

FLORIDIANA AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: THE CONNIE MAY FOWLER COLLECTION AT THE BROWARD COUNTY LIBRARY, BIENES MUSEUM OF THE MODERN BOOK

BY FREDERIC SANTERRE

MLIS Student at the University of South Florida School of Information

Librarians thrive in Special Collections as they work with unique treasures such as rare books, archives, and artifacts. Heritage professionals have the responsibility to preserve and make accessible to students and researchers a vast number of primary sources that tell the stories inherited from our past. As a graduate student at the University of South Florida, School of Information (USFSI) I am dedicating my energy and devotion to develop the knowledge and skills required to work in special collections after graduating.

My educational background in history, library science, and archival combined with my work experience in special collections gave me the unique privilege to open the doors of cultural institutions throughout my career. My passion for cultural artifacts carried me to work[1] in several libraries where I had the opportunity to observe, touch, organize, and catalog manuscripts and rare books dating back from the Renaissance to the mid-20th century.

The most prestigious institution I have ever visited is the Vatican Library in Rome. My connection with the Order of St. Sulpice in Montreal allowed me to have a private visit with Cardinal Brughes in 2011. Far away from the Eternal City, in a beach town in Florida, the marvels present at the Bienes Museum of the Modern Book, in Fort Lauderdale, made me cross one more time the thresholds of a unique collection of rare books and archival materials. I came across this opportunity by completing a fieldwork project through my studies at the University of South Florida, School of Information.

THE SUPERVISED FIELD WORK COURSE OBJECTIVES

Relocating to Florida to study at the University of School of Information, I wanted to expand my comprehension of special collections by enrolling in the course, Supervised Field Work to gain more experience and become acquainted with other professionals in the field. Concurrently, I enrolled in the online course Rare Books and Special Collections Librarianship, which provided intellectual background about this field.[3]

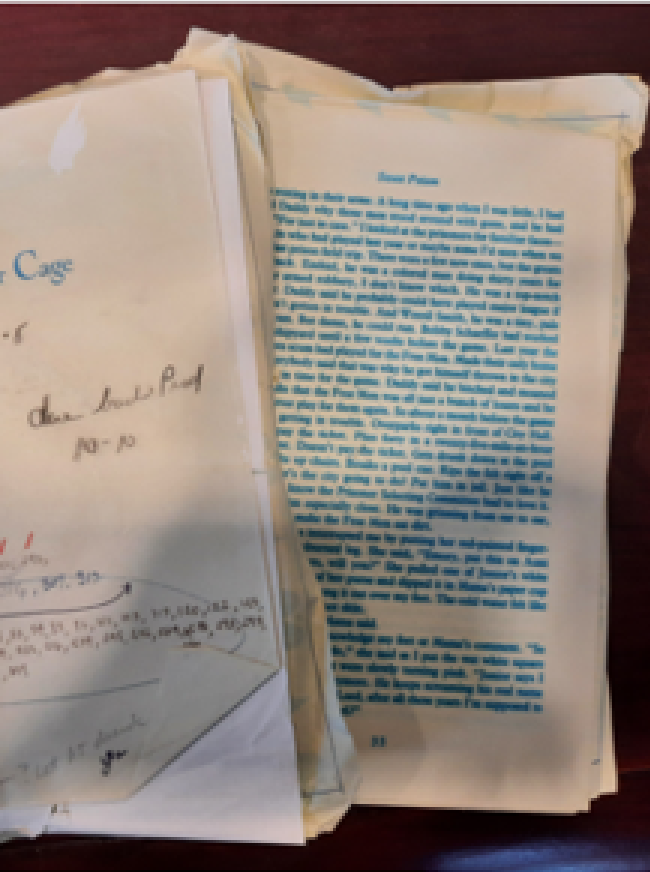
[1] Supervised by Dr. Vanessa Reyes at USFSI. <https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/departments/information/index.aspx>

[2] Taught by John Vincler from the University of Illinois in summer 2022. <https://www.online.uillinois.edu/catalog/CourseDetail.asp?CourseID=26552>



FLORIDIANA AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: THE CONNIE MAY FOWLER COLLECTION AT THE BROWARD COUNTY LIBRARY, BIENES MUSEUM OF THE MODERN BOOK

BY FREDERIC SANTERRE



The Supervised Field Work syllabus proposes three purposes for this course:

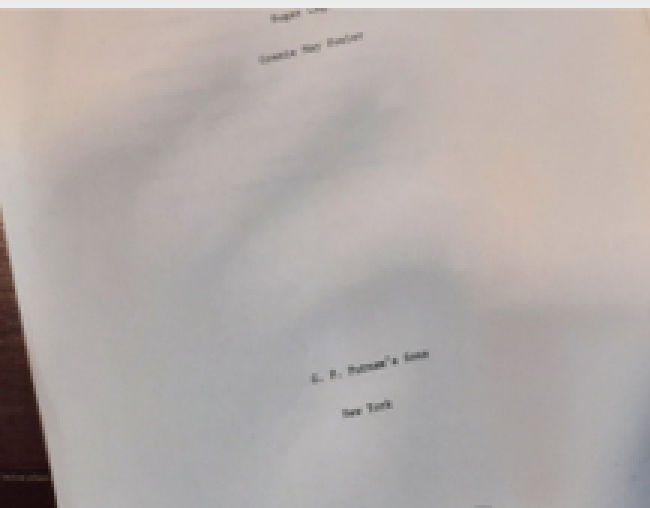
1. Introducing the student to the practical environment in which information professionals work;
2. Inspiring confidence in the student's ability to carry out the responsibilities of professionals in Library and Information Science; and,
3. Providing experiences to develop entry-level skills in one or more areas of Library and Information Science.

The benefits of internships at the graduate level are well documented in the Library and Information Science literature. The library gets the work done and the students get hands-on experience with best practices in the field. Special collections with limited resources often rely on students to perform tasks that would otherwise be difficult to accomplish. Galbraith and Smith (2012, p. 131) encourage special collection entities to hire interns stating, *“student workers can be great assets to rare book libraries and other special collections. You will find that they are capable of high-level work and want to be challenged..., adding further, “once they are trained to perform more professional work, their talents will surprise you.”* [6]

In a study conducted by Kopp (2019) about internships in special collections, she demonstrates that unpaid internships with an educational objective in mind, providers can be confident that they are offering high-quality experiences that comply with academic and legal best practices that support in-class education. [7] My own experience with the Bienes Museum of the Modern Book confirms all the above statements.

THE PROJECT DESCRIPTION

I live in Fort Lauderdale, near the Main Branch location of Broward County Library (BCL) where their special collections are held. After looking at the rich resources the make available online, I was inspired to learn more about their holdings. In April 2022, I approached staff at the Bienes Museum of the Modern Book, a branch of BCL to inquire about the possibility working on a special project using some of their materials. Rochelle Pienn, Curator of the Bienes Museum, and her two archivists, Afua Ferdnance and Emily Calderone, welcomed my offer with great kindness.



3 Here are a few interesting resources about internships in libraries: T. D. Lewey, and H. Moody-Goo, "Designing a Meaningful Reference and Instruction Internship: The MLIS Student Perspective," Reference & User Services Quarterly, 57, no. 4 (2018), 238-241; See also, 18. Lorraine Roy, "Practicum and Internship Experiences in LIS Education," in Service Learning: Linking Library Education and Practice. (Chicago: American Library Association, 2009), 185-190.

4 Alison Cullingford in The Special Collections Handbook (3rd ed.) dedicates a section concerning volunteers in special collections which addresses the motivations, issues, challenges, and best practices in coordinating volunteers.

FLORIDIANA AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: THE CONNIE MAY FOWLER COLLECTION AT THE BROWARD COUNTY LIBRARY, BIENES MUSEUM OF THE MODERN BOOK

BY FREDERIC SANTERRE

The staff proposed I process the Connie May Fowler Collection (eight Hollinger boxes), which is composed primarily of manuscripts, galleys, correspondence, and journal article clippings. Because I had a basic understanding of archival principles as a result of my certificate degree in archives from Université de Montréal, I accepted this challenge with enthusiasm. These archival principles[9] slowly came back to mind when getting acquainted with the collection and receiving feedback from the staff.

The Bienes Museum of the Modern Book is relatively young in comparison other special collections located on the East Coast of the United States. Fort Lauderdale's first major development began in the 1920s, and Broward County Library [10] was established in 1973, with the Main Branch, located downtown Fort Lauderdale, opening in 1984.

Diane and Michael Bienes, two philanthropists, dedicated their time, energy, and financial support to establish, in December 1996, a center dedicated to rare books and other primary sources that reflected the history of South Florida. [11]

The Broward Public Library Foundation obtained additional funding from the Florida Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, and the Florida Arts Council to build a physical space for unique materials. James A. Findlay was appointed director of the Bienes Museum of the Modern Book [12] at its opening. The museum has four primary acquisition theme:

- Children's Literature and Artifacts
- Floridiana
- General and Fine Presses
- WPA and New Deal Literature

This brief institutional history and the following biographical information about Fowler provides context for the Fowler collection. Connie May Fowler was born in North Carolina on January 3, 1960, and spent her childhood and part of her adulthood in Central Florida. [13] I connected instantly with Fowler for the surprising reason that we were both born on the same day, but not in the same decade. This anecdotal fact encouraged me to investigate the collection in greater detail and to explore this author's talent through her manuscripts and galleys.

5. Steven K Galbraith, and Geoffrey D. Smith, *Rare Book Librarianship: An Introduction and Guide* (Santa Barbara, California: Libraries Unlimited, An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, 2012)

6. Maggie Gallup Kopp, "Internships in Special Collections: Experiential Pedagogy, Intentional Design, and High-Impact Practice," *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, & Cultural Heritage* 20, no. 1 (2019): 12–27

7. "Bienes Museum of the Modern Book." *Special Collections | Broward County Library*. Accessed August 10, 2022. <https://www.broward.org/Library/Research/SpecialCollections/Pages/BienesMuseum.aspx>.

8. *Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS)*: <https://www2.archivists.org/groups/technical-subcommittee-on-describing-archives-a-content-standard-dacs/describing-archives-a-content-standard-dacs-second->

The Connie May Fowler Collection

Collection Identifier: 2022.2

Bienes Museum of the Modern Book: The Dianne and Michael Bienes Special Collections and Rare Book Library
The Connie May Fowler Collection

Collection Overview | Collection Organization | Container Inventory

Scope and Contents

The collection is comprised of manuscripts (typescript), prepress proofs, galleys, newspapers articles, correspondence, interviews, speeches, corrected sheets, handwritten drafts, computer disk, VHS cassette, and teleplay script. The collection highlights some of Fowler's work such as, *Sugar Cage*, *Ave Erzulie*, *Before Women Had Wings*, *Sparrow Hunter*, *River of Hidden Dreams*, *Onedia Looney*, and *Listening For Light*. It also contains a manuscript from...

See more >

Dates

1990-1998

Conditions Governing Access

The Connie May Fowler collection is open for research.

Biographical / Historical

Connie May Fowler (C. M. Fowler) was born in North Carolina on January 3, 1960 and lived in Florida, Vermont and Mexico. She is an American novelist, essayist, memoirist, screenwriter, poet, and teacher. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree at Tampa University, a Master of Arts degree in the University of Kansas, and became a core faculty member at Vermont College of Fine Arts (VCFA). C. M. Fowler is the author of 8 books: *How Clarissa Burden Learned...*

See more >

Extent

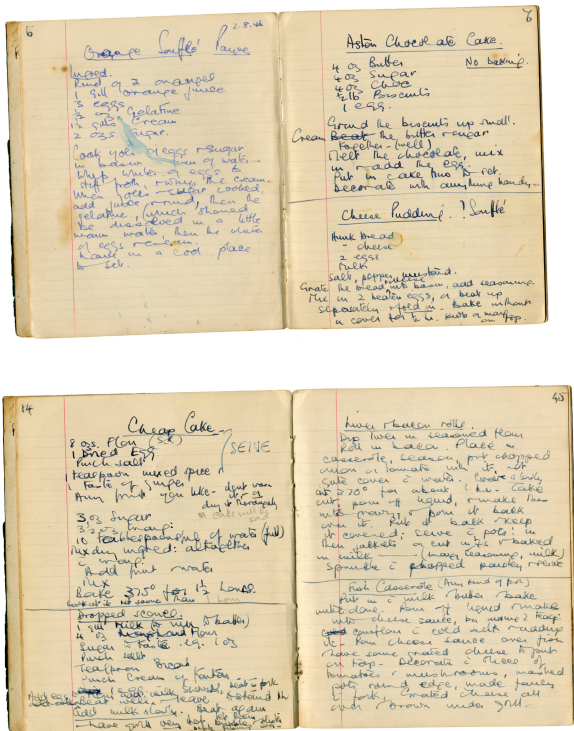
8 Hollinger Boxes

Language of Materials

English

Collapse All

Figure 1: The Connie May Fowler Collection



FLORIDIANA AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: THE CONNIE MAY FOWLER COLLECTION AT THE BROWARD COUNTY LIBRARY, BIENES MUSEUM OF THE MODERN BOOK

BY FREDERIC SANTERRE

Working with primary sources gives one a sense of proximity with the author and delivers great satisfaction in perceiving the novelist's state of mind through her writings. Having in front of me the original manuscripts of *Sugar Cage* (1992), *River of Hidden Dreams* (1994), *Before Women Had Wings* (1996), and some unpublished works, I discovered for the first time the intellectual and artistic process of creating a novel. [13]

To begin the process of arranging and describing an archival collection, the archivist must first review the materials comprising the collection and do some background research about the donor (in this case C. M. Fowler), if not well documented in the acquisition file. In the case of the Connie May Fowler Collection (hereafter, referred to as the Fowler Collection), the donor file revealed very little about the donation. A previous arrangement of the Fowler's collection was made by a library staff but it did not

meet current archival standards and principles; therefore, a new arrangement was mandatory. In this case, Fowler had not organized her materials in a manner that reflects her personal preference; consequently, I followed best practices and logic to impose order on the collection to facilitate its use by future researchers. A folder-by-folder inventory typically initiates the intellectual process of creating a finding aid that describes a collection.

American educator, librarian, and scholar, Sydney Berger aptly states, "a manuscript with no finding aid is essentially 'not there' for readers." [14] A finding aid typically contains the following fields: the name of the collection, the name of the institution housing the collection, an identifier, scope and content, biography, dates, extent, subject headings, language of materials, and other metadata. Figure 1 depicts the online landing page of the Fowler collection's description and organization. [16]

9. "Broward County Library." Wikipedia. Accessed August 10, 2022. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broward_County_Library.

10. Evan St Lifer and Michael Rogers, "Broward foundation receives \$1M gift," *Library Journal*, 120 no. 19 (1995): 13
11. Initially established as the Bienes Center for the Literary Arts from 1996 to 2010.
12. Ellen Kanner, "Connie May Fowler: Writing in Order to Reaffirm the Past," *Publishers Weekly* 243, no. 20 (1996): 50
13. Among other publications published after her donation are *Remembering Blue* (2000), *When Katie Wak es* (2002), *The Problem with Murrur Lee* (2005), *How Clarissa Burden Learned to Fly* (2010), and *A Million Fragile Bones* (2017).
14. Sidney E. Berger. *Rare Books and Special Collections* (London: Facet Publishing, 1994) p. 35
15. Sidney E. Berger. *Rare Books and Special Collections* (London: Facet Publishing, 1994) p. 36
16. An excellent resource to consult: *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts* by Dennis Meissner (2019).



FLORIDIANA AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: THE CONNIE MAY FOWLER COLLECTION AT THE BROWARD COUNTY LIBRARY, BIENES MUSEUM OF THE MODERN BOOK

BY **FREDERIC SANTERRE**

Another essential aspect of my work consisted of getting familiar with ArchivesSpace and CONTENTdm software to enhance the visibility and discovery of the Connie May Fowler Collection. I heard about these digital tools for the first time while taking the course Organization of Knowledge I and then had the opportunity to put knowledge into practice with my internship. As easy as it sounds, the reality was quite different because I had previously never worked with this software.

Bienes Museum staff often provided advice and support as I developed the finding aid in ArchivesSpace[17]. Finding aids are well suited for manuscripts and other nonprint media. While working with the finding aid, I started scanning the author's correspondence to make it accessible to the public. These letters reveal the relationship between Connie May Fowler and her publishers, booksellers, and fans.

[17] Here is the link of the finding aid:
<https://broward.lyrasistechnology.org/repositories/3/resources/180>

After completing the scanning, the next step involved adding metadata to CONTENTdm. Again, I needed a little training to get accustomed to this database and all its functionalities to maximize the discoverability of the correspondence. As we say in French, "Chapeau!" to Meghan Hoffman, librarian at the Broward County Library Division, for showing me how to navigate in CONTENTdm.

One of my favorite activities in processing this collection consisted of searching Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) to find the appropriate subject headings for the entire collection and, more specifically, for the correspondence. Interesting stories are revealed throughout Fowler's communications with other agents in the publishing industry. These stories would certainly spark curiosity among historians having a keen interest in understanding the relationship between an author and their publisher in the late twentieth century, at the threshold of the digital world.



FLORIDIANA AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: THE CONNIE MAY FOWLER COLLECTION AT THE BROWARD COUNTY LIBRARY, BIENES MUSEUM OF THE MODERN BOOK

BY FREDERIC SANTERRE

Florida's Literary Archives: An Overview

What I learned in this project is invaluable and has shaped my personality as a heritage librarian. Getting hands-on experience with ArchivesSpace, CONTENTdm, and LCSH increased my confidence in working with professional digital tools.[18] As a good driver, a librarian must watch in their rearview mirror to understand what came before, develop areas of expertise related to their historical collections, and look forward to using new technologies to enhance the discoverability of rare materials. The destination is unknown, but along the way, the librarian will welcome in their vehicle patrons who want to learn and share new knowledge about the past to transform the future. Librarians must be conversant and proficient in both library science and archives, for the simple reason that their library will host book collections and archival documents simultaneously in digital formats.

Fowler's collection situates itself at the fringes of both fields by having printed manuscripts, galleys, and handwritten documents. Historians of literature may revel in the heavily annotated drafts within the Fowler collection. This collection reflects the end of an era when hand-written drafts yielded significant information about the process of writing a novel.

The Fowler collection was acquired in 1997, a few months after the opening of the Museum of the Modern Book. Director James A. Findlay acquired this collection, seeing great potential for future research. Prior to the opening of the Bienes Museum, Fowler participated in literary lectures at the Broward County's Main Branch featuring River of -

18. In *Ambassadors of the Book: Competences and Training for Heritage Librarian*, R. Mouren (ed.), consult the following chapter "Preparing Librarians Technologically for the 21st Century" written by Katie L. B. Hennigsen. This contribution highlights digital tools available for special collections archivists.





FLORIDIANA AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: THE CONNIE MAY FOWLER COLLECTION AT THE BROWARD COUNTY LIBRARY, BIENES MUSEUM OF THE MODERN BOOK

BY FREDERIC SANTERRE

Florida's Literary Archives: An Overview

Hidden Dreams.[19] Once the acquisition was finalized, an event organized conjointly by Bienes Museum and the Broward Public Library Foundation offered Fowler the opportunity to present some of her papers and manuscripts to the public at the Main Library. [20]

Twenty-five years after its acquisition, the Connie May Fowler Collection was processed by a student who was encouraged by the partnership between the School of Information (USFSI) and the Bienes Museum. Unfortunately, it is common for special collection institutions to process unique materials long after they are acquired due to a lack of financial and human resources. Berger emphasizes that because of their very distinctive nature, manuscripts deserve to be high on the priority list for processing, depending on their importance relative to the research needs of the library. [21]

How does the Connie May Fowler Collection fit in the big picture of the Bienes Museum? One explanation resides in the goal of Broward County Library, to create a state-of-the-art literary center where rare books and special collections would be housed, preserved, and shared at the Main Branch.[22]. Since Fowler's stories take place mostly in Central Florida, her collection is well suited for the Bienes Museum, whose acquisition include literary works related to Florida's identity, that is Floridiana. Floridiana refers "to artifacts and collections of artifacts relating to the state of Florida [...], especially those artifacts pertaining to Floridian history, geography, folklore, and cultural heritage. [...] Floridiana could include paintings, prints, drawings, and postcards representing Florida's history or culture; fiction, non-fiction, music, and poetry describing or alluding to the state." [23]

19. Mary Ellen Hopkins. "18 Authors To Lecture At Broward Library" Sun-Sentinel, March 8, 1995: 4. NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/0EB4EE96B88587A9>.
20. The program unwinds under the SunTrust Literary Series: An Evening with Author Connie May Fowler, Feb. 10. RUSNAK, J. "WORKSHOPS OFFER WRITING ADVICE." Sun-Sentinel, February 9, 1997: 10. NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current. <https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/0EB515FC7245BF76>.
21. Sidney E. Berger. Rare Books and Special Collections (London: Facet Publishing, 1994), 36.
22. https://web.archive.org/web/20080512023532/http://www.broward.org/library/bienes_about.htm
23. "Floridiana." Wikipedia. Accessed August 10, 2022. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floridiana>.



FLORIDIANA AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: THE CONNIE MAY FOWLER COLLECTION AT THE BROWARD COUNTY LIBRARY, BIENES MUSEUM OF THE MODERN BOOK

BY FREDERIC SANTERRE

Florida's Literary Archives: An Overview

This definition sheds some light on why the Fowler Collection was of interest to the Bienes Museum. Additional insight is provided by Rochelle Pienn, Museum Curator, who opined that Findlay wanted the Bienes to be a repository for manuscript collections related to Florida Fiction. She adds this context:

"in the 1990s, Florida fiction was at the forefront of local special collections in terms of an acquisitions theme. Both the University of Miami Special Collections and Florida International University Special Collections vigorously bought publications by local authors. I believe Findlay wanted the Bienes to be THE place for Florida writers' papers, which explains why we also have the Charles Willeford papers and others.[24] Some healthy competition between academic institutions might have influenced Findlay's motivation to acquire literary materials by well-known local writers.

24. Among other literary archives acquired by Findlay figure the Michael Shaara Collection and the Olivia Goldsmith Collection.

Traditionally, special collections were responsible to steward literary archives that supported major textual projects which finds its origin in the 1950s and 1960.[25] On the last day of my internship, I found incidentally that my name was included in the Administrative Information section of the Fowler finding aid with the mention "Completed." It was rewarding to get some recognition after hard labor during the summer. This point seems innocuous, but it has been discussed in the last few years by archivists and other heritage experts about the lack of professional recognition for archivists who arranged and described a collection. A. H. Chen addresses the need to cite the name of the archivist in the finding aid. As she explains, "The fact that archivists are rarely named in finding aids prevents scholars from citing archivists, diminishing the value of their professional work as processors while amplifying their reference role and obscuring the history of how archivists shaped the literary archives market." [26]

25. Hubbard, Melissa A, Robert H Jackson, and Arnold Hirshon, Forging the Future of Special Collections (Chicago: Neal-Schuman, An Imprint of The American Library Association, 2016) – About literary archives, consult Ch. 12 "Literary Archives: How They Have Changed and How They Are Changing" by Ken Lopez.

26. Amy Hildreth Chen, Placing Papers: The American Literary Archives Market (Amherst; Boston University of Massachusetts Press, 2020), 105.





FLORIDIANA AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS: THE CONNIE MAY FOWLER COLLECTION AT THE BROWARD COUNTY LIBRARY, BIENES MUSEUM OF THE MODERN BOOK

BY FREDERIC SANTERRE

Florida's Literary Archives: An Overview

To conclude, in 1997, Connie May Fowler left a discreet note with great significance on top of a manuscript in the collection: "In happy celebration of the establishment of the Bienes Center, a hallowed space ever evolving into the future, where generations will come and learn and be inspired to create, a place whose foundation is in the past but where tomorrow will be born every day." This statement is almost prophetic and in keeping with the library's mission to provide information to communities and nurture creativity among patrons. Pienn also believes that this quote from Fowler is almost precognitive. Nevertheless, the time has come for Fowler's collection to be discovered and researched by generations of scholars eager to invigorate new literary creations. To this day, Fowler's remark strongly resonates in my mind and motivates me to further my education in rare books and special collections librarianship.



Author Acknowledgements

A special thank you to Rochelle Pienn, Afua Ferdnance, and Emily Calderone at the Bienes Museum of the Modern Book for their constant support. I also express my gratitude to my teachers at USFSI Dr. Vanessa Reyes, Dr. Kathleen de la Pena McCook; and Leah Richardson (my mentor at RBMS) from the GW Libraries Special Collections who encourage me to persevere in my pathway.

The Connie May Fowler Collection, The Bienes Museum of Modern Book, Broward County Library