

David Whitesell
G-20: Printed Books to 1800: Description & Analysis
10–15 June

Narrative Course Evaluations

1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Did you do any additional preparation for your course? Are there any books or articles that you would like to see included in future years? Any that you might suggest removing?*

1. Yes, Gaskell's book provided an effective introduction to the history of the hand-press period, and Carter's *ABC for Book Collectors* was a useful reference both before and during our in-class discussions. The RBS videos were both valuable in their own way, though I was surprised that they were only available on DVD. Perhaps they could be uploaded on the password-protected section of the RBS site.
2. Yes, the advance readings were very useful! Some sections in the Gaskell book can be difficult to fully comprehend on one's own, but became clearer with DW's explanations. I will keep Gaskell at hand for future reference.
3. Gaskell was immensely useful; Carter was completely unnecessary. (Carter is a great resource, but not necessary as a textbook for this course.) The video/workbook frankly felt like a gouge. Why isn't this at-a-minimum 25+ year-old-film available freely online, or included in tuition?
4. Yes, the pre-course reading assignments were very useful and prepared us well for the course.
5. The required reading was appropriate and necessary—very valuable. Some of it is intense and complicated reading that DW went over in class, so having exposure to it before and throughout the class was very helpful and important. I did not feel like I wasted any money on books; they will be useful going forward in my professional work and in future classes.
6. Both books were very useful, as were the sample worksheets that came with the DVD. This, however, was rather difficult to play. Could the videos perhaps be made available online, even if not freely?
7. Gaskell is extremely important reading prior to the course. Perhaps a list of the most important or challenging terms in *ABC for Book Collectors* could be circulated beforehand so we could concentrate on those, given how detailed & comprehensive that text is.
8. The Gaskell and course DVDs were useful. We did not use *ABC for Book Collectors* in class at all, nor refer much to the suggested readings, so skip those if you do not have much time to prepare. We did not examine the readings in detail/were not quizzed on them; they seem to be intended as general background rather than prep for class discussion.
9. I read all of the required readings and watched the two required films. I can't imagine trying to do the course without having prepared beforehand.
10. Yes, very appropriate pre-reading. I read some more general history of the book, long-span, as well as specific bibliographic monographs, but none to suggest. Having Pearson's book available would have helped.
11. Yes books were useful. The DVD could be converted into download.

12. Pre-course readings were dense but great preparation—what seemed impenetrable made sense here, and we could move more quickly having had at least a small intro to the scope of material.

2) *What are your thoughts on the course workbook and/or other teaching materials distributed during class? Was the content appropriate and useful? Will it continue to be useful for you after the course?*

1. The course workbook was extremely useful. I remain impressed at how many different subjects it covers—everything from the identification of illustration techniques to the construction of proper pagination statements. I will almost certainly refer to its contents again after the course.
2. The workbook was a great complement to the advance readings, in particular filling gaps where Gaskell is unclear or incomplete. The collation formula and statement of signing examples in the workbook and in workshop answer sheets will be useful for me in the future in my cataloging. {private response}
3. The workbook was wonderful and will continue to be valuable.
4. The course workbook was compiled with a lot of thought and care. It followed and complemented the sessions in class. It will definitely be a resource to consult and return to.
5. DW is extremely thorough and again I will say he has an economy of words. He is able to cover a great deal with true efficiency.
6. The course workbook was excellent and will continue to be of use, undoubtedly, although I would have been grateful for a slightly more comprehensive bibliography, at least in terms of geography.
7. Yes, I very much appreciate how thorough & well-organized the workbook is. I will be referring to it often in the future, and that itself is worth the course tuition; a compilation of DW's basic knowledge.
8. I would suggest removing or replacing the DVDs: a) It is hard to find a DVD player; and b) They seem out of date. At one point TB refers to "origami in a concentration camp." Perhaps a new video about format could easily be uploaded to YouTube.
9. Very useful and appropriate. I will most likely make use of the work book/handouts as reference works and consult them regularly.
10. Yes, excellent workbooks. Folding sheets and samples to study format would help. I will definitely consult in the future.
11. Useful now and after. Some high resolution copies would be nice.
12. Yes, all useful. **THOUGH CLEARLY THE DVD NEEDS RETHINKING. ABOUT 50% OF STUDENTS DID NOT HAVE PERSONAL DVD PLAYERS.**

3) *If you've taken previous RBS courses, how did this one compare?*

1. There was some overlap between this course and a previous RBS class that I took on the history of the book, most notably the printing and bookbinding demonstrations. While I enjoyed these activities, I would also have been fine making them optional so that we could concentrate on material that more general courses might not offer such as bibliographical descriptions.
2. N/A
3. N/A

4. The previous RBS course was more narrowly focused on one area, this one gave a broader overview of several topics.
 5. I loved all of my classes but DW's class was the best in terms of learning"—most of it was either completely new to me or it was very complex bibliographical analysis that required strong instruction and in-depth knowledge by DW, which he has in spades.
 6. No.
 7. {no response}
 8. N/A
 9. N/A
 10. N/A
 11. N/A
 12. {no response}
- 4) *Which aspects of the course were most interesting and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*
1. The aspects of the course I found most interesting involved descriptive bibliography, an area with which I previously had only a passing familiarity. I appreciated the chance to learn more about the subject, as well as some new pedagogical strategies related to rare book analysis that I might incorporate into my teaching and public outreach.
 2. The discussions on paper and binding types were the most directly relevant to my current work, which focuses on manuscript items. However, the segment on provenance was the highlight of my week in terms of fueling personal research ideas.
 3. {no response}
 4. Collation formula, bookbinding, provenance.
 5. Yes. Learn Latin, then call DW!! Seriously though, the concepts and practical material are things I will actually use in my daily work in Technical Services. DW's vast knowledge and passion for bibliography inspired me to think differently about what is important and what areas of bibliographical analysis interest me. Also, the areas I need to focus on are more clear.
 6. Those sections on the history of the book and the practical demonstrations. I am an historian of the circulation of knowledge and ideas in the early modern world, but until now rarely thought about the practicalities of it all sufficiently—this course has truly opened my eyes to dimensions of my sources that I had rarely considered.
 7. It increased my confidence in the areas I had read about via real-life examples & plenty of exposure to many books (format, typography, binding, papermaking), and it taught me, from scratch, subject areas I knew nothing about (collation, pagination).
 8. I have a much better understanding of how to describe and understand hand press and period books. I also have a better understanding of what bibliography (as a discipline) is and how bibliographers approach the books they study.
 9. I found the discussion/exercises associated with the bibliographical descriptions to be particularly thought-provoking and useful.
 10. Provenance examples were interesting. Most useful though was the introduction to collation and typesetting, which I needed. Descriptive work was great.

11. Insights into determining value/authenticity. And great to hear what others are working on.
 12. Many new ideas and plans-quite revolutionary to my thinking, still processing possible outcomes.
- 5) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Was anything left out or undeveloped? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*
1. The course instructor, DW, is extremely knowledgeable. He did an excellent job walking us through every aspect of the construction of hand-press books and the methodological challenges associated with their description. He is also a masterful bibliographer, and while I still have much to learn about that subject, I can think of no finer teacher to provide a preliminary introduction.
 2. DW, as well as AN and Josef Beery, who taught sessions in the course, were all fantastic and incredibly knowledgeable. I have learned what I had hoped, and more!
 3. Yes, no, yes. The week was very full, informationally speaking, and I can't imagine successfully learning even a drop more in five days.
 4. Yes, the classes followed closely the course description given on the RBS website. DW is very knowledgeable and highly experienced instructor.
 5. Yes! DW was able to take us through everything I expected, everything that I expected to be covered was, and more! Bonus stories about other famous bibliographers and booksellers were a joy.
 6. Yes. DW did exactly as promised.
 7. I did not think I would ever need/want to learn about collation, but DW explained it so well, and tailored interesting exercises for us to practice. I now have basic mastery of it! I feel at least secure about identifying different kinds of illustrations and wish we could have practiced/been tested on more examples, but I know that's difficult, and that there is an entire course devoted to illustration.
 8. I was expecting something more like history of the book and did not learn as much socio-cultural/historical context for the technologies discussed. However, I think this was just me misunderstanding what the course was about. The context was as intended.
 9. Very thorough overview. The only way I would really improve the program would be to maybe have 1-1 time with the instructor to go over individual collation or have an assignment marked up as homework.
 10. Plenty of content was covered—I scribbled forty pages of notes! Practical paper folding demos (that I could take back for students) would have been good.
 11. Yes. I think that on the final day, a sort of culminating project or test could be useful.
 12. I thought we would spend more time on collation and more examples, but that's okay.
- 6) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*
1. The knowledge acquired in this course will allow me to have more substantive conversations about early modern books, with members of my library's reference staff, rare book dealers, and members of the general public.

2. In my cataloging, as well as in my occasional reference and outreach work.
3. The knowledge I have gained in this course will have an immediate and lasting impact on my practice as a library administrator.
4. I hope to use them in my day-to-day work.
5. I will actually use this quite frequently in my real job working with rare books, collections development, and in technical services.
6. I leave with lots of new questions and ideas to pursue in my research—which I expected, and for which I am grateful—but also, more unexpectedly, with a desire to bring some of the pedagogical methods used here into my own teaching.
7. In my own archival research and pedagogical development of new courses, &c.
8. For history of the book classes. For understanding bindings and collection practices.
9. Every aspect of my work as a librarian will benefit from my time at RBS.
10. It will definitely impact library instruction sessions, the creation of public collection descriptions and curatorial statements, as well as approaches to booksellers.
11. Inform my purchasing and research.
12. Re-catalog, recognizing value in new period.

7) *Please briefly describe the intellectual level of the course. What sort of person might benefit the most from taking it?*

1. This course is quite rigorous, but the workload is manageable. Our class featured librarians, administrators, professors, and collectors, all of whom seemed to gain a great deal from our discussions.
2. The class was intellectually stimulating and difficult at times (collation and pagination!), but definitely accessible to anyone with some background in book history, or at least a great interest in it.
3. I came at this course having taken a graduate-level course in the history of the codex, but with very little additional background in rare books. I found it hit a perfect sweet spot: challenging enough to be engaging, but not overwhelming or frustrating in any way.
4. I believe librarians, archivists, faculty members and people involved in the book trade would benefit a lot from taking this course.
5. Moderate to high level—those working with rare books should see this as a “must-take” class. Booksellers, or book collectors, should also benefit from this very informed instructor!
6. This was an introductory course, aimed at students of different professions and backgrounds, but it was comprehensive and stimulating—a rare achievement.
7. Great for librarians and researchers (catalogers and archivists). It’s intellectually rigorous but approachable and open to all kinds of questions.
8. Rare book cataloguers, collectors, graduate students planning a dissertation on book history/materiality/printing of books 1500-1800. Not for researchers/catalogers focused on pamphlets, ephemera, or prints.
9. Very high intellectual level. Those who already have professional experience with books (i.e., librarians, academics, &c.) stand to benefit the most.
10. Experienced professionals with little letterpress period bibliographic description background. Curators with less book-making exposure.
11. Students need some basic knowledge, but the course is fairly introductory.

12. {no response}

8) *If applicable, what were the most original, powerful, or otherwise noteworthy educational moments in the course? Were there any “aha!” moments you’d like to share?*

1. After struggling through several tries, it was quite satisfying to finally succeed in providing the correct collational formula, signature statement, and pagination for an early printed book.
2. Understanding the physical labor behind typesetting and printing was eye-opening. Having the chance of setting a few lines of text ourselves and of maneuvering a printing press replica was the best way to learn.
3. The power of the hands-on nature of the class simply can’t be overstated. My learning this week was exponentially improved by the opportunity to study RBS’s collection materials up-close and in person.
4. The hands-on exercises and sessions were very helpful.
5. Some of the incredible rare items were stand-outs. Understanding how the publishing business has changed over centuries. DW’s stories are the best though.
6. {no response}
7. DW’s presentation of UVA SC materials was 1.5 hours of bibliophile heaven. The pieces were so well-selected to highlight many nuances and exceptions we had learned about in class, so being able to make those connections was extremely rewarding. I thank DW for this priceless experience!
8. A) DW’s explanation of value of bibliographical big dates on the last day of the course, and the example of Valencia plays; he provided both analysis and historical significance. B) Realizing that hand-press period books are handmade not machine made objects, and are highly individualized.
9. {no response}
10. The “tour” of SC material, including the close look at incunables, was great. And the “TV” provenance discussion. I get binding much better now, too.
11. I loved printing. The physicality was not something I had fully understood.
12. DW’s final description of his shelta project gave an admirable sense of the continued value and relevance of this kind of research.

9) *How could the course have been improved?*

1. The course was most exciting when we were engaging directly with rare books from RBS’s collections. By extension, it was least exciting when the focus shifted to lectures. The more that future incarnations of this course could emphasize hands-on analysis of texts over passive lecturing, the better it will be.
2. Not sure, it was very well organized as it is. {private response}
3. As a library professional, I would have appreciated a (perhaps optional) behind-the-scenes tour of UVA’s SC department and getting to meet more colleagues there. Doing signature folding, rather than watching, would have been more valuable.
4. No suggestions, it was perfect.
5. I can’t think of anything except a tour of SC stacks; that would benefit our class, I believe.
6. Given that this was a broad introduction to analytical and descriptive

- bibliography, a survey—however brief—of textual bibliography would have been very welcome.
7. Lessons on format and identifying bindings could be more energetic if the students were tasked with more hands-on work or problem sets where we ourselves answered questions and checked our answers.
 8. More discussion among the group. It is almost exclusively lecture-style. More cultural context/social context for the changes in practice and style over the three hundred-year period.
 9. See Q5.
 10. More hands on format work would help reinforce some learning objectives.
 11. Introduce catalog/description information earlier in work.
 12. More silent films. More time with RBS collection materials.
- 10) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? Would you recommend the course to others?*
1. Yes, on both counts.
 2. Yes, and definitely yes.
 3. With travel and accommodations, this course cost roughly double a typical national conference to attend. However, its impact on my professional practice will greatly exceed what I would expect from two conferences.
 4. Absolutely.
 5. Yes! Yes! There is truly no other resource or educational experience like RBS. This is quality instruction from true superstars of the book world. Very impressive, RBS!!
 6. I would certainly recommend this course to others, and will indeed do so.
 7. Yes.
 8. Yes, and yes.
 9. Yes, and yes.
 10. Yes, and yes.
 11. Yes. Lots of information.
 12. Absolutely.
- 11) *If your course made any trips outside of the classroom, do you feel that they were time well spent?*
1. As mentioned earlier, I enjoyed our trips outside the classroom, but in some cases I wonder if they should have been optional. One trip that was definitely worthwhile was our visit to UVA's SC. It was great to examine some of the university's most impressive volumes after we had learned more about all aspects of their construction.
 2. Yes! The SC field trip was impressive and offered great examples of the concepts we have been learning.
 3. Yes, very much so. They provided valuable experiential learning, while also breaking up the rhythm of the week nicely.
 4. Yes, especially the visit to SC.
 5. We went to SC for printing and viewing books. Wonderful opportunities you just don't get in online Library School.
 6. The visit to SC at UVA was very enjoyable and useful.

7. Yes, see Q8.
8. Yes-SC trip was great! So were the social events.
9. Yes. SC visit was great.
10. Yes, but a more thorough tour of SC stacks would have been good, and more time with the press.
11. N/A
12. Loved our time in UVA SC.

12) *If you attended any of our optional evening events, do you feel that they were a good use of your time? Were there any that were particularly important to your RBS experience? Any that you could have done without?*

1. I attended both the Monday night lecture and the Tuesday night exhibit tour. Both were extremely interesting, but I wish we had slightly more time to peruse the exhibition before being asked to leave the Rotunda.
2. The RBS lecture by Emile Schrijves was phenomenal. The description workshop for students of this course was crucial in practicing principles of bibliographical description.
3. I could have done without the exhibit opening, though it offered a nice variation.
4. I found the evening workshop on collation very useful.
5. N/A. All my classmates enjoyed various things.
6. I had to miss the Monday lecture owing to other commitments. The exhibition was very interesting.
7. They were okay, but due to the rigor of our schedules and limits to our energy level, in retrospect I should have skipped some to rest up for the next day.
8. The evening events were excellent and allowed for important peer socializing. (I attended the lecture, dinner, and Booksellers' Night, but not the comic book exhibit.)
9. Yes. I particularly enjoyed the talk on Jewish books.
10. They were important and I enjoyed them. Guest lectures and bonding are key I think.
11. Yes. I liked having the option. Without these, there is nothing happening in the evening.
12. {no response}

13) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*

1. Do not be discouraged if some of the course material seems confusing. The rules take a while to learn and a lifetime to master.
2. Be prepared for an intensive week of work that will prove very rewarding.
3. Do not plan or try to get any other work done during this week—it is an all-consuming marathon, so set your out-of-office reply and let everyone know you'll just be unavailable.
4. I would recommend it.
5. Thank you MFS for another fabulous speech on Sunday night. Always a highlight!!
6. {no response}
7. Pace yourself for the long days and bring your energy! Each lesson is capacious

and well worth the effort. The amount of content covered in five days is phenomenal.

8. This course is intended for catalogers/librarians/researchers who are interested in micro-level analysis of book objects, how they are put together, how to tell differences between multiple copies, and how to write a bibliographical description. It is not intended as a history of the book class, and is not focused on historicist macro-analysis.
9. Do it. You only stand to gain from RBS.
10. Do the reading, and supplement a bit.
11. {no response}
12. Descriptive bibliography isn't as impossible as it seems; if you will be cataloging hand press books, take the original course, "G-10: Introduction to the Principles of Bibliographical Description." If you won't be cataloging or describing hand press books, this is a fantastic introduction.

14) *If you had to sum up your RBS experience with a single sentence, phrase, or haiku, what would you say?*

1. Bibliography is not for the faint of heart,
But taking course G-20 provides a solid start.
2. A delightful and stimulating experience.
3. {no response}
4. DW's class was a perfect overview of the description and analysis of printed books in the hand-press period and the design and structure of the book in general.
5. There is no other library/book learning experience to match this.
6. Eye-opening—a must for any scholar of the early modern period, and many other, too.
7. A transformative learning environment. Amazing educators and unparalleled teaching materials!
8. I love old books
I love how they smell
On how many are unknown to us
We'd better now dwell.
Actually that's a pretty depressing poem. The course was excellent!
9. {no response}
10. Hopes, fears...collation
Describing precious objects
Stories better told.
11. Illuminating, intensive, specified.
12. {no response}

Student Data

Number of respondents: 12 (of 12)

How did you arrange for time off to attend this course?

My institution/employer gave me professional leave time: 6 (50%)

My institution/employer did not give me professional leave; I used paid or vacation days:
1 (8.33%)
I am self-employed, and can arrange my own schedule: 1 (8.33%)
I am a student or non-year-round employee, with a more flexible summer schedule:
4 (33.33%)

Who paid your RBS tuition costs?

I paid 100% myself: 1 (8.33%)
My institution/employer paid 100%: 6 (50%)
I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive 100%: 4 (33.33%)
I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive part; my institution/employer paid the rest:
1 (8.33%)

Who paid your RBS housing expenses?

I paid 100% myself: 4 (33.33%)
My institution/employer paid 100%: 6 (50%)
I stayed with friends/family, or stayed in my own home and commuted: 1 (8.33%)
My situation does not fit any of the options above: 1 (8.33%)

Who paid your RBS travel expenses?

I paid 100% myself: 5 (41.66%)
My institution/employer paid 100%: 6 (50%)
My situation does not fit any of the options above: 1 (8.33%)

*Which of the following **best** describes your current occupation?*

Library disciplines:

Archivist: 1 (8.33%)
Cataloger/metadata librarian: 2 (16.66%)
Library administrator: 2 (16.66%)
Special collections librarian: 1 (8.33%)
Subject specialist/bibliographer: 1 (8.33%)

Professional educator:

Assistant professor: 2 (16.66%)

Book trades:

Antiquarian bookseller: 1 (8.33%)

Other occupations/vocations:

Book collector: 1 (8.33%)
Post-doctoral fellow/researcher/scholar: 1 (8.33%)