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THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW

No. 3

May 1985

Lucy Sussex on **LEM**

Tolley, Blackford on
**GEORGE TURNER'S
IN THE HEART
OR IN THE HEAD**



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I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

After reading my piece in *TMR* 2 about the medical profession and My Eye, many kind people have asked about my health. No need to worry. Obviously I did not say clearly enough then that my weeping eye was cured by the time I published that article. I haven't continued with the diet strictly, I must admit. Now I allow myself a few cups of coffee per day—but not the caffeine overdose I was giving myself each day from combined amounts of coffee, chocolate, and Coca-cola. I consume little milk, no honey, and as little sugar as possible. And still I've put back on 4 kg of the 8 that I lost when first on my rigid diet. (My addiction to ice cream is the hardest to break. One day I'll write a book-length essay on 'My Addictions'.)

I went to the recommended chiropractor. Every couple of weeks, she does what seem like very simple things to my neck, but it does click as it's supposed to, and it has felt a lot better since I've been going regularly. I do some simple exercises, although I find that some more strenuous 5BX-type exercises, which keep down my weight, make my back feel sore. I still need paracetamol or aspirin to get through a working day.

That's my story for now.

Now it's Elaine's turn for the medical runaround. Her problem is different from mine—it seems to be really incurable. She started to get red lumps on her skin—just a few, and only for an hour a day—last November. By about three months ago, she was getting them all day, and all over her body. And they itched. The local GP sent her to a dermatologist. Hives, he said. No particular cure, but take these tablets. The tablets suppressed the hives all right, but made the inside of Elaine's brain feel like a block of concrete. ('I keep forgetting things', she said, 'and I can't concentrate at work.' 'What's new?' I said. 'That's how I feel most of the time.') Finally I persuaded her to consult the naturopathic doctor whose advice had helped me. She was put onto his partner, who so far doesn't seem any better able to pin down a trigger for the hives than the dermatologist had been. Lots of vitamins haven't helped much. Elaine has been given a yard-long list of things to which she is allergic, but staying away from them hasn't helped her yet. Hell hath no fury like an itchy hive. Does any kind reader know of a sure-fire cure for hives?

I can't think of much news for the moment that isn't gloomy, so I'll leave all that till the end of the column. If I have room for a 'Musely' column, I'll tell you about the concerts we've been to recently. Meanwhile, all those letter-writers are waiting in their folder for a chance to gnash their jaws a bit. I apologise in advance for the sexist bias of this column. Only five women readers sent letters over the last six months. Two of them were featured last issue, and two don't want their letters printed.

Take a letter from the file . . . any letter . . .

ROBERT DAY

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If you really wanted long articles from people about what truly interests them, you could end up with some quite specialist stuff. I could write about the joys of being a Saab owner, or of building plastic kits, or of working in an office of the Department of Health and Social Security, or the pleasures of Shostakovich or Mahler, any one of which I can discuss with authority. But would this sort of thing interest your readership? Surely you'll have to start by assuming a common basis of interest, and that will tend to exclude more esoteric topics—like the above. Otherwise *The Metaphysical Review* will transcend the metaphysical and become the 'totally esoteric review', and perhaps be of little interest to anyone.

'Totally Esoteric Review'? I should have thought of that first. But the magazine is going in the opposite direction from the one that bothers you. Contributors are presuming that *TMR* is actually *SF Commentary* in disguise. I might have to resurrect *SFC* after all. Leigh Edmonds is closing *Rataplan* (*sob*). That was my model for the type of magazine in which people talk interestingly about a wide range of topics. Leigh says that he can't get the letters of comment—not a problem I've faced so far. My feeling is that the subject

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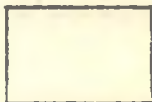
Edited, published, and printed by Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. Phone: (03) 419 4797 AH; (03) 699 8922 BH. Production help, and the covers of Nos. 1 and 2, by Elaine Cochrane. Cover printed by Print Mint, Melbourne. Proof-read (I hope) by Yvonne Rousseau. Available for letters of comment, articles, reviews, phone calls, postcards, traded fanzines, and any other clear indication of interest. Otherwise it's the Big Red X for you (see below).

CHANGES OF ADDRESS:

A few copies have been sent back, marked 'Address Unknown', but I suspect that most copies sent to removed people have been lost to the pulp mill. Send me your new address as soon as you know it.

CUTTING THE MAILING LIST:

Which happens yet again after this issue. If the box below contains the Big Red X, you receive no more issues unless you Do Something (as above).



EDITORIAL POLICY:

Much discussion of this matter in this issue. To summarise: I'm after interesting, well-written articles about topics that interest you.

MONEY:

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matter won't be too important if the quality of writing is. So what about some classy fanzine articles about Shostakovich and Mahler? Leigh Edmonds and I would read them.

My Messiah is the 1976 Marriner performance, on Argo, which is supposed to be faithful to the first London performance in 1743. I've heard plenty of mammoth Messiahs and found them hard to stomach. 'Rejoice greatly' runs, in the Marriner, about twice as fast as in the old versions; it has a wonderful 'tripping' rhythm. This version manages to sound large-scale, even while using reduced forces. (24 September 1984)

I have the Marriner version, and enjoy it a lot - but not as much as the Beecham third version, which I bought recently on the recommendation of Harry Warner Jr (in TMR 2). Great vigour; marvellous singing. ABC-FM recently played a three-hour Messiah marathon, during which every item was performed from a different version. The most striking version was the second Beecham recording, which featured Kathleen Ferrier.

PHILLIP BIRD

Flat 1, 37 Grice Crescent, Essendon, Victoria 3040

I've been glad to see the return to period instruments and the attempt at authenticity in performance of ancient works. It is done with a lot of scholarship and caring to achieve the sound of the time in which the composer lived. Nineteenth-century alterations to baroque works, etc., only distort their original reality. Although performances can sound a bit 'prissy' (or 'overly careful', I'd call it), I honestly find the sounds of original instruments exciting: as close to a trip back in time as we are likely to get and, I believe, closer to the composer's intentions. So roll on, Christopher Hogwood!

I can think of counter-examples. Last year Elaine and I heard a performance by Stephen McIntyre (with orchestra) of a Bach concerto. McIntyre played the piece on the piano, whereas the authenticists would demand a harpsichord. But no other version I've heard has had more of the intensity and excitement of Bach's music. By comparison, I was once silly enough to buy a set of the concertos wherein the orchestra so drowns out the harpsichord that it is difficult to hear the solo line at all. Maybe that was authentic.

PATRICK MCGUIRE

5764 Stevens Forest Rd., Apt. 204, Columbia, Maryland 21045, USA

I happened to catch on public television a documentary about a female trio of sisters called the Roches. They are apparently mildly popular, performing mostly works of their own composition, and I keep vaguely meaning to look for these. More to the point at the moment was that one clip from this documentary was of them doing a three-voice version of parts of the Messiah. And you could understand all the words! Unauthentic in the extreme, I'm sure, but this drastic reduction even below Handel's intentions may well have been worth it.

The Roches have released three records: The Roches, Nurds, and Keep On Doing; and Maggie and Terri Roche had another record, Seductive

Reasoning. You and I seem to be the only people who know about them. Their version of the 'Hallelujah Chorus' is on Keep On Doing.

I'll return to your letter later in this issue.

MIKE SHOEMAKER

2123 North Early St., Alexandria, Virginia 22302, USA

I had intended to loc SF Commentary 62/63/64/65/66, but then I heard that SFC was no more, which blunted the impulse. Let's face it, an unpublished argument is like words in the wind.

The letters of comment to SFC 62/6 are safely tucked away in a folder, waiting to be published. I haven't had time recently. My new 'freelance job' provides the money to publish, but no time for it. And I haven't answered a letter in months.

I'm afraid I don't care for your title, The Metaphysical Review. It sounds too pretentious.

It's meant to sound pretentious. Don't take the title too seriously, or... the magazine itself.

I wish you would do most of the writing (as in Supersonic Snail, which I recall was much better than TMR), and especially musing on books and movies which, as my The Shadow Line shows, is something I like a great deal. You certainly should continue with your Best of the Year lists. If length is a problem, you simply must learn to present them more succinctly (or even without comment), and should not worry about catching up with the last three years.

As a long-time fan of Capra, my favourite director, I am delighted to see that you liked It's a Wonderful Life, which I suppose is my favourite American movie, and second favourite movie behind Carne's The Children of Paradise. Film buffs over here are virtually weaned on It's a Wonderful Life; I first saw it about fifteen years ago. You may be interested in Capra's The Name Above the Title, probably the best Hollywood memoir ever written and an extraordinary rags-to-riches story.

A word of warning - since you're watching a lot of 'pre-1954 black-and-white films on late-night television' - the practice of cutting tv films has become so notoriously rampant in the last ten years or so that it's almost impossible to find any on tv that are uncut. This is true in the US, and I would guess in Australia, too. Even if your stations are good down there, they may not know that they have a cut print. It's practically impossible to find uncut prints outside of film archives. (One of the great things about the American Film Institute, to which I've belonged for the last ten years, is that their shows almost always use prints from the Library of Congress, NY Museum, or studio archives.) Long movies are particular victims. It's a Wonderful Life, for example, is 129 minutes, which means that with commercials it can't be shown in under 2½ hours. How Green Was My Valley, Captains Courageous, and The Quiet Man are just a few examples of films that have been severely mutilated and have not been shown in an uncut form for at least a decade around here. A few months ago they even cut The Maltese Falcon (the entire first hotel sequence) when they showed it on tv. And in

only the second-ever tv showing of Chariots of Fire, they cut out a scene (one of the scenes that showed the anti-Semitism in the English university). I mention all this because I think people should be alerted. The reputations of old movies suffer terribly when people see cut versions, and as an old-movie buff I get furious about this.

I've written a long piece, sparked off by It's a Wonderful Life, for a recent issue of Leigh Edmonds' Rataplan. You've probably seen it already. For years I've listed my two favourite movies as The Birds and 2001: A Space Odyssey, but recently I've thought of replacing them at the top with It's a Wonderful Life and This Sporting Life. I haven't seen Les Enfants du Paradis for twenty years; it's the favourite movie of Don Ashby, among others, so one day I'll see it again.

Tv prints must be pre-cut. Recently the Valhalla (local repertory flick palace) showed Notorious and Spellbound - both magnificent movies, but each missing 10 minutes! Tv prints. Fortunately the print they showed of Rebecca was uncut. Both times that I've seen It's a Wonderful Life on tv, it hasn't shown any obvious lapses of continuity. With any luck, I have seen the whole film.

Thanks for those compliments about my Top Ten Listings and other idle burbles that I've committed to stencil over past years. I promised to keep TMR small, but this issue is already large, so I might fit in 1984's listings. My Favourites for 1981 and 1982 are in the 'Last SF Commentary' issue of Van Ikin's Science Fiction (No. 15). Write to him, at the address given later this issue, if you haven't received that issue.

I've read very little sf in recent years. I started to become disenchanted with it ten years ago, when I saw the rise of what I have repeatedly referred to as 'alien exoticism', by which I mean the so-called hard-science world-building, and alien-building, and space exploration stories. I've always preferred the future-society and marvellous-invention stories, and these have practically disappeared from the field. As I recently said in a loc to Leigh Edmonds, regarding the fantasy vs. sf debate, I think it was these hard-science, alien-exoticism stories that led to the decline and paved the way for the heavy infusion of fantasy (because the difference between dragons and meticulously rationalised aliens is really not very important). Aside from the question of general story type, however, the current writers have also completely abandoned the writing of stories with a limited premise (a la Wells) in favour of the kitchen-sink technique.

However, this nonsense about 'parafiction', or literary sf that isn't called sf, is the worst sort of intellectual dishonesty. It shows that sf actually is not dead, it's just being called something else. I think the junk-sf fans should retaliate by calling their sf 'pan-fiction' (from the Greek neuter of pas, all). Then they can tell Turner and Foyster that there's no such thing as sf; and the rest of us can all get some sleep while they argue about it. As a debating gimmick, 'parafiction' is just a variation on that old line: 'That's good, so it can't be sf.' As for books in the general literature being better sf than those so labelled: I've lost track of how often I've

pointed out that any one Pirandello work is worth a whole library
of P. K. Dick. (28 November 1984)

My typewriter is quivering under the heretical impact of that last remark.

I don't seem to have expressed myself clearly enough when talking about sf and 'parafiction'. I was trying to say - ahem - that sf is not dead, but the kind of sf you'd like to read is not appearing under that label from publishers. Under 'sf' you find undisguised fantasy or sword-and-sorcery, or disguised versions of the same thing. And there are still those 'hard sf' books that ignore all the exciting science which you can find each week in New Scientist. 'Parafiction' is not a prescriptive term, but a vague descriptive term for those fictions that are obviously not sf, but might be more interesting to sf readers than the stuff appearing under that label. Some other readers thought that I was trying to define a whole new genre. Anything but. My aim is to talk about fiction that I and readers find interesting, and not worry about the labels. But if you, the readers and contributors, want to write about Robert L. Forward or Piers Anthony, you'll need to write a very good article for it to appear in The Metaphysical Review.

Mike Shoemaker's The Shadow Line is one of the last of the really interesting fanzines, but I don't know whether Mike wants to increase his print run or not.

GUIDO EEKHAUT

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I have found myself drifting away from sf gradually these past years too. Four years ago I was a real fan, publishing a fanzine, organising a convention, literally devouring the stuff. Now... well, there is indeed little sf that can keep my interest after a few pages. I started reading people like Nabokov, John Hawkes, Borges, and newcomers like John Calvin Batchelor. Recently I wrote an essay on books by John Fuller (Flying to Nowhere, Penguin) and J. M. Coetzee (Waiting for the Barbarians, Penguin), to be published in Kultuurleven, a general cultural magazine (in which I have a regular column about theoretical books on Utopian writing, sf, and the like). I pointed out various 'fantaist' elements in the texts: un-historical development, para-realistic happenings, lack of 'dating' in the stories, which make them universal. One can easily regard them as sf discourses without (or nearly without) any of the sf icons. Rudy Rucker (in the SFWA Bulletin, Winter 1983) has another term for a slightly different set of texts: transrealism, that he uses for somewhat the same category of work, though it should be interesting to look into the elements he has sorted out. For him, the transrealist writes about immediate perceptions in a fantastic way. This implies that one can add 'fantastic' and 'sf' elements to a naturalist/mimetic text, making the text much richer in the process since, for him, the sf icons are symbolic of archetypal modes of perception. Also the transrealist work grows, as it were, organically, so that its author cannot predict the outcome or final form of it. This is something I have experienced myself when writing stories and novels: that even with some planning I never know more of the book, at the start, than a vague theme and an even more vague conclusion. Plotting is done while writing scenes and chapters.

And it always seems to work, Rucker finishes: 'Transrealism is a revolutionary art-form... (it) is the path to truly artistic sf.'

(25 September 1984)

That's a bit more definition than I would want. It's enough to say that good fantasy or sf needs a solid bedrock of observed detail - but it's a poor sort of naturalistic tale that has no hint of the magical or transcendental.

ANDREW WEINER

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I sort of know what you mean by 'parafiction'... the phrase I hear being kicked around here is 'magic realism', although more for the South Americans than the people you mention... but I'm not sure that I'd agree that such fiction is impossible without the prior existence of genre sf. I suspect, in fact, that what you're really talking about here is 'mainstream fiction with fantastic elements', which may or may not bear points of resemblance to genre sf, but which actually has very little to do with it. For example, Ted Mooney's Easy Travel to Other Planets (not, I thought, a particularly good book) is really just an attenuated New Yorker story with a few quasi-sf trappings.

I think, in fact, that J. G. Ballard is probably right when he describes genre sf (or 'modern American sf' or Gernsbackian/Campbellian sf) as a blip in an otherwise uninterrupted evolution of mainstream sf and fantasy, from H. G. Wells and Stapledon down through C. S. Lewis to A Clockwork Orange or Riddley Walker. Did Ballard really say that? - well, something like it, in any case. Two hundred years from now, if anyone is around, nobody is going to remember any of this genre stuff, except maybe a few writers like Ballard or Vonnegut who got temporarily stuck in the middle of it. Well, perhaps they'll remember Heinlein and Asimov, but only the way we remember Rider Haggard, etc. And I think the reason that such mainstream sf and fantasy is largely superior to the genre variety is precisely because these mainstream writers are not encumbered with all the trappings of genre sf. 'Encrusted' might be a better word. Or, as I put it (perhaps a little heavy-handedly) in Charles Platt's Patchin Review, 'If it's good, it can't be science fiction.' Not modern American science fiction, anyway. That's not to say I don't personally enjoy superior genre offerings, like Benford's Timescape, say - no doubt you hated it - or more recently, Lucius Shepard's Green Eyes (almost, but not quite, out of genre completely... to the extent that a book packaged as an Ace Science Fiction Special can move out of genre). But there aren't too many of those.

So good luck with The Metaphysical Review, although I suspect that it's going to have very little to do with science fiction in any shape or form.

(28 September 1984)

A somewhat different viewpoint from that of Mike Shoemaker.

The Metaphysical Review would 'have very little to do with science fiction in any shape or form' if the readers would let it. You people won't let the old bone go. The only non-sf-related articles I have on file are those I've commissioned, or have found in apas (except

(Continued on Page 23)

'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' Supplement

YOU ASKED FOR IT

About five or six readers asked for the return of The Lists, so here they are. My favourites for 1981 and 1982 appear in Science Fiction, No. 15, which every SFC subscriber should have received.

I don't have room to include all the comments and annotations I once included with these lists. Here are the lists, first, and some comments, second - if I have room.

1983

Favourite Novels:

1. Riders in the Chariot, by Patrick White (first published 1961; this edition: Viking; 532 pages).
2. The Lost Steps (Los pasos perdidos), by Alejo Carpentier (1953; Penguin Modern Classics 14 002879; 252 pp.).
3. The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts, by Maxine Hong Kingston (1976; Penguin 14 004563; 209 pp.).
4. Rabbit Run, by John Updike (1960; Penguin 2097; 249 pp.).
5. His Master's Voice (Głos pana), by Stanislaw Lem (1968; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 199 pp.).
6. Living in the Maniototo, by Janet Frame (1979; Braziller; 240 pp.).
7. Grimus, by Salman Rushdie (1975; Overlook Press; 319 pp.).
8. Midnight's Children, by Salman Rushdie (1981; Jonathan Cape; 446 pp.).
9. Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle, by Vladimir Nabokov (1969; Weidenfeld and Nicolson; 589 pp.).
10. Saint Francis, by Nikos Kazantzakis (1962; Touchstone 21247; 379 pp.).

Favourite Books:

1. Riders in the Chariot (see above).
2. The Collected Stories of William Goyen (1975; Doubleday; 296 pp.).
3. The Lost Steps.
4. The Woman Warrior.
5. Rabbit Run.
6. His Master's Voice.
7. Living in the Maniototo.
8. To the Is-land: An Autobiography, by Janet Frame (1982; Women's Press/Hutchison; 253 pp.).
9. The Life of Katherine Mansfield, by Antony Alpers (1980; Oxford University Press; 467 pp.).
10. Grimus.

Favourite Short Stories:

1. 'Zamour, or a Tale of Inheritance', by William Goyen (The Collected Stories of William Goyen).
2. 'At the Western Palace', by Maxine Hong Kingston (The Woman Warrior).
3. 'Shaman', by Maxine Hong Kingston (Woman Warrior).
4. 'Life the Solitude', by Kevin McKay (Dreamworks).
5. 'The White Rooster', by William Goyen (Collected Stories).
6. 'Nests in a Stone Image', by William Goyen (Collected Stories).
7. 'A Shape of Light', by William Goyen (Collected Stories).
8. 'Ghost and Flesh, Water and Dirt', by William Goyen (Collected Stories).
9. 'Right of Sanctuary', by Alejo Carpentier (The War of Time).
10. 'Journey Back to the Source', by Alejo Carpentier (War of Time).
11. 'Lirios: A Tale of the Quintana Roo', by James Tiptree Jr (Fantasy Annual 5).
12. 'Leaps of Faith', by Michael Bishop (Blooded on Arachne).
13. 'Firewatch', by Connie Willis (Best SF of the Year 12).
14. 'After-images', by Malcolm Edwards (Interzone, Autumn 1982).
15. 'Sur', by Ursula K. Le Guin (Best SF of the Year 12).
16. 'Above Atlas His Shoulders', by Andrew Whitmore (Dreamworks).
17. 'Crystal Soldier', by Russell Blackford (Dreamworks).
18. 'Dinosaurs on Broadway', by Tony Sarowitz (Fantasy Annual 5).
19. 'Venice Drowned', by Kim Stanley Robinson (Best SF of the Year 11).
20. 'Souls', by Joanna Russ (Best SF of the Year 12).

Favourite Films:

1. Dark Passage, directed by Delmer Daves (1947).
2. My Favourite Year, by Richard Benjamin (1983).
3. Dumbo, by Ben Sharpsteen (1941).
4. The Women, by George Cukor (1939).
5. Don Giovanni, by Joseph Losey (1981).
6. Berlin Express, by Jacques Tourneur (1948).
7. The Trouble with Harry, by Alfred Hitchcock (1955).
8. Hans Christian Anderson, by Charles Vidor (1952).
9. Take Me Out to the Ball Game, by Busby Berkeley (1949).
10. The Shootist, by Don Siegel (1976).
11. The Letter, by William Wyler (1940).
12. Zelig, by Woody Allen (1983).
13. Diner, by Barry Levinson (1982).
14. Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean, by Robert Altman (1982).
15. Wonder Man, by H. Bruce Humberstone (1945).

1984

Favourite Novels

1. Mickelsson's Ghosts, by John Gardner (1982; Secker and Warburg; 566 pp.).
2. Paradise Reclaimed (Paradisarheimt), by Halldor Laxness (1960; Methuen; 254 pp.).
3. What Maisie Knew, by Henry James (1897; Penguin Modern Classics 14 002448; 248 pp.).
4. Time and Again, by Jack Finney (1970; Simon and Schuster; 399 pp.).
5. Morgan's Passing, by Anne Tyler (1980; Knopf; 311 pp.).
6. The Cupboard Under the Stairs, by George Turner (1962; Cassell; 215 pp.).
7. Some Tame Gazelle, by Barbara Pym (1950; Granada; 253 pp.).
8. The Aunt's Story, by Patrick White (1948; Viking; 281 pp.).
9. Transmitters, by Damien Broderick (1984; Ebony; 320 pp.).
10. Household Words, by Joan Silber (1980; Viking; 256 pp.).

Favourite Books

1. The World of Yesterday (Die Welt von Gestern), by Stefan Zweig (1942; Cassell; 448 pp.).
2. The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty (1982; Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; 622 pp.).
3. Mickelsson's Ghosts.
4. Paradise Reclaimed.
5. Pink Triangle and Yellow Star and Other Essays, by Gore Vidal (1982; Granada; 350 pp.).
6. What Maisie Knew.
7. Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia, by C. G. Jung (1912/1952; Routledge and Kegan Paul; 567 pp.).
8. Collected Stories, by Graham Greene (1972; Bodley Head/William Heinemann; 562 pp.).
9. Time and Again.
10. An Angel at My Table: An Autobiography: Volume 2, by Janet Frame (1984; Women's Press; 195 pp.).
11. Morgan's Passing.
12. The Moons of Jupiter, by Alice Munro (1983; Knopf; 233 pp.).
13. The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock, by Donald Spoto (1983; Little, Brown; 594 pp.).
14. A. E. Housman: The Scholar-Poet, by Richard Perceval Graves (1979; Oxford University Press; 304 pp.).
15. The Cupboard Under the Stairs.
16. In the Heart or in the Head, by George Turner (1984; Norstrilia; 239 pp.).
17. The Life of Raymond Chandler, by Frank McShane (1976; Penguin 14 004791; 306 pp.).
18. Some Tame Gazelle.
19. The Aunt's Story.
20. Transmitters.

Favourite Short Stories

1. 'May We Borrow Your Husband?', by Graham Greene (Collected Stories).
2. 'The Destructors', by Graham Greene (Collected Stories).
3. 'Moon Lake', by Eudora Welty (The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty).
4. 'June Recital', by Eudora Welty (Collected Stories).
5. 'Cheap in August', by Graham Greene (Collected Stories).
6. '"Gruppenfuhrer Louis XVI" by Alfred Zeller mann', by Stanislaw Lem (A Perfect Vacuum).
7. 'Mrs Cross and Mrs Kidd', by Alice Munro (The Moons of Jupiter).
8. 'Connection', by Alice Munro (Moons of Jupiter).
9. 'The Stone in the Field', by Alice Munro (Moons of Jupiter).
10. 'Going to Naples', by Eudora Welty (Collected Stories).
11. 'Saving Face', by Michael Bishop (One Winter in Eden).
12. 'The Wide Net', by Eudora Welty (Collected Stories).
13. 'Dulse', by Alice Munro (Moons of Jupiter).
14. 'Accident', by Alice Munro (Moons of Jupiter).
15. 'The Wanderers', by Eudora Welty (Collected Stories).
16. 'A New-Wave Format', by Bobbie Ann Mason (Shiloh and Other Stories).

Favourite Films

1. The Leopard (complete), by Luchino Visconti (1963).
2. Hangover Square, by John Brahm (1945).
3. A Star is Born, by George Cukor (1954).
4. The Secret Garden, by Fred M. Wilcox (1949).
5. Bunny Lake is Missing, by Otto Preminger (1965).
6. Fool's Parade, by Andrew McLaglan (1971).
7. Stage Door, by Gregory La Cava (1937).
8. Gilda, by Charles Vidor (1946).
9. Separate Tables, by Delbert Mann (1958).
10. The Man Who Knew Too Much, by Alfred Hitchcock (1956).
11. This Gun for Hire, by Frank Tuttle (1942).
12. Bad Day at Black Rock, by John Sturges (1954).

Chaotic Comments

Books

Fiction won in 1983, and non-fiction and anthologies won in 1984. That's not quite accurate, since on both lists the items are just about equal after the Top 4 or 5. I was surprised, for instance, to find In the Heart or in the Head and Transmitters coming in at 'low' positions in the Best Books for 1984, but the real situation is that in most years both books could have been in the Top 5. My system breaks down when faced with the task of giving a position to something like the collected stories of either Eudora Welty or Alice Munro.

It's a long time since I've read a novel as moving as Riders in the Chariot, and it could be a while before I read anything like it again. Not that White's prose is so great; what is remarkable is his ability to shine an intense light on characters and places, his ability to intensify the emotional power of a scene. Also, his main characters are loners, on the extreme edge of society, which could be why I warm to White's work. On the other hand, if you wanted a winner for perfect prose, take 1984's Books winner, The World of Yesterday, by Stefan Zweig. I knew almost nothing about Zweig before I began this book, and I'm not sure I know a lot more about the person. What he does tell well is the story of the decline and fall of Austria from the years of the late 1800s to the day when Hitler's troops moved in. Not that the book is all nostalgia; at the beginning of the book Zweig shows how marvellous was Vienna in the late 1900s, but in the next chapter shows how people's private lives suffered beneath the show of elegance and good taste. No wonder Freud set up practice in Vienna. Austria disintegrates under the pressures of privation and inflation after World War I - this was the part of the book that seemed most vivid to me. Not that this would have been any more than good documentary if it hadn't been for Zweig's limpid, evocative, perfect prose.

Not much more to say about individual books, especially as I've discussed quite a few of them in my '8 Point Universe' column for Science Fiction. As you can see, American women writers of the twentieth century have some importance in the Book and Short Story lists. I become more and more interested in American writing, as long as I can dig out the really good books. This is difficult. Most of the American fiction that is published in British editions is of the Mailer/Roth type - the mainstream's answer to Harlan Ellison. I was relying on the reviews pages of Time magazine for some time, but Time seems to have stopped reviewing the sort of low-key, intimate, elegantly written fiction which I'm looking for. Can anybody out there tell me good American fiction of the last two years, books that I would not have read about in reviews pages?

However, serendipity is still the name of the game when discovering good books. The Collected Stories of William Goyen just happened to be on a shelf at Whole Earth Bookstore. It doesn't seem to have had any English edition, let alone a widely available paperback. Nickelsson's Ghosts had almost no distribution in Australia. George Turner lent me his British hardback, a book he had received for review. I could not find a copy until Readings imported some remaindered copies of the American hardback. It has still had no paperback edition that I've seen. Thanks to Tom Disch, who recommended, on a list of Favourites that he sent me, Morgan's Passing, by Anne Tyler. I bought Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant in hardback - and a few months ago Hamlyn paperbacks, Britain, released all of her novels at once. Anne Tyler writes real books, the sort you chew, and taste, and roll around on your tongue, and don't need to spit out again. Her books have people in them, marvellous people, and clear, delightful language, and... I do go on a bit, don't I? Read her...

Films

Discovering films is a matter of forced serendipity. Which wonderful old film will a tv channel pick out of its vault this week? As you can see from my lists, most of my favourite films come from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Hangover Square is a particularly fine piece of American Gothic, made great more by its star, Laird Cregar, than by its director. I discovered two films with all-female casts, Cukor's The Women and La Cava's Stage Door (which has one male character). It couldn't happen now. At the cinema, the great feature of recent times has been the revival of long-lost films. The last thing I ever expected to see was the complete, Italian-language version of The Leopard. Yet there it was, probably the finest-looking film ever, and certainly much better than any film released during the 1970s and 1980s. Another revival was Cukor's A Star is Born, with a supernaturally thin James Mason and a rivetingly vivacious Judy Garland. It was great that this was the new near-complete print; better still was to see it in the proper ratio and size at the Trak Cinema. The Hitchcock revival season also did well, although the 'new' prints still looked a bit faded. Still, who could knock back Rear Window, The Man Who Knew Too Much, Vertigo, etc., on the wide screen and in moderately good shape? Surprise of the two years was Preminger's Bunny Lake is Missing, a creepy and splendidly photographed psychological thriller that had no favourable reviews when it was first released. And (since I've run out of space), a big cheer for My Favourite Year, the first new film in a decade with the pace, style, and humour that you expect from a proper film.

Lucy Sussex has published fiction and critical articles, and delivers penetrating talks on all manner of subjects.

TALES OF ANTS AND COMPUTERS

by Lucy Sussex

Discussed:

His Master's Voice
(Glos pana)

by Stanislaw Lem

original Polish
publication 1968;
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich;
1983; 199 pp.; \$US 12.95

Imaginary Magnitude

by Stanislaw Lem

original Polish
publication 1973, 1981;
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich;
1984; 248 pp.; \$US 15.95

Some writers are inchworms and others are gadflies. While Type A spends its literary life carefully measuring out a given territory, Type B flits around merrily sinking its mandibles into anything that takes its fancy. Stanislaw Lem is a Type B, gadding from the detective story (The Investigation) to the mutant fairy tale (The Cyberiad) to science fiction, philosophy, and god knows what else as yet untranslated or unwritten. Upon opening a Type A novel, the reader can expect certain subjects, like the Anglican Church in the novels of Barbara Pym. A similar prediction cannot be made for a work by Lem.

In front of the reviewer is a collecting box, and in it are His Master's Voice and Imaginary Magnitude, genus Lem, but as different from each other as chalk and camembert. Writing about these books is not a matter of comparing Vicars; there are few points of comparison. Imagine reviewing at one go Lem's Solaris and A Perfect Vacuum - as the pair in the collecting box are companion volumes to each of the above, that is precisely what has to be done.

His Master's Voice is a weighty, serious novel about scientists versus inexplicable alien phenomena, in mood as well as theme similar to Solaris. Where that novel was, in my opinion, flawed by Freudian overtones - the ocean's creation of succubi, which resulted in the ludicrous image of a straw-skirted black mammy in a space station - His Master's Voice has no love interest, but a political dimension. The scientists are subject to ideology, being elegantly compared at one point to truffle swine, who dig up delicacies for their (military) masters and are rewarded with acorns. This aspect of His Master's Voice remains frighteningly relevant. For a novel written in the 'sixties, the following is not far removed from Ronald and the Rayguns:

In the seventies... The competition-duel in nuclear payloads gave way to a missile race, and that in turn led to the building of more and more expensive 'antimissile missiles'. The next step in the escalation was the possibility of constructing 'laser shields', a stockade of gamma lasers which would line the perimeter of the country with destroyer rays; the cost of installing such a system was set at... five hundred billion dollars. After this move in the game, one could next expect the putting into orbit of giant satellites equipped with gamma lasers, whose swarm, passing over the territory of the enemy,

could consume it utterly with ultraviolet radiation in a fraction of a second. The cost of that belt of death would exceed, it was estimated, seven trillion dollars... the production of increasingly expensive weaponry... placed a severe strain on the whole organism of government. (p. 125)

Other parts of His Master's Voice are more anachronistic, and this is inevitable, given the nature of extrapolation. Cheap fun should not be made of them. Nonetheless, the reviewer cannot resist noting the IBM cryotronic calculator operated by foot pedals: 'Every time I pressed the "clear" pedal I expected, by reflex, to drive into the wall' (p. 81). Also anachronistic, but in a different way, is the editor's preface by one Professor Thomas V. Warren, which is dated June 1966. As the novel is clearly set well after that date, either the manuscript of His Master's Voice travelled backwards in time (something not mentioned by editor Warren), or Gbfbrey Shrudlu has struck yet again.

The narrator of the book, Professor Peter Hogarth, is a scientist somewhere between John von Neumann and Carl Sagan, a mathematician enjoying superstar status: 'at the age of sixty-two I had twenty-eight volumes devoted to my person' (p. 4)! Hogarth is possibly intended as a psychological study, for after Professor Warren has made his bow, the novel continues with a rough-draft preface by Hogarth which can only be described as an anti-apologia. In forced and somewhat baffling prose, a boffin admits to giggling at his mother's death. Confession over, the persona of Hogarth retreats and is succeeded by a series of character studies. All of these vignettes are minor gems of description (particularly memorable is the UFO expert Dr Sam Laserowitz - the Dr stands for Drummond) and by comparison Hogarth lacks colour. Only a certain acidity of phrase - 'scientists who were renting their consciences out to the State Department' (p. 126) - gives him life at all. The man is less interesting than the story he tells.

A message from space is a favoured theme of the better sf writers: in Vonnegut's The Sirens of Titan it consisted of the word 'Greetings!'; Ballard's stark 'The Voices of Time' had a countdown to the end of the universe; and in His Master's Voice the scientists never decipher the alien code. Such ambiguity is typical of Lem, who seems to distrust absolute certainty (The Investigation did not reach a definite conclusion). Also notable is his fine sense of irony, for while the scientists toil:

The diplomats in their stiff tuxedos awaited, with a pleasant trembling in the knees, the Moment when at last we would be done with our unofficial, less important, preliminary labor, and when they, all in medals and stars, could fly off to the stars to proffer their letters of authorization and to exchange notes of protocol with a billion-year-old civilization. (p. 127)

It is difficult to tell, though, how ironic is another Lem trait, his fondness for the history of imaginary science. Reading about the discipline of solaristics is like wading through the viscous ocean of that planet. The theories in His Master's Voice are less slow, but for most of its length the novel is interesting rather than enthralling. However, at the three-quarter mark, the novel abruptly metamorphoses into a scientific thriller: the message might have military applications. It would be churlish to reveal the end, except to note that both Hogarth and Solaris's Kris Kelvin have the

final intuition of a benevolent alien, something that cannot be dismissed as a disgusted reaction to humanity:

Ants that encounter in their path a dead philosopher may make good use of him... We stood at the feet of a gigantic find, as unprepared, but also as sure of ourselves, as we could possibly be. We clambered up on it from every side, quickly, hungrily, and cleverly, with our time-honoured skill, like ants. I was one of them. This is the story of an ant. (pp. 22-7)

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In contrast, Imaginary Magnitude is intended for 'eternal enjoyment' (p. 9), if we are to believe the author's Introduction. Its companion in the Lem oeuvre is A Perfect Vacuum, that collection of reviews of non-existent books, and Magnitude consists of prefaces to similarly figmental volumes. The trouble with A Perfect Vacuum is that the reader occasionally wishes Lem had gone ahead and written the idea, the book so attractively reviewed. Imaginary Magnitude is superior in the respect that one of the prefaces generated a novel, Golem XIV, the philosophical musings of a rebellious military supercomputer (presumably still untranslated?). Selections from this work accompany the original preface in the English version of Imaginary Magnitude.

So much for textual bibliography. To turn from His Master's Voice to the preface of Eruntings, a treatise on teaching morse code to bacteria, is like plunging into a bubble bath after cold, choppy sea water. This is Lem at play, the spirit being ably conveyed by the translator, Marc E. Heine, but when the sport is linguistics, the translation becomes somewhat laboured.

In Imaginary Magnitude's preface to a study of computer authors, examples are quoted of the logical computer's reaction to illogical human language. For Heine this would have meant finding English equivalents for a list of Polish puns, which is not an easy task, and he makes it seem hard work. It is possible that a computer would assume tartlet meant 'little prostitute', but not that 'screwball' was its synonym. In addition the pun 'carnivore/Mardi Gras prostitute' derives from ambiguity of the spoken word and would therefore not occur to a computer. 'Dimocracy' for 'lunatic asylum' is amusing, if inexact: dim refers to dullards, not the demented. Perhaps the dean of Lem translators, Michael Kandel, should have been employed for Imaginary Magnitude, as he was for His Master's Voice. After his tour de force with Cyberiad's love poem written in the jargon of pure mathematics, computer puns should have been almost recreational.

However, Imaginary Magnitude is not totally frivolous: the section from GOLEM XIV considers life, the universe, and everything from the viewpoint of a superintelligence. Inevitably, writing as a being more evolved than thou is never as good as it might be, being inconceivable, but Lem has some nice touches. The right note of condescension is struck with James Clerk Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism being described as 'really quite good' (p. 127). GOLEM has every reason to be smug - like a Nobel physicist in charge of a kindergarten for the day, he knows he can escape to higher things, to a more elevated plane of existence, where communication with lowly humans is impossible.

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It is difficult to evaluate GOLEM without reading the whole book, and in the context of Imaginary Magnitude it is problematic. The

supercomputer does tend to dominate the collection, with approximately two-thirds of its mass, and its most serious part. Possibly, more of a balance between inspired silliness and sobriety would have been desirable. However, this criticism is only a niggle: to consider the what-might-have-been in a Lem book is like trying to envisage the work of Imaginary Magnitude's computer author Pseudodostoevsky.

Also mind-boggling is the thought of what Lem might do next - actually write Pseudodostoevsky's novel The Girl, perhaps? For a writer who can quantum jump from belles-lettres to ontology in a single volume, or from Pirx the Pilot to Cyberiad in the wider context of his literary corpus, much is possible. The reader of Lem can only wait, like a watcher beside one of Stephen Hawking's bizarre black holes, to see what will come out. The Lem genus has some strange variations, but one prediction can be made - despite the efforts of the translator, it will not be a lemon.

- Lucy Sussex, March 1985

Michael J. Tolley is Head of Department, English Department, University of Adelaide. He writes extensively about popular fiction, and is a Blake scholar. He and Kirpal Singh edited The Stellar Gauge: Essays on Science Fiction Writers (Norstrilia Press, 1980).

WHERE IS FANCY BRED?

by Michael J. Tolley

Discussed:

In the Haart or
in the Head:
An Essay in Time Travel

by George Turner

Norstrilia Press; 1984;
239 pp.; \$A 16.95

This review first
appeared in
Fantasy Review,
vol. vi, no. 10,
November 1984

At the time of my own introduction to fandom, I first met George Turner, already established in his chosen role of critical gadfly, and it occurred to me that budding local writers would need strong nerves, living as they did within easy zapping distance of such a man. I was probably wrong, because Australian sf flourishes now as never before, though without much public encouragement. Exotics are favoured. George Turner's own success, since he transferred in his early sixties to science fiction from a moderately successful career as a mainstream novelist, has been so far one of esteem rather than profit. The first and

third of his powerful post-holocaust series, Beloved Son and Yesterday's Men, have won Ditmar Awards. This unusual autobiography is, however, more than the story of the man who began by rubbishing Bester and Pohl and proceeded (gently goaded by one of the minor heroes

of this history, John Bangsund) to prove that he could extrapolate more convincingly than they had done. It is the story of a born and determined writer saved by science fiction from a sort of despair after great adversities (all recorded without a trace of self pity). In return he has done a great deal for Australian science fiction, as may be read between the lines.

The first chapters of the book alternate between the writer's life and the history of science fiction. Sf is treated both objectively and, as it affected the breeding of his own fancy, subjectively. The life is interesting, well and sparsely written, a life of an appalling loneliness from its beginning in the mining area near Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, only somewhat mitigated (perhaps defied, rather) in later years. The sf part is less well managed, probably because of uncertainty over this book's readership. Readers of this review will certainly enjoy the in-group pleasure offered by George Turner's spot-on impressions of big-name visitors to Australian conventions in Part Two (where the life and reading coalesce) but will be impatient with the footnotes in Part One explaining the BEM and the significance of Thomas M. Disch. A good index is a bonus; and the book is well presented.

The title gives away what the text tries to hide, that George Turner is essentially a large-hearted man. He has tried in the book to follow Eliot's precept: 'It is not enough to understand what we ought to be, unless we know what we are.' Even he must re-evaluate himself when, after asserting that he has had 'an egocentric, selfish lifetime', he finds that he cares very much about the future he will not see. Towards the shaping of that future, George Turner's critical precepts, as embodied in this book, and creative writings, which will be illumined by it, are a significant contribution.

- Michael J. Tolley

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Russell Blackford has published a novel, The Tempting of the Witch King and several short stories. He is a frequent contributor to Van Ikin's Science Fiction and other journals.

TOWARDS A DEFENCE
OF FAR FUTURE SF

by Russell Blackford

Discussed:

Chapter 14 of

In the Heart or
in the Head

by George Turner

Norstrilia; 1984;
239 pp.; \$A 16.95

It is currently fashionable in intellectual circles to scorn sf set in the far future. Often the scorn is delivered in the same breath as an overt or thinly veiled contempt for genre fantasy writing. In Australia, this phenomenon is observable in the pages of the literate fanzines (Leigh Edmonds's Rataplan is an example, if examples must be singled out), at the more literary panels of conventions, and in the ambience of the Nova Mob, Melbourne's version of an academic think tank for sf critics and writers. Perhaps

it's time for intellectually respectable and rigorous defence of sf set in the far future. My intention in this essay is to provide some notes to contribute towards such a defence and, in particular, to make some comments on George Turner's most sustained attack on far future sf to date.

I

I have just read Turner's new 'autobiography', In the Heart or in the Head; I wonder whether 'autobiography' is the correct word. Whatever, this book is very readable and challenging, Turner's simple forthright prose working more effectively in this volume, which combines memoir and manifesto, than in what I have read of his fiction. And that is not intended as a sneer at Turner's fiction, which includes the most important body of sf produced by a living Australian. But the section which must be discussed before the dust settles is Turner's final substantive chapter before a brief 'Envoi'. That chapter is entitled 'Cottage Industry Time?', and it includes Turner's manifesto on the proper role of sf. The analysis given is tough, lucid, and imaginative; as so often the argument that Turner advances is the one which future manifesto writers, at least in this country, will have to come to grips with. Turner confirms here, and to a lesser extent throughout the book, that his is one of those minds which must be wrestled with over a daunting number of issues - on subjects of both agreement and disagreement - by anyone who wishes to develop informed and stable opinions on the important subjects for sf. On this particular issue, the question 'What use is sf?', I happen to disagree with Turner.

Courageous enough, Turner does end up postulating a single privileged use for sf, though he does so by way of prescription rather than description. Courageously - because any serious reader of the genre

will know that both mainstream and genre authors have found a variety of uses, serious and otherwise, for the typical situations, characters, and plot structures of sf. Analysing Kurt Vonnegut's work, the critic Donald L. Lawler invented the term 'enabling form' to highlight fictional contrivances which facilitate frames of reference for treating particular subjects in ways that go beyond the ordinary conventions of fiction. For example, in The Sirens of Titan Vonnegut uses a range of sf situations to reveal the triviality of any meanings that can be ascribed to humanity or to civilisation (in part because Vonnegut senses the category mistake in attempting to ascribe meanings to such things): the Great Wall of China, according to Vonnegut, has been constructed as a result of Tralfamadorian manipulation, and its purpose is simply to send a message to the stranded Tralfamadorian emissary Salo: 'Be patient. We haven't forgotten you.' Through the enabling form of sf, the portentous but confused idea of existential 'meanings' becomes a savage and funny philosophical pun.

Good thematic criticism of sf is in fact the study of sf as enabling form that allows the treatment of literary subjects in ways that would not otherwise be available. To the extent that a writer uses the sf mode with serious thematic intent (and I am not insisting that this should describe all sf), sf is an enabling form. There is no a priori reason, it may be noted in passing, why far future sf should provide fewer enabling forms for serious writers, and the same goes for the conventions of genre fantasy.

The literary uses of sf appear to be multiform, and it is courageous to attempt either description or prescription of an overarching single 'use' for sf. George Turner has provided such a 'use', while considering that sf has not in the past matched the prescription.

My own feeling is that the very recognition of sf as a unified genre, or perhaps as a related group of sub-genres with overlapping audiences and shared bookshops, suggests a certain unity of appeal about sf. At least it should be possible to find a variety of appeals exerted by sf and bearing some family resemblance - even when the appeals seem mutually contradictory. (Consider the following range of 'appeals' as a possible, primitive model: left-wing escapism, right-wing escapism, left-wing cognitive estrangement, right-wing cognitive estrangement. Disparate, yes, but forming a squabbling family group which excludes the literal depiction of experience in the writer's society - which has been defined as the proper role of fiction by some realist critics.)

Further, I am in the same position as Turner of being able to offer a prescription for the role of sf - but unlike Turner I believe that the prescription has to a significant extent been matched by sf itself. In other words, the theory is still prescriptive, but it is usefully close to what sf has been doing rather than a hope of what it can be bludgeoned to do. Accordingly, it provides a basis for literary judgments which are fair to writers working within the craft of sf, without forcing us to traverse the dangerous philosophical ground of the objectivity or ultimacy of aesthetic judgments.

What of Turner's own argument? This is woven intricately, with discussions of creative effects, the role of didacticism, the social function of literature, and much else. Turner concludes that genre sf has failed to match horror fiction for sheer visceral power in presenting the irrational and outre or to match mainstream metafiction/surrealism for the creation of non-mimetic 'metaphors for the human condition' (which I would tend to equate with the concept of enabling form discussed above). These are therefore eliminated as possibilities in any quest to find the use of sf. The argument is unconvincing. If Turner's generalised value judgments could be granted the status of facts for the sake of argument, all that would follow would be that the most formidable writers of certain genres closely related to sf - genres that exhibit similar structures and attract overlapping markets - have produced certain effects with more intensity than have genre sf writers... so far. This does not even involve the claim that genre sf writers have not themselves been able to produce effects of 'rank terror and cognitive estrangement, merely that the best genre sf writers have not done these things as well as the best writers in related fields. Yet Turner inconsistently goes on to prescribe a use for sf which he claims has hardly been fulfilled at all.

Having disposed of two potentially rich, if cloudily defined, areas for investigation of sf's 'use', Turner develops the preliminary argument that, as a matter of fact, the most influential genre writers have been didactic and, as a matter of prescription, didactic writing concerned with the near future is sorely needed. Yet, Turner argues, problems that can be expected to grow in the near future have been trivialised or at least treated with insufficient rigour to date. This last argument is pursued in convincing and labyrinthine detail before the conclusion, which has already been dropped several times during and even before the argument, that sf should be 'the literature of preparation for change' in the narrow sense of giving sound extrapolative treatment to political decisions that must be made in the near future.

Again and again, Turner comes back to this idea that it is the near future that ought to be the focus for sf, and the the near future ought to be presented analytically and didactically. As I understand this, the didacticism required involves warnings about particular social problems and possible outcomes of the problems. I agree wholeheartedly that this is a viable direction for some sf and that little in the way of popular philosophy or politics has the hardheaded future orientation that Turner wants to see. There is a role for sf here, though I would be happier to see the kind of thinking recommended carried on by politicians, business people, union leaders, bureaucrats, church leaders, academics and others. If sf can encourage them, well and good.

But there is a narrowness about Turner's conception which is objectionable, not simply because it is narrow but because it fails to allow for value in much that sf does well. Turner objects to stories of the far future and specifically to stories that present societies whose historical continuity with our own cannot be or has not been justified. (This would apply to most genre fantasy as well as to far future sf.) For example, Turner specifically objects to a story

that presents as a fait accompli a society in which such problems as war or sexism have been solved.

This approach leads to some peculiar results. In writing of the admittedly nightmarish problem of nuclear threat, Turner lists five 'science-fictional approaches to this urgent problem'; the first approach, which is condemned as a 'simple brazen cop-out' is 'the story set so far in the future that the whole matter is by then over and done with, lost in history...'. As far as I can discern after peering hard at this passage, Turner is describing a story that is set in the far future and is not about the nuclear threat at all! In other words, even a story in which the theme is not given any emphasis is listed as one of the five 'approaches' - and a particularly despised one. Now the problem of the nuclear threat is a good one to lose sleep by, but there are other literary themes, a bewildering range to choose from (or to be chosen by, as writers often seem to feel these things). It is no more possible for every story to 'approach' every meaty theme than it is possible for every person to give to every worthy charity or campaign for every just cause. To condemn a far future story that may succeed in its own terms, using a scenario historically discontinuous from our own society for its own purposes, as a 'cop-out' because it doesn't have anything directly relevant to say about the nuclear threat is wrongheaded criticism based on an unfortunate theory.

Even if Turner's remark is interpreted as applying only to far future sf stories containing airy references to the nuclear threat in the distant past (and this is not clear in context), I cannot see the application. If such stories are not basically about nuclear menace and nuclear warfare, the most they can be accused of is gratuitous and trendy reference to matters that don't concern them.

The theoretical underpinnings of Turner's critical doctrine become clear at one point where sf is enjoined to 'direct attention to the realities of cultural evolution and revolution, where at present it peddles only dreams of success or nightmares of destruction'. In one sweep, Turner precludes any theory that the function of literature, or even a function of literature, is precisely to externalise dreams and nightmares, a psychological function rather than the overtly social one which is continually put forward.

In order to convey the texture of Turner's argument and the extreme nature of his praise for social utility, it is necessary to sample the language used throughout this chapter of In the Heart or in the Head. Turner calls for 'a new breed of historically and socially educated writers to drag the genre screaming into contact with the facts of life'; seeks 'a socially meaningful role for the genre'; asks the genre to 'adopt a responsible attitude to the real burdens of the real world'; suggests that sf be divided into '"responsible" and "irresponsible", "aware" and "featherbrained"': deplores that it has lost its one 'usefulness' that sets it apart; hopes that it will undergo 'rediscovery of its prime function by a responsible authorship'. Such language is pervasive.

III

Genre sf and fantasy are strictly modern phenomena whose traditions in the English language have achieved strength and continuity only since the seminal works of H. G. Wells and William Morris respectively. Genre fantasy looks back to older traditions, but it has gained strength from the same historical phenomena that made possible a strong sf tradition, notably the occurrence of radical change in societies' social and economic structures and technological bases at such a rate as to be apparent within the lifetimes of individuals. This phenomenon was possible only after the scientific advances of the seventeenth century and was brought to fruition only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it has been linked with an anthropological awareness of other cultures with radically different social organisations and structures of values, while Darwinian biology and recent physics have impacted dramatically on older ethical and metaphysical ideas. Settled religious interpretations have been challenged by the biblical 'Higher Criticism', while other complacencies have been shattered by post-Freudian psychology and by the occurrence of two world wars. In such an environment, if a stretch of history can be looked at as an environment, the relativity of particular cultural organisations and belief systems has become clearer and clearer. Our own society's future will not be merely an extension of the present: it will be another culture, differently organised, with different beliefs, and perhaps better or worse to live in (though cultural relativity challenges even these distinctions). Fantasy and sf are both forms of fiction that embody the perception that present cultures are mutable and accidental, and indeed destined to be replaced.

Apart from the application to sf and fantasy, all of this is intellectual cliché. Yet it is not the common wisdom, as far as I can see. At this point I have to take a punt, but all my years of (for example) correctly guessing election results convince me that most individuals remain basically conservative, expecting tomorrow's lifestyle and values to be little different from today's, resisting undesired change piecemeal, perhaps expecting sustained increases in technological comforts and conveniences, along with indefinite economic growth. It's easy to be condescending about people who think this way. It's hard for people not to think in this conservative fashion when they have their own daily burdens imposed by the structure and values of our society as it exists right now: jobs to find or keep, children to support, homes and cars to maintain. Tell people that their problems are in a sense of only relative importance - that they might not be less but would certainly be different in a different society - and they'll look at you with scornful or uncomprehending eyes.

Fantasy and far future sf do have a use for these people, and a reinforcing role for those of us who think more radically (the radicalism I'm talking about need have little to do with Marxism, with which the word is vulgarly equated). The point is that our present society and the historical traditions with which it is continuous are not the only society and tradition possible. Human nature is not fixed, but changes to solve problems of environment and technology; patterns of social organisation and culturally accepted values are creative responses to situations (and causes of further situations), not results springing from any essential human nature. There may be

some bedrock of critical values by which societies can be judged, assuming there are some universal human needs, but the positive values of a particular society are of only relative pertinence and are vulnerable to changes in technology and other conditions. This felt recognition itself induces a more tolerant and flexible and less self-judgmental frame of mind, but it is not the whole story. We can build a freer or less free, more equal or less equal society, and the effort to make the best changes, judged by broad critical values, is not doomed to failure.

This knowledge can be internalised by studying the myths of cultures historically discontinuous from ours, or reading books about those cultures. Unfortunately we assimilate the attitudes and lives of past cultures continuous with our own all too easily to those of the present - which means that a knowledge of history rather than anthropology can be a tool for reinforcing our prejudices rather than a lever to force us to think radically. That's what far future sf can be and sometimes is: a lever to force us to think radically.

Genre fantasy and far future sf - and near future sf in different ways, with its emphasis on recording specific imagined changes rather than wholesale alternative societies - can have the much-needed merit of helping us transcend the limitations of our particular intersection of time and place in history, with its particular technologies, folkways, mores, and social and economic organisation. Can have - because we are all familiar with works that are merely parasitic upon the various social codes of our own society, while presenting action in some spectacularly removed environment. Creating a really convincing alternative society would be one of the most dazzling juggling acts in literature. Samuel Delany has shown in his brilliant reading of Le Guin's The Dispossessed that even that powerful novel, which presents the joys and pitfalls of a liberated anarchist Utopia with passionate virtuosity, is subtextually parasitic on many culture-bound attitudes for its effects. Perhaps this could not be otherwise, given the politics of communication with readers, not to mention publishers: just as a pragmatic reforming politician will not move too far ahead of the conservative electorate, a pragmatic subcreator of worlds will not move too far ahead of audience attitudes, or too far away from them. Yet I wonder how much Le Guin and her inferiors are even aware of the cultural assumptions that are automatically coded into their books. An attempt to ride the thin line that divides cultural parasitism from total obscurity seems to me a more zestful and appropriate role for sf, including far future sf, than Turner's literalistic social purpose. Given the nature and the habitat of sf, it also provides a fairer ideal against which writers of the genre could be judged.

- Russell Blackford, *A*
August 1984

(Continued from Page 8)

for two musical items that Greg Egan sent me the other week). And the subject of sf, 'parafiction', etc., attracted most of the letters of comment. Maybe most people are in my position: you read almost none of the stuff, but sf is the only field you know, and anyway, sf is more fun to read about than to read. A bit like my attitude to the magazine Sight and Sound: I love reading all those classy articles about films, but can't be bothered seeing any of the films.

SHANE WOOD

Flat 3, 10 O'Rorke St., Onehunga, Auckland, New Zealand

I'm twenty-one now and have read sf for only about three years, and I feel as though I've just arrived at a party when all the guests are leaving. Well, all the most interesting guests, anyway. And, like so many other of your correspondents, I have virtually stopped reading sf of late. (This seems to be a raging epidemic in some quarters - or are we the ones who are recovering?)

The description of 'parafiction' as 'books which could not have existed without the prior existence of sf and which often have the enjoyability and sense-of-wonder which we used to get from our sf' could be applied to thousands of books. One obvious example I haven't seen mentioned so far is Lessing's 'Canopus in Argos' series. 'Parafiction' is a dangerously loose term which, like all other convenient labels, only encourages pigeonholing and lazy thinking. From what little I've read, it's already obvious that there is far less cause to lump authors as diverse as Rushdie, Batchelor, Frame, and Priest together under this collective label than there ever was in calling certain authors 'science fiction writers'.
(14 October 1984)

Out of the ghetto and into the pigeonhole? Anything but. You're right. The only common characteristic of the writers mentioned so far is a willingness to include in serious fiction events that would be regarded by the more dour-minded as 'unrealistic' or 'fantastic'. If it is anything at all, 'parafiction' is more a linked characteristic, a shared feeling, in the reader's mind than any pigeonhole that writers are trying to squeeze into. I haven't read Lessing's 'Canopus in Argos' books yet, so I can't comment on them.

DAVID BRATMAN

PO Box 662, Los Altos, California 94023, USA

I can name a few new genre books I've read straight through with no trouble at all: Broken Symmetries, by Paul Preuss (sf), and Cards of Grief, by Jane Yolen (fantasy).

I like George Turner's concept of parafiction, though, and agree that if sf is ever going to merge with the mainstream, that's the way it's going to go. Many sf fans still suffer from siege mentality, and insist on defending the genre as such. The genre is only a means, and as such is not worth defending.

Exactly.

My acquaintance with Australian sf is very slight, being limited to The Altered I (for which even the term 'final draft' does not apply) and one George Turner story, 'A Pursuit of Miracles', which I thought superb. So reading your zine is going to send me on a lot of difficult hunts through libraries, but it should

do me good. I have a fair amount of experience in such chases, won in a long-standing search of early 'fifties British 'Angry Young Man' novels (lesser-known cousins of Lucky Jim), a hunt which, by the way, turned up one interesting piece of parafiction: Cards of Identity, by Nigel Dennis. (12 January 1985)

Why hunt libraries for Australian sf? Write to Norstrilia Press, PO Box 1091, Carlton, Victoria 3053, or to Paul Collins, PO Box 66, St Kilda, Victoria 3182, and we can sell you our wares. For sf from other Australian publishers, write to Merv Binns at Space Age Books, 305 Swanston St., Melbourne, Victoria 3000. With the Australian dollar currently low in value against the American dollar, you should be able to pick up all the Australian sf in print for under \$200.

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

22 Denbigh St., Pimlico, London SW1V 2ER, England

Many thanks for The Metaphysical Review 2. I think that the reason I never responded to The Metaphysical Review 1 was that ... I've lost interest in fiction, and thus no longer care to read detailed criticism of it. This must be a pretty awful admission, coming from someone who edits a reviews magazine for the BSFA, but the dreadful truth is that I just don't bloody care any more. Once upon a time, sf mattered a great deal to me, and the desire to write lengthy and intelligent criticisms of it arose from that fact; but after two or three years of this I began to realise that I was essentially wasting my time. A very small proportion of it is very very good, but the rest of it is absolute rubbish; and no matter how much you cajole the authors and rail at the readers that's the way it will always be. To pretend otherwise is to waste your time; better to get on with the things that really matter, on which you can actually have some effect. Never mind the Utopian ideal of reforming an entire literature, just get on with remaking the bits you can!

Which is obviously a conclusion that must have struck you some time ago, but has only recently percolated into my consciousness, no doubt as a consequence of my desire to give up editing Paperback Inferno for the BSFA. Come the June 1985 issue I'll have been in the post for exactly six years; and six years is at least a year (or more) too many. I need to step down now, immediately, before I go completely stale and before the magazine in consequence declines into a state of terminal lassitude. But such is my desire to end on an even number (the product, no doubt, of an anal retentive middle-class upbringing) that - although I come up for re-election to the BSFA Council at the Easter AGM, and since I won't be standing again, the April 1985 issue should technically be my last - I'm carrying on until June 1985, ending on a volume number and an even thirty-six issues since my first. And I have or will have every single one of those issues, each destined for permanent enshrinement in the Joseph Nicholas Museum of Triffic Heroism as soon as I can think of something that qualifies as triffically heroic.

(14 January 1985)

My disillusionment with sf has been set out in tedious detail in recent issues of Rataplan and in the editorial of TMR 1. But I still read as much fiction as ever; I just keep looking for a better brand

of fiction. :: All this talk about Paperback Inferno sounds like arcane gossip between fellow BSFA members, but it shouldn't be. Paperback Inferno is the current nearest thing to the 'Criticanto' pages of SF Commentary in its heyday. You can receive it by becoming a member of the BSFA (£7 to Sandy Brown, 18 Gordon Terrace, Blantyre, Lancashire G72 9NA, Scotland). Joseph Nicholas and Judith Hanna have been the most interesting contributors to Paperback Inferno, so I was hoping that they might take over the BSFA's Vector when Geoff Rippington quits as editor. To judge from Joseph's letter, this seems unlikely.

A viewpoint rather different from that of Joseph Nicholas... or of any other correspondent:

BUCK COULSON
2677W-500N, Hartford City, Indiana 47348, USA

I enjoy about as much of sf as I did thirty-five years ago; by that time I'd got over the wonder of it all and was picking and choosing. (Of course, the wonder of it all was mainly sparked by things like the Healy-McComas anthology, which I still think is the best ever produced.) I'm still picking and choosing, and finding about the same percentage of enjoyable fiction as I used to. Which is somewhere between 10 and 25 per cent of the total. Less than that if one includes fantasy, but then fantasy is easier to cull. Books about Celtic mythology, the Old Religion, and generally anything with either a hero or a heroine and a sword and/or a Power of Healing, can be discarded unread. But even after that, fantasy isn't doing well these days. Science fiction, however, is about as good as ever. (15 January 1985)

Which books, Buck, which books? I miss your lists of short book reviews in Yandro. I hope the magazine can become regularly published again, and that you reinstate the reviews column.

No more arguments for now about sf/parafiction/genre fiction. Here are a few readers' comments about books that they read and enjoyed. (A few such comments have appeared already in TMR 2.)

VAN IKIN
Dept. of English, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, WA 6004

I've just finished reading Benford's Across the Sea of Suns (Benford's work being new to me, or virtually new) and it has worked wonders in restoring my faith in the potential of the field itself. And yet, at the same time, I'm irregularly jotting notes on a piece that will eventually be about 'The Neglect of Character in SF', and tending to agree with you that 'it's the field that seems so worthless'. (16 September 1984)

More praise for Benford. I did like his Timescape, and said so in Science Fiction. I've trudged through the first chapters of several of his other books, including Against Infinity, but have given up the struggle, defeated by dullness.

ALLAN BEATTY
PO Box 1906, Ames, Iowa 50010, USA

The only book mentioned in TMR 1 that I have read is Dingley Falls. I enjoyed it, but can't for the life of me recall why it

should be classified as 'para-sf'. The best new sf book I have read this year was I, Vampire, by Jody Scott. It is only nominally a vampire story (unlike Sucharitkul's Vampire Junction). The true concerns of I, Vampire are the nature of love (witness the enthusiastic endorsement by Theodore Sturgeon) and the nature of reality. The book was promoted heavily at LACon with balloons given away and posters in restaurants. Perhaps it will be popular and win an award. Then we will have to change our minds and declare that it isn't really very good.
(19 September 1984)

I don't know these books at all. Maybe I have dropped so far out of the sf orbit that I shouldn't even think about reviving SF Commentary.

I printed the first paragraph of the following letter in MR 2. On the envelope Ralph wrote: 'Put metaphysics back in the ghetto where it belongs. The golden age of metaphysics is thirteen.'

RALPH ASHBROOK
303 Tregagon Rd., Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania 19004, USA

On the subject of metaphysics and Jung, I suggest Rupert Sheldrake's A New Science of Life. New Scientist praised it, Nature suggested it be burned. If you somehow see value in the 'collective unconscious' idea but wonder how it could be squeezed through DNA, Sheldrake suggests a marvellous metaphor. Which reminds me: I suggest you call your editorial 'Metaphorplay'. After all, it is preparation for getting your rocks off.
(23 September 1984)

The 'collective unconscious' seems the least interesting (or most evanescent) bit of Jung's world-view, but I'll read the Sheldrake book if I see it around. It was praised on the 'Science Book shop' program on ABC-AM radio. Before it goes all metaphysical at the end, Gary Zukav's The Dancing Wu Li Masters is the only book, so far, that has been able to explain the new physics to a scientific illiterate like me.

TOM WHALEN
6048 Perrier, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118, USA

Harness's The Paradox Men has been revised, and reissued by Crown. I've enjoyed most of Rudy Rucker's five sf books, especially Software and White Light. And I keep up with Lem. But that's about it with sf. I'd rather be reading German Romantics.

I have a collection (77 pp. MS) of experimental sf stories due out at the end of 1985 with Velocities Press. It's called The Eustachia Stories: An Astroromance. And I have more Walser translations due out in Robert Walser Rediscovered. Do you know Walser's work and his influence on Kafka? Vintage recently published Selected Stories by Walser in paperback.
(31 October 1984)

I had not heard of Walser until I read your letter, Tom. I'll order those books from Readings and see whether they turn up. (Tom also sent me a review of Dick's The Transmigration of Timothy Archer that he'd written for The American Book Review.)

BERND FISCHER

Zulpicherstr. 187, D-5000 Kln 41, West Germany

I rarely read sf these days (the Wolfe 'Book of the New Sun' tetralogy and Ballard's Hello America being the most enjoyable sf books), though I keep on reading fanzines and books on sf. I hope I can send you my list of the Best of Everything some day. I'm also a couple of years behind. (25 November 1984)

Your Best of Everything lists would be as welcome as ever. I still don't know whether or not I will have room for my own in this issue.

Here's another veteran Gillespie-fanzine correspondent (one of the very first SFC subscribers), who has married Brenda since the last time he appeared here:

PAUL ANDERSON

17 Baker St., Grange, South Australia 5022

I agree with you on the dearth of good sf around the place. A lot of it can still be readable, though. I do a lot of my testing by borrowing titles from the local library. In that way I keep relatively up to date without too much cost to me. I used the service for the recent Asimov books, Foundation's Edge and The Robots of Dawn. I was disappointed in both, but I did finish them, which is more than I found possible with Frank Herbert's The White Plaque. I scanned most of it, using the technique I developed with Stephen Covenant, mark 1. That served me well for Lavington Pugh (we disagree on that thing), but I loved Alasdair Gray's Lanark. (14 December 1984)

I've heard enough about The Robots of Dawn to steer me well clear of it. Foundation's Edge was bad enough. :: In a later bit of his letter, Paul repeats the view, expressed by Mike Shoemaker, that I was (in TMR 11) proscribing all sf published under that label. Not at all. I'm only saying that the reader is not likely to find enjoyable sf under the 'sf' label. If the situation changes, I'll change my opinion.

IAN CARMICHAEL

48 Suffolk Rd., Maidstone, Victoria 3012

Since my last letter I have completed a Bachelor of Theology, and am finishing training for the Baptist ministry, and pastoring a church out in the western suburbs. So no reading for relaxation, and no new sf. (Just as well, to judge from your comments.) The best book I read last year was Jurgen Moltmann's The Church in the Power of the Spirit, but I doubt that reviews of such rarefied things are really what you want - even in a Metaphysical Review. (9 January 1985)

Try me. A passionate, well-written review of a book of theology would be much better than a pedestrian review of a work of fiction, no matter how interesting the book reviewed. I say it again: send contributions on subjects that really interest you - and write as well as you can. :: The members of a western suburbs Baptist congregation would be slightly astonished if they knew that their pastor read science fiction. Even if he doesn't, these days.

PHILLIP BIRD (again)

Because the sf field is rather dry and derivative at the moment, I've dug out all those great books I never had time to read. I'm catching up with Phil Dick, J. G. Ballard, Ellison, Silverberg, etc. Belated discoveries are Dick's Ubik (a classic), Confessions of a Crap Artist, Counter-Clock World, and Dr Bloodmoney, Ballard's The Crystal World, The Terminal Beach, and High Rise, and Silverberg's Dying Inside (one of the most moving sf novels ever). The Moonee Valley library seems to have brightened up lately; I was sorely tempted to 'lose' J. G. Ballard's Myths of the Near Future; what a collection! That library seems to have all of Ballard, and most of Angela Carter.

Recently I've also read, and can thoroughly recommend The Origin, Irving Stone's mammoth fictionalised account of Charles Darwin's life; V. S. Naipaul's The Loss of El Dorado, a thoroughly researched history of Spanish, French, and English influence in the Caribbean; and Graham Greene's The Human Factor, a truly memorable espionage story.

I'm inclined to haunt the International Bookshop, where I've found The Murder of Chile, by Samuel Chavkin; El Salvador: The Face of Revolution, by Robert Armstrong and Janet Schenk; Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, by George Black; and Grenada: The Struggle Against Destabilisation, by Chris Searle. Fidel Castro, by Herbert Matthews, was also very good. When I read The Ugly American over fifteen years ago, I couldn't believe it. After reading these books, now I can,
(9 January 1985)

I keep meaning to read such worthy books (the ones you mention in your last paragraph), and have no real excuse for not doing so - except that I'm a slow reader, and the house is already full of unread books. Like many other people I'm so depressed by the endless stream of idiotic statements from the American President and his lackeys that I see little hope for changing those puerile and suicidal policies. I wake up in the morning and (when not worried about my job) I feel a rush of pleasure that World War III didn't start during the night. Which is no excuse, I realise, for staying ignorant about Central America.

FRANK C. BERTRAND

135 Rockhill Ave., Portsmouth, New Hampshire 03801, USA

I read mystery-detective novels more often than sf books, in particular those by Janwillem van de Wetering. Or, I listen to Tangerine Dream while perusing essays by Isaiah Berlin. The only intriguing sf I recall in the last couple of years is Dr Adder, by K. W. Jeter, though there are those who contend that Ronald Reagan's presidency makes for even better sf. (16 January 1985)

An end-of-the-world novel? :: Dr Adder sounds like another must-get book that I've never heard of.

DEREK KEW

16 Helene St., Bulleen, Victoria 3105

I find science fact more interesting now, which isn't surprising since it was usually the science-as-adventure bit about science

fiction that I liked. In particular, the space travel theme was my favourite, and it is a bit hard for writers to compete with reality these days. However, I did buy and enjoy Arthur Clarke's sequel to 2001: A Space Odyssey. Out of pure nostalgia I read Asimov's latest addition to his Foundation series, but found that hard to take. Again, I generally enjoy his science fact more than his fiction.

I read some of Larry Niven's earlier stories, but gradually I was turned off by the American get-up-and-go politics that seem to pervade much of his work ('the Universe will learn us or kill us'). I mention Niven since he is supposedly a 'hard science' man - but to show that I'm not entirely a one-track person, I'll say that I like just about everything that Jack Vance writes.

(18 January 1985)

Derek is the only TMR (formerly SFC) person who decided that swapping opinions over lunch is even more interesting than sending letters of comment. I presume that, since over the years we've lunched several times, but this is only the second letter of comment that Derek has sent. Luncheon-locs are recommended; my telephone number is on the colophon.

. PETER KERANS

56 Arthur St., Randwick, NSW 2031

A list of sf books I've enjoyed recently (in the last year or so) would include M. John Harrison's In Viriconium and The Ice Monkey... um... John Sladek's The Lunatics of Terra, Calvino's T-Zero (more Qfwfq stories), and Ballard's Empire of the Sun (sf?), which I stopped thesis-writing to finish. At the moment I'm reading Stanislaw Lem's His Master's Voice and finding it much to my taste, if a little tedious.

(4 February 1985)

Peter is the only male reader of SFC/TMR to change his surname, as well as his address, between issues of the magazine. He was known as Peter Coomber: '(The name-change was) a gesture symbolic of a coming to terms with things past; my father's name (Coomber) is now banished forever... "Kerans", by the way, comes from Ballard's protagonist in The Drowned World.'

I didn't find His Master's Voice at all tedious; it was one of the most pleasurable books I've read during the last year or so. I couldn't find time to write about it, however, so Lucy Sussex has reviewed it for TMR.

SIMON BROWN

GPO Box 1273, Canberra, ACT 2601

Here are a few books I've read over the last fifteen months or so and which I didn't see in any of the lists in The Metaphysical Review, and which I think are worth reading.

Fiction: Startide Rising (David Brin) (hard sf, yet!); Life and Times of Michael K. (J. M. Coetzee); and Waterland (Graham Swift).

Non-fiction: Danse Macabre (Stephen King); Monty Python: The Case Against (Robert Hewison); The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power (Robert A. Caro); The World of Odysseus (M. I. Finlay); and The Desert Column (Ion L. Idriess).

Coetzee, author of Michael K., would be worthy of an extended review in TMR. His work is not sf, at least not by my understanding of that term, but it does share some of the qualities that the best sf contains. I might even try doing such a review myself this year some time. (4 March 1985)

Any time. That's the sort of review I'm looking for. I haven't read any of the books on your list, but I've bought two of them. The Picador cover for Waterland is one of the most striking paperback covers I've seen since Penguin introduced the cool grey look for their Modern Classics in the early 1960s.

PATRICK MCGUIRE (again)

Just yesterday I found at the library the new Heyer biography, Hodge's The Private World of Georgette Heyer. There were seemingly no skeletons in the Heyer closet to match Sayers's bastard child, Lewis's alcoholic brother, or even Tolkien's arguable engrossment in his created world to the neglect of his academic duties, but in other respects the biography did rather remind me of that of other such early-to-mid-twentieth-century middle-to-UMC British writers. Heyer seems to have thought as little of the creeping British socialism as most of the others. I also got to thinking on the relation of Heyer to sf: just about all the male Heyer readers I know are also sf readers, 'Heyer Teas' are a fixture at Worldcons, etc. Hodge does not even bring the point up until the very end of the book, but when she does, I think she makes a good point. She says that Heyer, as well as sf writers, some mystery writers, C. S. Forester, and a few others 'create a private world as an escape from moral chaos'. All certainly does not come out as it should in this world; in (some) fiction we can find an existence that better fits our sense of ought-ness. For one reason or another, a stay here (at least if one of a reasonable length rather than a consuming obsession) can refresh us to cope better with everyday existence. I suppose Tolkien would argue that it does this by showing us a small model of the transmundane true order of things, and thereby restoring our virtue of hope. That's one reason for reading fiction, and in particular a large percentage of science fiction. I presume there are others, since somebody out there is buying Dhalgren and spawn, and since people like you, Bruce, seem to like mostly books that reinforce the feeling that we get from the real world anyhow, viz. that there either is no innate moral order at all, or that it's being violated left and right.

I wonder about Heyer's limitations. I find nearly all the non-Regency stuff of hers that I've ever tried to be quite unreadable, whether her historicals set in other periods or her mysteries. For me this is unusual; it is, come to think of it, paralleled in my attempts to read a Jack Vance mystery novel, but I will happily follow de Camp or Poul Anderson through any genre of fiction or nonfiction he chooses to work in. The Regency romances were Heyer's best sellers, so presumably a majority of her readership agreed with me. How does it come to be that some writers like Heyer and Tolkien are pretty much stuck with one fictional world, while others can make up one per book, successfully juggle three or four series, or whatever?

As someone working in Russian studies, I find it interesting that someone seemingly so English as Heyer in fact had a Russian grandfather (presumably Volga German or Baltic German, from the name), and in fact looks rather Slavic in photography taken in middle age, when (like most Slavic women) she had put on much weight. I also learn that I and everybody I know have been mispronouncing her name. Originally it was pronounced as one might expect, the same as higher, but her father anglicised it during World War I to be pronounced like hair...

Thanks for the comments on Heyer, Patrick. I'm not sure that I thank you for the assumptions made about ^{my}view of the world, or literature. I 'like mostly' books that are well written, regardless of their attitude to the 'innate moral order'. Do comfortably UMC writers 'escape from moral chaos', or simply leave out the uncomfortable bits of the worlds they create? Surely Heyer's Regency has little to do with the actual barbarity of life in that time? I like the 'nice' writers who can scribble a decent brand of the English language. There is a certain standard of well-crafted prose, found among the books by the top historical and mystery writers, that is often absent in the works of sf authors. Mystery and thriller writers can be a lot better than Heyer, Sayers, and Christie, of course; recent discoveries of mine include Josephine Tey and Eric Ambler.

I hope your health has improved and that your stint in the world of regular hours has not been too disagreeable. I'm not sure what to wish Elaine, as my feelings toward copy editors at academic presses are not of the kindest at present. A mildly revised version of my dissertation on Soviet sf is shortly coming out from UMI Research Press, which is a subsidiary of University Microfilm, the people who are the repositories for most doctoral dissertations in this country. UMI Research is making certain dissertations, viewed as the most saleable, over into small-edition books, presumably mostly for library sales. This won't bring me any money to speak of, but I'm pleased at the thought of a book to call my very own. I was not too pleased at what the copy editors did to my poor MS, with no consultation with me until everything was already in galleys. I finally talked them into capitalising 'Martian' (admittedly not the current astronomical usage) and (I am assured) into writing 'aircar' solid (the latter only after lengthy argumentation and citations from sf by me), but all manner of other barbarous adjustments, largely in the matter of capitalisation, will go through, such as lower-case earth and sun in an astronomical context, and even lower-case western as the adjective from the West (as a region of the world). I begin to see why SFWA recommends a contract clause about seeing the copy-edited MS. Copy editors would make infinitely less work for themselves if they would pause to at least consider the possibility that there may be some system or intention behind the 'errors' they detect. I certainly am not above careless errors, or even an occasional habitual misspelling that has persisted through the years, and I am more than happy to see these corrected; but confound it, most of the time I know what I am doing and what I mean to say! (End of rant.)

(3 February 1985)

I'm a copy editor, too, so I have at least as much suspicion of writers as they have of copy editors. An editor's first obligation is to 'house style'. Every publisher in Australia seems to have a different house style, although it would be much easier for both editors and writers if everybody stuck to 'Oxford style', based on The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors and Hart's Rules for Compositors and Readers at the University Press Oxford. I don't know what is the American equivalent of Oxford style. Why do publishing houses have house styles? Because writers often cannot spell, punctuate, paragraph, or type. At least, not in textbook publishing, where Elaine and I find ourselves. (At rival publishers.) You, of course, are an exception, Patrick, but how can a publisher's editor work on that assumption? For every writer who has a totally consistent system, 100 do not. The most satisfactory solution is to fit everybody into house style. I deduce from your letter that UMI Research's is to get rid of capital letters unless they are absolutely necessary, and to hyphenate or split words such as 'aircar'/'air car'/'air-car'. I found myself involved in an embarrassing case of writer/editor misunderstanding. George Turner carefully wrote In the Heart or in the Head in Norstrilia Press's house style. John Bangsund, as our copy editor, carefully changed everything to Oxford style. This incident, when everybody was in the right, led to somered faces..

Here's somebody who battles reviewers, rather than copy editors:

TOM DISCH

New York, New York 10003, USA

It is early Saturday, and here I am at my Kay-Pro 2, writing another unsolicited endorsement, and with such an embarrassment of good news that I may compensate by considering here for a little while our mortal condition: - since I can't think of much else to complain of. I did have a dreadful review of The Businessman in the fateful New York Times, but as it was Marion Zimmer Bradley who wrote the review, and as she had no more to say than that she doesn't think horror and humour can possibly mix (she having no sense of either, from sheer self-preservation) and that I'm disdainful of sentimentality (i.e., I've written woundingly of her big Arthurian claypit of a novel when I reviewed it in Twilight Zone), it was not as devastating as a bad review from someone of documentable intelligence.

See how, with just a little trying, I've milked my one gripe for the best part of a paragraph. Now it's safe to speak of good fortune. I've been working well, with a couple novels newly budded from the brainstem, and daily stints of completing Amnesia which gets programmed as I turn in each new sheaf of pages (a computer-interactive novel, how about that?); meanwhile, I've lost a bit more than 20 pounds and am still steady on course; and I have a new publisher who has negotiated (though not yet signed) a five-book contract, which includes the three UK-published poetry books as a single hardcover book, and The Brave Little Toaster as a children's book; plus three novels, one and a half of which are already written. I have even had good news from your continent: a Mr Connolly of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation sent a letter saying how much he liked the last two books of poetry and would I do a forty- to sixty-minute reading for Australian radio. For a price greater than the combined advances of the two books! So God bless Australia. And

speaking of Australia, did you know that you're now the In continent? This season Bloomingdale's is featuring the Australian look (lots of those bush hats and desert-hued twill), and your movies are more popular than most English imports. (Belatedly I've been renting the classics from Down Under to see on the Betamax, and my favourite of the lot has been Picnic at Hanging Rock.) And there's been a flurry of Australian novels from various publishers, a pair of which, by Elizabeth Jolley, I just reviewed for the Times, and which I commend back to you Australians (is 'Aussie' considered a slur or just gauche, like 'Yank' for Americans?), especially the recentest of them, Miss Peabody's Inheritance. It was, once again, good to hear from you, though a little dismaying to learn that if I ever do manage to get to Melbourne I won't be able to visit you at home for more than fifteen minutes at a time, being ultra-allergic to cats. Well, you probably have pubs, and by then I may be off the diet.

(20 October 1984)

The Businessman was reviewed favourably in Time and Newsweek, and (although Van has not published the piece yet) by me in Science Fiction. I hope it does well. Thanks for the other personal news. I'm ashamed to say that, for some trivial reason, I missed hearing you on ABC-AM's 'Radio Helicon' program when it was played on 1 April. I hope somebody taped the piece, or that the ABC repeats it.

'Aussie' is okay - often complimentary - as long as you pronounce it 'Ozzy', not 'Ossy'. I keep trying to work out how to take advantage of Australian In-ness. Can I make the SFC Reprint so fashionable that I can sell the other half of the print run? Can Norstrilia Press find a way to sell millions of its books in New York? I hope that pro-Australian book-buyers in New York rush for copies of Gerald Murnane's The Plains, when Braziller releases it this coming 'fall'. Surely it can do at least as well as Miss Peabody's Inheritance. I can't help you when recommending Australian films; I haven't seen any for some time. My own favourite is Peter Weir's The Cars That Ate Paris, the film he made before Picnic at Hanging Rock. Meanwhile a final, explanatory chapter for the Hanging Rock novel has turned up, and TMR reviewer, Yvonne Rousseau, has been asked to record a commentary on it. Neither the last chapter nor Yvonne's commentary has been released yet. Joan Lindsay's explanation cannot be as interesting as any of those offered by Yvonne in her book, The Murders at Hanging Rock.

TONY PEACEY

82 Milne St., Bayswater, WA 6053

When I want to read sf now I generally re-read old favourites late at night. The later the older - I awake at 5.30 a.m., have a cup of tea, switch on the computer, and work as a Writer - Adult, Mature, of Keen Intelligence - for a few hours. Then I go out and cut a tree or so for \$\$\$ (if there are any to cut), an occupation affording physical enjoyment and requiring a degree of circumspection but no great intellectual power. In the evening I lie in front of the fire and play with the cats and Gloria. Last thing at night, in bed, complete regression triumphs: I read a couple of pages of Tarzan and fall asleep. Not surprised! do I hear you say? No less a man than George Turner Himself once said in public that Burroughs was a rattling good story-teller.

'Our holiday consisted in hitch-hiking to Tennant Creek and back.

Eight thousand kilometres. Gloria and I. After she had agreed to the idea she had a week of nightmares, but once on the road she really took to it. Then I couldn't leave her for a moment without some young bloke in a fast car or a road train trying to whisk her off. She loved it. She's top lady, accountant and things, in a largish office. They thought it rather strange but envy her tan.

I waste a lot of time messing with the computer and thought when we went to escape it for a couple of weeks. Silly boy! The friend we visited teaches at Ali Curung, an Aboriginal settlement miles from anywhere in the NT. When we finally arrived I discovered he has a roomful of bloody Apples at the school. They're taking over the world, mate, so watch out.

(12 September 1984)

Not here. So far. I use a word processor at work, but the machine does not make it any easier to think up the words to write on the screen. Meanwhile, this magazine is being typed on the Adler Gabriele that I bought from John Bangsund in 1971, and which John bought from Noel Kerr in 1970.

Tony asked, 'Do you still have lots of cats?' Yes, still five of them. Oscar has grown much larger since I wrote for TMR 1, but he's still sooky and kittenish. TC is very big and sooky, Apple Blossom's still crazy, Lulu's tough and canny, and Solomon's still asleep.

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS

27 Borough Rd., Kingston on Thames, Surrey KT2 6BD, England

I'm glad to see you're still 'Talking to Your Friends', always the most important part of SFC, so I have great hopes for TMR. I was a bit alarmed to see this issue labelled No. 1, as I could have sworn I received a magazine from you with this title years ago. Liked the picture on the cover; it looks like a piece of English countryside - is it?

You seem to be the only person who remembers the first run of Metaphysical Review. I couldn't remember which issue number it reached, so I started the numbers again.

Elaine will be pleased to hear your comment about her cover. She drew the picture, basing it on her own photo of one of the cupolas in Melbourne's Botanic Gardens.

I am sort of semi-retired. Quit my job because I couldn't stand bureaucracy any longer. (Luckily) they treated it as early retirement. So I came away with a bit of cash, not enough to keep me going till sixty-five, but enough so I could take the summer off and sit at the typewriter. I now feel sane again. Have just applied for a part-time job to make some money.

(28 September 1984)

The dreadful winter appears to be over, thank God, so I suppose I'll have to start looking for a job once more - unless I can sell something quickly. I gave up trying in the bad weather, just couldn't face going out in it. Plus the last job I tried for, I had two interviews and both times I was told they'd let me know in a couple of days. That was a month ago and I still haven't heard a word from them.

(13 March 1985)

Sounds familiar - rather like the dispiriting days I spent in 1983 and 1984 applying for jobs. I hope your writing continues well, although that's not a way to gain a secure income.

JOHN MILLARD

18-86 Broadway Ave., Toronto, Ontario M4P 1T4, Canada

I have turned from sf to another interest of mine, the history of exploration. My primary interest is Antarctica, with secondary interests in the Pacific Rim and sailing ships. It's incredible how many long voyages around the world were made by wind power, and some sailing ships were even used during World War II. I've been working on a world-wide survey, which I began in December 1981, on a book published on the Antarctic in 1908. Also on a review, perhaps better called a critique, of an Antarctic book published in Australia in 1982. (24 November 1984)

Does any reader share John's interest in Antarctica? If so, write to him.

DIANE FOX

PO Box 1194, North Sydney, NSW 2060

Keeping a dream diary seems a great idea. I'd love to do that. Unfortunately I get up at 4.45 a.m., hurry until I catch the train at 5.55 a.m., and usually fall asleep again. I have no chance to write down my dreams until 8 a.m. I usually don't remember my dreams at all under these circumstances. In the past I had more vivid dreams, which often I did remember. They were about a failure to achieve something: running and not moving, flying and never getting more than a foot or so off the ground. The flying dream is supposed to be sexually symbolic, and my love life at that time, before I met John, was of overwhelming non-existence. But I think this dream dealt more with the failure of my life in every aspect - job, friendship, creativity, purpose. The failed flying dream was painfully frustrating and embittering. Yet at least I managed to get off the ground.

(5 December 1984)

Thanks for being the only writer to send comments about dreams, Diane. Dreams - actual dreams, not wishdreams - have been a major interest of mine during the last few years. I've never had a dream of flying, not even of getting a foot off the ground. I've had a few dreams of being airborne, or spaceborne, in vehicles - but never of winging away by myself. Once in a dream I saw a flying boy, whizzing along a few feet above the main street of a south-eastern suburb of Melbourne. But I wasn't the flying boy. How have your dreams changed since your life changed, Diane?

JOHN J. ALDERSON

Havelock, Vic. 3465

If you want more cats I may be able to help. Recently some bastard dumped two here, one of which speedily became four. I shot one and the rest lost several of their lives and have wisely decamped. My place is continually invaded by diverse creatures - mice, rats, lizards, possums, and an innumerable number and variety of birds, all wishing to share their lives with me, but never an eligible woman. I count those who may

wish to join me at a distance as ineligible. All this leads me to suggest that humanity may not really be the pinnacle of wisdom after all. (21 December 1984)

Do the locals call you the St Francis of Havelock? (I suspect that people have dumped cats on us as well, but the nice dumpees tend to stay. In Lulu's case, I think she surveyed the entire street to find the best suckers, and chose us.)

A long time since I had heard from John Alderson, and nearly as long a time since I had had a letter of comment from the fabled:

DON ASHBY

76 Kay St., Carlton, Vic. 3053

For the past eight months I have been (in between working as a mechanist at the Universal Theatre) exploring, with a group of young actors, improvisatory acting. I have, in the past, taken many workshops in this area, but I have never had the opportunity before to work over such an extended period with the same people. It has been both stimulating and eye-opening. The work has led me to change my views on many things, both about the nature of theatre and the nature of the arts in general.

The workshops have been a steady dismantling and atomising of the verbal and physical behaviour that make up social intercourse. The exposure of all the manipulative tricks that people use as a substitute for real communication, and the confused way in which people attempt to communicate their needs have at times been terrifying. It has long been my belief, now confirmed, that the sundry group 'therapy' methods that have sprung up over the past twenty years or so are a self-delusory scam. The idea that you can somehow get human relationships 'right' by modifying behavioural cues is appallingly misguided. Overt social behaviour is rather like Peer Gynt's onion. What matters is clarity of attitude and motive. I have discovered that once the genuine motive for action is in the mental foreground all behaviour becomes automatically clear and communication flows. The contrary is also true: by artificially modifying physical or verbal cues (that is, by changing the attitude of the head, keeping still, or by preceding each sentence with an 'um') it is possible to manipulate totally a situation and make the other person dance to your tune like a trained bear.

These may be generalisations, but it has been exciting to see these generalisations put into practice in very specific instances. In order to act (in the theatrical sense) in this way, removal of the ego must be authentic and believable. To take on a role with success needs a removal of the 'I'. 'Woe to him who wilfully innovates', as it says in the Tao Te Ching.

This, believe it or not, brings me back to fanzine publishing. The reason that your fanzines are a delight to read is that the blithering egoising that most fan editors indulge in is totally absent. 'Go to the pine to learn of the pine and the bamboo to learn of the bamboo', and go to TMR to learn of Bruce. The clear and ingenuous way in which you describe your triumphs and tribulations, mostly resisting the temptation to sermonise,

gives your descriptions a wholesome verity mostly absent from other fan writers.

It is, if I can reliably dredge my memory so far back into my past, the things I first found engaging about the sf genre that I now find boring, artificial, and pretentious. It is nice to think that this is perceptual progress. I, like everyone else, applauded the 'new wave', which showed so much promise, but has now deteriorated into endless linguistic elaboration. I can't remember the last time I finished a science fiction novel. The closest I have come to the genre with anything like enjoyment has been Angela Carter.

It is perhaps unrealistic amidst the Babel of our pluralistic society to expect anything other than what is being produced both within and without the sf genre; plunged, as we are, in the maelstrom of a vast pooling of ignorance and misinformation: garbage in, garbage out, is the rule rather than the exception. Just as 'authentic' drama has nothing to do with content and everything to do with vision and attitude, literature has nothing to do with discourse on the present or the future, but has everything to do with a defoliation of experience to reveal the ground from which it grew. It is ^{for} this reason that Beckett and Stoppard are great playwrights and Hesse is a great novelist. It is relevant here to repeat my quotation from the Tao Te Ching: 'Woe to him who wilfully innovates.' It is especially relevant to sf writers. (8 January 1985)

Thanks, Don. I must be doing something right, to receive such a letter, but I'm not sure what I'm doing right. My 'fanzine self' is actually a very artificial self - somebody built to eliminate, I hope, many faults of my 'face-to-face self'. My fanzine self is an edited self. My face-to-face self? I yam what I yam, as Popeye said. But people in fandom don't seem to like meeting that face-to-face self, and I'm replacing him, for the time being, with my fanzine self. All the fans who are popular now are people who put on a 'good act' in public. This I can't do; this I refuse to do. I don't like the idea of acting, of putting on a false front - yet probably I do it on paper. I'm not sure how all this applies to your experience among actors, Don. Maybe the apa is fandom's equivalent of the acting workshop, a place where egos can prance around and try themselves out. Fanzine editors need to be more canny about themselves and their readers; it's too costly to make a mistake. I don't improvise because I can't. I know the few things I can do, and the many things I can't do. Cramped in the box of my fanzine self, I rearrange the cushions and settle down to make the best use of the tiny space. If that's worth your compliments, Don, thanks for the compliments.

TERENCE M. GREEN

159 Parkhurst Blvd., Toronto, Ontario M4G 2E9, Canada

I've been teaching only half-time for the last year and a half - voluntarily - in order to devote afternoons, by and large, to writing. Have done a lot of professional work, most of it outside the sf field. Within the field, I've just completed a novel, which is currently with an agent in New York. My story, 'Barking Dogs', which appeared in the May 1984 F&SF, has made the preliminary Nebula ballot, as did 'Susie Q²' (Asimov's, August 1983) the previous year. This pleases me, modestly. 'Legacy'

is scheduled for the March 1985 issue of F&SF, and 'Point Zero' is in inventory at F&SF. I've just finished a story, and am working on another one. 'Room 1786', which I published back in 1982, has been picked up for inclusion in a Canadian high school writing textbook... And in spite of all this, the money is still running out, and I'll probably be back full-time teaching in Fall 1985. At least for a while again, to recoup. Don't know how you've lasted this long without a job.

The boys are growing up. Conor is seven, Owen is four. What a treat!

Your odyssey into medical para-competence parallels nearly everyone else's, I'm sure. They filled me with stuff to x-ray in October, and came to ambiguous, tentative non-conclusions. On another anatomical matter entirely, of course. But that only serves to prove the fact that medicine is mostly groping guesswork at best, once your body does something not widely annotated. One learns to keep one's fingers crossed - or something crossed - and tread carefully through the mines of doctoring. Good luck. (More sex will cure that back. Forget that chiropractor.) (18 January 1985)

Good luck with the writing, Terry. Maybe if I'd written enough fiction over the years I might have scored a few similar successes. Apathy, and a lack of self-confidence, deflect me into other activities, such as fanzine publishing. I have a lot of good story ideas in my dream diaries, but so far they've stayed there. At the moment I'm being paid by the hour to write - but not fiction. Last September I was given the task of writing 200,000 words by May. With one thing and another, I now have 100,000 words to write by the end of May. (That's 20,000 words a week - impossible.) :: How did we survive without a regular job for me? By the sweat of Elaine's brow. We like being a two-income family these days.

My tale of medical misadventures has brought a mixed, but not very quotable response. BUCK COULSON: (address earlier) wrote about being forbidden sweet things all together.

And here's a letter from someone from whom I hadn't heard for many years:

JOHN BROSNAN

23 Lushington Rd., London NW 10, England

Over the years, Bruce, you have taken your readers on trips into the deeper and wilder recesses of your mind, but in IMR 2 you took them somewhere entirely different - right up the back of your nose!

I found your description of your eye trouble interesting and, while I sympathise with you over the way you were treated by the specialists and staff at the hospital, we parted company when you started extolling the wondrous powers of the naturopath.

You've got to admit you displayed a remarkable lack of consistency - after being justifiably sceptical about the varying diagnoses that you got from the doctors, you then swallow without a blink of your good eye the automatic diagnosis from the naturopath that you are - surprise! surprise! - suffering from food allergy! Good grief, that's what you expect a naturopath to

tell you. You could be suffering from anything from a cold to gangrene in both legs and a naturopath would tell you it's all down to eating the wrong foods.

I mean, really Bruce - if one of the doctors at the Eye and Ear Hospital had told you to give up coffee, sugar, white flour, dairy products, and chocolate, would you have obeyed so smartly? Yet you treat the naturopath's word like gospel. Why? Well, because he was a young, stylish man who listened to you. I suppose if he'd told you to boil crow feathers in cow's urine for a half an hour and drink the result you would have too...

I'm not saying there's anything wrong with giving up dairy products, etc., and I think your own diagnosis was correct - that you were suffering from a mild, if irritating, allergy, but I'm sure it wasn't anything to do with white flour or coffee or would have probably cleared up on its own (as it seemed to be doing, according to your piece). Why didn't you try a course of anti-histamines before trying the anti-chocolate nut?

I'm sorry, but I must admit I regard all this 'back-to-nature' medicine with deep suspicion. There's this faddist belief - and it's growing fast - that all illness is in the mind, or rather caused by the mind; that diseases are an outward manifestation of a mental problem, or a spiritual one; that cancer can be cured by thinking the right thoughts, having a positive mental attitude, and giving up white bread; that modern medical science does more harm than good...

As far as I'm concerned, this is all another sign of the irrationalism of the age (your pet guru, Ivan Illich, has a lot to answer for, Bruce) - a more radical form of Christian Science which holds that if you're sick it's your fault, in the same way that some people blame the poor for being poor.

The truth is that the way the human body functions, and the way it breaks down, involves many complicated processes that are going to take a long time to unravel and may never be completely solved. Yes, I'm sure there is a correlation between personality and the body's immune system but that is just one of the processes involved. The natural health advocates are suffering from a chronic human condition - they want clear and simple answers. They want a nice and neat little formula that will define all illness and its cause - a kind of physiological Unified Field theory. And I'm sure they'll finally come up with one, and I bet white flour is mixed up in it somewhere.

If you are still suffering from coffee withdrawal, Bruce, I read of a crank remedy which is very popular in the States right now: it involves giving yourself coffee enemas. I'm not sure what it's supposed to cure or whether you apply the coffee hot or cold, but it sounds like a surefire way of waking yourself up in the mornings.

(24 February 1985)

This is pretty entertaining stuff, John, but it has little to do with what I said in my article. I'm not in the habit of placing my faith in anyone, least of all someone who earns a lot more money than I do. However, my doctor did provide a solution that worked. Not only did the specialists not fulfil this basic function, but they did not even try to find any answers. If someone treats you with contempt, and

makes no attempt to solve your problem, you leave his or her office as fast as possible. Medicos seem to think that vulnerable customers will take any old rubbish from them, just because it comes from an 'authority'. I had some prejudice in favour of my doctor/naturopath because Elaine's arthritis had been helped greatly by an allergy specialist about five years ago. At any rate, my doctor was not suggesting anything that could harm me. Why not give his treatment a shot? If it hadn't worked, I wouldn't have lost anything, except some weight.

I don't know how you deduced from my article that I thought all disease is in the mind. I would favour the view (on the basis of the evidence that keeps popping up) that much disease is caused by the modern city environment, or by the foods and drinks we consume. This seems to put the blame on the individual - maybe. If we lived in the country, we wouldn't have an income, since neither of us drives a car. And how easy is it to avoid known allergy-inducing foods, such as white flour and dairy products? Most foods in most shops are loaded with salt and sugar, both of which are known to be harmful in any quantity. How do you find substitutes? Coffee is a slightly different matter; I'm an addict. I had drunk coffee, more than ten cups per day, since I was fourteen. I had always insisted that it wasn't doing me any harm. My doctor/naturopath said it was a poison. A bit extreme, surely? I gave up coffee entirely for three weeks, but my headaches were as bad as ever, and I couldn't sleep properly. I went back to two cups per day. This was marvellous. These cups gave me the 'lift' that coffee was supposed to give people, but hadn't given me for many years. I crept up to four cups a day. I sleep much better, but every now and again my eye begins to feel weepy again. Okay, so it was caffeine that was the culprit. The only way to find out was by experiment. Why didn't the GP and specialists know about this effect? Probably because they didn't read the current research.

All this disputation is too much for me. I think I'll go and have another cup of coffee, and hand the floor to:

BRIAN ALDISS

Woodlands, Foxcombe Rd., Boars Hill, Oxford OX1 5DL, England

How fascinating was the story of your eye, your nose-picking, and your new diet; some of us long-term Gillespie-readers know more about your tear ducts than we do about our own. I'm sure that revised diet will help you. The sooner such slightly unorthodox treatments become standard, the better. Doctors should be able to specify exactly what foodstuffs disagree with us.

My brother-in-law, Antony, has considerable pain in one foot. He has undergone neurectomy and had one whole toe removed (they take it right back to the calcaneum, and do it so neatly that you'd think Antony was born with only four toes). Now he has more operations ahead and meanwhile suffers great pain. He went to a watchmaker in Piccadilly to get a watch repaired and the man said immediately, 'Sir, this breakdown is connected with your foot.' It turned out this guy is now certified as a layer-on-of-hands. Antony had a session with him, was put into a trance, and roused to a sensation of well-being. He had seen in his trance four women, all sharply differentiated, in different stages of their life, not chronological. They moved (i.e., they weren't just

stills) against a blue background - blue, the colour of healing. Antony got up and walked, to find the pain had completely disappeared. Several days later he is still, almost literally, walking on air. Of course he will have to undergo the surgery for the neuremia. He is haunted by the four women, and has no idea who they are.

Damien Broderick, in his review of the first two Helliconias, asks, 'Do we really wish to hear about these flawed, nervy kings and their beautiful, betrayed women?' Good question. My answer would be an enthusiastic Yes, which is why I wrote about them. Another answer to Damien would be that I derived this particular bit of the Helliconia story from the Nemanija dynasty which ruled a medieval Serbian state until the Turks overwhelmed them. Milutin, in particular, married a child bride for dynastic reasons. Third answer to the rhetorical question, and the best one, would be that while you are reading of this flawed king and his betrayed queen, you are also reading a drama of human lust and possessiveness. The story makes it clear that the queen really can't let go of the king, even when dismissed, any more than he can of her. And there are the lesser personages all the time, many of them slaves. In a sense, the whole book - to be completed on 18 April when Winter appears - is 'about' our fever to possess one another: the happiness it brings, the misery. I'm glad that Damien didn't consciously observe this, since it absolves me from the charge of didacticism... No, I'm cheating saying it that way: for in the end of Winter I do almost step forward and deliver my message to camera. You can't write three slogging great novels like these without having something to say about which you feel strongly.

I've lost Roger Weddall's address. Please thank him for his card. I heard he'd been in a bad accident in Cairo, and hope he is better now. Roger, dream of four women against a blue background. 'Blue Background' - there's a good title for a story.
(21 January 1985)

Roger is back in Australia (he had to return by 8 March to attend a concert by Neil Young), but has no dependable address yet. He was involved in a bad accident way out in the Egyptian desert, and only because of a series of miracles did he receive proper treatment. I hope he writes a book about his Egyptian trip, as he said he would.

Thanks for your brother-in-law's mystical medical story. I keep hoping for visions of one sort or another, but make do with my technicoloured dreams.

Brian mentioned the name of Damien Broderick...

LEIGH EDMONDS

PO Box 433, Civic Square, ACT 4208

I must admit to having wondered about the temporal content of both Valencies and Transmitters, by Damien Broderick. What I had thought was that they showed that Damien is either permanently or temporarily stuck at the end of the 1960s. But, unlike Lucy Sussex, I don't perceive this as a flaw; why should a book be flawed simply because it isn't written in the style of or deal with problems that are currently fashionable? The idea that Valencies (and Transmitters) were published too late is odd, in

that sf is a field that should allow authors flexibility of style. And anyhow, would Damien want to write fashionable books?

Were the problems that concerned people at the end of the 'sixties ever resolved? They were just overlaid with other problems and concerns. There's nothing wrong with a little archaeology.

And if the stuff in Valencies is fifteen years late, that doesn't say much for the vast majority of sf, which is anchored even further in the past.

Anyhow, I'm biased because, to a large extent, the atmosphere generated by Broderick's two novels generates the sorts of activities and emotions I was into in that period, and I'm no more averse to the occasional emotional wallow than anybody else.
(13 September 1984)

I've wondered where to include the following letter, which is the saddest I've ever received. Gian Paolo's words make the rest of the magazine look like mere frippery, so I'll let them stand alone:

GIAN PAOLO COSSATO
30121.Venezia, Cannaregio 3825, Italy

Agnes, my wife, died 12 January. She had cancer of the liver and her sufferings went on for a bit more than two months. She was forty-four. No symptoms till the beginning of October. She always enjoyed good health. In September she was still swimming and going to the gymnasium. No alcohol. She had stopped smoking ten years ago, two years before our daughter, Diane, now eight, was born.

They thought she had gall bladder stones. The operation took place 6 November, at the exact time and date of our thirteenth wedding anniversary. They gave her two months maximum. Chemotherapy was tried in the Institute for Cancer of Milan. Transplant was excluded.

She came back to Venice on 5 January, in time for the birthday of Diane. Managed to sit ten minutes at the table. Smiled for the last time, helping Diana to blow out the candles. Next day she was again in hospital. It was an atrocious death, but the law does not allow doctors to help a patient in such a condition. When you see this it is difficult not to be in favour of euthanasia, all of the logical objections notwithstanding.

She was cremated 16 January, as was her desire. It was one of the worst days Venice had known since 1929. Half of the lagoon was iced and it was almost impossible to walk in the streets. Our cemetery is a whole island (San Michele). Stravinsky and Ezra Pound are also buried there, not far from where Agnes lies.

She was a marvellous artist. Could paint, sculpture, work with any kind of material. Her knitting were masterpieces and she could turn any dish into a pleasure for the palate.

John Bangsund's sister, Joy, met her in 1973 when she was at our home for lunch.

Sorry for writing you such a sad letter, but even if you are far away and we have never met, I do consider you a friend. I

appreciate always what you write and what other people write in
your magazines. (1 February 1985)

I can't remember what I wrote back to Gian Paolo, but I'm sure it was inadequate. I can only be grateful for this letter, for what it says about friendship, life, death, and fanzines.

I hope that you and your daughter are finding ways to cope, Gian Paolo, and that one day we will meet.

Also I can only offer best wishes and condolences to Jenny Bryce and John Foyster, whose son, Colin James Henry, died on 24 February 1985, after a constant struggle for life since he was born in October 1983. Not much I can say, except to wish that events had turned out much better.

Recently I had dispiriting news from America that Norbert Couch, long-time St Louis fan, died early in 1984. Norbert and his wife, Leigh, were members of the 1969 St Louiscon committee, and were good friends to me in 1973 when I visited St Louis. While there, I met their son, Mike, who died in 1983 of a heart attack. Norbert and Leigh's daughter, Lesleigh, was the first DUFF winner, and has been a patron saint of mine over the years. Leigh's address is Rt. 2, Box 889, Arnold, MO 63010.

By now you probably know that A. Bertram Chandler, known as Bert to his Australian friends and Jack to his overseas friends, died in June last year. I met Bert only about half a dozen times, and didn't much like his books (although I can see why other people did), but he wrote to me continually during the life of SF Commentary. When we met, we seemed to take up a conversation interrupted only by a short space of time, although sometimes it was years between meetings. People who knew him better than I did have written obituaries in several other fanzines.

A sombre note to end on, but... but... that's what things have been like recently, with triumphs and disappointments cancelling each other out. The only pulse of excitement comes from the direction of the Aussiecon Committee. Aussiecon (the World Convention to be held in Melbourne this coming August) should be big, and exciting, provided that the Committee can stand the strain.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

Lots of fanzine editors. I was particularly glad to get my first issue of Yandro in years, and to get back on the mailing list of Small Friendly Dog.

Letter-writers who haven't appeared yet (or in TMR 2): LEE HARDING; JULIAN FREIDIN, who expresses great regrets about the passing of SFC; ARTHUR HLAVATY; DAVID PRINGLE, who has It's a Wonderful Life on videotape... 'I show it to almost everyone who visits.'; JOAN GASKELL; JEAN WEBER; FRANK BRYNING, who bought In the Heart or in the Head; DAVID RUSSELL; FRANK MERRICK; DAVID KING; NED BROOKS; JAY BLAND, whose letter should appear in Science Fiction; RICH BROWN, whose letter will appear in my FAPazine; MARC ORTLIEB, whose letter castigating Yvonne Rousseau I've shown to its luckless object; MICHAEL HAILSTONE; COLIN STEELE, who reviewed In the Heart... in the Canberra Times; TERRY DOWLING, whose letter will appear in Science Fiction; ALLAN TEMPEST; MAE STRELKOV, who has an army of twenty cats; KEVIN

DILLON; LANCE SYMES, who will keep an eye out for George Mills; TERRY CARR, who bought In the Heart...; ROSLYN KOPEL GROSS, who doesn't like to be quoted; STEVEN PAULSEN; ANDY RICHARDS; the PIPER family; GEORGE ERACLIDES; TERESA MORRIS, who liked Midnight's Children better than Shame, and who recommends Wilson Harris's Palace of the Peacock; MICHAEL HAILSTONE again, mentioning that he publishes a magazine called the Matalan Rave, which I've never heard of; GEORGE FLYNN, whose recent disasters make any disasters in my life look like the merest wrinkles on the orange peel of existence; the PRINCIPAL LIBRARIAN, NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA, who tells me that The Metaphysical Review now has the ISSN of 0814-8805; ROBERT BLOCH, who has recently had cataract surgery - somewhat nastier than a weepy eye - and who can't be at Aussiecon; MARK LAWSON, who is now a journalist with The Australian Financial Review: 'I've sort of finally hit the big time... I got the job after getting drunk with the Melbourne Bureau chief... (best job interview I've ever had)'; ALEXANDER NEDELKOVICH, who changed addresses without telling me, so has still to receive TMR 2; DORIS MEHEGAN, who keeps writing nice letters from the Spaced Out Library, Toronto, although I never get around to answering them; ERIC LINDSAY, who sympathises with me because I have to use an IBM Personal Computer at work, and an MS-DOS operating system, not to mention Wordstar word processing program: 'a disaster waiting to happen to people'; VALERIE WARD, who cannot work out how I can afford to publish a free magazine, but not one that's charged for... um, since I can't explain my reasoning in under a page, I'll leave it for now and write you a letter sometime, Valerie; RICHARD FAULDER, who makes a connection between my statement that I 'don't worry too much about the logic in sf novels' and the list of sf authors I like, such as Ballard, Wolfe, and Disch; STEVE GREEN, who sees no reason for using the term 'parafiction': 'Myself, I prefer the established label "Speculative Fiction"'; GREG EGAN, who sent lots of news, and two articles; and recommends John Sladek's Tik Tok; MATS LINDER, who wrote a very long letter, which his computer rejected with the surly comment: 'DISK READ ERROR OCCURRED'; so he sent a very nice short letter instead; and GEORGE 'LAN' LASKOWSKI, whose letter arrived too late for consideration in the main letter column.

No room left for the 'Musely' column, so I'll leave it to next time. Enough for me to say that I had one of those Great and Wonderful Transcendental Experiences - that is, one of Neil Young's recent Australian concerts. It was really 2½ concerts in one: more than an hour of Young and his 'International Harvesters' country-rock band; more than half an hour of Young by himself; and 1½ hours of Neil Young and Crazy Horse (who were revealed to be four-sevenths of the International Harvesters), playing the shake-the-Festival-Hall-to-its-foundations music that featured in Rust Never Sleeps.

And, finally... thanks for the Ditmar Award, folks. Of course, nobody can quite work out why I received it. Can one be 'Best Editor' of 1984, when I hadn't edited any sf? Is the award for 'Editor of Things About SF'? If so, I was eligible (having edited one issue of Science Fiction as well as two TMRs). If not... well, I wasn't the editor of In the Heart or in the Head; John Bangsund was. But thanks, anyway; I'm not giving it back; it looks good on the shelf. A particular congratulation to Merv Binns for gaining a Ditmar for Australian SF News at last; he should have won this years ago. :: Thanks for your company. See you soon. 4 May 1985.