

## Book Reviews: A Book Sleuth and a Sleuth's Sleuth

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**TANSELLE, G. Thomas.** *Books in My Life*. Charlottesville: The Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, 2021. Small 4to. Hardbound, dust jacket. xiii, 367pp. Frontispiece, color illustrations. **\$60.00.**

**MIRANKER, Cathy, and MIRANKER, Glen S. (curators).** *Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects: From the Collection of Glen S. Miranker*. New York: The Grolier Club, 2022. 4to. Hardbound. 168pp. Numerous color illustrations, marbled endpapers. **\$80.00.**

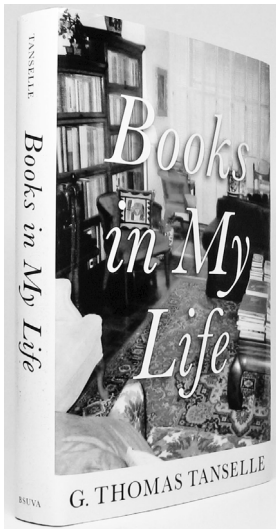
Nothing could be further from a quick read you blaze through to crank out a review than G. Thomas Tanselle's rich, dense, nuanced essay collection *Books in My Life*. Here's a book from a leading collector, bibliographer and textual critic that you want to savor like a fine cappuccino, to mull over like a Henry James novel, to contemplate up close like a Vermeer painting. "This book," explains Tanselle,

is both an autobiography and a study of the rationale and practice of book collecting. The theme throughout is the important role that physical objects play in the life of each of us – both with their ability to link us with the past... And through their power, as part of our environment, to influence our thoughts. Books have held a significant place in my life for as long as I can remember, and even

as a child I was attracted to their physical qualities as well as to the verbal and pictorial texts they contained. But it was not until I was in graduate school that I became a systematic book collector, and not until shortly after I began teaching that I started to write bibliographical essays. From then on, my primary subject has been the study of books as physical objects, along with the theory and practice of textual criticism and scholarly editing....

A perfect summation of this octogenarian's remarkably productive career.

Shortly after moving from Chicago to Galena in 1990, I happened upon a Winter 1960 issue of *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* that interested me because of the article "Herman Melville's Visit to Galena in 1840" by G. Thomas Tanselle – a name I kept on running across since entering the book trade a couple years prior. (From *Books in My Life* I learned this was his first article.) Over the next quarter century I encountered this name often and read a handful of articles and essays in a wide spread of publications covering a broad range of bookish topics, then in 2015 reviewed his enjoyable *Portraits and Reviews* in this column. My Tanselle collection has grown considerably since.



*Books in My Life* consists of nine essays first published between 1970 and 2014 followed by a worthwhile "Biographical Record" that includes a "List of Publications" – books authored by Tanselle with thorough bibliographical details for each (including later printings and other editions), pamphlets, editions he's edited, and large number of contributions to serials, books and

pamphlets. And while the title essay “Books in My Life” (1999) is given first position, the fifth position “A Rationale of Collecting” (1998) ranks first in *my* mind. This finely-argued philosophical exploration broaches the underlying question: Why does anyone collect anything? “The attempt to understand collecting not only adds to our understanding of human nature,” he writes,

But also enhances the experience of collecting itself. For whether one collects Renaissance paintings or cigar boxes, Greek antiquities or coffee mugs, rare books or advertising brochures, one’s sense of self-awareness is increased by being able to place one’s own endeavors in a framework that comprehends the full panoply of related pursuits.

Using his barebones definition of collecting as “the accumulation of tangible things” as a springboard for debate, Tanselle surveys the literature on theories of collecting, which is extensive and heavily psychological. He breaks it down “into several components, which include creation of order, fascination with chance, curiosity about the past, and desire for understanding.” Some argue collecting is leftover instinct from early human’s need to forage and hoard food; others find this explanation too simplistic. Werner Muensterberger’s 1994 *Collecting: An Unruly Passion* (highly recommended), which Tanselle rightly characterizes as “the most thorough and engaging treatment of the psychology of collecting written for a general audience,” looms large in his analysis. To Muensterberger’s interpretation he adds such thinkers as William James, Walter Benjamin and others who have addressed the topic. He strongly objects to the common notion that “the act of collecting is often seen as an aberration, if not a disorder, affecting some portion (frequently a small one) of the human population,” and argues persuasively that “collecting is part of the behavior of every person, and by definition it is therefore not abnormal.”

No collector can finish this provocative essay without a deeper appreciation of this activity – call it a mania if you will

-- in which we all participate. He sums it up eloquently: "This feeling of mastery, however temporary and provisional, is an emotional necessity, and we are all masters of the collections we surround ourselves with; we are all artists who create worlds with accumulated objects, whether or not we pursue our visions into the public sphere through display, research, or one of the forms we call 'art.'" My wife possesses a fine mind capable of debating cerebral niceties with the best of them, but she sometimes hasn't the patience for philosophical fuzziness and cuts through to the root of an issue. To my discussions with her about these high-minded theories about why we collect, she came back with: Isn't it just because we like stuff?

Moving on, the heart and soul of *Books in My Life* must be the 110-page "The Living Room: A Memoir," surely one of the most unusual, insightful personal recollections I've ever encountered -- I just cannot call it "autobiography," so offbeat is it. Tanselle describes it best: "a tour around that room, discussing many of the objects (including books) in it and reporting the associations they hold for me... an extended demonstration of how much of one's life can be summoned up by a contemplation of the objects that have formed one's private environment."

This single lengthiest (by far) essay in *Books in My Life* is a singular tour-de-force. Tanselle has over many decades filled his unusually spacious New York living room with a vast assortment of well-organized "furniture, paintings, porcelain, crystal, books, and other objects that recall people and episodes from many parts of my life" -- some valuable, some not, but all meaningful and each given history and context. Wall by wall, shelf by shelf, item by item, every nook and cranny of this rectangular space is circumnavigated by this most knowledgeable guide in 45 numbered sections, each corresponding to the floor plan provided and illustrated with eight color photographs. How clearly and artfully Tanselle surrounds himself with items that illuminate his life and experiences. It reminds you of the Victorian home decorating aesthetic so contrary to today's sparse look; here every surface is awash with bric-a-brac and *objets*, every wall carefully arranged with mementos. He muses, "I can perhaps

convey not only the pleasure I derive from my possessions but also some indication of how one's life story can be partially epitomized in one's accumulation of things."

But it's not the *things* that make "The Living Room" so extraordinary -- collectors tend to display a lot of stuff, after all. It's Tanselle's ability to describe each object and its personal connection to him engagingly and to impose order and clarity on quantities of items that elevates this essay from what would be a long and tiresome inventory in lesser hands to a revealing recollection. He explains:

I have spent much of my life thinking about the significance of artifacts – objects made by human beings in the past and, through their survival, bringing into the present a sense of their origins and of the previous lives they touched. Many of my writings...reflect an appreciation of how artifacts enrich our lives, both through their intrinsic evidence of human activity in the past and through the associations that they gathered around them over time.... Whether I am looking at a first printing of *Moby-Dick* or a vase from my grandmother's house, observe an object that was seen and handled by many people before me, one that brings a part of the past....

A few examples to convey the flavor:

- The tour begins just inside the front door, where "what most people's eyes land on first are the two Rockwell Kent drawings on the left (east) wall of the foyer, just past the closet door... two of the original drawings that were reproduced in the 1930 Lakeside Press edition of *Moby-Dick*, one of Kent's great achievements." These framed beauties spark two pages of Melville reminiscences – Tanselle's co-editing of the definitive text of *Moby-Dick* and other Melville writings, his compiling a checklist of *Moby-Dick* editions for a Newberry Library exhibition, the art gallery in Maine where he bought the drawings, memories of the beloved gallery owner. Every item becomes

a catalyst for connections personal and professional.

- Devotees of the work of bibliographical giant Fredson Bowers, one of Tanselle's mentors, will be warmed by his description of the many inscribed Bowers titles inside one three-shelf bookcase "which includes, besides pamphlets and offprints, dust-jacketed copies of the amazingly numerous books he wrote and edited."
- "And then there was John Carter" introduces Tanselle's two and a half shelves' worth of titles from another mentor, the legendary British bibliographer, book collector, all-around antiquarian and author of books about books (1905-75) who authored the 1950 classic *ABC for Book Collectors* and other standards.
- Hardcore bibliographical analysis looms large in Tanselle's world, so no surprise that four full barrister bookcases overflow with the longest portion of his commentary. This motherlode contains works by such towering figures as A.W. Pollard, W.W. Greg, Michael Sadleir and R.B. McKerrow – often choice association copies of their scarcest titles.
- One particularly memorable pile of books into which we glimpse (among many such described) are "five stacks next to the sofa.... Mostly inscribed presentation copies from friends, and they make connections with nearly every period of my life." The handful he profiles bear fine presentation inscriptions and their subject matters are as eclectic as are Tanselle's interests, ranging from Carl Sandburg's *Complete Poems* (inscribed to him by his "favorite high-school teacher") to cartoonist Draper Hill's *Political Asylum* ("in which he drew a self-portrait showing a pen going through his head"). Tanselle's knack for pulling together books and places, for showing connections between items seemingly unrelated, is at full view here.
- Not everything is scarce books, original artwork and

unique *objets* – not by a long shot. Some furniture is humble, even homely, such as “a simple single-drawer desk that has been part of my living room furnishings for nearly fifty years... a cheaply made piece, typical of the furniture that used to be found, before World War II, in second-rate hotels and is still sometimes encountered in clubs.” But it too has a story, but mainly Tanselle “found it appealing (and still do) and was attached to it (and still am).” Another table, a faux William-and-Mary console, is well worn, but was custom made in 1947 for Katharine Hepburn and its single “drawer is now filled with Hepburn memorabilia.” Dozens of knickknacks – vases, paperweights, doohickies of every size, material and shape – dot the room. Many are not high in monetary value, but all have sentimental value – links to cherished friends, family and colleagues.

Some readers may find “The Living Room: A Memoir” scattered as a shotgun blast, as nonlinear as tossing a manuscript up in the air and then reading it in whatever order the pages are picked up. But replace time’s chronology as organizing principle with the layout of a room and you will find this offbeat memoir as stimulating as did I. This is terrific stuff – you’ll never gaze about your own living room the same again.

As with any essay collection, I must gloss over several fine pieces. In the title essay, “Books in My Life,” for instance, Tanselle verbalizes a phenomenon that anyone who cares deeply about books and manuscripts and the relation between them has observed – that “many otherwise intelligent people, who are able to think about other kinds of artifacts, seem to have difficulty making sense of objects conveying verbal texts, such as books and manuscripts. They apparently believe that the texts can simply be plucked from the objects containing them and that the containers are irrelevant to the process of using the contents – indeed, that other containers would do as well.” He argues convincingly against the belief “that photocopies and digitized texts are as good as the originals,” a sentiment he elaborates on again and again in *Books in My Life*.

“The Pleasures of Being a Scholar-Collector” is another pleasant amble through bookish memories. It’s delightful to meet booksellers who have only been vaguely-known names, distant figures such as Chicago’s Jerrold Nedwick. “On one occasion,” writes Tanselle, “I was thrilled to find on his shelves a number of presentation copies – from Amy Lowell, Sara Teasdale, Harriet Monroe, and many others – inscribed to Eunice Tietjens. Few people, I imagine, have ever been thrilled by Tietjens association copies....” More importantly, Tanselle chronicles his pioneering of imprint collecting. It takes visionary, imaginative scholar-collectors to trailblaze new collecting paths, and “the idea of bringing together the output of twentieth-century trade publishers was practically unheard of.” He began collecting every title from early 20<sup>th</sup> century publishers Mitchell Kennerly, B.W. Huebsch, Boni & Liveright, Albert & Charles Boni, Thomas Seltzer and many others. “My list of publishers eventually numbered about forty, and my goal was to assemble not only every title they published but also every printing of those titles” – a gargantuan undertaking and groundbreaking contribution to the study of publishing history.

Association copies are of course near and dear to autograph and book enthusiasts, and Tanselle’s chapter by that title doesn’t fail to enlarge and illuminate this more-popular-than-ever topic. He rounds up all manner of 19th and 20th century references, demonstrating how the concept gradually came to be understood and accepted, and clarifies the distinction between association copies and presentation copies (the latter simply being a subset of the former). Most entertaining is his tackling of the notion “That many people regard an interest in association copies of almost any sort as a manifestation of ludicrous sentimentality....” He does a bang-up job of dissecting this prejudice:

Sentiment is indeed a laudable human quality, and any physical object that arouses it should not be despise for doing so. Sentimentality, however, is accorded greater awe, but there will never be a consensus as to the relative ranking of particular items.... Books



containing inscriptions or annotations should in fact be thought of as letters or manuscripts – and some inscriptions and annotations are more incisive and revealing than some letters and manuscripts.

Tanselle contends “The charge of sentimentality against association copies can also refer, not merely to overvaluing them, but to having an irrational attraction for them, based on feeling rather than reason. Although feeling is not to be discounted as undesirable, anyone who thinks that the value of association copies cannot be rationally justified makes a profound mistake....” His argument that follows is a rousing defense of association copies and provenance research. The essay provides a useful examination of the association copy concept and is well worth studying. In the end many book and autograph professionals (myself included) feel that those who question the value and validity of association copies just “don’t get it” and likely never will.

I hope the essay “A Bibliographer’s Creed” proves eye opening for the many who think bibliography the mere listing of books and compiling basic physical data (title, publisher, size, pagination, etc.). Think again! Far from it – in the hands of serious bibliographical scholars such as Tanselle, that is. Descriptive or analytical bibliography compares to bibliography as brain surgery compares to putting a band-aid on a boo-boo. Tanselle’s statement of beliefs, dense with critical observations, borders on dry at times, but a close reading reveals its depths. For him, it “sum[s] up the essential tenets of the field of bibliography... the beliefs that I have formed during a lifetime of bibliographical study... a convenient distillation of bibliographical thinking....” Each of these twenty-one points follows with a page or so of elaboration. Article #14, for instance, states:

The cultural significance of every physical characteristic of every copy of every edition makes descriptive bibliography – the detailed description of books – a basic genre of humanistic scholarship. A descriptive

bibliography of an author, for example, is a kind of biography, one that concentrates on the successive forms in which texts of an author's works appeared and on the production history that underlay those forms – both of which reflect changes in an author's reputation and readership and thus offer insights into a writing career.

Heady stuff – Tanselle is quite the bibliographical crusader. If you've never given thought to bibliographies in general or to bibliography as a scholarly pursuit, "A Bibliographer's Creed" may surprise.

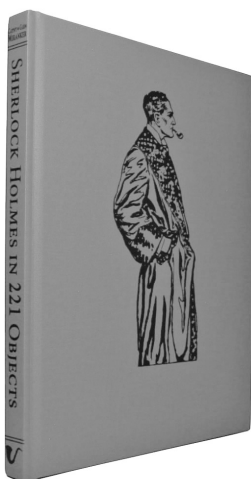
*Books in My Life* is easily one of the most thoughtful, provocative book collector's memoirs of recent decades.

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Moving from one superlative sleuth to another, the aptly-titled *Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects: From the Collection of Glen S. Miranker* highlights a collection centered around the most famed fictional detective of all literature, revealing in the process the formidable sleuthing skills of the intrepid collector Glen Miranker.

As an antiquarian bookseller, I have handled a good deal of Sherlockiana over the past thirty years, including gems such as letters from Basil Rathbone penned during World War Two upset that the Library of Congress failed to purchase his Holmes material. In addition to that are dozens upon dozens of editions of Doyle's primary works, literary critiques, pastiches and parodies, tributes, film studies, on and on.... But that is nothing, not blip on the radar, compared to the astonishing breadth and quality that Miranker has gathered, a tip-of-the-iceberg percentage of which makes its way into this dazzling exhibition catalogue.

Of the many exhibition catalogues reviewed in this column over the years, *Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects* ranks among the best. Such a thoroughly-explored study of a fictional character, so pictorial and colorful, is rare indeed, but then Sherlock Holmes was a special phenomenon with which few others can compete.



Tarzan comes to mind, but as distant second.

Miranker's organization of these 221 objects neither chronologically nor by object type, but rather by what he terms "clumps" (perhaps 'constellations' is a more dignified term) is inspired and effective. With autograph material, books and artwork therefore a-jumble throughout *Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects* given this "cluster" approach, let's approach these major categories in that order.

Autograph material included is jaw dropping and plentiful. It begins with two leaves from *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Miranker's opening "cluster." Exceptional rarities both, and what a thrill to view buried in the second leaf the spot where Doyle inks in as an afterthought Holmes' iconic words: "You know my methods. Apply them!"

Pride of place understandably goes to "Norwood Notebook No. 1," the holiest of holies from the autograph perspective. Miranker reproduces 19 of the 49 pages in this "idea book" filled with Doyle's handwritten notes. Writes Miranker, "they reveal the behind-the-scenes work of writing, how wide a net Conan Doyle cast for story ideas, what reading informed his thinking, his methods of working. It is here that Sherlockians can see private musings in transition to the germ of stories." Holmes buffs know how much Doyle wanted to bump off his wildly popular creation after a while and move on (he "entertained murderous designs on his detective for years"). This crowd-pleasing notebook must have drawn crowds at the Grolier Club like "Mona Lisa" at the Louvre if it was open to the page for December 1893 in which the last two words are a bluntly penned "Killed Holmes."

Surely the runner-up in the autograph category might be Miranker's copies of several of Doyle's *Return* short story manuscripts penned after he brought Holmes back from the dead. So thorough is the collector's treatment that in describing

the limp vellum bindings in which some are bound (Doyle called them “tidy white coats”) he even gives the name and address of the London bookbinder Doyle employed.

How refreshing to also see Doyle writing a 4-page handwritten letter to a complete stranger, a fan who wrote him, in which he offers up a fine explanation of why he created Holmes at the time he did: “...a little group of detective books, which arose from my irritation at the fact that the detective of fiction appears always to attain his results in a perfectly arbitrary fashion without any process of reasoning or thought. I only meant to write one little book... to show what I thought to be the true detective & analytical solver of problems....” If you’ve ever read what passed for detective novels in the mid-19th century, you’ll appreciate how spot-on accurate was Doyle’s motivation.

On a practical level, there’s a valuable cautionary tale. Illustrated is a 1910 Autograph Note Signed from Doyle to his agent agreeing to a new, cheaper edition of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and Miranker notes: “The tiny glyph beneath Conan Doyle’s last name indicates that this piece of correspondence was written by his private secretary, Alfred H. Wood, whose handwriting was remarkably, sometimes nearly undetectably, akin to Conan Doyle’s. Letters that Conan Doyle dictated sometimes had the word ‘Dictated’ across the top, but not always.” Another letter illustrated, this one from 1903, includes Miranker’s comment: “Note that the glyph beneath his signature differs from that in item 17, indicating a different secretarial hand.” The existence of these Doyle proxies has long been known and is duly remarked on in reference books, but many collectors who fail to collect reference works aren’t aware of this, so it bears repeating. Doyle autograph material is not inexpensive, so buyer beware.

*Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects* would seem incomplete without a mystery of its own, and Miranker delivers his own whodunnit. *Sherlock Holmes in 4 Acts* is a holograph play script in handwriting not identifiable and not dated. Doyle did reluctantly finally pen a play about Holmes, but this manuscript was burnt in a hotel fire while in actor William Gillette’s

possession. Endless questions arise. “It is not in Conan Doyle’s hand,” muses Miranker, “thus far eluding identification. Is this a genuine version of the play? When was it written down? Was it ever performed? Who was its author? If it was Conan Doyle, whom did he dictate it to?” With luck its appearance in this exhibit and in this book may coax out an answer to this puzzler.

As for books, the book’s centerpiece and single greatest work illustrated is Miranker’s magnificent first edition of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (London: George Newnes, 1892). Some of the books illustrated in *221 Objects* are at or near actual size, as is this bright and shockingly fresh copy in its lovely teal blue cloth. On top of that, a second, smaller illustration shows it *wearing the dust jacket that many thought never existed!* I hope Miranker was chuckling as he wrote, “it is the only known copy in dust jacket of the first edition...” Just as shocking, though, is this copy’s history over the past forty years, when it was discovered in Chicago and briefly owned by Mormon forger Mark Hofmann. For good measure, Miranker also owns (and also illustrates) a first edition of this title, second issue – likewise sporting the ultra-rare dust jacket. He points out an interesting typographical distinction between the two jackets – as if anyone will have occasion to use this distinction! A third dust jacket rarity is his first U.S. edition of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1894), wearing its bland “unadorned coarse brown paper” jacket – which again “makes it at present a unique copy.”

Miranker’s book coverage is satisfyingly in depth, with fine color images accompanied by captions pointing out significant points. His two-page spread of *Hound of the Baskervilles* editions showing “Four variant US states, with principal details that distinguish them” displays jackets, bindings, title page and copyright pages with often subtle but all-important differences.

The section on “Pirated Editions” is especially fascinating and not to be missed. “Pirated publications,” Miranker writes about this often-overlooked subject, “afford the collector a continually developing source of bibliographic discoveries and oddities. Some piracies preceded the authorized book publication; many

are the first printing, in book form, of stories already published in magazines. There are surely more piracies of bibliographic interest awaiting discovery.” Miranker’s selection of these items is extensive and intriguing. His discussion of “Price-Point Tactics Among the Pirates” may (and should) shock and dismay, as will “Flamboyant Covers and his discussion of outrageous visual practices such as publishers who “put the Great Detective’s picture on books that were entirely lacking Sherlockian content.” And did you know that many legitimate department stores – Wanamaker, Montgomery Ward and others – were not opposed to publishing their own pirated editions? These “ranged widely in quality and price, from cheap paperbacks to handsome, gilt-edged bindings.”

While some preach that a dealer’s ethical duty is to scorn any pirated editions, far more believe these productions are simply part of the historical record and that it’s not condoning piracy to buy and sell these collected items any more than it’s condoning slavery to handle a slave bill of sale or Naziism to handle a signed photograph of Adolf Hitler. Sometimes historical artifacts illuminate history’s many unpleasant aspects and as such should not be ignored.

Original artwork is the third major category of Sherlockiana that figures prominently in *Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects*, with beautiful examples sprinkled throughout. The “Original cover art and proof” for the 1981 Penguin Books paperback edition of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is shown, along with a 1959 “Advertising poster for the Peter Cushing movie – handsomely inscribed to Miranker by artist John Holder. The first of many Sidney Paget illustrations pictured is the original ink and gouache on paper for “The Adventure of the Final Problem,” which was “used in the *Strand* and both UK and US book editions.” There’s the 1902 “Publicity poster for the *Sherlock Holmes* play” showing actor William Gillette as a pensive Holmes in smoking jacket pensively puffing his pipe (not a Meerschaum, by the way). This is followed by Western artist William Koerner’s original *Gillette Posing as Sherlock Holmes*, an ink and crayon on paper of the very same scene – but whether the poster is based on this

sketch or the other way around Miranker is unable to ascertain. This is followed closely by artist Frederic Dorr Steele's original ink, pencil and crayon on paper dramatic drawing *Gillette as Sherlock*, side by side with the same drawing as reworked by Steele later as a promotional item for Gillette's 1929 farewell appearance and yet again (in reverse) for a 1930 poster for Ford's Theatre. Steele would no doubt enjoy that this profile image appears yet again on the front cover for *Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects*.

I'm extra pleased to report that my venerable colleague, dealer Peter Stern of Newton, Massachusetts, provides a wise and witty afterword that fittingly closes out *Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects*. Stern provided many of Miranker's rarities and describes his and the collector's antics as they tromped far and wide together on Holmes hunting forays.

Even non-Sherlockians will find *Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects* irresistible and may succumb to Sherlock's allure, thanks largely to Glen Miranker's splendid job. Autograph collectors/dealers will find this an unbeatable storehouse of Doyle handwriting exemplars that also aids in ferreting out those pesky proxies. Bibliophiles will appreciate the many fine rarities pictured and detailed elaboration on the critical points that identify them. *Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects* is an absolute must-have reference for the Sherlockians among us – and an entertaining education for those who are not.