



The Sheet of Shame



Reviewers On Parade

Currently Australian newspapers give quite extensive coverage to science fiction (although Bruce Gillespie, in the current *SF Commentary*, expresses concern that the world is coming to an end in this regard - on the other hand Bruce feels that way about most things), and most of the reviewing is done by People We Know.

For example, Damien Broderick does reviews for the *Melbourne Age*, Terry Dowling's reviews appear in *The Australian*, Van Ikin's reviews appear infrequently in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Peter Nicholls writes occasionally for the *Melbourne Sunday Herald*, and Colin Steele writes for the *Canberra Times*. Others have done reviews in the past - mostly in the *Melbourne Age*, where I (JF), Bruce Gillespie, Yvonne Rousseau and George Turner have all done reviews from time to time.

But what's it like? As Bruce Gillespie points out in *SF Commentary* the restrictions of reviewing in newspapers can be quite considerable. Nowadays the notion appear to be that a reviewer ought to cover a clutch of books, preferably in very few words. This wasn't always so - a decade or so ago when I was reviewing for *The Age* I only ever had to deal with a single book, and Stuart Sayers, the then editor of the literary pages, was quite generous with the wordage allowed.

Bruce Gillespie's *SF Commentary* reveals the perils of such reviewing by reprinting some of Colin Steele's columns from *The Canberra Times*. Colin seems to be allowed about 150 words per book, and by the time you include an introductory paragraph and a closing paragraph things are getting very tight indeed. The reviews are almost always reduced to single paragraphs which try to describe the plot and then all the other interesting characteristics the book might have, and it becomes really telegraphic stuff - the kind of thing which might more properly be called book notices.



Peter Nicholls has had only a handful of reviews in the *Sunday Herald* as I write (mid-March 1990), and they are very much a mixed-bag. A couple of his columns have been very much bob-a-job compendiums of the kind produced when there are a lot of books in the backlog but others, especially the first (15 October 1989), are meaty pieces which will induce the reader to buy and at the same time clearly set the work in context.

I don't regularly see the *SMH*, but Van Ikin's reviews in his own magazine, *Science Fiction*, are quirkily short and rely heavily upon the plot summary; I assume that this stuff for *SMH* is much the same.

Terry Dowling's reviews in *The Australian* are somewhat unpredictable. A review of the anthology *Other Edens II* back in April 1989 was very much an in-depth piece of writing, as was a review of David Zindell's *Neverness* a little later. More recently, however, Terry seems to have been claimed by the '150 words a book' trap, and perhaps this is the direction he will be going. In addition, there appears to be little concern with quality with regard to the books reviewed, so that while Terry has reviewed some of the commercially and critically viable books, others seem to be missing. What are the criteria for selection, one wonders?

Damien Broderick has been reviewing science fiction in the press for a long time now, and he also reviews non-sf books. His reviews are by far the most reflective and philosophical of those being considered, and reveal a disciplined capacity to be interesting and challenging at the same time. Although from time to time Damien appears to have to do a 'here are the 23 most interesting sf books I have read today' piece, he has been able, in the last year or so, to concentrate upon extended consideration of single works and his reviews, accordingly, are well worth reading and rereading.

Overall, Australian science fiction readers are well-served by their newspaper

reviewers - probably better than readers anywhere else in the world. How about that?

Hot Publishing News

Terry Dowling has set what must be a record for producing a fan fund trip report by getting his 1989 DUFF report into print by late '89/early '90. The furtively-released item, *PRINTS FROM A FAR LAND*, may be available from Terry Dowling for an undisclosed amount, but I heard a rumour that Carey Handfield was selling copies for \$10, and that was my source. * And in a thumbs-up gesture to those who doubted his skills (see *Doxy*, *Doxy*, seriatim), Jeff Harris teamed up with another Adelaide fan, Chris Simmons, to author the prize-winning novel in the Adelaide Festival Fringe Three Day Novel Contest with *Shadowed Magic* * Most horrifying news of all? Both of these works will be reviewed in the April *Doxy*. Let the reader beware!

News from Danse Macabre

The latest issue of *Bizarre*, the *Danse Macabre* newszine, contains an outline program which makes planning one's convention a little easier. Very high amongst the highlights must be the appearance of Stelarc to give two presentations (so far as I can make out, between 4.30 pm and 6.00 pm on Sunday April 15). David McDonnell in some program notes identifies Stelarc as 'an Australian performance of world wide renown', which is, if anything, an understatement. During March Stelarc has been in Adelaide for the Festival, and otherwise is an artist in residence at Ballarat CAE. In Adelaide Stelarc performed his event for third hand, amplified body and laser eyes on three successive nights to growing crowds, and his presence at *Danse Macabre* will give attendees a chance to hear from someone at the frontiers in this area. (When operating at full amplification Stelarc is quite terrifying...) Since Stelarc was at *Conjunction* in Melbourne

back in December in the company of Tim Redden, I guess it is reasonable to suppose that Tim is substantially responsible for Stelarc's appearance at *Danse Macabre*. Thanks, Tim, and I hope people will make the right decision at 4.30 pm on Sunday the 15th.

Bizarre also reveals some detail of the unwelcome attentions of the Australian Science Fiction Foundation towards the body politic of the Australian Science Fiction Convention. Mark Loney is announced in awed tones as the chair for the business meeting, but his aura, it seems, originates from his high office as secretary of the ASFF (that's a couple of long esses, I sometimes think). I would have thought Mark could have handled the onerous task in his own right..

Tringum Trangums

Who is the whinger who insisted on trading his(?) fanzine for both of Bruce Gillespie's fanzines (*SF Commentary* and *The Metaphysical Review*)? • How far down Julian Warner's throat does Lucy Sussex have to thrust her hand? • Who were the two young women who abducted SA fan Paul Whitbread from the fan lounge at *Conjunction*, and what has this got to do with technicolour yawns? • Will Janie ever recover her memory and discover that Virgil is really the father of her quadruplets and that Vince is attempting to organize a coup in Florida using her frozen orange juice farm as a base? • And who writes the dumbest letters to *Doxy*? (see below)

Dumbest Letter Competition

And the contenders are...

Well, this was a tough race. For a while the judges thought that Irwin Hirsh who, in a letter not addressed to the news editor of *Doxy*, wondered about the 'lazy' fanzine

reviews in issue 2. He speculated that I (John Foyster) took fanzine reviews seriously. Hm. In a comment not addressed to Irwin Hirsh, John Foyster wondered whether anyone had noticed that *Doxy* is a fanzine that runs to three pages. the judges (me & me) decided that two contenders were so closely tied that the decision had to be handed over to the readers. Your votes are solicited. The winning contender gets a prize of a year's free *Doxy*. And in alphabetical order they are:

Jack Herman writes

Thanks a lot for your support! You can always count on your mates when under attack.

After PSR and S&L, a DOXY of the tone adopted wasn't surprising, but I was surprised by the failure to accurately report the facts that were at the basis of your sneer about my report on Michael McGann has (sic) his overreaction. Two fairly obvious things to note about your article.

(The reader is spared.)

And speaking of historical perspective, it is good to see that you have not lost your knack for solomonic judgement in such disputes. Some of us recall how you (and your committee) determined that Peter Toluzzi should be ejected from EASTERCON '79, along with McGann, for his (PT's) heinous crime of being assaulted in the loo.

I'm also glad to observe that your clairvoyance has remained intact. I heartens me to know that the SYDNEY IN 95 bid is 'doomed to failure'. We might as well give up now. On the other hand, some of us see benefits from the bid even if it were to lose. For example, it may unify the disparate elements you identify to exist in Sydney fandom. And who knows, we might win the bid and run a con where Gaming, Media, Literary and Fan programming were all held in the same Hotel.

Doxy

I've received four letters from Sydney fans; exactly one (yours) supports the bid. Read 'em and weep, Jack! But you are probably right; Sydney has long had a reputation in the Gaming area at least.

'Mark Loney' writes (all strictly sic)

Well I am all to ready to admit that at the time I was wondering how you were taking Conjunction... There you were, the bearded patriarch of Melbourne fandom, cutting a splendiferous but lonely figure in the foyer of The Diplomat - an old fan and tired waiting for the convention to come to you, whilst all around that very convention was going its own merry way and taking scanty notice of your obvious importance.

I had intended to ask you what your intentions were but, well, I was busy having a good time at a well run regional convention... Plus I had developed a theory about your behaviour that, in the nature of fans everywhere, I was not keen to see debunked. But my timidity obviously cost me dear... There I was thinking that you were deliberately sitting in the foyer for most of the convention in order to prove to your satisfaction that all those mediafen didn't know a bnf when they sat down next to/walked past one, when, in reality, you were carefully ob-
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serving all the program items through a very well hidden periscope.

What a jolly time we could have had; sitting out there in the foyer, taking turns to peer through the periscope at those earnest young fen attending the (gasp) program items. The potential for sly japes at their expense and the subsequent adoption on our part of an air of innate superiority was immense and I will obviously regret to my dying days the fact that I participated in Conjunction rather than observing it, under your clear-sighted guidance, from an Adelaide perspective...

(Followed by tedious remarks about the reporting of New Year's parties. Since I can only recall seeing 'Mark Loney' going in to the sparsely-attended ASFF meeting, which I did not attend, I wonder if I accidentally snubbed him at some stage?)

Final Editorial Message

I hope that there will be sufficient reporters at Danse Macabre to make the May issue an interesting one. Next month - the above-promised goodies plus The Wedding. The deadline for copy is usually (but not always, the 15th of the month.

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