Antithesis is the narrow gateway through which error most prefers to worm its way towards truth. —Nietzsche

When Wayne Chapman asked me what I wanted to talk about today I said “Descriptive Bibliography and the Shape of Things to Come,” but as is usually the case with these things, that was before I had written my paper. Coming down over the Atlantic yesterday I brought myself to read it again and decided that it needed a new title. The subject is a can of worms, and since you are about to ingest it, let’s euphemize it a bit, and call it “A Diet of Worms.”

PRINT-BASED DESCRIPTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND LIFE RECORDS

I begin by paying tribute to three or four famous books from overlapping categories of scholarly enterprise even as I safely forecast the certain disappearance of the genres they represent as print-based publications. A Bibliography of the Writings of W. B. Yeats, edited by Allan Wade, is ninety-five years old. Of its four incarnations, the most recent is Russell Alspach’s updating of 1968, now 34 years old. It is a scarce book, particularly in the USA. I frequently find leading research libraries do not own it—the Woodruff in Atlanta being a case in point. So I bring it with me to save time as I search their treasures. My copy was deaccessioned by a Cambridge college (a disturbing harbinger) and I snapped it up for 20 pounds sterling.

Wade first appeared in 1908, within Yeats’s Collected Works in Verse and Prose (1908), as the last item in the eighth volume (there was also a 58-copy separate issue). Reviewing the Collected Works, Yeats’s friend Edith Lister remarked that in it we could read the story of his life and of his work; read it by the light of
the bibliography over which he has written in humorous protest

\[\begin{align*}
&\text{Accursed who brings to light of day} \\
&\text{The writings I have cast away!} \\
&\text{But blessed he that stirs them not} \\
&\text{And lets the kind worm take the lot!}^1
\end{align*}\]

Behind this worm squirms Shakespeare’s epitaph in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford upon Avon, which Yeats indubitably saw on one or other of his visits to his publisher, A. H. Bullen, who printed his *Collected Works* there. Yeats’s transumption of Shakespeare’s epitaph

\[\begin{align*}
&\text{Good frend for Iesvs sake forbeare,} \\
&\text{To digg the dvst encloased heare:} \\
&\text{Blese be ye man that spares thes stones,} \\
&\text{And cvrst be he th[at] moves my bones.}^2
\end{align*}\]

is daring and powerful: Yeats’s dead textual selves (as it were) are entombed within the bibliography and so within the *Collected Works* which contains the bibliography. Edith Lister continues:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{When we compare the writings kept with the writings rejected,} \\
\text{we find that the kind worm has not gone hungry . . . Mr. Yeats} \\
\text{has shown his strength fully as much by what is cast away as by} \\
\text{what is left; and though bibliophiles will prize to the end their} \\
\text{‘first editions,’ the lettered reader will doubtless prefer the} \\
\text{author’s ripened judgment.}^3
\end{align*}\]

At least one reader was grateful: Yeats himself. He wrote to Wade: “I am amazed at your bibliography. You have old letters to the papers there, the date of which must have cost you endless trouble. The thing is of great value to myself and now you have made it possible I shall re-read endless old things I had thought never to see again.” Bibliographies testify to absent texts. They keep the worm at bay in another sense, too: their correctness and completeness—always relative—forestails “error, the worm,” to use Shelley’s phrase.\(^5\)

The inclusion of Wade’s bibliography within a *Collected Works* is a remarkable example of a writerly self inwardly embracing the dead selves
which externally it professes to repudiate. In its later incarnations, Wade’s *Bibliography* established the standard format of Rupert Hart-Davis’s “Soho” bibliographies, of which it was the first (1951—its publisher was also editor of its 1958 version, just three years after Wade died). Various classified sections are devoted to the author’s books, books and periodicals edited by the author, books with a preface or introduction by the author, books containing contributions by the author including letters from him, contributions to periodicals, translations into other languages, separate publications in periodicals etc, with various appendices including one on broadcasting. The arrangement within each section is broadly chronological using the date of publication, though there are complications to which I will return.

Writers since Galen (or, in modern times, Erasmus) have been fascinated by their own bibliographies. Unlike Erasmus, Yeats lived with his printer only on odd weekends, but his interest in Wade’s work has lessons for his readers. As time passes, serious readers must simultaneously be Edith Lister’s “bibliophiles” and “lettered readers” because their “ripened judgement” of the textual continuum requires knowledge of “first editions,” as well as of revised texts. In this they are very like the revising authors themselves, for whom self-reading is the key to revision. The record of revisions is the means whereby we read such restless writers: what they reject is part of the meaning of their new texts. For such authors, a new *Collected Works* can be seen as a climacteric, an attempt at self-definition, a new passport photograph. For such a self-arraignment, volumetrics and implicit hierarchies are as important as textual revision itself. Revision and self-reading offer the “inner” and “outer” histories of text, showing how a multiple sense of self (and some genuine uncertainty) attends each bibliographical occasion.

In Yeats’s case such issues go back at least to 1894. If Yeats’s 1908 curse embraces that which it would seem to disavow, Allan Wade’s original headnote is a positive incitement to defy the curse. Recognising that many letters to the press had been omitted as dealing “merely with small points of fact in this or that controversy of the moment,” Wade defends his thoroughness in terms as akin to Yeats’s own as he could manage. The “many details,” he writes,

serve as guides to those who would study the path along which beauty has come into the world. I have watched the roses blos-
soming in the garden, though I may not know the secret of their growth. (Collected Works VIII, p. [198])

Such records as the Allan Wades of this world assemble are precious for all who would study that path.

Yet there are other ways of organising these materials. J. Milton French’s noble five volumes of The Life Records of John Milton (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1949-58) does roughly the same thing but with a passion for strict chronology: the entries range from “Writes to ask brother Christopher’s advice about business” to “has portrait painted,” “wife dies,” “signs contract with Samuel Symmons for publication of Paradise Lost” (famously for “five pounds of lawfull english money”; see Figure 1), Paradise Lost licensed for printing, entered in Stationers’ Register, published (with a full bibliographic description), “Poet Waller scoffs at Milton and Paradise Lost,” “receives five pounds for Paradise Lost and gives receipt to Samuel Symmons.” Every detail is there—when Milton buys or reads a book, pays a bill, buries a relative, writes a poem—and we may note how the publication of the poem is set out indistinguishably from the layout of a descriptive bibliography.

April 27. Signs contract with Samuel Symmons for publication of Paradise Lost.

These Presents Made the 27th: day of April 1667
Betweene John Milton gen of thone pte And Samuel Symons Printer of thother pte Witness That the said John Milton in consideira [con] of fiue pounds to him now paid by the said Sam[ll]. Symons & other consideracons herevnd [er] meïcoed Hath given

granted and assigned, and by these patiënt doth give grant & assigne
vnsto the said Sam'l Symoñas his executors and assigns All that
Booke Copy or Manuscript of a Poem intituled Paradise lost,
or by whatsoever other title or name the same is or shalbe called
or distinguished now lately Licensed to be printed Together
w'th the full benefitt proffitt & advantage thereof or w' th shall or
may arise thereby And the said John Milton for him his ex" &
ads doth Covenant w'th the said Sam'l Symoñas his ex" and ass's
That hee and they shall at all tymes hereafter haue hold and
enjoy the same and all Impressions thereof accordingly w'thout
the lett or hinderance of him the said John Milton his ex" or ass's
or any psion or psons by his or their consent or privitie, And that
he the said Jo: Milton his ex" or ads or any other by his or their
meanes or consent shall not print or cause to be printed or sell
dispose or publish the said Booke or Manuscript or any other
Booke or Manuscript of the same tenor or subject w'thout the
consent of the said Sam'l Symoñas his ex" or ass's In consideraçon
whereof the said Sam'l Symoñas for him his ex" & ads doth
Covenant w'th the said John Milton his ex" and ass's well and truly
to pay vnsto the said John Milton his ex" & ads the sum of five
pounds of lawfull english money at the end of the first Im-
pression which the said Sam'l Symoñas his ex" or ass's shall make
and publish of the said Copy or Manuscript, Which Impression
shalbe accounted to be ended When thirteene hundred Bookp of
the said whole Copy or Manuscript imprinted shalbe sold and
retaild off to pticular reading Customers, And shall also pay
other five pounds vnsto the said M[r.] Milton or his ass's at the
end of the second Impression to be accounted as aforesaid And
five pounds more at the end of the third Impression to be in
like manner accounted, And that the said three first Impressions
shall not excede fifteene hundred Bookp or volumes of the said
whole Copy or Manuscript a peice; And further That he the
said Samuel Symoñas and his ex" ads & ass's shalbe ready to make
Oath before a Master in Chancery concerning his or their knowl-

Figure 1: continued, p. 430
A D I E T  O F  W O R M S

Gerry Bentley’s *Blake Records* (Clarendon, 1969) offer a slightly more “narrativized” way of providing the same information, and with less bibliographical detail. (See Figure 2.) In modern times, of course, the tradition of the bibliography enclosed within the works has been a comic one. Introducing the “Bibliography by John Lane” appended to *The Works of Max Beerbohm* (1896), Lane remarked that “It is impossible for one to compile a bibliography of a great man’s works without making it in some sense a biography—and indeed in the minds of not a few people I have found a delusion that the one is identical with the other.”
Figure 2: G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, p. 59.
Stuart Mason’s *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde*, in its later editions—it began life as 11 copies privately printed for the author in 1908—is literally a bio/bibliography. It acts as a “Life Record” because it captures material never seen again, such as letters subsequently lost. One glance at Mason’s *Bibliography* and one senses the wisdom of Yeats’s remark to Florence Farr that “when one begins to write[,] one’s books are a sufficient history.”

All of these books are used to study other books and are those tools ‘of great power and complexity’ which Jerome McGann sees as one of the great triumphs of the print era. If I demur from his judgment that scholarly editions, descriptive bibliographies, calculi of variants, etc., are “infamously difficult to read and use,” it is because their alleged difficulty is routinely overstated—not by McGann, I hasten to add—but by lesser minds and by trigger-happy enthusiasts for electronic products. That said, no one who uses modern tools can deny that electronic “meta-books” offer “greater powers of consciousness” which break free of the limitations of the codex. Says McGann of codex-based meta-books:

Their problems arise because they deploy a book form to study another book form. This symmetry between the tool and its subject forces the scholar to invent analytic mechanisms that must be displayed and engaged at the primary reading level. Editing in codex forms generates an archive of books and related materials. This archive then develops its own meta-structures—indexing and other study mechanisms—to facilitate navigation and analysis of the archive. Because the entire system develops through the codex form, however, duplicate, near-duplicate, or differential archives appear in different places. The crucial problem here is simple: the logical structures of the “critical edition” function at the same level as the material being analyzed. As a result, the full power of the logical structures is checked and constrained by being compelled to operate in a bookish format. If the coming of the book vastly increased the spread of knowledge and information, history has slowly revealed the formal limits of all hardcopy’s informational and critical powers. The archives are sinking in a white sea of paper. (McGann)
In short, if as McGann says, “whatever happens in the future, whatever new electronic poetry or fiction gets produced, the literature we inherit (to this date) is and will always be bookish” we still “no longer have to use books to analyze and study other books or texts. That simple fact carries immense, even catastrophic, significance.”

YEATS ENTERS THE DIGITAL AGE

As we declare ourselves free from the analytic limits of the codex we ought not to lose sight of the poverty of ambition with which we have created some of our (admittedly rudimentary) electronic tools. Our failure to imagine how they might draw upon what has gone before is regrettable. Let me illustrate with just one example. W. B. Yeats entered the digital age because his Estate was stampeded by the threat of electronic piracy and digital error. The Estate therefore commissioned the *W. B. Yeats Collection*, which costs £750 for a single CD-ROM (single user only) and up to £1,500 (for ten users and more). Said to be the first of a low-cost range of single author CD-ROM products, it is also available by subscription to the publisher, and was supposed to become part of Chadwyck-Healey’s LION (*Literature Online*) project. Its editor, Richard Finneran, claims rather melodramatically that we live in “the twilight of the Age of the Book,” but his electronic product rather hurries us towards chaos and old night, if not ancestral darkness.

Elsewhere I have described *The W. B. Yeats Collection* as a “product worthy in principle and in purpose which proves functionally ill-attuned to its content, ill-conceived in canon and text, and inaccurate,” and pointed out that it appears “to violate the rights of third parties.” Errors of textual transmission, proof-reading, *mise-en-page* and expressive typography are confounded with limited searchability, bibliographical inaccuracy, eccentricities of canon, numerous items missing and items offered twice, and a disturbing amount of material by other authors which is searchable as if by Yeats himself. Hastily assembled, unchecked and uncriticized, this project represents a poor match between editorial ambition and fitness for purpose. “Yeats has not been so much digitally remastered as digitally dismasted”: so I wrote a couple of years ago, arguing for the recall of this “hypermarket edition” a product which had foundered “on the most basic of issues: sound editing” (Gould 349).
The other day I searched the Yeats database for a humble word: “worm.” Remarkably, I found a usage not in my recall. In Yeats’s poem “Into the Twilight,” I found the following lines, which are properly set in italics.

And God stands winding His lonely horn,
And time and the worm are ever in flight; [sic]

My students love this worm better than any of the worms—humble, weak, dull, limp, and blind—which spire their way legitimately through Yeats’s poems. They even preferred it to Yeats’s correct text “Time and the world are ever in flight” because they think that it echoes the “invisible worm / That flies in the night” in Blake’s “The Sick Rose.” Was not Yeats a Blake scholar? Could I not, as it were, legitimize their preference for complexity over correctness?

This offered me the chance to dilate to them on the endless history of error and its errancy. Luciano Canfora has a beautiful passage in The Vanished Library in which he reconstructs the dialogue of John Philoponus with the Emir Amrou Ibn el-Ass in Alexandria in AD late 640, while Amrou awaits the terrible order to burn the Library from the Caliph Omar in Constantinople. John rehearses for Amrou much of the history of the various Alexandrian collections, dating back a thousand years to Ptolemaic times when Demetrius Phalereus had sought to collect all the books of the world. Canfora at this point offers an accelerated history of more recent Alexandrian misfortunes and conflicts, commenting almost as an aside:

Naturally, the city’s books had changed, too; and not only in their content. The delicate scrolls of old had gone. Their last remnants had been cast out as refuse or buried in the sand, and they had been replaced by more substantial parchment, elegantly made and bound into thick codices—and crawling with errors, for Greek was increasingly a forgotten language.

The lesson here is timeless: translating textual artefacts into new media is inevitable and necessary, but the process is fraught with error because of human intervention. Error, as Dante, Milton, Pope—above all, Shelley—tell us, is the worm, and it worms its way only slowly towards
correctness as Nietzsche indicates. We all know those uses of error, and participate in the academic business generated and sustained by what we might term error’s errancy, which feeds our natural and perpetual need and desire to correct it.

**SELF-CONCEPTUALIZING DIGITAL BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Fulminating against this “palimpsest of conflicting views on editing in the digital age,” I did not fully see the larger problem behind its editorial failure: the failure to self-conceptualize a digital edition. A database pretends to be impersonal, objective, neutral, but, behind its apparent editorial “impersonality” or “neutrality,” there is, of course, editorial input. Every tag, every hyperlink, is an editorial decision. Even a decision to have a default setting which denies access to a contents page is an editorial decision. What seems magically free-form and unstructured is in fact the product of massive editorial intervention.

What I would want to stress today is that this particular product’s self-conception is poor. As I have said, it has much to be modest about. But its real trouble is that it chooses that we think of it as a database and not as a meta-book. What difference would it make for a database to be, and be thought of, as a meta-book? It would mean that its organising principle was not merely the tagged and searchable string or record or even the hyperlink, but that its editor had thought of it as a library, the oldest form of organisation which allows both its “contents and its webwork of relations (both internal and external)” to be “indefinitely expanded and developed.” McGann tells us, in “The Rationale of Hypertext,” that

the separate parts of the ensemble (nodes on the Net, files in a hypertext) are independently structured units. That kind of organization ensures that relationships and connections can be established and developed in arbitrary and stochastic patterns.

This kind of organizational form resembles our oldest extant hypertextual structure, the library, which is also an archive (or in many cases an archive of archives). As with the Internet and hypertext, a library is organized for indefinite expansion. Its logical organization (e.g., the LC system) can be accommodated to any kind of physical environment, and it is neutral with respect
to user demands and navigation. Moreover, the library is logically “complete” no matter how many volumes it contains — no matter how many are lost or added.

The noncentralized character of such an ordering scheme is very clear if one reflects even briefly on the experience of library browsing. You are interested in, say, Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s writings. So you move to that LC location in the library (any library). You stand before a set of books and other documents, which may be more or less extensive. Nothing in that body of materials tells you where to begin or what volume to pull down. It is up to you to make such a decision.

But these books are rare and valuable relics of the print era. They are locked away in environmentally controlled conditions. Therefore, the library has catalogued them to a depth of description whereby the cards, or MARC records, are detailed beyond the dreams even of (say) Nicholson Baker. The catalogue offers not merely a finding-aid or shelf-mark, with author, title, publisher, date, but also physical description, collation, details of limitation, edition, provenance, etc., etc.

Such a catalogue would of course be a descriptive bibliography, because by definition descriptive bibliographies account for all (or nearly all) that which one cannot read, and against them one is supposed to be able to verify rare examples. Yet what if such a descriptive bibliography were not the catalogue of a library policed by librarians but of one which you could browse at will, roaming the shelves, following your nose as you do in the stacks of a university library? Imagine, in short, that a database came equipped with an descriptive bibliography as an outer shell, standing in relation to an author’s entire oeuvre as metadata, as a catalogue does to a library? Now re-envisage that library as a book which is itself a collection of books within a book, like a Bible. To do so you must re-envisage the catalogue as a contents page, or as an index. (Remember, too, that, as Shakespeare reminds us, an index is not necessarily an epilogue or appendix. In his day, the word meant “prologue,” or table of contents which was synonomous with “index,” except that in the English language tradition we place the one at the front and the other at the back).

Well now, such a conception is possible, it is here, and its existence goes to the heart of a debate about electronic products. A couple of
years ago, Professor McGann and I examined a PhD thesis in London. Its author, Dr Philip Errington, who now catalogues and sells modern firsts for Sotheby’s in Bond Street, is also a Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Manuscript and Print Studies in my Institute. His thesis is a *Descriptive Bibliography of the Works of John Masefield*, in which it is possible to move with a click from the bibliographical description of items and volumes, to experience the works themselves, their variant texts, their illustrations, their manuscripts, and even the digitized recordings of Masefield reading his poems.

I stress that Philip Errington did not set out to create a full-text edition of the Masefield corpus. There are enormous stretches of Masefield’s *oeuvre*, particularly of his prose and drama, which are not available in the manner which I have described. The examples I have cited are the exception rather than the rule. He himself was rather surprised when I suggested that his architecture might be used for full-text editions rather than merely for on-line descriptive bibliography: it had, he said, never occurred to him that such might be felt suitable. His thesis lacks its own search engine and was designed for CD-ROM rather than web-based delivery. As the first—and, thus far, the only—thesis to be approved in London in CD-ROM format, it poses a number of problems of preservation and access, but also some glimpses of the shape of things to come in a University Library overburdened with 2,500 new PhDs in codex form every year.

THE ANNALS APPROACH

Why stop here? One problem which Wade imprinted on the Soho Bibliography format is that chronology is violated when reprints (e.g., of various states of *Poems*) are bunched together. Wade’s latest editor, Colin Smythe (also a Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Manuscript and Print Studies), plans to abolish that anomaly, but there is a larger conflict between pure chronology and grouping according to generic hierarchies in Soho bibliographies (books and pamphlets by, books edited by, contributions to periodicals, and so on). The other model, that of the *Life Records*, has only one hierarchy: chronology.

Of course, a good meta-book could offer a life records too, with access to the full-text hot-buttoned off every detail. This, I believe, a one of the organising principle in Richard Taylor’s *Variorum Cantos* project, of which the Annals of Ezra Pound’s life is a key document. If
information were suitably tagged, we could have at will a descriptive bibliography, a collected letters, and chronologies of composition, revision and publication at our fingertips. Editors of letters know that nothing “propinks like propinquity,” and that dating problems gradually solve themselves with the accumulation of dated information. Imagine how the history or continuum of consciousness might slowly be recovered, the histories of reading and self-revision, of self-reading and new writing.

By way of example, in 1924, when correcting proof of *Early Poems and Stories*, Yeats saw that ‘The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner’ had to be rewritten because for the first time in his career it was to appear within the same covers as the prose account of its source, “A Visionary,” from *The Celtic Twilight*. New pressures (the Irish Civil War) brought themselves to bear on what was being revised (“Now lads are making pikes again”) in this poem as in the “Dedication to a Book of Stories from the Irish Novelists” and other early poems which had outlived their occasion and demanded renewal. But re-reading the Old Pensioner, Yeats saw a way forward for new work, and the “Old Countryman” poems tumbled out in a manuscript headed “More Songs of the Old Pensioner,” before being combined as “A Man Young and Old.”

**THE DEFINITIVE TEXT**

Behind the modest *W. B. Yeats Collection* were the more vaunting and still unrealized plans of Professor Finneran to provide a full-scale electronic edition with variant texts keyed to the 1989 text of *The Poems Revised*. Reviewing a number of Yeats editions in the *TLS* in 1990,24 McGann proposed that a “definitive” text was no longer necessary. He was unworried by the idea that every hyper-reader would need to become his or her own editor.25 When McGann had proposed a Yeats hypermedia edition, Finneran responded furiously—in remarks apparently addressed to McGann’s university at large:

In a future electronic edition . . . no doubt . . . the reader [will] . . . toggle between . . . competing formats. But even then, one version will presumably have to be the default arrangement . . . yes, Virginia, short of the discovery of a lost codicil to Yeats’s will or the reappearance of his supernatural Instructors, read-
ers—and editors—must make such a choice . . . our choice of formats has significant consequence for interpretation. 26

I thought at the time that, despite this tone and my own long-argued and unanswered view that Finneran’s editions are simply wrong about the arrangement of Yeats’s poems, that he was nevertheless right about the problem of presenting the works of Yeats in hypermedia. If for McGann “HyperEditing” does not require “(even if it be at some deep and invisible level) a central ‘text’ for organizing the hypertext of documents” (McGann, ibid) it is hard to agree that an editor is solely a librarian, even if he or she is an accurate one. A “virtual library” of Yeats, including bitmapped images of manuscript pages, books, paratexts, and penumbral papers requires an editor to be other than neutral, in the same way that cataloguing does. If a meta-book is a library, it must contain for comparison and collitational purposes the best posthumous edited text, much as ordinary libraries contain the best modern texts as well as the original artefacts. Our duty to the historicity of text and to the perpetuation of textual accuracy in electronic form requires no less.

Finneran however, aimed to drive out Mrs Yeats’s 1949 “definitive edition,” to omit it and to replace it with his own. My preference involves a refusal to evanish the history of the books. Editors of meta-books cannot, in short, simply function as librarians, helping neophytes to negotiate “the logical structures” in which texts are housed. Neophytes are intimidated not merely because they can’t immediately understand the organizing principles of a library; they need to understand the logical structures in which texts have been made and evaluated. In short, e-editors are librarians and bibliographers too, but they must not hide in those duties and abnegate the task of making editorial choices. Their choices do not have to “shut the structure down . . . close its covers as it were” (McGann, ibid.), which is what Finneran seemed to want.

THE INHERENT DIFFICULTIES OF ELECTRONIC PRODUCTS

John Unsworth, Director of the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities at the University of Virginia, describes The Complete Writing and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Research Archive as follows:
A comprehensive electronic edition produced and updated continually since 1993 by Jerome McGann and more than 30 others working under his direction. The current version, published by the University of Virginia’s Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities (IATH) using Enigma’s Dynaweb software, is the first of four projected installments. It includes 10,388 SGML and JPEG files, presenting the material that centers on the 1870 volume of Rossetti’s *Poems* and outlining the structure that the completed archive will require. This material is marked up in a Document Type Definition (DTD) developed for the project at IATH—the Rossetti Archive Master Document Type Definition (RAM DTD). In addition, there are about 5,000 (offline) TIFF images, from which the JPEGs are derived; some HTML pages with introductory, summary, and navigational materials; and perhaps two dozen style sheets. The publication also includes 18 essays about the archive, by McGann and others, marked up in HTML and available from the ‘resources’ area of the archive. The completed Rossetti Archive is likely to contain 25,000 files and to take another 10 to 12 years (and another 30 to 40 people) to finish. The University of Virginia, private foundations, and corporations have already invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in developing this resource; perhaps as much as a million dollars will be invested by the time the project ends. 

Eighteen months ago, in Austin, Texas, I heard it confidently predicted that the Library of Congress will have been digitized within fifteen years. Contrast such technological dreaming with the fact that it costs $10 to bind or box a 300 page book, and $1,600 for base-level digitization, $2,500 for enhanced digitization. We have, surely, hardly begun to take stock of the difficulties and costs of electronic projects, which is not to offer an excuse for shoddily-conceived quick-fix solutions such as the Yeats edition. The logic, however, of McGann’s argument about the magnificent array of scholarly tools of the print era is that electronic tools require a like sophistication.

When I asked McGann in London some months ago what he thought of the idea that a descriptive bibliography or life-records or both might provide an outer shell—as it were—or way in, to a full-text data-base, he said: “It sounds austere to me.” I’m not ashamed of that. Indeed, the
rigor which the sophisticated print-based tools already impart to scholar-
ship seems to me to be an essential discipline if we are successfully to
move to a hybrid electronic/codical culture. Certainly at the Centre for
Manuscript and Print Studies, we hope that Descriptive Bibliography
will guide our modest way into that alluring future.

Notes

2. Yeats inscribed Quinn’s copy of *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems*
   (1889): “My first book of poems & full of mixed influences / Cursed be he who
   moves the bones of these verses to reprint them. W B Yeats. March, 1904.”
   (Berg Collection, New York Public Library; cf. the *Complete Catalogue of the
   Library of John Quinn sold by auction in five parts [with printed prices]*
   (New York: The Anderson Galleries, 1924), lot 11344, p. 1130. Yeats shared
   doubts as to the epitaph’s authenticity: “[t]he people of Stratford-on-Avon
   have remembered little about him, and invented no legend to his glory. They
   have remembered a drinking-bout of his, and invented some bad verses for
   him, and that is about all” (“At Stratford-on-Avon,” *Essays and Introductions*
   Review*, os 91 / ns 85.506 (Feb. 1909) 253-54.
5. True Love in this differs from gold and clay,
   That to divide is not to take away.
   Love is like understanding, that grows bright,
   Gazing on many truths; ’tis like thy light.
   Imagination! which from earth and sky,
   And from the depths of human fantasy,
   As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills
   The Universe with glorious beams, and kills
   Error, the worm, with many a sun-like arrow
   Of its reverberated lightning. (*Epipsychidion*)
6. Galen of Pergamon (AD 129-99) is certainly the first recorded writer to be thus
   obsessed; see Bernard H. Breslauer and Roland Folter, *Bibliography, Its His-
   tory and Development, Catalogue of an Exhibition at the Grolier Club, April
   21 to June 6, 1981, to Mark the Completion of the National Union Catalog,
7. Was the curse then a Cerberus or a Siren? No considered awareness of Yeats’s
   work can endure without engagement of the writings that he “cast away.”
   Though “The friends that have it I do wrong” and the curse stand volumes
   apart in the edition, they are nevertheless a doublet, enclosing the larger and
less stable area of Yeats’s writing. The antinomous principle cannot be dispensed with, though Yeats himself abandoned both curse and verse after 1908.


11. W. B. Yeats to Florence Emery, 4 October [1914].

12. “So far as editing and textual studies are concerned, codex tools present serious difficulties. To make a new edition one has to duplicate the entire productive process, and then add to or modify the work as necessary. Furthermore, the historical process of documentary descent generates an increasingly complex textual network (the word ‘text’ derives from a word that means ‘weaving’). Critical editions were developed to deal with exactly these situations. A magnificent array of textual machinery evolved over many centuries. Brilliantly conceived, these works are nonetheless infamously difficult to read and use (McGann, “The Rationale of Hypertext,” found on-line at http://www.jefferson.village.virginia.edu/public/ffm2f/rationale.htm).

13. Linda Bramwell of ProQuest Information and Learning informs me, on 6-02-03, that they now have “no plans” to incorporate *The W. B. Yeats Collection* (which has not been corrected or updated since its launch) into *Literature Online*.


20. G. Thomas Tanselle, “The Latest Forms of Book Burning (1993),” in his *Literature and Artifacts* (Charlottesville; Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1998) 89-95. See also Nicholson Baker’s famous essay on the jettisoning of library card-catalogues following retrospective conversion to electronic


22. See Nicholson Baker’s “Discards,” The Size of Thoughts: Essays and Other Lumber 125-81. Although Harvard University took the precaution of microfilming card records before destroying them, it did not photograph information held on the backs of such cards (p. 129). See also 140-42, 155-56.

23. “Ay me! what act, / That roars so loud and thunders in the index?” (Hamlet, III.iv); “The presentation of but what I was; / The flattering index of a direful pageant” (Richard the Third, II.ii.); “Lechery, by this hand! an index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts” (Othello, II.i.).


25. George Bornstein admits that “we need to know enough textual scholarship to be our own editors, rather than to have our critical field irrevocably defined by an editor’s prior judgments” in an otherwise readerly if superficial glance at the problem of Yeats in “Remaking Himself: Yeats’s Revisions of His Early Canon,” Text: Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship 5 (1991): 356. “[W]hat Yeats finally created was a process rather than a product” (356), observes Bornstein, but while the emphasis upon textual “process” is welcome, he ignores textual biography in the 1930s, and thus dismisses Yeats’s own obsessive concern for final intention in the preparation of canonical editions, the relationship between canonical and popular arrangements, and the acts of delegates.

