

**Dale Collins, Media Man:  
Australian Interwar Print Culture and the Technologies of  
Production, Distribution, and Reception Before and After  
‘Australian Literature’**

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As Michelle Smith has observed in her work on interwar writers who contributed to the periodical press, the tendency to dismiss authors or ‘shelve works that might be seen as backward or embarrassing’ because they were highly popular but insufficiently literary ‘creates intriguing gaps’ in a nation’s literary history (16–17). This article explores Dale Collins, and identifies him as one such intriguing gap in the Australian literary record. Collins was a prolific writer and a creature of the transnational and Australian interwar periodical press who was subsequently reviled and forgotten, and the variability of his reputation positions him as an exceptionally interesting example. Dale Collins is worthy of attention because of his output alone, but the vicissitudes of Collins’s fame and repute locate him in relation to new understandings of the literary past in particularly rich ways. These new understandings have been informed by work on transnational and vernacular modernity in Australia (from Jill Julius Matthews, to Robert Dixon and Veronica Kelly, and David Carter); by archive-rich reconceptualisations of the print culture of the interwar period (assisted by *Trove* and other digital technologies); in relation to emerging models of fame, media, and multi-platform publishing (in the work of David Carter and Roger Osborne, or Victoria Kuttainen, Susann Liebich and Sarah Galletly in Australia, and others such as Faye Hamill internationally); and by book-historical approaches focusing on the conditions of production and reception of Australian authors and their careers (as in Paul Sharrad’s work on Thomas Keneally, for instance.) I argue that the case of Dale Collins brings into focus the technologies of production, distribution, and reception before and after Australian Literature was professionalised by journals and institutionalised in the academy in ways that are energised by these intersecting issues, and which promise to open them up in productive and engaging dialogue.

On the one hand, in the title of this article I invoke the term ‘technology’ to refer to the new forms of transportation (motor yacht, car, and aeroplane), communication (radio, cinema, glossy photo-rich magazines, and hybrid literary genres), and accompanying models of distribution (smart monthlies, personality-based journalism, fame and the rise of cultural nationalism) that characterised this energetically modern period between the wars and transformed reading and authorship within it. On the other hand, I am also using the term ‘technology’ in a Foucauldian sense. Yet whereas Michel Foucault invoked in his ideas about the ‘technologies of the self’ a general ‘history of the different ways in our culture that humans develop knowledge about themselves’ (16), I take license with these ideas by applying and adapting them to the literary domain. My focus is on technologies of authorship and circulation, technologies of fame and repute, and technologies of reception and consecration. I consider how these technologies may have been deployed and shaped by forces such as evolving media forms and print culture markets, transnationalism, and institutionalisation that form an interwoven matrix in the literary and cultural field. Reciprocally, I consider how developments in these technologies influenced authorship during the rapidly evolving period of the early twentieth century and its aftermath. I tentatively propose that these forces loosely correlate with

what Foucault called ‘technologies of production,’ ‘technologies of sign systems,’ and ‘technologies of power and self’ (17), which are in ‘constant interaction’ both in the present and historically. I argue that a focus on these technologies may go some way toward illuminating not only the curious case of Dale Collins, but also changing understandings of Australian Literature in the busy and rapidly changing cultural landscape of the interwar years, and beyond.

### Technologies of Production: Authorship

Dale Collins is an enigma. If we trust the *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, Australia’s definitive encyclopaedia of figures of national historical importance, we would get the impression that he hardly mattered all. The *ADB* entry, which revealingly appears not to have been updated since 1981, identifies Collins as a journalist and self-promoter. ‘Between 1925 and 1936,’ when he was resident in London, the entry notes, ‘he completed twelve novels, most of them pitched unashamedly to a popular readership.’ It concludes that ‘[h]e is rightly criticized by eminent literary critic H. M. Green for wasting the promise of his talent on “mere thrillerism”’ (Sayers n.p.). It ends by informing readers that he ultimately washed up in Melbourne ‘[a] pudgy, friendly, little man’ who died in relative obscurity in 1956 at age fifty-eight.

Yet in 1947 Colin Roderick, then editor for Angus & Robertson before his appointment as Foundation Professor of English at James Cook University in the 1960s, named Collins among the twenty Australian novelists of the 1930s he thought worthy of the attention of ‘students and readers of Australian literature’ (Roderick vii). Roderick praised his 1927 novel *The Sentimentalists*, originally written for the American magazine *Cosmopolitan*, as work that reaches an ‘artistic level’ (47). He also admired his 1933 novel *Jungle Maid*, and called his 1936 aviation novel *Race the Sun* ‘a remarkable work’ (49). In the *London Mercury* J. B. Priestley called Collins’s 1924 novel *Ordeal* ‘a very powerful and enthralling piece of fiction’ embedded with clever social commentary (cited in Collins, *Bright Vista* 57). When it was turned into a play that opened at the Strand Theatre, *The Times* of London described the effect as ‘tremendous,’ and it was later serialised as a six-part BBC radio drama (Collins, *Bright Vista* 97).

It would appear that Collins’s international success, especially in the talkies, reciprocally fuelled Australian interest in him, and may have further stimulated interest in his writing overseas. Immediately upon returning to Australia from London via New York in 1924, Collins gave a radio interview for ‘The Celebrity Half-Hour’ on ABC Melbourne (Collins, *Bright Vista* 107), which led to a number of broadcasts and media opportunities across Australia and New Zealand (109). Later that same year, the sale of the film rights of *Ordeal* to Metro Goldwyn Mayer was a newsworthy event (for example, *Advocate* [Burnie] 11 October 1924, 1; *Brisbane Courier* 13 October 1924, 8; *Evening News* [Sydney] 11 October 1924, 1; *Telegraph* [Brisbane] 11 October 1924, 9; *Sydney Mail* 15 October 1924, 14). Three years later, his novel *The Sentimentalists* also made headlines for similar reasons: ‘Dale Collins’ Book: Film Rights Sold: Successful Australian.’ The article highlighted that ‘[t]he American picture magnate, Mr Cecil B. DeMille, has bought the film rights . . . Mr Collins is an Australian author who has been very successful abroad’ (‘Dale Collins’ Book’).

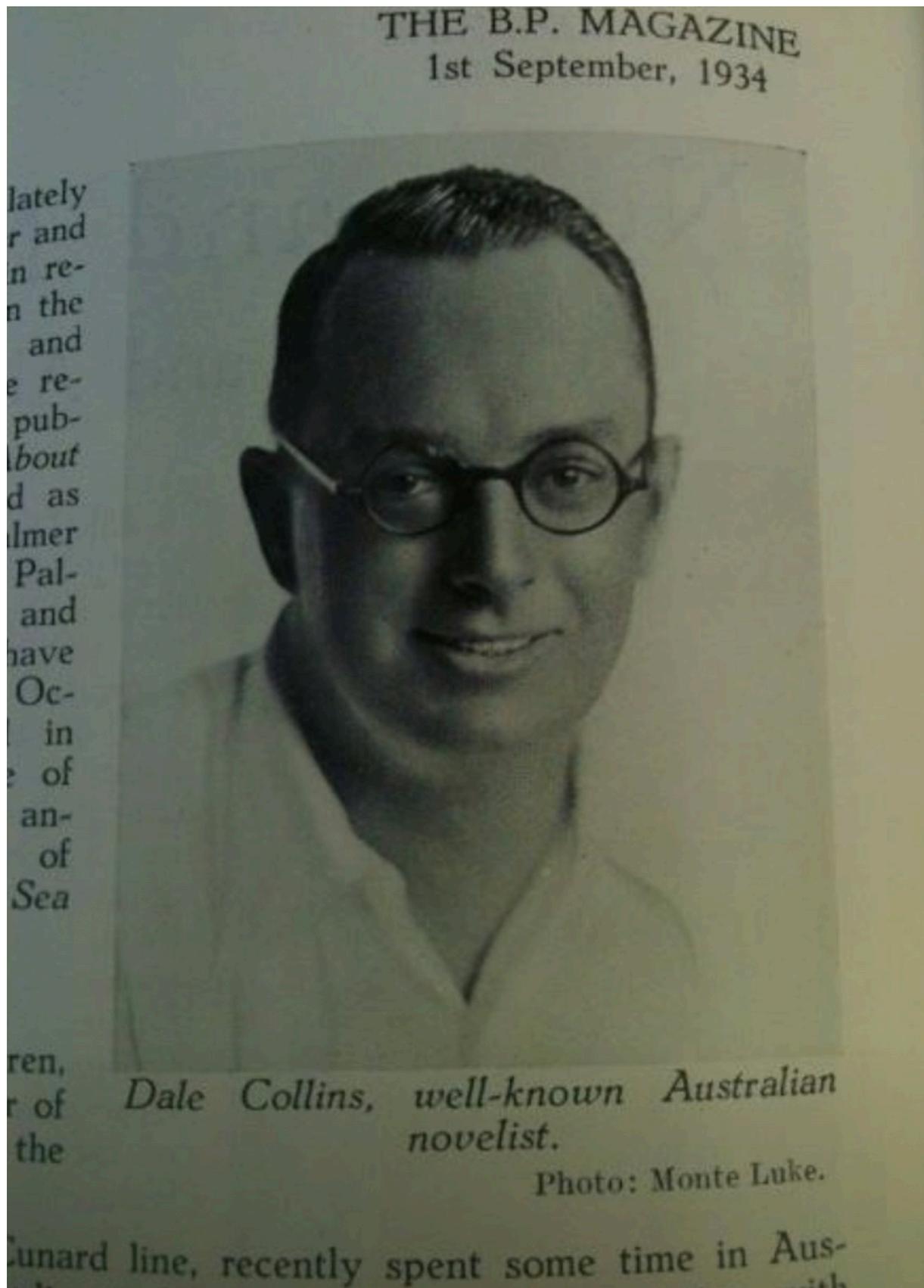


Figure 1: 'Dale Collins, well-known Australian novelist.' Photograph by Monte Luke. *The BP Magazine* 1 September 1934. National Library of Australia.

Films of his novels enjoyed worldwide release, appearing in cinemas not only in the UK and the USA as well as Australia, but also in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Hungary, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Brazil. The growing international recognition of Dale Collins was accompanied by multiple reprints and overseas editions of his books. In addition to publication in London, eleven of Collins's novels were published in the USA. Moreover, translations of his novels appeared in French, German, Italian, Swedish, and Hungarian.<sup>1</sup>

In the interwar years he was a household name in Australia. Australian booksellers feted him. In April 1930 Angus and Robertson, Dymocks, and Swains joined forces to organise a 'Dale Collins Week' (Sydney *Sun* 20 March 1930, 15), drawing on the cachet of his fame and authorial name to promote sales. By 1927, in a poll undertaken by the Melbourne *Argus*, Collins was named by readers as one of their favourite Australian novelists (Lyons and Taksa 54). Collins was a favourite with reviewers in the press as well—important arbiters of national and local reading taste in the period before Australia developed its own literary journals and professional organs for review (Harvey and Lamond n.p.; Thomson and Dale 120). In several Australian newspaper articles Collins is referred to as 'an Australian Conrad.' Some even favoured him over the famous writer. One comparison rates Collins as 'rather more subtle and sophisticated' ('Australian Bookman'). Another says his work possessed 'a Conrad touch' but 'with a fresh and lively humor [sic] that was lacked by Conrad' ('Australian Writer about the Sea'). This was, as David Carter and Roger Osborne have noted, a pattern that also characterised reviews of his reputation in the USA, where he could expect 'top-billing in *The New York Times* review pages' (*Australian Books* 141). Collins enjoyed spectacular success between the wars, nationally and internationally, but by the Second World War, as Collins himself tried to come to terms with, in his memoir *Bright Vista* (1946), something mysteriously changed.

Enigmatically, in his 1956 obituary in *Meanjin*, Dale Collins is remembered by Bernard Cronin as 'well to the fore' (104) of 'the comparatively few' of a group of writers in interwar Australia who were 'in pursuit of the Great Australian Novel' (103) and who he says were 'more closely knit than is possible in these days' (104). '[W]e delighted in his success' Cronin recalls, 'because it betokened—we innocently thought—an awakening of interest by publishers in the Australian writer' (103). Australian media coverage of Collins dropped precipitously in the 1940s and 50s, from upwards of two thousand mentions in newspapers and magazines in each decade of the interwar years yielded by Trove at the time of publication of this article, to approximately five hundred mentions in the 1940s, and fewer in the fifties—when he was more likely to be referred to as the younger brother of Vice Admiral of the Royal Australian Navy, John A. Collins, than in relation to any new literary achievements of his own. Certainly the *ADB* seems to indicate that by 1981 very few people regarded Collins highly if they remembered him at all. Apart from the dismissive 1981 entry in the *ADB*, and a recent mention in Carter and Osborne's *Australian Books and Authors in the American Marketplace* (2018) noting the high critical praise he received in the US where 'for the best part of a decade from 1924 Collins was among the most successful Australian writers in America' (140), he has disappeared into critical obscurity. As Carter and Osborne point out, and as my own experience confirms, Collins is largely unknown as a writer, in Australia or elsewhere, today.<sup>2</sup>

How do we understand Dale Collins's work, and the rise and fall of his reputation? Since he has disappeared into obscurity, no serious criticism of him has been written to offer scholarly clues. A beginning point of investigation is offered by analogous cases, such as Peter Kirkpatrick's analysis of Collins's contemporary Lennie Lower. A comic writer who contributed to the periodical press, and whose 1930 novel *Here's Luck* was an interwar

sensation, Lower was a famous Australian writer of the same era who similarly disappeared from critical attention. As Kirkpatrick argues ‘If [his] popularity has now waned’ and his ‘humour now seems dated, that is not to understate its influence and importance’ (1). Kirkpatrick emphasises the value of understanding Lower within the context of commercial vaudeville theatre. In this, he shares Carter’s impulse to uncover ways to understand these writers and their work in the context of their own time, in terms of their ‘*own* modernity’ (Carter, ‘Drawing the Line’ 47).

Re-situating a figure like Lower—and by extension Collins—within the contemporary currents of the periodical press of the interwar period offers insights into his public and journalistic reception before the advent of cultural nationalism and Australian Literature as an institutionalised category with its own instruments of consecration, and alongside the emergence of divisions in the cultural field. The remediated experience of reading about Collins and his work, through Trove and other tools, also affords ways of reading that are alert to what Carter recognises as a ‘critical hinge period for modern print and other cultural forms’ (‘Drawing the Line’ 47). This places Collins in an intermedial milieu, as early twentieth century new media emerged, including glossy image-rich periodicals that targeted various classes of readers, as well as radio and cinema. It exposes the way in which Collins’s work and repute can be understood in relation to what Kirkpatrick identified as the ‘adjacent media which were themselves the products of industrial technology and mass culture’ (2). Moreover, since the newspapers and magazines in which reports of Collins and his work can be found were awash with overseas fashions, celebrities, books, films, and touring productions, these periodicals also provide insight into the ‘transnational frame of early twentieth-century modernity within which the local mediascape operated’ (Kirkpatrick 2). All of these factors provide ways to understand how Collins may have attempted to locate his writing career in relation to ‘new models of fame emerging from Hollywood’ in the 1920s and 30 when, as Faye Hammill has argued ‘[l]iterary celebrity was increasingly predicated on public performance’ (2).

### **Technologies of Distribution: Fame and Repute as Sign Systems**

Despite common assumptions that fame has been a relatively stable historical phenomenon, it is entirely a creature of history and temporality, born out of the conditions of modernity. Richard Schickel has made the categorical statement that ‘there was no such thing as a celebrity prior to the beginning of the twentieth century’ (21), claiming that before the rise of mass media, people became famous for their recognised talents, rather than as a production of media and publicity. The interwar period in which Dale Collins rose to prominence was integral to the production of fame as a paradigmatic modern phenomenon and to shifts in the way society responded to and valued celebrity. In his empirical analysis of public interest in celebrated figures during the interwar period, based on a content analysis of figures profiled in American popular magazines across the sample years 1901, 1914, and 1922, Daniel Boorstin uncovered a significant change over this period in how subjects of biographical interest were profiled (59). Whereas at the turn of the century, subjects had been profiled for their professional success in business or politics, by 1922, Boorstin showed, attention shifted to figures associated with the field of entertainment. By the 1930s, as Neal Gabler has argued, social authority was no longer considered cheapened by the media as it had been so regarded among those who cared about propriety and good taste in earlier times, but was instead completely directed by it (184–85).

In outlining what he calls the various ‘taxonomies of fame,’ Australian cultural studies theorist Graeme Turner has identified broad changes in ideas about the boundaries of good taste that occurred across the world in the interwar period (11), such as the publicising of private

information about well-known figures in the public sphere and the proliferation of society news and celebrity gossip columns. Turner remarks upon the ‘fundamental modernity of celebrity’ (10), as a phenomenon that is the product of the massification of the media and the multiplication of media forms through new technologies such as mass circulation newspapers and taste-making magazines, as well as the advent of radio, film, and photography. In Australian cultural history, Angela Woollacott has identified the 1920s and 1930s as the decades in which ‘new technologies . . . remade the world,’ and in which the modern media vehicles of live theatre, magazines, advertising, and cinema conveyed dramatic images of entertainers and actors into Antipodean towns and cities from across the globe fostering ‘the culture of the star’ (xviii). Woollacott’s work begins to identify ways in which transnational currents of fame during this period circuited through Australia where the image and reception of high-society figures or famous names were recoded for Australian audiences which increasingly valued stars who had received acclaim on the world stage. For Australians, as Woollacott puts it, the emergence of ‘Australian celebrities meant that they could imagine themselves as part of global modernity’ (xvii). This cultural moment of transnational modernity was both outward-reaching and forward-looking. It suggested new identities and ways of being were possible for Australians who wished to break free from the colourless monotony of philistine cultural conservatism and embrace the modern world.

All of these dynamics are visible in Collins’s career and in his reception in the interwar press. Frequently, news articles address him as ‘the famous Australian author,’ and explicitly identify him as a connector to international modernity. In a feature on him in the ‘Prominent Personalities’ section in *Table Talk*, for instance, C. R. Bradish not only praised Collins’s writing talent, but remarked upon his cosmopolitan lifestyle which lent him a cachet of sophistication: ‘Dale Collins is probably our most travelled novelist,’ he averred in terms of praise and admiration (Bradish 13). Within the pages of the magazines and newspapers in which Collins’s name appears in the interwar period, changes in the volume and prominence of celebrity are also evident (Carter, ‘Conditions’ 172–74). Originally emerging out of the sphere of commercial theatre, notions of celebrity in Australia were quickly transposed to cinema stardom, and eventually to other arts, including opera and—to a certain extent—writing. As Kuttainen, Liebich, and Galletly have argued (141–73), book chat and cultural reviews in the highest quality magazines in the Australian marketplace, like *Table Talk*, the *Home* and the *BP Magazine* suggested that even figures who were regarded as making serious contributions to culture were increasingly constructed in relation to image-based notions of fame in this period. In this rapidly changing new media environment, as Carter has observed, ‘discussions of modern celebrity and literary value circulated in the very same journals, and in ways that can scarcely be described’ through the critical frameworks that have developed in Australia or elsewhere since, which rely upon ‘our anachronistic taxonomies of high and low culture’ (‘Conditions’ 171).

Paired with the scholarship of vernacular modernity, studies of the complex workings of transnational culture—including the mutable nature of modern fame—provide alternative ways of reading interwar Australian culture than the old binary that appeared to have affected Dale Collins’s repute: between an emerging cultural nationalism (which positioned Australian writing as a desert at this time) and the neo-Platonic Arnoldian notions of high culture and universal literary greatness (which regard Australia as a belated colonial outpost well into the 1950s). They offer ways to consider Australian writers like Dale Collins as dynamic, playful and serious commercial authors with significant audiences and cultural reach, whose repute may have been recalibrated in later years. Although many writers of the interwar period, as Faye Hammill suggests, managed to achieve cross-class appeal to aspirational, culturally

sophisticated readers as well as housewives and blue-collar workers, 'later their high sales led to their reclassification as commercial fiction' (3). Australian figures like Collins who achieved international literary fame in the interwar period may be particularly difficult to recast in the terms of their own modernity, because, as Carter has noted, scholarly models of literary value remain attached to exceptionalist notions of the literary sphere ('Conditions' 172). Moreover, binary models of high and low culture often mistake celebrity as something unique to the new media forms, exclusive from quality literature, in ways that are compounded in Australia:

The transnational perspective has been variously articulated for theatre, cinema, radio, jazz, interior design, dancing, and fashion in Australia . . . but hardly at all for print culture. With some exceptions (Hammill, Moran), celebrity studies too have been star-struck by the newer forms of media and publicity that emerged in the early twentieth century, mistaking print as an old technology or merely a carrier of the new. (Carter, 'Conditions' 172)

Yet in the interwar period when media and literary forms proliferated and magazines were key intermedial platforms increasingly structured around image-rich society news and Hollywood reviews, an explosion of print culture afforded new audiences for writers' work. These outlets were especially valuable for Australian writers before the development of a local book publishing industry here. And canny figures such as Dale Collins capitalised on them in ways that marked him as a luminary of the advanced guard, 'well to the fore,' as Bernard Cronin put it, of a group of aspiring Australian writers. Responsive to his times, rather than striving for a place in a permanent pantheon of Australian literary greatness which was backward looking and structured by the logic of 'memorialisation' (Carter, 'Conditions' 174), Collins was particularly agile at finding success within the multi-platform transnational circuits of modern fame that were beginning to characterise some authorial figures in the print media within and beyond Australia.

An opportunistic creature of the media, Collins openly courted media celebrity and rose to notice as a direct result of orchestrated publicity. With the encouragement and assistance of the editor of the Melbourne *Herald*, Collins approached an American millionaire who was undertaking the first circumnavigation of the globe by motor yacht. He thus became resident writer of the *Speejacks*, filing stories of the voyage in Australian, American, and British newspapers (*Bright Vista* 12; Sayers n.p.). His international voyage launched his first major publication outside Australia, *Sea-Tracks of the Speejacks* (London, 1923) and inspired his 1924 novel *Ordeal*, which achieved bestseller status and opened up other multi-platform franchise opportunities. *Ordeal* was made available as an incentive item, free with new subscriptions to *Triad* magazine in 1925. The novel was also produced as a play the same year, and later filmed in America by MGM 1930 as an early talkie.

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*"Ordeal," by Dale Collins—one of the rising Australian Authors—pictures a small group of characters on one hand and a small yacht on the other.*

*Sailors' Wives*

*Bull-Dog Drummond*

Figure 2: 'Let us Give You these great novels **FREE**':  
Subscription incentive offer featuring Dale Collins's *Ordeal: The Triad*  
1 May 1925. National Library of Australia.

Similar cross-over multi-platform deals continued throughout Collins's career. By 1932 four of his novels had become films: *The Sentimentalists* appeared as the part-talking production *Sal of Singapore* (Pathé 1928); *Ordeal* was adapted to the screen as *The Ship from Shanghai* (MGM 1930); *His Woman* (Paramount 1931) starred Gary Cooper and Claudette Colbert; and finally, a production of *Rich and Strange* was directed by Alfred Hitchcock (British Imperial Pictures, 1931) and released in the USA as *East of Shanghai* (1932). Collins's success in cinema seemed to intensify his public acclaim, in both Britain and Australia. 'The chorus grew and swelled,' he later wrote in *Bright Vista*, during that London spring in 1924 when *Ordeal* became a bestseller, and he was routinely recognised on the streets there: 'strangers shook me warmly by the hand and said they'd not only read *Ordeal* but bought it because they liked it so much' (59). 'The British [were] prone to magnify writers,' writes Faye Hammill of this period. 'They pampered Noël Coward, Michael Arlen, Freddy Lonsdale, and Somerset Maugham as if they were matinee idols' (1). Collins clearly enjoyed this kind of attention, while also retaining the capacity to ironise his own fame and that of others. His own novels possessed clever, satirical

insights into the nature of modern celebrity, in ways that suggested not only his own sophisticated understanding of the emerging technologies of acclaim, but also his penchant for concealing smart commentary beneath the sleek, polished surfaces of his work.

As I go on to argue below, on the one hand, Collins benefitted enormously as a media figure in the interwar periodical press from publicity, and from the multi-platform deals he struck. On the other hand, his capacity to command the press appeared to have declined as it became increasingly dominated by commercial interests and consumer appetites for an ever-changing display of American-influenced products in the latter half of the interwar period. The publicity and film deals which launched Dale Collins's career appear to have ultimately constrained it, in the milieu of Australian writing, criticism, and print culture that emerged after the war.

### Technologies of Reception and Consecration

Read consecutively, Collins's 1932 *Jungle Maid* and 1936 *Race the Sun* offer witty, polished reflections on the emergence of mass culture and modern celebrity, and on the promises and perils of the emerging technologies Collins used to communicate his work and comport his career. They reveal Collins's intelligence and self-awareness about the new technologies of fame, and presciently foreshadow impediments Collins may have begun to encounter in his path to later literary consecration in what Pascale Casanova has famously called 'The World Republic of Letters.'

*Jungle Maid* chronicles the life of Molly, an ingénue from rural Victoria, who learns to survive on her pluck when she finds herself amongst the coarse life of traders in remote Papua. In an act of planned deception designed to win the heart of a passing American yachtsman, a breakfast cereal magnate, Molly poses as Vanoriva, a white girl raised by natives, whom he rescues from the jungle, marries, and takes to America. Ultimately, she secures not only the infatuation of the so-called 'machine made millionaire' but also the adulation of sensation-loving New Yorkers and Londoners.

*Jungle Maid* is enmeshed in the contemporary mass media culture of its day, on which it comments. Its American anti-hero, the Walter-Mitty-esque Earl Brodney, also known as the 'Kute Korn King,' exemplifies the spirit of the American Roaring Twenties and its vernacular: 'Sometimes I hate this wealth and stuff' (10). He is also represented as an unreflective Babbitt, a victim as much as a beneficiary of advertising and media culture. Just as Lower draws on what Kirkpatrick identifies as 'the dynamic media environment' (5) of variety acts and slapstick cinema in which he worked, Collins is at his best in creating and chronicling a playful pastiche of newspaper headlines, magazine ads, publicity, and multi-modal media franchises that are part of the rapidly evolving early twentieth-century mass media and entertainment industries on which his own career relies. In *Jungle Maid* as the motor yacht refuels after the ocean crossing in Miami *en route* to Manhattan, Collins describes the appearance of the American media descending on the ship like a 'pirate band': '[T]hey were all there—the whole gang—the special writers, the sob sisters, the photographers, the newsreel lads' (145). Seeing her story as a veritable licence to print money, the Kute Korn King acts as amanuensis for Vanoriva, who secures immediate publication and a Book of the Month Club deal. Vanoriva is thus turned into a mass media product positioned perfectly for consumption. 'There was no end to it,' the narrator declares:

The *Jungle Maid* intruded into politics, the City news and the police reports . . . It was announced that the Mayor would be photographed with her on the steps of

the City Hall at noon and would extend to her a real American welcome. She was invited to visit Wall Street. Mr Girton Jones, the famous maker of travelogues, said she was Kipling's Mowgli come to life and improved in the process . . . A psycho-analyst declared that she would prove the most interesting subject for study in the world, and Mrs Vanderkelen Smith, the Christian Scientist, averred that her preservation was absolute evidence of the book of Faith. She had no enemies; she suited everyone's book; her triumph was flawless. (158)

She is feted by the press, serialised in magazines, and made into a star. Subsequently Vanoriva turns actress, and the book of her life is made into a stage play in London and then a Hollywood film. Even after her imposture is exposed, she continues to grow in popularity. *Jungle Maid* is a fun romp through modern mass media spectacle, imposture, and celebrity in a world of audiences primed to consume, written at the apex of Collins's commercial success, just after four of his novels were adapted for the screen. But the point is that it is not *just* a commercial book 'pitched unashamedly to a popular readership,' as Sayers derogatively characterised Collins's later output. Instead, it is a self-reflective book, aimed for audiences who could both enjoy and wince at an emerging culture of mass mediation and image-based entertainment.

In contrast, *Race the Sun* is a more cynically amusing account of the price fame demands of its victims, which suggests shifts in Collins's own authorial prestige and positioning within a more accelerated mass market. In it, two aviators, Rex and Kay, are media darlings whose careers profit from the publicity spectacle that ultimately entraps them. Kay, a salesgirl from a local department store, rises to spectacular international fame due to her career as an aviatrix, eventually joining forces with her competitor, working-class British airman Rex Masters, in a sham marriage orchestrated to win publicity and financial freedom. The novel portrays the aviatrix Kay as a glamorous creature of the media, a 'darling lassie' who was the 'answer to the newspaper man's prayer' (172) with her legions of 'Kay fans' (16).

Like *Jungle Maid* before it, the novel is a clever commentary upon the rise of mass media, interspersed with a pastiche of news reports, headlines, and broadcasts. It even contains a society novelist, Lord Midge, who works within a media economy primed for high society gossip. Allusions to Lord Northcliffe (190), the media baron who pioneered the personality-based upper-class gossip tabloid in England, suggest that Collins was well-acquainted with leading personalities of the British press, whom he satirised directly while also taking aim at the media more broadly. In their aeroplanes, the principal characters of the novel careen between London and Melbourne, even visiting New York. Similarly, as an authorial figure, Collins appears at ease about his place in the world of media and letters, and the place of his novel in the world, as he navigates the currents of emerging forms of transnational fame. Intertextual references to British star-authors are also interwoven throughout the novel: H. G. Wells (194), Alfred Hitchcock (194), and Noël Coward (224, 232). As Carter notes, 'Australian writers and readers participated in a dynamic, modern print economy comprised of local and imported products' in these years ('Conditions' 173). The most sophisticated of Collins's Australian readers would have been well abreast of the British and American authors and their work, with whom Collins positioned his own novel in dialogue. As such, these tantalising intertextual details suggest ways of reading Collins's work alongside other clever American and British send-ups of modernity, including Anita Loos's *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925), Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930), Noël Coward's *Private Lives* (1931), and Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* (1932).

Within his own time, at least in the early interwar years, Collins appears in command of the nimble associations he makes between his own work and those overseas authors. The technology represented in *Race the Sun* suggests a parallel with the technologies he was able to navigate in building his sensational transnational career. In the interwar years the futuristic combination of the flying machine and the female aviator, which he highlights in *Race the Sun*, represented new horizons and new subjectivities, and in particular the possibility of escaping conservatively constraining gender, class, and social roles. As Prudence Black has observed, 'It was the aviatrix who perhaps symbolised more than anyone else the kind of modernist subject it was now possible to be' (58). She was also, Black observes, the alluring siren of cosmopolitan, transnational, and mobile modern life. As cultural symbol, the aviatrix was practically purpose-built for the modern transnational media machine: a fast-moving globe-trotting engine of fashion primed to capture the attention of the world's press—if not only because the flashy figure of the aviator moved in those early interwar years faster than the monthlies, the weeklies, and even some of the dailies could keep up. Black explains that the aviatrix was thus a key figure in creating an 'image' of a growing international modernism as an historical and cultural formation, one thoroughly associated with 'fashion[s] and other forms of consumption' (58) rather than the experimental aesthetics of literary modernism. She was also a lynchpin between the local and the global, positioned at the interstices of a competitive and growing nationalism and a cosmopolitan internationalism.

Throughout the novel, Kay suggests the possibilities of this kind of modernist subject, embodying newness, agency, and possibility. She flies solo in all senses of the term: directing her own movements without the aid of a man, smoking, bobbing her hair, driving a motorcar, wearing lipstick, and modelling the latest fashions. More progressively, she is also depicted as engaging in sexual liaisons outside marriage, and she openly considers abortion and lesbianism. Kay embodies the kind of transnational media star Woollacott describes as pushing the bounds of identity and propriety: a subject of fascination and sophistication embodying the possibilities of a new kind of modern subjectivity. I am suggesting here ways to view her as a proxy for the self-fashioning transnational author himself, Dale Collins, her creator: a self-made man who is a master of self-invention, in command of the new mechanisms of publicity that allow him to reach beyond the limits of what was possible for an Australian writer of his era; further, a modern Australian author who was able to achieve success both overseas and at home while increasingly discovering the limits of this kind of fame in a rapidly massifying and segmenting cultural marketplace.

Revealingly, within the world of the novel Kay and her competitor Rex arguably become victims of the media machine in ways that possibly analogise Collins's own fate. As the narrator observes of the press, they were 'slaves in no uncertain fashion of all the millions of the public' (2). Kay's previous career freedom morphs into something less optimistic, driven by profit, greed, and competition. 'In turn,' the narrator observes, 'Kay and Rex were slaves of all mankind, and slaves of the machines' (2). Forced into a cycle of perpetually chasing faster speed records and bigger spectacles to gain an increasingly narrow dividend of media attention, Kay is enticed by her promoter to make a Faustian bargain. Instead of competing with Rex, she partners with him, entering into what is at first a publicity stunt and a sham marriage. But Kay and Rex soon reconcile themselves to this new order of things, and settle down to a more circumscribed domestic life, appearing only occasionally to attract the limelight of the press, in relative happy obscurity.

In his portrayal of the transnational media-scape that both enables and also constrains Kay's career, Collins is especially scathing in his satire of the emerging American mass media.

Despite her efforts to direct her career, in a New York radio interview on ‘station WJYZ . . . broadcast nation-wide by courtesy of Dixie-Drops,’ Kay is reduced to a glamour girl:

I’d like to tell you how she looks to me. Well, she looks just grand, and isn’t she the littlest lady with the biggest nerve! Five foot nothing and every inch the right stuff. Trim and cute as they come, and listen, girls, so smart and feminine you’d think the highest she’d ever been up in the sky was the Rainbow Room to dance. Sure, she dances. And are her eyes brown! And she can use ’em. (180)

Her agency and subjectivity appear constrained by two choices: that of being a cheapened star who is world-famous, or a pragmatic down-to-earth woman reconciled to the circumscribed parameters of a domestic life. *Race the Sun* might be read as an illuminating commentary on the spectacular rise of transnational celebrity, and also on its capacity to package, objectify, and belittle. But the novel also offers a critical comment on the increasingly limited horizons and cultural conservatism Collins seems to observe emerging in Australia in the aftermath of the Great Depression, in the run-up to the Second World War.

The abridgement of the London-published novel *Race the Sun* in the *Australian Women’s Weekly* offers an illuminating case of some of these dynamics: a rapidly expanding American-influenced commercial press, and the development of a more culturally conservative domestic Australian mass market. Although Collins no doubt profited from the many venues he found for publishing his work, some of these venues, like Kay’s radio gig on Station WJYZ, divest him of the power to direct his career, and reduce his work to a generic product within the commodity culture it at least partially positions itself to critique.

Comparing the novel to the abridged version that appeared in the Australian women’s magazine, it becomes obvious that the aspects of Kay’s modernity that threaten the status quo of a conventional mainstream feminine readership are all removed, pitching into a more conservative, female-oriented consumer culture. References to lesbianism, sex, and abortion have been excised, and Kay’s striking independence is noticeably circumscribed, if not outright dulled. Also removed from the magazine abridgement is the novel’s clever appraisal of the various transnational currents of modern print culture, including its references to and relations with Noël Coward and other international modernist analogues. The point is that Collins was not actually censored in Australia, but the ways in which he found a mass audience of 350,000 readers through the *Weekly* seriously compromised the originality as well as modernity of his work.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that *Race the Sun* was turned, in its Australian version, into a product palatable for that mass magazine market embedded amongst the ads for consumer products Collins often satirically mocked. Compared to the original novel, Kay is emptied of her dynamic modernity, and Collins’s work is reduced to a two-dimensional rendering, a more palatable commodity in a women’s mainstream commercial magazine. While the financial benefit of publishing in such a mass magazine would have been considerable for Collins, the cultural prestige was no doubt of a different class than either the cachet of international fame he achieved in the wake of his bestseller *Ordeal* or the ‘contemporary process of canonization’ (Carter, ‘Conditions’ 174) that would later take hold of Australian Literature.



Figure 3: *Race the Sun*, 'Complete Book-Length [Abridged] Novel.' *Australian Women's Weekly* 6 February 1937. National Library of Australia.

As Foucault offers, technologies of subjectivisation are not something invented by the individual, but are rather models that he finds in his culture, which are proposed and imposed upon him by his society and social group. As Paul Sharrad has observed in his study of Thomas Kenneally, ‘the individual product producer builds a career as part of, and sometimes in conflict with, the larger machineries of literary production’ in ways that ‘interact with reception by groups of readers’ (5). *Jungle Maid* indicates an author extending his authorial reach through expanding machineries of production, whereas *Race the Sun* begins to identify ways in which even the highly mobile modern producer can become entrapped by imposed models. All of the taste-making middlebrow magazines in which Dale Collins’s Australian name was associated with modern sophistication and transnational glamour began to decline by the Second World War, and all of them were defunct by the war’s end: *Table Talk* halted production in 1939, and the *BP Magazine* and the *Home* both reached their terminus by 1942. In contrast, mass female-oriented commercial magazines like the *Australian Women’s Weekly* continued to expand, alongside the emergence and proliferation of literary journals in Australia such as *Southerly* (1939–), *Meanjin* (1940–) and *Overland* (1954–). These changes suggest the decline of the print market for commercial, culturally sophisticated Australian products and a clearer segmentation between commercial and literary spheres. They also suggest a growing climate of stronger institutional support for Australian Literature, in ways that were laying the groundwork for an institutionalised cultural nationalism that would eventuate, after the conservative 1950s and 1960s, in an appreciation of Australian Literature in the academy. It was in this climate in and around the death of Collins, I want to suggest, that his work became irrevocably associated with a commercial register, in ways that obscured his earlier dynamism and transnational sophistication.

As a transnational media man, Dale Collins exposes what Katherine Bode calls ‘the implications’ of literary figures and their work in commodity culture, but in a positive sense, in which different kinds of media values as well as different kinds of writers could be understood in the terms Cronin used in his 1956 *Meanjin* obituary of Collins, as ‘more closely knit than is possible in these days’ (104). ‘General commercial magazines’ of interwar Australia ‘suggest a different world,’ Carter has also observed (‘Conditions’ 184), where books of all classes and reading were part of a general culture of entertainment, in the absence of a local book publishing industry, and where ‘a taste of cosmopolitan life’ could be gleaned. From a cultural nationalist perspective, which has subsequently shaped Australian Literature, Collins’s work is inscrutable and obscure. But from a different perspective, Collins’s career was situated in a complex transnational media network and franchise of multi-platform adaptations and multiple editions. In this milieu, he was able to dynamically perform his own celebrity, and to celebrate as well as critique the emergence of the mass media and authorial fame.

As Katherine Bode has noted, even though John Frow has pointed out that it is no longer possible to conceive of an aesthetic culture constructed in terms of a binary opposition between mass-produced ‘low’ culture and a ‘high’ culture that is seen to transcend commodity culture, ‘this dichotomy continues to structure literary studies’ (54). But a series of cultural relations were less structured by dichotomous binaries in the heady days of the interwar years, and more open to flux. These include the relations between high and low culture; between print and other media forms; between cosmopolitan and national letters; between authorial fame and literary prestige; and between public and cultural life. Recuperating a sense of the dynamism of the interwar years which included but was not limited to the nationalist perspective on the one hand, or a universalist perspective on the other, not only redeems Dale Collins from obscurity, but also opens up ways of reading other Australian authors and their work.

Such an approach would involve removing the lenses of aesthetic high modernism or cultural nationalism which have subsequently focused academic commentary and structured generic divisions, and reading even historical Australian books as ‘world literature’—on their own terms, in dialogue with the world of books, in their own time.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> French translations of *Ordeal* appeared as *L'Épreuve* (Paris: Hachette, 192–), of *The Sentimentalists* as *Une Brute sentimentale* (Paris: Les Éditions G. Grès & Co, 193–), of *The Haven* as *Un Homme en fuite* (Paris: Les Editions G. Cres & Cte., 19–), and of *Adventures*, a collection of Collins’s short stories, as *Le Rescape mysterieux* (Paris: G. Grès, 1931). German translations of *Ordeal* appeared as *Feuerprobe* (Berlin: Knauer Nachf, 1924), of *Vanity Under the Sun* as *Flucht ins Vergessen* (Berlin: Verlag von Th. Knauer Nachf [1930–1939]); and of *The Sentimentalists* as *In Malaiischen Gewässern* (Berlin: Th. Knauer Nachf, 195–). A Swedish translation of *Ordeal* appeared as *Eldprovet* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers, 1925); an Italian translation of *The Haven* appeared as *Il Porto dell'Amore* (Anciano: Carabba, 1933); and a Hungarian translation of *The Idolators* appeared as *Istenitélet* (Budapest: Tolnai-nyomda [1930–1949]).

<sup>2</sup> As an indication of the depth of obscurity into which he fell from fame, at the ASAL conference held at the University of Sydney in honour of Robert Dixon’s career, at which an earlier version of this article was presented, only one delegate, David Carter, responded in the affirmative to a straw poll asking who had encountered the work of Dale Collins. None had read his books. Further, the WorldCat holdings indicate that public libraries have not retained Collins’s books; a smattering of university libraries across Australia, the USA, Canada, and the UK suggest that holdings of his novels are now rare, or that titles are difficult to obtain.

<sup>3</sup> According to figures given by Bridget Griffen-Foley the approximate number of subscribers in February 1937 was 350,000 (41, 67).

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