Genre Worlds is the first systematic study of contemporary Australian popular fiction—the most significant growth area in Australian trade publishing.

The project aims to build a comprehensive picture of the contemporary genre worlds of Australian romance, crime and fantasy fiction. Our project mantra is simple: “Read the books. Talk to the people. Track the data.” These principles guide our research as we examine the practices and processes that shape Australian popular fiction.

Our research draws on interviews with key figures in Australian genre worlds as well as data from AustLit, a database of bibliographic and production information for Australian books. We have developed a close working relationship with AustLit, providing funding to update their database for genre fiction titles prior to 2012.

In 2017 we deepened our understanding of the interrelatedness of the Australian publishing industry by interviewing dozens more publishing professionals, and conducting fieldwork at Frankfurt Book Fair and the Romance Writers of America conference in Orlando, Florida.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR FINDINGS

The number of Australian crime, fantasy, and romance titles published has dramatically increased in the 21st-century.

Digital technologies have been successfully utilised by large, independent and self-publishers alike, but have facilitated the largest expansions for independent and self-publishers: established independents saw the biggest growth in output between 2000-1 and 2010-11 while self-publishing gained notable traction between 2010-11 and 2015-16.

Romance publishing by multinational publishing houses (the ‘Big 5’) increased by 135% between 2001-11 and 2015-16. Self-published titles have seen increases of 230% for crime, 290% for fantasy and 1000% for romance between 2010-11 and 2015-16, after e-reader technologies became more mainstream. While the steady increases of crime and fantasy titles by small-to-medium Australian presses demonstrates the strong traditions these genres and publishers have long shared.

EVENTS & COMMUNITIES

In November 2017, we convened an academic conference “Genre Worlds: Popular Fiction in the 21st Century” in conjunction with the national industry convention GenreCon at the State Library of Queensland. We presented the keynote during the plenary session, outlining the publishing data we have collected to date. A special edition of Australian Literary Studies featuring selected academic papers from the conference is forthcoming. You can find a summary of the conference on our webpage, including links to our Storify curated by Chief Investigator Dr Beth Driscoll and Research Assistant Dr Millie Weber, and a report for Books + Publishing written by Research Assistant Claire Parnell.

PUBLICATIONS & MEDIA

So far, there have been more than a dozen scholarly outputs associated with this project, including 1 edited book, 2 national symposia, 10 peer-reviewed chapters and journal articles, 16 conference presentations and 6 media articles, with another journal article and a short monograph in-press.

Some highlights include:

• Beth Driscoll’s chapter Middlebrow and Nobrow in When Highbrow Meets Lowbrow: Popular Culture and the Rise of the Nobrow, ed. Swirski & Vanhanen (Palgrave)
• Lisa Fletcher’s Island Genres, Genre Islands: Conceptualisation and Popular Fiction (co-authored with Ralph Crane) (Rowman & Littlefield)
• Beth Driscoll’s article The Sleaze-O-Meter in Interscript (co-authored with Claire Squires)
• Journal articles in MIA, Text, and one in-press with The Journal of Popular Culture.

We also presented work at The Association for the Study of Australian Literature and the Popular Culture Association conference (San Diego, U.S.), the Independent Publishing Conference. We were invited to appear on panels at Genrecon and at The World Science Fiction Convention (Helsinki). We were interviewed for 3RRR. Books + Publishing magazine, the Mercury newspaper (Hobart) and published articles for Meanjin and Pursuit (the University of Melbourne) and were mentioned in the Independent UK.

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