text should also seek out Guillaume de Laubier and Jacques Bosser's *The Most Beautiful Libraries in the World* (2003).

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Richard-Gabriel Rummonds. *Nineteenth-Century Printing Practices and the Iron Handpress*. New Castle, Del. and London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 2004. 2 vols. xxxvii, 482; xxxviii–lviii, 483–1051 pp.; US \$150/GB £ 85 (hardcover). ISBN 1584560886 (USA); 0712348808 (UK). US \$99.95 (paperback). ISBN 1584561009.

This set is, in a sense, an appendix to Rummonds's 1998 manual, *Printing on the Iron Handpress*. He had originally intended to include an extensive bibliography of historical sources in that book, but the list was deemed too much for an already exhaustive work of 470 pages, and dropped. In what probably was a typical response from a man whose life work is characterized by devotion to precision and detail, Rummonds developed the bibliography into not one, but two volumes that compare, contrast, and comment on every detail of printing with a handpress. Through comparing nineteenth-century practises to those of previous centuries, Rummonds creates a lively survey of the business of printing that is significant for both its breadth and depth.

Richard-Gabriel Rummonds was born in 1931 and raised in the United States. The story of how his interest in printing and books took him to Italy in the late 1960s probably is an interesting one, and may be told in the autobiography he is writing. (A renowned chef, the book will include, among other things, some of his favourite recipes.) He established an international reputation for the limited editions he printed on a handpress and published under the imprint Plain Wrapper Press during the 1970s and 1980s, and during a few years in the mid 1980s, while he was teaching at the University of Alabama, as Ex Ophidia. Although Rummonds's reputation grew primarily from his virtuosity as a handpress printer, he was very much a contemporary publisher in both content and design. His dedication to the handpress was not the stillborn affectation of days gone, but to a tool with unique abilities for letterpress printing. He was not, however, blind or indifferent to the handpress's history, and his quest

for technical excellence led him to search for any knowledge and guidance available from centuries when the handpress was publishing's engine. Only a lifetime spent researching and comparing sources of technical information could have produced a work as exhaustive as the new set.

Starting with Moxon's *Mechanik Exercises* (1683) – the acknowledged first printing manual – Rummonds draws on about three dozen manuals published to the end of the nineteenth century. (His study encompasses only English-language manuals – even a perfectionist must draw the line somewhere.) Working from these sources, Rummonds's book generally follows Moxon's structure for the contents, starting with the physical set-up of a printing office, and concluding, 28 chapters later with "The Business of Printing." Other than these starting and concluding chapters, the content is of a technical nature, such as detailed descriptions for assembling various presses, or remedies for soothing a compositor's sore fingers (parboil digits before bed, repeat in morning if still sore). All are accompanied by hundreds of illustrations. Each chapter addresses a specific activity. For example in Chapter 6 – "Covering the Tympan and the Frisket" – this activity is broken down into discrete steps, and specific instructions are extracted from the various source manuals and presented in chronological order of their publication. Each is preceded by succinct comments from Rummonds, providing historical connections, elaborations or comparisons with other sources.

To digest and retain all that the two volumes contain in a single push would rob the work of much of the pleasure it offers students of printing, publishing, and technology history. The front matter – foreword, preface, acknowledgements, and introduction – alone offer a concise summary of the history of printing manuals, and some insight into the task Rummonds was setting himself with his initial, innocent attempt at compiling a bibliography. The book could – and perhaps should – be read repeatedly, each time delving a little deeper into the details, moving up and down the process chain from whichever chapter most immediately appeals. Another strategy would be to begin by skimming the chapters, reading only Rummonds's brief commentaries that precede each reading/extract. These generally put the specifics that follow in some broader context, and often highlight similarities or differences with other texts. Or you could just flip through, looking at the many excellent illustrations culled from the various manuals.

Rummonds readily acknowledges his inability to call a manuscript finished, for there is always something that can be added or made better. The stamina and patience this kind of obsessiveness requires are traits that probably contributed to his success as a handpress printer. They also are traits that allowed him not only to assemble a library of source materials that spans four centuries, but more importantly, to retain all of the (often contradictory) minutiae for later comparison. This is one of the new book's strengths: the brief commentaries that Rummonds uses to introduce each of the extracts. His experience as a printer allows him to synthesize all of this material, and comment in ways relevant to both the contemporary printer and the historian.

Anyone practising or interested in relief printmaking will find the book (volume two in particular) a valuable source of ideas and information. The chapter on black ink alone should be required reading for all novice printers: "The color of the work can be increased only by the quality of the ink; the better the quality of the ink the more time it will take the pressman to work it, and the better may be the paper; it is impossible to work fine ink upon bad paper" (T.C. Hansard, 488). There's a chapter on printing in gold, bronzing, and embossing: "There is no trouble in printing in gold; it is within the power of any typographer" (T.S. Houghton, 634). There is also a chapter filled with tricks for printing engravings and blocks: "Week by week there is a greater demand for men who, to their other acquirements, add that of being able to make ready a fine wood-cut; and when found they are always well paid" (J. Southward, 667).

From a production perspective, the book adopts the same format, design, and layout as *Printing on the Iron Handpress*. This approach works fine, and there's logic in making a uniform series of the books. Though they are Smythe-sewn, the volumes' bulk makes the paperbound copies of questionable durability.

Asked shortly before the set's publication about his goal in undertaking the project, Rummonds replied, "I feel that one of this book's most valuable contributions to the study of historical printing is its annotated bibliography of pre-twentieth-century printers' manuals." But, without disagreeing with him, that's just 67 pages in a set that ends on page 1,051. In addition to being a practical resource, Rummonds's book is an excellent study of how a civilization-changing technology was spread, promoted, hobbled, developed, and exploited.

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