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like most smokers, and voters) and you'll enjoy the music. If you want this stuff for the music, that is. If you want it for interior decoration, get it all through the *Trading Post*, and don't spend more than \$200. For \$200 you can get some really splendid-looking dead or dying sound equipment. 'Come on over', you can say to your friends, 'and have a look at my knackered-michi.' Impress them no end. When they ask to hear it, tell them it needs a few adjustments to the catatonic double-plunging sennheisers, and play something for them on the tranny.

I confess that I spent a little more on my new gear than I have earned from writing articles for ABR. I confess further that I really didn't need any of it. I could have moved the television to another room. I could have bought a better set of headphones, and a blindfold, and stayed in the same room as the telly. But common sense of that degree of sophistication is not what I'm good at, so, apart from the faithful old turntable, we now have two of everything. The money ran out before I could make suitable provision for playing records in my study. This is sad, because every now and then Sally and I suddenly get in the mood to play a record, only it's a different record we have in mind, so we either compromise like civilized adults, by playing my record, or I retreat to my study, where my choice of music is limited to tapes, cassettes and whatever's offering on Melbourne's eighteen radio stations. This can be particularly distressing when the record I want to listen to is, say, the Symphony No.2 by Leevi Madetoja. I know I should have taped it, but for some reason I never have, and at any given moment hardly any of Melbourne's eighteen radio stations are playing Madetoja's symphonies.

What I bought was this: one AM/FM/SW tuner, one cassette deck, one open-reel tape deck and one set of headphones, or earspeakers, as the classier models are called these days. All well-known brands, nothing complicated, but nothing to be entirely ashamed of either. I'm having a lot of fun with them. They make a wonderful noise. The only thing that troubles me about them—well, it's not about them actually, it's about me. The thing is, I'm just your average Australian book editor and all-round lit'ry mechanic, you see, pretty sheltered Protestant childhood and so on, spent my formative years in a house that had many books but very little machinery, nothing much more technologically advanced than a mantel wireless set and an ice-chest, and—look, do you mind if I start a new paragraph? (The black button with the zig-zag sort of arrow, yes, that's the one, thanks.)

The thing is, these four machines I've bought have, between them, one hundred and thirteen different knobs, sockets, buttons, keys, switches, dials, indicator lights and so on, some of them with multiple functions. I don't know what possessed me to count them, but I did. I then went round and counted all the controls on the other machinery in the house—the turntable, the other tape recorder, cassette deck, tuner, speakers, headphones and (cheating a bit, because it's only mono) clock-radio—and found a further 152 of them. Unable to stop myself, I counted also 48 plugs and bits of bare wire that connect to sockets and terminals, and nine power leads. Altogether there are 322 separate bits of electrical business of this sort—and I know what every one of them is for!

I don't want to get emotional about this, but I've been trying to get on with Schoenberg for at least fifteen years, and despite all this high-tech sound-reproducing machinery, I still can't get through to him. Is there a switch I haven't discovered yet? Is there some ultradynamic MOS-FET IC filter (capture ratio better than +0.001 MHz at 30 kilojoules IHF per second, all channels driven into 17.5 ohms on a 5-pole elliptical hyperno) on the more expensive models that allows one instant comprehension of Schoenberg?

Or have I wasted an awful lot of time studying machinery and not listening to music? Arnold, forgive me!

Wordgames

By John Bangsund

'Am I still on the payroll?' I says to Mr McLaren, not having heard from him for a while.

'My word,' he expletes, or something like that. 'People have stopped complaining about the reviews.'

Well, I realize now that was a very cutting remark. At the time I thought it was one of them non-secateurs.

I set out this time to talk about why I don't review books. It's a subject close to my heart. I've always thought I shouldn't write book reviews because I'm not good enough. I have a profound respect for writers, editors, publishers, readers and book-buyers, and I have never yet found a satisfactory way of writing for all of these people at once, which is what I reckon a good book-reviewer should do, dealing honestly with the work at hand and yet encouraging everybody concerned.

I did a fair bit of research for this piece about why I don't review books. I read all the reviews in the *Age* and the *Australian* for a month, and all the back issues of *ABR*, and then I read some of the books that I'd read about, and at the end of all this I took a good look at myself, shuddered, and said 'JB', which is what I call myself under self-examination, 'you are an idiot!'

All those books I want and can't afford — all those books I don't want that would fetch a few dollars from even the meanest secondhand bookseller I know — and so many of them could have been mine, all mine, legally and respectfully come by, for nothing more than the price of a few hours' thought and prevarication. Oh, I could kick myself.

After that public confession, obviously I won't be able to review books in *ABR*, not under my own name anyway. I've suggested to Mr McLaren that I do them under an assumed name (Phillip Admass, Max Harrods, Gouth Whitelaw, Menning Clarke — there's no end really to the invention of a creative proofer, and all good for sales), and the sort of reviews I'd like to do are those omnibus round-up things, a dozen or so books at a time. I won't even ask for payment, so long as I don't have to give the books back.

I haven't heard from the boss about this proposal yet. Maybe he has all the reviewers he needs. Maybe he is all the reviewers, and I've accidentally tumbled to him. Anyway I've been getting in some

practice on writing reviews, just in case, and here's my first lot. Not having any real books to work on, I've had to make them up.

Galah Occasions

William Bligh's previously unknown water-colours are handsomely treated in *Breadfruit Upon The Waters*, a magnificent volume in AKUP's finest tradition. In a limited edition of 130, it is not overpriced at \$800, and Steph Campbell's sensitive and finely wrought commentary in no way detracts from its intrinsic value. If Bligh had been anyone else these pathetic little drawings would never have been reused from their well-deserved obscurity, but the book has indubitable historical interest and will be eagerly sought after by investors (If you miss out, write to me C/- *ABR* with your best offer over \$1000.)

A quite different sort of picture book is Middlemiss and Swift's *Great Australian Colour Book of Historic Wombats from the Air*. This must be the definitive work on the subject, and Rigby's have done it in grand style. Perry Middlemiss's application of computer technology to the aerial study of natural history is innovative, and Helen Swift's photography is nothing short of stunning. At \$14.95 this quite hefty paperback represents something of a bargain.

Cashing in on the success of the Salami Sisters, the Boloney Brothers (Lee Harding and John Bangsund) have published *Cain Get No Satisfaction*, a sizzling story of the secret world of balding men in their forties, 'a world' (I quote from the blurb) 'totally alien and unknown to today's youth', and no wonder. The chapter 'Dropping Acid', for example, from which one might expect to discover something useful about the world we live in, in fact is about their experiences in Form 2 General Science, circa 1951. I don't know who Cain is or was, but I didn't like it much either.

There is far more interesting fiction in the collection of stories by Leanne Frahm, *Head Hunting in Darkmost Queensland*. There is deft social satire in such stories as 'Pineapple Poll' and 'The Cane Mutiny', and haunting, one might almost say harrowing, imagery in the title story and 'Fifth Man in a Fruit Quartet'. Ms Frahm is a fine writer, with a delicious sense of the absurd and an ap-

parent commitment to the proposition that all vegetables are brothers.

The Portable Australian Authors series, a most worthwhile project, nevertheless seems to be scraping the barrel with the latest volume, *Michael Massey Robinson*. It is true, as Gary Mason says in his 26-page introduction, that Robinson has been neglected, but there may be good reason for this. The works selected represent Robinson at his best and are not without interest, but \$6.95 seems exorbitant for a 32-page paperback. One recalls that *Marie Bjelke-Petersen*, published in this series last year, cost the same but was almost twice the size. The Robinson may be better value, but one could ask for more bulk for the money.

I don't go much for poetry, I must confess, but I quite enjoyed Liz Murray's *The Boys Who Couldn't Wait for the Funeral*. As an evocation of the events of 1975, albeit in the form of fantasy, it is quite compelling, and the central characters — Big Mac, Li'l Phil, J. D., Haricot, The White-Haired Boyo and the rest — one recognizes without difficulty. The longish account of a secret meeting between Rupert Murdoch, Bob Hawke and Tirath Khemlani (Murray gives them other names) in the games room of a government hostel on Brisbane Avenue, Barton, I found unconvincing. Otherwise it's an entertaining romp, and you never find out whether The Big Feller gets his funeral or not, since the story ends at midnight on 10 November.

I have no idea how Thomas K. Nearly's latest novel ends, because I haven't got that far yet. Designed to be sold in supermarkets and corner milk bars for a fraction of the price of normal books, *Rip-off Republic* has been published in the form of a toilet roll, an interesting approach to marketing alternatives that will ensure the book's eventual value as a collector's item. I'm finding it excellent reading as toilet rolls go, but it's well below the author's best work.

The Oxford Companion to Puddings (C and D Ashby, eds) is good in places, but I can't quite see its relevance, and at \$57.95 it seems rather remote. Likewise Michael Tolley's *Adelaide Studies in Biblical Engineering, Series XVII*, which sold out before publication, but for the life of me I can't see why. On the other hand, Harold G. Nye's wistful autobiography, *Two or Three on a Tower*, was remaindered before publication — another first for this almost totally unknown author.