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Eve, Martin Paul (2018) Access Problems for the Contemporary History of the Book. In: Books.Files, 30 April - 1st May 2018, New York City, NY, USA. (Unpublished)

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- Two problems:
  - An archival problem (one of selectivity, privacy and value in the present)
  - A technical and legal problem for computational textual analysis
  - Background to the project
    - Close Reading with Computers: Textual Scholarship, Computational Formalism, and David Mitchell's Cloud Atlas (Stanford UP, 2019)

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- First problem: contemporary history of the book
  - Explain what happened with publication history
  - Explain sankey diagram
  - Explain importance of close reading and textual changes:
    - In *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924), before his influential *Practical Criticism* (1929), Richards introduced the notion that "unpredictable and miraculous differences" might come about "in the total responses" to a text from "slight changes in the arrangement of stimuli" and noted that these are, therefore, worthy of study.

    - So: slight textual changes are important, alongside a general interest in the editorial histories of recent texts

  - But, we don't know which texts will matter and the effort of archiving important editorial details is currently being left to authors early in their career: "Due to my inexperience at that stage in my uh three-book 'career' it hadn't occurred to me that having two versions of the same novel appearing on either side of the Atlantic raises thorny questions over which is definitive, so I didn't go to the trouble of making sure that the American changes were applied to the British version (which was entering production by that point probably) and vice versa. It's a lot of faff – you have to keep track of your changes and send them along to whichever side is currently behind – and as I have a low faff-tolerance threshold, I'm still not very conscientious about it, which is why my US and UK editors now have their assistants liaise closely.

    - These days when I ask one side to make a change to the MS or proof, the other applies the same amendment, and all is well. Back in 2003 this wasn't the case, hence the two versions. Though to be fair to me I really never dreamed back then that anyone would ever notice or care enough to email me about it, or that the book would still be in print 13 years later, let alone sell a couple of million copies and be studied or thought about by academics."

  - So, when I noticed these editorial differences between the volumes, I had to find a way to track down the original author and ask him. This is a problem. We are letting important editorial details and histories slip away from beneath us,

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- Problem 2: Getting access to texts

  - *Cloud Atlas* is a great novel for certain types of stylometric profiling/computational techniques – a singe author writing in six different registers/generic moods. It's a fantastic playground.

- Brief explanation of novel

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- So, the type of thing you can do is trigram visualization, like this.

- Explain trigrams – vocabulary-independent writing analysis of genre

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- Another example of what you can do: historical word-dating in texts

- In *Cloud Atlas*, the first chapter purports to have been written between 1850 and 1910. The first section of this chapter consists of 13,246 words. I wanted to know: what does it mean to "write as though you are writing in the 19th century from a twenty-first century perspective"? Is it about mimetic accuracy of the language that is used?
- To begin answering this, I wrote a computer program that looked up etymological first-use dates of terms within the novel in Dictionary.com and the OED. It wasn't perfect, but its operation can be summarised as: "return as many as possible, but not necessarily all, words in a text that have etymological first-usage dates after 1910".
- The upshot of this is that I found three terms that would have been inaccessible either to Mitchell's historic author or the intra-diegetic editor: spillage, from ~1934; latino, from ~1946; and lazy-eye, from ~1960. In the case of spillage, the text is here recounting the debate between the Moriori elders as to whether "the spillage of Maori blood" will "also destroy one's *mana*". Interestingly, the Online Etymology Dictionary disputes this entry, claiming it for the nineteenth century.[1] Mitchell could have avoided this slip through reverting to the verb form, "spilling". On the other hand, latino is definitely a twentieth-century construction: "'Passionate Latinos,' observed Henry, bidding me a second good-night". While this term did not actually come to prominence until after the Second World War, the use, here, of a racial epithet has an important different effect for the construction of a stylistic imaginary of the nineteenth century, to which I will turn shortly. Finally, Mitchell gives us a "parlour […] inhabited by a monstrous hog's head (afflicted with droop-jaw and lazy-eye, killed by the twins on their sixteenth birthday". The sources that I consulted give this slang term for amblyopia as appearing in the middle of the twentieth century.

- While this was a very good attempt at linguistic mimesis, it clearly also busts the logic that it has to be accurate to "sound right". On the other hand, I also took a 2004 magazine corpus, called COCA, and examined words that appear in *Cloud Atlas* that are not present in contemporary magazines. The most striking finding here was that terms of racist abuse – or at least outmoded terms with colonial overtones – Blackamoor, blackfella, darkies, harridan, womenfolk, bedlamite, mulatto, quadroon, and mixedblood – all occur significantly more frequently in *Cloud Atlas* than in contemporary popular discourse.

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- When we think about the digital humanities, we often go straight for breadth, as Amy Hungerford and others have recently gestured towards. The temptation that we have been sold by "distant reading" is that we can add ever-more texts to a corpus and that we might, thus, cheat death's ability to cut short our reading. For consider that, in 2015, according to

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1   'Spillage', *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2017 <https://www.etymonline.com/word/spillage> [accessed 2 December 2017].

Bowker data, almost three million new books were printed in English alone, of which two hundred and twenty thousand were novels. A good estimate for the number of days in a human lifespan is 26,000 (approximately 71 years), using the World Health Organization's figures as of 2015, so one would need to read an average of ten novels per day, every day from age ten onwards, to have read all English fiction published in 2015. The promise of distant reading is a way around this: even as we cannot hope to read all of this material, we might be able to study it computationally and statistically.

- BUT: explain situation here and retyping novel
- What we really need is legal access to plain-text copies of new fiction – for which we could pay and that would be stored in a secure place at universities – so that we can use new methods to study these texts.

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