

## Unravelling the Registers (II): Enlarging the Net

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I have called this second paper in the session 'Unravelling the Registers' 'Enlarging the Net', because I want to talk briefly today about how changes to the Rules of Procedure of the Register Sub-Committee, and an addition to the *General Guidelines to Safeguard Documentary Heritage* are, we hope, working, and will work in the future to enlarge our capacity to understand, appreciate and more appropriately evaluate the items and collections of documentary heritage that come before us as nominations to the International Memory of the World Register.

In the process of doing this, I also want to reflect, as my colleague Ray Edmondson has done, and as other speakers will do in the course of this conference, on an area where I believe the Register, as it currently stands, is lacking in coverage of a large and significant area of documentary heritage, and one that goes to the heart of why people around the world value this area of heritage so highly.

Let us step back nearly four years, to Lijiang in China in June 2005, where the International Advisory Committee of the Memory of the World Programme held its biennial meeting. That meeting considered a position paper on the Programme by three men known as 'the Three Sages' – I hope they don't mind me calling them 'elder statesmen' of the Programme, but the term is appropriate, as they have been involved with it for the best part of its existence. Two of them are here today – Ray Edmondson and Dietrich Schüller – and the other is our colleague from Great Britain, George Boston. The 'Three Sages' paper recommended, among other things, that the Rules of Procedure of the Register Sub-Committee be changed in places to allow it to operate in such a way as to capture the diversity of documentary heritage from around the world.

Here are the new rules of procedure agreed to by the International Advisory Committee in Lijiang. I have highlighted the sections that deal with the composition of the Sub-Committee.

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## **REGISTER SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE MEMORY OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME**

**Rules of Procedure as adopted at IAC meeting, Lijiang, 13-16 June 2005**

### **Rule 1 – Membership**

1.1 The Register Subcommittee (RSC) shall be composed of 7 members, including a [chairperson appointed by the IAC](#), [3 members chosen in consultation with each of the ICA, IFLA and CCAAA](#), and [other specialists appointed for their expertise and/or links to other NGOs](#). Additional temporary members may be invited to attend specific meetings where appropriate to the topics under discussion.

1.2 A rapporteur shall be selected by the RSC from among its members.

1.3 [As far as possible the RSC membership shall be geographically representative. The RSC shall ensure that NGOs seek advice from appropriate experts from the region relating to each nomination.](#)

1.4 The term of office of RSC members shall be four years. They shall be eligible for immediate reappointment, in order to ensure continuity. Under these provisions, no more than four persons shall be replaced every four years.

In accordance with these Rules of Procedure, a new Register Sub-Committee was appointed in late 2005, and I had the honour of being installed as Chair by the Bureau of the IAC.

The representatives of the Non-Government Organisations mentioned above are Jan Bos (IFLA); Ken Hall (ICA), and Ray Edmondson (CCAAA)

As representatives of geographical regions we have Rujaya Abhakorn for Asia; Nada Itani for the Arab States; and Lourdes Blanco for Latin America. Ray Edmondson and myself take responsibility for the Pacific; and Jan Bos and Ken Hall look after Europe. This division is not rigid and in some cases two members of the RSC share the load when assessing a complex nomination.

The newly constituted RSC met for the first time in Paris in December 2006, after considering the nominations submitted for inscription in 2007. As we discussed these, it became very apparent that we needed a more nuanced approach to deal with some nominations– the criteria did not always allow nominators and assessors to tease out all the meanings and values of the documentary heritage

under consideration. We were very concerned that some nominations could have had the potential to be inscribed on the Register if a more effective way was found to describe some of their characteristics, and thus their significance.

It was suggested that a new criterion be added to the *General Guidelines*, one that would allow us to consider how emotional attachment to and reverence for items and collections of documentary heritage by communities who are now living could become part of the process of assessing its significance.

Australians in the audience who are involved in other areas of heritage assessment such as built and movable heritage will recognise the criterion we recommended for adoption by the Programme. In built heritage assessment it is called 'Social Value'; in movable heritage it is called 'Social Significance' – it is the same thing in both areas. It is one of the criteria used to assess nominations for the Australian *Memory of the World* Register.

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#### Social/spiritual/community significance

- This concept is another way to express the significance of a document or set of documents in terms of their spiritual or sacred values, and the emotional attachment a specific community can demonstrate in relation to them for the way they contribute to its identity and social cohesion.
- This criterion must reflect *living* significance – the documentary heritage must have an emotional hold on people who are alive today. Once those who have revered the item for its social/spiritual/community significance no longer do so, or are no longer alive, it loses this specific significance and eventually acquires historical significance.

The IAC Bureau approved the new criterion at its meeting in Paris in March 2007.

This criterion allows the RSC to consider the value placed by a living community on an item or collection of documentary heritage. It takes into account the reverence and awe with which particular communities regard such items as the holy books, writings, and inscriptions of systems of faith and belief – the spiritual power possessed by items associated with saints and prophets, for example; or with documents associated with individuals revered by specific communities. It is a particularly powerful tool with which to analyse Indigenous collections that contain material that is secret/sacred.

Many Australian archivists and librarians who work with collections relating to Indigenous people can testify to the powerful emotions that are evoked when they find their families mentioned in documents, when they see photographs of their ancestors, or hear recordings of their voices. It is a criterion that will allow the Memory of the World Programme to better fulfill its mandate to achieve as

fully as possible the identification and preservation of significant documentary heritage and, most important, to take note of cultural considerations that are not necessarily easy to describe when using the rest of the selection criteria.

It also allows us to take into consideration the attachment of a community – and not just a geographically or culturally centred one, but a wider community of interest – in a particular issue or individual. In our digital world, ‘imagined communities’ that coalesce around an individual or a subject now have the capacity to extend exponentially the range of documentary heritage associated with that person or subject. And here I would like to turn to the Register to look at how this criterion can be applied to one particular type of documentary heritage – literary collections.

An examination of the types of documentary heritage collections represented in the Register as it stands reveals a surprisingly low number of literary collections. To date there are 7, in order of inscription:

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Hans Christian Andersen (Denmark, 1997)  
Derek Walcott (Trinidad and Tobago, 1997)  
Goethe and Schiller Archive (Germany, 2001)  
Ibsen, *A Doll's House* (Norway, 2001)  
Brothers Grimm (Germany, 2005)  
Astrid Lindgren Archive (Sweden, 2005)  
Christopher Okigbo (Africa, 2007)

Three of these are the collections of poets; three are children's literature and folk tales. One is a play. There are no collections relating to novelists inscribed on the *Memory of the World* Register.

Yet this is an area of documentary heritage where libraries across the world house literary collections; and where literary house museums that preserve and interpret the physical context for a writer's work draw in some cases thousands upon thousands of pilgrims a year. Why have none of these institutions sought to have the documents associated with their writer's work inscribed on the MoW Register?

The paucity of literary documents on the MoW Register is even more striking when one considers the popularity of such documentary heritage in the eyes of the public. Australians – particularly those of us who live in Canberra, and especially those who work in the National Library – will remember the heady days of the *Treasures from the World's Great Libraries* exhibition a few years ago. The Library stayed open 22 hours a day; people queued through the night to see such documents as Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech, and Einstein's  $e=mc^2$  equation – and also a copy of the first quarto of Shakespeare's

*The Merchant of Venice*, J R R Tolkien's own cover design for *The Hobbit*, part of Dickens' manuscript for *Nicholas Nickelby*, and two manuscript chapters of Jane Austen's novel, *Persuasion*. They came to gaze on the 'real thing', the pages inscribed with their own hands by the writers whose works they treasure. And they still do – devotees of one particular novelist come to the Library to gaze upon the one letter from their heroine held in the collection, then write rapturously about the experience in their publications.

Why do people revere documents associated with novelists, and pore reverentially over handwritten manuscript or typed pages with amendments made by the author's own pen? Why do they form societies to study their work, or often travel vast distances to the locations where the writers produced their novels. Here are some words, by one of the writers who have captured worldwide attention that may give a clue to the compelling emotional attachment of many millions of people to the work of novelists:

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'Oh, it is only a novel...' ... or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.'

For those of us whom Rudyard Kipling in a short story of 1924 styled 'Janeites', these words from Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* in defence of the novel will be all too familiar. The community of devotees of Jane Austen had been building throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, and today has reached enormous proportions, judging by the number of societies worldwide devoted to studying her life and works, devotees visiting the sites associated with her life, and engaging in lively debate on the accuracy of the various popularisations of her work and life in movies and television series.

The same things can be said for countless writers across the world – every continent boasts novelists whose works have inspired millions, and I am sure that every one of us could draw up a list of authors whose documentary heritage would be worthy of inclusion on the *Memory of the World Register*.

What can be done to address this lack of literary records in the Register? We are very pleased to welcome to this conference Lothar Jordan of the International Committee for Literary Museums (ICLM). I am hoping that dialogue between MoW and ICLM will produce a flow of nominations from literary museums on all continents.

And, while the works of the great writers of history – and of course I include poets, playwrights, essayists and short story writers in this as well – are more than capable of being included in the Register in terms of their world significance

when assessed according to the selection criteria in the General Guidelines, the addition of our new criterion for social/spiritual/community significance will also illuminate another aspect of this type of documentary heritage – its power to engage emotions down the ages, and to provide continuing inspiration to communities who turn to the work of creative writers to help them to understand how people have dealt with the challenges and opportunities, the pains and the joys, the struggles and the resolutions that each generation has faced down the ages as a necessary part of being human.

Lovers of literature, we have work to do – the Register and the Memory of the World programme needs you, to translate your passion for the works of creativity produced by the literary geniuses of our world into nominations to our Registers at all levels.