"Still Waters Run Deep": Empirical Methods and the Migration Patterns of Regional Publishers’ Authors and Titles within Australian Literature

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One’s commitment to place is [..] more mutable than one’s commitment to what that place represents.
(Meffan 393)

In the recent book London Was Full of Rooms, Carol Hetherington argues that the “statistical basis for the London-centric view of Australian literary production is misleading” (Hetherington 245). This account, though, when held against the bibliographic evidence that it examines, at least in AustLit’s current dataset, is itself incomplete [Graph A].1 As might be observed in the graph representing the place of publication of first-edition Australian novels around the world, for the period 1900–2000, the next largest publisher of Australian fiction after London, the United States, is less than one quarter the size of the total British production of Australian novels. The historical focus on London as Richard Nile’s and David Walker’s “mythologized literary center” appears borne out from such numerical comparisons, not challenged (Nile and Walker 7).

However, while it might be argued that the London focus cannot be significantly destabilized with reference to AustLit publication data in February 2009, Hetherington’s thesis does initiate a crucial expansion of book history research; that is, the incorporation of other “centers” into literary histories of Australian publishing, or what Hetherington refers to as the other “long distance connections in Australian literature.” That is, we need not concentrate only on the importance of London [Graph B, next page] since the “reality of [other] Australian literary connections overseas does indeed vary from the conventional wisdom” (245).

Much of this kind of research, in looking to centers beyond what Martin Lyons has called the “imperial cultural space” (Lyons and Arnold 22), is driven by the bibliographic visibility provided through AustLit on all editions of Australian works, where a search for any Australian title can return extremely complex records listing all domestic and international expressions and manifestations of a work [Graph C, next page].2 This data is invaluable in tracing the publication history of works, and an analysis of this data offers quite a detailed view into the overall distribution of the production of Australian novels, especially with what statistical regularities can be observed within this distribution [Graph D, page 177]. The nature of this article then, in the spirit of Hetherington’s “misleading London-centric view” argument, is to question the basis for the Sydney- and Melbourne-centric view of Australian literary production, but to do so from a state-by-state—and by territory—regional statistical perspective; that is, via the “interstate connections in Australian literature.”

Traditionally and psychologically, in the creative arts and writing communities, Sydney and Melbourne are viewed by writers and scholars as the main centers of publishing within Australia [Graph E, page 177]. In an industry where

GRAPH A: Publication of First-Edition Australian Novels Worldwide, 1900–2000
publication data suggests New South Wales produced 71% and Victoria 18% of all first-edition Australian novels during 1900–2000, and where half of the publishing workforce is in Sydney and another 40% in Melbourne (Lee 154), it is quite difficult not to view these two places and their parent regions as, to borrow Hetherington’s use of the word, “hubs” of Australia’s publishing industry for first-edition novels and manifestations [Graph F, next page]. In Western Australia and Queensland—two states that respectively publish only 3% and 4% of Australia’s first-edition fiction and account for only 1% and 2% of manifestations [Graph G, next page]—one might reasonably anticipate that writers look to these other places as the real literary centers of Australia, where reputations and commercial successes for national and international markets might actually be established. One might even expect to observe authors who are first published in Western Australia or Queensland to eventually relocate their own “center” of work to Australia’s East Coast [Graph H, next page].

Thus, while this paper acknowledges that Sydney and Melbourne, or New South Wales and Victoria respectively, play an overpowering role in Australian print cultures, one way to evaluate the creative flows between Australian states and territories is to examine, for example, what percentages of writers after being first published in Western Australia or Queensland go on to publish subsequent titles in another region, say New South Wales or Victoria [Graph I, next page]. To undertake such an examination is to look beneath the apparent stillness of state publishing totals and see if there are any deeper currents within. It is to ask if there is an identifiable pattern of writers moving their follow-up titles from their home publishers to the traditional “hubs” of publishing, not only for Western Australia but for other states, too. What, in fact, does publication data reveal about the claim that writers from most Australian states and territories look to Sydney and Melbourne as centers of the Australian literary world?

This is where a quantitative methodology, or “new literary empiricism,” might be useful. By treating all domestic Australian novels as things produced here or there—that is, as “material objects [with] symbolic form,” to recycle McKenzie’s terms (McKenzie 22)—“quantitative data allows access to a comparative dimension of [Australian] literary history” (Finkelstein and McCleery 207) and, in this instance, to Australian literary regional history.

A disclaimer should be added about this methodology. New empiricism, as applied to Australian literary history, is a highly instrumental way of thinking about literature and novels. It doesn’t usually ask the researcher to consider the content of individual titles nor does it care very much for the creative energies captured within the lines of a text by a specific author. Instead, new empiricism’s strengths lie with its application of a form of distant reading. That is, the researcher will step back from one title and examine what is common and uncommon across thousands of titles, shifting our “focus from exceptional texts to the large mass of literary fact” (Moretti 67). For this article, the enclosed graphs are one way of doing this, and they assess the distribution of approximately 21,000 first-edition Australian novels plus nearly 19,000 manifestations (or reprints), representing the state of the AustLit database as it was to be found and analyzed in February 2009 (updating an initial analysis conducted in August 2007). In particular, manifestations or reprints are important because it is known that quantifying first-
John Frow would want the researcher to recall when she analyzes figures like this, “genres emerge and survive because they meet a demand [...] because there are readers, writers or producers with the means to generate those texts and institutions to circulate and channel them” (Frow 137). And so a “poised attention” (Peiters 95) to the use of data in glossy technological formats is required in order to ensure we explore further rather than accept data visualization like this as being ideally “pure” and “complete” and without gaps. We should in this way consider new empiricist findings as starting points for greater discussion, not end points, and likewise be mindful of the subjective practices technology encourages.

Thus acknowledging some of the disadvantages in using statistics, what concerns this article is the relationships between regions and the flow of novels back and forth across the nation. This article is also interested in a recuperation of the “regional” back into national book history. Lars Jensen once wrote that “the term ‘regional’ signals not only that focus is shifted away from the hub of Australia’s [...] history in the Southeast, but also that its regional status betrays a provinciality, as a sideshow of no consequence to the national narrative” (Jensen 111).

On the contrary, a far more multilayered reading of Australian book history is possible, one that illustrates the ways in which the states and territories were and are interconnected, however large or small. In this way, the word “region” is applied (to reuse Suvendrini Perera’s words) to the reconfiguration of “Australian space, not as an island entire but as made up of different cultural [...] [and territorial] spaces which share histories and borders” with each other (Perera 16). Though the breaking up of Australia’s geography into states and territories is only one way of reading Australian space, this analysis is anchored to the borders of state and territory as the organizing principle behind this article’s use of the term “region.” This is done not in ignorance of Patrick Buckridge’s and Belinda McKay’s recent caution against using “administrative artefacts” and “artificial cartographic entities” as “unitary defining essences” (Buckridge and McKay 1, 4). Rather, the bibliographic codes of book history, in suffixing an Australian state or territory to every Australian town or city in a novel’s place of publication, seem to urgently call for it.

At this stage, given that the number of new Australian writers published from year to year remains high [Graph K, next page], why should it be important where a book is published? Does it really matter who is publishing and where a novel is produced, reprinted, or translated? Indeed, if we agree that this or that novel is an “Australian novel” or a “Western Australian novel,” what real importance does its “place of publication” carry?

It would be fair to claim that a novel’s “place of publication” is connected very strongly to the value culture attaches to books (Ensor). That is, novels impue a “presence” when thought of in a national context. So important is this idea of national “presence” that there exist whole institutions and bibliographies devoted to arguing which novels can
and cannot be thought of as Australian. In this way, then, questions of cultural "ownership" and creative autonomy can be drawn out and tested, and a novel's "place of publication" (as one coordinate of textual production) can be "framed as part of a cultural argument that defines the original situation of a published object as belonging to" (Ayers 761) a particular phase of socio-cultural relations. In other words, a novel can be viewed as a snapshot of the forces and forms of social and economic production that interrelate with its publication. This argument can then put into action questions over the organization of Australia's literary coordinates, allowing the historian to extract meaning about prior publishing conditions and trends, about how any novel comes about—and to be thought of—as Australian.

In a similar line of thinking, this article seeks to transpose the importance of "presence" in a national context to the importance of "presence" in a regional context, and to put into operation questions over the organization of state and territory literary coordinates, extracting meaning about publishing across the whole of Australia in a theoretical view that unites manufacturing with visibility. In other words, if we can critically argue with confidence that something culturally occurs when an Australian work or an Australian writer has her first novel first published overseas as opposed to being first published domestically, might we make similar arguments on a more localized scale? Or to paraphrase David McKitterick, to what extent is it possible to write authoritatively about any regional history of the book, without eventually transgressing state, territorial, and international borders? (McKitterick)

Transgressing borders seems an inevitable issue for any data-organizing principle used in Australian literature. In a survey of Australian everyday cultures, Bennett, Emmison, and Frow acknowledge the "difficulties in focusing on the [...] origin" of authors when they sought insight into the reading tastes of their respondents (Accounting for Taste). For them, many writers "are truly international in the sense that they reside in more than one country at different times of the year, or they may have moved permanently from their country of origin to reside elsewhere." We might recognize this as the "paradox of authenticity in the age of postmodern travel" and multinational companies (Barang 129). This is also a view that Macmillan, the publisher of Alan Yates's autobiography Ready When You Are, CB, would agree with. Alan Yates, as the author behind the extraordinarily successful pulp literature alias "Carter Brown," published extensively in Australia by the New South Wales firm of Horwitz, is described as "Australia's own and America's own and Britain's own"—any attempt to confine him as Australian only is a "vigorous assertion."

Yates's designation as an Australian writer is of particular significance in any statistical approaches to Australian literature, both regional and national. London-born, Yates arrived in Australia at the age of twenty-three, after which he wrote detective fiction for nearly two decades before returning to England in 1967. Yates was still living in London when his autobiography was published in 1983, but AustLit records his death just two years later in New South Wales. It is clear, to interpret his movement back to Australia and to quote from his autobiography, that Alan Yates retained a "great deal of affection for Australians" (Yates 1983: 1). This statement by Yates is important because even in his fifties he remained fond of Australia but did not explicitly identify himself as Australian. Nonetheless, because Yates is co-opted as an Australian writer, his impact on any statistical analysis of Australian literature is substantial and accounts for a considerable percentage of New South Wales publication output in the 1960s. If Yates's status was to change, so too would any empirical view of history.

Thus, though Macmillan's dust-jacket comments are an instance of publishers amplifying a writer's significance, in the market-hyped sense that the author proverbially "belongs to the world" rather than any limited group of people or single place, their statements and Yates's own draw attention to the problems of thinking about authors, novels, and their relationships to groups of readers and individual places.

Alan Yates and his Carter Brown alias do not figure in Bennett, Emmison, and Frow's study of taste, but the issue of linking authors to specific groups and places continues. What becomes important, then, to this research is "the content of reading material rather than the nationality of authors." Though having reservations, Bennett et al claim it is "necessity" that pushes them to "pragmatically assign" the country-of-origin categorization for some authors. Example reference is made to Peter Carey, who is coded as Australian, though it is acknowledged he has been living in the US for some time, and through this the issue seems closed.

However, if in the regional context of this article Xavier Herbert might be considered a Northern Territory writer because of the "reading content" or setting of his most famous work Capricornia, then the issue is actually further.
problematic by the Accounting for Taste example. It would seem, as Andrew Hassam argues with regards to a writer's national identity, that "[one can be regarded as Australian despite one's citizenship, place of birth or where one lives: the important factor is one's association with Australia]" (Hassam 1). In a similar twist, Xavier Herbert might be regarded as a Northern Territory author in the public imaginary despite the place of literary production for Capricornia being Narrabeen, New South Wales, Capricornia's place of first publication being Sydney, and—in a 1940 letter to Walter Cousins of Angus and Robertson—Herbert's own biographical statement calling Western Australia his "homeland" (Angus and Robertson Archives). It would seem there can be differences, conflicts even, in the kinds of criteria that might be used to classify or associate writers with a particular State, indeed even with Australia as a whole.

With this caveat in mind, the spider plots that follow treat where writers have their first novel first published and where they publish their subsequent novels as an indicator of movement and transformations within the production of the Australian literary estate. There are, of course, other ways to look at such currents between the states and territories. One way might be to compare an author's stated regional heritage or identity with the place of publication of their works (since it would be inaccurate to assume that a novel is always published in an author's home state or territory). This connection of author identity to place of publication might provide some useful empirical commentary on the influence of region since, as Diane Brown argues, "location and position of the writer profoundly affect their writing practice" (Brown 26). Alternatively, the path from author to place of publication to reader might open up a discussion of how, as Bruce Bennett maintains, a text's "readings and [. . .] influence remains severely circumscribed by the mode and place of publication" (Bennett 99).

But such information about Australian writers cannot at this stage be easily downloaded alongside book data from AustLit, making the creation of author-region to place-of-publication relationships a very demanding activity. Instead, given what Anne Galligan has named the "prestige or symbolic capital" (Galligan 105) that can accrue to authors, publishers, and places with the production of a book, these spider graphs link that originary moment, the first publication of an author's very first novel, with regional "presence." Let's take a look now at what might be argued on the basis of such analysis [Graph L].

"Graph L" is an overview of titles published throughout Australia, state by state. This graph admittedly speaks very little except that which might already be known: during the twentieth century, the bulk of novel production occurred in New South Wales, then Victoria, some almost equally shared between Queensland, South Australia, and Western Australia, with the remainder thinning out in the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania, and finally the Northern Territory. This graph includes all novels printed in Australia but it does not give any view into the possible transfers of creative production between one region and another.

For example, by taking a closer look at the Australian Capital Territory, it can be observed that from 1900–2000, fifty titles were published alongside nineteen reprints. However, within those fifty [Graph M], only forty novels can actually be attributed to authors who were published for the very first time in the Australian Capital Territory; the other ten titles (not counted here) are by authors who were first published in another region or another country. Similarly, out of nineteen reprints on the previous graph, only two of these can be attributed to authors first published in the Australian Capital Territory; the other seventeen not included here represent works by authors first published elsewhere in Australia or overseas.

What is Graph M trying to achieve here? First, it is quantifying the number of novels produced by authors who were published for the first time ever in a particular state or territory. Second, it is also tracking the subsequent titles of these same authors, to see whether they stay with the region that first published them or whether the production of a later novel occurs in another region. This is what the mysterious figure of "two titles" under "New South Wales" represents. It says that two authors, who first entered the literary field by having their first novels, first published in the Australian Capital Territory, have had later new works published in another region. In this example, loosely argued, for those two
authors their “center” for publication at one point relocates from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) to New South Wales, something which this article takes to indicate a “flow” within the literary field of production from one region to another.

Of course, this is only talking about two titles here and so the “flow” out of the ACT is rather small comparatively, though significant in another way. As might also be observed, no author first published in the ACT has subsequent titles published (or even reprinted) in Queensland or Western Australia. In fact, it is reasonable to claim that most authors who are first published in the ACT continue to publish later novels there as well and very rarely anywhere else (though the conditions that sustain this fact would be the object of further book history research). A similar claim too can be made for “ACT authors,” as this article will refer to them now and likewise for other regions, on the international scene [Graph N]. Aside from one novel produced outside Australia—incidentally Marina Maxwell’s Land of the Long Grass published by Covos-Day Books in Southern Africa (a title that followed Maxwell’s first novel, Time and Legend, published by Sirene Enterprises in the ACT)—reprints of and new titles by “ACT authors” have not been published internationally.

For the Northern Territory [Graph O], no subsequent novels by “NT Authors” have been produced overseas either. This would include Stephen Gray’s first literary work, Lungfish, published in Darwin 1999, which won the Jessie Litchfield Award. Gray’s follow-up title, The Artist is a Thief, won the Australian Vogel National Literary Award for an unpublished manuscript [Graph P] and had an extract published by Allen and Unwin in Sydney 2000, ahead of full publication in 2001, also by Allen and Unwin, and is the only work counted under New South Wales for an author first published in the Northern Territory. Likewise in Tasmania we can observe that no authors publish further afield in Australia after being established by local cultural producers [Graph Q]. From a circle of 27 authors, 49 titles represent a significant continuing choice to stay with Tasmanian cultural producers. The one reprint of a Tasmanian title is J. Walch’s The Mysterious Stranger (George Robertson, Victoria, 1915). Internationally,
“Queensland Authors” [Graph S], by contrast, have a large number of subsequent titles and manifestations produced overseas, with new novels published in the United States and England, and reprints throughout Europe. Locally [Graph T], a number of Queensland’s 204 authors follow-up their first novels with titles in New South Wales and Victoria. Some familiar names include Sydney-born Judith Clarke, who published her first three titles with the University of Queensland Press (UQP) before later novels were produced via Puffin, Penguin, and Silverfish in Victoria, and then Allen and Unwin in Sydney; Irish-born Nick Earls, whose first novel was called After January, published by UQP in 1996 and which won the Young People’s Category in the 3M Talking Book of the Year Award, published all his later novels through Anchor and then Bantam publishers in New South Wales, and then Viking and Penguin in Victoria. As a final example, there is Brisbane-born David Malouf, whose first novel, Johnno, was published in 1975 through UQP, but whose later novelistic works were produced through Macmillan and Oxford University Press in Victoria, and Chatto and Windus and Random House in New South Wales. The two titles published in Western Australia are through Fremantle Press, both by Dorothy Porter, which follow UQP’s publication of her first young adult fiction novel, Rookwood, before later books were taken up elsewhere.

South Australia [Graph U] has a similar picture empirically, also with a subsequent novel in Western Australia.

Internationally [Graph V], though, “SA Authors” appear to have more of their later works produced around the world, from Beijing to Scotland, Iceland to Paris. Western Australia [Graph W, next page]? Not nearly as much, with twelve works in England and fewer new novels in the United States and Europe and none in China. This pattern is repeated on the local scene [Graph X, next page], with leanings towards New South Wales, South Australia, and Victoria for authors first published through Fremantle Press, Paterson’s Press, Magabala Books, and Elephas Books.

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For Victoria [Graph Y] and New South Wales, there is no denying the strong international presence of their authors who, once established locally in Australia, create new works for overseas publishers [Graph Z]. The graph for New South Wales, although the totals are higher, is almost proportionally the same. Yet, with so many new novels placed outside Australia and with observable flows, however big and small, from other regions to Victoria and New South Wales, one would not generally expect to find novel writers first established in the South East to move the manufacturing and distribution of their follow-up titles to other parts of Australia. But the quantified macro evidence for Victoria would argue that this is not the case [Graph AA]. While there is a correspondence of production between New South Wales and Victorian authors for both states, plenty of Victorian authors like to place new works in other states. Some of these authors include Victorian-born Beverly Farmer and Frank Hardy, ACT-born Nicholas Hasluck, and Perth-born Elizabeth Jolley (following *Palomino'*s first publication by Outback Press in Victoria). With New South Wales [Graph AB, next page], though its authors seem to heavily favor subsequent publication in their home region, making the visibility of other states a little harder to proportionally represent, there remain by authors first published in New South Wales titles to be found in every region except the Northern Territory. This includes works by Queensland-born Thea Astley after Angus and Robertson published *Girl With a Monkey* in 1982; New South Wales-born Kate Grenville after the publication of *Lillian's Story* by Allen and Unwin; Western Australian-born Xavier Herbert after the Publicist Publishing Company produced *Capricornia* in New South Wales; and Western Australian-born Tim Winton, following the publication of *Shallows* by George Allen and Unwin in New South Wales, who followed up with new novels published by McPhee Gribble, Oxford University Press, Penguin, and Viking in Victoria.
So what is achieved when all this empirical data is appended to the very first spider graph [Graph AC]? As might be seen, there is some literary production moving back and forth between the states and territories and not only towards New South Wales and Victoria. Some of this movement is rather small or non-existent, giving the impression that these regions are quite self-contained, that the material production of their community's authors appears to generally remain at home (with only some minor contributions to other places). The ACT, Tismania, and the Northern Territory might be thought of in this regards. By the same token, other regions like Queensland, Western Australia, and South Australia appear to have a few more titles from their authors reaching out across the nation, interpenetrating into each other's publishing lists and significantly into those of New South Wales and Victoria.

It might be claimed that “yes” there are authors within these particular states that do look to Sydney and Melbourne for publishing subsequent novels. But, of special interest to the present argument, these states also look to each other as “centers” too. South Australia in particular is seen to produce a greater number of manifestations from other regions than it does from its own and Queensland has published the first editions of at least 56 new titles by authors who were first established elsewhere. Similarly with Western Australia, though the proportions are slightly different, it has published few manifestations of its own, even less for those originating interstate, while 15% of its new titles are from authors first published in another state or territory. Finally, New South Wales and Victoria appear empirically as production heavyweights, carrying many titles and reprints from other regions (even if proportionally less than that of Western Australia, South Australia, and Queensland). However, many authors first published in New South Wales and Victoria publish subsequent titles in other states and territories.

The reasons for why these authors should shift their publishing out of New South Wales and Victoria, whether temporarily or permanently, to another region (and vice-versa) calls for the kind of multi-layered book history with which this paper began. For it is not just a question of interstate literary and authorial geography and dispersal as viewed through a rational-choice model but, rather, a need to thicken research on the “interactions, cross-support and issues affecting [the] choice” of where an author publishes her first novel in Australia and the ones that follow its success (McKittrick 417).

This brings me to the final bar graph [Graph AD]. Covering a decade of Australian publishing, it represents those publishers who have produced the highest number of first-edition novels in Australia. Though this figure is dominated by Sydney-based Allen and Unwin, plus the usual branch offices of international multi-media conglomerates, in the period 1997–2007 it is noteworthy that the University of Queensland Press has grown to become the eighth largest producer of Australian first-edition novels. Additionally, of special local interest to Western Australia is Fremantle Press, which ranks
as the tenth busiest publisher in our time. For Fremantle Press, as just one of the white dots on a lonely corner of this map [Graph AE], represents a place of publication, in a region very far away from cities that once might have been considered the only centers or "hubs" for Australian publishing.

NOTES

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For a background on the Australian Literary Gateway (AustLit), please visit: http://www.austlit.edu.au:7777/presentations/index.html

WORKS CITED


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