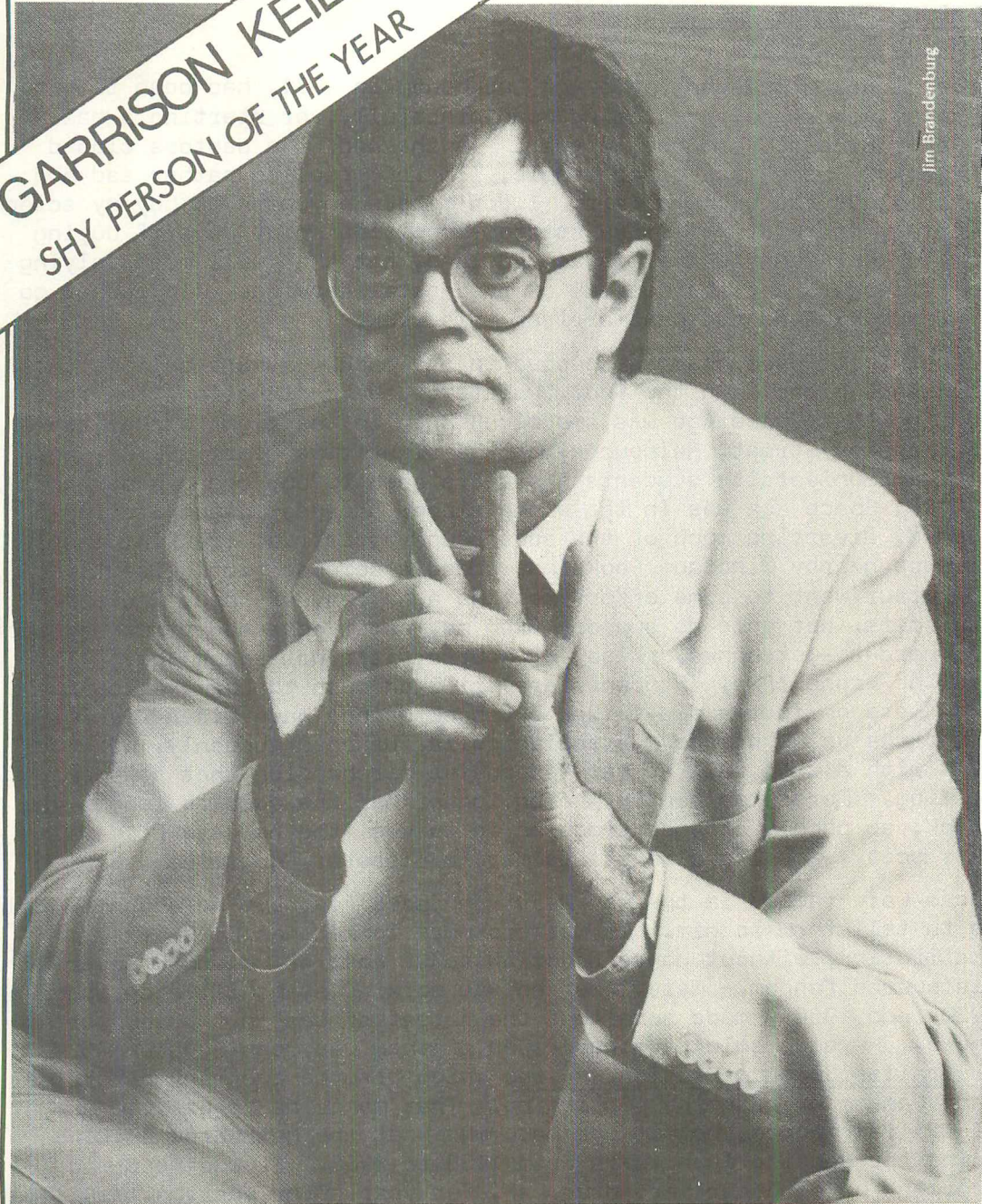


THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW

May 1986

No. 7/8

GARRISON KEILLOR:
SHY PERSON OF THE YEAR



Jim Brandenburg

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I MUST BE
TALKING TO
MY FRIENDS

Whatever you thought of the last issue of The Metaphysical Review (and some people were quite sniffy about it), you would agree with me that its Gillespie/Cochrane news was a bit stale by the time it hit your postbox. Two months later, I wrote a small magazine for ANZAPA and FAPA and a few others, but most of the news in that has become outdated as well. Therefore, if you are in FAPA or ANZAPA and think you've read much of what follows, you haven't. Only the sentiment remains the same.

FAREWELL, SPACE AGE...
FOR THE TIME BEING

Merv Binns, who began Space Age Book Shop in 1971, had been talking about moving shop, or closing down gracefully, or starting a mail-order business, for about a year. In the end, the debtors closed the shop. Like many other people, I'm left feeling rather sad and sorry about the whole affair. I don't have anywhere to buy my science fiction, for a start. I've started inquiring about ways of buying the books I want in America and England, but that will mean relying on catalogues and the perfidy of the postal service. I'd rather go to Space Age and see what arrived this week.

I feel that Space Age was stabbed in the back. Others believe that Merv shot himself in the foot. Whatever the explanation, the fact remains that Space Age was the right shop in the right place (top of Swanston Street, Melbourne) at the right time (early 1970s, when RMIT and university students had spare cash to buy cheap paperbacks). By 1984 Space Age was in the wrong place: because Museum Station had opened, diverting much of the southbound pedestrian traffic; and because nearby Minotaur Books had added a science fiction section. (Minotaur went to some effort to take away many of Space Age's customers, but gets no support from me, as it does not stock hardback and hard-to-get books. Also, of course, it's not Space Age.) It was the wrong time. Students are still on much the same allowance they were on in the mid-1970s, but book prices have risen fivefold. After the value of the Australian dollar dropped suddenly, Merv was left with a shop full of very expensive merchandise that stopped selling. More importantly, he no longer had the cash to import new stock, so people stopped trooping in to see 'the new stuff'. All very scary, and I'm glad it was Merv's disaster, not mine.

There were faults in the way Merv ran Space Age, but he doesn't need me to tell them to him. It matters more to me that Merv is an institution, without whose devotion to sf most of us would never have discovered fandom. Merv, when he was working at McGill's during the 1950s and 1960s, made sure that the latest sf was on the counter there. He also sold fanzines. One of them was John Bangsund's Australian Science Fiction Review, which drew me and many others into fandom and fanzine publishing. That magazine re-created Australian fandom, but it was Merv who kept the Melbourne SF Club going through the lean years from 1958 to 1966. It was Merv who supplied us with our hard drug, sf, for year after year, at McGill's

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THANKS

As you'll see in 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends', I gained the impression that you did not much like TMR 5/6. Seems I was wrong. Thank you to the people who voted for The Metaphysical Review this year on the Ditmar ballot. It was quite a surprise to win against very strong competition. I must be doing something right... or maybe half the award should go to Don Ashby for his contribution to TMR 4.

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Bruce Gillespie

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and Space Age. It's a rotten shame it all had to end this way. Or will it? Merv thought his world had ended in 1970, when the old site of the Melbourne SF Club, in Somerset Place, was closed down by the Health Department. Because of that shock, Merv was able to rally support, mainly from Ron Graham, to start Space Age and leave McGill's. Now Merv has suffered another shock, one that not many of us would recover from. Will Merv, yet again, prove to be the phoenix of Melbourne sf, and rise from the ashes? Of course he will.

HOW TO GO BROKE

At the beginning of 1985, when I began to earn a reliable income, there were probably Melbourne fans who whispered: what will Gillespie do now that he has money? Surely he can't plead poverty any more when we ask him why he doesn't attend interstate conventions?

For a while it was very pleasant to have money in the bank and credit on my Bankcard. I was going to publish The Metaphysical Review every two months. Elaine and I could plan luxurious holidays in exotic places like Geelong. The world - or at least the bit of it under the nearest cat - was our oyster.

But - and even Christine Ashby won't believe this - I found a way of going broke. I bought a compact disc player. Worse, I began to buy compact discs (CDs). Suddenly I reached my Bankcard limit, and had no money in the bank. The other day I counted the number of CDs we had bought since acquiring the player. Ninety-seven of the shiny little beasts. No, no. That couldn't be right. I was sure we had bought only about forty of them. I counted again. What's the arithmetic of all that? Some of the discs have cost \$20, \$21, or \$22 each. Most of them, however, have cost \$25 each. That's more than \$2000. In eight months?

Compact discs sound good. They don't crackle, double track, or distort. They don't wear out. They can play for much longer than two sides of an LP. You can programme the machine to play the tracks you want in the order you want. The sound you hear from a compact disc is much better than that heard from a black vinyl disc, unless you have a very expensive turntable and cartridge. Compact discs often provide the first satisfactory recording of something you've always wanted to hear properly. An example is Eric Clapton's 461 Ocean Boulevard. The original vinyl pressing of this record, released in the early 1970s, was woeful. It lacked all the precision and clarity you might have expected from the original tapes. To make the compact disc, Polygram seems to have gone back to the master tapes, making something that sounds like a new record.

Most of the money I've spent on CDs has been devoted to new releases of classic rock records from the 1960s and 1970s. Usually I've replaced worn-out black vinyl records or, as I've shown, replaced a black vinyl record that was badly mastered or pressed in the first place. They include Crosby Stills Nash and Young's Deja Vu, David Bowie's The Man Who Sold the World (the only Bowie record I've bothered to replace with a compact disc), Rod Stewart's Every Picture Tells a Story and Gasoline Alley (both sounding muddy on the original records), and Cream's Disraeli Gears. And, having worn out several copies of each of them on black vinyl, six of the early Rolling Stones albums.

None of this explains why I spent so much money so quickly. It has a lot to do with the fact that demand for CDs has outstripped supply ever since the new toy was released in 1983. There are still only thirteen CD factories in the world, none of them in Australia. Many of the CDs I would like to buy are not available in Australia. They include Supertramp's Crisis! What Crisis?, the first three Led Zeppelin albums, Crosby Stills Nash and Young's Four Way Street, Joe Cocker's Mad Dogs and Englishmen, the Rolling Stones' Now! and Let It Bleed, Ry Cooder's Chicken Skin Music, etc., etc. (I'm quite willing to pay for these if any overseas reader finds them on CD and sends them to me.) I once saw Mad Dogs and Englishmen in a store, but did not buy it on the spot. I haven't seen it since. If I see a CD I really want, I buy it. CDs seem to be pressed in batches; if you don't grab something when it's available, it's not there - or anywhere - the next time you go shopping. Which is why I've grabbed too often and spent too much. Also, buyers of pop music have been treated badly by the CD manufacturers. Almost no CDs are released at the same time as the black vinyl versions; you became uncertain as to which version to buy, and inevitably find yourself wasting money.

Terry Stroud, the first person we knew who had a CD player, and hence a major reason why we bought one, discovered a place out at Keilor named JB Hi Fi. It still has CDs at \$22 top price. Needless to say, I spent a fortune by 'saving money' at JB. Thanks, Terry, for driving us out there every now and again.

Classical-music buyers of CDs have been treated better than pop-music buyers. Brash's, in the centre of Melbourne, now devotes most of its classical-music section to CDs, and most major record releases now have simultaneous CD releases. Demand still outstrips supply, however. Until recently, there were no CDs available of Bruno Walter's versions of Mahler's symphonies. Even now, only two have been released here, although all of them have been available in Japan for some time. Where is Haitink's version of Mozart's The Magic Flute? The critics agreed that this is the best recent version of the opera, but it is still not available in Australia on CD. I've heard that it's been available in Japan for two years, but EMI has no plans to release it here. (True, the Colin Davis version on CD, which Elaine gave me for Christmas, is rather exciting. See my 'Musely' column.) But what I'd really like on CD is the Beecham version, or the 1952 Karajan version. And, with so many elderly Klemperer recordings being remastered and released on CD, where is his greatest recording - Beethoven's Missa Solemnis?

All this nitpicking underrates the enormous advantage that CD has been to recorded music. Classical CDs are often longer than 60 minutes each, whereas pop CDs usually keep the playing time of the original vinyl version. It goes without saying that digitally recorded classical CDs sound breathtakingly exciting through all but the worst equipment, although often new performances seem vapid compared with the old touchstone performances. Luckily, some of the famous old versions have been revived, digitised, sanitised, and super-magicked by sound engineers and can now be bought on CD. Two of my great favourites are Bruno Walter's 1952 version of Mahler's Song of the Earth, with Kathleen Ferrier, and Schwarzkopf's version of Strauss's Four Last Songs (the 1966 version, with Szell). Bruno Walter's versions of the Beethoven symphonies have just appeared on CD. I'm tempted...

And what happens when I go broke? I go broker. Just when I felt that I might recover from paying for all those CDs and the last issue of TMR, I received an estimate of my year's tax. Thanks to the oddities of provisional taxation, it's much higher than I expected. Perhaps you had all better buy CD players, and we can all be broke together.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING APART FROM GOING BROKE

This fanzine might give the impression that Elaine and I do nothing but listen to music and buy records and CDs. I'm sure we must do other things.

We provide laps for cats - when, of course, we're listening to music. For two months, we were down from five cats to four. Lulu, the whizzing little black cat who greeted visitors at the front door and usually conned them into letting her inside, was killed by a car on Wellington Street, Collingwood. Only a cat who has developed very foolish attitudes to cars would be anywhere near Wellington Street, the thoroughfare nearest our house. A few months ago, Lulu sneaked into the factory across the street and was stuck there for three days. When Elaine worked out a way to entice Lulu from the factory, she seemed contrite. Four days later, she did it again. She was locked in the factory all night, but this time found her own way out in the morning. Even for a cat, Lulu always had an inflated ego, but these escapades made her unafraid of anything. She had always been stupid about crossing Keele Street outside the front gate, but several times she tried crossing Wellington Street, which is always busy. One night she didn't make it.

Not that we've been back to four cats for very long. People moving out of the house across the road found a tiny fawn (very light orange) kitten in the backyard. They showed it to us, and of course we said we would try to find another home for it. Soon it showed every sign of wanting to stay here and take over us and the other four cats. TC and Apple Blossom didn't much like the new arrival, Oscar wants to play with it although he's the size of a battle ship beside a tug, and Solomon shrugged, as if to say: 'Not another kitten! Will they never learn? How boring!', and went back to sleep. Solomon sets a fine example in dealing with the little worries of life. (New cat is Theodore.)

We read a lot. Some nights it almost seems that I have fulfilled a wish that I had when I was twenty-one: that I would spend the rest of my evenings reading science fiction, Henry James, and other types of improving literature. After working in front of a word-processor all day, I don't much feel like tackling this manual typewriter at night. Hence the number of books read; I'll fit long lists of them later in this issue.

Often we go to restaurants - usually when neither of us feels like cooking after a day at the office. Going to restaurants is an expensive and waist-expanding habit, so I won't encourage it by telling you too much about our adventures. I keep waiting for a lucrative offer from a daily newspaper so that 'my partner and I' can become restaurant reviewers. Our favourites include La Paella (Spanish food, Sydney Road, Brunswick), Enri's (Argentinian, Bridge Road, Richmond), Abba's (Lebanese, Elgin Street, Carlton), Ruan Thai (Thai, Johnston Street, Collingwood), King Wah (Chinese, Lonsdale Street, Melbourne), Madame Butterfly (Japanese, Smith Street, Collingwood), Mamma

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Cover Story (1)

John Bangsund has long been known as Australia's best fan writer, but in recent years few fans, apart from the members of ANZAPA and FAPA, have seen his work. John does most of his current writing and editing for The Society of Editors Newsletter, although he promises to contribute to Australian Science Fiction Review - Series II (details elsewhere in this issue). Since people seem to have forgotten John's contribution to Australian fan writing, I'm introducing with the following piece a series of articles under the general title: The Best of John Bangsund.

CHARLOTTE'S WEB AND OTHERS

by John Bangsund

(Reprinted with permission from The Society of Editors Newsletter, Vol. 15, No. 4, Oct. 1985.)

E. B. White died this month. He was one of the great writers of our time, 'a master of luminous prose', as Paul Gray said in Time magazine (14 October). Anyone who has read him will agree with that. If you can't place him immediately, he wrote Charlotte's Web and other books for children. He was the White of Strunk and White's The Elements of Style, the little book no writer or editor should be without. With James Thurber he wrote Is Sex Necessary? He wrote many lovely books. My favourite among them is One Man's Meat, a collection of essays from the column of that name that he wrote for Harper's magazine from 1938 to 1943.

I read the full-page obituary in Time, and sat there feeling kind of sad, feeling I'd lost another friend I'd never met. Then I turned a couple of pages - Rock Hudson dead, Simone Signoret dead - and there was a review of Ursula Le Guin's Always Coming Home, and a photo of her, a friend I have met. I sat there still feeling kind of sad, because I haven't seen Ursula for ten years, and our correspondence has fallen off while she has been writing that massive book. By coincidence I am writing this on her birthday.

Sally and I usually do something special to celebrate Ursula's birthday. Last year we rearranged some things in my workroom, a few bookcases and their contents, and half a ton of papers and so on. Some years we move house, but last year we thought rearranging my room would be sufficient celebration. About 6.30 Sally had gone off to prepare dinner, and I had carefully manoeuvred a 4-foot bookcase and a 7-foot table into the best possible position for not being able to get to the phone, when the phone rang. When I got to it, which took a while, I said my name, as I usually do, and an American voice repeated it. 'John Bangsund', he said, in a musing kind of way. Then he went into some story about being here briefly on a visit from the USA and he thought we might be related, because his name was Bangsund too.

Well, I wasn't born yesterday: I knew instantly that this was a prank. The man's accent was right, he was certainly American, so obviously he must be a science fiction fan with an odd sense of

humour - Ted White, maybe, or even Dick Bergeron. We talked, and I was wrong: he really was a relative of mine - Clifford Bangsund, of Redlands, California - and we'd never heard of each other. Further, he didn't know there were Bangsunds in Australia until he came here, and I'd never heard of any in America. There are quite a few, it turns out, mainly on the west coast - those that Cliff knows about, anyway. One of them is named John. The thought disturbs me still.

Elwyn Brooks White probably grew up knowing there were other Elwyn Whites around, certainly plenty of E. B. Whites, and I doubt that it disturbed him. Other things disturbed him. In 1917 he was worried about the war, and wondering whether he should join the army, but he didn't weigh enough. 'I guess there is no place in the world for me,' he wrote on 7 June. 'I want to join the American Ambulance Corps, but I'm not eighteen and I've never had any experience driving a car, and Mother doesn't think I ought to go to France. So here I am, quite hopeless, and undeniably jobless. I think either I must be very stupid or else I lack faith in myself and in everything else.'

He quoted those young diaries in 'One Man's Meat' in October 1939. This is how that essay started:

I keep forgetting that soldiers are so young. I keep thinking of them as my age, or Hitler's age. (Hitler and I are about the same age.) Actually, soldiers are often quite young. They haven't finished school, many of them, and their heads are full of the fragile theme of love, and underneath their bluster and swagger everything in life is coated with that strange beautiful importance that you almost forget about because it dates back so far. The other day some French soldiers on the western front sent a request to a German broadcasting studio asking the orchestra to play "Parlez-moi d'amour". The station was glad to oblige, and all along the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line the young men were listening to the propaganda of their own desire instead of attending to the fight. So few people speak to the young men of love any more, except the song writers and scenarists.

I sat up late, that night I learnt that E. B. White had died, rereading some of his essays, marvelling again at how much he had to say, and how well he said it, at his wisdom, his wit, his humour, his humanity.

When I was a child people simply looked about them and were moderately happy; today they peer beyond the seven seas, bury themselves waist deep in tidings, and by and large what they see and hear makes them unutterably sad.

One odd fact I seem to have picked up in my research is that the performers in telecasting studios will be required to wear a small electric buzzer, or shocker, round their ankle, from which they will get their cues. The director will buzz when it is time for a line, and Actor Smoothjowl will wince slightly at the little pain, and appear suddenly to all the people of Melbourne.

Something about his style, and often enough his subject matter, reminded me of someone I felt I knew, and for a while I couldn't think who that could be. Then it came to me.

After the football games on Saturday afternoons I would walk down

the long streets into the town shuffling through the dry leaves in the gutters, past children making bonfires of the piles of leaves, and the spirals of sweet, strong smoke. It was a golden fall that year, and I pursued October to the uttermost hill.

Garrison Keillor might have written that - Garrison Keillor, author of the delightful Lake Wobegon Days (no Bangsunds in Lake Wobegon, I'm sorry to say, but plenty of other Norwegians) and compère of the possibly even more delightful radio show A Prairie Home Companion.

I decided I would write an essay on E. B. White and Garrison Keillor, sort of comparing and contrasting them, that kind of thing, with general observations on the American style, the American sense of humour and so on. But I didn't.

Two days ago I was listening to A Prairie Home Companion, and about halfway through, Garrison Keillor said this: 'Mr E. B. White, an American writer and a great friend to millions of us who never met him, died last week at the age of 86. In his memory I just want to read you a few poems, love poems that he wrote for his wife Katharine, that I like.' And he did.

In an essay on children's books, in which he decides that 'it must be a lot of fun to write for children - reasonably easy work, perhaps even important work', E. B. White says in passing (and I grinned as I read it):

Educators and psychologists are full of theory about the young: they profess to know what a child should be taught and how he should be taught it, and they are often quite positive and surly about the matter. Yet the education of our young, in schools and in libraries, is a function of home and state which gives every appearance of having brilliantly failed the world. A Sunday night radio invasion of the little people from Mars is still more credible than a book on the courses of the stars.

A few days after I read that, a few days after E. B. White died, the man who created that 'radio invasion', Orson Welles, died.

In Melbourne A Prairie Home Companion overlaps the ABC TV news by five minutes. Last Saturday I sat watching the picture on TV and listening to the closing music on the radio. On the radio the audience in Milwaukee clapped in time to the music; on the TV, also in time to the music - a freakish thing, but there it was - black people danced in the streets of Johannesburg. Suddenly the dance became a riot. The black people of Johannesburg were mourning the death of one of their writers, the poet Benjamin Moloisi, hanged that day.

That's web enough. I record without comment the deaths since last month also of Italo Calvino, Riccardo Bacchelli, Yul Brynner and Emil Gilels. Is it just that I'm getting old, or is it Götterdämmerung time?

- John Bangsund
October 1985

Cover Story (2)

Bruce Gillespie has published reviews (recently in Australian Book Review and Thyme), books (as one-third of Norstrilia Press), fiction (in Dreamworks), and the odd magazine or three. Motto: Real Soon Now.

GOOD NEWS

FROM:

LAKE WOBEGON

by Bruce Gillespie

Discussed:

A Prairie Home Companion
ABC-FM; 5 p.m. Saturdays, AET

Lake Wobegon Days
by Garrison Keillor
(Viking; 1985;
337 pp.; \$US17.95)

Warhoun 28
Walter A. Willis,
edited by Richard Bergeron
(1978; 614 pp.; \$US25;
available from publisher,
Richard Bergeron, Box 5989,
Old San Juan,
Puerto Rico 00905)

It's all John Bangsund's fault (or, before then, Terry Hughes's). Again it's all John Bangsund's fault. It's because of him that I discovered fanzine publishing, the delights of listening to the music of Vaughan Williams, and the need to own and operate a Roneo 865 duplicator. Now comes his greatest triumph - alerting me to the pleasures of listening to A Prairie Home Companion, a radio programme that is broadcast at 5 p.m. every Saturday night throughout Australia on ABC-FM.

I knew a fair bit about A Prairie Home Companion before I listened to it for the first time. I knew that it was a humorous radio

programme, made in St Paul, Minnesota, and broadcast throughout USA on the public radio network. I knew that much of it was written by Garrison Keillor, its compere, and that it featured the sort of music I like - American folk music of all kinds, such as country, jazz, bluegrass, and the blues.

But I never did listen to A Prairie Home Companion.

I knew that Garrison Keillor was 'the world's tallest radio comedian' who championed 'rights for shy people', that every week he delivered a monologue that purported to be the news from Lake Wobegon, Minnesota, 'the little town that time forgot, that the decades cannot improve', and that a collection of humorous material about this fictitious town had appeared in a book called Lake Wobegon Days, which was selling a lot of copies in New York.

I knew all these things, but I wouldn't have altered my Saturday-afternoon schedule and actually listened to the programme unless John Bangsund had written the article about E. B. White and Garrison Keillor that I've reprinted in this issue of The Metaphysical Review. And John would not have known about A Prairie Home Companion if Terry Hughes had not brought with him from America to Aussiecon a copy of Lake Wobegon Days to give to John. John read the book, and he and

Sally began listening to the show. Now they tell everybody else about it. In late October, I read John's article, listened to the show once, and told Elaine about it. She listened for the first time, and now we tell everybody about it. The two Prairie Home Companion hours of each week are its two happiest hours.

It's difficult to describe the delights of A Prairie Home Companion to you unless you have heard it already. The style of music is not that which most ABC-FM listeners would relish. Strictly acoustic, very down-homey and whimsical. The music has turned away some people who like everything else about the show. A pity that they show such symptoms of terminal trendyism. To me this is real music, the sort you could play in your living-room if you were as skilled as the people who appear on A Prairie Home Companion. No drums, no electric guitars; best of all, no synthesisers.

The programme's humour is also down-home humour, but very approachable. You hear advertisements for companies that don't exist, and hear stories about a place that never was, Lake Wobegon. Garrison Keillor is the centre of the humour, which relies mainly on whimsical or incongruous comments about his fictitious, but wholly real world, the one that seems familiar to his listeners. Lake Wobegon is a very small, never-quite-successful town in the middle of Minnesota. Its people are self-deprecating, puritanical, but pretty good at getting on with life - as long as nobody tries to make a big thing of it. Garrison Keillor's stories swing widely between an unashamedly sentimental recall of a rural America that has probably disappeared, even in towns like Lake Wobegon, and a penetrating, acid look at the kind of viewpoint that automatically approves of Reagan and wishes that the 1960s, let alone the 1980s, had never happened. Keillor's humour relies on funny inventions, such as the Statue of the Unknown Norwegian in the main street of Lake Wobegon, ~~Ralph's~~ Pretty-Good Grocery, where 'if they can't get it for you, you probably don't need it anyway', the Norwegian bachelor farmers, who lugubriously provide the town's main source of income, and the various concerns of the people who attend Lake Wobegon Norwegian Lutheran Church. Keillor has been known to relate tales about the people who travel to Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility, on the other side of town, but not often.

Why is Keillor's style of humour especially accessible to sf fans? For a start, many sf fans seem to have been brought up in family backgrounds much like that described by Keillor - father as head of the house, expecting you to attend church and do the chores, and never drink or smoke; mother, always expecting relatives as house guests, and cooking impossibly large meals; and better-favoured brothers and sisters, who escape to college and conspicuously succeed in life while you don't. In my case, Church of Christ people are much like the Lutherans of Lake Wobegon, with one major difference - as fundamentalists, puritans, and genuinely self-effacing people, Church of Christ worshippers are a tiny minority in a hedonistic, devil-may-care, make-a-buck, areligious Australian society. In Keillor's little town, everybody is Norwegian Lutheran, German Catholic, or (in the Keillors' case) Sanctified Brethren. No wonder Garrison Keillor now lives in St Paul, Minnesota. But an important part of the appeal of his humour is that he is taking issue with a dominant culture, not with that of a small group within a quite different culture. Keillor's humour matters to his audience in a way that any observations I make about growing up Church of Christ cannot matter to most other Australians.

Keillor's humour sounds much like the best fannish humour. A week before I began listening to A Prairie Home Companion, I finished reading Warhoon 28, famous throughout fandom as the collected writings of Walter A. Willis, edited by Richard Bergeron. Willis is best known for his puns and his contributions to fannish lore, but I was struck by a deeper quality in his writing. It's a quality of wisdom - for want of a better word. Using the same kind of underhand, seemingly off-the-cuff humour as I find in Keillor's work, Willis says much that is still true about the ethics, personalities, and possibilities of fandom, which was his Lake Wobegon, his fictional-but-true home. Like Keillor, Willis makes fun of the egotist and go-getter as well as the 'sercon' rule-maker and fannish party-pooper. Both humourists show a soft-flash glint of word magic, a sense of being caught off guard by the wholly but forgivably human.

If you become a listener to A Prairie Home Companion, your Bible may well become Lake Wobegon Days. Not that you can buy this book in Australia yet. When last I asked, Readings Books in Carlton had still not imported copies, and I can't see that any British publisher will put out the book until the radio programme is broadcast in the UK. Go to your import shop and demand a copy. Write to local Penguin and demand an Australian publication. It's not the best book of 1985, but it's one of the most satisfying to read. (I've been reading John Bangsund's copy, in case you were wondering.) Even the fan of A Prairie Home Companion will find much that is surprising in Lake Wobegon Days. He (or she) (or you; let's call this person you)... you will find that Garrison Keillor's family were Sanctified Brethren, a group so small, even in Lake Wobegon, that they were simply known as Protestants. You would never suspect this from listening to the radio programme, which tells a great deal about the complex connivings of the politicking elders of the Lake Wobegon Norwegian Lutheran Church. (Few things ring truer than this; my father has been an elder of nearly every Church of Christ he's attended, and most congregations bring out the stab-in-the-back politicking instincts of at least a few members, much to the distress of my father.) You would never suspect from listening to the radio show that young Garrison had ever had a sex life. Today ABC-FM broadcast an episode in which fourteen-years-old Garrison was taken skiing by an 'older woman', all of eighteen years old. In the radio version (rebroadcast from April 1984), the most memorable part of the episode is the moment when, trying to act like an experienced older bloke, Garrison steps on to the ski-slope for the first time. He confesses later to the girl that he had never before skied. She says, 'I know.' In the radio version, Garrison and the girl exchange addresses at the end of the evening and never see each other again. In the book version, the story ends thus:

...She twisted her ankle while getting off the lift and had made the long trip down in pain. I examined it as if ankles were my specialty, a top ankle man called in from Minneapolis. "Can you walk on it?" I asked. She said, "I don't want to sit in here with all these people feeling sorry for me," so we went to the car, her arm around my neck, mine around her waist. We sat in the car for awhile. After awhile, I said, "I never did this before," but she seemed to be aware of that.

Most of the book reads as if it had been spoken first. Other sections were obviously written, rather than spoken, first. The imprint page gives credit to material published in The Atlantic Monthly. That's

probably the long section on the history of Lake Wobegon - material that is so complex, funny, and detailed that it almost qualifies Lake Wobegon Days as one of those fantasy novels with funny maps on the end-papers and genealogies on the frontispiece. The whole history of the mid-west is here, summarised in the mudslide decline of New Albion, site of a New England puritan settlement in the mid-1850s, to Lake Wobegon, where nothing important ever happens. By the time the first Norwegian bachelor farmer arrives in Lake Wobegon, you feel that you've read one of those epic historical novels that are hundreds of pages longer than this one. And then you get to Garrison's autobiography (sounding not very fictitious at all) and the news from Lake Wobegon told according to the seasons.

The Garrison Keillor of Lake Wobegon Days is more succinct and less sentimental than the Keillor of A Prairie Home Companion. In the book he shows us more of the social geography of Lake Wobegon, such as the real relationship between the people who live in town and the Norwegian bachelor farmers:

On a warm day, six of them may roost on the plank bench in front of Ralph's, in peaceful defiance of Lutheranism, chewing, sipping, snarfling, and p-thooing, until he chases them away to the Sidetrack Tap (they're bad advertising for a grocery store, the heftiness of them seems to recommend a light diet) and then they may not go. Mr. Munch may just spit on the sidewalk, study it, and say, "I don't see no sign says No Sitting." "You get up, I'll paint one for you," says Ralph. They may wait a good long time before they go.

"Tellwiddam," says Mr. Fjerde.

"Tellwid alluvem," says Mr. Munch.

The Norwegian bachelor's password. Tellwitcha.

We are all crazy in their eyes. All the trouble we go to for nothing: ridiculous. Louie emerging from his job at the bank, white shirt and blue bow tie, shiny brown shoes, delicately stepping across the street for lunch: dumb bastard. Byron Tollefson bending over grass, pulling the odd stuff out: stoopid.

...the bachelor farmers are all still sixteen years old. Painfully shy, perpetually disgruntled, elderly teenagers leaning against a wall, watching the parade through the eyes of the last honest men in America: ridiculous.

This is material that, I suspect, Garrison Keillor did not use on his programme. It uses an implied swear word, after all. ('Tellwitcha.' What a great word.) And it's evenhanded in quite a complex way. The Norwegian bachelor farmers are the embarrassment of the town, but their viewpoint is the most definite of all. They're social pariahs, but they've done the shutting out; they're the ones with pride. In his radio shows, Keillor often implies that all the fine values were left behind in Lake Wobegon. In the book he shows all the crude values that were better left there.

The most brilliant section of Lake Wobegon Days, the section that most clearly stops it from being a collection of soft-focus aw-shucks memoirs, is the twelve-page footnote that begins on page 251. It is a parody of Martin Luther's 95 Theses. It was written by a 'former Wobegonian' who, having escaped the place, has been moved to write

an account of the way in which its values maimed his life. When he returned to town, the writer of the new 95 Theses was going to nail it to the door of the Lutheran Church but 'he was afraid the 95 would blow away since all he had were small carpet tacks'. He gave the document to the editor of the Lake Wobegon Herald-Star, daring him to publish it, but 'the 95 remains on his desk, in a lower stratum of stuff under council minutes and soil conservation reports'. Keillor gives us the unabridged document, which rages against the food that the 'former Wobegonian' was given to eat, the talk he had to listen to, the religion he inherited, and, worst of all, the moral and behavioural strictures he had to endure and which remain with him all his life:

9. You taught me to be nice, so that now I am so full of niceness, I have no sense of right and wrong, no outrage, no passion. "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all," you said, so I am very quiet, which most people think is politeness. I call it repression.

When Garrison Keillor talks of 'rights for shy people', he is not only talking of people who are shy 'by nature', but people who have had the forthrightness drummed out of them, people for whom shyness is some kind of archaeological shelter from which they can never quite emerge. I know this feeling well. I know well all the feelings of which Keillor writes. The 95 Theses tells my story as well. But I felt these things already, and could not express them as well as Keillor. What I did not know about myself hit me when I read this:

74. You misdirected me as surely as if you had said the world is flat and north is west and two plus two is four; i.e., not utterly wrong, just wrong enough so that when I took the opposite position - the world is mountainous, north is east - I was wrong, too, and your being wrong about the world and north made me spend years trying to come up with the correct sum of two and two, other than four. You gave me the wrong things to rebel against. My little boat sailed bravely against the wind, straight into the rocks. Your mindless monogamy made me vacillate in love, your compulsive industry made me a prisoner of sloth, your tidiness made me sloppy, your materialism made me wasteful.

75. I wasted years in diametrical opposition, thinking you were completely mistaken, and wound up living a life based more on yours than if I'd stayed home.

Thanks, Garrison Keillor. That's pretty much the secret of my life as well. I can only be grateful for pointing out this horrid truth - that in spending a large part of my life trying to put as much distance as possible between my family's values and mine, I've also 'wound up living a life based more on (theirs) than if I'd stayed home'. One doesn't like to find out such things near the age of forty. Or is that the age you found it out, Garrison? What does it mean? How should I have lived my life? Could it have been any different? Probably not. Garrison Keillor recognises this as well. He forgives and understands where a cruder writer would merely bluster:

95. Now you call me on the phone to ask, "Why don't you ever call us? Why do you shut us out of your life?" So I start to tell

(Continued on Page 21)

Yvonne Rousseau has been introduced in several recent issues of TMR, and will appear next issue as well. What more can I say about her? Her story 'Mr Lockwood's Narrative' (Strange Attractors) was noticed favourably in America, but did not fit the specifications for Nebula nomination. That's something. Yvonne was nominated as Best Fan Writer in the Ditmar Awards. That's something else. And Ursula Le Guin was favourably impressed by Yvonne's Le Guin article in TMR 5/6. Not bad. Also I'm nominating her for Shy Person of the Year 1986, since she won't let fanzine editors take photographs of her.

EAVESDROPPING

ON

AUSSIECON II

by Yvonne Rousseau

In 1985 I reported Aussiecon II for two publications: Australian Book Review and The Society of Editors Newsletter. In the following amalgamation of these reports, readers will therefore find clues that they are eavesdropping, for part of the time, on the more elemental responses that editors usually confess only among themselves.

Both reports began with the information that the 43rd World Science Fiction Convention had taken place in August 1985, and that it was not only the sixth such convention to be held outside North America, but also - as the title of 'Aussiecon II' suggested - the second in Australia. Like Aussiecon I, it was held in Melbourne and was opened by Race Mathews (who had meanwhile become both ten years older and Victorian Minister for the Arts). Thus, by the end of the Convention, Melbourne had hosted, and Race Mathews had opened, one-third of all the World Science Fiction Conventions held outside North America.

At the opening ceremony, Mathews revealed that his father, when Race was an infant in arms, used to walk the floor with him while reciting Macaulay's Lays of Ancient Rome and Tennyson's Idylls of the King - 'over and over and over again'. Race Mathews was a founding member of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, in the early 1950s, and his reminiscences also included some highly unembarrassed letters written by Lee Harding at the age of 15. (When Lee asked him privately where he had dug these up, he said that they were far down in an old pile of papers, and that rats had been making a nest with them.) Mathews disclosed how Lee had atoned for some earlier intemperate abuse with a letter of self-abasement: 'I'm a cad - a bounder - a Yank!' The laughter this won from the Aussiecon audience had a perceptibly American accent; over 20 per cent of the 1600 people who attended the Convention were American - and Americans outnumbered Australians among the 2200 members registered before the Convention opened. (Registration is always larger than attendance, partly because 'supporting' as well as 'attending' members constitute the World Science Fiction Society for the year, and are therefore entitled to vote for the year's Hugo Award candidates. This year, George Turner's In the Heart or in the Head came fourth in its category, while Leigh Edmonds was runner-up for the Hugo in two categories.)

Again and again, discussion panels at Aussiecon II emphasised America's prominence in both the consciousness and the markets of Australian sf writers. In a paper given before the opening ceremony, George Turner quoted American academic, James Gunn, writing in 1979: 'Even today science fiction must seem American in order to feel like the real stuff.' Turner acknowledged America's continued dominance in English-language sf, but also hinted at comparative insularity among Americans. He pointed out that Australia gets flooded with literature from overseas, making Australians thoroughly familiar with American, British, and various other 'literary accents'; by contrast, readers overseas encountered little if any Australian writing, and its distinctive undertones remained 'just below' their hearing.

From the audience, Rob Gerrard of Norstrilia Press outlined (upon request) the special difficulties of publishing for so small and so dispersed a population as Australia's. West Australian editor and writer Van Ikin later said that populations overseas are so much greater than here that an Australian writer must reach overseas in order to survive; and he described Harlan Ellison's helpless laughter on learning - in 1983 - of the comparatively miniscule print runs of Australian books.

A good deal of practical advice was given by American writers and editors. In order to understand the market - to discover, for example, which publishers accept multiple submissions, and which will consider manuscripts only if they come from an agent - Charles N. Brown recommended his own magazine, Locus (which won yet another Hugo Award this year), while David Brin preferred the Bulletin of the Science Fiction Writers of America. I therefore consulted an Australian writer familiar with these publications; he strongly recommended persuading local libraries to subscribe to both.

Writers agreed that an agent freed a writer to concentrate on writing, and that the agent could trumpet an author's virtues (and need for money) in a way too blusmaking for the author in person. Robert Silverberg said that Isaac Asimov is the only 'big-name' author he knows of without an agent; this lack will have cost Asimov millions: on the other hand, Asimov had all those other millions..... No American agent was likely to act for an unknown Australian writer, so David Brin advised new writers to make an American friend and to do that friend a very big favour. In return, the American could shop their manuscript around, back in America.

Unexpected insights and amusing practicality emanated from any panel that included Lou Aronica, the Publishing Director of Bantam Spectra Books. He explained that the covers of sf books - often an acute embarrassment to the sensitive reader - are designed to attract distributors, who do not read sf, but who look at the covers and say, 'I'll have ten of that one... pass on that one... six of this one...' However, sales to sf readership (once the distributors have chosen what will be available) are based on word-of-mouth recommendation from other readers. Aronica further cautioned publishers to choose only titles that distributors will not be embarrassed to say over the telephone, when they consider ordering extra copies. Aronica and other editors agreed that American sf publishers are not greatly interested in buying Australian books; on the other hand, an Australian writer was no worse off than a British writer in this regard.

It was left for Australians to attack contemporary Australian sf, and

class it with British sf as increasingly 'literary' - alienating itself from its readership. Ken Methold, current chairman of the Australian Society of Authors, accused small presses of misleading authors by publishing unsaleable sf, and he criticised authors for failing to study the marketplace. (Caution is needed in interpreting this, however; Lou Aronica specifically advised against attempting to 'second-guess' a publisher, since the currently popular trend will be two years out of date before the publication of a book written to capitalise upon it.) Methold also mentioned that he never wrote anything unless he was paid for it - a significant point in the sf world, where professional writers (Gene Wolfe, the Guest of Honour, among them) are members of fandom as well, and will often make unpaid contributions to fanzines.

Several people diagnosed a trend towards the synthesis of sf and 'mainstream' short stories. George Turner pointed out that the mainstream short story is booming in Australia (300-400 published each year), and that our mainstream market is not closed to sf - although he thinks poorly of 'up-and-coming' Australian sf writers. The fact that the New Yorker has published sf writers Stanislaw Lem and Ursula K. Le Guin was mentioned more than once; and Ed Bryant detected a 1980s synthesis between the 1940s American Golden Age short story and the 1960s British New Wave. Such a synthesis would fit the description, 'deep and meaningful ripping yarn', which Terry Dowling endorsed as desirable on the last day of the Convention, and which was coined on the first day, at the launching of two anthologies of original Australian sf stories: Hale and Iremonger's Strange Attractors, edited by Damien Broderick, and Ebony Books' Urban Fantasies, edited by David King and Russell Blackford. (Another literary highlight was the Australian Science Fiction Foundation's short-story competition, whose winner - Sean McMullen - revealed a spectacular limp, acquired during mock-mediaeval shenanigans of the Society for Creative Anachronism.)

A selection of papers presented at the Convention appears in Ebony Books' Contrary Modes (available from Box 1294L, GPO Melbourne, Vic. 3001, for \$4.95 plus \$1.50 postage). Contributors include not only John Baxter, 'Lucinda Brayford', Judith Hanna, Van Ikin, and George Turner, but also Norman Talbot - whose paper on Gene Wolfe caused Wolfe to arrive half an hour late for a panel, declaring Talbot so 'absolutely fascinating' that he was unable to drag himself away.

*

The Society of Editors might have been interested by the information so far - by learning, for example, that the covers of sf books are not intended to attract readers. But their chief concern (I felt) would be to get a mood-picture of the events surrounding an Unpleasant Occurrence between 11 and 12 on the morning of Sunday the 25th: to wit, the public assertion, by a panel of unAustralian editors, that 'copy editors are the lowest of the low'.

The general mood of convention-goers, before and after the Occurrence, was happy but expressing discontent. For example, some of the best-known American writers, while admitting that they were having a wonderful time socially, were calling Aussiecon a 'burnout' for its lack of exciting guests and programming. Their attitude was well described by Judith Hanna, who is nowadays an expatriate Australian and associate editor of Interzone, Britain's only sf short-story magazine. She explained that, although hardened convention-goers

pride themselves on never attending anything on the programme, they are affronted if the events provided for them to stay away from are not of the very best quality. (Gertrude Stein ascribes a similar sentiment to Alice B. Toklas: 'I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it.')

Most of the convention was held at the Southern Cross Hotel, but fannish activities and the Art Show were at the Victoria Hotel, the Sheraton Hotel had gaming and videos, and films were shown at the State Film Centre. My own Aussiecon included pleasant interludes at the Victoria, but was spent mainly at the Southern Cross, where coffee-getting with Bruce Gillespie revealed that 'Have a nice day!' (unAustralian and unBritish, alike) was printed at the bottom of the breakfast menu.

A truly dedicated mood-assessor would have spent a good deal of time eavesdropping in the Southern Cross's first-floor female lavatory, but I can report only two overhearings indicative of the kind of Aussiecon other people had. One contributor to the Art Show was extremely disillusioned; she mentioned with snorts of contempt the now-exploded notion that Americans liked to spend money; she felt she had been 'conned' into an utter waste of time, money, and effort. Never again!

My other overhearing began when, turning off a tap at the washbasin, I heard a brief irrepressible whimper from the powder-room section, nearer the door. Next minute, two uniformed women, obviously summoned by someone else, burst through the door. 'Now, dear!', I heard one of them say, 'what have you been doing to yourself?' while the other produced 'Look at all that blood!' with the slow, reproving relish proper to a vampire that likes to indulge in a bit of gourmet housemaster's-study-type flogging with its meal. Professional aid being so clearly at hand, I felt that the most helpful thing left to me was to avoid staring at the victim. Thus it was with averted eyes that I carried away the impression that she was very young, that she had probably fallen on the stairs near by, and that the uniformed ladies hoped she had been taking drugs shortly before doing so (she was wearing a fancy-dress cape, after all: odd, very).

Conjectures about this victim can reveal a lot about Aussiecon at large. No friend had returned with the uniformed ladies; was the victim truly alone? Had she perhaps travelled interstate or from overseas, hoping to strike up friendships with other sf fans, but finding herself defeated by the wandering nature of the enormous crowd, whose members were constantly streaming off to one or other of the programme items being held concurrently in different parts of the building? Or had she simply lost touch with her friends temporarily - arriving at a different time, attending a different item? If your friend passed by your coffee-shop without seeing you, or if you delayed for a few moments in casual conversation, the pair of you could spend hours of Aussiecon fruitlessly searching for one another. Meanwhile, my impression of the victim's youth and romanticism may have been quite false, since any age group can whimper from shock, or be addressed as 'dear' by uniformed ladies, and capes and cloaks were worn increasingly by all age groups as the convention went on - the unromantic reasoning being 'Huh! In my cape I'd look infinitely better than any of those silly show offs: why don't I wear it tomorrow?'

Not capes but yellow T-shirts were the distinguishing mark of

Aussiecon committee members. This was unnecessary. No other kind of member, however dedicated to dissipation, could match the awesome exhaustion expressed in the mien and on the faces of the committee. Among them was Mark Linneman, whose photograph in the subsequent Aussiecon edition of Locus demonstrated how someone should look in the instant between being pole-axed and falling to the ground. (He looked like that for five days, whenever he had a spare moment.) Among the committee's bugbears were the many programme changes, which had to be recorded, then revised, in Aussiecon's daily newsletter, the Free Press. These culminated in an announcement by the Chairman, David Grigg, just before the Hugo Awards presentation, that the committee was putting up a late nomination in the Speculative Fiction category - the Aussiecon programme guide.

Marc Orlieb was the committee member who presented the Hugos. He described how, ten years before, he had stood at the back of the hall, watching John Bangsund presenting the Hugos at Aussiecon I; oh, how he had wished that it could have been him and not John Bangsund up there! At last his wish had come true; and oh, how fervently he wished now (he said) that it could be John Bangsund up here and not him! This wish must have intensified as the presentation went on, with what proved to be an over-ambitious programme of accompanying slides. Marc was perceived, however, to have coped very agreeably with the continuous disasters - the most famous of these being a slide describing John Varley's novella 'Press Enter' as 'Pless Enter'. The next (and last) day of the convention, Free Press had become Free Pless; indeed, as Jane Jewell reported in Locus, 'the word "press" virtually disappeared from everyone's vocabulary for the remainder of the convention'.

So stressful was Aussiecon for its organisers that some of them (it is rumoured) will never speak amiably of one another again. Some of them, moreover, certainly failed to enjoy the convention - whereas a good time was had by most people for whom the wearing of a T-shirt was merely a matter of choice. Nevertheless, certain events went badly. A Wake for Richard III was held in Ballroom A of the Southern Cross on the evening of the first day, 22 August - that being the date concerning which, 500 years ago, the citizens of York reported 'This day was our good King Richard piteously slain and murdered; to the great heaviness of this city.' Not only was it a dry Wake, but at 11.30 the wakers were ordered to leave. The Tudor conspiracy lives.

A good deal of pleasantly useless information was acquired. Having been forced by outside commitments to miss Jeff Harris's talk on 'How to build a time machine out of ordinary domestic materials', I quizzed him about this next morning. Oh, one just used the kinds of things that one found lying around in any ordinary kitchen, he told me - but his manner was cagey. 'Ah. Things like plutonium?' said I. Thereupon he unbent, and revealed that the time machine did indeed require only such articles as are commonplace in kitchens a billion years in the future.

Gene Wolfe, the Guest of Honour, was asked for an impromptu few words at the opening ceremony; he therefore told us that he was suffering from a virus and that people who'd had their books autographed by him must afterwards place them in an oven at 451° Fahrenheit (or 451° Celsius - it was just the same; it didn't matter) until the virus was dead. If, by some extraordinary twist of fate, this treatment made the books illegible, then their owners must go at once to their local

bookshop and purchase replacements. Thank you. On the last day of Aussiecon, Wolfe further revealed that being an engineer was of great assistance to him in writing his books; for one thing, it prevented his writing stories in which the imprisoned hero manufactures a laser cannon from a rusty frying-pan and - I forget, I'm afraid, exactly what other object Wolfe mentioned, but it was another of the kinds of things you always find lying about in lightless dungeons. As an engineer, Wolfe said, he had found that making laser cannons was not easy.

The 'Strange Bedfellows' panel - suggesting unlikely author-collaborations - later produced from its audience two possibilities that I can hardly wait to see ghosted. One has Edgar Rice Burroughs working with Mervyn Peake; its title is Tarzan at Gormenghast. In the other, Earl Derr Biggers writes with Sax Rohmer Charlie Chan Meets Fu Manchu.

Perhaps the most tantalising moment of Aussiecon occurred on the last day, when Robert Silverberg and Frederik Pohl, sharing a panel, discovered that each of them intended to insert into their next fiction a Difference that each of them had silently noticed between the method of service in Chinese-restaurants-in-Melbourne and Chinese-restaurants-in-America. They refused to say what this difference was: people-who-wanted-to-find-out must buy their next books.

From Aussiecon as a whole, a further fleeting image or so: costumed figures rehearsing their routines for the Masquerade in the street outside the Southern Cross; Robert Silverberg waving a platypus (partly synthetic, at least); Anne McCaffrey signing books for a queue in which people stared at her adoringly from yards away, and yet found her so agreeable that they were still smiling happily when they moved away with their autographed books; John Bangsund and I explaining 'tired and emotional' to Mike Glycer and Marty Cantor, from America; Damien Broderick and I attempting to explain Tim and Debbie to Joseph Nicholas, from Britain (he, in return, explaining that 'triffic' was out, and 'much more better' was in); Andrew Whitmore (from Victoria) mentioning that he interpreted as commendable modesty the attitude that Terry Dowling (from Sydney) was denouncing as cultural cringe; people from the North and West accusing Melbourne of housing a 'literary clique' - with the Melbourne response disconcertingly reminiscent of Bloomsbury (namely, that given the range of conflicting viewpoints among us all, anyone who thinks of us as a clique simply proves himself to be a complete outsider).

'Enough!' I imagined my fellow editors to cry: 'We understand the mood. Now tell us why you are not reporting the alleged Unfortunate Occurrence from a prison cell, with the mark of your hands stark upon the dead throats of the perpetrators of the denigration of the copy editor.'

The truth is that they took it back.

The panel consisted of Lou Aronica from Bantam Spectra Books, Malcolm Edwards from Gollancz, Charles N. Brown from Locus, Stanley Schmidt from Analog and Ted White from Stardate. All of these editors told us that they suggest changes for an author to make, rather than tinkering with a manuscript themselves; they also advised writers to insist on a clause in their contract ensuring that they see the copy-edited manuscript - Aronica, Edwards, and other reputable publishers will allow this in any case. Edwards said that Gollancz, as Britain's leading harcover of publishing house, publishes eight British and

twelve American sf books per year; he is sole editor of the British ones.

Each editor described his editorial day - filled with meetings - and Lou Aronica explained how he and the art department would 'concept out a cover together'. They recalled classically shabby editorial offices (in Malcolm Edwards's case, partitions were even now encroaching so fast that he suspected there would be no room for him to sit behind his desk by the time he returned to England). They claimed that the day of the Maxwell-Perkins type of editor had ended; then they backtracked, delicately suggesting that each of them was, in fact, a bit of a Maxwell Perkins. Lou Aronica likes to have telephone conversations about a book while the author is actually writing it; Ted White gets together with the author and bounces ideas about; Malcolm Edwards tries to respond to the typescript as rigorously as the most rigorous reader will, and to put all possible objections to the author before the book goes into print. The author must then decide whether to take the editor's advice. Edwards does not spend a good deal of time improving irretrievably average books.

The panel (as writers themselves) went on to say that copy editors were the lowest form of life; that they were resentful non-writers, free to tamper without fear of identification. Then they backtracked, and Stanley Schmidt complimented a copy editor who had caught a grammatical mistake in an alien language for which Schmidt had not spelt out the rules. Some time afterwards, these indecisive panellists left the country.

- Yvonne Rousseau,
original versions September 1985,
this version February 1986

(GOOD NEWS FROM LAKE WOBEGON:
Continued from Page 14)

you about my life, but you don't want to hear it. You want to know why I didn't call.

I didn't call because I don't need to talk to you anymore. Your voice is in my head, talking constantly from morning till night. I keep my radio on, but I still hear you and will hear you until I die, when I will hear you say, "I told you," and then something else will happen.

Garrison Keillor has discovered and enunciated real truths which escape most other writers, and I'm grateful he's told me what he's found out. He's too good to be true, which is why, I suspect, he continues to inhabit Lake Wobegon, to the great pleasure and enrichment of us all.

- Bruce Gillespie,
January 1986

A euphonious little column about music

----- this time written by Bruce Gillespie -----

FAVOURITE RECORDED MUSIC 1985

1. FAVOURITE POPULAR MUSIC 1985

During recent years I've written two columns about my Favourite Popular Music for the Year. 1982's was supposed to be 'The Chunder! Rock Column', but the article disappeared along with the magazine it was meant for. 1983's was published in Leigh Edmonds's Rataplan. In both columns, I struggled to find a lot of words to write about a small number of records. Ten listenable pop albums a year seemed a goodly number, with five of them worth talking about.

At the end of 1985, I made a list of the pop music albums that I had bought during the year and which I could recommend. There were 57 records on the list. Many of them, I realised, were recordings made in years earlier than 1985. I counted again. Forty of the list - not five, not ten, but forty - were made during 1985. 1985 had become the best year for pop music since... pick a year... 1965?... 1972?

Little of this improvement of quality could be found on the Top 40 charts released by radio stations. I don't have a Top 40 Albums of 1985 by my side, but if I did, probably no more than two or three of them would appear on my list. Big things are happening in popular music, but regular commercial radio stations don't want to know about them.

How do I know about these improvements? Good fortune, I suppose. That's the way I discover everything else interesting in life. Good fortune arising from bad luck, in this case. At the end of 1984, Pop Inn Records, my source for imported records, changed owners. The bloke who had been there for many years had lost interest, and found it difficult to maintain supplies from America. However, he still discovered records that no one else knew about, and I thought that nobody could do as good a job in the dicey record-importing business, where overseas distributors, customs officers, and the local record companies are all your enemies.

The new owner, Bryce, has proved to be a miracle-worker. He seems to have the combination of enthusiasm and dogged patience required for such an enterprise. He began to import for me records that the previous owner had been unable to find. Later, he brought in American-made compact discs, whereas all other sources in Melbourne were importing only European- and Japanese-made discs. He's suggested to me records that I would never have heard of. Most of the records I bought in 1985 have been worth keeping, whereas in 1983 and 1984 I hardly seemed to find any satisfactory new records. (Pop Inn is at 24 Embank Arcade, Melbourne.)

So what has been so special about pop music in 1985? Bryce put me wise to the sort of music that is variously described as 'country punk', 'LA country', or 'Texas rock'. Perhaps it can best be described as

country rock that has travelled to Texas and back via the Los Angeles punk scene. Somehow all the worst aspects of country-and-western and punk have been slashed away, leaving a zesty brand of rock and roll. As Auntie Jack might have said - it's music fit to tear your bloody arms off.

The best of the country punk groups is Green on Red.

Recently I bought the group's first EP (on the English Zippo label). It's almost unadorned punk - you know, turgid arrangements and dreary half-tunes. I always wanted to like punk music. It had the energy of rock and roll, but its players were so determinedly incompetent that I couldn't listen to their stuff.

Keep the energy, and add smashing drums, snarling guitars, and humorous, sardonic lyrics, and you have Green on Red's first album, Gas Food Lodging (1985, on American New Rose label). It sounds more like the best of the Rolling Stones than like any country band, which is probably why I like the group so much. Until now, no group has struck the sparks that spatter from the Rolling Stones' first ten albums. Danny Stuart and the rest of Green on Red know how to send out streamers of ferocious fireworks. Even better than Gas Food Lodging is their very recent EP, No Free Lunch (English Mercury label), which has a combination of country-influenced songs (including a baroque arrangement of Willie Nelson's 'Funny How Time Slips Away') and Los Angeles-steeped songs, full of wild nights and strange adventures.

The main qualities that Green on Red adds to punk energy are drama and humour. The essence of punk was cool, dissociation, monotony. The members of Green on Red, like the other new groups, sound as if they are having a high old time, really enjoying themselves. The English New Wave performers sounded as if they suffered bouts of ennui from merely standing in front of a microphone.

Danny Stuart, of Green on Red, has an incisive, twangy voice, with none of the lurgy-like monotony of punk singers. Most of the new country punk singers sound much like him; especially Phil Alvin of the Blasters, one of the best of the new groups. The Blasters' Hard Line (Slash/Warner Bros.) owes a lot to the new sound of John Cougar Mellencamp, whose own new album, Scarecrow, embodies much of the do-or-die feeling of the new country music. Hard Line is dark, unadorned music, with lots of rhythm, good tunes, and (I suppose) chunky lyrics. These albums don't include lyric sheets, so I don't know whether or not the words are interesting. But I rarely listen to lyrics.

One group was even better than Green on Red or the Blasters. It combined the best of Green on Red (including singer Dan Stuart) and the best of two other groups, the Long Ryders and the Dream Syndicate. The result, Danny and Dusty, recorded one album, The Long Weekend (A&M) - presumably to show people how this sort of thing should be done - and broke up. The Long Weekend contains nothing but excesses and successes. 'The King of the Losers' tells of the most drunken night on record since the one overheard on Gary US Bonds'. 'A Quarter to Three'. 'Send Me a Postcard' and 'Down to the Bone' have more energy and irreverence than all the Byrds' records put together. And the Danny and Dusty version of Dylan's 'Knocking on Heaven's Door' isn't too bad, either.

The first country-punk group to attract attention was the Del-Lords, named by both Rolling Stone and Time magazines as one of the best

groups of 1984. Even Pop Inn Records could not corral a copy of Frontier Days (EMI America) until the middle of 1985. Poor distribution in America seemed to stop the album from having any real success. Poor publicity and distribution has, so far, been a problem for all the country punk groups.

Not that Lone Justice hasn't made an effort to score a hit record. Lone Justice (Geffen) features Maria McKee as singer. She writes a good tuneful, loud song, but so far is best known as the writer of Feargal Sharkey's English hit record, 'A Good Heart'. The group has been promoted in all the best magazines, and several of the songs on Lone Justice, especially 'Ways to be Wicked', are just as good as 'A Good Heart'. Radio stations still ignore the group as fiercely as possible. (Oddly, the only country punk group to be played so far on Melbourne commercial radio is the Johnnys, a Sydney group, which does a good imitation of second-rank Green on Red.)

If you haven't heard any of these groups, all I can do is mention names. Most are available only from import shops, usually in the 'Alternative' rack, beside the Cure, the Crammps, and Velvet Underground. The Long Ryders sound less energetic than the others, but Native Sons (Lolita) is worth listening to, and their very recent State of Our Union (Island) will be one of my favourites of 1986. On it, a song called 'State of Our Union' has some of the best guitar-playing I've heard since the heyday of the Yardbirds.

I guess the real comparison should be made not between the new country music and either punk or country music, but between the new country rock and the old country rock. Roger McGuinn, of the Byrds, is still the most influential pop musician, after Dylan, and some people, such as Tom Petty, have built a whole career on sounding more like McGuinn than McGuinn ever did. But McGuinn was essentially an old folkie, and never really understood the power of rock and roll. Byrds' drummers were always a bit light on wrist-strength. That's why the country rock groups, who always played under the shadow of the Byrds and, later, of Crosby Stills Nash & Young, sounded a bit too polite, a bit too nice to take over the rock and roll mantle thrown away after the decline of the great 1960s pop groups. The new country punk groups are aware of American folk music - country, blues, bluegrass, western swing, and jazz - but they're also aware that rock and roll - making those drums crash and guitars scream - is the muse that got lost in the 1970s. They've found her again.

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The 'new country' movement is creating interest in many types of music that have always been ignored by radio stations, despite the efforts of Ry Cooder to popularise them during the mid-1970s. In particular, Los Lobos, from Los Angeles, has had a lot of success in America with How Will the Wolf Survive? (Slash/Warner Bros.). Its Mexican-rock music has not been played in Melbourne yet, but maybe our radio stations will show some sense eventually.

In Australia, Joe Camilleri ('Jo Jo Zep' until recently) and the Black Sorrows have put out two EPs of zydeco (Louisiana blues style) music: Rockin' Zydeco (White Label) and A Place in the World (Spirit). Since 1976 Joe Camilleri has been consistently the most original rock musician in Australia, and he seems to have been successful with the Black Sorrows band, made up of most of the Falcons and some of Daddy Cool. Lovely, rhythmic, often melancholy songs, some traditional, but mostly written by Camilleri.

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Now that I've chattered about a whole group of records for a few pages, you'll be surprised to find that many of them don't appear on the Top 15 list. The truth is (as I pointed out in the second-last issue of Rataplan) that I divide popular music into two main groups, 'pop' and 'rock' (definitions supplied in tedious detail in that issue of Rataplan). I prefer rock, but I like good pop as well. Pop depends on memorable tunes for it to have lasting effect, and not many people can write such tunes. Most pop records on the Top 40 charts are made up of frenetic computer-driven rhythm tracks accompanied by faint hints of tunes. Put together the synthesisers, a whole album of good tunes, and a fine voice, and you have Kim Carnes's Barking at Airplanes. Because it is so good, the people who write the play-lists for radio stations ignored the album for months. Eventually Melbourne radio stations played the single 'Crazy in the Night', which isn't bad, but is not as enjoyable as most of the other tunes on the record. Barking at Airplanes has a consistent zest and generation of melody that eluded Kim Carnes on her earlier Mistaken Identity, but the latter was a hit album, and the former has not been. Neither, incidentally, is available on CD in Australia; somebody at the record company must be crazy in the night.

If all the energy for rock and roll is coming from punk and country at the moment, it came mainly from blues during the 1960s. There are only a few well-known blues players left, most of them white. The best is George Thorogood, and Maverick is the best record yet by him and the Destroyers. Nobody played it on radio. Thorogood's guitar-playing is better...here... than it has been since his first two records. When he is above his own average, he is much better than ever, especially on his exhilarating version of Chuck Berry's 'Memphis'.

In 1963, Aretha Franklin sang a different type of blues. By today's standards, it was not blues at all, but a blues-based jazz crooning, a type of singing that was already unfashionable when Aretha tried it at CBS records, and disappeared from pop music shortly thereafter. Too bad, for Aretha was one of the best jazz singers who ever lived, as Aretha Sings the Blues shows. She runs her great voice up along your spine, sometimes accelerated by spare blues-piano arrangements, and sometimes slowed by syrupy strings. Aretha recorded the wrong music for the wrong label, failed, then moved to Atlantic records and rock and roll success. It's nice to have these 'failures' reissued - actually the right songs recorded by the right person, but at the wrong time.

And my favourite record of the year? It wasn't recorded in 1985, but in 1975. It's from a duo I'd always heard of, but had never heard. (Famous idiotic radio stations' fault again.) Marc Ortlieb has spoken in worshipful whispers about them for years. So have most other people who've bought their records. They are... were... Richard and Linda Thompson. Their marriage split up a few years ago, and both have recorded solo albums since then. Nothing they've done together or apart has been anywhere near as good as Pour Down Like Silver (recently reissued on American Hannibal label). This is the essence of English folkie soul-rock (a whole new category). Wonderful dulcimer-like strings drip around the place; the bass moves mysteriously in the background, and Richard and Linda, together and apart, sing some of the most captivately mournful melodies I've heard. I'm not sure what some of the songs are about, but they reach so deep into the rich pits of angst that I would hardly like to ask. Richard Thompson's guitar-playing is rather good as well.

There's hardly a note of frivolous or merry music on the whole thing, just endless lashings of sadness.

Before raving on, ever on, I'd better run down the list. There's not much separating the Top 15 (except Pour Down Like Silver, much better than the rest), and nothing to separate the others, so I've listed The Others in the order in which I bought them. * = a record first released in 1985 (so far as I can tell).

FAVOURITE POPULAR RECORDS
BOUGHT DURING 1985

- 1 Pour Down Like Silver
Richard and Linda Thompson (Hannibal)
- * 2 No Free Lunch (EP)
Green on Red (Mercury)
- * 3 The Long Weekend
Danny and Dusty (A&M)
- * 4 Barking at Airplanes
Kim Carnes (EMI America)
- * 5 Maverick
George Thorogood and the Destroyers (EMI America)
- * 6 Aimless Love
John Prine (Oh Boy)
- 7 Aretha Sings the Blues
Aretha Franklin (CBS)
- * 8 Gas Food Lodging
Green on Red (New Rose)
- * 9 Hard Line
Blasters (Slash/Warner Bros.)
- *10 Born Yesterday
Everly Brothers (Mercury)
- *11 I'm Alright
Loudon Wainwright III (Rounder)
- *12 The Ballad of Sally Rose
Emmylou Harris (Warner Bros.)
- 13 The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle
Bruce Springsteen (CBS) . .
- *14 The Highwayman
Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, Kris Kristofferson.
(CBS)
- *15 Behind the Trap Door (EP)
T-Bone Burnett (Demon)

Most of the records I haven't mentioned yet are by people I remember fondly from the 1970s. John Prine is a singer-songwriter from way back. He has often been compared with Bob Dylan, because his voice sounds much like Dylan's. When he does his best, as on Aimless Love, he writes songs with more melodious tunes and more interesting lyrics than most of Dylan's recent songs. ('Recent', in Dylan's case, being any time in the last fifteen years.) The best song from Aimless Love, 'Unwed Fathers', appears on the fine new Johnny Cash record, Rainbow.

Loudon Wainwright III is the sharpest, most amusing singer-songwriter ever, but radio stations only played one of his songs, the foul 'Dead Skunk' from 1973, and the grapevine has never worked in favour of Loudon. His songs hit too hard, I suspect; they're too sardonic, too truthful for most people. Yet when Loudon Wainwright digs into his

carefully hidden store of finer emotions, he breaks your heart, every time, as in 'Screaming Issue', with a piercing melody by Terri Roche, about the prospects for a newly born baby. Loudon's new record, I'm Alright, is produced by Richard Thompson, who plays a nifty guitar line on some of the songs.

And Bruce... not me; I don't have any muscles. The Bruce who makes money. The Bruce who sells records, who can sing. He made very good records once upon a time, before he became very, very popular. Both his first two albums, Welcome to Ashbury Park, NJ and The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle, feature jazzy, surprising arrangements and streetwise, tricky lyrics, so that they keep surprising you each time you listen. (Anybody who is surprised during a second listening of Born in the USA is someone whose long-term memory cells have short-circuited.) I've bought some of Bruce Springsteen's albums on CD, and the best of them repay continued listening. With any luck, he might plunge back into obscurity one day, and start making good albums again.

T-Bone Burnett is the folk-rock singer-songwriter who was born in the wrong decade. If any of his records had appeared in 1972, he could have been at least as successful as Jackson Browne, although there is an irreducible irreverence about his music that would have prevented him from becoming a Bruce Springsteen. Burnett makes serious music that mocks every musical convention, even within the limits of an EP, Behind the Trap Door. On one track, Burnett twirls away with synthesisers, and a dark, disturbing lyric; on another, he plays impeccable bluegrass guitar. Like all the great singer-songwriters, Burnett fits no categories, which maybe is why Warner Bros. records sacked him two years ago, and why Behind the Trap Door appears only on an English label, not an American one.

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Occasionally I listen to commercial radio stations to find out which records not to buy this week. I heard a single by Wham called 'Wake Me Up Before You Go Go'. I thought: 'Bobby Rydell!' Sure, the sound is now bigger, the synthesisers are there, the beat stronger. But the song could have been any sung by Bobby Rydell in 1961. I heard a single I like very much, Feargal Sharkey's 'A Good Heart'. I thought: 'Everly Brothers!' Different voice, different instrumentation, different dynamics, but basically it's a song that the Everly Brothers could have sung in 1960. These days, Bobby Rydell has disappeared, but the Everly Brothers have re-formed. Their first reincarnation, EB '84, showed that Don and Phil could sing just as well as ever, but weren't too good at choosing songs. (The best song on that album, 'Like a Nightingale', was so tuneful that it would have been very successful if radio stations had played it.) With Born Yesterday, the Everly Brothers show just how they invented melodic rock and roll in the first place: some fine songs, mainly written by other people, and some sharp arrangements that have been produced by Dave Edmunds. The Everlys' version of Mark Knopfler's 'Why Worry' (from... you know... that album you hear every so often on the radio) makes their version sound a bit tame.

And Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, Johnny Cash and Waylon Jennings? A good country singer is better than any other type of pop singer, and here are four of the best on one album. The Highwayman could have been a disaster, as country albums often are these days, suffering as they do from synthesised strings and

mournful choruses. Instead, some good songs, especially Woody Guthrie's 'Refugee', are parcelled out among the four featured singers, and given restrained, at times delicate arrangements that carry the songs and don't drown them. On The Ballad of Sally Rose, Emmylou Harris is as good as ever, perhaps better, on this album of melodic, linked songs.

*

Here's the rest of the list of popular albums I bought last year and which I can recommend. A reminder that the following are not in rank order, but in the order I bought them, and that * = a record that, as far as I know, was released first in 1985.

- * Mark Knopfler: Cal (Mercury)
- Joe Walsh: You Bought It - You Name It (Warner Bros.)
- * Black Sorrows: Rockin' Zydeco (White Label)
- * Ry Cooder: Paris Texas (Warner Bros.)
- * Eric Clapton: Behind the Sun (Warner Bros.)
- * Los Lobos: How Will the Wolf Survive? (Slash/Warner Bros.)
- * Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers: Southern Harvest (MCA).
- * Various: USA for Africa (CBS)
- Del Lords: Frontier Days (EMI America)
- Eric Burdon: The Road (Thunder)
- Lou Reed (RCA)
- Led Zeppelin: Coda (Swan Song)
- Velvet Underground: White Light/White Heat (Verve)
- * Pat Metheny: The Falcon and the Snowman (EMI America)
- * Willy and the Poor Boys (Passport)
- * Joe Walsh: The Confessor (Warner Bros.)
- * Dan Fogelberg: High Country Snows (Full Moon/Epic)
- * Dave Edmunds, etc.: Porky's Revenge (CBS)
- * Lone Justice (Geffen)
- * Ry Cooder: Alamo Bay (Slash/Warner Bros.)
- Richard Thompson: Across a Crowded Room (Polydor)
- Ry Cooder: Six Song Album (Warner Bros.)
- * Long Ryders: Native Sons (Lolita)
- Don Williams: Now and Then (J&B)
- Richard and Linda Thompson: Hokey Pokey (Hannibal)
- Richard and Linda Thompson: First Light (Hannibal)
- * Hooters: Nervous Night (CBS)
- * Neil Young: Old Ways (Geffen)
- John Fogarty: Blue Ridge Rangers (Fantasy)
- Jefferson Airplane: After Bathing at Baxter's (RCA)
- * John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers: Return of the Bluesbreakers (Aim)
- * John Cougar Mellencamp: Scarecrow (Mercury)
- * Stevie Ray Vaughan: Soul to Soul (Epic)
- Rod Stewart: Absolutely Live (Warner Bros.)
- McGarrigle Sisters: Dancer with Bruised Knees (Warner Bros.)
- * ZZ Top: Afterburner (Warner Bros.)
- * Black Sorrows: A Place in the World (Spirit)
- * Party Boys: You Need Professional Help (CBS)
- Pink Floyd: The Final Cut (CBS)
- * Jimmy Barnes: For the Working Class Man (Mushroom)
- * Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers: Pack up the Plantation - Live (MCA)
- * James Talley: American Originals (Bear Family)
- * Dire Straits: Brothers in Arms (Vertigo) (CD version)

2. FAVOURITE CLASSICAL RECORDS BOUGHT DURING 1985

Land-mines and booby-traps - that's what you meet when you try to talk about classical music. It's snarls and traps all the way.

How do you talk about 'classical' or 'serious' or 'composed' music, or whatever you want to call it? When I talk about popular music, probably I know as much about formal music as most of the people I'm talking about - that is, nothing. Talk about classical music and you run up against people who know what they're talking about, people who actually know about key signatures and minor intervals and technical stuff like that. I shouldn't talk about music at all; I don't know that language.

But I've been heartened by the effort made by the commentators on the ABC-FM network to talk about recorded music in such a way that it makes sense to musicilliterate people like me. In particular, the ABC has a monthly programme during which commentators play a new record, play alternative versions of parts of the same piece, and offer their critical comments. This shows how startlingly different any record of even the oldest warhorse can be from another. The programme, 'Record Forum', also gives the listener a vocabulary for talking about records, without needing to refer to the inner workings of the music.

Not that I would pretend to be as articulate as Dennis Harrison or Roger Parker or any of that lot. They can say exactly why they like one record more than another; listening to the comparisons they make, you can make decisions for yourself. I just bumble on as usual.

Another difficulty: most of the music I hear in any year I do not own on record, tape, or CD. Most of it is played on ABC-FM or 3MBS-FM. Often Elaine and I write down in a little red book the names of records we would like to buy, based on our listening to the radio. Often the records we write down are already deleted, and we can only hope they will reappear in some dump bin, or will be re-pressed.

Therefore the following list does not represent the best of the music we heard in 1985, but only the best of the records and CDs we bought. Some of the best performances heard were on tapes sent to the ABC from overseas sources, as from the Salzburg Festival. When it receives such a tape, the ABC plays it once on FM and once on AM, and that's that. If, as often happens, we think it's the best version we've ever heard, that's too bad. Usually it's too late to tape it. Under these circumstances, music is an ephemeral experience.

And I'm abandoning my effort to put the following records in complete rank order. Okay, a little list, just to make you happy:

- 1 Beethoven: Complete Piano Sonatas
Alfred Brendel (Phillips) (11 CDs)
- 2 Pergolesi: Stabat Mater
Abbado (cond.), Margaret Marshall, Lucia Valentini Terrani (sops.)
DGG (CD)
- 3 Bach: Brandenburg Concertos
Nicolas Harnoncourt (Teldec) (2 CDs)
- 4 Mahler: Song of the Earth
Bruno Walter (cond.), Kathleen Ferrier (cont.) (Decca) (CD)
- 5 Beethoven: Symphony No. 6
Vladimir Ashkenazy (cond.) (Decca) (CD)

6 Mahler: Symphony No. 9
Karajan (cond.) (DGG) (2 CDs)

and the rest are in the order we bought them:

Strauss: Der Rosenkavalier; Karajan (cond.), Schwarzkopf (sop.)
(EMI) (reissue; 3 LPs)
Petterson: Symphony No. 8; Sergio Commissiona (cond.) (DGG) (LP)
Debussy, Duparc, Ravel, etc.: Lieder; Margaret Price (sop.), James
Lockhart (piano) (Orfeo) (CD)
Berlioz: Symphonie Fantastique; Dutoit (cond.) (Decca) (CD)
Chausson: Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Quartet; Regis,
Pasquier, Pennatier, etc. (Harmonia Mundi) (CD)
Brahms: Symphonies Nos. 1-4; Toscanini (cond.) (RCA) (reissue; 4 LPs)
Shostakovich: Chamber Symphony/Piano Concerto No. 1; Maxim
Shostakovich (cond.), Dimitrii Shostakovich (jr.) (piano)
(Chandos) (CD)
Mahler: Symphony No. 3; Abbado (cond.) (DGG) (2 CDs)
Schumann: Lieder; Margaret Price (sop.), James Lockhart (piano)
(Orfeo) (CD)
Mozart: The Magic Flute; Colin Davis (cond.) (Phillips) (3 CDs)

As you can see, to talk about these records is to continue the discussion about compact discs that I started in 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'. By and large, these records get over the main recording problem of the moment: Creeping Perfectionism. Put together two perfect sound systems - digital recording and compact disc format - and the sound system becomes perfect, and all the performers strive to produce perfect records. So all individual peculiarities are (to my ear, at least) hunted down ruthlessly and deleted in the search for the Perfect Record. The result is that many records are now perfectly dull. They all seem to be recorded in perfect studios, which give back a flat non-sound background that takes away much of the zest of a good performance. Perfect performances vary little from each other, or at least not so much that you can say that one is better than another. Place the field of music in the hands of the recording engineers, and you must blame the engineers. Mostly, they've failed. Record production was at its best in the middle 1960s, in the hands of such people as EMI's Walter Legge and the brilliant team at Decca. They were records that lived and breathed - and usually have not worn out, because they were pressed on hard vinyl. Solti's 'Ring', Kersetz's Dvorak, Karajan when he escaped to Decca or EMI, etc., etc. Little of that excitement is escaping onto CD, except: when older records, such as Solti's 'Ring' and (at last) Walter's Mahler, are revived.

But, given that paragraph-long grouch, there are some delectable recordings around. We prefer to buy them, when we can, on CD, since today's vinyl records have a freckle-free life of about four playings.

Brendel playing Beethoven is, of course, marvellous (although I'm told that his 1950s versions, once available on Murray Hill label, were better). The Phillips records come mainly from the 1960s and early 1970s. This music can be listened to endlessly.

Abbado's version of Pergolesi's Stabat Mater suffers, as do most of the CDs, from that flat, listless background resonance (or lack of it) I've mentioned already. The music, however, is fugal, enticing, and uplifting, scored as it is for orchestra and two female voices. This great piece floats on forever; you lose yourself in such rich sounds.

Harnoncourt's version of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos is brilliant playing, improved (if possible) by being played in a hall with a bit of sparkle to it. Harnoncourt's rhythms are not too fast, but they sound well sprung, so that you can hear the punctuation and the sound of every instrument throughout.

The instrumental playing on this 1952 version of Mahler's Song of the Earth is not as interesting as in (say) the mid-1970s Karajan version that is still around on LP. However, this Bruno Walter version is distinguished by the finest piece of singing I've heard - Kathleen Ferrier's rendition of the last movement, recorded not long before she died. Only Elizabeth Schwarzkopf's rendition of Strauss's Four Last Songs rivals Ferrier in the Greatest Vocal Performance Ever category.

I didn't think I would ever say, when listening to Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 on the radio: 'What a great new version... different from all the others.' A few weeks later, again I came in on the middle of it, and again knew that it was a version different from the others. More melodic, more Mozartian? Yes, but that makes it sound watered down, and it isn't. Ashkenazy has re-imagined the piece, substituting a more attractive, more golden musical colour scheme for the one we know already.

This Karajan version of Mahler's Symphony No. 9 is available only on CD, and was awarded The Gramophone's 'Record of the Year' in 1984. I'm never sure that I like the first three movements of this symphony, no matter what the version. They add up to spooky, restless music, not readily approachable, not even after listening to various versions for seventeen years. But in this Karajan version, the Berlin Philharmonic put every kilojoule of energy they have into the last movement, and express every bit of brilliance that's in them, and lift this, 'the loneliest music in the world', into a sphere of sound that's been unavailable until now.

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Enough, enough. If I talk too much about every record on the long short list, I'll fill another twenty pages. A few points from the list:

- * Petterson is a Scandinavian composer whose records are difficult to obtain in Australia. Does anybody have, and would like to sell me, a copy of his Violin Concerto No. 2?
- * Elaine likes to demonstrate the high-note possibilities of compact-disc recording by playing songs from the Margaret Price/James Lockhart Lieder recital. Margaret Price has the most exciting soprano voice that's come to my notice in recent years; I keep looking out for her records. (Her Brahms Lieder is not yet available in Australia on CD.)
- * There is no substitute for the version of Berlioz' Symphonie Fantastique that Colin Davis recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra many years ago, and which is now quite unavailable. That's annoying, because my copy is worn out. Davis re-recorded the piece with the Concertgebouw, and that's the version Phillips has released on CD. Idiots. Meanwhile, the digital version that comes closest to the spirit of Davis's first recording is this CD by Charles Dutoit and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra.

- * I heard Toscanini's early-1950s version of Brahms's Symphony No. 1 on late-night AM radio about two years ago, and thought: 'That's the way surely Brahms wanted it played - as Beethoven's 10th Symphony!'. Most other versions of Brahms's music are reverential. Reverence is for the dead, and reverential musicians kill Brahms every time. Brahms wrote his first symphony under the shadow of Beethoven; he said so. Play it right, as Toscanini does on this version, and it sounds as exciting as Beethoven's greatest symphonies. (The only other adequate version of the first symphony is Karajan's from the early 1960s; and there is an even better version of the second, by Beecham, which now seems unobtainable.)
 - * This new Maxim Shostakovich version of his father's Chamber Symphony is its first recording. Unbelievable, Ripley, but true. I heard it first during a concert at the Melbourne Concert Hall, and have waited since for a recording of it. It's based on a Shostakovich quartet, but this short symphony is much more than a rearrangement of other material. It's a powerful, dark work, rippling with double basses and cellos - my favourite of all the Shostakovich symphonies I've heard.
 - * And yet another Magic Flute? To add to the three other versions we have? Yes, but they are not on CD. Colin Davis's new version is. This is the first opera we've bought on CD, but it's enough to make us realise that glittering vocal music is what CD was invented for. Our turntable winces at sopranos' high Cs, but the CD player enjoys them greatly. Now we need Joan Sutherland on CD to give it some real work to do.
- Bruce Gillespie,
February 1986

(I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS)
Continued from Page 6)

Vittoria's (Italian, Smith Street, Fitzroy), Selamat Datang (Malay, Brunswick Street, Fitzroy), and Phantom India (Indian, Swanston Street, Melbourne). As you can see, we look for restaurants that are in the middle price range, offer tasty food in large quantities, and are within walking distance, or at least a short tram ride, of our place. (The suburbs mentioned are all inner areas within a few kilometres from the centre of Melbourne and, more importantly, from our house.)

We go on a real holiday every two or three years. In 1985 we went to the same resort we visited in 1982 - the Mt Buffalo Chalet. We like the Chalet because it's been kept pretty much as it must have looked in the 1930s, and because it offers pre-war service to its guests. No trace of motel-style short cuts about this place. Until very recently, it was run by the Victorian Railways, although the nearest railway station is 100 kilometres away. (The nearest station was once much nearer, at Porepunkah, from where all guests travelled by coach up the mountain.) Country rail services were on strike the day we left, so buses took us all the way. The experience of travelling in buses is a good argument for retaining country passenger rail services. When we reached the Chalet, we found it much as we remembered it, but not as cold as it had been in May 1982. It's usually 10°C colder than in Melbourne, which is 300 kilometres to the south and 1500 metres lower in altitude. The Chalet is on a plateau that has been made a national park. It is built very close to the edge of a sheer escarpment that looks out over the Buckland Valley. At the other end of the plateau is Mt Buffalo itself, the Horn, which looks out over a vast tract of untouched forest to the south-east. At the time of year we were staying at the Chalet, there were never more than about 60 or 70 guests staying at one time. When we went out for walks along the bush paths that crisscross the plateau, we usually met nobody else. The air was clean; the meals were great at the Chalet; and I didn't get a head cold this time. (I did in 1982.) Only one problem: the weather is very changeable. One morning we set out in bright sunshine, were drenched within an hour, returned to the Chalet for lunch, and went for another walk in the afternoon, by which time the sun had come out again. We had to change every bit of clothing to do the second walk. Our longest walk, which Elaine measured on the map as 21 kilometres - a stroll by bushwalkers' standards - took us through country that had not been touched since being swept by bushfire ten months before. Much of the unburnt part was rolling mountain river plains, quite different from the forested country around the chalet. The birds sang, the sun stayed out. One problem: I'm afraid of heights. We got nearly to the top of Mt Dunne and faced a steep, narrow ladder, without handrails. Elaine went up and saw the whole view. I didn't. There are some things Gillespies are not meant to do, although intrepid Cochranes don't mind so much.

Two wonderful sights at Mt Buffalo, both on the same night: we stood quite still in the dark on the lawn in front of the Chalet, while a wombat, built like a small furry tank, ate its way like a portable grass-cutter over the lawn in front of us (if we'd moved at all it would have scuttled away); and we stood, astonished, on the lookout near the Chalet, and saw the stars, millions of them, and the Milky Way, and I realised I had never seen stars that way before. Eat your heart out, Isaac Asimov.

If forced to summarise my 1985, I would say that it was a year that took a month to travel through. Why did I publish so few fanzines? I seemed to be always at work on an issue, or about to work on an issue, but that year slipped by too quickly. I tried writing a bit of fiction, encouraged by Randal Flynn, who's arrived back in Melbourne for a year, but writing one paltry story took a month of weekends.

Where are the year-long years of yesteryear?

THE BEST OF EVERYTHING

...which is a venerable SF Commentary institution, and therefore it hasn't appeared for a few years. Long Lists of Favourite Things, which I published in IMR 3, set a few people to sending me their lists, but I can hardly expect you to write comments about your favourite theses-and-thats unless I do so as well. Here goes...

FAVOURITE NOVELS READ DURING 1985

Some years ago, I stopped using the word 'Best' for these lists. Here are 'favourites', in order of enjoyability. I don't know how I register such distinctions; I once explained it as a sort of rating system formed of little glowing globes in my head - verrrry intellectual way of judging. The items at the top of these lists glow brightest.

- 1 Searching for Caleb
Anne Tyler (original publication date 1975; edition read: Hamlyn 600 32083; 309 pages)
- 2 Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant
Anne Tyler (1982; Knopf; 303 pp.)
- 3 An American Tragedy
Theodore Dreiser (1925; Signet Classics CQ235; 814 pp.)
- 4 Lake Wobegon Days
Garrison Keillor (1985; Viking; 337 pp.)
- 5 Legs
William Kennedy (1975; Penguin 14 006484; 317 pp.)
- 6 Such Pleasure
Martin Boyd (1949; Penguin 14 007230; 368 pp.)
- 7 Playing Beatie Bow
Ruth Park (1980; Puffin 14 03 1460; 196 pp.)
- 8 A Bigamist's Daughter
Alice McDermott (1982; Random House; 282 pp.)
- 9 The Talented Mr Ripley
Patricia Highsmith (1956; Penguin 14 004020; 249 pp.)
- 10 The Claw of the Conciliator
Gene Wolfe (1981; Timescape; 301 pp.)
- 11 Free Live Free
Gene Wolfe (1984/1985; Gollancz; 399 pp.)

Nine books by Americans; two by Australians; none from other parts of the world. I guess that reflects my current reading prejudices

fairly well. Five books by women writers; should that be a surprise? I don't set out deliberately to read a book by a woman writer for each book by a male writer, but the most interesting group of writers in the world at the moment are the North American women writers. Their work is very much better than that of their Australian counterparts, and much more approachable than that of their English counterparts, and far ahead of that of the popular American macho writers, such as Mailer and Roth. The North American women writers seem to be divided into such groups as the Southern Gothic writers (nobody on the list above), Eastern seaboard US writers (Tyler, McDermott, and Highsmith), and Canadian women writers (including Alice Munro; see the short story lists). Of course there must be a good contingent of western and mid-western American women writers as well, but offhand I can't think of any I've discovered except Ursula Le Guin. If I follow up all these writers, I'll buy another wall of books for shelving I don't have room for.

Enough of generalisations. Make what you will of these:

The title of Searching for Caleb sums up the story. As the back-cover blurb puts it so helpfully: 'Caleb Peck had vanished back in 1912, and all attempts to find him failed. Now, sixty-one years later, Justine Peck determines to help her ageing grandfather Daniel in the search for his missing half-brother.' A quest - and that's supposed to be the most interesting form of story, and seldom has it been more interesting than in this book. That's because this book has very interesting people: funny, slightly eccentric, energetic, vivid. Justine and her husband Duncan are the main characters; they hire the private detective to find their great-uncle Caleb. Daniel wants him found, but Caleb's advent affects Justine and Duncan more than it affects him. And Caleb turns out to be the most interesting character of all. What are people's 'characters'? Often they are the stories they see themselves as enacting. Tyler's characters don't have stories, pinned to them like trinkets; they are stories.

Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant is also unputdownable, but more sombre, elegant, complicated, and rather less vivid than Searching for Caleb. These people are members of a family who might have had grand stories if their mother had not somehow snatched them away. Their father left their mother while they were growing up. They would like to escape her now they are adults. They keep coming together at dinners arranged by the restaurant brother, but the meals always end in embittered quarrelling. But they keep coming back, entangled with themselves and their mother. As in all of Tyler's work, the writing is very funny, but the author is never scornful of her characters. As a reader, you want desperately to know more and more about each person, and can only be disappointed when the book ends. Not many novels give so much, yet why else would one want to read novels, except to find such treasures?

Distress signal: Why is there no Australian writer except Patrick White who understands the kind of artistry that flows seemingly unimpeded from every page of Tyler's work? Why are the best American writers so incomparably better than their Australian or English counterparts? End of distress signal.

An American Tragedy is a great American novel, perhaps the great American novel, yet, as the critics agree, its prose style varies from plain to plain bad. In other words, you must forgive a lot to finish An American Tragedy, but you feel glad of having taken the

trouble. This book is all story, the story of a man who believes in the gold-digger values of late nineteenth-century USA, yet does not have the killer instincts to become one of the rich. Dreiser's strengths are his irony and his tact. He always sympathises with his luckless character, yet he shows how his every action leads inevitably to his downfall. Dreiser does not show us a great artist, a great spirit. Instead, he shows a rather simple bloke who has too much imagination and passion to be successful in a dog-eat-dog society. Not much imagination; just too much. It's that fine line between morality and fortune that Dreiser treads like a highwire, while his main character stumbles all over the place. Skip the passages of purple prose; this is a great yarn.

I've talked about Lake Wobegon Days elsewhere in this issue. It's not a novel, really, and perhaps shouldn't be on this list. But it's all fiction: 'non-fact story-telling', perhaps, and some tales are as funny and memorable as any of the more artificial manoeuvres of Anne Tyler, say, or Alice Munro. I suspect that Lake Wobegon Days is much cleverer, more artificial, and less anecdotal than it appears on the surface. A second reading should be worthwhile.

Legs is the story of a man who acts as driver for Legs Diamond, the mobster of the 1920s. We know all along that Legs will be killed at the end of the story. We're interested in finding out why an articulate, sensitive character, the story-teller, stays with Legs. Because he's fascinated; because Legs has a story, a destiny, and he hasn't. Another grand example of American Vivid Extraordinaire (that's the flavour of novel I'm touting this year). What's a better word for this kind of book? Unputdownable.

Such Pleasure - like title, like book. Martin Boyd is the most stylish writer in Australia's literary history, and this is a previously unknown novel reissued by Penguin last year. In a style that hides style, but with every sentence a pleasure to read, Boyd tells the story of an Irish woman who married once for necessity, once for love, and once for money. Boyd circles around his main character, sympathising with her in one episode, admonishing her in another, making fun of her sometimes, but always admiring her vigour and determination.

Playing Beatie Bow won the Australian Children's Book of the Year Award a short while ago, and seems to be famous among everybody but Australian sf fans. If you call it fantasy, it is, along with Picnic at Hanging Rock, one of Australia's best fantasy books. If you call it sf, it is better than others within the same category. In it, a girl steps through (I suppose) a time warp in Sydney's Rocks district, and takes up life in the wharfside district of a century ago. Basically this is a well-researched and vividly realised historical novel, with a bit of time travel and magic thrown in.

A Bigamist's Daughter is another North American women's novel - urban and urbane, without too many touches of radical chic. The main character, who works for a vanity press in New York, falls in love (sort of) with a bloke who has submitted a book to be 'published'. More intriguing than the love story is the satirical dissection of the world of vanity publishing.

The people who know about Patricia Highsmith's work use her name as a password for... something... a sort of underground, bizarre mystery novel. I've bought a few of her books, but The Talented Mr Ripley is

the first I've read. Told from the viewpoint of a swindler and double murderer, this book has an irresistible gimmick. But that comes at the end, and I wouldn't reveal it, would I? Not that Highsmith is particularly interested in the gimmickry. This is a study of the behaviour of a schizophrenic, told with a sense of gritty detail and a lack of moralising historicisms that surely should allow critics to place Highsmith as one of America's finest novelists. (They won't, though.)

I never quite come to terms with Gene Wolfe's novels, especially if I've read them only once. Of the four books of 'The Book of the New Sun', the first, The Shadow of the Torturer, is the best. I read it for the second time last year, and enjoyed it for the first time. The Claw of the Conciliator is only an episode in Severian's story, and not a self-contained novel, but it contains some remarkable writing and memorable incidents. Norman Talbot makes more of this book than I can in his essay in Contrary Modes (discussed in TMR 5/6). On the surface, Free Live Free is an elaborate farce about some eccentric characters who happened to have met each other in a boarding-house that is about to be pulled down. Under the surface, of course, since this is a Gene Wolfe novel, it is a complex play between destiny and moral choice. Since I've read Free Live Free only once (and this is the trouble with Wolfe's work - I always miss the point during the first reading), I don't know what that play adds up to. I'm not even sure what happens at the end. Anyone want to review it for TMR? Somebody who's read it a few times?

FAVOURITE BOOKS READ DURING 1985

Until about 1980, I did not list non-fiction and anthologies at all, but only my Favourite Novels of the Year. When I started this Favourite Books list, I was surprised to find how often novels represented only a small part of the best of my reading for any one year. (I give details only for books first mentioned on this list.)

1. Searching for Caleb
Anne Tyler
2. Warhoon 28
Walter A. Willis, edited by Richard Bergeron (Richard Bergeron;
May 1978; 614 pp.)
3. Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place & Lunar Caustic
Malcolm Lowry (1961/1963; Penguin 14 005530; 346 pp.)
4. Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You
Alice Munro (1974; King Penguin 14 007289; 235 pp.)
5. Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant
Anne Tyler
6. An American Tragedy
Theodore Dreiser
7. Lake Wobegon Days
Garrison Keillor
8. Landscape With Landscape
Gerald Murnane (1985; Norstrilia; 267 pp.)
9. Malcolm Lowry
Douglas Day (1973; Oxford University Press; 483 pp.)

- 10 Legs
William Kennedy
- 11 Microworlds: Writings on Science Fiction and Fantasy
Stanislaw Lem, edited by Franz Rottensteiner (1984; Harcourt
Brace Jovanovich; 285 pp.)
- 12 The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle of the 1920s and 1930s
Edmund Wilson (1952; Noonday 326; 814 pp.)
- 13 Such Pleasure
Martin Boyd
- 14 Playing Beatie Bow
Ruth Park
- 15 Last Courtesies and Other Stories
Ella Leffland (1980; Harper & Row; 218 pp.)

You might wonder how I pick the books to read during the year. In a word - frantically. There's so much I read because I feel I ought to read it - especially sf, fantasy, and marginal books that I feel obliged to mention here or in my column in Van Ikin's Science Fiction. Most of these 'obligateds' I don't enjoy much. There are lots of pleasurable books on the shelves as well - five walls full. Do I try out books by favourite authors? Not all the time. I remember the acute disappointment I felt when I finished reading, for the first time, the novels of Hermann Hesse, say, or Scott Fitzgerald, and knew that I could never savour that pleasure again, no matter how many times I re-read them. To spare myself such disappointment, I'm rationing out my reading of such authors as Edmund Wilson, Henry James, Halldor Laxness, and George Turner.

And sometimes I take on a new fascination with an author - with, in 1985, Malcolm Lowry, whose books vary in quality and approach, but who seems a literary figure worth worrying about. I tried reading Under the Volcano, Lowry's famous novel, three times before I finished it, and I never did find much to admire in it. Lots of intelligence and hard work and forced style, but little that reads like natural style. The book of linked, autobiographical short fiction, Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place, is quite different from Under the Volcano, with some pieces, such as 'The Forest Path to the Spring', transcending all the limits that usually bind the English short story. (See 'Favourite Short Stories' below.) Hear Us O Lord has been linked with a slight novella, 'Lunar Caustic', in its latest Penguin edition. Douglas Day's Malcolm Lowry is one of those rare, mighty biographies that passionately show the reader some real glimpse of the person discussed. I disagree with almost all of Day's judgments about Lowry's fiction, although his defence of Under the Volcano is as fine a piece of literary exegesis as I've read. Day has an admirable ability to bring to life the contradictory figure of Lowry. (Yes, I know that this is a rather traditional thing to say about a biography, but it's true in this case. Many biographies leave their 'main characters' as nothing but dim shadows lost behind piles of their own books.)

It shows how unrealistic is my ratings system that Warhoon 28 is No. 2 on this list and Lake Wobegon Days is No. 7. Both are discussed in my article 'Good News from Lake Wobegon' in this issue of TMR. Each book is an unidealised account of an ideal community - fandom (Warhoon 28) or Lake Wobegon, Minnesota (Lake Wobegon Days). Each

book shows the kind of gentle and whimsical, yet penetrating and moral humour that I have no ability to write, although I love reading it. Both try to squeeze the most delicious drops of flavour out of experience, yet are honest about the failure of experience to match ideals. Both Willis and Keillor are literate essayists, very much concerned ~~at~~ ^{about} how to write well. (My favourite section of Warhoon 28 is Willis's explanation of why he takes six drafts to write an article for a fanzine.) I suppose I prefer Warhoon 28, which comes as a giant green-coloured book although it is also an issue of Bergeron's long-running fanzine, because Willis is concerned with fandom, and because he tells the story of fandom during its finest years (the late 1940s and very early 1950s).

Alice Munro is Canadian, another of those readable North American women writers I've been praising in this issue of TMR. Munro's stories rely on conversation, humour, atmosphere, and snippets of anecdote. She gives away little about herself, yet I get the feeling that her stories are mainly based on events from her own life or of those of people she's known. Her style does not draw attention to itself, yet what I remember from Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You is a sense of having read well-made sentences. There are also the images: the hippie boy about to walk into the sea; the woman who knows who committed arson, although this fact is not made explicit; the girl who waits at the gate so regularly for the postman to deliver a letter from her long-gone lover that she marries the postman instead.

Gerald Murnane's style, in Landscape With Landscape, also does not draw attention to itself, but the sensibility of the narrator is often obtrusive. Murnane calls this a 'work of fiction', which might be a coy way of suggesting that people consider it a novel. In the end, I didn't; although the narrator of each of the stories sounds the same, the stories vary greatly in quality and direction. The narrator in each story is a rather fragile soul whose grandiose dreams seem to have little connection with the surrounding world of suburban Melbourne. (Somebody put it to me more bluntly - that he is an incompetent fool who couldn't be expected to tie his shoelaces, let alone get married.) The life-experience of each narrator is different, but each narrator finds himself so entangled with his speculations about the hypothetical world that he cannot see the possibilities of the world in front of him. From this dichotomy comes most of the humour in the book. The narrator gets things wrong, and is shown to be wrong, yet his speculations are endlessly interesting, and in one story, 'The Battle of Acosta Nu', are important to the lives of other people. In the end, Landscape With Landscape is not as interesting as Murnane's first novel, Tamarisk Row, for Clement Killeaton, the boy main character of Tamarisk Row, sees the world more clearly than those around him while the nameless narrator of Landscape With Landscape sees things much less clearly.

I remember typing two of the pieces in Microworlds when they appeared first in SF Commentary, and in several cases converting the translations into my version of English, and understanding every word of them. Fifteen years later, I read them quickly in this volume, and felt as if I had slammed against a brick wall. Had my brain deteriorated so much in that time? Not entirely. Now I understand the difficulty that SFC readers had with Lem when they first encountered him. On one side of the typewriter was me, inscribing Lem's prose word by word. On the other side were readers, sitting down to enjoy light fanzine prose. The readers were often annoyed. Lem

is still not easy reading, and these pieces vary in difficulty and interest value. My favourite is still 'Science Fiction: A Hopeless Case - With Exceptions', which praised the work of Philip Dick (who then decided he didn't like Lem), poured cold water on most other English-language sf writers, and made everybody madder 'n' hell. Microworlds is not for the complacent or the lazy. Hidden in some glutinous prose are shoals of quicksilver cosmological and biological ideas, with quite a bit of literary good sense as well. The book as a whole has the difficulty that some essays unnecessarily repeat material from other essays, while some brilliant Lem material (from John Foyster's fanzines of 1969-70 and mine of 1970-2) has not yet been gathered into English-language book form.

The Shores of Light consists mainly of Edmund Wilson's literary reviews, first published in the 1920s. I've said often enough that Wilson is the best American writer of this century, although he was only intermittently good at fiction. His essays are always satisfying to read, and in many cases are amusing or - since the interest of this volume is to find out what Wilson noticed in the 1920s - prophetic. For example, Wilson needed only to read the first two novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald for him to summarise, perhaps better than any later commentator, the exact strengths and weaknesses of Fitzgerald's prose. Ditto for Hemingway's first books, Lawrence's during the 1920s, and so on. Curiously, though, the volume's best piece is a postscript memorial, written during the early 1950s, to the poet Edna St Vincent Millay.

Ella Leffland, author of Last Courtesies and Other Stories, is not as subtle a writer as Alice Munro, Gerald Murnane, or Malcolm Lowry, but she is so interesting that I cannot understand the neglect which has not her work so far. Her stories are a bit too melodramatic for many tastes, and she tends to telegraph her endings, but she has a vivid, even visionary imagination, and an attraction for the morbid side of human nature that Munro, for instance, might find a bit distasteful. I hope Penguin Books discovers Leffland, much as the firm has discovered and published many other fine short story writers during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The above list is rather unfair. It implies that there is some enormous distance between No. 1 and No. 15, whereas this year there is almost no distance. All the Top 15 are worth reading.

FAVOURITE FILMS 1985

We - A, B, C, and I - were at a party. A, B, and C were talking about some tv programme. 'Of course,' said A or B, 'we didn't see it all that well. We've only got a small colour tv.' 'How trendy!' said C. 'To have a small telly instead of a big telly.' 'Then we must be even trendier,' I said. 'We've only got a little black-and-white telly.' Shocked silence. Disbelief. 'But how can you live!?' said B. 'You must buy a colour tv set.'

It must give me a thrill to cause such consternation among people who think they've heard everything. To exist without a colour tv set is pretty easy. It's very strange when I visit my parents (who live in the fannishly named beach resort town of Rosebud). They switch on their giant-screen colour tv set. (It seems giant to me.) I look at it in disbelief. I walk around it, as if it's a pet lion. Sometimes I've watched programmes on it, marvelling all the time that things can really look so vivid in your own living-room.

But here at Keele Street I watch pre-1954 black-and-white movies on our little black-and-white telly, so I don't need colour at all. Well, not often.

*

These are not my favourite films released during 1985. I've seen very few recently released films. And these are not all of my favourite films seen during 1985. (If so, top position would go to Orson Welles's The Trial, which I saw first in 1969.) These are my favourite films seen for the first time during 1985. See?

- 1 Notorious
directed by Alfred Hitchcock (1946)
- 2 Rebecca
Alfred Hitchcock (1940)
- 3 Wonder Bar
Lloyd Bacon and Busby Berkeley (1934)
4. Action in the North Atlantic
Lloyd Bacon (1943)
- 5 The Lady Vanishes
Alfred Hitchcock (1938)
- 6 Rio Bravo
Howard Hawks (1959)
- 7 The Citadel
King Vidor (1938)
- 8 The Lady from Shanghai
Orson Welles (1948)
- 9 The Terminator
James Cameron (1984)
- 10 Jamaica Inn
Alfred Hitchcock (1939)
- 11 The Blues Brothers
John Landis (1980)
12. The Rocky Horror Picture Show
Jim Sharman (1975)
13. Blade on the Feather
Richard Lunscombe (1984?)
- 14 The Duellists
Ridley Scott (1977)

I didn't see Notorious on television, although no doubt it will turn up some night at 3 a.m., probably in the same snipped print that I saw at the Valhalla Cinema last summer. I'd say that at least a whole reel was missing - the reel of action between the time Ingrid Bergman meets Claude Rains and the time when - very suddenly - she is married to him. Did I ever mention that Ingrid Bergman is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in a film? In Notorious she is, anyway. (And in Casablanca, if I remember correctly.) To match Bergman, Hitchcock makes everything else in the film astonishingly beautiful, photographed in dense, close-up black-and-white photography that caresses every detail surrounding Bergman. No other film-maker

could make love with a camera as Hitchcock does in his best films.

Rebecca is also a very beautiful film to look at (and the print I saw seemed uncut). Hitchcock seems more interested in the shift of light and shade across fabrics, floors, and windows in Rebecca than in any of the people - except, startlingly, Judith Anderson as the memorable villain of the piece. Film commentators mention Hitchcock's 1950s colour films as his greatest work, but there seems to me an intense visual concentration in Notorious and Rebecca that is even more striking than the technicoloured riches of Vertigo or Rear Window. Black-and-white wins again.

More fabulous black-and-white... this time from Lloyd Bacon. He directed 42nd Street, one of my favourite films, mainly for its energy and vivacity. I'd use the same words for Wonder Bar and Action in the North Atlantic. Much of the energy in Wonder Bar comes from Al Jolson's performance. He's the master of ceremonies at a joint called the Wonder Bar, where businessmen pick up bar girls for the night. Yes, I thought this was surprising subject matter for a Hollywood movie, but obviously it was made before the Hays Code and the mid-1930s purification drive. Not a trace of moralising here: by the end of the film, the wives have made their own conquests for the night and have left behind their husbands in the Wonder Bar to fend for themselves.

Ten years later, Hollywood had plunged into the morass of wartime moralising and fine feelings, but it didn't stop Bacon from making the most enjoyable war film I've seen. As the title implies, Action in the North Atlantic follows the fortunes of a flotilla of civilian ships carrying supplies across the North Atlantic during World War II. Destination? Our brave buddies in Russia. The final scenes, when the Russians welcome the remnants of the fleet in port, must have seemed rather amusing several years later. Or maybe not. Lee Harding used to be fond of saying that art was 'life with all the dull bits left out' - a good description of Lloyd Bacon's best work.

The Lady Vanishes is a good low-budget pre-war British thriller, mainly shot in studio-built railway carriages, and propped up by many amusing minor characters. Not Hitchcock at his best, but surely better than most other films, British or American, of the late 1930s.

Rio Bravo is one of those Western movies with an unassailable reputation. I've seen better Westerns, but not many that are as memorable. It tells the story of a sheriff who is committed to guarding a prisoner, although nearly all the town's citizens oppose the sheriff. A small group of men (and one woman, played by Angie Dickinson) gather around the sheriff, and most of the film is a slow, discursive account of how this group connects with each other. The shoot-out is rather short. All you remember of the film are the people: Rick Nelson as the real-cool young gunslinger, Dean Martin as the alcoholic n'er-do-well still trying to make good, and of course, John Wayne as John Wayne and Angie Dickinson as Angie Dickinson. Howard Hawks directed.

I saw five minutes of the recent tv serial based on A. J. Cronin's novel, The Citadel, and switched off. Why have video directors forgotten every brilliant move learned by film directors during and since the 1940s? Not a trace of the energy and wit of King Vidor's The Citadel (1938) was left in the telly version. No wonder I watch old black-and-white movies late at night. Robert Donat is a wimp

as the doctor in the film version, but at least he's a lively wimp. Ralph Richardson, as his mentor and good conscience, and Rex Harrison as his bad conscience, dominate the movie.

Many film buffs will think I'm downright perverse not to place Orson Welles's The Lady from Shanghai at the top of the list. When the Australian Film Institute ran a season of Welles's movies in 1973, The Lady from Shanghai was one of two films it could not obtain. (Mr Arkadin was the other; I still haven't seen it.) For twelve years I had looked forward to this famous piece of Welles bravado. Perhaps I had expected too much, or had forgotten how strange Welles's most brilliant work can be. This is a film that I admire greatly, but don't like very much. Welles makes all his ferociously obsessive characters into part of a bizarre machine, a machine from which the viewer wants to escape. In the end, the characters become only melodramatic puppets trapped in a hall of mirrors; as viewer, you presume that they are all doomed; as soon as you can presume so much about any film, it loses some of its magic. Since Welles is committed to magic as the central metaphor for life, his film loses some of its intended force. I'll see this film again, I hope, and perhaps change my opinion of it.

By contrast, The Terminator is a refreshingly non-tricky movie, more honestly uncomplicated and enthralling than any recent film since My Favourite Year. It's certainly violent, but not silly and violent in an unbelievable way, as in Blade Runner. The Terminator doesn't drag out some fake heart to wear on its plastic sleeve, and it doesn't (when you think about the ending) offer any fake hope for the world. In fact, man-machine Schwarzenegger strikes me as about as true a symbol for the future of technological civilisation as any we've been offered. I don't know anything about James Cameron, but I hope he directs more movies.

I'm not sure how good Jamaica Inn is, since the soundtrack had almost worn off the print I saw at the Valhalla. This is a nuisance, since the film depends for its success on Charles Laughton's (self-written) witty lines and some rather intricate plotting. Still, Laughton, Emlyn Williams, and some of the other baddies give a lot of life to this romp.

The Blues Brothers has become a cult movie in Melbourne. Every Friday or Saturday night it is shown at some movie house. The place is packed with people dressed up in Blues Brothers gear. They perform the film along with the people up on the screen. Maybe they go out afterwards and crash their cars in the streets of Richmond. There are a lot of car crashes in this film. I didn't think The Blues Brothers was worth abject worship. If you watch it at home - on a small black-and-white screen - it seems at least an hour too long. Forget the car crashes; I would see the film again just for James Brown's ecstatic gospel-singing spree, Cab Calloway's comeback, and the girl who says: 'We have two kinds of music here: country and western.'

The Rocky Horror Picture Show is the other cult movie I saw on tv this year. In other words, it's the other movie shown late at night for people who dress up and perform the film in the aisles. When watching The Rocky Horror Picture Show, I didn't at all feel the urge to dress in drag. But I did like the film as a musical. Every step is choreographed, and every frame fits some larger musical shape. The acting's great, the songs are great. It's a real golden-age 1950s-style musical... but some of the dialogue is very strange.

I'm not sure whether or not you would call Blade on the Feather a real movie. It's been shown only on television here, but maybe it had a theatrical release in Britain. Very British-bitchy and upper-class-nasty, with a wonderful spy plot full of horrible surprises, and great acting from Tom Conti, Donald (un)Pleasance, and Denholm Elliott. If they showed films like this on the big screen, I might go to the flicks more often.

There had to be one film in this list that made me annoyed not to have colour television! Ridley Scott's The Duellists lights up the eyeballs, even in black-and-white, but it must leave film buffs - photography buffs, then - writhing in ecstasy when they see it in colour on the big screen. The main character, played by somebody-or-other, spends umpteen years during the Napoleonic Wars never quite finishing his duel with another officer, played by somebody-else. The main character is really the woodland where they meet for the final stage of their duel. Oh, my socks - how drivellingly gorgeous.

THE SHORT LIST

(in order of viewing, not rank order)

Spellbound (Alfred Hitchcock)
All Through the Night (Vincent Sherman)
The Night has a Thousand Eyes (John Farrow)
Brother Can You Spare a Dime? (Phillippe Mora)
Tootsie (Sidney Pollack)
The Purple Rose of Cairo (Woody Allen)
The Secret Life of an American Housewife (George Axelrod)
Careful He Might Hear You (Carl Schulz)
The Glenn Miller Story (Anthony Mann) (restored version)

FAVOURITE SHORT STORIES 1985

These are my favourite short stories read for the first time during 1985:

- 1 'The Forest Path to the Spring' (Malcolm Lowry) Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place
- 2 'The Battle of Acosta Nu' (Gerald Murnane) Landscape With Landscape
- 3 'Gin and Goldenrod' (Malcolm Lowry) Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place
- 4 'Landscape With Artist' (Gerald Murnane) Landscape With Landscape
- 5 'Oh, for a Closer Brush with God!' (Brian W. Aldiss) Twenty Houses of the Zodiac
- 6 'The Bravest Boat' (Malcolm Lowry) Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place
- 7 'The Forest' (Ella Leffland) Last Courtesies and Other Stories
- 8 'The Twist of Fate' (David Grigg) Urban Fantasies
- 9 'Press Enter' (John Varley) Best Science Fiction of the Year 14
- 10 'The Fittest' (George Turner) Urban Fantasies
- 11 'Marrakesh' (Alice Munro) Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You
- 12 'Tell Me Yes or No' (Alice Munro) Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You
- 13 'How I Met My Husband' (Alice Munro) Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You
- 14 'The Bullet that Grows in the Gun' (Terry Dowling) Urban Fantasies
- 15 'Inside' (Ella Leffland) Last Courtesies and Other Stories
- 16 'Last Courtesies' (Ella Leffland) Last Courtesies and Other Stories
- 17 'Slow Birds' (Ian Watson) Best SF of the Year 13
- 18 'Memorial' (Alice Munro) Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You
- 19 'Gorm' (Ella Leffland) Last Courtesies and Other Stories

I've talked about most of these stories, indirectly, when writing about My Favourite Books of 1985. When I come back to the best stories of Lowry and Murnane, I find myself more than usually lost for words. What I remember most about Lowry's best work is its sensuousness. To read 'The Forest Path to the Spring' is actually to live in the woods in a squatter's hut outside Vancouver, surrounded by forest and water, making do, facing dangers. Not that there's anything mundane about Lowry's account - his story is charged with an ecstatic sense of nature that makes all the later back-to-nature writers sound a bit anaemic.

Sensuousness is a quality that eludes Gerald Murnane - or perhaps it's a quality that he's never tried to cultivate. Also, his main characters, especially the narrator of 'The Battle of Acosta Nu', are so locked in their obsessive worlds that they don't enjoy much of the world around them. 'The Battle of Acosta Nu', as a story, is a whole giant step ahead of the other stories in Landscape With Landscape. A man believes himself to be a descendant of the Australian settlers in Paraguay in the late 1890s. He believes himself an Australian among Paraguayans, although everything he tells us of his surroundings shows us that he lives in Melbourne, Australia. His refusal to deal with 'Paraguyan' hospitals and doctors leads to severe difficulties when his son falls very ill. By the end of the story, he is lost in a perspective of conflicting mental landscapes. Obsession and madness, made all the more effective by unemphatic writing.

Obsession is the quality that also rules much of Lowry's fiction. 'Gin and Goldenrod' is the story of a man who simply wants a drink when all the pubs are shut. His wife, desperately afraid of what he might do if he finds a drink, walks with him through the woods as he roams from one bootlegger to another. The search for a drink becomes a pilgrimage for them both, and for the reader.

Another pilgrimage, in Murnane's 'Landscape With Artist', to the north-western region of Melbourne's outer suburbs called 'Happ Gully', where artists and other strange creatures roam. The story is also a pilgrimage in time, telling of three different journeys, separated by a decade each, to the same region. During one journey, the narrator and his down-at-heel friends, the Scraggs, invade a party held by a famous artist in the hills. During another, an older version of the narrator, accompanied by his son, set off for a party in the same region after the trendies have moved in. The narrator cuts an equally peculiar figure at each party, and in each case finds himself set loose in time and sensibility from those around him. 'Landscape with Artist' works like a science fiction story (particularly like Silverberg's 'Sundance') without being one.

A few years ago, I wrote a story called 'What God Said to Me When He Lived Next Door' (Dreamworks). It was only a pale shadow of the idea I had in my mind when I started writing the story. Ever since, I've been hoping someone would do the whole idea better. (The film O God! wasn't quite it.) The answer, it seems when reading Aldiss's 'Oh, for a Closer Brush With God!', is that I should have thought of a much more original idea in the first place. God, in Aldiss's story, is an alien creature that lives in everybody's house. People whinge at God, asking for things. Sometimes God accedes, when it can't stand the whingeing any more. People never ask for a better world, or greater goodness. Finally... Well, I leave the ending to you. This is the best Aldiss I've read in a long time.

I've said a fair bit about the work of Leffland and Munro (in the Favourite Books section) already. Munro's stories stand out from each other less than the best of Leffland's stories stand out from her others. Leffland reaches a peak of scary perfection in 'The Forest', about a child who is sent overseas to poor relatives, and who never quite understands the surrounding world of death and poverty. Munro is more urbane, but often she mixes that urbanity with a sense of rural Canadianness, as in 'Marrakesh'.

If all the stories in Urban Fantasies had been as accomplished as David Grigg's 'The Twist of Fate', George Turner's 'The Fittest', and Terry Dowling's 'The Bullet that Grows in the Gun', the collection would have been one of my top books of the year.

Non-Australian readers of sf might not know David Grigg's name, except as a venerable fan and Chairman of Aussiecon II, but they should seek out his remarkably accomplished story, 'The Twist of Fate'. In it, he combines into one tale elements of future sociology, fascinating physics, and arresting passion between two people who might have been lovers if they hadn't been enemies. (I'll copyright that blurb; how could it fail in Hollywood?)

'The Fittest' is also about the future of the world, as exemplified in the decline and fall of Melbourne, Australia. It's a tale of a bloke who uses every possibly nasty trick to survive at the top of society when everybody else is falling into the Swill (and into the sea, since the icecaps are melting), and who is eventually forced into some recognition of his connection with the world outside himself. George Turner has written (in The Notional) that many of the ideas in 'The Fittest' will reappear in his new novel.

In 'The Bullet That Grows in the Gun', Terry Dowling combines two ghost stories, and mixes them with a deliciously crazy idea: that in science, as in art, 'form follows function'. Do houses grow their own ghosts? Left alone for fifteen years, will a gun grow its own bullet? If so, who will it kill?

'Press Enter (untypable)', by John Varley, is one of the few Hugo winners that I've ever liked. A man dies in a house. His neighbour investigates. He finds a house full of computer equipment and a woman sent to investigate his equipment and work out whether or not he committed suicide or was murdered. Soon the neighbour has to find a way to prevent the woman's death, and later, his own. This is a tale of step-by-step menace, with many manoeuvres and counter-moves. As a love story, it's a bit neat and slick. As a story about the finaglings of a super-computer, it's more readable than Gibson's Neuromancer and less intellectually satisfying than Lem's Golem XIV (in Imaginary Magnitudes).

*

One of the main reasons why I fill space in TMR with Lists and Opinions is that I hope people will send such thingies back to me. Sometimes I receive such opinions indirectly - as in Mike Shoemaker's excellent fanzine, The Shadow-Line - and sometimes I receive letters such as this one from:

BERND FISCHER

Zulpicherstr. 18, 5000 Koln 41, West Germany

Since nothing much changes in my private life (except for the fact that I got married in December; people get crazy ideas when

they get older... I will be forty this May), I'm sending you some lists of books, films, and albums I liked during recent years:

Books: Hello America (Ballard), Lokaltermin (a novel by St. Lem, with a new adventure by Ijon Tichy of The Star Diaries), The Name of the Rose (Umberto Eco; now filmed, with Sean Connery); Barry Lyndon (William Makepeace Thackeray); Le Montage (Vladimir Vlokoff; a spy novel), The Testament of Donadieu (Georges Simenon), The Bloody Chamber (Angela Carter), Myths of the Near Future (Ballard; a story collection); and a couple of German novels by contemporary authors unknown outside Germany (Gerald Spath, Bodo Kirchhoff, Patrick Süskind).

By the way: if you liked Wolfe's 'The Book of the New Sun', do read his The Devil in a Forest. This underrated and neglected novel is one of my favourite fantasy books.

Films: The Purple Rose of Cairo (Woody Allen), Cal (Pat O'Connor), Angel and The Company of Wolves (both by Neil Jordan), A Private Function (Malcolm Mowbray), Love and Anarchy (Lina Wertmüller), Les Nuits de la Pleine Lune (Eric Rohmer), Favourites of the Moon (J. Iosselani, a French movie made by a Russian director), The Manuscript of Saragossa (J. Has; a three-hour film from Poland - made in 1964 - based on Jan Potocki's fantasy masterpiece from 1815); Love on the Run (François Truffaut; the last one in his history of Antoine Doinel), Crackers (Louis Malle), Paris Texas (Wim Wenders), Brazil (Terry Gilliam), and Rififi (Jules Dassin).

Albums: Rain Dogs (Tom Waits), Lost in the Stars (different artists, such as Lou Reed, Sting, Tom Waits, Marianne Faithfull, and Van Dyke Parks; it features the music of Kurt Weill), The Best of the Everly Brothers, The Best of Ricky Nelson (after he died, they showed Rio Bravo on tv), Sporting Life (Mink DeVille), Rattlesnakes (Lloyd Cole and the Commotions), Suzanne Vega, Creuza de ma (Fabrizio de Andre, Italian singer-songwriter), and lots of Irish and Scottish folk albums by artists and groups like Christy Moore, Silly Wizard, Dick Gaughan, Dave Burland, The Pogues (punk folk!), The Men They Couldn't Hang, De Danman, Mary Black, Moving Hearts, House Band, Easy Club, Tansey's Fancy (actually an Australian group), Touchstone, Tom Paxton (US folk-dinosaur from the 1960s, still around), and the Battlefield Band.

PS: After seeing the movie The Saragossa Manuscript, I reread the book. My all-time-best list of fantasy books is: 1. The Saragossa Manuscript. 2. The Gormenghast Trilogy (Mervyn Peake). 3. The Book of the New Sun (Gene Wolfe). 4. The Devil in a Forest (Wolfe). 5. The Earthsea Trilogy (Ursula Le Guin).

(16 January 1986)

Lots of things here that I haven't heard, seen, or read. (People say the same about my lists.) I haven't noticed Lost in the Stars, but it seems that I should have. No sign here of either the book or the film of The Saragossa Manuscript. People keep recommending Paris Texas and Brazil, but I still haven't seen them. I'm even stumped when it comes to the fantasy list. I can't remember liking The Devil in a Forest much when I first read it, and I have never read the Gormenghast books. Which leaves me with the Earthsea books, which I like a lot better than 'The Book of the New Sun'. My favourite

fantasy books are Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass, closely followed by the Earthsea trilogy. (But then, The Farthest Shore is one of my five favourite novels, along with Flaubert's Madame Bovary, Musil's The Man Without Qualities, Richardson's The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, and James's The Portrait of a Lady.) And there are also Russell Hoban's The Mouse and His Child and Alan Garner's sequence of books, Elidor, The Owl Service, and Red Shift. And the tales of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen. Fantasy is a rich field, and I've hardly explored it yet.

JOHN LITCHEN

PO Box 193, Williamstown, Vic. 3016

I don't listen to as much music as I once did. I don't play drums anymore - or hardly ever. I don't even go skindiving much now, even though I'm about to go on a little trip up the coast in search of some easy diving spots to take my young son Brian in the water. He's very keen, and has rekindled my interest in getting underwater again.

Meanwhile, here's some information for Greg Egan (p. 48, TMR 5/6) about various sorts of drums, especially the iya, okonkolo, shekere, and gato.

The iya and okonkolo are two double-headed drums played in a group of three and sometimes four. The other two are called the itotele and the omele. They are bata drums, and were used until recently in religious music of the Santo Lucumi cult in Cuba. They originated in Nigeria, and are part of the Yoruba culture. In Nigeria they are played with one bare hand and one stick. The small head is played with a stick whilst the large head is played with the bare right hand. In Cuba the playing is much more complex than in Nigeria, and both heads are played with bare hands.

These days you can hear bata drums playing in a lot of salsa music in New York and Los Angeles, as well as in the odd folk group (in modern or Latin music, Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock are two that spring to mind). Of course, a lot of Cuban jazz groups use them. The best known out of Cuba would be Irakere.

A shekere is a large gourd with beads strung decoratively around the outside. Different rhythms are played by rattling the beads against the shell of the gourd. This is not as easy as it sounds, and it takes a lot of practice, as well as having someone show you how to do it in the first place. A shekere is nearly always used to accompany a group of bata drums, and is an instrument used more in religious music than in secular music, although that, too, is now being used in salsa music to give it a 'new' sound.

Gata means 'cat' in Spanish. It is the brand name for a type of imitation log drum which is played with mallets, as one would a marimba or xylophone. The gata drum comes in three or four sizes, and has 4-6 or 8 notes. It had a rather interesting sound.

In fact, bata drums, shekeraes, and gato drums all have unique sounds, and I'm sure they are used in the music Greg is talking about not in the way they are meant to be played, but because the sounds they produce can be used for unusual sound effects.

(12 January 1986)

As well as providing all that interesting information (which doesn't seem to be in The New Oxford Companion to Music, bought by Elaine last year), John also said that - gasp! horror! - he didn't like John Calvin Batchelor's The Birth of the People's Republic of Antarctica. 'Gloomy and totally boring' were John's words. I had thought this might be just the sort of book John would like, as it is soaked in sea sounds and sights, and has what seems to me a rattling good plot (at least until three-quarters of the way through). It's a fairly gloomy view of the future world, I admit, but the writing itself is vigorous, even ferocious at times. Oh well. Someday I must finish writing that full-length essay about The People's Republic of Antarctica - the essay I started three years ago.

Before being dragged into discussion about *literature*, though, here's a bit more about music:

BEN INDICK

428 Sagamore Ave., Teaneck, New Jersey 07668, USA.

Greg Egan discusses a bright and talented lady, Laurie Anderson, who is resolutely uncategorisable. She is, however, very easy to listen to. The percussionist Greg mentions, David Van Tieghem, is a very funny performer, as well as a composer of excellence. I saw him do a one-man show, starting with a videotape in which he traipses around various New York streets drumming away on any and everything in sight, and then doing a show featuring everything from actual percussion instruments to plates, pots, and balloons. His dad is a good friend and fellow-artist of my wife. David has already scored several dance companies here, and I hope his music is easily available in Australia.

I regret that I missed the two-evening show that Laurie did a few years ago in New York City. I hadn't heard of her, and it seemed the height ofchutzpah for someone still not that big to demand two nights (and the rasbuckniks therefore). I was wrong. She called the show United States, and it was a rouser.

Nevertheless, I am less enamoured of her than of the minimalists, especially Philip Glass and Steve Reich. There is a certain catch-all quality in her work - perhaps this occasional formlessness, which gives her appeal - a sense of creativity, spontaneity - but it sometimes seems helter-skelter.

(11 February 1986)

I can't get very excited about the minimalist music I've heard - but it's not often played on radio, not even on ABC-FM, so I'll try to remain unprejudiced for the time being. I haven't heard much of Laurie Anderson, either. I can never catch any of the words of 'O Superman!', but it has a certain fascination for the idle listener like me. I heard one other track a few years ago, and have forgotten its name. In that, the poetry was the point of the piece, with the music provided merely as a counterpoint. One day Roger Weddall might lend me a Laurie Anderson album.

And now back to maximalist music - Bach, Brahms, etc.:

PHILLIP BIRD

Flat 1, 25 Hampton Rd., Essendon, Vic. 3040 (CoA)

I'm going back to our argument about early music and 'original instruments' in early issues of IMR. To be honest, I don't listen to too much from baroque-to-classical periods these days. However, I still find the return to original scoring and period instruments a refreshing change from what has gone before.

To confound the issue, I prefer J. S. Bach's keyboard works to be played on the piano, not the harpsichord. The structure of his toccatas, suites, variations, etc., seems to be more accessible and coherent to my ear when played on a piano. Mind you, the piano must be played with a 'harpsichord action' of the hands, with no sustaining pedals.

The most famous exponent of this type of playing is the American pianist, Rosalyn Tureck. A lot of her records are hard to find, though. Otherwise, Alfred Brendel seems to have the right idea. Glenn Gould is a waste of time.

Lately I've discovered the late chamber works of Brahms. God how I love this music! The cello sonatas, the violin sonatas, piano trios, and the beautiful viola (or clarinet) sonatas, the clarinet trio, and the quintets. Perhaps it's my mood lately or something, but the music is my major discovery so far this year. Also, I finally found a performance of Bartok's Violin Concerto No. 2 which satisfies. Yehudi Menuhin's performance (from the 1960s) really penetrates and illuminates this work. Another, more recent work (1976), by Penderecki, his Violin Concerto, is a very sombre work teeming with urgency. If it is not counted amongst the great violin concertos of all time, I'll be most surprised. Isaac Stern is the dedicatee, and the performer on my CBS disc. All heartily recommended for jaded palates.

I've also been rediscovering Pink Floyd, and Aretha Franklin.

Most recently I've read Harlan Ellison's Shatterday collection. He seems to be really at the top of his form. If he rewrote the Bible, I'd read it.

He probably will.

I did enjoy reading George Turner's In the Heart or in the Head. I've often thought his ideas on a 'vital' science fiction were thought-provoking, and reading his views in that book are still persuasive. I wonder if the 'radical hard' sf that the Interzone crew are striving for will fill the bill?

Your mention in earlier IMRs of Jung reminds me to recommend Dr Peter O'Connor's recent book, Understanding Jung, Understanding Yourself. I found it a bit incomplete, as Jung's research covered so much of the human 'inner life', but interesting and instructive nevertheless. Another book that I recommend is The Words to Say It, by Marie Cardinal. It is out in Picador. It is Ms Cardinal's autobiographical account of her psychotherapy, and it really highlights the meaning of the dreamworld, the unconscious, and the effects of input from outside influences in a person's early years. If you like, it is one of the best 'escape' books I've read in many years.

(2 October 1985)

Phillip also recommends Ballard's Empire of the Sun and The Disaster Area; Hesse's Siddhartha, Steppenwolf, and Demian; and Colin Wilson's The Outsider.

I'm not sure where to start with your recommendations. Can you, for instance, recommend particular versions (on CD?) of Brahms's late chamber works?

Elaine and I once heard Melbourne pianist Stephen McIntyre with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra giving as good an interpretation of one of Bach's keyboard concertos as you could hear. He played the piano, not the harpsichord. A set of records I bought some years ago features the harpsichord, which is often obliterated by the volume of the orchestra.. One of the CDs we bought was Glenn Gould's recent performance of Bach's Goldberg Variations. I found it a bit disappointing, and went back to Martin Galling's harpsichord interpretation - much more exciting than Gould's piano version. But Gould's very famous first recording of the Goldberg Variations might still be worth listening to.

I like almost everything of Bartok's I've ever heard, and Penderecki is one of the few middle- to late-twentieth-century composers I can listen to. Lutoslawski's another, and Hovhaness, and most of the Scandinavian composers I've heard. John Bangsund introduced us to Rochberg and Schnittke recently. I'm not too keen on minimalists, concretists, or people who play around with synthesisers.

O'Connor's Understanding Jung, Understanding Yourself is based on the lectures I heard at the Council of Adult Education in 1982. They were very interesting then, but far more detailed than in the book version. A reviewer said that O'Connor should have included some material about the Jungians - especially the way that Jungian psychology has taken since World War II. In fact, nobody seems to have written about the course of Jungian psychology in the twentieth century. There are plenty of reverential books about Jung himself, but none about his followers. On your recommendation, I've just bought The Words to Say It.

SIMON BROWN

GPO Box 1273, Canberra, ACT 2601

It was nice to return from a four-month journey overseas and receive the next issue of TMR. Because of the trip I haven't had a great deal to read. The only fiction I put away was a motley collection of airport potboilers. Most of my non-fiction reading was history or geography, to assist my torpid mind in providing some framework for the flood of sights, sounds, and smells that came with each new country (or culture, or region). The whole trip was something of an overload, and it will take a couple of years (and, I hope, a few stories) for me to place everything into perspective. Travelling may not broaden the mind so much as distort it.

While away, I caught a couple of films. In London I saw The Shooting Party, an effective work and, I believe, James Mason's last role. It would be easy to write off The Shooting Party as just another film that deals critically with the English upper class - easy, but unfair. Perhaps it's because I have a soft spot for actors of Mason's calibre, but the film possessed a tremendous dignity and appeal. It was enjoyable to watch, to

listen to, to absorb. The experience was interesting for another reason: I was watching it with a very much upper-class English audience. I couldn't tell if they recognised themselves in the film or not.

In a small art cinema in Paris I saw David Lean's Lawrence of Arabia. This film was made twenty-four years ago, but is still one of my favourites. Peter O'Toole has never had a better role, and he is ably supported by actors like Alec Guinness, Jack Hawkins, and Anthony Quayle... the list is a long one. The photography is excellent; no other film has revealed the desert's seductive beauty and mystery so well. The film was in English, for which I was grateful, since my French is far from good. It was interesting reading the subtitles now and then to see how the French translated English expressions.

Unfortunately I missed, by one day, the cinematic highpoint of my life - watching 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea. This was going to be shown in a filthy, crowded fire hazard in Iraklion. Unfortunately I had to leave the city the day before the film opened. I'm still curious to discover what James Mason, Kirk Douglas, and Peter Lorre would have sounded like in Greek.

One of the weirdest experiences of the trip was being stuck on a ferry in the Aegean for two days and two nights. The ship was leaving Santorini for Crete when a Force 8 gale hit and the ship had to anchor off the island's leeward side until the wind calmed down. Everyone assumed it would be only one or two hours before we set off again. The wind increased to Force 9, and our incarceration began. The toilets blocked up in a few hours, and by the second night our food had almost run out (we were on a ration of rice and gravy). One of the few things to do at night was watch television. On our first night we saw Orson Welles's Citizen Kane. Fortunately it was in English, and everyone who watched it enjoyed it. (It got our minds off our peculiar predicament.) Two days later, on our return to civilisation and food, we found out why the film had been shown - as a tribute to Welles, who had died that day.

The time on the ferry was a real time-slip, giving a macabre feeling of detachment, of being suspended from the real world. The waters where we anchored were relatively calm, but we could see the clouds being driven above us in swirling, grey torrents. At night we watched the eerie lights of other ships slipping in and taking refuge.

Sleeping head to toe with over a hundred other people, it's impossible not to make friends. One of these new friends was a Californian artist who knows people working in the film industry, particularly other artists who story-boarded many of the most recent successful sf films. Apparently the story-boarders often contribute far more to the general look and flow of a film than is generally recognised, and yet receive little or no credit for their work. It would be interesting to see just how much of a film's success is the result of the story-boarder's vision rather than the efforts of director or script-writer.

(3 February 1986)

When I began The Metaphysical Review, I had hoped that skillions of people would send in travel stories so that I could feel I had been

places and done things, without being tortured by airline flights and lumpy hotel beds. So far, Simon, you're about the first person to send such a letter. (I have another one on file, but I'm not sure whether or not it's DNQ.) My favourite travel tale sent to SF Commentary was Rob Gerrand's account of sitting in a hotel room in Beijing, China, reading a copy of Ringworld. That just about counters your story of watching Citizen Kane on a boat in a Force 9 gale on the night after Orson Welles died.

Another travel tale, this time in reply to Don Ashby's tale of the Magic Pudding Club (TMR 4):

RUSSELL PARKER

Flat 2, 37 Elizabeth St., Toowong, Queensland 4066

Even though I know little or nothing of the (Magic Pudding) players, Don Ashby's story compared with tales of a dwelling of my college days - the 'White House', home of many legendary parties and drop-ins - which suffered little for being next to the North Rockhampton Police Station.

The Magic Pudding Club was just down the street from the Carlton Police Station, which perhaps explains the Australian flag incident.

Best recounted is the story of the late night the inhabitants (me and two other Science undergrads) went vainly in search of an open laundromat. We came across a road sign bearing 'Brisbane - 683 km', and by seven the next morning, 683 km later, we were in Brisbane. At least we found somewhere to do our washing.

Re. TMR 1: Regarding your tastes (George Turner's 'para-fiction' - ugh! - 'para' unfortunately brings connotations of para-chuting, and I wouldn't like to think that 'para'-fiction was baling out of anything, except current sf, for which 'crawling out of' would be more appropriate): My own tastes have moved away from genre sf, for which I was never really very keen anyway, to absurdist fiction, I suppose. I'm not much interested in categorising, so here's an abridged list of favourite authors: Aldiss (at times), Ballard, Batchelor, Carey, Disch, Ellison, Harrison (M. John, not Harry), Ireland, Malouf, Marquez, Priest, Thomas, Rushdie, Vonnegut, and Wolfe. I am indeed glad not to be about fifteen years younger and starting to read sf; otherwise I doubt if I would continue, given the current state of writing.

(1 December 1985)

The Magic Pudding Club set its travel records only when moving other people from place to place. :: It sounds as if we agree pretty much on favourite authors. (But not Phil Dick as well?) The ones that overseas readers might not recognise are Australian - although Peter Carey nearly won the Booker Prize for Illywhacker, which has just been released in America as well, and David Ireland and David Malouf have both been released in America.

For those who remember the dreaded 'parafiction', 'magic realism', or whatever, here's a late entrant to the discussion:

SPAN

68 Phillis St., Maylands, South Australia 5069

The business of fiction, science fiction, and parafiction makes me uncomfortably aware of the anthropological struggles between structuralism, functionalism, and structural-functionalism. God help us and save us from categorisation.

I've read words on the subject (as you have, and your readers) and always sat out of the debate while wanting to take part in it - there are good arguments either way. What sent me scrabbling for a biro on this occasion was Andrew Weiner's phrase, 'magic realism', in JMR 3, and his references to South American literature. I am yet another disenchanted sf reader, by the way, but it strikes me that none of us would complain about our disenchantment if we didn't have some kind of respect for the genre which we felt (perhaps) had been betrayed by its proponents. I read almost nothing but sf until late 1971, when I went straight off it after reading Brunner's Stand on Zanzibar. About five years later, I was lent a copy of Piers Anthony's Macroscope and got hooked again, which sent me to the old cupboard at my grandmother's house and every secondhand bookshop in sight. Then, about five years later, I was given a copy of Terra Nostra, by Carlos Fuentes, and have had trouble reading sf ever since.

Terra Nostra is a good example of hybrid fiction, actually, set in the past as it is, but attempting a dialogue with the present that looks to the future. Especially it has its brilliant middle section, which deals with a marooned Spaniard entering into the mythosphere of New World Indians. But the book as a whole, if I had to sum it up, is basically the story of a struggle between several groups of people to determine what history is going to be, and that is not only a classic sf notion, but would be handled similarly by an sf writer.

There are a couple of avenues I could take here. One is inspired by a recent dipping into Robert Silverberg's Lord of Darkness. Sf and fantasy cross boundaries from time to time, and it is small wonder when their authors step into history. Add to that the ease with which cultural contact on this planet alone approaches the classic human-meets-alien theme, and there you go. I do in fact believe that when you go into a non-Western culture you enter a slightly different reality, and I think Silverberg is exploiting this, although I confess I've only read 100 pages of his book, and doubt that I'll finish it.

The other avenue of approach is more useful. Fuentes isn't trying to write science fiction, not even if you extend sf into the 'inner space' realm of Ballard and others, promulgated in the 1960s. Read Terra Nostra, read A Change of Skin, and you're dealing with the fantasisation or de-realification (sorry!) of the compromised world we're supposed to live in, whatever contradictions it presents to our inner worlds. Confusing these sorts of books with science fiction is like confusing the Vietnamese with the Chinese, or a brother with a brother. To use an example from another genre entirely, William S. Burroughs's The Place of Dead Roads is not a 'western', despite being set in the USA of the nineteenth century.

I believe sf is aimed at particular responses in the human psyche,

Just as rock 'n' roll and opera are meant to be appreciated in different ways without demeaning either by comparison. Every cultural form of expression has its own internal logic, dynamics, etc., and sometimes the rules become restrictions instead of guidelines. Sf's own popularity is what has stifled it - the same criticism could be applied to rock 'n' roll. That is, the majority of performers in either field are trying to evoke the stuff they got off on. Once it all looked exciting because everyone who did it was a pioneer. Now there is a very broad area of comparison, and the true pioneers are hard to pick out from the crowd. Some go for the purist 'orthodox' strain - the David Brins and Jerry Pournelles, who say sf is good hard science when it works. Some decide 'more chords more chords' and not only look silly but are a pain to read.

On the brighter side, works still appear which are good fiction, still a viable category, as well as good genre sf. While we are still within a few years of Philip Mann's The Eye of the Queen, we can hardly complain that good sf is dying out. It's just getting harder to find. As long as organs like TMR exist, and its contributors, it will still be possible to chart the worthies.
(20/21 September 1985)

As TMR was originally intended to operate, you wouldn't be able to chart the state of the worthies in the field, because I wanted to trace a fairly wide and eccentric path outside the field. But that's not the path contributors want to take, as you can see from TMR 5/6.

Apart from that quibble, I can only say that you sum up most of my own thoughts on the subject. In particular, I like the comparison between sf and rock 'n' roll. I'm one of these people, for instance, who wish that the Rolling Stones had kept playing 'true' Rolling Stones music after 1974. I keep hoping for some prophet to return rock 'n' roll to its true faith. (As 'Musely' shows, I've found not one, but several such prophets, but nobody else is interested in them.) Most of the Hugo-nominated novels for 1985 were trying to return sf to the era of Robert Heinlein, forgetting that even Heinlein got sick of being 'golden-age' Heinlein. The real prophets in either field, no doubt, can see little of use in the past, and try to offer something quite new. Despite what you say, I suspect that any new sf prophet might work outside the field, might be someone who doesn't read sf, doesn't know all the tired old traditions, and can offer just what is needed to knock the world on its ear. (I don't know who such a writer might be; besides, I'll probably be still grumbling away in a corner, re-reading Phil Dick or early Brian Aldiss for the umpteenth time.)

But your letter, and my reply, lead back to a recurring question: What am I trying to do with The Metaphysical Review?

Here are disparate and ever-so-slightly bitchy opinions on this subject. I'll answer them all together. John Foyster's letter is the first that I received in reply to TMR 5/6:

JOHN FOYSTER

21 Shakespeare Grove, St Kilda, Vic. 3182

What's the purpose of it all? The Metaphysical Review, I mean? I know that we disagree about fanzine production, and I have very great difficulty in believing that you can still have faith in:

fat irregular fanzines as the solution to your (or anyone else's) problems. It is rather like public transport authorities in Australia and their obsession with cutting costs by running fewer, larger vehicles, all unaware that successful systems (i.e., throughout Europe) run small but frequent vehicles. What it means in this case is that the reader is confronted with a monumental task in dealing with TMR.

Admittedly you could not run the Le Guin/Rottensteiner/Rousseau series in a small fanzine, but what is the likely readership now that you've published it? How many people are going to be willing to trot between the three publications, comparing notes as assiduously as they should? For that matter, why didn't you alter Yvonne's notes to match the new pagination of Franz's article and thus make reading easier? For that matter, what am I meant to do? I'm one of the few people who has met all three writers (and actually likes them all, to boot), but my devotion to understanding their innermost thoughts has limits. I cannot do justice without devoting a day or so to careful rereading of all of Le Guin's book, and probably checking through her fiction, if it comes to that. What reaction did you intend me to have? How can I react justly to Yvonne's obsessional detail? (Why didn't she follow up Franz's comparison of Tolkien with Howard? Will that do?)

But your shorter pieces are easier to assimilate, and to react to. For example, Greg Egan's description of what makes the heart of Laurie Anderson's art - the insertion of long pauses in unnatural places - is spoiled somewhat by one's recollection of Gough Whitlam's and Humphrey McQueen's public-speaking style; in Whitlam's case I could never work out whether he had not been able to adjust properly to a teleprompter or whether some mulehead thought that pausing at random places added drama to an otherwise boring oration. And Jenny Blackford (bless her!) cheers me up immensely by quoting from the Awful Auel; here I am struggling through Jack Williamson's early draft of Seetee Ship and thinking that no one can ever have written more turgid prose, and Jenny turns up a modern writer doing much worse! It almost makes it worthwhile staggering through the rest of the February 1942 Astounding.

Your little notes about Aussiecon II were most enjoyable. You have the knack of identifying incidents so well worth reporting that the reader is encouraged to believe herself/himself to be eavesdropping on the event.

And if you would be pleased to see Chunder return, why not ASFR? Certainly ASFR will be more frequent (meeting my condition, see above, for a useful fanzine), but that does not mean that it will attract every piece of stuff about sf written in the country. It will mean that people who don't want to have their stuff sit around for a year might try it (ASFR) first. On the other hand, very long pieces probably would not fit, and you might get some spin off from that. Who knows? (7 January 1986)

Who knows, indeed? But I'll leave a reply until after I've run the other letters that fit together here:

IRWIN HIRSH

Flat 2, 416 Dandenong Rd., Caulfield North, Victoria 3161

I'm not sure what to say about Yvonne Rousseau's article, except that many times I've started reading it and I still haven't managed to finish it. Wendy and I were over at John Foyster and Jenny Bryce's place recently, and John and I were talking about the article. At one point Wendy asked what was wrong with it.

'For one thing,' John replied, 'it's 40 pages long.'

Wendy shrugged her shoulders. 'Sikander had a 40-page article.'

'But this one has footnotes!' John said, and I think Wendy saw the point.

I don't know, Bruce, but I'm sure that if I were to go through one of the last SF Commentarys, I'd find a line from you about the thing that is wrong with academic journals like Science-Fiction Studies is that 'they have to justify everything with 50 footnotes'. I can remember agreeing with you at the time, and now look at what happens.

But then, I also thought 'Goodonya' when you said that you wouldn't take subs for TMR, and now look. It's a worry.

(25 February 1986)

Indeed, a worry. But again, I'll have to postpone a reply until after the next few letters. (Sikander is Irwin's somewhat-above-average fanzine, available for the usual, and the article referred to was Ted White's famed, lengthy canning of Oz fanzines.)

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

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

The same mail that delivered The Metaphysical Review 5/6 also brought The Notional 10. The latter, being so much thinner than the former, and thus somehow so much more inviting, was inevitably read first - which meant that before I'd even opened TMR I'd read Leigh Edmonds's review of it.

And I have to say that I agree with him. It is 'too big, too dense and too full of complex words and thoughts'. The latter of these three criticisms indicates that the fanzine occupies a higher intellectual plane than big, thick American fanzines like Holier Than Thou, which are usually just full of words (complex or otherwise) with no detectable thought behind them at all - but can this really be deemed an improvement when the fanzine itself is so dauntingly huge and unwelcoming, actively repelling rather than welcoming its readers, thus ensuring that they never really read it? Rhetorical question, you may think, but I'm going to answer it anyway: I don't think so.

I'm sorry to say that things don't improve much once one does begin to read it, either. To quote Leigh's review again, it's 'the kind of thing to set by your favourite chair to take your time over, but despite that the whole thing is somehow listless' - an impression that perhaps derives less from the contents as a whole or the roster of individual contributors than from the fact that so many of them appear to be Franz Rottensteiner and Yvonne Rousseau, hacking away about one not very memorable book for, God save us, forty-one fucking pages.

Too much, altogether too bloody much. What on earth is the point of it all?

Bugged if I know. I never got to the end of their stuff. I never will.

These negative impressions are not assisted by a memory that since giving up SF Commentary you have on more than one occasion explicitly stated that you'd rather not fill your fanzines with other people's views on and reviews of science fiction. Contemplating something as bloated and as chockfull of sf as The Metaphysical Review 5/6, I find myself wondering why, every time you put a stencil in your typewriter, you have such trouble sticking by that desire. 'Because that's what people send me,' memory also tells me you've said - again on more than one occasion. Yes, but why not send it back again? The question that fanzine editors must always ask themselves is: does this represent what I really want to publish? To publish what you receive just because you've received it and it happens to be both well written and well argued is hardly editing; more compiling, and unless you've got a particularly strong editorial personality the resulting package will have very little going for it. As it is, your editorial personality, although quite obvious when encountered directly in the letter column, is here marginalised by everyone else -literally; you appear at the beginning and the end of the fanzine, and from pages 7 to 68 inclusive might just as well be doing something else for all the presence you have. This Is Not The Way To Run A Fanzine.

In addition (and as I'm sure you will not be surprised to hear), the letter column is much too long, too full of repetition and redundancy. And I'm damned if I can work out what you thought was 'interesting' about my previous letter. But no DNQ instructions this time! You have my full permission to quote as much or as little as you like of this complaint, the length of which you will note I have confined to but one page in the interests of brevity. (17 January 1986)

Before returning to the tirade letters, I include this postscript to Joseph's letter:

JUDITH HANNA

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

I don't agree with Joseph: I thought Yvonne's deconstruction very interesting, even exemplary. I hope to loc at greater length later. (17 January 1986)

Ah, but Judith hasn't (so far), and neither have all the Le Guin and/or Rottensteiner fans out there who enjoyed every word of the battle in TMR 5/6. It's hard to believe that all the Le Guin fans have disappeared without trace.

Meanwhile, in Joseph's terms, here are 'repetition and redundancy' in the cause of entertainment - in other words, Skel says much the same as the previous letters, but adds his own special je ne sais quoi:

SKEL

25 Bowland Close, Offerton, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 5NW, England

(19 January 1986):

TMR arrived yesterday (Saturday) morning...

Stop right there... you get a mail delivery on Saturday morning? Next you'll be telling me that you still get two mail deliveries a day. I remember twice-daily mail deliveries in Melbourne. That shows how old I am.

...and found it lying invitingly on the hall carpet when I crept downstairs at around 7 a.m. to make my morning cuppa. I was in creeping mode lest I wake up Cas who, because of her nasty, hacking cough, has slept downstairs so as to allow me an uninterrupted night's kip. I snuck past the lounge and made my cup of tea as quietly as possible in the kitchen, and then grabbed TMR, several packets of crisps, and made my way back to bed and esconced myself there for the duration of your dialogue with your friends. This is the bit I always read first as, quite frankly, the other portions tend to intimidate me. After getting myself psyched up on the informal stuff, I feel confident enough to cut the other bastards out of the pack and deal with them one at a time, although I suspect that even then the big bull of the herd, Yvonne's 37-pager, will remain untroubled by me even then. One wonders why it should apparently take 37 pages to refute Franz's 4. However, one doesn't wonder that much.

As to 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends', I have to concede that the title would still pass scrutiny under the Trades Descriptions Act. However, should the ratio of plugs for Nostrilia Press products increase ever so slightly in relation to the other material, I trust you will do the decent thing and change the title to 'I Must Be Trying to Sell Stuff to My Friends'. Damned sneaky weaving all these advertisements into the mainstream dialogue of the fanzine.

I note your response to my letter and have to say that I basically agree with you, although I feel you took my remarks far too literally, dealing with the specific points rather than the generalities. In essence, I was trying to communicate the reasons why I find/found TMR/SFC less satisfying to me than it might be. This is because it is basically presenting only one side of Bruce Gillespie, or rather it is heavily stressing one side of Bruce Gillespie's interests, and it is mainly those interests and concerns which either I share the least or am least able to participate in (namely 'Serious SF Criticism'). I enjoy TMR for the 'IMBTtMF' section, and for the glimpses of 'Bruce-the-fan' that occur from time to time, as in (ouch!) this issue's editorial.

But you don't mention reviving your fanzine, which is what I hoped my reply in TMR 5/6 would prompt you to do.

(20 January 1986):

Today there was just that conjunction of circumstances that would cause me to tackle Yvonne's piece. I had to travel to a remote factory on business, which meant that I was faced with over 1½ hours of bus travel. I needed something to read and the

damn postman didn't bring anything. I had to decide between Yvonne's article and another attempt to get into Helliconia Spring. Colour me fannish, even if a bit sercon around the gills. Of course, in order to do it properly I had first to read old Franz's piece. Now I trust Yvonne will appreciate that greater love or dedication hath no man. I have yet to read a piece by Franz where I felt I understood what he was talking about when I'd done. It is not as if he uses difficult words or concepts, but simply that they seem to skip across the surface of my understanding, like stones across a particularly small pond, and vanish into the surrounding undergrowth.

Why does my mind have undergrowth? Shouldn't that be the pond? Maybe that's part of the problem. Maybe if I could just get all them damned frogs and newts out of my mind there'd be room for finer things. Get the undergrowth cut back as well. But what of the gnome with the fishing rod? Does that have to go too?

So OK, I realise that the problem is my own feeble intellect, rather than any fault of Franz's. It don't make it go away.

At last, though, I see why it took Yvonne so many pages to refute, or at least attempt to refute him. She's trying to do it one sentence at a time. Thank Christ she didn't try to do it word by word, otherwise the entire North American continent would be a deforested wasteland by now. She got sucked in, caught up in a whirlpool. Though I haven't yet finished the article, I see at least one instance where she appears to be going down the drain, bathwater, baby, and all. I refer to the section where she appears to be attempting to refute Franz's 'Not even her best sf is exceptional...' line (page 21). She lays all these points before us, but doesn't say why she thinks they prove her point. She plonks all these points down, but before drawing all her threads together she sights her next prey and gives chase without administering the humane killer to this one.

Let's face it, it is staggeringly easy to show that Le Guin's best sf is 'exceptional'. How does the dictionary define the word? 'Exception - thing that does not follow the rule.' Well, as a rule, only a small percentage of science fiction is written by Ursula K. Le Guin. As you can see, Ursula Le Guin's best sf is exceptional because a staggeringly high percentage of it, 100 per cent in fact, is written by Ursula Le Guin. Of course, her worst sf is exceptional, too, for precisely the same reasons. 'Aha,' you say. 'You are merely splitting hairs. That isn't what Franz was talking about, and you know it.'

Do I? Just what the fuck was Franz talking about? Show me! There are two ways Yvonne could attempt to refute Franz's statement that 'not even her best sf is exceptional...': that is, either prove that her best sf does in fact meet Franz's criteria for 'exceptional', or prove that Franz's criteria are invalid in at least this specific context. However, as Franz at no time sets forth his criteria, this is completely impossible. He doesn't argue his point, merely states it. His terms are so broad as to be meaningless. Rubbish my criteria all you will - the point is, they are there to be rubbished. They are there. Franz's aren't. I for one am unclear even in what respect her material is 'not exceptional'. As sf? As literature? Of course he does say 'as novels', but no novel can be exceptional if the

criteria you are measuring it by are precisely those which you use to define it. With her shorter pieces, he does get more specific, with 'shallow' and 'banal', but surely he isn't applying these also to her better novels? Of course, he does make some general statements, but even granting these, which are strictly a matter of opinion, and which I'm sure more people than Yvonne would argue with, he makes no attempt to show why they would prevent the work from being 'exceptional'. For instance, can a work not be 'exceptional', even if it '...tends to glide over unpleasant truths... for the sake of beauty...?' It would seem to me that, if it succeeds, it would be exceptional for that very beauty. If not, Franz, why not? Don't just tell me, Franz, show me!

I think I'd better give up. I begin to suspect that it's all a clever sort of game, and it's a game I am not competent to play. I enjoy TMR, or parts thereof, enough to want to keep right on getting it, but surface mail will do in future, Bruce. You've no idea how guilty it makes me feel knowing that, desperate as you are for money (witness the plugs for Norstrilia Press), you have spent a fortune airmailing me nearly thirty pages of material I am not going to read. Especially when I cannot give you the sort of response I think you're looking for.

But - and at last I'm starting to answer the letters set out above - it's possible that I'm looking for a wide range of responses, and that I can never hope to predict the response I might get from any particular person. (Except the people who don't respond at all, and they will no longer be on the mailing list after this issue.)

For a long time, during the first half of the 1970s, it seemed as if I could do no wrong (within the covers of my fanzine, that is). No matter what strange and wayward material I dumped within the pages of SF Commentary, people forgave my misdemeanours, even enjoyed them. Now, it seems, it's stomp-on-Bruce-Gillespie time. Now nothing I do is right. In the early 1970s I published quite a few issues of SFC that were larger than TMR 5/6. Nobody complained then. Eventually people seemed to think that the only good issue of SFC weighed in at 100 pages or more. The ultimate issue was just that - the final issue (so far) of SFC, which at 90 pages of 10-point and 8-point type, had something more than twice as many words as TMR 5/6. If Yvonne's Le Guin article had been in the offset SFCs, it would have been 14 pages long. I wouldn't have heard a whimper about its length. The main complaint I had about the regular-sized offset issues of SFC (16 pages) was that they were too short. People could not see that, in word length, they were about the equivalent of a 40-page duplicated fanzine. Too short, then. Too long, now. Whatever you're doing, Gillespie, stop it, 'cos it must be wrong.

Nothing exemplifies this attitude better than the all-too-typical John Foyster anecdote told by Irwin Hirsh. If Yvonne had offered her article to Foyster-and-co. for the revived Australian Science Fiction Review, they would have taken it like a shot. What do footnotes have to do with it? Most writers in Science-Fiction Studies are unreadable because they seem incapable of writing the English language, not because they use footnotes. Yvonne Rousseau, by comparison, is one of Australia's finest prose writers, so that it is a pleasure to read any of her work, of whatever length.

The whingeing about the mere length of Yvonne's article seems very peculiar. Let's see how the article evolved. There were some points about Franz's original article that annoyed me, and some arguments I agreed with. Later, Yvonne mentioned that she wanted to write at length about the works of Ursula Le Guin. It occurred to me that Yvonne could answer Franz much better than I could. However, that rebuttal (which, I admit, I expected to be not much longer than Franz's own article) would be merely a peg on which to hang Yvonne's in-depth study of Le Guin's work. That's how the article turned out. It took quite a while for Yvonne to write the piece, and then she re-organised it completely for me. The fact remains that, if you remove all the sentences she uses specifically to counter Franz's arguments, you still have most of her article left - brilliant analyses of such books as The Lathe of Heaven and The Left Hand of Darkness. It is that general discussion which, I thought, would be interesting to all those people who know Le Guin's work very well. (I am, I admit, still waiting for their letters of comment.)

So John, Irwin, Joseph, and Skel were not interested enough in Le Guin's work to see all this for themselves. Fair enough. To balance the length of the Le Guin section, I published a good long letter column and a wide range of smaller articles in TMR 5/6. Surely anyone could find things of interest here. Who reads all of any magazine anyway? I certainly don't. I read all the way through a couple of the newszines and some of the very short fanzines; that's all. A magazine the size of TMR is obviously meant as a collection of pieces, some of which will appeal to some readers.

But I do get back to John Foyster's question: 'What's the purpose of it all?' Well, why do you publish fanzines, John? That's always been a bit of a puzzler. I publish fanzines in order to keep in contact with people I couldn't reach any other way. I publish fanzines in order to receive other fanzines in trade. I publish fanzines to spark off response. But I never know what kind of response I can expect to any issue or part of an issue. Serendipity is all. The response I expected to TMR 5/6 was: 'So SF Commentary is back!' and cheers all round. The whole issue certainly felt big and cuddly to me, like the big old issues of SFC. And then I get this negative response, even from people like Leigh Edmonds, who liked the old large issues of SFC.

Joseph Nicholas asks some difficult questions about TMR policy. Yes, I have gone back on many of the policy statements I made in TMR 1. They didn't work. Ask people to send me articles about what they are interested in, and they send in articles about science fiction and fantasy! Doomed! In an even more interesting turn-up, the nearest I've seen to my projected TMR are the latest issues of Tigger, Marc Orlieb's fanzine. Marc talking about Jefferson Airplane/Starship, various people talking about evolution, etc., etc. I haven't received any fannish articles. TMR might have been the next Pong if Australian readers were in the slightest interested in writing that sort of fan article. But, as Leigh Edmonds found out when he was doing Rataplan, they are not. Australian fans might be interested in a multitude of things, but the common currency of fandom is still sf and fantasy. And the results, in TMR 5/6, were satisfying to me. Better to have well-written articles about sf and fantasy than badly written articles about things people are writing about just because I asked them. I can't write to order, Joseph, so I don't ask other people to do so. The only carrot I can hold out is the promise of review copies of sf books. Sometimes it works.

Who is the only person who can write about the subjects that should be covered in TMR? Me. At least, I presume so. I keep waiting for articles about The Plains, the new Vargas Llosa novel, operas on CD (though I'd better check my FAPA mailings to make sure Harry Warner hasn't done this already), Margaret Mahy and other children's writers, appreciations of Welles, Calvino, and all the other people who've died recently, a Corflu report, news from English fandom, and, of course, articles by John Foyster, Irwin Hirsh, Joseph Nicholas, and Skel. (And Judith Hanna, of course; she did promise a letter of comment.) None of this arrives. When do I find time to write it all myself? Sometimes. Never. Well... sometimes, as in this issue, which covers a few of the things I'm interested in. But I had to ask John Bangsund for permission to reprint his article about Garrison Keillor and E. B. White; he wrote it originally for another magazine. I know why John has little time for writing such articles - but you can hardly blame me for not running material of such quality if I don't receive it. I would like to write as well as John Bangsund, and I cannot. And most days I can't even write like above-average Bruce Gillespie.

Policy for TMR is decided by serendipity bound by necessity. Practical considerations actually rule policy. Now that much of my time is taken up with paid editorial work, I have little time for fanzine publishing. If I dropped the paid work, I would have no money to publish fanzines. If I keep on working, I can snatch, two or three times a year, the fortnight or so that I need to publish an issue of TMR. Since that frequency is fixed, I might as well publish a large issue as a small issue. Not that I'm committed to large issues every time; the next TMR might be 16 pages, or 4 pages reduced offset (my original concept for TMR) or anything that works with the material I want to publish. I keep wishing I could win some lottery so that I could do nothing but publish fanzines. There's certainly enough material to keep me going for a while (most of it about sf and fantasy).

I admit that I had a fairly hostile feeling to the thought of reviving Australian Science Fiction Review. ASFR is sacred territory, after all: that little collection of fanzines, my most precious possession apart from my complete set of SF Commentary. ASFR existed from 1966 to 1969, and every line of it was imbued with the trufannish spirit of John Bangsund. I realise that John Foyster and Lee Harding put enormous amounts of work into the magazine, but the personality was Bangsund's. The idea of publishing a new series of ASFR without Bangsund as editor seemed as ludicrous as the idea of running A Prairie Home Companion without Garrison Keillor as compere. The only purpose or reviving ASFR should have been to drag John Bangsund back to the fannish fold. Instead, he's writing only one short piece per issue, I wasn't too excited by the idea of a fanzine run by a Collective. Whoever heard of a decent fanzine run by a Collective? Whose viewpoint will ASFR - Series II present? Foyster's? Blackford's? (But Russell's critical stance seems quite different from John's.) Sussex's? Rousseau's? Independent spirits, all; each should be running a separate fanzine. My feeling, after seeing the first issue of the new magazine, is that it would be better called Australian Foundation, since its tone more closely resembles that of the straightlaced, and collectively run, Foundation than that of the irreverent, often wildly funny ASFR of the 1960s.

What Australia needs - and Foyster might have provided - is a fanzine

that might re-establish Australia's credentials as a country that can produce great fanzines. We need a thoroughly fannish fanzine, along the lines of Crank or some of the better English fanzines. Fuck the Tories might be it, but it's only one-third Australian, and No. 2 seems to have become bogged down. The only magazine that shows what I'm talking about comes not from Australia but from New Zealand: Tim Jones's Timbre (available for the usual from 20 Gillespie St., Dunedin, NZ). Maybe John could have produced something as involving as Timbre, but he's chosen to go a different direction. Another opportunity lost.

Irwin raised the matter of accepting subscriptions. Again, necessity has overruled good intentions. The subscription price, as you will have noticed, is much too high to be taken seriously. It's designed to make people wince when they reach for their cheque-books, and vow that they will definitely write a letter of comment or article instead of sending a subscription. A few people hate writing so much that they begged me to strike a subscription rate. This I did, and some of them have paid the price. But I would be more pleased with a small mailing list of regular contributors.

Just to prove that Foyster, Edmonds, Hirsh, Nicholas, and Skal are wrong, here is a letter to show you what is really bad about TMR:

ALEXANDER B. NEDELKOVICH

Professor of English, Romanijska 18, 11080 Zemun, Yugoslavia

I got a file of crudzines. Since my name started appearing in sf publications, I got crudzines from people I had never heard of. I certainly did not subscribe to any.

Don't.

For one thing, Metaphysical it ain't. Another: illustrations are ghastly, out-and-out bad. Third: it looks tired, wrong, and the contents are not the right thing.

I am happy that you can live your safe, rich, fancy-dancy free way. Nice: you ain't in any real bad spots on this earth, and there are some that are very bad. But I am not eager to read how much beer and Coca-Cola each of you big heroes there managed to drink, how many old papers and books somebody had on the floor, etc. Do not tell me.

I am casting around for a replacement to The Alien Critic/Science Fiction Review because Geis says he will quit after No. 62. The kind of thing you are making is not it. (Maybe File 770?) Either you try to assist me in my big, big personal effort to find, translate, sell, make good and great in literature, and to understand it, or count me out. Permanently.

Want news from here? Enclosed, a page.

PS: Is there any serious fanzine in Terra Australis? If yes, please send me the address.

On the one hand, you seem to imply: 'Please do not send me any more copies of your publication', but on the other hand you send a page of news about sf in Yugoslavia. I'm confused. Since that is a *contribution*, you will be forced to endure at least three more issues of TMR.

It's interesting that Messrs Foyster, Hirsh, Nicholas, and Skelton failed to write letters about the ultra-thin, ultra-fannish, and very well-written TMR 4. Not that you liked it, Professor Nedelkovich, but it must have seemed an odd sort of document to you. Life in Australia during the mid-1970s must seem very different from life in Yugoslavia now. We thought we were living on very little money then, but maybe it was a hedonistic paradise after all. If we were 'rich', as you put it, it's because of the Lucky Country we lived in. Who knows when the luck will run out?

Australian fanzines that are serious about sf? Try:

- * Van Ikin's Science Fiction (from Dr Van Ikin, Department of English, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, WA 6009; \$20 per subscription).
 - * The second series of Australian Science Fiction Review (GPO Box 1264L, Melbourne, Victoria 3001; \$A10 surface mail subscription).
 - * Ron L. Clarke's The Mentor (6 Bellevue Rd., Faulconbridge, NSW 2776; \$A2 per single issue, or contribution or letter of comment).
- The top Australian newszines contain long reviews as well as news:
- * Thyme, edited by Peter Burns and Roger Weddall (PO Box 273, Fitzroy, Victoria 3065; ten issues for \$A10, or £5 or DM20).
 - * The Notional, edited by Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown (PO Box 433, Civic Square, ACT 2608; \$A15 for 12 issues within Australia, \$A20 surface mail overseas, \$28 airmail overseas).

And now to the rest of your letter:

An SF Flareup in Yugoslavia

Science fiction is not directly related to the strength of the buyers' pockets: proof, the current expansion of sf publishing and fandom in Yugoslavia. At least fifteen new titles this year so far - that is a big upswing for the field here, compared with previous years.

Gateway 3 came out; and a giant, incredibly good 525-page, large-format, small-print anthology, Monolith 2, starting with Zelazny's Lord of Light, and including such gems as Farmer's 'Riders of the Purple Wage', Keyes' 'Flowers for Algernon', and more winners. The total is fifteen Hugo- and Nebula-winners.

Miller's A Canticle for Leibowitz also came out, and Asimov's The Gods Themselves, and Blade Runner/Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? by Philip K. Dick, and The Valley of Horses, by Jean Auel, and Sturgeon's (may he rest in peace) Venus Plus X, and Le Guin's The Eye of the Heron (but it is not a good novel). This is a renaissance for us. Of these books, I translated most of Monolith 2, Miller, Asimov, and Dick, and now I am doing Delany's Babel-17 and The Einstein Intersection, and then I will take on the dream of my life: Blish's Cities in Flight tetralogy. All this has been done in Belgrade; only Horses was done in Zagreb.

The biggest sf club is in Zagreb (SFera), and has about 200 members. Here in Belgrade (in fact it is Beograd) our club, Lazar Komarcic, has forty-plus members and serious meetings every Thursday in the year. Our fanzine, Emitor, a twelve-page monthly, costs \$US4 per year plus postage, which makes you a member of the club.

(10 August 1985)

It must be interesting to have all those goodies (and some baddies, like

the Auel) coming out all at once. In the same way, it is still exciting to begin reading sf in Australia, England, or America. Most of the sf 'classics' from the last fifty years stay in print fairly constantly. For instance, Gollancz has recently re-released in hardback such well-known titles from the back list as Heinlein's Time for the Stars and The Door into Summer, Sheckley's Dimension of Miracles, Journey Beyond Tomorrow, and Mindswap, and Ballard's The Voices of Time and The Terminal Beach. The same company has also released, in sturdy paperback format, a line of 'SF Classics', including Delany's Nova, Sturgeon's More than Human, Vonnegut's The Sirens of Titan, and Silverberg's A Time of Changes. I'll review them as soon as possible - if someone doesn't offer first.

Professor Nedelkovich's brief tales of Yugoslavian fandom bring me back to other tales of fandom:

TED WHITE

1014 North Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, Virginia 22046, USA.

When I was sitting in that same pub with Greg Pickersgill, the subject of the then-current TWA hostage situation in Lebanon came up. Greg was certain that Reagan was going to do something hasty and macho - something we'd all live to regret. This is, after all, Reagan's image in much of the world (and in yours, as well?). I pooh-poohed the thought. Reagan, I said, is all talk and no action: a great bag of hot air. He will do nothing, I said. He'll wait and let the situation resolve itself. The bluster and the loud words are meant to reassure his constituency; nothing more.

I was right, of course. Right then, and right since then. His recent bluster about Libya simply underscores the point.

And that's why I, for once, do not take seriously your notion that 'Reagan would like to find an excuse for a bang-up fight with the Russians'. Oh, I don't doubt that in his private fantasies Reagan might like nothing better, but the man is a curious combination of the idealistic nut and the pragmatic realist. In practice, this means that he says the most outrageous nonsense, but acts with due caution.

As a consequence, he has essentially reversed Teddy Roosevelt's dictum about talking softly and carrying a big stick. Reagan is almost a pussycat who swears a blue streak. Soon, I expect, he'll become better known as The Boy Who Cried Wolf - his threats to terrorists are becoming a bad joke.

So much for mundane politics. A distasteful subject.

I was much egoboosted by the quotes from my Fan Guest of Honour Speech and the context in which you placed them, in 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'. (The very title of that long-running section says a lot, doesn't it?) Thanks for saying that I 'gave great value for money'; in all seriousness, that is what I tried to do. I feel that any time someone is willing to pay for me to travel half way around the world, I owe a major debt.

It's interesting to see how the prozine situation has shifted in the past few years. Analog under Schmidt is as grey and colourless as even (never thought I'd miss Ben Bova, but...), and has lost its pre-eminence in the field. Asimov's is clearly

ascendant. Amazing manages to hold on, despite sales that remain at around 10,000. F&SF exists in an amber world in which it's still 1965 and nothing has really changed at all. These magazines are being edited and produced without any real awareness that it's now only fifteen years until the year 2000 - that the world is changing, has changed, and that magazines need to respond to these changes to survive. The digest-size format, a product of the paper shortages of World War II, is obsolete - digest-sized magazines are getting less newsstand display, and more erratic overall distribution - and newsstand sales are falling.

While I do not think that Stardate is the Ultimate Answer to these problems, I do think it's a viable answer - one of many - and I predict that as time goes on magazines like Stardate will take over whatever is left of the field. Our publisher is willing to try fresh approaches, fresh answers to perennial problems. Thus our magazine has a fresh format, a fresh mix of ingredients, and a fresh approach to distribution. And each issue, our sales go up.

I'm glad to see the inauguration of the 'Musely' column, but I had a mixed reaction to its first instalment. I have most of Laurie Anderson's records (excepting only a couple of private releases) and have seen her United States performance; I also have all (I think) of the Hunters and Collectors records, and have seen them live (the larger ensemble). So I start with that. But Greg Egan tells me almost nothing that I did not already know, and offers me no insights into the music at all. Instead he falls into the Rolling Stone trap of devoting most of his space to the lyrics. In Anderson's case this has more validity, but Hunters and Collectors give, I think, at least equal emphasis to the actual music. Even the lyrics quoted are flattened by their removal from their music context. Lyrics meant to be sung cannot be critiqued as words alone; they must be considered for their relationship to the whole work.

(13 January 1986)

Not much I can say to all that, except thanks for the letter, and that Stardate does not seem to have a distributor in Australia. Also: when and how did you get to see Hunters and Collectors in concert?

IRWIN HIRSH
(again)

I enjoyed reading Greg Egan's instalment of 'Musely'. I often wondered when you were going to take music out of your editorial column and give to it equal stature with the books. I'm glad Greg mentioned Hunters and Collectors. They were one of the bands I used to follow when I was 'into' the local music scena. Until this past New Year's Eve Wendy (my wife) and I hadn't enjoyed a good New Year's Eve together, yet both of us have fond memories of the New Year's Eve immediately before we met. I went to see Hunters and Collectors at the Seaview Ballroom. It was the last time I saw them, and the best time I ever saw them. For the last half of their set I was down the front right near one of the speakers, and I remember thinking, 'This is the way to listen to Hunters and Collectors.' The Horns of Contempt were in great form, and from down there they sent a shiver down my spine. For the final song, 'Run Run Run', they brought on the

members of one of the bands who had played earlier, and set in motion a fantastic finish. Those six extra people either played some percussion instrument or were at a microphone and used their voices as percussion instruments. For about ten minutes they kept us going with, as Greg says, 'complex, hypnotic rhythms... repeated over and over'. It was a great way to bring in the New Year. (25 February 1986)

I confess that I have never heard Hunters and Collectors, either in concert or on record. That could be because, although they are one of Australia's best-known bands, they are never played on commercial radio.

*

You might have noticed that I like each letter to lead naturally to the next one. This, Joseph Nicholas, could be called editing. It could also be called doing-jigsaw-puzzles-with-lots-of-bits-of-paper-before-typing-the-stencils. Now I'm stumped. I have before me lots of interesting letters on lots of different topics. Here's a letter about politics and sf:

GEORGE TURNER

Flat 4, 296 Inkerman St., East St Kilda, Victoria 3183

What on earth did I write in TMR 3 (I seem to have mislaid my copy) to give Gene Wolfe the impression that I think the threat of nuclear war is grave and imminent? In fact I think it is grave but postponable and will not easily go away (unless humanity becomes intelligent overnight) and that the USA and the USSR are the nations least likely to begin it. They know too much about it.

The real dangers lie with smaller, less responsible nations - particularly those driven by religious idiocies which could present wipeout as an act of virtue - and irresponsible terrorists. There is also the problem of accidental touch-off due to the inadequacies of automated surveillance systems run by computers. (We have a technology dependent on computers designed to control activities which turn out to be too complex for adequate programming!) There have been several false alarms acknowledged by the USA and nobody knows how many unacknowledged by the USSR. A frenzied locking of stable doors buys time but does not reassure.

Nor do I see any method of making such a war impossible. If Gene can come up with one in 'The Peace Spy' I will be the first to cheer - while the world beats a path to his door. The fundamental problems are two: humanity is given to spasms of mass stupidity; and knowledge cannot be abolished once discovered.

Any writer of futurist sf must take these into consideration when designing tomorrow's world. Their influence must and will pervade every historical movement from now on - until the race grows up. In the meantime, we might consider the obvious directions of weapon design for eliminating populations without destroying their cities and artefacts. Molecular biology seems the most practical line of research. Nor should weather control of droughts and freezing be ruled out of a more distant time. One of the more uncomfortable possibilities is the development of 'radiation bombs' with little explosive impact - just the thing for those unwilling to destroy themselves along with the enemy.

There is no end to the legacy of hate and stupidity, or to the psychological backlash of a galloping technology on a species too easily prone to mass neurotic behaviour; they are the dominant influences on modern history. One of the worst aspects is that we have, in the mass, become used to the idea of living indefinitely on the razor's edge. My feeling (possibly more emotionally optimistic than logical) is that we will survive all the perils, though with a few cliffhangers on the way - but that we will not survive by being complacent about the future. I do not know of one government in the world that is doing anything constructive about the known problems of the next century, or even the next twenty years. (27 February 1986)

There are governments such as that in Sweden which are doing their best to anticipate problems they can solve - that is, problems that can be controlled by their own people. The continued problem is that the fate of 100 per cent of the world's population is decided by two governments that represent about 20 per cent of the world's population.

But I've said so many things about the world's currently (to me) insoluble problems, that I'll leave George and Gene to slog this one out. Meanwhile, here's somebody who disagrees with George on a quite different matter:

ANDREW WEINER

124 Winchester St., Toronto, Ontario M4X 1B4, Canada

Re TMR 5/6: Not that William Gibson needs me to defend him, and not that I have any more belief in awards than George Turner, but for once I think the voters have got it right and Turner has got it largely wrong. Far from being deliberately constructed to have 'surefire selling values', Neuromancer seems to me to be a quite difficult and superficially uncommercial book, in terms of the density of its language and its unsympathetic main characters. Its success (at least in the various awards - it's hardly been a best-seller) may be an index of boredom with much more calculatedly commercial sf.

As Bruce Sterling observes in his slightly overwrought cover blurb ('Say goodbye to your old stale futures...'), the future it imagines appears wholly new. And yet at the same time it isn't really the future at all; it's now.

Much of the impact comes from the way in which it is written. And it's here that I find Turner's criticisms particularly unfair. Sure, there are some things that don't work, and some repetitive riffs, but for the most part the prose is remarkably well sustained. At its best, it's a kind of coherent William Burroughs, although I doubt that Turner has much time for Burroughs, either.

Gibson can get a little carried away with his action-adventure pastiches: in some of his short stories, like 'New Rose Hotel', it almost overwhelms everything else. But in Neuromancer it works. It's the frame on which everything else rests.

I don't know, maybe Turner is too morally offended by the book's tone to appreciate its real virtues. Read it, Bruce, and see what you think. (19 January 1986)

I did read Neuromancer - half of it, anyway. At about that time, George Turner reviewed it for me, and I thought, 'Whee! Now I don't have to keep trudging through this unreadable stuff.' It was George's remarks about the book's prose that I particularly agreed with. Gibson doesn't write the same brand of the English language as I read. I found whole pages of jargon that were incomprehensible. I could have finished the book, I suppose, but there was no enjoyment in it.

I agree with you, Andrew, that it's hardly a book designed to be successful. I don't think anybody can set out to write an award-winner, at least not with a first novel. All you can do is write a book and hope that somebody wants to read it. Count Zero, Gibson's second novel, is a different matter. Of course it will do well, because Bill Gibson's name is now well known. I've given a copy to Lucy Sussex to review for me.

BRIAN EARL BROWN

11675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, Michigan 48224, USA (CoA)

Aesthetics is, I'll admit, pretty much of a mystery to me. When I was signing up for classes in college I noticed that Chemistry was so much easier to spell. Still, it seems, in part, that the argument between Rottensteiner and Rousseau is over matters of personal taste - political correctness, as it were. Rottensteiner seems to be saying clearly that fantasy is a lesser literature and, since Le Guin writes fantasy, she must be a lesser writer. And, as Yvonne Rousseau points out, Franz Rottensteiner even criticises her word usage ('...tries to write beautifully...'), something you were telling me real critics don't do. Of course, Rottensteiner could be the exception that proved the rule.

Yvonne might have saved herself a lot of trouble if she'd concentrated solely on the divisions between Rottensteiner's underlying ideology and hers. She covers this matter to a certain extent, but sometimes it seems that Rousseau and Rottensteiner never quite spar with each other, as they stand on different platforms. It's hard to argue with Franz's two apparent axioms, just because they are axioms to him. They are (1) that fantasy is a lesser literature than real literature, and (2) writing that is popular (not 'popular writing' or 'pop literature', but writing that is loved by a large group of readers) is necessarily of lower quality than minority-interest literature. All I can say is that these are not axioms of mine, although they can seem to be true sometimes for specific works of literature. Yvonne, on the other hand, noticed a multitude of sexist assumptions in Franz's article, and she deals with them effectively.

But what if - just perhaps - Le Guin's writing is not as good as many influential critics in sf agree it is? It's quite valid for Franz to raise such a possibility; as a polemicist, he's trying to get people to question their own assumptions. Aesthetics, again. The whole matter is raised by:

CASEY ARNOTT

Apt 8, 1663 Frances St., Vancouver, British Columbia V5L 1Z3, Canada

Rottensteiner certainly knows how to rivet his audience - right through the unsympathetic nerve-centre. I have been reading

Le Guin for years - it was her The Left Hand of Darkness, for instance, that finally tore away the prejudice I'd inherited against sf and started me on the long, uncertain road to fandom. Whatever her faults, or my shortcomings (I wonder whether she has too much faith in our nobility or if I, mucked about with since birth, have not enough), I have always regarded her as a sister, an encouragement, someone against whom to measure my own integrity as a writer and an assessor/personkind, as a friend, and as a damn good read. Le Guin is a sort of village wise woman in the community of sf. If one looks at her wording, the elements she finds important to discuss, they are just those 'female' (although I disagree with that sorting out of opposites) elements that have been downplayed, ignored, and ridiculed by the established hierarchy (you know, the guys who tell us how we ought to think, even if we're too stupid to do so). I wonder if this is what old Rottensteiner is reacting to?

Look, Bruce, this is bugging me. I very seldom read literary criticism, because when I do I am generally appalled by the viciousness or the dullness of the piece. The exceptions that stand out for me were Susan Wood's criticisms - whether they were of children's books, Canadian lit., or sf. Where have I gone wrong? Are most critics just fools, arrogant knotheads eager to show their brilliance at the expense of someone else? Is it so difficult to envision what is being attempted by an author, to select and focus on their strengths, where they are going, how they have grown, and mention their flaws clearly, but in passing? Or, what about a balanced examination?

What is our priority, our responsibility to each other as people, and as bloody writers? What is the excuse for criticism? Are we here to act as a firing squad or as an open learning establishment, where the end goal is fine writing and satisfied human beings? This really boils my blood.

(18 January 1986)

I'm not sure whether the question 'boils my blood' or not, but it's one that has preoccupied SFC/TMR readers since 1969. You ask, 'What is the excuse for criticism?' Here's my answer - one answer, that is, since I might think of something quite different next week. In sf, criticism usually begins as an attempt by one reader to let other readers know which new books are worth buying and which are not: a market guide, a warning against shoddy goods, and a reward for well-made goods. As soon as you do that, you set up criteria of excellence, although these criteria might not be stated by the critic. Reviewing gives way to overall criticism as you start to think about excellence itself. Taken to an extreme, the great critic projects all of her or his knowledge of literature, knowledge of the world, self-knowledge, and strong feelings on to the work being discussed. This is what Susan Wood did: a main reason why I miss her more than I thought I could miss any person. But Franz Rottensteiner does this as well, and so does Yvonne Rousseau. Franz is consistent in his belief that sf books should meet the highest of literary standards, but his standards seem incomprehensibly different from those of his English-speaking readers. Hence the ritual head-butting that takes place when Franz encounters fanzine correspondents, and why (I guess) Franz rarely writes for Australian or North American magazines these days. If people don't share axioms of criticisms, they can't talk to each other; they can only make each other's blood boil.

In other words, Franz has the right to question the literary values of sf's 'village wise woman', especially if he can find a way of doing it that gets around the emotional importance of her works to people like you and me. Something of the same problem arises from Edmund Wilson's famous debunking essay, 'Oo, Those Awful Orcs!' (The Bit Between My Teeth), a nice piece of contemptuous polemic against Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. That essay, entertaining though it is, hardly made a mark on Tolkien devotees, except to make them hate the name of Edmund Wilson forever. To do a really effective demolition job on Tolkien's prose you would need to write a critical piece that shared some assumptions with those held by admirers of Tolkien. Polemic (Rottensteiner) or careful analysis (Rousseau)? Take your pick - or, as you suggest, ignore criticism entirely. But if you did that, Casey, you would miss out on The Language of the Night, which contains both polemic and analysis.

MATS LINDER

Bergsgatan 11, S-13300 Saltsjobaden, Sweden

Thanks very much for the latest issues of TMR. I must add my voice to the choir praising it as having essentially the same charm, attraction, etc. - if not quite the same content - as SF Commentary. Really, it's a question of feeling - and it's there: the Bruce Gillespie feeling.

I, too, would like to comment on John Brosnan's letter concerning doctors, naturopaths, etc.; and particularly his accusation of non-orthodox medical scientists saying, 'It's all in the mind.' I don't know if it's been brought to your attention in Australia, but in Sweden, at least, there has been much talk lately about 'oral galvanism', i.e., mercury poisoning from tooth fillings. This, it has now been discovered, is a very real ailment, causing those afflicted (not very many, considering how many people are walking about with amalgam in their teeth, but far too many) strange and hitherto inexplicable symptoms, like hair falling out, difficulty in concentrating, failing memory, and other things, very often of a mental character. What reaction do you think these people have been met with by the doctors consulted? Right: 'It's all in the mind'; i.e., we can't find anything wrong with you, ergo, you must be imagining things. Go to a psychiatrist!

Even now that it has been generally accepted that there is such a thing as 'oral galvanism', the Swedish 'social directorat' (or whatever it might be called in English), which is the state agency for matters like these, made a summary investigation, only to find that there was nothing to worry about. Why? Easy. If they did admit facts, it would cause a lot of people to worry, the dental industry would be forced to find other materials to fill the holes, and many people suffering from oral galvanism would know the cause and stir up a lot of trouble.

The point I am trying to make is that, although some illnesses are in the mind (or are caused very much by psychological factors), some aren't; but that the medical establishment won't accept anything that goes against the grain of their science. This is clearly illustrated by the reverse of the oral galvanism thing: the so-called psychiatric care given at most psychiatric hospitals. Now, because there exist many theories and a large

number of medicines based on the assumption that psychiatric illness is mainly not in the mind but just a matter of chemistry, we have people walking around drugged to the gills, year after year, in these institutions, when quite a few of them would be cured and back to normal once they stopped taking the pills that the doctors prescribe! (Yes, I do know from experience what I am talking about - as if there weren't a legion of witnesses describing the very same thing in newspapers, magazines, and books all the time.)

So: the sin committed by the people outside established medicine is not in saying that illness is in the mind, or isn't - it is quite simply to advocate unorthodox theories. The medical establishment is one of the most conservative coteries on this earth; maybe because they have enormous privileges to protect. Only some years ago was acupuncture accepted (reasonably so, at least) in Sweden; chiropractice still isn't, of course, and neither is zone therapy. 'Begone, quacks! If we "real" doctors can't cure people, then by damn they can't be cured, and shan't be, either!'

(3 February 1986)

Yes, but... Most of the theories of the alternative medicine people are foolish, if you take them as scientific theories. Formal medicine has theory on its side, but often not the results. I wouldn't accuse doctors so much of wickedness as of that dreadful indifference that comes from fitting human fallibilities into some overall scheme. I suspect that most alternative therapies are codifications of things that have been shown to work on a fair number of people, nobody quite knowing why. The more formal research that is carried out, the more that many alternative therapies seem to be supported, especially in the fields of human reactions to hostile food and other environmental agents. Take my constant affliction: non-reversible deterioration of the cushioning material between the top vertebrae of my spine. If I'd fallen among the wrong doctors, I could easily have been subjected to surgery on the top of my spine. Fortunately, I found a good chiropractor, whose occasional manipulations plus my daily exercises keep me on my feet (sort of).

(Mats also talks about a few favourite books read recently. They include Lisa Goldstein's The Red Magician, Michael Ende's Momo, and Joseph Weizenbaum's Computer Power and Human Reason.)

GUIDO EEKHAUT

Berkenhoflaan 13, B-3030 Leuven (Heverlee), Belgium

Some time ago I made myself the promise to write to you about some of the things that interest me (and others, I hope): photographing in the streets, non-sf sf books... As usual, the hand of God (or whatever, whomever) kept me from doing so, though I had about two pages of thoughts on photography in the streets. The hand of God made me decide to have a vasectomy in June, and on the 21st I went in for what was described as a routine operation with minimal aftercare. Full sedation, however.

The problem showed up the next morning, when I felt something painful in my lower abdomen and it took no great medical genius to discover that I had internal bleeding: scrotum, groin (or whatever it is called in plain English) and penis had, in mutual

agreement, doubled their size and would have tripled it had there not been bandages (removal of which was torture). The good doctor (the specialist who operated on me, not the, of course) nodded and told me that I was one of the three per cent. I could only agree.

My colleagues were happy to receive the news that I had survived but would be out for three weeks. The first week and a half I could barely walk (it could have been described as a sideways crawl), but things went better after that. Read a lot of books in those days (good old Chris Priest; his The Glamour kept me occupied during the most difficult hours; I am grateful to him). What had happened was that the stitches (internally) ruptured or something because I had moved in my sleep the morning after the operation.

Meanwhile, I sold a novel and started writing another one, while an older manuscript somehow found its way to my desk and begged for a rewrite and a second try. Another publisher asked for a collection of stories, and I sold some shorter material to literary magazines, all while writing two essays on entropy. Oh, and I have a full-time job. And get regular sleep.

(2 December 1986)

All I can say to your medical adventure is: ouch!

Guido sent one of his entropy essays to me, and it will appear in the next chunky issue of TMR.

You might remember from last issue that Buck Coulson suffered a heart attack in June last year. Fortunately lots of sf fans thunk real hard, projecting get-well thoughts towards Harford City:

• BUCK COULSON

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

I went back to work on 6 January and got my termination notice on 10 January. Never thought I could get through a job that fast. Actually, it doesn't take effect until 7 February. Thing is, the Hartford City facility is being closed. I get a fair chunk of cash at separation, plus I took early retirement - which is unfortunately not enough to live on. So I'll be looking for a job. I could probably wangle a transfer to another Overhead Door factory, but I don't want to. Selling the house would be a bitch, since lots of other people in this very small community are trying to sell their houses so they can move, and anyway, I don't want to live in Grand Island, Nebraska, or Dallas, Texas, or even Lodi, California (thought that would be the best choice). So, I'll be working somewhere else later this year. First time I've had to look for a job since 1965, when Honeywell closed its facility in Wabash, Indiana. (I can see personnel managers looking at my resumé now - 'Last two places he worked both closed? Forget him.')

Other news is that we advanced with science and installed solar heating in this place in December, just before the tax credits for such installation expired. With tax credits, it will more than pay for itself; without them, it might cost more than staying with fossil fuels. (Not that we don't retain the furnace; the solar heat is supposed to reduce fuel bills by one-

third, but it doesn't eliminate them. I doubt that one-third, myself; one-quarter might be more like it.)

I didn't say anything about buying Amazing in Australia; I said subscribe. I'm sure any fan could acquire US funds to subscribe with, though admittedly \$US25 per year is rather expensive.

Especially as \$US25 is more than \$A35 at the current exchange rate. (Not even F&SF is distributed here anymore. I was buying my copy monthly until last year, but have been able to buy only one issue, January 1986, since the September 1986 issue. Most of the other US sf magazines are similarly hard to get, but I gave up buying them years ago.)

In my list of excellent science fiction read recently, I'd add Wolfe's Free Live Free, but I'm not sure you would; it's humorous and I'm never sure about your sense of humour. I suggested in my Amazing review that it might be a parody of Heinlein, which may get me a nasty letter from Gene. (Actually, what I said was that I didn't know if it was an intentional parody; it can definitely be considered one. Among other things.)

Bedtime for me. I get up at 5.40 these days, so I go to bed early. It's a hard life; I may try to live on that retirement and ~~Wolfe's~~ my income from writing. (16 January 1986)

I seem to remember you publishing quite a few novels, by yourself or with Gene de Weese, a few years ago, so maybe that's a goer. I hope you can survive without having to take another job.

I never would have thought of Heinlein in connection with Gene Wolfe, but then, I don't often think of Heinlein in connection with anything. Yes, I find lots of Free Live Free humorous, and other bits mysterious. (As you can see from elsewhere this issue, I stretched my Top 10 Novels into a Top 11 to include it.) Did Gene Wolfe base Free's characters on fannish personalities? There's something about the way they speak that makes me think I've met some of them before in America.

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

- a misleading title, since I've heard from some people by phone (such as PIP MADDERN), and others have sent review copies. BRIAN ALDISS sent a copy of his The Pale Shadow of Science (Serconia Press), which I've reviewed already in brief for Science Fiction. Thanks, Brian. Several people, such as CHRIS PRIEST and GEORGE ERACLIDES, have sent change-of-address letters, and a few people (who might want to remain anonymous) sent subscriptions. It all helps. A few people have added me to their fanzine trade lists, but not nearly enough. (Please: more British fanzines...) Nobody's rushed down to South Melbourne for a luncheon-of-comment recently. That's a pity; the Maori Chief has quite a good lunch. Lots of people have sent letters...

As well as the letter printed in this issue, GEORGE TURNER sent a cutting from the TLS in which Tom Disch says he doesn't like Lem's Microworlds; and a flyer for Aphelion, Australia's latest, and most promising attempt at an sf prozine; TERRY HUGHES apologised for not sending a letter of comment; ANNIS SHEPHERD sent a letter from her

mother's home in Kooyong when she was here for Aussiecon, but I still haven't found out why the copies of TMR that I sent Annis in Arizona did not arrive; BRIAN EARL BROWN wrote several other times - in particular to ask Cy Chauvin to write the story (in answer to Don Ashby in TMR 4) of the slant shack he lived in in Chicago during the late 1970s; and to echo Andrew Weiner's opinions on George Turner's opinions of Neuromancer; MAE STRELKOV, as a onetime Baptist, sends greetings to Ian Carmichael, and says that her household is down to twelve cats (from twenty); TONY PEACEY tells how Western Australian fans spent their time after Aussiecon II (entertaining overseas fan guests); LELAND SAPIRO (PO Box 833-044, Richardson, Texas 75083, USA) says that the next Riverside Quarterly will be out Real Soon Now, and adds: 'Yer shore right - as we cowhands in Texas say - that Magic Pudding Club article didn't mean a god-damned thing to me!'; STEVEN PAULSEN sent a remarkable-looking publication: a magazine that looks like a comic book from the outside, and inside contains an anthology of pretty good Brian Aldiss stories, including 'Oh, for a Closer Brush with God'; I've never seen this on a newsstand, but buy it if it ever comes your way; JEANNE MEALY, who, as a fellow ANZAPA member, should have bumped into me at Aussiecon, but didn't, and is now back in Minneapolis, after 'a great overall trip'; PETE AND ANITA PRESFORD, who sent a circular letter at Christmas to tell about moving into 'Rose Cottage'; SYD BOUNDS, who is now retired, and is writing a lot, and doing a bit of other work; and who wants lots of information on Aussiecon II, which Yvonne Rousseau gladly provides in this issue of TMR; PAUL ANDERSON, who sent lots of personal news, and a list of Favourite Books of 1995: On a Pale Horse (Piens Anthony); Nana and Diva (Delacorta); The Consul's File and The London Embassy (Paul Theroux); Millennium (John Varley); The Unicorn Variations (Roger Zelazny); I Married a Dead Man (Cornell Woolrich); The Suburbs of Hell (Randolph Stow); Helliconia Spring and Helliconia Summer (Brian Aldiss)... I've read only one book on that list; ANDY SAWYER's recent recommended reading includes Patricia Wrightson's novels, Paul Scott's 'Raj Quartet', John Fowles's A Maggot, and Peter Ackroyd's Hawkmoor; and Andy points out that Franz's article about Le Guin reminds him of the long gap between The Dispossessed and Always Coming Home; and CASEY ARNOTT wrote a great cat epic, which I might yet get permission to print.

And that was the issue to 1 March 1986...

INEVITABLE LATE BITS

...but now it's early April, and I've had several more letters, which I won't acknowledge here, since they're for next issue...

...and I've had several verbal Swancon reports which put egg on my face for some of the remarks I made earlier. Even if several letter-writers and reviewers whinged about TMR 5/6, then obviously the Silent (but Ditmar-voting) Majority disagree. Thanks very much for the Ditmar (Best Fanzine) at Easter: a real surprise, since the competition was hot. Each of Thyme, The Notional, and Tigger has had a much better year than mine. Maybe TMR received everybody's second preference. Now all I need to do is find time to print, collate, and send out this issue... and type the 50 pages of material on file... and do the special Dream Issue I promised for last August's ANZAPA... What an exciting life it is.

This column was originally called '8 Point Universe' in SF Commentary (The Magazine). Under that title, it travelled to Van Ikin's tutor's desk, where it appeared in Science Fiction until it changed name to 'Terminus Est'. That still appears in Science Fiction, and has recently featured non-fiction books about sf. 'SF Commentary: The Column' is a belated attempt to get rid of the huge pile of fiction that has accumulated during 1984-6. It might move back to SF, or it might not. I have 84 books listed for mini-review, and room here to deal with 20 of them.

The rules of this column are much as ever:

- (1) Here are shortish reviews of science fiction and fantasy books, and of other fiction that might interest the TMR reader.
- (2) The books are discussed in rank order. A pity about that rule, since I won't have room this issue to get to the books at the bottom of the list so that I can put the knife into them.
- (3) I will try to give preference to review copies sent by publishers, but make no promises; there's still quite a stockpile of books here unread.

THE SIRENS OF TITAN

by Kurt Vonnegut (Gollancz Classic SF 1; 0-575-03819-5; original publication date 1959, this new edition published 1986; 224 pp.; £2.95/\$A6.95)

It's nice to see these 'Gollancz SF Classics' in sturdy paperback editions. (The others released in this first batch are Sturgeon's More Than Human, Delany's Nova, and Silverberg's A Time of Changes.) It's hard to believe that there is any sf reader who hasn't read these books, especially The Sirens of Titan, but perhaps Gollancz is aiming to change the reading direction of people who think that sf has something to do with Star Wars.

It's hard to describe why The Sirens of Titan is much better than nearly all other sf of the last forty years. Prolix academics and enthusiastic fans have tried. Brian Aldiss has tried, and done better than most. But the success of The Sirens of Titan cannot be described, because it's like trying to explain the best joke ever told. The book is a joke on science fiction itself, grabbing all its best and worst ideas, mixing them up, making the absurd logical, and the sensible crazy. It's a joke on human nature itself, as it pours forth a torrent of propositions about life, civilisation, and religion - propositions that sound sensible in themselves, but cancel each other out. Finely pitched ironies and echoing epiphanies are bunged together with a razzle-dazzle, very silly, wonderfully contrived plot - which in the end matters very little. Vonnegut's real concern is people, but his characters resemble the unlikely cardboard cutouts you find in science fiction stories. However, their fates are ours. Are our fates sealed, or are we the victims of circumstance? Both, of course. Rumfoord, stuck in a chrono-synclastic infundibulum, thinks he rules Earth's fate, but he is just part of the cockeyed plan of the Tralfamadorians. Malachi Constant suffers the curse of unending good luck at the beginning of the book; unending bad luck throughout the book makes him a better person, but somewhat wounded. The nicest character is Salo, the Tralfamadorian machine who is marooned on Titan. His dire fate is to become the only one of his people to discover love. Rumfoord's Church of God the Utterly Indifferent saves the Earth, but its practices are as silly as those of any of the religions it replaces. In recent years, Vonnegut has been accused of simple-mindedness, of a tendency to preach a particular line. Critics who believe this should go back to the early novels, where nothing (or everything) is revealed.

THE NEVERENDING STORY

by Michael Ende (Puffin 0-14-031793-7; 1985, original German edition 1979; 445 pp.; \$A5.95)

The Neverending Story includes about every element of every recent children's

fantasy story, and invents a few ones as well. It is, in fact, about 200 pages too long, but I don't mind. Plot and most of the characters and magical folk are familiar to the reader of children's fantasy, but I kept reading. The scenery and adventures come to life convincingly, and the prose style is pleasing. None of this explains why The Neverending Story is a good deal more satisfying than most fantasy books. Perhaps I can explain myself best by saying that it often reminds me of Le Guin's The Farthest Shore and The Language of the Night. The land of Fantastica looks pretty, but it casts dark shadows. The boy Bastian Balthazar Bux spends the first half of the novel being drawn from the everyday world to the fantasy world he is reading about. When he arrives in Fantastica, he is gradually transformed into something menacing. The everyday world depends on this fantasy world without realising it, but the world of Fantastica also depends on ours. There are no slick magical solutions to anything - all magic takes its toll in either world. The Neverending Story becomes a taut, vivid argument about the nature and function of fantasy itself. The argument is developed clearly enough that children can understand it, yet so open-endedly and paradoxically that it remains interesting for those of us who consider the ability to imagine and fantasise as the most important human faculty.

PLAYING BEATIE BOW

by Ruth Park (Puffin 0-14-03.1460-1; 1984, original hardback publication 1980; 196 pp.; \$A3.95)

If The Neverending Story's fantasy world is technicoloured, bedragoned, and bewitched, the fantasy world of Playing Beatie Bow is brown, bedraggled, and down at heel. But it is also magical, and also slightly bewitched. Ruth Park's main character, Abigail, slips through time and seems stuck in the world of Sydney's Rocks area of a hundred years ago. The great interest of the book is in seeing an unaccustomed environment from the perspective of a time-traveller; the mundane becomes significant, and the everyday of one person is the historical landscape of another. Abigail turns out to be (of course) more than a time tourist; she finds that this fantasy world, like all others, has its responsibilities as well as its revelations.

THE GLAMOUR

by Christopher Priest (Jonathan Cape; 0-224-02274-1; 1984; 302 pp.; £8.50/\$A17.95)

The Glamour is also a fantasy; it also creates a fantasy world burdened with responsibilities as well as revelations. Only a cleverer reader than I am could clearly say whether Christopher Priest discharges these responsibilities or, indeed, reveals anything at the end. The Glamour is presented as the story of Richard Grey, who has lost the memory of an important part of his life. In his attempt to regain that memory, he meets a girl who claims to have 'the glamour', a quality that hides her from the notice of most other people. In turn, she is bedevilled by a bloke named Niall, whose glamour hides him so effectively from the world that he can be seen only by her, and then only when he chooses. The essential idea - of people disappearing from the notice of other people, rather than becoming physically invisible - has more than a passing resemblance to that of Lee Harding's Displaced Person; perhaps a scholar will one day explore the very different directions taken by Priest and Harding in developing the notion. In The Glamour, the hidden characters are exaggerations of people we all know but can never quite place - people who really do have trouble making other people see them. In turn, this realistic problem takes on depth from being stretched into a fantasy premise. However, at the end, Priest upsets our expectations in such a way as to make us ask: are the characters meant to have been there, even in the story itself? Who or what is fictional? Who is the writer, and who is written about? This, of course, has become an almost fashionable approach to fiction, but its effect is to destroy the reader's emotional involvement with the novel. I'm tempted to say: 'So what?' or: 'It's only a clever trick'. Yet The Glamour rings true, for all that; its people and situations are authenticated by the wonderfully precise, underplayed, concrete prose. Priest sets much of his book in France, and one is reminded of the best nineteenth-century French writing in some of its finest passages. In the end, I have a grudging admiration for The Glamour, although reading it is like watching a chap who thinks himself clever for doing card tricks when all the time we thought he had performed some real magic.

THE CLAW OF THE CONCILIATOR .

by Gene Wolfe (Timescape 0-671-41370-8; 1981; 303 pp.; \$US12.95)(hb)
(Timescape 41616.2; 1982; 255 pp.; \$US2.75) (pb)

THE SWORD OF THE LICTOR

by Gene Wolfe (Timescape 0-671-43595-7; 1981; 302 pp.; \$US15.50)

THE CITADEL OF THE AUTARCH

by Gene Wolfe (Timescape 0-671-45251-7; 1983; 319 pp.; \$US15.95)

These are the second, third, and fourth books in the series called 'The Book of the New Sun'. They have already been widely read, highly praised, much honoured, and extensively written about. In fact, I have made some 'ooh' and 'ah' noises about them myself. I have a few niggling doubts, however, and I might as well write them here as anywhere else. 'The Book of the New Sun', for one thing, is too long. Much of The Sword of the Lictor seems like mere travelogue to me, and could probably have been summarised in such a way that the total work became a trilogy. 'The Book of the New Sun', like The Glamour, plays coy tricks in describing itself. Wolfe's main character, Severian, carries with him during his journey a book that is itself The Book of the New Sun. This implies that Severian's life's path - indeed, his every action - is already decided. This seems unsatisfactory to me. Why should we remain interested in a character who can't lose anyway? Because, I suppose, this particular fact is hidden from us until near the end of the tetralogy. Because Severian's world and culture are bigger and more interesting than he is - because they come to life, although he never quite does. Because almost every 'fact' about this future Urth is presented ambiguously, or hidden altogether except to clever guessers. Severian might be assured of a passage through the maze, but we never are. Much of the weight of the book is pushed from Severian's shoulders onto the reader's. This seems an acceptable fictional device these days, but still leaves the problem - Severian can't put a foot wrong, even when he is wrong. Go back to The Sirens of Titan and you see what I mean - everybody's fate is manipulated by the Tralfamadorians, but this provides no reassurance for anybody, only pain and irresolution for most. In 'The Book of the New Sun', a steely kind of complacency sets over proceedings - there never really was any doubt about how things would turn out. That's why The Sirens of Titan is a novel but 'The Book of the New Sun' is, in the end, a pageant, however richly decorated. Where does that leave The Glamour? Your guess is as good as mine.

THE BLIND MAN AND THE ELEPHANT

by Russell M. Griffin (Timescape 41101.2; 1982; 295 pp.; \$US2.95)

The failure of The Blind Men and the Elephant to achieve awards or a second edition shows, as much as anything, the poor state of science fiction today. Given the failure of this book, one might conclude that, if The Sirens of Titan had been written recently, it wouldn't have even found a publisher, let alone any acclaim. In the 1950s or 1960s, a zany yet adult book like The Blind Men and the Elephant would have found a loyal audience, in Britain or Europe if not in America. Now - nothing. Russell Griffin might even have been forced out of the sf business already. If he's still around, buy his next book... or this one, if Pocket Books has kept it in print. Griffin does not try to stretch your brain into strips of reinforced spaghetti (à la Priest and Wolfe), but he's a clever writer with a sharp eye on the world around him. He tells the story about a man who works at a very small-scale, small-budget East Coast television station. The descriptions of the workings of this tv station are the highlights of the book. Leffingwell 'discovers' Macduff, who looks like England's famous 'elephant man'. However, this elephant man's unsightly skin condition develops very fast, and he cannot remember his past. As flashes of memory return to him, various unsavoury people gather round, and some want him dead. Ingenious and amusing plots intercurl, crazy sights are seen, breathless revelations are made. If this book is allowed to disappear, there's little hope for we starved sf readers.

FREE LIVE FREE

by Gene Wolfe (Gollancz 0-575-03725-3; 1985, original, slightly different American edition 1984; 399 pp.; £9.95/\$A24)

I was hoping that some reviewer might tell me exactly what Gene Wolfe was up to in the final chapters of Free Live Free. The trouble is that there are few in-depth reviewers left in the sf field. I looked up Foundation magazine, but

its reviewer is as puzzled as I am. It seems to me... and here I'm being very cautious, having failed to decode Peace in my ASFR article... that the four main characters in Free Live Free are propelled as remorselessly towards Greatness, or World Leadership, or whatever, as Severian was in 'The Book of the New Sun'. And, although these characters are amusing, interesting, full of life, just the sort of people you'd like to meet skittering around some fictional cityscape, the fast remains that being Chosen makes them less interesting than they might have been. The puzzle at the end is to work out exactly who or what chose them, and what they are meant to do or be. What is really wanted by the person or persons unknown (collectively, it seems, Ben Free) who control the world at the moment? It's all a bit of a loony fairy-tale - hints of enchantment at the side, strange adventures ahead, but the people staying in centre focus. They are amusing, and pleasant to know. I wish I could figure out what really happens to them.

THE PEACE MACHINE

by Bob Shaw (Gollancz 0-575-03582-X; 1985, original publication, as Ground Zero Man, in 1971; 160 pp.; £7.95)

I read this last year, as Ground Zero Man, in a neat little Avon book that I bought a long time ago. A few weeks later, I received The Peace Machine for review. It's the same book, as far as I can tell - Bob Shaw's best novel. It has a coherence and fingernail-biting tension that are missing in his recent work. A man possesses one of today's great nightmare-dreams - a machine/device so powerful that it can destroy the world, and hence make all other weapons systems obsolete. Ultimate power, with the best of motives - to make atomic warfare unthinkable. For Lucas Hutchman, it's a lovely idea until he tries to put it into practice. The Peace Machine is a convincing, claustrophobic thriller, showing how the best of intentions twist themselves into contradictory bundles of frightening consequences. The Peace Machine deserves to be known to readers outside the sf audience.

GENE WOLFE'S BOOK OF DAYS

by Gene Wolfe (Doubleday 0-385-15991-9; 1981; 182 pp.; \$US9.95)

PLAN(E)T ENGINEERING

by Gene Wolfe (NESFA Press 0-915368-25-0; 1984; 155 pp.; \$US13)

THE WOLFE ARCHIPELAGO

by Gene Wolfe (Ziesing Brothers 0-917488-13-X; 1983; 119 pp.; \$A23.95)

In the first issue of the revived Australian Science Fiction Review, I've gone into tedious detail to describe why I find Gene Wolfe's short stories more interesting than most people's. I won't repeat all that here. The best collection of Wolfe's stories is still The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories, recently available in a British paperback edition. Three of those stories appear in The Wolfe Archipelago, a supa-deluxe edition for idiots like me with even less money than sense. (It's a beautiful book, with a Carl Lundgren cover showing Gene Wolfe flying - an impressive sight, one I had to own.) The 'archipelago' is, of course, 'The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories', 'The Death of Doctor Island', and 'The Doctor of Death Island'. In his Introduction, Wolfe includes an anecdote called 'The Death of the Island Doctor'. Wolfe readers, as distinct from Wolfe collectors, will be more keen to buy Gene Wolfe's Book of Days and Plan(e)t Engineering, two swags of previously uncollected stories. Waggish Wolfe arranges the stories of the former so that they fit such modern holy days as Mother's Day ('Car Sinister'), Halloween ('Many Mansions'), and Christmas Day ('La Befana'). My favourite story in Gene Wolfe's Book of Days is 'Forlesen', as grim and surreal a nightmare as any ever written by Ballard. Plan(e)t Engineering is one of those valuable little books issued each year by NESFA Press (Box G, MIT Branch PO, Cambridge, MA 02139-0910, USA) to honour the Guest of Honour at the annual Boskone. There are three stories, a non-fact article, a 'Logology' by Wolfe, an introduction by David G. Hartwell, an invaluable article, 'The Books in The Book of the New Sun', and seven stories, including two of Wolfe's favourites from among his own stories, 'In Looking-Glass Castle' and 'The Detective of Dreams', and a favourite of mine, 'The Marvelous Brass Chessplaying Automaton'.

WELCOME, CHAOS

by Kate Wilhelm (Houghton Mifflin 0-395-34431-X; 1983; 285 pp.; \$US13.95)
(Gollancz 0-575-03802-0; 1986; 297 pp.; £9.95/\$A35.95)

Since Kate Wilhelm began living on the upper north-west coast of America, she has observed so closely the landscape and weather of that area that sometimes the rich detail threatens to overtake her novels. You find this acute sense of the natural universe in much of her 1970s and 1980s work, but most effectively in Juniper Time and, now, Welcome, Chaos. At the same time, Wilhelm still writes convincing thrillers. An odd mixture - nature proem and ingenious political melodrama - but here it works yet again. Lyle Taney soaks up nature (it's very rainy in her part of the world) while four groups of hitmen circle around her, each other, and the two blokes who share the cabin in the next valley. They, it turns out, know the secret of immortality, which involves protecting the human body against all genetic damage, including radiation poisoning. Whoever grabs the secret first might well start World War III. And so on. Some nice thriller curlicues, a bit of tense storytelling, and some sentimental romantic stuff that clashes badly with everything else in the book.

THE CONTINENT OF LIES

by James Morrow (Gollancz 0-575-03659-1; 1985, original US publication 1984; 274 pp.; £9.95)

So who is James Morrow? And why didn't he score at least a Hugo nomination for The Continent of Lies when it was released in America? Gollancz does not take a punt on unknown authors very often. A good choice here, but nobody seems to have noticed. Not that The Continent of Lies is the sort of book I expected to like. It begins with a Big Invention - ocephapples, or dreambeans, fruits that convey entertaining hallucinatory experiences to the eater. It includes a Future Society, one of those sociological sideshows that sound like Los Angeles all over again. Quinjin, the narrator, talks big but not too coherently. The book tells of a quest - for an anonymously produced horror dreambean. It must be destroyed, you see, because it gives its users the permanent heebeegeebees. Despite Morrow's lumpy prose and penchant for melodrama, he allows Quinjin to tell a vivid story that improves page by page. The narrator does not take himself too seriously, which helps. And he has some eye-opening sights to show us, which is why the book is memorable. In particular, the reader enjoys sailing down the branch of a tree so large that entire jungles live on it. The world-sized tree becomes the most pleasant character in the book. The producer of the horror dreambean proves to be a real nasty guy, a master of illusion, a generator of some suspenseful pages. A rich meal, if you can put up with some of the lumps in the mixture.

IN MILTON LUMKY TERRITORY

Philip K. Dick (Gollancz 0-575-03625-7; 1985; 213 pp.; £8.95/\$A27.95)

I HOPE I SHALL ARRIVE SOON

Philip K. Dick, edited by Mark Hurst and Paul Williams (Gollancz 0-575-03578-1; 1986; original US publication 1985; 179 pp.; £8.95/\$A32.95)

The shards of the mighty Philip Dick are with us yet: in this case, one of the many non-sf novels that are now being published after Dick's death; and a collection of short stories, one of them published posthumously. Two questions about In Milton Lumky Territory: (1) why couldn't publishers have made Phil Dick a happier man by publishing it, as well as the other dozen or so non-sf novels he wrote during the late 1950s, in his lifetime instead of afterwards?; and (2) although it has no science-fictional content, why does In Milton Lumky Territory read as well as most of Dick's sf novels? The first question may never be answered. Dick's non-sf novels were known of, catalogued, and lying in a library in Fullerton, California. Only one of them (the great Confessions of a Crap Artist) appeared in his lifetime. The answer to the second question is surprisingly obvious. It's the density of small-town detail that links Dick's non-sf and the best of his sf novels. Many of his best sf novels feature small communities where people undergo all the intense experiences that are supposed (in fiction) to afflict only people from New York or Hollywood. The Martian desert village in Martian Time Slip, the small town in bombed-out America in Dr Bloodmoney, the gathering of time-regressed people and artifacts in Ubik: they all begin here, in 'Milton Lumky territory' - the vast stretch of middle America where a car salesman sets out on endless journeys in order to make a living, and

where Skip returns to town after twenty years and falls in love with a woman who was once his grade-school teacher. Ah, you say, that's not what Phil Dick's fiction is about; it's all about the nature of reality and identity, et cetera. Perhaps. That's what Phil Dick began to say his novels were about (as in the Introduction to I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon), especially after the critics repeated it too often. But if you read enough of Dick's books fast enough, you might make the observation that many are about chaps who have difficulty getting along with their wives. Hence the connection with In Milton Lumky Territory. After reading this book, you feel that it's just as difficult to negotiate a marriage in a small mid-western town as anywhere else. It seems more difficult to survive emotionally here than elsewhere. Small numbers of people have to put up with each other's oddities. They get suspicious and resentful, and try to solve situations in increasingly bizarre ways. That's what happens in In Milton Lumky Territory, as Susan Faine takes over Skip Stevens, and both of them take over and try to run the R&J Mimeographing Service. The ties that bind start to strangle. The net of human interaction closes in. You find yourself in Philip K. Dick territory. There's only one major problem with this book; Dick does not know how to end it. He tells us that everything turns out happily ever after. I've read other Phil Dick novels, so I don't believe him.

Ten short stories and a zany introduction make up I Hope I Shall Arrive Soon: a good collection, especially as most of its stories come from the last twelve years of Dick's life, when his powers were supposed to be in decline. 'Chains of Air, Web of Aether' and 'Rautavaara's Case', first published in 1980, are not the works of a declining mind. In the case of the former, we find an extra note of compassion and emotional complexity, slightly different from anything in the pre-1970s fiction. The book is worth buying (although not at \$32.95, surely - how do Australian distributors justify outrageous prices such as this?) for Dick's Introduction: 'How to Build a Universe That Doesn't Fall Apart Two Days Later'. Several people have mentioned this piece (written in 1978) as further evidence that Dick was off his na-na during the last few years of his life. Maybe. If he was crazy, he was still funny. In one moment, he spins a fabulous theological argument that proves we are still living in 50 AD, and that everything that seems to have happened between then and now is a horrible nightmare, and the next moment Dick is laughing at his own idea: 'I must admit that the existence of Disneyland (which I know is real) proves that we are not living in Judaea in AD 50. The idea of Saint Paul whirling around in the giant teacups while composing First Corinthians... - that just can't be. Saint Paul would never go near Disneyland. Only children, tourists, and visiting Soviet high officials ever go to Disneyland. Saints do not.'

URBAN FANTASIES

edited by David King and Russell Blackford (Ebony 0-9590655-1-2; 1985; 181 pp.; \$4.95)

STRANGE ATTRACTORS

edited by Damien Broderick (Hale & Iremonger 0-86806-209-X; 1985; 237 pp.; \$11.95)

Not much to say about these collections, as I have reviewed them for both Thyme and Australian Book Review, and discussed individual stories both elsewhere in this issue of TMR and in a recent issue of Thyme. That's the good stories. I might have placed both anthologies higher in the pecking order if I had liked more of the stories in either of them. I won't mention specific instances for fear of ending up at a room party with an author or two (or all of them at once: spare me!). On the other hand, I'm willing to believe that, between them, Urban Fantasies and Strange Attractors embody the best Australian sf and fantasy writing available at the time they were being edited. That makes them more enjoyable to read than any overseas original fiction anthologies I've read in recent years.

WHO GOES HERE?

by Bob Shaw (Gollancz 0-575-02347-3; 1977; 160 pp.; £3.95)

A bit late to mention Who Goes Here? - but I do get behind in my reading. Besides, it might still be in stock. Read it. It shows what happens when Bob Shaw, ace funny speaker from innumerable conventions, decides to be a funny writer of fiction as well. I wish he'd do it all the time. Good plot, lots of situation gags, a nice read.

