

Rachel Cusk:

An Inventory of Her Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

- Creator:** Cusk, Rachel, 1967-
- Title:** Rachel Cusk Papers
- Dates:** 1974-2018
- Extent:** 6 document boxes (2.52 linear feet), 2 oversize folders (osf), 1 computer hard drive
- Abstract:** The papers of British writer Rachel Cusk include drafts (typescript, printout, and electronic files), notebooks, correspondence, notes, photographs, proof copies, serial publications, programs, and printed materials. The collection documents Cusk's writing process for the *Outline* trilogy and *Medea* and provides insight into other professional activities and the intersection of her creative work with daily family life.
- Call Number:** Manuscript Collection MS-54131
- Language:** English, with printed materials in Polish and Spanish
- Access:** Open for research. Researchers must create an online Research Account and agree to the Materials Use Policy before using archival materials. Due to privacy concerns, some electronic files are closed to research during Cusk's lifetime. To request access to electronic files that are open for research, please email [Reference](#).
- Use Policies:** Ransom Center collections may contain material with sensitive or confidential information that is protected under federal or state right to privacy laws and regulations. Researchers are advised that the disclosure of certain information pertaining to identifiable living individuals represented in the collections without the consent of those individuals may have legal ramifications (e.g., a cause of action under common law for invasion of privacy may arise if facts concerning an individual's private life are published that would be deemed highly offensive to a reasonable person) for which the Ransom Center and The University of Texas at Austin assume no responsibility.
- Restrictions on Use:** Authorization for publication is given on behalf of the University of Texas as the owner of the collection and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder which must be obtained by the researcher. For more information please see the Ransom Center's Open Access and Use Policies. Certain restrictions apply to the use of

electronic files. Researchers must agree to the Materials Use Policy for Electronic Files before accessing them. Original computer disks and forensic disk images are restricted. Copying electronic files, including screenshots and printouts, is not permitted.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation: Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin. Rachel Cusk Papers (Manuscript Collection MS-54131).

Acquisition: Purchase, 2018-2019 (18-08-010-P and 19-09-001-P)

Processed by: Ancelyn Krivak, 2019

Repository: Harry Ransom Center, [The University of Texas at Austin](#)

Biographical Sketch

Rachel Emma Cusk was born in Saskatoon, Canada on February 8, 1967, to British parents, the second of four children. She lived briefly in Canada and then in Los Angeles until 1974, when her family moved back home to Bury St. Edmunds, England. Cusk attended Catholic schools and received a bachelor's degree in English from New College at the University of Oxford. She is the author of ten novels, four non-fiction books, and a play, and she has published short stories in numerous anthologies and literary magazines including *Granta*, *The Paris Review*, and *Zoetrope: All-Story*. Cusk is an occasional contributor of essays and reviews to publications such as *The Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*, and taught fiction writing as a faculty member at Kingston University London.

Cusk's first published book, *Saving Agnes*, won the Whitbread First Novel Award in 1993. Her third novel, *Country Life*, won the Society of Authors' Somerset Maugham Award in 1997, and many of her subsequent works have been shortlisted for other awards. In 2003, Cusk was named one of *Granta* magazine's "20 Best Young British Novelists." Her novel *Arlington Park* was adapted into the French film *La Vie Domestique* in 2013.

Cusk's non-fiction memoirs *A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother* (2001) and *Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation* (2012) recounted her experiences of motherhood and divorce with an unsparing honesty that polarized readers and critics. The personal attacks on Cusk by some members of the British press following the publication of *Aftermath* left her emotionally depleted and unable to write for an extended period. At the end of 2013, as she began to compose what would become the first volume of the *Outline* trilogy, Cusk felt that contemporary fiction had reached a dead end and set out to create a new form. The result was a cross between fiction and oral history that jettisoned plot, dialogue, and character development in favor of pure storytelling. Hailed as a reinvention of the novel, *Outline* (2014), *Transit* (2017), and *Kudos* (2018) received near-universal critical acclaim upon their release.

In 2015, Cusk received a commission from London's Almeida Theatre to create a new adaptation of Euripedes' *Medea* that placed the characters in a contemporary setting. The play was presented for six weeks during the Almeida's Fall 2015 season and also published in book form. Cusk's collection of essays *Coventry* was published in 2019.

Cusk resides in London and Norfolk with her third husband, artist and former marketing consultant Siemon Scamell-Katz. She has two daughters from her second marriage, Albertine and Jessye Clarke.

Sources:

In addition to material within the collection, the following sources were used:

Kellaway, Kate. "Rachel Cusk: 'Aftermath Was Creative Death. I Was Heading into Total Silence.'" *The Guardian*, August 24, 2014.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/aug/24/rachel-cusk-interview-aftermath-outline>

Thurman, Judith. "Rachel Cusk Gut-Renovates the Novel." *New Yorker*, July 31, 2017.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/08/07/rachel-cusk-gut-renovates-the-novel>

Scope and Contents

The papers of British writer Rachel Cusk include drafts (typescript, printout, and electronic files), notebooks, correspondence, notes, photographs, proof copies, serial publications, programs, and printed materials. The collection documents Cusk's writing process for the *Outline* trilogy and *Medea* and provides insight into other professional activities and the intersection of her creative work with daily family life. The papers are organized into two series, I. Works, 2002-2018 and II. Personal and Professional, 1974-2018.

In addition to manuscript materials, the papers include a selection of electronic files from the hard drive of a MacBook Pro laptop. Electronic files that are open to researchers include drafts of the novels *Outline* and *Transit* and several short articles and essays.

When Cusk offered her archive for sale, she drafted an explanation of her writing process and its physical manifestations in the archive, titled 'Introduction.' A printout of this explanation is filed at the beginning of box 1. As Cusk explains, she creates comparatively few draft versions of her writings, working from an initial set of notes with long periods of rumination leading to a few written iterations that conform closely to her initial conception of the story. She possessed few manuscripts of her earlier works, having discarded them during various house moves, but kept many of the notebooks that she used to record story ideas and housekeeping notes from her daily life.

Series I. Works contains draft printouts and electronic files, notebooks and notes, proof copies, and published versions of short stories in literary magazines. If an individual work has corresponding electronic files, an entry for the files is included in the container list within the material associated with that title and includes a brief description, the number of files, the file formats, and the timestamp. Drafts are present mainly for works written within five years of the sale of Cusk's archive, namely the *Outline* trilogy and *Medea*, as well as a few essays, reviews, and short stories. In addition to drafts of the *Medea* playscript, the series contains notes and dialogue for the play recorded by Cusk in a notebook and on oversize sheets of paper. Also noteworthy is a journal Cusk kept while writing the non-fiction memoir *Aftermath*, with notes for the book, thoughts on various writers and novels, teaching notes from Cusk's fiction writing classes, doodles and poems by Cusk's daughters, and recipes.

Series II. Personal and Professional contains correspondence, notebooks, notes, typescripts of speeches and reviews, artworks, photographs, clippings and other publicity materials, programs, and printed materials. Correspondence in this series is a mix of personal letters dating from her student years at Oxford in the 1980s to the 2010s, business correspondence, and fan mail from readers. Selected correspondence is indexed

at the end of this finding aid. Notable correspondents include writers Jonathan Coe, Larry McMurtry, and Helen Dunmore, and former Labour Party politician David Miliband.

More than a dozen notebooks kept by Cusk document ideas jotted down during her writing process, preparations for her fiction writing classes, and the minutiae of daily domestic life. Where notebooks appear to contain notes for specific works, such as *Arlington Park*, *Kudos*, and *Outline*, it is noted in the description in the container list; these notebooks are not filed with other materials for those titles in the Works series, because the majority of notes relate to other subjects. Many of the notebooks primarily consist of notes related to Cusk's fiction writing classes at Kingston University and other schools. They are filed together under the heading "Teaching notes." Two of the notebooks are journals Cusk kept while travelling abroad to Italy and Turkey as a student in the 1980s. They contain written entries describing her travels, sketches of locations she visited, and various printed materials glued on to the page.

Among the personal materials in this series are artworks given as birthday presents by Cusk's daughter, expired passports, and the ultrasound images and hospital discharge report from the birth of Cusk's older daughter Albertine. Therapy notes written in the form of an informal letter from Cusk's therapist provide an unusual degree of insight into how Cusk views her relationship with her parents and other family members; they expand on remarks made by Cusk about her upbringing in interviews with the *New Yorker* and other publications.

A group of materials described in the finding aid as 'Post' were originally housed in an olive green storage box with a metal clamp labeled with that title. These materials have been filed in their original order within the box. As the label 'Post' suggests, most of the materials in the box consist of correspondence and printed materials received in the mail; however, the box also contained clippings; photographs; publicity materials related to Cusk's second novel *The Temporary*; and typescripts of speeches, reviews, and brief essays. The bulk of the materials date from 1995 to 1996 (with a small selection of items dating from 2007 to 2009). They provide a glimpse into Cusk's professional activities at that time, including correspondence with her agent, participation in awards ceremonies and other events, publicity activities including a BBC interview, and solicitations for articles and reviews in various publications. The materials from this box have been treated for mold contamination; patrons with sensitivity to mold may wish to wear gloves and/or a mask while handling these items.

Separated Material

The following materials were transferred for specialized description:

69 books owned by Rachel Cusk were transferred to the Ransom Center Library.

2 unpublished, non-commercial video recordings were transferred to the Center's Moving Image Collection.

A MacBook Pro laptop was transferred to the Center's Electronic Records Collection.

Index Terms

People

Cusk, Rachel, 1967-

Subjects

Authors, English.

English fiction.

Novelists, English.

Women authors.

Document Types

Clippings.

Correspondence.

Digital images.

Electronic documents.

Journals.

Manuscripts.

Notebooks.

Photographs.

Programs.

Serials (publications).

Series I. Works, 2002-2018

| | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 'Introduction.' An explanatory note by Cusk describing her writing process and its physical manifestations in the archive, 2018 | Container 1.0 |
| After Caravaggio's Sacrifice of Isaac (short story). Granta 81, Spring 2003. | Container 1.1 |
| Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation (2012) | |
| Excerpt. Granta 115, Spring 2011 | Container 1.2 |
| Journal, 2012, undated | Container 1.3 |
| Notes, undated | Container 1.4 |
| Coventry (essay published in Granta 134, Winter 2016). 'Coventry LB light edit.' Draft with edits. 1 electronic file: MS Word, 2015 | Container 1808010P_001 |
| Freedom (short story). The Paris Review 217, Summer 2016 | Container 1.5 |
| In the Fold (2005). Uncorrected proof, 2005 | Container 1.6 |
| Kudos (2018) | |
| Drafts | |
| Printout of draft fragments with Cusk's annotations, undated | Container 1.7 |
| Printout of unfinished draft with Cusk's annotations, undated | Container 1.8 |
| Draft with editor's annotations, 2017 | |
| Printout, double-sided | Container 1.9 |
| Photocopy, single-sided (missing last page) | Container 2.1 |
| Uncorrected proof, with note from Eric Chinski (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux), 2018 | Container 2.2 |
| The Last Supper: A Summer in Italy (2009). Uncorrected proof, 2009 | Container 2.3 |
| Medea (2015) | |
| Drafts | |

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|---|----------------------------------|
| 'medea [1]' and 'M.' Partial drafts. 2 electronic files, MS Word, 2015 | Container 1808010P_001 |
| Printout of draft with Cusk's annotations (removed from spiral binder), undated | Container 2.4 |
| Draft 6, 7 July 2015 | |
| Printout with Cusk's annotations | Container 2.5 |
| Printout with annotations in unidentified hand | Container 2.6 |
| Printout of Draft 7 with Cusk's annotations, 18 July 2015 | Container 2.7 |
| Printout of later draft with Cusk's annotations, 2015 | Container 2.8 |
| Essay on Medea published in The Daily Telegraph, 30 September 2015. 'telegraph.' Draft. 1 electronic file: MS Word, 2015. | Container 1808010P_001 |
| Notebook with dialogue between Jason and Medea, undated | Container 2.9 |
| Notes on oversize paper, 2015 | Container osf 1 |
| Program and tickets. Almeida Theatre, London, 2015 | Container 2.10 |
| Thank-you notes from cast and crew, 2015 | Container 2.11 |
| Outline (2014) | |
| Draft, 'outline.' 1 electronic file: MS Word, 2013 | Container 1808010P_001 |
| Excerpts | |
| Part 1. The Paris Review 207, Winter 2013 | Container 3.1 |
| Part 4. The Paris Review 210, Fall 2014 | Container 3.2 |
| Printer's proof, 'OUTLINE_first proof Optima.' 1 electronic file: PDF, 2014 | Container 1808010P_001 |
| Uncorrected proof with Cusk's annotations, 2014 | Container 3.3 |
| Outline trilogy. Printouts of proposed book cover designs, undated | Container 3.4 |

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|--|----------------------------------|
| Pet Names (short story published in Zoetrope: All-Story, Winter 2008/2009). Printout of draft with Cusk's annotations, undated | Container 3.5 |
| Review of Sarah Waters' The Paying Guests published in The Guardian, 15 August 2014. 'waters.' Draft. 1 electronic file: MS Word, 2014. | Container 1808010P_001 |
| Thirst (short story). Zoetrope: All-Story, Fall 2005 | Container 3.6 |
| Transit (2017) | |
| Drafts and draft fragments. 18 electronic files: MS Word and PAGES, 2015-2016 | Container 1808010P_001 |
| Excerpt. Vice, December 2016 | Container 3.7 |
| Notes, undated | Container 3.8 |
| The Way You Do It (short story). Granta 78, Summer 2002 | Container 3.9 |
| Untitled work (short story?). Printout of draft fragment with annotations in unidentified hand, undated | Container 3.10 |

Series II. Personal and Professional, 1974-2018

| | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Correspondence, including book withdrawal, 1986-2018, undated | Container 3.11, 4.1-3 |
| Event program. <i>Between the Pages: An Evening with the Finalists</i> , Scotiabank Giller Prize. National Music Centre, Calgary, 12 October 2017 | Container 4.4 |
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| Brown leather. With notes for <i>Kudos</i> , 2017 | Container 4.6 |
| Red patterned cloth. With notes, telephone numbers, and addresses, 1997-? | Container 4.7 |
| Teaching notes | |
| '4006 Structure and Style Contemporary British Fiction,' 2008-2009 | Container 5.1 |
| Blue notebook. With journal entries, 2012 | Container 5.2 |
| 'Kingston,' undated | Container 5.3 |
| Spiral-bound, no cover, undated | Container 5.4 |
| Tan notebooks (two with identical covers), 2010-2011 | Container 5.5 |
| Travel journals | |
| Italy, March 1987 | Container 5.6 |
| Turkey, August-September 1987 | Container 5.7 |
| Yellow notebooks | |
| Large. With notes for Arlington Park, 2006-2011 | Container 5.8 |
| Small. With notes for <i>Outline</i> , 2013 | Container 6.1 |
| Notes | |
| Undated | Container 6.2 |
| 'Women's Writing,' undated | Container 6.3 |

Personal

- Artworks on paper given to Cusk as birthday presents by Albertine Clarke and "Billie," 1991, undated **Container**
osf 2
- Collected materials. Zoetrope: All-Story, Summer 2009 **Container** 6.4
- Letter from therapist with therapy notes; mother and baby discharge summary with ultrasound images; memorial program for Gwendoline Woods; certificate from Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 1996-2014 **Container**
6.5
- Passports, 1974, 1990 **Container** 6.6
- 'Post' (removed from olive box). Correspondence; printed materials; clippings; photographs; award and event related materials; typescripts of speeches, reviews, and brief essays; and publicity flyer and dust-jacket mockup for The Temporary, 1995-2009 **Container**
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- Publicity materials. Interview in Wysokie Obcasy (in Polish); reviews in New Statesman and The New York Times Book Review; Whitbread Book of the Year 1993 bookmark, 1993-2017 **Container**
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- DuPre, Jean (London Arts Board)--6.8
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