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Women's Instructional Writings in Nineteenth-Century France: A digital Bibliography

Hélène and I will first say a few words of introduction in order to situate ourselves and this project in a digital experience that we represent very differently. Second, I will talk about the project background and the corpus at hand. Third, Hélène will discuss the digitization young history and process, and finally, I will conclude by mentioning some of the questions such a project can help us address. Although one can and must think boldly and ambitiously about such projects, we are at the very beginning of the journey, so we truly really appreciate any suggestions or questions you might have for us, and we also look forward to learning from your own experiences.

Monicat intro: I have minimal computer skills and close to non-existent technical abilities (and that's being generous). I have mostly practiced "slow and solitary research" since a large part of my scholarly life has been spent consulting card catalogs and reading never checked out books while working on nineteenth-century France women's travel writings and children's literature. What has triggered my interest in the digital humanities lies in their feminist promises toward what digital tools can do both for literary studies and for research processes and experiences. In terms of literary studies, my enthusiasm has to do with the impact digital tools can have not merely on literary historiography narrowly speaking but more widely so on feminist theories and epistemologies. In terms of research processes and experiences, I am particularly interested in how they can transform ways of working with graduate and undergraduate students in the context of the foreign language classroom. The corpus we will discuss today, women's instructional writings in Nineteenth-Century France, is a prime candidate for exploring this

wealth of “feminist interventions” via digitization. The project aims to provide new scholarly entry points into a corpus that is still largely unaccounted for and give it a material, historical, and critical reality. It also aims at developing new research connections between individuals and groups of individuals.

Huet intro: My experience with digital humanities dates back to 2013. As I was working on the first chapter of my dissertation, entitled *The Decadent Book: Publishing, Illustrating, Reading*, I became interested in what digital tools could bring to my analysis of the relationships between Decadent writers and their publishers. More specifically, I wanted to know whether the Decadent writers and publishers' location within Paris played a role in shaping their collaborations. To answer that question, I began experimenting with mapping tools, seeking advice, and collecting data, which paved the way for the creation of my website, *Mapping Decadence*, in the Fall of 2014.

My commitment to DH, however, is not limited to this project. In addition, I am very involved with both the Penn State and the larger DH community. Over the past two years, for instance, I have been working in the Penn State Libraries as the Digital Scholarship Services Graduate Assistant, collaborating with other librarians, grad students, and professors on their digital projects, even going to a neighboring university to advocate for the use of DH in the classroom and in research. I am very excited about this digital bibliography project because I think it will be extremely valuable for scholars from so many different fields such as women's studies, book history, or 19th century French literature. I am also a firm believer that our research, as scholars, is meant to be read by as many persons as possible. Unlike the Decadent

authors I work on, who aimed to write for about 10 persons, I do think that we need to make our work and research accessible, open, and also, hopefully, meaningful to a wide variety of people.

Project back-ground (Monicat): there is an interesting domino effect at work when one researches women's writings. When I was working on women's travel narratives I realized that I also needed to examine children's literature, since it became apparent that fictional journeys for girls, for instance, constituted a large part of women's writings in that time period. When I then researched children's literature, I realized that the decisions I was making regarding what qualified as fiction or literature in the first place meant that a vast amount of works were not included in the analysis, hence the need to embark on another project devoted to instructional writings more "narrowly" speaking. The frustration I then experienced in making decisions regarding what to include or not in my study of this "not so narrow" component is the latest element in the women's writings domino effect that brought me to the corpus and database project we are discussing today. As I embarked on the writing of an impossible book on that corpus, which represents by far the largest part of women's writing production throughout the "long nineteenth-century" (Revolution to WWI), digitizing the bibliography I had begun to compile into a wider ranging database in order "not to lose" what was still invisible became part of an ideal and possibly much more ambitious scenario which would encompass eventually a much larger corpus and go beyond bibliographical boundaries.

The only reason why the project moved from wishful thinking to action mode is that the College of the Liberal Arts and the Penn State University Libraries have given their full support to such initiatives. Understanding that this type of research endeavors can ONLY be collaborative, they have facilitated exchanges between computer experts, literary scholars,

librarians, instructors, and students—graduate and undergraduate. This in turn is feeding new ways of conducting and envisioning research.

The corpus: quantitatively, as I mentioned earlier, instructional writing (which includes scientific vulgarization, readers, educational texts, etc.) is women's most prolific area of textual production. Authors range from major writers such as George Sand to “one book authors” who are not as humble contributors as we might comparatively reconstruct them to be. Qualitatively, the corpus is generically extremely diverse (from small pamphlets to multi-volume encyclopedias, from narrative to poetic form, from technical manuals to theatrical monologues, etc.). Editorially, it is extremely dispersed (from Parisian publishing houses to provincial leaders in the field, from specialized collections or denominational publications to self-published texts). Bibliographically and institutionally, it is at best marginalized, at the very least dispersed and thus inexistent as such. Conclusion: it is the best possible candidate for digitization. No print bibliography could possibly account for its size and accommodate its growth since much is being constantly uncovered and will keep surfacing in years to come. Most importantly, digital tools will provide points of entry into the primary material that can help articulate new research questions and outline new fields of inquiry. The bibliography as it stands is about 700 pages long, includes over 800 authors and thousands of references.

The digital database (Hélène): I would now like to talk about the chronological stages of the process we faced and are facing.

First, to create the digital database, Bénédicte and I both met with James O’Sullivan, Penn State’s Digital Humanities Research Designer, who is in charge of the technical side of this

project. What we had to decide was the kind of information we wanted to display in the database. As you can see on this screenshot, the bibliography currently includes a variety of information: from the author's name, book title, year of publication, to the table of contents, epigraph, and the printer's name and place. In the end, we all agreed we wanted the database to include as much data as possible. For example, as a book historian, I am very interested in finding out who the publishers and printers of these texts were, as well as what the format of the books was. But, of course, book historians are not the only people who will be using this database. Literary scholars, French historians, and gender studies scholars might also be interested -- and bring to the database their own research questions. This is the reason why we decided to include such a broad range of data.

Agreeing on the parameters of the database was the first step in its design and creation. The next step -- in which we're currently engaged -- is the creation of a relational database. What does that mean? The idea is that each entity (like an author) will be linked to another entity (like a book title). This means that when the end user searches for Author X, he or she will be able to find all of the works that Author X has written. Similarly, if users search for a given publisher, he or she will likewise find everything that the publisher produced.

To create this database, I will not only be entering (and otherwise 'datafying') all of the information in Benedicte's bibliography, but assigning numerical IDs to all of the various fields in the database. Thus, each individual author will receive a numerical identifier, as well as books, publishers, printers, and so on. After doing all of this, my next task will be to define the relationship between these various fields using the numerical identifier.

"data_model": As this slide indicates, I will be entering all of this information in an Excel spreadsheet. You see that there are fields for all the different types of records that go together

(author, publisher etc). James has populated this with a few examples for illustrative purposes.

"example": On this slide, we see another example of the data input spreadsheet, but with arrows to show how the relational component of the database works. As mentioned previously, I will ultimately be using numerical IDs alone to indicate authors, publishers, books, and the like.

To get a full sense of all of the relationship that will be charted in this database, however, I've included the following slide. James was kind enough to send me a diagram explaining more specifically how the various entities are connected.

Envisioned questions: The digitization and encoding of the existing bibliography will trigger a first set of questions related to/ enabled by network analysis approaches: were there/ what were women's publishing networks? How was the Paris/province divide reflected in women's production? Were there/ what were the "high periods" of instructional writings publication? How many of these authors are self-published and what do they write about? What is the transnational dimension of the corpus? Many more questions will ensue and lead to others when continued encoding and other digital tools allow to further explore elements of content and style: what are the corpus' claimed disciplinary and generic domains? How might the texts adhere to or stray away from such claims? How do paratextual elements inflect on and construct instructional writing? What roles do illustrations play in the various facets of the corpus? Etc.

And beyond:

This project constitutes a first step toward a possibly much larger digital endeavor that could later be inclusive of the great variety of genres practiced by women throughout this "writing

habits changing" century (from novels to travel narratives, from school manuals to journal articles, from poetry to scientific essays). As a first stage in a large scale endeavor of this kind, it will generate preliminary analyses that can help set up a much more ambitious (multi-genres) and more extensively collaborative (multi-institutions) undertakings. If one can dream, and dream big, then a cross-periods expansion would be something to envision... These are at the moment very humble beginnings and we would love your insights and comments on the projects as we start to work through it.