IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO GO OUT OF THE HOUSE.

STAY AT YOUR TABLE AND LISTEN.

DON'T EVEN LISTEN, JUST WAIT.

DON'T EVEN WAIT - BE COMPLETELY STILL AND ALONE.

THE WORLD WILL OFFER ITSELF TO YOU TO BE UNMASKED.
IT CAN DO NO OTHER.

IT WILL WRITHE BEFORE YOU IN RAPTURES.

- Franz Kafka

LOVED BOOKS ARE THE NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT SOCIETY OF THE ALONE.

- George Steiner

THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW EIGHT

OCTOBER 1972 25 PAGES

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Prepared for ANZAPA and APA-45. Available to Selected Friends for LETTER OF COMMENT ONLY.

Inside: THE OUTER APA (letters from Petr Wright-Smith, John Gibson, Barry Gillam, Cy Chauvin, Phyrne Bacon, Dave Piper, and Harry Warner Jr) (page 2), BRG: UN UNHERO'S LIFE (in which the Editor shows just how tedious one life can be) (12), and A SOLITARY MAN: KAFKA (where Elias Canetti discusses the life of ~~Bruce Gillespie~~ Franz Kafka) (17).

An AUSTRALIA IN 75 ! magazine.

PETP WRIGHT-SMITH

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(April 18 1972)

um
gillespie
prose
?

is
this

webster:
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~~language spoken or written~~
as in ordinary usage
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brg Petr Wright-Smith was a member of ANZAPA. Petr Wright-Smith wrote nothing but poems. Nobody else in ANZAPA understood Petr's poems. Occasionally I understood Petr's poems. But then I asked Petr to write in prose sometime and tell the other members about himself. Petr evidently considered that this meant that I didn't understand his poems; maybe all that was himself. We shall never know; Petr left ANZAPA, and communication has not been re-established. If Petr goes to conventions (such as the upcoming Brisbane Q-Con, New Year 1973) he probably converses in poetry as well. Must meet him. *

JOHN GIBSON

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(May 2 1972)

I went mad a couple of weeks ago and let an insane friend talk me into taking up a skydiving course. I did the course okay, both in theory and practice (such as, how to roll when you hit the ground). Yesterday, Sunday, I went up for my first jump. That wasn't so easy. I disgraced the whole club by twice getting out under the wing and then refusing to jump. You are set in roughly a prone position so that you are looking downward at the ground - two and a half Empire State Buildings below. They keep telling you that there's no sensation of height, but I knew that there was a great void right under my body - and the two parachutes I had on gave me no reassurance at all. You see, you're just hypnotised by that ground way down there. Your hands are crushing the wing strut and your feet are perched rather uneasily on the plane's wheel. The military do it better; they just have paratroopers step out the door in rapid succession. They don't even have time to think about it. Me, I was perched out there wondering why, getting sick to the stomach, heart going like mad, and this voice kept on yelling in my ear "GO! GO! GO!" Well, I didn't go. Not the first or second time. I had to go up in the plane again before I went - the third time. I can understand why skydivers feel the way they do about it now, but I'm not going to jump again - no, no. There was too much terror for too little pleasure.

However, the pleasure is there all right. When you're hanging under that opened canopy, there's a stillness and a peace that is unbelievable. It's probably similar to the sensation you'd get from going up in a balloon. The whole world seems utterly wonderful from this position of godlike, floating suspension. But then the word starts to move and you wonder whether you'll come down on those cows, those trees, or even that barbed-wire fence. Well, I landed. I forgot all about my lessons about landing and sprained my ankle. As I said, the feeling's great but I wouldn't do it again. Too much agony for this coward. Besides, I felt rather out of place among the other skydivers. They all seem to have this John Wayne complex: they strut, they're laconic about getting killed, and they have a martyrlike faith in parachute technology.

Anyway, Bruce, that's it - an s f experience I lived through and was glad to have but which I could not dare repeat.

brg I wouldn't go the first time. If I went up to skydive, the engine of the aeroplane would probably seize before we got up in the sky at all, and we'd have to crashland.

John Gibson, meet Dennis Stocks. Well, you can't actually, since Dennis will read John's letter, but John won't read Dennis' many remarks about skydiving. That's what it's really like, folks; don't believe Stocks' propaganda for a moment. *

BARRY GILLAM

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U S A

(May 31, 1972)

The last two issues of METAPHYSICAL REVIEW seem less substantial than the previous ones. Your editorial in No 6 is very interesting and your comments

on Proust are excellent, but the Paul Simon article is rather over-argued and I couldn't finish it. I find myself quoted, though (even misquoted - I know I've arrived) - an odd feeling. I didn't think I'd become a footnote quite so quickly. Also I can't get a grip on Stuart Leslie's letters. I find drugs as uninteresting as most Oriental philosophy. A man who enlists Wallace Stevens in his argument can't be all bad, though.

Paul Anderson is always worth reading. His list of films (in MR 7) isn't to my taste, but MY NIGHT AT MAUD'S is wonderful, full of natural lighting, brilliantly written, intelligent but real conversation, fine performances, and Rohmer's teasing moral sensibility. I found BED AND BOARD (on two viewings) to be empty and unfunny. It is situation comedy that Truffaut should be able to rise above. Of the other films in the series (THE 400 BLOWS, ANTOINE AND COLETTE - the LOVE AT TWENTY segment - and STOLEN KISSES), the first tends to be too socially conscious (some film critics see all of Truffaut's subsequent work as a betrayal of his first film) and the last is one of the most perfect, sublime romantic comedies ever made, placing Truffaut on speaking terms with Lubitsch and Renoir. In BED AND BOARD, Truffaut parodies himself, with a tired script, a tired style, and careless performances. I feel like relenting on my too-strict review of THE FORBIN PROJECT. It doesn't pretend to be a serious film and I should have approached it in another frame of mind.

MR 7: page 9: A friend of mine called RYAN'S DAUGHTER the best (and biggest) documentary on the weather he'd ever seen. That's pretty much my attitude. Bolt's idea of symbolism results in an epidemic of cripples, as if they'd all been run over by the same truck. That same friend remarked on the hurricane which results from the lovers' kissing. Can you imagine, he said, if they actually coupled? Precious little would be left of Ireland, when the earthquake subsided. I thought that the first hour was the slowest, but then I just sat through it to see Same Fuller's SHARK for a second time. This is one of those great double bills that are dreamed up by dyspeptic film buffs. (The New Yorker, a good repertory house, recently showed on one bill THE SEVEN SAMURAI and NIGHT AND FOG; that is, perhaps the greatest glorification of violence ever made and the most heartsickening indictment of that same force.)

SHARK is minor Fuller, but delightful, the only Fuller I'd seen up to then in colour. I expected garish tones to match his scripts, but this is full of pastels. To place the film (it opened in NY in a scatter booking on the second half of a double bill with REBEL ROUSERS, one of those awful Jack Nicholson bike movies), one of the cameramen photographing the sharks was actually killed by them. LIFE did a spread on it. But then the studio cut the film up and Fuller asked to have his name taken off it (which they didn't do). A still in the CINEMA (California) for Spring, 1971 shows Arthur Kennedy reading Malcolm Lowry's UNDER THE VOLCANO, though that isn't in the release print.

SHARK contains Fuller's legacy of anarchic humour if not the substance of it (which informs PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET, FORTY GUNS, UNDERWORLD USA, SHOCK CORRIDOR, etc). A cherubic-faced young boy is seen first smoking a stogie. It turns out that he is an adept pickpocket, thief, and con man. Arthur Kennedy plays an alcoholic former doctor who lurches through the movie in red, white, and blue. The hotel owner of this ricketty structure in a dusty Red Sea port wears T shirts bearing the legends: HMS Pinafore, USS Saratoga, USS Texas, like the punt in POGO. A native bazaar is demolished in a fight; a wonderful orgy of destruction. When there's a fight among the principals (Burt Reynolds, Barry Sullivan, and Silvia Pinal), Reynolds has no compunction about hitting Pinal. Their romance, as they try to outwit each other, is incredibly squalid.

The film balances between sea and surface, between the real sharks and the metaphoric ones (Pinal and Sullivan). There are overhead shots of the small rooms with somnolent fans turning, emphasising the characters' entrapment, which are played off the low-angle views of the sharks and the shot of Reynolds in the pre-credit sequences from beneath the wheel of the truck he is driving.

Why have I written all of this? You'll never see SHARK in Australia. In fact, I doubt your censors would pass any but the most innocuous of his films. Fuller's next is entittled, almost apocryphally, DEAD PIGEON ON BEETHOVENSTRASSE (**brg** What a magnificent name for a fanzine!**). And the next announced Bunuel also has a title that is the epitome of the director's attitudes: THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE.

I'm afraid I don't share your sense of humour, as I find both David Taeusch and J E Parsons tedious. Maybe I'm just tired. I've written all that is enclosed very quickly. Parson's jokes are too close to those in Poe's "comic" stories to be comfortable. And Poe's comedies - as comedies - are just as bad.

This letter seems to be totally about films. During the last few months I've read almost no s f, and a large pile of fanzines is likewise unread. I've spent so long writing about literature and you represent my only chance to write about film (aren't you lucky?).

brg Suits me fine. I don't know whether I've ever seen any films by Fuller, although the afficionados of the Melbourne University Film Society used to mention Fuller with hushed breath. I presume that they had seen some of his films. :: I'm glad somebody agrees with me about drugs. I must confess that I take the occasional aspirin when a headache gets really bad, but, as I said in the last edition of NOANS, I can't see why anybody would willingly fill themselves up with poisonous substances. (Apart from the canned food in the supermarkets, that is.). Readers of Stuart Leslie's letters in this magazine will be interested to read the most recent of them; it will probably appear in S F COMMENTARY 30. :: I hadn't seen most of the films on Paul's list; certainly not the Rohmer or Truffaut. Of the few Truffaut films that I've seen, the one that I liked best was LA PEAU DOUCE, with FAHRENHEIT 451 not far behind. I would like to see SHOOT THE PIANIST again sometime; never seen 400 BLOWS or JULES ET JIM. (Sorry to mix up the languages in the titles here, but each film seems to be best known in one or the other language, but rarely in both.) :: Agree with you about RYAN'S DAUGHTER; I still think David Lean is potentially the best film director in the world. The only problem is that he has been potentially the best for all of his career. His scripts get worse every film. :: Very few people share my sense of humour. Most people laugh at me rather than my jokes. :: Readers of ***S F COMMENTARY*** will be pleased to know that I will publish real soon now possibly the best letter of comment that I have ever received - from Barry Gillam, of course. Wait in breathless expectation. You're sure to suffocate before that issue appears.

I have to fill the space at the end of this page. What will I do? Tell a joke? No; there's not enough room. Besides, no one laughs at my jokes. Stand on my head? Stand on my head typing stencils while reading SCYTHROP through rose-tinted spectacles which are balanced at the end of a pole which is hanging out of the window of the thirtieth storey? Of course. I'll do that at the first world convention held on top of Ayer's Rock. Better get into training. End of page. Good. *

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U S A

Received MR 7 today; some strange stuff here. I don't know why you call the magazine that; a more informal title would be more appropriate, like your I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS (I love that lettercolumn title, by the way; I would like to steal it for a fanzine someday).

Stuart Leslie's comments caught my eye. I agree with him that man is basically irrational - emotions, when you look at them, don't make any logical sense. Love, hate, greed, revenge: why should a man risk his life to rescue a baby from a burning house? What good is in it for him? It's all insanity. But it's what distinguishes men from animals and computers. The world is starting to get too crowded, however, for this irrationality to continue. I read in the newspaper today about the numerous bricks and stones that are thrown by kids on the overpasses of the Detroit expressways. They do it for "kicks" and because they're bored stiff; but they smash the windows on cars and have killed two people so far. The climax came when a couple of boys dropped a dog on a car and watched as it was smashed to bits. But the love between a man and a woman is just as irrational, and perhaps no more pleasurable (for who can say what sadistic delight the boys got out of their deed?); the wrongness of the act was in the way the rights of other people were violated.

I don't believe in drugs either, for myself, because I am afraid of what they might do to me. If I knew precisely in what ways they might change me, then I might be more willing; but I don't. (Anyway, I think I am "peaceful" enough already; the problem is that everybody else is too aggressive and in too much of a rush!)

"I am in a prison and the prison is me." You know, Bruce, a fortress looks quite similar to a prison. Those walls which you say surround you may not only be meant to keep you in but to keep other people out. I doubt if you and I would be happy sharing the same cell - or let's say, body - together. You might insist that we read THE RECOGNITIONS, while I might prefer THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. Having only one pair of eyes, we couldn't do both at once. Those two people in your analogy, the one who says that the sky is blue, while the other says that it is tangerine; are they merely seeing the different walls of their own prisons or are they seeing the same walls and disagreeing on their colour?

I'm trying to point out that you shouldn't regard everything so negatively. If those "walls" surrounding you were torn down, the crowd outside would probably tear you to bits. (Surely you've had an experience sometime when you've expressed something deep and meaningful to you, and had everyone laugh at you?) ((**brg* Yes. Most of the time.*)) Would you like someone listening in to all your thoughts all the time? (I think that telepathy is the only way that the barriers that Stuart speaks of could be broken down completely.) Why regard yourself in a prison? Why not a palace? It's entirely up to you how you regard yourself. You can change that image whenever you want. You can stress the good or the gloomy in life, as you please; but you shouldn't fool yourself into thinking that any is objectively dominant over the other. As I see it, drugs can only help you to see this - to realise that there's many ways of looking at the world around you, and that the one you choose is a matter of personal preference. Are you sure you don't like being in a "prison"?

brg That letter is deeply appreciated, Cy. In some ways you're right (ah, what a brilliantly vague sentence that is). You've missed my original point, which is that even if two minds were in one body, it would simply mean that there would be two prisons inside the one space instead of one. For the same reason, not even telepathy would break down the walls, as long as the concept of the human mind remained. :: On a more ordinary level; yes, I suppose I do keep people out, mainly because I don't get on very well with many of them. I get on all right with people who write me letters, etc, but when I have to talk to people, the old prison walls go up, as solid as ever. Occasionally I get out of the prison, though, as recently, but always the doors clang shut again. And if the room is musty, dusty, cold, full of cobwebs, old books, uncomfortable furniture, knives in the floor, the light of blazing arcs, and similar instruments of torture, how can you call the prison a palace? Despite the traces of Dale Carnegie I find in your letter, Cy, you're probably right; but I guess I'll never really find out. Somebody pass me a hankerchief so I can wave it through the bars on the windows. *

PHYRNE BACON

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U S A

(June 17 1972)

I enjoyed Stuart Leslie's letter. I get attacks of mysticism every now and then myself. And my husband Phil gets upset. It's nice to see other people with similar tendencies. The idea that Stuart expresses is an old one. It is the central idea in Karl Mannheim's IDEOLOGY AND UTOPIA. Maybe the indeterminancy principle has finally gotten to me, but I have a feeling that no one can ever know where they are until they've gotten someplace else. It seems worthwhile though to find out as much as possible about one's current state of flux. In trying to understand the present it seems to me that one extends the boundaries of the present to include various levels of abstraction. Or perhaps it is just that I enjoy mixing abstractions into the flux of time. It gives me a feeling of accomplishment.

Speaking of abstractions: I passed my preliminary orals about a week ago and am now in the process of being admitted to candidacy for a Ph D for a third time. The first time was in 1963 in physics at Tennessee and the second was in 1965 in mathematics at Tennessee. But this time I think it is going to take. I've already done all my research, which was the main difficulty the first two times, and so all I have to do is to write it up. My advisor keeps talking about how easy it will be to get it cut up into a number of articles and published afterwards. Maybe though I will send it off for publication first and write it up as a dissertation afterwards. Fortunately that is allowed here. And since I'm not planning to graduate until June, since my mother wants to come to my graduation (next June!) I have a lot of time to play around in. My advisor wants me to graduate in December. I think that's just his plan to get me out of here before I write a 200-page dissertation that he has to read. I've told him though that I'm planning to put all the results I have already on coordinatized affine Hjelmslev planes in my dissertation. And that it will be about 200 pages. He says that I can quite about page 100. Where ever that is. Maybe I'll put everything not accepted for publication in. The only thing I have submitted for publication so far was accepted in three months, which is, I am told, nearly record time.

I thought that Lucie Edwards's letter was the most enjoyable letter I have read in a fanzine. I especially like the Sunday-morning-joke interlineation. Isn't fourteen feet rather long for a hat rack? I guess though that her (his?) (its?) upward curled fingers would be about the right height.

brg I'm glad somebody agrees with my sense of humour. :: Of course you're only telling me about your Ph D to make me envious. (Gaining honours in exams - or at least enough of them to do post-graduate work - was never my long suit.) :: "No one can ever know where they are until they've gotten someplace else." I wouldn't say it quite that way, but you express very well something that's been buzzing around in my mind for months. I call it the Looking Glass Hill Principle - i.e. the only way to get to the top of Looking Glass Hill was for Alice to walk in the opposite direction. At least, I hope the principle works, since I'm certainly walking in the opposite direction at the moment, getting nowhere fast. (There's a bit in THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS about that as well.) *

DAVE PIPER

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(June 25 1972)

Thanks for METREV 7 - entertaining as per. Congratulations on the nomination, or did I really say that sometime? I can't remember. Gawd! Senility is coming up fast. Secretly I believe that the nomination is really for METREV. S'just that nobody wants to admit it. After all, what better lettercol is there in the whole, nay, WHOLE of fandom than in those hallowed pages? After all, already it's the only place where the editor is desperate enough foolish enough to publish my locs. (!). Although I seem to recall that you did lower the tone of SFC somewhat by actually publishing my name on the cover, an action, Bruce lad, guaranteed to lose you at least 319 readers I'd imagine.

I enjoyed the Parsons piece very much. If the rest of the magazine is like this, can we expect some more excerpts? T D Yum is funny.

What's it like over here this time of the year, I hear you ask. Well, we've had a lousy "summer" so far. I've just about decided to knock a holiday on the head this year and save the loot for a good one next year. Me and me mate were talking about going to Spain with his caravan - about £100-£130 each we reckon - for three weeks. We'll have to see. Only trouble would be the car. With four adults and four kids (he's got two boys almost exactly one year younger than each of mine) it might be a wee bit crowded. Apart from that, nothing very exciting has happened/looks like happening in the Piper household lately. The youngest, Sara, is brain-washed at the moment. We tend to call her "Pickle" - I dunno why - and the other day something came up and Cath said she was "Sara Piper" and the nipper says "No, I'm not. I'm Pickle." (shrug). We're planning a party here on September 23 - just a boozy get together of about thirty-eight souls. I dunno how Cath managed to talk me into it. I'll probably just strip the downstairs rooms and fire the gun. £1 a head whip. So if you decide to visit these shores in September, well after all - you must feel the need of a little culture in your life - feel free. When do you make the bid for AI75, by the way? In Toronto? Pete Weston's making noises about arranging a charter flight over there. But it's Spain for us, with any luck.

brg One of the problems of SFC these days - apart from the fact that it is killing me from over-work - is that I'm gradually turning it into what METAPHYSICAL REVIEW once was, and still is. For instance, I going to discourse - again - about Melbourne Weather sometime in SFC, and mention in passing that we didn't have any winter this year. (No, Lesleigh, that wasn't cold; you must have been imagining that the wind was cold.) Resolute mackintoshed Britons will agree that it's a lot better to miss out on winter than to miss out on summer. I'm not sure; probably we will have the hottest summer on record this year. We've become so used to fine, sunny days that we're going to get quite a shock next year if it is cold at all. :: Gillespie household settles into more-than-uncomfortable disorder in a few weeks time. My parents go away for their holidays each time this year. Last year they left me to cook for myself, after ten months away from a hot stove. I had to re-learn how to open cans, thaw vegetables out of the refrigerator, and buy groceries. I seemed to spend every spare minute buying groceries, or buying meat for the cat, or trying to find a minute to hang out the washed clothes (which didn't look as if they'd been washed at all). It was hell. But, this year, my sister is staying here as well, and you can guess which nasty, putrid, time-consuming jobs I'm going to give to her. Every one of them! Then I'll buy four weeks' supply of new clothes and I won't have to touch the washing machine. However, I haven't quite figured out the problem that bugged me last year - how to get 400 copies of S F COMMENTARY to the post office. :: Anyway, I hope you get to Spain. Would much rather see you in Toronto. And it's a postal vote for AI75, remember. *

HARRY WARNER JR

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U S A

(July 6 1972)

Stuart Leslie's material is important because it's the longest exposition I've seen in a fanzine of the belief in the value of drugs held by so many fans. I'm still sceptical. There are many people who believe with all their hearts that they could be great composers if they had the time to learn the mechanics of writing music because these great symphonies and songs are perfectly clear in their imagination and need only writing down. Other persons claim that Jesus has come into their lives and made them entirely different people inwardly. I know some Hagerstown persons who engage in jogging regularly in the belief that it puts them at one with mature and the universe. There is no way to disprove these varied convictions, any more than it's possible to show Stuart to be wrong beyond all dispute, but I'd say that the claims are quite dubious when there is no action to back up the words. Besides, Stuart doesn't agree with himself when he finds fans to be lonely, insecure, immature, hung-up people and then speaks of the arrogance of western man in calling people normal or otherwise.

Movies: well, most of my viewing is older ones on television where there are no kids jumping over me or loudmouths making wisecracks around me and rapid attrition of my pocketbook. So far this year I've seen only two real, live movies: PLAY MISTY FOR ME, which I rather enjoyed except for the musical interruptions (I didn't mind the music but I didn't like the fact that it interrupted) and THE FRENCH CONNECTION, which is terribly overrated and should be enjoyed for what it really is, something as unpretentious as those little crime

movies that were so numerous in the early 1930s. Unfortunately, I saw in the preview of coming attractions some scenes from SILENT RUNNING that were so badly chosen that I didn't go, and now all the fanzines are reminding me what a mistake I made. Now two old movies that I've liked recently on television are THE TIGER MAKES OUT and A FINE MADNESS, which had some things in common including too many frills and doodads but I don't suppose there's any way to turn out a commercial feature film that runs only 35 minutes or so as each should have done.

David Edward Taeusch seems to be a genuine discovery. He impresses me as a sort of combination of W G Bliss and Tom Digby, perhaps with a dash of Dave Szurek seasoning.

The revelations about how long it takes to produce an issue of SFC are encouraging. I've been afraid that my own labours on HORIZONS were occupying entirely too much time, but apparently I'm not yet a fumbling old man since I compare quite favourably with you, making allowance for the fact that I stop after the stencils are cut, proofread, and corrected. This time I managed to get them all cut in four days' spare time and all corrections were completed in the spare hours on the fifth day. But I've never been able to listen to music while I'm doing things like the routine aspects of fanzine production. I can do such things while music is playing but I just don't hear it consciously enough to justify the consumption of electricity. This is probably a real penalty of growing old. I once was able to listen to a talk program on the radio and read a book and know exactly what my ears and eyes were taking in but the best I can do now is to alternate full attention rapidly between the two or half-attend to one while concentrating on the other. The next stage, I suppose, is that terrible condition where a fellow is so intent on his thoughts that he doesn't hear what the other person is saying during a conversation and he keeps making irrelevant statements in reply.

Record-buying: it's very hard just now to hold myself in check. Four-channel recordings are being pushed by the high-fidelity equipment manufacturers and the music magazines. If the public lets itself be shoved into total acceptance, I know what will happen: most of the recordings now available will be replaced within a year or two by four-channel records and tapes and if I don't buy now the things I want they may be out of the catalogue and unobtainable pretty soon and yet I really have more records now than one person reasonably needs and should salt away every dollar unneeded for essentials against this prospective early retirement. Some previously unrecorded Verdi operas are about to be released and I must have those, as well as the Schnabel recordings of Beethoven, but meanwhile I'm trying not to panic about the things that I'm just moderately anxious to own.

The J E Parsons article is just as funny as you claim. I'll probably do some semi-plagiarising for the newspaper the first time someone gives a talk here about converting to the metric system, protecting my character by emphasising the expressions and cliches that are most popular in Hagerstown. The Murnane article was also fine and I can't remember any previous explanation you may have made about the nature of Farrago: amateur or professional, a magazine or newspaper, or whatever.

Your mushrooming notes for the Aldiss project worry me because I'm encountering the same problem. They've set me to work on articles for a special anniversary issue of a local newspaper in the spring and I think I'm overdoing the research in my effort to get new slants on old topics. They want an article on the

Battle of Antietam, a key American Civil War action fought near Hagerstown, so I'm digging into such things as what cuss words the soldiers used (almost unchanged from those today, judging from records of court martials of men accused of cursing a commissioned officer) and how loud the noise was (artillery could be heard in Hagerstown a dozen miles away, rifles and occasionally yelling was audible in another town four miles away and upwind from the battle). It's amazing how many pages of notes pile up just from the reference works available in Hagerstown's middling-large library and a few other sources of information.

** brg** When I finally make That World Trip , it's nice to know that I'm going to meet an endless group of doppelgangers, poor blokes who are rather like me. From what I've heard about him, it sounds as if Bill Bowers is rather like me (very quiet in company, except when highly provoked), and so is Terry Hughes (I have the evidence of a very reliable informant), and Pete Weston says in the latest SPECULATION that he thinks of me as his doppelganger. Well, I don't vote the same way as Pete, and I'm not married, but I think I see what he means.

But the person in fandom whose views most nearly come to mine must be Harry Warner Jr.: You have the same devotion to fannish duty that I would like to have, you communicate almost entirely by mail rather than in person, you have about the same attitude to drugs (and, more importantly, exactly the same attitude as mine to people who try to evangelise for drugs) as I have, you watch about as many movies as I do, or perhaps more, you like the madness of Mr Taeusch's letter, you type stencils at about the same rate as I do, you have the same attitude to record-buying as I do, although I face vastly more temptation by travelling through the centre of Melbourne at least once every week, you like the articles by Parsons and Murnane, and you seem to do research in the same way as I do - i.e. as slowly and laboriously as possible.

I don't believe in Harry Warner Jr: he's just a projected image of me in a bit over twenty-five years time. However, he is a vastly better person than I will ever be, so perhaps he can wipe his brow in relief, put away his handkerchief, and retire back into his chair to enjoy the rest of this magazine.

A few things to make clear: FARRAGO is the long-lived student magazine of Melbourne University. At one time it was a very good student magazine, for I've looked at back copies. While Stephen Cook (potentially Australia's best s f writer until he killed himself at the age of 26) was drawing POROUS PASTERNAK, FARRAGO contained one of the best strips I've ever seen. POROUS was about ten years ahead of any underground comics, and just as trenchant as Feiffer or anybody now working in this field. However, during the entire four years that I dragged my body around Melbourne University, FARRAGO was lousy. It has improved in recent years, but not much. Gerald's O PADDY DEAR! was very badly printed and laid out when it first appeared.

SFC 29: Layout sheets typed over a matter of four months, mostly before SFC 26 came out; editorial typed in a day; entire stencils typed in two days; run off in three nights; collated in a day; final copies put together in a day; took four nights to do all the mailing labels and bundles. The only enjoyable job, typing the layout sheets and stencils, took the least time. Couldn't stand the tedium without listening to music as well. *

AN UNHERO'S LIFE

Being further extractions from the dusty diary of yours truly. You may remember that the last boring selection from its pages appeared six months ago, when MR 7 was published. Since then, a fair amount has happened: These notes won't contain more than a small selection of those events; besides, I tend to enter
* up my diary in fits and starts, and so some events have not been covered at all.

March 28: "First day of protest." 1972 for me has been mainly a succession of things that I've done for the first time. Very few of them have worked, but not to worry. Usually I only act when action is absolutely necessary; and in this case Action Was Necessary. You may remember that I said that at the beginning of the year I and a few other people were dragooned into the staff of THE EDUCATIONAL MAGAZINE, which is sent free to "every permanent teacher". Since some schools have only have half their staff permanent teachers, a lot of people don't see, or don't want to read our magazine. Often we feel unwanted. For the first few months we kept tripping over each other's shoes, until finally we got to the stage of mumbling "What the heck is going on?" and Gerald (who runs the ED MAG, and who wrote one of the articles that appeared in MR 7), probably murmured something to the effect, "If they're going to moan so much, why don't they do something to help?" General frustration.

But on the Tuesday in question I was talking to Barbara, who is probably one of the most efficient people in the Branch. When I started to talk in general about the problems of the job I was doing, Barbara began a long spiel in which she told me how she would run the ED MAG. I didn't understand most of what she was saying; but the thing that struck me was that we had enough staff for our magazine to divide all the sections, and give every person some specific responsibility. Up to that point, nobody really knew what to do about any particular job; as a result, some jobs didn't get done. I was doubtful whether Barbara's plans could ever work, and I was annoyed with myself for not having thought of them before. Later, I began to talk to Fay about these things. Then Sue and Irene joined the conversation. The pow-wow ended about halfway through lunch-time, if I remember. Gerald heard all about the whole thing, and I think that he was glad that there might be a way out of the problems that had been collecting on his in-tray. So we discussed the organisation of the ED MAG all afternoon as well. Next morning, I typed out the plans that we had all cooked up between us, so that we could present them to the boss. Sue asked for some official sanction to be Field Officer, so that she could spend most of the week travelling around schools, teachers colleges, and universities. I asked to be placed in charge of the section that we call "culture", for want of a better name. (So far, this has led to articles on CONTEMPORARY MUSIC, A TEACHER'S

GUIDE TO ROCK 'N' ROLL, MELBOURNE'S ART GALLERIES, THE PRAM FACTORY, and a superb article about CARLTON; plus articles about SCREEN EDUCATION, A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, and VISCONTI'S "THE LEOPARD" - the first time that articles about films have appeared in THE ED MAG.) Irene and Peggy were going to cover general overseas educational news, while Fay was to cover general state and Australian educational news.

All very good, huh? Well, it taught me one thing: if something needs doing, do it. Well, you say, that's obvious, isn't it? Not to me, it isn't. Usually, if something has to be done, I avoid doing it as long as possible. I can't claim that any of the ideas were mine, but still... Also, the episode showed that even a hopeless situation can be organised into rationality. To be sure, when it came to sheer hard work, Gerald had to do most of the rationalising, but again, I didn't really believe that the situation could be saved. By about July, THE ED MAG was running ahead of schedule, for the first time in about two years, although Certain Other Factors held us up later in the year.

By the way, if Elizabeth Foyster reads this, I can be sure that she will be grinding her teeth. Yes, I know that if teachers in the schools had time to sit down for two days and nut out a problem, then many of the organisational difficulties in the schools would be solved. But I realised this myself when I was teaching; that there was never any time to think, but only time to rush to the next class. Obviously, teachers need study sabbaticals and more in-service training; but this would never solve the problem that teachers in schools are usually drowned in trivia, while people in positions such as we have can make time to rise to the surface and swim. Probably, if you consider the time that we do have, we should make twice as good a job of it.

The next main item in my diary: "Melbourne Eastercon". I'm going to write about that for four or five pages in SFC 30, if that magazine ever appears. I'm waiting for a cover for the magazine, and if I could get the photo I want, I would even make it a wraparound cover.

April 8: "Stephen Campbell in city. Came to my place and read fanzines." And that's about the last time I've seen him. He was going to try to get a job in Melbourne. When I saw him a few weeks later, he still didn't have one. Information, anybody?

April 13: "Hugo day!" That was the day that I received the issue of LOCUS that said that SFC had made the Hugo ballot. I couldn't believe it then, and I can still hardly believe it. People expected me to be very disappointed when I didn't win the Hugo, but the placings (1 LOCUS; 2 ENERGUMEN; 3 GRANFALLOON; and 4 S F COMMENTARY) are exactly as I expected them to be. With the competition next year, I'm doubtful whether I'll get on the ballot again. Y'never can tell.

April 17: "TTAV stopwork meeting and march. Bearded the Tribunal in its den." This is another of my "firsts" for 1972 - or rather, the subsequent events are. I didn't ever expect to be involved in an indefinite strike, especially because I'm a member of the TTAV, but the series of stopwork meetings that started on the 17th developed into the first indefinite stoppage held by a teachers' organisation in Victoria. I would tell you all about it here, except that I've already promised to write about these events for THE FANARCHIST. I'll write that article as soon as I've published my next four fanzines.

April 24: "Heard radio play: THE AMERICAN (Geoffrey Hodgson/Henry James)" Now

do any of you overseas people remember radio? You know, that sound that comes out of that little box you carry around with you? (No, not the portable tv; don't want any of those around here.) In Australia we still have Radio. People actually perform plays, music, and other entertainments especially for radio. The people who pay the bills are the harassed members of the Australian Broadcasting Commission. On Monday nights, on 3AR, I can occasionally still hear a good play, performed by decent actors. How long will that last? At any rate, Henry James is one of my most esteemed writers, as you know, and the adaptation was very skilfull. The original story is superb, and the play had a very good last line. James always amazes me with his "universality"; with the fact although his characters live in a rarified, leisured world that has almost disappeared, they still face the same dilemmas as we do. It's the same effect as watching THE LAST PICTURE SHOW - the people are about as different from James' people as possible, and both groups are light years away from the social group that I live in, and yet the deepest moral problems still wrench apart the lives of all these people.

April 27: "TTAV out on indefinite strike!" As I said, I hope to tell the story elsewhere. I should mention that inbetween attending stopwork meetings, both in the Sidney Myer Music Bowl and in the cafe of the Special Services Building, joining picket lines, sitting in protest on the steps of Parliament House, and printing pamphlets, I managed also to type all the stencils for SFC 26. On the first day of the school holidays, after everything had finished, and the TTAV had rather obviously lost, I attended the annual meeting of the TTAV. "Mainly procedural boredom", as I wrote in my diary then. Also rotten coffee served at morning tea.

May 9: "Hanoi blockade. THIS ISN'T S F COMMENTARY 26." I presume that most people know what I think of the first; and the story of the second is written in SFC 29. Amerikans, get rid of Nixon fast! I went into town, picked up my mail, and heard Peter Bogdanovich (director of TARGETS, THE LAST PICTURE SHOW, and WHAT'S UP DOC?) speaking. He was in town to promote THE LAST PICTURE SHOW, which was just about to begin its season. Bogdanovich is a very impressive chap - sort of fannish humourist (very dry), and quite a master of the art of saying very little very entertainingly. He stood on the platform for about one and a half hours, and turned tricky questions. People kept asking him things like "Why did you use grainy film in that bit?" and "What was the exact elevation of that shot in that scene, and was the sun shining or did you have the arc lamps burning too high?" You know, the sort of questions that only film buffs or science fiction fans would ask. To each question, Peter Bogdanovich would say "Well, when I rang up my producer the other day" or "When I was talking to Boris Karloff" or "Orson Welles told me to go ahead and make LAST PICTURE SHOW in black and white", and then begin one of his long and amusing stories. He says that Roger Corman offered to let him make TARGETS, but only if he observed several rigid conditions: he could only use Boris Karloff for two days (because Karloff owed Corman two days' work), and he would have to make the other two-thirds of the film out of (1) forty minutes from some old Corman-Karloff film, and (2) forty minutes without Karloff - plus, of course (3) forty minutes with Karloff. I've never seen TARGETS, but I believe that Bogdanovich actually fulfilled these conditions. However, when Karloff saw the script of TARGETS, he gave Bogdanovich more than two days' work. ("It was about four days' work altogether.") I could talk for a long time about LAST PICTURE SHOW, and probably will, although I don't think I have the emotional stamina at the moment to see it a third time; and WHAT'S UP DOC? is probably the funniest film I've seen, except for Corman's LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS. I hope Alan Finney can get some more film directors to visit Australia sometime.

Friday, 12 May: "Duplicated non-stop all day." Saturday, 13 May: "Gestetner fell apart in the morning (bands around the side snapped irrevocably and silk screen ripped)." So you don't believe in superstitions about the 13th! Neither do I; there's a hex on every even-numbered issue of S F COMMENTARY. There is always something unbelievable that holds up every even-numbered issue of the magazine. In this case, I had very bad luck. The duplicator fell apart on the Saturday, so I could not get in touch with Gestetner til Monday. When I did ring Gestetner, I forgot to include one detail - that I live in the residence of a branch of the State Savings Bank of Victoria, and if the bank was closed, the serviceman should go through the side gate to our front door. Needless to say, the serviceman arrived at 3.05 pm, just after the bank had closed its doors. He waved and banged on the door, but the staff thought that he was just an irate, late customer. About ten minutes later, I (who didn't know that this was going on) went into the bank and put a little note on the door for the serviceman if he should come. By that time he had gone away again. On Tuesday morning, I rang Gestetner, but the serviceman, who was very pleasant about it all, said that he had to go to Geelong that day. What could I do? I rang up the minister of our church, and asked him if I could use the Gestetner that the church owns. Okay, he said. So mum and I packed into the car all the vast number of things that I needed to print a fanzine, and we set off. The church's duplicator is manual (as mine is), but it is much easier to use than mine. I stopped only for lunch - about half an hour - and managed to duplicate nearly half of that 120-page monster, SFC 26. Dad picked me up at 7.30 pm, after I had done the most work that I have ever done on one day. On Wednesday, the Gestetner serviceman turned up. (I should explain that, thanks again to my woeful inefficiency, I had copped another bit of "bad luck". My sister was visiting us on the Monday night. I asked her to give the material to be electrostencilled to Noel Kerr, whose address I wrote - wrongly - on the outside of the envelope. Fortunately my sister is used to my mistakes, so she delivered the material to Noel on the Tuesday night.) The Gestetner bloke was a Goyan Indian, who had been brought up in a Catholic seminary on the south-west coast of India. He had become a salesman for Gestetner in India (where Gestetner has the monopoly of duplicator firms in a country with one of the most centralised bureaucracies outside of Australia) but emigrated to Australia. Now how did I hear his whole life story? While he was working away on the machine, I was playing Bach on the record player. It was probably one of the Bach records that John Bangsund sold me. Mr Catchem (for that was the man's name) began to whistle the tune! "You're a Bach fan, then," I said. "Yes," he said, "I had to learn music when I was in school in India." And off he went. Somehow, meeting Mr Catchem almost makes it worthwhile for my duplicator to break apart. I was interested to find out that my duplicator, which I had bought second-hand in Ararat, was made in 1939. Well, that's the machine upon which I've done 29 issues of SFC, plus numerous other magazines. Gestetner knew how to make duplicators in 1939; still do, for that matter.

Anyway, they were the events that held up SFC 28. The events that stopped No 28 were twice as remarkable as that. I'm trembling violently to think what will delay No 30, for something will. "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks. Rage, blow!" Well, I feel a bit like King Lear at the moment, but I really don't want to call down his fate upon my head. It'll strike me all by itself.

The May holidays ended in grand style: on the Sunday night of the last week of the holidays, on May 21, I collated the last copy of SFC 26! The entire issue took about three weeks to type, duplicate, collate, and send out. I returned to work for a badly needed rest.

[illegible] way. June 19: "Bought EXILE ON MAIN STREET." Still not the Stones at the best, but fairly good. First side brilliant, especially if the record player is turned up very loud.

June 21: "Very pleasant first-night resurgence of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Tea at Degraves Tavern first (met John Alderson) with extras at the Pancake Parlor. Lee Harding's "talk" (after unsuccessful attempt to get drunk) at MSFC." That nearly explains all. At last Merv managed to obtain the flat above the Space Age Book Shop for the club. Merv and other members of the club moved the several thousand books from the Club library from the former clubrooms in South Yarra to the new premises. Parts of the flat were even painted and renovated. Merv planned a series of speakers, of which Lee Harding would be the first. Publicity was sent to all the members of the club, and as I've recorded, it was a good night. We started at the Degraves Tavern, but didn't stay too long. Lee did his best to get merry, mainly because he didn't have a speech prepared. However, Lee's worry about the non-content of his speech cancelled the effect of the wine. By the time we had walked from the Degraves to the Pancake Parlour and stayed there an hour, Lee was completely sober again. These cold Melbourne nights. John Alderson asked for "a pot of tea" at the Pancake Parlour, and performed similar amusing tricks. I managed to talk to a few people whom I hadn't seen for awhile. When we finally arrived at the club, Lee announced that he had nothing to say, and eventually John Foyster led most of a very spirited discussion. I was too busy talking to people like Rob Gerrand (I <u>think</u> he was there that night) to hear much of the formal discussion. But the fannish resurgence had definitely started in Melbourne, and culminated in the film made just in time for Syncon and LACon.

June 22. "Abortive attempt to get to COMPULSORY EDUCATION. Filled in time by going to ULYSSES (directed by Joseph Strick) but so good and tiring that I could not be bothered going to the theatre." I'm the first to admit that I do Very Peculiar Things on occasions. I bought a ticket for COMPULSORY EDUCATION, which was a play written by Bill and Lorna Hannan, and staged at the Pram Factory. I intended to go. Nearly everybody else at Publications Branch was going on the night. But I had to kill a few hours between the end of work and the start of the show. I didn't know what to do. Nobody would be at the Degraves. I couldn't sit in a cafe for more than two hours. I couldn't get to anybody's place and back again in time for the play. So I went to see ULYSSES, which is a beautiful film. I still haven't read the book, so I had no assumptions about what I was to see. It showed the Irish as a violent, callous, funny, and ultimately admirable people. The film contained some great acting, it was photographed in balck-and-white (how hungry I am for black-and-white films!), and it contains the very famous Molly Bloom soliloquy at the end. Completely charming. But I didn't feel like catching a tram back to Carlton when I came out of the cinema. An 88 tram came along, so I hopped aboard, and went home. Next day, everybody from the Branch agreed that I hadn't missed a thing. COMPULSORY EDUCATION, a satirical play about the Department's celebration of one hundred years of pitiful existence in 1973, was probably the first artistic flop that the Pram Factory have had. They're received rave notices for all their later, all-Australian productions. Come to the Pram Factory, Jerry Lapidus, to see <u>real</u> acting.

I won't tell you how I edited, and finally rewrote a sex novel for Gold Star Books. Another first, you see. A very depressing experience; the first of many events to hold up SFC 28. And I might tell you next time about the one week in which I wasn't allowed to read or write. (I had a bung eye.) And my Syncon Report goes in SFC 30. It's a dull life, isn't it? I even bore me.

September 26 1972. *

ELIAS CANETTI talks to IDRIS PARRY

A Solitary Man : Kafka

(First published in THE LISTENER, September 16 1971)

IDRIS PARRY About ten years ago I went to a dance in a university hall of residence and in the library I came across a book called AUTO DA FE, by Elias Canetti. I'd heard about this book. I'd seen one mention of it, some years before, in an essay by Professor Jack Isaacs: originally one of a Third Program series of talks on modern literature. I borrowed it and I read it, and I was overwhelmed by its power, its range, and penetration. I thought I'd write something about it. But nobody could tell me anything about Canetti. I should mention that AUTO DA FE is a translation from the German. How did it come about that a man with a name like that was writing in German? Nobody seemed to know. Should I perhaps write to him? One of my friends said, "It's no use writing to him - he never answers letters." I did write and he answered. And I wrote my article. And we became friends. Elias Canetti has lived in England since 1939. The book I mentioned, AUTO DA FE - DIE BLENDUNG is the original German title - was published before that in 1935, in Vienna where he lived then. I got to know his other books: CROWDS AND POWER, this imaginative encylopedia about crowd movements, crowd formation, crowd symbols - the relationship of people to power is the basis of all his work - and his plays, written in the 'thirties but only recently discovered and performed by the German theatre. Although he's been in England all the time, he still writes in German. He is a descendant of the Jews who were expelled from Spain in the 15th century. Those Sephardic Jews who settled in the Balkans found later on that their cultural centre had become Vienna and their cultural language German. That's how a man with a name like Canetti comes to be writing in German. He had his education in Germany and Austria. But his early childhood was spent in Manchester, just before the First World War. Some recognition of the quality of his work is spreading, at last, in the German-speaking countries, and even perhaps in England - though we haven't got quite as far as the Japanese, who are now busily translating all his works. Elias Canetti is with me now, and I'd like to talk to you, Elias, about the little book on Kafka you published last year. You called it DER ANDERE PROZESS. It hasn't yet been translated into English, but the title I presume would be THE OTHER TRIAL. You are obviously careful about what you choose to write about, and even more careful about what you choose to have published. So it does seem there must be some specific reason which made you write about Kafka's letters to Felice Bauer.

ELIAS CANETTI I think the main reason was that Kafka has been for many years one of the writers I admire and love most. But one knew very little about these famous five years of his unhappy engagement. One knew that this engagement had played a great part in his life, but only when

the letters he had written to his fiancee over these five years were published in 1967 could one find out what had happened, what the real core of this unhappiness had been. I happened to read a pre-publication of this volume in a German literary periodical and was so impressed by it that when I had the whole volume, which contains 750 pages, I found I couldn't read anything else. I couldn't think anything else. For months I was absolutely possessed by this book, and so I think there was no other way out. I had to write something about it.

IP Kafka first met Felice Bauer, who became his fiancee twice, in August 1912.

EC Yes. She was on a visit from Berlin, She lived in Berlin and he, of course, in Prague. She was on the way to Budapest to a wedding and stayed a few days in Prague: he happened to meet her one evening in the house of the parents of his friend Max Brod. It was the first time he saw her, and he didn't see her after this for seven months, but the correspondence that started a few weeks after he had seen her became very concentrated. He would write once a day, sometimes twice, and one could say, forced her to answer almost as often. So one has a correspondence now of 580 pages about the first period of their acquaintance. Felice Bauer was a girl from a middle-class Jewish family in Berlin. She went to work in an office. She was a very direct, open-minded, honest girl, not at all complicated. She obviously had the natural aim of a girl of her kind: she wanted to get married. But she also had some cultural interests - that was rather common in those circles then. She liked to listen to music and she would read. And whatever people spoke about in modern literature in those days she would try to get hold of and read. She had read books by Max Brod. When she met Kafka he had with him the manuscript of his first book, BETRACHTUNG. He wanted to go through this manuscript with his friend Brod, and it then went for publication to his German publisher. The fact that he had this manuscript with him, that there were photographs from a journey to Goethe's place at Weimar which he had undertaken a few weeks before with his friend, that he could show these photographs over the table and talk to her about them, brought them immediately nearer. He was a man with very little self-confidence. He found it very difficult to speak and particularly to speak to a girl. He was a shy man, very reserved. But on this evening he felt free, and I think that out of the freedom of the first evening the whole of the rest of the story developed.

He got used to this correspondence, in which he spoke about everything that concerned him. He was rather a hypochondriac: he always felt ill, he suffered from sleeplessness. He hated the office work he did. Now here was a girl to whom he could write all about it. He wrote pages and pages full of his complaints, full of his unhappiness, and full of the ideas he had about writing. But he also wanted to know about her. He asked hundreds of questions. And the type of question he asked is very characteristic of him. There was no detail that didn't interest him. He wanted to know where she worked, what her office looked like, what the view from the window was, what the people working with her looked like, what they said. He wanted to know what she ate, what she read. There is an accuracy in his questions, in his demands, and also in his answers, which does remind one most definitely of his books. So in the course of seven months he got used to this correspondence, and one has the feeling he didn't particularly want to see her. She was somebody far away who didn't bother him by her presence, but who gave him strength by answering his letters, by writing to him. What he wanted was to live his own life, to

have the nights in which he could write for himself, and then to get these letters from somebody who took an interest in him. That's why he postponed again and again seeing her. Well, in the end it couldn't be postponed any longer, so he made a trip to Berlin. He had found out even from her letters that she had come very close to him and perhaps was hoping to get married to him. He was frightened of that. When he saw her in Berlin, he couldn't make up his mind. He came back. And now we get the whole process of his hesitations, his withdrawals, his doubts about himself, his feelings of insufficiency, his idea that nobody could bear living with him, that it was quite impossible for anybody to suffer his presence, and, of course, behind all that the feeling that he ought to be absolutely free for his work. There is one letter, which I think is one of the most beautiful letters every written by a writer, where he describes what state he would wish for his writing, and speaks of this cellar in which he would like to live: a locked cellar where nobody could enter, rather vast rooms, where he would sit and write. People would put his food in front of a locked door. He would go and get it, would eat it slowly and then go on writing. He would be absolutely alone, isolated, and given to his work. It is in a way a reverse of the ivory tower one always hears of, and it sounds much more natural and plausible than the idea of the ivory tower.

IP He does remark in one of his notebooks that "we are digging the Tower of Babel".

EC Yes, that is exactly it.

IP Making a cellar of the ivory tower.

EC Yes.

IP Felice, then, you think was an ideal figure, as far as Kafka was concerned. Somebody who was necessary to him but with whom he couldn't live.

EC I think that is true: it also shows in the way the story went on. After a year he did give in to her and her family and there was a kind of half-engagement, but as soon as the thing had been settled by letter he couldn't bear this idea. He wrote to her that the whole thing was off, left Prague, went on a journey to Italy, and broke off even the correspondence. After some time the correspondence started again. It's perhaps impossible to give every detail of this relationship, which lasted for five years. But one would have to say that there were two official engagements in it, sometimes a year or more of absolutely separation, and a very painful final separation which followed from the starting of his tuberculosis.

IP As a character Felice seems to have been the exact opposite of Kafka, doesn't she?

EC Yes, she was. She was, first of all, very simple. She took decisions in

a simple way. If somebody said he wanted something, she believed it. If Kafka decided on doing something, he changed his mind the very next hour. He was a man who could never make up his mind. He always saw twenty, thirty, fifty different possible ways of acting.

IP I wonder if this constant repetition in the letters of requests for information from Felice about her daily life could be a quest for certainty - made by a man who knows there can be no certainty?

EC I think it is that very quest for certainty. Because he was so doubtful about all the facts of his own life - he knew them very well, but he was so doubtful about their meaning - he needed certain facts from outside. He could cling to the definite things she told him about herself. That gave him strength.

IP These letters are so characteristic of Kafka because they are an amazing blend of happiness and agony. I often think that Kafka is perhaps most miserable when he is happy. He is waiting for the blow to fall. How did this association affect his work, his writing?

EC That is, of course, the really exciting part about it. The reason why he went on with his corespondence, why he couldn't stop it, was that, immediately after he started writing to her, he wrote the first story he was pleased with: the rather short piece called THE JUDGMENT. And in the weeks after this story - about eight to ten weeks of work, which one can see as one of the best periods of his working life altogether - in these weeks he wrote the first chapter of AMERICA, which is called THE STOKER, and then five other chapters of this novel. And he wrote what many people, myself included, regard as his most perfect piece of work, METAMORPHOSIS. I don't think there was ever quite as concentrated a period in his life. And this suddenly stopped for a very strange reason. Whilst he was in this good period of work his first little book came out: I believe it's called MEDITATION in English, BETRACHTUNG in German. It's not a very important work; it's among the first pieces he wrote very much under the influence of Robert Walser. But it was the first book he'd published, and he sent it to her. Though she went on writing to him, he had no reply from her about it. He wainted for weeks. Their correspondence contained names of other writers she was reading, but she didn't dare mention his book. She obviously didn't like it or didn't understand it. That was a very hard blow. And it's quite obvious from the correspondence that he then stopped writing, and suddenly a period of sterility arose again. The correspondence went on, but this first period of real inspiration, which had come to him through the strength she gave him by writing all the time, was over, and it was never the same thing again.

IP Isn't it extraordinary how Kafka's always looking for approval? Or perhaps not quite so extraordinary. This incident of Felice and BETRACHTUNG is very reminiscent of so mething which comes later - when Kafka writes his letter to his father and refers to the incident where he gives his father the copy of his book, and the father says, "Put it on the bedside table", and this really cuts him to the heart.

EC Yes, that hurt him deeply. His father played an enormous part in his life and he felt that his father never approved of him. Kafka was physically weak - he was a very lean man. His father was a big strong man, very active, a very good businessman who had worked his way up. There's no doubt that his father wasn't pleased with his only son. In one of the first letters to Felice Kafka says, "I'm the leanest person I know, and I ought to know because I've spent a lot of time in sanatoriums and such places." Now this description of himself by a person who after all is writing a love-letter, or what he thinks is a love-letter, pointing to his almost non-existent body, is very strange. I found then that in his later correspondence with Milena, a woman whom he pasionately loved years later, a very similar thing happens. In one of the first letters to her he speaks again of his leanness. Thinking about this, I looked up his diaries and letters and collected in the essay we're talking about some of the proofs for the importance this physical fact had had in his life. Again and again he speaks of this weakness, thinking that he's a man who can never achieve anything because he hasn't got enough flesh, because he is too tall and too thin and the heart can't have the strength to pump blood through this thin body. "There is no reserve of fat," he says, "that's why I can't do much." Hand in hand with this goes a tremendous respect for stout people - that's a very amusing thing. He's suspicious of doctors, he believes in nature cures, but at one time later he has to go to a doctor and his report in a letter to Felice is, "I like this doctor - he was a man I could feel confidence in. He's so stout one has to have confidence in him. How you could ever have confidence in me, in a person as lean as I am, I can't understand." There was always this thing about his leanness, and following from that I think one can understand his hypochondria better. He felt that his body was open to attacks of all kinds. He suffered from sleeplessness. I think this sleeplessness derived from a kind of watch he was keeping over his body: he was all the time waiting for certain symptoms in this organ, in that organ, and as long as he was watching with this intensity, he just couldn't sleep. He was also frightened of bad air, he felt that bad air was a poisonous thing. This comes in his books too: you remember the attics in THE TRIAL or that terrible small studio of the painter Titorelli where suddenly the air is so terrible that he thinks he's suffocating and he has to get out. There's also his supicion of food. He doesn't allow himself coffee or tea or alcohol - these are absolutely forbidden. For a long time he's a vegetarian because he thinks meat is poisonous. All these things are dangerous intrusions into his body. This hypochondria explains many aspects of his work.

IP You say in your book that THE TRIAL emerges out of this relationship with Felice Bauer.

EC I am convinced that THE TRIAL is connected with part of this story of his engagement. When he got officially engaged for the first time to Felice, it was almost two years after he met her. Her family gave an official part for his engagement, and he travelled up to Berlin with his father. The description he gives later in letters or in his diary about his official engagement is very strange. He says in effect, "I felt fettered like a prisoner. If one had put me in chains in the corner and asked me to watch my own engagement, I couldn't have felt differently." Now this is a very curious attitude. He was obviously opposed to the engagement, but as it had to happen, and as he'd decided it should happen, what he suffered from most was what one might call the publicity of it. There were lots of people invited whom he didn't know, there were the two families there - Felice's and his own. He felt uncomfortable with families:

they gave him claustrophobia. He suffered from the presence of his own family, in whose flat he lived in Prague. All this was a very great shock for him. But this shock was doubled after the engagement when he went back to Prague. There was a friend of Felice's with whom he was corresponding and in the letters to this friend he'd made it quite clear that he didn't think he was a man who ought to marry. These letters were full of doubts, and Felice's friend showed parts of them to the fiancee. So he was asked to come to Berlin and to justify himself. Six weeks after the official engagement there was a meeting in a hotel in Berlin and this meeting was like a court of justice. There was Felice, her sister, the friend who shown her his letters, a friend of his, and in front of these people Felice came out with the accusations, showed him the things he'd written in these letters. He didn't defend himself, he listened to it all, he didn't say a word. But the engagement was off. I have the impression he was relieved about this, but the form in which it took place was a thing which impressed him enormously. From this time on he always speaks either in his diary or in letters about the court of justice, the tribunal, and a few weeks after this, back in Prague, he suddenly started writing the novel that then became THE TRIAL. It was the time when the First World War broke out, the beginning of August 1914, and I think that there's a connection between both events - the engagement and the court of justice - and the beginning of the war. So I tried to find whether there were any traces in the novel of these two private events, and it is really almost shattering to see that the emotional content of both those events, the engagement and the so-called court of justice, is there, almost literally there. The first chapter, when K gets arrested, is the official engagement, and the last chapter, the execution, is that very same court of justice in the hotel in Berlin. There are many concrete details which I think prove the connection. This doesn't mean that the novel is explained, of course: it doesn't mean that anything has been said about the novel. But it is important to know that things that happened in his life are really the emotional source of THE TRIAL, and also get transposed in a very strange concrete way into the work. This also precludes many of the mystifications which one finds about his works - these curious metaphysical explanations which one has to read and which I find mostly unbearable. I think one has to go back to the concrete things that are there in his life and in himself and to look at these.

IP I notice you speak of Kafka as the greatest expert on power. At first sight that seems an astonishing judgment.

EC Yes, considering the powerlessness of most of his characters. I meant that Kafka has experienced personally, and has described in his work, every possible form of humiliation, of fear of power, of avoidance of power, and by doing that he has shown his power in a much fuller way than we usually think of it. When we say "power" we think of a strong person exerting power and of what this power looks like, but we tend to forget that power is displayed in a great range of situations all the time in our whole life, not only politically or in dramatic events, and if one wants to know what power really is one can't only rely on the great stormy things, on thunder and lightning, the things that are treated in history: one has to know it in everyday life, in hundreds of different situations. These Kafka explored and experienced.

IP I think one might say that in terms of energy every aspect of experience is an aspect of power.

EC ...se, but where it becomes important for the person acting under its influence, or confronted by it, is where a feeling of danger or suffering is connected with it. Another thing which is very striking in Kafka is that he very often identifies himself with animals, with small, weak animals who are the victims or prey of stronger animals. This brings one to a point where one can't help feeling that Kafka's great originality as a writer is his gift for transformation into small things, into small beings. One only has to count the stories where such things happen. METAMORPHOSIS, the son who wakes up and finds himself a beetle, or the story of THE BURROW, some strange creature building a burrow, obviously some kind of mole. In his letters to Milena he compares himself to a sparrow he's watching whilst writing to her and what he says about this sparrow is an absolute identification: he becomes a sparrow, the movements, the fear, of this sparrow are described as his own movements in rleation to the woman he loves and to whom he's writing.

IP Is this related to his idea of patience? In one of his sayings he speaks of impatience as the most important human sin. It's because of impatience, he said, that we were expelled from paradise. It's because of impatience that we don't return there.

EC I think he has a very strong feeling for patience. He is a patient person, but this is also connected with another trait of his character, which I would even call obduracy. He's not a person who can react immediately. When he's attacked - for example, at that famous court of justice in Berlin - he doesn't defend himself, he doesn't answer, and one might at first think that he hasn't taken in the accusations, he hasn't felt them. But a long time afterwards one finds an accurate description of something that's happened in a later letter or in a diary, so the fact is that he senses everything to the smallest detail, but needs time in which to create a distance between himself and his reaction. This also comes out in his relations with his father. This obduracy, from which he suffered in his personal life, was a big gift to him as a writer.

IP There's something organic about this waiting.

EC It becomes patience.

IP This is rather like Rilke's image of the anemone in one of his sonnets, When he speaks of the anemone which has opened its petals so wide at nightfall that it can't close them. Is it possible to see this relationship to power in the widest sense - as a relationship with the whole of the environment? To include the relationship, not only of the insects and animals in Kafka's works, but of the heroes, if we can call them that, of THE TRIAL and THE CASTLE to the law and the bureaucracy - these distant, inscrutable, powerful conditions which seem to be everywhere and to which everybody and everything seems related?

EC The curious effect both these novels have on a reader is mainly due to that. In THE TRIAL you have these strange courts of justice which withdraw whenever you want to come near them. You're waiting for them to occupy themselves with you. You want to hear what you've done. And you don't get an

answer. They withdraw more and more. And that is their particular power. You get a similar thing, not quite the same, in THE CASTLE, where the hero is trying to settle down, to come nearer to these powers which rule the castle. He never can. He only sees some small bureaucratic officials, and they withdraw all the time. There's a very strong dislike of these powers in Kafka. And perhaps that's one of the things which appeals to us: we are just as much in danger from powers we can't control, and the most dangerous powers in our world today are mysterious.

IP I've never seen it quite so much as a dislike of these distant powers: fear, perhaps, but isn't he drawn to them as if to the source of truth?

EC Well, when you think of the long chapters in THE CASTLE where the activities of this bureaucracy are described, when you think of their orgies of files, when you think of the strange relationships of some of the girls that come in there to the most mysterious uppermost powers, I certainly could not deny then that I feel there's a dislike of this great power. There is also, perhaps, an element of the victim trying to ingratiate himself with these dangerous powers. But I don't think there's any affection for them. You feel differently?

IP Yes, I feel that we get this image of the devils, and, as you've just said, of the gods as well in the same concrete image, that behind all this preoccupation with detail, and with unpleasant details very often, there's the feeling that one must somehow comprehend all the detail of experience, even though it doesn't make sense.

EC I would call him a kind of Taoist. He has an almost Chinese way of reacting to the world as a whole. I don't believe it's the usual European way - which we know from the course of European philosophy - of seeing a separate ruling divine transcendent power behind everything. I don't think Kafka is a Platonist. On the contrary, I think that, with him, things are still one. He doesn't divide concepts from concrete, sensuous details. And that's one of the reasons why he likes some of the Chinese philosophers so much.

IP This is the aspect of patience we were talking about. He accepts the situation, doesn't he? You remember where he says it's only our concept of time which makes us call the Last Judgment by that name: in fact, it's a court in standing session. As though this is actually going on all the time.

EC Well, if you call that acceptance, then I agree with you. But it's not acceptance in a milder form, which we know from so many writers and poets. It's not being happy and satisfied.

IP I quite agree. We spoke earlier of what I feel to be this extraordinary combination of happiness and agony in Kafka, of God and Devil, if you like, at the same time.

EC There is again and again, in all his personal utterances, this continuing

process of his wanting to become small until he's not there any more. You can notice it, for example, in the way he signs his name. You can notice it in the names he gives the two heroes of THE CASTLE and THE TRIAL. There his own name is shortened to a "K" and in some of the letters he writes to Felice his name disappears entirely. Or there is the signature on one of the letters to Milena: there he writes "Franz", crosses it through, says "wrong", then "F", crosses it through, says "wrong", then "yours", crosses it through, "wrong", then, "Nothing, Stillness, Deep Forest".

IP Isn't there something saintly in this suppression of the self? It is a kind of humiliation of the ego which is defensive and yet the only constructive attitude as well. One of my favourite quotations from Kafka comes in that volume, WEDDING PREPARATIONS IN THE COUNTRY:

"It is not necessary to go out of the house.

Stay at your table and listen.

Don't even listen, just wait.

Don't even wait - be completely still and alone.

The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked. It can do no other.

It will writhe before you in raptures."

(RADIO 3)

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brg I reprinted that article because it has one of my favourite authors (admittedly, on the basis of only one novel, AUTO DA FE) talking about another of my favourite authors. Also, that final quotation is about the best that I found last year, and should be pinned up on the wall of any writer anywhere.

The article inspires all sorts of fascinating thoughts, which I won't explore here, as I want to talk about AUTO DA FE elsewhere: it is a much better book that any of the Kafka stories that I have read, but that doesn't denigrate Kafka much. The most frustrating thing about Kafka's stories, as Canetti says, is that feeling that The Truth is just around the corner, but as the reader turns every corner of a Kafka story, the truth recedes further and further. Kafka's books have a different effect from those of say, Musil (about whom I will say much more) or Proust, or most of the writers in the Thomist tradition, who place two or more sides of truth together and then explore the relationships between different contradictory possibilities. (Maybe I'm wrong, but I think that's called "dialectic".) Neither Canetti nor Parry say anything about what strikes me most about THE TRIAL - the way in which the author laughs at the main character, and hints time and again that Joseph K brings the whole catastrophe down upon himself. But there's no end to the speculations that can be made about Kafka's work: Canetti's is one of the most sensible approaches I've seen. 26.9.72. *