

FROM FIRST TO LAST: A FEW NOTES FROM SHARP 2018 CONFERENCE IN SYDNEY

Arūnas Gudinavičius | Vilnius University, Faculty of Communication,
Digital Media Laboratory
Universiteto str. 3, LT-01513 Vilnius, Lithuania
E-mail: arunas.gudinavicius@kf.vu.lt

This was the first time that the annual conference of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) has been held outside Europe and North America in its 25-year history. The conference took place at Western Sydney University on its historic Parramatta South campus, in the multicultural heart of Western Sydney. Parramatta was the first inland European settlement in Australia, founded the same year as Sydney in 1788. Aboriginal clans had occupied this land for more than 40,000 years. The theme of the conference “From First to Last Texts, Creators, Readers, Agents” acknowledges book history’s expansion worldwide across disciplines, cultures and languages. The three day long conference was intended to be an interdisciplinary multilingual destination for scholars, students, industry, practitioners, and all lovers of things bookish, embracing domains such as digital humanities and digital history as well as building connections with publishing studies, information history, reading studies, cultural studies, art and design history. Presentations covered a wide historical period: from pre-Codex, incunabula and medieval to present centuries. 53 panels on different topics were held with more than 150 presentations included. The main topics were: theories and approaches to book history, books as objects, covers and bindings, unconventional books, periodicals, authorship, reviewing, editing and reading, children’s literature, promoting ‘Global Modernity’ through print, visual and print cultures, approaches to archives and collections, twenty-first-century publishing, digital / audio reading and digital texts and contexts.

The conference started with a cocktail opening reception at the iconic State Library of New South Wales on Monday 9th July 2018. The library has exceptionally rich collections of Australian literature and manuscript material relating to Australia, so the participants were invited to take part in an excursion around

the library. They had a chance to see the oldest book (New South Wales General Standing Orders, 1802) and newspaper (Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser, Vol. 1, 1803) printed in Australia.

The main conference program was held at Western Sydney University's historic Parramatta South Campus from 10th to 12th July 2018. The conference started with greetings from SHARP President Sydney Shep (Victoria University of Wellington) followed by the first keynote speaker Richard Nile (James Cook University) who examined print culture, the censor and the implicated reader in Australia, making a few concluding observations about contemporary reading, moral panics and the web in the twenty first century. After a refreshment break eight parallel sessions started running, followed by one more keynote speaker Katherine Bode (Australian National University). She presented discoveries and investigations on fiction in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Australian newspapers, which demonstrates the capacity of digital collections and modelling methods to transform existing understandings of digital humanities topic.

SHARP 2018 conference was attended by three participants from Vilnius University. One of them, Arūnas Gudinaičius from Digital Media Lab at Faculty of Communication, started the first parallel session Covers and Bindings with his research presentation on the preferences given by readers to book cover colors across genders and age groups. After the lunch, another representa-



First book printed in Australia: New South Wales General Standing Orders, 1802



First newspaper printed in Australia: Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser, Vol. 1, 1803

tive of Faculty of Communication, Andrius Šuminas talked about the historical development and perspective of children's books publishing in Lithuania in the Children's Literature session.

The third representative, Paulius Subačius, from Faculty of Philology delivered a presentation on Book as Initiation, Workshop and Revenge: authorial use of 'The Voices of Spring' on Editing and Editions parallel session on the second day of the conference.

Despite the fact that most of the speakers came from North America and Australia itself, a few more speakers from Europe made themselves noticeable with interesting presentations. Claire Squires (University of Stirling) with her co-authors talked about constructing the purpose of research about twenty-first-century publishing, Alison Baverstock (Kingston University) presented reports from a large-scale research project into the significant influences on those who take up writing later in life, arguing what makes a writer? Aleksandra Fedorowicz-Jackowska from Polish Academy of Sciences talked about early photographically illustrated books in the Polish lands.

Keynote speaker Zhiqiang Zhang (Nanjing University) finished a long second day with his speech on culture identity, Western influence, and the changes in characters' layout in Chinese books. The third (and the last) day of the conference was started by the keynote speaker David Carter (University of Queensland) on Australian books and authors in the American marketplace.

Every evening after the presentations, new book launches took place: Helen Bones, *The Expatriate Myth: New Zealand writers and the colonial world* (Otago University Press, New Zealand, 2018); Claire Squires, Millicent Weber, *Literary Festivals and Contemporary Book Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom, 2018); Hart Cohen, *The Strehlow Archive: Explorations in Old and New Media* (Routledge, London, 2018) and more.

More about SHARP 2018 can be found Online: <http://sharp2018.sydney>. The next Annual Conference of SHARP will take place at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA, July 15 to 19, 2019.