

Short Story Collections, Cultural Value, and the Australian Market for Books

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THIS ARTICLE EMPLOYS A BIBLIOMETRIC DATASET COMPRISING FORTY YEARS OF Australian sole-authored short story collections to examine the degree to which non-economic values, such as cultural value and symbolic value, regulate cultural production in Australian book publishing. While short story collections may be an unexpected and oblique measure, the variable status of the sole-authored short story collection makes it a useful barometer for examining publishers' investments in cultural forms of value, as opposed to commercial ones. This data suggests two findings that diverge from accounts of recent Australian literary production: (1) that the flowering of Australian short fiction in book-length form occurred slightly later than commonly noted (in the mid-1980s rather than the 1970s), and (2) that there has been a significant contemporary increase in the publishing of largely non-commercial short story collections since 2012. This second finding potentially problematises narratives of literary decline in Australian publishing. In particular, the re-emergence of the short story collection suggests that debates about the disaggregation of the literary field may be overstated, since this data potentially suggests a repolarisation of the field. Rather than reinscribing hierarchies of literary value, however, this repolarisation may simply reflect trends within readerly demographics that consume different kinds of texts.

I. Short Story Collections in the Literary Field

Recent scholarship has sought to re-examine the continuing relevance of the Bourdieusian notion of the literary field for Australian contemporary publishing. For Bourdieu, the literary field is a historically emergent property rather than an inherent structure. As John R. W. Speller has argued, the literary field for Bourdieu arises from a 'historical process of autonomisation and differentiation'; in an autonomous literary field, the "fundamental law" or "rules of the game" which determine the relative positions and possible position-takings of all the agents involved in each particular field' are generated by internal values, and these internal valuations often operate in an inverse relationship to economic values ('Autonomy', *Bourdieu and Literature*, n.p.). As Bourdieu states, 'It is only in a literary and artistic field which has achieved a high degree of autonomy' that 'those who claim to occupy the dominant positions in it' will 'manifest their independence with respect to external powers, political or economic' (*Rules of Art* 61). As this suggests, the literary field follows an autonomous logic differentiated from broader social conceptions of value, and this internal logic is primarily determined by agents in 'dominant positions'.

For Bourdieu, the main mechanism of the field's internal regulation is symbolic capital, which, as Speller notes, relates to both 'the respect given to the literary vocation' and 'the sacredness of literary texts and idols', while also giving 'force to the field's norms and injunctions' ('Autonomy', *Bourdieu and Literature*, n.p.). Symbolic capital might be thought of as the prestige accumulated by either an agent or institution within the field. Literary prestige operates according to the 'rules of the game' within the field: it cannot simply be purchased with economic capital, but an agent may trade on their accumulated prestige in order to convert symbolic capital into economic capital (as Bourdieu notes, symbolic capital is 'a kind of "economic" capital denied but recognized, and hence legitimate—a veritable credit, and capable of assuring, under certain conditions and in the long term, "economic" profits' (*Rules of Art* 142)). In Bourdieu's formulation, which derives from a historical examination of 19th-Century French Literature, the literary field is structured by the competing and irreconcilable logics of economic and symbolic capital, which form the two 'poles' of the field. One pole is the 'anti-"economic" economy of pure art' which is 'founded on the obligatory recognition of the values of disinterestedness' while the other represents the "economic" logic of the literary and artistic industries' that 'confer priority on distribution, on immediate and temporary success, measured for example by the print run, and which are content to adjust themselves to the pre-existing demand of a clientele' (*Rules of Art* 141).

Mark Davis, however, has argued that the Australian literary field's autonomy has been undermined by digital technology, since books now circulate in a broader

transmedia environment that includes print books, ebooks, audiobooks, social media strategies, direct-selling by publishers, commercial self-publishing by authors, new online reading platforms like WattPad, book recommendation algorithms, and user-generated reviews on social media sites like Goodreads. For Davis, these technologies reinforce changes within the industry that had already been occurring in 2006 when he noted the decline of a 'literary paradigm' in Australian publishing. Whereas publishers' commitment to publishing important cultural works was previously seen as essential to their ongoing success, they have increasingly eschewed prestige for commercial interests (Davis, 'Decline' 119). While publishers' reliance on quantitative sales data already threatened the field's autonomous, internal regulation of literary value, new digital technologies 'cut across [the field's] very reasons for being and burst it open' (Davis, 'Who Needs?'). While the literary field might be a 'useful guiding concept' ('Who Needs?'), Davis argues that books now circulate in a fractured 'post-literary' space:

Ours is an increasingly borderless literary culture in which traditional sites of consecration function not so much as centres of power as outposts in the badlands of the formerly literary. The presiding greeting in this fractured, deterritorialised, post-literary space is not 'how are you one of us?' so much as 'who goes there?' ('Who Needs?')

In Davis's post-literary space, regulation by agents still occurs but does not meaningfully structure the field, whose rules are primarily constructed by external economic factors. Put simply, Davis argues for the de-autonomisation of the field, which has once again been made subject to the external political and economic powers that the French literary field freed itself from in the 19th Century. In this sense, the space Davis conjures may be temporally 'post-literary' but might also productively be understood as pre-literary and even pre-modern since it constitutes a return of the regulation of literary activity by externalities.

David Carter has similarly questioned the coherence of the literary field by surveying the overall production of fiction titles by commercial publishers in Australia from 2000 to 2013; his analysis does not find a tightly regulated field but a 'dispersed, disaggregated field, mobilised in diverse ways in diverse institutions—as commodity, industry, professional or aesthetic practice, ethical or pedagogical technology, leisure, entertainment, policy object and national space' ('Literary Field' 156). But for Carter, this disaggregation of the traditional literary field is not a collapse, as it is for Davis. Instead, it is the product of a healthy industry that includes different writing practices across media which can no longer be constrained by the rules of the game that constitute a Bourdiesian literary field. His suggestion is that scholars take up the term 'Australian writing' instead of 'restricted notions of Australian literature' that don't adequately capture the diversity of these practices ('Literary Field' 156). This also does seem

to be a post-literary space, as in Davis's analysis, but it is hardly a post-apocalyptic one.

Davis and Carter's differing accounts might be usefully thought of as a rhetorical form that Derek Parfit has termed the 'empty question': their analyses arguably present 'different descriptions of the same outcome' (*Reasons and Persons* 260). Both describe an effectively de-autonomised field which is no longer structured by the competing regimes of commercial value and literary value as is the case in the Bourdiesian literary field. Whether this development is positive or negative effectively becomes a matter of perspective, but both agree that this change has taken place. But I have undertaken a longitudinal survey of single-author short story collections that potentially complicates the claim that the field of Australian publishing has de-autonomised and may suggest a repolarisation of the literary field rather than its dissolution or dispersion.

The short story may seem an unlikely barometer of cultural change, but its usefulness in measuring the relative importance of symbolic capital for Australian publishing stems precisely from that fact that story collections are a comparatively uncertain commodity: single-author short story collections are generally viewed by publishers as unprofitable; they sell in much lower quantities than novels; they are printed in much smaller runs; and, in any year in Australia, publishers will produce far more novels than story collections. In Australia, a novel is usually considered 'successful' if it has sold 6,000 copies; even short story collections from high-profile authors are unlikely to sell a fraction of that. The few exceptions prove the rule; in the last twelve years, the only two Australian short story collections that definitely sold more than 6,000 copies are Nam Le's *The Boat* (2008) and Maxine Beneba Clarke's *Foreign Soil* (2014). As a result of their unprofitability, short story collections are often disguised as novels by publishers, especially when such works constitute interlinked collections or story cycles. Eva Hornung's *Majar: A Novel* (2003), for example, won the 2004 Steele Rudd Award for a short story collection, despite its subtitle. As Hornung herself noted, 'Oh yes, *Mahjar* is a short story cycle. We just said novel so we could market it' (Clarkson 11). Michelle Pacht has similarly noted that, because the novel is 'the most commercial and prestigious literary form', it makes sense for authors and publishers of short story collections to call their works 'novels' in order to 'enhance their reputations—and their sales' (*Subversive Storyteller* 5). Again, this emphasises the degree to which story collections remain marginal commodities for most publishers.

Short story collections, however, are still produced by every type of publisher in Australia, including large international and local publishers; this is not the case (or not true to the same degree) for other high cultural forms that are viewed as unprofitable, such as poetry collections (unless attached to marketable online personalities often described as Instagram poets) and literary miscellanies. Short

story collections are thus useful for indexing the relative importance of symbolic capital because they remain a marginal and generally unprofitable form, but one that has still not been wholly exiled from the commercial marketplace.

And while the short story has been a variable commodity in economic terms, it is a form that has held a culturally privileged place in Australia. As Elizabeth Webby has noted, Australia has a strong tradition of short story writing, as was often the case among 'white settler countries' that had a 'strong local newspaper and magazine culture' ('Short Story' 269), but a less developed book publishing industry. The opportunities for income generated by writing such stories in magazines and newspapers fostered a tradition of stories associated with Henry Lawson that were 'realist, using a colloquial, usually male, voice and featuring working-class characters and bush settings' ('Short Story' 269). As Webby argues, a new generation of short story writers influenced by Modernist techniques—such as Patrick White, Hal Porter, Peter Cowan, Elizabeth Harrower and Shirley Hazzard—began to appear in the 1950s and 1960s, but the Lawsonian tradition arguably remained dominant until the 1970s ('Short Story' 269-70). In the 1970s, however, a 'new wave' of Australian short story writers appeared—Murray Bail, Peter Carey, Frank Moorhouse and Michael Wilding, among many others—who revitalised the form through the use of postmodern techniques that often emphasised the fictionality of stories; as Kerryn Goldsworthy has argued, 'Short fiction was the dominant literary form in Australia in the 1970s' (Goldsworthy xxiv). There were more radical changes still in the 1980s, which saw 'a vast increase in the publication of Australian short fiction in individual collections, in anthologies and in magazines' ('Short Fiction' n.p.). As Webby notes, where the stories of the 1970s incorporated new fictional techniques and frank discussions of sexuality, in particular, the stories of the 1980s began to address a wide array of broader cultural issues: 'The number and range of anthologies published during the 1980s reflected not only the popularity of short fiction with both writers and readers but wider changes in Australian society and in attitudes to Australian literature: 'state of the art' and regional collections, stories by women, by gays and lesbians, by writers from non-English-speaking backgrounds ('Short Fiction' n.p.). Alongside anthology publishing, a large number of short story collections were published by highly-regarded literary writers, including Olga Masters, Elizabeth Jolley, Robert Drewe, David Malouf, Tim Winton, Helen Garner and others. For a brief moment, the single-author short story collection appeared to challenge the novel as the most prestigious literary form in Australia.

Subsequently, however, the short story's prestige appeared to decline. By 1999, Amanda Lohrey would argue that 'collections of short stories are increasingly hard to market, and, indeed, scarcely worth doing at all unless written by established literary names' (Bennett 7). Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman similarly observed that, during the early 2000s, single author short story collections had virtually

disappeared from the market, unless they were written by ‘novelists with high public profiles and (one assumes) guaranteed sales’ (97). Many of the notable short story collections produced between 2000 and 2005, such as Tim Winton’s *The Turning* (2004), Gillian Mears’ *A Map of Gardens* (2002), Mandy Sayer’s *15 Kinds of Desire* (2001) and Eva Hornung’s *Majar* (2003), were the work of established authors who had published novels and had been recognised by major literary awards. Very few significant collections appeared from new or debut authors and it certainly seemed as though the overall production of short fiction had diminished significantly. The form returned to some degree of notoriety in the late 2000s and afterwards propelled, at least in part, by the appearance of transnational Australian collections like *The Boat* and *Foreign Soil*.

But there has been, to date, no attempt to analyse quantitatively the broader cultural production of short story collections in Australian over this period and see how this production might reflect changes in the symbolic value of both stories, and the importance of non-economic value for Australian publishing more broadly. This absence of data-based analyses of short story collections is notable given that bibliometric approaches have become an important feature of Australian literary criticism. My approach draws on methods of bibliometric analysis that have been applied by a wide array of scholars, including David Carter, Mark Davis, Katherine Bode and others, to examine Australian literary production. There are distinct benefits to such quantitative literary analysis, which, among other things, enables the quantification of literary production in order to analyse trends. Such analysis can supplement historical and sociological analyses of the literary, which, as John Frow has argued, provide an essential vantage point that undermines ‘the apparent coherence of the literary’ by revealing that it is embedded within a social and cultural structure that is neither universal nor given (242).

In order to achieve this perspective, quantitative accounts must rely on necessary abstractions from social and institutional ‘literary’ praxis, which comprise a multiplicity of different acts and events, including tertiary modes of literary instruction, the staging of literary festivals, the awarding of literary prizes, the creation and dissemination of book reviews, the implementation of publishers’ marketing strategies, and even the shelving practices of booksellers, who physically sort individual works into different categories or genres—which is to say nothing of the literary networks that are being formed, reinforced, or altered through social media and other digital communications technology. Beth Driscoll has recently identified six key networks in contemporary Australian literary culture, comprising publishers, booksellers, literary festivals, literary prizes, literary magazines, and schools and universities (‘Contemporary Australian Literary Culture’ n.p.). Quantitative information can offer direct ways of analysing these networks, by looking at, for example, total numbers of books published,

attendance at festivals by authors, prize-listing practices (sorted by gender, genre or publisher type), the networks of authors presented by literary journals, and the kinds of texts that are set for secondary and tertiary subjects. In this sense, quantitative data presents an abstracted but still material insight into the way that literary culture functions in aggregate.

This analysis applies bibliometric data gathered from the AustLit database on single-authored short story collections between 1977 and 2017 to examine Australian literary production among publishers and determine their investments in non-economic regimes of value. It is worth underscoring that—from a Bourdieusian perspective—the analysis of production is inherently linked to reception because there is a ‘homology between the field of production and the field of consumption’ (*Rules of Art* 165). One important caveat does need to be noted here: it is possible—and, indeed, even likely—that the value of short story collections in terms of both economics and literary prestige have not been stable over the forty-year period. Indeed, the brief history of the story I noted above suggest that the prestige of short story collections has wavered. In this sense, tracking them does not provide a stable measurement of non-economic value in publishing over time. Nonetheless, I would argue that short story collections have remained marginal commodities especially in comparison to novels over this period. In this sense, publishers’ investments (or lack thereof) in short story collections over this period potentially offers a useful indication of their willingness to invest in non-economic values, such as literary quality, since short stories have rarely offered significant return on investment as commodities.

The relationship between economic and non-economic values in publishing, however, has always been complex, since books have always simultaneously been commodities and cultural objects. Indeed, all commodities, as Marx argued, can be said to possess a use value (‘the usefulness of a thing... conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity’) that is separate from its exchange value (the ‘mode of expression’ of a commodity’s fungibility for other commodities ‘distinguishable from it’) (*Capital* 126-7). But books inhabit non-economic regimes of value that seem different from use values in Marx’s sense, because they are conditioned not by physical properties, but rather by social and cultural factors. As David Throsby has argued, books ‘are not articles of commercial merchandise in the same way as footwear, beer or automobiles’, because they possess ‘an identifiable dimension’ to their value that is ‘separate from their financial worth’ and reflects the ‘contribution they make to the cultural life of individuals or of the nation’ (‘Commerce’ n.p.).

While cultural value may be ‘identifiable’, locating ‘an objectively measurable cultural value of books’ remains an extremely difficult task (‘Commerce’ n.p.). Cultural value, unlike economic value, has ‘no common unit of account’ and

'probably includes some components expressible only in non-quantifiable terms' (*Economics* 159). This is partially because cultural value itself encompasses a broad range of different forms of valuation, including aesthetic value (the aesthetic properties of the work), spiritual value (the religious or secular relation of a cultural work to the 'inner being' of its audience), social value (the capacity of a work to engage a sense of community), historical value (a work's direct relationship to a historical period or its capacity to 'illuminate' history), symbolic value (the meaning conveyed by a work), and authenticity value (the originality or legitimacy of the work) (*Economics* 28-9). For Throsby, cultural values have an inherently 'collective' or communal function, whereas economic values tend toward the 'individualistic' (*Economics* 158).

Despite these differences, however, Throsby notes that, generally speaking, there is a 'close relationship between economic and cultural value' (*Economics* 159). This is so because in the 'shadow economy involving cultural transactions', the 'quality evaluations' made by consumers are 'likely to have a strong influence on the prices they are willing to pay' ('Assessing' 193). Indeed, book publishers have traditionally sought to *capitalise on* this other regime of cultural value. As John B. Thompson notes, publishers have historically sought to foreground their cultural value as a form of distinction:

Publishers seek to accumulate symbolic capital just as they seek to accumulate economic capital. It is important to them partly because it is important to their image... But it is also important to them for good organizational and financial reasons. It strengthens their hand in the struggle to acquire new content because it makes their organization more attractive in the eyes of authors and agents... It strengthens their position in the networks of cultural intermediaries—including booksellers, reviewers, and media gatekeepers—whose decisions and actions can have a big impact on the success or otherwise of particular books (8-9).

Here, Thompson means symbolic capital in Bourdieu's sense: as a form of prestige that determines one's standing within the literary field. Historically a publisher's symbolic capital has been largely determined by the kinds of categories that Throsby designates as constituting cultural value: 'A publisher who has established a reputation for quality... is a publisher that agents, retailers and even readers will be more inclined to trust' (Thompson 8-9). Indeed, some forms of symbolic capital can even be directly exchanged for economic capital; this is particularly true in relation to prizes, which, as James English notes, facilitate 'cultural "market transactions"' by enabling a 'collective project of value production' (26). Thompson notes that the symbolic capital of literary prizes also exerts a direct economic benefit, since 'a book that wins a major literary prize will

very commonly experience a sharp upturn in sales, and may even lift the sales of other books by the same author' (9).

The notion of symbolic capital thus becomes a key interpolating term, which is missing from Throsby's articulation of cultural and economic value; symbolic capital, which includes the perception of cultural value by agents in the field, is important to publishers, because it enables the material economics of their business by underwriting their relations with other agents. As Bourdieu states more baldly, 'the accumulation of economic capital merges with the accumulation of symbolic capital, that is, with the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability' (*Distinction* 285). In short, symbolic capital clarifies how and why cultural values of the kind Throsby discusses remain important for businesses in literary cultural industries, because symbolic capital, or prestige within the field, is what has historically regulated the relationship between cultural values and economic ones for cultural intermediaries.

But the degree to which symbolic capital matters for a business within a cultural industry also depends on the organisation's structure, mission, and contexts—including, crucially, the shape of the field that it inhabits. Throsby partially acknowledges this distinction in his model of cultural value by discussing how 'non-profit arts firms can be portrayed via an objective function wherein the quality of work produced' and its 'audience reach' constitute its 'joint maximands' and the financial requirement is simply to meet costs; on the other side of this equation are 'profit-maximising firms' whose aims are purely economic (*Economics* 117-18). One could redescribe this opposition in a Bourdieusian mode by saying that the non-profit firm focused on quality occupies something like the 'autonomous' pole of art-for-arts sake production, whereas the profit-maximising firm occupies a 'heteronomous' pole that primarily seeks to produce cultural products for an economic benefit (*Rules* 121). Indeed, Bourdieu has explicitly identified a homology between publishers and writers of these two poles (*Rules* 61). In this sense, significant investments in symbolic capital (which in my study is represented by short story collections) suggests a moment when the autonomous pole is asserting its influence on the field, and the waning of these investments would suggest, in turn, a period in which the heteronomous or commercial pole is more important in structuring the field.

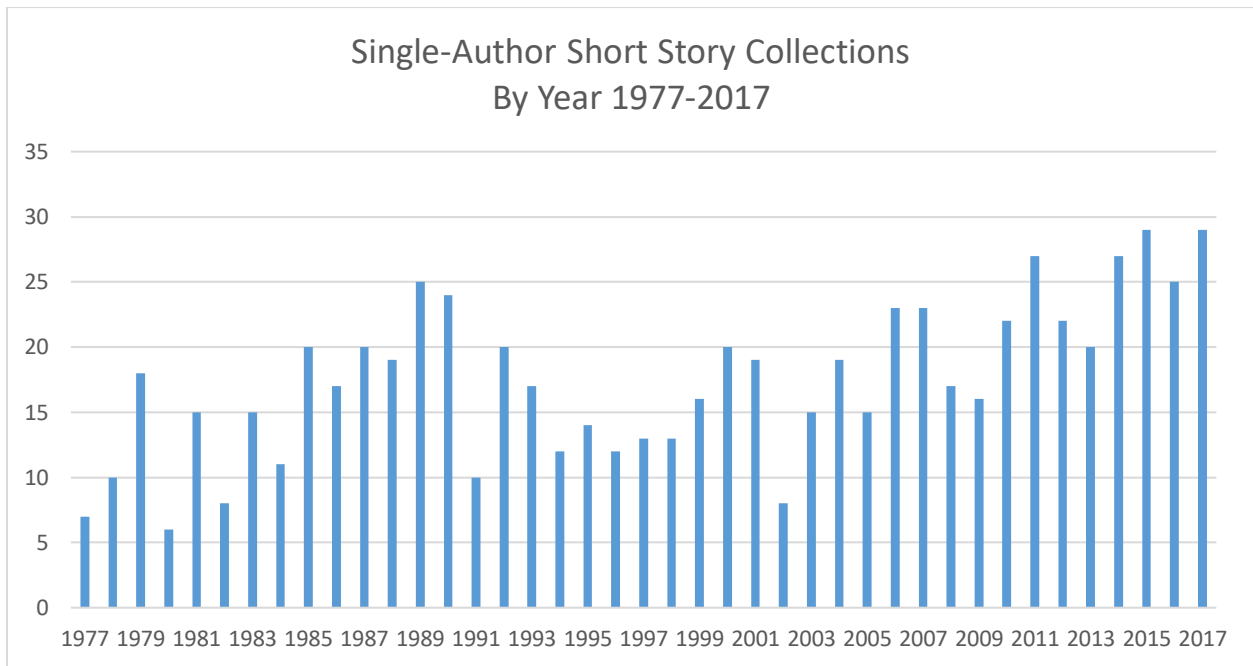
II. Short Story Collections and Non-Economic Values in Australian Publishing

The bibliographic data in this analysis has been derived from the AustLit database, and, as is typically the case, harvesting bibliometric data is never as straightforward as it might appear. First of all, there is no explicit 'short story collection' category in the AustLit database. To find such collections, under the advanced search option, you need to select the 'form' short story and the type

called 'selected work' and then search by year under the category 'first known date'. More significantly, the search also captures a wide array of other works beyond the single-author short story collection, which must be manually excluded. In particular, this search includes a wide array of literary miscellanies combining poetry, essay, short-story and memoir, which I excluded from consideration. I also removed a not insignificant number of local foreign-language publications, as well as works originating overseas which were never republished in Australia and thus bear only a tenuous relation to local literary production. I omitted volumes of 'collected stories' that only included the reprinting of earlier short story collections, but when such volumes collected new stories, I included them, *if* the author was still alive. I also excluded reprints of already published titles. I typically excluded works that were examples of genre fiction (romance, fantasy, science-fiction, and the like); this exclusion was made for three reasons: (1) genre-fiction operates according to a different market logic, which produces very different effects in relation to production and reception of story collections, (2) the production of genre-based single-author short story collections in Australia is a comparatively uncommon practice, and (3) my interest was in mapping explicitly 'literary' works that are traditionally seen as having high cultural value or symbolic capital and limited commercial appeal. At the same time, I tried to respect the porousness of the boundary between 'literary' and genre work by including titles that had been shortlisted for literary awards, were reviewed as literary works, or deemed as such on social reading sites or in a publisher's marketing materials. In other words, any work that could possibly be construed as literary, in the broadest sense, has been included in the count.

I also excluded collections that were self-published or vanity published (although I have included some works produced by so-called 'hybrid' publishing in which publisher and author split the production costs and share royalties). Again, the reason behind this exclusion was twofold: (1) my goal is to measure the cultural production of Australian *publishers* rather than *authors*, and (2) the dataset of self-published works available in AustLit is probably not complete given the large number of such publications. This distinction between traditionally published and hybrid or self-published works is not a qualitative judgment, but remains important for understanding how short story collections have been produced, mediated, and received in Australia.

This analysis yielded a total of 718 short story collections from 1977 to 2017. Individual production from year to year varied greatly, with the highest output of short story collections in one year being twenty-nine (in 2015 and 2017), and the lowest output of collections being six (in 1980).

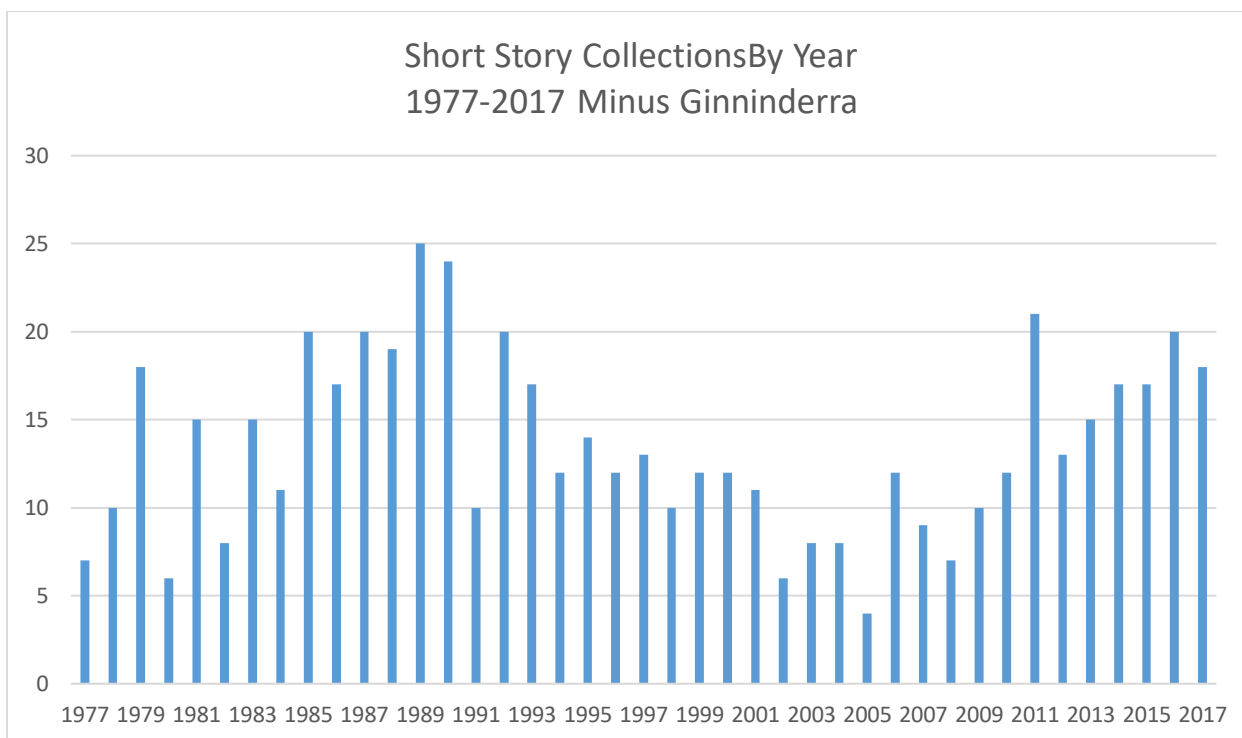


This graph of overall production appears on its face to overturn some common perceptions of Australian short story publishing. While there was low production in 2002 (eight titles), all of the other years of low production appear to occur in what is usually considered the heyday of the short story revival in 1977 (seven titles), 1980 (six titles), 1982 (eight titles) and 1991 (ten titles). This might support Webby's assertion that, in the 1970s, journals, newspaper, magazines, and anthologies were the most important modes by which stories were disseminated, whereas the only publisher to invest heavily in short story collections was University of Queensland Press (153-4).

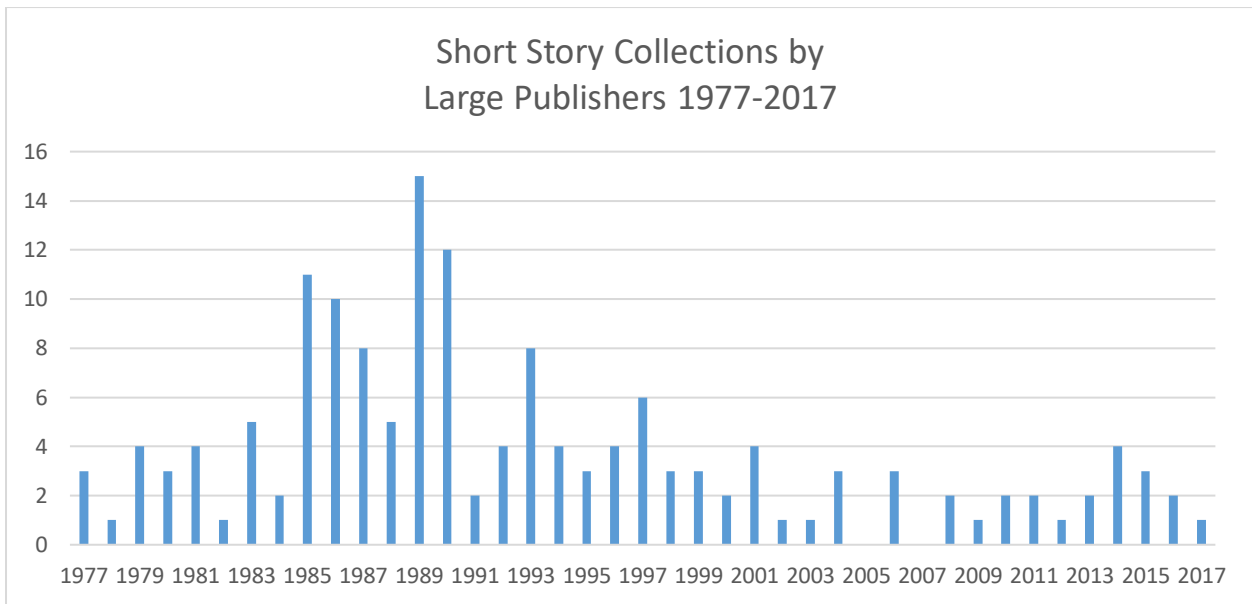
These totals are also heavily affected by one publisher: Ginninderra Press, which is surely Australia's most prolific publisher of single-author collections of short fiction. Founded in Canberra in 1996, and later moved to South Australia, Ginninderra engages in both traditional and hybrid publishing practices with a goal 'to provide opportunities for new and emerging authors as well as for authors writing in unfashionable genres or on non-mainstream subjects'. Ginninderra—during much of the 2000s—produced shorter, thermal-bound works of around 20,000 words in a traditional publishing model, offering royalties of 10 percent to authors. Longer works were subject to a hybrid arrangement, in which publisher and author split the costs and profits 50-50. Such partner publishing models are often accused of resembling vanity publishing, but Ginninderra, much to their credit, worked hard to discourage authors from having unrealistic expectations. In 2008, I submitted a manuscript to Ginninderra and was offered a hybrid contract; the acceptance letter ended by noting, 'It is recommended that every mainstream publication option be exhausted before a Ginninderra Press offer is accepted'. In many cases, Ginninderra served as a publishing outlet for books with

literary value that were ignored by mainstream publishers, and they had several works that were either shortlisted for or won the Steele Rudd Award—Australia’s only award for short story collections. Craig McCormick’s *The Princess of Cups* and Peter Frankis’s *Trouble in the Garden* were shortlisted in 2004. Michael de Valle’s *Take a Breath and Hold It* was shortlisted in 2006, and Craig McCormick’s *A Funny Thing Happened at 27,000 Feet... Tales from Times of Terror* won in the same year. Moreover, they published two early short story collections by Ryan O’Neill, who later won the 2017 Prime Minister’s Literary Award for Fiction for his *Their Brilliant Careers*.

Ginninderra has thus influenced broader literary culture, but its influence has been comparatively small, and many of their titles are not widely distributed even among independent booksellers. Ginninderra is particularly significant in relation to short story collections, because it has had a large investment in the form through its short-story only imprint, Mockingbird. Between its founding and 2017, Ginninderra has produced 159 single-author short story collections, or 22 percent of my total sample. Indeed, over the same span (1998 to 2017), all other Australian publishers produced 242 short story collections. Given Ginninderra’s outsized production and its comparative lack of distribution, I would argue that a more useful set of comparisons can be made by looking at the production of short stories by publishers excluding Ginninderra. This dataset produces a distribution that conforms better to literary histories of the short story. Now, the nadir of publishing short story collections appears over the span of 2002-2005, in which an average of only six collections per year were published, and the highpoint of short story publishing appears during the years from 1983 to 1993 during which an average of 18 collections were published per year (the average number of titles per year during my sample is 13.5).



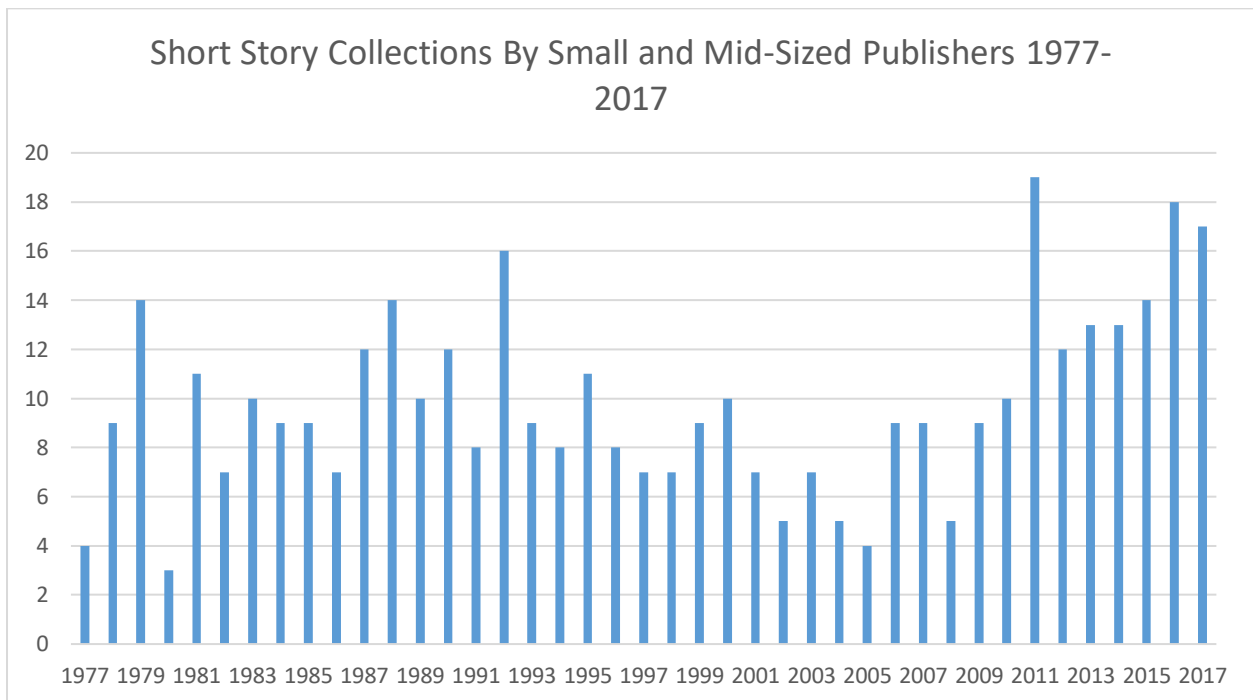
This data also reveals another significant spike in the publication of short story collections starting in 2011 up until 2017, during which an average of 17.29 collections have been published each year—very near the highs of the 1980s. This resurgence problematises, in certain respects, the notion of literary decline articulated by Mark Davis and others in the mid- and late-2000s. As this data suggests, the early 2000s do seem to have presented a marked decline in literary short story publishing, but this was a temporary state of affairs. What seems to have changed is not the total amount of literary production, but rather the *kind* of publisher who is producing single-author short story collections. Unlike in the mid-1980s, where large publishers like Penguin frequently published short story collections, large Australian publishers in the 2000s have printed such collections only infrequently. But as this data suggests, the span between 1983 and 1993 was very much the outlier, rather than the rule. Indeed, this span largely coincides with the reign of the Australian Labor government under Bob Hawke and Paul Keating, and a broader government investment in fostering and supporting national culture in various forms. It also coincides with particular industrial developments, such as Penguin’s co-publishing agreement with McPhee-Gribble, which began in 1983 before the eventual acquisition of McPhee-Gribble in 1989; McPhee-Gribble had developed a reputation as publisher of ‘important’ cultural works and on its own was responsible for 24 of the 93 (25.8 percent) collections published by large publishers between 1983 and 1993.



Large publishers' investments in short story collections from the 2000s have remained at low levels, including two years (2005 and 2007) in which they produced no collections. Short story collections are now overwhelmingly produced by smaller publishers and mid-level independents. Large publishers do occasionally produce short story collections, including three recent works by debut authors: Maxine Clarke's *Foreign Soil* from Hachette, Abigail Ulman's *Hot Little Hands* from Penguin, and Murray Middleton's *When There's Nowhere Else to Run* from Allen & Unwin. This suggests that short stories are receiving a level of consideration at larger houses that they were not a decade ago, but also emphasises that stories remain marginal. This does not mean that the literary paradigm has returned, but it might suggest that large publishers are strategically investing in symbolic capital in limited ways, by at least occasionally producing works with high symbolic capital and low commercial potential. Or it may be that, for large publishers, short story collections are sometimes being used as a testing ground for developing new authors.

Publishers and editors at large houses, do care about literary quality, but commercial concerns are the dominant factor in acquiring titles. For example, in a 2017 interview, Lexy Hirst, then a Commissioning Editor at Penguin Random House Australia, discussed the editorial acquisition process. While she discussed the importance of a work's quality, including 'the high quality of writing' and 'how unique and engaging the characters might be', acquisition decisions 'ultimately boil down to the sales projection' (n.p.). This qualitative claim is backed by quantitative results: in Throsby, Zwar, and Morgan's survey of large Australian publishers, 100 percent of the respondents published 'general fiction and non-fiction' (which are commercial titles), while only 17 percent engaged in 'poetry press or literary publishing' (15). The heteronomous pole thus remains dominant for large Australian publishers.

Over my entire sample, small publishers and mid-sized publishers have produced an average of 9.75 short story collections per year. From 2011 to 2017, however, this average jumps to 15.14 short story collections per annum. Purely from the perspective of production, the period from 2011 to 2017 absolutely comprises a resurgence of the short story collection that rivals the heights of the 1980s—and this resurgence is being almost wholly driven by small publishers.



The greatly divergent investment in a form like the short story collection, which has high levels of symbolic capital and limited commercial potential, suggests that Throsby's description of the two kinds of firms—the non-profit that seeks to maximise cultural value through quality while breaking even and the profit-maximising firm—actually depicts the contemporary literary field, which has now bifurcated into, on the one hand, a set of cultural industries publishers that are primarily invested in producing commercially profitable books and a set of smaller firms for whom symbolic value—including the kinds of precepts embodied in Throsby's notion of cultural value—still matters a great deal. This differentiation may sound like a value judgment or the reinscription of hierarchies of high and low, but in many cases it simply reflects the realities of a two-speed publishing industry, in which different kinds of firms fill different kinds of needs.

On the one hand, very large publishers, including both large local firms and major international publishers, have been under pressure for decades to rationalise their businesses and deliver greater profits. These large publishers sell through diverse outlets—including independent book shops, the remaining chain bookstores (for

example, Collins), online print retailers like Booktopia, so-called discount and department Stores (for example, Kmart and Target), as well as selling audiobooks and ebooks through Amazon and, in most cases, offering direct sales from their own websites. These large houses are often competing for attention with the kinds of books that are being successfully self-published both on Amazon and sites like WattPad. On the other hand, smaller publishers primarily sell through Australia's very strong market of independent booksellers, which represented 26 percent of the national print book market in 2016—a much larger share of the market than independent bookstores in the United States of the United Kingdom ('The Market Down Under'). Most of these independent bookshops are concentrated in major cities and serve an urban, educated clientele. There are subsidiary revenues from ebooks and so forth, but many of these sales are presumably going to consumers who resemble independent book store customers.

Because they are smaller organisations, small publishers are also able to make a profit from print runs as small as one thousand copies—especially if they are able to sell a significant percentage of that run directly through launches and events (and thus keep for themselves the roughly 50 percent of the retail price that a bookshop would take for each sale). Moreover, they are incentivised to seek out symbolic capital in a way that many larger publishers are not. Large publishers already have built-in advantages over smaller ones: they can offer bigger advances, possess larger distribution networks (which lead to greater profits), and typically have well-developed overseas connections. Such publishers do not really need symbolic distinctions to attract authors and agents; it is important to have *some* symbolic capital, and so large publishers continue to invest strategically in a few featured works or authors imbued with symbolic capital while generally applying a strategy of signing books that combine 'quality' with the prospect of high sales—which Beth Driscoll has described as the middlebrow literary dream of credibility and sales (*New Literary Middlebrow* 151).

Small publishers, on the other hand, have much more to gain from chasing symbolic recognition. By winning major awards, for example, such publishers can attract established authors of high cultural works who, in the past, would have published with large publishers, as is the case with Amanda Lohrey at Black Ink, Anthony Macris at University of Western Australia Press, Helen Garner at Text, and Brian Castro, Gerald Murnane and Alexis Wright at Giramondo, among many others. Winning awards or developing a reputation as a publisher of quality also offers advantages to small publishers who are seeking grant funding from the Australia Council or other funding bodies; for these funding organisations—which remain an important and even essential income stream for most small publishers—perceptions of cultural value as embedded in symbolic capital are far more important criteria than commercial success. This is true also of small publishers' relationships with independent booksellers, for whom notions of

literary quality continue to be important and foregrounded in their advertising material and in-store displays. Indeed, the idea that small publishers routinely pursue symbolic capital, and arguably now do so more than ever, would seem to be supported by recent data on Australia's major literary prizes, which, in 2016 and 2017, were dominated by small publishers for the first time (Stinson).

In this sense, the data around short story collections suggests that we are not seeing a post-literary field or a disaggregated one. Nor does it suggest that the distinction between literary and other popular forms of writing is being eroded. Instead, this data appears to portray a bifurcated literary field that can be divided between those larger publishers whose main priorities are (as a matter of fact) commercial and those smaller publishers who prioritise symbolic capital (which often supports the pursuit of economic capital). Such a bifurcated model is precisely what Bourdieu describes in his depiction of a literary field that has heteronomous and autonomous poles. This bifurcation is arguably *constitutive* of the literary field. While it is clear that some important players in the field—such as large publishers—increasingly have lower investments in symbolic capital than in the past or seek to focus on producing work that combines quality (however this term might be construed) with commercial appeal, this does not mean that the literary field is collapsing or has ceased to exist. Nor, of course, does this rule out the possibility that the field is being shaped and changed by various forms of digital mediation and distribution. Nonetheless, the quantitative analysis of literary production of single-author short story collections suggests a very different story, which is nothing more or less than an increasing polarisation of the literary field itself.

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