SUPERSONIC SNAIL 3

The magazine of
creative lugubriousness

27 pages April 1977

Editor, Publisher, Printer:
Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA,
Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia.

New residence: 10 Johnston Street,
Collingwood. Phone: (03) 419 4797.

It's all Carey's fault. He won't let me resign from ANZAPA, but I need at least 6 pages to retain my membership. Non-ANZAPA people should respond if they want the next issue.

MY 1977:

1977 AS I WOULD LIKE TO LIVE IT

Bruce Gillespie's 1977 began with a storm of exceptional lugubriosity. Misfortune having rained all over his bright new hopes during 1976, stinking puddles of misery lay around so that he would keep wetting his feet.

Needless to say, circumstances did not quite warrant the pained look which Bruce was apt to wear during those far-off days. Some kind (and masochistic) people from 10 Johnston Street took in our lad, who had been thrown into the streets by the evil landlord from Carlton. Hordes of great hefty chaps, their toes broken and knees buckled, heaved Gillespie's furniture from the palatial rooms of 72 Carlton Street to the slightly smaller rooms, and steeper stairs, of 10 Johnston Street. Frank and Elaine made tut-tutting noises about the various unexpected and odd habits of Bruce Gillespie, ahd counted off the gallons of coffee as he drank them. All, it seemed, had worked out as well as one could expect.

But not so. The thought-clotted brain of Bruce Gillespie, overburdened at the best of times, suppurated into a viscous, squelchy globbo of mind fever. Having become so accustomed to crushing blows of various sorts, his mind collapsed as first Crushing Blow 2, and then Crushing Blow 3, lifted their pressure. All he could think about was Crushing Blow 1.

To make things worse, one aspect of his life had even changed for the better. The poor ignorant people at the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association were under the impression that Bruce was performing a useful function on the editorial staff of that august rag, The Secondary Teacher. Little did they know that Mr Slattery, that brave champion of the working classes, non-working classes, and all shades inbetween, actually remained the genius who kept the magazine going. Bruce just suggested silly ideas and threw paper aeroplanes.

The first change in Bruce's life which he saw as an improvement was when he won Tattslotto. This is the only form of lottery in which he had ever taken a ticket. In his own words, "It's the only one worth winning." Bruce received this news with his customary equanimity, and wandered around for days with a cow's sick grin all over his face. Bruce's first thought was how to prevent anyone knowing that he had won the prize money. After all, the combined personal debt of Melbourne's s f fans is probably larger than the first prize in Tattslotto.

However, little by little, with that charming ease of manner for which he is so well known, Bruce let it be known that somehow... er... his circumstances had changed, and that no, he would not be staying at his new job after the middle of the year. The powers-that-be at the VSTA heaved a sigh of relief, Bernie put his papers back in order, and The Secondary Teacher improved greatly as the year went on.

Bruce had always said that the only reason why he wanted to win Tattslotto was so that he could buy a house. And not just a house.

Bruce trod the streets of Carlton and Parkville for some months, looking for the house. His face showed grim determination, his body was bent forward, propelled by a sense of absolute purpose, and his nose kept sniffing for a bargain. At length, he found the house that suited him in the street which he had been forced to leave - Carlton Street. He loitered outside the house at night, trying to make sure that this house was not afflicted by neighbours as noisy as those who had lived beside him before. The day of the auction arrived, and Bruce sauntered to the door, his face looking nonchalant, his gait jaunty. All other bidders for the house gave up their attempts to secure the lovely house. In rueful despair, they stepped back a few paces, and shrugged their shoulders (but not so obviously that the twitch would be mistaken for another bid). Only Bruce was left at the end, the nonchalance in his face giving away to a wide smile, his spirits lifted by a sense that he had a home of his own at last, that his world was back in its proper place.

Bruce paid out the rest of a year's rent at 10 Johnston Street, and gave Frank and Elaine the choice of sharing the new, large house with him, or remaining and taking in further boarders. They chose the latter. Bruce did not put fandom to an ultimate test, by asking the Ashby-Handfield moving team to help him. It cannot be recorded that the commercial firm of removalists did a better job, but they did have slightly less difficulty with the ten-ton bookcase and the boxes of books and records.

Boredom and a certain instability of emotions are conditions which afflict Bruce from time to time, regardless of his physical conditions. He decided that his new wealth should be used to buy time, rather than things, but the same reservoir of time should not be frittered away. Bruce devoted some effort to setting up both floors of his double-storey Victorian terrace house . Again he had a large front room with windows high and not too wide, letting in just enough sunlight in the winter, but allowing the house to stay cool in summer. Fine new carpet, not too ostentatious but comfortable and sound-suppressing, covered all the floors but those of the kitchen. Bruce placedhis bedroom downstairs and at the back (so that he was guaranteed relief from the heat in summer). The front downstairs room became a bookroom and a repository of all those little, unsightly things (like printing machinery and paper) which are required to complete the life of a dedicated fan. Bruce decided to leave the back upstairs room empty for the moment...just in case.

At first Bruce was not quite sure how to divide up the extra days of time that he had gained. He no longer needed to print his fanzine by duplicator, and could now afford to produce large, offset issues every month. But it takes a lot less time to type the material for an offset issue than to carry out all the production processes for a duplicated issue. Bruce decided that he really should apply some energy to writing . . fiction.

Bruce had always considered that his main disqualification from writing fiction is the fact that he has such a slender reservoir of experience from which to draw inspiration. "Experience", in this case, and for most writers, comprises either an expertise in some professional field, or else a huge capacity for partaking of, and surviving, the many hedonistic delights which are available in such places as Carlton. It is not as if Bruce disliked the idea of giving into temptation when it arose; the fact was that temptation resolutely kept out of his path.

Around the age of thirty (which, to his despair, was the age that Bruce reached in early 1977) he decided that not much experience ever was going to come his way. Bruce decided to find out whether he had a sufficiently fertile mind from which to grow a crop of fine stories. His first efforts dissatisfied him.

The people in his stories did not come to life. The descriptions of the scenery never quite implanted themselves in the reader's eye. But from time to time Bruce would see in his own mind curious and luminescent fantastic visions, brilliant spectres from unreal worlds. His attempts to give life to those dream-pictures drove him onward to write more stories. By the end of the year, he could even see slight improvements in his own work.

He never quite forgot to make notes for his Grand Project, a novel which would embody some of the feelings and notions which coursed through his heated brow during those cruel, breathless days of late 1976. The pages increased as scrambled thoughts followed each other in a scrawl across blue-lined strips of paper. The plot of the novel disappeared into countless strands which had little to do with the original inspiration. Characters, at first based on well-known figures who frequented Bruce's life, disappeared into a haze and then hardened again into people Bruce had never met before. The words still would not do what Bruce wanted them to do, but they still lay there, waiting for the right shaping at the right time.

Seven days of leisure can easily become seven days of socialising, as Bruce found out quite quickly. Perhaps it was because he could not help allowing a certain mellowness to seep into his style of life. This mellowness could only be aided by the constant supply of burgundy or riesling which Bruce kept in the house. Back in Carlton Street, he felt back in the centre of things. He kept buying records, of course, and the book collection spread over every available wall. And visitors liked listening to the records and perusing the books as much as Bruce liked acquiring them. If Bruce sometimes found the jocular conversation [illegible] slightly trivial, he showed his impatience less often than before. After all, he kept telling himself, there was always the next day to work.

And the fact the Bruce survived his good fortune at all must be due to the fact that there were days when no visitors called, days when he did not play records all day, or go wandering in the park (for - greatest joy! - he now had the Calrton Gardens opposite his front window again), but felt driven to work. Lassitude would leave his bones, and sparks of inspiration whiten into fire. One of Bruce's first acts upon receiving the money had been to buy an IBM compositor/varityper, so he could now type the galleys for SFC at home. Steve Campbell, and other people, had taught him how to lay out an offset fanzine. So there was always another issue of the magazine to appear. And there were those stories and that novel to finish, too. And he felt more like doing reviews for various magazines, especially as he no longer needed to beg for payment.

RUDE INTERJECTOR:

Hang on here. This rubbish has gone on long enough. None of this can happen unless the silly bugger wins Tattslotto. Just how likely is that? Three million to one! What a useless bit of airy-fairy spouting. And all he can think about his making himself comfortable and getting this nice house and letting the world go hang. What kind of a life is that! Geez, what a waste of time.

INTERESTED INTERJECTOR:

Your objections are, no doubt, quite correct. There does seem to be a singular streak of solipsism in this man's nature. But it is his daydream. I would suppose that your daydreams would be just as cushy. Let us proceed.

Bruce had always considered that his 1977 could never be ideal unless there was some way in which he could alleviate the essential loneliness in which it was led. When sharing a house for the first time in some years - with Frank and Elaine - he was surprised to find that cohabitation at this level was possible, but only if the people who lived in the same house made an amicable agreement to preserve each other's privacy. Being surrounded by people, even under such congenial conditions, was still hardly what Bruce was looking for.

The restaurants of Carlton had never seemed to Bruce the ideal place to meet anyone. For some years he had sat, night after night, at different isolated tables in different restaurants, and only once or twice had he ever been able to begin a conversation with any group of people. Eating alone in a crowded restaurant is some ultimate act of loneliness. Both before and after living at Johnston Street, Bruce began to cook his own meals, but he had a limited repertoire. Still, it was pleasant to sit in his own kitchen, with his own cat Flodnap sitting staring hungrily at his plate, taste food he had cooked, in no matter how mediocre a way, and reflect on how much more work he might get done that night, or which pleasant eccentric might ring on the bell in search of a chat or a drink.

It was at such a time and in such a state of mild euphoria that Bruce was sitting one night when the bell did ring. The house was not too untidy, and Bruce was ready to welcome anybody who wanted to chat. He was not prepared, when he opened the door, to be greeted by a demure young lady with a wan face, long black hair, and an expression of some distress. The young lady, who spoke with an American accent, said that she had been given instructions on how to find one of the proprietors of a...Nor-strill-ya Press...and had lost the bit of paper. She had knocked on other doors, but people turned her away, and seemed to imply that she was beating the footpaths of the wrong street altogether.

She was assured that she had not chosen the wrong street, and that Norstrilia press, insofar as it still existed, resided one half of its corporate existence in Bruce Gillespie. The other half was best not mentioned. Actually Bruce said, "Come in."

The young lady, whose name is perhaps best not speculated on in this essay, made suitably reassuring noises of surprise and wonder as she picked her way among the bookshelves in the upper part of the house. She began fumbling among the books which lay higgledy-piggledy on shelves around the large front room. In a few minutes, she found in the record collection a piece of music which she had once heard years ago but had never been able to find again.

Bruce was somewhat overwhelmed by the presence of this young lady of such charm, taste, and enthusiasm for those cultural pleasures which gave him such delight. Bruce's confusion expressed itself in the way in which he nearly fell on the stairs, and the traces of spilled coffee which lined the cup he brought her, and the fact that he did not ask her what she wanted with Norstrilia Press, until he had become totally tongue-tied.

The young lady had the good grace not to notice such gouacheness, and to explain that she was one of the last of the American teachers brought out by the Education Minister's ill-considered and politically naive "airlift". Indeed, she had found herself running a library in an inner suburban high school when other teachers, Australian born and trained, were being told that they were not wanted. Her own interest was in science fiction and fantasy, and she had noticed the gaps in these fields on the first day that she had examined the library's collection. She had already bought quite a few books from Space Age,

and had mentioned that she did not like much the range of books about science fiction. It was only after some time, and just as she was leaving the shop, that she was told of a publisher in Melbourne which had recently extended its line of books about science fiction. After much searching, Paul managed to find the most recent residential address of one of the partners, and had given the phone number. It was the wrong one, of course, but Elaine had explained just how to get in touch with Bruce Gillespie.

The young lady confessed that she was rather... surprised to meet this publisher and to visit such an unbusinesslike office. But a glowing, half-hidden smile lit her face as she said this, and Bruce realised that his eccentricity and opulent, overwhelmingly unnecessary passion for objects of the mind had not frightened the young lady (as happened so often) but had instead struck a nerve of sympathetic amusement the implications of which caused him even more confusion.

Bruce did not quite stammer his way through that conversation, but it must be confessed that he drank a little too much, and that he bobbed in his chair and gesticulated a great deal too much to draw out the best in his unexpected guest. When he gave her copies of his beloved magazine, she did not quite realise what they were, and thought at first that they were just another set of Norstrilia Press publications. She put them in her bag, scarcely looking at them. But she was surprised and pleased when Bruce swept a few stray volumes from his to-be-read-and-reviewed shelf and handed them randomly (and still breathlessly) into her hands. Yes, she said, she would like to write reviews, but she didn't quite see...

It was not until next day - after a very long and near-sleepless night by Bruce - that he realised that he had not even taken her school's library order for Norstrilia Press (which now included the complete Brian Aldiss essays, which had lain so long unfinished before Bruce had gained his new wealth and leisure), and that he had gained her address, but not her phone number, and he had forgotten the name of her school. In other words, he paced around his house for nearly two days, his brain quite preoccupied and his feet tripping over themselves, before she did...she did ring him. And he did take her order and ask her to have dinner with him the next night at a restaurant in Carlton.

Good fortune in small matters as well as large occupies a place in this narrative. It was good fortune for Bruce that he received the next day a set of manuscripts which he very much needed to complete the next issue of SFC. After typing most of the day, and taking out time to do the washing and some shopping (and to buy the latest Rolling Stones album - a grave disappointment), he had almost forgotten his date and had calmed down somewhat. Good sense reigned in his brain again. Evenings like this had taken place before. The girl, in the past, had always been polite, then friendly, then had never encouraged any further meetings. Disappointment was so much a part of Bruce's life that he felt ashamed with himself that the notion of romance had ever again crossed his mind.

The young lady had said that she would meet him at the restaurant, so Bruce sauntered there at about the right time and walked in with a bottle of wine under one arm and even a trace of a smile on his face. He looked around the restaurant several times, began to feel panic that she had not been able to keep the date, and readied himself to make a hurried and ashamed exit... But he felt ther merest brush of a hand against his sleeve, turned around, and was nearly reduced to mental incoherency. The young lady who stood in front of him had shed all signs of a teacher's dowdiness or an acolyte's fervour.

Her long hair was swept out and blown out. Her body was given grace and directness by a quite simple combination of silk blouse and sinewy black slacks. Her face had a mocking smile, a pursing of the lips with challenge, a lifting of the eyes with excitement. Without yet knowing such might signify, Bruce felt welcomed, invigorated, pushed off on a chute of human relationship where for so long there had been only a flat, empty, dusty plain.

Bruce barely trusted himself to speak, but she handed him a small piece of paper tied up in a ribbon. The waiter showed them to a table hidden in the corner of the low-lit restaurant, and she hid her face behind the menu as he twiddled with the ribbon of the piece of the paper. It fell open; he read; he was puzzled. He asked her to explain to him the list of numbers that lined the piece of paper. She explained, her voice almost chuckling, almost solemn, that the numbers referred to paragraph and page numbers of a certain magazine which had happened to be thrust into her hand at a certain place in Carlton Street some nights before. While a waiter circled shadowily somewhere in the background, waiting for an order which kept being put off, she pulled scraps of paper from her bag (the issues of the magazine seemed to have disintegrated after much perusal), read from the list of numbers, and told Bruce all about himself, the bad as well as the good, the blemishes as well as those evanescent qualities which occasionally inspired the letter writers of that magazine. Finally, she laughed and said that she did not know what you are like (pointing a finger directly at the middle of Bruce's ample chest) but that she rather liked this person here. Bruce replied, as best he could, that he did not know what she was like at all, but would very much like to find out.

It seems beside the point to give an account of the conversation that followed. Such conversations rarely stay in the minds of the participants, and the individual elements rarely have much meaning except for the two people involved, at that time. The process might best be described as holding up brightly lit versions of each other's world in the hope that the colours of one world will shine in harmony with those in the other. Plates of food were somehow consumed, a couple of bottles of burgundy somehow became empty, and the two paid their bill and stepped out of the doors at the end of what seemed like an extraordinarily short time. (No one else was left in the place, so they noticed they should leave.) The matter of where next to go seemed to resolve itself without much perplexing; they kept walking, talking, skipping, smiling, along wide Carlton streets, under familiar trees, beside familiar parklands, through thinner and dingier streets, til they reached the flat where, she had once told him, she lived.

It was at this point that the intoxication in Bruce disappeared. Emerging like a cold, brisk stream into a warm, sluggish pond was the icy certainty that life must not be passed by again, that this should not be "just another night". With that icy certainty came nervousness, ill-direction, and perverse failure to notice that her small talk was not just a polite overture to departure, as he kept thinking, ruefully, to himself. He had mustered all the civilisation and brightness that he had in him for the first part of the night. Now a cold hopelessness settled over him, a sensation that a magician's cape was about to be dropped over a softly glowing fortune-teller's bowl. As they manoeuvred and chattered at that door, and he prepared to make an escape, her hand brushed over his, the second touch of the evening. He should have been civil about his feelings, but he wasn't. He was awkward, and he held that hand, and then the arm, and then nearly knocked her senseless against the doorframe as he attempted to kiss her, and then realised that she had eased her body around to let the kiss take a more natural course. They did not actually speak to each other for some time after that, but they did not need to. Bruce was not seen to leave that place that night.

INTERJECTOR 1:

Lookithat, will ya? And he won't even tell us about the sexy bits. What kind of a romance do you call that? What a hopeless mess of sludge, anyway. Anyone can tell that no woman like that is going to look at a drongo like him. 'E's got about as much 'ope trying to pick up sheilas off the street - none.

INTERJECTOR 2:

But you will note that this aspect of the dream does meet your prior objections. It does not necessarily depend upon having an unexpected fortune lodged in the bank. It does seem to depend upon this man's setting up an independent establishment.

Bruce's soul was elevated high above the treetops and television aerials for many days afterward, if only for the joy he felt whenever he thought of the charms of the young lady with whom he became ever more involved. Most surprising, most elevating, was that she seemed to feel the same about meeting him. A woman with a steady smile, and a dry and ironic sense of humour finds herself little appreciated, except by young men who seemed incapable of listening to what she was saying. She implied that she had to extract herself from her relationships with these men without causing too much of a to-do. Meanwhile, there did not seem to be many hours when she and Bruce were apart.

Bruce was amazed by that combination of social and intellectual complexity and trusting naivety which seems unique to American women. He found himself listening to somebody whose intelligence ran away from his, then found himself making some crass remark which only amused her, and led them back to that complex task which occupied much of their time between love-making: untangling the weave of memories of the lives which had brought them together. So much luck, they kept saying to each other, and then decided that such luck was well-deserved.

She was a little put out to find her unexpected beau had an unforeseen, large, and unsweated-for income from which to draw. She soon discovered that he became just this side of unbearable if he stopped employing himself usefully. It was mainly because of her efforts that Bruce's ill-judged efforts to help some of his literary friends of their respective plights (causing resentment all round) emerged into a legally constituted fund to help talented creators who were ineligible for government literary funds. Norstrilia Press began to prosper under her direction. SFC began to find an independent market.

Not that this was her main concern. She was discontented enough with conditions in schools in Victoria, and was glad enough that her new lover could afford to support her until she found something better. The task of transforming Bruce's house proved a lot more difficult than she had thought, and strained to the utmost her capacity for guile and charm. They set up sections of the house where each could be guaranteed privacy, and in the other parts of the house she made sure that finances for redecorating were well-spent. Finally the lease on her own flat ran out, and towards the end of the year, when the euphoria had subsided and a relationship had begun to emerge, she moved in. For her part, she could see the outlines of urbanity, gentleness, and mellowness emerging from under the awkward exterior of Bruce. For his part, he had almost forgotten that choking melancholia which had filled him continually at the beginning of the year.

SUMMARISER 1

All seems loony to me. Now if I won a lot of money I'd zip off overseas, and buy meself every whore in Singapore for a night each, and go to Las Vegas, and buy a proper, big house somewhere up on a mountain, and drink - ghod, nothin' but champagne. And if I had the 1977 I wanted I'd get to be Prime Minister and push this country right back into shape again, and I'd tell Jimmy just where to go if he didn't listen to me, and...

SUMMARISER 2

...Somehow I would rather live in Bruce Gillespie's ideal 1977 than yours. He does leave out rather a lot, though, and he does not take into account the likely results of all that good fortune. All those friends who supported him when he was down, would they find him interesting at all? And he does not seem too interested in spreading good fortune to those who need it most.

SUMMARISER 1

Don't be bloody hypocritical. Think what you would do. Reckon this Bruce character has pretty silly daydreams, but good luck to him anyway. Now where's me Tattslotto form for next week? I bet the missus has hidden it somewhere.

c 1977 Bruce Gillespie
29 March 1977

* *

1977 - THE WAY I EXPECT TO LIVE IT

Bitched about boring 1977 for most of the year.

Read a lot of good books because I had nothing better to do.

Published five issues of SFC, each more expensive to produce the next. Nearly went broke, but got another loan.

Began to learn my job at VSTA by about the end of the year. Even starting to get a bit bored with that.

Went to a few parties, drank too much, didn't see many movies, bored the bejesus out of Frank and Elaine, fed five cats 365 times.

Fell in love again, knocked back again, even more depressed again.

Wrote one bad story, half a good story, and lots of notes for The Novel.

Got lots of letters, especially nice ones from overseas people I'll never have the money to visit. Daydreamed most of the time...about how I would really like to spend 1977.

SNAILSPACE

The trouble with editing S F Commentary is that very rarely do I edit it. Oops. I shouldn't admit things like that. What I meant to say is that I don't reject material. I get brilliant articles, letters, and reviews for the magazine. At least, I think they are all brilliant. I intend to use all of them. But somehow some pieces get pushed further and further down the pile while other articles (usually, George Turner's) go right to the top. I feel ashamed that I've been unfair to contributors by keeping their material for so long without specifically rejecting it. I still want to use this or that article or letter. But somehow, it never happens.

So here are a few of the pieces which didn't quite make it to SFC, and, given the restrictions imposed by the offset layout, probably never will.

SCIENCE FICTION AS AN AMERICAN POPULAR ART

by David Pringle

That the American popular arts have had a colossal impact on the rest of the world during this century is surely undeniable. Which other national traditions of popular art have had the variety, exuberance, vitality - or, for that matter, the sheer noise and selling-power - of American popular music, American cinema, and American prose fiction (in its various genres of the western, the "tough guy" thriller, science fiction, or the simple "block-buster" best-seller)? Even the ubiquitous comic books, from Superman and Batman to Marvel Comics and Nasty Tales, have been overwhelmingly American. American entertainment, American style - a whole American idiom - have become universally acceptable in Britain, Europe, Australia, and all those parts of the Third World where they have not been banned by strenuous governmental effort. Even in those nations where American popular art is officially unacceptable, there is strong reason to believe that, were the people given a free choice, they would opt for the American rather than their native traditions, ie, in the USSR they would prefer jazz to Shostakovich, and put Hollywood before Eisenstein.

The phrase "popular arts" is a trifle cumbersome, but I use it in preference to Art (a term which is usually associated with the "high arts" and which brings to mind a predominantly European tradition, with all its overtones of official patronage and school curricula) and also in preference to Entertainment (a word which is generally used either perjoratively or obsequiously, and is much beloved of middlemen, hustlers, and mediocrities to whom the popular art in question is just a commodity - whether "harmless" or "pernicious" - to be sold at a high price to a stupid public). I do not believe

in a split between art and entertainment: to me, all art is entertainment (however much particular examples may fail to entertain) and all entertainment is art (however bad some examples may be). The traditional splitting of our cultural life into "high" and "low" spheres seems to me to be an invidious process strongly associated with the class nature of our society, and it is a type of thinking which leads only to cultural ossification (after all, which art now regarded as "high" - the drama, for example, or the novel - did not begin life as something "low"?). The dividing lines between good and bad should be vertical rather than horizontal.

The popular arts, then, are simply those arts which happen to appeal to a large number of people, and it is my contention that, in the twentieth century most of what has been best in the popular arts had originated in America, or been heavily influenced by American examples.

This has been most obviously the case with American popular music, which critics such as Henry Pleasants, in his Serious Music and All That Jazz (1969), have termed the "Afro-American tradition". Since Scott Joplin's ragtime or, at any rate, since New Orleans jazz, Afro-American music has been the popular music of the world. Even when British performers became genuine, transatlantically accepted, superstars (The Beatles, The Rolling Stones), their music was rooted in the idiom of, and derived its greatest strengths from, American examples.

The cinema is another modern art form that had its beginnings in the 1890s, and which received its greatest impetus in America after 1910. The spread of the nickleodeons, the invention of the western, and the Mack Sennett comedy formula - above all, the creation of the Hollywood star system - all these developments were synonymous with the movies for most people, and they took place in America. The star system gave people throughout the world - particularly young people - a kind of international currency in fantasy.

The modern popular literary genres (with the notable exception of the western) were not created in America, but it was America that took them over and raised them to new heights of skill and relevance. For all the charm of Conan Doyle's work, the crime story was an effete thing (identified primarily in the 1920s with Agatha Christie and the "country house" school of detective fiction) until it was remade in an American image by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Ross Macdonald, Patricia Highsmith, John D Macdonald, and others. Even the classical detective novel was never at its best in the hands of, say, a Dorothy L Sayers; I much prefer the work of two American authors, John Dickson Carr and Rex Stout (Carr for the marvellous ingenuity of his plots, and Stout for his creation of Nero Wolfe who is, in my opinion, the most entertaining fictional detective since Sherlock Holmes). Just like jazz and the movies, American popular fiction was born in the market-place: it received no grants from cultural foundations; it was not subsidised by art galleries or libraries. It had to survive by virtue of its sales power - in other words, by being authentically popular - it had to engage meaningfully with people's lives.

Although the scientific romance was created by a Frenchman, Jules Verne, and although some of the finest examples of that tradition were produced by Englishmen - H G Wells, Olaf Stapledon, Aldous Huxley - science fiction did not really become a popular art with a unique identity until the late 1920s in America, i e until the foundation of the first pulp magazines devoted entirely to the genre: Amazing Stories in 1926, Wonder Stories in 1929, and Astounding Stories in 1930. Although for a short time they subsisted on reprints of the "classic" European authors, the magazines swiftly built up a body of native writers - men like E E Smith, Edmond Hamilton, Jack Williamson, John W Campbell, Clifford D Simak, and Stanely G Weinbaum - whose work was (in the best sense) vulgar, and which prepared the ground for better writers to come. Thus, science fiction became another American popular art, like jazz or the movies.

What, then, is the reason for this American dominance in the popular arts? It was a dominance which began in earnest

after 1918, and became even more noticeable after 1945 - and perhaps those dates offer a clue to the reasons for it all. The military, political, and economic dominance of the USA led to a cultural dominance - although it was a type of cultural dominance of which official American policy-makers could scarcely approve. It was an invasion of the vulgar and the anarchic, of those parts of American culture held to be "low": comic strips and movies, pulp magazines and paperbacks, jazz and rock 'n' roll. In a sense, this popular culture was subversive of American ideals and the American self-image. It carried with it, and rapidly made familiar to the rest of the world, associations which were often the reverse of those affirmed by America's political and cultural mandarins. In France, a strong distrust of America's political aims is combined with an intense love for the American popular arts. The USA of the Marshall Plan and NATO was unacceptable to many European intellectuals, whilst the America that produced the Bogart and Cagney "films noirs" (inevitably, the label is French) excited nothing but admiration and emulation. Similarly, with the young, the America of the H-Bomb, the CIA, and, ultimately, the Vietnam war, was abhorrent, but American rock music was the very reason for living. America was at once the political curse of the world and its cultural salvation.

The irony of the whole situation is the fact that a surprisingly high proportion of American popular art is not really American after. It is the creation of aliens on American soil - that is, white Anglo-Saxon Protestant American soil. American culture in general is still a WASP culture, in that most of the political and economic power lies in the hands of that majority of the population that is white-skinned, British in origin, and Protestant in religion (or that believes itself to have all these qualifications). But even so, the extent to which WASP Americans have contributed to their country's arts is astonishingly limited - their contributions have tended to be the exceptions rather than the rule.

The driving forces in American popular culture have tended to be men and women from various, more or less excluded, minority ethnic groups, "immigrants" of long or short standing. Those of longest standing are, of course, the American negroes, those whose grandparents were forcibly emigrated from African to American shores. Admittedly, they have been in America for a longer period than many of the WASPs, but that has not diminished the extent to which they are regarded as aliens by a large part of the American population. The American black's revenge on his white "superiors" has been to make them dance and sing to the black man's music, and in this his success has been so stupendous that not only the whole of white America, but the whole world, is now dancing to that music.

The American cinema is not so firmly rooted in the sub-culture of one particular ethnic group, but nevertheless the importance of immigrants to the film industry has been incalculable. Indeed, I am tempted to say that Hollywood has been the product of German-Jewish genius. Most of the entrepreneurs who set up the big studios were Jews, Eastern European immigrants who were ready to rush in where the more cautious WASPs feared to tread. The talent that they employed - directors, cameramen, script-writers, actors - was truly cosmopolitan, including as it did Englishmen such as Stan Laurel, Charlie Chaplin, Boris Karloff, Cary Grant, Errol Flynn, and Alfred Hitchcock, together with hosts of Irish and Italian-Americans, Frenchmen, Scandinavians and, above all, Germans. The German contribution to the art of film direction in America was immense, particularly after the rise of Hitler caused a mass of middle-European talent to flee to Hollywood - Erich Von Stroheim, F W Murnau, Ernst Lubitsch, Joseph Von Sternberg, Fritz Land, William Dieterle, Michael Curtiz, Karl Freund, and Billy Wilder being a few examples. Even the man who is most frequently cited as the great Hollywood director, the celebrator of American history and the finest exponent of the western genre, namely John Ford, was a second-generation Irish immigrant who had been christened Sean O'Fearna, and whose heart seemed to lie in Galway as much as it did in Monument Valley. (The tendency for Hollywood to buy its talent on a global market has of course continued

right up to the present - directors such as Antonioni, Polanski, and Milos Forman come to mind.)

The writing of science fiction seems to have appealed to people of the same sort of ethnic background as those attracted to the cinema. At this point I must quote the few sentences from Leslie A Fielder's Waiting for the End which inspired me to write this essay:

> The long dominance of the western and the detective story is challenged by that largely Jewish product, science fiction. There are a score of Jewish authors among the most widely read writers in that popular genre, as compared with practically none in the two older types of institutionalised fantasy. The basic myths of science fiction reflect the urban outlook, the social consciousness, the utopian concern of the modern, secularised Jew. The traditional Jewish waiting-for-the-Messiah becomes, in lay terms, the commitment-to-the-future, which is the motive force of current science fiction... Much science fiction, set just before or after the Great Atomic war, embodies the kind of guilty conscience peculiar to such scientist-intellectuals (typically Jewish) as Robert Oppenheimer, while the figure of Einstein presides over the New Heaven and New Earth which such literature postulates, replacing an earlier Hebrew god who is dead. (Penguin Books, 1967, page 76)

At first, I reacted negatively to Fiedler's remarks - how could one regard the s f of Wells and Stapledon or, for that matter, Wyndham and Clarke, Aldiss and Ballard, as being in any way a "largely Jewish product"? But when one ponders the ethnic origins of American s f writers (who, after all, are the majority of s f writers) one realises not only that such authors as Isaac Asimov, Alfred Bester, and Robert Silverberg are in fact Jews, but that most of their colleagues are first-, second- or third-generation immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe. If one modifies Fielder's thesis to say that American s f is largely a product of European immigrants to America, many of them Jewish, one is coming closer to the truth.

The man who founded the first s f magazines, Hugo Gernsback, was a Luxembourger who emigrated to America at the age of twenty. The body of writers that he and his successors nurtured over the decades is heavily freighted with Germanic and Eastern European names - names like Weinbaum, Simak, Heinlein, Kuttner, Leiber, Kornbluth, Pohl, Vonnegut, Sheckley, Zelazny, and Disch, for example. To be sure, many of these writers have concealed their ethnic origins in a WASPish Americanness so sincere that it must be a result of conversion rather than birthright. For instance, Clifford Simak (whose father was born "in Bohemia, in a town near Prague", as Sam Moskowitz assures us in his Seekers of Tomorrow) has nowhere in the pages of his books a character's name as outlandish, as un-WASP-like, as his own. Other writers, however, have repeatedly reminded us of their origins - the Russian-born Isaac Asimov, for instance, whose delightful name so befuddled poor Patrick Moore in his book Science and Fiction (1957) that he placed it in double inverted commas (obviously convinced that it was a pseudonym), or the Lithuanian Algis Budrys. Poul Anderson has gained some notoriety for his constant harping on his Danish antecedents.

Why, then, has American s f been so dominated by immigrants? Why, indeed, have the American popular arts in general have been dominated by various minority groups within American society. Fiedler gives some of the answers in his analysis of the concerns of the "modern, secularised Jew", but one must go further and talk of the need of excluded, minority groups to make good in a largely alien society and, at the same time, to impose their ideals, their dreams, on the majority culture. America's was always hospitable soil for the germination of new ideas, new styles. Traditionally, the American has not considered himself to be tied by the circumstances of his birth. He is always (at least in his own fancy) making himself anew. Immigrants to the USA have seized on this idea and become its most fervent advocates, demonstrating it both in their lives and in the products of their imaginations. This is where science fiction seems so central to American popular culture, with its assertion that every man -

- or man, in general - can become what he wants through the application of his creative powers. Perhaps the immigrants, and the sons of immigrants, are the truest Americans of all, for they have, within family memory, been translated from an Old World to a New. In a sense, they are living in a grand s f adventure already, having left the old European certainties behind and entered a land where anything can happen. Meanwhile, the rest of the world keeps watching America in order to see the outlines of its own future. Perhaps, when things are put in greater historical perspective, the whole of twentieth century American popular art will come to be seen as a report from that future.

c 1976 David Pringle

EDITOR:

It seems todd to me that David Pringle is an English fan, not an American. Needless to say, I disagree with most of what he says, but am intrigued that he says it all.

There seem to be two elements in his argument: that the swamping of the world by American pop culture is a Good Thing; and that the exponents of that culture can be found in a fairly well-defined group of people within America.

In fact, Pringle says that the world has had to put with American pop culture for so many years because it is a Good Thing, because its influence travel, no matter how hard you stop it. It's difficult to test this theory, since so much of the ingenuity of that culture is its power to take over from native forms of culture and to establish a tyranny over newly established forms of the mass media. A counter example might be the Australian soap operas of the 1940s and 1950s. During that time, Australian radio stations were not allowed to run plays, serials, etc, imported from overseas. Australian actors received continuous work during those years in radio soap operas, which began as imitations of American products, but achieved their own tang which can now be seen as progenitors of the new Australian theatre of Williamson, etc. Of course, there was little other theatrical work in the country at that time, so most Australian actors eventually went overseas, and most of those who did were successful. In Britain, many popular performers did feel the need to go to America, but English popular culture and English theatre proved sturdy enough to keep a home base.

The only way to judge the contribution of the people that Pringle mentions is to go back to their own words about the way they came to various forms of pop culture, but particularly those people who became science fiction writers. Science fiction was different from the others, I think, in that not only was there not much money to be made in it, but there was not even the promise of much money. One cannot escape the suspicion that many s f writers were people who felt that they could not have done well anywhere else. But they did seem to have a basic education, particularly of the popular science variety, and a tenacity which perhaps other Americans might have lacked. What stands out in the little biographical literature we have about science fiction is a picture of people who were intensely lonely, who stuck together, who made their living in the only game they knew, who were rather bemused by the twentieth century, rather than providing a guide to it. *

REFORM! WHAT REFORM?

A review of The Limits of Educational Reform
edited by Martin Carnoy and Henry M Levin
(McKay; 1976; 290 pages; $6.50)

Labor and Monopoly Capital:
The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century
by Harry Braverman
(Monthly Review Press; 1974; 465 pages; $7.45)

There have been a variety of popular notions put around about "educational reform". The one line that seems to connect these ideas is the assumption that educational reform will make schools better, and hence society better, for our children. The assumption is - and there was no reason to doubt this assumption during the 1960s - was that almost any change in schools had to improve the experience of children and, besides, here were a few very good experiments to try.

This assumption still seems to hold true. In schools where thorough-going and well-worked-out experiments have taken place, children do seem to have much richer and more satisfying experiences than most of us had. If society does not look too much different than it did twenty years ago, then we might reflect that most children are still going through much the same school experience as people did during the 1950s.

"School reform" is an even-handed sort of expression, though, as I discovered when reading The Limits of Educational Reform, which is edited and mainly written by Martin Carnoy and Henry M Levin. At first I thought this book was going to be an American Black Papers - you know, the local version of "lowering of standards" and "illiterate teachers" and all that.

But it isn't. This is quite a good book, within severe limits. "Educational reform", as used in the title, is not what happened in some Australian schools during the late 60s and early 70s. It is what happened in USA during the 1920s and 1930s. It is, quite simply, the process by which an entire population were convinced (many years before the rest of us were) that schools were Good Things, and that everybody should have more schooling. The escalation of spending on schools began more than forty years ago in USA and the aim, then as now, was to make people better.

I suspect that many of us believed the same thing during the 1950s and 1960s: that a vast increase in the rate of spending on schools, and the raising of the school leaving age, would produce a population of intelligent, self-aware people. Anybody in this population would gain the means to climb through the ranks, break out of his or her social class boundaries, and achieve whatever economic dream was around at the time.

Carnoy and Levin set out to show why this belief is entirely unfounded. Their argument, which is summarised quite well in the last chapter of the book, goes something like this:

* In theory, anybody in the capitalist economy can own capital and use it for production; but in practice, a relatively small number of individuals in a capitalist economy make decisions about what kind of things should be produced and how they should be produced. They are likely to use all means at their disposal including, if possible, the state apparatus, both to increase returns to their capital and to ensure that they maintain control over the means of production.

* The main method of reducing labour costs during the twentieth century has been to eliminate, as much as possible, the skilled-worker component of all production processes,

* One of the main tools in creating this pool of docile, unskilled workers has been the education system. "Educational reform" in USA first, and then in other countries, means separating the "under-achievers" from the "achievers", then giving the under-achievers a school course that is "suitable" for them. This is the essence of what Martin Carnoy shows in his excellent short history of American education in this book.

  The American education system specifically does not, as so many people believe, help most people to participate in the economic growth process and in decision-making. The decision makers come from much the same small social group that provided the "leaders" of earlier generations. Only the names have changed. "Schooling is a colonial institution whose employees, through their role in the system, end up trying to shape them to perform predetermined roles and tasks based on their social class".

* Reformers in American education, no matter how well-intentioned, have failed to break this pattern. Successive waves of educational theorists have had their ideas put into practice, but American society remains "business as usual". That is because reformists' ideas have reinforced the capitalist system, not changed it.

Is it, then, useless to attempt educational reform? This is almost the feeling of despair which I gained from reading parts of this book. It might not even help matters to abandon the schools altogether, as Illich suggests. A few people with money would still give their kids the training that would give them the top jobs.

Carnoy and Levin suggest approaching the problem from the opposite angle. Kids are never going to have a satisfactory education if, at the end of it, they must still fit within the capitalist system as it established at present.

The movement for work reform must begin in the factory. They quote Andre Gorz who writes that "the working class movement must demand permanent power to determine, by contract, all aspects of the work situation and the wage scale, so that all modifications in the productive process must be negotiated with the workers, and so that the workers can materially influence the management of the enterprise and orient it in a given direction."

You can choose to agree with that or not. It sounds to me like just another version of the old saw of "worker participation". A writer who would remain sceptical of all Carnoy and Levin's "solutions" is Harry Braverman. His book, Labour and Monopoly Capital, has become quite famous, and it is worth comparing it with The Limits of Educational Reform.

Carnoy and Levin sound fussy and tentative beside Braverman. This extraordinary man, whose training is in the workplace rather than in a university, set out to discover "the causes, the dynamic underlying the incessant transformation of work in the modern era". He does not see capitalism as a conservative force, but as an intensely radical one. This force has worked throughout the last two centuries in order to separate people from their labour, to make them into pieces of money-making machinery, to reduce their real welfare rather than increase it.

The power of this book is that Braverman assumes nothing. While reading the book, I watched with awe as I could see the man's mind working, examining all the evidence about each historical period, and treading remorselessly from one uncomfortable conclusion to another. Why cannot our system allow our schools to produce independently minded people who live complete lives? Because the rest of the society is actively seeking to take away that independence of mind and enjoyment of total life. Braverman shows just how this has happened.

These books are hardly recommended reading who think that all is well in the world, and that the education system just needs a bit of patching up. They are discomforting books, somewhat prophetic, and not too "useful" until other changes are made.

COUNTRIES OF THE MIND

Bruce Gillespie reviews:

A Fringe of Leaves, by Patrick White (Jonathan Cape; 1976; 405 pages; $12.50)
A Lifetime on Clouds, by Gerald Murnane (Heinemann; 1976; 157 pages; $8.50)

(The following reviews were rejected by Bottom Line magazine, and may yet appear in S F Commentary.)

A Fringe of Leaves

Confronting a new Patrick White novel is not an easy job these days. During the last twenty years, White's works have been covered by such a huge mound of critical exegeses and have been consumed by so much hot air that we can hardly find the ashes of the books themselves. A Fringe of Leaves is Patrick White's most recent novel - and anything I write here someone is sure to have said before.

But it is worth pointing out that Patrick White is not just Australia's elder god of letters. He is not just someone upon whose books we can stamp "classic" and put them back on the shelf. Patrick White really is still Australia's best, most interesting, novelist. He still says more about what we are, individually and collectively, than any other writer does.

This might seem untrue when you begin to read A Fringe of Leaves. It is set in the early 1800s. Its characters are entirely people from that era, and the style is that of the nineteenth-century novel. It seems that White has chosen a nice comfy bit of the past, researched it well, and sought to live in it for the time being. Has White opted out altogether? Is he just sitting this one out?

White certainly feels at home in this past era when people had well-defined niches in society, and the "best people" spoke the English language more carefully and interestingly than anybody does today. But White does not go to this era for comfort. From the beginning of the book, the characters are well aware of their difficulties, both physical and social. Perhaps White likes this era best because people had more complicated minds; they spoke a more complex language.

A Fringe of Leaves stops being a nineteenth-century novel at the point of theme. This is not a book about money, the order of society, social difficulties. White's interests are those of the 1970s - the possibilities for intense experience; what we are; how best to live. In the first few pages of the book, a minor character speaks of Mrs Ellen Roxburgh: "I only had the impression that Mrs Roxburgh could feel life had cheated her out of some ultimate in experience. For which she would be prepared to suffer, if need be."

A Fringe of Leaves is the story of how several people, especially Ellen Roxburgh, go through an "ultimate in experience", and Ellen suffers intensely. With other passengers on the Bristol Maid, she and her husband, Austin, are shipwrecked on a bleak part of the north-eastern Australian coast. The trip by small boat to shore is an ordeal which leaves them barely alive. All the other passengers die of exposure or are killed by Aborigines. Austin dies. Ellen is adopted by the tribe. Soon her only piece of clothing is the "fringe of leaves" of the

book's title. There remains little sign that she was ever the wife of a prosperous English gentleman.

As an adventure story, A Fringe of Leaves is probably as good as anything that has been written in Australia. Ellen's attempts to survive become ours as well. But adventure is not what the book is about.

Ellen experiences almost every possibility that any person can undergo. She began life as an untutored country girl. She learned a new style of life with Austin. In Van Diemen's Land, she is surprised by her own adultery with Austin's brother. During the privations of the shipwreck, she looks on wondering as she sees all of her old life disappearing. At last, she has only one preoccupation: "She would not, must not die - why, she could not imagine, when she had been deprived of all that she most loved and valued." When she escapes, naked, from the trible, she travels with an escaped convict to Moreton Bay. And the love she feels for him is quite different from any she felt for Austin. Her task at the end of the book is to regain any sympathy at all for people in general.

Few novelists have shown so exactly the way in which a person experiences. As long as Ellen can keep some continuity in her life, she remains the same person. But her violent physical experiences force her to slip sharply from one self-perception to another. She keeps becoming different people, while retaining an untouchable identity. This presentation of changing perceptions of reality is a remarkable feat for Patrick White.

So that's part of what one might say about A Fringe of Leaves. Others will probably say it better. The works of White demand fine speeches from his critics. But maybe they will not say that A Fringe of Leaves is a book for us and about us, and that White can still show us more about the possibilities of life than almost any other living writer.

** **

A Lifetime on Clouds

It's unfair to subject any Australian writer to close comparison with Patrick White. But Patrick White won't last forever, and we do need some pointers to a viable direction for the Australian novel. A Lifetime on Clouds is one such pointer.

The main character of A Lifetime on Clouds - almost the only character - is Adrian Sherd. He lives with his parents and brothers in an eastern suburb of Melbourne in 1953. Almost nothing happens to him in the book, and I doubt whether he would notice if anything did "happen".

Yet the experience of Adrian Sherd is, in many ways, as poignant as that of Ellen Roxburgh in A Fringe of Leaves. Both books are mainly about mental events rather than physical events. In A Fringe of Leaves, changes in the main character's perceptions are prompted by physical privation. In A Lifetime on Clouds, Adrian Sherd's view of the world changes as his own body changes. He is just growing up. The difference between the two books - and the reason why A Fringe of Leaves is more interesting - is that Ellen Roxburgh has some idea of how much she is changing. Adrian doesn't.

Adrian Sherd is aware of only two imperatives - sex and religion. The two imperatives fight each other to the last page.

Adrian Sherd is still fifteen, and actual bodily contact with girls is still a far-off possibility. So he invents an elaborate fantasy life in which he can masturbate as often, and as enjoyably, as possible. Adrian imagines himself in a wide-plained America, where he frolics with a whole troupe of movie starlets.

There is a problem: Adrian is a Catholic boy, still devout with fifteen-year-old enthusiasm. And we all know what priests have to say about solitary sins of the flesh. Adrian draws a sketch map of his classroom, marking a circle for each boy. "He took a yellow pencil and drew little spears of light radiating outwards from the boys whose souls were in a state of grace. Adrian awarded his golden rays to about twenty boys... Next Adrian edged

with black the initials of the boys who were in the state of mortal sin. He started with himself..."

So elemental a battle cannot last, of course. Adrian sees a girl in the train every day on the way to school. By standing quite close to her (without making her aware of his presence) he reads her name on the cover of her exercise-book. Denise McNamara. Adrian never quite gets around to speaking to Denise on the train. But this does not stop him living out an entire fantasy life with her. He courts Denise, marries her, and then works out an elaborate way by which they gain a good-sized Catholic family in a weekend. No more sins of impurity for Adrian; his devotion to the sacrament of holy matrimony would be a model for everybody - if anybody knew about it.

So Adrian's experience is almost entirely fantasy experience. Yet the book shows clearly that the same could be said of most of our most vivid experiences. A Lifetime on Clouds is about the power of the imagination to give depth and meaning to ordinary events.

Not that the book strikes any pose of philosophical solemnity. It is probably the funniest Australian novel we will read for years. It does not have the complexity of Gerald Murnane's first novel, Tamarisk Row, but it does prompt us to examine and value our fantasy experience - and laugh about it too.

Bruce Gillespie
November 1976

****

Life and Death and Medicine, a book published by Scientific American, informs us that the US's Department of Health Education and Welfare operates its own hospitals for a few specified groups within the community. These include "American indians, Alaskan natives, narcotics addicts, lepers, and Federal employees injured on the job."

****

The latest issue of Rolling Stone (no 235) actually features an Australian pop group in its international section. The group is Sherbert, and their manager, Roger Davies, says of their recent overseas jaunt:

"In England there's a whole mystique about being Australian. The only thing that pisses us off is that everyone calls you Bruce."

****

Gillespie: "Chris Priest has more dirt on English s f personalities than anybody else I know."

Flynn: "But would he want to throw dirt before swine?"

****

Henry Gasko, a permanent visitor from Vancouver, currently living in Melbourne, showed his acumen as he summed up the local scene:

"The Gillespies have good luck sometimes; Bruce left home once."

****

A really educated man is a dead one.

- Ron Blair, from his play, The Christian Brothers

****

You have to buy Locus to see who's dead this week.

- Bruce Gillespie

****

I came from a musical family; we had door chimes instead of a bell.

- Norman Gunston, The Norman Gunston Show

****

The sentimental person thinks things will last - the romantic person has a desperate confidence that they won't.

- F Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise

****

MAILING COMMENTS

Perhaps I should leave the whole page blank. I've already written my mailing comments - in the form of that section at the beginning of this issue. In particular, the comment is a reply to Christine McGowan (Ataxia 2, page 4, February Mailing). In that magazine, Christine really annoyed me. She said, "I think you are one of those rare people, like John Knox, who enjoys being miserable." Not true. I have a very clear idea of what it would take to fill my life with ebullience and endless happiness. Which is what I wrote in my "1977 - How I would Like to Live It". So there. And who is John Knox, anyway?

OCTOBER 1976 Mailing

Not much to say, except that eventually I did read it, and I did make notes of some of my favourite bits. My favourite sections were by Keith Taylor (but I wish he would not double-space his fanzines) and Mervyn Barrett. Full marks to the Bela Lugosi story - I'll write formally as soon as I can to ask you for the right to reprint it in SFC. (We must have a funny story in SFC sometime, even if I cannot write one.)

And... It was Don Ashby's note in Cacodemon 5, about Marion's "wealthy parents" which put me on the wrong track. No wonder I got such a complete surprise when I learned that Marion's father is actually George Lees, famed activist leader of the Technical Teachers Association of Victoria for some years, and now the Principal at Brunswick Technical School; and that Marion's mother is Stella Lees, who spoke on several of the panels at Aussiecon, and who is a lecturer (or is she the head of department?) in the Dept of Librarianship of the State College in Melbourne. George I've only listened to at TTAV meetings, when I was the branch president at Special Services in 1972 and 1973. Stella shared a beer with Catherine and Gerald, Rick and Reen, Kristin and me at Aussiecon during those few hours after that ghastly Hugo Awards Ceremony. But I never connected Stella with George, and I'd never connected either of them with Marion.

Some say they like the "people bits" in SFC - and then complain when people's true confessions reveal too much for the comfort of the readers! You can't have it both ways. Ask people to tell you all about themselves, and they are sure to tell you a lot you don't really want to know. :: You make a good point that "half the world seems to have been tripping through America". That is, a lot of people from Melbourne fandom. I agree. It seems strange that no real picture of America has emerged from their writings. I'm as guilty as anybody. For this issue of Supersonic Snail I was going to complete my trip report, but didn't get around to it. Perhaps Derrick can put together Christine's multiple letters from America in order to make her trip report. I despair of getting any real information from Carey. John Berry has already told us more about Carey's trip than he has.

Marc Ortlieb... Monaclave was my twenty-third science fiction convention. That is not the reason why I felt morbid at that one, but it might explain why I'm not enjoying conventions as much as before. Befcon was the last really good one I attended, and it seems that I won't get to either of the Adelaide conventions. :: You have probably heard the story of my moving day, so I won't

go into enough details to make a grown man cry. For instance, Melbourne fandom nearly lost three of its staunchest members (at least in muscle power) when we tried to lift the huge bookcase up the narrow staircase at Johnston Street. For one horrible moment, Charles was left holding the whole thing while most of its weight was balanced on a bannister which threatened to give way at any moment. (The bannister now wobbles noticeably.) If the bannister had collapsed while Don and Henry were ducking underneath it, then whammo...they would have been crushed, and Charles probably would have fallen down the stair-well after them. Fanerdammerung. At any rate, you've seen me at my new quarters. Others are invited to drop in.

I liked the Thurogood/Knapp collaboration and agree with a lot of your ideas about the good life. I don't know any islands in gulfs where I could lead a similar life, and I think I would need Someone to share that existence for it to be a Good Life. I keep hoping...and hoping...and hoping. :: Andrew Brown another Philip Dick fan! My very best friend, Lesleigh, has a theory that Dick fans form a special magic circle even within fandom. I know two people who got together because both were Dick fans, and I have made some very good friendships indeed (Charles Taylor and Allen Evans among them) because of this interest. Talk to me about Phil Dick's work next time you see me. :: Merv Barrett: Chris Priest turned out not to be just the English version of David Gerrold. Maybe he is in England, but he did a good job here, and certainly seems to have sparked a lot of action at the Workshop. I didn't see as much of him as I expected to, but I was in the middle of packing to move at the time. I'd still like to see Brian out here as well.

DECEMBER 1976 MAILING

Leigh and John F: BOF 6 - great. Full of that nostalgia for things never experienced. But Harding did, and I wish he would write a few more articles like that these days. Reading that magazine is the first time in a long time that I've recaptured that giddy feeling of being a fan.

John B: Philosophical Gas 35 is the best Bangsund magazine I've read for a long time. I don't think anyone has summarised the November 11 fracas better in any magazine. Why not try selling that article to an overseas magazine? There was one better summary, though. Bernie and I were having lunch one day with Bob Cugley (who is ST's printer) and were introduced to a bloke who had spent several years working in a university bookstore in Sierra Leone. He said that the newspapers in Sierra Leone reported political events in Australia in one phrase: it was a "bloodless coup". Nobody in an African country would maintain the kind of illusions which Whitlam spouted after he had been given the shove. (The paradox is that the African leaders have great respect for Fraser because he had achieved power in the accepted manner - conducting a bloodless coup.)

Catherine: Thanks for some of the pieces that your kids wrote. The attitude by school kids towards s f must have changed since 1969 and 1970, when I was teaching. Most of the kids at Ararat had little idea of what s f was. They thought it heresy to go beyond day-to-day events...a sort of unknown idea, to use the imagination. I managed to get a few fifth-formers writing imaginative pieces because I typed up their pieces and ran them off on the duplicator. A few kids amazed themselves (and me). They write much more direct, fresher pieces than do s f fans when they begin to write stories, mainly, I think, because s f fans become so bogged down in the conventions of the genre that they stop observing anything for themselves. :: You certainly have more fun teaching than I ever had. But I'm not well known for any capacity for having fun.

Welcome to John McPharlin: Lots of good, funny bits, but I can't comment on most of them. Some, perhaps. :: Paul Stokes is the sort of person I met... and survived... after I joined fandom. I was too scared to speak to anyone for awhile, but I did know the people who produced ASFR. They put up with me. :: I, too, have an early Edmonds photo. It shows him with short hair. The photo was published in SFC 8, but I'm sure Leigh is glad that there are few copies of that issue still around. :: Definitely not a cassette apa. I have a great dislike of my own voice on tape, and I wouldn't want to bore people too much. At least when I type notes for an apa, I sound something like I want to sound (tap...tap...ding!). :: I like your definition of most fan parties in Melbounre: "to keep out undesirables, we must limit attendance to those who care to come along." :: I've almost never had the experience of meeting people I with whom I went to school. That's because I've moved away from both Oakleigh (where I went to school for 10 out of 12 years) and Bacchus Marsh (the other two). I've never even heard of anybody from those schools. I suppose most kids got apprenticeships and the others went overseas to study. Or something. :: The best thing to do with a public service job, I would have thought, is get out of it. Or save enough money to go travelling. It's worth changing jobs every so often, if you can get away with it. I do it, but I don't make much money.

Keith: Your advice (re. the supremely silly situation which sparked off my comments in SS2) is quite sound and rather hard to put into practice. The only thing that has worked for me is to stay away from the young lady for as long as possible. :: I keep hearing of people who are ex-members of Ayn Rand fandom (or ex-Ayn Rand fans). Atlas Shrugged struck me at the age of sixteen, and it started me Thinking About Things. A dangerous course to take. So I'm still grateful for Ms Rand, even if I can see now that she is as barmy as an alligator stuck in dry mud. Specifically, reading that book began the process of weaning me from traditional religion. It made me fairly right wing for awhile (although... well, maybe... I'll discuss that later), until a few years at university broadened my opinions a bit. Specifically, Rand's stuff is emotionally immature, which is probably why Big Mal likes it.

Paul: I would really like to get to Adelaide again, but I just can't see it happening for awhile. No money, you know. It's all going on SFC at the moment (each issue will cost about $600 to print and post out, unless I can get lots more subscriptions, or some advertising; all help received). :: It's easy now to see Kennedy as very weak indeed. But the sort of forceswhich kept Nixon in power were probably against Kennedy, so he must have had a hard time. Specifically, evidence keeps comihg to light about the extreme pressures exerted on him to go ahead with the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Marc: Another good quote: "We Adelaidians ain't exactly slouches when it comes to twisted minds." We had noticed. :: No record is currently playing. The record player is downstairs, and the radio has The Goons on. I should listen to it, but somehow I keep typing these inane comments. ' ::
You'd better not start me talking about cats. We have five of them in our house. One of them is Flodnap. He's mine. Julius is a black kitten that once lived downstairs at Carlton Street. He's Flodnap's cat. I don't want him; all he does is ask for food. Solomon was the first cat that Elaine acquired, back in 71 or 72. Ishtar is a friendly furrball (Persian) who purs a lot. Apple Blossom is a neurotic black and white cat which Elaine brought home as a stray about a year ago. Elaine likes cats a lot - better than Frank or I do. Ever heard the sound of five cats munching, at dinner-time? (It beats the sound of one hand clapping.) Our life is a constant battle to keep edibles away from these cats. Worse; Flodnap has changed personality, from being a mouse to a hooligan. It's hell at our house, I tell you. ::

Don: As the first piece in this issue shows, I could just as easily go back to living by myself. But I'm the first to admit that your personality and mine are quite different, and I've noticed how you can pick up emanations from other people and somehow make yourself the centre of a group. I tend to react against the group: somehow you make it react with you. But I must admit that it is interesting living in a house with other people for the first time. I suspect that we would react against each other more, except that we have a common enemy -- the five cats.

Kitty: I'm not quite sure why you react so strongly to passages like the one you quote from Barbara Cartland. Tell us the worst, Kitty; are you trying to hint that every day of your married life is not like that? :: What about a Trip Report? I think I've seen you three times since you arrived back, and I haven't had any real conversation. So what were your impressions of all those exciting places you went to?

Here's a turn-up - a legible Andrew Brown. :: The beginning of the Ditmars. Ha haa! Remind me to tell you that story someday. :: In the latest Hitchcock movie, whose name I have quite forgotten, Bruce Dern is brilliant. I didn't even recognise him as the same character who hammed his way through Silent Running. :: I hope I did not give the impression that I went about the Carlton Gardens deliberately peering at cuddling douples! You see; there was a park bench (it's still there; I've moved) in the park on the other side of the road from my front window. Since often I stared out that window from my work table, often I watched the changing colours and movements of the park, including the variety of people who rested on that park bench. Including cuddling couples. Who I didn't appreciate, since they only reminded me that I don't have anybody to go park bench-cuddling with. :: Susan was not implying that the Hugo presentations at Torcon were ghastly, but that Hugo-presentation-night at Torcon was. It was the events long after the Hugo banquet that Susan and I and at least one other person will long remember. (Say no more.)

Mike Horvat: A continued extraordinary life. Makes us who live straight, ordinary lives shake our heads with amazement. I hope you get over your money worries although, from your account, you are making even less than I am. I don't know anybody but Lee Harding who is making less than I am. (Anybody who is my age or older, that is.) But you do seem to be using your resources well. House prices in your area sound a lot cheaper than they are here. The house from which I have been so recently evicted sold last week for $48,200, and that's a cheap house for the area. Since I have little money, and the banks are lending very little, I didn't buy. The house you bought, to judge from your description, would cost at least $100,000 here in the area I want to live in.

Thurogood/Knapp: I've heard Carey described as many things, but never before as "quite lovable". He must be so completely different when he is away from Australia than he is when he's here. He's just had his hair cut to short-back-and-sides, if you can imagine that. We welcome the news that he actually works in the garden when he visits overseas people. This will be of interest to all sorts of people here who are waiting to see Carey work. :: Dorothy Dunnett is not taking over this bit of Melbourne fandom. I'm pleased to say that I have not read one page of one of her books. :: I can only agree with what you say about "shared experience", and all that. But in fandom there are usually only males to "share experience" with; this has limited appeal. In fact, many fannish conversations revolve around the question of what we can do to attract more unattached females into fandom. And the question is never answered, although Roger reports that MUSFA has improved a bit this year. :: The page of quotes were the best I've seen for a long time. I'll have to put them in my Little Black Book.

Jan Finder: I wish I had as much access to the American convention circuit as you have (although you are still a long way from most of the cons). That's a part of my wish-dream which I left out from my essay at the beginning of the article. It's because I feel as you do, that happiness is being home. So, even if somehow I gained the means to do some of the things I want to do, I still might not travel. Or I would drop everything, attend lots of conventions in the US, England, Europe, etc, visit all the touristy places, visit all the off-beat places, etc. I suspect not, especially as I became so travel-weary on my last trip. :: But there are still a lot of people Over There who I must see sometime, somehow. Britain in 79? - I hope.

David: I hate gardening, too. It's my father's favourite pastime. :: I still haven't visited Gurner Street since you moved in. Sometime soon. :: Nothing to say about your notebook except that I would aid my writing endeavours if I kept a notebook in similar detail. As it is, my Little Black Book has only things that other people have said. I begain to write "My 1976", worte several thousand words, and am currently stranded on Australia Day weekend 1976. It's going to be a long year.

FEBRUARY 1977 MAILING

Charles K: Misinformation about mental illness seems to be almost tot l (as can be seen be seen by the number of s f writers who still interpret "schizophrenic" as as "multiple personalities"). Nobody ever does know whether what this or that psychiatrist says about mental illness is any indication of the true situation. So no wonder people don't have much sympathy for your bouts - they probably don't know what to have sympathy with. I've heard that there are now some good drugs now to alleviate depression. I wonder what would cure mine? (This remark is not completely frivolous. Maybe my periods of depression are partly physiological, since sometimes they have little relation to anything that has happened to me. But I wouldn't feel like going to a psychiatrist to find any answers.)

Carey: You actually like it when things are happening all the time in a communal house? Everybody to his own... To me, a guarantee of privacy is essential. I don't need the privacy itself all the time, but I like to know that I can close the door and that nobody will disturb me. That's why I have the workroom door closed at the moment. I suspect, though, at Brunswick Street, that you could lead whichever life you wanted - door open all the time, or door closed. :: I haven't heard anything more about the proposed 1000-page fanzine. Have you?

Keith: With your comments, those of Marc, and John Bangsund's in PG36, it looks as if this will become a cat fandom apa. Good. I've met Tybalt, and he really is a great cat. :: You forget to mention your real triumph in your writing career - getting Ted White to pay you for your stories. :: Your description of Conan and his ilk shows clearly why I refuse to read that sort of stuff.

Don & Maz: You deserve a rest after moving my furniture. Frank and Elaine and I decided that if we ever did win Tattslotto that we would buy a new house, move the books and records, buy new furniture, and simply leave the old stuff here rather than move it down the stairs. :: Interesting of you to mention all those dinners at Brunswick Street. There are some of us who are still waiting for invitations. (Yes, you are invited here any time, as long as you give us a bit of warning. You might be sorry; I might get the job of cooking for you.) :: At least you found a way to survive at Monaclave. I didn't. The lack of

oxygen in the place, and the heat, drove me away after one day. :: Three cheers for the suggestion to find a new lot of panelists for convention panels in Australia. As one of the people to be called on, during recent years, to appear on more and more panels, I will agree that soon even the most energetic panelist has run out of new things to say. So let's get some new panelists who might have new things to say.

Bill: Where did you get the typesetting done for the cover? How much does the place cost? Is there any chance that I might get access to a Varityper? I say this because (a) I want future offset issues of SFC to be done in 8pt Univers, as is No 51 (b) I can't afford it. It would be much better if I could hire time on somebody else's machine and type each issue myself. :: A brilliant article on the early aviators. What Capt Johns never told us in the Biggles books.

Christine: Since you are one of Them, you seem to have the typical reactionary attitude to the law ("it's just as well litigation is expensive"), quite ignoring the fact that expensive law serves only the few people who can afford to weigh the costs of litigation against the costs of losing a case. The whole tendency of lawyers to protect their own interests has led to a situation where the law is nothing but a horrid joke to most people...a force that can only work against all but those who are already financially well-protected. :: On the other hand, I will support one of your other reactionary attitudes, that there "comes a point when you're fed up with tolderance and understanding and want a bit of peace and privacy". I never did have too much tolerance and understanding, anyway.

Robin: I thought Chris' manuscript went a bit cheaply. If I had had the money, I would have paid at least $100 for it. But I don't suppose anybody else had the money, either. :: I thought Chris and Vonda survived very well, or put on a good face, even if they didn't... I would have thought that endless party between Monaclave and Chris' farewell party would have been a bit much for anybody.

Eric: Thanks for the first bit of the Lindsay Trip Report. I even start to feel jealous when I read about meeting all those people again. I don't feel jealous when I read about endless trips by Greyhound. More trip report, please. :: I think somebody should tackle Dying Inside properly sometime. Perhaps by a much better author. It's the main character's attitude which is so galling. Compare him with the main character of a Stanley Elkin novel, or of a book I have just finished reading, A Fan's Notes, by Frederick Exley. The main characters of these mainly confessional novels are certainly defeated, by both their own standards and the world's, but they don't set about to justify that defeat. They just show the way things happen, and have a huge enjoyment of the world. And, of course, they are interesting people. Selig is just an extended zero. And Elkin and Exley are funny, and Silverberg never is. Which is the real reason why Dying Inside is close to unreadable. :: I don't agree with you about cutting down the public service, if one still believes in a fully employed work force. It doesn't really matter whether they are paid for out of your tax money or not (and how much of the money you pay for a packet of soup goes into the pockets of the advertising men who promote it?). The economy is based on how much money is sluicing around the economic drain pipes. This fact seems to have escaped our Government's attention. What is obvious is that a distressing amount of what money is around is going into the coffers of a very small number of enterprises. Only in future years will we be able to measure the real extent of negative distribution of wealth that is going on at the moment.

Paul: Maybe I have not been reading the newspapers too carefully recently, but as yet I have not seen a listing of the simplest reason why the present government would be scared of becoming a republic. The most likely way of choosing a President would be by five-yearly, or seven-yearly, ballot. Since inevitably the contenders would line up under party banners, it is likely the President would be an ALP candidate, since the decision would be made on the basis of an absolute majority of votes throughout the country. No gerry-mandering. No big states/little states. Just a straight vote which would register the real temper of the country as it has been during most of the last 25 years. (For instance, a President elected in 1968, then 1974, would certainly have been left-wing.) More importantly, no excuse for nominees by the present parliamentary government. And, presumably, a new constitution with quite a few of the present "democratic" loopholes closed, and a guarantee that the government would remain in the hands of the party with the largest number of seats in the lower house. (I'm becoming enthusiastic about this idea, just by writing about it. I must find out if there is a local branch of a republic party nearby.) :: The fanzines I nominated on my "Locus Poll" were 1. SFC (at least it'll get one first vote). 2. Wrinkled Shrew (Pat and Graham Charnock from England; the funniest fanzine in the world, except for whatever Brosnan is printing these days and not sending me). 3. Maya (Rob Jackson; very close to what I'd like SFC to look like; more fannish than SFC is ever likely to be.) 4. Starling (of course). 5. Fanew Sletter (of course). Then I realised I had left out what is certainly the most rapidly improving fanzine I see, Van Ikin's Enigma, from Sydney, which must certainly be considered for an Australian Award this year (notice how carefully I avoided writing, "Ditmar"). Take your pick. I don't feel like nominating an American fanzine, on principle, but Starling and Mota are very good indeed. Was there a Khatru in 1976? If it were appearing regularly, Khatru would probably be my Top Fanzine. :: The Lessings and the Lems would be my only nominations for Penguin Modern Classics. And then only Cyberiad of Lem, and Solaris, if it were re-translated by Kandel. And - may I submit - Hothouse? Still a very underrated book. Briefing goes off the rails a bit, but Memoirs of a Survivor is far ahead of anything appearing inside the field.

Michael O'B: You've got more courage than I, to attempt to write about Monaclave. Thanks for fondly remembering moments at which I wasn't present to see. I really regret missing out on the first Paul Stevens Show in umpteen years. :: You read a lot more than I do. :: That's the best episode of Superfan for awhile. But the idea of William Right in charge of the Comorg Computer...!

Catherine: You give the same feeling in your fanzines as Susan Wood does in hers...that all life is going on simultaneously, and that most of it is good fun (even if exhausting). I was really pleased to hear (now that I'm a strong union man again) that the form of the annual dinner was a gathering of the VSTA. Does that mean that all the staff are members of the VSTA? Or just that the VSTA forms a more jolly social group than the staff as a whole? What about sending a report on goings-on to The Secondary Teacher (the editorial staff maintains a policy of running material by teacher-members wherever possible)? Bernie and I never quite know what is happening in the schools, unless somebody tells us.

Marc: I am another dog-hater, with two exceptions. The people for whom I was working last year (and for whom I still do a day a week; I lead a confusing life) have a superb little poodle named Nicky. It always remembers me and runs to welcome me, and it likes a tickle on the tummy, and is very like a cat in most important regards. My friends Rick and Reen have a small, friendly Australian terrier named Em (short for Emiliano Zapata) who is also very human and humane. I don't like big dogs. :: I'm glad that somebody had a good year.

And the extent to which my 1976 was not good was the extent to which, as you put it, I failed to get to grips with the opposite sex. :: I thought Melanie's "Brand New Key" was a brilliant song. Still do. As nice a piece of sexy come-on as has ever been played on AM radio. A lot of Melanie's songs sounded naive, but were really stilettos hidden in children's mittens. Charlie and I once listened to several Melanie albums at one sitting (they are his, not mine), and they have an impressive effect. But you know that already. You seem to like her very latest stuff, but Charlie doesn't. I haven't heard the last few albums. :: I like a lot of the people you have on your pop list, but would not put them on mine. I don't think I would make up my own list at the moment. A lot of the people I've always liked best have recorded lousy material during the last year or so. I've never thought of myself as a Bob Dylan fan, but Blood on the Tracks was the best pop lp of 1975 and Desire the best of 1976. Supertramp's Crisis? What Crisis? is the other album that stands way out above everything else. :: I've heard of going overboard about cats, but...! Well, I felt the same way when I met Flodnap. Now he's just one of the gang, although he still likes sitting on my lap sometimes. He still retrieves.

John F: And just how do you evaluate something like the Innovations Program? It's typical of Fraser Government thinking that it has to be "evaluated" in a cut-and-dried fashion. The aim, I presume, is to find ways to cut back the program as far as possible - and your aim, I should imagine, is to head 'em off at the canyon. Your "1977" idea, by the way, helped to spark off my beginning piece in this issue.

Susan: I've replied to a lot of this in my last letter or so. I too got Science Fiction Five-Yearly. I don't think I was well known enough last time to get it. :: See my reply to Keith elsewhere. Falling in love with inappropriate people is hardly something one can predict or avoid. Just recover from.

John B: Thanks for the research on ANZAPA. You will notice that, of the membership list for APA-A Mailing 1, Bernie Bernhouse is the only person who has, as far as I know, still the same address. (Michael O'Brien joined later. He has the same address, too.) :: Why not join Australian History fandom? John Alderson has been part of it for years. Semaphie is an Australian History fanzine, as far as I know. Did you come across any good books on the history of inner Melbourne? I realise that I need to do a lot of research for a novel I'm planning to write (any year now), and I have not begun to investigate the resources. Or maybe I should move to South Australia and find out about SA local history from you.

****

FANZINE REVIEW

I've actually found an American fanzine I like. (Apart from Khatru, and Starling, and all those American fanzines that I like, of course.) A new American fanzine I like. It is:

Scintillation 11: Carl Bennett, PO Box 8502, Portland, Oregon 97207; $US3.50 pa.

I'm not sure whether future issues will keep up the standard of No 11, which is high. And the quality is good because of an article by John Shirley, called "Pointless Hostility". Shirley exposes Harlan Ellison as a bit of a fraud, and then pours shit over a book called The Craft of Science Fiction, edited by R Bretnor. Shirley is the first US writer for years to laugh to scorn the present SFWA-type assumptions in s f writing, and I could only cheer. There's an article by Effinger, too. Last stencil typed 3 April 1977.*