean I love Ursula Le Guin and I love that Joanna Russ terrified me through her letters. Do you know what I mean? Like these are people I admired, and then all of a sudden, they're there. And one of the weird things that came out of it too is then I kind of became like a creepy fan for Le Guin for a while.

I was like, I know so much about, and you don’t know anything about me. So one of the things that I did, after reading nearly thirty years of this woman's letters, is I ended up writing her a letter afterwards saying I just want to introduce myself to you because I've learned a lot about you, and I understand the relationship is not reciprocal at all. However, hello, I've done this research. I won’t share your information casually. I had to feel like I had to at least have that kind of connection, and she emailed me back. Of course, it’s very nice, brilliantly literally email, which was wonderful. And then so I felt okay with that, but it is really weird. You can be a little fan stalker, you know what I mean?

**Daniel:**

Does that email become a part of her archive in the future?

**Kathryn:**

Oh, absolutely. It'll be in her random fan file probably, but that’s fine. I don’t mind it. When I was writing it, I was aware of the process of writing letters and now I actually write more letters to my friends. It actually caused me to become a creative writer. That was an unexpected thing because I was inspired by them. So, I was like, if I can’t use this for scholarship, I can use it to do creative work. I've
started doing creative work because of it, and I’ve started writing letters, paper letters, to my friends because I feel like that is a practice that’s dying out. Those are unexpected things that had no idea going into it.

Daniel:

I wish I had had enough of a background where I could have taken field notes and done daily reflections on archival research. It sounds wonderful to me. To keep with the panel theme and certainly, you know, not only kind of the gaming stuff for Cam and Steve, but I wonder how much other random bits make their way in that aren’t necessarily part of the actual gaming moment, but more part of the dig site moment during the day that happened to lead to the gaming session or whenever y’all were doing at that time. Yet, at the same time, those things in their own way might be able to speak to what J.J. was saying, that it’s not all text. It’s not even all correspondence. Some of this stuff that seems completely discontinuous with what you’re doing.

That was part of my experience researching the very small kind of archive that I was looking at and part of my desire to be on this panel was to learn some things from those who had done it, because I do want to go into Finney’s personal correspondence and letters in Arizona. And this idea being able to be open about necessarily what I’m looking for, not with one question perhaps, but with an open mind. This is why I really liked the idea of field notes. You have no idea what you’re going to find in there. I have no idea what any of it is going to say. And so in part, kind of going in with that open mind, being able to take those field notes and reflect on them later I think is an amazing thing because if we’re going into answer one question then we’re skimming, right? We’re not necessarily in the moment as you were, feeling the emotion and not only the affect but also cognition created by these letters and our entrance into them. The other thing I think might be really neat to open it up to, and your letter to Le Guin made me think about this, is that as researchers into an archive, when we go in and start going through these things and reading them ourselves, are we creating our own personal version of that archive like in our head and curating it on our own? How does the idea of kind of forensics digging through digitation alter what of that we keep in our own heads? How does this metadata and research and how it’s kind of pulling through things and how does that article change the function, or does it change the function of the archive moving forward?

J.J.:

So I have, in my own private archive in my head lists of things that undergraduates say when they’re first exposed to archival research. Things such as, “Hi! I want to prove this. Give me the material that will prove it.” The thing about an archive, what makes primary source material primary source material is that it’s not neatly organized. Unless you have the papers of somebody unbelievably obsessed with futurity only getting their own version of their life. It’s random; it’s rich. You can’t apply subject headings to it. You can’t say, “Well, these three letters prove x.” Primary source material is, by definition, material generated in the course of activities in the world, and nobody, nobody’s only an author; nobody is only a correspondent.
Nobody is only someone whose legs hurt them at the end of the day. It's all mixed up there. I had a moment with understanding primary source material when I was a culinary history curator. Someone came in to look for something, who was an archaeologist that was, you know, she did her food studies stuff while they like digging into the middens of slave cabins in the South, and I thought that’s primary material. That’s our primary source. And, of course, there no clear subject to it. There is no clear information that you’re going to get when you come out. I hadn’t thought about the fact that, I mean I’ve thought about it with undergraduates because it’s so comical, but I really, I hadn't thought about that in terms of serious research, although I do notice that someone who has researched with primary source material more than once is ready for that; for the miscellaneity and the slog. The thing that stands out for me is that it’s a slog. If you want to go from the primary undigested source, it’s a slog. I don't know if that answers your thought.

Steve:
I think the archeology is a nice sort of discipline to extend the metaphor because even in a primary source, for example, that midden, you've got selective survival of materials, and if you draw conclusions based exclusively on that material, you’re probably off the mark. That's probably the same in archival stuff. Whatever is going to survive, it may present or allow you to create a thesis of some form, but it’s missing so much stuff. I look at my own stuff and there’s more missing then present. So, that’s one of the caveats for archaeology. You've got to be careful even in your primary sources and drawing conclusions.

Skye:
Well, and I think that reflects nicely on what you were saying, Kathryn, about the question of ethics when you're going through this personal information, especially when that personal information was not designed for research. To go through and navigate those issues. As researchers, I think ultimately we want the complete picture, right? We want to engage in ethical practices, and I think that's a very different thing in an archive that is just looking at books or journals.

Kathryn:
To be clear, anything that I've published, like if you, if you want to quote from Le Guin or Russ, or whomever's papers, you must ask them or the person who runs their estate for permission to publish from their letters. So, they did read what I wrote, and they were ok with it. There is that ethical backdrop but like there's nothing stopping me from me just telling you right now in this room. I have all the letters on me. I have all the letters on my home computer, hundreds and hundreds of letters. And the University of Oregon has documentation because when you’re in the archive, you’re allowed to take photos or scans, but you have to make sure you fill it out on a line. I took this picture at this time of this letter. There is that kind of a check. In the news last year was a case in Australia where a researcher who found out personal information about an author who, I can’t remember, but she went public with it and was going to publish these letters that this author had written that she was not happy about. And I was like, how can you possibly do that? To me that was like such a breach of unethical trust, especially when the authors like please do not publish those letters. So, I think it's interesting
to see the motive of that person compared to my motive, which was I feel very protective over the information that I learned. And I’m like, no, it’s all mine. It’s all mine. That’s the creepy fan again coming up. It wasn’t an ethical thing, and that’s probably why I haven’t published purely scholarly work out of it because I can’t. It wouldn’t necessarily be illuminating or, in my opinion, very ethical.

Daniel:
I think that becomes a question of what does and doesn’t go into the article, so to speak. Steve, if you were consciously creating an archive, is there stuff that you would like to withhold, I assume, or is it disingenuous to the idea of the archive to keep things out?

Steve:
Yeah, I think it would be.

Daniel:
And hope that the researcher is more like Kathryn and less like the person in Australia?

Kathryn:
One of the quotes that I really liked from Joanna Russ in her letters to Tiptree, she said, I certainly hope people reading this in the future understand that this is not about us being crazy, but it’s about the world being impossible to live in. Basically hoping the future scholars wouldn’t judge them but the world in which they lived, and I just really loved that. She was aware of that kind of thing. She’s like, don’t judge us. We’re not the problem. It is this messed up world that we’re living in.

Audience question:
Could that also be a conscious editing of the material on their side?

Kathryn:
For Tiptree, her correspondence, she’s always kind of knowing, but it took Russ a while before she gets there. Was this one for later? That was. But yes, they are conscious that this is going into an archive and steering corrections. There are certain letters that are more obviously aware of a futurity to them and other letters are not depending on how they were feeling when they wrote it.

Steve:
I can’t think of anything in my archives where I was aware of any future aspect. It was mostly just gaming notes...

Daniel:
And now every email you’ve ever sent or received.

Kathryn:
Would you be comfortable with your personal emails? So that’s what I want to ask you. Would you be comfortable with all your emails going into an archive of all your personal information?
Steve:

Probably, yeah. I think so. I mean I can't think of anything off the top of my head that was so egregious that it would get me in jail or anything.

Daniel:

It'll kind of be interesting to see what we do going forward with spam emails in that respect though, right? How many different sales things you get in a week in a random email box? Does that not go into an archive, or do we all accept it? Well, this is garbage. No one needs to read this again.

J.J.:

Move forward a hundred years. Somebody who doesn't really care about a given author will be fascinated by the state of spam.

Daniel:

There will be multiple dissertations on why some random author was obsessed with male sexual dysfunction or something because of the number of spam emails in a given day.

Kathryn (to Steve):

Do you have, do you save all your fan letters too?

Steve:

Um, yeah. I kind of saved them, but I don't get any letters that are handwritten. I get them now from Russia, actually. Russian fans and the diction and structure of the sentences, I mean you want to frame sections because they are so fantastic, writing in second and third languages, but most of it by email.

Kathryn:

That would be part of your archive too. They're really useful. I found the fan letters, like if I could go back again, I would look at fan letters. I'm not a fan studies person, but the fan letters are fascinating because they come from all over the world and like Le Guin, in particular, saves all of her fan letters that she's ever been written from children as young as five to people who are like in their nineties, and she occasionally writes people back, but not always. She always usually tries to write children back because she thought that was fair to do. So, I think that if you're a fan studies person and you can locate an author like Le Guin, or somebody else who saved their fan letters from the last forty years, how amazing would that be? Right. Because they're directly saying, here's what I love about your work. I'm so happy that you had a girl in your novel. It was really fascinating. I would go through them, and they're not organized at all. They're just sorted by decade. They're not neat.

Skye:

Okay, I would like to open this up to audience questions and comments.

Audience member:

I guess my question is, I want to return to your first comments about how you decided to use the field notes and then decided to have daily reflections. If you
had it to do over again what would you focus on? How would you approach it? What are your recommendations for the physical, nature of having to search through hundreds and hundreds of documents, and to be able to use your time best? Since most of the time when we get the opportunity to explore an archive, we don't have unlimited time.

Kathryn:
I probably actually would keep it pretty much the same because I did, like I did do some reading before I went just to prepare myself. I think if I could go back, I would probably take more extensive field notes, not only at the end of my day but during my lunch break. As, by the end of the day you've probably forgotten some things that you've learned at the beginning of the day. So, I would have made two sets of notes during the day. I would've done it on my lunch break and at the end of the day, and I probably would have stopped myself from taking so many pictures of the letters. I felt like I was going to miss out on information if I didn't document everything. So, then I ended up with all these hundreds of letters that I'm just like, I don’t know what to do with it. So, I probably would have been more willing to let things go and take more extensive notes because knowing that I can always contact the archivist and request a scan instead of being bogged down and feeling like I needed to take that information with me. So yeah, I would’ve doubled my field note taking and taken fewer scans of the pictures.

Audience member:
Yes, I just wanted to comment briefly because I was so struck by what you were saying. My background was medieval literature, so I spent a lot of time working in archives on medieval books and doing that kind of almost archaeological work. And then I transitioned into publishing studies and did a project around Stephen King. In archival work around Stephen King, I found it was so wildly different in terms of the experience of doing it in part because questions about ethics did kind of come up because I was doing a combination of interviews, and I had found material that fans had archived from the publishing records but weren’t deposited anywhere except for the personal collection.

Audience member:
Regarding the utilization of the internet and social media, you aren't fully in the category of letters because it is recording everything you view, rate, and comment on, and how do you manage the different identities people might have online in terms of different social media accounts? Steve, would you want your different online personas if you have them, to be included in letters, or thought of as part of that category, or your browser history?

Steve:
Yeah, but at the same time it would be to be suicidal to imagine that this stuff is not going to be accessible to someone somewhere at some point in time. So, one has to be reasonable in terms of expectations, and so I don’t have a huge online presence. I did create a Captain Hadrian Facebook page, but I only visit him very infrequently. Maybe that’s telling in and of itself. You could track that sort of thing I suppose. So no, I just make an assumption that whatever goes online is, it's not
something that I'll ever be able to retract or hide. At the same time you can think about, I've got a home desktop computer but I'm not the only one on it, so what attaches to me or someone else?

Daniel:
It poses interesting questions moving forward. We are digging through this research, but what tools will we have to create in order to attempt to filter such things? What will we lose? What false conclusions will we draw? For example, I'm looking through Steven's Erikson's computer and he's looking at all of these things. And of course, for all we know it's some random person or a child who's looking at these things online for a history report and we're like, wait, I can find how this works, and we create these arguments. To kind of get back to the archeology metaphor, which I think is, you know, strikingly wonderful that it ended up on the panel, since it's kind of what we're all talking about in a very amateurish way, without the terminology or necessarily the same kind of rules that we follow. So, I do wonder, like movies watched or you watched this, so you might like x, you know, are the machines already trying to determine our personality? How much of that determination gets recorded and presented as our personality and how much of it is the machine's determination? How will we filter through that kind of stuff?

Steve:
And the machines are archiving as we go...

Daniel:
Then, is the machine's archive within our archive, or do we need permission of the machine? As weird as that sounds, if that's their archive, do I then, if I'm writing about you, do I write to Steven Erikson or do I write dear Steven Erikson's Netflix account, I would like to publish the following. So, what is the technology that we have now, and what do we need to build going forward? I would ask J.J., what do we have now?

J.J.:
What I am thinking is on the one hand, yes, the bits and bytes that make up all your tweets could be accessed. But, given the way the format of digital communication changes, there might be some really fancy coding a hundred years from now to get that material. One of the advantages that paper has is that it doesn’t need intermediation. You can pick it up, you can read it, unless it’s faded and you need to do, you know, infrared, whatever. Whereas all the kinds of things we’ve been talking about are mediated. They need certain programs to run. Ultimately either what they’re now used on, to be emulated or there has to be some kind of format migration. All of which is kind of invisible, you know, cause libraries and archives just kind of do it quietly on the side. But in fact, the things that now look to you like they're going to be most open might be the things that take the most enormous effort for a researcher in a hundred years to get at, at all.

Steve:
I'm already aware of that. I wrote Deadhouse Gates on a thing called a Psion Five, which is this little keyboard and monochrome screen. Yeah, I wrote the entire
novel on that, so it is there, but if you don't have a Psion Five, forget it. You can't do anything with it.

Kathryn:
Can I just say one thing? One of the things that I'm interested in in terms of how technology has changed not only the way in which the archive is saved, but the way in which the archive is developed. So, when people are writing a paper letter or they're typing a paper letter, they probably drafted it first and then rewrote it or wrote it by hand and then typed it up, but not always. There's a different kind of immediacy and on paper letters, there's the texture of the paper that they used, whether they were stealing it from work, or it had dragons on it, or they doodled on it. They include a lot of doodles and stuff like that. However, when we write an email, you can hide all your changes. It's not evident to the person who's saving it, that that's your fifth draft.

And there's not probably, they're probably not saving every draft of the email. Whereas for letters in the archive, there are the draft letter sometimes and the final letter that went out. So, you can see sometimes where they've decided, "oh, I probably shouldn't say that," or they're correcting a typo. Usually, it's because they want to be wittier, put in some kind of pun or something that I find very interesting too is that one where like if you're writing on your little tiny computer and how it's changing how the drafts are saved and tracking it between all those things. Because back in the day, authors printed out some of the pages, made the revisions, got it back from their editor. And, now that's changing the process with how authors are tracking their drafts. How does that change the process? And I'm really interested in those kinds of jumps from a material archive to a digital archive that changes the way in which it was even created in the first place.

Steve:
Well, that's the thing. Everything is becoming invisible.

Stephen R. Donaldson (audience):
And there's all kinds of technology items there for tracking every single key stroke of your work. You can go and find every draft created and every typo the editor sent you.

Daniel:
And every time the person stopped for any length of time.

Kathryn:
And then that changes the way in which you read it though, right?

Daniel:
It does. Because are you imagining that this letter was written in one sitting, you know, whereas this letter, it may not tell us so, but it may have been begun in the morning and then they did something else. So, when their legs are hurting at the end of the day, they're no longer in the same space mentally and emotionally that they were in the beginning of that letter and how that changes the affect.
Kathryn:
I can tell you that the emails are not as interesting to read as the written letters. It has nothing to do with the people producing it. I think it has to do with the medium in which it was produced.

Audience:
I have a question about the ethics you were talking about earlier. Do you think this idea of what the conscientious researcher can and cannot share, does that change after the death of an author? Does that like make a major impact?

Kathryn:
Yeah. And for me personally, I haven’t published anything on Le Guin, and I probably won’t until after she passes. I just don’t feel comfortable doing so. So what I have published on, it’s been on Joanna Russ and Tiptree. For me, I kind of needed that divide, mostly because I’m kind of intimidated by them. It’s kind of a natural reaction. But not everybody’s like that. I think it depends on who you are and what kind of material you’re writing about. I’ve used quotes from Le Guin’s things, but I wouldn’t write about her. I wouldn’t feel comfortable doing that.

Audience:
J.J., what would you want a scholar with a medium amount of archival experience to know coming in to the Eaton, especially about the kind of finding aids versus this is the catalog and kind of everything that goes into those things?

J.J.:
Well, I've sort of already said it, but I'll say it in a freestanding way. There is no “aboutness” in an archive. Librarians often pretend there is an “aboutness,” and sometimes there is indeed a subject, but one of the biggest battles in cataloguing is where in the catalog record do you make the distinction between what a book is about and what a book is? And so when you're cataloging cookbooks, the subject is not cookbooks. The subject is cooking, right? When you're cataloging a book about Julia Child and what she wrote, then the subject is cookbooks. Transferring that over to archives, the subject is not Ursula Le Guin, right? The subject is what Ursula Le Guin thought about, what she said she saw, and talked about and wrote. So, maybe this is kind of a leap.

One thing to know when you go into the archive is you’re going to encounter the miscellaneous. It’s not going to be easy. It’s going to be a slog. And there’s going to be lots of interpretation, which as we’ve been saying, stands a fairly good chance of being wrong. So, one way to get around that is to use many sources for Ursula Le Guin, it’s all kind of in one place. You know, on the other hand, for Philip K. Dick, it’s all over creation and in a way that allows you to triangulate more different pieces. If there is this imaginary entity known as the Phillip K. Dick archive, it’s all over the place, and it has supplementary materials that are very important to look at, like the Netflix account brought up earlier. Some crook of a dealer reasonably wanted to charge me $40,000 for a collection of Tolkien family letters.

So nothing by J.R.R., and nothing by Christopher, his literary executor, but stuff by his wife and daughters to family friends. So, you could see what Tolkienisms crept into their daily life. It certainly wasn’t for us, but for one of the big Tolkien
archives, it would be brilliant because it allows you to triangulate. So, I guess the advice, there is to use many sources, and go down some of those rabbit holes. Don’t expect it to be easy, pursue many sources, expect miscellany.

**Kathryn:**
...and go out to lunch with the archivists.

**J.J.:**
Particularly if the archivist has been there for a long time, because there were things that just don’t make it into the finding aids. I’m going to have a soap box moment.

We talk a lot about what’s archivists’ work and what’s scholars’ work. Archivists’ work is to make sure that all the names are correct and to make sure that things are dated correctly and things like that. Making the distinction between say a casual letter where the author was actually writing to someone and self-conscious letters where the author was writing for attribution, that’s over in scholars’ work. Really, any matter of interpretation. So another piece of advice would be to expect the archivist to have done the archival work, but any question of meaning you’re on your own.

**Audience:**
This is kind of a question for everyone, but how do you see archival research relating to creative writing? When you go really deep into someone’s archival writing, whether creative writing or in your own research, does that change how you write?

**Kathryn:**
It definitely did for me, because I had already read the women that I was studying, it did give me a deeper appreciation of where they were coming from in terms of their feminist politics. I was already aware of it, but I wasn’t really that cognizant of just how much that conversation was important in their friendships. So, I thought that was something that changed how I then read their work. It gave me a better understanding of where to situate them in terms of the larger genre, and then as I was discussing earlier, it definitely inspired me to become a, to admit that, yeah, I’m actually a creative writer and not just a scholarly writer, because one of the things that they’re writing to each other is they’re encouraging each other to write.

They’re like, women need to write, we need to write these feminist things and Joanna Russ in particular, even though she was really terrifying to me, she’s like the most feminist person I’ve ever encountered in any kind of space, real or not. And she was very much like, you have to do this for survival and you have a right to write, and you should be doing it, and this is how we create community, and this is how we create futures. So, for me that was really inspiring to transform it into that. And like what Helen said is it was like kind of the only way that I can actually process that particular information. Whereas it would’ve been very different if I was just looking at drafts of books. I probably would’ve been like, “oh, this is an interesting way that I can apply to my own writing,” but not the same kind of ephemeral inspiration kind of feeling.
Daniel: I think for me, since I was only looking at the books and doing much more textual and visual analysis between copies, it didn't, and I have no creative talent or desires at all.

Kathryn: ...that you've yet recognized.

Daniel: I guess what I would say is that there are portions of it that inform my scholarship on notions of and ideas of craft, and I think that were I creative in that respect, with wanting to write creatively, that I would take those notions of craft and do something very different with them than I do. Whereas for me, it goes through the scholarly. Another instance that I had done of this, though very informally and didn't really realize what I was doing at the time, was some textual analysis with an Updike short story of all things, where he changed two very simple things. He changed the type of car someone was driving, and then in what may have been a typo, shirt becomes skirt. Which I didn't think anything of, and most people wouldn't think anything of the fact that a guy goes from driving a Corvair to driving a Mustang in the second draft. But to me, it changed everything about the story because you could buy a four-door Corvair. You can't buy a four-door Mustang. If you're a family guy, why would you have a two-door coupe as your only vehicle? If he hits a telephone pole head-on, I know the Mustang won't run because the radiator's busted, but the Corvair is a rear engine car. So, these are the things I'm thinking of and I'm thinking, "ok, well I know that this story is created around the time that Updike's going through his divorce." So, I went back through an archive and looked at some of that time span of letters and such to see if I could find out where his thinking was at. In a way of triangulating an influence. Where did he get so irritated that he moved this guy into a two-door, or that he absolved himself? Is this really what he did?

Steve: Yeah, this is scary.

Daniel: I made great presumptions. This is an undergraduate paper, so let's not pretend it was brilliant, but kind of went for this moment where, ok, he's got his character in the Mustang, and it's clearly in some ways, Updike by the way he's doing it. Then he changes it and puts the character in a Corvair. Now, he is allowing the character to look like a family man instead of the guy who refused to let go of his coupe, you know? And so, it was finding that same moment in the letters and seeing if I could match up the chronology to it, which I could. It's a very different way of looking at craft. But as a scholar, that's part of what I look to, whereas I think if I was more creative minded, I might look back into, what would happen if I made this one change in my work? You know, cause no one else in this room might have ever thought about the difference between a Mustang and a Corvair, who cares? Whereas for me, it was the most important thing I'd read in that story.
Audience:

J.J., I wonder if you can go back and answer the question you alluded to earlier. What do you wish that authors knew before they agreed to deposit their papers there?

J.J.:

Well, when somebody asks me about their papers, or we have some of someone’s papers and the rest are coming, the rules are don’t get hit by a truck, don’t throw anything away, and don’t let your house burn down. More is better; more different kinds of stuff is better. We don’t necessarily want like every receipt you’ve ever had from the nearby 7-11. But your receipts from bookstores, maybe. Generally, more is better. Imposing some kinds of organization is fine, but again, it’s that difference. It’s factual stuff and meaning, like if your correspondence is by date or by correspondent, that’s great. Trying to organize it so it makes the most sense to you in terms of subjects of the letters is harder for the archivist. On the other hand, there’s this nebulous thing when we talk about which is collecting the collector’s mind.

So, actually what I just said is negating what I just said. More is better. It’s great if you organize it, but it’s easier for us if you organize it in objective ways rather than in subjective ways, but better for the research or maybe if the reverse is true. Condition is a big deal. I have my notes up here. One of them is the standard checklist of questions we ask about material condition. Has it been stored in a dusty place? Has it been stored in a damp place? Has it been stored in a very hot environment? All of those are going to change processing time. Some authors don’t care, they liked the idea of it being archived and they want to get it out of the basement. Some authors really, really want it processed for posterity asap and some of the things I’ve just said about condition and organization mattered very much.

Other specifics in your question, the kind of thing that archivists worry about is condition and organization. In archival theory, the two important things are arrangement and description. In arrangement, the big important thing is original order. Sometimes you can tell that there is an original order correspondence filed by date and correspondence manuscripts, organized by first draft, second draft, third draft, and it’s in that original order, there’s a lot of information. That’s great, when we get it. Sometimes it’s randomly in a box and then there is no original order. That’s harder for the person doing the finding aid, but potentially richer for the researcher.

Audience:

What’s the most exciting thing that you found in an archive?

J.J.:

Yeah, the syringe. (to audience member) Why don’t you talk about the syringe?

Audience:

Well, we’re digitizing the fanzines or are in the process of it at the Eaton, and I opened this collection of zines and a syringe was pasted into it so that it was a rocket, and it’s actually really racist. There was an Asian man depicted next to it,
talking about it, but I didn’t show it to my colleague who’s my age. I had her open it and look at it, freaked out, and like we showed it to two, three or four other people as well, depending on the age of the person. It was the grossest thing in the world because we grew up during the AIDS crisis. So, syringes and needles were this thing that Sesame Street was telling you to tell your parents about, but J.J. opened it, and she’s like, oh, syringe, okay, whatever.

Kathryn:

If you’re a researcher it’s going to be ambiguous, there’s going to be random organization. In the finding documents at the University of Oregon, they have it generally by year and correspondence, so it’s three letters and then it’s by decade. Then you go in, and it’s broken down by years. But then there’s the miscellaneous folder. One, two, three, four. Right, so I had some extra time, so I would say always make time to look into miscellaneous folders because the archives are always a process, especially if it’s a living author who’s still cleaning up their basement because they probably have a lot of stuff in there. So, I was looking on my very last afternoon in the miscellaneous category, just randomly, and I ended up finding four postcards that Tiptree had written to Le Guin that the archive didn’t know about because it was in the miscellaneous folder. It’s such a small thing, but after ten days of like eight-hour days, ten days of eight hours, you feel like you’ve found the holy grail. I was like, I found a missing piece of the archive, and the archivists were so nice. They were all coming over and saying, “we heard about your big find.” I think this is the smallest little discovery, but it filled in a little chunk, filled in about a year’s time when Tiptree was away traveling, and ill, and so it filled in this little tiny blank. So, that was the most exciting thing. I always look in the miscellaneous files because you never actually know what you’re going to find in there all. It could be not miscellaneous folders, one through four, it could be miscellaneous boxes ten through thirty-five. So, there’s another tip, leave lots of time. Now you have an idea for random things to throw into your boxes, Steve.

Steve:

Yeah, I can think of one that’s already in there, it’s my wife’s letter collection. At the time, my wife to be. I was traveling, well I was living in Port Saskatcheawan, working for Dow Chemicals of all places, and I got out for a weekend. She was in England with her friends and we were exchanging letters every now and then, but I got out for a weekend to Wood Buffalo National Park and I went to track Bison, and I couldn’t get close. They were in glades between the forest patch, and I could never get close enough to get good pictures. So, when I came home I slipped a tuft of bison hair into the envelope and sent it off to Claire. I know she has it still somewhere. Someone in the future is going to find this envelope with bison hair…

Audience:

Based on what Kathryn was saying, when it comes to personal correspondence? So, I’m a librarian who works on digital archives rather than an archivist who works in digital archives, and, I come at it and probably come in with different perspectives.
J.J.: 
To be fair, I should’ve said this the beginning. I am not a trained archivist, but I know what archivists do, but I’m actually a librarian. Take everything I’ve said for this last hour and a half with a large grain of salt.

**Audience:**
One of the things we have talked about is the ethics of working with personal correspondence, so working with material there’s an urge to digitize everything, throw it all up there so everyone can get access to it. And when you take this idea that you have this very personal correspondence that may have intentionally been meant for an archive, when you sort of see the shifting nature of archives, do you see this particularly when the author may have passed away and we don’t have the ability to just consult with them. There’s a difference between an intention of my personal correspondence will go into a box that five to ten people a year might look at it if I’m lucky, versus someone who’s going to take my personal correspondence, put it on the internet, and anyone and everyone can get access to it at all times. What are some of your feelings regarding that differentiation given your work with correspondence? Whether it is okay to release these things because, at a certain point, the release becomes at the discretion of the archives.

**Kathryn:**
I think the author gets to say not whether it it should be public, but I think they can control whether it’s digitized or not, no?

**J.J.:**
Le Guin is almost at one extreme.

**Kathryn:**
Yeah, technically anyone can look at it, but I think she prefers if you ask to look in her letters.

**J.J.:**
I understood that you had to ask.

**Kathryn:**
Yeah, there are people who embargo, where embargoing means say, you know, my papers cannot be looked at until everybody I’ve written about or to is dead, or a hundred years after my death, or whatever. I was just looking at my boiler plate for writing to authors and I was looking at what you want to do about your correspondence and one of the things that I think that authors have begun doing with the internet, in terms of correspondence. What I noticed is that a lot of the things that they used to talk about in personal correspondence has disappeared. I didn’t spend a lot of time with emails. But the emails, become more “daughter is doing fine, then business.” “The theoretical or philosophical discussions about politics and craft have become blog posts largely now for all authors. But I noticed that there’s this trend. So, in a way, an author’s archive has already been transmuted into the digital format through blog posts that they know are going to be read forever. Those kinds of conversations are already being moved into that sphere.
Audience:
I guess my interest is, we are talking about contemporary authors but the material out there, the stuff that was maybe ingested to an archive fifty years ago. When the question of digitalization wouldn't even be on the table. Do you see any sort of role of that ethical dilemma of digitization for those authors?

Kathryn:
I personally would consider what's in the material. And then, of course, there's still somebody who's probably in control of their estate and would have say over what can be released and what cannot be released. But if it's like two hundred years later, I mean

J.J.:
This is where research from medieval authors is actually simpler.

Kathryn:
No one's going to kick up a fuss and you talk about a secret affair or something.

J.J.:
This is a conversation that repositories and curators talk about all the time about what you can make public and how public you can make it. Although, once 200 years, or even a hundred years, have passed, the urge is to digitize as much as you can, to make accessible as much as you can, and hope not to be visited by an angry ghost.

Kathryn:
I think of it in terms of "how can you reduce harm the most?" because it's not necessarily about protecting the author who created the correspondence, but about the people who they talk about. Maybe they say things about their grandchildren and it's fifteen years later and that's still going to be hurtful. So that's how I always think like, do no harm, right? Try to reduce the amount of harm that you do. So, if I was an archivist I, or if I was even an author, I'd be saying a hundred years because by then, people should be cool with whatever is said.

Audience:
Steve, in terms of the gaming material and stuff, do you feel like this would be a particularly good type of source for an archivist, or do you think it would be meretricious, because with gaming material it is always going against the ephemeral performance of the game, right?

Steve:
That's one of the things, and it's different for whoever's running games. So, Cam and I would alternate, and Cam took a lot more notes in his campaign. I would have pages with just the character names and then when you get to the actual gaming session, I would wing it. And, so you wouldn't see any of that. So quite often I think it might be frustrating for a lot of archivists. They would just get character
names and very, very brief descriptions or stats for the NPCs. Quite often, the way we gamed was very much off the cuff. So, it’s very spontaneous storylines.

**J.J.:**

One of the things that the curators and archivists know is that there is no predicting what a researcher might be interested in, so it would be only a very unwise archivist who would look at a list of names and say nah.

**Audience:**

I’ve been thinking about as we continue moving into this digital age and the control of materials by corporations. For example, end users on Twitter can ask them to send your entire Twitter archive as an archivist later. Is that possible to ask Twitter to send direct messages or Facebook messages or i-messages stored on some cloud somewhere. Can those things be accessed in any way?

**J.J.:**

Twitter will charge you a pretty penny for it. One of my colleagues at University of California-Riverside started a project after Ferguson, right? An attempt to create an app that would scrape everything with a certain hashtag off of Twitter because apparently you have four days, when you can get it, and otherwise you’re paying Twitter for it. I don’t know if Twitter has been around long enough for an archivist to ask them for everything from a given person and that person is no longer available to ask themselves. It is an interesting question. I was just thinking when you were talking about where the personal stuff was and where the philosophical stuff was. We’ve only, in this conversation, gotten so far as talking about emails and blog posts. We haven’t talked about what happens in messaging, right. And Twitter, which you know, is where a lot of important stuff happens, but it’s severely mixed in with, you know, emojis or comments about the restaurant you’re going to. So that’s something that probably the next generation of archivists is going to have to work out.

**Skye:**

I think Twitter brings up interesting questions because there are a lot of contemporary authors who are happy to have conversations through tweets with their fans, and I know, Steve, you’ve done, a Redditt AMA before. It’s interesting because you would consider these conversations very important because it’s an opportunity for an author to speak directly with their fan base, but collecting all that material I think is interesting.

**Kathryn:**

In a way it’s already collected and it’s already publicly accessible like the internet archive, right? It goes back to what J.J. says that you have to make sure you are drawing on multiple sources and that would just be one source that just happens to be publicly accessible, but you would coordinate with actual archives that are housed.
J.J.: There is some agonizing in the information saving community about are we in a historical black hole where so much will not be retained because it was electronic. Well, yeah, okay, we have Rousseau’s letters, but we don’t have his conversations. Right. There has never been a state of affairs where preservation of somebody’s intellectual life is perfect. So, this is just a different version of it.

Audience: Since we have so much information, on some level we have the opposite position, right? Where, after we have someone’s entire Twitter history, including the random things that are being sent to them, all of those things have to be curated, right? Whereas with Rousseau’s letters, we have the letters, we can go through that and understand that. We don’t exactly in this new model, where there’s more curation that has to happen with this digital blood.

J.J.: That’s true. But also, we have text mining and text analysis tools that will only get more sophisticated over time. So the bulk would be a problem, but it won’t be the same kind of problem as if you had to read all 14,000,000 tweets.

Kathryn: That brings us to the question of the primacy that we put on the importance of text as our archive. I would love to go through yours and find bison hair. I think that would actually be really illuminating because it tells me very specifically what you were doing at that time and your relationship to that. Material like that - ephemera and pictures and photographs - are also visual mediums or people who upload videos of them speaking in speeches, those things that aren’t actually written down. I’m also interested in what happens with those things. I think that digitalization makes actually some finding those things easier because authors do also include pictures in there.

I know you were saying that with Philip K. Dick’s archive being all over you’re going through anybody, any science fiction writer at the time, you’ll probably run across a picture of Phillip K. Dick that he just sent to them, and it is one of those things. The pictures that he sends people, that’s what made me think of it, because that actually contains a lot of information in the pictures that he sends people. Sometimes they’re his author photos, but sometimes they’re just like him with a beer and a baby in a chair and you’re left questioning. His letter has nothing to do with it, and it shows where his kind of state of mind was. I think those kinds of connections between the textual materials things like bison hair and photos taken together, they make that such a larger source of information.

Audience: I’m just curious based on this discussion of the ephemeral and the changing nature of digital information, is do you see the role of archivists changing from being a more passive receipt at the end of a lifetime to a more active role in collecting? Because we speak to a lot of colleagues who do web archiving of government documents. They pretty much downloaded any conditional action government website they get their hands on. Sometimes with or without the approval of
governments to do that, but this idea where we almost claw it or scrape it together and throw it in a box and hope that we can then have an archive at the end of the day.

J.J.: What years did you go to library school?

**Audience:**
2005 through 2010.

J.J.: Right at that point, the archival profession was waking up to the fact that it was no longer as simple as, you know, William Hope Hodgson has been dead for seventy-five years and you get his archive, right? Because formats used today are more ephemeral in certain ways, they have to be saved, and then you have to have the intermediating mechanism of whatever kind, you have to migrate them forward. It's all gotten more complicated and now it has gotten to move more towards archiving at the point of creation. So that's a big change. And the archival profession has made giant strides to keep up with how the formatting of information is changing, but will always be a little bit behind, and as soon as this thing that my colleague at Riverside, Bergis Jules is working on, inspired by Ferguson, will help a lot because it will be a tool that anybody can use to archive from Twitter by hashtag, but then something else will come along. I think it will always be running as fast as we can to stay in the same place it is now. Is that the question you asked?

**Skye:** I'm sorry to say we are out of time. Please join me in thanking all our wonderful panelists. Thank you for coming out.