

Editing Versions

Historicism, Biography, and the Digital in Tanselle's *Descriptive Bibliography*

John Bryant

ABSTRACT

G. Thomas Tanselle's *Descriptive Bibliography* — a monumental compilation of essays devoted to bibliographical theory and practice as they have evolved as a discipline since the 1960s — not only attests to Tanselle's vibrant career but is also an occasion to reflect on bibliography as a “way of thinking” about book history, material culture, the editing of fluid texts, and digital scholarship. In our profession, the field of descriptive bibliography has endured decades of begrudging tolerance as “merely” custodial rather than critical; and yet bibliography — in so far as it records change — is the fundamental grounding for any historicist and materialist project. Melville's so-called “L-word” in *Typee* — once it is tracked from manuscript to first edition to revised edition — records an “oscillating revision” in Melville's thinking and writing that exemplifies the dance between accident and intentionality in the creative process. Tanselle's essays on the practical workings of bibliography also suggest the field's ability to extend its scope beyond idealized notions of the authorial work and to embrace non-authorized reprints, periodical placement, illustration, and non-literary documents, as well as adaptive revision in film and translation. Descriptive bibliography is essential for our deeper engagement with how and why versions evolve. Advancements in digital strategies related to database and display will facilitate the future acceptance of descriptive bibliography among literary scholars and critics seeking to test the interpretive potentials of biography, material history and culture, and the fluid text.

I AM NOT A DESCRIPTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHER, AND I AM AMONG THE least practiced readers of this journal to reflect on G. Thomas Tanselle's comprehensive volume titled *Descriptive Bibliography* (Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 2020). Would not one of Tanselle's equally titanic contemporaries — Hans Walter Gabler, Jerome J. McGann, Joel Myerson, Peter Shillingsburg, James L. W. West, or Michael Winship — be better qualified; or one of his former, highly accomplished students, such as David Vander Meulen; or any of a younger (though graying) gene-

ration who have made distinguished contributions in not only descriptive bibliography but also textual studies, such as Mark Bland, Maura Ives, Randall McLeod, and Paul Needham? That said, my qualifications lie in my advocacy for the field: its practitioners, its evolving commitment to historicism, and its continued centrality in our understanding of books, texts, images, and, in particular, versions in print and online.

Like many editors of scholarly editions, I have not created a descriptive bibliography — happily, such descriptive bibliographies in my field of Melville studies pre-date me — but editing a writer's work without a descriptive bibliography would be like wandering in an obscure wood without a map, or a Virgil. This is not to say that a descriptive bibliography is merely a tool useful in the making of something more important. It is a discipline in itself, and Tanselle's collection of a lifetime of essays gives you, in somewhat reiterative though invariably engaging ways, the history of that discipline: the fundamentals of the arts, sciences, and technologies of bibliography; the constituent parts of particular kinds of bibliographies; and arguments over the past six decades that represent the vital issues in the modern practice of making a bibliography.

As a non-practitioner in a field that many charitably call dry, I found myself instead engrossed by each chapter and wondering what is at the heart of our unlikely embrace of descriptive bibliography. Most compelling is the magnetism of the paradox of textuality being both material and immaterial. In reading, we transform material words written on the page into images, actions, thoughts, arguments, and discourse, all happening invisibly in the mind. Surprising it is, then, to recognize (which, eventually, we all do) that even these material words, solidly "there" on pages and in books, are artifacts of past writing and publishing processes that are as equally invisible to us as are the transformative processes of reading. Furthermore, does knowing about the past events of a creative process inflect the meaning of our present reading of these words? of the history of a process we call publishing? and of our lives as humans interacting with the stuff of culture? We cannot begin to know the answers to these questions — which get at the origins of the evolving versions of a text, or what might be called a work's textual identities — until we begin to list and describe the traces of words, books, publishing, and culture. In light of Tanselle's book, I want to address the pull — the inevitability and critical necessity — of descriptive bibliography, as well as its connection to other intellectual concerns including the editing of versions of works and the dynamics of revision, and bibliography's future growth in a digital world.

I. The Stigma of Mere

Granted, descriptive bibliography has an uphill battle in claiming anything approaching centrality in the protean fields of literary interpretation. In the disciplines of the humanities as enacted for decades and still today, the origins and evolution of a text are still marginalized by the more immediate need to focus on meaning as it emerges from other social, political, or cultural contexts of the text itself. To be sure, I celebrate the long-time-incoming diversity of interpretive fields we have witnessed since the shift from New Critical aestheticism to the New Historicism and multiculturalism starting in the 1960s and 1970s. The irony of this still evolving historicist “turn” is that descriptive bibliography remains marginal even though it is nothing if not fundamentally historicist and cultural, not only in its announced pursuit, as Tanselle puts it, of “the production and publication” of books (2020, x) but also in the foundations it lays for fuller material histories of reading and writing. The undeserved neglect is all the more concerning when we consider that the trans-disciplinary nature of descriptive bibliography makes its multicultural applications all the more useful: Its scope ranges from classical to modern texts, from European and Asian to American and African, and from single author to popular culture studies; it serves the needs of non-literary genres such as film, music, and dance, as well as such scientific fields as mapping, botany, and the stars.

Tanselle’s book consists of thirteen essays, first published between 1966 and 2006, each with a “Postscript” that updates past discussions to 2020 in light of intervening critical publications. The opening five essays cover broader, theorized concepts (e.g. Cataloguing, Ideal Copy, Edition); the remaining eight discuss practical problems in making a descriptive bibliography (e.g. Collation, Paper, Typography, Presswork, Binding, Dust Jackets). The volume’s appendix — consisting of a “Sample Descriptive Bibliography” (of Melville’s *Redburn*), a glossary of bibliographic terms, and a useful list of “The Literature of Bibliography” — gestures toward the book’s viability as a resource for courses in bibliography and editing; indeed, a pamphlet version of the sample *Redburn* bibliography and glossary, shrink-wrapped with the volume itself, is designed for classroom uses. Regardless of topic, each essay replays in variant language Tanselle’s consistent refrain that a descriptive bibliography is “a history of the books [it takes] up” and contributes to “the broader annals of printing, publishing, and human culture” (2020, x). The remarkable breadth of Tanselle’s book suggests that by “human culture” he means, at the very least, research, scholarly editing,

biography, book history, genre studies, material culture, literary interpretation, and, I would add, critical thinking in a democratic culture. It is good to know the material foundations of the media that shape our lives, in publishing and online, if finding truths is a goal for representative self-governance.

Despite Tanselle's protestations to the contrary, the long-established field of descriptive bibliography might share some blame for the disciplinary neglect it still endures. A persistent derogation of descriptive bibliography is that it is "merely" descriptive and, for that matter, alienating in its hyper-abbreviated collation formulas; it has been, erroneously equated with cataloging (another "mereness"), and at best useful as data for more important analyses. Literary scholars infrequently consult descriptive bibliographies, literary critics less so. Such neglect and minimizing might prevail in scholarship, unless and until, and perhaps serendipitously, individual scholars find themselves confronting critical problems that, in fact, require the sort of information that is consistently gathered and framed, thoroughly arrayed, and accessible only through a descriptive bibliography. Then suddenly a Melvillean "shock of recognition" takes hold. Suddenly, we know what descriptive bibliography is for; suddenly, descriptive bibliography becomes central, important, and no longer "mere".

I have had such Zen moments regarding descriptive bibliography, to be shared shortly, so I want to know, despite the "mereness" of descriptive bibliography, how the emergence of my own admittedly idiosyncratic, seemingly fortuitous need for descriptive bibliography might be universalized — maybe the word is evangelized — so that the necessary intricacies of the field might be brought more fully into the walled gardens of academic critical thinking. I realize that I am surely preaching to the converted, but the converted can become indifferent to their moments of conversion, and it helps to rehearse arguments as to why descriptive bibliography matters, even as those arguments include changes in our notions of description, textual analysis, interpretation, and scholarly access.

In proposing this agenda, I know that some of these questions have been asked and re-asked for generations. Nineteenth-century bibliographers — the precursors of modern bibliography — made chronological lists, including "bibliographical points" to assist book collectors in distinguishing one printing or edition from another. In short, the initial aim of descriptive bibliography was not history but the pricing and merchandizing of rarities. Early practitioners included not only scholars but also (to use the late book-seller William Reese's term) "operators" (1993), whom the cops call felons.

The infamous turn-of-the-twentieth-century collector Thomas J. Wise was both scholar and fraud: Well-versed in book lore, he concocted and stored “rare” books of his own making, which he in turn described in bibliographical lists that he circulated to unsuspecting buyers (PARTINGTON 1946). As scholarly editing, criticism, and the teaching of literature professionalized, so did descriptive bibliography, but not without disparagement. As Tanselle reminds us, though rigorous bibliographers were instrumental in establishing reliable texts, detractors complained that practitioners of the “New Bibliography” — among them the fulsomely-initialized A. W. Pollard, R. B. McKerrow, and W. W. Greg — spoiled the fun for book-collectors with their too-meticulous detail, or what Lewis Mumford (who should have known better) called the “barbed wire” of the editorial apparatus (1968). Apparently, for some among the *cognoscenti*, data is anathema to the immediacy of reading and access to the mind of the writer that texts presumably provide, never mind that texts are always edited and therefore as much an entrée into the selective minds of editors and the readerships they represent as they are into the writer. On bad days, descriptive bibliography continues to be dismissed as the listing of critically inconsequential detail, its collation symbols too “mathematical” — actually mathematicians would call these formulas simply bizarre — and its narratives too laden with technical terms. More charitably though no less vexingly, it is relegated to “mere” librarianship, a relegation that confuses a “book on a shelf” with “books that represent a work” and in doing so manages with deft economy to insult both librarians and bibliographers, who, as Tanselle establishes in his essay on “Library Cataloguing” (Ch. 3), are only as similar as first cousins: valued relations with complementary but significantly different critical agendas.

II. Bibliography and Biography

My shock of recognition regarding the utility of descriptive bibliography came early in my life as an employed scholar. Before that, in college, I was drawn to the phenomenon of revision in literary works: first, the broad strokes of Whitman’s successive, augmented editions of *Leaves of Grass* — suggested by James E. Miller’s 1964 side-by-side edition of the first and last versions of “Song of Myself”, tellingly subtitled “*Origin, Growth, Meaning*” — and shortly thereafter, the mare’s nest of a Keats manuscript leaf (reproduced in Jack Stillinger’s 1974 *The Texts of Keats’s Poems*.) Less evidence of

revision was available in Melville studies at the time because, besides Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts's 1962 *Billy Budd, Sailor*, little had been done with Melville's manuscripts. Moreover, evidence of textual variation from copy-text found in (say) the expurgated American *Typee* and expurgated British *Moby-Dick* — authorial revisions and editorial impositions alike — were, in keeping with intentionalist editorial practice, bundled together as substantive variants in virtually unreadable lists, only selectively discussed elsewhere, and not treated as the kind of revelatory revisions that would give identity and hence validity to versions. Accordingly, in the 1968 Northwestern-Newberry (NN) edition of *Typee*, evidence of Melville's fluid texts — the revisions and versions of his publications — was tucked out of sight (at least to this collegian at the time) in the textual apparatus at the back of the book, with its encoded, *cosidetto* barbed-wire lists of variants and emendations, highly abbreviated, and encrusted with symbols. But when, as a scholar, I found myself impaled on and scrutinizing the barbed wire, I experienced a series of revelations involving descriptive bibliography, and my interest in the integrative editing of manuscript and print texts began to grow.

By this time, the 1983 discovery of the three-chapter fragment of Melville's 1845 working draft of *Typee* sparked new interest in his first book and, naturally enough, I wanted to compare the three manuscript chapters to their corresponding texts in the first British edition as well as the first American and the American Revised editions, all three published within six months of each other in 1846. In crafting their 1968 eclectic, clear reading text of *Typee*, the NN editors had followed standard bibliographical measures to establish the first British edition text as their copy text, making emendations to it based on possible authorial revisions (rather than the presumably publisher-induced expurgations) found in the American Revised edition, which Melville had also supervised. Even if the complete manuscript of Melville's first draft of *Typee* had been available to the editors in the early 1960s, its text would not have replaced the British edition as the NN copy text because that heavily revised and later on significantly augmented document would not represent Melville's final intentions as he moved his text toward and through publication. Even so, the thousand and more revisions discoverable in my collations of the texts of the three manuscript chapters and their corresponding chapters in the British first and American revised editions were exciting evidence of Melville's *evolving* intentions. I felt this textual data, if made available to readers, would more fully contextualize our reading of *Typee* and broaden our notions of the

scholarly editing of fluid texts. Here, too, I found, descriptive bibliography became a useful tool in identifying the physical and inferred versions of the work we collectively call *Typee*.

Although my initial goal was simply to transcribe the *Typee* manuscript fragment, I quickly found that I could not adequately comprehend the working draft's revisions and main text without integrating physical description and interpretive analysis. The two were symbiotic modes of inquiry. One example is what I call Melville's "L-word". In Chapter 13, Melville's narrator Tommo attempts to translate into English his island servant Kory-Kory's Polynesian harangue against the belligerent inhabitants of neighboring valleys on the island. In the first British and American editions, Tommo says he "*literally* interpreted" (my emphasis) — that is translated — Kory-Kory's Polynesian for the English reader; however, in the subsequent American Revised (AR) edition, "*literally*" has been changed to "*liberally*". Although the two words differ by only one consonant, they are virtual antonyms when it comes to the art of translation, and, as I argue in *Melville Unfolding*, that word difference suggests any number of revision scenarios regarding Melville's attitude toward island culture, ranging from a respectful literalness in rendering Kory-Kory's language to a condescending, even mocking need for *liberality* in making proper English sense of what sounds to Tommo like gibberish.

This provocative L-word crux takes us to the problematic core of translation in general. How do you render the idiom of one culture into that of another; how do you balance linguistic exactitude and a necessary poetic license in treating the idiomatic? Happily, the L-word appears in the *Typee* manuscript fragment. Not surprisingly, what I found only complicated matters. In his sometimes inscrutable hand, Melville routinely failed to cross his internal "te" combinations so that a "te" can look like a "be", and vice versa. At first glance, Melville's inscription of the L-word surely looks like "*literally*", but after comparisons with similar words and upon closer inspection, I finally deciphered the manuscript word as "*liberally*".

What has this textual condition to do with descriptive bibliography? Hear me out. On the surface, we might imagine a revision scenario in which the manuscript "*liberally*" confirms Melville's original intention, which was then mistakenly typeset in the British edition as "*literally*", which was in turn corrected in the AR edition of *Typee* as "*liberally*". But an equally plausible scenario is that Melville originally wrote "*liberally*", changed his mind, and printed "*literally*" instead, so that the later shift in AR back to "*liberally*" may have been another change of mind, a flip-flop

back to “liberally”. Melville’s L-word is what I call an “oscillating revision”¹: in this case, physical evidence of a writer’s shifting intentions that also exemplifies the interpretive dimensions of the paradox of translation. So, is this oscillation a series of accidental errors or of intentional revisions in manuscript and print: Which is it? Here is where descriptive bibliography comes into play, not necessarily to resolve the conundrum but to help identify the versions of *Typee* and enrich our pondering of them.

Throughout his collection of essays, Tanselle reminds us that descriptive bibliography is the broader category that encompasses analytical bibliography, a field that uses book (and sometimes manuscript) evidence to inform decisions in identifying versions, establishing copy text, and justifying emendations in critical editions. The AR *Typee* is a particularly juicy case for analytic bibliography, as I learned some decades ago when I first immersed myself in the physical nature of textuality as explicated in the Textual Note for the NN *Typee*, written, as it happens, by G. Thomas Tanselle.

Here we learn that the AR edition was not a new setting of type but the result of breaking up and reassembling the typeset pages of the original American edition. Melville was asked to give instructions for expurgating chunks of his text — ranging from sentences, paragraphs, and pages to an entire chapter — and for revising individual words. To follow these instructions, printers broke apart lines of type in the typesetting of specific pages, removed the type corresponding to Melville’s expurgations from the pages containing them, closed up the space between the remaining type (sometimes adding new words to splice the remaining texts together), and rearranged the newly-configured pages in the printer’s “formes”. A forme encases a sufficient number of typeset pages to fill a single side of a full sheet of paper, with two formes printing an array of pages on both sides of a sheet. The pages of type in each forme — in this case twelve pages per side — are arranged in rows, some rows upside down and paginated out of the regular counting order, but when the double-sided, fully printed sheet is folded, the numbered pages in that particular “gathering” are sequenced properly.

Tanselle’s textual note for the NN *Typee* also observed that typos in the AR edition tended to cluster in the vicinity of expurgations and other

1. I developed this term for incomplete revision in describing the more concrete instances of Melville’s textual indecision in the digital editing of the *Billy Budd* manuscript for the *Melville Electronic Library* (2019).

instances of repaired typesetting because a good deal of resetting had to occur, and quickly, to fill in the gaps or to fix damaged type, and errors crept into the process. Tellingly, Tanselle found that the word “liberally” does not appear in or around repaired pages, and the appearance of this word as the sole change in a page of unrepaired text would not have been accidental; it had to be a change made at Melville’s request; it had to be intentional. Rarely are Textual Notes quite so revelatory. Suddenly, I saw in concrete terms how descriptive bibliography might be relevant to my own critical concern for the way texts might evolve or oscillate. In one moment, I learned not only more about printing but also that a line of critical thinking could be shaped by the materiality of book-making and that the mechanics of a technology could impinge upon the logics of literary interpretation. But while book data revealed in the NN textual note determines the likely intentionality of Melville’s change to “liberally”, it does not resolve the L-word debate: It does not explain the causes of Melville’s intended change.

You might assume that establishing the intentionality of “liberally” in the AR edition settles the case concerning which word the “L-word” represents. Granted, the NN editors — including Tanselle — conclude that because the American Revised edition’s change to “liberally” was intended, it must be a correction of the British and American edition’s “literally”. Indeed, the presence of “liberally” in the early draft *Typee* manuscript supports the suspicion that someone — Melville’s amanuensis (his sister Augusta) or a printer — misread Melville’s “liberally” as “literally”. But a more complicated history of shifting intentions might be at play. The equally plausible revision scenario, noted above, is that “liberally” is a change of mind, another oscillation in Melville’s relation to Polynesia, culture, language, and translation. Again, we must ask which is it? Is the L-word a comedy of errors involving bad handwriting, misreading, and correction; or does it represent a writer’s meaningful oscillation between two culturally-loaded antonyms?

You might not favor the “oscillation” scenario if only because the two L-words seem to be only accidentally antonymic; that is, the two *look* the same though they are virtual opposites, the one-letter distinction between *literally* and *liberally* being a chance coincidence of English orthography and Melville’s bad hand. With this in mind, one might argue that someone’s accidental misreading of the miswritten word “liberally” in manuscript as “literally” in print is all the more reason for accepting the “correction” scenario evident bibliographically in the print AR edition. But even accidents can have meaning, especially given the anxious art of translation, which

continually worries over whether a translated work is too literal and lacks liberal adventuring into the translator's own invention or too liberal in its invention as to betray the literalness of the original. In this case, both accident and intention take us to the same dilemma that Melville and his alter ego Tommo confront when trying to make sense of Polynesian language and people: Together they constitute a "shock of recognition" (for Melville/Tommo and for us) about identity in the context of interpenetrating cultures.

Given this textual anecdote, it may be easier for us to understand Tanselle's persistent claim throughout each essay that descriptive bibliography is history or his more sporadic but no less certain claim that bibliography is biographical. We might resist these claims because descriptive bibliographies are not narratives of past events or lives. That said, they assemble, sequentialize, list, and annotate the data crucial to anyone seeking to craft a historical or biographical narrative: the history of a book, the life of a writer. In the case of the L-word oscillation, descriptive bibliography helps us historicize a moment in Melville's life (see also BRYANT 2021, ch. 100). More broadly speaking, it assembles data for the material history of writing and book production as phenomena in ways that allow us critical integrations of a writer's thinking and creativity, a culture's conflicts, and our interpretation of texts. In this regard, a descriptive bibliography is not simply a reference tool but is, in itself, a genre of biographical and historical scholarship that facilitates our understanding of the integration of individual events and cultural interventions. More archival than narratorial, it is nevertheless critical as it sets parameters for the histories one might tell. In constructing their data transparently, the best descriptive bibliographies will share with readers the shape and progress of their inquiry, guiding us through the norms and divergences — whether intentional or accidental — in printing and publication.

III. Bibliography and Historicism

In Tanselle's view, descriptive bibliography is not only crucial in assembling data for our histories of lives, works, versions, and textual cultures, but it is also an inherently historicist discipline. The problem, of course, is how one "does" history. The chapter on "Ideal Copy" — first published in 1980 on the verge of the sea-change in scholarly editing and textual studies — goes directly to the challenge of comprehending how books are made and the way a bibliographer constructs data. But no other word in descrip-

tive bibliography is more misleading — so misconceived, misunderstood, and misapplied; so ahistorical — than “ideal”. Tanselle bemoans the inept usage, struggles to undo it, and despairs of its continued misuse, even as he continues to use it.

The problem arises out of the processes of largely pre-twentieth-century book production and dissemination. Copies of a single edition of a work — that is, a single typesetting event — do not consist of pages derived from a single printing. Instead, pages are typeset several pages at a time, printed for proofing, altered, and printed in full. The sheets are stored; the type is broken down and reset for printing up a different set of pages, which are in turn run off and stored. The sets of pages may be gathered together at different times with differing arrangements of title and half-title pages, back matter advertising, publishers’ bindings, and textual variations throughout. These printing moments — we call them editions, issues, and states — are also occasions for authorial and editorial interventions: revisions of the text. As a consequence, the printing of a book invariably involves copies with significant variants, and the data for a history of a book is only evident through the inspection of multiple sequential copies. This condition applies for any work that exists in a single edition let alone the three 1846 editions of *Typee*. Therefore, no single copy of an edition can stand as a full representation of a published work or the printing process that generated it; instead, bibliographers conceive of a composite that registers all issues and states. Sadly, the term of art decided upon for this conceptualized construct was “ideal copy”, a wording that from Plato to Emerson connotes something that transcends the actual and is essentially (as it were) the ahistorical opposite of the historicist thing this “constructed copy” wants to be.

The fundamental historicist challenge is how to describe the sequential, accidental, and intentional changes of an evolutionary process — evident in multiple sequential textual identities — comprehensively, accurately, and concisely. How do you structure the data? Descriptive bibliography begins by imagining for its object of description a composite “copy”, that is, a generalized construct — an abstraction — that can accommodate all known differences discoverable from actual copies of an edition; this constructed, or “ideal”, copy thereby represents the edition. An alternative approach, perhaps more feasible in the age of digital database, is to describe each of the multiple copies that bear witness to the different issues and states within an edition, but in the age of print scholarship such a choice would have involved enormous, mind-numbing, and costly redundancy. Think, then, of this composite copy as the cumulative, far-from-ideal parent to a brood of biblio-children.

Tanselle's most charitable derogation of the field's continued use of "ideal copy" is that it is an "infelicity of term" (2020, 87). Even though he registers better options, calling it a standard, generalized, hypothetical, or reconstructed copy, he sticks (grudgingly) with "ideal copy", often italicizing it, or putting scare quotes around "ideal". (Clinging to this nomenclature is like classifying a whale as "a fish" but one that looks and acts like a mammal.) Rather than dismissing "ideal" and settling on a better word, Tanselle uses it as an occasion to reflect on the historicity of bibliography:

Less misunderstanding about *ideal copy* would probably have arisen if the status of descriptive bibliography as history had been better understood. [. . .] Responsible historical accounts [. . .] are more than assemblages of discrete facts; they bring the facts together in such a way as to reveal a meaning or order in them. [. . .] Such an account is thus necessarily hypothetical, but for all its lack of certainty it marks an important advance in understanding; [. . .] A description of a standard or "ideal" copy of a book, in other words, is "truer" than the description of any one copy, even though it rests to a greater degree on subjective judgment.
(2020, 99)

Later, Tanselle defines the ideal copy as "a historical reconstruction" that "encompasses all states within an impression or issue" of a book evident in variant copies as they were "released to the public by their producer", excluding changes made to copies "no longer under the control of the printer or publisher" (2020, 108). Tanselle's 2020 "Postscript" to his 1980 essay laments continued misunderstandings about "ideal copy", but his succinct definition of what I would rather call a "bibliographical construct" remains useful, especially as it delimits book production boundaries, and even gestures toward expansions of historical description beyond the strict confines of book production. But to go where the discipline of descriptive bibliography might further serve broader frameworks in textual studies, we need first to examine another term Tanselle brings to the fore: the "sub-edition".

IV. Manuscripts, Sub-editions, Adaptations: Describing Versions

Tanselle's fourth chapter reprints and updates his 1975 essay "Edition, Impression, Issue, and State", which distinguishes these four venerable descriptors, and adds to them a fifth, the "Sub-edition". I say "venerable"

because they are commonly understood terms used uniformly by bibliographers and editors for almost two centuries. An *edition* represents copies of a work derived from the impression of sheets pulled from a single setting of type. *Issues* represent distinct publishing ventures in which sheets from an impression can be repurposed upon occasion with new title pages or bindings, presumably to attract different markets. *States* represent copies of an impression or issue that correct imperfections or typos at the line or page level and are not the result of a different, identifiable marketing effort. This nomenclature constitutes part of a critical vocabulary — a “way of thinking” (as Tanselle reiterates one way or another) — in the discipline of descriptive bibliography, and variants associated with them not only help us understand how books are made but also how a written work can evolve. As we know, the variations found in an edition, issue, or state can also have a meaningful impact on readers; they are material data for arguments in the making of a history, biography, textual analysis, revision narrative, literary interpretation, or cultural study.

However, these structural book categories are largely a matter of indifference to those literary and cultural critics who might distinguish one edition of a work from another only on the basis of largely ancillary book features, such as cover or page layout, paper, binding, publishers’ ads, an added introduction, or critical essays appended at the back. Granted, these seemingly supplementary features involving the way texts are designed, packaged, and marketed for readers are no less potentially meaningful, and Tanselle devotes fact-filled chapters to most of them; they give us a more precise way of talking about what I like to call the “physical versions” of a published book (2002). But what might be called the interpretive wing of our profession is still largely disconnected from the materialist wing and generally indifferent to this kind of bibliographical exactitude. This indifference is particularly concerning in light of the fact that critical communities (in adaptation, translation, annotation, colonial, even, or perhaps especially single-author studies) are becoming increasingly conscious of physically variant and hence interpretively meaningful textual versions of fluid texts as a cultural phenomenon. This growing awareness is evident for revisions found not only in printed books but also in the manuscripts that precede an edition and the adaptations and translations that follow in the wake of an original, even after the author’s demise. Of course, “version” is a conceptual term, broader in scope than “edition”, and seemingly baggier; it veers into speculative and interpretive realms of thought. It lacks the thump objectness of a physical “book”. And yet a version is no less rooted in material evidence, no less of an editorial or critical construct as an “ideal

copy”, and all the more in need of careful description. Needed, then, is an integrated way of describing the various textual identities that constitute the versions of a fluid text, as they might evolve as individual works or in tandem with other works (by the same or other writers). Descriptive bibliography’s “way of thinking” need not be restricted to edition, issue, and state; in fact, no fluid text analysis is possible without ways of clearly distinguishing one version from another.

The value of “description” in the study of versions becomes clearer when we consider the bibliographic notion of “sub-edition”. Often enough, a publisher will arrange for an impression from an original edition to be processed differently by another publisher: same typesetting, different publisher, and that’s one kind of sub-edition. Equally familiar is the “revised edition”, in which new text (a preface or appendix) may be added (forward or aft) to the original typesetting, and/or internal text can be altered or removed: this, too, is a sub-edition.

Think again of *Typee*. To revisit but in new terms: The British typesetting of February 1846 is one first edition; the March 1846 American resetting from a British copy is another “first”; but the “American revised” *Typee* of July not only broke up sections of the first American typesetting to expurgate text and alter the L-word but also (in separable actions) removed Melville’s original “Appendix”, which praised the British cession of Hawai’i, and added “The Story of Toby”, a chapter-length sequel to the narrative. The American revised *Typee* is unquestionably a sub-edition of the American edition. Melville’s British publisher in late 1846 added “The Story of Toby” but kept the Anglophilic appendix without resetting the original British type: Thus, it is a second but dissimilar sub-edition. As a result, for the rest of the century, and well into the twentieth, two radically different sub-editions, on different sides of the Atlantic, represented what we call “*Typee*”. A fifth physical version of *Typee* is the posthumous 1892 edition, which is a new typesetting based on the British sub-edition text with its own set of authorial revisions transmitted as instructions by Melville via his wife Elizabeth Shaw Melville to Melville’s literary executor and editor Arthur Stedman.

Physical versions are the proper subject of descriptive bibliography, but as the L-word demonstrates, Melville’s oscillating revisions, evident in print, are also evident in manuscript, and taken together they require a broader, more comprehensive scope of vision also to encompass what I have called *inferred versions*. Generally speaking, this type of version exists in fragments or remnants of stages of composition that no longer survive as complete wholes. We infer the reality of such lost versions from textual traces

on (let's say) partial or full leaves affixed to working draft manuscripts and typescripts, inserted and dispersed or layered throughout a document like a patchwork of fragments from earlier drafts. Both these layered fragments in manuscript and the versions inferred from them are as much in need of careful description as more fully evident physical versions of a work in books. The philological practice of stemmatics, which infers the existence of no longer extant copies of a work from scribal variants in extant copies, is one model for describing the genealogy of inferred versions. But given the extraordinarily complicated phenomenon of the cut-and-paste text collage that a working draft manuscript exhibits, tracing the lineage of texts inscribed on slips of paper is more like piecing together a jigsaw puzzle where many if not most of the pieces are lost — think Dead Sea Scrolls — but with the added dimension of time, since the cutting and pasting happens throughout the course of the creative process.

The problems of grasping inferred versions are further complicated when we consider the span of a writer's career. The *Typee* manuscript — Melville's first attempt at a lengthy prose work — is a three-chapter fragment of a first draft that, when compared to the first British edition and the American revised sub-edition, offers sufficient evidence of numerous inferable expansions and digressions that Melville would later add to complete his book. In contrast, Melville's last prose work — the ragged and only nearly finished *Billy Budd* manuscript — is nevertheless a single, complete, and coherent narrative and yet the document itself resembles an archaeological site consisting of the shards of past versions dispersed over 361 heavily revised leaves, which Melville never saw into print or even polished. Forty years divide these two documents: *Typee* represents the beginning of a project at the beginning of Melville's publishing life; *Billy Budd*, the end of a project at the end of his life. These are discrete textual evolutions within the evolution of a career. While the two works evolved through separate modes of expansion — we see evidence of digression and filler in *Typee* but the adding of back story and modulation of narrative voice in *Billy Budd* — they both exhibit similar cut-and-paste and oscillating revision behaviors. Editors of Whitman, Dickinson, and Twain, of Keats, Yeats, and Marianne Moore, of Joyce and Beckett recognize these biographical alphas and omegas and have grappled with the problem of describing their layered, interspersed, inferred versions, and one editorial solution is not likely to suit all textual conditions. But we will not fully comprehend the materiality of versions until we begin to describe them as separable textual identities. There is no doubt that the rigor of descriptive bibliography can be and has been applied to the study of modern working draft manuscripts.

Tanselle's own work in genetic transcription (2017) and on the bibliographical fundamentals of manuscript transcription (1995) is not included in his collection of essays, surely because the focus of descriptive bibliography is on books, but some inclusion, nevertheless, would have been an opening for broadening the discipline's scope. The culture of description is only beginning to become self-aware of the need for a critical vocabulary for inferred versions in manuscript, and the integration of that scholarly endeavor with the study of print versions for a fuller understanding of how texts evolve remains in the offing.

V. Adaptation and the Challenges of the Digital

Apart from the two versions of the version that result from authorial and editorial revision, a third version is rooted in adaptive revision. These generally physical versions exist in the wake of an original work and often beyond the author's control; they include announced adaptations, translations, abridgments, illustrated and children's editions, and anthologized texts; adaptations for stage, opera, film, radio, and TV; appropriations, quotations, and even memes from originating texts appearing in the fine arts, music, sampling, and social media. Generally noted in bibliographies as evidence of the reputation of an author or the cultural and critical impact of a work, these transformations more importantly record the ways in which readers take possession of another writer's writing. Adaptive revision is essentially the embodiment of an interpretation, not through explicit critical argumentation but implicitly through the imaginative (hence critical) recreation of the work itself. Paradoxically, while showcasing and extending the life of the originating source work, such intermedial revision detaches the original from its originating impulse even as it lures readers into a closer comparative inspection of it. Adaptive revision and translation — adaptation's most potent instantiation — are openings into the study of evolving readerships and the evolution of cultures generally.

Tanselle's historicist approach does not restrict the protocols of description to editions, sub-editions, issues, and states of originating works only, for he cites exemplary bibliographies that embrace rather than marginalize post-authorial versions of a work, such as "non-firsts", pirated reprintings, and even selected adaptations. One restriction, however, corresponds to traditional scholarly editing as well, and that is keeping the frame of reference within the lifespan of the originating author, but even here the boundaries are porous. The advent of book history — that is, the material

processes of writing and (re)production as objects of study over time — has given impetus to dissolving such barriers. Maura Ives's 2011 *Christina Rossetti: A Descriptive Bibliography* is a case in point. Beyond its initial attention to familiar bibliographic details, it includes sections on musical settings of poems (with descriptions of sheet music), performance notices, translations, and selected "Rossettiana", up to 1900. Although Tanselle only lists Ives's Rossetti bibliography as a noteworthy publication, he devotes several pages in praise of her earlier essay on Victorian periodicals in his "Postscript" to his 1984 essay on "Arrangement", and in doing so he touches upon certain practical limits to descriptive bibliography. They imply problems all the more relevant if we extend the scope and disciplines of description to include other material instances of cultural production and adaptive revision: I am speaking of the twin dilemmas of human exhaustion and publication costs.

Ives rightly argues that it is not enough simply to list a poem's (or any text's) material appearance in an abstraction of a periodical's table of contents; rather, we are obliged to describe its actual placement in the context of the entire issue in which it appears. The work of the late George Bornstein on the "politics of the page" in modernism (2006), Jerome McGann's digital editing that puts the "writings and pictures" of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in context, and Marta Werner's *Radical Scatters* (1999/2010), which edits into existence the "space of creation" by tracking manuscript versions of certain core Emily Dickinson poems: These critical, archival, and editorial projects substantiate the need for the kind of descriptive contextualization Ives calls for. Tanselle acknowledges the enormity of the materialist approach in bibliography (and laterally, I would add editing). In raising thoroughness to the highest of heavenly virtues in bibliography, he also recognizes human limits. Doing what Ives proposes unto all periodical or anthologized appearances of a poem — whether it is by Yeats, Rossetti (Cristina or Dante Gabriel), or Dickinson — would, Tanselle rightly observes, "increase bibliographers' work beyond what most bibliographers would regard as feasible"; moreover, it would lengthen "bibliographies beyond what most publishers would be willing to consider" (2020, 517).

In short, bibliographic description is labor intensive and can take up a lot of pages, and Tanselle concludes in his 2020 Postscript on "Arrangement" by calling for an abbreviated format. Imagine, then, if descriptive bibliography were to expand the range of physical versions to embrace non-authorized adaptation, let alone periodical appearances: The commitment to editing material culture would be addressed, but the workload and production costs would skyrocket. And while abbreviated bibliographic nota-

tions might lower page counts, they would not lessen (and might in fact increase) the bibliographer's toil. But these realities do not preclude the necessity of description. If you think digital is the solution to these twin dilemmas, you are only mostly right, but more on that shortly.

For the time being, consider how descriptive bibliography is now in a position of having to catch up to textual studies, fluid-text editing, and adaptation studies; and consider, too, what the discipline stands to lose if we do not rise to the challenge of discerning versions, for the versions will diminish its predecessors. Consider some common mistakes. When some say they have “read Melville”, they often are speaking metonymically: They mean they have read *Moby-Dick*. Never mind, which *Moby-Dick*: the American original edition or the reset British expurgation, both published in 1851, or the 1988 Northwestern Newberry eclectic *Moby-Dick*, or the 2006 Longman fluid-text *Moby-Dick*. Regardless, there are other human errors: when readers of *Moby-Dick* think of *Moby-Dick*, they often reduce it synecdochally to Ahab, and thinking of Ahab, they imagine Gregory Peck. And when readers think of Ahab's demise, they think cinematically; they see Peck going under, astride a white whale. But that stirring end never happens in Melville's novel. Even so, no less of a great reader than Edward Said made this common mistake in his introduction to the novel by referring to the film ending when speaking of the novel's ending (BRYANT 2010).

Film director John Huston's screenwriter, the novelist Ray Bradbury, cleverly devised the cinematic ending. In reducing the novel to film length proportions, he had had to sacrifice Ahab's Orientalized alter ego Fedallah from the film plot, but in a later revision of his screenplay he resurrected him partially by giving Fedallah's demise to Ahab. Melville scholar Jaime Campomar (2019, 2022) has also studied Bradbury's sequential drafts, recording numerous other cuts and revisions in bringing *Moby-Dick* to the screen. A descriptive filmography for *Moby-Dick* would include these physical and inferred versions as well as the 1926 silent *Moby-Dick* with John Barrymore, remade as a talkie in 1930, and remade again, as cultural critic Martina Pfeiler (2021) has revealed, in a 1931 German version directed by Mihály Kertész (AKA Michael Curtiz), not to mention more recent television adaptations. Comparing these films — episode, scene, speech, shot, symbol — to the novel's textual originals is to study *Moby-Dick* not only as text and material book but also as an international cultural phenomenon. But our interpretation of the meaning of the evolution of these versions cannot gain evidentiary validity unless descriptive bibliographies are created that embrace book and film. Adaptation studies has taken us beyond

the insistence upon “authenticity” as an impossible measure of the success or failure of adaptive revision; instead, this burgeoning field — like textual studies and translation studies — assumes equivalent textual and aesthetic status to screenplay and original. All the more reason, then, to broaden the scope of descriptive bibliography to include both kinds of version and to employ its discipline of description to establish their unique textual identities and to pave the way for the editing of adaptive revision.

In complaining that he will never complete his risible bibliography of whales in “Cetology”, Ishmael bemoans that all that is needed is “Time, Strength, Cash, and Patience” (LONGMAN 2006 and BRYANT ET AL. 2019b *Moby-Dick*, Ch. 32). If these mortalities delimit any descriptive bibliography project, what, then, is the solution to the task of a larger bibliographic whale: the integration of authorial, editorial, and adaptive versions of a work, or set of works? The answer surely lies in digital technologies, and Tanselle both scouts and skirts the issue. When he began his astonishingly varied and robust career in the 1960s, he early on acknowledged the potential of humanities computing, noting its early presence in library cataloguing — touchingly referring in his 1980 chapter on “Ideal Copy” to their “cathode ray tube” displays (2020, 111) — and in more recent sites, accessed through our flat screen liquid crystal displays (LCD). In several chapters in the book’s praxis section, Tanselle underscores the important utility of digital sites that give us (reasonably) reliable representations of paper, typography, publishers’ binding fabrics, endpaper designs, dust jackets, and colors. Moreover, Tanselle has been supportive of digital scholarly editing, though that is not his purview in *Descriptive Bibliography*. Tanselle’s “Postscripts” to each of his collected essays invariably include digital updates, providing an opening for a fuller discussion of the role of digital in the future of materialist historicism and descriptive bibliography. For those engaged in digital and fluid-text editing, that future lies in at least two areas of development: database and visualization.

The power of database is that different kinds of text and image data can be sorted in different configurations in response to the different scholarly and pedagogical desires of different users. But if database is a solution, what, beyond human exhaustion and production costs, are the problems it resolves? In the conclusion to his unexpectedly probing chapter on “Arrangement”, Tanselle puts it succinctly, indeed eloquently, it is “the problem of finding order in the raw material of history” (2020, 516). Putting aside for now the epistemological problems of what kind of order, whose order, and how many orderings, we find in Tanselle’s more pragmatic quandaries a fundamental conflict between structure and chronology. That

is, either we might order, or rather “arrange”, a descriptive bibliography so that individual works are listed as they appear in their separate structural forms (periodicals, collections, editions, sub-editions, non-firsts, and contributions to anthologies); or we might order these physical versions as they appear in time, in the sequence of their publication. Complications arise when we consider that in a writer’s career, sub-editions of an early work might (and reprints invariably do) emerge after the appearance of first editions of subsequent works. Versions also overlap in time with simultaneous or subsequent publications abroad, using the same sheets or not, and with translations based on different versions (including abridgments and other translations). If you want to see a clear genealogy (so to speak) of publications that Tanselle calls the “parents” of subsequent publications, here and abroad, you will desire one kind of categorical “arrangement” of your descriptive bibliography. But if you are a biographer interested in *what* appears *when*, linearly and simultaneously, throughout a writer’s career, you will want to arrange the data chronologically. Relating the constituent parts of the bibliography arranged one way in a single main list might be achieved by providing identifiers for each entry or an index to facilitate cross-referencing, and Tanselle considers these page-flipping, print-technology options, cogently discussing the merits of different approaches, and wisely favoring none but advising the descriptive bibliographer to be mindful of what arrangement best suits the material at hand. That said, there is no better way to facilitate this kind of access and mindfulness than in a button-pushing digital environment.

Certainly, though, a digital descriptive bibliography built atop a relational or, better, an atomized database (like the University of Chicago’s OCHRE database service) enables users to query any number of arrangements suited to user needs, independent of the bibliographer’s preferred arrangement. It permits users to find different kinds of “order in the raw material of history” (TANSELLE 2020, 516). Does this make the labor of bibliographers easier? Not really, but it makes their work more accessible, more comprehensive, more pedagogical (I would add), and more useful. Because databases allow bibliographers to “granularize” the “raw materials of history” — from multiple types of edition down to typos, variants, and revisions — a digital descriptive bibliography is capable of a more detailed historical representation. Does digital bibliography spell the end of books? Not really: a printed descriptive bibliography following one “arrangement” can be linked to a digital workspace where the bibliographical data can be fully displayed and accessed in other arrangements, whence the user can be sent back to the comfort of the printed book. Students can be brought into

the digital workspace for instruction in book history, printing, and publishing, thus opening the field to new generations of learners, heightening the appeal of returning to the library for tactile and sharper visual involvement with books themselves. Strategically arranged, Books and Digital Sites can be gateways to each other.

The benefit of digital visualizations in assisting the description of book production in descriptive bibliography has not been seriously contested. The collation formulary — the inscrutable notation system for outlining the gatherings, signatures, and variant features of a single book or ideal copy — might serve as a test case. I know that “inscrutable” is likely to exasperate practiced bibliographers who can read such formulas with ease, and I would not condone abandoning the formulary for the world, but, for other readers, they are the epitome of the kind of alienating “barbed wire” that Lewis Mumford derided. On the one hand, the collation formulary is a perfectly effective tool for experts, a “technology” that gives us at a glance the distinctive constituent parts of a book, without bibliographers having to resort to redundant and space consuming written descriptions. Of course, this coded abstraction is only a small part of any descriptive bibliography, which in most other respects offers readers more engaging narrative descriptions of editions and sub-editions. But on the other hand, like any code, or nesting of arcane symbols, the collation formula basically says to the non-expert reader: Abandon Hope; Do Not Enter. Bibliographers, like any literary or historicist scholar, want to reach not exclude readerships, and evidence of their outreach is found in rare book schools and other book history related programs. The Folger Shakespeare Library’s website *The Collation* provides visuals devoted to book production, including graphic demonstrations of what a collation formula represents (BLAKE 2016). On a larger scale, carefully strategized digital versions of gateway descriptive bibliographies could be designed to link collation formulas to images of the very books they encoded so that scholars, critics, and students can see the gatherings and odd inserts or absences otherwise abstracted in formula without having to decode the formula on their own; they would have pictures of what the barbed wire represents. In this regard, with time, strength, cash, and patience, the strategic application of digital technologies to descriptive bibliography will only enhance and deepen the protocols of historical description. It will occasion new shocks of recognition for new scholars and new generations of readers regarding the versions of works.

Tanselle’s *Descriptive Bibliography* is a monument to scholarship and historicist “ways of thinking”. It clarifies and updates a critical vocabulary that lays a solid foundation for book history, textual studies, revision analysis,

and the various approaches to scholarly editing, and it suggests pathways to future digital development. It is a lasting resource for scholars, critics, and students seeking fuller access to the fabric of the cultures of writing, reading, and the making of books.

Hofstra University

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