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**Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek NB**

# **Swiss Literary Archives (SLA) Collection Guidelines 2024-2028**

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## Background of the Swiss Literary Archives

The Swiss Literary Archives (SLA) were founded as a result of the donation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's estate to the Confederation in 1989. At the request of the Federal Council, the Federal Office of Culture, having evaluated the German Literature Archive in Marbach, identified a way to preserve the estate by incorporating it institutionally into the Swiss National Library (NL), which contributed the collection of its manuscript department (Handschriftenabteilung) as a dowry to mark the founding of the new archive. Legally, the Swiss Literary Archives were enshrined in the Federal Act on the Swiss National Library as "Switzerland's literary memory" (Peter von Matt) under the auspices of the National Library.<sup>1</sup> Its legal mandate comprises the acquisition and collection of estates and personal archives from Switzerland's culture and intellectual life, the philological processing of the collections by scientific indexing and in making the collections available to the public and conducting expert research of the holdings. The NL pursues this aim through events, publications, exhibitions and research projects. In 1991, the NL was able to manage the archive on its own premises with four new estates, equipped with the collection of the former manuscript department with about one hundred holdings, staff and an acquisition budget. The Swiss Literary Archives are now a national commemorative institution for the four literatures of Switzerland. They document literary work in Switzerland and with a connection to Switzerland<sup>2</sup> and thus establish for future generations a representative collection of literary holdings from the 20th and 21st centuries, which are updated on an ongoing basis. The SLA acquires, maintains, indexes, allows access to and researches these holdings in line with international standards.

### Collection mandate

The Literary Archives collect literary holdings from Switzerland's four languages and cultures with a focus on Swiss literature from the 20th and 21st centuries. Switzerland's literary work manifests itself in many ways and is constantly changing. The Collection Guidelines of the Swiss Literary Archives reflect that.

#### 1. Collection

Since 1991, the SLA has developed its collection into a representative holding of 20th and 21st century Swiss literature, with in the region of 450 holdings in 2024. They can be subdivided as follows:

- Archives and estates of authors in Switzerland and with a connection to Switzerland of national and international significance, whose works are also in circulation or – for authors who are no longer remembered – were once circulated in neighbouring countries. The authors are well documented in the Swiss Literary Archives up to the cohort born in the 1940s;
- Holdings of literary institutions such as writers' associations, publishing house archives and literary magazine archives;
- Holdings of academics and of literary critics and publicists of international standing or those whose life's work involves Swiss literatures;
- Selected libraries of authors and academics with a close connection to literary life in Switzerland.

The documenting of Switzerland's historical literary developments in all their derivations, the ongoing evaluation of the literary tendencies of contemporary literature and the cultivation of relationships with living authors, literary companies and literary juries provide the basis for the establishment and expansion of the collection. The collection places value on representing authors from Switzerland's

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<sup>1</sup> The basis is Art. 6 Swiss Literary Archives of the Federal Act on the Swiss National Library:

<sup>1</sup> The National Library manages the Swiss Literary Archives.

<sup>2</sup> The Swiss Literary Archives are tasked with acquiring, collecting, cataloguing and providing access to the estates and personal archives of Swiss persons or persons associated with Switzerland whose work is significant to the culture and intellectual life of the country.

<sup>2</sup> The basis is the Ordinance on the Swiss National Library (National Library Ordinance NLibO), section 4, Art. 7 Mandate:

<sup>1</sup>The Swiss Literary Archives (Literary Archives) collect documents related to literary work in Switzerland, especially in the four national languages.

cultures in the 21st century. The SLA continually evaluate the output and contributions from authors of Swiss literature.

In the past decade, the SLA's work has focused on expanding the collection in the areas of exile literature in Switzerland, authors' libraries plus academic and avant-garde holdings. The SLA compiled exemplary collections in these areas from 2012 to 2023.

## 2. Inclusion criteria

The Swiss Literary Archives gather nationally and internationally significant holdings of literary work in and about Switzerland.<sup>3</sup> Criteria for the acceptance and evaluation of estates and archives are as follows:

- National and international significance (canonisation in publication history, relevance in literary history and portals, prizes and distinctions, literary criticism);
- Excellence and aesthetic quality;
- The representation and diversity of literary phenomena, events and developments (genders, languages, regions, generations, genres, etc.)
- Connections to and networking with the current collection (e.g. in mail networks);
- The materiality of holdings in their analogue and digital forms.

The selection criteria are to be developed in a constant process of reflection and justified individually. The collection is designed to document Switzerland's literary work and to create and store the country's literary memory like a repository. That is why the SLA does not merely evaluate offers that are presented to it but also actively seeks out suitable holdings. The SLA also takes steps to document literary phenomena on an ongoing basis that go largely unnoticed in the contemporary literary scene and thus establish a type of counter-canon.

## 3. Expansion of the collection 2024-2028

The SLA maintains and updates its collection within the framework of its annual acquisition budget and according to the following priorities:

- Systematically working through authors born in the 1950s and 1960s not yet in the collection based on relevance, representativeness and quality of output. Swiss authors living abroad are included in the evaluation. Dialect literature of national interest may selectively be included in the collection.
- The collection of academic and institutional holdings is being continued but also limited; offers are carefully reviewed and only pursued if the holdings make a meaningful addition to the collection.
- Switzerland has been a classic destination for expatriates and migrants since the 19th century. Exile literature from the National Socialist period from 1933 to 1945 is already plentiful in the SLA. Nonetheless, more recent definitions of exile literature are broader in scope. Accordingly, holdings of migration literature from after 1945 must be taken into consideration over the next few years for inclusion in the SLA's collection work. That includes the documentation of the migratory movements of guest workers to Switzerland, from Italy for example, but also migratory movements from eastern and south-eastern Europe after 1945.
- Authors' libraries are only to be acquired in exceptional instances, if they are part of the academic's or author's work and complement the holdings.

The selection procedure for expanding the collection is meticulously documented. Every offer is reviewed and documented in a multi-stage process, applying the four-eye principle and based on written reports. The expertise of the Sound Archives in Lugano is at hand to evaluate audiovisual

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<sup>3</sup> The collection does not include children's and youth literature, which falls under the remit of the Swiss Institute for Children's and Youth Media (SIKJM). Holdings of dramaturges, translators, comics, graphic novels and computer games are currently not a priority.

content, the Prints and Drawings Department of the NL can assist with artistic content. The SLA also manages the growing supply of estates and archives to the extent that it assists in their allocation and ensures their preservation together with the cantonal institutions and university archives. It gives suppliers the contact details of professional establishments.

#### Conclusion:

The SLA is involved in building its collection and preserving Switzerland's literary memory, irrespective of whether it is in analogue or digital format. It participates in the canon formation process and is considered an important partner in literary discourse and is involved in decision-making processes. This collection work (as a process of the archive) is closely connected to questions pertaining to research in philologies and archival science. The SLA responds consistently and appropriately to developments and changes in the literary field and addresses the question of how the literary memory has changed over the past 20 years.