

Proposal for

The Prosaic Imaginary: Novels and the Everyday, 1740-2000

1-4 July 2014, Sydney

### **Hardware and Fiction : Genre Intersections**

This paper will reflect on the intersection of two genres, each from a different world : *hardware stores*, a subset of retailing; and *the novel*, and genres within the novel form.

Over several years, I've sought, identified and read fiction in which hardware and hardware stores are taken up in (1) significant and (2) reflective, metaphorical, imaginative or otherwise interesting ways. Certain patterns surface within the fiction (and beyond it to poetry, film and other realms).

My paper will provide a kind of "distant reading" account of those patterns and intersections. These include: (1) The valence of the hardware store in common understanding, and its meaning in a particular novel (or story), as a benign (or not) place, and a marker for a character's ambition, virtue, humanity, etc. (2) The mutable nature of this retail genre itself (stores evolve, or fail). (3) Gender and maturity issues. (4) The relationship of language with things; in a business selling thousands of items, words, labels and definitions matter.

My corpus exceeds 100 titles and includes "literary" *and* genre works, e.g., romance (including evangelical romance), mysteries, science fiction, erotica, humor, and conduct-of-life fiction. I will omit from my discussion novels published after 2000.

*reference* —

An unevenly annotated and partial list of fiction in which hardware and/or hardware stores are significantly employed:

<http://jmcvey.net/hdwe/fiction/index.htm>

Part of a larger project described at

<http://jmcvey.net/hdwe/literature.htm>

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