



LEAF

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Delves & Tickell - a pleasant association of sounds and no doubt of persons, and for the two years that I worked at Cassell's the names of these writers occurred daily in conversation. I don't think I ever met either Delves or Tickell, and at this distance in time (I left Cassell's in 1967) I can't remember whether they are Mr, Mrs or Miss D&T. They are, I think, school teachers. They have published two volumes for secondary English classes called THEMES AND RESPONSES.

Last night - 30th January, for the curious - Wynne Whiteford and Peter Innocent visited us at the Clifton Hilton, and both were bearers of interesting news. I will reserve for the time being Wynne's news, with the promise that if it bears fruit you shall hear about it. But Peter, who joined Cassell's a few months after I did and still works there - as a book designer - informed me that I am one of the contributors to THEMES AND RESPONSES Book Three. I was delighted, of course, though curious to know what purple passage from my numerous outpourings had been selected for Form 3 pupils to study. Could it be my masterly editorial from ASFR 10, where once and for all I defined the place of sf in the Australian literary tradition? Could it be an extract from one of my three short stories? Could it be my brilliant review of the PLAYBOY BOOK OF SF&F? No, it was a letter I wrote to the Melbourne "Age" some time ago when some editorial ningnong had repeated the old calumny that sf writers would have nothing to write about now that We were On The Moon.

My delight was only slightly lessened by the facts that I had quite incorrectly stated in the letter that CAMP CONCENTRATION had been banned in Australia (it was only delayed for some months while Customs considered it), and that the Cassell catalogue describes the THEMES AND RESPONSES series thus: "Each book contains extracts from children's literature, imaginatively illustrated and &c &c". Children's literature, eh? Hrmph!

Since Peter, Redd and possibly others are not in the habit of reading the letter columns of the "Age", this is what I wrote, and this is what the children will be reading this year:

SF HAS SOMETHING TO SAY

Dear Sir, --- Your editorial - For All Mankind?, admirable in other respects, is quite wrong in saying that science fiction writers will find much of their writing obsolete when men land on the Moon....

Science fiction asks: "What would happen if...?", and in applying this question and speculating upon possible answers to it SF writers, 30 years ago, had passed

beyond the Moon to the planets, beyond the planets to the stars, beyond the stars of our galaxy to other galaxies, and beyond our universe to others.

In recent years there has been an increasing preoccupation with the world of inner space, with the science of mind and human behaviour, and many of the finest recent SF works have been concerned with possible events on this Earth a few years hence.

One of the best of them, Tom Disch's CAMP CONCENTRATION, is even banned in Australia - and this certainly doesn't happen to books about Moon landings.

Because it has freedom to speculate on anything, SF can be concerned with matters that are important to all of us, and at its best it is.

The mood of today's progressive SF writers - and there are many of them - may be indicated by this quote from a taped message from Brian Aldiss, delivered to last Easter's Melbourne science fiction conference.

"Space travel has become the most orthodox of ideas. Once it was fresh and sparkling and new: it bowled you over with its daring so that you gasped and trembled. But now even astrophysicists agree that there's some theoretical chance of crossing space. The idea of discovering alien life was similarly amazing once upon a time. One was passionately consumed with longing to know what the Martians might be like. But it's old hat now. I read the other day of an astronomer in America who is certain that there is at least one civilization almost as highly developed technically as Earth, within 300 light years of Earth, and he said we should make every effort to contact it. And yet, America does not officially recognize China, and is building an anti-missile defence against it. Wouldn't you say China was almost as highly developed technically as we are?"

Most science fiction is rubbish (and I specifically include in that category every SF programme I have ever seen on television), but the best science fiction has something to say to us that may be heard nowhere else - and, whatever happens to the rest, this body of work will become obsolete when Shakespeare and Dostoevsky become obsolete.

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Editor
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The kids should have fun with that. The brighter ones might even notice that I've made a string of assertions and not backed them with evidence - and, just possibly, this might be why Delves and Tickell selected it.

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I'm sorry I haven't time to contribute more than this to this mailing. Briefly, though... After sending out my 4th Halliford House Newsletter recently a lot of people apparently realized for the first time just what I had to offer. I have a stack of orders, and have decided to stay in business. But I must expand it, and my first move will be to launch (groan!) another magazine. SF NEWS will appear eight times a year (subscription \$1 pa); it will to some extent overlap with Gary's NEW FORERUNNER, but I would like it understood that I am not trying to crowd Gary: the object of the magazine is to allow me to send out my booklists at reduced postage rates, and to do this the booklists must be surrounded by something which looks like a magazine. I will be advertising/reporting all Australian sf activities and publications, and I hope that in fact Gary will gain from SFN's much wider (c600) circulation. HH has other schemes up its chimney, too, and you will hear about them if anything looks like coming of them. ::: This is probably the last CROG! I have applied to join OMPA, and if I get in I intend to do a combined ANZAPA/OMPazine quarterly. At least you should get more than 2 pages from me then.

Ciao! JB