

## 6. Towards a New Bibliography of Eighteenth-Century French Fiction<sup>1</sup>

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The following text looks back over a project in literary history that began using digital techniques in the early 1980s. Growing out of earlier work in bibliometrics, it attempted to harness computer-based techniques to the double task of harvesting and organising data on eighteenth-century novels. A retrospective discussion of the advantages and the problems of this approach over time raises questions that may well be unfamiliar to contemporary scholars in the field, but that still can be relevant today. It moves on to outline current and future perspectives in studies such as this: in particular the exponential growth of access to library records and to digitized versions of the texts themselves, together with the still often incomplete and unstable data produced and the statistical problems raised as a result, and briefly raises some of the issues around the rescuing and producing an accessible version of material collected over such a long period and then merging it with larger and more recent projects.

Our story begins in 1968, Angus Martin in Sydney sent out a request to various French academic journals seeking help in preparing a list of prose fiction titles appearing after 1750 and up to 1800. Those boundary dates were chosen because there already existed the Jones 1939 list of titles from 1700 to 1750.<sup>2</sup> Two persons responded to the query: Vivienne Mylne in Canterbury and Richard Frautschi in State College. (A second respondent from the US expressed interest, but was advised by others to avoid team scholarship in favour of independent research.) The three of us agreed to undertake the joint venture: Angus made annual trips to Paris; Vivienne visited UK collections in addition to sharing her personal collection; and Richard consulted the National Union Catalog in Washington, followed with visits to libraries in the United States and Central Europe. Vivienne located a publisher in London – Mansell – who was formatting print versions of the U.S. National Union Catalog and the Catalogue of the British Library. In 1977 we published a first volume: *Bibliographie du genre romanesque français, 1751-1800*, or as we called it, MMF. When we set out on our project in 1968, and even when we published our *Bibliographie* in 1977, we did not realise that we were embarking on what would become a pioneering project in what is now called ‘Digital Humanities’, still less the possibilities that might one-day emerge through linking our data digitally to other eighteenth-century datasets. Nor could we imagine the further challenges, opportunities and life-long labours that a shift to digital formats and working with vast collective online catalogues would present us.

It was Andrew Brown, then Head of the Voltaire Foundation, who first proposed we might transfer our work to the digital realm at an ISECS meeting at the beginning of the 1980s.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a combined and extended version of a text presented at the Rotterdam ISECS 2015 Conference by Angus Martin and Richard Frautschi and of another given by Angus Martin at the SHARP Conference in Paris in 2016. Richard Frautschi, because of declining health, was unable to attend the latter meeting, and, born in November 1926, died in August 2016. His contribution to the MMF2 bibliography project continues, thanks to the vast amount of work that he had accomplished during his active life.

<sup>2</sup> S. Paul Jones, *A List of French Prose Fiction, from 1700 to 1750, with a brief introduction* (New York, H.W. Wilson Company, 1939).

He suggested that we update the earlier Jones lists for the first half of the eighteenth century and merge them with a revised and expanded version of the MMF data, so covering the whole period to 1800. We acted on Brown's proposal and code-named the project MMF2. From that time on we were able progressively to make use of digital technologies: word processing, e-mail, Internet searches, databases.

Vivienne worked on the updating of Jones and Richard that of MMF, our 1977 publication. Angus undertook the task of searching for pre-eighteenth century works that were republished in our chosen period. Thanks to research grants, Richard was fortunate to sample more public and private collections in Eastern and Western Europe during and after the Cold War. In the 1980s we would meet at Vivienne's home in Oxford to collate new data. Then in 1992 Vivienne Mylne died suddenly.<sup>3</sup> Her tragic death forced Angus and Richard to revise their responsibilities. Angus now worked on updating the Jones data, as well as the titles of pre-1700 fiction; Richard continued his work on MMF and updated ever-expanding references in Europe and the United States to relevant works in our total corpus. The dramatic increase in digitized library catalogues and holdings pertinent to our work continued to enrich our goal of a more detailed overview of French prose fiction throughout the Enlightenment. The methodology and presentation we adopted were more exhaustive and more detailed than those both of Jones and of our original publication, although based thereupon.<sup>4</sup> Although final statistics have not yet been calculated, current estimates (getting on for 4,000 first editions and 5,000 re-editions) confirm Jones' and our own earlier conclusions concerning the large numbers of works of fiction produced — and the growth of those numbers — during the century.

All research is by nature infinite, but there was one very practical challenge in our case. With the growth of collective library catalogues on the Internet, the breadth of our sources and the time and work involved in searching them have both increased dramatically — one could even say exponentially. Whereas MMF was based on relatively restricted print sources including published library catalogues and visits to institutions to which we had access, MMF2 has had access to such websites as the *Catalogue collectif de France*, the British site *COPAC*, the *Karlsruher virtueller Katalog*, and *WorldCat*, together with the possibility of checking individual library holdings through the web, and sighting actual texts through various sources of digital copies. Although it is now possible to collect masses of raw data with surprising speed, the sorting and examination of such quantities of data must be done with care. The library records one finds are often incomplete or contradictory, as they derive largely from early digitization work on hand-written catalogues or card systems. The absence of publisher or pagination details, for example, can inhibit the identification of particular editions. Equally, a

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<sup>3</sup> Vivienne Mylne was born in October 1922 and died in June 1992.

<sup>4</sup> As in MMF, we include short and long fictional prose narratives (including, more comprehensively than previously, examples of *littérature de colportage*), together with similar works translated from languages other than French (including narrative works that have been translated into prose). We set out individual works chronologically: *princeps* entries are placed in their year of first appearance and include a detailed listing of first and new editions and their re-editions, with a further yearly reference list of these latter. We provide basic bibliographical material: author, title, place of publication, bookseller, date, format and pagination, together with listings of international library holdings (noting the copies we have been able to examine), contemporary periodical and catalogue references when possible, and other relevant academic publications. References to the articles of the *Bibliothèque universelle des romans* are included, as are the original sources of translations. A summary description of content follows these.

lack of general standards for representing presumed publishers and presumed dates can make it difficult to determine whether these items are present on title pages or not. We are thus forced to rely on the information that appears to be the most accurate, unless an insoluble case requires contacting the institution in question. It should be added that making these contacts has been facilitated by the existence of e-mail, as well as the remarkable helpfulness of most of the librarians we have had to bother.<sup>5</sup>

The access to public information through advances in technology has thus been both a boon and a challenge for our work. The same may be said for the editing of our material, as we have adapted to technical changes over a quarter of a century. MMF was constructed from thousands of handwritten or typewritten slips of paper. The print version was produced from cards prepared by an assistant for the publisher with an electric typewriter capable of imitating a range of print styles. These were then photographed, unnecessary spaces were removed, and the resulting images were set out in double-column pages for printing – a technique which our publisher had used to produce those important multi-volume library catalogues mentioned above.

By the time we started MMF2, personal computers had replaced our mechanical typewriters, but our exchange of data was still at first managed through printouts sent by post. With the advent of e-mail the transfer became of course electronic, both considerably faster and cheaper. Another technological change occurred with the use of an early optical character reading program (Kurzweil) to prepare a digital version of MMF as a starting point for MMF2.

The original concept for MMF2 was a print version. But even then publishers were moving into electronically produced texts. We were encouraged therefore to adopt a formula for our entries that included a set of fields for different sections of the text, as well as a series of markers within the fields designed to facilitate not only the printing process but also the automatic construction of indexes. These fields and markers were added to the digitized version of the MMF text and they also formed part of the basic preparation of the 1700-1750 and the pre-1700 data.

All the pre-1750 data was in fact moved into an early database – dBase II, and then into another forgotten system from the 1980s, which was called Notebook (apparently an ancestor of the current Nota Bene), and offered the great advantage for us of permitting variable length fields as well as offering a sophisticated system for formatting printouts. Because of incompatibility between Microsoft (used by Vivienne and Angus) and Apple operating systems and software (used by Richard), and in particular the difficulty of transferring Richard's word-processing files into Angus's Notebook database, the 1751-1800 data was not transferred immediately to it. However, tests made early on demonstrated that the field markers we were using would allow us to undertake that process when a final version of the files became available.

We were still expecting in the early 2000s to be publishing MMF2 in print, but when we came to consult a prospective publisher, it was proposed that we move to an electronic

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<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that the range of individual collections represented in collective online catalogues, together with their content, has increased progressively over the years. This inevitably means that the locations collected for entries will possibly vary according to the time at which the research for a particular entry was completed. In view of the quantity of material amassed, it will not be possible to revise all this data immediately prior to publication.

format on the web. We were still very attached to the idea of some nice solid volumes because of what the French elegantly call the *pérennité* of print, and sought advice on what should come first: the paper-based chicken or the electronic egg.

In early 2013, circumstances finally precipitated a decision when Simon Burrows arrived at Western Sydney University and brought with him his extraordinary website, the French Book Trade in Enlightenment Europe (FBTEE). Simon was very interested in including our data among the myriad other sources of information on eighteenth-century publishing that he is progressively adding to the resources of the site. For him, the inclusion of a comprehensive, meticulously researched, genre and subject classified, and above all FRBRised bibliographic dataset on a genre as distinctive as that of prose fiction, promised major efficiency gains and new research possibilities.<sup>6</sup> Above all, it would facilitate harvesting high quality data from structured sources (i.e. those that separated out novels from other genres of print) at speeds hitherto impossible for his team, since it would no longer be necessary to identify and research every work and edition categorized.<sup>7</sup> In return for our data, he, with his team, is facilitating the transfer of our material to decidedly more modern electronic forms, as well as determining how a variety of old and new formats can best be made compatible within a wider collective database.

The lead on this work, which involved formidable practical and conceptual challenges, has to date been taken by Simon's colleague and co-Investigator, FBTEE's digital developer and book historian, Dr Jason Ensor, to whom I remain immensely grateful. In addition to transferring and trans-formatting data between very different software systems, Jason also had to devise means to translate the symbolic language and structural solutions we had adopted in MMF-2 in order to adapt an ancient software system, designed for linear thinking, to serve our purposes, which required something akin to a relational database. This process presented human communications challenges as well as technical ones. As Jason memorably explained it in appropriately digital language in a series of unpublished conference presentations, his first step involved 'downloading Angus's brain.'<sup>8</sup>

The advantages – for us and for the user – of a digital database are obvious: the possibility that all types of text and frequency searches will introduce new understandings of French prose fiction in the eighteenth century, particularly with the extremely sophisticated software offered by the FBTEE site. New possibilities for research based on our data include,

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<sup>6</sup> On the FRBR system and its implications, see Simon Burrows's chapter in this volume, 'The FBTEE Revolution'.

<sup>7</sup> For more details, see Simon Burrow's chapter in the present volume.

<sup>8</sup> Dr Jason Ensor, now of the Western Sydney University Library, was Research and Technical Manager with the Western Sydney University Digital Humanities Research Group from 2013 to September 2017. He was Simon Burrows' chief collaborator in developing FBTEE from 2013 to 2016 and a co-Investigator with him and Angus Martin on the ARC 'Mapping Print, Charting Enlightenment' project from 2016 to 2017. I am deeply grateful for Jason's assistance with the MMF2 project, and also to Dr Vincent Hiribarren and Dr Katie McDonough, who have both worked with us on digital aspects of the project, as well as Dr Susan Ford and Dr Laure Philip who have taken on important roles since September 2017. Jason used this phrase several times, notably in his paper at the first Digitizing Enlightenment conference and several weeks later at a panel presentation in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris at SHARP 2016 entitled 'Something Borrowed, Something New: The Adventures of Connecting Bookish Datasets'. Besides myself, the other panellists that day were Simon Burrows, Alicia Montoya, and Paul Djistelberge.

for example, ‘micro’ projects in which researchers seek more detailed descriptions of individual first and re-editions. Such searches can add new light to patterns of actual production locales, paper source and font styles. And, on the other hand, broad categories of research – ‘macro’ projects – in which researchers investigate patterns of content, narrative form and location as these evolved from the days of *colportage* to intra- and interregional marketing schemes across Europe. Printer production and purchaser preferences contribute to a dual overview of prose fiction both as an artistic and as a commercial phenomenon.

For us, it is a very important consideration that a digital version of MMF2 will make available to researchers the work we have done to date, however incomplete, and can continue to be updated as a project in progress. Ideally, the research community will be able to contribute additions and corrections over time, preferably under the aegis of some kind of committee of experts. On the other hand, perhaps because we are of the generation we are, a print version of our bibliography remains a dream that is very much alive. Whether it is economically feasible, when partial or complete print-on-demand is available, is another question that the future must be left to answer ... and perhaps new forms of technology – that same technology that we have been running to keep up with throughout the life of our project – will make the answer a positive one.

As our research progressed, access through the Internet to a wide range of collective and individual library catalogues and to digitized copies of works offered us two attractive new possibilities. Firstly, we should be able make our lists of editions far more complete – adding both new items and copies of others known from secondary sources but not formerly located – and also to report them far more accurately. Secondly – and this was a far more ambitious goal – could our statistics on the numbers of extant copies of a work over a broad geographical sampling of libraries potentially provide data on both the volume of production and the dissemination of individual works of eighteenth-century French prose fiction? Would a large number of present-day library locations in a wide range of countries reveal not only large print runs but also something about the reception of works in different geographical areas? Our data would be of no help in determining the true place of publication in the case of works bearing false ones (which we report in general just as they stand on title pages), but only how many copies of any particular work have ended up where. (Links to other areas of FBTEE may in future provide data on false imprints that MMF2 does not provide.)<sup>9</sup> Further *caveats* would obviously apply, and we return to that question below, with examples of the complexity of drawing conclusions from the results of our search for library copies.

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<sup>9</sup> Identifying false imprints remains problematic. Dominique Varry’s work on the use of the false imprint ‘Londres’ in the eighteenth century identifies the scale of the problem (he worked on 5,514 French titles with London imprints) and the discusses difficulties in identifying actual publication place. See Varry, *La fausse adresse ‘Londres’ au XVIIIe siècle* at [<http://dominique-varry.enssib.fr/Fausse%20adresse%20Londres>]. However, digital databases of printers’ ornaments (*fleurons*) and image recognition software promise help to address this challenge in the foreseeable future. Silvio Corsini, whose *La Preuve par les fleurons? Analyse Comparé du matériel ornamental des imprimeurs suisses romands. 1775-1785* (Ferney-Voltaire, Centre international d’étude du XVIIIe siècle, 1999) remains seminal, has been developing cutting-edge tools for content-based image retrieval to work alongside a database of printers ornaments, the ‘Passe-Partout. International Bank of Printers’ Ornaments’. The latter is available at [<https://bcutodai.unil.ch/BCUTodai/app/todaiGetIntro.do?uri=todaiInfo&page=todaiIntro.html>].

The first of these ambitions – to expand and make more precise and above all more complete our reporting of the numbers of editions of each work in library holdings – has proved extremely worthwhile, although the bibliographer's duty of accuracy and exhaustiveness still cannot be realised completely. The second ambition has to date raised more questions than it has answered, but nevertheless has so far led to some very general (and perhaps disappointing) conclusions concerning the distribution of our types of printed texts. To explain these conclusions and how they were reached, the rest of this paper will focus on the pleasures and miseries of attempting for bibliographic and bibliometric purposes to exploit on a large scale and in a systematic way Internet library catalogues (otherwise known as Online Public Access Catalogues) and in particular their availability through collective or 'union' Internet sites.

Those collective sites we have used consistently have been, in the early days, OCLC and RLIN, and then the *Catalogue collectif de France* (for French sources), COPAC (for the United Kingdom), the *Karlsruher virtueller Katalog* (for Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and beyond) and WorldCat (a successor to OCLC), which, as its name suggests, has global ambitions. The Canadian and the Dutch collective catalogues have, over time, presented problems of access for us, and those for Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and a number of other countries have largely been accessed through KVK and (for the US in particular) WorldCat.

Richard Frautschi and Angus Martin – Vivienne Mylne died, as noted above, before the full range of these sources became available – have learned over the years better to understand how to make best use of them in our terms. We have, however, learned only by trial and error and cannot claim any sort of overall expertise, hampered as we have been by our own working conditions, as academics with many other duties apart from our research, as well as the limitations of our disparate equipment, which was not always the most modern, the most easily compatible and the fastest available.

We shall first discuss here the harvesting on the net of large-scale bibliographical data principally through collective public access sites. Each of these sources has had its own particularities for us. The *Catalogue collectif de France* (CCFR) has been a magnificent resource, providing extensive and consistent results. It does not, however, appear friendly to long and time-consuming searches like ours and frequently forces us, when our time limit has been reached, to re-start our more extensive sessions several times over. Although for most searches one dispenses with accented letters when entering titles, a very few of them in the CCFR are fruitless if one does not use accents (in particular é), and the same applies at times to archaic spellings (*romant, nouvelle, facécie, queste, faits* ...) that may or may not be normalised in the catalogue entry. It should be added that here, as in most catalogue entries in all our sources, the format given cannot always be relied upon. Again, whether to include apostrophes in search formulae can vary from catalogue to catalogue.

COPAC (Collective Online Public Access Catalogue) is also a stable, broad and reliable site for a wide choice of important United Kingdom libraries. Like the CCFR and WorldCat, it allows one to delimit the time span of the search – of great assistance when the title one is looking is made up of words of low specificity (*lettres, mémoires, histoire/s, comte de ..., princesse de \*\*\**, and so on). The catalogue entries it produces are often rather succinct (the entries from the British Library catalogue are a major case in point), and, although it is possible to click on the title in search of fuller details, the original catalogue entries too frequently fail to offer more precise information. COPAC distinguishes between print, electronic and

microfilm copies, but the data from some libraries is incorrect, and it is wise to get the actual shelf mark data, which COPAC does provide. For our project we have attempted to exclude non-print copies from our locations data, as they represent a totally different type of distribution from that of actual volumes.

The Karlsruher virtueller Katalog (KVK) has a greater range than the two sources already discussed, as it goes beyond the libraries of Germany, Austria and Switzerland to report on a long list of international sources. This site has in particular revealed the extraordinary riches in our type of material to be found in the libraries of German-speaking countries. As in all sources, when the database conflates records from two or more libraries one would need much more detailed investigation to check for errors (in other words that the copies are not in fact of the same edition), a process we have not felt able to engage in. One has to get used to the particular way records are often presented by German libraries: one entry for the title as such and separate entries with further details for the individual volumes – and they do not always come up in sequence. KVK has been our first point of access to Swissbib, which is remarkably consistent in its results and in distinguishing between print and other types of copy. The Italian collective catalogue, also accessed through KVK, offers an unusually high level of bibliographical data, especially paginations that have enabled us in many cases to detect different editions that the lesser details from other sources didn't allow us to differentiate.

As a parenthesis, it should be noted that the Bavarian State Library is a really remarkable source of digitized copies for our sort of eighteenth century French material. Access through this medium to actual text has enabled us to increase greatly the accuracy of our reporting of editions (full form of titles, correct pagination, information on *privilèges* and *permissions*, details of content for the brief summaries that MMF2 provides...). The same applies to Gallica, the Hathi Trust, Internet Archive, and, of course, Google Books. The number of individual libraries that are digitizing at least parts of their collections continues to grow and has obviously been of great assistance in our project.

WorldCat has been our problem child, but again the fault may well be with us. We use it to look for libraries our other catalogues don't cover, in particular U.S. institutions. Curiously, Richard Frautschi, working in Virginia, appeared to achieve more hits in his homeland than Angus Martin does either in Australia or in France, even though he constantly tells the site that he is in California. It appears to be too intelligent always to believe him. The fact that we do not always harvest the same results is most apparent with WorldCat, but it happens all too frequently from elsewhere. Is it inattention on our part, or is it because not all collections are available all the time on the collective sites? In CCFR for instance, Bordeaux and Grenoble come and go. And KVK provides a long list of those libraries that have given an answer – positive or negative – and those that have not responded. A further problem for a project like ours that is still ongoing is that all of our collective catalogues regularly add new sources over time.

In spite of all my *caveats*, I must stress what extraordinary tools these Internet catalogues (both the collective ones – and those of individual institutions that we consult when problems arise) have been for us. Of course, they will become with time ever more comprehensive and accurate, and this is a lesson of modesty for us in that our search for data can never be complete. The FBTEE site will offer a home for our work that can be constantly updated in accuracy and breadth of coverage. However, the huge sampling that our work to

date represents will, we hope, permit bibliometric analyses that will have a certain statistical validity.

Now we shall turn to our second theme: the extant copies in libraries in Western and Central Europe and the United States. The extensive sampling of titles and their editions that we have amassed has obviously added to our knowledge of the phases of publication through which various titles of French eighteenth-century prose narrative have passed. It has also permitted us to add new titles to our corpus and to confirm the existence of editions for which we previously had only printed bibliographical sources, such as Barbier, Quérard, Gay and references in eighteenth-century catalogues and periodicals. Common sense has traditionally suggested that, with quite a number of *caveats*, a large number of *re-editions* means that a work was available to a wide range of readers, and that the eighteenth century had its own set of best-sellers. On the other hand, what a small or large number of *copies* of titles in a particular geographical range of libraries may tell us is far more problematical. This is essentially because the reasons for which a particular volume ends up in a collection (and our data concerns overwhelmingly only public institutions) are so varied. Collectors have a preference for first editions, illustrated editions, libertine works, well-known authors and, indeed, the presumed rarity of a particular edition. Does a large number of extant copies of a given edition suggest that a large number were produced in the first place? Is there a correlation between a large number of re-editions and a large number of surviving copies? How does one interpret 'collaborative' editions, where the same printing is issued under a number of different title pages bearing the names of different publishers. Or when multi-volume sets – including collections of works – are made up of individual publications, at times from differing years? What does it mean when there are a large number of library copies for some editions and not for others? Do pirate editions achieve lower or higher numbers of copies? To what extent does the current geographical representation of copies coincide with their original distribution in the eighteenth century? A large number of copies in North American libraries is a statistic that will clearly need different criteria of interpretation than those used for, say, French, German or Russian long-standing institutions – not to mention the particular collection biases of those institutions. There are as yet no overall answers to these questions, but there is the hope that the completion of the basic data of the MMF2 data may enable some sort of conclusions in these areas and at the very least a starting point for further research. For now, a handful of particular cases chosen from the years around mid-century may illuminate the vagaries of the data and the difficulties of interpretation.

It is convenient to start with two somewhat similar works from 1746: *Les amours de Zéokinizul*, often attributed to Crébillon fils; and *Angola, histoire indienne* du chevalier de Morlière. Both are pseudo-Oriental stories with satirical and erotic overtones. The first edition of the *Amours de Zéokinizul*, according to our present data, is represented 32 in libraries, principally in libraries in Germany (16 copies) and France (10 copies). This is for the period quite a high score in our terms, but, as is common, the numbers of copies fall away for the re-editions, albeit unevenly. Among the nine for this title between 1746 and 1779, most reach only between one and four. The highest number occurs in 1747, when there are 11, and in both 1746 and 1748 when there are 7. The reason for the very high numbers for the *princeps* is certainly the putative connection with Crébillon fils. The importance of an author in the literary canon regularly appears to have, as one would expect, an influence on what libraries collect. The seven copies in 1746, the same year as the *princeps*, are also no doubt subject to this influence. The

rise in 1747 is probably due to the fact that a key to the identity of the personages who are satirised is included in the edition, a factor that could have influenced both contemporary readers and later collectors. The other work, *Angola*, attains a higher number of re-editions than *Zéokinizul* (18 in all including the *princeps*), but only once a total of 26 copies, for a re-edition, rivalling the 32 for the *princeps* of the other work and far above the regular 1 to 7 for other editions. The reason for this sudden surge is not clear, but, other similar examples suggest that it is probably because this is an elegant, collectible edition, with a red and black title page. In 1781, a total of 13 copies is reached for the same reasons by an edition claimed to be from the Cazin press, a quite regular phenomenon for copies nominally from this publisher.

To sum up, the fame of an author, both contemporary and present-day, can have its influence on the numbers of volumes one finds in libraries, as can the attractiveness of the particular edition for the same range of collectors. The first of Voltaire's *contes philosophiques*, *Memnon* (soon to be rebaptised *Zadig*) and Madame de Graffigny's enormous best-seller, the *Lettres péruviennes*, both of which appeared in 1747, are exemplary cases of works the reputations of which grow over time. Erotic works of the period, such as Diderot's *Bijoux indiscrets* and Argens's *Thérèse philosophe* (both 1748), are regularly represented by hard-to-find first editions, because of the contemporary pressures of censorship (and also the interest of subsequent private collectors whose copies are missing from the public record today), but become best sellers in terms of editions and of copies over time.

One of the more sobering conclusions one can draw from the analysis of library copies, is that it is often texts that are to some degree marginal to a strictly defined concept of prose fiction that outdo the more traditional forms. A case in point in 1750 is the volume of supposed letters by Ninon de Lenclos, written by a certain Louis Damours as a kind of epistolary novel, which achieves a very impressive tally for a work of fiction of over 80 library copies for the four editions dated the year of its first appearance. This phenomenon, when novels have strong historical pretensions, is common, and it results from the higher prestige of history over fiction, not only in the hierarchy of literary types, but also in the minds of collectors of all kinds.

Educational works, including language teaching versions of well-known titles, can have large numbers of re-editions, but relatively low numbers of extant copies for each edition, a measure both of their low literary prestige and of the less than careful treatment afforded them by their juvenile audience. This appears to be the case of the *Magasin des enfans* by madame Leprince de Beaumont, which went through some 150 editions between 1756 and 1821, but for which a total of half a dozen or fewer library copies is the norm. On the other hand, a popular adult compilation, like the *Dictionnaire d'anecdotes* attributed to Lacombe de Prézel, the title of which goes on to offer *historiettes*, *bons mots*, *naïvetés*, *saillies* and *réparties ingénieuses* not only reaches nearly 30 editions over a similar period, but is represented in multiple copies in collections all over Europe.

A slightly later example illustrates the difficulties inherent in collecting records both of editions and of extant copies: it is *La nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The masterful example of material bibliography published by Jo-Ann McEachern about this work in 1993 enables us to compare her meticulous and exhaustive methodology and our bibliometric

approach which, by its nature, remains more distant from the texts examined.<sup>10</sup> She faced many of the same challenges as we have:

- the frustrating but inevitable incompleteness of all bibliographical studies;
- variations in titles (in this case, *Lettres de deux amants* or *Julie* or *La nouvelle Héloïse*) making searches more complex because of the choices made by cataloguers;
- the problem of editions within collections of works, the collective work indicated by a half title sometimes and other times by a full title with place, publisher and date – again complicated by the way the works appear in catalogues; the frequent lack of details in library records that prevent any sort of precise identification of particular volumes<sup>11</sup>

McEachern's results, however, reveal often startling differences from our own, both because of the difficulties cited and of the strengths and limitation of the library sources used. The material bibliography is based essentially on letters written to some 800 libraries and their replies together with the physical examination of copies in over 100 of them. Our own work, as outlined above, is now based principally on international collective catalogues available on the Internet, which, it is clear, do not provide the same level of accuracy and exhaustiveness. There appear to be various reasons for this:

- digitized library catalogues are not always complete nor accurate (often because of faults in the digitization processes used, often years ago)
- in many cases, not all libraries are available when searches are made; not all libraries one would expect to be indexed produce a result at a given time; we assume that time limits on the web contribute to these difficulties.
- the geographical spread of the 800 libraries interrogated by McEachern goes beyond the one so far available in the collective catalogues we have exploited.

We have yet to analyse in detail these differences between the two bibliographies. However, they suggest that both methods produce a full range of editions. We constructed a list from our sources, which was entirely compatible with the bibliography of the *Nouvelle Héloïse*, taking due account of the different levels of description – in other words we were obviously unable to identify all the variants of particular editions that are listed there. This suggests that in our work the use of OPACs to define editions and their number is justifiable. On the other hand, differences between the two approaches in totaling the number of extant copies in libraries that have been located and their distribution demonstrate that the *caveats* outlined above need to be carefully applied, taking account of all the possible sources of distortion we have suggested.

We shall take as an example the first edition of *La nouvelle Héloïse*, existing in two states (McEachern 1a and 1b), which MMF2 cannot expect to differentiate. The two pieces of research share 17 library sources for this version of the novel, McEachern adds 13 confirmed locations where she sighted copies and MMF2 adds 12, based either on sightings or sufficiently detailed records in catalogues. To those one must add six unconfirmed locations to the

<sup>10</sup> Jo-Ann McEachern, *Bibliography of the Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau to 1800: I. Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (Oxford, The Voltaire Foundation, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> See McEachern, *Bibliography*, p.1-11, her Introduction and Methodological Note.

McEachern tally, giving her a total of 36 to the MMF2 total of 25.<sup>12</sup> However, the score is evened up if one takes into account that five of McEachern's libraries do not occur (or do so intermittently or extremely rarely) among the material collected by MMF2 on the Internet. This surprisingly reassuring result is however on shaky ground from another point of view – the actual libraries that appear in each listing. Copies located by McEachern in Amsterdam, New York, Philadelphia, Stuttgart, Toronto, Wiesbaden and Vienna – which could have been expected to be revealed by OPAC searches – were in fact not found in this case through the collective sites. On the other hand, locations proposed by MMF2 in Detmold, Gotha, Halle and Hamburg do turn up in McEachern's unconfirmed lists or, as in the case of the others, are part of her general listing of unconfirmed locations.

This situation in one entry – a fairly compatible overview but mismatches in some important aspects of the results – are not necessarily representative of the whole, and further work clearly needs to be done on finding out the detailed reasons for the problem. It must be stressed that McEachern's close-up and painstaking research is certainly more likely to be immediately reliable than ours, which has been done for a large part at a distance. It may be that each case needs to be treated in its own way, but perhaps the kinds of overall data amassed by MMF2 for thousands of prose narratives across the eighteenth century will provide an illuminating context for each one.

This conclusion also relates to the justification for the whole mass of material that MMF2 will offer. Why all this labour to produce such a bibliography, when scholars can look up for themselves on the Internet an up-to-date range of data for whatever particular case is of interest to them? The original hope of the authors of MMF2 is that it will provide not only a detailed checklist but also a starting point and a comparative measure for individual studies, whether bibliographical, bibliometric or more purely literary – a road map, if you will, of the eighteenth-century French novel, short story and their many related narrative genres. But through linking to other bibliographic datasets like FBTEE and MEDATE and the tools they are developing, we can now hope to map rather more literally the dissemination, ownership, consumption, and reception of works of prose fiction as well.

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<sup>12</sup> The common locations for this version of the novel are: Antwerp, Bamberg, Bern, Cambridge University, Cambridge Kings' College, Cologne, Geneva, Leiden, London, Mannheim, Neuchâtel, Oxford, Paris (Arsenal and BNF), Princeton University, The Hague and Wolfenbüttel. McEachern's confirmed additional locations are: Amsterdam, Bordeaux, Chur, Geneva (personal collection), Namur, New York (Pierpont Morgan Library), New York (Public Library), Philadelphia, Stuttgart, Toronto, Vienna (University), Wiesbaden, Yale University, while MMF2's are: Berlin, Brussels, Detmold, Dresden, Eutin, Geneva (Institut et Musée Voltaire), Gotha, Greifswald, Halle (Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek), Halle (Franckesche Stiftung), Hamburg and Nürnberg. McEachern's unconfirmed locations are: Lodz, Odense, Saint Andrews, Uppsala, Wrocław, Torun.