

## **Horwitz Publications, Pulp Fiction and the Rise of the Australian Paperback**

By Andrew Nette

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Reviewed by David Carter

**H**ORWITZ PUBLICATIONS, PULP FICTION AND THE RISE OF THE AUSTRALIAN PAPERBACK IS an informative, fascinating book focused on one of the main Australian publishers of the twentieth century, Horwitz Publications. Many of us lurking in the shadows, or it might be in the full sun, of Australian literary studies will know the name of Carter Brown, but few of us will know very much at all about his main Australian publisher, Horwitz, and its connections both in Australian book publishing and the international pulp fiction world. *Horwitz Publications* is a rare book in the Australian scene. Apart from works on Angus & Robertson (Jason Ensor, Jennifer Alison) and the New South Wales Bookstall Company (Carol Mills) there are very few book-length studies of specific publishing houses and their social or cultural contexts. There have been field-defining broader studies of publishing, such as Katherine Bode's work, and critical essays, old and new, covering specific periods. But much remains scattered across these different works, even as new avenues and pathways for cultural history are revealed. My own essay on post-war Australian publishing and cultural politics in the 2009 *Cambridge History of Australian Literature* does mention Horwitz and other popular publishers as 'the most active local publishers of new Australian novels', but I also have to admit that these firms do not play a larger part in the essay's arguments.

More directly for *Horwitz Publications*, Toni Johnson-Woods' wide-ranging work on Australian pulp and popular fiction has been foundational, as Andrew Nette acknowledges, along with other important background work. But this material has scarcely entered broader debates about Australian book publishing. Hence the serious interest of this new and entertaining work.

*Horwitz Publications* is published by Anthem Press, based in the UK (and the USA). It appears in Anthem's very important Studies in Australian Literature and Culture Series, edited by Nicole Moore (<<https://anthempres.com/anthem-studies-in-australian-literature-and-culture>>). It is a major, innovative addition to the field

of books covered by this series. At this point I should also admit to being the Editor of another Anthem Series, Studies in Book History, Publishing and Print Culture (<<https://antheypress.com/anthem-studies-in-book-history-publishing-and-print-culture>>). As it happened, I was asked by Anthem publishers a few years back to write a review of the publishing proposal submitted by Andrew Nette for this book. I was very happy to do so, and on the basis of a full publishing proposal and a chapter supplied by the author I was strongly supportive of the book's publication. I'm glad to say that it does also appear in our list of publishing history titles as well as in the Australian Literature and Culture Series list.

Horwitz was primarily a publisher of 'pulp fiction', and Nette is happy to keep using the term in order to indicate the specific kinds of 'mass production' contracts that a writer such as Carter Brown would sign, to begin with, 'an ongoing monthly series of two 20,000-word novelettes' (41); the kinds of genre fiction published (crime mysteries and thrillers, war fiction, especially from World War II, westerns, medical romances, science fiction); the books' physical format (in paperback, often, increasingly, with erotically teasing covers); and the methods of the books' distribution (through newsagents and other mass distribution networks, largely through the work of the major firm Gordon and Gotch). The result was that 'local pulp publishers, particularly Horwitz and two other companies, were responsible for the majority of Australian novels published in Australia between 1945 and 1969' (8).

At the same time, while revealing in detail the extent and development of Horwitz's provocative covers, blurbs and storylines, Nette does not allow the term 'pulp fiction' to become an easy means of dismissal for such publishers. Horwitz, alongside other pulp fiction publishers such as Calvert and Cleveland, played a key role in identifying local authors and local readerships in Australia, exploiting the opportunities that paperback publishing presented in bringing new books to readers, managing Australia's complex relations with the modernities of contemporary American popular culture, taking advantage of the opportunities for international publication, and, in Horwitz's case, in also publishing recognised Australian authors such as Ruth Park, D'Arcy Niland, Robert Close and Lawson Glassop (*We Were the Rats*).

Horwitz's significance to the history of Australian book publishing, and through that to the influences and mediations of its cultural history, is structured into Nette's book by its focus, first, on the organisational and institutional details of Australian publishing and readership. These details were both internal, such as the 1938 then wartime restrictions on the importation of foreign, especially American, print materials (magazines, comics, books) which created new opportunities for local publishers to enter and expand the market; and external, such as the rise of pulp and paperback fiction in the USA after World War II.

Horwitz positioned itself to play a 'pioneering role in the increased local uptake of the paperback that occurred in Australia following the 1959 decision' (to lift import restrictions) (19).

The second key focus of the book is on Horwitz's relation to the 'vernacular modernity' emerging in Australian cultural life post-war and its engagement or intermeshing, above all, with the USA, not least in its popular fiction publishing. The book's ongoing consideration of modernity is one of its significant achievements. In taking up the arguments of newer studies of modernism/modernity over recent decades, pulp fiction can here emerge in a more central and influential role in being shaped by but also in shaping emerging cultural desires, fears and conflicts produced by economic growth, expanding consumerism, changing conceptions of sexuality and youth, new models of masculinity, but also, Nette argues critically, new models of womanhood or femininity, 'a more assertive, modern urban sensibility that was potentially very attractive to women' highlighting 'not only women's sexual desirability but also their slowly increasing role as modern consumers of fashion and life experience' (15). These are recurrent concerns throughout the book as it traces changes in Horwitz's genres of publishing or in its public or professional modes, core to the analysis rather than just passing observations.

Horwitz was started in 1921 by Israel Horwitz, a migrant from Great Britain. It produced magazines, then school textbooks and local newspapers. It expanded into book publishing in the 1930s and 1940s. Israel Horwitz's son Stanley Horwitz ran the company from 1956 until the 1970s and oversaw its massive rise into pulp fiction book publication. Horwitz produced an eye-opening number of individual titles from the 1940s to the 1970s, with major figures such as Carter Brown, J. E. Macdonnell, Marshall Grover (Leonard Frank Meares), R. Wilkes-Hunter, K. T. McCall, Carl Ruhen, Marcia McEwan (Marcia Osterberg-Olsen), and Irina Cross—a mix of pen-names or of authors who published multiple titles under a range of different names. Carter Brown's titles are estimated to around 300 novels, though the precise number is impossible to determine. Another prolific author was Gordon Clive Bleack, with multiple titles again, mainly released by Cleveland and Action Comics.

Horwitz did not leave an archive of its own correspondence and publishing deals, a challenge to new researchers today. Nette's research is thereby extensive in other related fields, in the novels themselves, in authors' and agencies' papers, in newspaper and magazine archives, in the records of US publishers, and more. As well as analysing the fiction and its material forms (not least its covers, of course), Nette also emphasises Stanley Horwitz's role in Australian publishing institutions, for example as President of the Australian Book Publishers Association (ABPA) for two years from 1967. Horwitz combined his position as 'a commercially

aggressive purveyor of salacious paperback fiction, with a role in the “publishers’ establishment” (207) of the ABPA. He was increasingly active in the NSW branch of the association from the early 1960s onwards, elected executive vice president, and an advocate and consultant for increased export incentives for Australian publishing.

The book is organised largely in chronological terms, a structure that makes good logical sense, as well as providing coherence to Nette’s analysis, as it enables the work to analyse key shifts in the external structures of legislation, censorship, writing and publishing careers, popular tastes and consumability and in the internal shifts in Horwitz’s own practices of publishing books and working with authors. Chapter 1 examines the impetus for Australian pulp publishing offered by the import restrictions on imported materials in the late-1930s and during the war. Chapter 2 has Carter Brown at its centre and his ‘faux American crime fiction’, as a ‘crucial launching pad for Horwitz going into the second half of the 1950s’ (18). Critically, Horwitz’s role here and later was in providing access and ‘acculturation to popular American-style entertainment’ while equally feeding into ‘far deeper shifts in post war Australia, including changing conceptions of sex, masculinity and consumerism’ (18). I might add that I’m sure Carter Brown’s 1959 novel *The Loving and the Dead* carried in its title a nod, perhaps affectionate but also wry, to Patrick White’s *The Living and the Dead* (first released in 1941).

Chapter 3 shifts to examine Horwitz’s crucial and pioneering role as an exporter as well as an importer of print culture, from the second half of the 1950s. Horwitz signed a 10-year contract for Carter Brown with the expanding New American Library for a series in its Signet paperback imprint, with the New American Library agreeing to publish ten Carter Brown novels per year. Nette notes the significance of such publications in making Carter Brown a truly international figure in crime and mystery publishing, ‘a global publishing property’ (71), as well as a star back home, prominent, for example, in features in women’s magazines such as *Women’s Day*, but with no reputation that generated book reviews or consideration in Australian literary journals. But the dual contracts in Australia and the USA also meant increased production and ongoing editorial supervision, ‘meeting deadlines, plot changes, correcting inconsistencies in time, locale and fashion to make the books more ‘American’’ (38).

Horwitz also extended its coverage of pulp genres, not only through the everlasting enticements of crime and the western, but also by investing in the newer forms of the medical or ‘doctor-nurse’ romance, especially those authored by R. Wilkes-Hunter under various pseudonyms, part of his own output of over 300 titles, and in the war novel, mainly J. E. Macdonnell’s naval stories. The critical study of Gordon and Gotch’s key role as a distributor also features here,

positioning Horwitz in a strong position to benefit from its broad reach once import restrictions were lifted in the late 1950s.

Chapter 4 examines the period through the 1960s and the increased role Horwitz was able to play in the local 'paperback revolution' that began across this time. The rise of local paperback publishing became a major feature discussed in trade magazines and newspaper reporting. Horwitz was also one of the first Australian houses to take advantage of cheaper and more productive printing and production industries in Hong Kong. Chapter 5 turns to examine the underplayed female contribution to Horwitz's publishing success, 'The Female Fiction Factory'. Nette clearly defines the masculinist bias of the pulp jungle, but is also very careful in emphasising the important role that female authors played for the house: Audrey Armitage and Muriel Watkins, publishing as K. T. McCall, Lee Pattinson, Irena Cross, Marcia McEwan (Marcia Osterberg-Olsen), Kay Keavney, Dianne Irwin and Carele Hardy. Their roles are also critical when questions of female readership of the otherwise loudly masculine genres are considered. The position of women writers in the firm produces a series of challenging questions for genre and gender relations, emphasising the openness even within romance fictions, the role of new genres such as the juvenile delinquent novel, and the range of potential reading positions within both 'male' and 'female' genres.

Horwitz's critical role as an Australian publisher constantly engaged with the international markets for his authors re-emerges in Chapter 6 focused on Horwitz publications in the 1960s. The company's relationship with key US publishers is critical to its story and alters our understanding of Australian publishing in this mid-century period. Two new genres emerged in Horwitz's line-up, Kings Cross pulp, exploring and exploiting its reputation as Australia's 'alternative enclave' (119) for entertainment both musical and sexual, and prisoner of war novels, relating especially to Japanese imprisonment. Chapter 7 explores in detail Horwitz's engagement with state and federal censorship especially related to imported magazines and books set for reprinting. Chapter 8 turns to the later 1960s and early 1970s with a specific focus on Horwitz's uptake of more sexually explicit and enticing fiction, especially in its new Scripts imprint. The increased 'sexualisation' of popular and adult culture drove Horwitz to follow (or lead) this route but also signalled the beginning of the end of pulp's dominance in the cultural field.

The changing dynamics of Horwitz's cover art is the subject for Chapter 9, with again very detailed analysis of key shifts from illustration to painting and photography and of the sensual or thrilling storylines promised within. In the 1970s, as Chapter 10 shows, many other local and mainstream publishers developed additional paperback lines or established themselves, like Sun Books, as primarily paperback publishers for original new texts as well as reprints.

Horwitz remained a significant publisher throughout the 1980s, but the distinctive generic spaces that had been open for cheap pulp publishing to explore or invent were shrinking in significance and profitability. But as Nette concludes, his central argument is that

in addition to being one of the largest post-war publishers of pulp paperback fiction in Australia, Horwitz played a greater role in mainstream Australian publishing than has generally been credited, particularly in the wider uptake of the paperback following the end of import restrictions in 1959. (212)

*Horwitz Publications, Pulp Fiction and the Rise of the Australian Paperback* covers a wide range of publishing, contracting, authorial, promotional and institutional contexts for this important publisher's life span from the 1940s to the 1970s. There are some annoying errors typographically and otherwise ('Denise' rather than Denis Cryle; Labor elected in 'late 1971' rather than 1972), but the book makes a very persuasive case for Horwitz Publications to enter ongoing research and debates about the shifting histories of twentieth-century Australian publishing, and as a mainstream participant not merely a pulp sideline.

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