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Reimagining happily ever after in Rix Weaver's New Holland colonial romances

Abstract:

During the Second World War (1939–1945), Western Australian author Rix Weaver published her *New Holland* trilogy comprising *Behold, New Holland!* (1940), *New Holland Heritage* (1941) and *Beyond Cooralong* (1945). These novels were highly popular at the time of publication, serialised in magazines and on radio and reportedly taught in local high schools. Though published in the 1940s, these novels are of significant cultural importance because they provide a relatively rare historical depiction of the establishment and development of the Swan River colony (later known as Perth) from 1830. Even more unusual is the emphasis on the lives of women in these works. Arguably Weaver's trilogy contains a dual narrative, one devoted to the early colonisation of Western Australia between 1830 and the 1880s while the other personalises the settlement stories through her heroines Jane Mabie and her daughter Jennifer in conjunction with their families. Through the historically grounded romantic stories of Jane and Jennifer, the experiences of women are depicted within early settler history. In this article, we read Weaver's trilogy as "romantic historical fiction" (Teo & Fresno-Calleja, 2025) where the trilogy format calls into question the kinds of endings and closures given to their heroines. Overall, we argue that Weaver's context while writing, the trilogy format and historical setting contribute to the individual and collective, not always happy, ending(s) of these novels.

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Keywords:

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Introduction

Our engagement with the *New Holland* trilogy began serendipitously when one of us stumbled across a glowing online review of *Behold New Holland!* In that review, several unusual and striking qualities of the novel piqued our curiosity: the story was set in early settler Western Australia (circa 1830), was published in 1940, used the conventions of romance, and had a prologue by renowned Western Australian librarian J. S. Battye praising its historical accuracy. Upon reading this novel, other interesting and somewhat surprising features emerged. Namely, the novel centralised the rarely depicted experiences of women in the early Swan River Colony and although the conventions of romance led the heroine to find “true love”, *Behold New Holland!* did not have an ending that was “happy”, “ever after” or substantively brought the heroine together with her romantic interest. The ending was, however, hopeful for its heroine and for the fledgling colony. Despite the novel defying romantic closure, it did bestow financial and legal independence as well as a sense of life purpose on its heroine. *Behold New Holland!*'s heroine Jane Mabie had little choice but to continue with the independence she had been gifted and continue she did in the second novel of the series, *New Holland Heritage*.

While *Behold New Holland!* could stand on its own as a novel, when contextualised as the first of three novels with the same continuing narrative, it becomes rapidly apparent it is what Warren Olin-Ammentorp terms an “epinovel”. An epinovel is one or more novels in a series with a “unified plot” (1991, p. 2), where the “whole is something more than the sum of its parts” (1991, p. 5). Olin-Ammentorp cautions against offering a comprehensive definition of an epinovel but rather refers to their experimental quality as “unified works of narrative with developing structures that extend, complicate, and develop their original premises into a continuing plot that is nonetheless structured by an eventual ending” (1991, p. 3). In the case of Weaver’s trilogy, one portion of the whole is the romantic theme that waxes and wanes across the three books and in the lives of the two main heroines. In the first two novels, the romance between Jane Mabie and Gratton Hird is set against the trials and tribulations of Jane’s immigration experience and the early disaster of the Swan River colony. Tragedy befalls them: towards the end of the first novel, just when their marriage is promised, Gratton dies.

In the second novel, the bereaved Jane, now financially secure from Gratton’s inheritance, is immersed in life in the young Swan River Colony, including the contentious introduction of convict labour. Despite initially disapproving of convicts (like many other colonists at the time), Jane’s view is challenged when she controversially falls in love with a convict who has the “same eyes” and “same hair” (p. 109) as Gratton. A reparation narrative (Roach, 2016; Teo, 2021) follows where Jane works to use her position to redeem the convict (who the reader and Jane discovers eventually is Gratton’s brother Rothwell). Once Rothwell’s true identity is revealed, he and Jane marry and then have a family. Having made a significant contribution to the building of the colony since her arrival, found true love with Gratton, had a “sufficient” love (p. 264) with Rothwell, and experienced motherhood, at the end of *New Holland Heritage* Jane dies. The narrative positions readers to believe that after her death, Jane’s spirit is reunited with Gratton, a gesture to tragic, fatal love. With Gratton and Jane deceased, the third novel *Beyond Cooralong* shifts perspective to Jane’s daughter Jennifer (affectionately referred to as

times in the novels as “Captain Jenny”). Jenny’s more conventional romance story sees her grow from a child to a young woman who eventually marries an English doctor, James Adrienne, after his first wife dies. Jenny and James’s story is told in conjunction with the development of logging and timber production in South-Western Australia.

While romance and love are significant themes in the *New Holland* novels, the history of the early colony is arguably the meta-story, seemingly looming larger than the stories of Jane, Jenny and their families. While Jane, Gratton and other family members die, the colony’s development continues; their stories contribute to its progress. These novels together represent approximately the first fifty years of the settlement. *Behold New Holland!* depicts the first ten years from the arrival of the first free settlers including the difficult journey from England, the challenging conditions upon arrival, and hardships faced during the initial settlement; *New Holland Heritage* spans approximately 1840-1868 including the controversial introduction of convicts while *Beyond Cooralong* begins in the late 1860s, marks the end of convict labour, and explores the development of the jarrah industries in the colony’s South-West through to the 1880s. Through the intermingling of history and romance is arguably a battle between what Olin-Ammentorp (1991) describes as closure and continuity. As we discuss in more detail below, romance narratives, particularly romance novels, are seemingly always journeying towards an inevitable closure, however history is always moving, resisting the boundaries of closure. These tensions, as we argue, play out in the *New Holland* novels, especially their endings, and are arguably complicated by the trilogy/epinovel format.

In this article, we explore the intermingling(s) of history and romance as they relate to the multiple “endings” in the *New Holland* trilogy. We do so to reflect on how the novels deal with the invariable tension between the pressure for romantic closure against the historical force of continuity and progress. We argue that how romance and history are represented influence the kinds of endings and closures found in the trilogy; those endings and closures are not necessarily in the order or location that a reader (especially a 21st century reader) might expect or prefer. We provide context to the trilogy, particularly in terms of Rix Weaver writing and publishing these novels during World War Two. We discuss the novels as what Hsu-Ming Teo and Paloma Fresno-Calleja (2025) term ‘romantic historical fiction’ with their emphasis on representing historical fact as well as the romantic aspects of the protagonists’ lives. While love and companionship are important for Weaver’s heroines, and social conventions expect them to marry, the narrative does not present marriage as their ultimate goal. Indeed, as we argue, Weaver does serious reparative and seemingly revisionist work to represent women within the colonial story of the Swan River settlement, at times railing against convention. With the story spread over three novels, the plot has different ebbs and flows as compared to a single novel story. Therefore, we are interested in how history and romance figure into the trilogy (epinovel) structure.

Rix Weaver’s romantic historical novels

In *The Purple Heart Throbs: The Subliterature of Love*, Rachel Anderson discusses romantic literature of World War Two, tracing two distinctive uses of romance fiction for “morale-

raising". One use integrated the war into stories of love and romance while the other "encouraged the reader to forget the war altogether and try to think about something quite different" (Anderson, 1974, p. 212). Rix Weaver's trilogy is clearly written in the second mode, taking the reader away from the realities of wartime and into the past; at times, though not directly referring to the war, the *New Holland* story is framed nationalistically. The use of a historical setting quite removed from the time in which Weaver was writing exemplifies one of the two main qualities of women's historical fiction (Teo & Fresno-Calleja, 2025), which "enables, paradoxically, both escapism into the past and critical reflection upon the present" (p. 3). This decision to not engage directly with wartime may have been a way to position readers to reflect on earlier, perhaps more hopeful times, to remind the reader what was at stake in the war or to consider imperialist histories more widely. At the time of the war, although Perth was well away from frontline battle, many Australians served in Europe and elsewhere. In March 1942, the threat of a Japanese attack on Fremantle and Perth led to extensive preparations, namely the "Fremantle Fortress", bringing the war closer to Perth's doorstep.

Archival articles from Australian newspapers around 1940 portray Rix Weaver as a highly successful "authoress" who gave away proceeds from selling her novels to the war effort. Weaver was born in Cottesloe, Perth in 1902 and died in 1990 in Applecross, Perth. News articles frequently noted that Rix Weaver was the non-de-plume of Mrs A. J. Weaver of the small wheatbelt town of Goomalling. She was widely travelled and had many interests, "refus[ing] to be bound by convention or her sex" (Austlit, 2024). *Behold, New Holland!* was reportedly one of the first novels published in Western Australia; its publisher was C. H. Pitman and Son. Weaver published five novels: *Behold, New Holland!* (1940), *New Holland Heritage* (1941), *Beyond Cooralong* (1945), *All These Years* (1946), and *The Gingko Tree* (1984). Her sixth book *Theirs to Bestow* (1979) combined *Behold, New Holland!* and *New Holland Heritage* into one volume, seemingly for a new generation of readers. Published during World War Two, Weaver gave royalties from her New Holland book sales to the Red Cross for the war effort (*The Sun*, 1940). Weaver was well known, at least in Western Australia, as a fiction writer but perhaps equally or even better known later as a Jungian psychologist, who, after publishing most of her novels, studied with Carl G. Jung at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich. In 1954 Weaver started the Analytical Society of WA (later known as the C. G. Jung Society of WA), publishing two books on Jungian psychology: *The Old Wise Woman* (1964) and *Spinning on a Dream Thread* (1977). Members of the Jung Society of WA appear to remember Weaver fondly, with biographical information and some of Weaver's lectures on their website (2025).

The strength of the history depicted in the *New Holland* novels is emphasised in peritextual material, namely their subtitles, acknowledgements and introductions. Such material underscores how the novels can be read as women's historical (romance) fiction. As Teo and Fresno-Calleja explain of such works: "they take their historical settings seriously, and they engage in thoughtful ways with historical research and representation of the past" (2025, p. 8). Readers are primed from the early pages of the *New Holland* novels to be aware that they are reading historically informed stories. *Behold New Holland!*'s subtitle points directly to the past "A story of early Western Australia" while *New Holland Heritage* melds history and romance

“An early West Australian Romance” and *Beyond Cooralong* returns to the first subtitle “A story of early Western Australia”. In the acknowledgements of *Behold New Holland!*, Weaver expresses her “appreciation” to historian Paul Hasluck “for checking historical data” and Dr J. S. Battye, then “Public Librarian of Western Australia” as well as historian Dr Cyril Bryan “for help and information so readily supplied”. The dedication nods to history and the war at once: “Dedicated to the old colonists and those who have fought and to-day are fighting to retain the freedom of our great nation”. The foreword to *Behold, New Holland!* was written by Battye, then Chancellor of “The Perth University” (the University of Western Australia), and for whom the J. S. Battye library of West Australian History is still named. Battye praises Weaver’s “careful research” and provides his impression that Weaver has produced a “very interesting and absorbing tale”. Weaver was quoted as saying that “Dr Battye, who is also an authority on Western Australian history, assures me that the tale is historically accurate” (*The Sun*, 1940). *New Holland Heritage* has a similar foreword attesting to Weaver’s adherence to “historical facts” especially with regards to the introduction of convict labour. *Beyond Cooralong* contains acknowledgements to several people and the Perth Public Library Staff and Librarian for “supplying information” as well as a short introduction to attest to the fictional family portrayed.

The historical detail in the *New Holland* novels, authenticated by several sources, seemingly garnered much attention and supported their adaptation into other mediums, thereby making them accessible to a wider audience. While *Behold New Holland!* appeared popular in its written form, it was serialised nationally on radio in December 1940 and January 1941. The novel was recognised as one of the first published in Western Australia and was one of few novels of the time that represented the early colonial settlement of Western Australia in book and radio formats, let alone from the perspective of women. Indeed, Weaver explained that the attention to historical accuracy was the reason her novels were taught in schools at the time (Praed, 1947, p. 6). Much of the emphasis in archival news material about Weaver and her novels is on the historical representation, with some brief mentions of the story’s romance thread.

After the 1940s, Weaver and her novels received little coverage in the newspapers of the day. Her works are currently accessible in all Western Australia’s university libraries and the State library as well as some interstate libraries. She is however not listed in Juliet Flesch’s biobibliography of romance novels, *Love Brought to Book* (1995), nor are her works mentioned in more extensive studies of Australian romance fiction such as Juliet Flesch’s *From Australia with Love: A History of Modern Australian Popular Romance Novels* (2004) or Lauren O’Mahony’s chapter on “Australian Romance Fiction” in the *Routledge Research Companion to Popular Romance* (2021). *Behold New Holland!* and *New Holland Heritage* are described as “two popular historical novels of the early Swan River settlement” (1979, p. 93) in the chapter on “The Novel” in Bruce Bennett’s authoritative *The Literature of Western Australia*. Her works are listed in Debra Adelaide’s *Australian Women Writers: A Bibliographic Guide* (1988). Despite Weaver’s efforts to use the novel form to represent women in the early history of Perth and her popularity in the 1940s, her works do not appear to have received any substantial academic attention. Yet, even in 1940, J. S. Battye noted the important contribution

of her works to Western Australian literature, stating in the foreword to *Behold New Holland!*, “Novels dealing with the early days of Western Australia are few in number, and this addition to their ranks should be sure of a welcome from all those interested in the history and development of our State”. Of course, Battye was not even remarking on novels written from the perspective of women, which further marks Weaver’s trilogy as exceptional and worthy of analysis.

The historical trilogy (epinovel) format: Complicating romance

Weaver’s *New Holland* novels are historical and romantic; however, the trilogy format appears to complicate the representation of history and romance, especially through the delay and denial of closure. In their study of the epinovel, Olin-Ammentorp argues that “Closure is what allows us to make sense of a narrative: it gives us a vantage point outside the experience of the narrative from which we can reflect upon that experience, shaping it into knowledge and judgment” (1991, p. 10). But closure is certainly a “mixed blessing” where although the reader seeks closure, when it comes, it points to the “artificiality” of narrative (Olin-Ammentorp, 1991, p. 10). As Olin-Ammentorp states, death is really the “only true experience of temporal closure we know ... And even this closure is closure only for the individual who dies; temporal experience continues for the living after the dead are gone” (p. 11). Because of the associations between death and closure there is as much fear as there is anticipation which attest to “our conflicting desires for understanding and for experience” (p. 12). Understanding comes from closure while experience comes from continuity. The *New Holland* trilogy deviates from tethering neat romantic resolutions and the closure they are expected to bring to the ending of each novel. At the end of the first novel, just when the reader relaxes into the idea that Jane Mabie will marry the dashing Superintendent of Supplies, Captain Gratton Hird, he is thrown from his “fiery black stallion” and subsequently dies. Then in the second novel after Jane marries Rothwell and they settle into family life in the colony, she dies, only to be reunited with Gratton in the afterlife. The third novel offers more of a conventional romantic closure with Jane’s daughter Jenny marrying the disinherited English heir turned doctor, James Adrienne, after many impediments and difficulties. The centrality and interweaving of death and love (with their economic associations) in this colonial saga, arguably intertextually connects Weaver’s trilogy to other works such as Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936). As well, through such associations the movements and tensions between narrative continuity and closure become more apparent.

Through the death of one or more lovers, certainly with its powerful tragic connotations, within the epinovel form, Weaver experiments with notions of closure and continuity. The death of one lover is arguably one of the greatest impediments to the realisation of true love. For a lover to die at the end of a novel blocks the closure related to a couple being together and the happiness that may flow from their union. At the same time, death is a closure in the form of a life ending; death narrows if not nullifies the potentials available to the character within the narrative world. As Olin-Ammentorp (1991) notes,

A narrative ends so that we can understand its events (and, by extension, the reality it models); but by ending a narrative also denies itself the continuity which is one of the principal conditions of life as we experience it. (p. 12)

Endings invested in love with their associations with healing, redemption and society remade reinforce the power of love for human life and meaning (Regis, 2003; Roach, 2016). However, in *Behold New Holland!*, while love is recognised and mutually acknowledged, it is not realised substantively in narrative reality for Jane and Gratton. They do not experience the joy of the love they have discovered for longer than one evening.

In Gratton's death, the meaning of the novel shifts to what Jane may do with her inheritance and how she may help and support the growing colony. Her story must continue while Gratton's ends. Gratton's death at the end of *Behold, New Holland!*, bestows on Jane financial security, inclusive of property, investments, money and a home for her alone to manage. Receiving the inheritance from Gratton frees Jane from her brother Henry and his responsibility for her including his insistence that she marry, even if it means entering a loveless marriage. Henry can therefore no longer exert an influence in what Jane does or who she marries, thus freeing her from some of the prevailing social conventions that held sway in the Swan River colony. Furthermore, what is important in Gratton's inheritance to Jane and his deathbed speech is his reassuring sense of what she should do with the wealth she has been given. Gratton tells her she will be "wealthy" and that he wants her to "buy beautiful clothes ... want you always to be beautiful ... make others happy ... worth while" (p. 284). Gratton's direction here is to use the money rather than save it, and use it to "make others happy", supposedly in the pursuit of worthwhile causes. Of course, Gratton has no control over Jane once he dies, but she nonetheless honours his wishes. From Gratton's death, Jane thus has the economic power and independence to be a positive force in the fledgling colony. These pursuits, though they will never salve her grief, will keep her busy and give her purpose.

When read in their epinovel format, what is interesting in these novels, especially *New Holland Heritage*, is that Weaver is not finished with Gratton. Nor is she finished with the assumed closure normally associated with death. In *New Holland Heritage* Gratton's memory lingers in the lives of the characters, especially Jane who seems to look for or be reminded of him often. The novel continues the story of the Mabie family, with a focus on Jane after Gratton's death in the expanding Swan River colony. Newspaper book reviews at the time *New Holland Heritage* was published signal the reader's relief in this sequel for "Janet Mabie at last finds peace and happiness" (Reviewer's Corner, 1942, p. 3) however it is noted that this occurs "in a manner unexpected by the reader" (Glances at the New Novels, 1942, p. 32). As the reviewer in "Glances" notes, "The Story leaves the reader really sorry that our romance has finished" (1942, p. 32). In *New Holland Heritage*, Jane experiences two romantic closures, one with a convict who turns out to be Gratton's brother Rothwell and seemingly the second closure is with Gratton's spirit when she dies.

Jane's death scene appears to sum up her mortal life while pointing to her metaphysical future. One evening she "shivered and drew her wraps about her then feeling there was something

impelling her to go into the garden, she, who had always obeyed impulses, went” (p. 303). She goes to the banksia and acacia trees that had been planted by her and Gratton years before and takes a seat under a forked tree. The narrator explains, “Down the slope she went on mossy steps under the banksias and drooping acacias that had tangled themselves affectionately with the English trees [...] England and Australia [...] You are very, very close. You always will be twined and intermingled though seas part you” (p. 303). Jane thinks of her daughter “Captain Jenny” who has left her hat in the garden, the narrator notes:

A still gracious world this. Here in its calmness there were no regrets, no sorrows. Here under this tree her lover, Gratton, had come to her so often in those past years, parting its soft tresses and passing through ... She sat stiffly. He was coming again ... In the last years with her life so wrapped around with children he hadn't seemed so close as he seemed to-night. He was coming under the boughs, smiling down at her ... young as ever.

“Oh, my darling,” she cried. “I’ve neglected you so. You said you would come, always ... all through the years, even though my hair greyed and time ripened. My darling I shall make it all up to you. Will there still be tumult ‘midst the stars for I’m coming, my darling, I’m coming.” (p. 303–304)

In consideration of the broader epinovel structure, Jane’s death contains both continuity and closure. Her death signals the closure of her romantic relationship with Rothwell. Gratton and Jane are both dead, therefore their lives and narratives are “closed”. However rather than representing death as a final type of closure, the implication in this scene is a continuity; they are reunited, their love is rekindled, which brings happiness while at the same time it is tragic that their love cannot be realised in an earthly form. The narrative implies that they are able to continue in a manner unseeable and unknowable to the reader in the afterlife. Rachel Anderson notes the importance of love and death in romantic fiction, as she states, “For traditionally, the truest, purest romantic love is a fatal love” (1974, p. 26). Despite being a “fatal” type of love, there is happiness to be gained in Jane and Gratton’s reunion. Moreover, the way in which Jane’s death is written seemingly positions readers to reflect on what lies beyond life, for some readers in a reassuring, less fearful way. Such a meditation on death may have been of importance for readers within the wartime context in which these novels were published when death, whether literal or its threat, was omnipresent.

Indeed, reflecting back on Gratton’s death in *Behold New Holland!*, readers are given clues about the views on metaphysics underpinning the trilogy. Gratton voices his disappointment to be dying at the wrong time but reveals that he has left Jane well provided for financially and urges her to have a fulfilling future. Moreover, he expresses his views of death and what lies beyond, thereby priming the attentive reader to entertain the possibility that Jane and Gratton may be reunited later. He says of dying,

“There’s no death, Jane. I shall not be gone, really ... near you always. Each evening I will come to kiss you ... share joys and burdens ... There will be burdens. Life’s like that. Be Brave. You will grow old ... those curls turn silver ... your lovely face even

more sweet ... I shall continue to come ... Will ... you ... always ... remember that?" (1941, p. 236)

He later says "Don't fret ... it can't be helped now. One courts disaster and quite irrelevantly expects victories. Keep the flag flying, Jane, my dear!" (p. 283). The references to "victories" and "the flag" seemingly alludes to a nationalistic vision, so important in the context in which these novels were published. Seemingly, the narrative suggests that the threat of death is a near and present danger when taking risks in being bold and/or fighting for what one believes in. Weaver engages with a very human expectation and understanding of death, especially for contemporary readers, of death being final but also largely intangible and unknowable without first-hand experience. Arguably, given the wartime context in which these novels were written, the New Holland novels provide a meditation on death, particularly its metaphysics.

The thread of narrative continuity from Jane's death leading into the final novel in the trilogy is found in the mention of her daughter Jenny. Just before she dies, Jane finds Jenny's hat laying on the ground. She picks it up and the narrator observes, "A careless child, Captain Jenny, growing so tall these days; riding often with the Colonel and learning, the scamp, to shoot as well as he did" (p. 303). When Rothwell finds Jane dead "her head [is] cradled in the fork of the tree, her eyes closed and lips smiling", she is "clasping Captain Jennifer's hat" (p. 303). The mention of Jenny learning to shoot alludes to her degree of unruliness and defiance at convention (much like her mother) that defines Jenny's personality in the third novel *Beyond Cooralong*. There is a slight overlap in the narrative of *New Holland Heritage* and *Beyond Cooralong* of about three years. Jenny is part of the first generation born in Western Australia to English migrant parents. Having grown up in the settlement, her first trip to England at age eight with her father sees her tanned brown skin in stark contrast to "rosy cheeked English children" (1945, p. 9); her friendliness in waving at strangers is not returned by some English children she meets. Even her cousin Jessica describes her as "so colonial" (emphasis in original, p. 12) and a "funny little fish" (p. 12). On this trip, she and her father are seeking investors for their timber company, particularly railway infrastructure, including a stop at Brae castle to meet Lord Appleyard. Rothwell hopes to secure investors in the timber industries of Western Australia, believing such investment "would save a State, which had found nothing else to save it from ruin and stagnation" (p. 10). At Brae Castle Jenny meets Lord Appleyard's son James, then aged eleven. Jenny tells him stories of convicts and what her father "does" with his time, though James, because of his aristocratic upbringing, is then of the view that "nobody *became* anything, people were just born something or weren't" (emphasis in original, p. 15). As Jenny and Rothwell depart Brae, Jenny exclaims her love for James "next to my brother" (p. 19) and asks James to visit her one day. As Jenny sails away from England, the narrative point of view splits, shifting between James and Jenny as they grow from children into adults.

The love story between James and Jenny follows a more conventional path than the previous two novels. Aside from the physical distance that separates them between Australia and England, the main barriers that keep them apart are firmly related to James. He secretly trains to become a doctor much to the horror of his father. Soon after qualifying James is tricked into marrying a young woman, Gossamer, who lives on the Brae estate; only after their marriage is

confirmed does James discover that Gossamer is his cousin. Once his father has learned about the marriage, James is quickly disinherited. When Gossamer discovers they will not be living in the castle, something she had schemed for her whole life, she lets James leave for Australia to start his life anew without her. In the meantime, Jenny has become the belle of the colony with many admirers much like her mother was. She is aware that she should be married but tells her father, "If I ever marry it will be someone alert" (p. 74). When James and Jenny are reunited as young adults, they quickly realise they still love each other, however, they cannot be together because of his pre-existing marriage to Gossamer which James eventually confesses. Jenny is more concerned that James must have loved Gossamer to marry her. James reveals that he married her because "he was so lonely in his own family" and Gossamer married him because "she wanted to inherit at least something of Brae estate" (p. 227). James even contemplates divorce, despite the stigma it carries, but Gossamer will not "release him" (p. 227). The narrative impresses Jenny's belief in a one true love that once discovered cannot be forgotten, as she states to James, "And whatever comes or goes, we will always have that in our hearts. No one can take that from us" (p. 228). At this point, Jenny and James are preparing themselves for a kind of tragic love, similar to the one experienced by Jane with Gratton, though they will have to live with distance between them. Jenny tells James, "I do love you [...] If ever you cannot do without me, I will be waiting" (p. 228). James worries that he will hurt her, however Jenny confidently states, "Love has never hurt anyone, James" (p. 228). James and Jenny agree to hide their love from others, as Jenny describes it, she could be a "maiden lady with a secret" (p. 229).

The expectations of the colony for marriage and according with convention weighs on James and Jenny. However, the possibility of resolution emerges when Gossamer arrives announcing to James that not only do they have a son Christopher from the short time they shared after marrying, but Christopher is to be the next Lord Appleyard. Gossamer dies soon after from an incurable illness. As the narrator observes, for James and Jenny, "There was no barrier between them now. They were free and that very knowledge which was uppermost in their minds kept them apart and silent" (p. 248). James and Jenny marry some time later and make their home "where the great jarrahs grew" (p. 249). When reflecting on the endings of novels for their meaning, especially the meaning imbued in *Beyond Cooralong's* conclusion, the emphasis is certainly on the love between James and Jenny. However, James is the one who has learned much, appreciating with humbleness his life now as a country doctor. He says, "I could not ask for more than you and in addition to live where I am loved. It is life as I have chosen it and would choose again, though perhaps I would do it a little more wisely in regard to the method. I think all any man wants is to live his life and have the opportunity to live it freely" (p. 253). While there is closure in terms of their relationship, it is buttressed by the sense of continuity in the setting, the development and possibilities of the growing settlement. Indeed, in the final chapter, after much hardship, readers are informed that "Western Australia had gone prancing into prosperity" (p. 245): in the state's north, there have been pastoral developments, gold has been discovered in the "southern interior", there is talk of petition for "responsible government", and finally, railroad lines have been built into the south-west forests to support the timber industries.

Conclusion

It is a brave writer who meddles with the ending in a work of romantic fiction. However, should a writer wish to tackle such a challenge, they may, like Rix Weaver, wish to work across multiple connected novels (or today even across media such as by way of transmedia storytelling) and a broad story arc. In this article we have discussed and analysed Rix Weaver's *New Holland* trilogy to engage with the romantic stories of their main heroines Jane Mabie and Jenny Hird. As we have argued, read through an epinovel lens, the *New Holland* series uses romance to experiment with continuity and closure. Because these are works of historical romantic fiction, the history pulls at continuity while romance pulls towards closure. In the first two novels, the endings do not offer romantic closure in ways that readers might expect. Indeed, the deaths of the main couple, Jane and Gratton, one at the end of the first novel and the other at the end of the second, point to both continuity and closure, thereby representing the kinds of contradictions that can be found in epinovels. The endings, where Gratton and then Jane die, have the potential to be unsatisfying for a reader, however such endings also invite the reader to continue into the third novel while reflecting more broadly on the historical narrative of the Swan River colony. As we have argued, there are multiple endings in these novels. Jane secures a home, financial security and love, however not at the same time or in the order a reader may expect. The complexity of the narrative is evident through an analysis of the endings and when set against the background of early colonisation in Western Australia in the 1830s and the economic, social and cultural conventions affecting women at the time. We argue that there is a feminist and revisionist impulse in these novels that critiques the gender conventions of the period through the characters of Jane and Jennifer; the gender conventions are complicated by the colonial setting. Although the trilogy ends with a more traditional romantic closure when James and Jenny marry and settle into life among the jarrah forest, the overarching story of the novels points to the broader history of the early colonisation of Western Australia. While the romantic stories of the protagonists ultimately rest more in closure than continuity, the overarching story about the settlement history of Western Australia is very much emphasised in terms of progress, dawning prosperity and continuity.

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