

HERE THERE BE MONSTERS: SOME IDIOSYNCRASIES OF SCIENCE FICTION BIBLIOGRAPHY IN AUSTRALIA*

SINCE THIS ARTICLE IS LIKELY TO REINFORCE MISCONCEPTIONS about the irretrievable 'weirdness' of science fiction readers and writers (and critics and bibliographers), let me begin with the defensive assertion that the 'cases' discussed below concern only the monsters in the litter, and that bibliographical excursions into Australian science fiction writing are usually quite straightforward. Nevertheless, the monsters do exist and are fascinating beasts to look at . . .

To justify the use of the word *idiosyncrasies* in the title, let me begin by discussing the phenomenon of discrepancies in authorship. Or, to pose this matter as the kind of question which might confront a bibliographer: How does it come to be that a story written by X is attributed to Y and Z in the *same publication*?

CASE 1: 'Jet Bees of Planet J'

One of the earliest Australian 'pulp' science fiction magazines was *Thrills Incorporated* (1950-52; 23 issues), and one of its more illustrious contributors was Alan Yates (who later adopted the pseudonym 'Carter Brown' and created the 'Al Wheeler' pulp detective series for which he became famous). Alan Yates began his career by writing westerns (usually under the name 'Tex Conrad'), but his autobiography tells of the expansion of his literary productivity:

As time went on I also branched out into other fields than westerns. There was a horror series and a scientific thriller series — I wrote under [the pseudonym] 'Paul Valdez' for that one and still have a sneaking affection for Valdez, wherever he is. There was also *Thrills Incorporated*, which was:

"Fantastic adventures, but these stories of tomorrow are only one jump ahead of science . . . you too can take a trip to the world of space ships and inter-planetary travel . . .".

Short stories only were required for this magazine and strictly in terms of space opera. Very often, when the editor was running to a tight schedule he would have the artwork already done and hand you a picture, saying, 'Three thousand words and a title, old boy, and I do need them by Friday.'

One picture he gave me didn't allow a lot of scope as far as the title was concerned, I thought, so I called it 'Jet Bees of Planet J'.

He took another look at the picture when I brought in the manuscript, then looked at the title again.

'See what you mean, old boy.' He nodded approval. 'Sort of self-propelled by their own farts.'¹

'Jet Bees of Planet J' was attributed to *two* different writers when it was published in *Thrills Incorporated*. The magazine's cover blurb credits the story to Paul Valdez, but in the Contents-page index the author's name is given as Roger Garradine. Someone in the editorial section evidently forgot which pseudonym was to be used for this particular story!

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Such matters can be confusing for the bibliographer who is unaware of the circumstances of literary production for the 'pulp', but for those who do have this knowledge the confusion can lead to enlightenment by establishing that the name 'Roger Garradine' is in fact a pseudonym. (However, a bibliographer versed in 'pulp' publishing practices would not jump to the conclusion that Garradine could always be read as a pseudonym for Alan Yates. One would have to allow for the possibility that Garradine was a 'house' name which might be assigned to any writer, unlike the Paul Valdez pseudonym, which appears to have belonged to Yates alone.)

CASE 2: Undead Magazines

In the folklore of sf, fantasy, and horror literature, the 'undead' are of course vampires: creatures which, though dead, still find the nocturnal energy to visit their passions upon wholesome wenches. But to science fiction bibliographers the 'undead' are sometimes publications — specifically, those magazines which continue to appear after formal cessation of publication.

The infamous *Thrills Incorporated* is a good example of an 'undead' magazine. It has always been accepted that *Thrills* came to an end in June 1952 after twenty-three issues. However, recent research by Graham Stone of Sydney has shown that the magazine may have lingered on for some months longer than previously recognized.

Transport Press of Sydney published *Thrills Incorporated*, but this was just one of the publications in their 'stable'. Another Transport Press product was *Action Monthly*, a general fiction magazine that appeared in 1952 and possibly into 1953. (The issues known to collectors are numbered '10', '11', and '12' and are given neither month nor year dating.) On inspection, *Action Monthly* seems to have been a Frankenstein's monster made up of body-parts from the defunct *Thrills Incorporated*, for there are striking correspondences in artists, writers, advertisements, and general features of presentation of the two magazines. Covers and internal science fiction illustrations are by Stanley Pitt (a noted *Thrills Incorporated* artist); the regular advertisement on the back cover of *Action Monthly* is identical with that used on the back cover of the last six issues of *Thrills Incorporated*; and the *Action Monthly* science fiction stories are written by established *Thrills Incorporated* writers such as Alan Yates, Norma Hemming, and G. Clive Bleek.² This strongly suggests that when *Thrills Incorporated* folded, the remaining unpublished science fiction stories and artwork were included in the more general *Action Monthly* magazine, giving *Thrills* a phantom life of three more issues.

CASE 3: Mutant Undead Magazines

A more complicated situation involves the 'undead' magazine which mutated itself into another form — leaving bibliographers to ponder the question: How could a magazine which ran to only five issues manage to run to twenty issues?

The year 1975 saw a 'renaissance' in the writing and publishing of Australian science fiction, and one of the central figures in that 'renaissance' was a magazine called *Void*. (And no, that's really *not* an unfortunate title. Reviewers did surrender to the temptation to make puns — '*Void* by name, void by nature . . .' — but readers were happy with a title which pointed them spaceward.) *Void* magazine was launched as a

means by which its editor and publisher, Paul Collins, could make money whilst initiating his own literary career.³ Five issues of *Void* appeared between 1975 and 1977, and then in 1978 the publication . . . mutated. *Void* as a magazine was laid to rest, but the publisher turned to producing a series of books (comprising a mixture of multiple-author short story anthologies and novels).

The first of these books did not appear until thirteen months after the magazine had disappeared, and magazine-subscribers had not received refunds in that time. To overcome this problem, the publisher decreed that each book would count (for subscription purposes) as three issues of *Void*. The first book, *Envisager Worlds*, was designated 'Void 6, 7, 8'; the second, *Other Worlds*, was 'Void 9, 10, 11'; and so on. Since these books were all anthologies featuring the work of different authors, it was quite fair and reasonable to regard them as magazine surrogates; in fact, most of the stories in the first two anthologies had actually been submitted for publication in the magazine. Subscribers received a good deal in return for their patience, and a dead magazine mutated into new life by it shrugging off its magazine chrysalis and spreading its wings in book form.

(The Australian science fiction magazine *Aphelion* [1985-87; 4 issues] also found life after death in this particular way, though the books which came after the demise of the magazine were single-author short story collections, not multiple-author anthologies, and therefore could not strictly be regarded as 'magazine surrogates'.)

CASE 4: Funny Numbers, Rubbery Figures

The story of *Void* is much more complicated and intricate than the above account would indicate. Even terminology is a problem for bibliographers. For example, take the phrase I have just used, 'the story of *Void*'. This is potentially misleading, for it could be taken to refer only to the duration of the magazine-proper, or to the magazine-proper and those book-form anthologies which could fairly be regarded as magazine surrogates, or to everything that was published by Paul Collins. But it would be pointless to talk about 'the story of Paul Collins's publishing', because (a) he produced at least one book outside the sf/fantasy field (and therefore completely extraneous to his publishing canon),⁴ and (b) the publishing imprints associated with Paul Collins were various — Void Publications (1975-80), Cory and Collins (1981-83), and Paul Collins Pty Ltd (1983) — with almost half of the total number of titles being published during his association with Rowena Cory.⁵

There are also strange perturbations in the numbering system which the publisher applied to these books. The bibliographer who confronts this particular idiosyncrasy would be left asking the question: How can it be that the fourth book in a numbered series comes to be followed by book number 13?

An explication of these matters may save future researchers and bibliographers from vexing frustration.

The anthologies which replaced *Void* magazine (honouring subscriptions by acting as magazine-surrogates) were all very much part of a series: the titles were *Envisaged Worlds*, *Other Worlds*, *Alien Worlds*, *Distant Worlds*, and *Frontier Worlds*. (Taking a hint, people began to refer to them as the *Worlds* series.) In order to come to grips with the bibliographical oddities associated with these publications, it is necessary to understand

that whilst Paul Collins saw his *Worlds* anthologies as extensions of *Void* magazine, he also viewed them as a separate publishing venture — as *book* productions rather than *magazine* productions.

It is also necessary to understand that the *Worlds* books sold well enough to make a small profit. This was important, for these were books of short stories, and long-standing Australian commercial publishing wisdom claimed that novels sold much better than story collections. So Paul Collins reasoned that if the story collections were making a little money, the prospects for novels could only be better. Thus the publisher of *Void* began to issue novels as well — all the while keeping the *Worlds* anthologies alive (probably because he might otherwise have to pay back subscription money . . . and possibly some Literature Board grant money, too, I suspect).

Anyone compiling a bibliographical listing of these works would find that the cover of the fourth *Worlds* book, *Distant Worlds*, not only proclaims it to be 'Void 15, 16, 17', but also proclaims it to be book number '4' in a series. The publisher was clearly getting a bit carried away with his numbering systems, but all this *does* make sense because *Distant Worlds* is the fourth book in the *Worlds* series. But the *fifth* book in the *Worlds* series, *Frontier Worlds*, is book number '13'. How does this come about?

In 1980, with three *Worlds* anthologies already published, Collins embarked upon the publication of novels (and, later, one single-author short story collection), numbering *the novels* serially as '1' '2', etc. (The *Worlds* anthologies, remember, already had their own separate serial numbering system as 'Void X, Y, Z'.) For some reason unknown to me,⁶ the fourth *Worlds* book was allowed a place in *both* sequences, so that this one book came to be labelled as 'Void 15, 16, 17' and as book number '4' in what was now called the (*separate*) 'Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy Series'.

There was a two-year gap between this fourth *Worlds* title, *Distant Worlds*, and the final *Worlds* anthology, *Frontier Worlds*, and in that time eight more works appeared in the separate 'Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy Series'. This meant that the fifth book in the *Worlds* series came to be numbered as book '13' in the larger series in which it had become immersed. The *real* anomaly here, therefore, is not the fact that the fourth book in a series is numbered '4' and the fifth is numbered '13', but the fact that the first three book publications (*Envisaged Worlds*, *Other Worlds*, and *Alien Worlds*) were not counted in the serial book-numbering system.

As one further, final complication to this saga, it should be noted that issues of *Void*-the-magazine were numbered with an ISBN rather than an ISSN. (This may have been a stratagem to render the publication eligible for various grants or printing bounties then in force.)

CASE 5: Model-T Fords Disguised as Jumbo Jets

Satellite Series, a science fiction magazine circulating in Australia in the 1950s, began with issue number 211 and ended with issue number 216! These were the only six issues of this magazine, published from March to August 1958 by Jubilee Publications on behalf of a company known as Satellite Books. But was *Satellite Series* an Australian, British, or American publication?

The second issue (numbered '212') has a cover price of '35 cents U.S., 1/6 U.K.' printed in one fount, and '2/- AUSTR.' printed in a much larger fount. The title page

says 'Satellite Books London New York'; the verso has 'Jubilee Publications, North Sydney' and 'Distributed by Gordon & Gotch'. The science fiction stories are from obscure American writers. It is likely that the 'Satellite Books' masthead was entirely Australian, but designed to give the semblance of an international operation. 'Satellite Books' is not listed in any American or British bibliography or directory, and this can be taken as evidence that tufts of wool were being pulled over the readers' eyes.

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NOTES

1. Alan Yates, *Ready When You Are, C.B.!: The Autobiography of Alan Yates Alias Carter Brown* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1983), pp.31-2.
2. *Not* a pseudonym.
3. See Van Ikin, 'The Paul Collins interview', *Science Fiction; A Review of Speculative Literature* no.8 (vol.3, no.2 – May 1981), pp.57-63.
4. The one known 'extraneous' work was his own attempt at a western: Paul Collins, *Hot Lead, Cold Sweat* (Fortitude Valley, Qld. Void Publications, n.d. [c.1974-5?]).
5. Precise details are as follows:
 - Void Publications (1975-80): 4 magazines
7 books [4 anthologies and 3 novels]
 - Cory and Collins (1981-83): 9 books [1 anthology, 7 novels, and 1 single-author story collection]
 - Paul Collins Pty Ltd (1983): 1 book [novel]
6. The most likely reason is that he wanted to proclaim a running tally of the number of books published – but the problem is that the first three books (that is, the first three titles in the *Worlds* series) had not been included in this tally. Seventeen books were published in all . . . but only the final fourteen are numbered.

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