Along Gender Lines: 
Reassessing Relationships between Australian Novels, Gender and Genre from 1930 to 2006

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In 1998, Elizabeth Webby professed a widely accepted account of contemporary Australian literary history. During the 1970s, Australian literature emerged from a period of ‘masculinist’ (13) conservatism into a ‘golden age’, manifested in a marked increase in ‘Australian publishing and the promotion of Australian literature’ (16), and the proliferation of authors other than White Anglo-Celtic Males or ‘WACMs’ (17). By the late 1990s, however, the combined impact of ‘economic rationalism’ and ‘globalisation’ (17) had rendered this golden age ‘well and truly over’ (16). According to Webby, ‘WACMs’ lost their dominance on literature courses and publishers’ lists, but ‘reasserted control via the doctrine of economic rationalism at the political level’ (17).

But is this accepted – and gendered – account of contemporary Australian literary history accurate? I reconsider this history from a quantitative perspective, drawing on AustLit database records to ask simple but broad questions about the relationships between gender, genre and Australian novels from 1930 to 2006.¹ What number and proportion of Australian novel titles published during this time were by wo/men? What genre were these novels? What trends, if any, are revealed? Such questions have been asked and answered in the past. But the answers have been derived predominantly from analyses of individual (usually canonical) texts rather than data-rich, empirical research. Work in print culture and book history poses an increasing challenge to the tendency of literary historians to make broad claims about their field based on readings of a small selection of texts.² This essay responds to that challenge, concentrating on the implications of a

¹ This study proceeds from a previous analysis of gender trends in the authorship of Australian novels from 1830 to 1930 (Bode, ‘Graphically’).
² In the Australian context such work includes Tim Dolin’s analysis of nineteenth-century Australian reading communities, Mark Davis’s study of Nielsen BookScan sales data, and recent collections like Making Books (edited by David Carter and Anne Galligan) and the A History of the Book in Australia series (Volume 2, edited by Martyn Lyon and John Arnold, and Volume 3, edited by Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright).
quantitative reassessment of Australian literary history for feminist understandings of that history.

The results of this study at times affirm, but also challenge and reposition, accepted ideas about Australian literary and cultural history. An analysis of the gender of authors of Australian novels confirms previous critical perceptions of the field as male dominated from the 1930s to the 1960s. But an assessment of the genres of published novels indicates that this period should be understood as two distinct eras and forms of male domination: the first characterised by male-authored literary fiction, the second, by male-authored genre fiction. Scholars in Australian literary studies have largely failed to recognise this second era due to a focus on select literary texts. This focus is also responsible for misrepresentations of the 1970s as a time of massive and unprecedented growth in the publication of Australian novels. Although the number of such novels declined in the 1970s, the proportion of titles by Australian women clearly increased from this time. This trend is routinely attributed to the impact of second-wave feminism. However, an analysis of the novel genres women published during this time allows us to query whether the impact of feminism has been over-stated. The results of this study will not be applicable to every Australian author or novel at the individual level. Rather, identification of trends offers insight into the broad impact of gender and genre on the publication of Australian novels, and provides a framework that allows subsequent explorations of individual texts, authors or themes to be more aware of dynamics influencing the field as a whole.

I collected the data for this study from AustLit in February 2008 by requesting records of all novel titles published from 1930 to 2006. I then conducted individual searches of all authors listed in these results, using AustLit's 'gender' category to determine whether authors were male or female. In some cases, such as when AustLit did not identify an author's gender and I was unable to discover it through further research, I listed the novel in the 'unknown' gender category.3 I also determined which of the titles in my results were listed in AustLit as genre fiction (for instance, crime, fantasy or romance). From the resulting dataset I removed all texts categorised by AustLit as 'Non-AustLit Novels', as well as the non-Australian novels included in AustLit's 'Banned in Australia' subset.

As with any dataset, the results of this study are approximate. It is probable that AustLit does not contain every Australian novel title published between 1930 and 2006 and, as AustLit is regularly updated, the results I present may not be identical to current database records. Nevertheless, the dataset I have collected is certainly large enough and full enough to render the impact of small omissions and errors statistically negligible,4 and thus to enable analysis of trends

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3 I also used the unknown gender category when a novel was written by a man and a woman or by a wo/man and an author whose gender I could not discover. Authors who employed pseudonyms are categorised in accordance with their 'gender' listing in AustLit. Accordingly, these results do not differentiate female authors who used male pseudonyms from the general category of 'female' author, or vice versa.

4 It includes over 15,000 novel titles published from 1930 to 2006.
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in the authorship of Australian novels. Moreover, the random nature of errors and omissions in AustLit means broad trends will remain constant regardless of minor changes. The viability of this study is further supported by the relative completeness of records on the Australian novels (compared to other forms) in AustLit.

Figure 1 depicts the number of novel titles by Australian men and women published from 1930 to 2006. Figure 2 displays the same results in five-year moving averages (a format that evens out any exceptional peaks or plunges to display overall gender trends more clearly). Apart from a lull at the end of

Figure 1: Australian Novel Titles, 1930 to 2006

Figure 2: Australian Novel Titles, 1930 to 2006

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the 1930s and start of the 1940s (coinciding with World War II), the number of novel titles by men increased steadily through these decades. The number of novel titles by women also increased, but overall growth was uneven, and much less significant. Accordingly, through the 1930s and 1940s the proportion of Australian novel titles by men increased steadily: from approximately 60% in the 1920s, to 64% in the 1930s and 71% in the 1940s.\(^5\)

Quantitative analysis of the gender of authors of Australian novels therefore supports critical assessments of the 1930s and 1940s as a male-dominated (or in Webby’s terms, a ‘masculinist’) era in Australian literary history. In critical histories, the masculinisation of Australian literary culture in these decades is commonly attributed to the growing dominance of literary nationalism and intellectualism in constructions of Australian literature.\(^6\) The standard opposition of modernist literary discourse – the privileging of serious, masculinised literature over frivolous, feminised fiction – is frequently identified as intrinsic to the masculinisation of Australian literary culture at this time.\(^7\)

While quantitative results concur with qualitative assessments of Australian literary history in the 1930s and 1940s, they deviate from, and at times directly challenge, critical arguments about subsequent decades, particularly the 1960s and 1970s. In the established account of Australian literary history, the 1970s are identified as a ‘turning point in Australian writing’ (Goldsworthy 131), the beginning, as Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman contend in The New Diversity, of ‘an immediate and dramatic increase in the production of Australian fiction’ (2), especially Australian novels (3). The iconic, and effectively unchallenged, position of the 1970s as the ‘golden age of Australian publishing and the promotion of Australian literature’ (Webby 16), is ascribed to a number of factors, chief among them being the election of the Whitlam government in 1972, and the increased funding for universities and the arts, and ‘easing of censorship restrictions’ (Goldsworthy 131), that ensued.\(^8\)

\(^5\) The correspondingly diminishing proportion of novels by Australian women justifies – numerically at least – Miles Franklin’s despair, at the end of her life, regarding the absence of a new ‘generation of young women’ writers (Modjeska 2).

\(^6\) See David Carter (267–70).

\(^7\) See Richard Nile and David Walker on the distinction critics like the Palmers drew between masculinised literary achievement and feminised literary tastes. Susan Sheridan has documented the ways in which many Australian women novelists (particularly critically successful ones) actively affirmed and identified with this dominant construction of Australian literature – viewing themselves as ‘serious writers with a social responsibility to national cultural development’ (Sheridan 155). Elsewhere I argue that the critical focus on the successful, ‘serious’ women writers of the 1920s, 1930s and, to a lesser extent, the 1940s, has tended to obscure the increasing male dominance of the novel field as a whole from 1920 (Bode ‘Graphically’, 445).

\(^8\) Other factors identified as influential in the transformation of Australian literature during the 1970s include: the consolidation and teaching of the national literature in schools and universities; freer cultural attitudes and greater literary experimentation arising from late 1960s new left radicalism and second-wave feminism; and more general ‘social and cultural changes’, including ‘escalating population, greater social and political complexity, widening economic structures and marked cultural diversity’ (Bird 183). See Bird (183–4, 196–206) and Gelder and Salzman (1–9) for detailed discussions of social changes in the 1970s and their purported effect on publication of Australian literature.

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Accounts of transformation in Australian novel publication in the 1970s are strongly numerical— in other words, they refer to various indicators of growth in the number of novel titles published. For example, in their now widely accepted account of Australian literature in the 1970s and 1980s, Gelder and Salzmann cite various statistics to demonstrate growth in the number of novels funded by the Literature Board, the number of courses on Australian literature offered, the number of publishing companies in operation, and the number of awards, writing programs and festivals funded.9

In contradiction of such assertions, quantitative analysis demonstrates that the 1950s and early 1960s were in fact the time of a dramatic increase in the number of Australian novels published. The 1970s, in contrast, were a period of marked decline, despite the factors and statistics outlined above.10 As in the 1930s and 1940s, the increase in the number of novel titles published in the 1950s and 1960s was predominantly the result of writing by men. In the first half of the 1950s, men wrote approximately 78% of all novel titles published. The proportion of novel titles by men increased further in the second half of this decade to 83%—and reached its highest point for the entire twentieth century in the first half of the 1960s, with men writing 84% of all Australian novel titles.

To a significant degree, genre fiction—much of it produced by major Australian pulp fiction publishers like Horwitz and Cleveland (Bode, ‘From’)—explains the remarkable discrepancy between qualitative and quantitative identifications of the period during which significant growth in the number of Australian novels occurred. As Figures 3 to 5 demonstrate, publication of crime and detective,11 war and particularly western novels increased dramatically during the 1950s, peaking at the start of the 1960s. In fact, 48% of novel titles included in my dataset for the year 1960 were westerns, and all of these were by men. Of total novel titles published that year, approximately 87% were genre fiction, and 91% of these genre novels were by men.12 Thus, growth in the publication of Australian genre

9 See, especially, Gelder and Salzmann (1–9). Subsequent accounts of this period, such as Bird’s chapter on ‘Contemporary Fiction’ in The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature, accept Gelder and Salzmann’s statistics and cite their assertions of a ‘massive increase in the production of Australian fiction’ in the 1970s.


11 Although these genres are also listed separately in AustLit, I have combined them due to the frequency with which novels are described as ‘crime-detective’ or ‘detective-crime’. Approximately 21% of genre novels included in the AustLit database are ascribed multiple genre tags (for example, ‘adventure-romance’ or ‘fantasy-action-thriller’). In such cases I allocated each genre category within the tag equal weight (so that an adventure-romance novel appears as half an adventure novel and half a romance novel in the year in which it was published). Although this approach provides a fair indication of trends in the publication of Australian genre novels, it is not ideal. For this reason, with the exception of crime-detective novels, I have focused on genre categories where multiple tags rarely occur (that is, romance, westerns and war novels).

12 Some fiction was serialised. To avoid such works counting as publications for every year they were serialised, I made the year they began to be published their date of publication. It is necessary to include serialised works in the quantitative results for Australian novels not only because the
fiction in the 1950s and 1960s largely explains both the marked increase in the proportion of novel titles by men during this period, and the overall growth in the size of the Australian novel field.13

Compared to other periods in Australian literary history, the middle decades of the twentieth century receive little attention. When they are considered, the 1950s and 1960s are generally identified as a masculinised period, and such masculinisation is aligned with the professionalisation and institutionalisation of Australian literary studies, and the resultant movement of 1930s and 1940s discourses of literary nationalism and intellectualism into academia.14

Although quantitative analysis supports the well-established perception of Australian literature as masculinised and male-dominated from the 1930s to the 1960s, when genre fiction is considered, two forms and eras of male-domination emerge: in the first period, during the 1930s, the male-authored literary novel predominated; in the second period, especially from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the field was dominated by genre novels, especially westerns.

* AustLit database categorises these texts as such, but because serialised literary fiction works, like Marcus Clarke’s *For the Term of His Natural Life*, are routinely understood as novels in Australian literary history. Moreover, given the correlation between serialised fiction and a working-class readership established in a number of British studies (Joseph McAlee 1964–65; Billie Melman 113–14) an exclusion of such fiction from Australian literary history potentially neglects working-class readers.

13 A relatively small number of novelists produced this large amount of genre fiction. For example, 27 author names — signifying 17 individual men — wrote the 218 western novel titles published in 1960. While this represents an average of 12 to 13 novels per man, in fact some of these authors published only one novel that year, while others wrote many. Discussing the careers of prolific novelists of this time — like Carter Brown (‘Mysterious’) and Gordon Clive Bleeck (‘Pulp’) — Toni Johnson-Woods provides insight into some of the contractual and institutional factors that created the conditions for the mass-production of novels by certain authors.

14 See Delys Bird, Robert Dixon and Christopher Lee; Drusilla Modjeska (254–55).
Overwhelmingly authored by men, and presumably targeted at male readers, these genre novels perpetuated the masculinisation of the Australian novel. But while this masculinisation is commonly identified with literary nationalism and intellectualism, these genre novels did not arise out of such discourses, nor did they have any association with the professionalisation and institutionalisation of Australian literary studies. Rather, the popularity of these novels, many with a distinctly extra-national tenor, suggests the distance between scholarly discourses of literary nationalism and intellectualism and the majority of authors (and readers) of Australian novels.
Despite the statistical and social significance of Australian genre fiction of the 1950s and 1960s, this phenomenon has received little attention. Toni Johnson-Woods’s work on Australian pulp fiction, a major component of this such fiction, is a notable exception to this general oversight (‘Pulp; ‘Mysterious’). Johnson-Woods attributes the upsurge in Australian pulp fiction in the 1940s and 1950s to import tariffs on American pulp fiction, from 1939 to 1959. In restricting the import into Australia of American pulp fiction these tariffs enabled the expansion of the local industry. This conclusion seems likely, but Johnson-Woods’s corresponding claim – ‘when the prohibitions were lifted in 1959, the local industry died overnight’ (‘Mysterious’ 74) – is complicated by the quantitative results. In accordance with Johnson-Woods’s hypothesis, publication of Australian crime-detective novels declined significantly after 1960. But although 1959 and 1960 stand out as noticeable peaks in the publication of western and war novels, output of such titles (mostly produced by major Australian pulp fiction publishers) remained relatively high through the 1960s. Possibly, the boost to the local industry provided by import tariffs established Australian authors and publishers of westerns and war novels, thus enabling the local industry to continue after tariffs were lifted. Rather than a sole function of the cessation of import tariffs, the reduction of Australian genre (including pulp) fiction through the 1960s is probably also associated with the introduction of television (and TV westerns) into the majority of Australian households at this time.15

The scarcity of critical assessments of Australian genre fiction in the 1950s and 1960s must be understood in relation to the relative scarcity of critical attention to the middle decades of the twentieth century as a whole. A possible reason for this neglect can be found in the intellectual preferences and career trajectories of scholars in the discipline of Australian literary studies, many of whom identify their intellectual roots, and the beginnings of their academic careers, in the rise of the university and the political liberalism of the 1970s. The parallel between the widespread perception of this decade as the defining period of growth and change in Australian literary history, and the beginning of the careers of many of the academics responsible for forming and defining contemporary Australian literary studies, is not problematic in and of itself. But it is not supported by a quantitative assessment of novel publication.

Predilections in feminist literary scholarship also contribute to the overall critical neglect of the middle decades of the twentieth century. Providing much of the energy and innovation in studies of Australian literature since the 1970s, feminist literary critics nevertheless tend to perceive women’s writing as definitive of gender issues in fiction. Accordingly, most feminist critics have found

15 Dolin makes this point, asserting that the ‘Australian appetite for cheap popular fiction ... only decreased when reading was succeeded as the dominant form of popular household recreation by radio and television in the 1950s’ (115). However, like Johnson-Woods’s discussion of import tariffs, Dolin’s identification of a decline in popular fiction in the 1950s is premature. Possibly, the decline of cheap Australian fiction in the 1960s – rather than the 1950s – arises due to the interval between the introduction of television into Australia in 1956, and its actual availability to the majority of Australian households (by the mid-1960s) (Free TV Australia website).
little reason to explore this male-dominated era in Australian literary history, preferring instead to concentrate on periods when proportionately more women were writing – that is, the first and final three decades of the twentieth century.¹⁶ The feminist critics who have investigated the 1930s and 1940s concentrate on women writers.¹⁷ This approach has the important aim of recovering such authors from critical obscurity. But in foregrounding women writers, these feminist analyses are limited in their capacity to explore and comment on gender trends in novel publication more broadly.

While these factors help to account for the lack of critical attention accorded to the middle decades of the twentieth century, the specific neglect of the enormous number of genre novel titles published in the 1950s and 1960s – and the resulting error in identifying the 1970s as the time of significant growth in Australian novels – arises due to the almost exclusive focus of Australian literary history on what is described as literary fiction, the canon in particular. This focus is apparent in the evidence Gelder and Salzman provide for what they identify as ‘a massive increase in the production of Australian fiction’ (1) in the 1970s and 1980s: the different levels of subsidised publishing provided by the Commonwealth Literary Fund (operational until 1972) compared to its successor, the Literature Board (established in 1973). Gelder and Salzman point out that whereas 18 works of fiction were published under the Commonwealth Literary Fund in 1972, the Literature Board supported 54 works between 1973 and 1974, and ‘by 1986 the number had increased to over 200’ (2). An increase is thereby demonstrated. But literary fiction is only one category, or genre, within the field of fiction. Generalising trends in the support and publication of Australian literary fiction to Australian novels as a whole overlooks the unrepresentative nature of the fiction subsidised.

The distorted picture that results produces misconceptions not only about the size of the field of Australian novels and its growth, but also regarding the operations of the publishing, marketing and reading of Australian novels at the beginning of the contemporary era. Excluding genre fiction of the 1950s and 1960s from Australian literary history excludes writing aimed at a commercial market. In this omission, one can detect the influence of 1930s and 1940s literary intellectualism, grounded in a privileging of serious (masculine) novels and a disparagement of frivolous (feminine) fiction. The fact that the genre fiction in question is itself masculinised does not negate this reading, but highlights the distance between notions of the masculine in the literary or academic world compared to those that circulate in society generally. As Gelder argues in more recent work, lack of attention to popular fiction in Australian literary history is a consequence of its transnationalism as well as its generic features: ‘The placement

¹⁶ That said, the high proportion of novel titles by Australian women in the middle decades of the nineteenth century has been relatively neglected by feminist literary critics and Australian literary history in general (Bode, ‘Graphically’).

¹⁷ For example Sheridan, Modjeska and Maryanne Dever (and many of the authors in Dever’s edited collection, Wallflowers and Witches: Women and Culture in Australia 1910–1945).
of a localised literary realism at the heart of the Australian canon ensured the marginalisation of transnational popular fiction: Australian literary studies was simply critically unable to deal with it’ (‘Recovering’115). Thus, in the omission of 1950s and 1960s genre fiction from contemporary Australian literary history, 1930s and 1940s notions of literary nationalism (as well as intellectualism) appear influential.

Dolin argues that mass-market fiction is seldom ‘ascribe[d] cultural significance’ in histories of Australian literature because ‘mass culture is held to be self-evidently uninteresting, undifferentiated, and immaterial to a national history of the book’ (116). The omission of Australian genre novels of the 1950s and 1960s from accounts of Australian literary history demonstrates the interrelationship of constructions of quality that Dolin invokes with those of class, gender and nation. In relation to Australian literary studies, such exclusions present an uncomfortable picture. Contemporary manifestations of this discipline – and discourses about the 1970s and 1980s in particular – are founded on the inclusion of previously excluded groups of authors (like women, migrant and Indigenous writers). Yet in the cradle of this purported revolution in Australian literature and its criticism, one finds the conservative definitions of the literary that dominated in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s – definitions supposedly contested by Australian literary studies over the past three decades.

Although the reduction in the overall number of novel titles published in the 1970s counteracts established accounts of growth during this period, one might suppose that claims about this decade could be traced to growth in the publication of literary novels. Unfortunately, this is somewhat difficult to ascertain. The AustLit database specifically identifies genres like romance, fantasy and young adult, but this is not the case for literary fiction. A spot-check of AustLit records against novels that would generally be considered literary fiction indicates that such texts are simply not allocated a genre. The absence of any category for literary novels underscores the invisible and normalised position of such texts in Australian literary studies; it also presents difficulties for a quantitative assessment of publishing trends. In particular, due to the lack of a specific category for literary fiction, there are some instances when novels identified by AustLit as historical fiction might also be considered literary fiction. Nevertheless, a far greater proportion of the novels identified as historical would align more strongly with romance than with literary fiction, so it is not sufficient merely to add historical novels to uncategorised novels to gauge the number of literary texts.

Some caution is therefore necessary in interpreting these results. But what emerges is unsteady growth in the total number of literary novel titles published from the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s (Figure 6). In the second half of the 1990s, the number of literary novel titles increased considerably. However, such growth is not exclusive to literary titles, but is indicative of a significant overall increase

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18 I am referring, here, to novels by authors like Gail Jones, Annamaree Jagose, Thomas Keneally, Wendy Scarfe, Kate Grenville and Barbara Hanrahan.
in the publication of Australian novels. When one considers the proportion of Australian novel titles constituted by literary texts, a somewhat clearer trend emerges. In the 1970s and early 1980s, literary novels represented 37.6% of total novel titles. This proportion is higher than the 32.6% of novel titles represented by literary novels in the late 1980s and 1990s, and the 28.7% of novel titles constituted by such texts in the 2000s, but it is significantly less than the 50.2% of total novels represented by literary texts in the 1930s.19 Ultimately, while the number of literary novels did not increase dramatically in the 1970s, it did increase somewhat, whereas the total size of the field decreased. As no other quantitative findings explain perceptions of the 1970s and 1980s in terms of a 'massive increase' (Gelder and Salzman 1) in the number of novels, one must attribute this notion to the rise in the proportion of the field represented by literary novels during these decades.

While the overall number of novel titles decreased in the 1970s, the number of titles by women, and hence the proportion of the field they represented, increased. This gender trend affirms critical understandings of the 1970s as the beginning of a period of significant growth in the publication of novels by women. When the overall publication of Australian novel titles began, again, to increase in the 1980s, publications by women continued to increase at a greater rate than publications by men. Since 1992, women have published more novel titles than men per year (except for 1997 and 2000). The following table depicts the percentage growth in novel titles by Australian women from 1960 to 2006.

The impact of second-wave feminism seems apparent in these results. At the start of the twenty-first century, women are more than ‘a well-established presence in Australian literature’ (Bird 196): they are producing and publishing more novel titles than Australian men. However, as with westerns in the 1960s, this marked rise of one gender as a proportion of novel publications has a previously unexplored relationship to trends in genre fiction. As Figure 7 demonstrates, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a significant increase in the publication of romance novels. Since 1970, this genre of Australian novels has been increasingly, and in the 1980s and 1990s overwhelmingly, authored by women.

A number of influential studies have challenged dominant perceptions of women readers of romance as passive recipients of patriarchal messages.20 But it would seem irrefutable that the content of most romance novels is antithetical to, rather than commensurate with, second-wave feminism. Nevertheless, while growth in romance novels contributed significantly to the increase in the overall

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20 Janice Radway’s Reading the Romance is an early and influential example of such work.
number of novel titles by women since the 1970s, and particularly in the 1980s, this growth is regularly attributed to the impact of feminism. The continuing high number of Australian romance novels by women in the 1990s was accompanied by a noticeable increase in the publication of other Australian novel genres, including fantasy, historical, science fiction, thriller and young adult. Women authors do not dominate in all these genres. But they do dominate in those genres with the highest number of titles – namely, historical and young adult fiction.

This growth in the publication of genre novels by Australian women – romance in the 1980s and 1990s, young adult in the 1990s and fantasy in the 2000s – challenges a common understanding of Australian women’s writing since the 1970s in terms of its direct, or at least very close, interrelationship with second-wave feminism. According to this perspective, second-wave feminism created a market for Australian women’s novels that led directly to an increase in the number of feminist novels and thence to an increase in the number of feminists. Gillian Whitlock expresses this general perception when she asserts that, during the 1970s ‘there was a flourishing feminist culture which was the seedbed for women’s writing’. As the decade progressed, ‘this writing was part of the women’s movement’, where it was associated with ‘understanding women’s experience’, ‘conscious-raising’ and ‘actively changing women’s lives’. In the 1980s, the site of critical engagement with women’s writing moved from outside academe to within, leading to the rise of feminist literary criticism in Australia (236). This account assumes that novels by women have a feminist or oppositional content – an assumption that is enabled by a view of the novel field that is restricted to literary fiction.

The relationship between second-wave feminism and Australian women’s writing might have been overstated, but this does not detract from the fact that growth in the number of Australian novel titles by women has been significantly stronger than that for men since the 1980s. Moreover, the decline in the number of novel titles by Australian men since 2000 contrasts the growth in the number of titles by Australian women until 2004. Taking a longer view of Australian literary history, a correlation emerges between growth in the proportion of novel titles by women and the two periods in Australian history commonly associated with feminist politics: its first- and second-waves. The first-wave of Australian feminism is generally located in the suffrage movement of the 1890s. Accordingly, as Figure 8 demonstrates, the proportion of novel titles by women increased in the 1890s and 1900s, before it peaked in the 1910s and declined in the 1920s. Likewise, the start of second-wave feminism is commonly identified

22 Science fiction and thriller novels are more likely to be written by Australian men.
23 For an explanation of the relatively high proportion of novel titles by Australian women before 1890 see Bode “Graphically” (440).
with the 1960s and 1970s, and the proportion of novel titles by Australian women increased from this time. Such correlations between growth in the publication of Australian novel titles by women and the two waves of feminism suggest a relationship between the gender of published novelists and the presence of feminism in the public and political spheres.

Although growth in the proportion of novel titles by Australian women characterised the decades following the first and second waves of feminism, an important difference emerges, one that potentially counteracts the above interpretation of a positive correlation between feminism and women’s writing. The proportion of novel titles by Australian women declined in the 1930s, presumably due to the growing dominance of masculinised discourses of literary nationalism and intellectualism in constructions of Australian literature. In the 2000s, we are yet to witness a decline in the proportion of Australian novel titles by women. This trend might seem cause for celebration. After all, the success of women’s publishing in the contemporary era has to a significant degree been understood in terms of the success of feminism. However, when one considers the changing value of novel writing as an occupation, a different possibility emerges.

Sociological studies of occupational gender segregation demonstrate that men tend to enter a field when it is valued, and leave it when it is devalued (or when more desirable jobs become available). In the Australian context, the alignment of novel writing with nationalism and intellectualism in the 1930s and 1940s – and notwithstanding the generally poor remunerative rewards of a career as a novelist at this time (Adelaide) – presumably enhanced the cultural value of

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24 See Gaye Tuchman for an analysis of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British fiction through the paradigm of occupational gender segregation (especially pages 10–12, 205–06). In a rejection of a traditionally canonical approach to literary scholarship, Tuchman approaches ‘the occupation of novelist as merely another job rather than as the culturally lauded endeavor of a few gifted people’ (11).
this profession. The growth of genre fiction in the 1950s and 1960s might have decreased the cultural value of novel writing, but in financial terms, its rewards increased (or, at least, they were extended to a greater number of – predominantly male – novelists). Moreover, the movement of literary criticism from the public arena into the academy during this same period endowed the profession of novelist with a different form of cultural authority and value. In the 1970s and 1980s, government funding of Australian literature enhanced both the cultural and financial rewards of novel writing.

From the perspective of cultural and financial value, how does novel writing in the 1990s and 2000s appear? Webby’s comments regarding the end of the ‘golden age’ of Australian publishing imply the diminishing cultural value of novel writing as a career. In particular, reductions in government funding of the arts in the 1990s both indicate the declining cultural value of writing fiction, and reduce its potential remunerative rewards. Growth in self-publishing has reduced the exclusivity – and hence, the cultural value – previously associated with novel writing. Indeed, the term commonly used to describe self-publishing – ‘vanity publishing’ – suggests the perceived cultural worthlessness of this activity, and its feminisation. Finally, the growing popularity of autobiography, biography and history (Webby 17) suggests that cultural capital is moving away from fiction generally. From this perspective, it becomes possible to argue that a reduction in the cultural importance and value of the novel in Australia, and the profession of novelist – rather than, or as well as, the popularity of particular genre categories and the impact of political feminism on women’s writing – explains the pre-eminence of women in the contemporary Australian novel field.

The strong correlations that emerge between gender and patterns in the production and publishing of Australian novels demonstrate the continuing and fundamental importance of feminist- and gender-based studies to understandings of Australian literary history. However, quantitative analysis also exposes, and challenges, assumptions commonly made within feminist literary criticism. In particular, the direct relationship many feminist literary scholars draw between women’s writing and feminism arises from an equation of the novel with the literary novel, and results in a failure to recognise gender trends in the broader novel field. Quantitative analysis indicates that more complex forces are at work on Australian women’s writing than simply feminism, including the variable cultural importance of the novel and the changing popularity of novel genres (including, but not restricted to, literary fiction).

WORKS CITED


