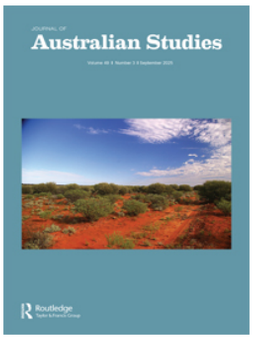

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Elizabeth A. Smyth

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Subverting Social Order: Recovering the Intelligent Woman Farmer in John Naish's *That Men Should Fear* (1963)

Elizabeth A. Smyth

College of Arts Society and Education, James Cook University, Cairns, Australia

ABSTRACT

In a 1985 lecture, Australian literary scholar Bruce Bennett said that people associated with farming are commonly regarded as intellectually impoverished. John Naish's farm novel *That Men Should Fear* (1963) subverts the literary social order that Bennett described by portraying a farmer who is characterised as highly educated. Naish's first novel, *The Cruel Field* (1962), has appeared in recent georgic studies and ecocritical scholarship, and in analyses of the migrant experience and labour systems. In this article, I recover his second novel, *That Men Should Fear*, and argue that Naish's characterisation of the farmer as university educated subverts the literary "scale of civilisation" noted by Bennett while enabling insights into a class division based on ownership of farmland. This article centres on Naish's portrayal of a strong and independent woman farmer at a time when women felt sidelined in Australian literature and society. I argue that Naish's *That Men Should Fear* reshapes the genre of the Australian farm novel by expanding traditional representations of women and class. It also enriches the farmer's perspective offered in Naish's *The Cruel Field*.

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John Naish's *That Men Should Fear* (1963) is an Australian farm novel that features a striking portrait of an educated woman who inherits a farm and refuses to marry a man to help her run it.[1] However, Australian rural society has only in recent years increased the visibility of women—albeit White middle-class women—as active contributors to or leaders of farming enterprises in a shift away from traditional patriarchal authority.[2] Contemporary patterns of succession planning show that "traditional scripts of the oldest son being the natural and only successor are being disrupted by the wider social norms around women's roles in the public space".[3] In *That Men Should Fear*, Naish did more than cast an independent woman as the farmer; he made her a highly educated person who had completed more than seven years of university

CONTACT Elizabeth A. Smyth elizabeth.smyth@jcu.edu.au

[1]John Naish, *That Men Should Fear* (Hutchinson and Co., 1963).

[2]Laura Rodriguez Castro and Barbara Pini, "The 'White Middle-Class Farming Woman': Instagram and Settler Colonialism in Contemporary Rural Australia", *Journal of Rural Studies* 94 (2022): 83–90, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.05.024.

[3]Alison Sheridan et al., "Changing Scripts: Gender, Family Farm Succession and Increasing Farm Values in Australia", *Journal of Rural Studies* 100 (2023): 9, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2023.103024.

study to become a medical doctor. This aspect of his work contrasts with a 1985 lecture by Australian literary scholar Bruce Bennett, who said "the world of farms and country towns is commonly thought to be inhabited by slow wits".[4] *That Men Should Fear* subverts the literary social order that Bennett described as descending from metropolitan intelligence and sophistication to agrarian ignorance and artlessness. Both Bennett's observation of common attitudes and the recent increased visibility of women farmers in Australia prompt the question: What was the cultural impact of Naish's novel? This article takes a step towards answering that question through a reading of *That Men Should Fear* that attends to gender and class in the farm-novel genre (farm novels are usually set on a farm, feature farmers and farm workers as main characters, and address agricultural issues).[5] My aim is to recover this forgotten novel as a contribution to the literary scholarship on Australia's relatively small collection of farm novels, which form part of the much larger body of working-class fiction. Such readings are important to enriching understandings of the history of farming and farming literature in a country where over 60 per cent of the continent is managed by farmers and graziers. In this article, I argue that Naish's *That Men Should Fear* reshapes the genre of the farm novel by expanding traditional representations of women and class.

John Naish was a Welsh immigrant who wrote 16 plays, an autobiography, *The Clean Breast* (1961), and two novels, *The Cruel Field* (1962) and *That Men Should Fear* (1963). He died at the age of 40 in the same year that his final novel was published. His oeuvre received scant critical attention for decades, with the women characters of his first novel briefly described as "foolish, heartless or mercenary".[6] More recently, Naish's work has been read for its contribution to studies of georgic literature,[7] to the history of the Australian cane fields,[8] and in an overview of his entire oeuvre.[9] Prior to Naish, Aotearoa New Zealand–born Jean Devanny was (and perhaps remains) the most prominent novelist writing about the North Queensland cane fields. Devanny was a feminist and communist who wrote to advance working-class lives.[10] She wrote in a realist style saturated with political agenda. Naish instead delivered studies of the human condition. As a result, his fiction offers important insights into the lives of canecutters and farming people of the 1950s, when he himself worked as a canecutter. His works span an era in northern Queensland of replacing Indigenous hunting and gathering, in all its forms, with European-inspired farms,[11] and of rapidly changing social structures.

[4]Bruce Bennett, *Place, Region and Community* (Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, 1985), 41.
[5]Florian Freitag, *The Farm Novel in North America: Genre and Nation in the United States, English Canada, and French Canada, 1845–1945* (Boydell and Brewer, 2013); Roy W. Meyer, *The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century* (University of Nebraska Press, 1965).
[6]Cheryl Taylor and Elizabeth Perkins, "Warm Words", in *By the Book: A Literary History of Queensland*, ed. Patrick Buckridge and Belinda McKay (University of Queensland Press, 2007), 213–55.
[7]Elizabeth A. Smyth, "The Semi-Georgic Australian Sugarcane Novel", in *Georgic Literature and the Environment: Working Land, Reworking Genre*, ed. Sue Edney and Tess Somervell (Routledge, 2023), 184–98; Elizabeth A. Smyth, "Sugarcane and the Wet Tropics: Reading the Georgic Mode and Region in John Naish's Farm Novel *The Cruel Field* (1962)", *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 21, no. 2 (2021): 1–12, https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/JASAL/article/view/14901.
[8]Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui, "A Beaut of a Cut Near Cairns: The Butty Gang System in the Cane Fields in John Naish's 'The Cruel Field'", *Labour History* 124, no. 124 (2023): 31–61, https://doi.org/10.3828/labourhistory.2023.3.
[9]Cheryl Taylor and Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui, "John Naish's Contribution to the Literature and History of the Queensland Canefields", *Queensland Review* 31, no. 1 (2024): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1558/qre.25954.
[10]Carole Ferrier, *Jean Devanny: Romantic Revolutionary* (Melbourne University Press, 1999); Nicole Moore, "Interrupting Maternal Citizenship: Birth Control in Mid-Wave Women's Writing", *Australian Feminist Studies* 17, no. 38 (2002), 151–64, https://doi.org/10.1080/08164640220147933.
[11]Peter Sutton and Keryn Walshe, *Farmers or Hunter-Gatherers?: The Dark Emu Debate* (Melbourne University Publishing, 2021).

That Men Should Fear is the story of one man's life from childhood to middle age, told in the first person by the protagonist, Jim Pearce. The narrative offers a philosophical contemplation of the effects of a degenerative disease while navigating the entanglement of two families. Jim is born in 1920 on a sugarcane farm near the fictional North Queensland town of Brettville, on land cleared of "jungle, harsh and screaming", by his grandfather.[12] Before Jim's birth, the neighbouring farmer's son, William Vaughan, had proposed to Jim's mother, Grace Barlow; but Grace turned him down and instead married Gordon Pearce. William then marries Freda Challinor and has three children, Robert, David and Mary. The tragedy for the Pearce family is that Gordon had sold his farm to William Vaughan before absconding with Freda to Europe. Afterwards, Grace takes her young son, Jim, to live in the Vaughan farmhouse, where she raises William's children as well. The difficulty of Grace's new subservient situation is attributed to the loss of her financial security as her husband had left her none of the proceeds from the sale of their farm and to her moral failings in establishing an intimacy with William Vaughan outside of marriage. Roy W. Meyer notes this type of plot in the farm novels of the American Midwest: "If a character goes into debt or loses his farm, it is likely to be less the result of an iniquitous economic system than the consequence of some inadequacy on the part of the unfortunate person."[13] Ian Syson also notes a common theme in Australian postwar stories of "apolitical workers with few prospects struggling to survive", which contrasts with the common social realism of that era.[14] In *That Men Should Fear*, Grace and Jim's loss of their farm is illustrative of the emergence of two classes: one with farmland and one without.

Mary Vaughan is a university-educated product of the farming upper class, who, unusually for a woman, inherits her family's productive farm. Her character vividly contrasts with the representations of farmers in the farm-novel genre as outlined by Meyer in his seminal text, *The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century* (1965). When Meyer argues that the genre depends on its content, he asserts that it should include an "accurate handling of the physical details of farm life; the use of the vernacular; and the reflection of certain attitudes, beliefs, or habits of mind often associated with farm people of which the most important are conservatism, individualism, anti-intellectualism, hostility to the town, and a type of primitivism".[15] Meyer's interpretation of this content is based on his readings of the farm novels of the American Midwest published between 1891 and 1962. His analysis stresses the "primary significance of farm fiction as social commentary rather than its secondary importance as artistic creation".[16] Hence, the social context in which works are written is crucial to his description of the genre and means that Meyer's proposed traits of the farm novel may not necessarily apply in a contemporary setting or beyond the American Midwest. Indeed, the trait of anti-intellectualism that defines the characters Bennett described as "slow wits" is not supported in an Australian context by *That Men Should Fear* (1963). Both the affluence of the Vaughan family and Mr Vaughan's predilection for learning enable Mary to travel to London to study medicine. The Vaughan family's intellectual pursuits (writing plays,

[12]John Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 11.
[13]Meyer, *The Middle Western Farm Novel*, 130.
[14]Ian Syson, "Fired from the Canon: The Sacking of Australian Working Class Literature", *Southerly* 57, no. 3 (1997): 78.
[15]Meyer, *The Middle Western Farm Novel*, 7.
[16]Meyer, *The Middle Western Farm Novel*, 5.

trialling crop varieties and accessing university education) are central to the text. Before Mary commences her studies, Jim recognises the difference in their prospects: "Whereas she was embarking on an exciting future whose possibilities were inexhaustible, here was I changing down over Belinda bridge to resume a job I had never really liked in a township I simply hated."[17] The job was working as an assistant to the mechanic Andy Burton at Burton Motors. These vastly different prospects reinforce a class division while reshaping the farm novel genre through an association of farming with university education. It also draws into the Australian literary imaginary a new type of woman farmer.

Women Characters in Australian Farm Novels

Women are at times depicted in the Australian farm novel as active participants in farming but rarely as landowners. Australian farm novels include Benjamin Cozens's *Princess of the Mallee* (1903), James Green's *The Selector: A Romance of an Immigrant* (1907), J. K. Ewers's *Men Against the Earth* (1946), Jean Devanny's *Cindie: A Chronicle of the Canefields* (1949), John Naish's *The Cruel Field* (1962), Randolph Stow's *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1965), Carrie Tiffany's *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* (2005), Alice Robinson's *Anchor Point* (2015) and Stephen Orr's *The Hands* (2015). Three of these works—by Devanny, Tiffany and Robinson—feature a female protagonist. In each narrative, the protagonist gradually assumes the responsibility of managing the farm, which is otherwise depicted as the work of men. Devanny's *Cindie: A Chronicle of the Canefields* is set in the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries and tells the story of Cindie Comstock, a young woman who escapes her unwanted position as a domestic maid to become the manager of a sugarcane plantation. At the end of the story, she joins the plantation's wealthy landowning family through the traditional means of marrying the farmer's son, Randy Biddow. Tiffany's *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* is set in the late 1930s and tells the story—from the perspective of young woman Jean Flanagan—of the calamitous results of using phosphate fertilisers to enable wheat cropping on marginal land. Jean becomes the sole farmer on a property that is ruined by human activity and drought, after her fiancé, Robert Pettergree, enlists in the army to serve in World War II. Robinson's *Anchor Point* similarly depicts a farm environment violated by detrimental human activities and drought, but the events take place in the mid-1980s to 2018. The protagonist, Laura, is the young daughter of farmer Bruce. As an adult, Laura inherits her father's failed sheep property and plans to replant it with trees. Together, these three novels portray women who come to farming through marriage, in which a farmer husband offers the heroine class mobility, or through inheritance, where the acquired land is unsuited to agriculture and the farming effort fails. This makes Mary Vaughan's sole ownership and management of a productive farm enterprise in *That Men Should Fear* a powerful depiction in the Australian farm-novel genre.

Australian literature in the 1920s to 1940s often reflected the gender-specific difficulties faced by women, which are echoed in Naish's characterisations of Grace Pearce and Mary Vaughan. Representing traditional roles for women, Grace endures an inescapable and constant workload in the household, cooking for the family and caring for children.

[17]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 80.

While Alison Bartlett points to "historical structural barriers for women",[18] Nicole Moore identifies in the fiction of the 1920s to 1940s a "pervasive preoccupation with representations of sexual misadventure, problematic maternity and sex outside marriage".[19] She reads Katharine Susannah Prichard's short story "The Cow" (1928) as depicting fertility "as a trap laid for the woman by her own body, at odds with her reason and intellect".[20] Birth control therefore, Moore argues, affords women a means of self-determination and access to rational decision-making, offering freedom from an existence bound to reproduction.[21] In *That Men Should Fear*, Mary inherits the farm and chooses not to marry, which enables her to escape the "trap" of fertility.[22] Tragically, Mary's inheritance comes after her brother Dave kills both his pregnant wife and himself over fears that their unborn child could be carrying the gene for Huntington's chorea, a degenerative disease that affects the brain, which had already caused the premature deaths of their mother, Freda, and older brother, Robert. Moore notes that "sometimes contraceptive birth control is more 'obscene' or unspeakable than abortion", as demonstrated by Kylie Tennant's *Time Enough Later* (1943), where "the lovers have lots of sex outside marriage, but the plot includes no mention of either pregnancy or the avoidance of pregnancy".[23] In *That Men Should Fear*, before Mary leaves for London to commence her university studies, she and Jim have sex on the beach at Drummond, and, like Tennant's *Time Enough Later*, there is no mention of birth control. Mary Vaughan is distinguished by her refusal to marry and have children. The implied reason for this is her fear of transmitting Huntington's chorea, but she nevertheless gains power and authority in becoming the sole owner and decision-maker on the farm. Moore notes that in "interrupting maternal destinies for their characters", authors "can also interrupt historical accounts of Australian feminism that offer maternal citizenship as its best model".[24] This leaves Mary, a highly educated woman, to take on the role of landowner and farmer of a commercial enterprise in a move that extends the possibilities for women on the land represented in earlier farm novels and that is rarely superseded in the Australian farm novel.

Other women characters in *That Men Should Fear* include a barmaid, sex worker, cook and carer, and store attendant whose roles contrast with Mary's position of power and financial security. Similar characters populate Naish's first novel, *The Cruel Field*, where the women are "foolish, heartless or mercenary" and not "directly involved in farming".[25] In *That Men Should Fear*, Jim's mother, Grace, reveals a mercenary desire for her son's financial gain through marriage, which is driven by her experience of poverty and subservience. The subservience of her domestic role is conveyed by her tolerance of inappropriate behaviour by the patriarch William Vaughan. Both William and his daughter, Mary, use words of which Grace disapproves, yet Jim notes how, after his

[18]Alison Bartlett, "Gendering Australian Literature", in *The Routledge Companion to Australian Literature*, ed. Jessica Gildersleeve (Routledge, 2020), 235–42.
[19]Nicole Moore, "Interrupting Maternal Citizenship: Birth Control in Mid-Wave Women's Writing", *Australian Feminist Studies* 17, no. 38 (2002): 151, https://doi.org/10.1080/08164640220147933.
[20]Moore, "Interrupting Maternal Citizenship", 154.
[21]Moore, "Interrupting Maternal Citizenship", 154.
[22]Moore, "Interrupting Maternal Citizenship", 154.
[23]Moore, "Interrupting Maternal Citizenship", 153.
[24]Moore, "Interrupting Maternal Citizenship", 156.
[25]Taylor and Perkins, "Warm Words", 213–55; Smyth, "Sugarcane and the Wet Tropics", 9.

mother's reprimands, Mary "merely lowered her eyes and remained silent no matter how robust was my foster-father's blasphemy".[26] Grace's disapproval of Mary underlines changes in social expectations of women. As does the characterisation of Mary as a medical doctor, which aligns with social changes in the postwar era, in which "medical authority grew".[27] Furthering the clash of traditional and emerging expectations of women, Grace says to William, "If you must have a doctor in the family why don't you give Robert the chance, it's a man's job not a girl's!"[28] However, William does not yield to Grace's influence. Consequently, Mary takes the opportunity to study, despite falling in love with Jim, in a show of her strength and independence. Sheridan et al. observe that "the ideal of feminine respectability was so prominent and inflexible, right up to the mid-1960s that women with a different class affiliation, or who rejected its sexual rigidity, undoubtedly felt alienated" from that world.[29] Naish's *That Men Should Fear* was acutely attuned to this social change as shown by the contrasting level of agency and opportunity available to Grace Pearce and Mary Vaughan—low for the former and high for the latter. Naish's creation of a socially respected, highly educated and independent woman farmer marks a notable shift in his usual characterisation of women.

Apart from Naish's characterisation of Mary Vaughan as defying widespread expectations of women, his representation of Grace resembles the lower-class women appearing in fiction in the decades after the publication of *That Men Should Fear*. In Naish's novel, traditional expectations of women are reinforced by Jim, who expresses a desire to establish a patriarchy in his own relationship with Mary. After having sex with Mary for the first time, Jim reflects that "I recalled with mild self-reproof the proud sense of proprietorship I had felt when she was working among the men in the paddock" and "I pictured her, bathing, hanging out clothes, ironing; gave her thoughts and read them; allowed my body to bask in anticipatory and reflective desire".[30] But the character most aligned with domestic labour is Jim's mother, Grace, whose financial loss and unmarried situation had dropped her into a lower class. Barbara Pini and Josephine Previte's study of the "bogan" as a representative of the "white working class poor" sheds light on the development of class in the decades after *That Men Should Fear*.[31] Pini and Previte suggest that working-class women are at times positioned within recent texts and media at a lower level than men of the same class, where the moral standing of these women is disparaged due to their appearance and behaviour relative to middle-class women.[32] While Grace is hardly a "bogan", she is subject to similar moral judgements, in which, as Pini and Previte observe, "the female bogan's identity as mother is invoked as a source of scorn".[33] In *That Men Should Fear*, readers are drawn to disparage Grace, as Jim does, for her mercenary intent. Upon

[26]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 43.
[27]Susan Sheridan et al., *Who Was That Woman?: The Australian Women's Weekly in the Postwar Years* (UNSW Press, 2002), 5.
[28]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 99.
[29]Sheridan et al., *Who Was That Woman?*, 6.
[30]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 79–80.
[31]Barbara Pini and Josephine Previte, "Gender, Class and Sexuality in Contemporary Australia: Representations of the Boganette", *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no. 78 (2013): 349, https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2013.857385.
[32]Pini and Previte, "Gender, Class and Sexuality", 348–63.
[33]Pini and Previte, "Gender, Class and Sexuality", 353.

receiving advice from Grace that "marrying Mary would have many—compensations", Jim "despised [his] mother more than any other time".[34] In their research, Pini and Previte point to the work of sociologist Bev Skeggs to argue that such disdain is not similarly directed at upper-middle class women.[35] In *That Men Should Fear*, Mary is the upper-class professional who is neither criticised by the male characters for her sex outside marriage nor viewed by them as subservient. For example, Mary's brother, Dave, does not complain about Mary failing to contribute to the manual labour, which has become his responsibility. Instead, he complains of his older brother, Robert, spending too much time writing plays, poetry and prose, saying, "whenever there's any yacker to be done he's missing! For three months it was his bloody play, and now it'll be some other bloody thing! Writing! For Christ's sake send him off to some sodding university. I've had a gutful of him!"[36] Here, Dave demonstrates the anti-intellectualism that aligns with Meyer's observation of the farm novels of the American Midwest (though it is worth noting that "bookishness" or "indoor work" is compatible with farming when, then and now, the role of the farmer resembles that of a chief executive officer). Indeed, Mary's high level of education makes her well suited to the position of the farmer, which gives her autonomy to choose a way of life that defies prevailing expectations of a woman in the 1950s, let alone a university-educated one.

Mary's future management style as an independent farmer can be derived from depictions of her father as her predecessor and of Jim as a farm labourer. Jim makes a distinction in the novel between unskilled labour and work that requires specialist knowledge and skills. "It's *labour*, growing food! … There's nothing to *show* for it. Children could do it, or animals. What *work* can I do? With work something satisfying is left behind: something remains."[37] Yet Jim is incorrect in his assertion that growing food is simple. This is the perspective of a farm labourer rather than the farmer. The farmer must manage a wide range of financial, agronomic and environmental issues, not to mention a multitude of risks such as adverse weather, labour shortages, pests and diseases. Indeed, Naish's portrait of William Vaughan as the farmer who precedes Mary includes an obsession with breeding new varieties of sugarcane and testing the plants on various soil types. In this way, the narrator, Jim, underestimates the knowledge and skills required for farming, where the author does not. By depicting William Vaughan's trials of cane varieties, *That Men Should Fear* steps further towards the farmer's perspective than in Naish's previous novel, *The Cruel Field*, which focuses primarily on the labour involved in cutting sugarcane without commensurate attention to other aspects of farming.[38] Another responsibility of the farmer is managing employees. The latter is demonstrated in *That Men Should Fear* through Mary's conversation with Jim, who describes his labour as "a day or so on the hoe"; "I repaired the fence up and down the creek, did my share of milking the cow".[39] Mary responds to Jim's complaints about farm labour by raising its broader social value—"There have to be farmers, people must eat!"—and by comparing it to the labour of a doctor: "I rush to a sick

[34]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 235.
[35]Bev Skeggs, "The Making of Class and Gender Through Visualising Moral Subject Formation", *Sociology* 39, no. 5 (2005): 969–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038505058381.
[36]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 103.
[37]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 206, emphasis in original.
[38]Elizabeth A. Smyth, "The Semi-Georgic Australian Sugarcane Novel", 184–98.
[39]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 119.

person, diagnose correctly, take out his appendix, and he dies—of alcohol."[40] Her medical assessment is presumably more complex than milking a cow, but her point is that farm labour is no less important than a doctor's work and that both may have no satisfactory outcome. This dialogue gives an inkling of the empathetic management style likely to be adopted by Mary in her role as landowning farmer. For Jim Pearce, his role as a lower-class farm labourer is, in his opinion, a matter of fate.

Fate, the Working Class and the Australian Legend

Naish aligns notions of predestiny or fate with class by showing how, despite the same upbringing, a person from a landowning family (Mary Vaughan) will prosper while a person of the same age, growing up in the same house, but from a non-landowning family (Jim Pearce) remains impoverished. Authorial intention to entangle class and determinism is signalled in the title *That Men Should Fear*. This same line exists in both the Bible and Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*. In the King James Bible, Ecclesiastes 3:14 states "and God doeth *it*, that *men* should fear before him". This passage has been read as a "philosophical-theological issue" about "the divine act by which God has predisposed everything to happen at certain times and in certain ways".[41] In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the line becomes, "It seems to me most strange that men should fear; Seeing that death, a necessary end, will come when it will come."[42] Here, Shakespeare uses "death's inescapability [as] a manifest argument for bravery".[43] In *That Men Should Fear*, Jim has his own explanation: "It was 'us', for whom nothing had been or ever would be easy, for whom the future could only be assured, barely, by the rigid enforcement of Waste Not Want Not, and its gloom relieved only by the grace of God—and '*them*', the Vaughans over the creek, whose advancement was a matter of course, and whose sin of sins was a kind of inevitable affluence."[44] Meyer notes in the 19th-century farm fiction of the American Midwest, "a class system very much in evidence, with a good deal of talk about the importance of 'birth' in determining whether one [was] a gentleman".[45] In Naish's 20th-century Australian farm novel, "birth" is about Jim's inability to escape a working-class life of poverty and unskilled labour; but Naish's characterisation of Jim as lacking the financial security required to overcome the challenges in his life also serves to reinforce the Australian legend.

The victim status of protagonists like Jim Pearce can work to hide certain privileges that many White men held relative to minority groups at that time. In her study of the film *Kenny* (2006), Kirsty Whitman identifies how the film's protagonist, who is a "heterosexual, white working-class male is granted victim status" even though he "does not occupy a position of marginalisation".[46] She asserts that "identities such as

[40]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 206.
[41]Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Ecclesiastes 3.1–15: Another Interpretation", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 20, no. 66 (1995): 62, https://doi.org/10.1177/030908929502006603.
[42]William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Rex Library, 1973). Act II, Scene 2, 806.
[43]H. W. Walling, "Shuffling off this Mortal Coil: A Shakespearean Perspective on Death and Dying", *The Western Journal of Medicine* 169, no. 6 (1998): 391, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1305418/.
[44]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 13, emphasis in original.
[45]Meyer, *The Middle Western Farm Novel*, 15.
[46]Kirsty Whitman, "The 'Aussie Battler' and the Hegemony of Centralising Working-Class Masculinity in Australia: Gender, Class, Mainstreaming and the Axis of Visibility in Kenny", *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no. 75 (2013): 51, https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2012.758026.

the convict, the bushman and the ANZAC Digger" are figures that symbolise struggle against adversity and cites Richard Nile to explain how these characterisations developed into the Australian legend.[47] Her main concern is how centralising working-class men in stories has a "legitimising power" and when crafted with an "everyman" appeal is "closely linked with Australian national identity"[48]—that is, a national identity that is detrimental to women and mothers. Russel Ward wrote about the Australian legend in 1958, which Alison Bartlett interprets as "typified by a sardonic white male who preferred to imagine his place in the bush rather than the city".[49] Nile in 2000 noted a similar typology characterised by "an able-bodied white male with very few personal attachments who ekes out a modest existence with honest work … often a solitary character".[50] In *That Men Should Fear*, Naish's protagonist is crafted in a similar fashion and despite Jim being capable of working to improve his financial position after Mary inherits the farm, he chooses to languish in Brisbane. He lives at the age of 41 in a "cheap" boarding house, sells his car, takes a "military pension" because of a "stiff and useless leg" (which had allowed him full mobility, even running, until near the end of the narrative) and on a daily basis he visits a Kangaroo Point "pub lounge" to "sit and sip and stare".[51] Jim's victim status here reinforces a national mythology that glorifies masculine struggle while also concealing his privileged status as a White heterosexual male in mid-20th-century Australia. The fate of farm workers without their own farmland, according to Naish, is to languish with no prospects.

Land ownership as a marker of higher class and "inevitable affluence" is reinforced throughout the text. Early in the narrative, an argument over which of the children "owns" the prized tamarind tree in front of the Vaughan farmhouse provides a key lesson for Jim: "My mother and I, though somehow having become permanent visitors, were still, nevertheless, only visitors."[52] From a young age, Jim understands that ownership of land—and the tamarind tree upon that land—offers privileges to the Vaughan children that are not extended to him. Affluence associated with land ownership is later demonstrated by the financial position of Mal Tarino, a 24-year-old farmer on the neighbouring farm, who could "sell out and go live on Capri".[53] Jim explains that Mal "was affluent" and that his farm was worth "twenty thousand".[54] After Mal's death in a tractor accident, William Vaughan buys the farm for "seventeen thousand five hundred pounds".[55] This ability to purchase a neighbouring farm whenever it becomes available, and Jim's description of Mr Vaughan as being "too big to show much delight at such an acquisition" reinforces the characterisation of William Vaughan as an affluent and extensive landholder.[56] Once established, a class structure is maintained in the narrative through descriptions of the different expectations and aspirations of each child. Jim recalls: "My childhood dreams of becoming a loco-driver

[47]Richard Nile, *The Australian Legend and Its Discontents* (University of Queensland Press, 2000).
[48]Whitman, "The 'Aussie Battler'", 53.
[49]Bartlett, "Gendering Australian Literature", 235.
[50]Nile, *The Australian Legend*, 2–3.
[51]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 252.
[52]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 23.
[53]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 123.
[54]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 122.
[55]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 149.
[56]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 149.

when I left school had long since faded. They had been replaced by the assumption that I would eventually become a canecutter, a farmhand, a millworker, or—at long odds already—a railway fettler."[57] Thus, landownership is key to distinguishing the two emerging classes.

The first-person narration by Jim Pearce, along with numerous depictions of his work and perspective, adds to a body of Australian working-class fiction. Australian literature has no shortage of works that focus on the concerns of the working class—such as those of Jean Devanny, Eve Langley and Dorothy Hewett[58]—but few farm novels speak so effectively to how this class is created on the farm. Syson defines working-class narratives as those that "take work and working life as a theme"; they are "texts written *about* working class people, texts written *by* working class people and texts written *for* working class people".[59] He notes a "golden age" of Australian working-class writing between the end of World War II and 1970 by writers such as Frank Hardy, Dorothy Hewett, Gavin Casey, Dymphna Cusack and John Morrison.[60] John Naish's *That Men Should Fear* (1963) can be added to Syson's extensive list of working-class novels. Cheryl Taylor and historian Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui note a structure of class division in Naish's novels which positions "hereditary landowners" in the upper class, the "doctor, bank and mill managers and substantial cane farmers" in a middle class, and the "part-time cane cutter" and "pub owners and shopkeepers" in a class "lower again in the social hierarchy".[61] Naish's *That Men Should Fear* shows how the upper and lower classes emerged by following the life paths of a girl and boy raised in the same house, where one, Mary, inherits farmland and the other, Jim, does not.

Conclusion

In writing *That Men Should Fear*, a novel that significantly reshapes the traditional Australian farm novel, John Naish drew on his experience of canecutting, one of the hardest physical jobs in Australia prior to the 1960s introduction of machine harvesting. Despite Naish's pervasive attention to the hardships for working-class men, *That Men Should Fear* furnishes the farm-novel genre with a striking image of a socially respected, highly educated and independent woman farmer, Mary Vaughan. Mirroring broader social changes, traditional barriers for women were amalgamated in the character of Grace Pearce (uneducated, financially insecure and tied to domestic servitude) in contrast to the next generation of women epitomised by Mary Vaughan (educated, wealthy and free to travel). Mary completed more than seven years of university study to become a medical doctor, inherited a productive and profitable farm, and chose to manage it alone rather than marry. This portrait by John Naish of a woman farmer is more progressive than Jean Devanny's portrait of Cindy Comstock, who takes the traditional path of marrying the farmer's son and consequently cannot achieve the same autonomy. Naish's female farmer who inherits and manages a productive farm that

[57]Naish, *That Men Should Fear*, 29–30.
[58]Peter Beilharz and Sian Supski, "Reading for the Flavor of Life and Labor: Four Social/ist Realist Novels in Mid-Twentieth Century Australia", *Journal of Narrative Theory* 52, no. 3 (2022): 336–57, https://doi.org/10.1353/jnt.2022.0015.
[59]Syson, "Fired from the Canon", 79.
[60]Syson, "Fired from the Canon", 78.
[61]Taylor and Vidonja Balanzategui, "John Naish's Contribution", 5.

has not been ruined by human activity or environmental crisis is rare in the Australian farm novel, although comparable characterisations may exist in other rural genres. Naish's portrait of Mary Vaughan thus reshapes the genre of the Australian farm novel.

That Men Should Fear also offers a compelling account of the Australian class structure due to its depiction of the development of a rural class division based on ownership of farmland in an era when sugarcane farms were being established in North Queensland. Naish portrays an upper class comprising those who owned land and were consequently affluent and expected to have opportunities for education or intellectual pursuits, and a lower class of landless people who were expected to live in relative poverty and to provide the upper class with unskilled labour. Thus, *That Men Should Fear* can be added to Australia's collection of working-class novels. By depicting William Vaughan's trials of cane varieties, *That Men Should Fear* expands on the farmer's perspective offered in Naish's previous novel, *The Cruel Field*, which centred on managing labour. *That Men Should Fear* is a singular book that generates a mid-20th-century fusion of the role of the farmer with a highly educated and independent woman, which speaks to contemporary shifts away from traditional patterns of succession to the eldest son.

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ORCID

Elizabeth A. Smyth http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7320-769X