



Second edition. Small quarto (223 by 180mm), xvi, 101pp, illustrated throughout by the author, original wrappers printed with titles and illustration in black, chipping to wrappers, front hinge cracked (with backstrip separated from text block); some foxing to endpapers; text clean and untrimmed.

“O DAY AND NIGHT, BUT THIS IS WONDROUS STRANGE”

Flatland A Romance of Many Dimensions. With Illustrations by the Author.

Author

[ABBOTT, Edwin Abbott, pseud.] “A SQUARE”

Publication date

1884.

Publisher

Seeley & Co.

Publication place

London,

Physical description

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Dimensions

Notes

A cult classic published pseudonymously by Abbott, an English schoolteacher, as "A Square".

"[A]n influential mathematical fantasy that simultaneously provides an introduction to non-Euclidean geometry and a satire on the Victorian class structure, issues of science and faith, and the role of women. A classic of early science fiction, the novel takes place in a world of two dimensions where all the characters are geometric shapes. The narrator, A Square, is a naïve, respectable citizen who is faced with proof of the existence of three dimensions when he is visited by a sphere and is forced to see the limitations of his world" (Harper).

After Einstein's general theory of relativity and its suggestion of a fourth dimension, Abbott's 'Flatland' looked prescient for its imaginative yet scientific engagement with the idea of further dimensions. "At the time of its publication 'Flatland' did not attract as much attention as it deserved" (Garnett).

The book is dedicated "To The Inhabitants of Space in General... by a Humble Native of Flatland In the Hope that Even as he was Initiated into the Mysteries of Three Dimensions Having been previous conversant with only two So the Citizens of that Celestial Region May aspire yet higher and higher To the Secrets of four five or even six Dimensions Thereby contributing To the Enlargement of The Imagination".

"Edwin Abbott's Flatland may be one of the most unclassifiable works of literature ever published. While it is acknowledged to be a classic of early science fiction, a work of Victorian social satire, and a religious allegory, it also presents, through its introduction to higher dimensions, an important contribution to the development of an area of mathematics that was eventually merged into non-Euclidean geometry. Flatland is an unusually effective work that spans disciplines and challenges divisional categories. Since its publication in 1884, the book's popularity has continued today as its readers have embraced it as science fiction, popular science, and metaphysics. Working from the groundwork of philosophical issues raised by Plato's Republic, Flatland merges social satire and geometry to produce a novel situated in two-dimensional space, a believable world populated by memorable inhabitants whose geometric shapes designate their positions in a complex social structure, one that bears some resemblance to the Victorian class structure" (Harper).

'Flatland' has been the catalyst for several books and films. The novella was the basis for two eponymous animated films both released in 2007, and has inspired various reinterpretations in popular science fiction, including 'Sphereland' by Dinoys Burger, 'The Planiverse' by A. K. Dewdney, 'Flatterland' by Ian Stewart, and 'Spaceland' by Rudy Rucker.

The present example contains a near contemporary inscription to the second free endpaper:

"Won by a Wager,
The loser alleging that I could not
Walk to Southampton
- in Three days -
I accomplished the journey in two days
- as witness my hand
Autumn Samuel
Signature of the Loser
Myer S Nathan
Dated this Sixth day of August 1885".

Bibliography

Garnett, 'Letter to the Editor', in 'Nature', 12 February 1920; Harper, introduction to Abbott,

'Flatland', 2009.

Provenance

Price: £1800

Inventory reference: 24182

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