

The Year 3000: A Dream

Paolo Mantegazza

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By the fourth millennium, the capital of the United Planetary States is the pinnacle of civilization. Andropolis is a sparkling city at the foot of the Himalayas. Even the poorest citizens have clean water and cheap, pre-fabricated housing, and the grandeur of its vast streets, plazas, and fountains are marvelous sights to two young travelers on their journey to celebrate their “mating match.”

Paolo and Maria have come in their fantastic, electric-powered watercraft. After leaving their home in Rome, they have visited several other countries on their trip, such as the Land of Equality—where all citizens are equal in wealth, power, and even their dress—and Tyrannopolis—whose people live under the despotic regime of a petty tyrant. But even utopian Andropolis has its dark side, the travelers learn, such as the brain scans used on all infants, and the immediate cremation of any who are deemed incurably “defective.”

Imagined by a nineteenth century fiction writer and scientist, the Earth of AD 3000 is a fascinating yet contradictory place. Using the young couple’s curiosity to explore his “dream” of a futuristic society, the author fashions a compelling look at what our world may one day become, with all its marvelous technological advances juxtaposed with its political and moral shortcomings.

Paolo Mantegazza (1831–1910) was a veritable Renaissance man. A neurologist, anthropologist, and adventurer, he was also well-known in his native Italy as a fiction writer. Nicoletta Pireddu’s lengthy introduction to this first English translation of Mantegazza’s 1897 novel is superbly crafted, and it expertly frames Mantegazza’s book in the political and social landscape of his time. As the director of the comparative literature program and an associate professor of Italian and comparative literature at Georgetown University, Pireddu is perfectly suited to introducing the author and his work to an English-speaking audience.

Mantegazza wrote this book at the turn of the century, a time of great social optimism tempered by a deep-rooted anxiety which would bring about the Great War that he predicted. Though the book reflects the author’s concerns, at its core it is an optimistic story. And as a contemporary of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, whose works have long outlived their authors, Mantegazza’s contribution to early science fiction deserves no less attention.

Thanks to the extensive introduction, *The Year 3000: A Dream** will appeal to anyone interested in the literary evolution of science fiction or the early contributions to the genre of one very talented and foresighted Italian fiction writer.

ALAN J. COUTURE (November / December 2010)

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