Authors, avant-texte, archives.

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What I would like to talk about today is a particular subset of literary archives that I believe deserves particular attention. That is the materials that an author produces in the development of his or her works. It is nothing new to give this type of material special treatment, though this tends to be along the lines of raising them to the status of 'treasures' in our collections. One of ours, beloved of visiting tourists, is the manuscript of Winnie the Pooh, which we possess together with the manuscript of The House at Pooh Corner, though we have no associated Milne manuscripts to contextualise them. For my part, I do believe that the archives of creation are precious, but not as some relic of a literary genius (or for that matter of AA Milne**).**

Essentially what I want to argue today is that they are both more prosaic and more important in that they form a vital and complex record of the cognitive processes of literary creation, with all the consequences for the cataloguing process that this entails. I should make the point that this applies as much to works of fact as those of fiction.

Records of authorial creativity may take many forms and contain documents in many formats, and I shall speak throughout of archives of the pre-wordprocessor era. They may be part of a more complete author's archive containing correspondence, diaries and other documents that are not closely connected with creative activity or may be preserved separately and perhaps even severally. They may contain notebooks and rough notes of one sort or another, scenarios, sketches, rough drafts, fair copies and annotated proofs. The interrelationship of these materials may be complex and significant in the understanding of not only the individual documents and the archive they comprise, but also the texts contained within them. So in order to preserve fully the evidence afforded by the record of the authorial process, these relationships ought to be considered the cataloguing process. Now while this may seem obvious to many, historically it has not been the case and many of the great libraries including my own must bear some of the blame for this.

In order to further explain my views I want to briefly examine the general cognitive processes which introduce complexity into the record, and to indicate at least one influential school of literary studies that shows what can be achieved through the study of literary process based on the archival record. As a result, much of the next quarter of an hour will be made up of an examination of why we should seek to represent intellectual order in a catalogue and how much

is achievable, rather than giving a blow-by-blow account of how this might best be achieved.

But first, to clear up any misunderstanding of the continental intrusion in the title of my paper (and to apologise for using a term that is not in the GLAM thesaurus) I should explain my use of the phrase avant-texte. It was first coined by Jean Bellemin-Noel, one of the prime agents of the French Genetic School. I use it not, I hope, in order to sound completely pretentious, but I think it is a wonderfully succinct term that carries with it a good deal of meaning. The term has been the focus of some debate (though no more than is usual in French academic circles). However, if we restrain ourselves sufficiently to accept one of the more concrete definitions we will not stray too far from the original sense. That definition is 'all the documents which come before a work when it is considered as a *text* and when those documents and the text *are considered part of a system.*' – the italics are mine. Crucially, the definition recognises that a vital part of the identity of avant-texte is that it is formed by the manuscripts of creation when arranged in such a way as to mirror the process of authorship. Thus it very clearly highlights the relationship between arrangement and understanding. The term Bellemin-Noel uses for the body of *unarranged* manuscripts is not avant-texte but 'le dossier'. Of course any avant-texte, like most catalogues, is a construct, but the journey from dossier to avant-texte does

not merely provide an interesting parallel with the process of cataloguing. It gives us an ideal for which to aim.

In considering the arrangement of potentially complex archives it is important first to consider their identity. Here I think there is an area where confusion creeps in, especially in the case of those who have sought to demonstrate that the materials I am considering are not archival in nature – often by concentrating on their informational value while ignoring the evidential. I believe that the archives produced by authors writing are best represented as the records of a series of cognitive processes, and that our understanding of avant-textes as such may be illuminated by taking a look at the way cognitive sciences consider these processes.

 I think if we approach them correctly it is evident that avant-textes are not simply an end-product, but are both an integral part and a record of authorial process as it takes place over time. This view has profound consequences not only for how it is interpreted, but also for how it must be catalogued. As a record of process it provides an evidential quality that supports the informational value of the material. It is precisely because it gives us evidence of the cognitive processes of the author, evidence which gives us a precious

chance to investigate those processes, that we should take due care in the way in which we preserve, arrange and catalogue this material.

So to demonstrate the relationship between the avant-texte and the cognitive process I want to make a short and I hope not-too-painful digression into the world of cognitive theory and look at how exponents of the subject model the writing process. The model I want to use is a fairly general one produced by John R Hayes who divides the functions and processes of writing between two environments. The first of these he calls the task environment, which covers external factors such as audience, collaborators, history of genre, the text composed so far and the medium. More important for our purposes today is the second main environment, which covers factors internal to the individual. Here processes are split into four classes, motivational, cognitive processes, working memory and long-term memory, each comprising a series of tasks. Vastly simplified, the process of writing happens thus. Drawn from data in long-term memory, the author uses cognitive processes operating in working memory in order to produce text that undergoes reflection that in turn allows for rewriting or redrafting. Numerous iterations of these processes may take place before the author is satisfied with the text.

That the process is often recorded in some detail to create the archives that I am discussing is a consequence of the limitations of working memory and as we know, the necessity of remembering, whether in a personal or administrative scenario, is one of the prime agents in the creation of records. The Hayes model assigns a central role to the working memory, to which all processes have access. But vital as it is, it is also is a limited resource. Studies suggest that most people, even experienced writers, are only able to hold in working memory a surprisingly small number words of a composition before a record of this has to be made, in order to allow it to be cleared to make space for composition of the next phrase or sentence. In this manner, piece-by-piece a work is composed, and the record created.

Perhaps more importantly for the complexity of the record, working memory, with all its limitations, is also used by those processes that amend a draft. And it is these amendments that usually prove so interesting as they show the development of the text over a period of time. According to cognitive theory any rewriting of text, whether revision or redrafting involves a process of reflection where the text is read in order to evaluate it. This too is reliant on available working memory with the result that it is not only the original composition of the text that must take place phrase by phrase or sentence by sentence, but also any *re*writing of the text. The practical result of this is that

where there are only a few changes of words or phrases to be made, this generally happens on the original draft. However, given the limitation on cognitive resources that we have seen, any rearrangement of text that needs extensive rewriting or a wider scope, for example to arrange the order of events within a narrative, generally requires redrafting, thus creating a new manuscript and adding another facet to the complexity of the avant-texte.

I have tried to make the case for seeing the avant-texte as a record of the process of which it forms an integral part. Of course, like other forms of record, it will be interpreted by researchers, and indeed by archivists, in various ways, and their opinion will face the judgement of their peers. But in order to give them the opportunity to do so, we as archivists must attempt to preserve or reconstruct as best we can the record of the process of composition. While I think that this is self-evidently correct, I also wish to call on support from the process-driven (and therefore archive-driven) revolution that has taken place in literary studies over the last fifty years. For the first half of the last century, the material which made up the avant-texte was used for the most part in *textual* studies, that is that it was used to correct texts of works already printed, to give variant readings or to provide copy-text where no printed exemplar existed. However, from the 1960s onward theoretical studies based on the archival evidence of the avant-texte has moved the material into the sphere of *literary*

studies. One of the most important schools in this development is the French Genetic School based around work at *The Institut des Textes et Manuscrits Moderne*. One of the crucial points about this group of scholars from our perspective as archivists, was it's origins, for, though undoubtedly owing something to the philosophical zeitgeist, the catalyst was not the prevailing French philosophical tradition but the quality of the literary manuscripts acquired by the Biblioteque Nationale from the late 60s onward., including especially those of Heinrich Heine and Gustave Flaubert. Crucially, it was the comparatively complete survival and the complex organic nature internal to the archives that the Biblioteque received and the realisation that the importance of the context that the understanding of the whole gave to each of its documents that encouraged the emergence of a completely new approach to literary studies. Closer to home, similar archive-driven work on textual process can be seen in Sally Bushell's recent volume *Text as Process* – the clue's in the title – which is one of the more obvious examples in which the author looks as the authorial processes of Wordsworth, Tennyson and Emily Dickinson.

Given what I claim is a vital resource for attempting to understand the cognitive process by which an author's work is created and with the support of schools of thought that do so on the basis of close archival examination, I think that it is clear that any catalogue of this material should attempt as closely as possible to

engage with the question of the intellectual arrangement of the materials. Indeed, it is clear not to do so runs the risk of permanently denuding our ability to make real sense of the material in our care.

Such an approach, however, certainly presents difficulties, some intellectual and some practical, but not necessarily ones that cannot for the most part be overcome. Some archives are more complex and better preserved than others and the quality of preservation may well have an effect on how much context can be saved. We have seen that the record of the cognitive process a partial one – in coverage it is closer to a series of minutes rather than a verbatim narrative. But without legal or administrative imperatives, much of the record may be destroyed before the archive reaches the repository and this clearly should be a consideration when cataloguing author's papers. At the extreme, an author might insist their complete creative archive is destroyed on their death – in Kafka's case this failed spectacularly as his friend Max Brod used the archive to publish *The Trial, The Castle* and *Amerika*. Others such as Flaubert appear very much aware of the importance of the record of their authorial process and wish to preserve it both for reference by themselves and for other interested parties, and as such are a godsend for archivist and researcher alike. Most authors fall between the two, and it is sometimes the case that early notes and drafts for works are destroyed by the hands of their makers, through ignorance,

embarrassment, want of space. Indeed in some cases, it is part of the artistic process – *ars est celare artem* and all that. While such destruction clearly affects the extent to which the catalogue can reflect the authorial process as a whole, it should not prevent our first instinct being to preserve or reconstruct the order in what remains.

Even where an archive is safely in the repository all is not necessarily straightforward. Archivists catalogue objects, not concepts or strands of thought. While at times the physical nature of the surviving record of creation might follow its intellectual order, for example in a series of successive, self-contained drafts of a work, there are clearly times when it does not and the archivist may find themselves having to find some compromise that satisfies the needs of physical and intellectual arrangement. Take the example of Tennyson, much of whose manuscripts consists of a series of notebooks now divided between Cambridge, New Haven, Lincoln and elsewhere. As part of the revision process, Tennyson replaces in the page words and phrases he is dissatisfied with. However, when he moves to more substantial revisions, he redrafts elsewhere, often in a different notebook. Anyone wishing to retrace the process of writing *The Gardner's Daughter* will need to take into account eighteen drafts in 12 notebooks (incidentally in 4 repositories). By the same token, many of the notebooks contain drafts for a number of poems and so form

part of the avant-texte for different works. Now, of course we would not consider disbinding the relevant volumes in order to shuffle their contents – even if they were all in the same repository or even same continent – but we might consider using hypertextual strategies to alert the reader of our catalogue to the interrelationship between the notebooks, either on paper or in HTML or ideally EAD. Indeed, given the flexibility of XML it should not be too difficult to produce virtual catalogues where archives are split between repositories.

It is also quite clear that the sort of approach that I am proposing will not be the quickest. However, I do think that any time invested in taking a careful, even scholarly approach to the cataloguing of avant-texte may well pay dividends as there are substantial bye-products to be had. Firstly, and most importantly, it will offer us the best opportunity to present the material in a way that preserves both its full evidential and informational value. Second, the information that we gain from the cataloguing process will allow us to offer a better service to our readers and to understand their needs on a deeper level. Third, the greater knowledge will produce greater efficiencies in dealing with enquiries (which may eventually even exceed the extra time expended in the cataloguing process). And fourth, the experience of arranging and cataloguing these materials will contribute greater understanding to our knowledge of that very skill, which is central to our professional lives.

I should also point out that this approach does not run contrary to the ideas of MPLP, certainly as envisaged by Green and Meissner, who are sensible enough to realise that some items of greater importance do warrant greater scrutiny in the process of arrangement and description, even at item level. It is not the intentions of the original proponents of the idea that I fear. What concerns me are the dangers of mission-creep, where the success of MPLP in, say, administrative archives, where well-ordered series of files do not necessarily require listing to the item level, encourages its employment in areas of archives less suited to its use. In cataloguing avant texte it is not just a matter of 'representing the materials sufficient to affording acceptable access' but also preserving them in such a way to afford greatest understanding.

So in brief conclusion, I believe that once we understand the identity of the records of literary creativity and examine examples of how they can be used by scholars, the importance of the internal context of the papers becomes clear and must guide our cataloguing. The work is likely to be a mix of preserving order, reconstructing order from internal evidence and providing hypertextual cross-references between documents. But I also believe that cataloguing should not be seen in isolation, but as a process that produces many benefits for both researcher and archivist beyond simply giving access to archives, though some

of these may not be immediately understood. So I would argue that the greater

time that the archivist is able to devote to cataloguing these materials, the

greater the benefits are to all parties.