Research Proposal
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Scholars transcribe. Every day, at every stage in our research, we engage with the practice of replicative inscription: of transferring a text from one page to another, from one medium to another. We transcribe interviews, copy printed passages, replicate archival documents, produce critical editions of historical texts. Transcription, which I define as the sequential duplication of a text across media, has rarely been given the same scholarly attention as the more exotic practices of translation. This is because transcription offers the promise of the perfect copy, that word-for-word precision so elusive to translators. Yet transcription, too, carries interpretive weight. We choose what to transcribe and we choose how to inscribe it, imposing orthography, chirography, and context onto the replicated text.

My research is concerned with the role that transcription plays in shaping historical memory, focusing on the documentary record of early colonial New Spain. The early decades of Spanish colonization were characterized by the complex transcriptions of the contact zone: the movement between pictographic, oral, and alphabetic text. My project, "Unreadable Books: Early Colonial Mexican Documents in Circulation," considers the long history of textual replication in the context of these sixteenth-century textual objects. Moving across borders and historical periods, it considers the translational aspects of transcriptive labor; how these practices have been adapted to differing historical and geographical conditions; and how these changing conditions have shaped the meaning of each transplanted text. By considering the transliteration of sixteenth-century New Spain, the transatlantic copying of the nineteenth century, and the automatic transcription of new digitization projects, it shows that through the assertion of accuracy and authenticity, transcription can serve as a vector of colonization. A transnational, translingual history of this practice reveals the slow processes of global change that underlie the digital transformations of the present day.

As a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I will revise "Unreadable Books" for publication by shifting my attention toward the circulation of historical texts, considering how mechanisms of transcription engage with marketplace consumption, collection, and repatriation. This work will benefit from the relationship between comparative literature and folklore studies at Wisconsin, which parallels my own methodology and academic trajectory. It will also benefit from the research in digital scholarship conducted by the Working Group for Digital Inquiry.

Past Research
My dissertation research developed out of two projects that focus on the problems posed by the digitization of historical printed books. Digital platforms offer new opportunities for scholarly editing, as I argue in my article, "Representing the Social History of Early Modern Printed Objects" (*Scholarly Editing* 2016), but the opportunities posed by digital tools are limited by their design. Tools designed specifically for the early modern period remain scarce. The NEH-funded "Reading the First Books" project, for which I served as research assistant and project manager, addresses these concerns by extending Ocular, a tool for the automatic transcription of early modern printed books. This interdisciplinary project is designed to improve Optical Character Recognition software to handle the radical multilinguality and orthographic variation

of early colonial books and to provide new transcriptive features useful for book historians, including modernized spelling and language tags.

Transcription tools like Ocular draw on information about natural (human) language to build predictive models for transcribed texts. An examination of these models reveals how research agendas and information access inform the accuracy of the transcribed text. In an article forthcoming in *Digital Humanities Quarterly,* I consider how, in the *Primeros Libros* case, Ocular interacts with both historical and modern relationships among English, Spanish, Latin, and Nahuatl. I argue that machine reading is part of a longer history of the transcription of historical texts shaped by both capitalism and colonialism. By understanding this historical context, we can see more clearly the implications of our own transcription practices. Furthermore, by understanding the mechanisms of transcription, we can build tools that more successfully reflect our scholarly and ethical intentions in producing digital editions of historical texts.

Current Research

Both the "Archaeology of a Book" and the "Reading the First Books" projects deal with the mechanisms of reproduction that facilitate access to the documentary record of early colonial Spain. My dissertation, which I will defend in the spring of 2016, argues that these mechanisms have long played — and will continue to play — a crucial role in how history is read and understood.

My dissertation takes as its point of departure the commonplace association between the first decades of print production and the first century of digital technology, which I refer to as the print-digital analogy. This association has motivated the study of book history at least since Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962). By thinking about how these parallel mechanisms of textual reproduction have informed the study of historical texts, I suggest that it is through the often-overlooked act of copying that technology and history make their mark on the modern page. By taking the documentary record of early colonial New Spain as my object of study, I further argue that by reorienting the print-digital analogy towards Mexico City, we gain a critical understanding of the role colonial history has played in shaping the historical record. To make this argument, I use a structure that moves iteratively through historical and technological frameworks as it explores the themes of circulation, transcription, return, and representation.

The first part of the dissertation focuses on the production and circulation of New Spain's documentary record. Chapter One, "Collection," describes the movement of colonial printed books into private collections and public libraries in the United States. This work develops from archival studies by Ann Laura Stoler, Kathryn Burns, and others, which show how national colonial archives shape the historical record. Because printed books exist in duplicate, however, they can simultaneously exist within and beyond these national histories, a condition that requires a unique approach to archival and bibliographic study. Focusing on the development of colonial Mexicana collections at the John Carter Brown Library and the Benson Latin American Collection, I illustrate an archival methodology for the study of historical replicates that moves beyond the limits of the nation as an organizing entity. I received a Helen Watson Buckner Fellowship from the John Carter Brown Library to support research for this chapter.

Like printed books, manuscript documents have long archival lives in replicate, fostered by the processes of transcription that allow texts to move between archives, collectors, and historians. This is illustrated in Chapter Two, "Transcription," in which the case of automatic transcription described above is used to demonstrate how new technologies and historical

contingencies collide to transform historical texts. Far from being a new story, however, transcription haunts the history of New Spain, from Cabeza de Vaca's *Relaciones* to the Franciscan efforts to transliterate Nahua histories in both pictographic and alphabetic scripts. Transcriptions are present, too, in historical archives and libraries, where a sixteenth-century manuscript may appear as an eighteenth-century manuscript copy, a nineteenth-century imprint, or a modern photographic facsimile. This chapter seeks to tell the long history of the transcription of documents from early colonial New Spain, arguing that mechanisms of transcription inform both the documentary record and the historiography we use to understand it. I am currently revising an article based on this chapter, "In Spite of the Hieroglyphics."

The second part of the dissertation focuses on the intentional use of reproductive technologies to reshape our relationship with colonial history. Chapter Three, "Return," explores how digital and mechanical reproduction can facilitate the repatriation, or return, of historical documents to affiliated communities. Considering three very different kinds of repatriation projects, this chapter engages with debates about the ethical responsibilities and practical challenges of heritage management, from James Cuno's *Who Owns Antiquity* to the extensive digital projects led by Kim Christen Withey. Through case studies based in the city of Cholula, Mexico, the chapter reveals shifting definitions for the categories of artifact, property, nation, and ownership that frame the discussion of repatriation, and explores how those categories fracture across national borders and legal frameworks.

Chapter Four, "Refashioning," considers the literary reworking of the documentary artifacts that are the subject of the dissertation, focusing on the twin processes of reproduction and refashioning at play in imprints from the Taller Martín Pescador (Kingfisher Workshop). Operated by Juan Pascoe, the Taller originated in Mexico City as the press of choice for the experimental poets associated with the "infrarrealista" movement described by Roberto Bolaño in his novel *Los detectives salvajes*. After a musical hiatus, the press reappeared in Michoacán, where it began to specialize in the reproduction of early colonial documents. Using a methodology drawn from bibliographical practice, this chapter shows how these historical artifacts have been refashioned for aesthetic purposes and what that may mean for the way we imagine the historical artifact. It argues that as scholars engage the reproductive experiments of eLiterature and digital humanities, they must include the printing press as a powerful nostalgic mode. This research is supported by the Bibliographical Society of America - Pine Tree Foundation Fellowship in Hispanic Bibliography.

Taken as a whole, "Unreadable Books" attempts a rethinking of the so-called "digital age" that takes seriously its colonial roots. Each chapter serves as a reminder that colonial history is book history is digital history. The larger question that this dissertation addresses, however, has to do with the narratives that shape our engagement with both print history and the digital present. How has reproduction — and the associated processes of circulation, acquisition, and destruction — informed the stories we tell about the history of modern textuality, and how do these stories, in turn, inform our understanding of the textual present? The desires awakened by historical documents interact with financial, political, and intellectual factors to shape access to, and memory of, the documentary past.

Future Research
As a fellow at the University of Wisconsin, I will focus on revising my dissertation towards a publishable book. The process of writing the dissertation has both spawned new projects and suggested ways to refine and extend my claims about textual transmission. My preliminary work

in Cholula opened new avenues for research focusing on the challenges of community-centered repatriation in a diverse city with competing conceptions of history and culture, and conflicting hopes for the community's future. Sustained work there will set the groundwork for a comparative project that explores more fully the role of U.S. institutions in transnational processes of repatriation. This research has parallels in the transcultural and transnational archival projects of Christine Garlough and Janet Gilmore at UW-Madison.

This focus on circulation is also central to my continuing digital scholarship work, which I am conducting in collaboration with the developers of the Ocular transcription system. We believe that Ocular's statistical model can do more than simply transcribe a document; it can also learn new information about the material history of printed texts. As we continue to extend Ocular's utility, I am helping to design experiments that will improve Ocular's use in book history, focusing on the recognition and analysis of historical type. This project has the potential to change the way we think about and evaluate the circulation of mechanisms for textual production, adding new data to our understanding of the history of the printed book. This project will bring a global, multilingual perspective to the critical agenda of the Working Group for Digital Inquiry at UW-Madison, while benefiting from the group's methodological grounding in iterative analysis and visualization.

My research in transnational literary circulation, digital scholarship, and archival studies will inform the courses that I hope to teach as a fellow. I find that methods for digital scholarship are best taught through thematically structured courses; to this end, I would like to teach courses on global digital humanities oriented around the themes of archival studies, Latin American literature, and global Anglophone literature. These courses will introduce digital and archival methods for scholarly research, while offering diverse perspectives on the implications of these methods for our understanding of literature and culture across borders of class, race, ethnicity, and nationality.