

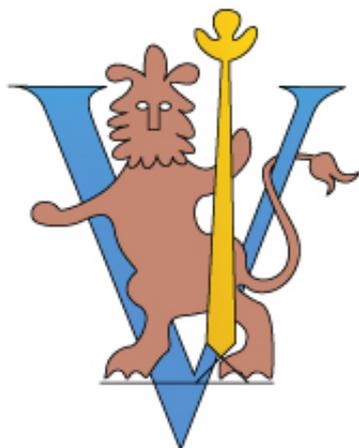
"The Book Embodies a Form of Life":

**A Look at Rare Book School (Charlottesville, 2013)
and**

**The Society for the History
of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP)
Annual Conference (Philadelphia, 2013)**

Annual Conference (Philadelphia, 2013)

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1. Rare Book School, July 29-August 2, 2013

Course: Introduction to the Principles of Bibliographic Description

Rare Book School (RBS), based at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, offers the opportunity “to study the history of written, printed, and born-digital materials with leading scholars and professionals in the field.” From the history of printing and papermaking to the advent of the machine-made book, from typography and book illustration to binding and book design, from collecting, curating and cataloging rare materials to mastering digital preservation and managing born-digital materials, RBS has it covered.

Rare Book School is open to students from all disciplines and levels, and its week-long non-degree courses are attended by librarians, graduate students, faculty members, collectors, and booksellers. The School was founded by Terry Belanger at Columbia University in 1983; upon Terry’s retirement in 2009 as director (but not as instructor), Michael F. Suarez, S.J., assumed the helm of an organization that now offers courses throughout the year at several East Coast institutions, with related Institutes across the country and abroad. Indeed, RBS fills a critical need not met

entirely by library science and other graduate programs. Its own characterization of its essential role, though perhaps bold, is not overstated: “Over time, it became increasingly clear that RBS was not just a collection of non-credit courses on bookish and bibliographical subjects, but the mainstay of bibliographical education in the United States and the English-speaking world.”

About Desc Bib. Many consider Introduction to the Principles of Bibliographical Description (familiarily, “Bibliography Boot Camp,” or the less-forbidding “Desc Bib”) the flagship course of RBS. Like the more “leisurely” RBS courses, Desc Bib meets Monday to Friday from 9 to 5 with two coffee breaks and an hour and a half for lunch. There the similarity to the other RBS courses ends. Desc Bib features intense late night one-on-one workouts with old books that keep students in the library counting leaves, shining tiny fluorescent lights through paper in search of watermarks, and scrutinizing broken and upside-down type with jeweler’s loupes until monitors usher protesting students out at closing time. As one lab instructor told her recruits: “Keep hydrated. And remember: you can do without food or sleep, but you can’t do without both.”

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Preparing for Desc Bib. The work, and the fun, begins before students arrive in Charlottesville. There is a book to read: Philip Gaskell’s *A New Introduction to Bibliography*, a user-friendly run-through of the history of book manufacture from Gutenberg’s invention of movable type to developments of the mid-twentieth century. There is a video to watch: Terry Belanger’s not-to-be-missed deadpan demonstration of paper-folding techniques, aimed at producing different-sized textblocks which typically in the hand-press period had characteristic configurations of watermarks along with the wire- and chain-lines of the paper mold. To help make the abstract concrete, facsimile sheets are provided for students to experiment with. There is a chapter to absorb: from Fredson Bowers’s classic but notoriously difficult bibliographer’s “Bible,” *Principles of Bibliographical Description*, whose discussion of the “collation formula” is the core of Desc Bib. The collation formula is a compressed expression of how the book was put together: how many sheets of paper were used, how they were folded, whether numbering schemes stay consistent (if not, perhaps an alert that more than one print shop was involved), whether leaves were replaced or shuffled (perhaps indicating error correction or even censorship).

The science of bibliography, of which descriptive bibliography is a part, began in the nineteenth century as an effort to analyze and account for the textual variations found in early books. Scholars attempting to establish the definitive texts of Shakespeare’s plays were confronted by widely differing versions in early editions; in fact, scrutiny of each surviving copy revealed unique details in each one. The apparent promise of the printing press, versus the pen of a scribe, to provide identical and interchangeable copies of a text, remained unrealized. Scholars in due course concluded that reconstructing printing practices could help account for variations in early books, and provide an avenue to arriving at the version of the text closest to the author’s original intention.

Desc Bib for law librarians. The principles of Desc Bib apply to legal texts just as to texts from literary and other disciplines. Physical variations in early printed customary laws, for instance, might provide evidence for how the laws were compiled or corrected. If one were to encounter leaves with dedications to the powerful in only some copies of an early legal treatise, that finding could provide evidence for shifting sponsorship, or more firmly grounded legitimacy in the case of the copies bearing dedications. Altered pagination in a nineteenth-century civil law code could reflect changes to an ostensibly uncorrupted text. Perhaps the most frequent use today of the principles of Desc Bib by rare law book librarians is the practice of inspecting a well-constructed collation formula to compare copies: is the copy of a sixteenth-century legal treatise offered for sale by a dealer complete? Does a copy of an early work in a distant library exhibit a replaced leaf or even an entire replaced sheet, and thus perhaps qualify as a variant text?

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Unfortunately, the complexity of our Fredson Bowers “Bible” does not engender swift understanding of the building blocks of collation formulae. Only time spent grappling with actual early books can build appreciation for the mysteries lurking within their physical structure. Desc Bib’s densely-packed hands-on week provides that experience.

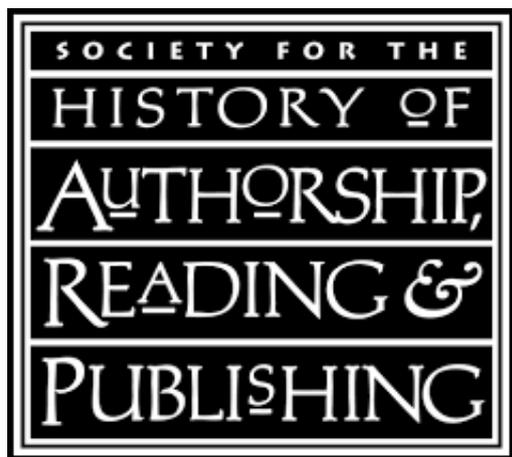
The Desc Bib Week. The experience began on Sunday night, with director Michael Suarez’s welcoming address. He brandished a pair of boxer shorts he swore were his own. “Paper was made from linen. That means people’s used underwear.” The materiality of books, he pointed out, reflects people’s lives. The fact that people in England wore wool, not linen, had a direct economic impact on the production of texts: paper needed to be imported, and thus the production of “culturally instantiated meanings” was subject to broader historical and political trends. “The book embodies a form of life.” Heady insights are commonplace at RBS, as is comfortably-shared community: Suarez also announced that it was the birthday of one of the instructors, and we sang.

The next morning, Desc Bib began in earnest with a lecture by University of Virginia rare books curator and course instructor David Whitesell, followed by a meeting with the lab instructor of each cohort. In the afternoon, cohorts split up. Half of the afternoon was spent tackling the “homework:” a group of books to examine in detail, discovering the patterns that underlay the structure of each book, examining each page, noting each anomaly, boiling everything down into a brief formula, suddenly realizing the period was over and more work awaited that evening. The other half of each afternoon was spent in the Museum, a shifting series of learning stations spread around a long central table and along other tables that lined the walls. Each Museum treated a set of themes: paper, binding, printing, illustration. Most stations had a historical artifact to pick up, manipulate and examine: samples of marbled paper, leather, or patterned bookcloth for bindings; a mold used for hand-casting type, to take apart and reassemble; an engraved copperplate used to print book illustrations with a copy of the book that holds the illustrations; stereotype plates in the original box sent to the printer with a copy of the book printed from them. Holding history in your hands is perhaps the most powerful part of Rare Book School. We touch, we examine, we connect: the book embodies a form of life.

Evening events abound at Rare Book School, although Desc Bib students have so much “homework” they are hard-pressed to attend them. Evening lectures in this session included an update on the web version of the English Short Title Catalogue – one of the monuments of traditional bibliography – on the verge of opening itself to user-generated content (catalogers shuddered). There was also a talk by G. Scott Clemons, a Desc Bib student who is a world-class collector of books published by the late fifteenth-early sixteenth century Venetian Aldus Manutius, the celebrated printer who was instrumental in preserving the surviving ancient Greek texts in the then-new medium of print. (Books from Clemons’s collection will be on display at New York’s Grolier Club in Spring, 2015.) Video night featured ice cream and popcorn, and Bookseller Night was devoted to touring Charlottesville’s extensive network of antiquarian and used bookstores, one of which offered Virginia ham and biscuits to RBS participants.

The sense of community at Rare Book School begins in the classroom, and flows through the RBS experience: from wine and cheese receptions after lectures, to impromptu lunches with class members or old acquaintances (many RBS students return more than once), to the traditional Friday afternoon class outing in which students treat their teacher to lunch, the RBS formal and informal gatherings all contribute to a sense of collegiality as well as camaraderie.

At RBS, the book embodies a form of life.



II. "Geographies of the Book:" Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP)

Annual Conference, July 18-21, 2013

Nearly a decade after the birth of Rare Book School, in 1991, a group of scholars founded an organization aimed at understanding the social meaning of books and other media. The Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) does not focus primarily on the physical book as an artifact; rather it scrutinizes the cultural networks that surround the production, transmission, and survival “of written communication in material forms including marks on stone, script on parchment, printed books and periodicals, and new media ... from the individual reader to the transnational communications network.” Topics at its conference, “Geographies of the Book,” held July 18-21, 2013, in Philadelphia, included international publishing networks, maps on the backs of paperback mystery novels, readers and collectors of foreign and exotic books, and international copyright and design protection, with a primary emphasis on later periods in print culture, from the late eighteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries.

The basis of SHARP’s inquiry is not the older discipline of Bibliography, but the newer field of Book History, initiated by French historians of the *Annales* school, notably in Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin’s *The Coming of the Book* (1958). SHARP’s focus is largely sociological, although literary topics often are addressed, as in the opening keynote speech by book history luminary Roger Chartier. He addressed imagined geographies in *Don Quixote* and the surprising early attempts to link them to real places in a seemingly delusional quest for errors in the literary text. An interest in the sociology of print sometimes led researchers down fascinating byways of forgotten history: French émigré booksellers in early nineteenth-century Philadelphia; an African-American newspaperman in antebellum Baltimore; a back-issue news archive that went up in flames in New York between the two World Wars; a mid-twentieth century French Canadian dictionary sold in part-issue in supermarkets; nineteenth-century educational maps

of the historical Jesus.

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At times, a deeper knowledge of traditional bibliography might have helped to inform discussion of certain topics presented for examination. One such was a study of "the materiality of the text," which made much of the arrangement of individual sections of an eighteenth-century work to argue that the text was composed all at once, but did not consider the material arrangement of the folded sheets on which the text was printed to make sure that the text could not have been delivered to the printer piecemeal.

An interest in the sociology of texts often led to the study of the history of law. Numerous presentations addressed the relationship between intellectual property protections and the rise of modern notions of authorship, from independent self-publishing in Enlightenment France to Romantic nationalism in nineteenth-century Poland. Other presentations addressed design protection and the piracy of typography, trans-Atlantic business relationships that led from informal respect for foreign copyright to the modern regime of international intellectual property protection, and the political control of print in the Cold War or Restoration France.

Most events were held at the University of Pennsylvania, but there also were tours of historic Philadelphia libraries and a reception at the Chemical Heritage Foundation, which houses a large collection of artifacts and print materials from the history of science and technology. Indeed, despite SHARP's emphasis on the history of print, the Society does not shy away from technology. The closing address by digital humanities scholar Ian Gregory highlighted the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to map itineraries in England's Lake District by nineteenth-century poets Thomas Gray and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as well as a large-data analysis of nineteenth-century British government reports that links the rhetoric of medical investigations during the mid-nineteenth century cholera epidemic to health policy outcomes in specific regions of England. Likewise, although SHARP's general meeting featured awards for books and journal articles, there was also an award for the best use of Twitter during the conference, for which the prize was...a book.

Of course, book history and bibliography enjoy significant overlap, and many SHARP attendees were familiar faces from RBS. RBS instructors chaired sessions; former RBS students gave papers; one Desc Bib lab instructor gleefully primed a Desc Bib recruit for the rigors awaiting in just a few weeks. There is also overlap with the library world. A luncheon organized by the Library History Round Table of the American Library Association was well attended, as members traded information about current research projects over sandwiches and salads.

The most conspicuous overlap occurred on Friday evening: the keynote address was delivered by Michael Suarez, director of Rare Book School. Suarez's introduction by the recently retired University of Pennsylvania rare books curator (and RBS faculty member) Daniel Traister exhibited intimate knowledge of Suarez's irreverent displays at RBS, including the underwear-waving. Suarez's talk called for global bibliography: an expansion of the traditional discipline to embrace all technologies, all distribution systems, all cultures, at each level from high to low. Much of this was salutary. What does it mean, for instance, when an African translation of *Alice in Wonderland* features Alice as an African girl, or as a white European? Is there a connection to the legal regime of apartheid? What does it mean when a textbook for teaching English to Asian children features an illustration of benign Caucasian adults and their awestruck Asian pupils? Is there a connection to intercontinental adoption laws? What are the politics of such books and their distribution?

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Even so, Suarez's presentation betrayed a discomfort with some aspects of popular culture. He referred several times to "the Disneyfication of culture," with which "we" need to come terms. "We," he said, need to learn to understand debased manifestations like the musical *Miss Saigon* which, he remarked with apparent distaste, "rhymes boy with joy." It wasn't clear exactly who this "we" was, since it was evident that a number of presenters at the SHARP conference assumed, in general, that their audiences took popular culture seriously, and others seemed already embarked on the voyage toward "global bibliography." When one audience member in the question-and-answer period expressed her uneasiness with Suarez's inspirational (she said "religious") tone, he responded with something that would have played well in the fervent circle of Rare Book School, but which perhaps seemed surprising to some audience members here: "The more you know, the more you feel love and awe." Suarez is an inspirational speaker who can provoke insights rarely offered in mundane academic settings; for him, bibliography and its newer sibling book history are clearly a sacred calling. Some might be rankled by his lofty tone, but the power of his convictions can move others deeply, and spark the human ability to imagine.

Suarez's remarks provided a fitting preview of SHARP's September, 2014, conference, "Religions of the Book," in Antwerp, home of the Museum Plantin-Moretus, the only surviving printing house from the era of hand production, and UNESCO World Heritage site. As the call for papers for the conference explains, "religion" is to be interpreted broadly, to include "bibliophilia...cult authors...reading as a trance-producing practice, the sacral status of the printed book, the strong belief in freedom of the press...the cultural apocalypse [of] digitization, the imminent salvation promised by internet and tablet gurus..."

Indeed, global bibliography can embody a form of life.B

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