

Social Hour for Australia's Scholars of Book History and Publishing Studies

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This themed section of *Antipodes: A Global Journal of Australian and New Zealand Literature* collects articles about book history and publishing studies in Australia and New Zealand.

Book history, which had its beginnings in France with the *Annales* school of historians, is a field devoted to studying the creation, dissemination, and reception of texts. From its geographically circumscribed origins, the discipline “spread to England and Germany in the 1960s and 1970s and began to make its appearance in [the United States], as a formally recognized field of study, in the late 1970s” (West). Until the mid-1980s, however, there remained two distinct book history methodologies: the French school, which examined “the impact of the book on society” and culture, and the Anglo-American school, which was “primarily bibliographical, and concerned with the book as a physical object” (Antonetti 20). In other words, even though book history as a field of study began in France and expanded outwards from there, it evolved into something slightly different when it was taken up by Anglo-American scholars. Of course, both were still studying the creation, dissemination, and reception of texts—just different aspects of this subject matter.

This distinction between the French and Anglo-American schools has diminished over time. Nonetheless, it has left a legacy. For example, Australia and New Zealand have only one scholarly journal devoted to book history: *Script & Print: Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand*, which has been consistently publishing issues since 1970. *Script & Print* has a mandate in the area of physical bibliography—the “technical analysis of individual books or editions characteristic of bibliography” (Finkelstein and McCleery 1). This mandate hinders its engagement with matters foreign to physical bibliography but comfortably accommodated within the critical framework espoused by the French school of book history. Consequently, scholars of book history in Australia and New Zealand who work in the French tradition have been forced to look for publication opportunities in international journals with no connection to Australasia or Australasian culture. Alternatively, their articles can be found like far-flung islands in the sea of an Australian or New Zealand journal of media or literary studies.

Furthermore, *Script & Print's* devotion to physical bibliography means that it has remained relatively isolated from one of the most exciting developments in book history in Australia and New Zealand. The last couple decades have seen a remarkable growth in “scholarly research into contemporary publishing . . . alongside the growth in universities of largely vocational training programs for aspiring book industry professionals in the 1990s and 2000s” (Weber and Mannion 116). Publishing studies is a sub-field of book history that focuses on scholarly research into publishing, including both historical and contemporary examples. Australia and New Zealand have experienced a significant growth in scholars with an interest in publishing studies, especially contemporary publishing studies.

This themed section draws together a diverse range of articles about book history and publishing studies in Australia and New Zealand, with an emphasis on social history. By bringing these articles together in a themed section of a journal devoted to Australasian literature and culture, they have been placed in conversation with one another, thus capturing a unique moment in Australasian cultural history.

For example, “The Miles Franklin Literary Award: Investigating the Value of a Local Prize on the Global Stage” by Airlie Lawson and Catriona Mills investigates Australia's most prestigious literary prize and its connection to the licensing of international rights. Thus, it explores Australia's status in the international literary field, or the relationship between local and global literary value. “Australian Authors in the House of William Morrow: Writing Good Commercial Fiction for the American Market” by Roger Osborne and David Carter traces the careers of Australian authors Morris West, Jon Cleary, and George Johnston, in order to investigate the print culture networks that brought their novels to an American audience for good commercial fiction. Clearly, these first two articles are speaking to similar issues, even though the former is focused on the period from 2000 through 2020, while the latter article is concerned with the imprints associated with William Morrow and Company in the 1950s and 1960s. In other words, Osborne and Carter sketch a historical precedent for the contemporary licensing of international rights explored by Lawson and Mills.

Meanwhile, in “Measuring ‘Diversity’ in Australian Publishing: An Overview and a Proposal,” Jodie Lea Martire surveys the data-collection methods currently being used to capture information about Australia's “writers of difference.” Martire furthermore shows how the improved provision, collection, and monitoring of “diversity” data—especially metadata—could enable greater recognition for excluded voices in Australian publishing. This article is in

conversation with Julia C. Rodwell and Anna Welch’s “Aura and Access: Towards a New Methodology for Book Exhibitions in the Digital Realm,” which also considers the potential of book-related data. More specifically, Rodwell and Welch identify types of online exhibitions of rare books, define their points of difference to physical exhibitions, and demonstrate the potential of online exhibitions to facilitate access and interpretation. When these two articles are placed in conversation with each other, it leads one to wonder about the potential for using the kinds of data visualizations and data analysis detailed by Rodwell and Welch—but instead of applying them to rare books, apply them to books by Australia’s diverse literary creators. What new insights might this facilitate? It’s an intriguing question because it asks the respondent to consider not just the collection of book-related data (which is Martire’s focus) but also its presentation and subsequent interpretation (which is Rodwell and Welch’s focus).

The final two articles in this themed section of *Antipodes* are both concerned with relationships between the margins and the center. In “Peripatetic Printers of Early Nineteenth-Century Australia: The Interconnected Stories of Howe, Bent, and Fawkner,” Jocelyn Hargrave writes about the movement of printers between Tasmania and the Australian mainland. She argues that this movement is representative of localized sites of contestation between the imposed imperial center and the colonial periphery, which made possible the emergence of localized voices. Brigid L. Magner and Emily Potter are also concerned with the “periphery,” but whereas Hargrave focuses on Tasmania in the early nineteenth century, Magner and Potter focus on the Mallee region of northwest Victoria in the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. In their article, “Imagining Mallee Readers: Literary Infrastructures of a Regional Community,” they analyze the “literary infrastructures” made available to Mallee readers over time. They observe that “there is a tension evident . . . between the kinds of works made available by invested infrastructures, particularly from the city, and what Mallee residents actually wanted to read.”

Clearly, there is much to commend the articles collected in this themed section of *Antipodes* about book history and publishing studies in Australia and New Zealand. In both subject matter and methodology, it is a diverse and innovative compendium. For readers with an interest in Australasian literature and culture—whether they are newcomers to the fields of book history and publishing studies or well-established scholars—there promises to be multiple points of interest and engagement.

Works Cited

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