

C H U N D E R !

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BRIAN ALDISS IN SYDNEY

(our correspondent reports)

"Brian Aldiss must be ruing the day he came to Sydney University to speak about Science Fiction.

His address was on Monday the third in Stephen Roberts, always a flattering venue, with its nice foyer, cordless mikes - even a water jug and glasses ... but the worst place in the world if the doors are left open, inviting people to wander in and out. Aldiss, already tired from his trip from the U.K. and from interviews, was obviously distracted. He even said so!

The talk itself was in excellent style, anecdotal at first, but expressing serious thoughts about the genre. Happily, Aldiss opened up to questions early on in the piece.

This was a fiasco; we know that SF readers make no particular claims to intelligence, but some of the questions directed to Aldiss really were insane. Moreover, one pseudo-intellectual in the peanut gallery insisted on pummelling Aldiss with l-o-n-g and plentiful words on the rise of the American novel; just a stir, but boring. Well handled by Aldiss, incidentally.

The coup de grace, both for us and Aldiss, had yet to come. Ian Langham of the philosophy department had previously announced that his evening tutorial would commence when he, Ian Langham, decided he had had enough of Aldiss's talk. This occurred at 6.30. Langham crossed the theatre in front of Aldiss (who was in the middle of a question) causing the (apparently to Aldiss) spontaneous exodus of a few dozen people.

It's hard to imagine a ruder or more unfair treatment of a speaker. At any rate Aldiss decided to end his own misery at that point and closed the proceedings.

In short, the talk was well presented and received - but it's hard to believe that Aldiss could know that!" (Nigel Douglass, Physics IV: this letter originally appeared in the April 18 edition of HONI SOIT)

(more)

"Extrapolation is a very important feature of Science Fiction, according to Brian Aldiss. It is also a very dangerous tool for judging human motivations, as Nigel Douglass's letter (Honi 18/4/78) inadvertantly demonstrates.

Since I am emphatically not in the business of being grossly 'rude' and 'unfair' to eminent guest lecturers, let me set the record straight about my involvement with, and attitude towards Science Fiction in general, and the Aldiss lecture in particular.

(1) My HPS course was the first (and to my knowledge) is still the only course available on the Sydney campus which makes it possible for students to formally study Science Fiction.

(2) It was through my direct action that a considerable sum of money was contributed towards the expenses of Mr Aldiss's visit to Sydney University.

(3) Approximately one quarter of Mr Aldiss's audience of 300 were HPE students, who were there only because I had concalled one of my

lectures in order to enable them to attend.

(4) My announcement before the lecture that the HPS seminar for the evening would begin when I left the lecture theatre represented nothing other than the communication of an essential piece of organizational information to a small number of students who would otherwise have been uncertain about what was happening to their 6.15 seminar. Since final arrangements for the Aldiss lecture were completed only a few days beforehand there had been no opportunity to make such an announcement during the previous week's seminar.

(5) My 'walkout' was in no way a conscious or deliberate attempt to torpedo Mr Aldiss's performance. I definitely did NOT leave because I had 'had enough of Aldiss's talk'. In fact I found his talk both interesting and amusing. I left because I was already 15 minutes late for a seminar which the University pays me to conduct.

(6) When I rose to leave, Mr Aldiss had just finished answering a question, and if another question was already under way by the time I crossed the floor, it was not my intention to disrupt it.

(7) I totally failed to foresee that the departure of myself and a handful of my students would precipitate the result that it did. What apparently happened was that our exit triggered off a snowball effect, so that other members of the audience seized the chance of leaving at the same time. This may well have been a reflection of the fact that, as Mr Douglass correctly observed, question time had been less than inspiring due to the verbiages of a certain 'pseudo-intellectual in a peanut gallery'. Even so, I was flabbergasted that the exit of a couple of dozen people after about 20 minutes of question time had already elapsed was interpreted by Mr Aldiss as a sufficient reason for bringing his performance to a close. (Inaccurate extrapolation on his part?) And I can well understand that the upwards of 250 people who remained in the Theatre must have been furious. At any rate, since I was already outside the building when the abrupt termination occurred, it was not within my power to rectify the situation.

(8) The reason I had not forewarned Mr Aldiss of my impending departure was that he had arrived looking tired and hassled, with a large audience already impatient that the lecture was 10 minutes late in beginning. Under these circumstances, I did not think it fair to burden him with a piece of information which I regarded as trivial from his point of view. In any case, I have now written a letter to Mr Aldiss expressing my regret that I was inadvertantly responsible for a misunderstanding which had such unexpectedly cataclysmic results.

If the Science Fiction Association was to lend me a time machine, I would be happy to re-live the evening of April 3rd in such a way that Mr Aldiss is (will have been?) fully apprised of our intention to leave during question time. However, if Mr Douglass makes any further gratuitous inferences about my alleged 'rudeness' and 'unfairness' I shall be tempted to borrow a people-eating Dalek instead " (Ian Langham, Lecturer in History and Philosophy of Science: this letter originally appeared in the May 5 edition of HONI SOIT)

And a five issue sub will go to the first person correctly to identify the 'pseudo-intellectual in the peanut gallery'.

FANZINES RECEIVED THE MENTOR 24, March 1978 (Ron L Clarke, 6 Bellevue Road, Faulconbridge, New South Wales, the usual or two for \$1.50) This is Australia's longest-running fanzine, although this is, as Ron says in his editorial, his fourth bite at the cherry. The cover, by Virgil Finlay, is reproduced from a drawing in the collection of Ron Graham, who apparently owns the reproduction rights. Ron has used these covers occasionally, and they lend some attraction to a package which otherwise, at 75¢ for 17 pages, would look a little thin. Apart from the editorial there are four short items, the best of which is by Jack Wodhams: when Jack is funny, he is usually very so. Bert Chandler's piece on covers for his novels is too short, as is John Alderson's note

on men in science fiction. Now while I would have preferred Bert's article to be longer, I think it unlikely that John Alderson's would have been improved by greater wordage: John writes in a way which is in my view too loosely based on what some people call facts and far too strongly based upon opinion. The longest item, Dianne Southgate's book review, shows that one can write pieces too solidly based upon fact: even though two books are dealt with, four pages of plot summary are a little too much for my taste. // The strength of THE MENTOR in the old days was, I think, in the letter column and in Ron Clarke's editorials (mainly for their semi-conscious humour). You can't write all of the letter column, Ron, but you might do well to editorialize for more than a page.

THE HAG AND THE HUNGRY GOBLIN 2, undated but April/May 1978 (Christine and Derrick Ashby, P.O. Box 175, South Melbourne, Victoria 3205, available for letters, contributions or trade, or for \$1 a copy) Here we have about 20 pages of fanzine! it would be helpful to be precise, I know, but I'm not sure that one should count a couple of pages of index to a fanzine whose pages are unnumbered. The longest piece in the issue is probably Derrick Ashby's polemic on UNICON IV. I write 'probably' not because I can't check through the pages to count, but because for one reason or another (perhaps my copy was collated by Tom O' Bedlam) my copy contains only Chris Johnston's excellent illustrations for the article. I did read Derrick's article (or a version of it) in ANZAPA, but perhaps my reading there can't be counted as part of the present fanzine. The best piece in the magazine is Leigh Edmonds' explanation of how aeroplanes fly - one doesn't usually find sustained lunacy at this level except in the speeches and writings of politicians. Keith Taylor's too short article on serial heroes would have been enjoyed much more by me if Keith had been writing about the author he appreciates (Robert E. Howard) and if Derrick had been able to restrain his wish to insert nonsequiturs into the article. Derrick's interpolated comments in the letter column are appropriate, and that's where they ought to be kept. The editorial stuff is mostly deadly serious and related to better ways to organize Australian Fandom (Let's do awards this way; let's schedule conventions this way) - an interesting but I suspect futile exercise. The page and a half of fanzine reviews are far more enjoyable, but remind me to remark that I'm not sure that 'DUFFzines', publications issued to support a candidate's campaign, are a great idea. Mostly they seem to be a funny sort of advertising by people who are not really fanzine fans at all. I found this readable and indeed pleasant, but it needs to be done more often.

GEGENSCHNEIN 33,35, somewhere in 1978 (Eric Lindsay, 6 Hillcrest Avenue, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776, all sort of complicated arrangements but otherwise 90 ¢) Thirty pages in one, ten in the other, and mightily varied pages they are, too - but all rather well duplicated (multi-colours in 33). The Lindsay fanzine, if such a thing is clearly identifiable, consists of Eric natterings interspersed with reader's letters and occasional drawings. For some reason GEGENSCHNEIN looks to me far more like an English fanzine than an American one. GEGENSCHNEIN is the best Australian fanzine (when Eric bothers to put it out) and this is probably because it has so relaxed a style (which is not to be confused with no style at all).

SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW 24, February 1978 (Richard E Geis, 1525 NE Ainsworth, Portland, Oregon 97211, USA, subs \$4.15 one year, \$7.50 two years from Space Age Books) Quarterly, 80 pages, opinionated (sometimes even right), beautifully produced and illustrated, Important authors: if you are interested in science fiction this is hard to do without, and even if you are not there are plenty of goodies.

DUFF Christine Ashby, DUFF administrator, has announced the results of the 1978 DUFF race, which has been won by Paul Stevens (91 votes) from Shayne McCormack (37 votes) and Keith Taylor (19 votes). Paul now goes to IGUANACON.

Christine has a funny line in which she suggests that for a small donation she might publish a list of the prominent fans who did not vote. That's hardly necessary: TAFF used to simply publish a list of those who did vote - it is a fine old tradition, and there is no reason why it should not form part of a DUFF administrator's report, although the names of donors rather than voters is probably the more interesting list.

THE NOVA MOB The May meeting, though not well attended, was one of the best in a long time! perhaps people were frightened off by the imagined scientific content. // The June meeting of the Nova Mob will be held at 3a/19 Marine Parade, St Kilda on Tuesday June 6 at 7.30 pm. John Foyster introduces the subject - The Influence of PLANET STORIES on science fiction. (94 1605 for info on how to get there, if necessary).

AUSTRALIA IN '83 Two groups in Australia are bidding (or planning to bid for the 1983 WORLDCON. Eric Lindsay's GEGENSCHWEIN 35 lists a committee which reads more like a list of pre-supporting members - forty people on a committee! - and this group, bidding for Sydney, is headed by Ken Ozanne, Keith Curtis, and Eric Lindsay. The address for that group is P.O. Box J175, Brickfield Hill, NSW 2000. // Adelaide is also planning to bid for the '83 WORLDCON, and in connection with that bid one should write to Allan Bray, 5 Green Ave, Seaton, South Australia 5023.

MELBOURNE in '79! There's the makings of a small feud in Melbourne concerning who'll go where at Easter in '79. During UNICON IV Derrick Ashby and others were rounding up the support of organizing fandom for an Eastercon in Melbourne. Soon after the convention The Melbourne University group circulated a note indicating that they planned to hold a film weekend at Easter '79. Some people see these groups as competing for customers: I must admit that I would have thought that different groups would have been catered to by the different programs. Stay tuned!

EDITORIAL NOTE The next issue will be a little too early to bring you the lowdown on BAYCON, but the one after that should be just about right.

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