

## Review of *Book Publishing in Australia: A Living Legacy*, edited by Millicent Weber and Aaron Mannion

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SCHOLARLY research on book history and contemporary publishing has expanded significantly since the 1990s. *Book Publishing in Australia: A Living Legacy* draws on a wide range of print and digital resources, and builds on the work of three earlier volumes: *Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia 1946–2005*, edited by Craig Munro and Robyn Sheahan-Bright (University of Queensland Press, 2006); *Making Books: Contemporary Australian Publishing*, edited by David Carter and Anne Galligan (University of Queensland Press, 2007); and *The Return of Print? Contemporary Australian Publishing*, edited by Aaron Mannion and Emmett Stinson (Monash University Publishing, 2016).

*Book Publishing in Australia* has several chapters on small presses and also includes memoir-based case studies: one by writer Sophie Masson on her own publishing and crowdfunding experiences, and another by the founders of Arcade Publications, Brow Books and Bowen Street Press. The case study on reading groups in northwestern Victoria is largely based on group meetings organised by the researchers themselves, and the chapter on feminist publishing delves into the University of Melbourne's extensive Germaine Greer archive. There is also a study of gender in speculative fiction, as well as two chapters on literary prizes. All in all, this new volume provides both scholars and students with an eclectic mix of recent research on book history and contemporary publishing

The opening chapter by digital humanities pioneer Katherine Bode on nineteenth-century fiction publishing in Australian newspapers, makes extensive use of

Trove's word-searchable database. This project – undertaken between 2013 and 2016 in conjunction with Carol Hetherington – deliberately excluded the names of well-known authors, instead searching much more broadly under terms like 'story' or 'tales' and using algorithms to sort the data. It identified a larger than expected amount of fiction in provincial newspapers, sourced from no fewer than eleven fiction syndicates. A high proportion was in popular genres like adventure, crime, westerns and romance – genres often dismissed by literary scholars as pulp fiction. Among other findings, Bode and Hetherington's data analysis confirmed the predominance of the masculinist bush tradition, but they also discovered that many novels featured families and 'the emotional bonds between men, women and children'.

Another chapter that explores long forgotten works is Jocelyn Hargrave's study of two printing guides which were precursors to the Australian government's ubiquitous *Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers*, first published in 1966. Hargrave's research unearthed the now extremely rare guidebook *The Art of Printing* (1861) by John Degotardi, and Benjamin Fryer's *A Book and Its Elements* (1930), using the forensic skills of a textual scholar to throw light on the little studied field of printing history in Australia. Degotardi had worked as a newspaper compositor before setting up a general printing business producing pamphlets, magazines, maps and even sheet music, while Fryer worked for an importer of printing materials and was secretary of the Australian Limited Editions Society.

Book contracts – the basis for most author-publisher business relationships – are often regarded as the province of literary agents, publishing executives and intellectual property lawyers. As Katherine Day writes in her chapter, this power balance has changed with the advent of moral rights, digital rights, self-publishing, social media, and the 'communitarian landscape' of creative commons. Day provides invaluable historical context about the evolution of copyright legislation from the fifteenth century to the present, with its long-established tradition of regarding authors as unique creators. In conclusion, she writes that much more research is required, as globalisation and digitisation provide authors and publishers with new commercial opportunities – as well as further potential for conflict.

'From Cultural Entrepreneurs to an Apprenticeship Practice' is based on the experiences of Tracy O'Shaughnessy, Rose Michael and Ronnie Scott who all teach publishing at RMIT University – which in the 1990s pioneered what has become Australia's most respected course for professional editors. The authors are all involved with RMIT's Bowen Street Press which has been in operation since 2016, providing hands-on experience for the Master of Writing

and Publishing students. O'Shaughnessy, Michael and Scott describe their own publishing apprenticeships and explain how their masters students now collaborate as interns to run the Bowen Street Press. The other chapter about setting up a small press is by widely published children's author Sophie Masson. Her ventures include Dirt Lane Press, Gumbootspearlz Press, Christmas Press (for picture books) and Eagle Books (adventure fiction), all of which have used a crowdfunding model, with presales generating the advance income required to cover costs and set the initial print run.

'Scholarly Feminist Presses: Germaine Greer and Stump Cross Books' by Millicent Weber focuses on the small feminist press Greer established in the late 1980s. The chapter is based on Weber's research in the Greer Archive at the University of Melbourne, which contains no fewer than 487 boxes of original material including correspondence and manuscripts. By way of comparison, Weber analyses the philosophies and output of Melbourne-based Spinifex Press and the more mainstream British publisher Virago Books. The early titles Greer issued at Stump Cross Books were republications of works by what Weber describes as 'neglected and pioneer women poets', a project that combined both scholarship and publishing to 'recover and reconstruct a lost historical tradition of women's writing'.

Michelle Goldsmith – in her chapter on author and reader gender in speculative fiction – uses the annual Stella Count on gender disparity in Australian book reviews, referring also to the British and American equivalent, the VIDA Count. Goldsmith's own research included age statistics as well as gender, and one of her graphs on the gender readerships of speculative fiction lists a number of fascinating sub-genres including Sword and Sorcery, Space Opera, Military SF, Paranormal Romance and Grimdark. As might be expected, more female readers enjoyed the romance sub-genre and more males the military titles. She found that eighty-nine percent of male readers did not favour authors of one particular gender, whereas a quarter of the women surveyed preferred reading books by female authors. In conclusion, she writes that while initiatives such as the Stella Count may encourage prize judges, for reviews editors and publishers to 'lift their game', addressing the broader issue of readers' gender bias is a much more complicated, but still necessary, objective.

The final chapters rely on reviews data as well as other research on contemporary publishing. Emmett Stinson looks at the rate of success by small publishers in three literary awards including the Miles Franklin, Australia's most prestigious literary prize – first won by Patrick White in 1957 for his novel *Voss*. Stinson also considers the Prime Minister's award for fiction and the Stella Prize for women writers. Cleverly adopting Franklin's first name,

the Stella was set up in 2013, and since then all but one of the Miles Franklin winners have been women writers. Stinson looks not only at the rate of success by small presses but also at the issue of literary value versus popular genres, and he usefully distinguishes between financial benefit and enhanced symbolic or social capital.

The data used in Melinda Harvey and Julieanne Lamond's chapter 'Literary Prizes and Book Reviews in Australia since 2014' is somewhat wider than Stinson's. They add the New South Wales and Victorian Premier's awards to Stinson's mix and consider the connections between prizes, reviews and educational reading lists. In one table they list the number of prizes won by individual publishers between 2014 and 2016, and on the facing page the twenty most frequently reviewed publishers. Not surprisingly Penguin Random House tops the chart for review coverage, followed by Allen & Unwin. Text Publishing is a distant third and the only other smaller independent houses in the top bracket of eight are Black Inc and the University of Queensland Press. The prizes-won list is skewed by the fact that very few presses publish poetry, and of more statistical interest is the frequent crossover Harvey and Lamond found between judges and reviewers, and between judges and authors.

Studies of reading groups were included in *The History of the Book in Australia: 1891–1945* (edited by Martyn Lyons and John Arnold, University of Queensland Press, 2001) and to a lesser extent in the 2006 sequel volume *Paper Empires*. The pioneering study was *Australian Readers Remember: An Oral History of Reading 1890–1930* by Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa (1992). For their *Book Publishing in Australia* chapter 'Shared Reading in the Victorian Mallee', Brigid Magner and Emily Potter approached reading groups in Mildura, Swan Hill, Quambatook and Hopetoun. They were only able to interact with one group, in Swan Hill, and in the other centres had to 'artificially' assemble one-off reading events. Three contemporary novels were discussed in detail, with participants' responses shaped by factors such as education, life experience and class, allowing Magner and Potter to better understand what they termed the texture of everyday life in the Mallee.

Readers, writers, reviewers, booksellers, editors and publishers form complex and interdependent cultural networks in every country. In Australia the 'legacy' book publishing industry has been in steady decline since the advent of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and increased competition from digital platforms. Over the past few years the growth of e-books seems to have slowed but sales of print editions continue to slide. Whatever the mode of delivery, this is a retail industry, and the future of book publishing in Australia may be in the hands of readers.