

Pulp Jungle Down Under: Horwitz Publications and the rise of the Australian paperback, 1945–1972

Andrew Nette

Abstract of a thesis for a Doctorate of Philosophy submitted to Macquarie University, Sydney

“Pulp Jungle Down Under” examines the largely unexplored field of mid-century Australian pulp fiction through a study of the now defunct Sydney-based publisher, Horwitz Publications. The dissertation covers the period from 1945, when the company published its first pulp fiction, to 1972 and the election of the reformist Labor federal government, which resulted in the removal of the last vestiges of Australia’s post-war censorship system, closing a historical period in which pulp had the ability to shock. Although best known for its cheaply produced, often lurid, softcover books, Horwitz Publications played a far larger role in mainstream Australian publishing than has been recognised, particularly in the expansion of the paperback from the late 1950s onwards. As this dissertation demonstrates, the company was adept at seeking out and exploiting the porous spaces that existed, sometimes only temporarily, between pulp and mainstream publishing: where mainstream literary forms were reconfigured to suit more sensational tastes, authorial reputation was fluid, and government regulation failed to keep pace with shifting reading tastes and social mores. Its dealings were

transnational, moving beyond London, the traditional focus of Australian overseas publishing efforts for much of the last century, to directly encompass the United States and other fiction markets. Horwitz Publications provides an Australian articulation of global pulp culture, continually mining international literary and publishing fashions and successes to create local analogues of popular pulp and mass-market publishing genres, giving them a makeover to align them with Australian cultural sensibilities, tastes, and the legislative environment. This dissertation also examines how Horwitz pulp paperbacks acted as a local conduit for vernacular modernist currents; the way they channelled modern thoughts, sensations and experiences, often in conversation with other parts of the globe, and the interaction of these with changing notions of culture, class and gender relations in Australia.

Dr Andrew Nette
Macquarie University
Macquarie Park NSW 2109

Email: andrewnette@gmail.com

