

Digitization of Young People's Printed Heritage in France: building a cooperative digital library for all

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Abstract:

At a time when public libraries in France are more and more heading towards digital services to offer their patrons, adults and children alike, what kind of digital material is available online for these libraries, in the field of children literature? This paper focuses on the digitization of printed heritage by public institutions in France, giving examples of a few realizations, and how we are trying to build a cooperative digital library of printed heritage for young people, in the near future.

Keywords:

Children literature

Digitization

Printed Heritage

Introduction

At a time when digital resources for children have become widely spread for all age groups (see for instance the rapid development and success of digital tablets designed for kids), it seems appropriate to question the material available on these digital media. We will not address here the commercial offer, we will concentrate on documents for children digitized by public institutions in France, and available online for all (from children themselves to mediators or researchers, institutions, private companies...). Consequently, our main subject will be printed heritage for children or young people published from the origins of the "genre" until the beginnings of the 20th century, in keeping with copyright laws.

What is available nowadays (and what will be tomorrow) online in this category? How are digitization programs being conducted, and what issues are they dealing with? In which ways do the digitization programs of the different parties involved combine or interact, inside a given territorial area?

Here are some of the questions which will be addressed, but not necessarily answered here. While France, and the French national library particularly, have now acquired a long experience in the field of digitization, the idea that children books do belong to cultural heritage and therefore justify the same kind of preoccupations for their preservation and digital dissemination is still not obvious in France, or even in Europe.

Digitization at the French national library (BnF)

As soon as 1992, the institution created to prefigure the creation of a new French national library adopted an ambitious digitization program, leading to the opening of Gallica.fr, the online digital library, in 1997. In the year 2007, a change of scale occurred: thanks to a process of mass digitization, mainly supported by public funding through the Centre national du livre (CNL) - a public agency - Gallica now contains about 2.5 million documents of all nature (books, periodicals, maps, sound recordings, manuscripts...) published in France and for the most part no more protected by intellectual property rights. These documents are also available for free in the European digital library europeana.eu. At the same time, new services are being proposed: since 2012, Gallica is available on iPad or smartphone. To be informed of latest news from the website, discover new collections or services, a wide range of communication tools has been developed (Gallica blog, Facebook profile, newsletter, Pinterest page...).

How does children literature fit into the picture?

The national library of the Netherlands (Koninklijke Bibliotheek) is **the** absolute model in terms of digital library for children books: its pages on picture books and press for children offer high quality digitization, excellent website ergonomics and an editorial content one cannot but admire. On the French part, this level of excellency has not been reached yet, but we are working on it.

Starting from 2007, digitalization programs specially dedicated to children literature have been launched at the BnF: for instance a work on the very rich collection of ABC picture books (see for example a beautiful *Nouveau syllabaire récréatif*, with 16 color plates, published 1872). Simultaneously, a large number of children books have been digitized in the course of programs which were not specifically concerned with children literature: for instance books for children published during World War One, along with a European funded program Europeana 14-18 (www.europeana-collections-1914-1918.eu), in which the BnF is a partner. One could also mention the digitization of the Prints department collection of *images d'Epinal* (blog.bnf.fr/gallica/?p=3202), considered as one of the ancestors of comic books.

Inside this Ali Baba's cave, we have begun to register books, journals, picture books and songs dedicated to children and young people which are already available in Gallica, but not easy to find out. It is indeed, for the time being, rather difficult to identify a specific children literature corpus inside Gallica, except for people knowing beforehand what they are looking for. Following an important exhibition on the press, a selection of journals for children has been pointed out (for example *Journal de Toto*, published 1937-1940, or *Semaine des enfants: Magasin d'images et de lectures amusantes et instructives*): see <http://gallica/html/editorial/presse-enfantine#docs>.

Thanks to this demanding task, it will soon be possible to isolate a specific corpus on children literature, and access it more easily through Gallica's search screens. It will then be easier for everyone to make this cultural heritage their own (from children to researchers, but also teachers and librarians, as well as grandparents) and experience it on digital tablets, educational websites such as the Bibliothèque numérique des enfants (enfants.bnf.fr), on blogs, social networks etc. A wide range of tools is proposed to those, institutions or individuals, wishing to reuse the content available in Gallica. An option for example is to

include in your library catalog a link to a digital document or a specific page, through a permalink (permanent URL). It is also quite easy to insert on your blog a thumbnail or exportable reader in order to browse a particular document, or publish your findings on Facebook, Twitter or other social networks. The possibility is also open for any library to harvest Gallica's OAI server in order to aggregate to its own digital library particular sets. For academic audiences, BnF is present on iTunes U, where you can download free content, including a section on children literature with eBooks in ePub format, podcasts etc. This bunch of resources may content everyone: public libraries as well as libraries with heritage holdings, in France or elsewhere, to build bridges with their own collections or use them in their mediation activities dedicated to young people, to show them the readings of their grandparents, or coming from other cultural contexts.

An example of this is the work achieved by the team of *Bibliothèque numérique des enfants*, at BnF, to highlight the work of Benjamin Rabier (1864-1939), the father of "Vache qui rit", whose protean and trans-generational production is no longer protected by intellectual property legislation, and therefore more and more widely available online (http://enfants.bnf.fr/benjamin_rabier/index.htm). *Bibliothèque numérique des enfants* offers, for children from 7, a selection of browseable books (*Contes de la souris bleue*, *Bobine et son chien Bricol*, and Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, illustrated by Rabier), games, a graphical workshop to build an image using animals created by Rabier, and a page pointing to the works by Rabier available on Gallica). For this much admired and prolific illustrator, a cooperative selection and digitization process has been initiated with other French libraries, notably the *Heure joyeuse* library in Paris.

Building a cooperative digital library

The French national library is obviously not the only place in France where to find collections of heritage interest for young people, although, and even more so since the aggregation of the *Joie par les livres* collection in 2008, it does maintain by far the biggest collection.

Some institutions have begun digitizing their collections. Without claiming to be exhaustive, a few realizations are to be mentioned: the digitization of the entire collection of 108 manuscripts by Jules Verne, completed by the City of Nantes library (available freely on its website, for registered users). The City of Toulouse library has also put a remarkable collection online, called *Enfantina* (<http://rosalis.bibliotheque.toulouse.fr/index.php?pages/enfantina#.UZX7dTfMh6Y>), where you can find a large selection from its Heritage fund of more than 30.000 books, ranging from Berquin's works in the 18th century to *Les Bêtes s'amusement*, a colouring book published 1925 and illustrated by Jean Matet, to board-bindings published by Hetzel in the 19th century. Lastly, the Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image (Center for the conservation of comic books, in Angoulême), has undertaken several years ago a digitization program dealing with the work of particular authors (Caran d'Ache, Alain Saint-Ogan, Rodolphe Töpffer...) as well as journals such as *Le Rire*, a humorous newspaper published by Félix Juven from the year 1894, or *Lisette*, a magazine for girls published in the 1920s and 1930s (For more information on these programs, see <http://www.citebd.org/spip.php?article342>). The digital collections of these last two institutions (Angoulême and Toulouse) are being harvested (through OAI-PMH protocol) by the BnF, and therefore accessible through Gallica. Beyond these individual projects, we are trying to build, on a national level, a more organized and cooperative scheme, in order to avoid, as much as possible, to digitize the same copy of a book twice (and ensure a responsible usage of public funding), or on the contrary leave aside major sources for research on children literature. This kind of cooperative program has

already been experienced successfully in France for two other disciplines: legal sciences and history of the arts.

The implementation of this program may also capitalize on distributed long-term storage for children literature, which has developed actively over the last years: these plans for cooperative conservation, exchange and elimination have been organized on a regional level in several regional districts of France. Even if they are dealing with physical, not digitalized collections, and are primarily concerned with contemporary rather than Heritage collections, they are important in that they inscribed into the picture of libraries in France two major ideas: the existence of a cultural printed Heritage for children on the one hand, the benefits of library cooperation in this field on the other hand.

Our leading partner in this program for cooperative digitization is the *Heure joyeuse*, a children library in Paris, where a remarkable Heritage collection has been accumulated over the years by successive librarians since 1924. Almost 90 years later, some part of this collection is available on Gallica: Benjamin Rabier's books as mentioned, but also cloth books, etc. (*L'ABC du cousin Léon, Un bon petit veau, La Poule aux oeufs tricolores...*). And the list keeps growing as the program advances.

ReLIRE and the digitization of unavailable books

Beyond the strict frame of public domain, it is important to mention projects concerning the digitization of unavailable books. First, a private initiative of two French illustrators Jean Claverie et Michèle Nikly "Les Livres au bois dormant" (<http://www.livres-au-bois-dormant.fr>) - i.e. Sleeping books – intends to make available for the public books that are out-of-print and not republished, hidden in their authors' drawers. To be noted: original drawings are used for the digitization process. These e-books may be downloaded in PDF or e-Pub, for a fee.

This initiative is interesting in that it shows the will of certain authors to take in charge the task of distributing their own work, casting aside intermediaries such as publishers or booksellers. It takes place in the context of a big national project, commissioned by the French ministry of culture to the BnF, to digitize unavailable books of the XXth Century, covered by intellectual property rights but not any more subject to commercial exploitation. This project opens new opportunities for children books, in as much as it pushes forward the time limit and could help put back in the hands of children a whole segment of print Heritage that was dedicated to them. The BnF is responsible for the construction and publishing of a register of unavailable books, in a database named ReLIRE (meaning Register for unavailable books in electronic republication). A first list of 50 000 titles, containing children books, published in March 2013, should open the way for the digitization of young people fiction starting 2014.

Conclusion

At a time when more and more French public libraries are heading towards the digital age and offer their patrons, adults and children alike, digital tablets or eReaders for example, the question is to know how these libraries and their patrons will handle the resources available, which are beginning to reach a critical mass big enough to attract, if not fulfill, the needs of a general public eager for cultural Heritage. In this phenomenon, children literature's role is all the more prominent as it arouses and is a medium for intergenerational exchange, which the digital media may then enhance.

Further reading

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Blog Gallica : <http://blog.bnf.fr/gallica/>

Informations sur les programmes de numérisation de la BnF pour les professionnels, sur le site web de la BnF : <http://www.bnf.fr/fr/professionnels.html>

Centre national de la littérature pour la jeunesse – La Joie par les livres website : <http://lajoieparleslivres.bnf.fr>

Information on digital libraries concerned with children literature : Accueil >> Nous connaître >> Coopération nationale >> Conservation partagée