

DREAMS AND FALSE ALARMS

No. 4 August 1987

Celebrating 50 years of FAPA

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DREAMS AND FALSE ALARMS, No. 4, August 1987. Celebrating 50 years of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. Edited for FAPA by Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. Phone: (03) 419 4797. Proofread by Elaine Cochrane.

I'm still a bit of a newcomer to the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, but I can still celebrate as well as the next FAPAn. Even so, the following magazine is perhaps not as great an expression of celebration as I had meant to contribute. I'm still aiming at an 80-to-100-page issue for the next Metaphysical Review, but it won't exist by FAPA deadline time. Write to me if you're not on the mailing list but want a copy.

Those FAPA members who are on the TMR mailing list will have read some of the following. Sorry about that. I hope the rest will seem fresh and exciting and as high as an elephant's eye and all that. Thanks for the people who voted for me in the annual poll; shamefaced, all I can do is apologize yet again for failing to do mailing comments. Any mailing now.

EN SAGA OR TWO

I think of my life as a continuing saga. Bruce and Elaine, in their little boat on the ocean of life, battle the seas of adversity, poverty and cats. Great waves threaten. Cats get sick. The mailbox is empty. Life is endangered.

If you have worse problems, you don't notice. Our life will not seem like an epic, a saga, to you. You will see us as rowing our tiny boat in some sheltered millpond of Collingwood. You yawn. You droop.

Nevertheless, the following bits and pieces are interesting to me. They form the frail fretted fabric of my life. If you're not interested -- then pish tush! Join the crowd.

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SAGA #1: THE CONTINUING PROBLEM OF HOW TO PUBLISH A FANZINE CHEAPLY

I spent most of the Easter convention (Melbourne, 1987) asking people for hints on how to publish a fanzine using a computer and daisywheel printer. The computer is no problem, now that the constantly crashing Rhinoceros has been replaced by an altogether sturdier machine bearing the Profound brand name. (They were probably both built in the same Taiwanese factory, but this one works.) Word-processing is the way I always dreamed of publishing fanzines: infinite editing facilities, ease of correction, comfortable keyboard. I doubt whether my bad back would let me use a portable typewriter these days, anyway.

But... I now discover... the only daisywheel printer that punches out a decent stencil is one of the Brother models. The others, including my Epson RV-90, don't. Marc Ortlieb told me that Gestetner made a stencil, the TR-90, suited to daisywheel printers. Elaine visited Gestetner for me, and came back with Memorex stencils. The girl in the office had never heard of TR-90s. The information that came with the box of Memorex stencils claimed that they work with daisywheel printers. There was one catch: the heads were not Roneo heads. Could I work out a way to use them? It took a bit of experimenting to find the answer, which is: no.

I had what is laughingly called a brainwave. Could I use my usual Roneo stencils the same

way that was suggested for the Memorex -- that is, by typing through the ribbon? Taking the ribbon out and typing through a plastic coversheet had not worked.

To cut a short story shorter: yes, my brainwave worked, but only just. The resulting fanzine still had a few too many grey pages. Worse still, the printer broke down two weeks after cutting stencils with the printer. I had had it only nine months. Epson repaired it under warranty, but I hadn't told them of my unorthodox way of using it to cut stencils.

Okay; it seemed obvious that most of my fanzines from now on will have to be offset. How could I afford that? When last heard from, I was \$4000 in debt, with very little hope of publishing a genzine this side of 1990.

Short answer: I had a bit of luck -- the sort of luck a Gillespie needs to keep operating. Having invited an insurance agent into my home for the purpose of taking out an Accident and Sickness policy, I asked him to take a look at my old policy. I'd been paying out \$200 a year on this policy for umpteen years, and I wanted to find out whether or not it was worth anything. It wasn't -- at least, not as a continuing deal. It's a life policy, payable only when I die, and not an endowment policy, payable at age 65, which is what I remembered taking out. Ghod knows why I took out a life policy in the first place. Needless to say, the surrender value on the old policy does not come to anything like the amount I've paid in instalments, but the amount is ... shall we say... helpful. I can pay off a few debts, though not all of them. I can take out a superannuation policy, which is what I will actually need at age 65. And I can -- cross fingers and whiskers -- afford to publish the next issue of TMR.

What did my detective work at Eastercon reveal? Marc Ortlieb tells me that Roneo duplicator ink has just hit \$18 a tube. Last time I bought ink, it cost \$6 a tube. The Memorex stencils cost \$1 each. Last time I bought stencils commercially, they cost 40 cents each. (More recently, John Bangsund sold me some Roneo Supertype stencils at a lot less than that. If I were willing to retype the next issue of TMR on a manual typewriter, I could use those.) Duplicating paper keeps going up in price.

Add up all the costs, and duplicating the next issue (about 80 pages) comes to nearly \$500. Compare this with commercial offset printing. The quote I had recently, for 300 copies of a magazine 80 pages long, was just over \$700 for printing only, and not much more than \$800 for printing, collating, folding and stapling. Maybe you and I have seen the last of the duplicated Gillespie fanzines.

My discussions at Eastercon ruled out two options: (a) home-grown offset duplicating and (b) home photocopying. If I lived in Sydney, of course, I could ask Ron Clarke to photocopy or offset-duplicate fanzines for me. Nobody in Melbourne wants to outlay money for a photocopier, even though he or she might cover costs by producing all the current Melbourne fanzines from the one machine. Nobody wants to buy an offset duplicator. Who wants to spend the latter half of each day's production time cleaning the machine, carpets, walls, etc.? Offset machines are not easy to use.

As if to answer some of my queries, the latest Weberwoman's Wrevenge arrived today in the mail. Jean has at last gone offset. It looks good, and perhaps it did not cost too much.

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SAGA #2: TO BEECHWORTH AND BACK

Probably nobody else but me in Australia would regard a weekend's trip to northern Victoria as an epic journey. Only I would quail at the thought of imagined disasters on such a small trip. Only I would assent to such a trip and then go to almost any lengths to back out at the last minute.

Mark Linneman thought of the idea, but I guess we thought of bits of it as well. Elaine and I don't own a car. Neither of us drives one. Linneman had long since offered to take us to the wineries of central and northern Victoria, but pointed out that it was a four-hour trip to Rutherglen, and four hours back, and that he would be doing all the driving. This had to be a weekend expedition.

Four months ago Linneman booked the motels and, more importantly, booked a table at the most famous restaurant in northern Victoria: the Shamrock, in Rutherglen.

I should point out that I'm scared of staying overnight at motels. The beds won't be warm enough. The walls will be too thin. There will be neighbouring guests who will party on all night. Et cetera. Fingernail-biting stuff.

What would we do with the cats? This was the next big worry. Roger Weddall had cat-minded quite a few times, but it became obvious that his current job(s) would make it impossible for him to help out this time. Could the cats survive being boarded? Only one way to find out. The local vet (who gives our cat-collection a bulk discount for innumerable services rendered) has a boarding service, which is quite cheap. On the night before we were setting out, Mark Linneman helped Elaine transport the cats (first three, and then the other two) up the road to the vet's. All were horrified except Apple Blossom, who seemed to find the whole weekend a jolly adventure.

The house seemed larger and lighter without cats in it. We must do this again. No cat seemed too upset by the experience. Oscar suddenly decided to be a Brave Cat after surviving four days at the vet's. Solomon and TC didn't eat much while being boarded, but that could hardly have hurt them. Theodore didn't seem too upset.

I wasn't too excited at the thought of travelling around by car for three days. This proved to be the easiest part of the weekend. I was sitting in the front seat, and we stopped quite often. I suppose the longest stretch was from Mitchelton to Melbourne on the way back. (I still have horrifying memories of travelling non-stop in the back seat of a Volkswagen from Baltimore to Pittsburgh and back again during my 1973 American trip. That almost put me off car-travelling for life.)

After all that terror and apprehension, everything went perfectly, of course. Well, almost. The weather was perfect. In fact, Victoria has about three weekends of such weather per year, and we copped one of them. Still, warm air, nothing hot, nothing cool. Balmy, clear skies. Unbelievable.

The wineries were variable, and I almost spoiled my own holiday by gulping, not sipping, during the first day's tastings. Also, I had had only three-and-a-half hours' sleep the night before, as I was so worried about the ordeal ahead. Not to worry. A Bailey's Hermitage or an HJT Chardonnay will cut through a jaded palate or a slightly carsick stomach.

I wish I could remember in which order we visited various wineries. They did seem a bit interchangeable after awhile. Hang on a bit. It's all coming back to me. HJT is the one beside the lake that covers dead trees. Elaine has photos of that one. The owners, who were the winemakers for Bailey's, retired and set up their own vineyard, specializing in light reds and an award-winning Chardonnay. Bailey's, on the other hand, specializes in the huge reds that we set out to buy. I liked the 1983 Hermitage.

Nearly every winery has a mascot: a cat named Trebbiano at Campbell's; Tequila at All Saints; and one named Frontignac had died. Cats at other wineries had more prosaic names. At another winery five dogs trotted over to inspect the car. Elaine and Mark were obliged to tickle the tummies of four of them for some minutes before we could set off.

Brown Brothers, at Milawa, was the disappointment of the trip. As late as 1980 you could buy a classic Brown Brothers red that was so enormous that (in John Bangsund's words) it leapt out of the bottle to meet you. This style of wine has become unfashionable, so Brown

Brothers has changed its style completely. We didn't buy any of their anonymous light reds or equally anonymous whites. Sigh -- what a waste of a great enterprise.

If we hadn't visited Brown Brothers, however, we wouldn't have visited Milawa (a rather small town about 20 kilometres east of Wangaratta), and without visiting Milawa we wouldn't have discovered The Old Emu Inn. This turned out to be a Swiss-food restaurant built inside an old Cobb & Co. coach station, or something similar. It was cosy, and the food was good, so we returned the next night.

I realize that travelling by car gives a whole new perspective on life to a chronic pedestrian like me. On the map, distances in northern Victoria look daunting. With Linneman as a friendly chauffeur, distances became small. A whole unknown patch of the state became domesticated. Inspect four wineries on the way to Rutherglen. Stop overnight at Rutherglen. (The motel was superb, although sleep was disturbed when the clock-radio alarm in a empty room went off at 4.30 a.m., waking everybody. Some departing guest's idea of a joke.) Whip up to the Murray, inspecting Campbell's and Buller's. St Leonard's winery overlooks a billabong that lies next to the Murray River. Sylvan gum-treed countryside. The Murray, in trickle, did not look much like Australia's major river. Feeling hungry? Burl through Chiltern, a small and historically correct town -- but, unfortunately, without stopping to inspect the Henry Handel Richardson residence -- then through endlessly folded, interesting countryside until suddenly down a long hill into Beechworth.

Beechworth is one of the those places that should be repellent, but isn't. The people of Beechworth have done everything possible to make the town into a tourist trap, and to remind visitors of its Vast Historical Interest. Visit a cell in which Ned Kelly was once kept, and you see this mock man lying on a bed in the cell. Tacky. At another display, pay \$2 for the privilege of inspecting mock gold nuggets illuminated by spotlights. Tacky.

But then, as we did one morning, you wander under the autumn-leaved trees past the old pubs and homes to a small stream from where you can walk through an equally autumnal valley covered by lawns, grass, and sandstone buildings, and you sigh and realize that there is a better way of life than your own -- provided, of course, that you are in receipt of a private income. (Also, of course, you have to realize that this part of the world is bloody hot for five months of the year. It was the summer heat of Chiltern, you remember, that drove Henry Handel Richardson's dad mad -- see The Fortunes of Richard Mahony.)

The most interesting part of Beechworth -- perhaps the most interesting part of the trip except for the meal at the Shamrock -- was wandering around its cemetery. I don't think I had realized until then that the well-to-do in the nineteenth century used tombstones to tell epic tales. A woman dies before she is forty; her husband at thirty-five; the three children are all dead before they are twelve. There it all is on the monument. A woman buries her husband and children, but there was no one to add her name to the monument. A tombstone lies askew in the ground and you can barely read the writing. A poor family's grave, but something of that family remains. A large patch of land has no tombstones. There lie the bones of the pioneers of Beechworth, buried in the early days and transferred anonymously to this patch of land. The Chinese section is eerie. A huge temple-like structure presides over small slabs of stone that poke out of the ground. Look at a slab carefully and you can just make out the Chinese characters. What a heartbreak little town Beechworth must have been during the gold rushes, and for many years later. What a contrast to the wonderful sense of careful planning that seems to surround every building, tree and sod of grass in today's town.

Why is Bright tacky and Beechworth not? Both towns have commercialized themselves as far as possible. They are both based on the sort of sentimentality about 'historical relics' that lets people pay lots of money for not much return except a vague good feeling. 'Nothing for something', as Stanley Elkin once wrote.

The difference is that in Beechworth you feel that there is some room to move. It's in a wide, flat valley, of which the town centre forms only a small part. Real people as well as

tourist promoters inhabit the town. Bright, however, is in a narrow valley. It's at the head of the Ovens Valley. From there, most roads rise upward to such ski resorts as Mount Feathertop and Mount Hotham. Along the road into the town, all you can see are caravan parks and motels. There seems little sign of anybody but tourist trappers. This wouldn't matter if the town wasn't supposed to have some intrinsic appeal. My mother and father have always spoken fondly of Bright, and have spent quite a few holidays there. Maybe they haven't seen it for a few years. If they went up there today, they would see that the valley has been ruined by vandalism -- on the surrounding hillsides the native mountain ash has been clear-felled, and is quickly being replaced by regimented stands of pine.

Where are the conservationists when they are needed? They race off to Tasmania and up to Queensland and out to east Gippsland, but do not seem to have made a whimper about a clear-felling operation that has already ruined one of the most attractive valleys in Australia.

The view was even worse when we took the side road to Wandiligong. I remembered being told by my parents that Gillespie ancestors lived for many years in Wandiligong, and that family bones lay buried there. I should have done my research before I went on the trip. When I got back, my mother told me that the bones are actually buried in the Bright Cemetery. Given that I didn't have the time or information to do a bit of family research, I found Wandilogong a bit disappointing -- but again, I realized that it had once been magnificent. The avenues of autumn-leaved trees are still there. It's only the backdrop that's changed. Now there are slashed and cleared hills the length of the road from Bright to Wandiligong. Perfidy! Horror!

Little wonder, then, that I felt overcome by emotion as I looked up at Mount Buffalo at the Porepunkah turn-off, and thought, 'That's where we should be going! There is the real Australia! A plateau of untouched bush. But for how long?' You really feel the forces of evil when you realize how greedily the loggers want to tear into the national parks of Victoria.

While we were returning down the Ovens Valley, Mark Linneman made a mistake. He mentioned that he had been told in the office of the motel we were staying at in Beechworth that the other rooms were occupied by people who had come into town to attend a wedding. This news immediately gave me the horrors, much to Linneman's amusement. He suggested visions of hoons tearing up and down in front of the motel at 3 a.m. 'on their trailbikes, singing "Boom Boom Boom" and playing mandolins'. I could imagine all that. Sounded like all the parties we've endured from the people next door. I was quite sure that we wouldn't get any sleep that night -- either there would be noise, or I would be so worried that I wouldn't sleep anyway. You can see why travelling is an epic adventure for me.

As it happened, the day had been so interesting and exhausting that Elaine and I fell asleep immediately after dinner, and awoke without hearing a thing. Elaine kept saying that I shouldn't have worried in the first place. The motel-owners had told Mark Linneman that half the wedding guests had German surnames and half had Dutch surnames. Elaine guessed that they must be Lutherans, and would probably not even drink at the wedding, let alone stay up all night. Are Lutherans as straitlaced as Garrison Keillor says they are? Seems so.

The last day of the trip would have been uneventful, except that Linneman decided that driving along the Hume Highway for four hours continuously might send him to sleep. As a distraction, we turned off the road in central Victoria, and visited two last wineries. This seemed a victory of optimism over experience. We had already filled what seemed like every cubic centimetre of the car with cases of wine. At our last destination near Rutherglen, Morris's, we had been so impressed by the tasty reds and whites that we had bought three cases between us. There was no room for any more -- but we visited Chateau Tahbilk anyway. There was space for the extra bottles. We're going back, soon.

The trip was not quite over. A sign pointed to Mitchelton's Winery, so we thought we would investigate while it was still light. As we bumped along the road we saw an anomaly in the landscape: a shape that looked like a triangular brown Dutch bonnet poking above the

horizon. It was not like anything else on the wide, green rolling plains that stretch from the Great Divide to the Murray. It was, in fact, the observation tower that has been built at Mitchelton, along with a huge complex of rooms that includes four restaurants, a wine-tasting area, a supermarket filled entirely with Mitchelton's wines, a picnic spot, a river steamer for those who want to explore the Goulburn River, and an aviary. It was the only place we visited where the owners have realized that Wine = Tourism, and acted accordingly. Also, of course, it's within two hours' drive from much of Melbourne, whereas the northern Victorian wineries are not. Even as we pulled in at 4.30, huge buses of Japanese tourists parked beside us. The wine-tasting area was closing down, but we did have a look from the observation deck. It's the only really high point for hundreds of kilometres, and worth visiting for the view.

Home... dinner at a small Chinese restaurant in Richmond... sleep... pick up cats in the morning. Exhaustion. But it had been a successful trip, especially when buying wines. We bought malbecs at quite a few places: that seems to be the most interesting red variety in the region at the moment, but often the malbecs are available only at the cellar door. We were surprised by the variety and power of the whites of the region. Northern Victoria has such a reputation for giant reds that we didn't expect to buy whites. Instead we kept coming across marsannes, semillons, chardonnays and sauternes with strange genie-like scents and flavours. And most of them were also available only at the cellar door. We've planned to set out on another saga soon (Linneman willing).

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SAGA #3: BEST OF 1986

A few years ago, I listed my Favourite Thingies for the Year, and people complained because I didn't write a commentary to explain my choices. In TMR 7/8 I went into vast and tedious detail about all my choices, and few readers liked that, either. (Let's face it, Gillespie. Whatever you do these days, it's wrong. So do what you feel like doing. Okay.) So here is as much as will fit in a slender fanzine.

Favourite Novels 1986

- 1   The Secret Journey
by James Hanley (year of first publication: 1936; edition read: Chatto & Windus; 569 pp.)
- 2   The Furies
by James Hanley (1935; King Penguin 14-006440; 395 pp.)
- 3   La Bête Humaine
Emile Zola (1890; Penguin Classics 14-044327; 366 pp.)
- 4   Le Grand Meaulnes
Alain-Fournier (1913; Penguin Modern Classics 14-002466; 206 pp.)
- 5   A Room with a View
E. M. Forster (1908; Penguin 1054; 223 pp.)
- 6   Lost Illusions
Honoré de Balzac (1843; Penguin Classics 14-044251; 682 pp.)
- 7   Lady Chatterley's Lover
D. H. Lawrence (1928; Penguin 1484; 317 pp.)
- 8   Emma
Jane Austen (1816; Signet Classics CQ705; 386 pp.)
- 9   The Wings of the Dove
Henry James (1904; Dell Laurel 9581; 512 pp.)
- 10   Empire of the Sun
J. G. Ballard (1984; Gollancz; 221 pp.)
- 11   The Neverending Story
Michael Ende (1979; Penguin 14-007619; 377 pp.)
- 12   Dorothea Dreams
Suzy McKee Charnas (1986; Arbor House; 308 pp.)

In the middle of November, I discovered that A Room with a View was the best novel I had read all this year, and I said to myself: 'This will not do. Where can I find some novels that are really worth the No. 1 spot?' A Room with a View is a fine and funny book, and it's certainly a lot better than the James Ivory film, but it was not a No. 1.

In my search, I found the best English writer of the twentieth century, James Hanley. Nobody knows about him (although The Furys is in a King Penguin edition, which must mean something). He's not even listed in the Oxford Companion to English Literature. I've called him the English Emile Zola -- but Hanley can be better than Zola. His Irish-Liverpudlian working-class characters have a ferociously independent view of life. Hanley is almost the only highly articulate English writer who is not condescending to the 'lower orders'; instead, he lives inside his characters, showing their experience in a series of dramatic scenes. The Secret Journey is the sequel to The Furys, but is a more complex and free-flowing piece. I hope I can find some more Hanley. (All I've been able to find so far is a book of collected short stories and a critical study published by, of all organizations, Melbourne University Press.)

But when I wanted contenders for the No. 1 spot, I turned to the French, of course. There they are, those nineteenth-century French novels, funny, acerbic, stylish, unputdownable, and with a commitment to putting the knife into a whole society, not just one bit of it. That's over-generalization, of course: Victor Hugo does not read much like Emile Zola. But compare nineteenth-century French novels with those from Britain published during the same period, and you'll see why I did not reach for Dickens, Scott, Trollope, or George Eliot when I wanted a good munchy read.

So I picked out one book by Balzac (Lost Illusions: a bit tedious in spots, but it does provide a funny and comprehensive anatomy of a whole society and way of thought), one Zola (La Bête Humaine, a mad multi-murder thriller set around the French railway system; the only novel I've read with the true Hitchcock feel to it), and a French classic, Alain-Fournier's Le Grand Meaulnes, which has also been titled in English as The Wanderer or The Lost Domain. Le Grand Meaulnes, a richly romantic metaphor for the decline of France itself, was published just before the author lost his life during World War I.

Other novels on the list are surprises of one sort or another. Most surprising of all is that they are English, not North American, South American, or European. (Okay, James was American, but it is hard to think of him as anything but English.) Elaine was going to throw out Lady Chatterley's Lover, but I found it had a rich blend of zest, bitterness and (surprise!) sensuality. Emma was a surprise, in that I liked it at all. My last encounter with Jane Austen, 22 years ago, was not a happy one. Emma caught up with me, although I still don't find Austen an unputdownable writer. On the other hand, The Wings of the Dove shows how far James's dramatic powers declined during his last years -- all the most important scenes take place offstage, and some of the sentences make no sense at all. But somehow the James magic works, especially during the final chapter.

Empire of the Sun is perhaps the most memorable book on this list, although it is written in a very plain, almost throwaway style. (More comments in TMR 11/12/13.) The Neverending Story is a richly baroque Jungian fantasy, one that throws up more images than it can possibly draw into its pattern. I wish I had been a teenager when I read it. And Dorothea Dreams is a thriller with a touch of fantasy which dips its hat in the direction of Ursula Le Guin.

The only other genre sf/fantasy books to impress me much during 1986 were Russell Griffin's The Blind Man and the Elephant (1982; Timescape 671-41101; 295 pp.) and two Robert Sheckley novels revived by Gollancz: Dimension of Miracles (1968; 190 pp.) and Journey Beyond Tomorrow (1962; 189 pp.).

And the most welcome novel of the year? Gollancz's first publication of Philip K. Dick's In Milton Lumky Territory (213 pp.). Not entirely a success, especially towards the end, but haunting and memorable.

Favourite Books 1986

Where a Favourite Novel appears in this list, I haven't listed its details again; I just write '(see above)'.

- 1 The Secret Journey
James Hanley (see above)
- 2 The Furys
James Hanley (see above)
- 3 The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society
Lionel Trilling (1950; Oxford University Press; 284 pp.)
- 4 Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning
Lionel Trilling (1965; Oxford University Press; 204 pp.)
- 5 The Whitsun Weddings
Philip Larkin (1964; Faber & Faber 571-09710; 46 pp.)
- 6 High Windows
Philip Larkin (1974; Faber & Faber 571-11451; 42 pp.)
- 7 Blood and Bone
Philip Hodgins (1986; Angus & Robertson; 60 pp.)
- 8 La Bête Humaine
Émile Zola (see above)
- 9 The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer
(1981; Penguin 14-006436; 429 pp.)
- 10 Dance of the Happy Shades and Other Stories
Alice Munro (1968; King Penguin 14-006681; 224 pp.)
- 11 One Human Minute
Stanislaw Lem (1986; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 102 pp.)
- 12 Le Grand Meaulnes
Alain-Fournier (see above)
- 13 A Room with a View
E. M. Forster (see above)
- 14 The Terminal Beach
J. G. Ballard (1985/1964; Gollancz; 221 pp.)
- 15 The Voices of Time
J. G. Ballard (1985/1963; Gollancz; 197 pp.)
- 16 Lost Illusions
Honoré de Balzac (see above)
- 17 Lady Chatterley's Lover
D. H. Lawrence (see above)
- 18 Emma
Jane Austen (see above)
- 19 The Wings of the Dove
Henry James (see above)
- 20 Empire of the Sun
J. G. Ballard (see above)
- 21 The Diaries and Letters of G. T. W. B. Boyes, Vol. 1, 1820-1832
edited Peter Chapman (1986; Oxford University Press; 687 pp.)
- 22 The Neverending Story
Michael Ende (see above)
- 23 Dorothea Dreams
Suzy McKee Charnas (see above)
- 24 Wonder's Child: My Life in Science Fiction
Jack Williamson (1984; Bluejay; 276 pp.)
- 25 Fire Watch
Connie Willis (1985; Bluejay; 274 pp.)

Gillespie reading entire volumes of poetry? I was pretty astonished, too, but Philip Larkin and Philip Hodgins are not just any old poets. They are that rarest of the breed -- the unputdownable poet. Of course, both are a bit gloomy, but I like a bit of deep satisfying

melancholy from time to time. Hodgins has written most of his poetry since he was told he had incurable leukemia a few years ago; with a strong theme like this and a brilliant capacity for fine-tuning words, he's turned out some of Australia's best poetry in the last three years or so. Philip Larkin had no incurable disease except life itself; his viewpoint seems a bit wet compared with Hodgins' scornful anger about dying and unstoppable love of life. But Larkin had time on his side -- time to observe the whole range of life; time to perfect his craft. But the talent that Hodgins shows in Blood and Bone is startling; I trust he has some valuable years left.

I've known about Trilling for many years, but have never been able to buy his most famous collections of criticism. While working at Oxford University Press, Elaine discovered that the venerable institution reprinted all of Trilling's work in hardback a few years ago. What a pity that they didn't tell anybody! With inside information and a bit of luck, I've been able to get all but two of this series; the others are out of print. Trilling is not as readable as my hero Edmund Wilson, but some of the essays in The Liberal Imagination and Beyond Culture are richer than most of Wilson's work. Wilson's specialty was introducing the reader to individual authors; Trilling stretches beyond the individual author to explore insights about changes in culture itself. On the one hand he would seem a bit reactionary: he exposes the debilitating effects of the Progressive movement on American culture after World War II, and defends that idea of remorseless high culture that I, for one, find liberating. On the other hand, I've read no other author who has so lucidly explained why Freud is very important to literary culture during the twentieth century. Particularly fine essays are those on Jane Austen's Emma, Freud, and 'The Meaning of a Literary Idea'.

It's tempting to say that the list descends rapidly after Hanley, Trilling, Larkin and Hodgins. But I was surprised to find at Nos. 9 and 10 two books which, in other years, might have been Nos. 1 and 2. Elizabeth Spencer is at her best when she writes about the Deep South, which she knows well. In the middle of her collected stories are some rather flat mock-Jamesian pieces about Europe; evidently they were the product of a mid-career crisis or too much European travel, as Spencer returns successfully to home territory at the end of the book. Munro never gets far from her chosen territory, back-country Toronto. Look at the formal properties of her prose, and you see that she is better than Spencer; but Spencer is better at telling a ripping yarn.

One Human Minute is not, as Locus claims in its most recent issue, a book of short stories. It is a collection of three essays that shows what can be done if you let your mind play with scientific ideas, and you happen to be Stanislaw Lem and not, say, Isaac Asimov or Larry Niven. Lem doesn't just play; he runs an idea out on a lead until it flies like a kite. What will actually happen to the current arms race? Lem's speculations are rather different from any others I've read. Why is human life unique to this solar system, and probably unique to this galaxy? Lem shows us. This book actually delivers the thoughtfully speculative sf ideas that have virtually disappeared from science fiction novels.

I've included the first volume of Boyes' diaries because, if you can afford its \$176 and are willing to order it directly from OUP, it's a good read. I know about it because I copy-edited it. Nearly sent me bonkers, mainly because of Peter Chapman's voluminous footnotes. Don't worry about the footnotes: Boyes, who was sent by the British army to New South Wales before being sent to Van Diemen's Land, speaks for himself quite well, in that robust, all-observant, unaffected tone which disappeared from English letters in the 1840s. It's a pity that, because of the book's outrageous price, only the Aust. Hist. buffs will ever know about Boyes and his world.

Favourite Films 1986

- 1 Peeping Tom: directed by Michael Powell (1960)
- 2 The Small Back Room: Michael Powell and Emric Pressburger (1949)
- 3 The Bitter Tea of General Yen: Frank Capra (1933)
- 4 Three Strangers: Jean Negulesco (1946)

- 5 The Furies: Anthony Mann (1950)
- 6 You Can't Take It With You: Frank Capra (1938)
- 7 The Quiet Earth: Geoffrey Murphy (1984)
- 8 99 and 44/100 Per Cent Dead: John Frankenheimer (1974)
- 9 A Tree Grows in Brooklyn: Elia Kazan (1945)
- 10 The Sun Shines Bright: John Ford (1953)
- 11 Cat People: Jacques Tourneur (1942)
- 12 Where the Sidewalk Ends: Otto Preminger (1950)
- 13 Laura: Otto Preminger (1944)
- 14 Twilight's Last Gleaming: Robert Aldrich (1977)
- 15 A Question of Guilt: Robert Butler (1978)
- 16 Night Must Fall: Richard Thorpe (1937)
- 17 Caught: Max Ophuls (1949)
- 18 Mr Skeffington: Vincent Sherman (1944)
- 19 Repeat Performance: Alfred L. Werker (1947)
- 20 Séance on a Wet Afternoon: Bryan Forbes (1964)

Either I talk about each film in detail -- but I don't have the room -- or I make remarks that are so generalized that they will annoy Joseph Nicholas. Well, everything in my fanzines seems to annoy Joseph Nicholas these days. Here I go.

The trouble is that you've heard it all before -- how I have this little black-and-white telly which you will find me watching at midday or late at night when I should be doing other things, and how I find these wonderfully beautiful films at these amazing hours, and how I never go to cinemas because usually the films they show at cinemas are made after 1947. So I won't bore you by saying it again. I saw five films at the cinema during 1986: The Jagged Edge, which was slack, A Room with a View, which was slack for quite different reasons (nobody ever told James Ivory that you don't make a film beautiful merely by pointing your camera at beautiful people, scenery and objects), and The Quiet Earth, the New Zealand sf film which is a ripper film and which should be seen by all film and sf buffs. That makes three. The other two were Laura and Where the Sidewalk Ends, both by the enigmatic Otto Preminger, and both made before 1953.

1953 is the average year of release of my Top 10 Favourites. It is also the a.y.o.r. of my Top 20. Not that 1953 itself was a great year for films -- it was the first year of real decline in Hollywood movies. But it's a workable average. One of the Michael Powell movies, Peeping Tom, is on this side of the divide, and The Small Back Room is on the other. I want to see all the other Powell or Powell/Pressburger movies. Surely he's the best British director! (Hitchcock only became really great after he migrated to America.) Peeping Tom is certainly the creepiest, most ingenious psychological thriller ever made -- yea verily, perhaps even better than Vertigo? The Small Back Room must be the most watchably suspenseful movie ever made, with David Farrar sprawled out on the beach sand waiting for that bomb to blow his head off. (There are plenty of movies that are suspenseful, but most of them I can't bear to watch.) I'm rather annoyed that (a) I couldn't attend 1986's Melbourne Film Festival; (b) three restored Powell movies were imported for the Festival; (c) the same three movies left the country immediately after the Festival.

Little room left for the others. But I must point to The Bitter Tea of General Yen, because it was made before Capra and script-writer Briskin made all those maddeningly heartwarming movies (of which You Can't Take It With You is a nice example), and yet it shows all the unique features of the Capra style -- especially his astonishing ability to make complex patterns of human movement, either among crowds or among smaller groups of people. The Bitter Tea of General Yen is a rarity: a Hollywood movie that is also a tragedy; a film that takes its characters seriously. You watch it and say to yourself, 'Well, that's what film-making is all about', then say to yourself, 'But why has much of that been forgotten in the last fifty years?'

Two other highlights: The Furies, a particularly epic Western epic, with Barbara Stanwyck riding roughshod over people and landscapes; and Three Strangers, which has Sydney

Greenstreet, Peter Lorre (already you're annoyed you missed it), and Geraldine Fitzgerald (hero/villain), but the real star is John Huston's fabulously ironical script. Three strangers have shares in a sweepstake ticket that Fitzgerald's Oriental goddess has guaranteed success; but the three strangers seem determined to ruin their own lives before they have a chance to share the loot. One of the great fantasy classics, although I haven't seen it mentioned much.

A few oddities:

- * Where the Sidewalk Ends is dark and suppressed, self-searching and self-hiding, and makes a nice contrast with Laura (same stars: Dana Andrews and Gene Tierney), which is all bravura suspense and Hollywood black-and-white baroque.
- * John Frankenheimer's very funny 99 and 44/100 Per Cent Dead didn't get a theatrical release in Australia, as far as I can remember. With its Mafia crazies, funny lines and gags, and unexpected high jinks -- and Richard Harris and Chuck Connors -- this is one of those loony films that somebody must show at a convention some time.
- * Robert Butler's A Question of Guilt was shown during yet another week of Azaria-frenzy. Ron Liebman acts as the prosecutor who is determined to convict a woman (Tuesday Weld) of murdering her young child. Liebman's character disintegrates under the force of his own hatred for the mother, even while the evidence for and against her becomes more and more ambiguous. The viewer is still not sure of the truth by the end of the film. This is a curiosity because it's a stylish made-for-television movie, and the acting is first class.

Most of the other films are famous. If you want to discuss them with me, send a letter of comment for the next issue of The Metaphysical Review.

Favourite Recorded Music 1986

It was great to get a letter from Frank Denton confessing that he, too, has been made bankrupt by compact discs. Music has become my obsession during recent years, and much of this obsession has to do with the superb golden oldies that are at last appearing on CD. None of this shows on the popular music listing. Almost all the pop CDs I've bought have been replacements for wornout classics: Supertramp's Crisis? What Crisis?, Elton John's Honky Chateau, the Rolling Stones' Sticky Fingers, Exile on Main Street, Goat's Head Soup, It's Only Rock 'n' Roll, and Tattoo You (all in the one week), Fresh Cream, and Rod Stewart's Gasoline Alley. And think of all the records I can't afford, and which have disappeared already! Madness, madness. And when the Jacqueline du Pré record of Elgar's Cello Concerto turns up, and I buy it, and a week later the CD appears, but a month after that the CD had already disappeared from the shelves...

The world's treasures are in front of me, and I can have only one gem a month. How about a bit of sense? Here's some lists -- with the reminder that they show records or CDs bought for the first time during 1986; asterisks indicate records that, as far as I can tell, were also first released in 1986.

- * 1 Graceland: Paul Simon (Warner Bros.)
- * 2 Cocker: Joe Cocker (Capitol)
- 3 Gravity Talks: Green on Red (Bigtime/Slash)
- 4 Johnny 99: Johnny Cash (CBS)
- 5 Beneath the Double Ego: Kinky Friedman (Sunrise)
- * 6 Biograph: Bob Dylan (CBS) (3 CDs)
- * 7 Rainbow: Johnny Cash (CBS)
- 8 Centerfield: John Fogerty (Warner Bros.)
- * 9 State of Our Union: Long Ryders (Island)
- * 10 Like a Rock: Bob Seger (Capitol)
- * 11 Johnny Comes Marching Home: Del-Lords (EMI America)
- * 12 Landing on Water: Neil Young (Geffen)
- 13 Truth Decay: T-Bone Burnett (Line)
- * 14 Street Language: Rodney Crowell (CBS)

- 15 Behind the Iron Curtain: John Mayall's Bluesbreakers (GNP/Crescendo)
* 16 Live 1975-85: Bruce Springsteen and E Street Band (CBS) (3 CDs)

Other records released during 1986 that I recommend are (in the order I bought them):

Repo Man (soundtrack) (San Andreas)
13: Emmylou Harris (Warner Bros.)
Fervor: Jason and the Scorchers (Slash)
Who Knows Where the Time Goes?: Sandy Denny (Carthage) (4 LPs)
Tribute to Steve Goodman: various (Red Pajamas) (2 LPs)
Lost in the Stars: various (A&M)
Blue City: Ry Cooder (Warner Bros.)
Crossroads: Ry Cooder (Warner Bros.)
Song X: Pat Metheny, Ornette Coleman, Charlie Haden, David Coleman (Geffen)
We Love You... Of Course We Do: Sacred Cowboys (Man Made)
Cover Me: various (Rhino)
Revenge: Eurhythmics (RCA/Ariola)
Big Daddy (Rhino)
Peter Case (Geffen)
Highlights of a Dangerous Life: Johnnys (Mushroom)
Lonely Street: Arlen Roth (Flying Fish)
Bring on the Night: Sting (A&M) (2 LPs)
Eye of the Zombie: John Fogerty (Warner Bros.)
The Art of Excellence: Tony Bennett (CBS)
Gossip: Paul Kelly and the Coloured Girls (Mushroom) (2 LPs)
Feargal Sharkey (Virgin)
Out of the Grey: Dream Syndicate (Chrysalis)
Partners: Willie Nelson (CBS)
Unsung Stories: Phil Alvin (Slash)
T-Bone Burnett (Dot)
Get Close: Pretenders (Sire)
Suzanne Vega (A&M)
Think Visual: Kinks (MCA)

Looks like I've been spending a bit too much money on records again, doesn't it? I must keep up with what's going on -- that's what I tell myself. And what's going on? Not the great takeover by country punk that I hoped for in TMR 7/8. The radio stations play synthesized slush, so the gritty bands are unplayed. The Blasters seem to have broken up. (Phil Alvin recorded the quirky Unsung Stories, and Dave Alvin is reported to have joined X, a Los Angeles band.) Green on Red didn't produce a record in 1986, but 1983's Gravity Talks, discovered in 1986, is as good as anything else they've done. Not that the record companies have given up altogether. The Long Ryders' State of Our Union was a zinger of a record, and the Dream Syndicate's Out of the Grey was released on CD. Still, with radio dead set against you, it must be hard for a mean'n'ornery country punk band to reach the big time. Last year's hopefuls, Lone Justice, solved the problem by yielding to synth power (Shelter, which has some tracks that are made listenable by Maria McKee's song-writing and singing).

The highlight of 1986 was Paul Simon's Graceland, which I bought on CD, so it won't wear out when we play it once a week. Perhaps it doesn't take genius to record South African bands in South Africa, or even to record some of them in New York, or even to pinch their music -- but Paul Simon had the wit to use their music, to combine it with his own music, and write brilliant lyrics as well. This record does not merely have a beat to it; it has a mighty pulse of syncopation, melody, and merriment. And those lyrics! They keep echoing in the mind, picking up resonances and connections, delighting the listener in the way that good poetry does. How many other albums with listenable lyrics have there been during the 1980s?

Cocker is Joe Cocker's best album since Mad Dogs and Englishmen (which I was able to obtain on CD, thanks to Terry Hughes). Yes, there's a synthesized backing, but it has power and melody. More importantly, there's Cocker's voice flattening listeners into the carpet.

Johnny Cash never tires or retires, and in Johnny 99 he chooses a whole album of good songs, which are played by a gutsy little band. Two Springsteen tracks done well, plus lots of other good things. Brian Ahern produced it. Rainbow is a bit mushier, with more strings and things, but Johnny Cash still knows how to choose a mournfully melodic song. Kinky Friedman was a new voice to me, but I heard one of his songs on 3RRR's program 'High in the Saddle', and I knew I had to buy the album. The songs are all equally good: very tuneful, very restrained, some quite amusing. Now I discover that most of Friedman's albums are out of print.

The best singles for the year were Paul Simon's 'Boy in the Bubble' (from Graceland), Joe Cocker's 'You Don't Love Me Anymore' (from Cocker), and Feargal Sharkey's 'A Good Heart' (from Feargal Sharkey, of course). A pity that the rest of the songs on the album are not as good. Lots of other albums were not as interesting as their best songs; perhaps only the Top 12 are consistent albums. CBS's two blockbusters for the year, Springsteen's Live 1975-1985 and Dylan's Biograph (both of them 5 LPs or 3 CDs), were spotty, of course, with Springsteen spottier than Dylan. There should have been more of Springsteen's stage monologues than there are, and far more of the famous cover versions and far fewer Springsteen standards. On the other hand, when Dylan does an alternative arrangement of one of his famous songs, he makes the song seem new.

And here's the classical record list:

- 1 Gluck: Orfeo ed Euridice
Kathleen Ferrier (cont.), Greet Koeman (sop.), Nel Duval (sop.), Charles Bruck (cond.), Netherlands Opera Chorus and Orchestra (HMV/WRC) (2 LPs)
- 2 Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 5, Op. 73 ('Emperor')
Claudio Arrau (piano), Sir Colin Davis (cond.), Staatskapelle Dresden (Philips) (1 CD)
- 3 Schubert: String Quintet, Op. 163, D. 956
Fitzwilliam Quartet plus Christopher van Kampen (cello) (Decca) (1 CD)
- 4 Haydn: Symphony No. 88, Symphony No. 100 ('Military')
Bruno Walter (cond.), Columbia Symphony Orchestra (CBS) (1 CD)
- 5 Beethoven: Missa Solemnis, Op. 123
Otto Klemperer (cond.), Köln Rundfunk Symphony Orchestra (Memoria) (2 CDs)
- 6 Brahms: Four Serious Songs, Op. 121
Kathleen Ferrier (cont.), Sir Malcolm Sargent (cond.), BBC Symphony Orchestra plus songs by Bach and traditional Christmas songs: Boyd Neel String Orchestra (Decca) (1 LP)
- 7 Schubert: Lieder
Margaret Price (sop.), Wolfgang Sawallisch (p) (Orfeo) (1 CD)
- 8 Donizetti: Lucia di Lammermoor
Joan Sutherland (sop.), Luciano Pavarotti (tenor), Richard Bonynghe (cond.), Orchestra of Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (Decca) (3 CDs)
- 9 Chausson: Poème de l'amour et de la mer, Op. 19
Kathleen Ferrier (cont.), Sir John Barbirolli (cond.), Halle Orchestra plus songs by Brahms and Bach (Decca) (1 LP)
- 10 Mahler: Symphony No. 1 ('Titan')
Bruno Walter (cond.), Columbia Symphony Orchestra (CBS) (1 CD)
- 11 Elgar: Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85
Jacqueline du Pré (cello)
Elgar: Sea Pictures, Op. 37
Janet Baker (cont.)
Sir John Barbirolli (cond.) London Symphony Orchestra (HMV/WRC) (1 LP)
- 12 Beethoven: Symphony No. 7, Op. 92, 'Coriolan', Op. 62, 'Egmont', Op. 84
Vladimir Ashkenazy (cond.), Philharmonia Orchestra (Decca) (1 CD)

Not much I can say about these except that they are all exceptional versions of music that is otherwise well known. Kathleen Ferrier is the greatest recorded voice of the century, and she sings during most of Gluck's Orfeo ed Euridice, so this record had to be No. 1.

Unfortunately, it was recorded in 1949, and can be hard listening at times, despite the best efforts of record engineers. By contrast, the resurrection force at CBS is performing miracles with Bruno Walter's recordings, and the Haydn record sounds more vibrant than digitally recorded versions of the 1980s.

I'm grateful to Terry Hughes for finding in America a CD release of a 1955 recording that Klemperer did of the Missa Solemnis. The recording quality is bad (sounds as if taken from old 78 rpm records), but the version is mighty, although rather sweeter and slower than Klemperer's later, greater EMI recording (which has still not seen the light of CD release). Don't get the latest Karajan CD of the same work; it is a dire insult to Beethoven, and likely to put people off the Missa Solemnis for life.

The Arrau/Davis/Staatskapelle Dresden version of Beethoven's Concerto No. 5 will remain the benchmark for some years -- the only one to buy, although many are around on CD. I would like to know when Philips will release in Australia the same combination's version of the Concerto No. 4. The Fitzwilliam Quartet's version of Schubert's String Quintet may not be the benchmark version, but I haven't heard better.

Enough, enough. If I want to write a 100-page fanzine, I'll tell you about the CDs that got away: Berlioz' The Trojans, now out on 4 CDs (\$112!), various stunning versions I've heard of Schubert's Quartet No. 14, the Hogwood/Schroder versions of Mozart's symphonies, Walter's version of Mahler's Symphony No. 2, which I will have to buy the next time I see it, no matter how broke I am. For the music listener with a million dollars, it's a wonderful world out there.

Favourite Short Stories 1986

- 1 'Dance of the Happy Shades' by Alice Munro (Dance of the Happy Shades)
- 2 'I, Maureen' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 3 'Deep End' by J. G. Ballard (The Terminal Beach)
- 4 'A Trip to the Coast' by Alice Munro (Dance of the Happy Shades)
- 5 'The Terminal Beach' by J. G. Ballard (The Terminal Beach)
- 6 'A Letter from the Clearys' by Connie Willis (Fire Watch)
- 7 'My North Dakota Railroad Days' by Garrison Keillor (Happy to be Here)
- 8 'The Girl Who Loved Horses' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 9 'Sharon' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 10 'The Finder' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 11 'Boys and Girls' by Alice Munro (Dance of the Happy Shades)
- 12 'The Tip-Top Club' by Garrison Keillor (Happy to be Here)
- 13 'Images' by Alice Munro (Dance of the Happy Shades)
- 14 'The Overloaded Man' by J. G. Ballard (The Voices of Time)
- 15 'The Day Before' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 16 'Judith Kane' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 17 'Old Bessie' by Brian W. Aldiss (The Pale Shadow of Science)
- 18 'All My Darling Daughters' by Connie Willis (Fire Watch)
- 19 'Walker Brothers Cowboy' by Alice Munro (Dance of the Happy Shades)
- 20 'Time Zones' by Damien Broderick (Introducing Damien Broderick)

This list is quite different from the others; it took six months until I had the courage to sort the items into order. Courage? To make up yet another Gillespie list? Am I mad?

Let me start another way. The trouble with writers of non-sf short stories is the way they bamboozle readers by making sure that the title of a story never tells you anything about its contents. Take Alice Munro's 'A Trip to the Coast', for instance. I couldn't remember what that was about, although my recommendations list showed that I liked it a lot. I had to read it again. I would have been spared the effort if the author had called it 'Grandmother and the Hypnotist'. That would not give away the surprise ending of the story, but it does remind you of the story if you've read it already. When I looked at my list, I realized I could remember almost none of the stories by looking at their titles. I had to spend a whole

weekend re-reading The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer, Alice Munro's Dance of the Happy Shades, and bits of three Ballard collections, making extensive notes, and suffering bloodied eyeballs before deciding on the Top 20. And all this when I should have posted this magazine two weeks ago!

I didn't mind re-reading the stories, of course. It's just that I have about ten other things to do, and all of them at the same time. Lunatic thoughts raced through my head as I skim-read the books. The most lunatic of them was to abandon this mini-article and instead write a gigantic article about the State of the Short Story. I was saved from madness by the clock and the calendar.

I should not have bothered with a numbered list, but a true lister lists on. At least as many great stories are left off as are included, and after the Top 3, the rest are more or less equal. A good year for short stories, although I didn't read as many story volumes as in most years. Elizabeth Spencer and Alice Munro are the two stars. Spencer writes mainly about Tennessee, Mississippi, and other southern parts of the USA. Munro writes about the backblocks about Ontario, where everything has the same air of faded, poverty-stained gentility as Spencer finds in southern towns.

Even as I say this, I can hear in the distance the sf fan who complains about 'New Yorker-style stories', the sort of fan who snorts in derision at any fiction that deals with ordinary people. Such a person has probably never read any fiction about 'ordinary people'; sf stories, after all, mainly deal with subnormal people (usually described as 'superhumans').

My first response is usually to say that it doesn't matter what a story is about; it's only the style that counts. But I don't believe it -- not unless the style is so exciting that you forget about everything else. There are no 'ordinary people', no 'average guys'. There are lots of people who think of themselves this way, but each has his or her own story. Nothing is typical of anything. There are only individuals.

My second response is that writers like Spencer and Munro do a lot more than write about the stories of 'ordinary' individuals. They can shine a torch through a life so that suddenly it becomes extraordinary. I'm not sure how they do it. Neither has a particularly distinctive style -- in fact, sentence by sentence you could mistake the style of one for the style of the other. It's all a matter of intensity.

Take 'The Dance of the Happy Shades', yet another story which I could not remember by its name until I read it again. ('Miss Marsalles's Music Party' would have been less euphonious, but more accurate.) The kind of reader who does not like fiction about ordinary people or places would stop reading immediately. That person would be the loser. Not even an Edgar Allan Poe horror story would make you more uncomfortable than moments in this piece. Every year since forever, Miss Marsalles has held a recital for her piano students. Each year the number of students decreases and every few years she moves to a smaller house. She insists on giving the yearly recital of her students as a party which becomes more awful each year. The story takes place on a hot summer afternoon. Miss Marsalles's few remaining students and their mothers crowd into the tiny parlour of a tiny house. Flies crawl over the dried sandwiches; the soft drinks are already warm. Mediocre students play their boring pieces. Everybody is about to escape when a new group arrives -- Miss Marsalles's class from a school from mentally retarded kids. They also crowd into the tiny room; for the moment all we feel is the acute embarrassment of the story-teller. But one of the mentally retarded girls sits at the piano and plays magnificently. Miss Marsalles's life's work is justified although 'people who believe in miracles do not make much fuss when they actually encounter one'. Munro's point is fairly clear: miracles among people happen where you least expect them, and the writer is the person best able to recognize them.

(End of sermon. I still have my notes for a longer article.) (And what about the Ballards? you cry. I discuss them more fully in the next TMR. Some Ballards, such as 'The Cage of Sand', are not listed because I read them years ago.) Seeyuz soon.