

PERRYSCOPE 3



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Cover photo by Robyn Mills.

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INTRODUCTION

Three issues in three months? I didn't think I had enough to write about at the beginning, but found that I had more ideas the more I wrote. And I've been trying to write something or other every day for the past few months. Mostly it's just a few notes which later get turned into something a little more substantial. The effort has been enjoyable. Not so sure about the end result however.



WHAT I'M DOING TO KEEP MYSELF BUSY

Bibliography of C. J. Dennis

From the late 1950s until the early 1980s my family was living in the small South Australian country town of Laura. This is one of those “blink and you'll miss it” towns, 225 km on the main road north of Adelaide if you pass directly through the Clare Valley. In this town of about 600 people my father had been running the local Pharmacy since 1958 and we were well settled there. I was attending high school in Adelaide, and so only visited home every four to six weeks; the reason why is a story for another time.

On one such visit I walked down the town's main road from our house to visit my father in his shop. Along the way I passed an empty block which, the last time I had noticed, had been occupied by a derelict building, the Beetaloo Reservoir Hotel. I mentioned this to Dad when I saw him and was told that the site had been taken over by the motor garage next door, so that the owner could expand his car sales business. “But we managed to save the Dennis window,” he said. Noting that I had no idea what he was talking about he went on to explain that C. J. Dennis had scratched his initials on a painted window using a borrowed woman's diamond ring.

I had never heard of C. J. Dennis prior to that. We had never studied him in school. This seemed later to be a terrible oversight as he was Australia's biggest selling poet, outdoing Lawson, Paterson and Gilmore in his heyday. And yet I'd never heard of him.

Some time later his name came up again when at some family dinner discussion it was revealed that my mother's middle name was “Doreen”, named after the love-interest of Dennis's most famous character, the Sentimental Bloke. Two such coincidences should well have sparked some sort of interest but I don't recall any of Dennis's books in our house and by that time I was fully ensconced in reading through my father's science fiction books.

It was some time in the late 1990s by the time I came across him again and by then I was starting to get some idea of my connection to him. Dennis had been born in 1876, the small town of Auburn in the Clare Valley, about 110 kilometres south of Laura. His father was a publican in that town and Dennis was sent away to school in Adelaide, at the Christian Brothers' College. By the time Dennis left school at 17 Dennis's father had taken over the Beetaloo Reservoir Hotel in Laura and Dennis moved to join him there a year or so later, after working for a period on the *Critic*, an Adelaide periodical. He began develop a drinking problem and he started to write poetry for the local newspaper, and after a stint in Broken Hill in New South Wales, moved back to Adelaide to rejoin the *Critic*.

In 1906 he founded a rival paper *The Gadfly*, but left that in 1907 and moved to Melbourne, before shifting again to Toolangi in the Yarra Valley outside Melbourne. Here he lived a poor existence, writing poetry for various magazines and newspapers, before starting a sequence of poems about a young larrikin living in Melbourne named Bill. These proved to be extremely popular and he continued to write more long poems about Bill and his wooing of Doreen until he published his first major verse novel, *THE SONGS OF A SENTIMENTAL BLOKE*, in 1915.

It proved an immediate hit in the country as it, and its sequel *THE MOODS OF GINGER MICK*, were taken up by Australian soldiers in the First World War. Smaller pocket-sized editions were published specifically for the armed forces which greatly increasing their popularity. By the mid 1920s *THE SONGS OF A SENTIMENTAL BLOKE* had sold more than 300,000 copies. Other sequels and other books were to follow.

I became interested in Dennis due to the Laura connection and because I'd finally gotten round to reading about Bill, Doreen and Ginger Mick to my great enjoyment. And I soon discovered that he had written vast amounts of other poetry and prose which had never been collected in book form. I wondered how much was out there.

Well, quite a lot as it happens, and not all of it documented. Ian McLaren, a Liberal member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, in 1976 produced *C. J. Dennis : A Chronological Checklist of his Contributions to Journal* based on his extensive collection and his research in the State Library of Victoria. I started trying to track these works down and the more I looked into Dennis the more works I found that McLaren had missed or overlooked.

I then also became aware of Austlit, the Bibliography of Australian Literary works, based at the University of Queensland. A check of their Dennis entries revealed that there were vast numbers of the author's works which were listed in McLaren but not in Austlit, some in Austlit which were not in McLaren, and some that were in neither. This didn't seem like a particularly good situation to me so I began writing emails to the Austlit people containing long lists of the Dennis works I had discovered which needed to be entered into the Austlit database.

Before long they got tired of this arrangement and offered me editing rights to the database so I could bypass the emails and just enter the items myself. I started that in about 2005 and I'm still at it. It keeps me busy.

When I first began looking into the author Austlit had around 1200 Dennis works indexed. That number is now up to just over 1900, and I think there are about another 1200-1500 to go. That is only a rough estimate and the final figure will probably never been truly known – Dennis, like a lot of editors of his time, tended to write lots of small, uncredited pieces for each

issue of the magazines he edited, mainly to fill in gaps in the pages.

This has become something of a never-ending quest, trawling old newspaper and magazines via Trove (the National Library of Australia's invaluable online newspaper archive) and occasionally visiting State Libraries in search of possible writings. It has been great fun, sometimes tedious, and I haven't worked at it in a continuous stream, but I expect it will keep me busy for quite some years to come.



Podcasting – TWO CHAIRS TALKING

Episode summary catch-up (ep 11-20):

Episode 11: The role of sheep in science fiction (14 September 2019)

I was still away overseas so Carey Handfield stayed on as co-host. He and David discussed Aussiecon, Ursula Le Guin's GoH speech from that convention, and there were pre-recorded interviews with Leigh Edmonds, Bruce Gillespie and me about our memories of Aussiecon.

Episode 12: Don't drop your phone on the glacier (28 September 2019)

I talked about the Dublin worldcon. David and I discussed the works of Connie Willis and we chatted about what we had been reading lately.

Episode 13: Blasts to the Past (14 October)

David spoke about the Ian Tregillis Milkweed trilogy; we reviewed the 1956 Hugo winners and discussed the winners of the 2019 Hugo Awards.

Episode 14: The Misfortunes of Melbourne (28 October 2019)

This episode featured an interview with Lucy Sussex, specifically about her book BLOCKBUSTER, but also about other Victorian era crime novels.

Episode 15: A great big countdown timer (12 November 2019)

We mostly discussed a number of Ridley Scott movies – mainly the Alien series – and asked the question: Are the Hugos a good guide to best SF? David also interviewed Daniel Scott White.

Episode 16: Falling through doorways (27 November 2019)

We chat about what we've been reading lately, and watching – in terms of sf tv series – and we look at the 1958 Hugo Awards.

Episode 17: Fiery the angels fell (14 December 2019)

We note the perils of Alternate Histories; discuss our recent reading; and have a look at the film BLADE RUNNER 2049 along with its prequel and the original Philip K. Dick novel.

Note: we took a fortnight off at this point for the Christmas/New Year period.

Episode 18: Food for the soul (7 January 2020)

Dedicated to a discussion of the best books we read in 2019, in various categories and our overall top 5 of the year. A very long episode.

Episode 19: Perplexed by hailstones (21 January 2020)

David and I discuss our favourite film and television from what we watched in 2019, and then tackle the 1960 Hugo Awards.

Episode 20: Don't need no Saturn V rockets (4 February 2020)

We discuss what we've been reading lately, I chat with Lucy Sussex about the new biography THE SHEFLIFE OF ZORA CROSS, and the hosts then get stuck into Christopher Nolan's film INTERSTELLAR.

Notes from this month's episodes

Episode 35 : The gifted grotesqueries of Gilliam (1 September 2020)

David and I noted the passing of John Bangsund, a well-known Australian sf fan who helped introduce David into fandom, and who was a heavy influence on me in my earlier days. I very much doubt that modern Australian sf fandom would be where it is today without John's writing, reviewing, communication and publishing back in the 1960s. He will be a great loss. We then went on discuss three films directed by Terry Gilliam: TIME BANDITS (1981), BRAZIL (1985) and 12 MONKEYS (1995). I enjoyed all three but do agree with my wife in her assessment that BRAZIL is "one of the strangest films I've ever seen". One thing I have to work on is my reviewing of films. I've come to realise that I can utilise some of my book reviewing techniques but that leaves something missing. It's a different art-form and therefore requires a different method of review. I'll need to think about this a bit more.

Episode 36: Marrying the genre next door (15 September 2020)

It's David who comes up with the titles for these episodes, and I must admit I laughed at this one. We discuss a number of books which might be described as "genre-adjacent", that is, books marketed as literary yet which utilise a number of sf/f memes or tropes. I talked about A SUPERIOR SPECTRE (see review below), ALL THE ANIMALS IN THAT COUNTRY and THE RAIN HERON: three recent Australian novels, all worth reading. David looked at IQ84, HUMAN CROQUET and WHAT THE WIND BRINGS. He then interviewed Matthew Hughes, the author of the third of these. I really enjoyed the reading for this episode. I sometimes complain – mostly in jest – about the amount of reading I have to do for this podcast but it's forcing me to spread my wings a bit which can only be a good thing.

Episode 37: One Hundred Years of Cyberitude (29 September 2020)

Back to the Hugo Time Machine, this time the year is 1964. Interesting that the novel category in that year contains two of my all-time favourite books: WAY STATION and DUNE WORLD. Well, okay, DUNE WORLD is only the first part (of three) of the final book DUNE, but I didn't want to skip a good note about the nominees. David and I disagreed about this one – I liked it and he was just so-so – and also about A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES by Roger Zelazny. This was one of our better Hugo Award episodes. We need to think about what we are going to do when we hit 1966 and the Nebula Award starts up. Oh, the pressure.



WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

2020 targets met this month: 14 Literary novels; 12 Australian novels;

Codes – F: format (e for electronic, blank for paper); R: rating, out of 5.0.

Abbr – 1001: 1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die; Hugo: Hugo Award winner.

September 2020 books

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Notes
A Superior Spectre	Angela Meyer	Lit	Sep 3		4.3	Australian
Glory Road	Robert A. Heinlein	Sf	Sep 8	e	2.4	
The Rain Heron	Robbie Arnott	Lit	Sep 8		4.6	Australian
The Animals in That Country	Laura Jean McKay	Lit	Sep 13		4.0	Australian
Witch World	Andre Norton	Fantasy	Sep 16	e	3.4	
Cat's Cradle	Kurt Vonnegut	Sf	Sep 22	e	3.2	1001
Way Station	Clifford D. Simak	Sf	Sep 23		4.7	Hugo
Dune World	Frank Herbert	Sf	Sep 26	e	4.5	
Time and Stars	Poul Anderson	Sf	Sep 30		3.3	Collection

Books read in the month: 9

Yearly total to end of month: 92

Notes:

A SUPERIOR SPECTRE (2018) – see review elsewhere in this issue. Discussed on the podcast in episode 36. R: 4.3/5.0

GLORY ROAD (1963) – It's about here that Heinlein started to go off the rails. This comes across as a teenage wish-fulfilment fantasy, and not a good one. There is far too much talking, far too much lecturing, and far, far too much sexist commentary disguised under a "hail fellow, well met" casual attitude. This is a science fantasy novel – mixing elements of both genres – and follows the adventures of Evelyn Cyril Gordon as he is recruited by Star, a stunningly beautiful woman, to accompany her and her companion, Rufo, on a quest to retrieve the Egg of the Phoenix from some distant planet. Along the way they talk, and talk, and talk, and occasionally fight dragons and other exotic creatures, and then talk some more. Dire. Discussed on the podcast in episode 37. R: 2.4/5.0

THE RAIN HERON (2020) – see review next issue. Discussed on the podcast in episode 36. R: 4.6/5.0

THE ANIMALS IN THAT COUNTRY (2020) – see review next issue. Discussed on the podcast in episode 36. R: 4.0/5.0

WITCH WORLD (1963) – Fantasy thinly disguised as sf. I'm not sure if the Witch World series (of which this is the first) counts as YA though it certainly reads like that. Competent and interesting without being anything out of the ordinary. Simon Tregarth, an American, escapes this world just ahead of a group of assassins and finds himself in a world where magic works. He saves the life of an important witch and becomes embroiled in an escalating war between the witch's country and a neighboring kingdom which appears to have imported high-tech

weaponry. Discussed on the podcast in episode 37. R: 3.4/5.0

CAT'S CRADLE (1963) – I just don't get Vonnegut. I remember SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE with some degree of admiration, though I reckon that's because I read it at the right time in my life, somewhere in my late teens or early twenties. Coming across this novel now, in my 60s, I just find it to be rather forced in its humour and social commentary. This book is a product of its time rather than of my present. Discussed on the podcast in episode 37. R: 3.2/5.0

WAY STATION (1963) – One of my all-time favourite sf novels. Enoch Wallace is an old man. A few years after returning from fighting for Lincoln in the American Civil War to his family farm, he buries his dead father next to his mother in their family plot. As he is mourning his parents and contemplating his future he is approached by an alien, who Enoch calls Ulysses after the Union general, who wants him to man Earth's way station, an essential hub in a galaxy-wide network of matter transfer stations. His old family farm house is transformed into the station and while Enoch is inside the house he does not age. A hundred years later, in the 1960s Earth is approaching nuclear war, and galactic diplomacy is breaking down due to the loss of a Talisman, and its custodian, which spread a atmosphere of peace among people who experienced it. In addition, Enoch and his house are being watched by US Government officials who steal the body of an alien who died in the station and was buried next to Enoch's parents. The loss of the body, and peace at both a planetary and galactic level, needs to be resolved to avoid disaster. R: 4.7/5.0

DUNE WORLD (1963): This was a three-part serial in *Analog* and is the first half of Herbert's major novel DUNE, considered one of the greatest sf novels of all time. The second half was published in *Analog* as well in the first 5 months of 1965, with the final novel appearing later that year and winning the Hugo Award and initial Nebula Award in 1966. In the far future the galaxy is ruled by a Emperor above a number of Houses who have the main commercial and political control. House Atreides has been ordered to take over the planet of Arrakis from House Harkonnen and to therefore control the production of melange, a spice only found on Arrakis and which is critical to the functioning of the Empire. But it's all a trap. Discussed on the podcast in episode 37. R: 4.5/5.0

TIME AND STARS (1964): A collection of stories from novella length down to short story. It contains the Hugo-winner “No Truce With Kings”, which was discussed on the podcast in episode 37, plus 5 other stories. Competent without being anything startling. R: 3.3/5.0



REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS 1

BEAT NOT THE BONES (1952) by Charlotte Jay
Genre: Mystery

“Charlotte Jay” is the pseudonym for Geraldine Halls (nee Geraldine Jay) (1917-1996), a writer born in Adelaide who wrote five novels using this pen-name, one as by G. M. Jay, and eight under her own name between 1951 and 1995. Not a prolific writing career for that length of time but certainly a respectable one.

Her third novel, BEAT NOT THE BONES, won the inaugural Mystery Writers of America Edgar

Allan Poe Award for Best Novel in 1954, and yet appears not to have raised her to the prominence you might expect from this sort of win. Such, it seems, is the destiny of mid-twentieth century Australian women writers.

Jay graduated from the University of Adelaide in 1941, then worked in Melbourne, Sydney and London before taking on a job as a Supreme Court stenographer in Papua New Guinea in 1948. She lived there for 10 years, during which time she married Albert John Halls who worked for UNESCO. Her stay in PNG heavily influenced the novels she wrote during that period with this novel being fully set in that country.

Stella Warwick has travelled to Marapai (a re-named Port Moresby) in Papua to take up a job as an administrative assistant with the Australian Government authorities, but also to investigate the death of her husband David. His death has been ruled a suicide by the police but Stella is convinced that he would never do such a thing and that a major crime has been covered up. Just prior to his death her husband sent her a letter detailing his interactions with an Australian beachcomber, Alfred Jobe, and disclosing the fact that Jobe had discovered gold ornaments belonging to a tribe of native Papuans in Eola, a village outside the patrolled territory. It's Stella's feeling that this gold discovery might be linked to her husband's death, yet all of his friends discourage her from investigating and actively attempt to mislead her when she persists. It appears that everyone is lying to her or misleading her in some way. The modern reader will see a lot more of this than Stella herself; it is not that she is unintelligent or too believing, it's just that we are now more attuned to the conventions of mystery novels.

After some time she discovers that David died while on a trip to Eola, and that he was accompanied by Philip Washington, who is recovering from a bout of malaria, and Hitolo his native servant. Her persistent attitude results in her organising a return trip to the village with these men where she hopes to finally discover the truth about what happened to her husband. The journey down the river, and then through the jungle towards the village is reminiscent of Conrad's HEART OF DARKNESS: the tension builds with the heat and the humidity as the group dynamics become more fraught and fractious. The two native porters accompanying the group disappear first, this is explained as being due to their fear of the "sorcerers" in the village, followed soon thereafter by Hitolo. As they near the village Washington shows increasing signs of madness and he finally admits his part in the theft of the gold from the villagers. Stella eventually reaches the village of Eola and discovers the reason for her husband's death and the mystery of the village.

Like all good crime or mystery novels the country and location of the action forms a major part of the work and helps to drive the plot. Added to that is the background of the Australian administration of the territory and the inherent racism involved in everything they do and say. Jay stated that she did not set out to write an anti-colonial novel. She didn't need to, the characters do all the work for her.

Crime or mystery novels set in Papua or New Guinea are rare. Novels as good as this are even rarer.

My rating: 4.2/5.0



REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS 2

A SUPERIOR SPECTRE (2018) by Angela Meyer

Genre: Literary

Angela Meyer has been on the Melbourne literary scene for around 15 years, as a book-seller, lit blogger, book reviewer, writer of short fiction and now publisher. A SUPERIOR SPECTRE is her debut novel, marketed as literary fiction but also crossing over in the historical and science fiction genres.

Our protagonist, Jeff (surname unknown), is an Australian man dying of an unnamed disease who decides to spend his last days in the wilds of Scotland, near where his ancestors lived. It is the mid-2020's and the government has the means to track their citizens, and the authority to enforce their hospitalisation. Jeff doesn't want any of this. He has had enough of life and just wants to die in peace, unmolested.

As he nears the end of his journey into Scotland he acquires an android servant to help with his care, and some new neural technology which allows him to project his mind into the past, into the mind of an inhabitant of the 1860s. Whether by design or accident he finds himself interacting with Leonara, an intelligent young woman living in the Scottish Highlands. Although warned not to use the technology more than three times, Jeff becomes habituated to the mind transference which slowly changes his world-view and has an even larger impact on Leonara.

Initially living with her widowed father on a small farm Leonara is sent off to sooty Edinburgh to stay with her aunt when her father becomes involved with another woman, and also to remove her from the chance of an unsanctioned relationship with a local laird. At first disgusted by the grit and grime of the city, she slowly makes friends with a group of young students, both men and women studying at the local university, while still chafing under the strict influence of her puritanical aunt.

Jeff lives Leonara's life vicariously, fully aware of her emotions, intellect and sexuality. At the same time, various thoughts and feelings from Jeff seep into her consciousness. She comes to think of these intrusions as hallucinations, and she believes she may be going mad. While being fully aware of this Jeff clings to the time he spends with her, risking her sanity as his body rapidly deteriorates.

The novel is told from the points of view of the two main characters, both in the first person. With a lesser writer this may have proved difficult to follow, yet Meyer handles the transitions deftly ensuring the reader is left in no doubt about who each character is within the first sentence or two. Near the end of the novel she allows possible confusions to creep in, not from a lack of attention on her behalf, but in order to add an extra insight into the slow merging of the two personalities. For an experienced writer this would be seen as showing real novelistic expertise; from a debut writer it is very heartening. You know you're in good hands when you see the technical side of the writing handled as tightly as this.

There are lot of depths to his novel: explorations of identity; the blurring and exploitation of social, class and gender barriers; and the morality of control being only a few of them.

Meyer's debut is a controlled yet emotionally engaging novel which should appeal to any and all readers. I, for one, will look forward to her future work with much interest.

My rating: 4.3/5.0

[Cross-posted to Goodreads.com and to the Facebook Australian Literature page.]



WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

THE UMBRELLA ACADEMY Seasons 1 and 2 (10 episodes each season)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: SF

Based on the Dark Horse comic book series of the same name written by Gerard Way.

I'd be loathe to describe this tv series as fitting into the "superhero" sub-genre but it does have many aspects in common with the Marvel Comics Universe, and with the X-Men in particular. The basic premise behind the series is as follows: on the 1st October 1989 43 women around the world became pregnant and gave birth on the same day. Eccentric billionaire Sir Reginald Hargreaves adopts seven of these children, who all have specific "super-powers" and moulds them into a crime-fighting team called The Umbrella Academy. Although originally only given numbers for names, they are eventually named by their robot-mother as: Luther, Diego, Allison, Klaus, Number Five, Ben and Vanya (though Number Five only seems to retain his original title). At the start of the series Ben has died – though he remains in view, at times, as Klaus's ability is the power to commune with the dead – and Vanya is kept separated from the crime fighting as she is deemed to have no powers. This last note is the driving force behind the two series produced so far as the group attempts to stop a world-ending apocalypse in different time-lines in each season.

There is a helluva lot going on here, too much to condense easily into a short review. If you are a fan of quirky super-hero material involving time-travel, alternate time-lines, seemingly omnipotent organisations, and good acting with large slabs of humour and fight scenes thrown in, you'll like this. I did.

Season 1 rating: 4.1/5.0

Season 2 rating: 4.4/5.0

GIRI/HAJI Season 1 (8 episodes)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Crime

The title is taken from the Japanese words for "Duty" and "Shame".

A Japanese businessman is murdered in London, with the knife left sticking in his back. He is identified as the nephew of a Tokyo Yakusa boss and the knife as belonging to another boss, after it was stolen a year before by a fleeing Yakusa hitman. In order to forestall a major crime war, Tokyo police detective Kenzo Mori is dispatched to London to track down and return the

killer, knowing full well that it is his brother he's looking for.

Although a BBC production there is a fair amount of the story set in Japan with some very funny and some very tragic subplots involving the Yakusa, the Mori family and Kenzo's police colleagues. In London Kenzo becomes involved with a rent boy, and a single policewoman before his daughter arrives on the scene unexpectedly. I had heard some good things about this series before watching it and all of them proved to be correct. This is an excellent television crime series revolving around the Eastern-Western cultural divide. There is a ghost story, a couple of romantic couplings, a drug addict's unravelling, a teenage runaway and lots more going on.

I had originally thought this was to be a one-off series, but the ending of episode 8 leaves that question very much open. One query, and this is not a spoiler: can someone explain to me a certain "sequence" that turns up in the last episode? You'll know what it is.

Season 1 rating: 4.5/5.0



EMAILS OF COMMENT (P2)

Martin Field : I first read Vance's The Dragon Masters in serialised form, in Galaxy from memory – loved it. I must read again. [[**PM** – I would recommend it. My podcasting co-host, David Grigg, is a big Vance fan, though I must admit to having a big blind spot in my reading regarding the author. I really must rectify this at some point. Martin later realised that the novella had been published in one issue of Galaxy magazine and not as a serial.]] Excellent after all these years, it holds up well. I wish a lot more modern scifi authors could pack so many ideas, concepts into so few words.

I also heard from: Chong (who liked the fanzine title. He was happy to read the capsule book reviews and was pleased I wasn't commenting that all of them were "pretty good", a repetitive rating I used a lot in the early days of the podcast, apparently).



Captivitatis Defricatus Urina 2

[Being an occasional attempt at humor.]

Back in 2010 Christos Tsiolkas was nominated for the Bad Sex in Literature Award (yes, there is a such a thing) for his novel *THE SLAP*, but he didn't win. I responded with some lame humor.



The original illustration was published in *The Bulletin*, 17 December 1903.