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The Ten Most Basic Things I Can Tell You about Processing Literary Papers

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by
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A bit more than a year ago, as I neared the end of a two-year gig as an archivist at the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection at USM, I finally completed the most tiresome, tedious, plodding archival processing experience I have ever endured. I organized the papers of an author—I won't name him for propriety's sake—who had produced a sizeable body of records resulting from his composition of about three dozen books. Its volume was not a problem, nor did it arrive as the hideous mess common to most literary papers. Instead, the yoke of these records came about from the type of books the author wrote—the type of books I would never read: science fiction novels, Gothic mystery and romance, pseudo-medieval fantasy.

He wrote a few rather good books for children, which was the reason for his inclusion in the de Grummond Collection, but most of the papers on hand were produced while writing books for adults. To me they were tired, uninteresting books, the kind that are written quickly for short-lived sale at discount stores and druggists before spending long retirements in cramped second-hand paperback exchanges with low ceilings, plywood shelves, and orange shag carpeting. The papers themselves reflected the industrial quality of the genres: photocopied guidelines for prospective authors of Starlight Romances (absolutely no illness or children allowed); typescripts of sci-fi novels written on the backs of engineering printouts made on that old green- and white-barred computer paper; and boxes and boxes of printed booklets for a fantasy roll playing game meant to mimic Eastern Europe during the later Middle Ages. Not surprisingly, my assistant noticed my repeated visits to the water fountain and routine afternoon strolls about the exhibit area ostensibly to stretch my legs.

Fortunately, I began working on the papers about a year and a half after I had begun working at the de Grummond Collection. By that time I had become so familiar with the nature of literary papers that I had developed procedures to process them quite efficiently. Mercifully, these little tricks allowed me to organize and describe the records almost mechanically, so I could become somewhat mentally detached from the content of the papers.

These little gems of knowledge that I gained over a couple of years spent exclusively processing literary archives got me through some pretty rough road. While the basic archival principles I learned in school still applied, I nonetheless perceived some unique qualities in authors' papers that required the adoption of special methods. So, in the spirit of state archival camaraderie, I'd like to share the ten most useful things I learned about processing literary papers for the benefit of those who haven't had to deal with them yet.

1. Archivally speaking, all authors are the same

I'm sure if you actually asked them, every author on the planet would insist that he or she is a totally unique individual. If you really asked, they probably would get all indignant and insist that their work sprang from their own experiences with life and love and the land or whatever and that no one else could ever express the same feelings and attitudes and observations to a readership so eager and desperate to understand them like they could. Well, sure, okay, fine. Maybe there's something to that. I'm not a writer and I probably never had the same kinds of experiences they had nor do I particularly care anyway. Nevertheless, from a documentary point of view, I can attest that all authors fundamentally are the same. They all wrote their books in pretty much the same way and those books all passed through the same production process. They all hung on to ratty typescripts; they all dumped their cast off pages in the same incomprehensible piles; and they all saved the same patronizingly encouraging letters received from the same sycophantic editors. Archivally speaking, the idea of authorial individuality is nonsense. One author's papers are the same as any others and it is this consistency that allows us to use the same procedures when processing literary papers for any author across the spectrum.

2. Don't read any books

Most likely, you will know the titles of the books for which you have production material. If you have ready access to them, retrieve copies of the books to consult while processing, but if you can't find them all, don't worry about it. The honest truth is that you don't always need a copy of a book to process its production material. Galleys, page proofs, and blues can serve you just as well, although they're not as convenient to use. Only very rarely will you need to order a copy of a book from a dealer to finish a processing job.

As for the books you do have, here's another secret. You won't read them. First, you usually don't need to read them and second, you haven't got the time anyway. Do not read any book organized into chapters. Authors who write books that long usually do some planning before writing, so the structure of the book during production usually varies little from the finished work. Just skim through it so you can understand what each chapter is about. Additionally, folder descriptions for chapter books (discussed below) employ only chapter numbers, so all you need to have for those is a general understanding of the contents of each chapter. The only times you will need to read a book are when the papers are very, very disorganized or when the book is very long and you have a huge quantity of material to sort. This will happen only about 1 percent of the time.

3. The books series is the only series you haven't seen before

Series identification for literary papers is pretty much the same as with any other type of personal papers. Authors create correspondence, financial records, and personal files just like everyone else. The only series really unique to literary papers is the Books Series. Creating material for published books is the most common and significant function there is among literary papers, so you will definitely have a series for books in your organization.

At the de Grummond Collection, we followed a simple alphabetical organization for the Books Series by just listing the titles for which we had material in alphabetical order. The only exception to this alphabetical rule is a case of a single book being reissued under more than one title. In this event, I always preferred to keep the items for these incarnations in close proximity to each other. To do this while still maintaining the integrity of the alphabetical list, I invented the expression "Titles derived from." In place of the normal title on the subseries level, write "Titles derived from" followed by the book's original title. This acts in much the same way as a uniform title in book cataloging. Under this heading, list each title for which you have papers in chronological order and give the place and date of publication in parentheses next to it. Here's an example of a Books Series from the Gloria Whelan Papers.

A. Books (1976-2002)

1. *Angel on the Square* (2001)

2. *Are There Bears in Starvation Lake?* (2002)

3. *Bringing the Farmhouse Home* (1992)
...

27. *That Wild Berries Should Grow: The Story of a Summer* (1994)

28. Titles derived from *A Time to Keep Silent* (1979)
     a. *A Time to Keep Silent* (New York, 1979)
     b. *A Time to Keep Silent* (Grand Rapids, 1993)
     c. *The Silence Trap* (Oxford, 1994)

29. *The Wanigan: A Life on the River* (2002)

30. *A Week of Raccoons* (1988)

31. *Welcome to Starvation Lake* (2000)

If you have several books that were written as parts of a multi-volume series, do not organize them together as a series. While there is nothing really bad about doing that, we always reasoned that anyone using literary papers would probably want to investigate individual titles before an entire series; thus, having a straight alphabetical list of all an author's books ought to be more user-friendly.

While we always avoided including overlong lists of subseries or sub-subseries in our organizational outlines, we still made an exception for the Books Series and gave a complete list of all the books for which we had material no matter how long it was. We always worked on the assumption that production material for published books would be the most popular material for patrons, so we wanted them to know right away for what books we held material. Visit the de Grummond Collection's website and look at the finding aids for Bruce Coville (82 books) or David Adler (148 books) for examples of monstrous lists of book titles.

4. Writing precedes typing

The only sensible arrangement for literary production material is order of creation. Not surprisingly, correspondence, composition notes, and research notes usually will lead off the creative process. Arranging these types of material requires no special skills beyond basic archival knowledge. The greatest challenge to arranging literary papers in order of creation comes with manuscripts and typescripts. This is the place where close observation and repeated comparisons are most necessary to figure out which item came before or after which other ones.

When faced with an assortment of manuscripts and typescripts, I first look for obvious dates written on items. Most of the time authors do not date their drafts, but you do get lucky sometimes. I also check for numbers an author might have assigned to drafts, but these are even rarer. Designations like "new draft" or "revision" might have meant something at the time, but they seldom mean anything by the time the papers reach the archives. Even labels like "first draft" may be misleading. A "first draft" might have been the first draft made by the author or the first draft she sent to her editor, which could have been the third or fourth draft actually written. You might consider the size of an item, but don't rely on it. Since books can be both shortened as well as expanded during revision, shorter typescripts do not necessarily precede longer ones.

Most likely, you will have to do a bit of close observation when handling manuscripts and typescripts. My method for figuring their order of creation rests on one assumption: an author would have written something by hand before he typed it. No one types a chapter then revises it by rewriting the whole thing by hand.

Start by taking a quick look at the typescripts. One or two may be in better condition than the others. Typescripts that appear to be in good physical condition owing to less handling probably belong at the end of line because the last few typescripts always need the least tinkering. Furthermore, typescripts with publication marks on them always go at the end. Publication marks differ from content editing by being marks placed by a copy editor specifying how the text is to appear in published form. These include references to font size, spacing, margins, and so forth. For obvious reasons, copy editors don't mark up typescripts before the author is finished composing the content of the book. So, if you find any typescripts like this, put then at the end of the line for now.

Next, examine your manuscript material and compare it to the chapters in the published book. Be sure to remember what chapters in the finished book are covered by each manuscript because you will need to know this for the description. Don't worry too much about how chapter numbers might have changed from draft to draft. For description, we always referred to the chapter numbers as they ultimately stood in the published book because these are the only chapter numbers our patrons would be familiar with. So, if chapter 2 in the book was originally chapter 1 in the manuscript, then say that the manuscript covers chapter 2.

You likely will have only one real manuscript, so compare the remaining typescripts next. Keeping in mind my injunction about handwriting always preceding typing, look for a typescript that has a good deal of handwritten additions inserted into the text. Compare a passage from the typescript with the same passage on another typescript. If the inserted passage in the first typescript appears typed in the second, then the first preceded the second. If the second typescript doesn't feature the inserted text, then one of two things might have happened. Either the second typescript preceded the first or the second typescript is a copy of the first one. This probably seems all very simple and elementary and most of the time it is. Comparisons of handwritten and typed text will work for you in the majority of cases without too much confusion.

Naturally, you shouldn't rely on the comparison of just one passage to draw a conclusion about a whole typescript. Find more inserted handwritten passages elsewhere in the typescript and keep comparing them to the same portions in other typescripts. While you certainly don't need to read the whole draft, you will need to make several comparisons in this manner before you can confidently reach conclusions about order of creation. Once you have decided on a probable order of the typescripts, go ahead and physically arrange them in that order on the table. Now look at them again, following them from left to right, from earliest to latest. You inevitably will find something amiss about your arrangement and need to shift and re-shift items repeatedly as you reexamine them and refine the order. It's time consuming, but it's vitally important to figure out the exact order of the papers and eventually you will find it to your great satisfaction.

I want to stress again that it is very important to check the entire typescript when comparing different drafts because it is not uncommon for authors to change only small portions of a typescript and replace only the pages they have changed. Take this example, also from Gloria Whelan, from her novel about a young Ernest Hemingway, *The Pathless Woods*.

> 16/1-2
> Typescript for front matter, chapters 1-11, and bibliography, contains revised version of chapter 1, edited and marked for publication, 145 pp.
>
> 16/3
> Typescript pages for front matter, chapter 1, and bibliography removed from above typescript during revision, edited, 10 pp.
>
> 16/4-5
> Photocopy of above typescript for chapters 1-11, contains original version of chapter 1, edited, 136 pp.
>
> 16/6
> Carbon copies of revised typescript pages for front matter and chapter 1, lightly edited, 5 pp.

Here's what happened. Gloria Whelan typed a complete typescript for the book: front matter, chapters 1-11, and a bibliography. Most of this original typescript is in folders 1-2, but not all of it. She made a photocopy of the typescript—at least the parts for chapters 1-11—and made some editing notes on it. The photocopy is in folders 4-5. Whelan next rewrote the front matter, chapter 1, and the bibliography and made a carbon copy of the first two parts while she typed them. The carbon copy is in folder 6. She then switched the original front matter, first chapter, and bibliography for the new versions of the three sections. The final typescript, composed of the original chapters 2-11 and revised front matter, chapter 1, and bibliography, is in folders 1-2. You can easily spot the revised first chapter because Whelan made it with a different typewriter. The typescript pages for the original front matter, first chapter, and bibliography ultimately landed in folder 3.

As you can see, putting manuscripts and typescripts in order of creation is frequently a process of reconstructing how an author worked. You discover that he wrote chapter 3 before he wrote chapter 1 or that she restored passages to a final version that she had deleted at some point before. By the time you finish arranging a lengthy line of production material, you ought to know exactly how your creator worked and wrote. You'll also have plenty of privileged information to pass on to your patrons.

One last thing about manuscripts and typescripts: occasionally you'll deal with a fuzzy-headed author who, every time he retyped a page, tossed the old page into a pile with other castoff pages, not caring a thing about them. Naturally, when he shipped his papers off to you, he considerately included his brimming mound of throw-away pages, figuring he was doing you a big favor by including them. If you come upon one of these literary mulch piles, cuss under your breath for a few moments but don't try to conquer it. You will never put these pages into a useable arrangement with any certainty. Just describe it as "typescript pages removed from several typescripts" and count the number of pages. That's about all you can do. Leave it to the user to figure out what the author did. They'll care more about his work to take the time to figure out the whole thing—or maybe not.

5. There is printed material for every place and time

After an author has finished writing the text, she sends it on to her editors who prepare it for printing. The first bit of printed material the author receives from the publishers are galleys. Galleys are mechanically printed sheets used to preview how text will appear in a book. Galley sheets are narrow and long and, since they are the first version of how a book will appear in print, have no page breaks. Rather, the text appears in a long unbroken column. Traditionally, galley sheets measured about 7 x 25 inches, while some more recent ones are the size of legal size paper. The general rule of handwriting preceding typing applies to printed material as well, although any text added by hand is later printed rather than typed. A further advantage when working with galleys and page proofs (discussed next) is that these items frequently bear the date on which they were printed, thereby making arrangement far easier.

It is not unusual to find duplicate sets of the same galleys. Frequently, an author might put his comments on one set of galleys and mail them to the editor who would in turn write both her own and the author's comments on a second set of the same galleys. After the book is published, sold, remaindered, and forgotten, the author always receives any production material still in the possession of the publisher, including multiple sets of galleys. Don't discard duplicate sets of galleys or page proofs. It's all valuable information on a book's creation that must be preserved.

Once the text has been finalized by editor and author, the printers can impose page breaks on the text. Once these breaks have been added, the printers make sheets previewing how the text and any illustrations will appear on the newly numbered pages. These are called page proofs. Early page proofs were printed on long sheets of paper similar to galleys while more recent ones may appear on glossy paper anywhere from 8 ½ inches square to 11 x 17 inches. For books featuring illustrations, the page proofs may or may not contain printed images of the pictures. While it is hardly unusual for authors to make last-minute editorial changes to page proofs, they tend to be rather minor since too much time has already been invested in the page layouts to take the trouble to make major revisions. Like galleys, page proofs usually bear their dates of printing, making identification and arrangement rather easy.

Once the page proofs are finalized, three other forms of printed material are produced: blues, folded and gathered sheets, and advance reading copies. You can easily tell that they belong at the end of the line because they all look like finished book pages, only without a cover. Blues are the pages of a book printed by a cyanotype process giving them a distinctive uniform blue color. Blues are a cheap way for the publishers to check how the pages of a book will appear in their final published form. They might contain some editing, but usually very little. I have to admit that I have never seen blues for books published after about 1994. I don't know if publishers even use them anymore.

Once the appearance of a book is deemed well and acceptable, the publisher orders the printing of the book on large press sheets printed on the quality of paper chosen for the book. The sheets are folded and cut to make folded and gathered sheets. These are the printed and cut pages of a book in their final form for use as the text block, but not yet bound as a book.

You occasionally may find an advance reading copy among an author's papers. This is a set of folded and gathered sheets for a book, sometimes not yet featuring illustrations, bound in a simple paper cover for early distribution to reviewers before the official publication of the book.

6. Indices at the end; dust jackets wherever

Naturally, indices always appear late in the production process. Since an indexer cannot prepare an index until he knows exactly on which pages every bit of text will appear in the published book, the typescript of an index is not prepared until after the last set of page proofs is approved. Sometimes you might find a duplicate set of page proofs with all the proper nouns underlined. These sets have been marked for indexing and should be identified as such.

Sometimes an author will file the typescript of the index with the final typescript for the book or the galleys of the index with the book galleys. Be assured that this is only a filing habit imposed at the spur of the moment when the author received a shipment of old production material for his failed book. The typescript and galleys for the index were not created at the same time as the typescript and galleys of the book. In such cases, separate the material for the index and put it in its proper place in the order of creation. Returning it to its appropriate place in the process is far more useful to researchers than retaining a meaningless filing method unthinkingly used by the author.

Conversely, the dust jacket usually is created rather early in production, often before the author finishes the typescript. As soon as the author pretty much knows the plot and characters of a book and conveys this to the editor, an artist sets to work on the dust jacket. As you probably know, dust jackets lie like politicians, so it is unnecessary for the artist to know very much about a book before drawing its cover illustration. Also, the author sometimes will momentarily set aside his main typescript for a book to quickly throw together some meaningless twaddle for the back cover.

About half the time you will find dates on the dust jacket proof material to confirm its early spotting in the production process, although typescript pages for cover copy are seldom dated. Nonetheless, the easiest way to deal with dust jacket material is simply to combine it all in one folder and describe it as "typescripts and proofs for dust jacket" or something like that. You will seldom have more than a half dozen items for a dust jacket anyway, so there's really no point in trying to place each item in its precise place in the order of creation. Just pack it all together and find an appropriate slot for it somewhere early in the process.

7. You have time for eight elements in a folder description

After a prolonged effort at trying to achieve the right balance between detail and efficiency in a literary folder description, I concluded that eight is the maximum number of elements that I can cram into a folder listing without taking up too much time.

First, since the item in the folder is a tangible thing, begin your folder description with a clearly defined noun (e.g., typescript, galley, page proofs).

Second, carefully examine the item and determine if it is a copy of some kind. Users ought to know if they can expect an original item or a copy. You may have some difficulty identifying copies for people writing after the advent of word processing and photocopiers. Sometimes you really can't tell if an item is a printout or a very good photocopy, so don't call something a copy unless you're very sure of it.

Third and fourth, enhance your folder descriptions by noting the order of creation of a particular item and the range of chapters in the finished book covered by it. I think it's very helpful for patrons to know both of these characteristics because it lets them get an idea of how a book was created by only reading through the container listing. Number an item with ordinal numbers and describe the range by referring to chapter numbers (e.g., second typescript for chapters 1-4, third galley for chapters 1-6).

Fifth, include a verb describing anything significant that happened to the item, such as the editing of an item's content. If an item contains any publication marks—marks placed by a copy editor specifying how the text is to appear in published form—then write that it was "marked for publication." This is a catch-all expression I invented to describe all kinds of publication marking and copy editing. If a page

proof was marked up by an indexer, you can note that, too. Don't worry about who did the editing or marking. Some typescripts are touched by three or four different people and you don't have time to figure out who they all were.

Sixth, note any material accompanying the item, such as a cover letter.

Seventh, include the span of dates covered by the material in the folder, if you know it. Most manuscripts and typescripts will be undated, but probably more than half of printed material will feature a clearly printed date of manufacture. For undated material, estimate a date and put it in brackets. If you don't know the date and can't figure out one, then be safe and write nothing for the date. I always assume that a patron will take my word on estimated dates, so I'm very careful to be sure of my guesses before I put them to paper. Don't give dates for accompanying material, just for the main item in the folder.

Eighth, finish the folder description with a statement of volume. The statement of volume is not made for any security purposes, but rather to give patrons a rough idea of how big an item is. If pages are numbered, go ahead and trust them unless they're obviously poorly numbered. If you happen to notice that a page is missing, don't bother mentioning it in your folder description. To be honest, you will never have time to check if every page of every typescript and every galley is present, so you will notice missing pages only by happenstance. Under those conditions, alerting patrons to occasional cases of missing pages will only give them an unrealistic impression of your diligence. If sheets have no numbers or the numbers are woefully inconsistent, then count the number of sheets. You'll probably miscount them, but as long as you get close, that's okay. No one is ever going to count them again to disprove you.

8. Control your impulse to apply cross references

You may find a few occasions to include cross references in your container listing. It's perfectly fine to do this, but I advise you to be very, very stingy with them. They can easily get out of hand and send everyone—including you—into a cyclone of confusion. I very nearly lost control of all the cross references I put in the Bruce Coville Papers and was rather lucky to have them all make sense in the end. I use cross references only to connect the main body of records for one literary work with other production material for the same work that happens to be filed in a different series. And that's it!! Don't be tempted to do more!! I don't care if an author happened to mention a particular title in a letter he sent to his publisher ostensibly for some other reason. Don't try to link the folder that contains that letter to the citation for the book itself in the Books Series. Those kinds of cross references will become simply overwhelming.

9. The scope & content note is the same here as anywhere, except for one paragraph

The scope and content note for a body of literary papers is really no different from those for any other body of records. Here as there it gives a broad prose description of the contents of the papers. It lists the forms of material, describes the functions that led to the records' creation, details the organization and so forth. It's also your chance to show off what you've learned in the process of becoming the reigning world authority on the complete literary output of what's-her-name.

Whatever format you use for the scope and content at your institution should be just fine for literary papers as well, but I do have one thing to share regarding description of the Books Series. After offering an introductory paragraph for the series describing the forms of material, the date range, and any special information on organization and arrangement, I add this special paragraph to every note:

The quantity of material for specific titles varies tremendously, from a single typescript to a huge assortment of notes, typescripts, proofs, and correspondence. The container listing offers detailed descriptions of the holdings for each title and information on the material's process of creation may be gleaned easily from the container listing for each book. However, some additional explanation is needed to understand the arrangement and description of the material for several books.

This whole paragraph is boilerplate language that I use in almost every finding aid to excuse myself from describing the holdings for every single title in the scope & content note. I follow it with a few paragraphs

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describing the holdings of only those titles that require special description. The container listing is sufficient to describe the holdings for the rest of the books.

10. If none of this makes sense, look at some examples.

　　　　If I have only teased and confused you with my pretentious advice, visit the contributor index on the de Grummond Collection website (http://www.lib.usm.edu/~degrum/html/research/re-manuillust.shtml) and look closely at our better finding aids. For authors' papers, see my finding aids for David A. Adler, Bruce Coville, Gene DeWeese, Charles Ghigna, Dan Halacy, Bill Severn, Whitney Stewart, and Gloria Whelan. For illustrators' papers (which I didn't discuss here), see Cheri Alder's finding aids for Merritt Mauzey, Jan Pienkowski, and Louis Slobodkin. And for the whole kit and caboodle, take your time savoring our mammoth finding aid for H.A. & Margret Rey. Everything we ever learned about anything came together there.