

Reading, Writing, and Re-Visioning the Past: the historical novel in history.

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The extraordinary popularity of historical fiction shows no sign of abating. Historical novels have been attempted by most major contemporary novelists; they regularly top bestseller lists and win literary prizes; and the genre is also discussed by a range of scholars, who often distinguish between bodice-rippers, or 'costume' novels, and more serious, often revisionist, engagements with the past in fiction. What is the historical novel now? How does it draw on, revise, and extend examples from the 18th and 19th centuries? What role might it play in the telling of national histories and contested pasts? Drawing on examples from Australian and British fiction, this seminar will discuss the history of the historical novel, and consider specific debates that attach to the genre, particularly: who owns the past?