

Nicolas Freeling:

An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

- Creator:** Freeling, Nicolas, 1927-2003
- Title:** Nicolas Freeling Papers
- Dates:** circa 1952-2003, undated
- Extent:** 34 document boxes (14.28 linear feet), 1 oversize folder (osf), 1 galley file (gf)
- Abstract:** The Nicolas Freeling Papers consist of manuscript drafts, correspondence, journals, clippings, contracts, and royalty statements belonging to the British mystery novelist Nicolas Freeling.
- Call Number:** Manuscript Collection MS-5194
- Language:** English, French, German, and Spanish
- Access:** Open for research. Researchers must create an online Research Account and agree to the Materials Use Policy before using archival materials. **Part or all of this collection is housed off-site and may require up to three business days' notice for access in the Ransom Center's Reading and Viewing Room. Please contact the Center before requesting this material: reference@hrc.utexas.edu** **Access Note:** Several folders of correspondence, contracts, and clippings are contaminated with mold. The Ransom Center Conservation Department vacuum treated material in these folders, but mold may be still present. For health reasons, patrons may consider wearing gloves and a dust/mist respirator while handling this material. One box of clippings contaminated with mold has not been treated. Use of this material is restricted and is subject to permission from the head of the reading room.
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Administrative Information

- Acquisition:** Purchase, 2010 (10-10-006-P)
- Processed by:** Amy E. Armstrong, 2012
- Repository:** [Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin](#)

Biographical Sketch

Nicolas Freeling was born in London on March 3, 1927, and spent his early childhood in France and later childhood in Southampton, England and Dublin, Ireland. He attended the University of Dublin for a year and then joined the military service in 1945. He served in England, North Africa, and France and left the service in 1947. In need of a job, he began working as a kitchen apprentice in a hotel in the south of France. Over the next twelve years, Freeling became a chef and worked in hotels throughout France, England, and northern Europe. In 1954, he married a Dutch woman, Cornelia (Renée) Termes, and the couple later had four sons, Hugo, Conrad, Yvan, and Wolf, and one daughter, Fabienne (whom they called "Nana").

In 1959, Freeling was arrested for stealing food from the kitchen of an Amsterdam hotel. Though this event caused his family's deportation to England, it also began his literary career. Freeling was fascinated with a particular Dutch police officer and over his four weeks of incarceration, he began writing a detective story on the wrappers of soap he was assigned to package. While still working in hotels, Freeling finished his first two novels, *Love in Amsterdam* (1962) and *Because of the Cats* (1963), which introduced readers to Dutch Police Inspector Piet van der Valk and his wife, Arlette. The sale of these two books in America and Europe allowed Freeling to retire from the hotel restaurant business and become a full-time novelist. The family returned to the Netherlands for several years and in 1964, moved to a town near Strasbourg, France, where Freeling would remain for the rest of his life. The van der Valk mysteries were hugely successful and led to two successful British television series based on the character. Between 1962 and 1972, van der Valk appeared in ten novels, and in the final book, *A Long Silence* (1972), Freeling killed his popular detective, angering many of his readers and disappointing his publishers.

While writing the van der Valk mysteries, Freeling wrote several other novels and a book about his early career in hotel kitchens called *The Kitchen Book* (1970). The publication of *A Dressing of Diamonds* (1974) introduced readers to Freeling's next detective, French police *commissaire* Henri Castang, who appeared in sixteen novels.

Freeling briefly reunited readers with widower Arlette van der Valk who solved mysteries through her Strasbourg "help bureau" in two novels, *The Widow* (1979) and *One Damn Thing after Another* (1981). In 1989, he wrote a Piet van der Valk prequel called *Sand Castles*.

Freeling's 42 books not only profiled the cases of his three famous detectives, but also followed other protagonists in eight "Euro Crime" novels and four non-fiction books: *Cook Book* (1972) and *Kitchen Book* (1970) which were reissued together in 2002, a book of essays about literature's best crime writers, *Criminal Convictions* (1994), and his memoir, *The Village Book* (2001). Freeling was awarded three prestigious international awards for crime writing: the Grand Prix de Roman Policier (1964, France), Edgar Allan Poe Award (1966, United States), and Crime Writers' Golden Dagger (1964, Britain).

Freeling expressed ambivalence at being categorized as a crime novelist and preferred to see himself as a "straight novelist" who used crimes to analyze human nature, cultural conventions, and social institutions. Beginning with his earliest novel, Freeling sought to move away from the predictable formulas of the English detective or the American private-eye story which focused on answering "whodunit?" Instead, Freeling explored the psychological realms of all those involved in a crime, particularly his detectives, and sought to answer "whydunit?"

Nicolas Freeling died of cancer on July 20, 2003.

Sources:

In addition to material found within the Nicolas Freeling Papers, the following sources were used:

"Nicolas Freeling." *Contemporary Authors Online*, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed 24 January 2012).

"Nicolas Freeling." *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed 24 January 2012).

Scope and Contents

The Nicolas Freeling Papers consist of manuscript drafts, correspondence, journals, clippings, contracts, and royalty statements belonging to the British mystery novelist Nicolas Freeling. The papers are organized into three series: I. Works, 1964-2001, undated; II. Correspondence, 1962-2003; and III. Personal and Professional Papers, circa 1952-2003.

Series I. Works makes up the bulk of the papers and includes materials associated with Freeling's writings. It is arranged into three subseries: A. Published books, 1964-2001, undated; B. Other Writings, 1973-1993, undated; and C. Television and Plays, 1971-1980, undated. Materials in each of these subseries are arranged in alphabetical order by title, based on Freeling's original folder titles, which are most often the British title. The title following in parentheses is a variant title, most often the American title.

Subseries A. Published Books primarily contains drafts for most of Freeling's mystery novels and non-fiction books. Correspondence accompanies some manuscripts and is often editorial notes between Freeling and his editors. Most drafts are near final versions and contain minor edits. One exception is the book *Gadget*. Freeling developed the story with physics professor Peter Zimmerman and consulted with him on the technical information; therefore, there are many technical notes and exchanges between the two collaborators. The journals in Series III. Personal and Professional Papers contain some notes and working draft fragments for some of Freeling's novels.

Subseries B. Other Writings are drafts, notes, clippings, and galley proofs for Freeling's articles, essays, book reviews, book chapters, and short stories. This subseries also contains works that were in progress or were unpublished which Freeling labeled as "shelved scripts." The material titled Hearsay is an early draft of an autobiography Freeling was developing.

Subseries C. Television and Plays contains script drafts, outlines, television episode synopses, and correspondence for a theater play and several proposed television series based on Freeling's characters Piet and Arlette van der Valk.

Series II. Correspondence includes personal and professional incoming and outgoing correspondence. It is arranged into two subseries: A. Incoming, 1962-2003; and B. Outgoing, 1967-1997. Letters in each of these subseries are arranged chronologically following Freeling's original order. Some letters contain attachments such as photographs, drafts of articles, book jacket designs, and contracts. Works that are interfiled with correspondence are listed in an index at the end of this finding aid. Additionally, Freeling often included corrections and responses to his editors' questions in his letters and these are scattered among the incoming and outgoing correspondence. A complete index of all correspondent names in this collection is included at the end of the finding aid.

Several folders of correspondence were treated for mold infestation and patrons may consider wearing gloves and a dust respirator while handling this material.

Series III. Personal and Professional Papers contains a variety of material documenting Freeling's writing career and it is arranged in alphabetical order by topic. Included in this series are clippings, collected research material, contracts, journal notebooks, photographs, publicity materials, publishing catalogs, and royalty statements. There is little personal material except for poems Freeling copied at the age of fifteen and the journal notebooks, which contain personal notes mixed with writing notes and handwritten draft fragments for some of Freeling's novels and books.

The clippings are arranged into two segments: publicity and reviews and assorted topics. The assorted topics are collected newspaper articles in French and English on a variety of subjects--presumably some used for research--which cover crime and punishment, politics, gastronomy, books, publishing, authors, culture, travel, etc. One box of clippings contains material contaminated with mold that has not been treated for mold infestation and use of this material is restricted and is subject to permission from the head of the reading room.

Publishing contracts are arranged in chronological order. Several folders of clippings and contracts were treated for mold infestation and patrons may consider wearing gloves and a dust respirator while handling this material.

Of particular interest are twenty-seven journal notebooks. Titles, if present, are taken from the covers and provided in single quotes. Most of these journals were used for both personal and professional purposes, but a few contain handwritten incomplete drafts for a few of Freeling's books. Personal notes include daily journal entries, to-do lists, recipes, household budgets and expenses, and other jottings. The journals are arranged in rough chronological order.

There are very few photographs in the collection and those that are present are head shots or publicity photos of Freeling taken at events.

Royalty statements are arranged chronologically and also include a notebook in which Freeling recorded account overviews for specific works over several years. Several folders were treated for severe mold infestation and use by patrons must be under a vent hood and is subject to permission from the head of the reading room.

Related Material

The Alfred A. Knopf Records at the Ransom Center contains additional Freeling-related material.

Index Terms

Subjects

Authors, English--20th century.
Autobiography.
Mystery and detective stories.
Novelists, English--20th century.

Places

Amsterdam (Netherlands).
France.

Document Types

Clippings.
Contracts.
Correspondence.
Journals.
Manuscripts.

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