FIRST STEPS IN

ANNOTATION

in

LIBRARY CATALOGUES

By

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1955

NOTE

In its first form this little work was submitted to the Library Association Examiners who at that time, 1906, required an essay, to be written at home before the examinations, for most of the six subjects in which we were then examined. It was published in the magazine of the Croydon Libraries Staff Guild and subsequently as the fourth in the little L.A.A. series which I had started at about that time. In its long life retouchings had made it patchy; for example, the forms established by L. Stanley Jast in the Croydon *Reader's Index* still survived, and some repetition existed.

I cannot hope to have eliminated these faults in the rewriting I have made, but I have now had the advantage of suggestions made by tutors, and by our Honorary Editor, Mr. A. C. Jones, who collected them for me. The main entry, which to save space I have not repeated in every example, conforms to the standard entry given in the L.A. *Students' Handbook*, pages 27-8, 1955, and new examples replace the old. I am grateful to my helpers, who, however, are not responsible for the result.

The main criticism I have encountered is that my examples exceed the 30-40 words some regard as ideal. There is no authoritative rule in this matter. In my final paragraph I suggest that students reduce those given to that length as an exercise. This, however, is not a complete survey of the subject. E. A. Savage's *Manual of Annotation*, 1906, our standard treatise, gives examples of both long and reduced forms.

The student who cares to continue the study will be happy to find that little book, long out of print but still alive, in the librarianship collections of older libraries. W.C.B.S.

March, 1955.

I

SOME PRELIMINARIES AND DEFINITIONS

1. Annotation is the somewhat pedantic name we give to the notes which are added to entries in catalogues to make clearer the meaning or purpose of some or all the parts of these entries. It will clarify if we repeat from Brown's *Manual* a more comprehensive definition and add others that may amplify it later:

> "Notes, which must be as brief as possible, should elucidate obscure titles; show the qualifications of the author, his method, elementary or otherwise; the preliminary knowledge required for the reading of the book; its place in the literature of the subject, and the presence of bibliographies, glossaries, etc.; and should give, in the case of reprints, the date of first publication, and in that of revised editions, the nature of the revision or/and editorial additions".

2. Standard current cataloguing practice makes a main entry consist of heading, title, sub-title in which the author's name is repeated in precise work, imprint, collation, annotation, and notation. It is useful to give it here; showing these parts:

[*Class no.*]	
Heading	Frayne, John G. . *and* Wolfe, Halley.
Title	Elements of sound recording [by] John G. Frayne, ... [and] Halley Wolfe.
Imprint	New York, John Wiley & sons inc.; London, Chapman & Hall ltd., 1949.
Collation	vii, [I], 686p. illus., tables, diagrs. 23½cm. Bibliographies, graphs.
[*Annotation*]	

The entry is for a classified catalogue but can become one for a dictionary catalogue if the entry is arranged in alphabetical order and not in order of class numbers.

The entries of examples that follow should be regarded as being in accord with the above form, although, to save space, they are given here more briefly.

3. The book is by joint authors; otherwise it is a simple uncomplicated example. A main entry is often more complex. The author may be a monarch, nobleman, archbishop or have some other distinctive character; the book described may be a translation, may be edited or re-written or revised by someone other than the original author, and so on. It is necessary to indicate these simple factors, as the facts they reveal are worked into the heading or after the title. They are not part of the annotation, although occasionally they have been so used. The entry should be made as informative as its character warrants before the annotation is reached.

4. The sample entry tells us nothing more of the authors than their names, and nothing of the treatment, elementary or advanced, mathematical or otherwise, of the subject, and does not show its limits. These may be important matters for so large a book. It is here that annotation comes in.

5. Broadly, annotation includes the *contents note* where this appears to be useful, but it is usual now to separate them. If so, the contents note, which should be an independent paragraph immediately after the annotation proper, is a list of the chapters, sections, or separately treated subjects. Books of composite (polytypical) or miscellaneous character sometimes require such a note, and this may in some cases make further annotation unnecessary.

6. It should be clear, too, that the classification symbol is, or can be made, a full representation of the book, especially in modern "depth", which means minute, classification; its subject, geographical place, time, language, method and form can be expressed; indeed, in a perfect classification number, all the meaning of an entry can be conveyed by a symbol. Such symbols, however, are for the trained librarian only, but for him are a most effective means of discriminating books. Annotation, however, is, in the main, for the reader who is not so trained.

7. The above apparent asides are necessary I think as annotation may serve several purposes. In general libraries it is used to attract readers to books they might overlook; in learned libraries it may be merely to isolate special information, but in both it is used ultimately for its "attention value". Its simplest form, occasionally used today, consists of a few words in square brackets, immediately after a

title which, as so many are, is fanciful, to show what the book is about. Examples from books published in 1954 are:

Barge, Victor. Danger is my life [Pearl fishing.].

Manchester Guardian. The middle class way of life. [Family budgets].

Price, William. Journey by junk [Japan].

Ritter, Christiane. A woman in the Polar night [Spitzbergen].

Swan, Michael. Temples of the sun and moon [Mexico].

Titles of many books of travel, from *Eothen* to the *Kon-Tiki expedition*, are quite meaningless in themselves.

The above notes are perhaps more suitable in the current book bulletins of libraries than in permanent catalogues; they "break the purity" of the entry and the information may more safely be placed in a formal annotation.

8. Fuller definitions have been formulated, to show the purpose and range of orthodox annotation, as follows:

a. "To make an accurate and compendious statement as to the subject, scope, manner, qualifications of the author and general suitability of the book for this or that type of reader."

—*E. A. Baker.*

b. "An abstract of the character and individuality of the book catalogued . . . excluding judgment".—*E. A. Savage.*

c. "Criticism should be avoided in the writing of annotations; but the use of appreciative adjectives like 'good', 'complete', 'exhaustive', is not necessarily to be considered a transgression of this rule".—*J. D. Brown.*

d. "Annotation deals with matters of fact, not matters of opinion; the true function of the annotator is elucidation. Criticism, direct or implied, is inadmissable".

—*Sayers and Stewart.*

These rules seem to be rather rigid now; modern librarians do aspire to guide readers, especially those to whom books are not regular companions. Children's librarians should be competent to advise young readers; and librarians of special libraries, experts we assume in the bibliography of the subjects they cover, to tell their readers "where to look" at least. The general librarian may attempt it if he realises that no such person exists as a universal specialist; and he is safe—although safety is never everything—when such criticism

as he uses in his notes is drawn from reviews or from the opinion of writers he is able to name. Otherwise he appears to be writing, with an authority that few may possess, on subjects as diverse as Aristotle's Categories and Cybernetics, Anaesthetics and Irrigation or anything on which men have written. The general cataloguer who can employ with knowledge such adjectives as Brown allows would be indeed knowledgeable. No doubt there are fields in which he may write safely; he only will know what they are.

II

SOME METHODS AND EXAMPLES

9. A brief list of points that may be helpful as we endeavour to produce such annotations as are suggested may be given as questions:

1. Who is the author and what is his standing in the subject of which he writes?
2. What are his real subject, argument and method?
3. Has the book a special purpose or intention?
4. What preliminary knowledge is required to read it?
5. What special features does it present in the following matters (always bearing in mind that information already given in the parts of the entry preceding the annotation should not be repeated in the note):
   (*a*) editing
   (*b*) contributions not indicated by the title
   (*c*) bibliographies, glossaries, appendices?

There will emerge some other questions:

1. Is the work one of original research, travel, excavation, or thought?
2. Does it include former work and conclusions from it? And add to them?
3. What relation has it therefore to other books?

We call any part of the annotation a "note" and the usual parts are the author, the subject, the treatment, the relation, the editing and the bibliographical notes. Not all books need annotations so elaborately made, and this precise separation of the parts would require me to write an annotation illustrating each, for which space cannot be spared. Annotations which combine several or all of them can, however, be constructed.

10. Confine the author note to facts which show that the writer has expertise in his subject. The author often places on the title-page or in the preface, or on the "blurb" if there is one—he is usually its writer, too—what he advances as his qualification. This may be used. Occasionally a book takes some importance, or at least interest, because of its writer's fame in other fields. Sir Winston Churchill's *Painting as a pastime*, 1948, is an example. A few annotations may serve to illustrate the arguments. (It is assumed that the heading and the rest of the entry have been made in the standard form as in paragraph 2).

Hamilton, George Heard.

The art and architecture of Russia. (Pelican history of art), 1954.

Author is associate professor in the history of art, and curator of the E.A. Abbey Collection, Yale University. Describes, with unique illustrations now first published in western countries, the impact of Christian and Byzantine imperial influences from the 10th cent. on the newly settled parts of Russia west of the Urals, as shown in survivals today; the deviations into western form under and after Peter the Great, 1765-93, until the 19th century, when there was gradual return to the earlier forms. Scholarly, advanced and authoritative.

This also illustrates what may be required in a subject note—the coverage of the work—as well as suggests some degree of importance. A simple further example is:

Stanley, Ilsa.

I will lift up mine eyes. London, Gollancz, 1954.

Experiences in pre-Hitler Germany of the daughter of a Jewish rabbi, from memories of the visits of Wilhelm II to a mining village in 1912, and of his flight six years later; and continuing, through the rising and intensifying terror of Hitler's movement, with her many trials until her escape to America, 1939.

11. All "subject books" and indeed some novels, have a pedigree; the former should refer to previous knowledge and, to be justified, add something. This example will illustrate:

Ranganathan, Shiyali Ramamrita.

Philosophy of classification. Copenhagen, Munksgaard, 1951.

Author (M.A., Ph.D., F.L.A.) was professor of library science University of Delhi. The theories of bibliographical classification first developed in *Prolegomena*, 1937, and *Library classification: fundamentals and procedure*, 1944, and exemplified in his Colon classification scheme, as well as his several subsequent works, are summarised and further developments are indicated.

This is an advanced note which might also indicate his contributions to the Indian Library Association's journal, *Abgila*, and the later *Annals of Library Science.*

12. Of *new editions* it is desirable to show what actually is new:

Cocking, W. T.

Television receiving equipment, 3rd. ed. London, Iliffe, 1951.

Author is ed. of the *Wireless World.* A comprehensive work the first ed. of which, 1940, was concerned with radar before the advent of TV broadcasting. Describes the science and practice to 1951. For the general reader who has knowledge of the technique of sound radio. Mathematics as needed by the designer are delegated to the appendix.

Where a so-called new edition has no matter that is new; this should be stated.

13. Books *edited* by others than their authors call for a note on the nature of the editing:

Housman, Alfred Edward.

The manuscript poems of Alfred Edward Housman ed. by Burns Huber, University of Minnesota Press, 1955.

From the notebooks of the poet of the *Shropshire lad*, which he left to the discretion of his brother, Lawrence Housman, who published as *More poems*, 1936, those he believed A.E.H. would wish to preserve and endeavoured to erase or cover the fragments and rejected verses so that they could not be published. These fell into the care of the University of Minnesota and the editor has deciphered and uncovered what he could. A work A.E.H. would execrate but a revelation of his rigid self-criticism and selection methods.

14. *Translations.* In these the entry and annotation together should show, 1, the form the translation takes, 2, the title in the original language and, if necessary, 3, the place of the work. One example may suffice:

Dante Alighieri. The divine comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine. Cantica I, Hell (l'Inferno). Trans. by Dorothy Leigh Sayers. Harmondsworth, The Penguin Classics, 1949.

Imitates triple rhyme scheme (*terza rima*) of the Italian so far as the poverty in suitable rhymes of English allows. Has a lucid introduction on the historical setting, 13th century Italy, the biography of Dante, and the political and religious influences to which he was subject. Commentaries after each canto, an appendix on Dante's universe and chronology, and glossary. Probably the best "first book" for English readers ; former notable translations were those of H. F. Carey, 1805-12, in blank verse, H. W. Longfellow, in unrhymed three-line stanzas, 1867-70, and Laurence Binyon in English triple rhyme, 1933. A line by line prose translation, by J. A. Carlyle, with the corresponding Italian text on the left page, is in Dent's Temple Classics, 1900.

Only important works (*as* translations) would attract so long a treatment.

III

THE LITERATURE OF POWER

(*Literature*).

15. This, the name given to works of imagination by de Quincey, covers in the main Poetry, the Drama, Fiction.

1. In poetry, state the theme, form, and where it is the first work of a poet catalogued, or a collected edition, his place in literature, his dates, etc. To do this for his individual works would mean unnecessary repetition:

ELIOT, Thomas Stearns.

Considered by many to be the most significant and influential of contemporary poets. Born in America in 1888, he

has lived most of his life in England and, after many academic offices and honours, has received the Order of Merit, and the Nobel prize for literature, 1948. His chief poems are *The waste lands*, *Ash-Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*; he has also had great success as a dramatist both for the study and the stage, and as critic and essayist is held in veneration.

If space were not a consideration more details could be added but this would be enough to indicate Eliot's stature for new readers. An individual work could be annotated thus:

ELIOT, Thomas Stearns.

Ash-Wednesday. Faber, 1930.

A poem of Lenten confessional abasement and exaltation in irregular, occasionally rhymed verse, unusually difficult even for Eliot, with, however, haunting rhythms and several beautiful images and lines.

2. *In drama* the type of play—comedy, tragedy, farce, etc., should be noted; as also its time, the number of acts and scenes, number of characters and any other facts of interest to reader or performer.

MORGAN, Charles.

The flashing stream, 1938.

A prose play. Characters 8 men, 3 women. Time, the present. Setting, the living room of officers of an experimental unit in the British island, St. Hilary, in the Atlantic, engaged on a mathematical defence problem of great moment. The interplay of characters involves the commander, his woman colleague and the jealousies of the wife of the admiral. First produced Sept. 1, 1938, by Godfrey Tearle at the Lyric Theatre, London.

3. *Fiction.* Annotation of novels is the most common form of it and may be worth while when they have any special characteristic, local, historical, personal or otherwise. It has become common in libraries to "classify" novels by special interests, to save the time of readers who read, so to speak, in grooves; i.e., romances, crime, detective, sensational, medical, war, sea, air, space, historical, westerns, oriental, and so on; classes which clearly may overlap one another. As with the drama, annotation may be used to show

the type of story, its setting, place, period, and, among other things, the introduction of important historical or romantic characters—as Savonarola in George Eliot's *Romola*, the Erasmus family in the *Cloister and the Hearth* and Napoleon in *War and Peace*. While the nature of the story may be indicated, the plot should not be unravelled: especially in mystery and detective novels: something may be lost of the dramatic pleasure any novel may give if its story is known before it is read. A few examples only appear to be necessary.

SAYERS, Dorothy Leigh.

Murder must advertise.

A mystery develops in a London advertising agency whose business methods are meticulously described. A Peter Wimsey detective novel.

SAYERS, Dorothy Leigh.

Nine Tailors.

A Peter Wimsey detective novel. The setting is in a village and concerns the church bell-ringers. The art of bell-ringing is expertly woven into the background of an exciting story.

DOUGLAS, Lloyd C.

The Robe.

Rome and Judea A.D. 33; The Crucifixion and the effect on a young soldier who stood under the Cross and became possessed of the Robe for which the soldiers cast lots and the mystical and dramatic effect on the lives of many in Palestine and in Rome in the time of the persecution.

(This may be used to draw attention to other works on the life of Christ and in the early trials of Christians; i.e., the old popular stories, Wallace's *Ben Hur*, and Wilson Barrett's *The Sign of the Cross*, and more considerable ones, Farrar's *Darkness and Dawn*, Sienkiewitz's *Quo Vadis* and even George Moore's *The Brook Kerith*.)

PHILLPOTTS, Eden.

The River.

Dartmoor solitudes, sombreness, and tragedy as well as romance, in which the River Dart is the dominant and boding presence.

Sequels and sequences may be indicated. The well-known trilogy of Dumas *The Three Musketeers, The Vicomte de Bragelonne,* and *Twenty Years after,* are an example, as are R. L. Stevenson's *Kidnapped* and *Catriona,* de la Roche's *Jalna* sequence, and so on. There are also whole series in which a favourite sailor as Captain Hornblower, or detective as Sherlock Holmes, Monsieur Poiriot, Inspector French, and Dr. Thorndyke, appear—this sort of sequence is popular at present. In most of these cases a collective annotaton describing the nature of the novels and the order of the sequels or sequences may be an economy.

IV
BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

16. The annotation of children's books is done much on the methods described for adult books, with children and their parents both in mind. Savage laid it down that they should be written in the language of the book as the reader of the one would read the other, but, as he himself agrees, there need be no writing down to children. Examples that seem to suffice are:

Osmond, Edward.

A valley grows up, 1953.

The story of the river valley town of Dungate from the iron age, when it was lonely, almost unpeopled, country to the modern town of considerable size. It consists of a clear description of each age which is associated with one of ten large double-page coloured pictures, and there are many black and white drawings. The changes are introduced gradually and attractively and show many things which must have happened in our own town of [————] as well as at Dungate.

Knight, Captain Frank.

Voyage to Bengal, 1954.

An exciting story of a lad who as a baby was rescued from the sea and nurtured by fisher folk of Littlehampton; became a fisher himself and in turn was run down by a ship, *The True Friend,* off Beachy Head, and saved himself by climbing aboard the vessel, a smaller East Indiaman, in 1832. As a

common seaman he made the voyage by way of the Cape of Good Hope with adventures and intrigues about him all the way, proved his heroic qualities and eventually solved the mystery of his birth. The historical and nautical background is accurately realised.

For somewhat younger children this example comes from Hampstead's *What shall I read next*:

Wood, Andrew. The phantom railway.

Railway enthusiasts become involved in an adventure, the climax of which is the disappearance of the Golden Hind, the newest British Railways Pacific locomotive.

A recent work for younger readers which received the Carnegie Memorial Medal award for 1952, may be annotated:

Norton, Nancy.

The borrowers, 1952.

Children of all ages find interest in the little people who live between the floor boards and the ceilings of houses and borrow the things that seem unaccountably to disappear from mantelpieces and sideboards, such as cotton reels, studs, pens and other things. This is the story of their exacting and nervous lives and is humorous and pathetic as well as wise.

V

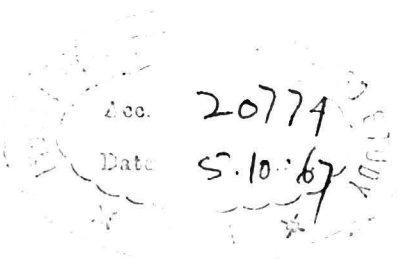
CONCLUSION

17. It should be clear that annotation, however useful it may be, can be an expensive addition to simple cataloguing. Utmost brevity in their writing demands skill; otherwise notes may be uninviting. It follows that every book which appears to require description in this way should be scrutinised carefully and if written, its note be reduced to essentials. The examples given can no doubt be reduced much farther, an exercise in which the student may find amusement. Library magazines, and bulletins, provide more space than can be afforded in complete catalogues, or even in card or sheaf catalogues except in card catalogues where printed cards in small type are used. Earlier examples were often reduced by profuse use of abbreviations, but these are not always acceptable to, or even decipherable, by

users of popular catalogues. Notes should in all senses be readable. Enthusiasm for the expounding of books should not lead to so much of it as may consume more time than many libraries can afford.

18. It will have been clear that I have not attempted a code for specialist book annotation; that would be beyond my space and powers, but it may safely be asserted that if the special cataloguer works in his own field according to the methods I have described, he will produce valuable information for his readers.

In addition to Savage's *Manual of annotation* some study can profitably be made of library publications or others which have good annotations. In those issued by the Leeds and Bethnal Green public libraries, and in *British book news*, issued by the British Council, good examples will be found. The weekly "Books received" pages of the *Times Literary Supplement* should be studied, and excellent specimens of brief annotation in our narrow field are the synopses Dr. A. J. Walford has recently included in the contents list of *The Library Association Record.* The fiction annotator would do well to examine Dr. E. A. Baker's *Guide to the best fiction*, 1932, which remains the most considerable and valuable annotated list to its date of publication.



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