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NOTES ON AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION

TREVARTHEN, Hal P. World D. Sheed & Ward, London & New York, 1935. 7-320 p. 8"

Observers of the mid-thirties SF scene knew of this book as one of the more unusual and imaginative of the many appearing outside the developing field of science fiction proper and evidently quite unaware of it.

Here's what Walter Gillings had to say of it:

"This remarkable piece of British science fiction, containing scientific conceptions of the thought-variant order mixed with Roman Catholic doctrines, is sheer food and drink to the hardened scientifiictionist, so much so that it must prove utterly bewildering to the ordinary reader.

"It describes how, at a time when the human race is doomed to destruction (though from what source is not disclosed), a super-scientist constructs a new world called Helioxenon ten miles beneath the surface and plans to populate it with carefully chosen specimens of humanity.

"To perform this feat he perfects the new science of Psycho-physics, which enables him to increase his mental powers by a Great Machine ~~with~~ his brain can absorb scientific knowledge involving the use of fifteen dimensions.

"Through the Great Machine, whose workings are fully described, the founder of the bubble-like world contacts the strange inhabitants of far-distant planets in an attempt to enlist their aid in saving Earth from destruction.

"These creatures, their alien mentalities and habits, together with a hundred other fascinating conceptions, are dealt with by the author in a way that cannot fail to please; and in the process is unfolded a love story which adds to the enjoyment of the whole."

Like so many older books this has a slow beginning with a tedious narrative framing device, the manuscript given to someone who doesn't vouch for its authenticity but is passing it on for what it's worth. But once past the circumstantial introduction of the supposed

editor, one J. K. Heydon, the pace picks up briskly with the viewpoint that of a recruit to the scheme.

Where is the colony located? "In the red-hot granite, ten miles below the Indian Ocean," he hears from the lady enticing him to sign on: "It is a kind of thermos-flask, of ten cubic miles capacity, with five hundred floors of three square miles each. That is to say, its effective area is about fifteen hundred square miles --" Where's that pocket calculator? -- "Or about the size of Greater London... (with provision for)...indefinite extension as the population grows." Just as well, since amidst the hairsplitting rationalising throughout the book it's clear that any prudent regulation of fertility is out, and the colonists can be expected to breed like bunny rabbits.

And to get there? Take the subway already constructed. This train itself, travelling in a vacuum at a steady thousand miles an hour, along a force-stream from the Force-stream Sub-distributor --" Well, of course, where else would a force-stream emanate from, dumkopf? "--might furnish matter for a six-hour lecture, and you would be very little the wiser at the end."

Before they're past central Europe, I would estimate, the orientation meeting has got to the interstellar contacts with --- now we get a clue to the title -- Worlds A, B and C: distant respectively some 200, 170 and 25,000,000 lightyears. The communication is evidently faster than light then. And, for those who had read a few early would-be SF books and were fearing the worst, relief: "None of those worlds is inhabited by human beings, or by beings anything like human beings..." What they look like doesn't matter, all three species are developed far beyond us and can teach us a thing or two. Can they help us in the disaster to come? They probably could, but that would not be right. "One world may not interfere with another's evolution...Each world, like each individual, has to work out its own salvation and must respect the

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freedom of others." Well, that's one position, but one open to debate as the book develops.

It's an odd book, crammed with ideas, many of them half-baked. There is some original thinking combined with some rather curious attitudes. In how many stories about saving Earth, or preserving a remnant through catastrophe, is it found essential to clear the project with the Vatican and ensure that the survivors will be ideologically kosher?

Anyhow, World D was established as an interesting item to add to the well rounded SF collection. But finding it listed as of Australian authorship was something else. It was certainly not generally understood to be anything but English, and needed investigation.

What did the publisher know of the author? And was anything on record about him? It appeared that Trevarthen was an alias, the correct name Heydon, but he did not appear in several reference sources. (But that was because I didn't go far back enough, as I later found). The Mitchell Library had some other publications, all pamphlets on various controversies.

My query to the firm of Sheed & Ward brought a reply from Frank Sheed, the aged founder, in Jersey City. He had been "a rather older contemporary and a close friend of mine.

"He was an Australian, educated by the English Benedictines at Downside in England. His father Judge Heydon was the first prominent Catholic to disagree publicly with Archbishop Mannix about conscription. He and I talked for a bit (round 1925) on the Catholic platform in the Sydney Domain. He owned some sort of manufacturing business in Sydney but I've forgotten what...He divided the later part of his life between England and Australia.

"I'm glad you liked World D."

Mr Sheed also put me in touch with a niece in Sydney, Mrs Mary Collingridge, who had details to add.

"Joseph Kentigern Haydon was born in Sydney on 13th Jan. 1884. Both his parents were also Australian

born: his father Louis Francis Heydon born in Sydney in 1848 and his mother Mary Josephine (nee Gell) in Bathurst in 1863. His grandfather Jabez King Heydon is listed in the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

"J.K. was educated in Sydney, then England. Later he did Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology at Boston, and Law in Sydney, where he joined his father's legal firm...married an English woman and eventually retired there and died in Oxford in 1947..."

He worked as an analytical chemist in London for a while before turning to the law, and at the same time as practicing law he established a felt manufacturing business in Sydney in 1916, said to be the first in Australia. What you'd call a man of parts.

So there we have it. Another Australian science fiction author. He only wrote one book, but ~~one~~ of stature.

The British and American editions of World D are typographically identical, aside from amendments to the title and copyright pages, both printed or at least set up in England. The American however is on a thicker, stiffer paper making a 50% bulkier book. All copies seen of the British edition are in medium blue cloth lettered in black. The only one seen of the American is in light green lettered in gold.

LANCE, Lancelot. Hortense: a study of the future, a romance. Sands & McDougall, Printers, Melbourne 1906. viii, 266 p. 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ ".

It's hard to be sure whether a book like this was printed at the author's expense (as one is inclined to suppose) or was seriously produced by the printers as a business proposition. In Australia it has not been firmly established that a printer is a printer and a publisher is a publisher. It was not at all a clear distinction two or three generations ago. So it could (and even today still can) happen that an author of a

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quite readable novel could not interest anyone in putting money into turning it into a book, and decide to do it himself. More often, though, if the author had to undertake publication it is a fair sign of a book with at best curiosity value.

This book certainly has curiosity value, and is interesting as an example of the expectations for the future to be expected in Australia of its time. The overall picture is vague and there is little effort to tie together the changes that are predicted into a whole.

The supposed date is not given, but as near as I can estimate it must be about 1930. The viewpoint is that of a young man from a group lost on a remote island from a shipwreck for long enough for the maroons' children to grow up. But this is not seriously exploited to explain things about the situation.

The marvels of science he sees include quite an advanced form of television (no mention of commercials), electric roadways and common use of private fliers, called "aerials". Mail goes by pneumatic tube.

Turning to the political and social spheres we hear this: "Australia, they say, is at the present time on a wave of great prosperity, due in a measure to the wise legislation of what was once termed the Labor Party, who triumphantly swept the elections, both State and Federal, many years back, and have remained in power ever since. Taking New Zealand as their model State, they have adapted its legislation to Australian needs." Full stop. End of lesson. If we wonder what it's called now since evidently it's no longer "termed the Labor Party" -- or just how New Zealand's legislation was adapted to Australian needs -- we must go on wondering, for no more details are offered.

We are also told that there is equality of the sexes, but what that amounts to in practice is not demonstrated. There seems no particular difference from the 1906 position. Social stratification is

quite as real as ever, though we are only shown the upper classes. Non-European domestic servants are commonplace.

Though as noted above there is no sign of an active political life in Australia of around 1930, there are forces at work internationally. A war between the two leading powers, America and China, is fought out in the book. New military technology? Yes, the Americans trot out vessels fitted with a new weapon: "a form of burning lens that projected a beam of light...to shrivel and burn up everything in its path." Like the heat ray used by Mr. Wells' Martians in their invasion of a few years earlier. But there are old fashioned explosive projectiles as well.

Against this background we have a boy-meets-girl plot. He meets more than one likely candidates in fact. And before the happy ending we have misunderstandings, coincidences, meanderings, not what I'd call a logically developed story. As we often find in delving into antique Australian writings, such action as there is often marks time while the author goes off into irrelevant sentimental ruminations on reincarnation and other nineteenth century notions.

The title role of Hortense, villainess of the piece, is a more interesting character than the rest: a femme formidable and scientific genius to boot. The scene is mainly Sydney -- what a pity there is no real visualisation of all the exciting changes that surely must have taken place -- with episodes in other places, notably among some North African desert Arabs who are just as usually represented in Victorian fiction.

Hortense certainly qualifies as early science fiction, but not as having much significance. Nothing is known of the author.

SOMETHING ABOUT EDITORS.

Most people seriously interested in science fiction, I observe, have ideas about writing the stuff themselves. If they all put the thought into action we'd be smothered in manuscripts indeed, and even the small minority who do get around to writing something creates more than could be read even if they succeeded in getting it into print.

But I think that there's an even greater multitude out there who, not anxious to write, like to think they could edit. Obviously only a very few would ever have a chance to work on putting a magazine together. But the prospects of editing at least one short story collection are a lot brighter. Since Don Wollheim sold the concept of a Pocket Book of Science Fiction -- not seriously imagining that he might get to do it more than once -- to Pocket Books in 1943, the number of sf anthologies has gone into thousands.

But what I want to consider here is an essential part of the work of editing an anthology. Selection. Somehow you have to decide on what stories are going into your book. Strangely this is something that is not much discussed. One of the few discussions is in the double introduction to Science Fiction: The Great Years, edited by Carol and Frederik Pohl. Fred had more than enough experience in this job, and as he remarks this created a problem: "I did not select these stories by reading through every old SF magazine...I selected them in the first place from memory -- from remembering the pleasure they had given me when they first came out, and remembering the pleasure that they gave me still, decades later. I read them again to make sure that I still liked them, and that was how I came to the first rough selection of possible stories."

Carol, on the other hand, reports that her first thought was: "You must be kidding. I don't know enough about science fiction to collaborate on an anthology." True, Fred conceded. The point was that with a fresher viewpoint she could narrow down the choices to those she found still held up. Of course, most anthologists

go it alone. But essentially they have to do the same. Start with a large body of work to be considered, based on reading extensively in the literature. Or do they? Some, I note, obviously find that there are short cuts. As soon as there existed a fair number of books collecting stories from magazines and odd sources, it became easier to thumb quickly through a few books instead.

Consequently we find that certain authors are more often represented in anthologies than can be put down to their merit alone. They had become more visible. And particular stories would appear again and again.

This, you say, is all very well, but how does it relate to Australian science fiction? Only a very small number of short stories by Australians has ever appeared in anthologies, whether published here or abroad, from the relatively small body of work that exists. And this is just as we would expect. So if we see the same story in several books it may be that it has really outstanding merit. Then again, it may be due to lazy anthologists using what someone else has found already.

The late A. Bertram Chandler wrote something in excess of 150 stories, most remaining uncollected. so far. Some, mainly those more or less connected by continuing characters and backgrounds, have been combined in a few books; less than 10% are anthologised; but one, *The Cage*, is anthologised at least three times that I have noted. Does it stand out as a truly remarkable piece of work? Perhaps. It has an original point that would appeal to a lot of readers. But it must have been another point in its favor that it was brought to notice the first time.

Nor consider *The Place of the Throwing Stick*, by Frank B. Bryning. Originally in *New Worlds* 45, March 1956, it was in *Coast to Coast*, the now defunct biennial prestige volume, in 1959. Then it was in *Southern Harvest*, edited by R. F. Brissenden, Macmillan

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1964; in *Stories and Afterthoughts*, ed. W. H. Mason, Blackwell 1966; and in *Aliens in their land: the Aborigine in the Australian short story*, ed. L. E. Rorabacher, Cheshire 1968.

These books were not compiled with science fiction in mind. I cannot say whether *The Place of the Throwing Stick* was the first SF story to appear in *Coast to Coast*, not as yet having scanned through the series, but it may perhaps have been and if so this is worth noting. But I would be happier about this situation if rather more examples of Frank's work had been anthologised somewhere, and he has I think written better. *The Robot Carpenter* for one, a really original work that gives a lot to think about.

ANDREW DUNSTAN

Biographical notes here and there on A. Bertram Chandler mention that as well as writing fairly frequently as George Whitley he used the name Andrew Dunstan for some early stories published in Australia. But details have not been available.

There were many SF stories printed from time to time in the important Australian magazine *Man*, which ran from 1936 to 1974. As a complete run is not available for perusal to my knowledge I have not been able to list all of them with confidence: but in scanning the incomplete sets in the National Library and the Mitchell Library, among the more rewarding finds were three stories signed Andrew Dunstan.

Foul Log, in Dec 1945, is a sea story with the familiar Chandler ambiance, marginally SF. A plotless anecdote rather than a story, it tells of a ship's encounter with two unknown marine monsters: first a recognisable ichthyosaur, then a large carnivorous crustacean with suspiciously intelligent behavior.

Path of Glory, Feb 1946, does not qualify as SF. It is a "what if?" theme, a fortune teller showing a man another life he might have lived in a crystal ball.

The Traveller, May 1946, is a rather weak time travel tale. The time traveller visits a barbaric future and encounters the local witch doctor.

All of these are obviously early works. They do not have enough structure and purpose. But the easy natural narrative style is developing. These pieces are not likely to be printed again, but they are now located.

SLEIGH, Barbara ed. Funny Peculiar. Wren 1975.
6-174 p. 8½" Ill. Jennie Garratt.

The Melbourne firm of Wren was dabbling in SF, publishing The Bitter Pill by Chandler for example, at the time this curious miscellaneous compilation was printed in England. Perhaps it had another imprint there? What the overall plan was cannot readily be seen, but it may have been meant as a juvenile.

Its interest here is two SF stories and a piece of verse. Meteor by John Wyndham is said to be "adapted", it doesn't suggest why. The Odour (sic) of Thought by Robert Sheckley has an introductory note giving the name as Spreckley. The poem is Tea in a Space-Ship by James Kirkup.

One for the indefatigable collector of marginalia.

...OR NOT, AS THE CASE MAY BE

HENNESSY, John David, 1847-1935. An Australian Bush Track. Sampson Low nd (1896). Reissued Hodder nd with cover title The Bush Track. This book is known in the Lost Race field. A letter by Captain Cook is found describing how he encountered a native sailing ship in Moreton Bay and from it acquired a boomerang inscribed in an unspecified language. Eventually translated, this gives vague directions to an inland location and a 19th century expedition goes to look into it. They find a small enclave of snake-venerating Asians with no explanation of how they got to outback Queensland.

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-- true, their forbears must have navigated from somewhere and then walked. They have the usual stash of gold and crystalised carbon, but nothing in the way of scientific marvels. No monsters or ape-~~persons~~.

Two more books by Hennessy were examined and also can be eliminated.

The Caves of Shend. Hodder 1915. A mystery involving organised crime in 19th century Sydney

A Tail of Gold. Hodder 1914. About mining, robbery and fraud in Australia.

RUSSELL, Arthur. Dream Isle, an Australian story. Boys' Own Paper Office, London nd (1926). A juvenile novel of rather tame adventures in the bush with nothing unusual.

-- The Sky Pirates. Cassell Melbourne 1946. Reads as if much earlier. About robbery and kidnapping using a camouflaged aircraft -- exaggerated idea of camouflage as virtual invisibility -- to force down commercial flights.

-- G.S.

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