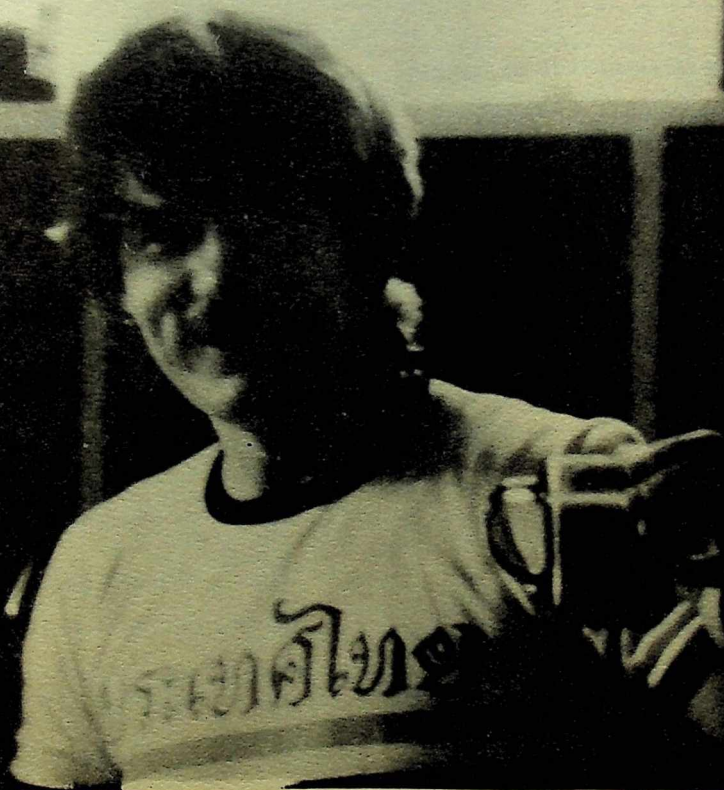


# THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW

No. 19/20/21

July 1994



ROGER WEDDALL 1953–1992

*'He rises and begins to round, / He drops the silver chain of sound . . . / For singing till his heaven fills, / 'Tis love  
of earth that he instils, / And ever winging up and up, . . . / To lift us with him as he goes . . .'*

— George Meredith, *'The Lark Ascending'*

# THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW

No. 19/20/21

July 1994

120 pages

**THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW** No. 19/20/21, July 1994, is edited and published by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood, Victoria 3001, Australia. Phone: (03) 419 4797. **Please note that this is a change of postal address.** Printed by Copy Place, Melbourne.

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## ART

Apart from isolated out-of-copyright pieces of art, the **illustration** is by Martin Bridgstock (p. 25); **cartoons** by David Russell (p. 76) and Ian Gunn (pp. 109–12 and 114–15); and **photographs** (where I can find attribution) are by Elaine Cochrane (pp. 7 and 16), Dick & Nicki Lynch (pp. 11 and 12), John Litchen (pp. 31–3), and Hocking, Vigo & Gerrard (pp. 35 and 37). The cover photograph and that on page 4 were found in Roger's own collection. Can anybody tell me who took these photos? Thanks to Ellikon Pty Ltd for processing the photographs.

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# Welcome to the Time Freeze Issue

Before I so rudely interrupted myself I had prepared about 70 per cent of this issue of *The Metaphysical Review*. That was in April last year, more than twelve months ago.

Then came the usual problems with juggling time and money. Producing *SF Commentary* became a more urgent priority. That appeared in October last year. If you didn't receive your copy, get in touch.

By the time I came back to *TMR* I found that a nice little file of 80 pages of material had grown to more than 200 pages. What to do? A 200-page issue? Impossible! A 120-page issue? But *which* 120 pages?

The 120 pages that you hold in your hand.

The issue that has been sitting on diskette for at least

a year.

I have not updated the letters. If you wrote a loc on *TMR 19*, I have not lost it. It'll have to wait a month or two.

The 'Wasabe' column is now up to date. So are my Lists of Favourite Everything's, although the other sections of 'Lists! Glorious Lists!' have not been updated.

One last word: **The tributes to Roger Weddall from me, Yvonne and Lucy are merely a small selection of the pieces that appear in *Lhyfe Thyme*. Read the ad below. Send your money to Jane Tisell for your copy.**

— Bruce Gillespie, 24 May 1994

## LHYFE THYME

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*LHYFE THYME* CONTAINS TRIBUTES TO ROGER BY HIS AUSTRALIAN FRIENDS, FROM SCHOOL DAYS TO THE RECENT PAST, AND IS ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS.

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# I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

ROGER WEDDALL 1953–1992

## Bruce Gillespie: THE LARK ASCENDED

After Roger Weddall's funeral on 8 December 1992, a large group of his friends gathered at the house where he had been living, ate afternoon tea, and told Roger stories. There are thousands of them, each as varied as the teller. Here are some of my Roger stories. Of course they are also Bruce Gillespie stories:

I

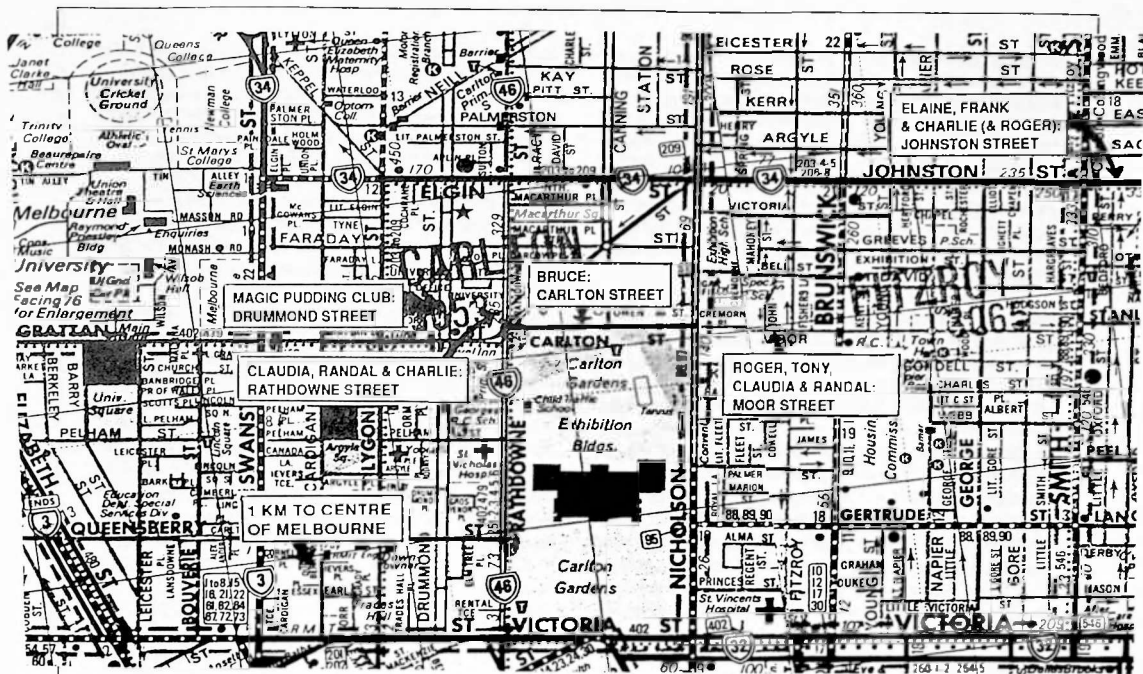
The first time I talked to Roger was in early 1974, after I returned from my only overseas trip. He and Alan Wilson visited the Degrares Tavern, which was once in a basement off Degrares Street in the city, and was the weekly fannish meeting place until it closed in early 1976. When I returned to the Degrares Tavern in

February 1974, I found that a new group of people had joined Melbourne fandom. The most noticeable newcomers were Don and Derrick Ashby, who had identical midland English accents and black pointy beards. Loquacious and amusing, they held court at the centre of a group dominated by Lee Harding and Irene Pagram, and Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown. Henry, the proprietor of Degrares Tavern, had arranged the tables in a large U shape. Roger and Alan sat way off at the end of one of the U arms. Nobody spoke to them. This was typical. Malcolm Gordon turned up every week for two years at Degrares Tavern before anybody spoke to him. Eventually I said hello, but little else, to Roger and Alan. All I knew about them is that they represented the Melbourne University Sci-



Some members of MUSFA (Melbourne University Science Fiction Association) in 1975 (left to right): Dennis Callegari, Alan Wilson, Mark 'Rocky' Lawson, Roger Weddall, Charles Morgan, Michael Joseph.





Where we lived during 1976: the inner Melbourne suburbs of Carlton, Fitzroy and Collingwood.

ence Fiction Association (MUSFA), and that MUSFA people wanted to get involved in general fandom. This did not happen until the late 1970s, and Roger and Alan did not bother turning up to Degraives Tavern again.

During 1975 I was the only person from general fandom who discovered that the MUSFA people were friendlier and less cynical than the Degraives cabal. During 1974 Charles Taylor had introduced me to Elaine Cochrane and Frank Payne, the two people with whom he was sharing a house. The three of them were members of MUSFA. I visited them several times during late 1974. In 1975 Charles invited me to one of the monthly MUSFA Bistro Nights. The first I attended was at the old Jamaica House when it was owned by Monty, a tall black man who was known to everybody in food circles and Carlton bohemia. (After he died, at the age of forty, his wife Stephanie Alexander became Melbourne's most distinguished restaurateur.) Monty served the hottest food I have ever eaten. That night in late 1975, about twenty riotous MUSFAns drank a vast amount, and returned to 10 Johnston Street. Somebody was very ill in the toilet. In the early morning, Dennis Callegari walked home from Collingwood to Templestowe.

Me? I was suddenly stricken by *l-o-v-e*. Not for the first time was I transfixed by the presence of a woman who hardly noticed me. Claudia Mangiamiele was the

princess of MUSFA, and I suspected all the other males at Jamaica House were equally, hopelessly, in love with her. Not that Claudia meant to be flirtatious. She had (and still has) the rare quality that Roger had: the ability to focus her interest entirely on any person she considered a friend. Because most of her friends in MUSFA were young, single males, her presence created a stronger emotional effect than she intended.

Four weeks later, we held another riotous MUSFA night, this time at a long-defunct Lebanese food restaurant known as Green Cedars. We were placed in a large upstairs room. What better place for a polite riot? Most of these people were under twenty, and not used to alcohol. Yet again, a MUSFAn was very ill. Rigid, he was handed down the stairs of Green Cedars and carried out the door.

I can't remember Roger as being more riotous than any other MUSFAn in those days. He was a lot quieter than the (in)famous David Firman, who needed only the slightest hint of tipsiness to begin singing loud ribald songs. (Whatever happened to David Firman?) But already I recognised that Roger listened to what you were saying while talking to you flat out and carrying on three other conversations around the room. (He also conducted hour-long pun competitions with Dennis Callegari.) Roger included me in the group. That's more than anybody in general fandom bothered

to do.

At the beginning of 1976, about thirty of us, mainly MUSFAns, went to Adelaide to join some people from the Adelaide University SF Association at an sf convention at a camp site in the hills. The aim was to repeat the very successful first Advention (held at another hillside camp site) of 1972. The weather was very hot, the chemistry of people not quite right (although meeting Marc Ortlieb for the first time was a highlight of the convention), and a very young, very drunk James Styles caterwauled loudly all one night.

I was glad to escape at the end of that convention, but some Adelaide University people enjoyed it so much that they returned the visit. Anaconda, an entirely impromptu convention held mainly at Claudia Mangiamela's mother's house in Carlton during the Australia Day weekend, 1976, began the most extraordinary year of my life.

People who had been only acquaintances suddenly became friends. Roger decided that I was a person who should be cured of chronic shyness. On the Monday morning after the night of Charles Taylor's twenty-first birthday party, I heard a knock at the door of my flat in Carlton Street. Not only were all those people up, but they had decided to invade my place. After the invasion, they dragged me out to the Carlton Gardens across the street from my place. Never have I met a group of people so glad to be in each other's company! I enjoyed that company, and I was glad that Claudia was there, although it seemed obvious that she was already nuts about Roger. Add to that dynamic several other romances that had begun in Adelaide or during Anaconda, and you have an atmosphere of heady joy that had escaped me during my adolescence but was quite a tonic three weeks before my twenty-ninth birthday.

The events of the next three years turn on a sentence I spoke that morning in January 1976. 'The Magic Pudding Club is only two streets away,' I said. 'Let's invade them.' And we did. The Magic Pudding Club, in Drummond Street, Carlton, was a slanshack that at that time included (at least) Don and Derrick Ashby, Ken Ford and John Ham. (For the story of the Magic Pudding Club, read *The Metaphysical Review* 4; copies are still available.) Staying with them for the weekend was a very young Queenslander named Randal Flynn. Randal had travelled to Melbourne from Brisbane for the World Convention and Writers' Workshop held in August 1975. He decided that he liked Melbourne and Melbournites so much that he returned. Surely he could stay in Melbourne forever, for free! When we invaded the Magic Pudding Club in Drummond Street, everybody but Randal groaned, rolled over and went back to sleep. Randal invited us into the back yard. In that way Anaconda carried on, while the other Magic Pudding people swore at us and got breakfast.

By the end of that morning, when the Anacondans disappeared out the front door, Randal had become

firm friends with Claudia and Roger. Two weeks later, by the time of my birthday party (catered by the Magic Pudding Club, it was also Valma Brown's birthday), the three of them had decided to set up house in Moore Street, Fitzroy, nearly as close to me to the east as the Magic Pudding Club was to the west. My peace of mind was about to disintegrate.

I visited Moore Street often, because Claudia lived there. Claudia didn't notice me, but she certainly noticed Roger. She and Randal agreed that Roger was behaving 'very peculiarly'. Randal had agreed to give a home at Moore Street to two cats, MGM and Gus. Roger had the same magical effect on them as he was to have on Apple Blossom, but at that time he had little idea of how to take care of cats. Claudia and Randal didn't like cats. Suddenly Claudia and Randal were living together, as well as living in the same house. To the outsider, Roger seemed an outcast in his own house. For perhaps the first time in his life, Roger had no idea what to do. Why hadn't he carried off the magic princess? Why had he left her to an cheeky upstart like Randal? And why did magical princesses never notice people like me?

I visited Moore Street when all three of them were there. Roger kept playing records that I had never heard, but which became favourites of mine. If it had not been for Roger, I would never have heard *Crisis! What Crisis?* by Supertramp. That album has never been played on radio, although Supertramp became popular later in the 1970s. Roger played *American Stars and Bars* by Neil Young. Like many other people, even today, I rather dismissed Neil Young because I had heard only *Harvest*. *American Stars and Bars*, with 'Like a Hurricane', the first of Young's power-guitar anthems, made me a permanent fan. It was because of Roger I discovered Lou Reed — not *Berlin*, Roger's favourite, but *Coney Island Baby*.

Roger, Randal and Claudia agreed that I was somebody who should be rescued from lonely isolation at 72 Carlton Street. Randal made this his crusade. Some days I had to chase him away in order to get some work done. (Unlike Stephen Campbell, another friend of mine, he was not much use for producing fanzines.)

Roger was less insistent than the others about the crusade, but one night he knocked on the door at midnight. 'How'd you like to come around for dinner?' he said. Since I had last eaten at 6 o'clock, and was feeling peckish and lonely, I followed Roger to Moore Street. There I found the main room full of people. I can't remember where they had been or why they hadn't eaten, but Randal and Claudia began preparing food at midnight.

At two o'clock in the morning we sat down to the one of the grandest feasts I've ever been to. It was the first time I really saw Roger in action as the Great Celebrator. He was able to draw the best out of everybody in that room. From then on, I took it as an axiom that even a social troglodyte like me would always

enjoy a social occasion organised by Roger.

Roger's dinner parties become art events. Not that he cooked home dinners, or paid for restaurant meals. All he had to do was ring you. You dropped everything to make sure you attended these events. If you sat down between two people you didn't know, Roger made sure you got to know them. If you didn't, he changed seats to sit next to you. If the whole dinner party failed to sparkle, he managed to get everybody to change chairs. This was hell on the waiters.

Randal and Claudia moved to a large two-storey terrace house in Rathdowne Street, Carlton, leaving Roger by himself at Moore Street. Tony Sullivan, the almost invisible fourth member of the Moore Street household, had already moved. Charles Taylor moved into the new Rathdowne Street slanshack. Roger could not afford the rent, so he gave up the Moore Street house and moved in with Elaine and Frank.

Meanwhile, Elaine had picked up Apple Blossom on a building site at 1 a.m. one morning while walking home from the Easter 1976 Convention held at Ormond College, Melbourne University. (All the action of this saga takes place within walking distance.) Roger and Apple Blossom fell in love.

## II

In the end, 'Roger's cat' Apple Blossom outlived him by two weeks. Roger died on 3 December 1992, and Apple Blossom on 18 December. Not that Roger ever owned Apple Blossom; she owned him. So did every cat that Roger ever patted.

When Roger shared the house at 10 Johnston Street, Collingwood, with Elaine and two other people in 1976, he was already a person who slept during the day and lived by night. When he arrived home at some late hour, he listened to records on headphones. Sitting in the bean bag, he fell asleep. Apple Blossom fell asleep on top of him. When they were both awake and in the same house, Roger teased Apple Blossom. She spat and howled and clawed, having a wonderful time. She had the world's second-best vocabulary of cat swear words. Apple Blossom lived in the same house as Roger for only about four months. He ran out of money, and returned to his parents' place. Elaine and Frank asked the other person to leave, and I joined the household.

After Elaine and I got together, each time that Roger visited he called first to Apple Blossom, who always expected to be picked up and teased. Howl, spit, claw. What fun! In 1982, when Roger returned from overseas, and had been away from our house for about a year, Apple Blossom remembered him immediately. After Roger died, when his father visited us, Apple Blossom tottered towards him because for a moment it seemed that Brent Weddall's voice was that of his son.

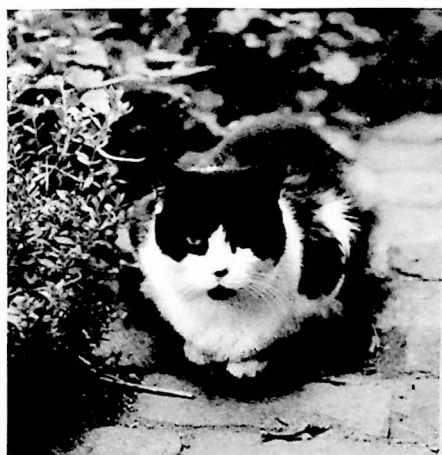
## III

In October 1976 I was still in love, to the amusement,

annoyance and embarrassment of everybody I knew. Instead of Worshipping From Afar, my usual approach to falling in love, I had Declared Myself. And got nowhere. But I still lived within a hundred yards of the Beloved. No, I was not ordered from the door. Claudia and Randal always welcomed me whenever I visited, as they welcomed everybody else in Melbourne fandom. It was quite common for a nightbird such as Don Ashby to call in at Rathdowne Street at midnight because he saw an upstairs light. Rathdowne Street became host to some of the most spectacular parties I've ever staggered away from.

For the first and only time in my life, I began to hold parties at my eyrie in Carlton Street. I went as close as I've ever been to madness. I needed people desperately. If I couldn't entice them around for a beer or a yarn, I would find any available excuse to visit them. Carlton Street became the epicentre of one instant party after another. Roger and I began to demolish bottles of Southern Comfort as if they were mineral water. During one party at my place, Roger succumbed to alcohol early in the night. He locked himself in the toilet and wouldn't emerge. Fortunately, long-suffering Martin, who lived in the flat below, was away for the night, so the rest of us could use the downstairs loo. When everybody else had left, Roger was still in the loo. I hauled the spare mattress down to the kitchen. Next morning, he was lying on it. He was lying so still that Flodnap, my cat who was so shy that nobody but me had set eyes on him for months, was circling him unafraid. For a few moments I thought Roger had died. He got up, said 'Good morning: I'm fine', staggered up to divan in the living room, and fell asleep there for another four hours.

One night in late October, one of my parties finished with Roger, Claudia and I sitting together on my living-room floor. Fuelled by Southern Comfort and cof-



Apple Blossom.

fee, we talked all night. It was bizarre magic. At dawn, Roger and I walked Claudia back to Rathdowne Street. We all said goodbye, and I floated home.

I slept for a few hours, and woke to the strangest weather I have ever witnessed in Melbourne. A seamless shroud of luminous orange cloud glowed across the sky. The weather was early-summer warm, but not yet hot. There was no wind. We all waited for the total eclipse of the sun. Roger had gone with a group of MUSFAns to the hills to observe the eclipse. I had been invited to Claudia's mother's place to join the eclipse-watchers there. The air became quite still. It became nearly dark, and the air glowed. I glowed, and knew I would never again feel such a stranger to myself.

Leigh Edmonds called the events of my life during October and November 1976 my 'crushing blows'. For years afterward ignorant fans believed that my entire function in life was to fall under crushing blows of ever more devastating strength. Within twenty-four hours, (a) Claudia told me very clearly of what she thought of the ragged idiot (me) who kept claiming her affections without having the slightest reason for doing so; (b) the estate agent sent a letter saying that the house at Carlton Street would be sold, and that I should leave the flat as soon as possible; and (c) it became obvious that my regular freelance employer had dispensed with my services for the time being.

Within a month I found a job of sorts (half-time assistant editor of *The Secondary Teacher* for the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association, at a miserable pro rata salary), but not until I had nearly run out of money. I survived only because Bruce Barnes, a kindly soul who is constantly in the background of all this action, lent me a large amount of money in order to set up *SF Commentary* as a commercially run magazine. Business success, as ever, evaded me, but the loan gave me an improbably provident cushion of money during those difficult months. During my enforced holiday I published some of the best issues of *SF Commentary*, but they produced few new subscriptions.

I decided to become a sensible person again, but this proved impossible. After spending most of my life trying to keep human beings at arm's length, I found I needed them very badly. Or was it simply that visits from friendly people gave me an excuse to drink too much?

I visited Elaine and Frank and Roger several times at Johnston Street, Collingwood. This old bluestone house had always been a gathering place for MUSFA people. However, Frank was often at Melbourne University, studying for fifth year Medicine exams, and Roger was rarely home. He returned very late at night, and woke up sometime during the day. Already Elaine and I were enjoying each other's company.

Soon my worries had narrowed to one problem: where would I live? Upstairs at 72 Carlton Street was the first place that was really *mine*. It was my home; I could not face the thought of living anywhere else. I

was offered a few rooms in a vacant house, but I could tell from the description that my books and records and duplicating equipment could not fit there. The Final Notice to Quit arrived in January 1977.

In January Chris Priest and Vonda McIntyre arrived in town to conduct, with George Turner, the second large SF Writers' Workshop. (Ursula Le Guin had conducted the first in 1975.) Vonda visited a fan gathering at my place. People dropped in from everywhere to say hello to Vonda. Elaine and Frank visited as well. On that night, only about a week before I had to leave Carlton Street, they offered to accommodate me at Johnston Street. Roger had run out of money, and was returning to his parents' place. Elaine and Frank wanted to get rid of the other bloke. And I needed two entire rooms, plus a lot of the store room, to fit in my junk. And it was decided that night. I had always said that I would not share a house with other people — but I had grown desperate for company, and I needed the accommodation.

This story has become more about me than about Roger. Roger had separate groups of friends, entire worlds of people who did not know each other, but knew Roger well. He would disappear for weeks at a time, then visit every night for a week. Yet we never had a sense that he was slighting us. Of course he would always return. He would be drawn back by Apple Blossom as well as the other cats. The household now included Solomon and Ishtar, Elaine's cats from 1973/74, my cat Flodnap (inadvertently named by Randal in 1976), and Julius, a half-wild black kitten who was, strictly speaking, Flodnap's cat. I suspect the real reason why Elaine asked me to move to Johnston Street was because one day at Carlton Street Julius fell at her feet and declared his unending devotion to her. And thus it was until Julius disappeared in 1980.

#### IV

1977 was a difficult year. I had little money, and I was living a household in which Frank and I whinged at each other whenever we saw each other. I was sharing space with Elaine. We discovered that we ran the household together rather well. As far as I knew, she and Frank were a permanent couple, so I didn't allow myself to think libidinous thoughts. I published some magazines, wrote a bit, and generally wished I could find a way back to 72 Carlton Street. (The house sold for \$50,000 at the beginning of 1977, was renovated and sold for \$100,000 two years later, never occupied before it was sold again two years after that for \$150,000, and would be worth at least \$350,000 these days. This property-speculative process explains why none of us lives in Carlton these days.) The VSTA job seemed designed to make me feel incompetent — the lowest of the low. I gained some extra money by typing (including the first draft of what eventually became Gerald Murnane's *The Plains*) or editing occasional monographs for the company that had dumped me in

late 1976.

1977 was also a healing year. I saw Randal and Claudia very little, so I regained a sense of perspective. I reduced my drinking, sobered by the rapidly rising price of alcohol during the mid-1970s. Roger turned to tequila from Southern Comfort; I was content to go back to beer or Coca Cola. Except for typing *Yggdrasil*, MUSFA's magazine, during that year, I was out of much of its activity.

The more I was sure that my life had stopped altogether, the more it moved towards great change.

Frank finished sixth year Medicine, and in December 1977 was offered a residency at Hobart Hospital. Elaine and I were left in the house together. Things did not seem well at Rathdowne Street. On the day when Roger introduced me to Patti Smith's *Easter* album, Claudia and Randal seemed hardly to be talking to each other. Roger, Alan, Dennis and the other MUSFA members were attempting to organise their first national convention for Easter 1978. Within twenty-four hours, both Roger Zelazny and Brian Aldiss accepted Roger's invitation to be the guest of honour at the convention. Roger moved house to Nicholson Street, Abbotsford, to live next door to Don Ashby, who had moved after the Magic Pudding Club broke up.

After a month of growing desperation, I asked Elaine if she would live with me. She said maybe, but flew to Hobart to work out with Frank if their relationship was actually over. It was, and I was deliriously happy. Elaine seemed pleased about the new arrangement, although she probably would have liked a bit more freedom from stress to decide the direction of her life.

Roger asked Don for a Tarot card reading about the rapidly approaching Easter convention. After giving his reading, Don threw away his cards. Is disaster, he reasoned, in the prediction or the expectation? And can the person who tells the cards escape the upcoming catastrophe?

Roger was merely one of a committee who ran Unicon IV, the notorious 1978 Easter Convention, but somehow he copped all the blame for its failures. His crime was to be the most visible to a group of upstarts who were trying to put on conventions without the help of the 'real fans'. The convention events were quite enjoyable, and I had a good time.

But my position was supposed to be *the* Ditmar Awards Committee. My decisions should have been absolute, so that the committee could not be accused of self interest. But the committee had allowed on the ballot (and allowed to win) MUSFA's own magazine. Worse, the committee changed my casting vote in one category. A rebel meeting during the convention declared several winners void. The recounted results pleased no one. When the awards had been given out, I received a non-Ditmar committee award for my work with Norstrilia Press. At the end of the day, the committee gathered all the attractive green lucite trophies

for engraving. I kept mine. The other trophies disappeared into the Geology Building of Melbourne University, never to be seen again. Mine is still on the mantel.

The 1978 Convention had two Guests of Honour stalking the corridors glaring at each other. Roger Zelazny and Brian Aldiss each put on good shows for the crowd, and Elaine and I had several wonderful long chats with Brian. But Roger Weddall was blamed for the situation. Some years later, he visited Brian in England and they made friends again.

Roger's crime? Oh, he was young and naive in 1978. All through January, February and March 1978 he would insist on saying: 'Everything will turn out all right at the convention, you'll see.'

Then as now, I never trust anyone who says everything will turn out all right on the night.

Roger has rarely been under greater pressure than during those months. We knew his personal life was in tatters, but he could not tell us how or why. The convention was *not* all right on the night, but it was more memorable than any dozen perfectly run conventions held since.

Roger took everything right on the chest. So did Alan, Dennis and a few others who remained members of the convention committee. Nothing annoyed his critics more than Roger's relentless cheerfulness. In the end, that cheerfulness saved the convention and made Roger quite a few lifelong enemies.

A few days after the Convention, Claudia rang. She had split up with Randal. Could she bunk down at our place for a fortnight until she could find somewhere else to live? She arrived, but we hardly saw her. Soon she departed to join a strangely mixed household in northern Carlton (including Henry Gasko, Keith Taylor and Carey Handfield, as I remember it), and set out to make up for lost time. Roger and she were now, we were told, 'an item'. Okay, I thought, that settles that. That's how things should have been all along.

And Roger? Not for the first or last time, Roger disappeared. When Claudia visited his place, he was never there. Distraught, she would go next door. Don and whoever else was semi-living in the house at the time welcomed Claudia. A few months later, Claudia and Don began living together, and did so for five years.

## V

From 1978 onwards, Roger appears less frequently in my story, yet becomes more and more a mainstay of it.

Roger made grand appearances. He disappeared for months at a time. Then a phone call. 'Why don't we go out somewhere?' And it would be the best night out for months. We went with Roger, Charlie and Gerald and Catherine Mumane to the Mermaid Restaurant before it burned down. One night when we felt rich we took Roger and Charlie to Two Faces, by reputation the most expensive restaurant in Melbourne. \$100 for the



four of us? Yes, that was expensive in 1979. The food came in tiny portions, and did not seem remarkable. The wine cellar was magical. The bottle of 1972 Wynn's Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon we had that night is the best bottle of wine I've ever tasted.

Roger and Charlie were sharing a house in Whitby Street, Brunswick. At the same time, Roger had gone back to university to do one subject a year. He joined what was called the Part Timers' Association, which connected him with a completely new group of friends. Some of them were also in MUSFA, but many were not involved in science fiction. Charlie got a job teaching at Monivae College in Hamilton, in the Western District of Victoria. We saw him once or twice a year. Roger moved house many times.

In 1980, Roger set out on his first overseas trip. He worked out a way to extend the life of his Eurail pass. He often slept on the train to save on expenses. In a letter that he sent to Phil and Mandy, he drew a map of his European rail travels. The crisscrossing lines blacken the middle of the continent. He visited almost every country, and went to some, such as Finland and Hungary, whose languages were too difficult even for him. He walked along the coast of Cornwall to Lands End, and visited Bergen, the northernmost railway station in the world. He sent vast letters written in mountains of tiny writing. His photos, particularly of Norway in winter, were magical. On the way home, he visited Sri Lanka. A few weeks later, when we took him to Phantom India restaurant, he asked for the hottest curry in the house. He ate it, too.

There were odd elisions in his account of the journey. What really did happen during that glorious Christmas Eve at Innsbruck? Roger would never tell us, although he told a few people. He did tell us about the girl he spent some time with. They arranged to meet a few months later in Paris, but Roger said that he simply could not bring himself to turn up to meet the appointment. The lady obviously had marriage on her mind, and Roger (it always seemed to me) was determined to avoid permanent relationships of any kind.

Roger was always master of the information brick wall. I remembered a night at Enri's Restaurant about a year before Roger went overseas. We had dinner with a friend of mine who counted himself as a bit of a psychologist. Roger managed to get Rick's life story out of him without any trouble. When Rick began to ask questions of Roger, he gained nothing.

The head of the Lifeline telephone counselling service, speaking at Roger's funeral, said that although he had worked with Roger for six years, he had learned about his connection with science fiction only the day before!

I still wonder what Roger really discovered about himself during his first overseas trip.

When he returned, he was still the same Roger. He still regarded the company of other people as the only valid focus of his life. He visited his friends regularly,

offering gossip, humour and even advice and comfort when needed.

When he returned, he was *not* still the same Roger. During the early 1980s he began to shrug off many of his butterfly tendencies. For the first time, he would commit himself to a time and date, and *actually turn up at the right time on the right date*. For the first time he committed himself to regular publication of a fanzine. He and Peter Burns took over *Thyme* magazine from Irwin Hirsh and Andrew Brown. In that magazine Roger showed journalistic skills and powers of wit and sarcasm that nobody had suspected. Some people were determined to be annoyed by Roger's repartee; others realised that he had an unerring eye for the true pattern of events. As someone once said of Jane Austen — he might have been protected from the truth, but precious little of the truth was protected from him.

Elaine and I remember Roger best because he helped us so often. In 1982 and 1984 he allowed us to take trips to Mount Buffalo because he minded the house and took care of the cats while we were away. After we returned from our first Mount Buffalo trip in 1982, the woman who lived next door said: 'What has that man been doing to your cats? They've gone completely mad!' Of course, Roger knew exactly the right way to entertain cats.

Roger's 1985 overseas trip was quite a different journey from the 1980–81 lark. We received almost no letters. Several long letters from Egypt went astray. We still don't know why he went to Egypt of all places. On the way overseas, he lost his luggage. (It stayed in an airline office in Manila for six months until he returned for it.) In Egypt, he suffered a near-fatal road accident. Or rather, it would have been fatal if the bloke he was travelling with hadn't been an American. Transferred to the American hospital, his body completely wrapped in plaster, Roger gradually improved. Eventually he reached Britain, then home.

After he returned from the 1985 trip, Roger began to acquire an unexpected quality — purpose. Roger had always lived every moment as it came, usually successfully, but often to not much effect. Again he took up the reins of *Thyme* (from Peter Burns, who had successfully pretended to be Roger the whole time he was away). *Thyme* won a Fanzine Diemar in 1987.

Roger became a volunteer of the telephone counselling service known as Lifeline. He took this activity very seriously, often going away for weekend training courses, and eventually becoming a trainer of counsellors. To judge from the eulogy given at the funeral by the head of Lifeline, Roger was one of the most effective counsellors they ever had.

Roger got a job. A real job. He became a social worker with Bridge House, a halfway house to train intellectually handicapped people to join the general community. As far as I know, he was very good at that job.

Roger disappeared again. Spectacularly. The people



Roger playing croquet during his American trip, September 1992. (Photo: Dick and Nicki Lynch.)

with whom he was sharing a flat did not see him. They woke up in the morning to find attached to the refrigerator a brief note and enough money to pay the rent and expenses. They guessed that he had, after all these years, become involved with somebody. They did not know how far he was taking the experiment.

After a yum cha lunch at King Wah Restaurant in the city, Roger took the tram home with us. This was unusual, as we thought he had been avoiding us. As we were clumping along Koele Street, I overheard him telling Elaine that he had just broken up with a particular bloke. His first attempt at a serious relationship had been a perplexing disaster.

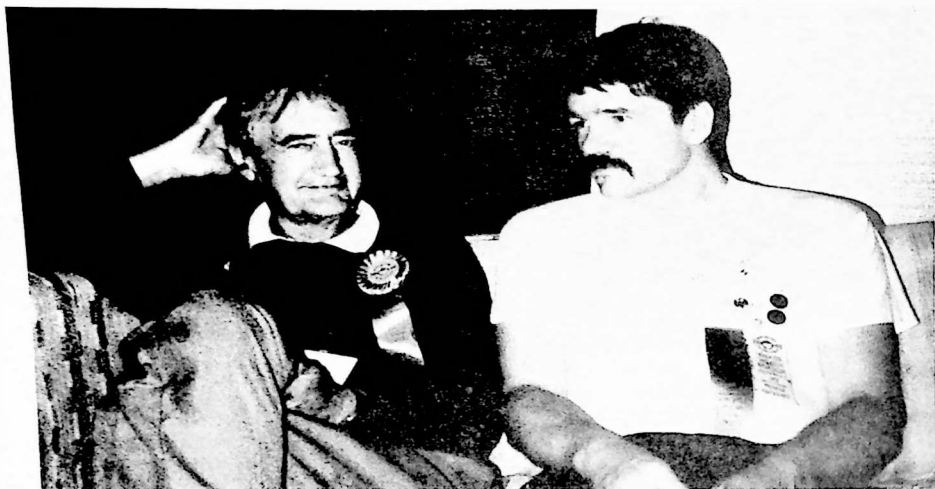
I don't think we were surprised to be told, in the most offhand way, that Roger had decided he was gay. Or rather, that for him sexual relationships with men had become more satisfactory than his many relationships with women had been. Many bits of the Roger

pattern began to fall into place.

Later we surmised that for many years Roger had been deeply puzzled about his sexual identity, probably beginning with the failure of his relationship with Claudia. Some event during his 1985 overseas trip had made him decide that a satisfying homosexual relationship might have been what he was seeking.

As I said, only during the 1980s did Roger gain a sense of purpose. Soon after his first relationship failed, he introduced us to a bloke named Geoff Roderick. They set up house together. Geoff is a very quiet bloke when you first meet him, but Elaine and I felt from the first that he was exactly the person Roger had been looking for all his life. (Yet for many years Roger did not know he was looking for anything, let alone anyone.)

Roger and Geoff's good luck ran deep for about four years. And then . . .



Walt Willis (left) and Roger at Conspiracy (World Convention, September 1992).

## VI

In *The Metaphysical Review* 19, you can read about our Garden Party. Right there at the beginning of May 1992, it was one of the few highlights of a dismal year. It wouldn't have been a great celebration without Roger's attendance. Roger sparkled. Everybody sparkled, especially Monty our cat. Roger introduced Geoff to Claudia.

A few weeks later Theodore, our ginger cat, couldn't pee again. (I've told the story of Theodore's ghastly 1992 in my reply to Mac Strelkov elsewhere in this issue.) Roger rang. 'Geoff and I want to visit. We have some pretty bad news to tell you.' 'Even worse than a cat who can't pee?' I said. 'Yes,' said Roger, 'it's even worse news than that.'

On 30 May 1992 Roger and Geoff arrived at our place. The place had been full of visitors all day. It took awhile before Roger could begin his story. He had suffered a lump under the arm about six months before. It had been diagnosed as 'cat scratch fever'. The lump returned. It had been tested a couple of days before our Garden Party. In late May it had been diagnosed as lymphoma, but doctor said that it could be treated successfully.

Roger swore us to secrecy. He knew that the lymphoma was very dangerous, but all the medical personnel assured him that he should be optimistic. A Chinese doctor in Richmond said: 'I can cure you!' but put Roger on an unexciting 'treatment' of meditation and macrobiotic food. The important thing was optimism. We weren't allowed to be anything but optimistic. We would rather not have known the secret at all, especially as we could not say what we really felt. We could

not even say: 'Roger, if your life is nearing the end, why not end it properly? Let's talk about all the good and bad times. Roger, have you made your will?' (He hadn't.) 'Roger, let's say goodbye.' But we could never allow ourselves to say goodbye.

Roger won the DUFF trip to America. He was greatly pleased at the honour given to him, and he and Geoff had made elaborate plans to travel through America and Europe for six months or more. However, he had to tell some people about his condition because he had to cut short his August–September trip to America in order to return to Australia for chemotherapy. When Roger returned, it was found that the cancer had travelled to a section of his spine, giving him dreadful pain. Treatment actually removed the growth in his spine, but not until he had been placed on heavy pain-killers. Also, no treatment could stop the growth and eventual spread of the original tumour.

We knew, as few people did, that he was ill and in great pain during the last two public events he attended — the farewell party for Mark Loney, and Mark and Vanessa's wedding. But Roger sparkled during Mark's party. Nobody could have suspected he was ill. I'm told that it was obvious he was in pain during the wedding, but in photos taken then he looks no different than most people remember him.

For Elaine and me, Roger *appeared* ill only about a fortnight before he died. Very few people ever saw him other than the exemplar of amiable energy photographed so well by Dick and Nicki Lynch in the latest issue of *Mimosa*.

On 3 December, Geoff phoned us late in the afternoon to tell us Roger had died. He invited us to the

ERIC WATTS from Atlanta, Georgia, was one of many Americans who met Roger Weddall for the first time during Roger's DUFF trip in August-September 1992. This is part of a letter he sent to Geoff Roderick in December 1993:

Your news of Roger's death stunned me and Rob. After reading your letter, Rob and I toasted his memory and reminisced about our short friendship with him. Certainly our grief can in no way compare to the loss which you must have suffered. . . .

I feel very sure that you already know that at 1993's Worldcon in San Francisco, one of the panel programs was a 'wake' held in Roger's honour. Both Rob and I attended the panel, and several of Roger's other friends. The hour was filled with many of his friends sharing the best memories of their friendships with him. Seldom have I attended any function where there was so much love and warmth flowing throughout the room. Rob and I amazed at how much genuine affection so many people felt for him. It sounds so hokey to put it into words, but Roger truly was loved around the world. . . . I wish you had been able to attend this very emotional panel.

— Eric Watts, 13 December 1993

## Roger's last postcard to us

Elaine, Bruce, hi. So far I've been to SF, Seattle (where Denise Manning was 4 1/2  
 cities all in peace!... perhaps you should study how she does it?)  
 Chicago (for about 11 hrs! Dr. Joan Munkel-Wade is one of those special special  
 people. My my), Atlanta (well, Georgia. Richard took us up to the Apple-  
 Valley area near N. Caroline and then down south to near Warm Springs...  
 and there's so much to see, including everything - a lot like my last  
 (foster - going) and now I'm in Birmingham at the Japhen  
 Family Reunion. Chet's Pastor and the McGreethers are  
 a big key I find. Bruce, as you've reported, the Americans -  
 even the ones on the street - are so friendly, outgoing, but  
 coincident... I'll be - and big party - with a little time off for sleep  
 Actually, up until Birmingham things were so rushed - I was getting worn  
 out. Depression hits in the background. So do the things. (and his  
 that for a couple's comment - which I know you'll understand) I was  
 finally I'm (I'll be) and I've been having a wonderful time. I was  
 fascinating journey! Anyway, see you soon to the  
 Birmingham, ALABAMA

GREETINGS FROM  
 BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA



Post Card

BRUCE & ELAINE

59 KEELE ST.

COLLINGWOOD

3066

AUSTRALIA

hospital to make our own farewells. There we met Beryl and Brandon, Roger's mother and father, Deb, his sister, and Dai, who lives with Deb. In 1979 Roger's father had built the renovations for our Keele Street house before we moved there from Johnston Street, but I had never met Roger's mother before. I had also never met Deb or Dai. It was a bit startling to meet Deb, since she resembles her brother very much. Within a few minutes we felt we knew her and Dai.

We went to say goodbye to Roger. As when my father died, I felt that the unmoving shape on the bed had very little to do with the person we had known. After all, hadn't Roger always represented the Spirit of Life Itself? And if that life disappears, cannot it reappear?

Roger's funeral at the Springvale Necropolis on 8 December was the saddest event I've ever attended. Many of the several hundred people who were there had not known Roger was ill until after he died. His co-workers at Lifeline and Bridge House were as afflicted as his family and the hundred or so fans who attended. The service included a brief section from Vaughan Williams' 'The Lark Ascending', Roger's favourite piece of music, and a eulogy. The celebrant spoke some paragraphs that Elaine and I had written. The head of Lifeline spoke about Roger's work with that organisation. And Deb, courageous, said: 'Roger was no saint; he was unique.'

Roger was unique because he was the only person I have ever met whose central interest was other people. Not just selected individuals or groups, but all people. Roger was equally available to all his friends. He paid absolute attention to our concerns, and remembered what was important to us. He made patterns from people, seeing unexpected connections between them or healing emotional wounds. There were only a few people he gave up on, usually egocentric people who could not stand slights or prickings of their pomposity.

Roger became angry with friends who sold themselves short. A few weeks before he told us about the cancer results, he listened to me wondering whether I would ever make a success of anything non-fannish. 'Let's face it, Bruce,' he said. 'You're a failure! Enjoy it.' What he was trying to say but couldn't was: there are much worse things than petty abstractions like 'failure'. His impatience and his words seemed strangely liberating at the time, but gained extra meaning when I learned of his illness.

Roger's great strength was also a weakness. He never finished his degree in Psychology because the university course made it into an abstract study. Because he did not finish his degree, Roger could never get the jobs for which he was really suited until he

gained the position at Bridge House.

In times of trouble, I trust the dream machine in my head to tell me what is really happening.

In one dream, I was sitting in the next room while Roger and Elaine were talking. I wanted to go in there and say, 'Why are you talking like this as if nothing is wrong? Roger will be dead tomorrow.' When I woke up, it took me some minutes to realise that it had been a dream. I dreamt it on the night after the funeral, but my main feeling remains disbelief that Roger is no longer a central part of my own story.

Another dream was surrealistic, but just as vivid. I was on an train travelling around a curved valley. The carriages of the train had running boards on the side, as in Western movies. Rocky Lawson appeared as a train-napper. He was climbing along the running boards outside the carriages, attempting to stop the train. He reached the engine, and I'm not sure what happened. The train stopped suddenly. Carriages spilled off the rails into the valley. The engine was balanced on its back end. People wandered around hurt and dazed, but nobody was killed. I was unhurt, but had no idea how to help the others. Suddenly Roger was there. I stared at him in disbelief. He shrugged. 'Sure, I'm back,' he said, as if I should never have doubted otherwise. 'I'll be leaving in a transcendental ascent into heaven next time, but you won't be there to see it. Now let's help these people.'

In another dream, Melbourne University's Union building was a giant glass palace featuring a double-storey restaurant. I was at one huge table of diners, and went to get some extra wine for the table. As I looked down the sweeping staircase between the two floors, I saw the other group of diners I had promised to be with that night. I went down to talk to them, and they begged me to stay. But I still had to fetch the wine for the table upstairs! I had no idea how to resolve the situation. At the end of the dream, dressed in nothing but shirt and shorts, I was running in the driving rain away from the Union building.

I suspect my dream showed me what life was often like for Roger. He promised so much to everybody that often he was caught in the middle of all us, unable entirely to enjoy the celebration.

But Roger enjoyed most of his life. What I'm really mourning is life for all of us who are left. We're all stuck for someone to talk to in an emergency. We don't know to whom we can tell all those secrets and jokes we could only tell Roger. We don't really believe what's happened. And maybe we never will.

— Bruce Gillespie, 5 March 1993



## Yvonne Rousseau: MEMORIES OF ROGER

I knew Roger Weddall for about ten years, having met him for the first time on Sunday 26 September 1982 at Keele Street in Collingwood when Bruce Gillespie and Elaine Cochrane invited us both to lunch in order that we should meet one another. Roger was eleven years younger than me, but we agreed (discussing it much later) that subconsciously we thought of one another as contemporaries. There was even a remarkable similarity in our age on the birthdays that had made us feel oldest: for me, it was my twentieth — for Roger, his nineteenth. These were the only birthdays when each of us felt that our whole lives had been wasted: our youth irrevocably gone — so many years behind us, and nothing accomplished.

For my daughter Vida, on the other hand, the most memorable of Roger's birthdays was his thirtieth — because of an incident during the party he held to celebrate it on the evening of Saturday 18 January 1986 at his house in Rathdowne Street, North Carlton. Many of us were seated on the floor when Roger decided that the light bulb above us was too bright. He hospitably set about changing it for something dimmer — without first turning the light off. Roger had not bargained for the light bulb's being as hot as it was, and Mark Linnemman had not bargained for suddenly receiving an exploding hot light bulb in his lap. Each of them seemed both puzzled and startled (Roger more puzzled, and Mark more startled).

When I first met him in 1982, Roger had recently taken over the editorship of *Thyme* from Irwin Hirsh and Andrew Brown. Indeed, Roger was either editor or co-editor of *Thyme* for almost all of the time that I knew him while I was living in Melbourne. (He finally gave it up in February 1987 — and it was less than a year later that I moved from Melbourne to Adelaide, in January 1988.) As an editor, Roger thought constructively about directions for his fanzine; at the end of July 1985, for example, he wrote that, instead of publishing 'general reviews of any sort of sf, the motivation behind the critical material in "Thyme" is much more focused, following the pattern I had thought out for it just before I went overseas, and which has now begun to unfold. [...] The idea is for "Thyme" to review all (if possible) new Australian sf — novels, mainly, of course — and other such material as may be topical to review at the time.' His intention was for *Thyme* to become 'a forum for the study of Australian sf'. In a postscript to this letter, Roger demonstrated another characteristic that made him outstanding both as an editor and a friend, when (after thanking me for letting *Thyme* reprint my review of George Turner's *In the Heart or in the Head* from the Melbourne Age), he

dispelled the impression I should otherwise have had of publishing into a vacuum: 'It was a delight, and something which a few people privately commented on to me, all in praise of what you said and the way you said it. Bravo.'

There were many similar instances: Roger had a genius for keeping people in touch with what other people in fandom were thinking and doing — and he would ponder one's case during one's absence, and then offer advice about the best direction for one's talents (in my case, he recommended writing fiction rather than criticism). I was vividly aware of Roger's responsiveness not only to other people's anecdotes or ideas, but also to their troubles. (I have seen a person literally crying on his shoulder at a convention — having confided in him about a medical ordeal she was soon to undergo.) After I moved to Adelaide, I also became aware (equally vividly) of Roger's genius for inspiring other people to scandalous thoughts (in my case — the Ditmar category 'Best Fannish Cat'; in Lucy Sussex's — the DUFF candidature of the Rogers Street Laundry Door; in John Foyster's — the Peter Nicholls Theme Park).

Looking at Roger — tall and amiable, with broad shoulders and a broad chest — I associated him with health, strength and longevity. It always seemed obvious that he would outlive me. And the shock of his absence now is constantly being renewed because we were keeping one another posted about so many unfinished sagas: when another instalment eventuates, my immediate thought is of how Roger will respond to it. He was notable for listening with a completeness of attention that nobody else could offer; but this was not at all disconcerting, because it was apparent that he listened equally attentively to many others.

A frequent conversational gambit was, 'Now, tell me, Yvonne' — whereupon I was likely first of all to be told (in order to be given a chance to explain) what other people (unnamed) had reported that I had been saying or doing. This kind of disclosure is salutary: it makes clear to one how very seldom others receive the impression one hopes and even believes that one is conveying. Someone once said to me, 'Roger often gets things wrong.' But my impression was, rather, that he let people know what they would otherwise have no idea was being generally said about them — thus giving them a chance to put the record straight. He judged for himself whether one person's version was more credible than another's.

An example of Roger's attempting to shed light occurred in April 1984, when in *Thyme* 34 he published Mandy Herriot's complaint about the Aussiecon Two



Yvonne Rousseau,  
photographed by Elaine  
Cochrane in 1987 during  
the first of the Botanical  
Gardens picnics instigated  
by Roger Weddall.

committee. Roger expanded on Mandy's complaint by describing the impression of disunity that the committee had been making on fandom: 'Personally I prefer for things to be kept out in the open', Roger explained — giving his advice on how to improve matters, and hoping that 'people will possibly work together to prove that what I've said isn't so.' In consequence (in Easter 1984, at the Victoria Hotel in Melbourne during the 23rd national convention, Eureka!con), I observed Roger listening in a manner expressing both complete attention and willingness-to-be-persuaded-if-only-a-reason-was-provided as Christine Ashby (the Aussiecon committee's Treasurer) delivered an impassioned rebuke. The tone of this tongue-lashing was being accepted dispassionately, as an aspect of the universe. There was no hint of Roger's feeling either angered or cowed by it; he was simply attending to what Christine said.

As for Roger's gift for unpredictable absurdist mischief — this partly developed from his talent for bringing into play both the strengths and the weaknesses of one's personality. If the result was unfortunate, one had only oneself to blame. I recall with great affection his frequent disbelieving-and-reproachful-yet-subtly-elicitng response ('Oh, Yvonne!') and his elaborately inventive explanations of the reasoning behind some other person's actions ('Oh, now I see: . . .'). In this manner, he both created the opportunity and provided the catalyst for ideas that would never otherwise have come into being: the 'Best Fannish Cat', for example.

When Roger stayed with John Foyster and me in Adelaide in January 1991, and sat down at our dining-room table one evening to ask Roman Orszanski and me whether we could think of some interesting Ditmar categories, he seemed utterly confident that each of us could dredge up something wonderful, if only we would take the trouble. If we disappointed him, it was clear that he would bear up gallantly; but the blow to his trusting nature would be painful. The implicit flat-

tery was well aimed: living up to Roger's expectations became my paramount consideration — as it had been when he telephoned me in late 1987 to disclose that there was a new DUFF candidate (the Rogers Street Laundry Door), and to ask whether I could oblige him (on the spur of the moment) by thinking up an encomium on its fitness. The rage that both the Door and the Cat unexpectedly provoked in others ought (I know) to be an education to me.

As for the genesis of the Peter Nicholls Theme Park — in May 1990 Roger wrote us a letter remarking upon the mixing of 'myth with factual narrative' in John's fanzine *Doxy*, and conjecturing that Peter Nicholls might become 'one of the "themes"' in its future 'reportage'. Again, Roger provided an opportunity and a catalyst: it remains a mystery to me why his notion of a theme should instantly inspire John with the concept of a theme park.

Another plan that Roger made when visiting us in Adelaide never came to fruition. In March 1992, he and Roman and I developed a scheme to hold an Australian variant of the Corflu convention. Roger went back to Melbourne, and reported this to Bruce Gillespie as a scheme to hold the world Corflu convention in Australia. Upon discovering this, Roman and I put our heads together, and I rang Bruce and asked him what he felt about our plan to hold the World Corflu Convention in a marquee — erected on the vacant block that he and Elaine had bought next to their house. (This would be a venue that Bruce could very easily get to.) Bruce was completely unfazed, and merely observed that the idea, though good, was impracticable, because of the rate at which Elaine was converting the block into garden. Almost certainly, our suggestion about Corflu had no part in inspiring Bruce and Elaine to erect a marquee for the garden party subsequently held on the vacant block on 3 May 1992.

Anecdotes about Roger are likely to reveal both his intelligence and his interest in how things work. When

letters to our post-office box in Norwood were being randomly 'returned to sender' by a postal worker. Roger addressed a letter to us at the post-office box, but wrote our residential address under his name as 'sender'. When he and I alighted from a bus in which we had been travelling on Adelaide's O-Bahn, where horizontal guide wheels automatically steer buses travelling at high speed on a raised concrete track, Roger bent down to see the retracted guide wheels, and made interested exclamations which very obviously pleased the bus driver (who had become accustomed to much more apathetic passengers).

In my first year in Adelaide, writing to thank Roger for his birthday card in August 1988, I confided: 'John rang you at your new telephone number while Vida and I were off seeing "The Incredible Shrinking Man" and "Forbidden Planet" — neither of which either of us had ever seen before. (How the audience laughed when ever-so-clever Morbius said words to the following general effect: "Why didn't I think of that?" — Jeff Harris, upon hearing of this, opined that once upon a time the audience would have been breathlessly silent at this point (possibly with minds racing frantically?); and I sensed from his demeanour that some might feel that times had changed somewhat sacrilegiously.)' Roger replied: 'Thanks — in return for the perhaps-too-large-a-canvas-of-fannish-life-in-Melbourne that I tried to essay — for a sketch of what things are like in Adelaide. I tried to imagine Jeff Harris sitting in a cinema, his brow furrowed in concentration as Dr Morbius cries "Why didn't I think of that?" but each time I broke out in laughter. Ah well.'

When he visited Adelaide in December 1989, Roger was staying in the suburb of Norwood with Alan and Carol Ferguson ('Yes, in Adelaide there is a Scottish fannish enclave,' Roger wrote to me in August 1988: 'Brit fans come out to see [Alan] and Carol, visit no one else; he does a fanzine that's read by British fans and me'). Roger was distributing publicity for *Danse Macabre* (the 29th national convention, which was to be held between Friday '12a' April and Monday 16 April 1990 at the Diplomat in Melbourne). I therefore accompanied him to the Adelaide sf and comics shops, where he introduced himself to the owners, explained about *Danse Macabre*, and handed out flyers and posters. When he introduced himself to Jacq Felis of Known Space Books, she mentioned in a depressed way that it was little use telling him her name because 'everybody' found it impossible to pronounce and called her 'Jack' or 'Jackie' instead. Roger requested her name nevertheless, and then assured her (in a quiet voice, so free from boasting that it cast inevitable doubt on the intelligence and courtesy of the 'Jack'-sayers) that he believed that pronouncing 'Jacq' was not beyond his own powers.

Roger's visit in 1989 also included the annual sf Christmas party — held at Allan and Lesley Bray's house on Saturday 9 December 1989. Michael Tolley

nobly and kindly drove us there, first collecting Roger (whom he had not met before), and then John Foyster and me, and then Roman Orszanski (who had to finish writing a paper, and had therefore arranged to be collected from outside the SUV radio station in North Terrace). At the party, people who were meeting Roger for the first time were soon confiding in him about the state of Adelaide fandom; thus he was soon able to surprise us with the news that there was a clique in Adelaide whose whole aim in life was to prevent anything happening in Adelaide fandom, and that the ringleaders of the clique were the Critical Mass people. John and Roman and I were fascinated to hear this, because John had inaugurated the Critical Mass discussion group when he came to Adelaide from Melbourne in 1987, and all of us were members. But none of us had ever had an inkling that fannish initiatives were being squashed all around us. I therefore carefully enquired: 'Er — was there any hint that those ringleaders might possibly be us?' Roger simply shook his head at us in a pained and saddened manner; one sensed that in future (thanks to his informant) no dastardly deed we might commit could ever amaze him.

Meanwhile, John had instructed people to bring to the party a list of 'the ten best sf books'. When the obedient party-goers had gathered together, he disclosed the game we were to play: the first player (and, thereafter, whichever person had made the most recent correct guess) would declaim from memory either the first or the last sentence of a book, or else give a précis of its plot, or else mime its title. I undertook to mime — putting my left hand under a low table and saying that this was the title. People looked to see what was under the table. So I put my hand under the table again — 'This is the title' — and then, 'This is not the title', waving my hand behind me elaborately to ensure that the light caught my wristwatch and wedding ring. Hand back under the table again — and, behind me, Roger exclaimed: 'Left hand of darkness!' The mime was thereupon judged a great success — but (despite all the 'of courses' intimating that someone else would very soon have guessed it) I was extremely grateful that Roger had been there.

For Roger's thirty-fifth birthday in 1991, I sent Sally Morgan's 'Men and Ducks' card, which shows nine identical stylized human figures in three rows of three. Each of them is in the arms-raised legs-apart resigned-to-being-frisked position. The people on the right are merely waiting their turn, but beside each of the others is a much taller identical duck, either balancing on its tail with its beak stretched across above the human's uplifted hands, or else balancing upside down with its beak stretched across under the human's feet and crotch. Inside the card, I mentioned in passing that it depicted the Customs Service's latest innovation at Australian airports: Giant Sniffer Ducks. Responding to this, Roger began by addressing John Foyster with: 'I was sad to see the extent to which the degenerative

brain disease which can come from drinking Adelaide tap water has now affected Yvonne. One can only hope that the extent to which her mind has become clouded will not hinder — and, perhaps, may even help — her with her writing of fiction.' This was written inside another of Sally Morgan's cards, entitled 'Hearts and Minds' — which Roger ended by elucidating (beautifully) for my benefit:

'Dear Yvonne, you will see here an illustration of a shocked dinner party of eight as they sit around at the traditional dinner table, having realised that they are unable to eat any of the food at the table because of the fact that all of their teeth are rotten. (Note the cleverly inlaid depiction of rotten throats, and gangrenous gums.) Since visiting their respective dentists for weeks previously, they have had nothing else on their minds — yet they have been looking forward to this party and have travelled many miles over the mountains for days to be here. The cusp moons refer both to how long it has taken each person to get to the party, and also how many teeth in all have most recently, cumulatively, been removed.'

During the 1992 Adelaide Arts Festival, Geoff Roderick and Roger stayed with us between the 29th of February and the 4th of March. On the evening of the 3rd of March, they took us out to dinner at the trendy Nediz Tu restaurant. At one point during the meal, Roger adopted the diffident yet resolute manner of somebody embarking upon the construction of a very elaborate house of cards, and laid out an opportunity for John to explain his own perspective on the troubles of the Aussiecon Two committee before John had resigned from chairing it on 6 August 1984. Roger made it plain that he knew what some other people's perspectives had been. In response, John described a particularly frustrating instance of inconsiderate non-communication that he encountered shortly before his resignation.

Later, as we walked from Nediz Tu to the bus stop, Roger and my daughter Vida were discussing what Vida had learnt about the various socialist organisations in Australia. The members of any socialist group where she made enquiries tended to warn her against the excesses of other seemingly likeminded parties: she had been told, for example, of one club's indoctrination camps in the hills near Melbourne. Vida was inclining at this time towards the 'Green Left' people — in other words, the local Democratic Socialist Party (publishers of the *Green Left* newspaper), who had formerly been the Socialist Workers Party (publishers of *Direct Action*). Listening constructively, as usual, Roger suddenly 'remembered' having heard of a particularly evil club in Adelaide which not only indoctrinated people but also prevented them from associating afterwards with relatives and friends with incorrect political views. It was no use trying to remember the former name of this organisation, because he had heard that it had changed. He thought that the new name was some-

thing with 'Left' in it, and a colour. Now, what was the colour? It wasn't 'Red'. Hmm: 'Brown Left', could it have been? No, that didn't sound quite right. 'I wonder what the colour could be...' Geoff and I (with one of us, at least, suppressing scandalised laughter) reproached Roger for teasing — but Vida seemed unperturbed (not jumping to conclusions, but merely waiting to see if Roger could remember).

Later that year, when a biopsy revealed that Roger had a malignant tumour, he gave the news to Bruce Gillespie and Elaine Cochrane on 30 May 1992. After this, doctors believed for a time that the chemotherapy they applied had been successful. But Roger was less certain, and his doubts were confirmed in July. He gave me the bad news by long-distance telephone on 20 July. Our call was interrupted, so I rang him back — and our itemised telephone bill shows that we then spoke for three-quarters of an hour. He agreed that I could telephone at any time — he could always turn on the answering service if he felt too tired or ill to respond. And he asked me: 'What do you think?' Part of my reply to this was a promise that, however ill he became, I would never lose my awareness that it was still him, Roger, that I was talking to — because one of the frightening extra troubles of being badly ill or injured is that your friends (in their distress at your situation) will sometimes behave towards you as if your illness were now all of you; as if they no longer recognised you as yourself.

After this conversation, and before Roger left for his DUFF trip to Magicon, my telephone bill shows that we had another five conversations, ranging from sixteen to twenty-five minutes. When he returned from his trip, Roger's illness was worse — and the answering service was not connected when he and Geoff moved to Rogers Street. I spoke to him by telephone on 15 September, the day he returned (I had misunderstood his schedule, and believed that he had returned two days earlier); but after that I seemed unable to get in touch. I heard from Lucy Sussex that Roger was wondering what was wrong, and why I hadn't telephoned. Meanwhile, I was getting as much information about his progress as I could from other people in Melbourne (including Geoff), and asking them to pass on the message that I was continuing to dial Roger's number, however unsuccessfully. On 28 October I had my last conversation with Roger (twenty-five minutes, according to our telephone bill), and on 18 November I posted my last letter to him. Despite my best efforts to keep in touch, I did not discover how greatly Roger's condition had worsened until the evening of 3 December, when John answered the telephone: I heard him greet Bruce, and then I heard his tone change, and I knew (although I am still unable to accept) the news that we were receiving.

— Yvonne Rousseau, March 1993

## Lucy Sussex: THE CAT WITH EIGHT LIVES

It has been opined that nobody will ever know about all of Roger's pranks. Well, I know about several, enough to correct Elaine Cochrane and Bruce Gillespie's obituary (*Llyfe Thyme*), where they ascribed the 'Best Fannish Cat' to Roger. It was in fact Yvonne Rousseau who came up with the category. Roger was visiting Adelaide at the time, and incited Yvonne and Roman Orczanski to create bizarre categories for the Suncon Ditmar ballot. Yvonne's modest proposal tickling his fancy most, he took the idea and ran with it — straight to the ballot box. Thus Typo won a Ditmar, we christened the stray ginger moggy in our backyard Noah Ward (think about it), a lot of dog and ferret owners got most upset . . . and Roger looked innocent.

He did much the same thing with the dreaded Door for DUFF campaign. This is the prank I know most about, as I was present at the birth of the joke. One dark and stormy night (actually it was a dark and steamy night, ideal for a Rogers Street party), Roger and I were leaning against said laundry door, occasionally taking part in a conversation about the DUFF race. Needless to say, much alcohol had been consumed. As I recall, talk veered to compromise candidates, and suddenly all present were nominating their personal choices. I thumped the wood beside me, and said something like: 'Here's a solid upstanding character, won't need vaccination, can be sent freight, to save the airfare . . .'

Roger looked innocent, as much as you can when a Cheshire cat grin extends from ear to ear. The rest of the Rogers Street collective said nothing, but their eyes glistened. 'Urk,' I said, recalling suddenly that one of the other DUFF candidates was an editor of mine. 'I shouldn't have said that.' 'Too late now, Lucy,' said Roger. And thus a lot of people got upset again, etc. etc.

Behind all these pranks was something that might be called morality, expressed via indirect and particularly devious means. In some respects Roger was the conscience of Oz sf/fandom. Others might have written to Swancon saying that calling for categories was silly; he ably demonstrated just how daft it was. In retrospect Roger should have gone into politics — I can imagine an ashen John Hewson disclaiming a fake policy document proposing slavery for the unemployed or the pre-selection of Muffin Cochrane-Gillespie as candidate for Collingwood. (Before he died, Muffin was known as a cat with megalomaniac tendencies.) But I doubt Roger would have liked the political arena. He was the enemy of pretentiousness, of pomposity, and

of rampant egomania — character defects found more in politics than in fandom.

What did he like in people? He was friends with some very disparate types, so I really can't say. Character fascinated him: he had all the insight into personality that a novelist is supposed to have, and much more charity, of someone who gave him a hard time he said: 'X is basically a little frightened person who thinks the world is out to get him, so he always attacks first. However, within him there is a decent human trying to get out . . . unlike Y.' Needless to say, to X and Y he was perfectly affable. Possibly he thought that life was too short to pick fights.

Perhaps Roger's most admirable aspect was his attention to what Tove Jansson called 'the lonely and the rum'. At parties and other gatherings he would make an effort to talk to the stranger, or the person slightly out of place, and by relaxing them, draw them out in conversation. It wasn't for sexual or social gain — he got a buzz from helping people. Small wonder he was such a successful Lifeline counsellor. He was a natural listener, something that helped preserve his paradox, of being a person intensely convivial while at the same time highly private.

Not a lot of people knew that he was seriously ill. This was his desire, the gossip shrinking from being gossiped about himself. However it went further than that: he said at what proved to be the last of our many lunches together that he didn't want people he barely knew giving him bear hugs and commiserating with him. Pride, I diagnosed. Then, having spilled his guts, telling me just as much information as he felt I should know, he switched into a mode more natural to him: the listener. 'This must be a terrible shock to you,' he said.

'No,' I lied.

I have known precisely two people who, when faced with the threat of death, could think of others. Both had cancer — one, despite not really wanting to survive, proved to have nine lives, while Roger, who was younger, huskier, and desperate for life, didn't. Ponder the irony of that, if you will; ponder also the courage of his eighth life, spent as a patient, that we will never really know about. 'Live as if you are a guest of existence,' say the Russians, and I think Roger did. We should be glad that he chose to share some of his eight lives with us.

— Lucy Sussex, January 1993



SYDNEY J. BOUNDS,  
27 Borough Road,  
Kingston on Thames,  
Surrey KT2 6BD, England

I'm sorry to hear about Elaine's father, but there does seem to be rather much emphasis on death in the early pages of TMR 15/16/17. Possibly guilt? We all realise, when it's too late, that we never did enough for our parents.

The star turns this issue were Turner, Rousseau and Sussex on 'Writing in Australia'. All good stuff. The opening pages of Yvonne's article made me laugh; I hope she will write to Aunt Agatha again.

How do British writers get on? Your figure of 2000 hardbacks is wildly optimistic these days. The last figures I heard were 800 for this country; 1700 if the Commonwealth is included. It may well be less now; only this morning, the BBC announced that tv was Britain's number one entertainment.

'Listomania' enables me to put my finger on why Bruce G. won't make it as a fiction writer. Professional writers are compulsive writers; you, Bruce, are a compulsive consumer of books, films and records. Obviously, there isn't enough time in your life to write seriously. For instance, I don't have tv, and it's years since I went to a cinema; music is background listening when I'm working, sometimes; reading is mainly for market study or reference. It's writing that takes up my day.

\* You're only too right, Syd. But what takes up my day is usually the uninteresting book editing work that pays the bills. I write a fair bit at night and on holidays, but never the sort of stuff I might sell to anyone. Most books I read in the early to late evening. Most films I see late (or late-late) at night on television. I listen to one CD a day when I'm reading the paper in the morning, and count it a good day when I have time to listen to more than one. \*

The personal bit: I've just written 15,000 words of extra material for a course in Crime Writing. Collins has reprinted five of my children's stories in a *Bumper Book of Ghost Stories*; must be some kind of record? I shall be a guest at the first Vintage Pulp and Paperback Book Fair next month, in London. It seems you just have to

outlive the others to get famous!  
(27 August 1991)

\* That's the basis of my whole fanzine career, Syd — stay around longer than anybody else. \*

BEN INDICK,  
428 Sagamore Avenue,  
Teaneck,  
New Jersey 07666, USA

Lurking beneath the grand exterior of TMR 15/16/17 is the pure, simple heart of a fanzine.

\* Now that's what I call a real compliment, Ben. The fanzine reflects the pure, simple heart of its editor. \*

I offer condolences to you, to Elaine, to Lee, to John, all commemorating lost relations. Fortunately, in each case the dolorous and the lugubrious have been avoided. Straight narrative is more effective, anyway.

At sixty-eight I have lost people too: my dad, my mother-in-law, but, remembered after forty-seven years, still the most poignant, a little brother, just turned fourteen. My wife, watching her mother's inordinate prudence with a dollar, determined to live within limits, without worrying about that 'rainy day'. We have thus enjoyed many lovely vacations, and can only hope our not terribly capacious umbrella will be adequate for that dismal future day. This year, medically, Janet (fifty-nine) has had gall bladder laparoscopy (very successful) and I have had cataract surgery (after two months, coming along very well).

I also offer condolences to George Turner. Imagine being forced to read forty novels! In medieval times this would have been termed 'torture'. Of course, it might have been worse. The contest dealt with fiction in general, but imagine if it had been exclusively horror novels? Turner's brain would have turned to mush, and he could never have written such a long, long, long article.

Yvonne Rousseau need not worry about 'stretches of free times' as long as she is occupied with writing Writers' Week reports. I cannot pretend that her article is, like Turner's, unengaging, but it too is lengthy. Brevity is a virtue you might consider urging upon your

correspondents.

The acerbic Lucy Sussex, on the other hand, is tough but direct. And if you, Bruce, listen to her, and really give a damn about graphomania, you'll work at it, stick to it, and you'll do it!

On the other hand, what do I know? I can't even stand Glenn Gould and his interminable tinkling. Fie on my criticisms! I think I'm getting too old, too cantankerous.

(29 August 1991)

\* I'm not complaining, Ben. I try to be cantankerous occasionally. But I hope my correspondents don't take to heart your words about brevity. I have to fill this fanzine, you know. \*

DOUG BARBOUR,  
11655-72 Avenue,  
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Alberta, Canada T6G 0B9

The *Metaphysical Review* 15/16/17 is just too much for any single sane person to respond to.

John Bangsund and Lee Hoffman were both moving in their descriptions of difficulties with ageing and dying parents. My father died in 1986, and I haven't yet worked out all the problematic unsaid and undone aspects of our relationship; I suspect such difficult self-reflection continues for a long time; you're probably finding that, too.

I enjoyed 'Wasabel' very much, especially for the reviews of Australian books, although, damn it, you have added to the number of books I'll have to buy (some, I hope, from used-book stores) when next I travel there. Most of the books I must get are poetry. Given my growing interest in AusLit, I especially enjoyed George Turner's, Yvonne Rousseau's and Lucy Sussex's pieces. Given that I have just served on a literary jury, I was fascinated by his descriptions of his travails with one. No doubt, someone on such a jury has to make a compromise, and such compromises may mean that none of the judges see his or her first choice win. But I have yet to serve on a jury in which the jurors do not bend backward to make sure that their prejudices don't subvert the process, and I find it hard to choose just one best book of the year, when I can usually pick three or four I would place at the top. I can usually live with the compromises I have to

make.

Even if George finally feels that he sees no purpose in ever serving on a literary jury again, I hope he will continue to allow that they do have their uses, for in a world where literature gets little if any press, they are among the few events that may get for the winners (and sometimes the runners-up) at least a modicum of promotion. Given my own delight in reading some of the authors George dislikes, I do think he is correct to feel that a generational gap — almost an abyss — separates him from many of his younger colleagues on such juries. That's a very good reason for him to serve again, for it would be good for them (us) to hear the clearly argued case he is capable of making for his point of view.

I agree with him about the need for jurors to have more time, especially on such big prize juries as he served on. The same problem exists with the Governor General's Award here.

(5 February 1992)

DON ASHBY,  
49 Darlington Grove,  
Coburg, Victoria 3058

A letter from The Ashby and the Last Trump is still to be played? This is in fact a letter of comment generated by *The Metaphysical Review* Nos. 11/12/13 and 14. It takes me a while to get around to doing things. When was the last time you put on an opera?

The meal we had with you whenever I saw you last is still a warm glow in my stomach's memory, and my head is happy from the conversation. The theatre biz is not a wash with great conversationalists. Half of them seem to be closer to our anthropoid antecedents than is normal, and the other half are so fey they'd sour milk at fifty paces. Restaurants are normally shut when I leave work, so to have good food and good talk at once is a well-remembered feast.

The reason I have time to write this letter is because a rhinoceros fell on me. I was trying to get it down from a very high rack and either it slipped or I did. Next thing you know: slipped discs and three broken ribs. I don't think I'll ever feel the same about *The Magic Flute* again. It's an ill wind, etc., so here I am on the glorious birthday of the interminable Elizabeth Secundus Regina, pounding away on a keyboard instead of building a new workshop in

the back yard. I can't even feel guilty about not making *Phantom of the Opera* masks, because I have run out of French kid leather and am waiting on the French goats. I have a contract to make 100 Phantom masks over two years, as they break on average one every week.

Ili Elaine. We haven't seen each other on the tram lately because I am almost exclusively depending on my bike. I need the exercise, and it saves on tram fares. I do miss the lost reading time, though. I have rigged up a radio in my bike helmet so he will have Radio National wherever he goes. It gets a bit hairy at times, especially in the wet, when Melbourne motorists develop a murder psychosis and try to kill each other and poor old cyclists.

TMR 11, the Music Issue, was a joy to read, if only the fact that it contains some well-remembered fan writers from my days of yore.

I lost interest in pop music when it became a wholly artificial culture at the beginning of the eighties when punk became respectable. My quite substantial collection of records, tapes and CDs is either pre that period or non-mainstream. I find it impossible to listen to commercial radio because the advertising makes me want to vomit, and their cynical opinion poll programming makes for insipid predictable listening.

My appreciation of live concerts has been coloured by setting up too many of them in the past. I would rather go to La Boite, the folk venue that has a very good acoustic and no artificial aids, and listen to wooden music, than go to a Motley Crue gig that uses three pantects of PA that almost disguises the exploitative banality of the music.

I have very little of Fairport Convention on disc or tape. I think I only have *Leige and Lief*. I do, however, have most of the output of Steele Span and still listen to them. I heard their last concert in Melbourne, which confirmed that you do not have to go to big gigs for the music unless you have a really lousy stereo. I am sure most people go to concerts for the atmosphere. You get a much better sound in your own lounge room. Not true for classical concerts, where you get the benefit of a natural acoustic, even if these days they are sometimes reinforced by PA.

Working for the Victoria State Opera has confirmed my opinion of Italian opera: most productions make *Days of Our Lives* look like Academy

Award material. I am not criticising the production values of the VSO, but the nature of Italian opera. I have been surprised by Benjamin Britten. Staging his operas has revealed in them an astonishing psychological depth, a quality that is not as obvious when they are heard on record. Monteverdi and Purcell sort of invented opera, and I get a great deal of pleasure from productions of their work. I wish our local companies would do less Puccini and Verdi and more older stuff.

At the moment I find nineteenth-century music very hard to listen to — all that suffering catgut and orchestral Caesarism. My interests are medieval, baroque or modern. Thomas Tallis, Messiaen and Birtwistle are on top of my 'serious' playlist at the moment; also Stevie Wishart's *Sinfonye*. Max is singing John Rutter's *Gloria* with her choir, so we went out and bought the CD. It's rather fun, preposterously brassy and Anglican.

We must have dinner again soon. I'll get my answering machine to ring your answering machine. See you in the soup.

(9 June 1991)

GREG EGAN,  
GPO Box J685,  
Perth, WA 6001

Lucy Sussex's graphomania piece was entertaining — and I hope it will inspire me finally to get my hands on all the Kundera I haven't read (i.e. everything but *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, the film of which was referred to in an *SF Chronicle* review as *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*... a genre-centric Freudian typo of ever there was one). In fact, I saw Kundera's new book, *Immortality*, in a bookshop quite recently, but it was in hardback so I wasn't tempted at all.

My reading these days is woeful. David Ireland's *Bloodfather* has been sitting by my bed for six months, buried under a pile of *Asimov's*, *Analog*, and *F&SF* which built up while I was working. Most of *Analog* and much of *F&SF* I find unreadable, but I still feel obliged to 'stay in touch'. Trouble is, this leaves me no time to 'stay in touch' with the novels. I still haven't read Dan Simmons's 'Hyperion' books, or Greg Bear's *Queen of Angels*.

I think that both you and Lucy are wrong in proposing a single major explanation as to why people write.

(I'll leave Kundera out of it until I've read *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* — I suspect that his thesis wasn't intended to be taken quite so literally.) You say 'the main reason why people want to become writers' is that 'they want to emulate the only people who gave them any pleasure during childhood'. I'll take your word that this is true of yourself, but I don't know what makes you believe that it's true of anyone else. It's certainly not why I write — which is mainly to conduct thought experiments. I'd confess to a tinge of graphomania, but the content of what I write is the most important thing to me. I'm not writing for the sake of it. I have no overwhelming respect for writers *per se*, and though I value some people's work very highly, I think your list of 'honourable professions' is a load of old cobbles (or a load of old musicians). Carpentry or plumbing (just to give two examples out of thousands) don't exactly strike me as despicable occupations.

(9 August 1991)

\* But they were not on a list of professions that I would want to follow, although of course they could be on anybody else's. \*

DENNIS CALLEGARI,  
159 Kilby Road,  
Kew East, Victoria 3102

You say that people *mostly* want to become writers so they can emulate the only people who gave them pleasure during childhood. Why, then, the emphasis on being published and getting paid for it? Wouldn't the act of writing be its own reward?

But your view has some merit. I read an article that classed all writers as either *paywrights* or *penitents*. Penitents write for the love of writing, and usually get little for it but the personal satisfaction of having done it — 'real' writers, if you like. Paywrights use their craft purely as a way to make a living. Most journalists, technical writers, etc. fit in this category. Both Jo and I are paywrights. We have steady jobs — she is a technical writer, I'm a science writer — and we get paid fairly well; better, I dare say, than most 'real' writers. And though we sometimes get the satisfaction of a job well done, it's not the buzz of being a 'real' writer.

(16 August 1991)

\* My argument started out with the fact that most writers emulate their own favourite writers when they begin. If they are good enough and write enough, eventually they develop their own style. When I was seven or eight, I wanted to write like Enid Blyton, both because of the pleasure her books gave me and because she was financially very successful at writing. As I grew up, I realised quickly that many of my favourite writers had made little money from their work. Since I didn't see myself making money from the kind of writing I wanted to do, I buckled down to the editing career that I've followed. (If writers charged by the hour, they would be in clover or never sell at all.) And most of my 'real' writing has been for amateur magazines that cost money, not make money. \*

BUCK COULSON,  
2677W-500N, Hartford City,  
Indiana 41348, USA

*Metaphysical Review* 15/16/17 arrived today, and I'm trying to keep my letters up to date because I'll have a week's worth piled up after Worldcon. I'm also trying to get the magazine and book reviews finished and in the mail before we head for Chicago, and that's complicated by the fact that *Amazing* and *F&SF* haven't arrived yet.

Also, our drains plugged up May 30, and weren't located and cleaned until last week. Now we have all the way around the house a trench that we're filling in by ourselves. Problem was nobody knew where the drains went. It turns out that under the house they turn southwest, and then somewhere double back on themselves and head northeast. The backhoe operator finally located them two feet from where he started trenching, after going all the way around the house. After they were located, the plumber finished cleaning them, reconnected the part where the tile had been torn up by the backhoe, and put in a standpipe outdoors, so further cleaning if necessary can be done from there, and we can also check on whether or not they're clogging up again. Total cost around \$300, which is very cheap, but more than we could afford. This covers

four hours' work each by backhoe operator and plumber, and about \$40 worth of plumbing parts.

A lot of writers survive in this country by doing other things to make a living and writing in their spare time. (Of course, even a medium-name writer can make a living here if he or she is reasonably prolific, since there are a lot more customers.) Gene Wolfe, for example, was for years a senior editor of *Plant Engineering* magazine and wrote novels in his spare time. Bob Tucker was a movie projectionist. And to get into the small-time, I was a garage-door designer.

I can sympathise with George Turner's feeling of being out of the mainstream of contemporary life; it's one reason I've stayed in fandom, where it's easier to find places to fit in. On the other hand, I don't really care all that much about the mainstream of contemporary life, and I certainly don't take literary awards as seriously as George does. They're interesting as judgments of that particular year, but they have very little to do with honouring great literature, and never have.

I enjoyed Yvonne Rousseau's article, but no comments. I was enjoying Lucy Sussex's writing until she wrote 'the fate dreaded by all writers — she was completely forgotten after her death'. What happens after my death doesn't concern me in the least. In the highly unlikely chance that one of my books is declared a classic after my death, I won't know anything about it, so what good would it do me? My name can be obliterated after my death with my good will; just pay attention while I'm alive.

Marie Miesel is still known as 'Chirp' to her mother, despite her attempts to bury the nickname. As her adopted uncle, I use the name she prefers. Parents do tend to refer to their children by the habitual name and not the name the now-adult child prefers. Fortunately, we never nicknamed Bruce, so we have no problems. Bruce and Emily did get married (and didn't ask me to perform the ceremony, for which I give thanks) and Miranda Juanita Coulson arrived on Earth on 8 July 1991.

Thirteen cats? Allan Bray is a comparative piker. We had twenty-two once, but they died off before I had to resort to the shotgun. (These are barn

Continued on Page 70

## STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

### A personal account of the Creation Science controversy

by Martin Bridgstock

I am writing this in my room on Griffith University's beautiful bush campus. A couple of miles away, the Creation Science Foundation lurks in its warehouse lair. I think of it as a wounded monster, and it was me who hit it the hardest. In a fantasy story, the husky hero would go in and finish the creature off. Reality is a bit different. I think I'll let it lurk.

So how did it happen? How did a fairly non-combative academic — not even a scientist — get pitchforked into a battle against the massed hordes of fundamentalism? How did the good guys win, and why isn't it finished?

For me, it's all the fault of fandom. In the early 1980s, I'd worked up an entertaining little talk debunking Erich von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods*. Schools and businessmen's groups seemed to like it. A fan group got wind of the talk, and I was asked to speak to Brisbane sf fans on the topic.

The von Daniken talk went down well with the fans, but at the end I made the remark that changed my life. I pointed out that other sorts of pseudo-science existed too, like astrology and creation science.

And, of course, there was a fundamentalist in the audience. He tackled me afterwards and asked if I'd actually studied creation science. Well, no, I hadn't. Would I be prepared to look at some literature with an open mind? Well, yes of course I would. ... What else could I say?

And so I found myself looking at about a dozen magazines titled *Ex Nihilo*. They were the publications of the Brisbane-based Creation Science Foundation, and they challenged the whole of modern science.

#### Detour:

##### What do creation scientists believe?

I don't remember clearly my first reactions to those glossy, well-produced magazines, but it was clear that they contained a massive amount of evidence. And their case was radical. Creation scientists believe that the universe is very young — perhaps only ten thousand years old — and was created in six days. The Bible, they believe, is a literal and infallible guide to how creation occurred.

Most people's reactions to this are snorts of laughter. This often turns to bewilderment when they try to argue with creation scientists. Using Noah's flood and the Tower of Babel incident, creation scientists can account for many features of the world. Fossils? Laid

down by the flood. Radioactive dating? Unreliable — and they have some scientific references. Human races? Dispersed after the Tower of Babel.

This phenomenon isn't new. Pseudo-scientists are usually well versed in their beliefs, and can make mincemeat of ordinary objectors. Given knowledge and determination, you can make a plausible case for *anything*!

The creation scientists are very sophisticated in their use of democratic rhetoric. In political debates, most of us accept that if there are two viewpoints in a controversy, both should be heard. The fundamentalists have used this cleverly, arguing that in the 'creation-evolution' debate, both sides deserve an equal hearing.

This sounds pretty plausible to most people. It's only on close examination that the flaws show up. For a start, why are there only two sides? Why are 'creation scientists' and 'evolution scientists' the only people with views on the subject of the origins of humanity? In fact there are many other views, such as those of the Hindus, the other Christian churches, and so on.

Again, science does not work like politics. There are vigorous debates within the scientific community, but that does not entitle every crank to a say. Once agreement has been reached on an issue, scientists tend to regard it as closed and to go on to the next point. Flat-earthers, anti-evolutionists and so on have no support within the scientific community. In the creation science issue, the fundamentalists obscured this point by using political pressure — from the outside — to force their way into scientific acceptance. They made no effort to convert scientists to their view in the normal way.

#### Queensland: the Deep North

Queensland, of course, was uniquely open to creation science. Unlike other Australian states, Queensland had fundamentalists in power at all levels of government. Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the Premier, and Lin Powell, the Minister of Education, were both fundamentalists. So was the Leader of the Opposition, Keith Wright! The creation scientists saw Queensland as their most promising target in Australia, and began work.

By the early 1980s the Creation Science Foundation, based in a Brisbane warehouse, had built up an annual income of over half a million dollars. It

employed 14 people, and pumped out an endless stream of propaganda. Its free newsheet, the *Creation Science Prayer News*, went to over 12,000 people. The glossy magazine *Ex Nihilo* was an impressive affair. Well produced, it seemed to present a great avalanche of information, supporting the views of creationists and sweeping away the claims of scientists about evolution, an ancient earth and an ancient universe.

Nowadays, jokes about Victoria have replaced jokes about Queensland. It's hard to recall the feeling of helplessness that existed in much of Queensland during the 1980s. I think there was real slide towards a totalitarian state, with the National Party dominating all areas of life: the courts, the police, the newspapers, the schools, and so on.

Bjelke-Petersen dominated the National Party. He could — and did — fiddle the electoral boundaries to his advantage, and turned the Queensland branch of the National Party into a machine for rewarding its friends and punishing its enemies. Government contracts were awarded to friends of the Party, and government funds were used to prosecute its enemies. Elections became largely a farce, with boundaries being skewed more and more in favour of the government — after all, the government was setting the boundaries!

Of course, the National Party government was responsive to its friends: the farmers, the fundamentalists and the gung-ho developers. However, academics, teachers and the like were viewed with suspicion. Virtually all National Party ministers had got where they were without higher education, so why should they bother about over-educated oddballs?

### Back to the story

So there was I, a fairly shy academic without an ounce of public influence, gazing dimly at a dozen fundamentalist magazines. Most scientists, I know, turned away. There's no profit in arguing with fundamentalists. Far better for the career to do a few more experiments, crank out a few more arcane academic papers. Should I be proud of my decision to bore on in, to get involved with creation science?

Maybe I had nothing better to do. My marriage had withered from anger via misery to indifference. I'd got heavily involved in fandom, presided over a convention, and lost interest. So, here was something.

One handicap was that I wasn't really a scientist. My background is in sociology. Throughout the whole controversy I waited with fear and trembling for a denunciation from the creation scientists. It never came. They seemed to figure out, in some dim way, that I wasn't a proper scientist, but it went no further.

What should I do? Tentatively, uncertainly, I did the obvious. The most impressive parts of *Ex Nihilo* were its heavily referenced scientific articles. Evidence was quoted from major scientists and from major journals like *Nature* and *Science*. So I took the pile of glossy

magazines down to the university library, and checked the references. And the horror emerged. The references were hideously, grossly wrong. Quotes were often misquotes, figures were misused, and evidence was torn from context to fit the creation science case.

Normal scientists are human. They make mistakes and they may misquote evidence. But this was a mass of misquotes, a tower of corruption! My shocked sniggers echoed down the library aisles.

About this time I decided, rather vaguely at first, that Something Ought to Be Done. I put on what I hoped was a saintly expression, and visited the Creation Science Foundation. I used my research money to buy a full run of *Ex Nihilo*, and got myself on their mailing list. I checked a mass of references and quotation, hundreds of the things. Then I set to work.

### Strategy

I needed a strategy. What should I do? Well, it struck me that the first thing to do was to communicate to key people in the education industry. So I wrote a series of papers about the errors and misrepresentations I'd found in the Creation Science literature, and sent it off to some journals. The names are self-explanatory: *The Australian Science Teachers' Journal*, *The Queensland Science Teacher*, *The Journal of the Queensland Schools Librarians Association*. I also sent off papers to the scientific magazine *Search*, and the magazines of the State Teachers' Union and the independent schoolteachers' union. All were published.

I'd also got a mental map of how people probably thought about the issue. It looked something like the diagram on Page 25:

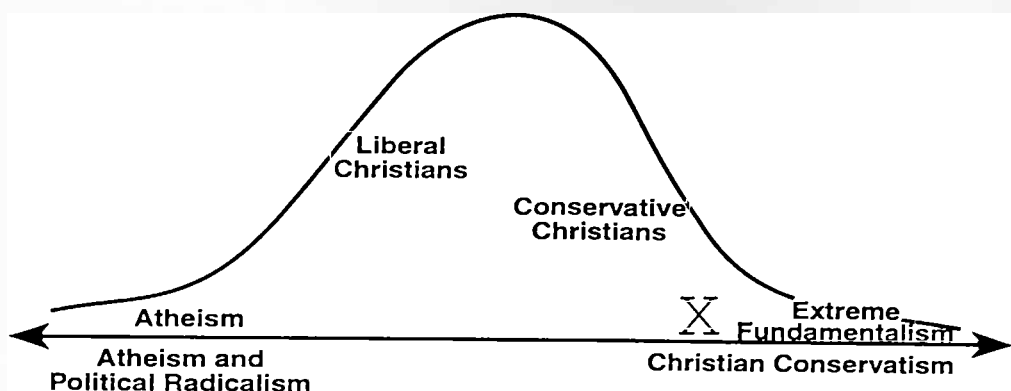
Now, I thought, the raving militant atheists, lefties and anti-clerics are against creation science anyway. No point in talking to them. The crackpot fundamentalists are beyond my reach. To win this, I need to convince the conservative Christians. That is, people who are staunch Christian believers, and who think that the Bible might have something to say about science. Hence, the tone of my message should be pitched somewhere over about point X. I would stress issues of integrity. I would make it clear that I was no atheist and had no quarrel with any religion. And I would attempt to pin the creation scientists into the corner they belonged — extreme fundamentalism.

I would flog one other point, too. The fundamentalists were keen to have their religion privileged above others. The Catholics spotted this. So did the Uniting Church. I never did find a clear position from the Anglicans, though they were threatened too.

### Fire and brimstone

The first papers were scheduled to appear in March 1985. About that time all hell broke loose. The Queensland branch of the Australian Skeptics got hold of the issue. They decided to hold a public meeting at which





## How I saw people in the Creation Science Controversy

a number of speakers would criticise the creation scientists and their claims. The media heard about this, and I ended up arguing on the radio — live — with the chief creation scientist, John Mackay.

Remember, I'd no experience at all of this kind of confrontation, while John Mackay had had hundreds of hours of meetings expounding his views. On a blazing February morning I found myself wedged into a tiny studio with John Mackay — he seemed twice my size in all dimensions — and local broadcaster Hayden Sargent. The discussion was so vigorous that Sargent extended it from half an hour to an hour. Afterwards, I walked round the city for the rest of the day, shaking.

I've got a tape of most of the discussion. Rather to my surprise, it's a pretty clear win for me. I'd read all Mackay's magazines. Whatever he said, I was able to bomb him with some unsuspected reply, and my evidence about false quotes and errors went completely unanswered.

The debate had an unexpected consequence. From that day to this, no Australian creation scientist has met me in debate. Their opinion of my performance seems to have been higher than mine!

The public meeting came: I had it marked with a skull and crossbones in my diary. I was terrified! Hundreds of people poured into a University of Queensland lecture theatre. I was the first of five speakers attacking creation science. There were a couple of fundamentalist hecklers, but it became clear that most of the audience was friendly. At the end, in a question session, I got quite angry and hammered on the arm of a chair while I denounced the fundamentalists. The meeting erupted in applause.

The next week was farcical. John Knight — a

lecturer in Education — and I agreed to appear on an ABC radio show. The idea was that we would face a couple of creation scientists, and argue and answer phone-in questions. The ABC offered the creation scientist any date over a week. They refused to turn up, and John and I had a good time fielding questions and denigrating the fundamentalists. Next week the creation scientists turned up and demanded equal time! It was pathetic, and gave us the first inkling of just how rattled they were.

Through the rest of 1985, the creation scientists and their opponents continued to flail away at each other. The fundamentalists ignored some of my articles and wrote angry denunciations of the rest. I heard of lecturers at Colleges of Advanced Education giving out photocopied copies of my articles to whole classes. I received abusive letters from fundamentalists. The Vice-Chancellor got a poison pen letter, trying to have me sacked. The *Creation Science Prayer News* made shriller and shriller attacks on me. Finally, it stopped mentioning me by name and just attacked me anonymously.

I made some monumental stuff-ups. I completely botched a visit to a school in central Queensland, and probably turned a whole class against science. I made a scattering of errors in my papers. In one case I had to apologise to a creation scientist when I accused him of lying: it wasn't him, it was another one. Most important, I was making no impact on government policy. I only faced the disgusting Minister of Education twice, on TV. The first time he chewed me up. The second time I clobbered him, but this had no effect. After all, the fundamentalists were his friends, and I certainly wasn't.

## Nuking creation science

Late in 1985, things began to look a bit more hopeful. The Australian Skeptics decided that they wanted to sponsor a book on creation science, highlighting its fallacies. This was quite a commitment. The book would cost thousands to produce, getting on for half the Skeptics' annual income. Ken Smith, a mathematician, and I edited the book and produced it.

It was hell. Ken and I worked well together, but we knew nothing about typesetting, and the Skeptics kept sending us odd bits and pieces from down south. The University printers did the book for us, but they couldn't do A3 printing, so the hideous result was an A4 pile of pages stapled at the edges.

The book was ready in early 1986. And inside it was our nuclear bomb. Our custom-made warhead for the Creation Science Foundation.

Tony Wheeler, the Queensland Skeptics secretary, and I had dug out the records and accounts of the Creation Science Foundation, from the state Department of Corporate Affairs. I don't really know what we were expecting to find. I wondered vaguely about links with some disreputable American organisation.

We didn't find that. Oh no, much better! We found that the Foundation had lost over \$92,000 a couple of years before. This wasn't a simple trading loss; they'd sunk the money into some oddball investments, and blown the lot. What was worse, they hadn't told their supporters about it.

We kept our little nuke under wraps for several months. Finally we released the book at the same time as the Creation Science Foundation's annual conference, in January 1986. Some of the press and TV coverage was disappointing, but some was great. We found ourselves on the front page of the *Age* ('A large lump of Mammon lost in God's Vineyard' said the headline). More important, I ended up on statewide television blowing the story of the financial loss. During the program a press release from the Minister appeared, denying that he had ever supported the introduction of creation science into classrooms. Ah, the beautiful sound of political feet back-peddalling!

Apparently the Foundation's phones ran hot for days. All my evidence and intellectual arguments had counted for less than the financial revelations.

And that was the win. The Creation Science Foundation still exists, but with the radical change of politics in Queensland, its influence seems to be nil. John Mackay left — not amiably, I gather — to set up his own organisation. The whole question was buried as the corruption issue exploded, and blasted Queensland into the twentieth century.

## Aftermath

The Queensland fundamentalist churches have suffered several more scandals, one financial and a couple sexual. The fundamentalists are withdrawing

into themselves, hurt and ridiculed.

I think, intrinsically, there is something self-destructive about the fundamentalists. Their asset is their vociferous self-righteousness: singly they can be intimidating, en masse they are terrifying. However, that and their loyalty to each other is about all that they have.

Fundamentalists seem to assume that once someone has been reborn, converted to fundamentalism, then they are a different kind of person. Within the fundamentalist community there is precious little check on behaviour. The churches tend to be independent businesses, with little check on what happens financially or sexually. Hence, the eruption of a chain of financial and sexual scandals within fundamentalist organisations. But these organisations are dependent upon their supporters, so the scandals are uniquely destructive. A scandal in a big church might result in a congregation moving to another church, or a bishop taking action. In the fundamentalist movement, it means severe damage for the organisation.

As the fundamentalist community shrivels and turns in on itself, I suspect that the creation scientists are becoming immured within it. They remain one provider of comfort and entertainment to fundamentalists. One week, at a fundamentalist church, there might be faith healing. The next week, perhaps muscle-men will demonstrate that Christians aren't wimps. The week after that, the creation scientist may turn up, to demonstrate that science really does support their view of the Bible. So don't expect the disappearance of creation science. As long as there is a fundamentalist movement, there will be creation scientists.

I'll hazard a prediction, though. The next time fundamentalism erupts into aggression it won't be on the evolution issue. They'll find some other way to curry support and publicity in the larger community. Watch for it, in a decade or two.

The affair changed my life, of course. The University declined to promote me on the basis of defending Queensland science; pure academic papers only, Dr Bridgstock, and preferably in sociology.

I developed a pretty vicious style of arguing. It stood me in good stead recently. I was cross-examined by a nasty lawyer about how much maintenance I could afford to pay my ex. I wiped the floor with her.

I found I hated politics. I got involved a couple of years later with the campaign for one vote one value in Queensland. We won that too, but I've no desire for more.

So, Bridgstock, sheathe thy sword. Get back to marking essays and giving lectures. But hold on to that nice warm glow inside. For once in my life, I did something right.

— Martin Bridgstock, July 1993

The following article received a 'so what?' response when I published it in ANZAPA. Fans don't like to be reminded of their schooldays. The same article, when run in *Tirra Tirra* (a sort of up-market fanzine for non-fans), gained the best response of any article I've published there.

## PEOPLE

# The Reunion

by Bruce Gillespie

On 20 June 1992 Elaine was rung by a person whose name was unfamiliar to me. Puzzled, I rang him back. Nick told me that he had been in my primary school class from Grade 3 to Grade 6, yet still I could not recall his name. He said that some of the people from Oakleigh Primary School (then Oakleigh State School) have kept in touch with each other, as they live in the Ferntree Gully/Knox area, and planned to hold a reunion of Grade 6A, 1958, early in 1993.

Still puzzled, I said that I would like to attend that gathering. I still could not remember Nick, and I was not quite sure whether I really wanted to meet these people from my deep past.

I received a bulletin from the committee. It included our class photo from 1958. Of course! Now I recognised Nick. After emigrating from Egypt, he was the first boy of Greek ancestry to enrol at Oakleigh. And there in the photo were David, Vic, Janet, Carolyn, 'Jockey', Graeme, Graeme, Graeme, and the rest. Wolfgang was the first person of German descent to attend the school; Elja the first from Holland. The names were as familiar as if I'd left the class last year. Some personalities I could not recall. Some personalities I could recall only too well.

It was the committee's enthusiasm that kept me interested. I talked to Graeme on the phone. He is now known as 'Wal'. It took a bit of mind change to shift to his 'new' nickname. Nick and Wal had lived in the Ferntree Gully area for many years, but had met each other only recently. They made contact with Graeme, who also lived nearby. After a night at the pub, they started looking through Graeme's old photos. This led to the idea of a small reunion; Wal suggested that it should become a reunion of the whole class. They enlisted Sherrill to the committee; eventually Carol became the other member.

The hunt was on. The members of the committee were determined to find all the former students. They

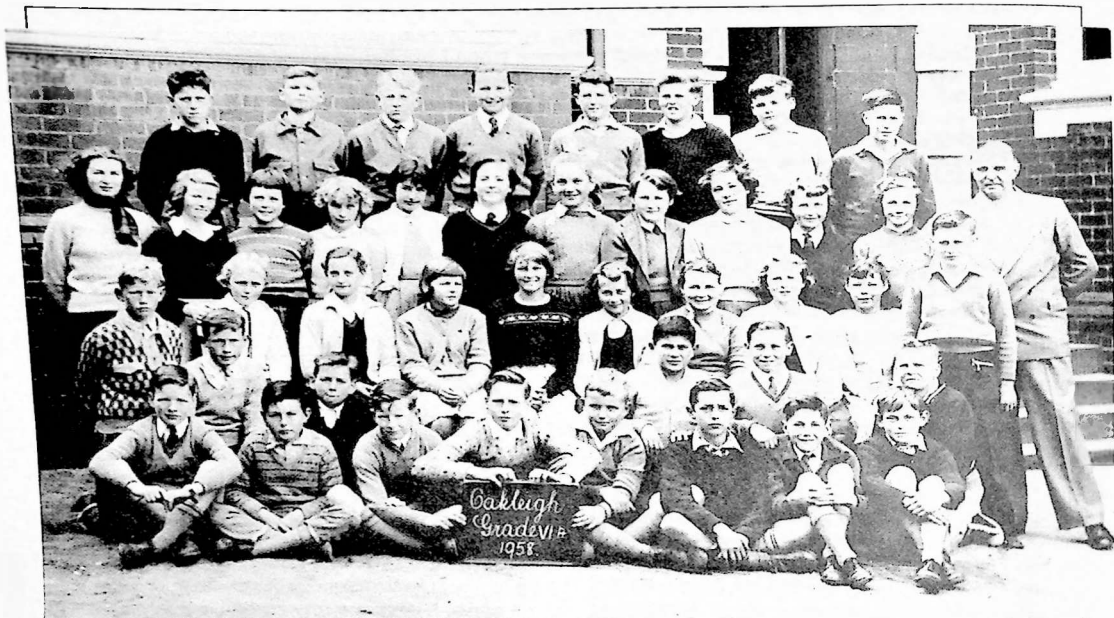
divided the class photo into sections. Each person had to find all the people in his or her section.

They began phoning surnames in the Oakleigh area. If this failed, they tried the Ferntree Gully/Knox area, since many Oakleigh families had moved there during the sixties. If this failed, they tried phone numbers for the whole south-eastern area of Melbourne.

Each person found could usually remember some tiny detail that would lead them to somebody else. Ian had moved to Canberra on the early sixties; it took only one phone call to find him. Of Marie, it was known that her sister had at one time been married to one of the prime ministerial Hols. Endless blind alleys and phone calls to London and back eventually found Marie married and living in Sicily. Somebody remembered that Graeme lived outside of Brisbane; he turned out to live 1000 kilometres north of Brisbane. I was one of the easiest to find, as my Auntie Linda still lives in Oakleigh. Bob was easy to find, as he still lived in the Oakleigh area; he is a train-driver; he knows Elja's husband, who is also a train-driver; the committee found Elja. David seemed impossible to find, as his family left Oakleigh in early 1959. One night while I was talking to Nick on the phone I remembered that he had a brother Richard. Eventually the committee made contact with Richard, who arranged for David, who was working in northern Victoria on the Dartmouth Dam, to ring back.

By early 1993, the committee had found every class member except one. That's forty-five ex-students out of forty-six. The missing girl, Gina, was in the class for only a year, and seems to have returned to Britain at the end of that year. Only one person had died: Doug, of cancer, at the age of forty-two, leaving a wife and two children.

In mid-1992 I said to Wal: 'What about Ron? What about Bill? How come they are not on the list?' 'Because they weren't in our class. They were in the other



Back row, left to right: Vic Clarendon, Bruce Gillespie, Michael Fenton, David Cook, Ian Phelan, Robert Holdsworth, Wolfgang Peters, Ken Taylor, 3rd row, Janis Kerr, Marilyn Kent, Lyn Turley, Lyn Hamill, Carol Davidson, Elja Jousstra, Alice Knights, Sue Kerr, Lucille Hornbuckle, Marie Johnson, Cheryl Scott.

2nd row: Kevin Leak, Peter Foster, Jan Cregan, Prudence Barker, Sherril Stynes, Ailsa Barnhill, Laurel Beggs, Nick Arvanitakis, Bev Hall, Graeme Robinson, Carol Gillard, Gina Burton, Laurie McGhee.

Front row: Carey Anderson, Kevin Dotler, Douglas Gunther, Brian Halliday, Graeme Howland, Graeme Turner, John Atkins, Graeme Clarke, Ian Romanes, Stewart Mallinson.

Teachers standing: left, unknown student teacher; right, Mr Landgren, class teacher.



sixth grade, 6B.' I remembered Ron and Bill well because I had gone to school with them for another four years at Oakleigh High School. I had forgotten that they were in the 'other class' all the way through primary school. The committee put together a list of well-remembered people from Grade 6B. Eventually twelve of them, plus spouses, attended the reunion.

Don was part of a subcommittee that set out to find our teachers. Most of them had been in thirties or forties when they taught us. Our Grade 6A teacher, Mr Landgren, had died in the 1960s. He was the best teacher I ever had. Other teachers had died as late as the 1970s. Two were left: Mr Tonkin, who taught us in Grade 4A, and Mr Lewis, who taught the 'other class' in Grades 3B and 5B. We did not know their first names while we were at school, so I won't call them by their first names now. Mr Tonkin was in hospital during the reunion, although he wanted to attend. Mr and Mrs Lewis attended, and seemed to have the best time of all. Mr Lewis, who had organised the drum-and-fife band and many other school activities, remembered everybody from both classes.

The phone bill for the year was over \$600. People put in \$20 each for expenses, and agreed to bring their own everything to the reunion. The date was set: 21 February 1993, at the Ferntree Gully home of Wal and Anna.

We were all rather nervous by the time we arrived. What do you say to people you haven't seen for nearly thirty-five years? Would we recognise each other?

The committee had taken care of the introductions. They enlarged a class photo and cut it into bits. When we arrived, we received a lapel button with our 1958 photo on it, plus our first name. Each person had to guess the surname of the other person. Each spouse received a button with just a first name on it.

About ninety people turned up on the day. I was almost the first to arrive, since my taxi from Collingwood took only forty minutes to reach the unfamiliar hills of Ferntree Gully. Graeme looked much as I might have expected him to look; so did Wal. Ian had flown in the night before. I could not associate him with the round-faced boy I had known years before. Fit and thin, he now looked much like a friend of mine who was now living in America. Bill was also a surprise. Even in his mid-teens, he had had a very round face. Now his face was aquiline, and he wore a beard.

The only disappointment of the day was that I was one of the few people other people recognised immediately. I had thought the addition of much weight and the deletion of much hair would have made me seem the mystery man of the day. Not so. But it was gratifying to find that since 1958 at least half the blokes had put on as much weight as I have.

I found it hard to recognise most of the women, even when told their names. I suppose females change far more radically in adolescence than males do. I rather wish everybody had brought progressive photos with

them: 'Myself at twenty-one'; 'Myself at thirty', etc. I had a few with me, but there never seemed any chance to show them to anyone. Carol was much as I might have expected her to turn out; Jan and Lyn were very recognisable; the two Ailsas were still good-looking, but in different ways than those shown in their school photos; Carolyn and Lyn remain as funny as ever. Later in the afternoon, a woman express-trained into the gathering, greeting everybody with vast enthusiasm. I couldn't remember her. Someone reminded me that Joan had been the champion sport of the school. Not much had changed, since she still has the body of an athlete and the energy of a sixteen-year-old. Somebody said she works as a tree-lopper.

I had an extreme hatred of sport when I was at school, but I admit that those who were good at sport looked healthier than the rest of us. Quite a few people remain lean and fit. I knew that they were the same age as me, but I suspect that their friends and family rarely think of them as being in their forties.

Was it worth meeting these people after half a lifetime?

I don't remember their childhood selves with much affection. Some I hated, and some were willing to admit that they hated me because I found it very easy to stay equal top of the class.

I was always equal top of the class with Jan; we showed a good healthy hatred to each other all through primary school. At the reunion, Jan was one of the most pleasant people I met, and certainly has had the most varied life, with stints at cartooning, photography, film-making and psychological research, among other things.

Some of the boys had been bullies, and others were obsequious members of the gangs. The girls we had avoided on principle — or was it because the schoolyard was divided by a white line, over which neither boys nor girls were allowed to step?

Thirty-five years later, our class has become a group of thoroughly pleasant people. I'm so glad we all escaped from childhood. A couple of blokes I used to think of as overbearing have become successful business people. Many men had become accountants or engineers; many women had become teachers. Many of the men have changed careers, either voluntarily or involuntarily, during their early forties. Few have remained unmarried; several are now grandparents. There were no drunks at the reunion; no bores. A few people were still very funny, especially while the photographer was trying to take the 'class photo'. We had to stand or sit in exactly the same places we had taken for the 1958 class photo. This was difficult for some. Even the photographer began to make silly jokes.

Well-organised nostalgia gave extra pleasure to the day. The principal of today's Oakleigh Primary School lent the committee the original school bell and a drum from the drum and fife band. All other school artifacts from our era were destroyed in a fire in 1976. The

committee used fruit juice bottles and tinfoil to mock up a crate of the school milk bottles we had to drink every morning recess during the 1950s. Somebody tacked together 'Mr Tonkin's strap' (since Mr Tonkin now says that he never used the strap) and an old-fashioned ink bottle. There were plenty of old photos and magazines. Somebody found an old desk; not quite as old-fashioned as the all-wooden desks at Oakleigh, but close enough.

At the end of the day, we felt the reunion had hardly begun. Some people I had merely waved to. Most other conversations had not gone beyond bare-bones discussions about children and jobs.

Stewart had been a little kid at school, not great at his work, and carrying what seemed like a permanent chip on his shoulder. He was famous for being the first boy to wear a crew haircut to school. Wal had told me that he had recently been an Olympic champion equestrian. 'I've heard you've had something to do with horses,' I said to Stewart. 'That's just a hobby,' he said. 'Sorry; I thought it was your job.' 'No, I'm marketing

director of . . .' He named one of the major multinational companies.

With other people, I should have started by asking about their jobs, then talked about their hobbies.

The reunion hasn't ended yet. As they distributed the copies of the new class photograph, the members of the committee found that groups of newly reunited people are meeting all over Melbourne. Jan is trying to arrange a discussion group among us. A group of us visited Mr and Mrs Lewis, who still live in Oakleigh. Mr Tonkin was also there. I didn't want to interrupt their conversation; they kept telling funny anecdotes all morning. That afternoon we visited today's Oakleigh Primary School to talk to the principal. Yes, we are welcome to use the old school hall for our next reunion next February. 'And by the way,' he said, 'if you have the time, because we don't, would any of you like to put together a short history of the school?' We're thinking about it.

— 2 April 1993

### The second reunion

On Sunday, 30 January 1994, there was a second reunion of our 1958 Grade 6A from Oakleigh State School. This time it was a reunion of Grade 6B as well, and it was held at the school itself.

Our Grade had fewer people turn up than last year, and by no means all of the ex-Grade 6B people turned up. But this occasion felt more relaxed than that of the year before. Quite a few of us had kept in contact during the year, and because we held the get-together in the old junior hall, we had more room in which to move around.

Of the people who turned up for the first time, most could easily be recognised, even after 36 years. Les looked exactly as I imagined he would like after all this time. So did Kevin (nicknamed 'Jockey'). Chris's face had much the same shape as when I last saw him in Form 4 (Year 10), but like me, he has been afflicted by receding hairline.

On the other hand, Neville was the only person recognised by nobody. Wearing a full beard, he had led most of his life in the alternative lifestyle: managing a health food store, setting up a business out in the country. Neville picked up the drumsticks from one of the drums that still exist from the old drum and fife band. He began to rattle out one of the rataplans that he last played 36 years ago. Everybody went quiet. One of the women began to play one of the old fifes. Pure time travel!

Faye Halliday set a new record for distance covered to the reunion: she was staying with her parents while on holiday from Chicago, where she lives.

We toured the new section of the school (rebuilt after the fire of 1976): open-plan classrooms and acres of facilities. The old section, restored and painted, still had traditional classroom and its beautiful nineteenth-century-style hall with its leadlight windows.

Mr Arthur Lewis could not join us at this reunion. He was taken seriously ill on the day before the reunion, and he died on 24 February. Fortunately he was interviewed for the local newspaper in early January, and his contribution to the whole life of Oakleigh recognised. Mr Ern Tonkin, who had been ill the year before, looked chipper and seemed to be enjoying himself at the second reunion. Mr Alan Kaufmann, who had taught the 6B people in Grade 4, and his wife, were there. He had retired early, and he and his wife had been eel farming for the past twenty years.

The next reunion? Most people seemed to feel that they did not want to meet every year. Besides, the members of the committee, who had once again done a remarkable job, need a break. Why not in 1997, the year that most of us turn fifty?

Not sure whether or not this was a note of celebration to end on, we went home.

(Indirect results of these reunions will continue. Some of us will meet again in August. And Wal Robinson has contributed a travel/adventure article for the next *Metaphysical Review*.)

— 22 May 1994

**JOHN LITCHEN** has travelled extensively in Europe, and in 1968 he lived in Mexico for twelve months working as a percussionist in Acapulco. He has been involved in underwater cinematography and fandom, and is currently developing a writing career. John is perhaps best known in fandom for directing and photographing the *Aussiefan/Antifan* films that were used to help win the right to hold the 1975 Worldcon in Melbourne. Here is the story of those films.

#### FANDOM AND FILMS

## What was the name of that film?

photographs and text  
by John Lichen



It never had a name or a title. It was sometimes called the *Aussiefan Film*, the *Aussiecon Film*, the *Antifan Film*, or even *The Australia in 75 Promotional Film*. The only title that appears on the film simply denotes the place where the action happens, Melbourne, but for me it was always the *Antifan Film*. *Antifan* was the star.



(Above) The film-maker: John Lichen in 1972.

(Left) Paul Stevens as Antifan.

In 1972 a group of us were over at John Bangsund's house in St Kilda. The occasion was a party, though I can't now remember what it was for.

Nevertheless we were having a good time when the subject of bidding for the Worldcon in 1975 came up. The big names were there — Foyster, Harding, Edmonds, Grigg, Stevens, Binns, and so on. There were a few others there too, including me.

I didn't have much to do with the discussion, but apparently it was a serious affair, and we non-serious people left them to it and went with enjoying ourselves.



Sometime during the evening, however, I suggested to John Bangsund that we should make a film as part of our bidding presentation. I had plenty of film left over from an underwater film project, 25 x 100 ft rolls to be exact, and I offered this to be used for the film. I also had the camera to film it if they were interested.

Perhaps the offer wasn't taken seriously, or they thought it might be too expensive, but I heard nothing about it for a while. I do remember telling them that I would donate the film as long as I was the one to do the photography. The only thing the committee had to pay for, once it was filmed and edited, was the final release print that was to go overseas.

Weeks went by and I heard nothing. In fact I'd forgotten about it. Then one day at Space Age Books, everyone was talking about this film we were going to make and coming up with ideas about what should be in it. It was no surprise then when John Bangsund contacted me to see if I was still interested in making it. I told him I was, but they would have to come up with a script. Paul Stevens is already working on it, was his reply.

So, we were off and running. I got together with Paul and some of the other fans who had by now nipped out a plot. Paul was a fan of those early silent films and Saturday afternoon serials and melodramas, and this was the style he wanted to adopt.

This was the plot. There was another country bidding for the WorldCon at the same time as us. This country, fearing that we might beat them, decided to infiltrate Space Age Books, then the centre of sf activity in Australia, with a nasty character who would set out to ruin our bid. He was to do this by eliminating members of the bidding committee until there was no one left to put in a bid. This super-nasty character, called Antifan, would almost succeed in this dastardly deed. He would, however, be foiled at the finish by a superhero called Aussiefan, who manages to get Antifan blown up by his own horrible bomb. Aussiefan was of course rewarded for his valiant efforts and presented with a gold medallion from his grateful fans. The very final scene, improvised as most of them were while we were filming, was to have Antifan survive and be seen vowing revenge. This of course allowed him to be revived for another film shot in Sydney when that city was bidding for the WorldCon ten or so years later.

The idea was to use as many famous locations as possible during the filming so potential visitors could see what Melbourne was like. Thus the Art Gallery became the palatial home of John Foyster. Space Age Books, the hub of sf activity, was also prominently featured. Our parks and gardens were shown. The City Square in its earliest manifestation was seen, and our tree-lined streets. Even our trams were featured. Committee members used them to go in search of a suitable location for the convention.

If the finished film had a lot of spontaneity, it was because none of us knew exactly what we would film.

## FOYSTER PULPED

Freak Accident  
Kills Leading Fan

CASH  
FOR



One of the fake headlines used as chapter dividers in the Antifan film. Antifan finishes off John Foyster by burying him under a pile of his own pulp magazines.

We followed the rough plot, but generally invented a scene when we found an appropriate location. The result was as surprising to Paul Stevens and me as it was to the audience who first saw it in Sydney.

Of course the real star of the film was Paul Stevens and his alter ego, the dastardly Antifan. He did it so well he even convinced a bunch of kids in the park when we filmed the chase scene. After Robin Johnson shoots himself in shame when it is revealed that he is bald, Antifan takes off into the park with the bidding committee following. All these kids joined in. We had a heck of a time trying to keep them out of the shots



Merv Binns of Space Age Books and a mighty crowd (all six of them) congratulate Aussiefan (Malcolm Hunt) for riding Melbourne of the menace of Antifan. (Left to right: Merv Binns, John Braden, Elaine Cochrane, Malcolm Hunt, Stephen Solomon, and unknown. Bill Wright is hidden behind Malcolm Hunt.)



Triumphant Aussiefan (Malcolm Hunt) surrounded by his devoted admirers. Valma Brown (left) and Liz George are the devotees.

that made up this sequence. They finally caught up with Paul after he escaped the committee. Paul was forced to reveal that he was just an ordinary bloke like the rest of us. He took off his cloak and hat and his gloves, but his black leather jacket that he never took off made them doubtful. It was only when we showed them the camera that they would let Paul go.

Paul was a natural as Antifan. In the scene in which he leaves the bomb in front of Space Age Books and runs away up the street, on impulse he raised his hat in a salute to a passerby who stared at him in astonishment. Then he did that little jump he always did before turning a corner, and disappeared.

And that scene at the pissoir in which he changes into his Antifan costume. We were going to do it in a phone box, but considering the nature of Antifan, a pissoir was considered more appropriate. There was actually someone in there taking a leak when he ran in to change. So we incorporated that idea into the scene and had a gentleman come out, after Paul's quick change, shaking and scratching his head.

For the crowd scene we had only six people. When Aussiefan goes up the steps to receive his reward for saving the WorldCon bid, this crowd of six was to applaud and cheer and try to look like they were six

hundred. It had to be a tight shot so there was an impression that it was more crowded than it was.

It was rushed, it was chaotic at times, but it was a lot of fun. Paul and I spent two weeks on and off editing the first version, and we took this rough cut to Sydney to present at the Australian National Convention in August 1972. The music had been selected — I can't remember who did that — and taped. This tape was played a bit out of sync while the film was projected. We received a standing ovation, and we knew then that what we had done would be successful.

We had a week to make a release print. Back in Melbourne Lee Harding recorded the narration and I did the sound effects (the explosion in which Antifan is blown up by his own bomb) and mixed the narration, sound and music together. Five minutes was edited out of the film, each scene was tightened and made a little more snappy, and the violent punchup was taken out. Master and sound were taken to the lab, and a release print made.

None of us saw that print. It went straight to America to be shown at the 1972 WorldCon. During the next three years Jack Chalker and others showed it at hundreds of conventions throughout America. It wasn't until Aussiecon, our WorldCon here in Melbourne in 1975, that the film was shown on opening night and I actually saw the final print. It was as good as everyone kept telling us. That was our reward. To see the WorldCon here for the first time, to meet our favourite authors and actually speak to them, to know that what we had done was instrumental in achieving something like this, was hard to believe, but there it was, all around us. That week, you would not have found two happier people than Paul Stevens and I.

#### A few final words:

There was another short film made in colour. It featured I don't know how many very short one- or two-second grabs of the fans who would be in Melbourne or who had been involved in the organisation of the Australia in 75 Worldcon. This film was about five minutes long, and was sent over to America in the last few months before Aussiecon happened. It was just a teaser. The original black-and-white film was the one that did the job and convinced everyone who wanted to come to actually come here.

But the films were only part of it. The credit should go to all those people who worked behind the scenes, both here and in the USA, who went about talking to people, promoting Australia and our bid, and writing about it in the fanzines.

— John Litchen, January 1994

I know little about **ADRIAN RAWLINS** except that he writes poetry; that he organises and recites at poetical, musical and all manner of other artistic happenings around Melbourne and throughout Australia; that he has been painted by a number of leading painters in Melbourne and Sydney, and that a lifesize statue of him has been erected on Brunswick Street; that we both write for *Tirra Lirra* magazine; and that he is one of Australia's great enthusiasts. We met first backstage at a Kronos Quartet concert, and Adrian recognised my name because I once reviewed favourably one of his poems.

## MUSIC

# 'Only the impossible ...'

An ecstatic account of the Wynton Marsalis Septet in Melbourne, March 1994

by Adrian Rawlins

Who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time  
and Space ... and trapped the archangel of  
the soul ... and joined the elemental verbs  
and set the noun and dash of consciousness  
together jumping ...

to recreate the syntax and measure of poor  
human prose and stand before you speechless  
and intelligent and shaking with shame ...  
the madman bum and angel beat in Time ...  
and rose reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of  
jazz in the goldhorn shadow of the band and  
blew the suffering of America's naked mind  
for love into an eli eli lamma lamma  
sabacthani saxophone cry ...

This to me apocryphal, apocalyptic yet radiant and immortal image of America's destiny (from the finale of Book One of *Howl!* by Allen Ginsberg) came into my mind as I listened to the veritable miracle that is the Wynton Marsalis Septet in the Melbourne Concert Hall on Sunday, 6 March 1994. In the years since Ginsberg wrote those words, the image 'the ghostly clothes of jazz' has become more and more meaningful, as the music that was 'modern', even avant garde, forty years ago, becomes just another barline in the (hopefully) never-ending symphony that is jazz.

One says 'hopefully' because round about 1970 it looked as though jazz had nowhere else to go: it had descended into unabashed screaming. Even the tentative teenage aficionados were grooving to the self-same records my circle had grooved to in 1959-60. The jazz-rock fusion thing of the 1960s and early 1970s

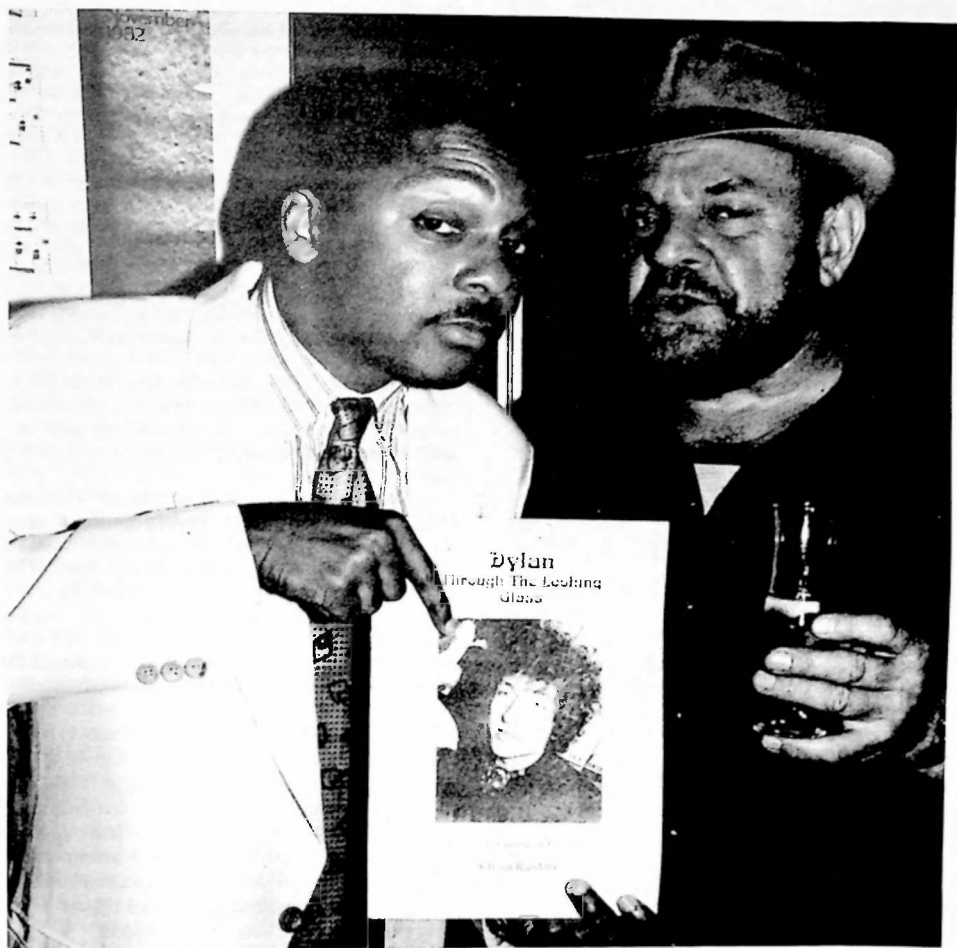
quickly petered out into nothing (who now remembers Charles Lloyd?) and it seemed that the music had reached a serious impasse.

During the 1980s something was happening that would break the impasse: in 1982 Columbia Records released *Wynton Marsalis*, the artist's debut album. It shot straight to the top, both critically and in sales. The rest, as we know, is history.

Yet knowing all that and having heard records and seen television programs did not prepare me for the wonder, the unpremeditated joy, the Virtual Second Coming, that unleashed itself upon me from the Concert Hall stage. It was though Madame Jazz (Madame Zazz, as Ellington called her) had been freed utterly from her ghostly raiment. And, to my inner eye, it seemed that every true jazz voice was reincarnate in this humble, gracious, egoless group.

Truly all of Jazz — from the first anonymous comet player using his junk comet to replicate the chants and speech patterns of his West African forebears, to the colourful and lively riverboat and street march aggregations, to the great dance bands, to the small combos — the whole hundred year history stood before me alive and shining: reinvented in utter purity.

As this superbly chosen group of individuals launched into three little-known Ellington numbers — 'Play the Blues and Go', 'Where Is the Music?' and 'Rubber Bottom' — another thread of poetry from the late Australian, Robert Cumming, came to mind. In the same year that Ginsberg wrote *Howl!* Bob had written of 'the artist ... who knows only the incredible warrants believing and only the impossible warrants



Wynton Marsalis backstage with Adrian Rawlins, 6 March 1994. Can Adrian sell Wynton a copy of his book about Bob Dylan?

achieving'. For the Septet's music which rolled and sizzled at once, solos and ensembles perfectly balanced in a gracious harmony, seemed the living embodiment of all of jazz: at once as funky and basic as Ike Rogers or Buddy Bolden and as contemporary, as fresh, as newly invented as any new music anywhere; traditional only inasmuch as the original elements of jazz as exemplified in Jelly Roll's Red Hot Peppers were present alongside the total commitment of the players' own feelings and personality; contemporary as the living moment.

But, most miraculous of all, Marsalis' genius and

his colleagues' dedication were producing a music so pure, so grounded in present joy, that in it all the divisions/factions/animosities that have arisen in jazz since Louis Armstrong inadvertently destroyed the New Orleans ensemble tradition were simply non-existent, were entirely obliterated. To speak metaphorically: the Old Hag arose as a fresh, beautiful, clear-eyed maiden.

As the Septet swung into a well-articulated head based on the chords of Hoagy Carmichael's 'Stardust' (which at first, though its familiarity was undeniable, I couldn't put my finger on; then it sounded like 'Body

and Soul'; and which I truly recognised only when the leader back-announced it) there was no Trad. versus Modern; Mouldie versus Progressive; there were no periods: no Then, no Yet. There was only Jazz Now. How can I convey to you how clean, how sweet, how pure, how ultimately good it felt to hear this revived music, this effortless singing of the soul's heartbeat? It was literally, virtually and totally 'too good to be true'. But it was true. The impossible was *happening*.

Listening to Louis Armstrong in 1954 and 1963 had been scintillating, joyous and sustaining largely because of who he inherently was. Watching Johnny Hodges play stoically for the angels while Harry Carney flirted like a bubbly seven-year-old with an ageing though comely blonde in the front row while possibly the most exalted presence in jazz tickled the ivory (and Wild Bill Davidson *almost* filled in) during Ellington's 1970 tour was great, but mainly for what Duke had already accomplished. Listening to the Marsalis Septet was the most rejuvenating and transcendental experience I have had since hearing in 1988 the specially selected quartet play Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* after the composer had spent twenty minutes telling us the scaring, harrowing and humbling story of how he came to write it. The transmission of music from the Source to us was clear, direct, radiant, divine, unimpeachable. Three days later I'm still enraptured.

I have, you may have noticed, avoided talking about W. M. and his septet (as the press tended to do) for the simple reason that the Septet is a real band, a total moral and aesthetic unity, and the trumpet player is just one of the front-line instruments. He gets no more solos than anyone else, and when one horn player is soloing all the others retire behind the drums. Their stage deportment is impeccable.

Marsalis's tone is very much like that of Clifford Brown's, but when the moment calls for it he soars like Cat Anderson, mellows like Bubba Miley, expands like a frill-necked lizard the way Dizzy used to, except that it is, for all its eclecticism, all Marsalis.

Wycliffe Gordon on trombone is an even more scintillating player than Trummy Young — so inventive, so energetic, so conversant with jazz history, so ready to swap extemporisations with the other front-men. Exemplary!

Wes Anderson on alto and soprano saxophone is the very soul of invention: a fabulous and ebullient improviser and a sensitive, witty and respectful sideman. In him the legend my contemporaries used to applique to their duffle-coat sleeves, 'BIRD lives', has come fully to life. I kid you not.

Victor Goines, a native of New Orleans, finished his studies with Ellis Marsalis, and fits in perfectly with the spirit of the band.

Ben Wolfe, the newest member of the band, seems an ideal bassist, and did his all-important job

faultlessly.

Eric Reed on piano was inspired, witty and fiercely inventive.

Herlin Riley, the group's oldest member, is also a native of New Orleans, and has played with a very impressive line-up of superstars — among them Ahmad Jamal, Dr John, George Benson, Harry Connick Jr and Don Byrd. I bet they were very glad to have him, for he seemed to me not only the perfect drummer for this band but actually that rarest of rarities: a perfect drummer full stop. I've been listening to jazz since 1952 and I've heard Gene Krupa, Joe Morello, Shelley Mann, Horace Arnold and the most amazing drummer in rock, Cozy Cole, but this is the first time I've ever been moved to call anyone a perfect drummer. (And I'm glad it has finally happened.)

The second half of the concert seemed to strike a more serious and intense note. True, each player played with as much vivacity and personal commitment as before, but it seemed to be more today: more demanding, more deeply rewarding.

'Modern Vistas. Far as the Eyes Can See', the music Marsalis wrote for a ballet about a projected post-nuclear holocaust, was appropriately sombre. From his description, the ballet followed a scenario almost identical to a short fiction film shot in Melbourne a few years ago — a film called *Smoke 'Em If You Got 'Em* — in which Nique Needles (remember the John Landy miniseries?) made his screen debut. The creators of the ballet envisaged the same dread prospect with similar irony.

The rest of the music was so overwhelmingly arresting that I forgot to write down titles, though how can I ever forget a haunting piano trio reading of 'You Don't Know What What Love Is'? Nor will I ever forget a trumpet solo in which the leader cried all over the stage — *really* the blues, as Mezz Mezzrow would have said.

And, to sustained demands for encores, the band came back and played Morton's 'Jungle Blues' as Mr Tony Jackson would have remembered it.

After the concert, backstage, I almost bumped into the man himself, and started to burble the totality of my appreciation. He looked at me like a seer, then put his arm around me and established . . . unity, equality.

Once before a jazz musician looked at me the same way. It was in 1970, and Edward Kennedy Ellington had just left a recording studio in Sydney after what I think was an unsuccessful attempt to lay down an album. I had been in the studio to see the entrepreneur Kym Bonython, and came down in the lift after Duke and two others. They were standing about uncertainly before getting back on the bus to take them to their hotel. Duke looked at me as one who could 'see' all levels of being and started to speak. It was not a worldly tongue: to my unprepared ears it sounded like psychobabble (but at a deeper level my soul intuited this was

the way my guru conversed with his guru in his learning phase). My face must have expressed equal portions of wonder and incomprehension; Duke tried another tack; again his meaning eluded me. Then, realising he had to bring it down to earth, he asked me for practical assistance: 'I need to pee. Is there a john around here?'

'Well', I replied, 'the only one I know of is back up on the floor you've just left' and, casting around for an alternative and noticing that to our left was a defunct petrol station, stripped and denuded, suggested that he could use the back wall of the station.

'You know, I've never done that before, but I don't want to go back *in there*,' he said with slow dignity, and went over and relieved himself, nodding benignly to me as he and his cronies then crossed the road to their bus and I hurried on my way.

Backstage at the Concert Hall Wynton Marsalis treated everyone with an equal benignity. Everyone who so desired received an autograph, more than one kind word, a smile, an embrace. Every member of the band really was as sweet-natured as that other intuitive genius, Errol Garner.

Eric, Wycliffe, Wes, Victor and Ben then went straight to the Bennetts Lane Jazz Club, arriving just as Tony Gould, Ben Robertson and Keith Hounslow were leaving.

A band led by Scott Tinkler took the stand and played one number before the leader announced: 'This is an open session and, er, we've got some pretty important visitors here tonight and if they'd like a blow just say when.' As he turned around to count in the next tune Wes yelled 'When!' and the members of the Septet arose from various parts of the room and made for the stage.

What happened next, tune after tune after tune, with local players having their say and receiving warm recognition from the American visitors, was some of the most joyous, inventive, wildly exciting jazz I've heard since some members of Ray Charles' Band sat in with the house band at the Fat Black Pussy Cat in 1965 — though I don't think the Australians shared the honours as equally back then.

Both the concert and the jam session that followed established in my mind the certain conviction that, as Allan Browne put it to me recently, Wynton Marsalis is the best band leader on earth; the Septet is a jazz band — a whole unit — as were the Red Hot Peppers, the King Oliver two-horn band, the Hot Five and the Hot Seven (there, I've said it!), Andy Kirk's Immaculate Clouds of Joy and Duke Ellington's classic orchestra. There is no other jazz band on earth about whom one



Adrian Rawlins (left) and Wes Anderson, 6 March 1994.

could make this claim. As I've said above, this band — inspired by this leader — presents the best, most universal traditional jazz, with the clarion originality of Bolden, Lane and Morton as they were *inventing* the idiom. The music is, in the same breath, as contemporary as the living moment.

It was wholly a privilege to listen to this superlative art, to meet these superb gentlemen. With the extreme reticence for which I'm noted I am happy to assert that Wynton Marsalis has assured the art of jazz of a future, far more convincingly than did Miles Davis in his later years. Mr Marsalis, in my eyes, already stands alongside Buddy Bolden, Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Lester Young, Charlie Christian and Charlie Parker as a primordial innovator of the art of jazz. Because of his genius and dedication, the art music I love so dearly will never die.

As Picasso arose to completely revolutionise and redirect the course of European painting, to be quickly followed by Malevich and Pollock, so Wynton Marsalis has set jazz back on the straight and narrow. Naturally, he did this in New Orleans — 'in my end is my beginning' as the poet said — but he has done it in such a way as to ensure other younger players can make ultimately creative contributions to our beloved art, based on clear guidelines of how the tradition may be re-invented in 'terms deduced from itself' rather than by aping other folkloric traditions.

Wynton Marsalis through his Septet has achieved the impossible: he has made the old new and rendered the new timeless.

— Adrian Rawlins, March 1994

# Lists! glorious lists! (Forward to 1962!)

by

Bruce Gillespie,  
Greg Egan,  
Robert James Mapson,  
Richard Brandt,  
Don Ashby,  
Andy Sawyer,  
Philip Bird,  
Gerald Murnane,  
Bernd Fischer, and  
Doug Barbour



## BRUCE GILLESPIE's lists:

People actually ask for these lists. Not many people, but enough to give me an excuse to publish them.

I sat down for three days, searched through endless scraps of paper, then constructed these lists.

What did I learn from my searches about the last three or four years?

Flipping through my diary for 1992 showed that it was an even worse year than it seemed at the time. (See the story on Roger Weddall in this issue.)

I learned that I remain forever on the brink of falling prey to CD fever — not quite as manic as gambling fever, but nearly as expensive. But my mania still gives me great pleasure: music is still the fountain that refreshes.

I learned that I read too many books because they are written by friends or because I review them for *SFC*, *TMR*, *Thyme* or *The Melburnian*. Without intending to, I've almost stopped reading critical books. I read few nineteenth-century novels, and few books that remain living in the mind.

And I realised that those good old black-and-white movies have almost disappeared from television, except at 2 a.m. Hence a greatly reduced competition among items for My Favourite Films lists.

### Notes:

- These are my favourite (not The

Best) items read, seen or heard for the first time during the year mentioned. For this reason I've left out, say, some favourite CDs because they are remastered versions of performances that have long been favourites. (In at least one case, I've listed the repackaged version because the digital remastering makes the old version redundant.)

• When I published my Favourites Lists for 1990 (in *TMR* 15/16/17) I had not yet worked out my Favourite Popular and Classical CDs. Which is why they head the list:

### 1990 FAVOURITE POPULAR CDs

- 1 *Songs for Drella*  
Lou Reed and John Cale (Sire/Warner Bros.)
- 2 *The Byrds*  
The Byrds (Columbia/Legacy) (4 CDs)
- 3 *Heart's Desire*  
Henry Kaiser Band (Reckless)
- 4 *I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got*  
Sinead O'Connor (Chrysalis/

Ensign)

- 5 *Lake Wobegon Loyalty Days*  
Garrison Keillor (Virgin)
- 6 *The Layla Sessions*  
Derek & the Dominoes (Polydor) (3 CDs)
- 7 *Bluesiana Triangle*  
Art Blakey, Dr John & David 'Fathead' Newman (Windham Hill Jazz)
- 8 *Stranger in this Town*  
Mick Taylor (Maze)
- 9 *Live*  
Carla Olson and Mick Taylor (Demon)
- 10 *Blazing Away*  
Marianne Faithful (Island)
- 11 *Attainable Love*  
Christine Lavin (Philo/ Rounder)
- 12 *Two Roads: Live in Australia*  
Butch Hancock & Jimmie Dale Gilmore (Virgin) (LP)
- 13 *America — Do You Remember the Love?*  
James Blood Ulmer (Blue Note)
- 14 *Les Ailes du Désir (Wings of Desire)*  
Soundtrack (Verèse Sarabande)
- 15 *True Voices*  
Various artists (Demon)

In *Songs for Drella*, ex-Velvet Underground members Lou Reed and John Cale write the lyrics as if they were the words of Andy Warhol. I don't know

whether or not they were, but the device is effective. Reed and Cale were estranged from Warhol when he died, and their tribute shows a deep but puzzled affection. Unsentimental, spare rock 'n' roll instrumentation sets off the words. What makes this the record of the year, though, is the track called 'A Dream'. John Cale speaks in his Welsh accent words from Andy Warhol's final diary entries. Here is a vivid word landscape that reaches beyond the narrow world of Andy Warhol and his New York.

In any other year, a four-CD compilation of *The Byrds* would have been Record of the Year. Okay, it's my other Record of the Year. The remastering of the familiar music is perfect, but what makes this collection unmissable are all the tracks we've never heard, including Gram Parsons' original vocals for tracks that eventually appeared on *Sweethearts of the Rodeo* with Roger McGuinn's vocals substituted for Parsons'.

Henry Kaiser was the discovery of the year. He's one of rock's amiable madmen, the sort of person who keeps making CDs that make no profits for either him or the various small record companies that sponsor him. He doesn't sing, although he employs brilliant vocalists. I first heard his hand on a Rolling Stones tribute album *Stoned Again*, on which the Kaiser Band were the only performers who had the slightest notion of what the Stones are about. Kaiser's best CDs are *Heart's Desire* and a small number of others on which he makes original and often very funny cover versions. (Included are Grateful Dead's 'Dark Star', Ray Charles' 'Losing Hand', Neil Young's 'The Loner' and the Band's 'King Harvest (Has Surely Come)'). The Kaiser Band's own 'The Ballad of Shane Muscatell' must go on any 'Greatest Comedy Tracks' CD if Rhino Records gets around it.

*I Do Not Want What I Haven't Got's* title song became so familiar on radio that you might not have listened to the album from beginning to ending. Wrist-slashing lyrics, but what a wonderful voice Sinead O'Connor has!

When you consider how popular Garrison Keillor became when *A Prairie Home Companion* was broadcast in Australia during the mid-1980s, it's puzzling that the record companies have not released more of his material, especially as he still produces two hours of it every week in America. *Lake Wobegon Loyalty Days* remains a welcome break in the drought, with

lots of Lake Wobegon business, a monologue, and (with Philip Brunelle conducting, the Minneapolis Symphony) 'The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra'. Keillor's seeming blandness is an apt way of disguising the subversive quality of his humour. I just wish somebody would import his PHC compilations, which I presume are now on CD somewhere in America.

The world's best blues guitarist, Eric Clapton, can be heard at perhaps too great a length on the 3-CD *Layla Sessions*. But the remastering of the 1969 tapes is a jaw-dropping technical masterpiece. This is one of those sets I had to have, even if I play it only a track at a time. (The set has the original *Layla* album, improved beyond anything that might have been suspected from the original LP pressing; all the alternative takes; and a CD of jamming, which I don't think I've played yet.)

I don't know jazz much. I bought *Bluesiana Triangle* because Dr John (Mac Rebennack) produced it. That was a guarantee of quality. Art Blakey, who proves here that he was one of the world's greatest drummers, dominates what proved to be his last recording session. David 'Fathead' Newman is always a brilliant sax player, whether on jazz or rock records. Satisfying blues/jazz.

Every time I play a Rolling Stones album made after 1974, I regret the disappearance of Mick Taylor from the band. He also disappeared from recording for about 15 years, but *Stranger in this Town* and *Live* show that he is still a master of rock/slide guitar. Luvverly listening, especially the long versions of the Stones' 'Sway' and 'Silver Train'.

Marianne Faithful, like Mick Taylor, was more damaged than helped by her association with the Stones, but every now and again Faithful cranks up her almost-disintegrated voice and her vast talents and produces an album as delicious as *Blazing Away*. Here is singing with passion, pathos and whip-snap bitchiness. Over 72 minutes of state-of-the-art live recording in a London church. When you hear a CD like this, you say good riddance to LPs.

Christine Lavin seems as amusing and inconsequential as Marianne Faithful seems terminally sad and angry. Listen to Lavin's lyrics on *Attainable Love* and you find a fair bit of slicing and carving as well as celebration. My favourite songs include 'Sensitive New Age Guys', in which Christine finds lyrics that a participa-

tion chorus of SNACs won't join in on, and 'Shopping Cart of Love: The Play', which tells how she brought New York to a stop by attempting to pay for her groceries at the wrong cash register. There's also 'Castlemaine' about, you guessed it, a bloke she met at that town in the Western District.

Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore, two veterans of the Flatlanders, armed with two acoustic guitars, also toured Australia during the late 1980s. Hancock and Gilmore are two of the best song writers in the world, and many of their 'greatest hits' are featured on *Two Roads: Live in Australia*. Paul Kelly invades the stage for a couple of songs.

Not much jazz in this list, but James Blood Ulmer is usually regarded as a jazz performer. To America — *Do You Remember the Love?* is upbeat rock-blues rather than jazz. I'm not quite sure which New Age message Ulmer supports, but he does enjoy himself.

Celebration of a different kind from the various singers who contribute to *True Voices*. Live artists celebrate dead artists, with (for instance) Michael Nold singing (and improving greatly) Kate Wolf's 'Across the Great Divide' and Gene Clark singing Phil Ochs' 'Changes'. Only one trouble with this disc: Gene Clark himself has died since making his contribution.

#### 1990 FAVOURITE CLASSICAL CDs

- 1 Mozart: *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (The Abduction from the Seraglio)  
Nikolaus Harnoncourt cond. Orch. & Chorus of the Zurich Opera House (Teldec) (2 CDs)
- 2 Tchaikovsky: *Symphonies 1-6/Manford Symphony*  
Mariss Jansons cond. Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra (Chandos) (7 CDs)
- 3 Richard Strauss: *Thus Spake Zarathustra/Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks/Salome: Dance of the Seven Veils*  
Herbert von Karajan cond. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (DG Gal-leria)
- 4 Isaac Stern (violin): *Early Concerto Recordings, Vols. I & II* (Bach No. 1/Vivaldi RV 522/Haydn No. 1/Brahms: VC and Double Concerto/Tchaikovsky/Mendelssohn/Ravel:



- Tzigane/Lalo/Bruch No. 1/Sarasate Op. 20/Sibelius/Bernstein: Serenade/Saint-Saens Op. 28/Prokofiev Nos. 1 & 2/Wieniawski No. 2  
Various Orchestras (Sony Classical) (4 CDs)
- 5 Bach: *The Well-Tempered Klavier*  
Glenn Gould (piano) (CBS Masterworks) (3 CDs)
- 6 Schubert: *Die Schöne Müllerin/Winterreise/Schwanengesang* etc.  
Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (baritone), Gerald Moore (piano) (EMI) (3 CDs)
- 7 Brahms: *Symphony No. 3/Tragic Overture*  
Christoph von Dohnanyi cond. Cleveland Orchestra (Teldec)
- 8 Bartok: *6 String Quartets*  
Emerson String Quartet (DG) (2 CDs)
- 9 Haydn: *Piano Trios Nos. 38-40*  
London Fortepiano Trio (Hyperion)
- 10 Haydn: *Il Ritorno di Tobia*  
Ferenc Szekeres cond. Hungarian State Orchestra & Budapest Madrigal Choir (Hungaroton) (3 CDs)
- 11 Haydn: *The Creation*  
Nikolaus Harnoncourt cond. Vienna Symphony Orchestra/Arnold Schonberg Choir (Teldec) (2 CDs)
- 12 Mendelssohn: *5 Symphonies*  
Herbert von Karajan cond. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (DG) (3 CDs)
- 13 Schubert: *Piano Sonatas D. 894, D. 840*  
Alfred Brendel (piano) (Philips)
- 14 Brahms: *Piano Quartets*  
Emanuel Ax (piano)/Isaac Stern (violin)/Jaime Laredo (viola)/Yo-Yo Ma (cello) (Sony Classical) (2 CDs)
- 15 Rachmaninoff: *The 3 Symphonies/Vocalise*  
Eugene Ormandy cond. Philadelphia Orchestra (CBS Masterworks) (2 CDs)

This is very much a list of Big Luscious New Versions That Make You Listen Again to Works that Are Usually Just a Bit Boring. Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Mariss Jansons, currently my conductor heroes, show that no work need be always boring.

I've heard boring versions of *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, and I've heard enjoyable versions, but never anything like Harnoncourt's reading,

which makes it into a major opera. Here is a deft mixture of sensitive engineering and sharp playing and singing. Greatness comes from the sense of commitment, passion and humour that Harnoncourt adds to the mixture. Buy this CD set to find out just how enjoyable Mozartian opera can be.

Similarly, Tchaikovsky symphonies usually leave me with yawn cramp. One day I heard on 3MBS a piece of music of which I thought: This sounds like Tchaikovsky; I don't know what it is, but it's great! It was Mariss Jansons conducting the Oslo Philharmonic. The piece was Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5, usually the ultimate yawn-inducer. Jansons transforms each of the big boring symphonies (Nos. 4-6 and the *Manfred*). You need never listen to another version. He's also fine with the first three symphonies, which I liked already, although Geoffrey Simon and the London Symphony (on Chandos) still pip him on the second.

Karajan was a Richard Strauss specialist, and each of his performances of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is inspired. My favourite is this 1970s' version, although I'm sure the 1960s' version would also still be available on EMI.

I'm a sucker for anthology recordings, and Isaac Stern, one of the century's great violinists, playing almost all the great violin concertos on 4 CDs is irresistible. Some versions are, inevitably, limited by the quality of the conductor or the vintage of the recording (some go back to 1952), but Stern's reading of the Prokofiev concertos is in itself enough to make this set indispensable.

Also indispensable is Glenn Gould's version of Bach's *The Well-Tempered Klavier*. That's if you like piano playing, the work of Glenn Gould, or the music of Bach.

The listed Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau versions of Schubert's major song cycles are not glossy new versions, but are his first or second attempts at them. His interpretation may have deepened over the years, but his voice was at its best in the 1950s. (Hans Hotter's golden version of *Winterreise* from the early 1950s is still the best recorded version — but there is still no sign of a CD release of Hotter's *Schwanengesang* from the same era.)

Back to transformations. The No. 3 is usually the Brahms symphony that I don't like at all, until I heard one late night Christoph von Dohnanyi and the Cleveland Orchestra playing it freshly

and cleanly. No more boring old Brahms; listen to this version.

I dare say there are an even dozen great current versions of the Bartok Quartets on the market. Nobody records music like this unless they are brilliant and self-confident. But the Emerson Quartet version happens to be the one I bought, and it'll do me for a while yet.

Until I bought the boxed set of Haydn Trios by the Beaux Arts Trio (see 1991's classical music list below), Elaine and I had experimented by buying single CDs of various trios. Only one was satisfactory: the London Fortepiano Trio's version of the trios Nos. 38-40. Maybe it was the unusual sparkling quality of the fortepiano; perhaps it was Hyperion's recording sound, which I always find very enjoyable, although some critics claim that it is 'reverberant'. Whatever. I haven't heard of the London Fortepiano Trio recently. A pity.

Haydn operas are hardly boring, but they are independently interesting unless played with a lot of commitment and daring. *Il Ritorno di Tobia* has these qualities, supplied by a Hungarian outfit under the direction of Ferenc Szekeres.

Harnoncourt again, with Haydn's *The Creation*. In its way it's as exciting a recording as the same conductor's *Seraglio*, but the music is not as interesting as Mozart's. It shows a lot about the competitiveness of this list that this version of *The Creation* is not No. 3 or 4 on the list.

Karajan doesn't always provide fresh or exciting interpretations of well known music, even music he loves, so the boxed set of his 1970s versions of the Mendelssohn symphonies varies from the humdrum to the very great. The very great is his epic reading of the choral Symphony No. 2, parts of which don't survive unless played as well as this. The 'Reformation' Symphony is also very moving. The others? Wait until Harnoncourt gets to Mendelssohn. (Surely soon.)

Mariss Jansons, already mentioned, conducted the Rachmaninoff symphonies on a recent set of CDs. His versions were much praised, and the one I heard on the radio was magnificent. But I had already bought the Ormandy versions listed here, and they are also magnificent. In both cases, the conductors give the composer something more than he put into the music. Rachmaninoff's music is not exactly a sow's ear, but I never thought I would consider it a silk purse, let alone buy records of it.

1991  
FAVOURITE POPULAR CDs

- 1 *The Bootleg Series, Vols. 1-3*  
Bob Dylan (Columbia) (3 CDs)
- 2 *Flashpoint/Collectibles*  
The Rolling Stones (Rolling Stones) (2 CDs)
- 3 *The Early Years 1959-1966*  
The Shadows (EMI) (6 CDs)
- 4 *Back to Mono (1958-69)*  
Phil Spector (producer) (Phil Spector Records) (4 CDs)
- 5 *CSN*  
Crosby Stills & Nash (Atlantic) (4 CDs)
- 6 *24 Nights*  
Eric Clapton (Reprise) (2 CDs)
- 7 *The Birth of Soul*  
Ray Charles (Atlantic) (3 CDs)
- 8 *Mr Lucky*  
John Lee Hooker  
(Charisma/Poindblank)
- 9 *Tabaran*  
Not Drowning Waving (WEA)
- 10 *Comedy*  
Paul Kelly (Mushroom)

For pop CDs, 1991 was The Year of the Boxed Set. The boom in CD boxed sets began in 1987 with Bob Dylan's *Biograph*, continued with Eric Clapton's *Crossroads*, still the best of them, and hit a sales peak in 1990 with *Led Zeppelin* (remastered album tracks on four CDs). When that package sold more than a million copies (i.e. four million little silver discs), you couldn't stop the record companies. And, of course, sucker Bruce couldn't resist the best of them.

Or, in a couple of cases, the worst of them. (Don't, even if you are as demented as I am, buy the Bee Gees' four-CD set *The Continuing Story of the Gibb Brothers*. I had hoped to get a good collection of their late 1960s-early 1970s stuff. No such luck. Two CDs of the good stuff. Nearly two CDs of the disco and other post-1978 stuff. Bye bye, dollars.)

In my Favourites list are a few of the boxed sets that I bought in 1991. Bob Dylan's *The Bootleg Series, Vols. 1-3* is a peak even in this bloke's illustrious career. As the title of the three-CD set implies, many of these tracks have been available on bootleg albums for many years. But the quality of sound on bootlegs, especially during the 1970s, is usually atrocious. Dylan has gone back to the original masters of these tracks, and the digital engineers have had a great time making these

into what feel like new performances.

Some sets, such as producer Phil Spector's *Back to Mono*, I bought because of the importance of the material itself (and, of course, all that digital remastering). The selection of material was disappointing: a fair number of tracks by the Crystals and the Ronettes, but a lack of important items such as 'Hung on You' (the Righteous Brothers' best song) and one of Spector's last production sessions, Dion's 'Born to Be With You'.

On other sets, such as the *Shadows' The Early Years 1959-1966*, you get everything you wanted to hear, provided you are a Shadows fan, of course. The best of the best, plus a lot of fillers, all (again) in glorious remastered digital sound.

If I liked Crosby Stills and Nash better than I like Dylan, Spector or the Shadows, I would have placed CSN at No. 1. All the best of their material is here, plus many previously unreleased tracks. The package notes are informative and amusing. CSN is an example of how to produce an anthology.

Also an excellent collection, but without some essential items, is a Atlantic's three-CD selection of Ray Charles' 1950s work for them. *The Birth of Soul* is worth buying, but it is one of many boxed sets that made me think that if I could have raided the vaults, I would have done a much better job.

In the end, I like classic Rolling Stones better than any of the above. Recent Stones records are a problem. The studio albums have been uninteresting since the mid-1970s. The concert albums are usually poorly recorded. *Flashpoint* is the exception: excellent recording quality and spirited performances from the 1990 world tour. More valuable, however, is *Collectibles*, which was briefly available in a package with *Flashpoint*. *Collectibles* is a dip into the vault that proves that many of the Rolling Stones' best studio performances of the 1980s stayed in the tape vaults. In particular, 'Fannyman Blues' proves that the Stones are still the world's best blues group, even if they rarely play the blues.

Recent albums?

Eric Clapton's *24 Nights* is a small selection of the songs he played live at the Albert Hall in a series of 24 concerts in 1990. I want the lot (If I knew which bootleg CDs to buy, I could probably get them.) Here are a few tracks from each of four bands, each bigger than the other, that he employed during the concert series. Needless to say, the items played with an orchestra are not

too interesting (but they include Clapton's music from *Edge of Darkness*). As always with Clapton, the blues songs are indispensable, while most of the pop songs are avoidable.

It says a lot about 1991's music that the best studio-produced new CD is pushed down to No. 8 on the list. John Lee Hooker, one of the last of great bluesmen left alive, has had a wonderful time during recent years. He's employed today's top blues musicians and high-quality technology to make swaggering, exciting albums. *Mr Lucky* is the second of them.

I don't know why it took me years to become aware of Not Drowning Waving, one of Australia's best groups. But suddenly pieces of *Tabaran* were all the radio, and it became the CD to buy. (Most of NDW are also part of a group called My Friend the Chocolate Cake, whose debut album was No. 11 on my list.) *Tabaran* features lots of musicians from Papua New Guinea, where much of the album was made. Lots of percussion, lots of good tunes, and David Bridie is a very effective singer.

To round out the list, Paul Kelly, Australia's best singer-songwriter, with *Comedy*, an album that in most other years would have been No. 2 or 3. It has 72 minutes of wise, funny, sharply observant songs, all in Kelly's sardonic spit-it-out voice.

1991  
FAVOURITE CLASSICAL CDs

- 1 Haydn: *The Piano Trios*  
Beaux Arts Trio (Philips) (9 CDs)
- 2 Beethoven: *The Complete Piano Sonatas*  
Arthur Schnabel (EMI) (8 CDs)
- 3 Haydn: *Symphonies Nos. 6, 7, 8*  
Nikolaus Harnoncourt cond.  
Concentus Musicus Wien  
(Telarc/Das Alte Werk)
- 4 Mahler: *Symphony No. 3/ Rückertlieder*  
Michael Tilson Thomas cond.  
London Symphony Orchestra/Dame Janet Baker (soprano)  
(CBS Masterworks) (2 CDs)
- 5 *Winter Was Hard*  
(Sallinen: *Winter Was Hard*;  
Riley: *Half-Wolf Dances Mad in Moonlight*; Part: *Frates*; Weber: *Six Bagatelles*; Zorn: *Forbidden Fruit*; Lurie: *Bella by Barlight*; Piazzolla: *Four, for Tango*; Schnittke: *Quartet No. 3*; Barber: *Adagio*; Kronos Quartet:

# A Door Is Ajar

Kronos Quartet (Elektra/None-such)

- 6 Dvorak: *Cello Concerto*/Bruch: *Kol Nidrei*; Tchaikovsky: *Variations on a Rococo Theme*  
Lynn Harrell (cello)/Vladimir Ashkenazy cond. Philharmonic Orchestra/Lorin Maazel cond. Cleveland Orchestra (Decca)
- 7 *Black Angels*  
(Crumb: *Black Angels*; Tallis: *Spem in Alium*; Marta: *Doom. A Sigh*; Ives: *They Are There*; Shostakovich: *Quartet No. 8*)  
Kronos Quartet (Elektra None-such)
- 8 Domenico Scarlatti: *Complete Keyboard Works*  
Scott Ross (harpsichord) (34 CDs)

The combination of Haydn and the piano trio form and the Beaux Arts Trio is perfect, so how could this set be anything but No. 1 in its year. Not that I know the Haydn trios yet in the way that I (sort of) know the Beethoven trios. But they are sitting on the shelf, waiting to be played for the rest of my life — which is about as pleasant an anticipation as one could hope for.

I've waited for years for some company to release the Schnabel versions of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas. When I listened to some of the CDs in the EMI package, I felt just a bit cheated. Just why is Schnabel thought to be the best pianist ever recorded? Yes, the performances are wonderful, but even digital remastering cannot hide the fact that they were recorded in the 1930s. The May 1994 *Gramophone* reveals that at least two other companies have released these sonatas, each using a different method of remastering the old 78 rpm records. One method, used by Pearl, keeps the snap, crackle and pop, but also allows the listener to hear the music clearly. The method used by EMI suppresses the surface noise, but also rounds off the highs in the music. Which is why this set seems a bit dull. A pity. I've never seen the Pearl set on sale in Australia. Someday ...

It's fairly hard to make Haydn's symphonies unfresh, but plenty of conductors have tried. Let Nikolaus Harnoncourt and the Concentus Musicus Wien loose on the three glorious early symphonies Nos. 6, 7 and 8, and you have the essence of freshness.

Until the Abravanel version of Mahler's Symphony No. 3 was released on CD last year, I kept searching for some version that had any of the

magic of that performance. Tilson Thomas's version with the London Symphony Orchestra comes close. It remains a valid version, although of course I would still urge you to buy the Abravanel on Vanguard.

We had, of course, already bought CDs by the Kronos Quartet before *Winter Was Hard* and *Black Angels* appeared. 1991 was the year of these two remarkable anthology/concept CDs, and also the year in which we saw the Kronos Quartet performing at the Melbourne Concert Hall. Not many string quartets make a vivid spectacle of their work, but that's what happened the night we were there. Kronos Quartet only play music from the twentieth century, and they commission most of the works they play. The result is mixed: sometimes nearly unlistenable, but usually surprising and often witty. Kronos Quartet introduced us to the music of Gorecki before the rest of the world bought his Symphony No. 3. They introduced Peter Sculthorpe to American audiences. Of these two CDs, *Winter Was Hard* is almost too abundant with good things (from Reich to Schnittke), and *Black Angels* is almost too accurate a portrait of the sombre side of the twentieth century. *Black Angels* has, oddly enough, the only disappointing performance on any of their CDs: an uninteresting version of Shostakovich's Quartet No. 8.

I bought the recent Lynn Harrell anthology of cello music because I heard his version of Bruch's *Kol Nidrei* late one night on the radio. It is usually played as a show piece, but Harrell treats it as a deeply moving meditation. It makes this CD worth buying, but his versions of Dvorak's Cello Concerto and Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations* are also worth having.

And there, sitting at the bottom of the list, one of the great achievements of twentieth-century recording: Domenico Scarlatti's *Complete Keyboard Works* that Scott Ross recorded before he died of AIDS. Not that I bought this set, although I was tempted. Elaine bought it. I can only listen to a few CDs at a time of brilliant harpsichord playing. You may be more ecstatic than I am about what is, of course, very great music.

## 1991 FAVOURITE NOVELS

- 1 *Only Begotten Daughter*  
James Morrow (1990; Morrow; 312 pp.)
- 2 *The Transit of Venus*  
Shirley Hazzard (1980; Macmillan; 337 pp.)
- 3 *Stallion Gate*  
Martin Cruz Smith (1986; Collins Harvill; 287 pp.)
- 4 *Time and Chance*  
Alan Brennert (1990; Tor; 281 pp.)
- 5 *Sleeping in Flame*  
Jonathan Carroll (1988; Legend; 244 pp.)
- 6 *Ragtime*  
E. L. Doctorow (1974; Macmillan; 270 pp.)
- 7 *Kickback*  
Garry Disher (1991; Allen & Unwin; 192 pp.)
- 8 *Breathing Lessons*  
Anne Tyler (1988; Alfred Knopf; 327 pp.)
- 9 *Brain Child*  
George Turner (1991; Morrow; 407 pp.)
- 10 *The Hole Through the Centre of the World*  
Kevin Brophy (1991; Simon & Schuster; 225 pp.)

You'll remember how these lists work: first I make up a list of Favourite Novels, and write about those; then for my Favourite Books list I intersperse all the other types of books I read these days: anthologies, non-fiction, poetry, etc.

In *SFC 71/72/73* I've already taken several thousand words to write about *Only Begotten Daughter*. Certainly it's a satire, but it works at a much deeper level than satire. Much of it stays vivid in the mind.

According to your taste, *The Transit of Venus* is a stiff, priggish, pretentious nineteenth-century novel; or it's an agile, penetrating novel that has many of the virtues of the great nineteenth-century novels. It's a rich meal; appreciating it depends on the diner.

*Stallion Gate* is the story of the building and first detonation of the atomic bomb told from the point of view of the native Americans who were booted off their land to provide a testing ground. Dull, documentary stuff? Not a bit of it. Martin Cruz Smith's characters don't get in a twist about the large implications of all this. They just get on with their lives. But those lives are being

twisted anyway. Most memorable image is that of the two blokes who nursemaid a plutonium bomb in the back of a truck as it hurtles along one of the roughest roads in the state.

But I've talked about *Stallion Gate* already in *SF Commentary*. Excuse me if I repeat myself, or don't talk about books that I've reviewed already. Books that fall into this category include *Time and Chance* (a well-done parable about a man who changes lives with the person he might have become in an alternative reality), *Sleeping in Flame* (an indescribable dream/nightmare about someone who inadvertently has become grim part of a Grimm's tale), and *Brain Child* (a dour but tense fable about the limitations of power that people who think they are powerful impose upon themselves and the world).

I don't remember a great deal about *Ragtime*. The story that dominates its end is that of a black man who, without meaning to do so, insults some white men, and refuses to 'apologise'. But there are also historical characters, and — best of all — the story of a woman who travels from New York to the centre of the continent by means of interlinked tramways. You could do this in the early part of the century, before the car manufacturers bought the tramways and closed them down. I can't remember how all the bits of this book interconnect.

*Kickback* shows that an Australian can write a first-class thriller. Wyatt is a criminal who decides to do one last job before he retires. Unfortunately, he hires unreliable help. And then he annoys people he didn't know were interested in his caper. Formula plot, but there is nothing formulaic about Wyatt's implacability or the well-observed terse detail of the back streets of Melbourne. Two sequels, *Paydirt* and *Dead Deal*, have appeared, but neither is as interesting as *Kickback*.

According to your taste, *Breathing Lessons* is just another Anne Tyler novel, or — ah! — another luscious Anne Tyler novel. Yet another American odyssey, of two people who are not quite sure of how to get on with life, but find a way by bumbling through. Anne Tyler's novels are so convincingly upbeat that they are probably unfashionable. They give endless pleasure to an old sofite like me.

I don't usually put in my Top 10 a book that doesn't quite work. Kevin Brophy's *The Hole Through the Centre of the World* is such a book. However, the first half of the novel, which stars the

story-teller's eccentric father, is excellent writing, and the book glows in the mind. Not many Australian novels are unforgettable.

#### 1991 FAVOURITE BOOKS

- 1 *Patrick White: A Life*  
David Marr (1991; Random House; 727 pp.)
- 2 *The Burnt Ones*  
(1964; Penguin; 316 pp.)
- 3 *Only Begotten Daughter*  
James Morrow (details already given)
- 4 *The Transit of Venus*  
Shirley Hazzard (details already given)
- 5 *In the Fields of Fire*  
edited by Jeanne van Buren Dann & Jack Dann (1987; Tor; 416 pp.)
- 6 *Blood Is Not Enough*  
edited by Ellen Datlow (1989; Morrow; 319 pp.)
- 7 *Yes, Let's: New and Selected Poems*  
Tom Disch (1989; Johns Hopkins University Press; 112 pp.)
- 8 *Selected Poems 1960-1985*  
Andrew Taylor (1982/1988; University of Queensland Press; 205 pp.)
- 9 *Stallion Gate*  
Martin Cruz Smith (details given above)
- 10 *Time and Chance*  
Alan Brennert (details given above)
- 11 *Little Novels of Sicily*  
Giovanni Verga (1883; Penguin Modern Classics; 172 pp.)
- 12 *Sleeping in Flame*  
Jonathan Carroll (details given above)
- 13 *Ragtime*  
E. L. Doctorow (details given above)
- 14 *Kickback*  
Garry Disher (details given above)
- 15 *Personal Best 2*  
edited by Garry Disher (1991; Angus & Robertson/Imprint; 353 pp.)

Now I fill in the gaps between the novels:

Elsewhere in this issue of *TMR* or the next, I've written about David Marr's *Patrick White: A Life* in detail. Few biographies let you meet person being written about, and fewer give a holographic life to their portrait.

Marr's book is the best biography I've read, because it does not hide the unpleasantness of its subject, but does show his brilliance. And, although Marr does not get sidetracked into literary criticism, his passages about the fiction make you want to read *White* again or for the first time.

Which is what I did: find a Patrick White book that I hadn't read. The short story collection *The Burnt Ones* has some of his best writing. Not only is there 'A Cheery Soul', a hallucinatory horror story about a woman whose view of herself is the opposite of the view everyone else sees, but there are several other of the best short stories written by an Australian.

As you can see from my list of Favourite Short Stories (below), few anthologies have ever contributed as many stories to my annual list as has *In the Fields of Fire*. But, I hear you cry, it's built on a barmy premise: fantasy stories set in the Vietnam War! Barmy or not, it works. As *Apocalypse Now* showed, the Vietnam War seemed like a horrid fantasy to many who were involved. These stories take that feeling just a bit further than did Coppola. The results are spectacular. Congratulations to the editors for putting together an impossible anthology.

*Blood Is Not Enough* is pretty good as well; not much to choose between these anthologies. Datlow was seeking stories about vampirism, rather than about ordinary old vampires. The most memorable premise is in a story I haven't listed in My Favourite Short Stories: Gahan Wilson's 'The Sea Was Wet as Wet Could Be', which stars Lewis Carroll's Walrus and the Carpenter. The best story is Scott Baker's 'Varicose Worms' (see below, Favourite Short Stories). The story that has had the greatest financial success: Dan Simmons' 'Carrión Comfort', which he turned into a fat novel.

I don't quite know why I've been turning to books of poetry recently. Philip Larkin and Philip Hodgins inspired me to begin reading poetry after neglecting it since university days, but that hardly explains why I kept going. There are times, I suspect, when I need the meditative glistening qualities of the great passages of great novels without having to push through the boring narrative. (The rest of the time I crave the tense, exciting narrative without having to endure the boring meditative bits.) Most poems these days are short, and the best of them distil and purify the flavours of experience in a way that's unavailable

elsewhere.

That last sentence is how I would describe the best poems in both Tom Disch's *Yes, Let's* and Andrew Taylor's *Selected Poems 1960-1985*. Disch's poetry isn't much known in Australia, because his books are almost impossible to order. Adelaide poet Andrew Taylor is possibly not much known outside Australia. A pity. Many of Disch's poems are funny as well as wise. The best of Taylor's poems are like Escher's illustrations: they turn perceptions inside out.

Not much to say about *Little Novels of Sicily* except that Verga mastered that flat, declarative style that we usually think of as 'mid-nineteenth-century realism', and turned it onto the harsh landscape he knew well. Many of these stories are fantasies or near-fantasies.

Here's Garry Disher again, as anthologist (*Personal Best 2*). Nice premise: authors introduce their favourites among their own stories. Some of the introductions are longer and more interesting than the stories, but most of the stories are good as well. Disher prepared a third *Personal Best* anthology, which unfortunately has not appeared yet.

#### 1991 FAVOURITE SHORT STORIES

- 1 'Varicose Worms'  
Scott Baker (*Blood Is Not Enough*)
- 2 'A Cheery Soul'  
Patrick White (*The Burnt Ones*)
- 3 'Dead Roses'  
Patrick White (*The Burnt Ones*)
- 4 'The Moon'  
David Brooks (*Millennium* ed. Helen Daniel)
- 5 'Goats'  
David Smeds (*In the Fields of Fire*)
- 6 'The Shores of Bohemia'  
Bruce Sterling (*Universe 1* ed. Robert Silverberg & Karen Haber)
- 7 'Credibility'  
John Kessel (*In the Fields of Fire*)
- 8 'Dream Baby'  
Bruce McAllister (*In the Fields of Fire*)
- 9 'Black Bread'  
Giovanni Verga (*Little Novels of Sicily*)
- 10 'Across the Sea'  
Giovanni Verga (*Little Novels of Sicily*)
- 11 'The Shobies' Story'  
Ursula K. Le Guin (*Universe 1*)

- 12 'The Extra'  
Greg Egan (*Eidolon*, No. 2)
- 13 'Turtle Soup'  
Rosaleen Love (*Eidolon*, No. 3)
- 14 'Shades'  
Lucius Shepard (*In the Fields of Fire*)
- 15 'The History of Saint Joseph's Ass'  
Giovanni Verga (*Little Novels of Sicily*)
- 16 'Lazarus'  
Leonid Andreyev (*Blood Is Not Enough*)
- 17 'My Country, Tis Not Only of Thee'  
Brian Aldiss (*In the Fields of Fire*)
- 18 'The Game of Cat and People'  
Craig Kee Strete (*In the Fields of Fire*)
- 19 'Delta Sly Honey'  
Lucius Shepard (*In the Fields of Fire*)
- 20 'Voices'  
Michael Bishop (*Close Encounters with the Deity*)

I'm not going to go into detail about each of these stories. I wrote this list at the end of 1991, and details of many of the stories have slipped down my holy memory. Also, I've written about many of them already in my book review column in *SF Commentary*.

'Varicose Worms' is the most wonderfully malevolent and strange story I've read in many years. Magic, torture, vengeance, paranoia: you want it, you get it. The style is cryptic but highly readable.

Patrick White's fiction has a fair bit of paranoia and torture as well ('A Cheery Soul'), but also an ability to slip away from mundane reality into meditative dream states (the last section of 'Dead Roses'). White's stories never rely on fantasy plots, but they sure ain't realistic, either.

*Millennium*, reviewed here or in the next issue of *TMR*, did not work as a collection, but it did bring to notice a rattling good medieval ghost story, 'Moon', by David Brooks.

I must admit that David Smeds' 'Goats', Bruce McAllister's 'Dream Baby', Craig Kee Strete's 'The Game of Cat and People' and Lucius Shepard's 'Delta Sly Honey' have become mixed in my memory. Each of them is paranoid, jungly, and scary, like the Vietnam War itself. Several of them are based on the premise that the war was an excuse for the American government to perform all sorts of unseemly experiments on soldiers and civilians. 'Goats' is different from the others, in

that it is set on an island in Hawaii, and John Kessel's 'Credibility' is based on the premise that man who escaped the draft tries so hard to convince people that he went to war that eventually he believes it himself.

'My Country, Tis Not Only of Thee' is set in a Britain that has become a Vietnam: north against south, a land in which every person might be The Enemy. A grim, convincing story about treachery.

Bruce Sterling's 'The Shores of Bohemia' is set in an alternative twentieth century that has remained medieval in many ways. The story succeeds mainly because it dumps its reader convincingly down in another, alien Paris. Is it related to the world of *The Difference Engine*. I don't know, since I haven't yet read *The Difference Engine*.

'The Shobies' Story' is one of those stories that only Ursula Le Guin can do convincingly: about people who travel through an alien experience that changes them although they are unable to explain the experience itself. All sort of mystical, but it makes a good story.

I reviewed the Greg Egan and Rosaleen Love stories in my editorial for *SF Commentary* No. 71/72.

#### 1991 FAVOURITE FILMS

- 1 *Avanti!*  
directed by Billy Wilder (1972)
- 2 *Eight Men Out*  
John Sayles (1989)
- 3 *One Foot in Heaven*  
Irving Rapper (1941)
- 4 *The Phantom of Liberty*  
Luis Bunuel (1974)
- 5 *His Girl Friday*  
Howard Hawks (1940)
- 6 *Spartacus*  
Stanley Kubrick (1960)
- 7 *Winter Kills*  
William Reichert (1979)
- 8 *Breaking In*  
Bill Forsyth (1989)

1991 was the first year in which Melbourne television stations cut back the number of black-and-white films shown at hours when I could watch them. Bill Collins, enthusiastic presenter, disappeared from the screen. So did the type of movies he presents. Basketball replaced him on Friday nights. Other black-and-white movies were shown at 2 a.m. and later. Without a videotape recorder, I had to miss

them.

Hence the shortness of the 1991 list. I tried to compensate for the loss of good movies on television by seeing some good movies at the Astor Cinema in St Kilda. This did not happen often, since somehow I had to organise myself to travel to the Astor, then always had to catch a taxi home because Astor sessions finish after the buses stop running.

My Astor phase did not last long, but it did produce one of my pleasant nights at the cinema. I went to see John Sayles' *Eight Men Out* and George Stevens Jr's *George Stevens: A Filmmaker's Journey*. There were about ten people in the giant Astor edifice. The missing patrons missed some good films, and I scored a free piece of cake (because there were so many pieces left over) as well as the traditional giant Astor Cinema chocolate-coated icecream cone.

*Eight Men Out* is one of the few recent movies with any of the style or pizzazz of Golden Age (1940s) films. It tells the story of how and why an entire baseball team fixed the 1919 World Series: complicated motives, and nothing but sad results, but enormous energy and humour in telling the story.

*A Filmmaker's Journey* has its moments, but cannot hide the fact that Stevens became a dull director after *World War II*. Because of seeing this film, I would like to see a lot of his pre-war movies.)

*Amanti!* I saw on television. Perfect colour print, too. Nobody has raved about this film until now, but I'll rave about it right now. It's an exquisitely told love story about two people (Jack Lemmon and Juliet Mills) who meet in Italy when they investigate the deaths of his father and her mother, lovers for years, meeting each other once a year. During this holiday, a car accident had wiped out the parents. He can't believe his father had ever been unfaithful to his mother; she has always known about the affair. Complications follow. Love story is inevitable. Billy Wilder's real love song is to Italy itself.

*One Foot in Heaven* must have been one of the very last movies that Bill Collins presented in prime time before Channel 10 traded him in for basketball, or rugby, or whatever other idiotic activity reaps more advertising dollars than showing good movies. The film itself (in glorious black-and-white) is based on Hartzell Spence's novel/memoir about his father, who was a minister at various midwestern churches during the early part of the

century. Father is no saint, but he performs as well as possible despite the best efforts of his various congregations. Both novel and film are studies of the mayhem that 'nice' people can wreak.

In watching *The Phantom of Liberty*, I was surprised to find that Bunuel remained just as deft in all his later films as he was in *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*. Again this is a series of surrealist vignettes, but they are flavoursome and menacing little stories.

Two more films seen at the Astor: *His Girl Friday*, the 1940 version of *The Front Page* with Rosalind Russell as the star reporter and Cary Grant as the conniving editor (didn't they know how to deliver that machine-gun dialogue in those days?), and a film that's not worth seeing anywhere but at the Astor: the new 70 mm print of Stanley Kubrick's epic *Spartacus*. This film has a few dull spots, but the use of the wide screen gives meaning to many scenes which must go flat on a TV screen. Peter Ustinov is the real star of this film, although the other stars (even Kirk Douglas) are memorable.

*Winter Kills* has John Huston as the Kennedy-like father who is the nemesis of the reporter who tries to find out the truth behind the President's death. When Richard Condon's novel and William Reichert's film appeared, much of the story must have seem far-fetched, but the archives have given credibility to this over-the-top story.

In 1988, Paul Harris announced in *Film Buffs' Forecast* on 3RRR that Bill Forsyth had died. I have never seen any confirmation of that fact: no obituaries, no news items. Yet *Breaking In* from 1989 remains Forsyth's most recent film, and there are no rumours of more to come. Can any reader enlighten me? If Forsyth did die, why weren't honours paid to the best director of the 1980s?

At any rate, if he did die, *Breaking In* is not a great finale, but it's very enjoyable. Burt Reynolds is an old burglar who meets a young burglar while they are both doing the same house at the same time. Reynolds decides to teach the young bloke how to become a success, but somehow has to learn a few pointers himself.

## 1992 FAVOURITE POPULAR CDs

- 1 *Songs of the Cat*  
Garrison Keillor and Frederica von Stade (RCA Victor)
- 2 *The Best of Green on Red/Green on Red Live*  
Green on Red (China) (2 CDs)
- 3 *A Tribute to Jack Johnson*  
Miles Davis (Columbia/Legacy)
- 4 *Warren Zevon*  
Warren Zevon (Elektra)
- 5 *The Legendary Roy Orbison*  
Roy Orbison (CBS Special Products) (4 CDs)
- 6 *Falling from Grace*  
Soundtrack produced by John Mellencamp (Mercury)
- 7 *History*  
Loudon Wainwright III (Charisma)
- 8 *The Essential Marty Robbins 1951-82*  
Marty Robbins (Columbia) (2 CDs)
- 9 *The Queen of Soul*  
Aretha Franklin (Rhino/Atlantic) (4 CDs)
- 10 *The Classic Years*  
Ray Charles (Castle) (3 CDs)
- 11 *Joshua Judges Ruth*  
Lyle Lovett (MCA/Curb)
- 12 *Love and Danger*  
Joe Ely (MCA)
- 13 *All Alone*  
Frank Sinatra (Reprise)
- 14 *Lubbock (On Everything)*  
Terry Allen (Special Delivery)
- 15 *Magic and Loss*  
Lou Reed (Sire/Warner Bros)

How, you say, could I let *The Legendary Roy Orbison*, a four-CD Best of Roy's Best Years, remain at No. 5 on my list? Surely it should have been No. 1? Not if the record company stuffed it up, which they did.

Why didn't Columbia ring me? Surely everybody in the universe knows by now that I'm the world's most ardent Roy Orbison fan? For a start, I would have filled every minute of each CD, instead of short-changing the customer with CDs that are less than 60 minutes long. Second, I would have made a much better choice of material. True, CDs 2 and 3 contain all the essential Monument hits, but the selection on CD 1 of pre-Monument stuff is mainly uninteresting, and so is the sketchy selection on CD 4 of later Monument stuff and isolated tracks for obscure record companies. The simple

fact is, as I wrote to the record company some years ago, that one could fit almost every track that Roy Orbison recorded for Monument on four CDs. If Columbia had done so, *The Legendary Roy Orbison* would have been the ultimate boxed set. (A six-CD complete set of Orbison's work for MGM was promised three years ago, but has never appeared.)

*Songs of the Cat*, by far my favourite CD of 1992, is a good test of the proposition that CDs don't wear out with much playing. Almost every visitor to our place during the last two and a half years has had to put up with at least a few tracks from this CD. You are warned. Initially RCA brought 300 copies of the CD into the country. Announcers on 3LO began playing it. Last I heard, it had sold 40,000 copies in Australia, the equivalent of a half a million sales in America.

*Songs of the Cat* employs all of Garrison Keillor's finest talents for mimicry, sly humour and tribute playing. Also, he's a very good singer, at least a match for Frederica von Stade. Keillor is equally at home with classical ('Cats May Safely Graze') and popular ('Hallelujah! I'm a Cat') material. Philip Brunelle supplies the arrangements, including nice pieces of trad jazz for 'Alaska Cats' and 'Cat Won't You Please Come Home'. This album probably swells the heads of cats, which is a bad thing, but it entertains forever, which is a good thing. (I can't work out, however, why there is no song about the intimate and constant relationship that develops between a cat and its veterinarian.)

It's competitive up this end of 1992's Popular CDs list. Any one of the Top Four would have been Number One in any other year.

*Green on Red Live*, the interesting half of its package, was never released in Australia. Gaslight Records just happened to import an English copy, which I just happened to see at the right moment. Since Danny Stuart remains the world's best rock and roll singer, and Green on Red is still capable of great things (despite the evidence of other recent CDs), this is the best rock and roll concert album since Neil Young's *Live Rust*. Stuart is a shambling lunatic of a singer, and the drummer is brilliant. If you can't find it in stores, ask an English fan to buy a copy for you.

Miles Davis's *A Tribute to Jack Johnson* is the greatest record of fusion jazz — an astonishing welding of the epic qualities of both jazz and rock.

Turn up this CD. Let lightning slice through your brain. Would I call this 'enjoyable'? Can perfection be enjoyable?

Warren Zevon, made in 1976, should have been the most successful record from the West Coast Sound era. Instead, Linda Ronstadt made a fortune from making cover versions of most of these songs. I did not even know about Zevon's first album until shortly before he visited here. Out it popped on CD. It's much better than *Excitable Boy* or any other Zevon record except *Stand in the Fire*. Here are most of his best songs — the ones covered by Linda Ronstadt. Here is his best band (Larry Zack on drums; Bob Glaub on bass; Warren on piano; Waddy Wachtel on guitar); sizzling arrangements, the lot.

Numbers 6 to 15 are pretty much equal. Perhaps I should have called them Equal Number 6.

*Falling from Grace* has annoying bits of dialogue from the movie that John Mellencamp directed and for which he produced the music. Apart from that, the songs are brilliantly morbid country ballads, mainly written by Mellencamp or members of his band.

*History is Loudon Wainwright III's Big Album*: the one in which he tells the story of his recent life, and then some. Bitter, funny songs, especially the tribute to his father (Loudon's manager), who died recently. We played this the night before we heard that Roger Weddall had died; if we'd left it another night, we could never have played it from beginning to end.

Marty Robbins had a few big pop hits during the late 1950s, and some equally successful country-pop hits during the early 1960s. I still love the hits, but *The Essential Marty Robbins 1951-82* shows that there was much more to his career than the early hits. Informative liner notes; chart information; a satisfying selection of songs: this is the sort of package every performer deserves.

Why not place *The Queen of Soul* at Number 1? Four CDs of more than 70 minutes each; well-researched liner notes; a magnificent selection of Aretha Franklin's work with Atlantic. It's all there. But it's all too much of a great thing. Aretha was almost too brilliant; too epic. I find I need to listen to these CDs in 36-minute halves. Such raw genius repels me, then draws me back; I will still be exploring this set in ten years' time.

Much the same could be said of Ray Charles' *The Classic Years*. This three-

CD set, unavailable in America, presents most of the best songs from Charles's years at ABC Paramount. It's wonderful to have all the hits from 1962 to the early 1970s; again, it's a set to savour rather than try to play at a sitting.

Lyle Lovett's *Joshua Judges Ruth*: at last, a CD actually recorded and released in 1992. Lovett's combination of jazz, country and blues is unique. What sets this album apart is the dry exquisiteness of the lyrics of the songs. Lyle is not just another hatchet face; he has a hatchet mind as well.

Joe Ely's *Love and Danger* is the sort of epic country-rock album that I usually list at No. 2 or 3. The competition from the golden oldies is too fierce this year. This is super duper cranked-up *rally epic* country-rock: you have to turn down the amplifier to 11.

Frank Sinatra singing great ballads with a great orchestra is about as satisfying an experience as popular music can offer. He made many albums of this sort of music until the early 1960s. This is one of the best of them.

Steve Smith of Reading's Records in Carlton is always trying to sell me CDs. In the case of *Lubbock (On Everything)*, his recommendation was spot on. Terry Allen is a crazed funny wise bloke from West Texas. He sounds much like Kinky Friedman, and his lyrics can be even wilder. His voice is better than Kinky's. He hasn't started writing crime novels, so I suppose he's still poor. These songs are brilliant. Discover him, someone.

*Magic and Loss* cuts a bit too deep for the bone even for little old misery-bones Gillespie. Lou Reed intones a restrained eulogy for two recently dead friends of his. I've only just been able to bring myself to listen to it. Only Philip Larkin, in his poem 'Aubade', says some things about death better than Reed does here. I'm not sure that I'm up to hearing them.

## 1992 FAVOURITE CLASSICAL CDs

- 1 **Verdi: Aida**  
Sir Georg Solti cond. Orch. and Chorus of Rome Opera Theatre (London) (3 CDs)
- 2 **Brahms: 4 Symphonies/Haydn Variations/Academic Festival Overture/Tragic Overture/Double Concerto/Liebesslieder Waltzes/Song of the Fates!**

- Hungarian Dances Nos. 1, 17, 20, 21*  
Arturo Toscanini cond. NBC Symphony Orchestra (RCA Victor) (4 CDs)
- 3 Haydn: *Symphonies Nos. 1-104*  
Antal Dorati cond. Philharmonia Hungarica (34 CDs)
- 4 Mahler: *Symphony No. 2*  
Mariss Jansons cond. Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra and Latvian State Academic Choir (Chandos) (2 CDs)
- 5 Beethoven: *Symphony No. 4/Symphony No. 7*  
Nikolaus Harnoncourt cond. Chamber Orchestra of Europe (Teldec)
- 6 Mahler: *Symphony No. 1*  
Klaus Tennstedt cond. Chicago Symphony Orchestra (EMI)
- 7 Shostakovich: *24 Preludes and Fugues*  
Tatiana Nikolayeva (piano) (Hyperion) (3 CDs)
- 8 Mozart: *Symphonies Nos. 28, 29, 35*  
Claudio Abbado cond. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (Sony Classical)
- 9 Mahler: *Symphony No. 9*  
Bruno Walter cond. Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (1939) (EMI)
- 10 Gorecki: *Three Pieces in Olden Style for String Orchestra/Symphony No. 3/Amen for Choir*  
Karol Teutsch cond. Warsaw National Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra/Jerzy Katlitz cond. Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra/Jerzy Kurczewski cond. Pznan Boys' Choir (Olympia)
- 11 Taverner: *The Protecting Veil/Thrinus/Britten: Third Suite for Cello*  
Steven Isserlis (cello), Gennadi Rozhdestvensky cond. London Symphony Orchestra (Virgin Classics)
- 12 Schubert: *Impromptus D899, D935*  
Lambert Orkis (fortepiano) (Virgin Classics)
- 13 Mahler: *Symphony No. 1*  
Leonard Bernstein cond. Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam (DG)
- 14 Berlioz: *Harold in Italy/King Lear Overture/Roman Carnival Overture*  
William Primrose (viola); Sir Thomas Beecham cond. Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (Masterworks Portrait)
- 15 Janacek: *Kreutzer Sonata for*

*Strings/Barber: Adagio for Strings/Wallton: Sonata for Strings*  
Richard Tognetti cond. Australian Chamber Orchestra (Sony Masterworks)

Gillespie putting an opera at the top of his Classical CDs list? An Italian opera? A Verdi opera? Okay, *Aida* is a very good Verdi opera: one of the few with a halfway decent story. The last scene in particular must be breathtaking on stage, both for the drama and the music. It's Verdi's most listenable score. But this particular version is here because of the real star: conductor Sir Georg Solti. Occasionally he produces not merely a great performance, but the best possible performance. It doesn't have Maria Callas as star, like Serafin's version (which I also bought), but it has a pulsating vivid life to it that divides the rosette records from the also-rans.

I already had a vinyl set of Toscanini's late-1940s versions of the Brahms symphonies, but the remastering on the CD set made them seem like a new discovery. I believe that Brahms wanted all his symphonies to sound like a Beethoven's Tenth. Toscanini and Karajan are the only conductors who have played them the way they were meant to sound: majestic, craggy, leaning. When you consider how extraordinary and truthful were Toscanini's versions of the symphonies, you cannot forgive the perpetual denigration of Brahms that you find in most other conductors' performances.

I already owned on LP quite a few of Dorati's great cycle of the Haydn symphonies, but there is nothing to compare with owning them on a set of 34 CDs. The authentic-instruments mob pretend they can improve on Haydn, but Dorati and the Philharmonia Hungarica show that they got them right in the late 1960s. (Thanks to the Annual Reading's CD Sale, one of Melbourne's more important cultural events, I was able to buy the set for half price.)

I keep buying versions of Mahler's Symphony No. 2 in the hope of buying perfection. Bruno Walter's version from 1962 still holds up against the opposition, but Jansons' is the best of the digitally recorded versions. If you can stand the near-terminal damage to your speaker system, turn up this version.

I still haven't bought Harnoncourt's complete set of the Beethoven symphonies. Perhaps it's because I first

bought this single CD tesser from the set. This version of the Fourth is as near perfection as you might find on CD (apart from the Schmidt-Isserstedt version, re-released in 1993 on Decca), but Harnoncourt's Seventh can only be described as odd. Not just too fast, but somehow missing the point of the symphony. Are the other symphonies in the series an equal combination of perfection and oddness? I guess I'll just have to fork out the money some time and find out by buying the lot.

Mahler is the composer most likely to send the CD collector mad with frustration, or poverty, or both. I just have to hear each new, highly praised version of my favourite symphonies. At one time or another I've owned eight versions of the Second, and nearly as many of the First. Only once have I ever heard my favourite version of the First. Played from a scratchy 1950s records made by a conductor whose name I don't think I heard correctly, it was on MBS late one night. Two versions I bought in 1992 come near to the experience I had of hearing that old version. One is the Bernstein/Concertgebouw version that I've put at No. 13 on this list. The other is the new Tennstedt version, which I've listed at No. 6. Tennstedt had already recorded it with the London Symphony Orchestra; a satisfactory version, but hardly one to place in a Top Ten. He must carry a DAT recorder to his concerts. I can imagine him or his technician rushing down the corridors after the performance with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra shouting 'I think we've got it! I think we've got it!' And I think they have: all that attack, that freshness, that you've always wanted to hear in the First, but nobody ever quite achieved. Listen to it, and cheer.

At the same time as I bought Tatiana Nikolayeva's version of Shostakovich's *24 Preludes and Fugues*, Julian Warner bought Keith Jarrett's. They are remarkably similar versions, equally enjoyable. The critics probably prefer Nikolayeva's version because Shostakovich wrote them for her when she was in her twenties. She recorded them when she was in her seventies, not long before she died. A fit tribute to her, and an unexpectedly fresh aspect of Shostakovich's output.

The authentic-instruments lot have done well by Mozart, but Mozart is a lot bigger than any one approach. Claudio Abbado has recently inherited the forces of the Berlin Philharmonic. Choosing Mozart's Symphonies Nos.



28, 29 and 35 as the first CD of his deal with the BPO has not the disastrous decision that it might have been. Mozart does well out of the deal. So do my ears.

Not more Mahler! I hear you cry. Mahler forever! says I. In 1939, just before the German tanks surrounded Vienna and Bruno Walter set out for America, he recorded with the Vienna Philharmonic the first commercial recording of Mahler's Ninth. Released by EMI, it remains one of the best recordings of the Ninth.

At last I get in the greatest financial success among recent classical recordings: Gorecki's Symphony No. 3. Not, however, the Zinman/Upshaw version that topped the pop charts, but a genuine Polish version, with Karol Teutsch conducting the Warsaw National Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra. The oddity of Gorecki's success is that the symphony, like all his music, really is very good. Melbourne's leading newspaper music critic disagrees. Maybe he's right, thought I, until I played the symphony again. For once, the people who buy CDs have it right: this music really is the breath of fresh air that we've been waiting for since the beginning of the century.

Not to be outdone by the Polish, the British have produced their very own Gorecki: John Tavener, a rather gormless-looking chap who surrounds himself with the stink of sanctity and produces magical modal music that melts all my objections. *The Protecting Veil* and *Thrinax* feature Stephen Isserlis's able cello. He also plays Britten's *Third Suite for Cello*. (Where can I find the other suites?)

Magic of another kind comes from that rather odd instrument, the fortepiano, straight from the honky-tonks of the 1830s, played by Lambert Orkis. Schubert's *Impromptus* are okay on an ordinary piano, but played on an unfamiliar instrument they sound like newly discovered music. If familiar music jades you, tinkle away on a fortepiano.

Still feeling recession-out, the major record companies have almost stopped raiding their vaults for the Classical Oldies. Just before this process stopped, Sony released Beecham and Primerose's version of Berlioz' *Harold in Italy*, which is really a viola concerto. This version gives to this piece the status that I could never give it after hearing the more famous Davis/Imae version. The recorded sound is a fiftyish and boxy, but the

performance has majesty as well as wit, like all Beecham's recordings.

One of the few Australian classical recordings worth ordering from overseas in the Australian Chamber Orchestra's deft arrangements of small-ensemble pieces for small orchestra. For each of these pieces, Janacek's *Krcutzer Sonata*, Barber's *Adagio* and Walton's *Sonata*, the orchestra provides a valid alternative version that sounds as interesting as the original.

#### 1992 FAVOURITE NOVELS

- 1 *The Last Magician*  
Janette Turner Hospital (1992; University of Queensland Press; 352 pp.)
- 2 'Was...'  
Geoff Ryman (1992; HarperCollins; 356 pp.)
- 3 *The Birds Fall Down*  
Rebecca West (1966; Macmillan; 428 pp.)
- 4 *The Adventures of Augie March*  
Saul Bellow (1953; Penguin; 617 pp.)
- 5 *Tehanu*  
Ursula K. Le Guin (1990; Atheneum; 226 pp.)
- 6 *Bridge of Birds*  
Barry Hughart (1984; Corgi; 271 pp.)
- 7 *The Destiny Makers*  
1993; AvoNova Morrow; 321 pp.)
- 8 *After Silence*  
Jonathan Carroll (1992; Macdonald; 240 pp.)
- 9 *Guardian Angel*  
Sara Paretsky (1992; Hamish Hamilton; 438 pp.)
- 10 *For the Sake of Elena*  
Elizabeth George (1992; Bantam; 384 pp.)
- 11 *Unicorn Mountain*  
Michael Bishop (1988; Arbor House/William Morrow; 367 pp.)
- 12 *A Great Deliverance*  
Elizabeth George (1989; Bantam; 320 pp.)
- 13 *The Last Picture Show*  
Larry McMurtry (1966; Penguin; 220 pp.)
- 14 *All That Remains*  
Patricia D. Cornwell (1992; Little Brown; 373 pp.)
- 15 *Micky Darlin'*  
Victor Kelleher (1992; University of Queensland Press; 276 pp.)

I read many of these books because I was reviewing them for *The Melbourne SF Commentary*, or a few other magazines. *The Melbourne* reviews appear in my 'Wasabe' column, if I can fit it into this issue. The *SFC* reviews appear in the next issue, because they didn't fit into No. 73/4/5.

*The Last Magician* is a vivid book about Australia. It is vivid, I suspect, because the author spends half her time in Canada. It's an outsider's inside view. Nothing genteel and boring-UMC here. Put modern Australian society up against the wall and order out the firing squad. There is a science-fictional quality to *The Last Magician*; there are at least four possible explanations for the ending; its characters are fabulously villainous or insanely heroic. They don't make wide-screen technicolour books in Australia very often, and Janette Turner Hospital's *The Last Magician* is the best for a long time.

Was... *Guardian Angel*, *For the Sake of Elena*, *A Great Deliverance* and *Micky Darlin'* are all reviewed in 'Wasabe'.

*The Birds Fall Down*, published in the 1960s, reads as if it were written early this century. It's a densely detailed story about the fear that the Russian saboteurs evoked in Western Europe before World War I, particularly among representatives of the Russian ruling class stationed in embassies. West makes a meticulous pattern from her revelations of plots and counter-plots, and evokes a society that had almost completely disappeared by 1918.

*The Adventures of Augie March* is the novel that both Stanley Elkin and Frederick Exley have credited as the main inspiration for the own writing. Unfortunately, Bellow has no Elkin or Exley. Instead, he has an ability to render events and places in luminous clarity, like a painter. Bellow shows a family falling apart during the Depression. The story-teller is forced to leave the safety of Chicago, flee to Mexico, and return to a strange America, well on his way to becoming a writer. A long, munchy read.

*Tehanu* is one of Ursula Le Guin's best fantasy novels, which is why I will talk about it in the next issue of *SFC*.

As I will do for *Bridge of Birds*, *The Destiny Makers*, *After Silence* and *Unicorn Mountain*.

Not many novels to go. *The Last Picture Show* is a lot funnier than Peter Bogdanovich's 1972 film based on it, mainly because it's a lot ruder, but it's

the performers and the grainy black-and-white town of the movie that stay in the memory, not McMurtry's threadbare prose.

Patricia Cornwell's *All That Remains* is merely one of the best of her four novels. She shows that evil is banal, but no less dangerous for that. The trick is to pick which unlikely circumstance links the victims of the mass murderer; the interest is in her main character's fights with City Hall in order to gain the resources to investigate the murders. Gritty stuff, at a high level of prose competence.

#### 1992 FAVOURITE BOOKS

- 1 *The Last Magician*  
Janette Turner Hospital (details given above)
- 2 *Woodbrook*  
David Thomson (1974; Vintage; 332 pp.)
- 3 *'Was...'*  
Geoff Ryman (details given above)
- 4 *The Birds Fall Down*  
Rebecca West (details given above)
- 5 *The Architecture of Fear*  
edited by Kathryn Cramer & Peter D. Pautz (1987; Avon; 278 pp.)
- 6 *The Adventures of Augie March*  
Saul Bellow (details given above)
- 7 *Tekenu*  
Ursula K. Le Guin (details given above)
- 8 *Bridge of Birds*  
Barry Hughart (details given above)
- 9 *Spit Delaney's Island*  
Jack Hodgins (1976; Macmillan of Canada; 199 pp.)
- 10 *The Destiny Makers*  
George Turner (details given above)
- 11 *Sleeve Notes*  
Alex Skovron (1992; Hale & Remonger; 88 pp.)
- 12 *After Silence*  
Jonathan Carroll (details given above)
- 13 *Guardian Angel*  
Sara Paretsky (details given above)
- 14 *For the Sake of Elena*  
Elizabeth George (details given above)
- 15 *Unicorn Mountain*  
Michael Bishop (details given above)

- 16 *A Great Deliverance*  
(details given above)
- 17 *Remaking History*  
Kim Stanley Robinson (1991; Tor; 274 pp.)
- 18 *More Crimes for a Summer Christmas*  
ed. Stephen Knight (1991; Allen & Unwin; 236 pp.)
- 19 *Walls of Fear*  
ed. Kathryn Cramer (1990; Morrow; 395 pp.)
- 20 *The Last Picture Show*  
(details given above)

Not much to add here, since *Woodbrook* is also reviewed in 'Wasabe'. (I would not even have known of the existence of this book if I had not been given it to review for *The Melbourne*. Drudge reviewing has its compensations.) I've also reviewed *Sleeve Notes* in 'Wasabe'. I will review *The Architecture of Fear*, *Remaking History* and *Walls of Fear* in SFC.

Doug Barbour sent me *Spit Delaney's Island* from Canada. A valued present, since as far as I know it's never appeared on any Australian bookshelf. The linked stories about the inhabitants of an island off the west coast of Canada range from the merely competent to the startlingly brilliant (see the Short Stories list).

#### 1992 FAVOURITE SHORT STORIES

- 1 'By the River'  
Jack Hodgins (*Spit Delaney's Island*)
- 2 'The Fetch'  
Robert Aickman (*The Architecture of Fear*)
- 3 'Nesting Instinct'  
Scott Baker (*The Architecture of Fear*)
- 4 'For Mr Voss or Occupant'  
Janette Turner Hospital (*More Crimes for a Summer Christmas*)
- 5 'Follow Me'  
Marele Day (*More Crimes for a Summer Christmas*)
- 6 'Penelope Comes Home'  
M. J. Engh (*Walls of Fear* ed. Kathryn Cramer)
- 7 'The Doorkeeper of Khaat'  
Patricia A. McKillip (*Full Spectrum 2*, ed. Lou Aronica, Shawna McCarthy, Amy Stout & Patrick LaBrutto)
- 8 'Rainbow Bridge'  
Kim Stanley Robinson (*Remaking History*)

- 9 '"A History of the Twentieth Century, with Illustrations"'  
Kim Stanley Robinson (*Remaking History*)
- 10 'Three Women of the Country'  
Jack Hodgins (*Spit Delaney's Island*)
- 11 'The Eyes of the Green Lancer'  
Sean McMullen (*Call to the Edge*)
- 12 'A Plague of Strangers'  
Karen Haber (*Full Spectrum 2*)
- 13 'Tanner's End'  
Kate Stephens (*Crimes for a Summer Christmas* ed. Stephen Knight)
- 14 'In the Memory Rooms'  
Michael Bishop (*The Architecture of Fear*)
- 15 'Zurich'  
Kim Stanley Robinson (*Remaking History*)
- 16 'The Lunatics'  
Kim Stanley Robinson (*Remaking History*)
- 17 'The Haunted Boardinghouse'  
Gene Wolfe (*Walls of Fear*)
- 18 'Erosion'  
Susan Palwick (*Walls of Fear*)
- 19 'Muffin Explains Teleology to the World at Large'  
James Alan Gardner (*The Best of the Rest of the World 1990* ed. Stephen Pesechnik & Brian Youmans)
- 20 'Where the Heart Is'  
Ramsey Campbell (*The Architecture of Fear*)

1992 is yet another year in which my Favourite Short Stories is the most competitive list. A great short story combines the compression of poetry and the pleasure of a well-crafted narrative. By comparison, there is a lack of focus and purpose in most poems or novels, the former because they are too short and the latter because they are usually far too long.

'Astonish me!' is what Harlan Ellison said (probably quoting somebody else) when asked what he wanted from a good story. The ending of 'By the River' fair knocks you over the back of your chair. But that's only because the delicate indirection with which Hodgins misleads you until the ending.

'The Fetch' is the best Robert Aickman story I've read. It's a ferocious account of the way a malevolent father systematically makes life difficult for his family, and the way the equally determined son attempts to make restitution. Unfortunately, the father's final insult is to leave as a legacy an icy-cold Scottish fetch. This is haunted-

castle fiction, with a vengeance.

Like 'Nesting Instinct', 'Varicose Worms' grabs the main character and reader by the neck and slowly tortures us into perception. Again from *The Architecture of Fear*, an anthology of stories about assorted odd haunted structures, 'Nesting Instinct' describes the oddest building of all. Scott Baker is a star writer; I still cannot track down most of his other stories.

Also a ghost story of a sort, or perhaps merely a story about a resourceful and monomaniacal criminal, is Janette Turner Hospital's 'For Mr Voss or Occupant'. Few other Australian writers value suspense or know how to create it. This is the best nail-biter among the stories Stephen Knight has published in his 'Crimes for a Summer Christmas' series over the last few years.

Marele Day's 'Follow Me', also from *More Crimes for a Summer Christmas*, is also a fine suspense tale, and again has a ghostly feel to it. I keep meaning to buy some of Day's detective novels, but I rarely see them on book shelves.

M. J. Engh writes little, but her novel *Arslan* from the 1970s guarantees that I will always read anything she publishes. 'Penelope Come Home' is a remorseless story of a family haunted by a place. The property plagues both the family who go away for a year and the people who rent the place for the duration. The story appears in *Walls of Fear*, yet another highly recommended collection of haunted-structure stories.

'The Doorkeeper of Khat', by Patricia McKillip, is one of those pretend-fables that actually works as well as a genuine old-fashioned lost-in-the-mists-of-time fable. Elegant story-telling, with a memorable ending.

Kim Stanley Robinson's *Remaking History* produced four stories for this list. His best stories are about epic, magical and ambiguous journeys. 'Rainbow Bridge' is about a journey into a canyon and back. "A History of the Twentieth Century, with Illustrations" is about the journey made by a person who explores history: the same person comes to rest at the edge of an island. 'The Lunatics' tells of a truly epic journey upwards through the crust of the Moon. And 'Zurich' is a journey through the possibilities of perception. Robinson is never too portentous; his lightness of touch balances his visionary qualities.

Three Women of the Country' is another excellent Jack Hodgins story

about Spit Delaney's Island.

'The Eyes of the Green Lancer' is one of those very rare Australian stories: one that actually creates an alternative Australia. Vivid story-telling about a resource-stricken but inventive people attempting to survive.

'A Plague of Strangers', 'In the Memory Rooms' and 'Erosion' are one-day stories that stay in the memory because the ideas are vivid.

Haber's 'Strangers' is one of the few stories with an original idea to spring from the challenges of the AIDS epidemic.

Bishop's 'Memory Rooms' is amusing. When you go to all those funerals, do you ever stop to consider whether the dear departed wants all those ghostly relatives gawking around the coffin?

'Erosion' is not much more than title suggests: the story of a house whose land base is eroding all around it.

In another year, I might have picked Gene Wolfe's 'The Haunted Boardinghouse' higher on the list. Truth to tell, I still don't know what to make of it. I suspect that, as in *Peace*, the main character is dead from the beginning of the story. This would account for the hallucinatory quaintness of the events of the story.

'Mufin Explains Teleology to the World at Large' has a special meaning for me, since our Muffin, a splendid cat, died in early 1993. The story is as quaint as its title; a piece of whimsy that is as light and delightful as its title suggests.

'Where the Heart Is' is a good old-fashioned nineteenth-century weepy ghost story. There were a few others in *The Architecture of Fear*, which helps to explain why it is a highly readable anthology.

#### 1992 FAVOURITE FILMS

- 1 *Some Like It Hot*  
Billy Wilder (1959)
- 2 *The Murderer Lives at No. 21*  
Henri-Georges Clouzot (1942)
- 3 *The Vanishing*  
George Sluizer (1988)
- 4 *The Dead Zone*  
David Cronenberg (1983)
- 5 *The Edge of the World*  
Michael Powell (1936)
- 6 *Violent Saturday*  
Richard Fleischer (1955)

- 7 *On the Beach*  
Stanley Kramer (1959)
- 8 *Night Moves*  
Arthur Penn (1975)
- 9 *The Man from the Pru*  
Rob Rohrer (1989)
- 10 *Comfort and Joy*  
Bill Forsyth (1984)

Not a great year for films, as you can see from the average year of release for these films (1967, up about twenty years from my lists of the late 1980s). On television the drought of good old black and white films continues, and I'm too lazy to venture out to a cinema each time a golden oldie comes to the Cinematheque (successor to the old Melbourne University Film Society) or the Astor. Hence most of these films are recent (ugh) colour (ugh, ugh) films. But enjoyable.

*Some Like It Hot*, a perfect black-and-white print shown at prime time on television. You won't believe me when I say that this was the first time I had seen it. I don't believe how good it is: a distillation of every comic skill that had been developed in late 1940s cinema, but here reworked and distilled even further by Billy Wilder in 1959. *Some Like It Hot* has the greatest last line in cinema, but lots of the other lines are good as well. I had heard how breathtaking Marilyn Monroe is in this film, but nothing had prepared me for Tony Curtis's glorious imitation of Cary Grant.

As I say, the speed and zing of Wilder's film is a continuation of the skills developed in 1940s films. I had not realised that such skills ever travelled to France. Clouzot's *The Murderer Lives at No. 21* has all the energy of the great Hollywood comedies, plus a French manic edge. Who committed the murder that begins the film? The murderer must live at No. 21. The boarders at that address are good friends, but they must suspect each other. They are all hilarious as the detective tries to trap one of them. The ending is outrageous, but also satisfying. This is a murder mystery with none of that dry quality of English detective films of the same era.

The 1988 original version of *The Vanishing* has, I'm told, little to do with the recent American remake, also by George Sluizer. *The Vanishing* (original version) is all about self-delusion and suppressed feelings. Little appears on the surface except people talking to each other, yet not even Hitchcock ever created suspense as gripping as this. And the ending! *Never* reveal the

ending to anyone who hasn't seen this film!

*The Dead Zone* is a rarity: a recent film that has all the speed and style of a 1940s film. Even the colour is well done. King's novel is a giant toe-destroyer; Cronenberg's film is a lean political and social fable with well-paced moments of true horror. The main character wakes up after a road accident (photographed in hallucinogenic hues to make it look like the rupture of a star into another universe), only to find that he can see moments of the future. He is, of course, powerless to stop Dreadful Things from Happening. Except... Well, the ending, like everything else in the film, is perfect. I must catch up on the other Cronenberg films soon.

It's a bad year when I cannot catch up on a long-lost Michael Powell film. *The Edge of the World*, shot in 1936 in the Orkney Islands, is his first masterpiece. It owes more to Flaherty than Powell would ever admit, but its power and poetry are undeniable. An island off the Scottish coast (actually St Kilda, but Powell was not allowed to make the film there) has become economically insupportable. John Laurie is the intractable farmer who will not leave the island after the others vote to go. The drama is quite good; the island land and seascapes are spectacular. (It was shown at the Cinematèque with a short film made forty years later by Powell, who revisited the island of Foula, where *Edge of the World* was actually made, accompanied by all the crew and cast who were still alive and could make the journey. In 1936 John Lawrie had been a young man playing an old man, so in 1976 he seemed very little changed. Some of the islanders who had performed in *Edge* seemed remarkably unchanged. Foula itself seemed much less spectacular in colour in the later film than it had in black-and-white forty years earlier.)

*Violent Saturday* is one of those perfect little crime movies that Richard Fleischer made better than anyone. (Remember the original *Narrow Margin*?) Lee Marvin is a splendid villain; Victor Mature is, improbably, well cast as a quiet, resourceful bloke trying to protect his family despite all the mayhem that a gang of crooks wreak on a small town on a sleepy Saturday.

*On the Beach* can boast some of the worst dialogue ever written for a major film, but it is riveting viewing for a Melburnian. It is one of the few American films made in a non-American city that actually gives any idea of the

nature or geography of the foreign city being photographed. (A late-1950s Yarra skyline would have been useful as well.) I keep meeting people in their fifties who appeared in the crowd scenes at the end of the film. What makes *On the Beach* a great film, however, is the sequence when the submarine returns to the West Coast of America after the nuclear war. As the American sailor sitting in his little boat, knowing he is already dying from radiation poisoning but content to have come back home, Australian actor John Meillon gives one of the great performances of cinema.

*Night Moves* is too murky, fractured and dispiriting to be called a true film noir, but Arthur Penn's 1975 attempt at the genre is not bad. Gene Hackman gives his usual fine performance. All the acting is effective in this film.

Bill Forsyth fans tend to discount *Comfort and Joy*, but I found his account of the unlikely war between ice cream vans very diverting. Forsyth is never less than original, and there are inspired moments in this film.

And where are the lists for

#### 1993

#### FAVOURITE POPULAR CDs

and

#### 1993

#### FAVOURITE CLASSICAL CDs

?

I hate to confess this, but I'm just a bit behind in listening to the best CDs of 1993. At the moment I'm pretty sure I'll pick Sonny Landreth's *Outward Bound* as my Favourite Popular CD of the year, and Maurice Abravanel's recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 9 as Favourite Classical CD. But I haven't quite got around to listening to Bernstein's 1961 recording of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, and I've played only a few tracks of the two-CD Talking Heads anthology *Sand in the Vaseline*. And so on.

Some lists just have to mature in the barrel awhile.

#### 1993 FAVOURITE NOVELS

- 1 *The Age of Innocence*  
Edith Wharton (1920; Penguin Modern Classics; 301 pp.)
- 2 *The House of Mirth*  
Edith Wharton (1905; Avenel; 327 pp.)
- 3 *In the Reign of the Queen of Persia*  
Joan Chase (1983; Harper & Row; 215 pp.)
- 4 *Boy's Life*  
Robert McCammon (1991; Pocket Books; 440 pp.)
- 5 *Doomsday Book*  
Connie Willis (1992; Bantam Spectra; 445 pp.)
- 6 *The Painted Bird*  
Jerzy Kosinski (1966; Corgi; 222 pp.)
- 7 *Cruel and Unusual*  
Patricia D. Cornwell (1993; Little Brown; 356 pp.)
- 8 *Quarantine*  
Greg Egan (1992; Legend; 219 pp.)
- 9 *The Hollowing*  
Robert Holdstock (1993; Harper-Collins; 314 pp.)
- 10 *Complicity*  
Iain Banks (1993; Little Brown; 313 pp.)

Again I have reviewed, or will review many of these books in Other Places. This saves me a bit of space in this column, which is already umpteen thousand words long, and gives you something to look forward to, if (a) I can squeeze in the 'Wasabe' column; or (b) I ever write the missing SF Commentary column. Ah! the suspense of publishing a fanzine.

In this way, I dispose of *Boy's Life*, *Doomsday Book*, *Quarantine*, *The Hollowing* and *Complicity* — except to recommend them highly.

I read *The Age of Innocence* so that I could have it read before Scorsese's film was released. I fell in love with Edith Wharton's writing, and was very disappointed by the film. Fans of the film believe that it does what the book does: stays simultaneously inside the rich, stuffy society of New York at the end of last century, and stays resolutely outside it, analysing all its prison-like edifices. This is called irony, and Wharton is good at it. The love story works in both the film and the book; but in the novel you are inside Newland Archer's mind as he actually ties around himself society's spiritual ropes. The film suffers from a voice-

over narrator. The novel is told in third person, but almost always from Archer's point of view.

For a long time I wondered whether *The Age of Innocence* was better than *The House of Mirth*, or the latter more interesting than the former. In the end, I decided for *The Age of Innocence* because it is perfectly balanced: at all times we share the values of Wharton's society and can see beyond them. In the second half of *House of Mirth*, Wharton comes heavily down against her own society, thus destroying the perfection of her own method. In the process she produces a harrowing epic about New York society swallowing up and spitting out an ambitious woman who never quite understands the rules of a cruel game.

In *The Reign of the Queen of Persia* tells of growing up in the Midwest of America sometime early this century. Standard stuff, surely? Not the way Joan Chase tells it. Each of the four parts of the novel, you realise only towards the end, is told by a different sister. You have to guess which sister tells each part and remember what you've already been told about her. The foreground of the story is country life itself, made into a complex dance by Joan Chase's prose, presided over by 'the queen of Persia', the matriarch of the family.

*The Painted Bird* is the story of a boy who is made an orphan in the middle of Europe during World War II. The war touches the lives of the peasants only intermittently. The boy suffers not at the hands of soldiers, but at the hands of the unconscious cruelty of peasants who fear a stranger among them. The strength of Kosinski's novel is in its abbreviated, ballad-like style; prose cut to the bone.

Patricia Cornwell established a pattern in her first three crime novels. In each, a serial murder leaves behind him carnage that her main character, working at the forensics laboratory, must clean up and from which evidence she must try to discover the criminal's identity. In *Cruel and Unusual*, Cornwell adds a number of complications to this pattern, including a niece who uses a computer to solve the source the crime. The challenge in crime fiction is to continue to explore personal themes while meeting readers' appetites for formulae. Cornwell meets the challenge.

#### 1993 FAVOURITE BOOKS

- 1 *Christina Stead: A Biography*  
Hazel Rowley (1993; Heinemann Australia; 646 pp.)
- 2 *The Age of Innocence*  
Edith Wharton (details given above)
- 3 *The House of Mirth*  
Edith Wharton (details given above)
- 4 *In the Reign of the Queen of Persia*  
Joan Chase (details given above)
- 5 *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand*  
Ursula K. Le Guin (1991; Harper Collins; 193 pp.)
- 6 *Boy's Life*  
Robert McCammon (details given above)
- 7 *Doomsday Book*  
Connie Willis (details given above)
- 8 *Cruel and Unusual*  
Patricia D. Cornwell (details given above)
- 9 *Quarantine*  
Greg Egan (details given above)
- 10 *Tales of Men and Ghosts*  
Edith Wharton (1910; Avenel; 353 pp.)
- 11 *The Motion of Light in Water: East Village Sex and Science Fiction Writing 1960-65*  
Samuel R. Delany (1988/1990; Paladin; 581 pp.)
- 12 *Up On All Fours*  
Philip Hodgins (1993; Angus & Robertson; 94 pp.)
- 13 *Dark Verses and Light*  
Tom Disch (1991; Johns Hopkins University Press; 124 pp.)
- 14 *The Hollowing*  
Rob Holdstock (details given above)
- 15 *Children of the Wind*  
Kate Wilhelm (1989; St Martins Press; 263 pp.)

In 1991, David Marr's biography of Patrick White dominated the Australian book scene. In 1993, Hazel Rowley's equally satisfying *Christina Stead: A Biography* became the Book Most Mentioned. I've reviewed it in 'Wasabe'; nothing much to add here except: read it!

In the latest issue of *Foundation* magazine (No. 60, Spring 1994) Marleen S. Barr reviews *Searoad: Chronicles of Klatsand* as if it had something to do with science fiction. Will the arms of the ghetto never let go? Ursula Le Guin must chuckle at all this. *Searoad*, which

contains linked stories about a small Oregon coastal town, contains some of Le Guin's best writing. Weaving magical interconnections between seemingly unconnected characters, Le Guin is hardly writing boring old realistic fiction. On the other hand, she doesn't introduce unnecessary fantasy or sf elements. *Searoad* is just good, satisfying fiction, somewhat better written than anything else Le Guin has done other than *Tehanu*.

Edith Wharton's only weakness was that she seemed to pay a bit too much attention to the example of Henry James, her literary mentor. Henry James wrote quite a few supernatural stories, collected as *Tales of the Supernatural* (thanks to Charles Taylor for finding a copy for me). *Tales of Men and Ghosts* collects Wharton's attempts at the same genre. Most of them are successful; indeed, a few (mentioned in Favourite Short Stories) are among the best ghost stories in the language. But Wharton sheds quite a bit of her ironic skills when she turns to the ghost story. This is an interesting book, even a memorable one, but in the end it sends one back to her great novels.

I've been promising Van Ikin for years that I would (a) read and (b) review *The Motion of Light in Water*. I had received the US edition of this book for review, then bought the British edition because at least 40,000 words had been added to the original text. I don't like Delany's fiction, and was wary of reading his autobiographical meanderings. I needn't have worried. The writing is vigorous, detailed and funny. For a shy retiring person like me, the content is startling: an description of the gay scene in New York well before AIDS ruined everything. Perhaps here is more detail than I really wanted to know, but it's a lot more information than any gay acquaintance has ever disclosed. This book helps to make sense of many of the unsaid undertones of the AIDS debate. What I don't understand is why Delany persisted in his other life: writing science fiction. How can a man experience as much as Delany says he experienced during the early 1960s, yet write the puerile adolescent fantasy that he actually published? Delany might well have become sf's James Baldwin; instead he became not much more than sf's Lawrence Durrell.

Neither Philip Hodgins' *Up On All Fours* or Tom Disch's *Dark Verses and Light* are quite as interesting as their authors' previous books of poetry, but that hardly makes them uninteresting.

Lots of enjoyable poetry. You will be able to buy the Hodgins book readily enough, but it took one bookshop over a year to track down a copy of *Dark Verses and Light*.

More on *Children of the Wind* below.

1993

# FAVOURITE SHORT STORIES

- 1 'Children of the Wind'  
Kate Wilhelm (*Children of the Wind*)
- 2 'Trusthouse'  
Garry Disher (*Murder at Home* ed. Stephen Knight)
- 3 'Hand, Cup, Shell'  
Ursula K. Le Guin (*Searoad*)
- 4 'Ashland, Kentucky'  
Terence M. Green (*The Woman Who Is the Midnight Wind*)
- 5 'Afterward'  
Edith Wharton (*Tales of Men and Ghosts*)
- 6 'Blue Grouper'  
Robert Wallace (*Crosstown Traffic* ed. Stuart Coupe, Julie Ogden & Robert Hood)
- 7 'Quilts'  
Ursula K. Le Guin (*Searoad*)
- 8 'The Legend'  
Edith Wharton (*Tales of Men and Ghosts*)
- 9 'True Love'  
Ursula K. Le Guin (*Searoad*)
- 10 'Apartheid, Superstrings and Mordecai Thubana'  
Michael Bishop (*Full Spectrum 3*, ed. Lou Aronica, Amy Stout & Betsy Mitchell)
- 11 'Matter's End'  
Greg Benford (*Full Spectrum 3*)
- 12 'The Gorgon Field'  
Kate Wilhelm (*Children of the Wind*)
- 13 'The Eyes'  
Edith Wharton (*Tales of Men and Ghosts*)
- 14 'The Letters'  
Edith Wharton (*Tales of Men and Ghosts*)
- 15 'Ethan Frome'  
Edith Wharton (1910; Avenel; 92 pp.)

I spent much of 1993 reading many Kate Wilhelm books in the vain hope of finding any novels that matched her best work from the 1960s and early 1970s. The only two pieces that reminded me of (say) 'Somerset Dreams' or *Juniper Time* were two stories from the collection *Children of*

*the Wind*: the novellas 'Children of the Wind' (No. 1 on this list) and 'The Gorgon Field' (No. 12). Wilhelm is very good at dramatising big, spectacular sf or fantasy ideas, but in the recent novels there have been very few wonderful or consistent ideas. In 'Children of the Wind', however, Wilhelm takes one of the oldest ideas in sf — malevolent, telepathic children — and makes a lip-smacking meal of it. Poor parents, not knowing what to do with creative, possibly telepathic children. But are they telepathic? Are they as evil as they sometimes seem? Wilhelm shows here the subtlety of her best work of nearly two decades ago. Even the big ending answers none of the teasing questions.

'Trusthouse' is one of the best suspense stories written by an Australian. Each year a family travels to a seaside resort near Adelaide. Each year one set of children meets a set of children from the other side of the tracks. They get along okay; they never see each other during the rest of the year. This holiday, something goes wrong. A stranger seems to be following the group as they scout around the streets and beach. What is he up to? What are the children up to? The last two paragraphs are masterly, but I'm not quite sure what happens at the end of the story.

'Hand, Cup, Shell' is the most assured of the stories in Ursula Le Guin's *Searoad*. A family takes a beach house for the summer. In a few pages, Le Guin introduces us to these people, shows us their histories, and reveals the main tensions that bind them together. This is concentrated storytelling at its best.

'Ashland, Kentucky', a sort of ghost story (or is it an exorcism story?), should have won some prize or another for its author, Terence M. Green from Canada (otherwise known as Terry Green, *SFC/TMR* correspondent since the mid-1970s). Beautifully constructed and very moving, this story shows that Green might still become one of the better-known names in sf.

'Afterward' is the best ghost story in Edith Wharton's *Tales of Men and Ghosts*. It is so subtle that the reader does not realise that it is a ghost story until the last few pages. ('The Legend', 'The Eyes' and 'The Letters' are less subtle stories from the same book; they are vigorous and visionary.)

'Blue Grouper' is a bit over-elaborate for my taste (which means that I don't quite catch everything that

Robert Wallace is on about). But I won't readily forget the tale of the poor boy who is betrayed by the people in whom he has put his trust: well-heeled people who invite him every year to spend the summer with them at Portsea. As in (for instance) L. P. Hartley's *The Go-Between*, 'Blue Grouper' tells how misunderstood childhood events can wound a person's soul for the rest of his life.

'Quilts' and 'True Love' are further fine stories from Ursula Le Guin's *Searoad*. I particularly like the suggestion in 'True Love' that one might gain true love from your favourite books in a way you cannot from an ardent suitor.

Because of the lumpy title of Michael Bishop's 'Apartheid, Superstrings and Mordecai Thubana' I expected nothing but lumpy sermonising. Bishop goes to South Africa and flattens it! I should have remembered that Bishop's most successful story-length is the novella. In its 70 or so pages, 'Apartheid' covers the whole dismal experience of a South African black who happens to fall into the hands of the security forces under the old regime. There is a fantasy element in the story, but it heightens rather than alleviates the pathos of Mordecai Thubana's position. Is there a better world somewhere? This story is an effective reminder of the difficulties that the new South African government faces.

'Matter's End' is the only old-fashioned Big Idea SF story on this list, but it's a Very Big Idea (would the universe end if we all, simultaneously stopped believing in its cohesion?), and it's better done than in any other Benford story I've read.

'Ethan Frome', which is a novella, not a novel, was the first Edith Wharton piece to be filmed as part of the sudden Wharton boom. Within its limited range of subject matter and expression it works effectively, but shows only few of Wharton's literary strengths. None of the reviews made the film sound interesting enough for me to visit a cinema to see it.

## 1993 FAVOURITE FILMS

- 1 *Smiles of a Summer Night*  
Ingmar Bergman (1955)
- 2 *Buddy Buddy*  
Billy Wilder (1981)
- 3 *The Postman Always Rings*

- Twice  
 Tay Garnett (1946)  
 4 *The Arsenal Stadium Mystery*  
 Thorold Dickinson (1939)  
 5 *Blade Runner: The Director's Cut*  
 Ridley Scott (1982)  
 6 *That Hamilton Woman*  
 Alexander Korda (1941)  
 7 *The Apartment*  
 Billy Wilder (1960)  
 8 *Paths of Glory*  
 Stanley Kubrick (1957)  
 9 *Libel*  
 Anthony Asquith (1959)  
 10 *The Train*  
 John Frankenheimer (1965)  
 11 *Whistle Down the Wind*  
 Bryan Forbes (1961)  
 12 *All That Jazz*  
 Bob Fosse (1979)

Average year of production: 1960. Just thought you would like to know. Quite an improvement on 1992's average of 1967. The presentation of movies on television improved slightly in 1993.

SBS is often good for catching up on a European black-and-white movie that I might have missed during my MUFs days when I watched nothing but subtitled films. A great yawning gap in my viewing has always been Ingmar Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night*. It's not every European movie that inspires a Sondheim musical (*A Little Night Music*) and several American movies (especially Woody Allen's *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*). If I had seen *Smiles of a Summer Night* in the 1960s, I might have understood why true film buffs have always been sceptical about Bergman's high reputation among ordinary viewers of art movies. *Smiles* has all the Mozartian charm, wit, lightness, ebullience, etc. that didn't reappear in a Bergman film until *The Magic Flute*. Indeed, *Smiles* is a Mozartian opera without the music: very sexy, very delicious, with just enough hints of dark forces to make all that charm interesting. No wonder the buffs sat horrified through *Through a Glass Darkly*, whereas in 1966 I thought it was a great movie.

The last three years have been my 'Discover Billy Wilder' era. Apart from Hitchcock, Wilder has been the only director to maintain the best Hollywood traditions throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, a period when American cinema deteriorated alarmingly. Wilder was (still is, I suppose, but nobody will finance his films now that he is over eighty) the film-maker who provides everything you want in a film: that combination of wit, melo-

drama, vivid acting, tight script-writing and splendid photography that comes to mind when I think of 'great Hollywood movie-making'. *Buddy Buddy* was ignored when it was first released, but Wilder puts together Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau into a manic farce that contains some of my favourite comic scenes. Matthau is the hitman who has been hired to kill a mob squaler before he reaches the witness box; Lemmon is the nerd in the next room whose attempted suicides put Matthau off his stroke. No wonder canny Hollywood agents keep teaming these actors every now and again. (No, I haven't seen *Grumpy Old Men* yet. Soon, soon.)

*The Apartment* is pretty good too. In this Wilder success, Jack Lemmon is a bit too Lemmon even for my taste, but Fred McMurray performs one of his few great roles, and the sight of Shirley Maclaine's attempts to hold back from weeping into Fred McMurray's wine glass is enough to do serious damage to my romantic old heart. (As in *Buddy Buddy*, the impeccable script is the backbone of the film. Lemmon and Maclaine in Wilder's *Irma La Douce* are just awful, since the script is awful.)

I've never seen the recent Bob Rafelson version of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. I'm glad I kept my eyes for the 1946 Tay Garnett version, a classic among crime movies. Lana Turner and John Garfield manage to be very sexy as the two tramps who do the dirty on the husband, played by Cecil Kellaway, whose performance steals the film. I liked the way Garnett turns out a Hollywood film, giving the lead characters a certain amount of glamour, but also shows how unglamorous they really are. You can do this sort of thing in black-and-white.

During the summer of 1992-93, while *Live and Sweet* was in reruns, Channel 2 ran a series of old British movies, mainly from before World War II. I suspect that few of them had been shown on television before. (During football season, the series was switched to the 2 a.m. slot, and has stayed there. I'm rarely up at 2 a.m.) Of the films in this series, the best is Thorold Dickinson's *The Arsenal Stadium Mystery*. It's a most peculiar mixture of mystery story (a strong plot) and vigorous English comedy. Leslie Banks plays the detective as a down, solving the crime by upsetting everybody and watching their reactions. I wish this character had been turned into a series, or that someone would bring back comedy to the detective

genre. (There's lots of soccer as well, but you wouldn't expect me to notice that, would you?)

*Blade Runner* seemed a different film when I watched 'the director's cut'. (So far it's the only director's cut to do just that — cut a minute or two from a film instead of adding thirty minutes.) The voice-over seemed unnecessary when I saw the original cut of the film. It wasn't just unnecessary; it obscured the meaning of the film. Suddenly this time I saw what the film was all about: that the replicants are the heroes of the film, and that Deckard is at best a cipher, or at worst, the villain. More than this: undistracted by the voice-over, I could really watch the film, which is a non-stop feast of shifting colours, lights and shapes. Ridley Scott is now one of the few American directors with any idea how to use colour photography.

Very few English directors knew how to make a Hollywood-style film. Michael Powell was one of them; Alexander Korda was the other. In *That Hamilton Woman*, made in 1941 just before the Korda independent film empire collapsed, Alexander Korda takes corny material, such as the Nelson-Hamilton romance, and makes a first-class entertainment from it. He was the only director who could put on screen the extraordinary qualities of Vivien Leigh; by comparison, *Come With the Wind* erases her fine qualities. Olivier is adequate as a film actor; here, with his new wife Vivien Leigh, he is more than adequate.

Many film buffs would automatically place *Paths of Glory* on top of their list in the year they first saw it. These days it seems a bit stagey, but it's also one of the few films about World War I to give any idea of the chaos of the time. The script is a bit too neat in its deft exposition of the way in which soldiers were murdered routinely during hopeless charges during the war. Kirk Douglas is, as usual, too Kirk Douglas. The final scenes lift the film to greatness; very risky stuff for a young director, as Kubrick was at the time. I'll have to see this film again before I make up my mind about it.

Anthony Asquith was no Michael Powell, but he did know what a good film was. Occasionally he achieves fine results. *Libel*, with a creaky script and worse acting, is actually very good. A man returns some years after World War II. Is he who he says he is? Traditional stuff. The rival heir to the family fortune arranges it so that the pretender must sue for libel. The court

scenes are brilliant. Almost certainly they were scenes from a play that was the kernel of the film. If this turns up again, grit your teeth through the first half hour and enjoy the rest.

I've seen better Frankenheimer films than *The Train*, but I was pleased to catch up with it at last. (A perfect print, too. Are the tv stations importing their own new videos or laser discs of these films?) When *The Train* first appeared in 1966, Colin Bennett commented in *The Age* that it was 'John Frankenheimer playing trains'. This is the main delight of the film, although the final confrontation between the Resistance saboteur, played by Burt

Lancaster, and the Nazi general, played by Paul Schofield, is the only real drama in the film.

The British New Wave of film had not started when Bryan Forbes made *Whistle Down the Wind*, which is a great deal better than films like *Room at the Top* and *The Pumpkin Eater*. Forbes' romanticism and Powellean love of the English countryside show strongly in this story of a criminal on the run who convinces a group of children that he is really Jesus Christ. Christian symbols are littered around the film; much more convincing is the luvverly deep-focus black-and-white photography and the concentrated commitment of

the child actors, led by a young Hayley Mills.

Everybody said that *All That Jazz* was 'self-indulgent' when the film first appeared, which is why I didn't see it. The same critics should also have said that it was self-aware. There's a pretty snazzy intelligence working in every frame of this film. Fosse makes a film about a stage director who knows his heart is giving out. Which it does in the last scene. And then Fosse died of heart failure a few years later. Perhaps one shouldn't tempt fate by making a film like *All That Jazz*, but to tempt fate and construct a great film is quite an achievement.

## GREG EGAN:

I'm on the verge of turning thirty, and feeling pretty ancient and unplugged from current popular culture. I can feel myself ageing out of JJJ's target audience day by day, but I'm stuffed if I know where I'll turn to if ever I find their programming completely impenetrable. (Certainly not Perth's ultra-bland 96FM, whose idea of fun is a twenty-part special on the history of Fleetwood Mac; I'm not *that* decrepit.) Maybe every decade's children need their own customised music station, not refusing to play anything new, but catering to our various tender sensibilities.

Mind you, I thought I'd never like a single rap song, but after repeated exposure, I'm finding that some of it is quite okay — for example, 'Burn, Hollywood, Bum' by Public Enemy. You can't not love N----- With Attitude for the sheer Take-This-You-Bastards factor of a song like 'Fuck the Police', but there's only so much bragging about automatic weapons that I can swallow.

But nobody new since the Smiths has really grabbed me; the Happy Mondays, the Lightning Seeds, They Might Be Giants, Julian Cope in various incarnations, are all OK, but none of them is exactly electrifying.

After years of resisting, I hereby succumb to the pathology of listomania, and offer my all-time twenty-

five (ten is impossible) favourite songs (unranked). I have no idea which were singles.

- 'How Soon Is Now?' by the Smiths (*Hatful of Hollow*)
- 'Reel Around the Fountain' by the Smiths (*Hatful of Hollow*)
- 'Half a Person' by the Smiths (*The World Won't Listen*)
- 'Paint a Vulgar Picture' by the Smiths (*Strangeways, Here We Come*)
- 'Pump It Up' by Elvis Costello (*This Year's Model*)
- 'Little Palaces' by Elvis Costello (*Mighty Like a Rose*)
- 'How to be Dumb' by Elvis Costello (*Mighty Like a Rose*)
- 'Invasion Hit Parade' by Elvis Costello (*Mighty Like a Rose*)
- 'Still Hanging 'Round' by Hunters and Collectors (*What's a Few Men?*)
- 'Love All Over Again' by Hunters and Collectors (*Ghost Nation*)
- 'Five Years' by David Bowie (*The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust*)
- 'Rock 'n' Roll Suicide' by David Bowie (*Ziggy Stardust*)
- 'Sweet Thing/Candidate' by David Bowie (*Diamond Dogs*)
- 'Four Flights Up' by Lloyd Cole and the Commotions (*Rattle Snakes*)
- 'Lost Weekend' by Lloyd Cole and the Commotions (*Easy Pieces*)

- 'The Same Old Walk' by Paul Kelly (*Under the Sun*)
  - 'Everything's Turning to White' by Paul Kelly (*So Much Water, So Close to Home*)
  - 'Sweet Bird of Truth' by The The (*Uninfected*)
  - 'The Fat Lady of Limbourg' by Eno (*Taking Tiger Mountain (By Strategy)*)
  - 'Uh-oh, Love Comes to Town' by Talking Heads (77)
  - 'Pulled Up' by Talking Heads (77)
  - 'The Big Country' by Talking Heads (*More Songs About Buildings and Food*)
  - 'Once in a Lifetime' by Talking Heads (*Remain in Light*)
  - 'The Great Curve' by Talking Heads (*Remain in Light*)
- (9 August 1991)

\* I've heard five of those songs (Talking Heads' 'Once in a Lifetime', plus two by Bowie, and the two by Kelly). Discrete pop generations are absolute. I can't listen to JJJ at all, but I can't take much of GOLD-FM, Melbourne's Sixties Golden Oldies station. It might play singles from my generation, but it plays the same ones over and over again. \*



*Further conjunctions*

TMR 15/16/17 is a form of time machine, or more precisely, a map of a certain late twentieth-century geographical and temporal period, with its collocators' responses spread about in an enigmatic dance from continent to continent, and from year to year. Not that I'm complaining about this Tralfamadorian representation. As Dave Piper says on page 105, we are 'mosaics'. The juxtapositions increase the nuances of meaning. As Heraclitus wrote: 'Unapparent connection is better than apparent.'

*So sit back and enjoy with me*

It's nice to see someone who isn't running down Bill Collins (p. 76). The man's style and mannerisms make parody rather easy, but I've always felt that anyone who can demonstrate such raw enthusiasm for anything must be admired, even if I disagree with his recommendations. I read an interview with him in which he showed a great love of modern films. Unfortunately, Channel Ten cannot afford them, and so he's labelled as a presenter of films of a specific period by default. He also mentioned that the bane of his life are cinema audiences (those potato-chip-chewing, running-commentary deliverers) who ruin film screenings these days. Hear, hear! There should be laws inflicting bamboos under the fingernails for these people.

A personal gripe: people who walk out while the credits are running. I've actually been harassed into leaving the cinema on one occasion while I was reading the credits — by the usherette.

*In space no one can hear the Berlin Philharmonic*

I was interested to read that you became a classical music fan after seeing 2001: A Space Odyssey. I can't say this was the only influence on me (I think *Fantasia* was a subliminal influence that sat in my psyche for many years before manifesting itself fully) but it was certainly important. As a result I sought out complete recordings of the pieces used in the film. Do all those Bushell's ad-watchers know (and can they hum) the other 40 minutes of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*? The film also lead me down the path of contemporary classical music via the reasonably accessible works of Ligeti.

*Forgotten books*

Confession time: I'd actually stopped reading Brian Aldiss some years back, just after the 'Helliconia' trilogy. I can't actually think of a reason, though I think it was related to a general dissatisfaction with that trilogy. Perhaps I thought Aldiss was going down the path of multi-volume fantasy epics that mar the sf shelves these days. (I still think *Helliconia Summer* was more of a soap opera than anything Aldiss has written.) But then I read *Forgotten Life*. This may well be the best novel he's written (and not just from him, but far better than much sf of recent years). So I went out for an Aldiss splurge, buying up all those books I had missed out on. Immediately after *Forgotten Life* I read *Ruins*, the related novella. The two reinforce and strengthen each other. Memories of the Horatio Stubbs trilogy add a numinosity to the novel (more of those temporal conjunctions and layerings referred to above). I was reading 'So Far from Prague' when Russian tanks roamed the streets of their own country, and crowds lined up against them (shades of Tiananmen Square). This juxtaposition was eerie, and refutes somewhat Aldiss's statement about 'sell-by dates' in his introduction to *A Romance of the Equator*. Some products rejuvenate themselves at unpredictable moments.

*Radio-activity*

Leigh Edmonds makes some scathing comments about the quality of Perth FM pop radio. Since then, the situation has changed, with more stations changing to FM, but the quality has not altered dramatically. The local public broadcasting stations offer the most varied and challenging sounds, many broadcasting only on very low power, so you're lucky to pick them up more than a suburb away.]]] broadcasts here now also, which is nice if you like rap music. (I don't.)

Apparently most radio listeners spend most of their time listening to only two radio stations. This is a result of that modern demon demographics: radio stations play a restricted slice of music aimed at a particular age/monetary range. There must be something wrong with me, as I tend to flick about from ABC-FM to Radio National to 6RTR (the local FM university station), and also spend a lot of time

listening to shortwave radio, including the BBC and Deutsche Welle.

I listened to Radio Moscow on 19 August. None of the normal programs were on, just classical music with news bulletins for a couple of minutes at the hour. Beethoven's Ninth was interrupted with an announcement that a State of Emergency existed, and vague threats towards certain elements. It was also interesting, though, as the crisis continued, how the station became more open, reporting events that I'm sure the Stalinists would rather were not reported at all, as an indication of their failing grasp on power.

As an aside, have you listened to *Livewire*, the program now filling the 7 p.m. Saturday time slot on Radio National? I've tried on a number of times, but can't last longer than the first half hour. The fact that the host denigrates all her co-workers every week in the first five minutes just doesn't seem funny to me. Garrison Keillor would never have done it.

\* *Livewire* has either been axed or shifted. I couldn't stand to listen to more than one minute of it. Mark Linneman has sent me from Kentucky some tapes of Keillor's program *American Radio Theatre*. I'm all the more annoyed that Australians are still deprived of Keillor's work, especially as he has now revived *A Prairie Home Companion*. \*

PS: I've tracked down *Quest of the Three Worlds*. Wonderful stuff! I think Cordwainer Smith was an early semiotician, and went without his due reward because he wrote for the sf ghetto. People like Umberto Eco and Georges Perec are/were writing the same kind of puzzle novels twenty years after Smith and being praised as innovators. I also came across a secondhand copy of *Space Lords*, which contains some of his best writing in the Prologue and Epilogue. The closing comments of the Epilogue sadden me — where in the implicate universe do those 'thousands of pages' now exist in *potentio*? But they also cheer me up — I don't think Cordwainer Smith minded his lack of fame too much.

(23 August 1991)

■ As I mentioned in my piece on Cordwainer Smith, it was the information contained in the Prologue and Epilogue of *Space Lords* that enabled John Foyster to discover Cordwainer Smith's real name in 1966. ■

#### Best of 1991

##### Books 1991

- Christian Morgenstern: *Palmström*  
German nonsense poetry, very witty, rather untranslatable.
- Robert Layton: *Sibelius*  
A good general biography and survey of the composer's works.
- Voltaire: *Candide and Other Stories*  
A new translation of what is probably my favourite book.
- Raymond Chandler: *The Long Goodbye*  
The most autobiographical of the Marlowe books, and only one of a number that might easily have made it into this list.
- Philip K. Dick: *The Days of Perky Pat*  
One of a number of the Dick story collections that might have been included.
- Federico Garcia Lorca: *A Poet in New York*  
And Garrison Keillor thinks it's tough in New York. Probably Lorca's most important work.
- Cordwainer Smith: *The Instrumentality of Mankind*  
One of the currently available representative collections of this author's work.
- Ted Hughes: *Tales of the Early World*  
Written for children — poetic mythmaking.
- Albert Camus: *Exile and the Kingdom*  
One of Camus' more accessible books: a collection of short stories bordering on sf.
- Brian Aldiss: *Forgotten Life*  
Already raved about above.

##### Favourite CDs 1991

- Nielsen: Symphonies 2 and 3, 4 and 5 (San Francisco Symphony Orchestra conducted by Herbert Blomstedt)  
Brilliant recordings. Brilliant performances of a contemporary of Sibelius. Romanticism knocking at the door of modernity (but not too much).
- Beethoven: *Missa Solemnis* (Monteverdi Choir and English

Baroque Soloists cond. John Eliot Gardiner) (Archiv)

Performed on authentic instruments and with a small ensemble with a big sound. This must be played loud for maximum effect.

- Sibelius: Violin Concerto (original and final versions) (Leonidas Kavakos (violin) and the Lahti Symphony Orchestra cond. Osmo Vanska)  
The first recording of the original version authorised by the Sibelius family, but also a great performance with the typical BIS high standards of recording.
- Beethoven: Piano Sonatas (Wilhelm Kempff) (DG)  
Nine CDs of bliss. Recording from the sixties, so some slight tape hiss, but the assured playing of Kempff soon takes the listener's mind away from that. (If only Gilels had recorded all the sonatas before his death.)
- Thomas Ravenscroft: *There Were Three Ravens* (The Consort of Musicke cond. Anthony Rooley) (Virgin Classics)  
Songs, rounds and catches of this Elizabethan composer: some lighthearted, some very serious, including some viol works, and a version of 'Three Blind Mice' in a minor key. Great fun.
- Garrison Keillor: *More News from Lake Wobegon* (Minnesota Public Radio)  
Four well-filled CDs of the Original and the Best. Includes some personal favourites like 'Pontoon Boat' and 'Alaska' (the monologue that threatened never to end).

(22 June 1992)

#### Best of 1992

##### Best Books 1992 (in no particular order)

- George Orwell: *Nineteen Eighty Four*  
Okay, okay, so it's taken me a long time to get around to reading this book. I needed something to fill in the time while waiting to appear before the Human Rights Commission (that's another story).
- Philip K. Dick: *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale*  
There's an unmatched brilliance in these stories that is not in evidence in the earlier volumes — a deepening of perception and characterisation. Sadly, this resurgence did not have enough

time to express itself fully; some malignant force (anti-force) decided to extract Dick's presence from this world.

- Yukio Mishima: *Acts of Worship*  
A new collection of short stories by this writer who, even in translation, presents an amazingly precise view of people.
- Raymond Chandler: *Killer in the Rain*  
A collection of the early short stories that were later reworked into the early novels.
- Farid Ud-Din Attar: *The Conference of the Birds*  
A Sufi classic: a long poem in which a group of birds go on an allegorical search for enlightenment.
- Jorge Luis Borges: *Labyrinths*  
Probably Borges' most 'fantastic' collection of stories within stories.
- Christian Morgenstern: *Alle Galgenlieder*  
An omnibus collection of Morgenstern's wonderful nonsense poems: Carrollian wit with a Germanic bent.
- Alan Garner: *A Bag of Moonshine*  
A new Garner book is always an event. This, though it is a collection of retold tales rather than a new novel, is no exception.
- Philip K. Dick: *Nick and the Glimmung*  
Not as bad as Lawrence Sutin says, this is virtually a prologue to *Galactic Pot Healer*, with its explanation of the arrival of the Glimmung and the anti-Glimmung, and the appearance of the Glimmung's Book.
- Joseph Conrad: *The Rover*  
Conrad's last completed novel, a more straightforward narrative than usual for Conrad, but the same characters fighting against an imponderable and immovable (and ignorant) fate.

##### Best CDs 1992 (again, in no particular order)

- Sibelius: *Piano and Violin Music, Volume 1* (Nils-Erik Sparf and Bengt Forsberg) (BIS)  
Part of the BIS Complete Sibelius Edition, this may not be major Sibelius but is nonetheless well-played and well-recorded wonderful music.
- Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan: *Shahbaaz* (Real World)  
This is Sufi devotional music reinvented by Nusrat with a stronger beat and a faster pulse.

These songs of love for god are hypnotic.

- Tchaikovsky: *The Nutcracker* (Royal Philharmonic Orchestra cond. Vladimir Ashkenazy) (Decca)  
A masterpiece of the record engineer's art and the conductor's control, the set also includes Glazunov's *The Seasons*.
- Thomas Tallis: *Spem in Alium* (Tallis Scholars) (Gimell)  
Devotional music of the sixteenth century in a critically acclaimed performance.
- Elgar: Cello Concerto/*Sea Pictures* (Jacqueline Du Pré/Janet Baker/London Symphony Orchestra cond. Barbirolli) (EMI)  
A reissue of a famous LP. With performers like these, how can you go wrong?
- Bruckner: Symphony in F Minor (Radio-Sinfonie-Orchestra-Frankfurt cond. Eliahu Inbal) (Teldec)  
Bruckner's first essay into the symphonic form, and surpris-

ingly good it is, especially when it's as well played as here.

- Tom Waits: *Bone Machine* (Island)  
Tom back in fine form. A sort of spiritual odyssey of modern life, ranging from idiosyncratic hymns ('Well I've been faithful/And I've been good/Except for drinking/But he knew that I would' ('Jesus Gonna Be Here')) to masterful ballads of loneliness and veiled threat ('There's nothing strange/About an axe with bloodstains in the barn/There's always some killin'/You got to do around the farm' ('Murder in the Red Barn')).
- John Cale: *Fragments of a Rainy Season* (Rykko)  
John Cale performing live, accompanying himself mainly on the piano only. Classic Cale songs here, as well as settings of Dylan Thomas, his paranoid performance of 'Heartbreak Hotel', and a couple of cover versions.
- Finlandia (Lahti Symphony Orchestra cond. Osmo Vänskä)

(BIS)

A compilation of works by Finnish composers, including Sibelius, over the last 100 years, and worth buying for the *Cantus Arcticus* (Concerto for Birds and Orchestra) of Einojuhani Rautavaara.

- Everly Brothers: *The Cadence Classics* (Rhino)  
Twenty of the Everly Brothers' greatest recordings.  
(8 February 1993)

\* I haven't heard most of your choices. I tried to listen to *Bone Machine*, but could stand only half a track. I've bought the John Cale record, but haven't had time to play it yet. And the Barbirolli/Du Pré/Baker CD (Cello Concerto/*Sea Pictures*) is one of these records essential for the cheering up of the fanzine editor whenever life in general seems arid. \*

## RICHARD BRANDT, 4740 North Mesa, Apt. 111, El Paso, Texas 79912, USA:

Thanks for sending me a copy of *The Metaphysical Review* 15/16/17 (and all in one bundle, too). Once the arrival of such a tome might have seemed a daunting prospect, but I've been on your mailing list long enough now that I don't even bat an eye.

Cy Chauvin mentions burglaries. We had a videocassette recorder stolen from our apartment, quite possibly while we were in the apartment with our backs turned. It was sitting on top of a table next to the cable decoder box, connected to the cable box by an easily removed jack, and plugged into a power outlet on that same cable box because of a shortage of available house outlets. It would be the work of a moment to unhook it and walk off with it; we suspect a neighbour who had been in the house a few days before to help us move some stuff, and who moved out of his apartment very shortly thereafter. (Oddly enough, we got through an entire weekend of being out of the house, running Corfu, with no incident, and the burglary happened the day after our return, lending credence to the idea that it happened while we were actually there in the apartment!) This is likely to happen until I move out of this low-

rent efficiency. I suppose, one night the coke fiends from downstairs banged on our door insisting we had stolen the rent money off their dresser. (They apologised profusely the next morning, but we made it clear we don't want any repeat visits.)

'Listomania' rebukes me as always: I have read perhaps even fewer books in the past year than before (spending my days catching up on correspondence and my evenings ploughing through old fanzines); I managed to read some of the novels nominated for the Hugo Award this year (not worth mentioning); Carole Nelson Douglas's *Good Night, Mr Holmes* (Tor, 1990), a retelling of 'A Scandal in Bohemia' and prior events from Irene Adler's point of view, reworking the tale into a feminist parable; and Stephen Nickle's *Torso: Elliot Ness and the Search for a Psychopathic Killer* (John F. Blair, 1988), whose title sort of says it all, doesn't it? The story is that of America's first acknowledged serial killer, who left a trail of dismembered victims across Cleveland in the twenties and thirties, but in spite of a massive manhunt was never apprehended. There's a tantalising but unsubstantiated possibility that he moved to LA and committed the also

unsolved 'Black Dahlia' killing. Nickels never makes much of the idea that the failure to crack the case led to the downfall of Cleveland's Public Safety Director, Elliot Ness, but the book makes a good bio of the old crime-buster (the characterisation in the Kevin Costner movie seems pretty accurate, although hardly anything of the story line was). Ness died in obscurity and near-poverty, just six months before publication of *The Untouchables* made him a national hero.

Movies, now, are a different story — I seem to have seen 350 or so in the past year. My favourites would rate out roughly as follows:

- 1 *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang, 1952)
- 2 *White Hunter, Black Heart* (Clint Eastwood, 1990)
- 3 *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990)
- 4 *Drugstore Cowboy* (Gus Van Sant, Jr., 1989)
- 5 *Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, 1989)
- 6 *Avalon* (Berry Levinson, 1990)
- 7 *The Mask of Dimitrios* (Jean Negulesco, 1942)
- 8 *Matewan* (John Sayles, 1987)
- 9 *The Unbelievable Truth* (Hal Hartley, 1989)
- 10 *I Wake Up Screaming* (Bruce

- Humberstone, 1946)
- 11 *The Bear* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1989)
  - 12 *Shock Corridor* (Sam Fuller, 1965)
  - 13 *The Silence of the Lambs* (Jonathan Demme, 1991)
  - 14 *The Seventh Victim* (Mark Robson, 1944)
  - 15 *I, Madman* (Tibor Tahacs, 1988)
  - 16 *Men Don't Leave* (Paul Brickman, 1989)
  - 17 *Driving Miss Daisy* (Bruce Beresford, 1989)
  - 18 *She-Devil* (Susan Seidelman, 1989)
  - 19 *Q&A* (Sidney Lumet, 1989)
  - 20 *The Chocolate War* (Keith Gordon, 1987)
  - 21 *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1932)
  - 22 *Nightfall* (Jacques Tourneur, 1956)
  - 23 *Where the Heart Is* (John Boorman, 1989)
  - 24 *I Am the Law* (Tim Whelan, 1938)
  - 25 *10 Rillington Place* (Richard Fleischer, 1971)

I guess I caught more good movies than I realised. I had to drop a few of my favourite sleazy B-movies.

*The Big Heat* is almost the ultimate film noir, with Glenn Ford surprisingly good as the vengeful cop, Lee Marvin as a vicious hood and Gloria Grahame in the role she really earned her Oscar for.

*White Hunter, Black Heart* is a delight to watch; based on Peter Viertel's very thinly disguised account of working with John Huston on *The African Queen* (Viertel shares script credit with James Bridges and Burt Kennedy). In the lead role, Eastwood masters all of Huston's mannerisms without quite descending to caricature, giving the performance of his career as the director who keeps delaying the start of his movie until he's bagged an elephant; good supporting cast, too. A movie-lover's movie.

*Goodfellas* is Scorsese's vastly entertaining gangster film, based on Henry Hill's account of growing up in the Mob. The film makes it clear how appealing the gangster lifestyle is to a disadvantaged kid like Henry, without skimping on the downside — yet at the end Henry appears thoroughly unrepentant.

*Drugstore Cowboy* shifts between surrealism and gritty realism, following a band of addicts as they roam the Pacific Northwest in 1972, robbing drugstores for their habit.

*Cinema Paradiso* is another film buff's treasure, a justifiedly popular (says I) look at the moviehouse as the

social centre of a small Italian town in the postwar era. Like all exercises in nostalgia, it spends some time complaining about how everything has changed for the worse, but makes some valid points about what we give up in exchange for progress.

Similar is *Atolom*, Levinson's look at his immigrant family's history in Baltimore; the changes in family life once the television set takes centre stage in the home are genuinely chilling. Beautiful Randy Newman score.

*The Mask of Dimitrios* boasts one of Peter Lorre's finest performances, as the unconventional hero of Ambler's thriller (a kind of criminal *Citizen Kane*).

*Matruen*, adapted by Sayles from his National Book Award nominee *Union Dues* is the fight for a union among rural coalminers; a powerful film; gorgeous photography by Haskell Wexler.

I enjoyed discovering an obscure gem such as *The Unbelievable Truth*, a quirky independent production about an ex-con coming home after serving time for unintentionally killing his girlfriend's father, after first driving the car in an accident that killed the girlfriend. He hooks up with a teenage girl obsessed with impending nuclear doom. (The young woman is played by Adrienne Shelley, an actress with a disconcerting resemblance to Rosanna Arquette.) Lots of offbeat characters; funny as hell.

*I Wake Up Screaming* is a 20th Century Fox mystery-romance, made compelling by Laird Cregar as a twisted, obsessed hardboiled detective. Carole Landis, as the doomed ingenue, is an eye-ful.

*The Bear* gets amazing mileage out of an orphaned bear cub; no description will do it justice.

*Shock Corridor* is one of Fuller's strident B-movies, recently restored with surreal colour flashback sequences removed from its theatrical release.

*The Seventh Victim* is one of the Val Lewton films: a missing relative, a Satanic cult, and nightmarish events segueing poetically one to the next.

*I, Madman* is another discovery, a grotesque B-movie whose heroine reads one of those sleazy forties paperbacks and starts seeing the characters wandering around in real life; marvelously captures the spirit of that period trash.

*Men Don't Leave* is Brickman's first movie as a director since *Risky Business*; he has a real knack for atmosphere.

*Driving Miss Daisy* is perhaps too

genteel, but worth seeing for Jessica Tandy's performance.

*She-Devil* revealed just what a superb comic actress Meryl Streep can be.

*Q&A* is remarkably faithful to the novel that I read fifteen or so years ago. Nick Nolte is good as the corrupt cop whose point of view is fairly represented.

*The Chocolate War*, from Robert Cormier's novel, encapsulates the repressive atmosphere of a Catholic boys' school. The headmaster enlists the aid of the boys' secret society to unload a rash purchase of Mother's Day chocolates. After its serpentine plot turns, the villain of the piece, a brilliant sort of psychopath with a genius for devising punishments, is actually sort of sympathetic.

*I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* is an especially scathing Warners social melodrama. The bleak, unresolved ending for its embittered true-life hero is like nothing else from its time.

*Nightfall* is a Tourneur film noir that I've been waiting to see for years, after catching only the evocative opening scenes years ago.

*Where the Heart Is* apparently was a Canadian tax-shelter quickie deal, but Boorman cranks out an entertaining film about a developer father who turns his spoiled brood out to live in a condemned inner-city building. Christopher Plummer gives an amazing performance as a street magician (I didn't recognise him until the end credits). Much of the appeal comes from one daughter's project of photographing surreal painted landscapes that incorporate painted human bodies.

*I Am the Law* is a routine Columbia B-programmer, given great energy by Edward G. Robinson as a law professor turned crusading prosecutor. Robinson was always an underrated actor.

*10 Rillington Place* takes a dispassionate look at the sordid details behind the Christie murders. Fleischer's direction is uncharacteristically restrained, but perfectly suited to the mood.

Speaking of Fleischer: One of the contemporary movies *The Narrow Margin* makes look so amateurish is the recent remake by Peter Hyams, to which the original is superior in almost every regard, particularly in its intricacy of plot. Hyams uses the cliché device of having an unsuspected hit-person aboard the train; how many other movies besides the 1952 version instead use an unsuspected target?

I see a letter from Andrew Weiner. His short story 'Going Native' was adapted for television on *Tales from the Darkside*, and to my mind was the best sf in visual medium for the year. I especially liked its ambiguity: I like those stories that might or might not be fantastic, depending on the state of the narrator's mental health. Anybody out there seen this? (I wonder what Andrew made of it.) In 1990 the Showtime cable network made almost as good a short film of Richard Lupoff's '12:01 P.M.', which went so far as to be nominated for an Academy Award. Why can't anyone make a movie this interesting for \$40 million?

\* Richard, your lists are made up of films that I would like to have seen rather than films I've seen. Most of these 1930s, 1940s and 1950s B-movies have been shown once or twice on

Melbourne television, but usually in the middle of the night or at some other time when I cannot watch them. I've seen only two films on your list (Nos. 1 and 25): both are favourites of mine. \*

Your music reviews do more than express personal preferences; they summarise the trends in CD publishing over the years in question. Not so any lists I could compile, since my purchases tend to be from record club sales or from the three-cassettes-for-a-buck bin at the discount mart. Still haven't bought a CD player; have more than enough credit at the electronics boutiques, but waiting until we make the long-awaited move to more commodious surroundings. In the meantime, I'm still using the stereo I got as a high school graduation present, so most of our listening is on the car

stereo. Make what you will of our most recent acquisitions:

- *Blind Faith* (Blind Faith)
- *Disraeli Gears* (Cream)
- *Apocalypse Now* (Stan Getz)
- *John Barleycorn Must Die* (Traffic)
- *Promise* (Sade)
- *The Sun Years* (Roy Orbison)
- *So Good* (Mica Paris)
- *Born to Burn* (Ethel and the Shameless Hussies)
- *The Cincinnati Kid* (soundtrack) (Lalo Schiffrin)
- *Hearts and Bones* (Paul Simon)
- *Indigo* (Matt Bianco)

To answer one of your questions, Bruce, there was a single released from *Dark Side of the Moon*: 'Money', which made it fairly high up the US pop charts. The album was still on the LP charts over here, last I heard. Can't help you on 'Sweet Jane', though.

(26 August 1991)

## DON ASHBY:

I'm trying to make a list. My favourite pop records. Hopeless really. It depends on memory and mood at the time. Most tracks that I like aren't pop music, as they never reached the charts, or even tried to. My likes and dislikes are often associative rather than musical. Here are twenty that come to mind at the moment, and in no particular order:

- 'In the Right Place' (Dr John)
- 'You Really Got Me' (Kinks)
- 'Cocaine' (Chain)
- 'With God on Our Side' (Bob Dylan)

- 'Sympathy for the Devil' (Rolling Stones)
- 'White Room' (Cream)
- 'Southern Man' (live) (Crosby Stills Nash & Young)
- 'Paint It Black' (Rolling Stones)
- 'Purple Haze' (Jimi Hendrix)
- 'Woman You're Breaking Me' (The Groop)
- 'Friday on My Mind' (Easybeats)
- 'We Got to Get Out of this Place' (Animals)
- 'Spoonful' (Cream)
- 'See Emily Play' (Pink Floyd)
- 'Rock On' (T Rex)

- 'White Rabbit' (Jefferson Airplane)
- 'Gloria' (Patti Smith)
- 'Eight Miles High' (Byrds)
- 'Johnny B. Goode' (Chuck Berry)
- 'If I Needed Someone' (Beatles)

I cheated a bit. The live version of 'Southern Man' was on *Four Way Street* and was never a single. Very heavy on sixties music. What do you expect? I was forty in 1990.

(9 June 1991)

## ANDY SAWYER:

I'm puzzled about your comment on me missing out on the sixties. Most of my list in TMR 15/16/17 (Easybeats/Dusty Springfield/Stones/Them in the singles; Van Morrison, Fairport, Velvets, Incredible String Band in the albums) is certainly chronologically sixties. My touchstones for music are definitely from the 1960s. I was eleven when 'Please Please Me' hit Number One, and the musical word changed. A few years later I heard 'White Rabbit' by Jefferson Airplane, and 'Seven and Seven Is' by Love on the radio, and knew there was another leap.

But I went to a lot of tedious parties in the 1970s where people proudly had their Beatles and Simon and Garfunkel albums, and had never heard of Van Morrison, let alone Van Der Graaf Generator, and it rather put me off sixties revivalism. I'm of the school of John Peel, who once pointed out that the whole point of the sixties music scene was the opening up of new ideas and sounds, and to stick to the sixties pop classics when there was a world of new music appearing was curiously retrogressive. I have never been to that peculiar institution: the 'sixties party'.

And I hope I never will. The idea of ex-Flower Children bopping away in their zimmer frames to the Honeycombs and Freddie and the Dreamers fills me with horror.

But the sixties don't go away. We appear to have had another sixties revival with a hundred and one aspiring stars wishing they were Syd Barrett, and every band featuring weedy organ. Which is OK — there could be a lot worse.

Or maybe I'm just mellowing in my old age. My daughters have become stone-fanatic Beatles fans. I don't know

if this is just them and a group of their immediate friends, or whether this is a genuine 'movement' (though I do know, separately, other teenage girls who have also discovered the Beatles) Beatles music fills the house most days, and I've remembered just how good and exciting and inventive their music,

especially their early music, was. I went through an anti-Beatles phase in the mid-seventies, partly because of those parties ruled by people who had Beatles albums and nothing else. Just try saying 'Sex Pistols' to those people. (Irony: now people are nostalgic for the Pistols, and they've been neatly

repackaged. Do people a decade younger than me go in parties and find nothing but 'Never Mind the Bollocks' and wish for some more contemporary music?)

(29 October and 24 November 1991)

## PHILIP BIRD, Flat 1, 25 Hampton Road, Essendon, Victoria 3040:

'Listomania'? I've enclosed Top Forty listings to pander to your vice. These are the official annual charts from 3UZ from 1950 to 1973. A workmate picked them up somewhere a few years ago.

I would point out that:

- As if to confirm your comment about changes in rock tastes during the early 1970s, you'll notice that they stop in 1973 when, as I remember, the trend became for people to buy LPs rather than singles. Any singles issues after the early 1970s became 'appetisers' for albums.
- Look how the quality drops around 1972-73. The really interesting blues-based and folk-based music was being replaced by the resentful nostalgia of Don McLean, and the spurious 'glam rock' nostalgia of Elton John and Gary Glitter, along with an Elvis Presley who'd been dead for years. Throw in the sentimentality of the Carpenters, and the creativity of the earlier years was being undermined. It really was all over! At least Suzi Quatro could rock!

\* Although I sent a letter to Philip, I found it hard to express my gratitude for the lists he sent me. An irreplaceable treasure trove, since the old 3UZ probably threw out its charts years ago. I don't have room to reprint these charts, but you might be interested in, say, the Top Five of each year.

I discovered immediately that the early fifties have utterly disappeared from pop history, at least on radio programs. The early 3UZ charts don't carry information about performers (perhaps because charts during the fifties were based on sheet music sales as well as record sales), and I found that my ignorance is about the

period is complete. Fortunately GERALD MURNANE helped with a lot of information (see his letter below). I also used Lillian Roxon's *Rock Encyclopedia* (Grosset & Dunlap/Workman, 1969), which has singles charts stretching back to 1949, and Joel Whitburn's *Billboard Book of US Top 40 Hits: 1955 to the Present* (Guinness, 1983; I've ordered the latest edition but it hasn't arrived yet).

1950: 1. 'I've Got a Lovely Runch of Coconuts'. 2. 'Mona Lisa' (Nat 'King' Cole). 3. 'Forever and Ever' (Perry Como; Russ Morgan Orchestra). 4. 'Jealous Heart' (?). 5. 'You're Breaking My Heart' (?).

1951: 1. 'Are You Lonesome Tonight' (Al Jolson) (You mean, there was a version before Elvis Presley's?) 2. 'Too Young' (Nat 'King' Cole). 3. 'Loveliest Night of the Year' (Mario Lanza). 4. 'Place Where I Worship' (?). 5. 'Abbadabba Honeymoon' (?).

1952: 1. 'La Ronde' (?). 2. 'Some Enchanted Evening' (?). 3. 'A Kiss to Build a Dream On' (Louis Armstrong). 4. 'Anytime' (Eddie Fisher). 5. 'Here In My Heart' (Al Martino).

1953: 1. 'I'm Walking Behind You' (Eddie Fisher). 2. 'I Went to Your Wedding' (Patti Page). 3. 'Song from Moulin Rouge' (Percy Faith). 4. 'Doggie in the Window' (Patti Page). 5. 'Tell Me a Story' (Frankie Laine).

1954: 1. 'Little Things Mean a Lot' (Kitty Kallen). 2. 'Three Coins in the Fountain' (Four Aces). 3. 'Oh My Papa' (Eddie Fisher). 4. 'Little Shoemaker' (Gaylords). 5. 'Heart of My Heart' (Four Lads).

1955: 1. 'Melody of Love' (Billy Vaughn). 2. 'The High and the Mighty' (?). 3. 'I Need You Now' (Eddie Fisher). 4. 'Let Me

Go Lover' (J. Weber). 5. 'A Man Called Peter' (?).

1956, below, is the first year of the Rock and Roll Era. No sign of this in the Top Five, or even in the Top Ten. Ditto for 1957, except that Elvis Presley's 'Teddy Bear' sneaks in at Number 20. For the next few years, I don't believe these charts, since Elvis Presley dominates the US chart lists from the same era.

1956: 1. 'Memories Are Made of This' (Dean Martin). 2. 'Suddenly There's a Valley' (Gogi Grant) (Jo Stafford). 3. 'The Poor People of Paris' (Les Baxter). 4. 'It's Almost Tomorrow' (Jo Stafford). 5. 'Gal with the Yaller Shoes' (?).

1957: 1. 'Tammy' (Debbie Reynolds). 2. 'Jamaica Farewell' (Harry Belafonte). 3. 'Butterfly' (Andy Williams). 4. 'Round and Round' (Perry Como). 5. 'Hey There' (Rosemary Clooney?; her version was a hit in America in 1953).

1958: 1. 'He's Got the Whole World in His Hands' (Laurie London). 2. 'Padre' (Toni Arden). 3. 'Chances Are' (Johnny Mathis). 4. 'Return to Me' (Dean Martin). 5. 'Just Married' (Marty Robbins).

A few rock 'n' roll songs start to appear in the 1958 Top Twenty of the Year ('He's Got the Whole World in His Hands', 'Purple People Eater' and 'Bird Dog'), but I get the idea that 3UZ heartily disapproved of rock 'n' roll, and continued to do so until the first rock craze was over.

1959 is the first year I can confirm from my own collection of pop charts:

1959: 1. 'Tom Dooley' (Kingston Trio). 2. 'Petite Fleur' (Chris Barber Band). 3.

'Enchanted' (Platters). 4. 'Forget Me Not' (Kalin Twins). 5. 'Beep Beep' (Diamonds).

No rock 'n' roll there, but a great deal starts to appear below the Top Five: 'A Fool Such As I' (Elvis Presley) at No. 8, Lloyd Price's 'Personality' at No. 11, Bobby Darin's 'Dream Lover' at No. 12, 'Hard Headed Woman' (Elvis) at No. 15, Dion's 'A Teenager in Love' at No. 17, the Teddy Bears' 'To Know Him Is to Love Him' (Phil Spector's first record production) at No. 18, and — a real triumph — Johnny O'Keefe's 'So Tough' at No. 20 for the year.

From now on, the 3UZ charts more or less confirm my own findings:

1960: 1. 'Just a Closer Walk With Thee' (Jimmie Rodgers). 2. 'He'll Have to Go' (Jim Reeves). 3. 'What Do You Want to Make Those Eyes at Me For?' (Emile Ford). 4. 'Everybody's Somebody's Fool' (Connie Francis). 5. 'Oh Carol' (Neil Sedaka).

There are five Australian songs in the rest of the Top Twenty, and eleven that are recognisably of the rock 'n' roll era.

1961: 1. 'Wooden Heart' (Elvis Presley). 2. Theme from *Exodus* (Ferrante and Teicher). (I've just managed to get a copy of that on CD.) 3. 'A Scottish Soldier' (Andy Stewart). 4. 'Wonderland by Night' (Bert Kaempfert Orchestra). 5. 'I'm Gonna Knock on Your Door' (Eddie Hodges).

1962: 1. 'Moon River' (Jerry Butler, Henry Mancini, and umpteen other versions). 2. 'Can't Help Falling in Love' (Elvis Presley). 3. 'Roses Are Red' (Bobby Vinton). 4. 'Midnight in Moscow' (Kenny Ball's Jazzmen). 5. 'Stranger on the Shore' (Mr Acker Bilk).

The trad jazz revival (Nos. 4 and 5) of 1962 was genuine enough, but short-lived. The kids at school were divided between the rockers and the jazzers. Within a year, the Beatles had united them.

1963: 1. 'Painted Tainted Rose' (Al Martino). (Here the top tune is a syrupy throwback ballad that is now not only

never heard on radio, but is unobtainable in any form. Ditto for 'A Scottish Soldier', above, No. 3 for 1961.) 2. 'From a Jack to a King' (Ned Miller). (Ditto.) 3. 'Blame It on the Bossa Nova' (Eddie Gorme). 4. 'Move Baby Move' (Johnny O'Keefe). 5. 'Tamoure' (Bill Justis Orchestra).

1964: 1. 'I Saw Her Standing There' (Beatles). 2. 'I Want to Hold Your Hand' (Beatles). 3. 'She Loves You' (Beatles). 4. 'A Hard Day's Night' (Beatles). 5. 'All My Lovin'' (Beatles). The only non-Beatles songs in the Top Ten were by Millie ('My Boy Lollipop'), Cilla Black ('You're My World') and Al Martino ('I Love You More and More').

1965: 1. 'I'll Never Find Another You' (Seekers). (The first time an Australian performer or group had the top hit of the year in Melbourne. Of course, the Seekers had to go to Britain to record it.) 2. 'The Wedding' (Julie Rogers) (another totally disappeared soppy ballad that was played on pop radio once an hour for six months in 1965). 3. 'It Ain't Necessarily So' (Normie Rowe). (1965 is the breakthrough year of Australian pop, although I can't say I liked many of the singles by either the Seekers or Normie Rowe). 4. 'A World of Our Own' (Seekers). 5. 'I Belong With You' (Laurie Allen and Bobby Bright) (Australians again).

For 1966, 3UZ went chart-mad, and produced for the first time a Top 170. However, I don't have room here for all of it.

1. 'Step Back/Cara Lyn' (Johnny Young) (Australian). 2. 'These Boots Are Made for Walking' (Nancy Sinatra). 3. 'The Carnival Is Over' (Seekers) (Australian). 4. 'Gloria' (Them). 5. 'Born Free' (Matt Monro).

1967: 1. 'Georgy Girl' (Seekers) (Australian). 2. 'San Francisco' (Scott McKenzie). 3. 'This Is My Song' (Petula Clark). 4. 'Snoopy versus the Red Baron' (The Royal Guardsmen). 5. 'Puppet on a String' (Sandie Shaw).

It looks as if unadventurous pop had returned by 1967, but deeper down the Top 178 were Procol Harum's 'A Whiter Shade

of Pale' and the Beatles' 'Penny Lane' (equal No. 12), the Animals' 'When I Was Young' (No. 25), Aretha Franklin's 'Respect' (No. 27), Jimi Hendrix's 'Stone Free' (No. 33) and the Beach Boys' 'Good Vibrations' (No. 38).

1968: 1. 'Sadie (the Cleaning Lady)' (Johnny Farnham) (Australian). 2. 'The Unicorn' (The Irish Rovers). 3. 'Love Is Blue' (Paul Mauriat Orchestra). 4. 'Honey' (Bobby Goldsboro). 5. 'The Impossible Dream' (Jim Nabors).

That list seems straight out of the 1950s, but further down the list are the Beatles' 'Hey Jude' (something wrong with 3UZ's chart making here, since it was Number One for the Year in every other corner of the known universe), Richard Harris's 'Macarthur Park', Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich's 'Legend of Xanadu', the Small Faces' 'Tin Soldier' and Georgie Fame's 'Ballad of Bonnie and Clyde', each of which sounds good twenty-five years later.

1969: 1. 'The Real Thing' (Russell Morris) (Australian — and a genuinely experimental masterpiece that still sounds exciting). 2. 'Hair' (The Cowsills). 3. 'Picking Up Pebbles' (Matt Flinders) (Australian) (a disappeared syrupy ballad). 4. (equal) 'The Sounds of Silence' (Simon and Garfunkel) and 'Love Theme from Romeo and Juliet' (Henry Mancini Orchestra). 5. 'Honky Tonk Women' (Rolling Stones) (by far the most successful Stones single, with 'Ruby Tuesday' and 'Walking the Dog' the only other Stones songs to hit a Top Ten of the Year).

1970: 1. 'Let It Be' (Beatles). 2. 'Bridge over Troubled Water' (Simon and Garfunkel). 3. 'In the Summertime' (The Mixture) (Australian) and Mungo Jerry. 4. 'Close to You' (Carpenters). 5. 'The Wonder of You' (Elvis Presley).

1971: 1. 'Eagle Rock' (Daddy Cool) (the Australian single you might have expected to do best overseas, but it didn't; it remains a rock 'n' roll favourite here). 2. 'My Sweet Lord' (George Harrison). 3. 'I Don't

Know How to Love Him' (Helen Reddy) (Australian). 4. 'LA International Airport' (Susan Raye). 5. 'Daddy Cool' (Drummond) (Australian).

1972. To show how my own interest in pop music had disappeared by 1972, I cannot remember ever having heard the Top Two songs: 1. 'Rangers Waltz' (Moms and Dads). 2. 'Puppy Love' (Donny Osmond). 3. 'Boppin' the Blues' (Blackfeather) (Australian). 4. 'Without You' (Nilsson). 5. 'American Pie' (Don McLean).

Into real sleazeville: 1973. There were great songs being recorded in 1972 and 1973, but almost entirely as tracks on albums that were never played on radio. 1. 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon' (Dawn). (This song more than any other stopped me listening to commercial pop for nearly a decade.) 2. 'Never, Never, Never' (Shirley Bassey). 3. 'And I Love You So' (Perry Como) (who had not had a hit since 1959). 4. 'Crocodile Rock' (Elton John). 5. 'I Don't Want to Play House' (Barbara Ray).

Australian songs almost disappear in 1973, and don't reappear until the end of the 1970s.

Back to Philip Bird: \*

It was with crystal sets that my brother and I tuned into Brian Taylor on 3UZ every Sunday at 2 p.m. for the official Top 40 while doing our homework. Then over to Stan 'the Man' Rofe on 3KZ at 4 p.m. for two hours of original rock and roll. As 1961 and 1962 went by, Stan's taste for black artists and the original energy of mid-1950s music became the guiding light for me. While the charts dripped with the sugar teen schlock of Bobby Vee, Bobby Vinton and Pat Boone, I was seeking out 'Marvellous' Marv Johnson, Sam Cooke, Ray Charles, Cliff Richard (when he rocked), George Hamilton IV, Jerry Butler and Brook Benton. Roy Orbison's only score with me was 'Candy Man', nice and funky. I mustn't forget the instrumentals. One of the first 45s I bought was the Shadows' 'Apache', and I kept buying their stuff until 'Geronimo' in 1964, by which time I realised my taste was changing drastically.

During those years I was keen on Duane Eddy, Johnny and the Hurricanes, our own Thunderbirds (remember 'New Orleans Beat'?), who backed Johnny Chester, and those one-hit wonders the Fendermen, the String-alongs, the Ventures and the Spotnicks ('Orange Blossom Special'), a European group. And I thought! Rob EG was great, also.

By 1963-64 I was discovering classical music, principally because of

the return to the cinema of *Fantasia*, bits of which I had seen on *Disneyland*. Since I couldn't get the soundtrack as a whole at the time, I resolved to get recordings of each work featured in the film, and from this my interest and record collection exploded in the 1960s and 1970s. While everybody was getting off on the mid to late 1960s rock music scene, I was away on my own planet discovering Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Mozart, Sibelius and Brahms. And Debussy was a revelation! The world was my oyster.

I was in Port Hedland (Western Australia) for most of 1967 as a weather observer. I lived in a back room of one of the three hotels up there. People in the bar kept the juke box going. While from my portable record player could be heard Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony, out in the bar it was Slim Whitman's 'China Doll' almost constantly. On the radio, of course, were the Easybeats or Scott McKenzie. When Slim Dusty toured the area, they really got excited, and couldn't understand why I wasn't.

It wasn't until 1971 that my interest in pop or rock returned, and I started catching up on what I'd ignored during the sixties. By then, of course, there were new artists such as the Allman Brothers, Steely Dan, Little Feat, the Eagles and Led Zeppelin. I was rocking again.

(1 September 1991)

## GERALD MURNANE, Macleod, Victoria 3085:

I'm reassured that a tune called 'Velvet Waters' did/does exist, and I may one day hear the burbling instrumental version.

I'm especially grateful to you for taping the Tokens' version of the tune I call 'Wimoweh'. I first heard that tune on the radio on a hot afternoon late in 1953. I had just walked into the kitchen of our weatherboard house in Peter Street, East Oakleigh, after having trudged the three-quarter mile from East Oakleigh station (not yet named Huntingdale). My mother was saying something to me, but all I could hear was this unearthly music. I learned after the record was finished that the music was 'Wimmaway', sung by the Weavers. I wrote the word thus just now because that was how I saw it written in my mind for the next eight years. (I may have been thinking of the

Wirraway aeroplane.) I knew the Weavers well, of course, but I heard the unearthly music only once or twice during the next year or two and the Weavers themselves hardly ever afterwards, although I didn't know why they had faded away. I only read years later of the McCarthy years.

In 1961 I heard the Weavers' 'Wimmaway' once again on the radio, and this time I learned that it came from an LP titled *The Weavers at Carnegie Hall*. I bought the record and played it until I was satisfied. Strangely, in that same year, a different version of 'Wimoweh', as I now spelled it, reached the Top 40 or 50 or whatever. That version may have been the Tokens' version, although I'm not sure, since one or two other versions have been around at odd times, and I'm confused, and all this was more than

thirty years ago, God help us.

I later lent my Weavers LP to someone and never saw it again. Until you sent me that tape, I relied only on my accurate memory. I must say too that I have often been reminded of 'Wimoweh' when I've heard Max Merritt singing that song that goes 'Oh-oh-oh, slipping away from me...'

My knowledge of pop music extends from exactly 1950 until exactly 1962. One afternoon in 1962, I switched off Stan Rofe in order to have silence while I went on with the opening pages of my first novel. I have never deliberately listened to that sort of music since then. I was and still am indifferent to the Beatles, although I liked the sound of 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds' when I first heard it in the summer of 1967. I could recognise the irritating sound of Abba if ever I was so unfortu-



nate as to hear it again. But the rest is silence.

Often, a student will write in a piece of fiction that the chief character was listening to Billy Joel or ... (I can't even remember the names of the singers or groups that I read about. And, come to think of it, I haven't read a reference to Joel for many years.) I make no comment, but another student in class will sometimes say something such as 'Yes! That's just the sort of music that such a character would listen to.'

As recently as last year, a twenty-

years-old student wrote about a young man and a young woman driving in a car with the radio sounding or the tape deck going and something called 'Khe Sanh' being played. One of the characters said something to the effect that the song was part of the heritage of their generation (or some generation). The character may have been speaking sincerely or ironically — I forget now. The thing I was struck by was not just that I had never heard the song that the two were talking about but that I had never heard of the song — never heard

anyone speak of it; never read a reference to it.

I always enjoy hearing or reading your accounts of your hit-parade days, but then I always like to one-up you with a report from my earliest hit-parade days: the very early fifties, before Rock and Roll. I love to recall Guy Mitchell, Frankie Laine, Tennessee Ernie Ford, Jo Stafford, Patti Page, Kay Starr, Johnny Ray, ...

(16 March 1993)

## BERND FISCHER, Damiansweg 95, D-50765, Köln, Germany:

### 1960s pop music

I started listening regularly to music programs around 1960, mostly to country and western music on American Forces Network (AFN) Frankfurt. There was a one-hour program on week days, and the weekly C&W hit parade on Saturday morning, from six to seven (I had to leave for school at seven). Other radio stations to which I tuned were Radio Luxembourg and a local (German) station in Frankfurt with mostly American pop music (that was in the pre-Beatles era when I didn't listen to German pop music).

I still have a small notebook from that period. In it I carefully listed all the titles played during the daily C&W programs, and the titles of the weekly C&W hit parade (I stopped that habit in 1967).

Here are my annual Best lists:

1962 (C&W only): The list is too long to be given here, but here is the condensed version: (1) 'Louisiana Man' (Rusty and Doug). (2) 'One More Town' (Kingston Trio). (3) 'Misery Loves Company' (Porter Wagoner). (4) 'Alligator Man' (Jimmy Newman). (5) 'I Walk the Line' (Johnny Cash). (6) 'Blue Train' (John D. Loudermilk). (7) 'Pick a Bale o' Cotton' (Johnny Cash). (8) 'Hills of Georgia' (Hylo Brown). (9) 'Blackland Farmer' (Wink Martindale). (10) 'El Paso' (Marty Robbins). (11) 'Partners' (Jim Reeves). (12) 'I've Been Everywhere' (Hank Snow). (13) 'Rain No More' (Osborne Brothers). (14) 'Only the Hangman' (Bobby Sax) (?). (15) 'Heartbreak USA' (Kitty Wells). (16) 'Whom Can I Count On' (Patsy Cline). (17) 'Next Saturday Night' (Hank Locklin). (18) 'Springtime in Alaska' (Johnny Horton). (19) '42 in Chicago' (Merle Kilgore). (20) 'Shame

on Me' (Bobby Bare).

Of the original list of 74 items, there were two pieces that have nothing to do with C&W: 'Green Onions' by Booker T. and the MGs and 'Take Five' by the Dave Brubeck Quartet.

In those days I liked instrumentals much more than I do today. Remember the Ventures ('Walk, Don't Run'), 'Asia Minor' (B. Bumble and the Stingers), a number one hit around 1960, 'Wheels' (Billy Vaughan Orchestra), the Chantays ('Pipeline'), Floyd Cramer ('Last Date' and many more), Bent Fabric ('Alley Cat'), Johnny and the Hurricanes ('Red River Rock') and Al Caiola ('The Lonely Bull')?

I won't list my favourite C&W hits for 1963 and 1964, except to say that my favourite C&W song from 1963 was 'Dang Me' (Roger Miller), and from 1964 was 'Kentucky' (Glen Campbell).

My 1963 Best of Everything List (in no particular order): 'Walk Right In' (Rooftop Singers). 'Rhythm of the Rain' (The Cascades). 'You're Gone' (Bobby Darin). 'Yakety Sax' (Boots Randolph). 'Harry the Hairy Ape' (Ray Stevens). 'Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport' (Rolf Harris). 'Green Green' (New Christy Minstrels). 'Martian Hop' (Rondells). 'Wipeout' (The Surfaris). 'Surf City' (Jan and Dean). '55 Days in Peking' (The Brothers Four). 'Do You Love Me' (The Contours). 'Hello Muddah Hello Faddah' (Alan Sherman). 'Drag City' (Jan and Dean). 'Washington Square' (The Village Stompers).

1964: 'Glad All Over' (The Dave Clarke Five). 'Fun, Fun, Fun' (The Beach Boys). 'Kentucky' (Glen Campbell). 'Hey Little Cobra' (The Ripchords). 'Surfin' Bird' (The Trashmen). 'California Sun' (The Rivieras). 'Miller's Cave' (Bobby Bare). 'Dead

Man's Curve' (Jan and Dean). 'The Little Old Lady from Pasadena' (Jan and Dean). 'I Get Around' (The Beach Boys). 'Rag Doll' (The Four Seasons). 'Travel On' (Billy Kramer). 'Memphis Tennessee' (Johnny Rivers). 'GTO' (Ronny and the Daytonas). 'Bread and Butter' (The Newbeats). 'The House of the Rising Sun' (The Animals). 'Four Strong Winds' (Bobby Bare). 'Ringo' (Lorne Greene). 'Have I the Right' (The Honeycombs). 'Little Honda' (The Hondells/the Beach Boys). 'I'm Crying' (The Animals). 'Blue Moon of Kentucky' (Patsy Cline). 'Baby Love' (The Supremes). 'Where Did Our Love Go?' (The Supremes).

No Beatles: A lot of surf music. The Rolling Stones entered my life in 1965:

1965: 'You Can Have Her' (The Righteous Brothers). 'Here Comes the Night' (Them). 'Highwaymen' (Curtis Leach). 'Satisfaction' (The Rolling Stones). 'Heart of Stone' (Rolling Stones). 'Hitchhike' (Rolling Stones). 'If You Need Me' (Rolling Stones). 'Get Off My Cloud' (Rolling Stones). 'She Said Yeah' (Rolling Stones). 'Like a Rolling Stone' (Bob Dylan). 'Eve of Destruction' (Barry McGuire). 'We've Got to Get Out of this Place' (Animals). 'Look Through Any Window' (Hollies). 'You Were on My Mind' (We Five). 'Come Stay With Me' (Marianne Faithful). 'Long Live Love' (Sandie Shaw). 'If You Gotta Go, Go Now' (Manfred Mann). 'All I Really Want to Do' (The Byrds). 'Down at the Boon-docks' (Billy Joe Royal). 'Heartful of Soul' (The Yardbirds). 'Unchained Melody' (The Righteous Brothers). 'Catch Us If You Can' (Dave Clarke Five). 'Mr Tambourine Man' (The Byrds). 'New Orleans' (Eddie Hodges). 'Turn, Turn, Turn' (The Byrds). 'Positively Fourth Street' (Bob Dylan).

'Still I'm Sad' (The Yardbirds). 'The Carnival Is Over' (The Seekers). 'You've Got to Hide Your Love Away' (The Silkie). 'Universal Soldier' (Donovan). 'England Swings' (Roger Miller). 'It's My Life' (The Animals). 'My Generation' (The Who). 'Good News Week' (Hedgehoppers Anonymous). 'Shame and Scandal in the Family' (Shawn Elliott). 'Over and Over' (Dave Clarke Five). 'Lumberjack' (Hal Willis).

1966: 'The Sounds of Silence' (Simon and Garfunkel). 'Keep On Running' (Spencer Davis Group). 'Nineteenth Nervous Breakdown' (The Rolling Stones). 'California Dreaming' (The Mamas and Papas). 'Dedicated Follower of Fashion' (The Kinks). 'Elusive Butterfly' (Bob Lind). 'I Fought the Law' (Bobby Fuller). 'Daydream' (The Lovin' Spoonful). 'Soul and Inspiration' (Righteous Brothers). 'Bang Bang' (Cher). 'A Message to Michael' (Dionne Warwick). 'Substitute' (The Who). 'Paint It Black' (Rolling Stones). 'Strangers in the Night' (Frank Sinatra). 'Pretty Flamingo' (Manfred Mann). 'Pied Piper' (Crispian St Peters). 'Eight Miles High' (Byrds). 'Little Red Riding Hood' (Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs). 'Summer in the City' (Lovin' Spoonful). 'Tar and Cement' (Verdelle Smith). 'Bus Stop' (Hollies). 'Wild Thing' (The Troggs). 'Sloop John B' (Beach Boys). 'The Streets of Baltimore' (Bobby Bare). 'All or Nothing' (The Small Faces). 'Eleanor Rigby' (The Beatles). 'Little Man' (Sonny and Cher). 'You Can't Hurry Love' (Supremes). 'Have You Seen Your Mother Baby Standing in the Shadows' (Rolling Stones). 'Out of Time' (Chris Farlowe). 'They're Coming to Take Me Away' (Napoleon XIV). 'Psychotic Reaction' (Count Five). 'Good Vibrations' (Beach Boys). 'Reach Out' (The Four Tops). 'No Milk Today' (Herman's Hermits). 'The Poor Side of Town' (Johnny Rivers). 'Trains and Boats and Planes' (Dionne Warwick). 'Mellow Yellow' (Donovan). 'If I Were a Carpenter' (Bobby Darin). 'Last Train to Clarksville' (The Monkees). 'Stop Stop Stop' (Hollies).

1967: 'I'm a Believer' (The Monkees). 'Happy Jack' (The Who). 'Save Me' (Dave, Dee, Dozy, Mick and Tich). 'Ruby Tuesday' (Rolling Stones). 'Good Thing' (Paul Revere and the Raiders). 'Friday on My Mind' (The Easybeats). 'I Feel Free' (Cream). 'Painter Man' (Creation). 'On a Carousel' (Hollies). 'Ups and Downs' (Paul Revere and the Raiders). 'Happy Together' (The Turtles). 'Strawberry Fields Forever' (Beatles). 'Night of

Fear' (The Move). 'Everybody Needs Somebody to Love' (Wilson Pickett). 'The Happening' (Supremes). 'Sweet Soul Music' (Arthur Conley). 'New York Mining Disaster 1941' (The Bee Gees). 'Get Me to the World on Time' (The Electric Prunes). 'Pictures of Lily' (The Who). 'Mr Pleasant' (Kinks). 'Windy' (The Association). 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' (Procol Harum). 'See Emily Play' (Pink Floyd). 'San Francisco' (Scott McKenzie). 'Light My Fire' (The Doors). 'We Love You' (Rolling Stones). 'Ode to Billy Joe' (Bobby Gentry). 'Hole in My Shoe' (Traffic). 'King Midas in Reverse' (Hollies). 'The Letter' (The Box Tops). 'Never My Love' (The Association). 'From the Underworld' (The Herd). 'Autumn Almanac' (The Kinks). 'I Can See for Miles' (The Who). 'Morning of My Life' (Esther and Abi Ofarim).

1968: 'The Days of Pearly Spencer' (David McWilliams). 'Legend of Xanadu' (Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich). 'Paradise Lost' (The Herd). 'Tin Soldier' (The Small Faces). 'The Mighty Quinn' (Manfred Mann). 'Green Tambourine' (The Lemon Pipers). 'Walk Away Renee' (The Four Tops). 'Nights in White Satin' (The Moody Blues). 'Fire Brigade' (The Move). 'The Music Goes Round My Head' (Easybeats). 'Sky Pilot' (Eric Burdon and the Animals). 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly' (Hugo Montenegro Orchestra). 'Jumping Jack Flash' (Rolling Stones). 'Third Stone from the Sun' (Jimi Hendrix Experience). 'Hurdy Gurdy Man' (Donovan). 'Fire' (Arthur Brown). 'Classical Gas' (Mason Williams). 'Indian Lake' (The Cowbells). 'Hey Jude' (Beatles). 'Born to be Wild' (Steppenwolf). 'Listen to Me' (Hollies). 'Those Were the Days' (Mary Hopkins). 'Hush' (Deep Purple). 'Voices in the Sky' (Moody Blues). 'Susie Q' (Credence Clearwater Revival). 'Midnight Confessions' (The Grass Roots). 'Time Has Come Today' (The Chambers Brothers).

Of the items on your 1961 chart, I have all the songs except Numbers 2, 8 and 10. 'Wonderland by Night' was one of the first singles I bought (together with Elvis Presley's 'Muss I Denn', probably the only German folk song I have on record).

My interest in country and western music declined in the second half of the sixties. During the eighties I started buying my favourite 1960-65 country songs on record, as far as possible. For instance, the item 'Lumberjack' by Hal Willis, on my 1965 list is virtually unobtainable. To my knowledge it has

not been reissued, on sampler or elsewhere. I have not even heard that song since 1965.

I have doubts about your information about the Caterina Valente version of 'Milord'. Edith Piaf's version was the original one, and the version popular in Europe, even in Germany where Caterina Valente was, and still is, very popular.

I'm glad to see the Johnny Horton entry 'North to Alaska'. Horton is one of my favourite singers (the others being Van Morrison, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen and Dick Gaughan, a Scottish folk singer). It took me twenty-five years (and some money) to get hold of his records. I have all his officially released songs, except for four titles that appeared only as B-sides of singles. To my great joy Bear Family Records has just released a four-CD boxed set of mostly previously unissued Johnny Horton songs from the 1952-56 period. The same company has issued an LP box with songs from the Columbia period (1956 to 1960, the year of his death).

1970 was the year I started listening to Irish and Scottish folk songs. In 1971 I moved to Köln, where the local radio station BFBS (British Forces Broadcasting Service) had a weekly radio show of folk music. This is still my favourite kind of music.

#### Books

I can't give you a list of my favourite sf books, since I haven't read much sf during recent years. My interest has moved to the mystery field. My current number one author is Jim Thompson; my all-time favourite is Georges Simenon (I've read at least 150 of his novels; it's an addiction). It's a pity that you don't share this preference for the mystery field; otherwise I would recommend to you *The Armchair Detective Book of Lists*, which contains exactly what the title says.

Let me conclude with three short lists:

**Favourite books 1990-91** (in no particular order):

- *The Secret Pilgrimage* (John Le Carré)
- *Dictionary of the Khazars* (Milorad Pavić)
- *The Land of Laughs* (Jonathan Carroll)
- *Sleeping in Flame* (Jonathan Carroll)
- *The Position of the Sleeping Killer* (Jean Pierre Manchette)
- *Pop. 1280* (Jim Thompson)

- *The Sea and Summer* (George Turner)
- *Skin Tight* (Curt Hlasen — a Florida-set thriller, very nasty and very funny)
- *The History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* (Julian Barnes)
- *Aegypt!* (John Crowley)
- *The Billiard Table Murders* (Glen Baxter).

#### Favourite films 1990-91

- *Lawrence of Arabia* (restored version)
- *The Grifters* (based on a Jim Thompson novel, like the next item)
- *After Dark, My Sweet*
- *Les liaisons dangereuses*
- *A Fish Called Wanda* (I'm a great fan of Monty Python and John Cleese)
- *Silence of the Lambs*
- *Mortal Thoughts* (Alan Rudolph)
- *Miracle* (Neil Jordan)
- *Til the End of the World* (Wim Wenders)
- *Time of the Gypsies* (Emir Kusturica).

#### Favourite albums 1990-91

- *Freedom* (Neil Young)
- *The Bootleg Series, Part I* (Bob Dylan)
- *Marc Cohn* (Marc Cohn)
- *Atalon* (Van Morrison)
- *Irish Heartbeat* (Van Morrison)
- *The Best from Down Under* (Easybeats)
- *Home Fire* (Ron Kavana)
- *Half Set in Harlem* (De Dannan)
- *The Great Wide Open* (Tom Petty)
- *Hymns to the Silence* (Van Morrison).

(19 September 1991)

\* And that was the last I heard of Bernd Fischer until a week ago. I wrote him the letter that appears below, but it was returned 'address unknown'. I wrote to Franz Rottensteiner asking if he had a more recent address for Bernd. The address he gave me (from which he had received an answer) was exactly the one to which I had sent the letter.

The letter I sent to Bernd:

Dear Bernd  
I can't help being fascinated by the dominance of American music programming in Germany, possibly even more than in Australia, where at least

the beginnings of a recording industry could be found by 1959.

I love those lists, of course. The crossover between C&W and pop music was fairly high until 1964, but there are a lot of your titles and versions I haven't heard. The original version of 'I've Been Everywhere' is by Australia's Lucky Starr. Hank Snow merely adapted it for America.

Like you, I was most interested in instrumental hits. Hence I was then, and still am, an ardent fan of the Shadows. A brilliant Melbourne group of the time was the Thunderbirds (no relation to the many groups named the Thunderbirds that have appeared since then). The closest Australian equivalent to the Shadows were the Strangers, but none of their big hits has been transferred to LP or CD. The Joyboys, a Sydney group, were more lucky. The most extraordinary act was a steel guitarist, Robie Porter, who recorded under the name Rob EG. He did some brilliant stuff, including the local hit version of '55 Days at Peking'.

On to 1963. I can't remember ever hearing 'You're Gone' by Bobby Darin. I'm still trying to get a decent CD of his Capitol hits. No luck so far. As I said in my article, the hit version of 'The Me Kangaroo Down Sport' in Australia was by a Melbourne jazz group, the Horrie Dargie Quintet. Rolf Harris's version was hardly played in Melbourne until years later.

I can't say I like many of your items on the 1963 list, but we agree a bit more for 1964. 'Fun Fun Fun' was certainly the Beach Boys' best record. I didn't like most of the other surf records. (We even had our local dance craze, the stamp, which began in the surf clubs of Sydney.) My 1964 is dominated by people I already liked, such as Roy Orbison, and the best of the English groups, such as the Stones and the Animals.

I'm glad that somebody beside me knows the Righteous Brothers' version of 'You Can Have Her'. My favourite version, of course, is the original Roy Hamilton version, but the arrangement of the Righteous

Brothers version is wonderful. It was released as a single here in 1965, but was played very little. Your 1965 list includes lots of items I liked, but my own list is very different.

Ditto for 1966, with more agreement than disagreement. 'Eight Miles High' was never played in Australia; probably considered too drugs-oriented. In fact, the Byrds were ignored in Australia after their third single. I discovered them only in the late 1970s. I was a great fan of the Lovin' Spoonful.

I just realise that you might never have heard the great singles made by the Easybeats before they went to England. They were the first Australian group to be recorded properly; recording studios here before then were terrible.

1967: more agreement. Nice to see that somebody else noticed the Stones' 'We Love You', which is Charlie Watts's greatest drum solo. That sounds particularly effective on the recent Stones boxed set of their singles.

It's very hard to work out which was the successful version of 'Mildred' in Australia, since a Melbourne-recorded version did very well here. It seems that Edith Piaf's version was No. 1 in Sydney and the rest of Australia.

I was never much of a folk fan, at least when the top English performers were at their best. I've become much more of a fan of Fairport Convention, etc. during recent years. My sister is a real folk music fan, and sings quite a bit at folk festivals. There seems to be a folk festival every weekend somewhere in Australia. I went with my sister to see Scotland's Battlefield Band; Christy Moore is a frequent visitor to Melbourne; the Fureys are often through; we seem to get the Chieftains and most of the top Irish bands fairly regularly. And there are plenty of brilliant Australian folk performers.

I read mysteries from time to time. Australian literary writers have suddenly discovered the mystery field during the last four or five years, and are all madly writing successful series.

I've just finished two very entertaining anthologies, *Crimes for a Summer Christmas* and (one year later) *More Crimes for a Summer Christmas*. Lots of very good stories by Australian writers. The best Australian thriller/crime novel recently has been Garry Disher's *Kickback*.

Thanks for the lists of recent **Favourite Books**. 1990-91: I've bought the John Le Carré; have written much about Jonathan Carroll (see *SFC* 71/72) and regard *Land of Laughs* as one of my favourite novels of recent years; and am glad to see that you could get hold of George Turner's *The Sea and Summer*.

**Films**. It was lovely to see *Lawrence of Arabia* in all its glory again. Perfect viewing conditions at the cinema in which I saw it. I meant to see *The Grifters*, but didn't quite get there. It's disappeared now. I haven't seen the others.

Of the records on your list that I've heard, I agree. I must buy Marc Cohn's record; he earned rave notices as the support act for Ronnie Raitt at the Melbourne Concert Hall at the weekend.

Thanks for sending me the Bear Family Catalogue. Then I tried ordering releases from my local record dealer. His face fell when he heard the name of Bear Family. It seems that they are very difficult to order from, unless you are asking for records on their own label. My record dealer (Steve Smith from Reading's in Carlton) got me the Bear Family CD releases of James Talley (although one of them no longer plays), but he said they simply do not have available the records they claim to sell. This is a terrible pity. Which other company would even know of the Greatest Hits of John D. Loudermilk? Or an LP by Jerry Byrd (steel guitarist for the Monument label; once recorded a Roy Orbison song, 'Memories of Maria', that I've never been able to obtain). Or advertise a Best of Lonnie Lee? (In the Australian section. Lonnie Lee's records were produced by Johnny O'Keefe, and he was the best of the young Sydney vocalists who worked

with O'Keefe during the very early days of Australian rock and roll.) But I checked with Festival Records in Sydney, and that Lonnie Lee record is no longer available in any form. Now is it possible that Bear Family has a copy somewhere in its storehouse?

What I'm asking is: is there any easy way that you could find out what Bear Family actually has or has not? I could easily transfer funds to them if I were sure of not wasting my time.

Here are some of the lists for the collection:

#### **Favourite singles**

**1962:** (1) 'The Crowd' (Roy Orbison). (2) 'Ginny Come Lately' (Brian Hyland). (3) 'Dream Baby' (Roy Orbison). (4) 'Leah' (Roy Orbison). (5) 'Silver Threads and Golden Needles' (The Springfields). (6) 'Midnight in Moscow' (Kenny Hall's Jazzmen). (7) 'Love Letters' (Ketty Lester). (8) '5-4-3-2-1-Zero!' (Rob EG) (Australian). (9) 'Evergreen' (Roy Orbison). (10) 'Can't Help Falling in Love' (Elvis Presley). (11) 'Sing' (Johnny O'Keefe) (Australian). (12) 'Crying in the Rain' (Everly Bros.). (13) 'I Could Have Loved You So Well' (Bobby Cookson) (Australian). (14) 'It'll Be Me' (Cliff Richard). (15) 'Pride Goes Before a Fall' (Jim Reeves). (16) 'I Remember You' (Frank Ifield) (Australian). (17) 'Stranger on the Shore' (Andy Williams). (18) 'Kon-Tiki' (The Shadows). (19) 'Cottonfields' (The Highwaymen). (20) 'Love Star' (Roy Orbison). (21) 'Don't You Believe It' (Andy Williams). (22) 'Moon River' (Henry Mancini). (23) 'Guitar Tango' (The Shadows). (24) 'Tzena Tzena Tzena' (The Springfields). (25) 'Girls Were Made to Love and Kiss' (Warren Williams) (Australian).

**1963:** (1) 'The End of the World' (Skeeter Davis). (2) 'Maria Elena' (Los Indios Tabajaras). (3) 'Mean Woman Blues' (Roy Orbison). (4) 'Falling' (Roy Orbison). (5) 'In Dreams' (Roy Orbison). (6) 'Jezebel' (Rob EG) (Australian). (7) 'The Wayward Wind' (Frank Ifield) (Australian). (8) 'Detroit

City' (Bobby Bare). (9) 'Baby's Gone Bye Bye' (George Maharis). (10) 'Nobody's Darling But Mine' (Frank Ifield) (Australian). (11) 'Distant Drums' (Roy Orbison). (12) 'Island of Dreams' (The Springfields). (13) 'Speak to Me of Love' (Warren Williams) (Australian). (14) 'Tips of My Fingers' (Roy Clarke). (15) 'Foot Tapper' (The Shadows). (16) 'Leaving Town' (The Strangers) (Australian). (17) 'Living a Lie' (Al Martino). (18) 'I May Not Live to See Tomorrow' (Brian Hyland). (19) 'The Royal Telephone' (Jimmy Little) (Australian). (20) 'Saturday Sunshine' (Burt Bacharach).

**1964:** (1) 'Tell Me' (The Rolling Stones). (2) 'Beautiful Dreamer' (Roy Orbison). (3) 'Indian Wedding' (Roy Orbison). (4) 'I'm Gonna Be Strong' (Gene Pitney). (5) 'Long Tall Sally' (The Beatles) (EP). (6) 'She's Not There' (The Zombies). (7) 'Money' (Bern Elliott). (8) 'It's Over' (Roy Orbison). (9) 'You're the One' (Kathy Kirby). (10) 'What'd I Say?' (Roy Orbison). (11) 'Shazam' (The Shadows). (12) 'Around and Around' (The Rolling Stones) (EP). (13) 'The House of the Rising Sun' (The Animals). (14) 'The Golden Wedding' (Woody Herman). (15) 'The Miracle' (The Shadows). (16) 'Heartless Heart' (Floyd Cramer). (17) 'Little Honda' (Hondells). (18) 'The Summer Is Over' (Frank Ifield) (Australian). (19) 'Geronimo' (The Shadows). (20) 'Theme for Young Lovers' (The Shadows). (21) 'Anyone Who Had a Heart' (Dionne Warwick). (22) 'The Rise and Fall of Flingel Bunt' (The Shadows). (23) 'Fun Fun Fun' (The Beach Boys). (24) 'One Road' (Jimmy Little) (Australian). (25) 'Angry at the Big Oak Tree' (Frank Ifield) (Australian).

**1965:** (1) 'Crawling Back' (Roy Orbison). (2) 'Unchained Melody' (The Righteous Brothers). (3) 'Goodnight' (Roy Orbison). (4) 'Zorba's Dance' (Mikis Theodorakis). (5) 'Justine' (The Righteous Brothers). (6) 'You Can Have Her' (The Righteous Brothers). (7) 'Bring It On Home to Me' (The Animals). (8) 'Ride Away'

(Roy Orbison). (9) 'The Last Time' (The Rolling Stones). (10) 'Satisfaction' (The Rolling Stones). (11) 'If I Loved You' (Chad and Jeremy). (12) 'Yesterday' (The Beatles). (13) 'I'm a Man' (The Yardbirds). (14) 'Fool Fool Fool' (Ray Brown and the Whispers) (Australian). (15) 'For Your Love' (The Righteous Brothers). (16) 'Sick and Tired' (Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs) (Australian). (17) 'Goldfinger' (Shirley Bassey). (18) 'Under the Boardwalk' (The Rolling Stones). (19) 'Ain't It True' (Andy Williams). (20) 'The Carnival Is Over' (The Seekers) (Australian). (21) 'True Love Ways' (Peter and Gordon). (22) 'Sins of the Family' (P. F. Sloan). (23) 'I'll Forgive You Then Forget You' (Dinah Lee) (Australian). (24) 'Route 66' (The Rolling Stones) (EP). (25) 'Little Red Rooster' (The Rolling Stones).

1966: (1) 'River Deep Mountain High' (Ike and Tina Turner). (2) 'Nineteenth Nervous Breakdown' (The Rolling Stones). (3) 'It's Over' (Jimmie Rodgers). (4) 'Lady Jane' (The Rolling Stones). (5) 'Until It's Time for You to Go' (Buffy Sainte Marie). (6) 'Monday Monday' (The Mamas and the Papas). (7) 'Daydream' (The Lovin' Spoonful). (8) 'Spicks and Specks' (The Bee Gees) (Australian). (9) 'Zorba the Greek' (Tijuana Brass). (10) 'Nessuno Mi Può Giudicare' (Gene Pitney). (11) 'Spread it on Thick' (Gentry). (12) 'Flowers Never Bend With the Rainfall' (Simon and Garfunkel). (13) 'Visions' (Cliff Richard). (14) 'The White Cliffs of Dover' (The Righteous Brothers). (15) 'The Dangling Conversation' (Simon and Garfunkel). (16) 'Bang Bang' (Cher). (17) 'Go Ahead and Cry' (The Righteous Brothers). (18) 'The Sound of Silence' (The Bachelors) (Simon and Garfunkel). (19) 'Soul and Inspiration' (The Righteous Brothers). (20) 'Too Soon to Know' (Roy Orbison). (21) 'See See Rider' (Eric Burdon and the Animals). (22) 'So Much Love' (Steve Alaimo). (23) 'A Love Like Yours' (Ike and Tina Turner). (24) 'Fannie Mae' (Max Merritt and the Meteors)

(Australian). (25) 'I Am a Rock' (Simon and Garfunkel). (26) 'Second Hand Rose' (Barbra Streisand). (27) 'Lana' (Roy Orbison). (28) 'Love Is Just a Broken Heart' (Cilla Black). (29) 'Going Back' (Dusty Springfield). (30) 'Eight Days a Week' (Alma Cogan).

1967: (1) 'Can't Take My Eyes off You' (Frankie Valli). (2) 'Ruby Tuesday' (The Rolling Stones). (3) 'Somethin' Stupid' (Frank and Nancy Sinatra). (4) 'Ode to Billie Joe' (Robbie Gentry). (5) 'If I Were a Rich Man' (Bill and Boyd) (Australian). (6) 'She Said' (The Valentines) (Australian). (7) 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' (Procul Harum). (8) 'She' (Roy Orbison). (9) 'There Won't Be Many Coming Home' (Roy Orbison). (10) 'Deadlier Than the Male' (The Walker Brothers). (11) 'The 59th Street Bridge Song' (Harpers Bizarre). (12) 'Communication Breakdown' (Roy Orbison). (13) 'Little Games' (The Yardbirds). (14) 'A Man and a Woman' (Francis Lai Orchestra). (15) 'Respect' (Aretha Franklin). (16) 'A Love Like Yours' (Ike and Tina Turner). (17) 'Who'll Be the One?' (The Easybeats) (Australian). (18) 'I Feel Free' (Cream). (19) 'Running Round in Circles' (The Thinmen) (Australian). (20) 'Like an Oldtime Movie' (Scott Mackenzie). (21) 'I Was Made to Love You' (Stevie Wonder). (22) 'We Love You' (The Rolling Stones). (23) 'Hello Hello' (Sopwith Camel). (24) 'Fakin' It' (Simon and Garfunkel). (25) 'San Franciscan Nights' (Eric Burdon and the Animals). (26) 'Words of Love' (The Mamas and the Papas). (27) 'To Love Somebody' (The Bee Gees) (Australian). (28) 'Paint it Black' (Chris Farlowe). (29) 'C'mon Marianne' (The Four Seasons). (30) 'Penny Lane' (The Beatles).

1968: (1) 'She's a Rainbow' (The Rolling Stones). (2) 'Come In You'll Get Pneumonia' (The Easybeats) (Australian). (3) 'Think' (Aretha Franklin). (4) 'The House That Jack Built' (Aretha Franklin). (5) 'Valley of the Dolls' (Dionne Warwick). (6) 'Fire' (The Jimi Hendrix

Experience). (7) 'Mrs Robinson' (Simon and Garfunkel). (8) 'MacArthur Park' (Richard Harris). (9) 'Jumpin' Jack Flash' (The Rolling Stones). (10) 'Conquistador' (Procul Harum). (11) 'Sky Pilot' (Eric Burdon and the Animals). (12) 'I Say a Little Prayer' (Aretha Franklin). (13) 'In the Heat of the Night' (Ray Charles). (14) 'Guitarman' (Elvis Presley). (15) 'There Is' (The Dolls). (16) 'Do It Again' (The Beach Boys). (17) 'People Got to Be Free' (The Rascals). (18) 'Sour Milk Sea' (Jackie Lomax). (19) 'Love Is Blue' (Al Martino). (20) 'Listen to Me' (The Hollies). (21) 'White Room' (Cream). (22) 'Billy You're My Friend' (Gene Pitney). (23) 'Dock of the Bay' (Otis Redding). (24) 'Revolution' (The Beatles). (25) 'The Ballad of Bonnie and Clyde' (Georgie Fame).

1969: (1) 'Honky Tonk Women' (Rolling Stones). (2) 'Proud Mary' (Checkmates Ltd) (Solomon Burke). (3) 'Natural Born Bugie' (Humble Pie). (4) 'Me and Bobbie McGee' (Roger Miller). (5) 'A Salty Dog' (Procul Harum). (6) 'Crossroads' (Cream). (7) 'Atlantis' (Donovan). (8) 'Games People Play' (Joe South). (9) 'She's My Baby' (Johnny O'Keefe) (Australian) (re-release). (10) 'See' (Rascals). (11) 'The First of May' (Bee Gees) (Australian). (12) 'All Along the Watchtower' (Jimi Hendrix Experience). (13) 'The Boxer' (Simon and Garfunkel). (14) 'Such a Lovely Way' (The Group) (Australian). (15) 'Is That All There Is?' (Peggy Lee). (16) 'If You Go Away' (Ray Barrett) (Australian). (17) 'Picture Book' (The Kinks). (18) 'You Were There' (Cheryl Gray) (Australian). (19) 'Don't Forget to Remember' (Bee Gees) (Australian). (20) 'Scarborough Fair/Canticle' (Sergio Mendes).

And that's it! That's the end of the great days. There are some weird tracks listed there. I based all those lists on adding up the points at the end of the year based on my Top Ten Favourites each week. Hence some strange items that I just don't remember. Why is 'We Love You' way down on its list,

when now I would place it No. 2 or 3 for that year? Often I would still agree with the Top Ten of the year, but want to add in some items that have lasted much better in my memory (for instance, Dusty Springfield's 'Going Back', the best version of a great song; why so low?).

I aim to do for you a tape of Great Australian Songs of the Early Sixties, where I can track them down. Some have disappeared forever. Others have acquired a strange latter-day infamy. When I doted on a little song called 'She Said' by the Valentines, a group from Perth, Western Australia, how could I know that the song would be available today because the lead singer of the Valentines was Bon Scott, later to lead (and die while leading) AC/DC?

Other people have faded a

bit. To me the Great Hero of Australian Rock is Johnny O'Keefe, not only because of the best of his songs (Bear Family claims to have available in Germany the eight-CD Johnny O'Keefe package from Festival Records that I own) but because he created the early Australian rock and roll industry. He made umpteen records, produced most of the best of the early Sydney records, began the first Australian pop TV show, and led a fairly deadly life (nearly killed twice, in two different car accidents; alcoholism; 'nervous breakdowns', the lot). There's a famous story that he was performing at the major rock and roll pavilion in Melbourne with three of the top American acts of the time (including the Everly Brothers) and all were hoed off the stage until O'Keefe was given time to perform. I

wasn't there; my great regret in life is never having seen Johnny O'Keefe perform live. And I never will, since he died of a heart attack in 1977.

But there have been lots of other good people in Australian rock, often recorded appallingly in appalling record studios. I'll try to tape them in roughly chronological order, but that's difficult. Also, I cannot track down many of my favourites, including the hits of Lonnie Lee. Yours, Bruce  
(26 March 1992)

I received that letter back from Germany, crossed 'Address Unknown'. Despite Franz's assurance that Bernd really did live where he said he did, I did not try again writing to him again until recently. Bernd rang me to tell me that finally he had received my letter. \*

## DOUG BARBOUR:

Your ongoing lists overwhelm me, but they are great fun to peruse, and provide as much of a continuing autobiography as perhaps you'll ever need to write.

I see you are able to include a poetry book in your Best Books of the Year, but I read so many poetry books, along with much criticism and theory, and then there are all the sf and fantasy books, the mysteries and thrillers, not to mention the fiction of Canada and Australia. How would I fit examples of each onto one list? Desert island stuff? I am not made for desert island existence; I want to keep everything!

\* That sentence sums up my own view exactly. \*

It was nice to see Dave Piper talking about jazz and Whitney Balliett, even if I'd not agree with his choices of albums. I'd have to have Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* before all else by him. I'd want something by Pres, but there have been some terrific reissues of early stuff on CD, so the choices are

difficult, although *Jazz Giants '56* is a wonderful album. I'd want something great from Ellington, as well as Basie (especially the small-group stuff). I'd insist on one of Gil Evans's many great albums, some Mingus, some Monk, the heady and stunningly intellectual work of Paul Bley's recent quartet, along with the sumptuous and sensual big-band work of Carla Bley (*Live or Fleure Carnivore*, for example); something by Canadian tenorman Fraser McPherson, now in his sixties and a wonderfully swinging player in the Young-through-Sims tradition. Something with a bunch of the great Blue Note players on it, especially Joe Henderson, not to mention Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane (but he is on *Kind of Blue*), something, early or late, by Bird, and also Art Pepper and Lee Konitz (Dave will note, even if you don't, that I am a great fan of the saxophone), and there are other I just know I couldn't do without (the young new soprano sensation from Canada, Jane Bunnett, for example).

I see only one possible way out of

the dilemma: to use a VCR as recorder, which would allow me to take ten six-hour tapes along, and I might manage with sixty hours of music that I had carefully chosen and ordered.

By the way, Balliett is a wonderful writer, and I recommend him to you, even though you don't listen to jazz all that much, just for his stylish interpretations of music. I can almost hear the music playing when he describes it, for he knows how to use imagery and metaphor to engage our senses. There are performances he's described that I now wander around feeling sure I've attended. I've read the books *Dave mentions*, but would add some others, like *New York Notes* from the early seventies, and his two major works, from OUP in the US, *American Musicians and American Singers*, in which he presents his wonderful profiles of major figures in the jazz scene and, in the latter book, of the music scene generally.

(5 February 1992)

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY  
FRIENDS  
Continued from Page 22

cats. We have only two house cats, and they never go outdoors.) Now I don't know quite how many we have; I counted fifteen once, but that wasn't all of them. They never seem to all show up at the same time, and a lot of them are grey, and hard to tell apart. I stepped on one the other day, unintentionally, but it survived. This was the white tiger, and the last one of the lot that I'd want to get rid of. He's white with grey stripes, and when I stepped on him he was hiding in a clump of tall grass and I didn't see him. I think we have over twenty again, but I can't prove it.

Cy Chauvin's letter is another good reason for living in the country. When we go away for longer periods than just over a weekend (such as attending the five days of Worldcon) we have a couple of local librarians who come out and feed the cats (the dog is boarded) for the 'pay' of going through our books. One of them mentioned that we should tell the neighbours they're coming, because they didn't want to have to explain things to a deputy sheriff. Rural people notice everyone who arrives in the area, and are ready to call the law about anyone who doesn't belong.

I sympathise with Walt Willis. My own hearing has deteriorated, but not as much as his. My major problem is in picking out a specific voice — usually of the person who is talking to me — from the conversational background at a party or convention. I tend to bluff a lot. Particularly high notes are now gone; I can't hear goldfinches chirping anymore. But mostly I can still hear recorded music, and can carry on a conversation if there aren't too many other people around me talking. Losing all the high notes down to the upper violin range would be a disaster — is a disaster — for Walt.

On the Namia question, I admit to not noticing things like racism and sexism in books or movies when I was a child, but at the same time neither one provided any lingering impressions for my adulthood. So I see no particular harm in the books. For that matter, I see no particular harm in religion, except for the fundamentalist types, and they exist in all religions. I enjoyed *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* immensely when I first read it as an adult, and then

read the succeeding books with a gradually lessening interest until I gave up before finishing. But that's just my inherent dislike of series. I also enjoyed the tv versions, except for the stuffed-animal depiction of Aslan.

On the other hand, I don't want 'everything I've ever loved' restored to me in Heaven; the result would be one of the biggest dogfights ever seen, and possibly a few nether embarrassments. Of course, since there isn't any Heaven, it won't happen.

I did read *The Hobbit* at the age of eleven or twelve, and not only enjoyed it, but remembered the author's name some fifteen or so years later when *The Lord of the Rings* appeared, and ordered the British hardcover edition as soon as I heard about it. *The Hobbit* made a tremendous impression on me, and Tolkien's alleged fascism is immaterial; he wrote one of the great children's books of all time. I'm suspicious of reinterpretations of deceased authors — or famous historical characters — according to current social theory, anyway. (The big thing in the US now is denigrating Christopher Columbus for being a man of his time instead of a twentieth-century liberal.)

Gene Wolfe was down here recently; he wanted to shoot holes in a jacket with my Luger. I gather this started when his publisher wanted a photo for the dust jacket of a hardcover book and asked for a 'jacket shot'. He'll be getting a photo of a jacket, shot. We used an assortment of hand guns, shot about twenty holes in the coat, and Gene left it behind; all he wanted was the photos. I've decided to wear the jacket to a few conventions in the fall; it's too hot for wearing any jacket now, and will be too cold for an air-conditioned one by late November, but early autumn might be about right. If this all seems a bit odd to you, I assure you that it did to me as well. I've been assuming the jacket photo was for Gene's *Letters Home* (from the Korean War), even though I already have a review copy of the book, but I don't believe it was ever specified.

(19 August 1991)

\* No copies of *Letters Home* have ever been sighted in Australia. I would have bought a copy if I had known it existed. \*

TERRY JEEVES,  
56 Red Scar Drive,  
Scarborough YO12 5RQ,  
England

It was nice to see that William Danner is a Leacock fan. I've been one since I first met his work in the pre-war pages of *Newnes' Happy Mag*. Somewhere I have a couple of his pieces that were done on steam radio, and I have quite a collection of his books: *The Hohenzollerns in America*, *Literary Lapses*, *Nonsense Novels*, *Further Foolishness*, *Essays and Literary Studies*, *Behind the Beyond*, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, *Moonbeams from the Larger Lunacy*, *Frenzied Fiction*, *Winsome Winnie*, *Over the Footlights*, *College Days*, *The Garden of Folly*, *My Discovery of England* and *The Leacock Laughter Book*.

I'm looking for *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* and *Short Circuits*. Does anyone want to sell or trade?

\* We bought a few Leacock novels from John Bangsund, then gave back to him those we did not want to keep. My favourite was *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, so I don't feel like selling it. What I like best about Leacock's books are their titles. Each sounds like the title of a particularly fannish fanzine. \*

Ah, trains... I had a couple of Homby O gauge locos, a stack of trucks, and oodles of track, bridges, a turntable and a level crossing. It would take me hours to set the whole caboodle out around the living-room floor. Once operations began, there were two hazards — either someone would trip over the track, or else the faster of the two trains would fail to negotiate a bend. Either way, it meant scrambling about among the network to put things right, inevitably pulling more rails apart in the process. Final score: setting-up time, two hours. Running time: 20 minutes.

I notice that Joseph Nicholas claims that *New Scientist* should be required reading. Sorry, I disagree, for two reasons, one minor, the other not so. First, I have no interest in articles on biology, plant life, sea life, insects or bacteria. Articles on these and quite a few other topics leave me snoring. In addition, the science is often aimed way over my head, so from an issue I may only get one or two articles of

interest. That of course is my problem, but what I totally dislike about a magazine with 'scientist' in the title is its left-wing bias and propaganda.

It's fair enough if a scientist writes a scholarly article showing the snags in a government scheme to grow kippers on the Sahara. That's a legitimate criticism. What gets right up my nose is phrase, in otherwise scholarly articles, of this kind: 'the neutrino is as difficult to find as a Tory spokesman when unemployment figures rise' or 'This accelerator should have been on line if the Iron Lady hadn't squashed it'. This sort of thing isn't scientific reporting; it's pure left-wing propaganda — which is why I no longer buy *New Scientist*. I see Mr Nicholas also takes in the left-wing *Guardian*, a CND journal and a Marxist paper. But you don't expect impartiality from someone who publishes a zine called *Fuck the Tories*.

\* Indeed not. But you wouldn't need to be left-wing to fly to the left of Thatcher or Major. And you would hardly expect impartiality from a profession that has been systematically denigrated and starved of funds since the Tories took office. Elaine reads *New Scientist* all the way through every week, but that's a professional necessity as well as a pleasure. Me? I'm too dumb for any of the mathematical explanations, and I'm struggling to absorb most of the other information. \*

JONATHAN COWIE,  
5 Charlville Road, Erith,  
Kent DA8 1HJ, England

Re publishing Australian sf: You should be world-weary enough to realise that publishers are shits (I speak, of course, as a science publisher). Unwin sold out to the giant Collins in early 1991 and within six months the entire academic staff was out on the street. Why? I went down to the HQ and was told that it was 'for strategic investment reasons'. The academic lists were making a sound profit, but an even bigger profit could be made from publishing mundane fiction.

All in all three major UK publishers have had nights of the long knives in 1991, and US publishers are encroaching. Then again, the NET agreement

(between bookshops and publishers) is about to marginalise publisher lists. Against this kind of backdrop there is little chance of Australian sf taking off over here. We could import, but only if the fans over here know what's on offer. Perhaps, Bruce, instead of giving us lists of music and book titles (which at best tell us a little about your taste, and at worst absolutely sod all) you could give us detailed review of Australian sf. How about it, Bruce, huh? Go on, be a devil. You know it makes sense.

\* I cover nearly all Australian sf titles in *SF Commentary*, which I also send you. However, I've never thought to make a systematic survey that would give overseas publishers some idea of which Australian-published books they should republish. Perhaps I can persuade Sean McMullen, Melbourne's sf bibliographer, to take on this job. \*

I feel that your book review section is a bit of a blunderbuss, and a pain to navigate. You cover everything on whim, and in an unstructured way. The least you could do for the reader with specific interests (that is, for the person who does not look at absolutely everything all the time) is to flag what you are reviewing. Then if I saw page of poetry reviews I could cheerfully, nay, joyously skip it, and dive in feet first into the Aussie fiction section.

I confess that faced with 148 pages of typeset zine, unless I can navigate through it easily, most of it gets unread. For instance, you head each letter with the writer's name in bold. Faced with so many pages of letters, it would help to have a few key words of their content in bold as well. Sorry, but I'm a busy man.

\* My first reaction to this letter was 'Well, I'm a busy man, too', but I can see some useful points. For instance, I ran bold leader sentences from letters in *SF Commentary* 62/63/63/65/66, but until recently did not know how to manipulate the new software well enough to gain the same effect.

Categorising books reviewed in the 'Wasabe' column? Hard to choose the categories, but I might try it next time. \*

Joseph Nicholas on 'Journals Worth Reading' was interesting. Currently I

read five weeklies (*Nature*, *BMJ*, *New Scientist*, *Science* and *The Bookseller*), and over a dozen specialist science monthlies and quarterlies. I gave up buying a daily newspaper some years back, and the information I was getting out was not worth the time I was putting in, and so find Joseph's comments on *The Guardian* irrelevant.

These days I get my news from journals. You would be surprised at what gets covered. The World Cup was covered in one article in *Nature* with a piece on probability theory, and in the *BMJ* on sports injuries. Political coverage in the journals is surprisingly extensive: GATT problems were mentioned several times in a number of one-page articles in *Nature*, G7 meetings regularly covered, unemployment and its effects monitored, budgets are always closely analysed, etc., etc.

Joseph queries *New Scientist's* target readership, 'supposedly aimed at the intelligent but untrained lay person'. Actually *New Scientist* is specifically aimed at the scientifically trained person — the fact that others can get their jollies off it is a bonus. The *New Scientist* target membership is the science community as a whole, and it aims to provide scientists with general coverage and news of science so that scientists are aware of what is going on outside their own particular discipline (which is why the technical terms are either explained or not used — you should get by on school science). That's why its job pages are so extensive and varied, but nearly all the posts advertised require academic qualifications.

I was surprised to see Joseph reading *ENDS*, and then I saw he was talking about *END Journal*, the European Nuclear Disarmament publication, and not the Environmental News and Data Service journal. *ENDS* is full of interesting data. We all know that recycling is good, but who recycles what, and exactly how much? The information in this little gem provides substance to what otherwise would be wishy-washy 'green' thinking.

(24 November 1991)

KIM HUETT,  
PO Box 679,  
Woden, ACT 2606

Some recent reading:

• *Jagger* (Carey Schofield). An interesting read, in that previously I



had very little knowledge of the history of the Rolling Stones. Now I understand much better how they fitted into the history of the sixties and seventies. Beyond that, though, the book was all a bit superficial. Comes from Schofield not spending near enough time inside Jagger's head. There was far too much 'and then they did this' material. It was particularly noticeable in his account of the aftermath of Altamont.

- *Decline and Fall of Practically Everybody* (Will Cuppy) stands with *1066 and All That* in a category of its own. Having now read both, I prefer Cuppy. He spends more space on the historical figures, and it is space well spent. I can only hope nobody ever writes about me in such a way after I'm gone.
- *The Drunken Goldfish* by William Hartston is the sort of book I would most like to have written myself. Hartston has brought together dozens of examples of irrelevant research and bound them together into a thoroughly absurdist reference work. Where else would it be possible to discover that it is possible to train pigeons to distinguish Bach flute music from Hindemith viola music? A book to be memorised for parties.
- *Napoleon III* (John Bierman) does not go into the detail that this enormously successful loser deserves. The large brush strokes of history are well done, but not the details of political methods and emotional manoeuvring that should be the life of the story. Not a bad explanation of France between Napoleon I and World War I.
- *Brute Force* (John Ellis) is not a book to read in one sitting, or even a chapter at a time. This book tells the real story of the Allied victory in World War II, and it is not a pretty story. The war is examined piece by piece, taking into account the economic factors of battle that are ignored in most histories. The well-argued conclusions are that Germany and Japan had no chance of winning, and that the Allies could have ended hostilities up to eighteen months earlier if they had not had poor leadership. An excellent book, but ultimately depressing, since the victorious nations have

based their later tactics on those that won them World War II.

Speaking of lists, have you ever seen *The Perfect Collection*, edited by Tom Hibbert? It is the most wonderful volume with which to annoy people. Hibbert solicited lists of best-ever albums, with comments, from twenty-four music writers and fans. As he admits, it isn't the perfect collection, but it is a hell of a lot of fun. Cream's *Disraeli Gears* gets the comment: 'Great cover. Music to climb amplifier towers by'. The Rolling Stones' *Beggars Banquet*: 'Perfect from conception to resolution with no post-1970 compromises.' If the choices don't cause arguments, the comments will. However, the choices are guaranteed to cause arguments. How will Pink Floyd fans react when they discover that the only listed Pink Floyd album is *Piper at the Gates of Dawn*? Yes sir, that's right. No *Dark Side of the Moon*. I love pointing that out. I'm not a fan of that album.

To Lucy Sussex: Could it be possible that there are other equally valid reasons for being published, especially in fan publishing? Her arguments don't cover my case. I write and/or publish because I am very short of people to listen to me here. I publish not for posterity but because I keep having interesting thoughts but nobody to share them with. This is not entirely true, but it is accurate to say there are very few people in Canberra who appreciate my thoughts. When halfway-decent conversations occur only every two or three weeks, it is reasonable to find some replacement.

(21 August 1991)

\* Even if you live in the hub of civilisation, as I do, with the trendy café society of Brunswick Street within walking distance, you would sometimes want to say the things that only a fan could write in a fanzine, and could never say to a denizen of Brunswick Street. (Not without getting a punch in the mouth.) \*

ANDREW WEINER,  
26 Summerhill Gardens,  
Toronto,  
Ontario M4T 1B4, Canada

Re Turner, Rousseau: I have to confess to almost complete ignorance of Australian literature. I have been read-

ing, although not much liking, English writer Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* (something offputting about the narrative voice, although the material itself is quite interesting).

\* To read Canadian literature, we have to buy US or British editions of Canadian authors. I presume the same goes for you if you want to catch up on Australian writers. But quite a few are now in British and American editions, and Patrick White has always been in Penguin editions. Start with White's *Voss*, *The Tree of Man* and *Riders in the Chariot*, then Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney* and Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children*, Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia* and any of Martin Boyd's novels, and work your way down. \*

I succumbed to CD culture. Couldn't find vinyl anymore, and when I could it seemed to self-destruct almost instantly. On the whole, CD doesn't sound noticeably better to me (minus, of course, the scratches) and in some cases it sounds worse. But it is neat to be able to get all those reissues and recompilations.

One of the first CDs I bought was Gene Clark's *Two Sides to Every Story*, an album I'd somehow missed out on completely. I wouldn't mind seeing your extended thoughts on Gene Clark. I don't think anyone has ever done him justice.

I bought the Byrds' boxed set, too, of course. It's conspicuously light on Clark, a little heavy on Gram Parsons, but not a bad job at all. And more recently I've been listening a lot to the Dylan *Bootleg* boxed set. I don't play the first album at all (I never really liked folkie Dylan). For awhile I fixated on the second album, the one with 'She's Your Lover Now'. But I think the biggest revelation is actually the third album, with offcuts from *Desire* onwards. It shows just how good Dylan still was, at least intermittently, in the eighties.

I'm enclosing a copy of my (fairly) recent Canadian-published short story collection *Distant Signals*. This one I think you might enjoy.

(11 September 1991)

\* 'Extended thoughts on Gene Clark? What an invitation to pontificate!

In 1979, before I bought the cassette recorder, McGuinn, Hillman and Clark toured here as virtually a revived Byrds. At the same time, ABC-FM played a tape of the same group's concert in Britain, in which the group performance was preceded by each of the three performing, with his own hand, a set each. Clark played hard-driving country rock that was far better than anything he ever put on record. A revelation. When the group toured here, they played a nice long Byrds set, and that was all. The promoter couldn't afford to bring out their separate bands.

Therefore it's impossible to do justice to Clark's work, because the records, mostly filled with very slow ballads, give little idea of that work. *No Other* is to me his only stand-out album, with a few other tracks (especially 'See the Sky About to Rain' from *The Byrds*) revealing how well he could sing. If any of his records had succeeded commercially, no doubt he might have become more daring in his choice of songs and arrangements. \*

**WILLIAM M. DANNER,**  
RD 1, Kennardell,  
Pennsylvania 16374, USA

\* Bill sent us a piece of a CED (the video discs, played with a stylus, that were never released in Australia and have been withdrawn from sale in USA): \*

Elaine must indeed have a very acute sense of touch; I can't feel the CED grooves with a fingernail. Once you get enough light on them under the microscope you should be able to see the metal coating perforated by tiny holes. It's amazing the information that can be stored by such means. These discs are supposed to be good for at least 200 plays. I have one (picked up at a flea market by a friend for 40 cents) that must have had about 2000. It still plays continuously, but there are continual streaks across the screen, and there is a lot of noise in the soundtrack, though it is quite intelligible. Apparently the only way to destroy one completely is

to break it.

I don't know anything about computerised composition, but I am slightly acquainted with the IBM Selectric Composer. The late John S. Carroll had both a Composer and a Selectric typewriter, and I typed a few lines on each. He wrote books (mostly revisions) on photography for the American Photographic Publishing Co., and with the Composer he supplied the firm with repro proofs all ready for the offset printers. He did very nice work indeed with the machine.

John, who lived in Emlenton, about 15 miles from here, died while carrying a new word processor into his house from his car. The stairs to the porch had a rickety railing. Apparently he had some sort of attack while climbing them with the heavy machine. He crashed through the railing and rolled down the steep side yard to the bottom. The rear door of his station wagon was left open, and after some hours the next-door neighbours noticed this and called the police. They found John unconscious with a temperature of around 68°F. He was rushed to the hospital but never regained consciousness. This happened two days before Christmas 1982. He had no relatives left, and left everything to a guy named Stuart in Kane, who has a large business in used photographic materials and books. I've never seen the word processor or anything of his since death.

Certainly the old Composer did better work than most of the computer stuff I've seen. So computer composition can be good, but most of the time it isn't. The erratic word spacing from yours is odd, indeed. In the old days even an apprentice compositor could do better by hand, and I've seen typed and mimeographed fanzines with justified right-hand margins that were more neatly done than work from your equipment.

\* The trouble wasn't in the hardware, but in the software. I was using Wordstar 6, merely an update of the earliest and most primitive of word-processing programs. The justification function was inadequate. Since *SFC 71/72* I've been using Ventura. I trust you will find this much more satisfactory.

Your friend must have been a canny user of the Composer, however, to get results better than laser-printed computer

setting. I went out of the typesetting business in the early 1980s because we (Norstrilia Press) could afford only an Electronic Composer, but the results were not good enough for customers. \*

I frequently play old LPs as well as the new ones, and many of them are very good indeed. Surfaces vary widely, but many have better recording in heavy orchestral passages than I've heard from CDs on FM radio. In these there seems to be some sort of blocking; maybe there just aren't enough digits to go round. Digital recordings of solo instruments or chamber groups are usually very fine, but orchestral recordings are often annoying—they have what I call 'digital distortion'. This is noticeable even in LPs made from digital masters, as most of them are now. Despite the advantages of digital records, I think analog recording is better overall. Both my receiver (I'm back to an old Heathkit AR-29, which has the best amplifier I've ever heard) and my speakers, which are Altec-Lansing 604s in 10 cft. infinite baffles, have a frequency response that is almost flat from 20 to 20,000 hertz. When I hear broadcasts of CDs on lesser equipment, such as I have in the print shop in the cellar, the distortion, while still there, is less noticeable.

An announcer at an FM station in Ohio thinks we were all sold a bill of goods by the industry in replacing LPs with CDs. The manager at the Oil City Radio Shack told me that CDs are the last recordings that will have any moving parts. He claims that some day there will be lengthy recordings contained in tiny chips that need only to be plugged into the player made for them.

(23 October 1991)

\* The rumour, never confirmed, that I heard when CD came on the market in 1983 was that small-chip playback technology was already fully developed, but nobody has been able to work out a way to market tiny chips containing vast amounts of information.

CD equipment has great trouble with certain sounds, particularly the high hats of drum kits. The sound disintegrates into a vague 'shshsh' sound, whereas even a worn LP copy of the same record

will retain the sound of a  
cymbal. \*

ANDY SAWYER,  
1 The Flaxyard,  
Woodfall Lane, Little Neston,  
South Wirral L64 4BT, England

Since I received TMR 15/16/17 I've been on holiday and ended up with a large backlog of mail. Then we took the plunge into cat ownership. I don't need to tell you how time-consuming the beasts can be, particularly extremely cute small black kittens. Billy will go from 'being cute' to search-and-destroy mode in less than a second, and his favourite game appears to be ambushing feet from behind doors and articles of furniture. All of which is good for the soul and very relaxing, but it's hardly conducive to stepping up the gears when it comes to fanatic — especially when the main topic of conversation is 'What did the kitten do today?' Someone warned me that kittens go through a juvenile delinquent phase, and this is certainly true. He's just like a naughty child: tell him off for climbing on the meal table or the word processor and he runs around chasing anything that moves in a 'You can't have any fun around this house' sort of temper. He appears fascinated when Rosamund does her violin practice, and seems to be a Tom Waits fan, judging from his reaction when I played *Asylum Years* the other day. He's at his most active at about 11 p.m., which is usually when I want to go to bed. Imagine me, a grown man, rolling about on the floor with a scrunched-up bit of newspaper and a kitten. The things supposedly normal human beings do. The really scary thing is that I don't regret it at all, and within a few weeks he is part of the family.

I liked Ian Gunn's cartoon on page 72. Billy is already adept at playing Schrödinger. I've already lost him twice, to find him five minutes later in the room I shoed him out of and closed the door.

I found George Turner's article about awards interesting partly because it reminded me of my own stint representing the BSFA for the Arthur C. Clarke Award (which George, of course, won; I was on the final panel though not the shortlisting panel that year). With the Clarke Award there was considerable discussion about whether particular books on

the short list were science fiction in the genre sense, and if not, whether it mattered: whether best book on the short list was the best science fiction book on the short list. In the end, it's very difficult to say that Book A, written by someone with very different intentions than those of the author of Book B, is actually better than Book B. All I can say is that the proper function of an award is to publicise and generate excitement for not necessarily a particular book but books, or that kind of books (in the case of a genre award). I'd like to see more attention given to the actual short lists, and the reasons why the books in question made the places than going overboard about a winner.

Sometimes there is one book that is outstanding in terms of the rest. My colleague, who was on the panel for the Greenaway Award (for the best illustrations for a children's book published in the UK), tells me that this year's winner (Gary Blythe for pictures for Dyan Sheldon's *Whale Song*) was so clearly a winner that it was obvious from the start. Everyone to whom I've shown the book has been amazed by it. I tried reading it to a class of children, and have never before seen such enthusiastic reactions to a picture book. These were kids with learning difficulties, but they were engrossed in the pictures as soon as I opened the book.

(29 October 1991)

DAVE LANGFORD,  
94 London Road, Reading,  
Berkshire RG1 5AU, England

I've been looking again at TMR 15/16/17, whose sheer classiness brings back that feeling of intimidation I had in early encounters with fine sf fanzines: sort of 'How can my feeble writings presume to appear alongside these almost godlike people?' Fortunately there were and are plenty of other productions that perform the morale-boosting service of making one think, 'Hell, I could do better than that.'

\* When I began, some fanzines, such as *ASFR* and *Warhoon* were intimidating, but I knew I could do better than most of the others. But I'm still intimidated by the good-looking fanzines, such as *Trumpet*, *Odd*, *Granfalloon* and *Double Bill*, that were around in 1969,

fanzines that I will never be able to emulate because I just don't have the layout and artistic skills. \*Sigh\* \*

Skel's tirade against Lucius Shepard for being called Lucius misses the important point that this forename is redolent of the very Essence of Skiffy. Who can forget (I certainly wish I could) the 1950s juvenile sf novels of Captain W. E. Johns? Their leading character is the subtly named Professor Lucius Brane, an amateur spaceship designer who embodies the pioneering zeal of Columbus, Drake and Captain Cook:

'No,' denies the Professor firmly. 'I have seen enough for one voyage. Now I look forward to a quiet time at home, where I shall be able to devote my thoughts to the wonders I have seen' (*The Death Rays of Ardilla*, 1959)

When I first met these novels (quite remarkably awful and not a patch on the author's Biggles books) the name came across as Luscious Brane, a suitable remark to be made by hungry aliens as they crack the tiresome savant's skull with a large silver spoon. Yvonne Rousseau, who not only knows all about everything but can do both footnotes and end notes on it, sent me some delirious examples of bad science from the series; perhaps she plans a full-scale article? From my own researches, the eponymous death rays of *Ardilla* are an interesting kind of electromagnetic radiation that doesn't travel very fast ('I imagine it depends on the wave-length'), allowing our resourceful heroes to accelerate and leave the ray standing ('As we approached the velocity of the ray its power began to diminish'), and... no, I can't take any more of this.

(13 September 1992)

\* A copy of Captain W. E. Johns's *Kings of Space* lay for months in the window of the local newsagent's. I couldn't afford to buy it, and eventually it disappeared. Meanwhile, I started to write my own giant first novel, still unfinished: *Jim Blake, Master of Time and Space*. Much later, I read a copy of *Kings of Space* found in a school library, and wished I hadn't.

I tried hard to be a fan of Biggles, but found his

adventures often peremptory and boring. (Plane goes up; plane goes down; Von Stroheim encountered; Von Stroheim defeated yet again; plane goes up; plane returns home.) Later I discovered a small group of novels, re-released by a different company, that told of Biggles' adventures during World War I. The writing had vividness and richness of detail about flying, qualities that were completely missing in the later books (which might have been ghost-written). The best Biggles book was *Biggles Goes to School*, because the story of Biggles' schooldays read as if it were semi-autobiographical.

As happens often with Jerry Davis's letters, I have no idea which comment in one of my fanzines has set him off on a particular train of thought. I must have mentioned that Jerry is older than most of my other correspondents. \*

JERRY C. DAVIS,  
109 Seaview Street,  
Pt Huenne,  
California 93041-3330, USA

I don't really hate the elderly, senior or seasoned citizens, as they call themselves hereabouts. I just wish they would not continue to give political advice and other kinds of advice to the young. In many ways, they are responsible for this past brutal century, and they have nothing of value to contribute.

I see many of them every day. Most are healthy and full of beans, bursting with funds and energy. The other day I went to a Senior Centre where I found over 100 women, over 60, over 70, dressed like applicants for a chorus line tap-dancing their little hearts out, along with three out-of-place old duffers. Now I don't want to call them old gaffers and gammers because some are beautiful and shapely (not the men) and will probably live until they crumble into the dust. If they would just tap, or act, or get college degrees at the age of 90, that would be fine, or if they all went on year-long cruises that would be better yet.

Even if you come up with an old guy who just ran a 3:50 mile, bicycled

100 miles, and swam the English Channel, it wouldn't change anything. We don't need continuity. The young don't listen to the old, and that's good, except that the politicians get older and older. (26 August 1991)

\* But now in Australia the old are discounted altogether. So are the middle-aged. Vast numbers of people of my own age (forty-seven) or only slightly older are being forced to take retirement 'packages' that will leave them in poverty within a few years. The two Prime Ministerial candidates for the current Australian election are both about my age. Now experience and wisdom is being ditched altogether in favour of image. A society that fails to use the talents of most of its people (school leavers cannot get jobs, either) hiccups to a stop.

#### WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

GERALD MURNANE, who has been trying to track down 'Velvet Waters', the late 1950s pop melody that was inspiration for the title of Gerald's latest collection of short fiction. On 10 June 1991, Gerald wrote: 'I think one little mystery of recent times may have been solved. I received in a brief note from John Tittensor recently the following details as answer to my plea for information about the recording 'Velvet Waters': Tony Worsley and the Blue Jays (Sunshine label). To which I replied: 'That was an Australian cover version. The Sunshine label did not begin until 1965.' Steve Smith, of Reading's Records in Carlton, found out that the original version was by the Megatrons, on the American Laurie label. I've ordered a copy through Reading's from a record searcher, but it has never turned up.

GABRIEL McCANN seems to have disappeared. Before he disappeared, he put through a computer search on the nation's libraries for Gillespie publications. *SF Commentary* seems to be in a few libraries to which I cannot remember sending it, and no longer in others that once had subscriptions. Gabriel also sent a list of all the CDs he owned in 1991. He's younger than Greg Egan, but his tastes are very close to mine (lots of Beatles, Bowie, Kinks, Doors, Dylan, Lennon, Led Zep-

pelin, Randy Newman, Pink Floyd, Lou Reed, Rolling Stones, Springsteen and Velvet Underground). Maybe pop generations are not fixed by one's date of birth.

ROBERT LICHTMAN (17 August 1991) chatted pleasantly. Not quite a letter of comment, but welcome.

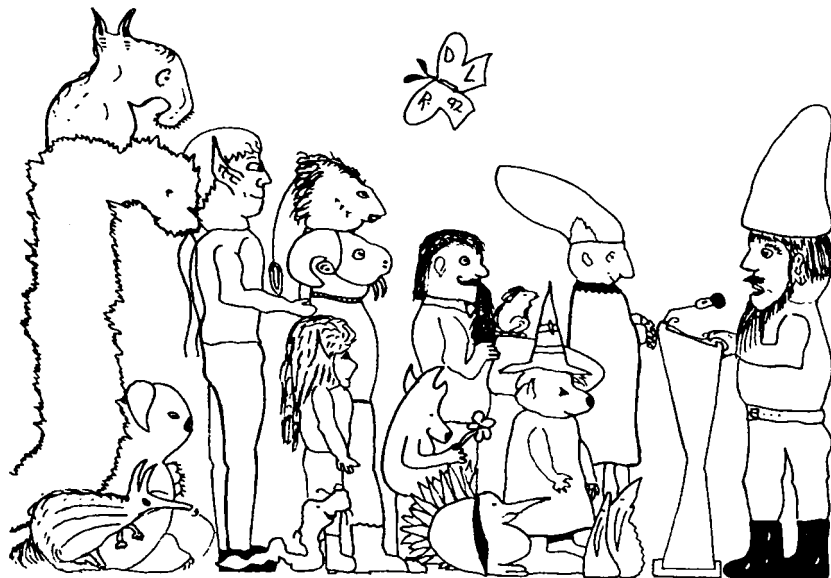
RALPH ASHBROOK (19 August 1991) thanked me for *The Monumental Review* 15/16/17. I anticipate *The Megalithic Review* 18-412 sometime in 2091. If my son can look forward to *Thelma and Louise 2*, can I do less? ... I recently came upon an old copy of Fredric Brown's *The Screaming Mimi*. I read it and loved his darkness and light. I don't know why. Now I discover that Black Lizard Press has just published two other 1950s Brown mysteries in the same series as the Jim Thompson reissues. Great. Now other people will have to wander around liking something and not knowing why.

MICHAEL O'BRIEN sends a letter every fifteen years or so, but he stays on the mailing list because he's a Good Bloke — and a member of ANZAPA. (Any current member of ANZAPA receives copies of all my publications. Enquiries: Alan Stewart, PO Box 222, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 3005. Phone: (03) 429 8354.) I will definitely be sending in some comments on TMR 15/16/17. Promises, promises, Michael.

TERRY GREEN sent me copies of his books. I haven't yet read *Barking Dogs*, which I had already bought. I enjoyed the collection *The Woman Who Is the Midnight Wind* (especially the story 'Ashland, Kentucky', which should have won a Nebula Award) and the novel *Children of the Rainbow*, both which have so far been published only in Canada. Reviews will appear in the next *SF Commentary*. In August 1991, Terry wrote: 'My two boys are now ten and thirteen and fill my time with incredible wonder and purpose. My thirteen-year-old and I spent a great three days in New York City in March, and I began to appreciate the bond more than ever at that time. And my eighty-seven-year-old father is now living with us, and he is legally blind. So tell me about fathers and sons. I'm smack in the middle of it all, and can identify greatly with your eulogy for your father. (My own mother died seven years ago; I remember it all.)'

DAVID RUSSELL rarely sends detailed letters of comment. Instead he sent lots of small but interesting tidbits of comment, plus cartoons (see his Cartoon of Comment on TMR No. 19). For

The motion by the Federated Gnomes, Elves and associated faerie creatures' Union to destroy Elaine and Bruce's garden is hereby passed.



instance, he showed the last issue of TMR to friends of his in Dennington. One extra subscription. He sent me a copy of the highly unofficial biography of Garrison Keillor, *The Man from Lake Wobegon*, by Michael Fedo. It shows that Keillor is made of sand, like the rest of us, but is still the world's tallest and best radio comedian.

In his letter of 26 August 1991, David wrote: 'I liked the art in *The Metaphysical Review* this time, and I admire your restraint in not using more than one illustration that features cats. Perhaps cartoonists and illustrators will start contributing work to your fanzines now that you have the means to reproduce it.' I wouldn't be too sure of that, David. The estimable C. E. Hull (in the most recent SFC) and Ian Gunn, yes, but almost nobody else.

Good news for David is that

through these pages we were able to alert RICHARD BERGERON that the American distributors of *Warhoon 28* (Joe D. Siclari and Edie Stern, 4599 NW 5th Avenue, Boca Raton, Florida 33431) had not sent David his copy. Richard followed up the matter for us, and David has received his copy of the greatest fanzine ever produced.

As well as sending, offhand, the most outrageous compliments for TMR and SFC, David also deals a nice line in put-downery: 'As to whether or not it's worthwhile to supply fans with old SFC Commentary material — ask yourself the question, then go and look at how many copies of the SFC Reprint Edition you still have left.' The answer is: 80 out of 200. I get the message, David.

ROSALEEN LOVE sent a subscription and a copy of her book about

current and historical science. Thanks very much for both. Rosaleen's new book should be out from Women's Press soon, but Women's Press seems to have no distributor in Australia at the moment.

BRIAN EARL BROWN sends lots of paragraph comments, including his experiences of trying to learn Pages-Stream for Atari ('And this is the user-friendly desktop publishing program for the Atari.') ... 'Deniece's grandfather died this summer, but you've probably had enough of stories about other people's parents dying. ... I see in lifelittle that speaks well of it and yet the body fights so very hard till the very end to hold onto life. ... an acquaintance with AIDS once said: he wasn't afraid of dying; it's the stuff inbetween ... You end up admiring the people who had strokes or coro-

naries because it is all over with so quickly. It takes a lot of work, a lot of friends and a lot of family to "just" died in bed.' I didn't hear from Cy Chauvin after the last issue, but Brian fills in the story: 'The house next to his is now gone, swept away by election politics, which had the mayor suddenly pushing forward maniacally to remove destroyed housing. Of course, once he won re-election the city discovered a \$50 million deficit. I live about two miles from Cy in a supposedly "better" neighbourhood. Well, it's better because Cy's gotten so much worse. Christmas of that year he asked us to feed Molly, his cat, while he was away. There were three burned-out houses on the half block, and several more along the route there. It's hard to begin to imagine how sad Detroit has gotten.'

PETER SIMPSON sent lots of money to support both my magazines. He also unpacked some boxes that were still lying around seven years after his move from Melbourne to London: 'Technology has changed the fanzine. Each issue of *TMR/SFC* is a quantum leap, but it only strikes you when you see them all together. At least, it does when the you is me. Perhaps it's nostalgia when I say that I prefer the older, rougher style of fanzine. Even though the content remains basically the same, the magazines seem different.' I finally got rid of the duplicator a few months ago, Peter. I could no longer spend the fortnight duplicating, collating and stapling a fanzine as I once did. My friendly print shop can do it all in two days. When I sold the duplicator, I tried to track sources of duplicator ink and paper for the buyer. There is now one importer of duplicator paper in Melbourne, and it's also very hard to find ink. Even if I had no access to a computer, I would have been forced to go to offset printing by now. Very occasionally I feel nostalgic about the old duplicated issues — until I sit down to produce a new offset issue.

LYN McCONCHIE has sold some more stories since she sent her letter/article that appears in this or the next issue. 'Do you have *Eidolon's* address? Back at the very beginning of writing I typed out a list of ten things I'd like to do first as a pro writer. 'Make sales to the four countries: NZ, UK, US and Australia.' I only have Australia to go. Since I never seem to be able to

come up with anything the other lot like, maybe *Eidolon* would be happier with my work. The actual amount doesn't bother me, so long as it is something that I can classify as a pro sale. I've been paid everything from 25 cents (NZ) a word down to around a quarter of a cent a word. My poetry pays best — \$5 (NZ) per verse (that's a verse, not a poem). I've now sold ten of those to date.'

I've probably sent you *Eidolon's* address long since, Lyn, but here it is again: PO Box 225, North Perth, Western Australia 6006. Send manuscripts to Jonathan Strahan at that address.

DAVID BRATMAN (20 October 1991): 'You mention concern that your big country seems to have no well-known epic writers to pick up the torch of Patrick White. The prevalence of miniaturism seems to be an international phenomenon. Tom Wolfe wrote an article, I believe in *Harper's*, on this. He was astonished to observe that, despite a wealth of larger-than-life material, nobody seemed to be writing big novels on contemporary American culture. So he wrote one himself: *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. Not surprisingly, there has been no shortage of litterateurs to disagree with Wolfe's essay and disparage his book.'

In response to John D. Berry, I would agree with his second thoughts that the first duty of the editor is to the reader. One part of an editor's job is to persuade the author to rewrite things that could be better expressed, sometimes even by removing parts that stand in the way of the main points. Certain small-minded people might call that censorship, but it's not the same thing at all. Some authors, as well as editors, would benefit from being reminded that their first duty, too, is to the reader. But this can be carried too far, and often is: the authors of popular trash, who enjoy smiling smugly all the way to the bank, would benefit more from a course in the principle that their first duty is their own authorial integrity.'

PATRICK NIELSEN HAYDEN seems to have become too busy for fandom recently. Last I heard from him, he was Senior Editor, *SF & Fantasy*, Tor Books. Not that he's forgotten us altogether: 'I've put you on the Tor *SF* and fantasy review list, which ought to get you tons of hard-

covers and paperbacks, albeit by slow boat. Does this fulfil 'the usual'? I hope so; *The Metaphysical Review* and *SF Commentary* are like letters from home.'

A plea from MICHAEL TOLLEY (Department of English, University of Adelaide, GPO Box 469, Adelaide, SA 5001): 'My survey of Phillip Mann for *Van Itkin* needs some sort of peroration to put it in context, and I know that there is a longish review of his work somewhere, I think either in *SF Commentary* or *Science Fiction*, either by you or him. Can you place this for me? The short answer is no. I wrote a short review of *Eye of the Queen* for my regular *SFC* column, and I have a vague idea someone wrote a longer review for me.'

Once a year ROBERT DAY sends a Christmas Card of Comment, to which I take a year to reply. Recent (Christmas 1992) excitement at the Day residence has been a slippage of foundations and a burglary. 'We had a rude awakening a couple of weeks ago when a car ran into the front of the house after losing control on black ice.' That an increasing work load has stopped Robert from finishing the giant article on film music that he promised me about four years ago. But that leaves more time for decent film scores to be reissued on CD, such as a Rocca selection, *Spellbound*, on RCA Victor'. Robert bought a cheap CD player, then wonders why it skips through CDs in ten minutes all by itself. The best sound I've heard is from the Mercury Living Presence reissues of stuff they recorded in the late fifties on 35 mm stock.'

Long-time supporter IAN PENHALL had a cancer scare a couple of years ago. That and various other problems, which he has marked 'DNO', fill his letter of 4 June 1992. Enjoyable letter; a pity about the personal problems.

And they are the letters I had received by the beginning of 1992. The rest of the letter column can be found in the Feature Letters in this issue, and the section called 'Lists! Glorious Lists!' Other letters will have to wait until next issue — or perhaps the second half of the *Metaphysical Review* of which this is the first half.

— Bruce Gillespie, 16 March 1993

## FEATURE LETTERS

Until Constantinople (Easter 1994) I had met **LYN McCONCHIE** only once in person. She was in the lobby of the Diplomat Motel, the venue of the Australian national convention at which she was the FFANZ winner from New Zealand, and she was trying to make a phone call despite the combined efforts of Telecom and the hotel receptionist. Hi, Lyn. However, I've 'met' Lyn many times through the pages of ANZAPA (the bimonthly Australia and New Zealand Amateur Press Association), in which she is one of the most active and interesting correspondents.

Lyn sent the following piece as a reply to **Lucy Sussex's** 'So You Want to be a Paperback Writer' (TMR 15/16/17). It is followed by other **FEATURE LETTERS** by **Leigh Edmonds**, **Skel**, **David Grigg**, **Sue Trowbridge**, **Alan Sandercock**, **Mae Strelkov**, and **Joseph Nicholas**.

# Yes, I want to be a paperback writer

by Lyn McConchie

LYN McCONCHIE,  
Forside Farm, RD  
Norwood, New Zealand

I have a suspicion that if this appears, it won't be until 1993-94. Which is OK by me. By then I'll have either made it as a writer or vanished into the world of just-another-writerwannabee.

Everything Lucy says about graphoholics is right, at least as far as she talks about me. I wrote in school and took pride that it was my essay that was invariably read out to demonstrate what an essay should be. Then I left. For umpteen years I wrote nothing but letters to friends. Unlike a lot of other writers, though, I never missed writing. I was too busy doing other things.

It wasn't until I was crippled in 1977 that I began to write again. Still only letters to friends, but said friends kept chuckling and saying that I should write a book. At this stage I had no idea of the work involved, but agreed politely. Then I met Greg Hills in the early 1980s. By a process of constant dripping wearing away stone, he convinced me that I should join Aotearapa. In mid-1983 I did so, and discovered what fun writing could be. By the end of 1987 I belonged to three apas, did my own fanzine, edited a

clubzine (and had since 1983) and sent letters of comment to various fan friends. I also did a comic strip called *The Rabbit's Progress* for Jean Weber's *Weber Woman's Wrevenge*. I sent articles and reviews to our national club fanzine *Warp*, and generally wrote like there was no tomorrow and I had to say it all today.

In 1988 my damaged leg worsened suddenly and they operated again. Instead of fixing matters, it made them even worse, until I was unable to return to a normal job. Eventually I sold my home of 10 years and moved to a small farm in a township. Norwood has a population of some 342 people split into Upper and Lower Norwood (I live at Upper). Then I sat down and thought. I had never felt that it is good for you to do nothing at all just because you have the income. I recall the way some of my unemployed friends went quite off after being unemployed for a long time. I also remembered that I had problems adjusting to being home for several years when I had the first accident in 1977.

The obvious conclusion was that I should get myself some kind of job. But it had to be something I could do at home, something into which I could put the hours at any time of the day or night, and something I could do in winter from my bed, since often I had to spend days or weeks there then. I

could think of only two professions.

My Siamese could have objected strongly to one of them. He likes his own half of the bed unencumbered.

So I simply decided that the only profession that fitted my criteria was writing. I therefore announced to the outfit that pays my disability pension that I didn't need to be rehabilitated. I was going to do that myself by becoming a professional writer.

At first they fell about laughing. I had never done a writing course. I had no paper qualifications. How on earth did I think I was ever going to find someone who'd buy stuff from me?

I pointed out indignantly that thousands of other writers probably hadn't either, and why pick on me. Eventually they agreed to leave things a year and see. They saw.

At first I entered every short story and poetry competition I heard about in the entire country. After six months I hadn't even had an honourable mention. I was a bit bewildered. I knew my writing wasn't that bad, but I wasn't getting anywhere. In addition, I have always had a small facile talent for doggerel. I was reading my copy of *Locus* one afternoon in a somewhat despondent state when I spotted a bit about a new magazine in America wanting stories.

The next few seconds can be covered by showing one of those

cartoons in which a light bulb flashes on over someone's head. If my beloved country didn't like science fiction, fantasy or fringe stories, maybe overseas would?

I sent out a story to the person and address listed. Then for good measure I looked through the *Locus* and sent off a couple more stories to listed magazines that included addresses. The months went by, and nothing happened from that direction.

Meantime I'd been writing daft little poems to go with my eggs on the sale table at Women's Institute meetings. Everyone found them funny, and the purchaser had to read them out. A friend nagged me into sending a hunch into a large newspaper. They held them for a couple of months, asked for more, held them again, and returned them. The editor, he said, found them very funny, but thought they'd be too much run too often. This was my first encounter with the irrationality of editors. What was to stop the fool from running them once a week? Once a fortnight? Nothing said that he had to stick one poem in six papers a week!

Nagged even more by the same friend, and having a second address waved under my nose, I gave in and posted another lot to a large national farming magazine. Then I sat down to wait again. (I think it occurred to me at this point that a lot of writing appeared to be watching the mailbox.)

February 1990 arrived. Midmonth I received a letter from America. I peered at it, wondering who on earth it could be from? Looking at it won't tell me. I ambled back inside, opened it, and gulped in a stunned sort of way. The magazine wanted to buy my story; contracts and cheque enclosed! To say that I was stunned was a bit like saying that Hitler didn't like the Jews much. I was flattened! flustered! and flabbergasted!

I signed the contracts, and shot the stuff back. I then sat at my work table in the kitchen and started to write more. A month later I received a second letter from America. Out of the first three stories I'd sent there, a second had now been accepted. I'd sold one to Marion Zimmer Bradley! If the first sale had laid me in the aisles, the second sale just about pole-axed me. I couldn't believe that I'd sold a story to a writer/editor of that stature. I was still reeling from that one when I received a phone call from Wellington. It was the editor of the farming magazine. They loved my poems, and wanted to talk turkey on price and pay-

ments.

I think at that point I knew I'd died and gone to heaven. All this wasn't real!

By the end of the first year of writing, I'd sold eleven items. This totally silenced the government disability department on rehabilitating me in some other way. They were happy just to let me get on with it.

However, I was still not breaking even. The whole point of this exercise was to make me self-supporting if possible. Or at the very least to give me half an income that they could top up. I was paying out more in postage than I was getting back in payments for stories, articles or poetry. Something had to be turned around here.

So I wrote a book. It was intended to be a single, but at 90,000 words the story had come to a natural break, but was still not at the end. Yes, well... it was going to be either a 900-page tome or a trilogy. It's hard to cover years and a whole war without the space to move in. Figuring that nothing ventured, nothing attained, I sent Draft One of Book One into the Gryphon Award. In return I got a wonderful letter from Miss Norton explaining what was wrong and suggesting changes. I rewrote. I rewrote again. I continued to make sales of small stuff, and also completed a serious novel in first draft.

The first book of the fantasy trilogy now being in Draft Four, I tried it again with Miss Norton. She liked it, but thought it still needed a couple of minor things done. I did them. Between these events, I went overseas for a few weeks. There I met writers, editors and fans in five countries. I arrived back, having sold another story to Marion Zimmer Bradley, to find that I had also sold one to an equally eminent author if the anthology she was thinking of editing went ahead. All I could do was wait with that. However, I'd managed, by some fluke, to persuade the Curtis Brown Agency in New York to take me on as a client. (I was living in a permanent haze of delight by now.)

I came back to rewrites. I had tried an agency in Australia with my serious work. They liked it. They also wanted me to do things that amounted to a total rewrite. I had to agree with most of the comments, but I put the book aside for awhile. I wanted time for my subconscious (which does all that sort of thing) to work on that. Comments about Book One of the trilogy made me aware that I had the same fault in Book Two. That would also have to be

redone.

At the moment (September 1991) I've sold seven short stories (three adult science fiction and fantasy stories in the US, and four children's fantasies in New Zealand), two articles, and seven poems. That makes 16 professional sales in 19 months, with two other sales to America made, but depending on external events for publication. To me it seems pretty pitiful. Just a few odds and ends to show for over a year and a half's hard work and cash. On the other hand, my books might sell. They might not, too.

I've enjoyed this time. Even if eventually I have to take up something else to make a living, I've had this opportunity to try writing. I wanted to do that. I once worked in an Old People's Home, and the saddest thing there to me were the old people who told me at one time or another how much they wished they'd done something. The old lady who'd had a wonderful voice, but she married and gave up singing. The old lady who'd always wanted to act, but her father thought all people on the stage were immoral and wouldn't hear of it. The list goes on. I didn't want to be one of them in thirty years saying to some young girl, 'You know I always thought I could write, but I never really tried in case I couldn't.' If nothing else, I've had a lot of fun, made some sales, and enjoyed my work.

I regret not being about to sell science fiction and fantasy for adults in New Zealand. I note that both the stories I sold originally to America in 1990 were originally entered in several competitions here. They were good enough for magazines to pay for, but not good enough to be placed in tinpot little contests in a country this size.

Kiwis purchase hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of science fiction, fantasy and fringe fiction annually. But a local writer cannot sell category fiction to a publisher or editor here. It doesn't sell, they'll tell you. Kiwis don't like it. If they don't like, who is buying it all?

Of course there was one Kiwi who once sold an SF novel. An elderly intellectual called Cooper (or Hooper; I can't remember) spent ten years writing a terrific post-holocaust trilogy set 600 years in the future on our West Coast. The NZ critics went wild over it. Libraries purchased copies. And when the dust cleared and the accounts were done? He'd cleared around \$239. Why? Because it was so very NZ that it wouldn't sell anywhere else. However, that's why it sold here and why our



critics loved it. Once I got that through my head I got the message. If I too wrote very NZ stories, they might sell here. But I don't want to.

My ancestry is Celtic. I prefer to write generic fantasy, not ethnic work. And I'll be damned if I'll screw up my work just to sell it here! So I'm not quite sure whether or not I'm a graphoholic. At the moment I'm writing what I want

to write, what I enjoy writing. People can darn well buy it or not, but it's what I'm doing. The Chimaera people (Australia's *Aurealis* magazine) tell me that my stuff is 'too American' for their tastes, but it's more British, I think. However, I don't want to change. If my subconscious comes up with a specifically Aussie story, that's fair. But I won't twist things into a false pattern

to make a sale.

I'm obstinate and optimistic. It seems to make a good combination to date. But one day, Lucy, I hope to be a paperback writer (and a successful graphoholic). Maybe by the time the next issue of *TMR* appears, I'll know. In the meantime, to quote Schiller, my life is a restless march.

(10 September 1991)

#### Epilogue:

I can stop saying 'I want to be a paperback writer'. In May of 1993 my book *Farming Daze* appeared. This was in trade paperback size, 130 pages, and was 'stocking filler' format. Funnily enough, it wasn't one I'd intended to write for ages, but when a publisher comes to you and asks you to write — well, at the very least you say 'Yes' politely. (After that you go away quietly to scream with excitement in the kitchen.) My short stories continued to sell, and National Radio also bought rights to the book — it's to be an 8 x 12 minutes series of episodes. And books

trickled from my typewriter in a slow steady stream. At the time of writing I have eight more completed and being considered in the USA and NZ.

My career financially can be summed up easily. For the first three years I have written more and more, sold more and more, and been out of pocket more and more. But this financial year 1993-94 it looks as if I'll break even for the first time. It looks possible that 1994-95 will see me actually making a profit — until the IRD collect their share. I have a handshake agreement with a large stock and farm merchandise firm to write the small poems to go with their animals photos for their 1995 calendar.

My short story sales are close to fifty. I suspect that if I'd had any idea in 1989 just how much work all this would be, I'd never have started. But I didn't, so I did.

Now I am a paperback writer and I wouldn't quit. It's 50/50, for those who wonder. I couldn't write just for the money, and I couldn't write that volume if I didn't hope to get paid. A nice balance — just like farming and writing.

I am the eternal optimist, and one day I may sell fantasy in American paperbacks. After all, I've come this far. What's to stop me?

— Lyn McConchie, January 1994

## Thoughts while hanging out the washing

by Leigh Edmonds

LEIGH EDMONDS,  
6 Elvira Street, Palmyra,  
Western Australia 6157

Have you no shame at all? I'm sure that you have no money left. The other day there was a huge thumping sound from the front veranda and when we went out to look it had been caused by the latest multi-numbered issue of *MetRea* having been delivered. The postman delivers the big things onto the veranda rather than overburdening

our poor little letter box.

\* It did take a while to pay Elaine back the \$1500 I borrowed to publish and post that issue of *The Metaphysical Review*. \*

More and more lists! I have read very little sf or fiction in the past three years, so that all this is new to me. I keep on promising myself that I will find the time to read fiction, but I somehow suspect that such a time is a few years off yet. In the areas of history that I am currently following (mainly tech-

nology) I keep on having people give me lists of things that they think I should read, so my schedule is booked up years in advance now. The other thing that does not help, of course, is that poor impoverished students can't afford to buy books. This is, of course, no excuse at all, because one of the best sf collections I know is in the Murdoch University Library thanks to Grant Stone's interest and drive, so that I could keep myself happily amused there if time permitted. In fact, I have a couple of books that Grant lent me, but there is this great stack of photocopied articles I want to read, the last two

copies of *Technology and Culture* and the most recent issue of *Australian Cultural History* sitting right under *MetRoo* — and then Van Ikin's *Science Fiction* arrived yesterday (or was it the day before?) and that looks interesting too.

The thing that worries me, really, is that I can remember almost all the songs that you mention in your Top Ten lists for 1961, 1962 and 1963 on the last page of *bbg*\*. Just to see the title 'Runaway' from 1961 or 'Silver Threads and Golden Needles' from the following year sets off that old jukebox in my mind, and while most of the words are reduced to mumbles by now, I can certainly remember how the rest of it goes for most of the two or three minutes of the song. This is not really a good thing to be able to do when it comes to monstrosities like Frank Ifield who has, I hope, returned to the obscurity from which he so unfortunately but briefly emerged.

\* You'll be so pleased to learn, Leigh, that two of the very best CDs I bought in 1992 were *I Remember These: The Best of Frank Ifield and Frank Ifield: The EP Collection*. In the era since 1962, Ifield has been one of a small number of vocalists who have done anything that vaguely resembling singing. All the others vocalise. \*

The Delltones were not a bad surfie band, but they matured a lot. Valma and I went to a Civil Aviation ball one year in the late 1970s, where they did a beautiful version of Paul Simon's 'Mother and Child Reunion'. From being younger and enthusiastic, they had progressed to being real professional entertainers.

Just flicking through the pages of this issue is a pleasure: you're not just talking to your friends, you are talking to a lot of mine too. I was delighted to see that Jennifer Bryce is doing well in Bendigo. Her teaching stories were lovely, but they make me glad that the only experience I have had of teaching has been part-time tutoring at university. Even that can be more than a little exciting. There was the time when I handed back people's assignments with the offhand comment that I thought the course was difficult to fail but that some of them were working at it. One young woman who had done particularly poorly burst into tears and ran out of the room. Then there was the time when the schedule said that we had to talk about gender differentia-

tion, and as we were doing that another young woman asked me in all seriousness if it was true that men had to have sex all the time. Fortunately I had already told them that I was not there to answer questions but to help discussion, so I pushed the question off onto some suitably flustered young men.

You ask: 'Is the Karajan version of Haydn's *The Seasons* the best record ever made?' In a word, no! The complete Shostakovich quartets played by the Borodin Quartet probably are. I have them from 1 to 11 in the original two twelve-inch three-record boxed sets, and am pleased to hear that they are on CD. When I have some money...

I find it difficult to imagine that anyone would find the Shostakovich quartets as difficult to approach as you apparently do. In fact, I would have thought that your personality would have made you particularly partial to them, but perhaps that is the reason why you find them special but difficult. I got acquainted with Quartet No. 15 only recently, and can only stand in awe.

\* Hang on. I find it difficult still to distinguish the early Shostakovich quartets from one another, but I like to think that I can spread that project over the rest of my life. That's the only sense in which I find them 'difficult to approach'. The Borodin Quartet versions that are on CD come from the complete set that was recorded in the 1980s.

One night over dinner, John and Sally and Elaine and I started working out lists of our favourite twentieth-century pieces of music. My first choice was Ives' Quartet No. 2, but I hadn't heard it for some years. A week later, the Emerson Quartet released a CD featuring both of Ives's quartets. Hearing them again, I can see why I liked them so much, but...

I suppose my very favourite twentieth-century pieces are Vaughan Williams' *Partita for Double String Orchestra* and *The Lark Ascending*, but are they really twentieth-century works, or only brilliant relics of the nineteenth century? Best of the twentieth century? Britten's quartets and Shostakovich's Quartets 13 and 15. Shostakovich's Fifth and Eighth

Symphonies. Vaughan Williams' Seventh Symphony. That's a few contenders. \*

I have taken a turn for the worse, and find myself enjoying a lot of the French Impressionists' chamber music. The other weekend I took one of the comfy chairs out onto the back lawn, loaded up the Walkman with the Faure Piano Quintet No. 1, the Ravel and Debussy String Quartets, and the Ravel Piano Trio, wore my straw hat to protect myself from the sun (this is Perth, you know) and drank pleasant red plonk. I felt like a character in one of those Renoir paintings. Despite my sudden and unexplained liking for later French music I still find Berlioz unlistenable. I occasionally have a go at trying to make sense of the *Fantastic Symphony*, but it just seems to wallow around with no great point in mind. I cannot see why other people pay money to play it.

\* I now have most of Berlioz' music, since he seems to me one of the few composers, apart from Beethoven, to combine melody and rhythm in the right combinations. I took to classical music only when I realised that I could drum pieces in my head, even when the composer doesn't use drums. Berlioz often does; but the rest of the time he uses a wide variety of complex whip-snap rhythms. If Beethoven is the Mick Taylor of classical music, Berlioz is the Charlie Watts. (Okay, Beethoven is the Mick Taylor, Ian Stewart and Bill Wyman of classical music. Let's be precise about these things.) \*

Actually, the work that I am wearing out at the moment is Glass's *Akhmaten*. I think I prefer *Einstein on the Beach* for musicality, but what amazes me about *Akhmaten* is the way that it sounds so much like Verdi's *Aida* at times. Don't scoff. There are times when I think that there are more similarities between Schoenberg and Mozart than there are differences. They both have a certain Viennese sensibility that comes through, particularly after Schoenberg stripped his music of most of that post-Romantic garbage.

Your Favourite Classical Records for 1989: I see that you mention a work by Russo that I do not know, which is not unusual, since the only piece of his with which I am familiar is his *Three*

*Pieces for Blues Band and Orchestra*, which I like a lot, but the blues band bits are better than the orchestra bits.

Colly, here's Philip Bird in the letter column; the very same with whom I once went to a delightful performance of *Così fan tutte* at which we had the nerve to laugh at all the funny bits while the fuddydiddies around frowned because Mozart is sacred "Art"?

\* These days everybody laughs at the jokes in Mozart because the opera companies show surtitles above the stage. \*

I've never made much of a point of thinking about or remembering dreams. I recall that I have them, and I seem to find most of them entertaining and interesting, but I have never got around to trying to remember them. I have this policy that if they come from my subconscious (which I define as that part of me that knows all about the bit that thinks it is writing this letter while this conscious bit is not very much aware of all the bits that do not reveal themselves) then they have every right to stay there if they want to. When I find the time to write fiction, which is not often, I am endlessly surprised at what my subconscious throws up for my conscious consideration, and so I'm quite happy to let things come as happy surprises rather than force the issue. Besides, these days I find that I have to spend time concentrating on rational and logical thought, so the conscious gets quite a wringing out at times and I don't feel like involving my subconscious as well. I'm sure that my subconscious is at work most of the time on the historical problems that concern me at the moment. I find that while I am sitting on the bus gazing out the window or doing the washing, the best and most interesting thoughts just sort of pop up like bubbles in a volcanic mud pool. The other day I was standing in the back yard hanging out the washing when an idea just appeared in my mind, an idea that seemed to link together the problems of the histories of technology and society and something else of equal importance that may have been the perception of time. I remember think-

ing that it was a stroke of brilliance, and somehow that so overwhelmed me that I became sidetracked into thinking about how these sorts of things happen, and before I knew it the original idea has submerged again and I cannot now remember what it was. No doubt it will one day emerge again, and I'll be waiting for it.

\* Your definition of the subconscious (or the 'unconscious', as it's called in the literature) is about the best I've read. The unconscious is the big non-stop problem-solving factory of the mind, so I keep chucking it problems to solve. When it chuck\* back the answers in dreams, the dreams are in code, although sometimes transparent codes. Best of it all is when it chuck\* back the answer in clear transcribable ideas while I am actually writing. This happens occasionally. \*

One of the delights of Melbourne is its train system. When I was over there last, I commuted between Pascoe Vale and Middle Brighton and had a lovely time looking at the people and the graffiti. Melbourne people look less happy than those in Perth (this is understandable) but the art on back fences and other large blank areas facing the railways is magnificent in comparison to that of Perth. There seems to be two kinds of work in Melbourne — the junk that is just people let loose with spray cans of black paint to scribble on any flat surface; and the complex and visually exciting stuff that appears in great bursts of colour. The people who do that work might not get paid for it, but their art must get seen by more people than any of the gallery art being shown. The other thing about Melbourne trains is that they are so much wider than the tiny little things we have in Perth. A Melbourne carriage is like a vast hall in comparison to the dull and grimy little Perth things. The suburban trains in Brisbane are also excellent these days, even though they are on the same 3 feet 6 inches gauge we have in Perth. When I heard that the new electric trains in Perth were being made in Brisbane, I hoped that they would be to the same

standard, but I saw one from a distance a while back and it did not seem very impressive. The trouble with the Perth suburban train system is that it is just a city use of the lines to the port (Fremantle) or to the country (north and east to Geraldton and the eastern states, and south to Bunbury). Only now are the city fathers embarking on an independent light-track line that is not linked to the historical lines. This one is going to run right down the middle of the freeway. Which freeway? Western Australia only has one freeway.

We have a new cat. He is called Charlie. He came to us pre-loved from an academic friend who got a job in New Zealand. A few months ago he had a disagreement with a car and lost, almost completely. As I say to people, if he had been an inch further away we would not have noticed, and if he had been an inch closer he would have had a very flat head. As it was, he ended up with a broken jaw and nose. A couple of hundred dollars later, he had a wired jaw and was on the way to mending. The wire has now come out, and you would hardly know what had happened. While we had him in the hospital we also had his 'manhood' (for want of a better word) removed. Now that he has returned, he seems to have undergone a bit of a personality shift, and is not as cuddly as he used to be, and is obsessed with jumping up on things and knocking things over, which was not a hobby of his until now. One thing that has not changed is his mental capabilities. Even for a cat he is a bit slow — at least two bob short of a quid, if not five bob short. Sometimes he will be doing something and suddenly his brain will start to function for some unknown reason but, because he doesn't have enough mental circuitry to go around, everything else stops until he has finished thinking. I've watched him pause in the middle of stepping from one place to another in mid-stride for a minute or two or in mid-lick when he is washing himself. He's lovely, all the same.

By god, David Lake is absolutely correct about those 99 bars of pure heaven in F sharp minor. Is it really only 99 bars . . . count, count, count. Yes indeed.

(29 August 1991)

# The randomness of thingy

by Skel

SKEL,  
25 Bowland Close, Offerton,  
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Elaine and Bruce:

Just taken the rubbish bags out — it's bin day today. Double bin day, seeing as they didn't make any collections in this area last week because of the Christmas holidays. Double bin day plus, in fact, what with all the extra rubbish engendered by the aforementioned period of festivity. Seven large black plastic sacks I got them from where they were stacked just inside the shed, totally filling what little free space there normally is in there. It is not a large shed, though plenty adequate for my needs. Said needs being shelf space for storing enormous amounts of home-brewed beer (the overspill from my brewing room — overspill not always being an inappropriate word in this context, as I have been known to occasionally over-condition the bottles), a large collection of tools for being an incredibly poor and inept workman I need lots of things to blame, a lawnmower that I actually had to use last year now that the guinea pigs which, with the aid of the rabbits, used to cope easily with keeping our modest ~~lawn~~ patch of scabby grass cropped, are now ex-guinea pigs, and the occasional bicycle (exceedingly occasional nowadays) as what remains of the rear wheel is detached in a corner, spokes akimbo, jammed in with my large collection of 'Really Useful Pieces of Wood'.

The truly odd thing about these 'Really Useful Pieces of Wood' is that whilst undeniably and inarguably 'Really Useful', their potential usefulness never seems to match the reality of any DIY tasks I'm ever unable to avoid, thus ensuring that I always have to visit our local wood shop on such

occasions, and pay extortionate prices for similar pieces that are invariably that fraction smaller or larger in some vital dimension. I do not allow this fact to discourage me though, but rather I see it as proof that my collection of 'Really Useful Pieces of Wood' is simply not large enough, and so I become ever more vigilant as I walk from wherever I am to wherever I'm going. This pisses Cas off no end, for I am usually in her company, and she is embarrassed by my scavenging tendencies.

Anyway, having removed the rubbish sacks from the shed I lifted out a couple of bottles of strong 'Sipping Bitter', which I could then reach, and which are lubricating my LoCing facilities even as I type. The rubbish sacks were carried the relatively short distance to the bottom of the garden, where I then heaved them up above my head and over the fence. There is a gate, but this is wedged shut lest any passing tradesman, postman, window cleaner or delivery man should inadvertently use it to allow Cas's rabbits to nip through before they realise and perform the lagomorphic equivalent of *The Great Escape*. Having sprained my back heaving them up and over the fence I then went back indoors, out the front, walked around the house, and carried them one at a time from outside the fence to the area from whence the refuse men collect them. Everybody else must have been equally profligate over Christmas and New Year, because there were several humongous mounds of rubbish sacks, a veritable big bag convention. I remember thinking 'Please, God, don't let them miss today's collection' because now that they're out there all the cats and dogs in the neighbourhood will rip the shit out of them in search of the residues of thousands of Christmas turkeys, and the wind would scatter anything they didn't eat. Fortunately my prayers must have been heard, because as I look up from the word processor screen and out through my den

window I can see the first of the disposal vehicles tackling the mounds on the other side of the green. Sic Transit Chrimble. Goodbye enough wrapping paper to cause widespread deforestation and global warming. Goodbye remnants of rich food that caused the shelves of the local pharmacies to be denuded of indigestion remedies. Clink merrily away ye empty bottles, your duty done. Once more Malt did more than Milton can, to justify God's ways to man. Gin was a big help too.

So, having seen just how much rubbish has come out of Offerton in the last couple of weeks, I figured a little bit more couldn't hurt . . . and besides, this letter is way, way overdue. About which I feel really guilty. After all, you spent ten dollars airmailing the damn thing to me just to make sure I got it promptly, and then I wait until even sea mail would have appeared like an express service. I may be a lousy ingrate, but you aren't supposed to rub it in. However, in a couple more issues you'll be able to make sure we all respond straight away. This is because simple correlation of the ever-increasing size of TMR indicates that it won't be long before it'll be cheaper for you to pay all our return air fares to Oz to read the masters, than to print and mail an issue. Until then I guess I'll just have to wear my raiment of guilt for all your mailing list to see. Next time, though, surface mail will do. Honestly.

In truth, TMR arrived at just the right time, as I was in the middle of some protracted DIY (with me all DIY is protracted, even if it's just changing a light bulb), and I was able to keep dipping into your zine as the weeks and months wore on, in the odd moments when I rested from my primary tasks (some of these light bulbs can be real bastards!). If only my waning fannish powers had been up to making a few more notes in the margins. I'm not kidding about the waning fannish powers, either. Take 'egoscanning', for instance. You know what I mean, the way a trufan can

casually flip through empty-squidgy pages of closely typed text and his or her eye will be instantly drawn to the one mention of their name? Well... and this is acutely embarrassing... I am ashamed to admit that I somehow failed to spot my name on both the cover and the contents page. How could this be? Well, I have a theory.

It's to do with probability theory, and the way things either are or aren't, or simply are potentially — and also about the newer theories about the way our expectations might interact with the universe at some quantum level of reality. Thus it was that when I opened your envelope I was convinced that I hadn't responded to your previous issue. Yes, I know how unlikely such an event might seem to you, but don't forget that your previous issue was sometime in the Fannish Jurassic when even I was relatively active. Now my expectations are governed by my decline, so that I 'knew', with absolute certainty, that I hadn't responded to the previous issue, and this 'fact' was uppermost in my mind as I gazed guiltily at the \$10 of stamps the envelope flaunted. That being the case, my name couldn't be on the cover or contents page. Such was the strength of my conviction that the hook I cast into the river of reality at that precise moment snagged the one essential quantum required by probability theory, in which I wasn't there.

That's the only explanation I can think of. When I first pulled forth my copy of your fanzine my name wasn't on the cover. Couldn't have been. I'd have seen it. Stands to reason. If I didn't see it, it wasn't there. But it is there now. So how do we explain this apparent contradiction?

Easy-Peasy!

As time wore on, and I became caught up and involved in this latest TMR, my conviction that I hadn't responded to the previous issue faded from my consciousness. Now it is a fact, I think, that I have responded to most of what we laughingly refer to as your 'recent' issues, so that as my beliefs began to stop affecting the outcome, it now became probable (almost a statistical certainty in fact) that I had indeed responded, and that therefore you could have included my letter. So probability, sneaking by when my back was turned, had its way and in the fullness of time I came across my letter. I was pissed off! A 'featured' letter, and not even on the contents page. I flipped back to confirm the justification for my outrage, and had the wind taken right

out of my sails. OK, I could have missed it on the contents page (though breathes there a fan who could make that admission and really believe it?). Now nobody likes to be made a fool of, and I'm no exception (though I provide more opportunities than most). So it was that as I gazed at the contents page the sails of my outrage began to billow anew. Well, ever hugger else whose letter got featured had made it onto the cover, with their names writ large. Well, large-ish. Why was I the exception that broke the camel's back? (Could it perhaps be retrospective punishment for metaphors as yet unmined?) So I flipped to the cover and... aaargghh!

Now there simply is no way that any fan could miss his or her name on the cover of a fanzine. Say it ain't so, Joe. Abso-lutely no-fucking-way! So it has to be down to Probability Theory and the Randomness of Thingy. I'm sorry I don't have the right academic degree to explain this in more precise and correct terminology. Actually I don't have any degree, but when you're as defensive about this as I am it sounds so much better (and just as accurate) saying you don't have 'right' one. That's probably why I overreacted so much to Elaine's piece in the last-but-one TMR. Here she was, with all those degrees of theory, and all I had was three kids-worth of practice. Also three kids-worth of guilt at all the mistakes I'd made. Yes, my letter may have been a true and valid response, but it preys on my mind that said response may have contributed to 'stopping her in her tracks'.

\* It'd take more than you to stop Elaine in her tracks, Skel. Even six cats can't do that. Besides, Elaine is quite willing to admit that her only degree is a third-class honours degree in Chemistry, and she doesn't believe that a degree in Literature is worth anything much. \*

Bruce's comments on a Richard Thompson concert on page 124 seem relevant here, Elaine. Bruce says you dislike Thompson's work. I neither like it nor dislike it, having had insufficient exposure to it. Bruce also goes on, though, to add that Loudon Wainwright III was more enjoyable, with an unspoken implication that he was also more enjoyable to you, Elaine. He is certainly more enjoyable to me, and I am put in mind here of one particular

lyric: 'Who needs love, who needs romance? I just want to eat your underpants!' I consider this to be one of the quintessential Loudon Wainwright III lyrics, for its inherent honesty and lack of sugar coating, its expression of a basic human need. Another basic human need is for contact and communication, to get to know someone. This is one of the things that fanzines are about, and however inadequate they may be for really getting to know someone, as has been pointed out from time to time, sometimes they are the only method available.

When Bruce writes 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' he isn't stretching any truths, even though he has never met (and may never meet) some of those friends. Through his writing we have come to know him (as well as we can) and to care about him, and it is this caring that carries us over the boundary from acquaintances to friends. I would also like to get to know more about, and care more about you, Elaine, but I can only do that if you first reach out to me through your writing, just as Bruce has done. It sets me back to think that my in some ways curmudgeonly response to your previous piece may have contributed to your unwillingness to share your thoughts and ideas with us again. It is true that I tended to react against, rather than support, many of the points you made, but it is also true that no other piece of fan writing in the past year or so stimulated me to anything like the degree yours did.

Mind you, Loudon Wainwright III isn't the only musical connection in this issue of TMR. Bruce's list of favourite popular records for 1989 listing Linda Ronstadt's (one of Cas's and my favourite artists) *Cry Like a Rainstorm, Howl Like the Wind* right alongside Jane's Addiction's (one of my daughter Debi's favourite bands) LP as a for instance. Truth to tell, we had just about given up on Linda Ronstadt, feeling that her more recent LPs were full of strings and Nelson Riddle, but signifying nothing. It was only Bruce's recommendation that caused us to buy our very first full-price CD, *Cry Like a Rainstorm, Howl Like the Wind* (to go with the CD player we'd been given, and which only needed about £17.50's worth of work by a friend of a friend to make it functional). We then picked up cut-priced Willie Nelson and Bonnie Tyler CDs before chancing upon Joe Ely's *Lord of the Highway*, our second full-priced CD. I had this on cassette, of course, courtesy of John Owen, but

didn't have my own version, so I couldn't mix and match those tracks with my other Joe Ely LPs. I've noticed this with lots of albums people have recorded for me. The record companies complain that home recording fucks up their profits. And yet, if Mike Meara hadn't sent me some tapes featuring some Ry Cooder material I wouldn't since have purchased every Ry Cooder LP known to mankind. If Mike Maera hadn't played me Jimmy Buffet's *Volcano* shortly after Mike Glicksohn had recorded for me some of the earlier Jimmy Buffet material I wouldn't now be one of the few owners of every single Jimmy Buffet LP that has ever been recorded. What more can these record companies want?

Mind you, I view audio and video recordings somewhat differently. In fact, the video of Roy Orbison's *A Black and White Night* is the only musical video Cas and I own or play, it being the only musical video that is improved by its video aspect. Speaking of visual aspects, I shouldn't let William M. Danner go by. When he says that the RCA video discs were 'never sold outside of North America' he was certainly misinformed, because they were definitely sold in the UK. I remember seeing them and thinking that they were not worth buying when mostly what one wanted a video for was time-shift recording. History has

passed its judgment on CED discs. Even to this day, when Cas has several shelves of videos for her subsequent enjoyment, the concept of a 'play only' video on old, rather than CD, technology is totally laughable.

In fact, there's a basic difference in the way we utilise our senses from a recreational point of view. I can listen to a musical album time and time again, whereas I don't think there's a single visual recording that bears such repetition.

(3 January 1992)

\* Although there's hardly a fan in Melbourne who shares my varied tastes in music, now I find there is a house in Oflerton, Cheshire, where I could sit down to enjoy almost any item in the record collection.

Who else knows the work of Loudon Wainwright III? Susan Wood did. After thirteen years, I still miss her letters. Elaine and I listened to Wainwright's new CD *History* on the night of 2 December. If we had delayed another night, we would not have been able to play it, for most tracks talk to us of the death of Roger Weddall although they were written by Loudon Wainwright about the recent death of his father.

David and Kitty Vigo know the work of Loudon Wainwright III. They should; they lost a fortune when they promoted his first concert tour of Australia. But David said to me, rather in surprise, after the concert: 'You know, his songs have a kind of poetry to them, don't they?' Loudon is never just a funny man.

Linda Ronstadt? Joe Ely? Joe Ely! I thought I was one of the few people in the world to know about Joe Ely. All of his albums are on CD now, sounding much better than they did on LP. *Love and Danger*, his new CD, is his best for some years.

Ry Cooder? How could I have left out his records from my account of my 1976 (earlier in this issue)? Probably because the standing joke between Roger and me was that he loathed Ry Cooder's records, while I played them as a constant background to everything that happened then. Those early records also sound even better on CD than they did on LP.

You would probably enjoy listening to our record collection, Skel and Cas, as much as we'd enjoy listening to yours. Some day. \*

## I write, therefore I am

by David Grigg

DAVID GRIGG,  
1556 Main Road,  
Research, Victoria 3095

Thanks very much for sending me a copy of *The Metaphysical Review* via Carey Handfield. Believe it or not, your fanzine has contributed heavily towards a resurrection of my interest in getting back in touch with old friends, with amateur publishing, with things fannish in general. Thanks also for the many issues of TMR that you sent over the years but which fell into the void of

my self-imposed speechlessness.

It's now clear to me that my six-year gaffiation brought about by my ill-fated entanglement (no other word suits) with Aussiecon II has left me cut off from many things that I now find were important to me.

I'm finding it very hard to write this letter because my written communication skills have grown so rusty. Over the last six years I have written nothing. Nothing. Except for business letters, replies to tenders, consultancy reports. Nothing that counts as *real* writing; that is to say, writing out my personal thoughts, my opinions... writing to people who (I can only

modestly hope) are interested in me as a person.

'I should be talking to my friends...' Whether they still consider me as a friend, I don't know, but your fanzine was full of well-remembered names from the past, and perhaps they won't mind if I rejoin their ranks from time to time.

TMR 15/16/17 was full of plums, and while I can't say I have read every word, I have read very many of them, and enjoyed what I read.

Or is enjoy the right word? Certainly it's hard to apply that word to 'The usual melancholy Gillespie diary entry'. I was sorry to hear about

Elaine's tribulations and to read Lee Hoffman's sad story about her father. Perhaps everyone's story of the last days of their loved ones would inevitably be tinged with the anguish of 'if only ...'.

Both my parents and Sue's are, thank goodness, still with us, though my father gave us all terrible scare recently when he was apparently hit by every illness he has avoided over the last fifty years in one month. Terrible influenza, severe angina, blood poisoning, shingles and a violent allergic reaction to penicillin (which he had never taken before in his life — he's seventy-three!) all at once.

We also have avoided your cat abscondings and traumas. We now only have one cat, who has been with us the last twelve years, but about ten years ago we lost two cats to cars on the main road in front of our house. Our remaining cat (who has a silly name) was also clipped by a car many years ago, and now sports a plastic hip replacement, which seems not to bother him a bit.

George Turner's article about literary award judging was, I think, unsurprising, though interesting nonetheless. Perhaps these high-sounding awards should be taken off their pedestals and considered in the same light as the Oscars or the Hugos — simply as beauty contests. I agree with the thought that George seems to be presenting: that really the only certain guide to worth is the judgment of history. I suppose the problem with posterity as the judge is that it, too, may prove a biased magistrate. There must be many works of the past now no longer in print but which would well repay resurrection.

Yvonne's article on the Adelaide Writers Week was also very entertaining reading, though I wasn't quite sure where Aunt Agatha fitted in.

And then Lucy Sussex hits me right between the eyes. Yes, I admit it, I was a graphomaniac. Still am, I think. Otherwise, what am I doing writing this letter? But at least I have unhooked myself from the claws of fiction writing. I'm forty now, and I think I have to face the fact that I am never going to write fiction. A good thing, too. As Lucy gleefully tells us, there are more than enough mediocre writers (particularly of sf) in the world already. The best service I can do literature is probably to desist from swelling their ranks.

But I think I am going to start publishing fanzines again. Graphomania

takes many forms. As I said earlier, there is a strident need to express oneself. Perhaps I can view Lucy's comments with particular clarity after my six years of self-imposed repression. In that silence, I have been feeling more and more disoriented, out of touch with who I was. Justifying your existence by writing? Oh yes. *I write, therefore I am*. But that doesn't mean I have to write fiction.

Lucy quotes you, Bruce, as saying that you should write fiction for the good ethical reason that writing fiction earns money. I was trying to write fiction out of similarly skewed reasoning, I think, though not for the money. In some ways, I think I was trying to write fiction because it seemed expected of me. Yet the only good reason to write fiction is because you can't help yourself. In other words, if you are a graphomaniac whose obsession takes that particular form. No one, surely, writes purely to make a dollar (cleaning offices gives a better return per hour invested). And as for one's soul ... you save that by writing what your soul tells you to write, not your conscience. You are a terrific fanzine publisher and book reviewer, one of the best. Why fight against that?

Avedon Carol's letter about sexuality was fascinating and in some ways sad. I am in these matters (as in many things) very naive, but always thought that giving pleasure to one's sexual partner was a large and important part of the whole experience, and failure in this regard a considerable disappointment. For this reason, I think that both partners in Avedon's description of 'rotten sex' are to be pitied; neither, perhaps, know what they are missing. There is a sexual revolution for men, too, I think. And is it too naive to say that I have to confess that I have never fully understood *why* women would want to fake orgasm? That they can do so, I freely admit — no need for the scene out of *When Harry Met Sally*. But *why*? Except to smother their partner's disappointment? That's why I find Avedon's use of the word 'some' as in 'some people get a great deal of their own pleasure from seeing that their lovers are very aroused by them' to be terribly sad. I would have guessed (naively) that she would have said 'most'.

Alan Bray's letter was a joy, full of enthusiasm for life. Perhaps there is life after forty ...

And then the lists ... ! Aaaarrgh!

I have read P. D. James's *Innocent Blood*, as well as most of her other

books. I was surprised to find you liked this title, as I found it the one I liked least, while recognising that it is probably her best written. I just found it very hard to stomach the distressing impact and the whole agonising atmosphere of the book. I deeply disliked every one of the characters. And it is interesting that I remembered (several years after reading the book) the girl protagonist and her ex-convict mother, but not the obsessed father of the abducted child, while you reminded me of. I guess this is a kind of fiction that may be true to the more unpleasant aspects of life, but it fails to entertain me — just gives me the horrors without redeeming value.

\* Most of the other P. D. James novels I've read have been rather smug, fitting all too comfortably within the conventions of the detective genre. When she last visited Australia, she said that the detective novel probably can never be a true novel, since necessarily it cannot give the same kind of insight into the mind of the criminal as it can give into the minds of the other characters. I couldn't tell whether or not this was fake modesty, or she had forgotten during the interview that in *Innocent Blood* large sections are told from the viewpoint of the intending criminal. \*

Bill Forsyth is some kind of Scottish genius. I have seen both *Gregory's Girl* and *Local Hero*, and loved them both. In fact, we have *Local Hero* on videotape, and must have watched it half a dozen times, and look forward to watching it many more times in the future. A truly delightful film, and quite probably my favourite film of all time. *Comfort and Joy* was also very good, but not in the same league, and I haven't yet seen *Housekeeping*.

I'm also fond of Dorothy Sayers' books. *Murder Must Advertise*, on your 1989 list, is not I think her best — there's some very silly stuff in there about Wimsey dressing up as a harlequin and dangling out of trees and suchlike, but the autobiographical material about the 1930s advertising agency is, I admit, well worthwhile. Of her works, I think *The Nine Tailors* and *Gaudy Night* my favourites. Have you read Sayers' biography, *Such a Strange Lady* by Janet Hutchinson?

\* I don't think I've ever seen the biography of Sayers. If Mark Linneman were still living in Melbourne, armed with his sheaf of library cards, I'm sure he would find a copy of it in some library within a day or two.

What you dislike most in *Murder Must Advertise* is what I like most — a few pages of genuine magic in a mystery novel. (Most mysteries are fairly

plodding, which is why I'm no addict.) *The Nine Tailors* is one of the few mystery novels that one could call a 'real' novel — a major piece that gives some idea of what happened to England between the wars. \*

I've read more items on Dave Piper's list. I've had a copy of Stewart's *Earth Arides* for about the last twenty-five years, and read it many times

when I was a teenager. It's still one of the best world disaster stories, because it concentrates on the characters involved. I also loved the Bester books, and *Catch-22*. But stuck on a desert island, I couldn't do without the six-volume 'Lymond' historical series by Dorothy Dunnet, one of the most — no, the most enjoyable burst of sustained reading I've ever had.

(20 October 1991)

## Return to Georgia

by Sue Trowbridge and Alan Sandercock

SUE TROWBRIDGE,  
612 Clairmont Circle,  
Decatur,  
Georgia 30033, USA

We got the giant copy of *The Metaphysical Review* in the mail today. Many thanks for airmailing such a weighty tome at such a non-trivial expense. Receiving it sort of drove home the outrageousness of our not having written even once since leaving Melbourne over eighteen months ago. We have not disappeared into some void, but we are somewhat farther down the street than the address you used. When we first got back here, we were living in an apartment not too far from our old one, but rather too near a noisy street. I started agitating for a move to a quieter location a few months later, operating on the theory that we would be renting for some while, so we might as well be comfortable, and where we were was too much like Cotham Road by half.

A few months after we settled into our third address on Clairmont Circle, a house came up for sale near by. Many of our friends in this neighbourhood (acquainted with it through being friends of the former owner) assured us it was just right for our smallish family, so we finally had a look at it in late October. We bought the place, and are now at our fourth and, I sincerely hope, last location on Clairmont Circle.

Alan is currently working for the Georgia Geologic Survey, as he was

when we left for Australia, although at a different and better location. The State of Georgia is facing some knotty budget problems at the moment, so state jobs are an iffy proposition right now. Alan is in a better position than most, because there is a great deal of interest in the technology he is using, and he's the only one there qualified to do that particular kind of work. I am almost too superstitious to put these thoughts into print. Why tempt the gods...?

I am working in the library of my old university, cataloguing Russian and other Slavic-language books. I work twenty hours a week, and find the job well suited to my education, work experience and temperament. An academic library particularly appeals to me because I find that many of us with degrees in obscure subjects have washed ashore and are cooling our heels until it is time to start the revolution. Or maybe open a panel discussion about it. No big hurry, as there seems to be plenty of books to read in the meantime.

I have just finished the first half of a two-year apprenticeship at a pottery studio where I have taken classes over the years. There are seven of us assistants, as we are known, and for six hours of studio maintenance a week (firing kilns, mixing glazes, etc.) we each have a studio space and unlimited access to glazes, firing and low-cost clay. When the two years are up we are each, in turn, expected to have a gallery exhibit of our work, and are then thrust from the nest. I have also been teaching

a class for beginners for the summer term just ending. This is the first time in my life when I have been able to spend hours and hours at a time with other artists, working, chatting, experimenting and sometimes just doing nothing because it seems appropriate. There are in excess of 150 students using the place, so there is plenty of work to be done, and plenty of interesting artwork coming through. Those of us fortunate enough to be in this position find that we are both students and teachers, that the give and take exists at all levels of expertise.

Maria will soon be starting the first grade at the same school I attended, having done kindergarten last year (the equivalent of primary prep in Victoria). She has firmly established her power base at the day-care centre two doors down the street. It's part of the apartment complex where we used to live, and is the focal point of a large part of the social life in this neighbourhood. I am continually amazed to find that day care is still regarded by many people as just a necessary evil, especially when I realise what a vast network of friends and acquaintances we have acquired as a result of Maria's attendance there.

As you say in your letter, Bruce, I was not in fact very pleased with things in Melbourne, and 'there didn't seem to be anything anyone could do to help'. That last clause may go a long way toward explaining the whole thing. 'Help' is not the thing I have often been very interested in having. What I thrive on is activity that seems



purposeful and meaningful within the context of my life, and that activity was in very short supply in Melbourne. Nothing I knew seemed to be of any use to anyone, and nothing that was available for me to do seemed to take me one step further along the path I had been following in my life. So, dying a slow spiritual death, I turned into a snivelling nitwit. Except for those occasions when I was a screaming bitch instead.

But, to set the record straight, we didn't come back here just to keep me from losing my mind. (What do I mean, 'just'? It's the only mind I've got.) Alan was inclined to think even before we left Adelaide to live in Melbourne that our stay in Australia should be a temporary one. I'm not about to speak for him and try to explain his reasons, but I won't have it said that if I hadn't been a homesick spoilsport, everything would have been perfectly jolly. The funny thing is, when he first suggested coming back here, for some reason I was stubborn and thought it was too outrageous to go changing hemispheres the way most people change shirts. Really, in the context of the international scene these days, our household seems a veritable bastion of common sense.

And speaking of bastions, I have recently finished reading an article about Barry Humphries in the 1 July issue of *The New Yorker*. I picked it up in the staff room at work where it lay with other ageing magazines of unknown provenance and was reading it at odd moments, during breaks and lunch and whatnot, until I finally got impatient and pinched that issue so I could finish it at home. I had heard of Edna Everage, and somehow even seen snippets of his/her performance, but hadn't really known anything much about Barry Humphries at all until reading the article, and I found myself not knowing whether to laugh or cry about some of his comments on life in Melbourne. Most Americans have never heard of the Humphries/Everage phenomenon, and probably never will. And they probably would have, at best, a marginal appreciation of it. I think you almost have to have lived in the British Commonwealth to get the point.

I suppose it would be civil of me to respond to TMR, but in fact I haven't had time to read much of it yet, and I know that any slight delay in writing a letter usually means I don't ever finish it at all. We are all still alive and even prospering, with a house and a budgie

and a pet mouse to show for it.  
(20 August 1991)

\* Melburnians may have reviled Barry Humphries twenty-five years ago when he first revealed their many peculiarities, but now he is regarded affectionately as a unique repository of detailed nostalgic information about a city that (to many of us) has been corrupted by American influences over the last thirty years. In fact, Humphries is probably the cleverest, and certainly the funniest man this country has produced, a man with a mercurial, even poisonous wit, who taunts any particular audience with precisely the image that might most annoy them. I have no idea how Humphries could find an audience in America.

I can't imagine living anywhere else but in Melbourne, and you couldn't live here. But however much I live on the fringes of Melbourne society, I'm part of it. Those who are not rarely (for instance) have their qualifications recognised. Marc Ortlieb was a fully qualified teacher in South Australia, but when he wanted to teach in Victoria, he had to spend an entire year gaining a valid Diploma of Education at Melbourne University. A friend of ours has taken some space in much the same kind of artistic and performance loft you describe. Would a stranger to Melbourne ever find out about such facilities? As John Hepworth used to write about Melbourne in his columns for *Nation Review*, 'what a hearthreak old town you are!'

ALAN SANDERCOCK,  
same address

I was reminded of things Australian (and in particular Melbourne fandom) a couple of weeks ago when I was reading *Brain Child* by George Turner. At one time when we were visiting you in 1989 I remember you telling me that George had written a new novel and was in the process of trying to get an

American publisher to buy it. I suspect that this is that book, since the timing seems to be about right. It's not quite as forceful a novel as *The Sea and Summer*, but it still holds at least my fascinated attention. Of course *Brain Child* has all George Turner's themes and obsessions — at least I have heard him talk extensively about the changes that will occur when or if humanity takes evolution into its own hands. If George did have trouble finding a publisher, he has almost managed to attract some critical acclaim, judging from some excerpts from various reviews of the book. The complimentary remarks range from *The New York Times* through *Locus* to *People* magazine (not the same style as the Australian publication of the same name). Arthur Clarke's admiration for the book is touted on its cover. I hope George is doing well financially from this book, since it does seem to have had a fine paperback introduction under the AvoNova imprint. Amusing to see a book dedicated to the Melbourne Chapter of the Nova Mob.

\* *Brain Child* was the book that I read in 1989. It had some much better title in its manuscript form. In early 1991 I read the book that has now appeared as *The Destiny Makers*. (My suggested title was *The Falling Axe*; George's was *The Waiting Axe*.) I like *The Destiny Makers* better than *Brain Child*, although *The Sea and Summer* (Drowning Towers in USA) is George's masterpiece. The new novel, just accepted by AvoNova, has a slow beginning but in many ways is George's most accomplished book (if, says I, he's incorporated the changes I suggested). That's supposed to appear in July 1994. \*

Are you managing to keep employed in these recessionary times? I am employed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to study environmental issues using computerised geographical data bases, and some of us are hoping that Clinton will win the November US Presidential election since his running mate, Al Gore, has written a book detailing his concern for environmental issues. Maybe (we surmise) such concern will be translated into some more definite and long-term support for work that we do on such things as wetlands conservation and ground water protection. When

we were living in Melbourne, I was working with the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands on issues of forestry. The mention of long term support for anything implies thinking ahead and planning, and this brings up the sorry mess that is the plan for the Atlanta Olympics in just four short years. Both Sue and I were hoping that Melbourne would get to host the Olympics, but no such luck! Sue and I are thinking of taking a trip out of the country during that two week period.

\* During the whole bidding period, we kept hoping that Athens would win it, and didn't realise Atlanta was bidding until it won. At which point we jumped up and down very quietly in exultation — but did wonder if Olympic fever would force you and Sue to make a flying visit back to Melbourne and Adelaide. \*

Most of our movie viewing at the moment revolves around the VCR. I must thank you again for the mentions in *TMR* of the Wim Wenders film *Wings of Desire*, which we saw a few months ago and I am wanting to see again. Last night we watched another German film, starring Sam Shepard, who wrote the screenplay for *Paris, Texas* which is, of course, another Wenders film. This particular film is *Voy-*

*ager* by Volker Schlöndorff, who directed *The Tin Drum* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. It is actually a film adaption of Max Frisch's *Homo Faber*, and it is worth seeing for Shepard's wonderful performance. The film is refreshing in that it is a 1991 release that doesn't feel that it has to update a story set in 1959. The other enjoyable German film we saw recently was Percy Adlon's *Bagdad Cafe*, an offbeat production set in the US desert.

I sent a letter to Paul Anderson a couple of months ago, but I have yet to receive a reply. Actually I haven't from Paul since just before Christmas 1990, so I really don't know how things are going with him or his family. I imagine that he is managing to get by as he usually does.

I'm not sure what is going to happen with my mother (my only surviving immediate family in Australia since my father died in 1964 and I have no brothers or sisters) since she is in a nursing home and is suffering from a cancer. It is lucky that she is well taken care of (my father's ice business has seen to that), but if anything were to happen, I may be in for an unscheduled trip down under. My mother was over here visiting just last year, but it has been in the last few months that her condition has gotten worse.

Would you happen to know the present address of Joy Window? I want to get back in contact with Joy, since

she has always written interesting letters over the years, and once paid us a visit when we were living in Nashville.

(12 September 1992)

\* We would also like a current address for Joy. We are not even sure that she has heard about Roger's death. An awful lot of people still haven't (Andrew and Mary Whitmore still hadn't until Andrew rang me a few days ago), although on 4 December we tried to ring everybody who might ring anybody else. We don't have a phone number for you, Alan and Sue. An international and interstate phone rates plummet, we find more and more often that a phone call is the easiest way to pass on information.

We saw *Bagdad Cafe* on television only a few days ago, and rather enjoyed it, but *Wings of Desire* has still not turned up on television here. No doubt I'll see it again at the Astor Theatre sometime soon.

Has *Voyager* passed through town and out again? Or did it never arrive? Or is it available only on video? I can't remember reading any reviews or publicity about it. \*

## In cahoots with the Creator

by Mae Strelkov and Bruce Gillespie

MAE STRELKOV,  
4501 Palma Sala, Jujuy,  
Argentina

Dear Elaine and Bruce  
Sympathies are extended for the sad times you've been through, though believing as I continue to do (with a vivid sense of its super-reality) in my vision of what's beyond — adventure if you're ready for it, comfort if that's what you'd prefer — I am never sad for the ones who die, but only for those

who miss those departed. I don't believe in some meaningless 'eternal hell' but in a constant round of learning via lessons, from life to life.

Mind you, I had a taste of such lessons when my difficult mother-in-law died in 1972. Earlier she'd begged me to wangle from my God a chance for her to be my daughter in our next lives, and I was so touched I promised I would. She was made very happy by the promise, and when she did die years later of a sudden stroke, her last words were eager. 'Happy to be going. . . . Forgive me!' she added, for there was plenty to forgive, true. She

was eighty-eight and a very passionate 'old school' Russian from a well-off home originally.

Scarcely a day or so later, my first grand-daughter was born in Buenos Aires. (We were then in the heights of central Cordoba.) I thought: 'It's her!'

I'd already been promised via a 'dream' in which Mother Earth (Pachamama here) assured Vadim that I would not have to be her mother in her next life. I was dreading it. So? Well! The moment she learned to speak (Spanish, her mother's tongue) and they arrived on holiday — she was scarcely two — she called her parents

and me for a conference. Firmly, she pointed to her mother: 'You must be my aunt. She' (pointing to me) 'must be my mother'. She then looked doubtfully at her father, my eldest son, and said, 'You can still be my father' (condescendingly). 'Oh crazy!' I laughed and beat it to the kitchen out of sight to giggle privately. In the back dining room I heard her parents anxiously trying to convince her that she must accept her real mother. I was just her grandma, see?

She wouldn't give up. Another time, I was at a table writing when she came up and demanded I come out and play and run with her. 'I'm an old lady', I told her, 'and you mustn't expect me to run about like a young girl.' She collapsed in giggles. 'You're an old lady now and I'm the young girl!' she gloated.

She's in her teens now in Canada, and very proud that she's left-handed like me, and looks like I did when young. She'd asked for that also while getting things promised: 'I want to look just like you and be like you,' she'd said, having given up trying to prove to herself that I wasn't a 'proper daughter-in-law'.

Another granddaughter of ours shocked her mother (another daughter-in-law) dreadfully when she first learned to speak by discussing some lovely dresses she'd had when she had another mother. This daughter-in-law was very upset, and tried to argue: 'But you've never had that dress, and I'm your mother.'

'Yes,' said the little girl patiently. 'But it was before I got killed when our car crashed. Then, I had another mother. Now you're my mother, that's true.'

I could go on and on with these stories that make me jubilant, ebullient. While 'walking on tiptoe' through each eternal instant of every hour and day, all I say all day long is, 'Oh, thank you, Father. It's so lovely to be in your universe and trust you.'

But is it a Christian universe? It's got Jesus in it. And Buddha? Yes, if he isn't just a mushroom, for his last words when dying were 'I have become a shattered ear', which refers to the mushroom, you know. And Peter went and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant in the last scene in the Garden, which I find distressing, for I very much don't want Jesus (charming as he is if taken away from his true believers) to turn into another mushroom-ear.

That's part of what I've been study-

ing lately, for it was distressing to me earlier to recognise that the Burning Bush was probably the Sacred Mushroom too. Years ago I wrote to John Allegro, and he sent me an autographed copy of his book on the Sacred Mushroom, which I've been checking ever since. Old Chinese forms confirm all he says. Incidentally, the archaic Quechuan word (in northern Argentina) for a red mushroom like an ear is *paca* (red) *nickri* (ear). They now call the ear in Peru *rincri* instead (IRNG for 'ear' is a fuller Maori echo). The point is that 'ear' and 'mushroom' in China over three millennia ago (as per Bernhard Karlgren's reconstructions) were known as *niuk* or *niok*.

Yes, Elaine and Bruce, come here. Don't go to boring conventions. Join our crazy ways and learn to be utterly 'worthless and free'. Jesus said, 'Take no thought for the morrow and the morrow will take care of itself.' True, 'today' keeps our son Tony and our son-in-law Charlie (Carlos) trotting, for that matriarchal 'Auntie Lou' has now become a great-great-great-etc.-grandmother, and around her almost a hundred (or maybe it's more by now) little and huge pigs of all sizes and ages pullulate. Tony's father-in-law, hard-headed and gifted at making money, is delighted as he hears of our contratemps — pigs running loose in all directions, needing more and more space. (We eat them and sell them, but never Auntie Lou!)

Tony's father-in-law Alex (half-Arab, half-Italian) is eager to smooth the way for Tony, and delighted that we like to go it on our own. So he sends one of his trucks regularly with more maize than we've managed to grow so that we can feed our burgeoning piggery (whom we'll never totally manage to eat or sell unless thunderbolts from heaven put a stop to all that fertility). And he sends rolls and rolls of chicken wire too, and Tony and Charles are forever hammering new posts in here and there. (Piglets have to be segregated, for the big ones eat the tiny ones otherwise). The medium-sized young-uns began eating our hens the other day, and we were so angry that instantly we transported them to the newest enclosure across the highway. (It's gravel, where wood trucks raise pink dust half the year, and the rest of the time can't pass our place because the Santa Rita is uncrossable because of spring freshets.)

This Alex has been so cute really (pretending to be tough and flinty) that he is embarrassed by Tony's appreci-

ation. He did not risk visiting us. I guess we do sound formidable. His daughter, Tony's wife, had some difficulty fitting in, but now she's as crazy-bouncy as the rest of us. The only time I ever blew up at her was once when she worried about 'What'll we do for money next year?' 'Trust!' I shouted. 'It always works!'

So she named her new baby boy 'Alex Vadim' (after his two granddads) and she insisted on naming the eldest girl, not yet two, 'Mae' (Erika Mae, actually) and so proud of it, for it shows she bothered, for it means trouble to get permission from the law to register a child without using the name of some saint. Her grandma is called Cesaria! They're an old family of real country folk for generations. A lovely Indian streak shows too on her mother's side. I always wanted at least one child to marry a Chinese. This is next best.

Sylvia will have her first by November, and her mother-in-law and sister-in-law in Buenos Aires are selling out there to move up to Jujuy to buy land near us. I had a letter today from the daughter, our Sylvia's sister-in-law, saying she's just longing to go for walks with me and talk. Will you, Elaine, come visiting and go for walks with the cats (not the pigs, no), and talk and talk? Forever? Are you 'one of us'? I bet so. And Bruce will be, by your good offices. He's a true cat-lover. That's the mark we share.

Isn't it lovely to be alive? And the day I die, in turn, I'll ask that someone remembers a lovely Argentine song, 'El día que yo muera, que nadie se pome triste', concluding, 'Have a party for me and "que lindo que ti guiste"'. In short, 'The day I die, let no one be sad. Celebrate and say, "How lovely you've gone"'. Death is not sad. I thought I'd never get over the sudden death of our third son Danny when he was thirty (nephritis, with heart trouble, and he insisted on climbing cliffs still). But my cousin's daughter in the USA, who was his pen friend, had twins that year. When I met her in 1978 she timidly asked me, 'Isn't it Danny?', indicating one of the twins. 'I thought so too,' I said, avoiding letting the little boy notice my interest. It's best to forget your former life each time you come back 'all new' to 'try again'. As a twin, it was doubly strange, for before Danny died, a doppelganger or twin (mistaken by many for him) used to appear in broad daylight regularly for some ten years. I and the youngest three got an awful fright when this twin went riding by one bright noon on the hilltop behind

us on Danny's bike, which Danny was certainly not riding. (The real bike was broken and we could see it lying on our lawn below that hillside.)

I deliberately stepped out of our mundane 'now' years back in girlhood, and 'walked through every crack in reality' into dimensions that ask to be comprehended and respected, adjoining our own. 'God' becomes so much vaster and at the same time present in every quark and antiquark within each one of us. I feel uplifted by this constant flow of increasing Reality beyond Time.

But, you know, there's a devaluation of those 'bright silver fish' (the dollars I mentioned in an earlier loc to you). Folks with their eyes on the 'fish' may think they flow with the fish, but the fish get swallowed, and then what? Nary a dollar will come my way while I still have breath remaining, but we're swept along to a destination beyond time and into an Eternity in which we so firmly believe; we just don't know fear. Earthquakes shake us, a volcano blows in southern Argentina, and it's so horrible the tv doesn't say anything more, lately. Not so many years ago a huge flood washed away the bridge to the 'mainland' over the nearby Santa Rita, so we were really cut off in this island-like 'sliver of Eternity' between mountain tops and the torrent at our foot.

And around us the simple people nestle and no stranger comes along. (Can't find their way here, it seems.) It's so out of time! A long detour is still possible in flooded summer seasons, over another shaky bridge pushed sideways a bit but not totally, way to our rear, but who'd find it normally, then backtrack to us? No road signs, of course. No places to stop to ask directions. We used to be 'near Palma Sola' (20 km away) but now it's always a fording of the swift river if we want to take the direct route.

A last bit of news. The black-and-white little tv set we now have is Carlos's. But we lack an antenna. So the tiny first aid station across the road has a clever male nurse. He made his own antenna out of wire, a bamboo post and a marrow bone. He came over and made one for us too. We receive only what is retransmitted at Palma Sola from 'Canal Once' of Buenos Aires, unless they suddenly switch to a Mexican program that flickers badly. Evenings, our kids (Sylvia and Carlos, Tony and Graciela, and the latter pairs' two babies) sit hypnotised till midnight while Vadim and I go to sleep. We're

the first up, mornings, but soon after, everyone appears. Vadim lights the wood stove for breakfast.

We had our eldest son and new wife on a visit from Canada recently, and they 'went native'. Everyone does who comes here.

(2 September 1991)

\* My reply will be a letter I wrote to Mae. Some details have changed — for instance, Apple Blossom died of old age in December 1992, Muffin of feline AIDS in early 1993, and Monty died of liver cancer on 17 May 1994, leaving us with four cats.

#### BRUCE GILLESPIE

Dear Mae

Seven cats. They are supposed to stay outside during the day, and all must remain inside overnight. (To answer one of your questions.)

About five weeks of this year have been lost to one cat. Or rather, we nearly lost the cat. It was our ginger cat, Theodore. On one day he was a bit dopey, but okay. He threw up his night's dinner, but that's fairly normal for a cat. Next day he disappeared. No sign of him that night. Next morning Elaine found that he'd crawled out from under the house, and was very ill. Straight up to the vet. (I say this because the vet's house is up the hill from us. We feel that we've visited the vet so often that we've worn a track up this hill.) The cat had lost a lot of heat, and was badly dehydrated, with almost no blood sugar. The vet sent him out to an emergency veterinary hospital. By the time he reached there, Theodore was just a few minutes from being dead. However, the wonders of modern science are now available for cats as well as humans. Theodore was put straight onto various drips and catheters. He survived the day, and by the end of the weekend seemed okay. Nobody can work out what happened to him. As far as anybody could tell, he'd been bitten by a snake, which seems impossible around here. But Theodore is always hunting

mice, and there is a bit of long grass around what seems like a heavily built-up inner-suburban area. Who knows?

That would have been fine if it had been the end of the story. When Theodore returned home, seemingly okay, he couldn't pee. Something in his muscle system had been badly affected by whatever venom or poison had hit him. He had to have a catheter put in. The vet had to put a wide collar around his neck to prevent him pulling out the catheter. (Nonetheless, he succeeded once.) We had to hire a cage that he could sit in, so that he wouldn't trail pee around the house. He had to be kept in the kitchen.

When the catheter came out a week later, Theodore still couldn't pee, although he was much better. Despair, despair. There was no way of telling how long this would go on, since the vet was completely puzzled. He conducted tests and drew blood samples and administered an X-ray. He consulted a cat urologist (such people do exist), who advised feeding Theodore a mixture of Valium and cortisone. This has helped Theodore, and finally the problem is starting to right itself. Six weeks after the original crisis. Well over \$1000 later. This cat should be set in gold plate and stuck on a mantel shelf.

So that's our crisis for 1992 so far. We can only guess what the rest of the year might be like. Cats are brilliant at getting into trouble.

To the rest of your letter: I can't believe in something I can't believe in. Try as I might, I simply can't believe in life after death, or endless lives. I've never experienced (in a wholly tactile, unavoidable sense) anything that would indicate such things exist. (Mind you, that doesn't stop me enjoying ghost stories more than perhaps any other sort of fiction.)

One short sparkle of life is it. The only trouble with this singular life is the shortness of it. When I was a child, time dragged by, but now decades go by without anything much happening. I've just had my

forty-fifth birthday. Males of our family usually don't last much beyond the age of seventy. Twenty-five years to go, if I'm lucky. But the last twenty-five years have slipped by at high speed!

On the other hand, I'm well aware of being born as perhaps the luckiest person in history so far: an Australian born after World War II and growing up in the 1960s. The only generation for nearly a century to escape war; the only lower-middle-class generation ever to receive a university education; one of the few generations to have a choice of good jobs. The disastrous prospects facing all of today's eighteen-year-olds because of the recession is hard to comprehend for someone of my generation.

The other reason for feeling so lucky is that I'm living through the age of the CD: of true high-fidelity music available in the home. Apart from being able to read great books, there is no greater privilege in life than being able to sit down in one's home and listen to a Beethoven symphony in conditions that are rather more perfect than those of the concert hall.

We'll certainly keep in mind your invitation to visit your place. You would have to send us a lot of instructions for getting there, but somehow we would get there. The only trouble is that I hate travel, and Elaine finds it very difficult to get me to go anywhere. I keep urging Elaine to go on a world trip while she has, for the first time in her life, the money to do so. (That's the legacy from her father.) But she's bought the block of land next door, which has taken a fair chunk of that money. Now she's spending all her spare time converting a flat area of soil into a rambling garden. The cats are having wonderful fun supervising her every move. Muffin supervises from afar, yelling his instructions throughout the day. Sophie likes to get her nose two inches from where the fork is about to go. Monty just likes showing off to everybody. (He can walk along the top of the

new fence, which is only one wire wide. The other cats are jealous.) Apple Blossom watches. (She is really feeling her age. She's seventeen.) The other cats wander in and out. I avoid the garden; I'm too busy trying to catch up with *SF Commentary*-related activities at the moment. Next week I'll probably have another enormous lot of Macmillan work. No wonder I feel chained to the computer.

The only sad bit of this letter concerns people who just disappear. I speak of Mike Shoemaker. He no longer sends me fanzines, although he did for nearly twenty years, and I got no answer to the last fanzine. Is he still in touch with you? Did I offend him? If so, how? And why do people so often cut one off without saying why? All very sad. One day I'll write a book about the lost people; the people who just disappear from one's life despite all one's best efforts. I'm just glad that despite the problems of postage systems, we've been able to keep in touch all these years.

Yours, Bruce (for Elaine)

(28 March 1992)\*

MAE STRELKOV,  
Address given above

Dear Bruce

Your letter of 28 March has had me thinking of answers for a while. There is so much I could have said face to face.

First, I am able to see things your way and especially Elaine's way... the cats she so loves. But also her love now for the little patch of late ground she's acquired and is going to turn into a rambling garden. While I confess I gave up my attempts at Chinese-style rambling gardens years ago, I know the feel. Right now we have a wide green front lawn, wrest from a real jungle-tangle of fallen overgrown-with-weeds trees and branches. Eight years ago I still had the superhuman-seeming strength to pull them all up and drag each old trunk, stripped of the tangled dead branches, to the back of the new one-roomed place (it now has many rooms added) and help Sylvia setting up a fence around the

newly donated peach-tree saplings, now huge and overburdened with fruit — and grubs — every year.

The menfolk on that occasion were away trying to arrange for a truck to bring more building blocks from far-off Jujuy town. When they got back they couldn't believe it — we had the fence protecting the peach saplings up, to the horses' disgust, and our front jungle growth was on a fair way to becoming a future lawn.

As for that superhuman strength that had aided me while Sylvia dug holes for the saplings and for the posts of the fence too (for we also had a bit of wire), it is an access to *something* I can always call upon when required. I've healed with it too — twice — for instance, gallstones that were due for surgery. The next X-rays found them missing. Things like that. It is this superhuman strength (explain it as you please, for I cannot) I call upon whenever needed, and it never fails. Sure, I'm getting old now (going to be seventy-five) and see no need to go on being 'super-female' on occasion. But it's thing gives me confidence in the unity of all Creation (co-operating when you co-operate) some call 'God'. That's all I'll say in defence of my continued 'superstition'. It has given me this forcefulness that I think has been recognised even in my mere loes to fandom. I don't find myself involved in petty feuds, for whenever in former times some kiddie (whatever his age) tried, storms replied. (In teacups, certainly, but they silenced the would-be putter-downer each time. And I was amused, not at all upset. My world is wider than teacup bickerings.)

We can't, hence don't, take our loved cats to vets. None here. Sylvia studied veterinary medicine for four years, but it was only the fifth year when cats and dogs would be the topic. She's very good with horses and cows. She's sewed up one neighbour's cow that fell and opened one side of the body with all the intestines hanging out. They called her and, for free of course, she disinfected, put back in the intestines and sewed up the hide, and the cow is again fine (if it hasn't by now been turned into beef).

So we don't take our beloved cats to vets. We allow them to live their natural lives out, hunting happily, having their mating adventures, sometimes having successful litters, sometimes not. They sleep either on our zinc roof or on the back porch, and are so loving it's incredible.

We also have our wonderful ducks,

which spend their nights under my bedroom window. They like feeling near, though by day they wander all over. I rescued them at the moment of hatching from their parents, who'd been raised in a store for sale at Christmas, and the children in town who acquired the pair couldn't keep them any longer, so their aunt sent them to me. 'To Mae's', as they put. 'Visiting Mae' means a lot to those folk in the distant town when they manage it. With us they really can relax and feel good. As do our animals.

Two of the white ducks (which I took out of their eggs myself, for they couldn't get out, and the mother walked off) got stolen by some kids under cover of dripping fog one cold day. I was sad for them.

The first sets of duck eggs that were hatched by the city bred pair stood no chance. The parents rushed them around non-stop in the irrigation ditch until they died from starvation three days later. So after another tragic try at letting the parents rear the ducks, I took over, with complete success, rescued them when they hatched.

Sadly, a neighbour's dog got the newest batch of eggs one night, and nearly killed the mother too. We cured her. They needed but a few days longer to become chicks.

I don't raise them to eat. My excuse for wanting them to multiply is that 'when we've hundreds of ducks we may eat a few; meanwhile, try some duck eggs'. (Ugh, is my local-town-bred daughter-in-law's answer.)

Enough on ducks, loveliest creations of a lovely Creator with whom I do feel strongly in cahoots. It's like I romp through life even when wanting to tear my clothes and hair and howl with grief. How to share it? I can't. Maybe get yourself some ducks, not to eat, but to love bravely. But they make awful splats if they invade the front porch, so they've learned not to try.

\* It would be worth getting ducks just to see the look of

consternation on the cats' faces. Except Monty, who would probably treat them as a quaint brand of dog to be teased. \*

Son Tony's wife comes from a family who worship money, which they never manage to acquire. She fails to comprehend loving anything for its own sake, its beauty. 'What's the use of it?' she only remarks. That's the present cross the Dear Lord expects me (and Vadim, my patient good spouse) to bear happily. Tony also finds it not absolutely easy, as he tries to penetrate her conditioning, with her family up in arms in the distance determined to convert him, instead, to join in their anguished prayers for Riches.

Bah, bah! I am studying old symbols for 'the Backside of God' Moses once glimpsed. Emperor Yu of China displays his also in his written character. (He separated the dry land from flood waters, long ago.) Other back-sides come into view: a Xingu Sun who fished at night with a bright light shining out of his anus, which it was death to watch. (God's face would be death to see, too, Moses was told.) The Emperor Yu's glyph is hooded too. It's a romp studying former human imagery concerning deities, even the Bible one named Yah. See? I'm a heathen. But a Christian heathen, if you please, for I think a lot about the simple non-'Christian' Jesus in the stories, despite their discrepancies. The force of the Way comes through, and I try to copy it.

I don't worry about your soul, you know, Bruce, you stubborn atheist. I hug you and Elaine and all our friends in fandom, beloved chicken. 'I'll pick off your cracked shells yet as you mature' is my motto, and cuddle you as I've cuddled my newly hatched yellow chicks. With rejoicing. Bygone human experiences of super-reality endure, and one old saying goes, 'Weeping shall endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.' Earth undergoes a great hatching of her new-

born chicks right now. The Old really will be washed away, with pain unavoidably. But I believe in rebirths and new forms replacing the old, so bear the grief and foresee the joy for all. Hell? Hell's for hide-bound hellfire preachers! They keep it going.

(23 April 1992)

\* I hope that nothing I said would imply that your beliefs were 'superstition', Mae. I try to fashion a belief system that is based on my own experiences. Since I've had none of the transcendental experiences that you describe, I have to stay content with a non-transcendental belief system that assumes that the years of one's life are all the time one has. What I see mainly in the world is the endless cruelty committed by people against other people. I don't have any way of dealing with that, except to be pleased to live in (so far) a relatively safe part of the world. Hell is other people, except for those valuable friends who personify the heavenly. More often, heaven is the experience of hearing a magnificent performance of a great piece of music, or reading a remarkable book, or watching a great film.

Whatever happened to Theodore? Six months after he nearly died, his urinary tract blocked again. Our vet sent Theodore to the Veterinary Hospital at Werribee, where the surgeon discovered that a faulty catheter used in February had scratched the tract, irritating it into forming a blockage. A bit of snipping and tucking, incidentally making Theodore into a Theodora, fixed the urinary tract problem. Final 1992 bill for one small ginger cat: \$1500. \*

# No sympathy for the editor

by Joseph Nicholas

JOSEPH NICHOLAS,  
5A Frinton Road,  
Stamford Hill,  
London N15 6NH, England

(1 October 1991)

*The Metaphysical Review* 15/16/17 arrived here in mid-August 1991, and received a brief perusal as I sat out in our tiny patch of back garden one bright, warm Sunday — but before I could consider it further, it was shoved well down the reading list by events in Moscow the following morning. However, I had another look at it in early September, slotting it into the schedule of more urgent things I wanted to clear away before we went off to Eastern Europe, for a week in Budapest and Prague, again without doing more than skim apparent highlights before laying it on one side for possibly more concentrated attention at a later date.

But now we are in October, the autumn closing steadily in around us, the daytime temperatures noticeably cooler and the evenings becoming darker an hour earlier than they used to, and I still haven't read all the issue.

Nor am I ever likely to, because there's just too bloody much of it. Pages of reviews of unknown and unmemorable novels, interminable lists of alleged favourite films and old records, letters that for the most part are over three years old... Aside from its mild historical interest, the thing resembles less a fanzine than a telephone directory, and is about as welcoming. Are we really expected to wade diligently through that many thousands upon thousands of words in search of something that might possibly catch and retain our attention?

Well, I know what your excuse would be, since it seems to be repeated at intervals throughout the pages of this issue: that when you have the time to publish *The Metaphysical Review* you don't have the money, and when you do have the money you don't have the

time. The inevitable corollary of waiting until you do have both the time and the money, of course, is that the material steadily accumulates, the issue consequently becomes larger and larger, and its costs in turn increase — generating more wails of despair from its editor as he finds himself postponing publication for a third or a fourth or even a fifth time.

But, frankly, it's difficult to feel much, if any, sympathy for the editor, since he clearly doesn't exercise much control over the whole business, and the problems he has are by all available evidence mostly ones that he brings upon himself. Yet they could be easily overcome; for example, the editor could keep his costs down by the simple expedient of setting himself a maximum page limit for each issue and then keeping to it — which would in turn force him to exercise greater discrimination about the articles and letters he selects for publication rather than trying to include almost everything he's sent. He would then find that each issue required less physical work, and so took less time, to actually produce, which would mean that finding the time in which to do that work would become immeasurably easier — and thus, perhaps, he would be able to publish more frequently; at least once a year, for instance, rather than the present rate of once every two or three years.

In short, Bruce, it's high time you stopped whining about your problems and concentrated on trying to cure them at their source rather than expecting our automatic sympathy for what are, in truth, your own editorial failures.

\* I don't 'whine'; I 'explain'.

I was rather pleased to find, after I hefted the copies of *TMR* 15/16/17 into the mail, that for the first time in years, the files were almost empty (except for the bundles of quite readable articles I still have in my 1972 and 1977 spillover files).

Your analysis of my editorial practice is fairly accurate, but leaves out two inescapable factors: (a) my vicious CD habit, which often empties the bank account just when I might have produced a small issue of one of my magazines; and (b) the nature of my work, which pushes me to deadlines that stop me doing anything fannish for six months at a time. The most recent project for Macmillan, a 600-page, 500,000-word Physical Education textbook, took all my energy and most of my days (except Christmas Day, Roger's funeral and the picnic for Roger's birthday) during the last five months. At nights, I had energy only to do my back exercises, read a book or watch a movie on television. \*

(2 October 1991)

A day goes by. I make another attempt to read *The Metaphysical Review* 15/16/17, and am once again struck by the fact that the first three items in this issue are not allowed to run to their natural conclusions, but are interrupted and continued elsewhere. The letter column begins, runs for five pages, and is then interrupted (in the middle, so help me God, of an actual word!) by the first of your so-called 'Feature Letters' (197 which after three pages is itself interrupted in the middle of a sentence) by the first and then the second of your articles. This is bloody irritating, to say the least — but, to put it as bluntly as possible, it's also fucking bad editorial practice, and one you keep repeating in issue after issue. It's past time you learned just how bad a practice it is, and dispensed with it. Your contributions should be published entire, without interruptions, and if that means they have to be reformatting and rewritten to stop them straggling over onto odd half-pages, then get on with reformatting and rewriting them. You're the editor — edit!

\* So there, Scott Campbell (See his ferocious letter in the last issue of *SFC*.)

My 'bad practice' is, of course, done deliberately.

For each of the interrupted articles, keeping it as a block involved wasting an extra page's space, and I had neither that page to waste, nor spare artwork to fill the spaces created.

In the letter column, I was faced with the problem that I could hardly run a 100-page letter column continuously, but I wanted to make it plain that the regular column and the 'Feature Letters' did make up a single entity. Hence the fascinating maze designed for astute readers.

In fact, almost all the letters were mini-essays, and could have been run as 'Feature Letters'. That would have pushed the issue's page count beyond the available space. As it was, to achieve that slimline 148-page issue, I cut out an enormous amount of material. \*

I'm also rather amused that you should have thought it worthwhile excerpting a portion of my previous letter on whatever jumbo issue of *The Metaphysical Review* it was to run as a 'Feature Letter' (repeating your bad practice of interrupting the flow of the other letters, again in the middle of a sentence), not least since three of the six journals mentioned have indeed ceased publication, and the listing is thus as worthless as the ancient political commentary attached to each title. (A week is a long time in politics; three years is like unto a glacial epoch, and to publish commentary on events that are of such age is simply a waste of space.) *END Journal* closed down in mid-1989 (just before the events that started to realise its post-Cold War European agenda), the English-language edition of *Moscow News* is no longer available in the UK except on subscription through the Soviet Embassy (but my copies are sent free from a contact in Kiev), and *South* went so heavily into business and economics that it lost all its readership appeal and was forced into receivership (by which time I'd stopped reading it anyway). A postcard of enquiry advising me of your intention to publish this list would have established these facts prior to publication, and saved you

those two wasted pages.

However, I still read *The Guardian*, *Marxism Today* and *New Scientist*; I also read (are you ready for this?) *Current Archaeology*, *Folk Roots*, *History Today*, *Geographical Magazine*, *New Internationalist* and *New Statesman & Society* — from which titles you may note that there has been a shift away from the political obsessions that dominated my personal agenda a few years ago, a development not unconnected with my having given up political activism (for a variety of reasons, but chiefly because it was leaving me less and less time to do anything else).

However, this should not be taken to mean that I've begun reading science fiction once again; I review a few books every now and then for the BSFA's *Paperback Inferno* (a magazine that you may recall I once edited) and peruse a few myself for my own amusement, but otherwise my reading remains dominated by non-fiction: still lots of current events, but also lots of history. And, as the occasion demands, guide books to keep us acquainted with details of the countries we visit: in 1988 we went to the USA, in 1989 we went to the Soviet Union (as it then was), and in 1990 we went to Paris, the USA again, the Netherlands and Brittany; and this year we've been to Egypt, Italy and selected bits of the former Eastern Europe (which we must now learn to refer to by its recovered, historical, proper name of Central Europe). In January we're going to Petra, in Jordan; but after that we're not sure. Judith is talking about going to Australia, finally; this would mean that we'd be unlikely ever to visit Greece, Spain or the Caribbean, but would thenceforward concentrate on the southern hemisphere, particularly Africa, India, South East Asia, China and Japan. When you have the real world to entertain you, who needs the invented gimcrackeries of science fiction?

Which is where I disagree with John D. Berry's argument that at its best far-future science fiction allows one to look back on the present from a new and alien perspective. I do this for two reasons.

The first is that I simply do not believe that it is possible to imagine a world that is truly and profoundly different from ours, because having been brought up by and inculcated with the values and mores of our society we are sociologically unable to step outside them. Not even the most alienated and anomic individuals have

ever managed to rid themselves completely of their upbringing; they have ceased to internalise their society's norms and ethics, so that they no longer believe in them, but have not replaced them with any others. Thus the allegedly 'new' and 'alien' perspectives on the present that science fiction claims to offer are in fact only rejections rather than coherent criticisms of it.

The second reason for disagreeing with John's argument is that all writing about the future — near, middle or far — is essentially a form of disguised commentary about the present. The nearest handy example is perhaps the socio-technological vision of 'classic' cyberpunk, whose near-future vision of private affluence and public squalor, renaissance multinational corporations and cynical individualists, decaying cities and a despoiled global commons exactly replicated the physical and social characteristics of the 'high' capitalism that is the most dominant feature of the past decade (most notably the period roughly contiguous with the US invasion in October 1983 to the global stock market collapse in October 1987). These characteristics were sometimes celebrated and sometimes denigrated; but even when the novels claimed to be set in 1998 or 2015 or 2042 or whenever, the landscape against which their action played itself out was distinctively that of the eighties, and thus hardly a new or alien perspective on the era at all.

On the other hand ...

On the other hand, who needs this sort of earnest critical footfall anyway? As Rob Hansen and I jokingly agreed at a Wellington meeting a couple of months ago, we don't want any of this sensitive artistic bollocks — what we want is giant indestructible robots from the future blowing people's heads off in slow motion with guns the size of severely aroused elephant parts and bloodshed by the pumpload. Arnold Schwarzenegger for world president!

\* That's one wish that will probably come true. \*

(3 October 1991)

Another portion of my previous letter appears elsewhere in this issue of *The Metaphysical Review*, itemising some of my favourite rock and folk acts. Time moves on, and although nothing has actually fallen off the list, a lot more has crept on, mostly a load of paisley-shirted semi-psychedelic mop-haired guitar-jangling outfits from the British



independent scene which I daresay have absolutely no profile whatever in Australia: Chapterhouse, Bleach, James, the Charlatans, the Stone Roses, the Darling Buds, Slowdive, Cranes, House of Love, Lush, the Sundays, Inspiral Carpets, Cruve, the La's, the Wonder Stuff, Ride, the Heartthrobs, Josi Without Colours, Belltower, Birdland, the Mock Turtles.

\* If I listened to the music played on JJJ, 3RRR or 3PRS, I would have heard them. Since I don't, I haven't. \*

Also some bands and solo singers you probably have heard of: Siouxsie and the Banshees, REM, the Pixies, the Men They Couldn't Hang (RIP), Warren Zevon, Martin Carthy, the Albion Band, Capercallie, De Dannan, Kathryn Tickell, June Tabor — almost all of which were represented in our record collection when I wrote my previous letter, but were omitted from the list included therein simply on the grounds of space. But this just brings me back to the question I asked last time: what's the bloody point of all these lists anyway? Who cares what others think is best, and why do the people who compile them think that anyone else should care? And isn't it

about time you tried answering such questions instead of hoping that if you ignore them they'll go away?

\* If nobody cared, nobody would send me their lists (and more importantly, their explanations of why they chose particular items) and I might even abandon mine. Obviously I consider music, fiction, cinema and the arts of all kinds (individual activities) more important and interesting than politics and sociology (collective activities). Discussion of a person's favourite art objects is a shorthand way of getting to know that person's tastes and interests. It would be much better if each person sent detailed discussions of his or her Favourites, but most people don't have time or energy for the exhaustive approach. \*

(7 October 1991)

Well, a weekend has clearly ambled past there, but it was quite a busy one nevertheless: I spent Sunday typing up the letter column (always the first item to be committed to disk) for the next issue of *FTT*, and still have a bit more to do. Then I must plunge into the

thickets of my own contribution, featuring cyberpunk sf, the nature of the eighties, the peace movement, the reconstruction of Europe, chaos theory, the so-called New World Order, green economics, the cultural significance of paisley shirts and black lycra cycling shorts, and the guitar-jangling mop-haired British independent scene. Which means that this letter will now come to a juddering halt so that my absolutely undivided attention can be claimed by the selfsame next issue of *FTT*.

\* It is indeed a compliment to be insulted so exhaustively. I wish I could discuss all those subjects, but I don't know a lot about them. The only thing I know about is my own life, my own tastes and interests, and those of a few people I see frequently or who write to my magazines. To step outside that framework might make one seem a bit self-important, and I wouldn't want anybody to think that of either you or me. *FTT* remains lively and enjoyable as always, but it's a long time since I've found in it any subject on which I could comment. \*



# WASABE! (If gets up your nose)

In which **BRUCE GILLESPIE** reprints some reviews that he wrote for *The Melburnian* (known as *The Melbourne Report* until recently). Reviews of fantasy and sf books will appear in the next *SF Commentary*.

## MILLENNIUM

edited by Helen Daniel  
(Penguin pb; \$A14.95)

## PERSONAL BEST 2

edited by Garry Disner  
(Collins Imprint lpb; \$A16.95)

Recent anthologies by Helen Daniel (*Expressway*) and Garry Disner (*Personal Best*) were so enjoyable that perhaps I expected a bit too much from their new books.

*Expressway*, you may remember, arose from Helen Daniel's invitation to a large number of Australian writers to use Jeffrey Smart's painting *Cahill Expressway* as the stimulus for pieces of fiction. Some stories suggested specific reasons why the little man was standing at the entrance of the Cahill Expressway. Other writers alluded to the painting in only the most indirect way. The result was a lively collection of stories.

For her new collection *Millennium*, Helen Daniel has overestimated either the stimulating power of her central idea, or the writing ability of her authors. Something has gone wrong.

Daniel's starting point, 'The Millennium', is both too woolly and too concrete an idea to stir the imaginations of her writers. The Millennium — the end of the second thousand years AD — is only a few years away. Either nothing much will change throughout the world in that time, or we will experience another year like 1989, in which everything changes. It's not like asking authors in 1954 to write about the year 2000. You can't let your imagination go anymore.

But even that limitation should have stimulated a more exciting bunch of stories than the ones we find here. Australian writers have a deep fear of imagination, of speculation about the future. At least Judith Brett is honest; the title of her essay is 'In Which I Fail to Imagine the Future'. Author after author offers oddly flaccid little poetic notions instead of engaging pieces of fiction. I kept waiting for somebody to

write a meaty story about something — anything.

*Millennium* does contain the occasional enjoyable story. But is David Brooks' 'The Moon' (by far the most impressive piece in the collection) about the upcoming millennium or the one that happened a thousand years ago? And if the story is set in 1000 AD, is Brooks merely responding to an anthology framework that was much too fuzzy in the first place?

If I were editing an anthology called *Millennium*, I would of course ask Australia's science fiction writers first. The future is their business. Only three of Australia's sf writers — Damien Broderick, Victor Kelleher and Rosaleen Love — appear here, and none of the three seems to rise to the occasion. Surely George Turner, Greg Egan or Lucy Sussex could have run rings around most of the authors in this volume?

The surprise of the collection is (as far as I know) Dinny O'Hearn's first and only venture into fiction. 'Caveat' is a jolly satirical romp that gets in under my definition of future fiction. The other stories I enjoyed, such as Joan London's 'Letter to Constantine' and Georgia Savage's 'Colour Me Vietnam', don't seem to have much to do with the book's theme, but are worth reading.

*Personal Best 2* is a much more successful collection than *Millennium*, but perhaps does not have the sparkle of the first *Personal Best*. A comparison between the collections shows much about what is good and bad about contemporary Australian writing.

I count sixteen stories in *Personal Best 2* that are wholly successful, and many of them are brilliant. (The score for *Millennium* was only six out of forty-one.) Nearly all the successful stories in *Personal Best 2* are based on incidents from the childhood or youth of the author. The *Millennium* authors, cut off from this anchor of memory, drift off. The authors in *Personal Best 2* cling to their anchors. When will Australian writers stop needing anchors?

The gimmick of *Personal Best 2* is the

same as for the first volume. Garry Disner asked each author to nominate her or his favourite story, and supply an explanation for that liking. In the first volume this idea got a bit out of hand. At least one author wrote an introduction that was longer than the story itself. In the second volume, the introductions have been kept down to about a thousand words each.

Australian writers dive back into the past with great alacrity; it's only the future that defeats them. Janette Turner Hospital's 'The Mango Tree' is a breathtaking exploration of what it's like to grow up a Queenslander. The author's introduction, showing how the story relies on memory and escapes from it, is also enjoyable. Much the same comment could be made about many of the other stories, including Rod Jones's 'The Blue Man', Michele Nayman's 'High Water in Venice' and John Hanrahan's 'Beneath the Hanging Tree'.

The best piece of writing in the book is not a story, but an introduction: Judy Duffy's account of how her dying father handed the torch of creative optimism to her. The story that accompanies the introduction, 'According to Mrs Maloney', is also memorable.

Why can't Australian writers escape the dark tendrils that grow up from their earliest memories? Why can't they jump the tree — themselves — and fly a bit? Should we worry about this, or wait for the process of maturation to take its own course?

Maybe the answers will be in *Personal Best 3*, which I hope is already in preparation.

THE HOLE THROUGH THE  
CENTRE OF THE WORLD  
by Kevin Brophy  
(Simon & Schuster fpb;  
\$A16.95)

Kevin Brophy is one of the few interesting prose stylists in Australia. Like Gerald Murnane, Kate Grenville, Liam Davison and a few others, he has

mastered the *faux naïf* manner of writing, the pose of the 'perfect fool', the narrator whose mind seems simple but whose simplicity is a mask for penetrating perceptions.

In his second novel *Visions*, Brophy's mask was that of the obsessed girl who takes the darker precepts of her religious faith just a bit too seriously. The result was in places terrifying.

In *The Hole through the Centre of the World*, Brophy has retreated to a less disturbing mask: a drifter adolescent male, Martin Gaasland. The temptation is to mistake Martin's voice for Brophy's. Brophy counters this with much humour, mainly at the expense of Gaasland's personality and worldview.

Martin Gaasland is a bit of a fool, but more importantly, he's a character who can't let himself feel anything. Like the rest of his family — his father Erno and his mother Val — he invested all his feelings, positive and negative, in his baby brother Daniel. Daniel was the golden boy of the family. One day Daniel slipped away from his brother's care and slipped down a hole in the ground (the first of this novel's 'holes through the centre of the world'). Nobody could rescue Daniel before he died. The family died with him, gradually falling apart. Val Gaasland leaves, and becomes a radical protester. Erno Gaasland, full of endless gasbagging optimism, is given a work assignment to sell chairs to China.

All this seems mundane material, but this is no realist novel. Martin Gaasland's distracted view of the world converts everything into a surrealist fable. His father Erno, who dominates the book, behaves like a Salvador Dali of international commerce. His fantastic theories and manic energy fill up the holes in his son's world. The trip taken by Erno and Martin through China makes the reader feel as if watching a painting by de Chirico. Everything is clear to the view, yet nothing quite makes emotional sense.

It becomes clear that Erno is suffering from terminal cancer, even while he pulls off one of the great chair deals of the century. His courage under suffering is memorable. His son, always the belittler of his father, is reduced to nothing by Erno's grace under pressure. When Erno dies, Martin has no emotional centre in his life. He is the unfilled hole at the centre of his own world.

Unfortunately, Brophy has no idea

what to do with his narrator once all the interesting characters have died or disappeared. We expect an epiphany, a moment of clarity, but it doesn't arrive. *The Hole at the Centre of the World* is not the great novel it might have been, but I look forward to Kevin Brophy's next book.

**OVAL DREAMS**  
by Brian Matthews  
(McPhee Gilblie pb:  
\$A14.95 np)

Did I expect too much from Brian Matthews' new volume of essays? Of course. His recent book of short stories, *Quickening and Other Stories*, was so enjoyable that I was looking for another swirl of the Matthews pen. *Oval Dreams* has much of the Matthews wit, but in general it is a badly focused, disappointing book.

Why this book?

Why this peculiar mixture of writings?

At its worst, *Oval Dreams* gives the impression that Melbourne-born Adelaide-based academic Brian Matthews has slung together every essay he can put his hands on, hoping they would make a book. The reader who would appreciate sensitive essays about football and cricket will loathe the academically arch 'Biographical Discourse under a Gum Tree'. The reader who, like me, appreciates Matthews' hilarious account of his first attempt to chair a session at an Adelaide Writers Week ('Falling Down in Adelaide') could be a bit bored by detailed analyses of the Nine Network's cricket stuff-up.

No, the miscalculation is worse than that. The best writing in this book is about the organisation and playing of cricket and football. Even I, a lifetime avoider of football and cricket games, can tell that. There is a literary value in Matthews' deep outrage at Channel Nine's cricket shenanigans that goes far beyond the interests of followers of the game. In several essays, Matthews celebrates the wonders of Australian Rules football so effectively that he might even tempt me to a match once before I die.

Why, then, did Matthews not write a real sports book? Many Australian sports fans would welcome the sort of book that Brian Matthews could write if he set his mind to it.

But any well-read sports fan who

finds *Oval Dreams* will make little of the trivial self-indulgence of the pieces on 'Suits' O'Sullivan, or the pretentious crap about current literary theories. They belong in another book.

Skim *Oval Dreams* and enjoy it. It is pleasing enough in its way, but it won't satisfy any of its intended audiences. Find the bits that please you.

But whoever you are, read 'Small Boy's St Kilda', the one essay in *Oval Dreams* that is unmissable.

**KICKBACK**  
by Garry Disher  
(Allen & Unwin pb: \$A12.95)

How refreshing to read *Kickback*, a new Australian crime novel written by a professional writer (not an academic) who is not turning out yet another imitation of the novels of Peter Corris.

Garry Disher's *Kickback* will be welcomed by everybody who has winced their way through other recent Australian crime novels. If you are sick of flashy prose and brilliant but incomprehensible plots, you will enjoy this book. You might even find, as I did, that it is 1991's best Australian novel.

Other reviewers have praised Disher's cool, gritty prose and his startling evocation of the back streets of Melbourne. That's true enough. But even more enjoyable is a story in which every move is surprising but makes overall sense.

Essentially *Kickback* is a brilliant play on the Charley Varrick theme. (You might remember *Charley Varrick*, the 1973 movie that starred Walter Matthau and Joe Don Baker.) Wyatt is a professional criminal who is tricked into stealing a haul that is much too valuable for him to handle by himself. He shakes off the organisation that also wants the haul, but reckons without the lone idiot criminal who is also after his blood.

This is much too simple a version of a tense story that works believably. Wyatt is (of course) set up by Anna Reid, the delectable woman, but he does not realise that he is also cursed by the attentions of Sugarfoot Younger. This punk crook may be so dense that he believes *Sixty Minutes* is complicated, but he can do a lot of harm.

Wyatt's weakness is that he believes himself a cynic, but he is actually an idealist. All he wants to do is pull the perfect job and settle down to a peaceful rural retirement. *Kickback*

is the story of how one man discovers that almost everybody is more cynical and much nastier than he is. A bleak view of humanity and of Melbourne, but convincing.

**WOODBROOK**  
David Thomson  
(Vintage pb; \$A14.95)

Perhaps the aim of cover blurbs is to persuade the reader that a nice, safe experience may be found within. 'Woodbrook' is simply one of the most enchanting books I've read in a long time,' writes Seamus Heaney on its front cover, which shows a Georgian mansion seen through trees. The back cover tells us that 'Woodbrook is a huge house that gives its name to a small, rural area in Ireland. ... In 1932 David Thomson, aged eighteen, went there as a tutor. He stayed for ten years.'

We know about such books. We receive them often from Australian publishers. A writer of some ability tells fondly of a succulent time in his or her youth: an affectionate memoir, a 'good read'.

It is difficult to point to the passage that first shows that *Woodbrook* is much more than a 'good read'. The first few pages are pleasant enough, showing David Thomson getting used to a household in which he is tutor to two girls in their early teens. Schoolwork seems to occupy few hours of the day; he learns much about the countryside by riding out with the girls and their parents in the surrounding hills. Thomson has an almost supernatural ability to create the sounds, sights and smells of this area.

Disturbances creep into Thomson's narrative.

From the beginning he hints that his stay at Woodbrook ended abruptly and tragically. He tells us the story of the Kirkwoods, his hosts — of the strange life of the British who ran the Indian Empire, the marriage that nearly didn't happen, the perpetually perilous financial situation of the estate, and the tale of the breeding horse whose success seems to guarantee the Kirkwoods' income.

Thomson admits that he, an eighteen-year-old when he joined the household, was always in love with Phoebe, one of his charges. This barely matters while Phoebe remains very young, but becomes important to the

household (though almost nothing is said) when Phoebe reaches her mid-teens. Thomson's vivid recollections of events at Woodbrook are made all the sharper because he can always recall the exact actions and reactions of Phoebe when any of them happened.

A man in the grip of an endless unexpressed first love seems incredible today, and we never find out why Thomson failed to claim Phoebe once they were both of age. The reason, one suspects, was that Thomson, however dear a friend of the family, was not one of their class.

Much of *Woodbrook* is taken up with class — or rather, the sorry history of Ireland that gave the Kirkwoods such a peculiar position in its society. Thomson's account of Irish history is passionate and uncompromising. The unremitting cruelty of the English towards the Irish goes back well before Oliver Cromwell. It was Queen Elizabeth who committed the equivalent of the British Government's crime against Australian Aborigines — declaring their entire land area 'terra nullius' (empty land), liable to be settled by any Englishman who could raise the cash and a fighting force to clear away the Irish peasants. Thomson reveals the basic crimes of the English against the Irish, intertwining this story with that of the Kirkwoods. But the Kirkwoods are the last of a long line of oppressors.

In the end it seems appropriate, not merely sad, that they must sell and leave Woodbrook. Thomson would never say it directly, but the impression he gives that although he remembers the Kirkwoods with nothing but affection, they were his enemies, and nothing could ever change that relationship.

Great sadness flows through this book, borne by perfect prose and a mischievous appreciation of the funny side of life at Woodbrook. Minor mysteries remain all over the book (why was Thomson rejected from the army during World War II? did Phoebe ever reciprocate her tutor's love?), giving yet more flavour to this rich meal.

**PAYDIRT**  
Garry Disher  
(Allen & Unwin pb; \$A12.95)

It seems only a few weeks ago that I was writing a review of *Kickback*, the first of Garry Disher's novels about Wyatt, a professional criminal whose

career becomes unstuck. I realise that I was a bit late reviewing *Kickback*, but at the same time I did not expect the sequel to appear quite so soon.

In reviewing *Paydirt*, there is little I can add to my praise of Disher's style and approach. Disher knows how to use the fewest words possible to tell a crowded story, but at the same time never allows his narrative to slip into obscurity.

Wyatt is still on the run from the Outfit, whose plans he unwittingly foiled in *Kickback*. He thinks he has escaped entirely, but a particularly nasty and effective hired killer called Letterman is on his trail. Wyatt thinks he is safe because he is working in a small South Australian country town. Disher's evocation of this landscape is vivid; the countryside itself becomes a character in the book.

Wyatt cannot let old habits die. The local pipe-laying company is careless about delivering the weekly pay packets to its workers. Wyatt sets up an operation to relieve the company of its cash. He does not realise that there might be local small-time crooks who would get wind of his plan and try to beat him to the profits.

Disher's sour joke is that there almost no money left in rural Australia except in crime. Nobody has a job, so everybody is trying to sell something illicit to somebody who also has no money. Wyatt thinks he has escaped big-city crime, only to find it crawling out of the paddocks.

*Paydirt* is a good action novel — although I worry about all those dead bodies left at the end of the novel. They make Wyatt seem inefficient.

*Paydirt* is also a wry social comedy that demonstrates what twenty years of 'dry' economics and poverty have done to rural Australia. I'm impatient to read the next Wyatt novel.

**A SUITABLE VENGEANCE**  
Elizabeth George  
(Bantam pb; \$A10.95)  
**FOR THE SAKE OF ELENA**  
Elizabeth George  
(Bantam hb; \$A29.95)

New mystery writers tumble off the book shelves in such profusion that it's become impossible to keep up with them. The new books all have similar covers; each new series features a particular detective or pair of detectives.

So you have only me to trust when

I say that Elizabeth George is a remarkable new talent in the mystery field, and that I would never have known about her if I had not received her latest two novels as review copies. Which just shows that book reviewing can be fun.

Elizabeth George (real name Susan Elizabeth George, who lives in California although all her work is set in Britain) is not a great stylist. Some of my more recent discoveries in the mystery field, such as Martha Grimes and Reginald Hill, can write the socks off her. Elizabeth George will never use a fine phrase if a clunking cliché will do.

But Elizabeth George is that rarity in the field — a true novelist. *A Suitable Vengeance* is not primarily a puzzle piece, although the answer to the mystery is well worked out. The book is mainly about the detective, his friends, and his family. Of course (and the author who is straightfaced about telling us this) the detective, Thomas Lynley, just happens to be the Eighth Earl of Asherton. And all his friends and relatives are frightfully stiff-upper-lip. Which happens to be the problem. While the ever-so-slightly-lower-class criminals can dash about the countryside getting their revenge and killing off people, the detective can hardly bear to say 'I love you' to his intended without half the family going into hysterics.

This summary makes *A Suitable Vengeance* sound slightly ridiculous. I suppose it would be, if you once put your head up after starting to read it. But this is classy melodrama, with a large cast of interesting characters, and endless human problems to mull over. Somewhere towards the end, somebody or other actually solves the crime.

If I were a suspicious person, I would say that *For the Sake of Elena* was written by somebody other than the author of *A Suitable Vengeance*. The prose is much cleaner, denser, more detailed — altogether more satisfying. Lynley is reunited with his detective sidekick Barbara Havers in a narrative that is more of a traditional crime novel than *A Suitable Vengeance*. Lynley's problems are pushed to the sideline.

*For the Sake of Elena* is still the work of a novelist, rather than a mere plot-pusher. Of course, we are invited to solve the mystery of who killed Elena Weaver while she was jogging on a foggy morning in Cambridge. The solution is worked out well. No complaints.

But the real 'killer' of Elena, regard-

less of whoever did the job, proves to be her father. This we realise about halfway through the book. Lynley and Havers explore ever-widening circles of people who have been affected by the conflict that had raged between the ambitious Cambridge academic and his deaf daughter. Between them, they seem to have given half of Cambridge good reasons for exacting revenge on both of them.

*For the Sake of Elena* is actually about failing and broken marriages, step-children and step-parents, and the near impossibility of men and women finding common ground in their search for love. This book has a deep, true tone that will ring in the mind long after the reader has forgotten the solution to the crime.

#### DEATH AT VICTORIA DOCK

Kerry Greenwood  
(McPhee Gribble pb;  
\$A11.95)

If you are a reader of Australian books or mystery novels, you probably know by now that Phryne Fisher is the hero of Kerry Greenwood's current series of adventure/detective yarns. *Death at Victoria Dock* is the fourth of them.

Probably you also know by now that Phryne Fisher is a private detective in Melbourne during the 1920s, that she is remarkably beautiful (of course), fabulously wealthy (for reasons not recounted in this volume) though once poor, and that her sympathies are for battlers and people down on their luck. She seems to have an endless supply of lovers and hangers-on.

Fisher does not look for cases for detection; they roll up at the door. In *Murder at Victoria Dock*, she investigates two separate crimes. On the one hand, she has been shot at while driving past Victoria Dock. Another shot from the same volley hits a man who dies in Phryne Fisher's arms. She swears vengeance. On the other hand, a rich buffoon wants her to find his missing daughter.

Greenwood's prose is delightfully spare and vivid. However, elegant sentences cannot hide the central triviality of *Death at Victoria Dock*. For a mystery novel to be enjoyable, it must tease the reader with at least the possibility that the detective might not solve the mystery. There must be a real sense of danger and perplexity.

Phryne Fisher need only snap her

fingers for vast squads of people to help her. Men fall into her arms. All mysteries are solved easily.

With regret, I say: ho hum. I look forward to a time when Kerry Greenwood stretches her literary muscles and gives to her books the emotional power that is missing in *Death at Victoria Dock*.

#### THE ANCESTOR GAME

Alex Miller  
(Penguin pb: \$A14.95)

Should fiction be written by fiction writers?

Critics argue that fiction remains valuable because it is the truest reflection of our world. Fiction writers, however, often give the impression of being stuck-away, highly strung characters who would do anything rather than take a long look at the real world. Solitude and sensitivity go with the territory, but they make unreliable witnesses.

Take Alex Miller's *The Ancestor Game*, for example. The contemporary world described in this novel is not mine. Much as I would like to mooch around, discussing literature and art, the real world grabs me by the scruff of the neck and drags me away from such activities.

In Miller's novel, however, three people who meet when teaching at the same school spend long and rather tedious chapters meditating on the finer things of life. They are Steven, his friend Lang Tzu, and Gertrude Speiss. They circle each other warily. The exact nature of their relationship is difficult to work out. In his family home in Coppin Grove, Richmond, Lang stores artifacts from his family's past. Steven is fascinated by the artifacts and a diary. From these he begins to discover the story of Lang's Chinese past.

These characters live in a world of their own, made as remote as possible by Miller's long sentences. As reader, I felt as if I were trying to make out outlines in an attenuated impressionistic painting. These people are not alive, I felt; they are Characters in a Novel.

Suddenly in this colourless painting I find a gleam of light. This light bursts out of its corner and fills most of the frame. This is the 'real' novel within the lifeless framing device. This is the story of Lang's childhood and the story of his ancestors on both sides of his

family.

When Alex Miller writes about China, *The Ancestor Game* gains all the life and spirit that is missing in dank Coppin Grove. Skip over the bits about Steven and his incomprehensible friends, and enjoy the epic story of Feng, the man with no sons. In the disintegrating China of the late 1920s, he marries a strong-willed wife who gives him two still-born sons. As she reaches full term a third term, she returns to Hangzhou to visit her father. With her goes her friend and doctor, August Speiss.

As we discover, these actions break Chinese tradition. In Shanghai, Lien is the wife of an enterprising capitalist, born in Australia, who cares nothing for Chinese tradition. In Hangzhou, she becomes again the daughter of Huang, a great calligrapher, keeper of the family secrets and traditions. Dr Speiss, confined in Huang's house, goes for a walk in the old town of Hangzhou, discovering too late how severely he has broken tradition.

After a difficult labour, Lien bears a male child, Lang Tzu. This child is caught between the conflicting values of his father and his grandfather, and intertwined with the values of his mother who is caught between them. The only real home he knows is the train that takes him regularly from Shanghai to Hangzhou and back again.

To the Melbourne reader, many of the tense situations that arise from these conflicts seem bizarre and enthralling. Through a number of set pieces, Miller shows how the simplest actions can cause havoc in the lives of people who are dedicated to tradition. In the novel's most memorable scene, the ten-year-old seems to turn into a Chinese devil as he destroys everything that his grandfather holds most precious.

The past might be another country, but it is the country in which Alex Miller moves with great assurance. His exotic characters form themselves into grand stories. Fiction becomes the point of life.

But what of our lives in modern Melbourne? Miller appears not to find them of much interest. Have patience. Skip the dull bits in *The Ancestor Game* and you will find a stimulating novel-within-a-novel.

**GUARDIAN ANGEL**  
**Sara Paretsky**  
(Hamish Hamilton fpb;  
\$A17.95)

The V. I. Warshawski adventures by Sara Paretsky are based on a simple but irresistible premise: what would life actually be like for a woman establishing herself as a private investigator in Chicago during the dying stages of the twentieth century?

Paretsky tries to skip all the movie fantasy clichés about private investigators. What kind of job is it for a single woman — fit, intelligent, and feisty, but vulnerable to the pressures that affect single women in modern cities?

Inevitably, Paretsky cannot stick to absolute realism. The result would be tedious. Instead, she chooses Vic Warshawski's more flamboyant cases, the ones in which her hero sustains a bit of damage. But Paretsky remains true to her main character.

In *Guardian Angel*, the best and most recent of the series, Warshawski finds herself drawn herself drawn into a case by misadventure and her own good nature. Her downstairs neighbour Mr Contreras is missing an old friend of his. Nothing very suspicious, but the old buddy seems to have been out of contact for an unusually long time. At the same time, another of her neighbours, the elderly and cantankerous Mrs Frizell, has fallen badly and been taken to hospital. While there, neighbours from across the road persuade her to give them power of attorney. Within a day, they have searched the old lady's house and destroyed her beloved dogs.

These are niggling, enraging and time-consuming problems. They pay no bills. Each is a case of urban nastiness.

However, the old friend of Mr Contreras is found dead in a canal, and Vic's apartment is searched and she is attacked when she tries to solve the problem of Mrs Frizell's missing documents.

Inevitably, the two stories are bound together, and Warshawski finds herself in danger from powerful attorneys and insurance bosses. What lifts *Guardian Angel* above other thrillers is the authenticity of Paretsky's vision of Warshawski as a person and of Chicago as an entity. The accumulation of detail, effortlessly related, makes a wonderful reading experience. We also gain the feeling of being a part of Vic

Warshawski, suffering the sheer exhaustion of investigating a case that sets off alarm bells all around the city.

To me, the modern American thriller has taken the place of the old 'realistic' novel. The clichés of the genre have been renovated by writers like Paretsky. In her hands, they become a superstructure on which she can build a true picture of the corrupt yet invigorating life of the modern city. The V. I. Warshawski novels are essential reading for anybody interested in good fiction, and *Guardian Angel* is a particularly fine example of the series.

**MICKY DARLIN'**  
**Victor Kelleher**  
(University of Queensland  
Press  
hb; \$A29.95)

**TO THE DARK TOWER**  
**Victor Kelleher**  
(Random House Australia  
hb; \$A19.95)

The trouble with writing fiction is, surely, that a fiction writer is an articulate person who is trying to show the lives and thoughts of inarticulate people. That's if the fiction writer makes any claim to be writing about humanity in general. Most fiction writers have been willing to write only about people who are also articulate. As a result, the experience of most people during most centuries has been lost.

Victor Kelleher has solved these problems in *Micky Darlin'*. When first dipped into, it seems an unambitious collection of separate short stories about a poor expatriate Irish family in Britain between the wars. The 'Micky Darlin' of the title is surely a version of young Victor Kelleher. Here is the very bright and articulate lad who comes from that 90 per cent of the world's population usually unnoticed in literature.

At least that's what seems to be happening in this book. The author seems to be saying: 'I was there. I remember. Here is what happened.'

But poor Irish, like rich Irish, have never been inarticulate. They are not people of the closed mouth and steely gaze, like Australian suburbanites. They invent fresh language. No wonder the Irish have produced many writers.

So the 'Micky Darlin' of the book's

title cannot patronise the people he sprang from, even at forty or fifty years' distance. His Nan and Gramps, with whom he lives as a boy, are very strong people. They are certainly too strong for their neighbours and relatives. Feuds and counter-feuds give them their best moments. Life is frequently violent, but rarely dull.

But, as the older, wiser Micky seems to be saying, violence and overabundance unravel lives as well. In the end, Micky's Nan and Gramps cannot triumph, because this world is too enclosed by poverty to allow anybody any life-long satisfaction. Micky escapes, but not until he disappoints most of the people with whom he grows up. He cannot protect Tink, with whom he falls in love, but she has already been made into a prostitute-slave within her own family. He cannot help the spiritually wounded relatives or parents with whom he tries to connect.

Since all these characters have much to say for themselves, how do you prevent them becoming gabby and boring? Victor Kelleher has solved this by self-discipline. He has obviously edited and rewritten these stories until they tell only the essentials. This is prose so finely sliced that it becomes as cutting as poetry.

What relationship then, has the author of *Micky Darlin'* to that of *To the Dark Tower*, the latest in a series of fantasies by the same Victor Keller? Not much. If I had been handed each novel without any details of authorship, I would never have guessed that they had been written by the same man.

The Victor Kelleher of *To the Dark Tower* is awkward and gushing. Often he sounds like an amateur, writing his first novel for adolescents. We find out that the whole action, and not just the dream sequences, takes place on an alternate Earth. But even this alternate Earth has no substance to it. It is just a construct, a gimcrack scaffolding on which the unconvincing characters can clamber.

I don't understand the difference between the two novels written by the same author, unless *To the Dark Tower* is a very early novel pulled from a desk drawer to meet market demands. *Micky Darlin'* has already been chosen for the short list of one of Australia's major literary awards. The honour is deserved. Let's hope the judges don't also read *To the Dark Tower*, and scratch their heads as I have done.

**TRILOGY OF DEATH  
(AN UNSUITABLE JOB FOR A  
WOMAN  
INNOCENT BLOOD  
THE SKULL BENEATH THE SKIN)  
P. D. James  
(Penguin pb; \$A17.95)**

About ten years ago, *Innocent Blood* made me a P. D. James convert. I didn't read any more of her books for some years. Today I would be one of the few people who believe that P. D. James does not deserve her extraordinary reputation as the currently reigning queen of British mystery fiction.

But *Innocent Blood* has lost none of its power. It's just that it is very much better than any of the other P. D. James books that I've read. It is one of the few British crime books in which the viewpoint character is the criminal. I realise that American crime writers have been doing this sort of thing for years, but nobody has managed quite that deft combination of sympathy and horror that James brings to the killer in *Innocent Blood*.

The other strength of the book is that it is one of the few British books of any genre to give a picture of ordinary British suburban life. British novels have always been set in pastoral fields or rich city or country houses. *Innocent Blood* is one of those few books to admit that anybody in Britain lives in anything but tapestried halls.

P. D. James did her dash with *Innocent Blood*. *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* and *The Skull Beneath the Skin* are well and truly back in the territory of murder among the rich and snobby. Both books are saved from terminal stiff upper lip by their detective, Cordelia Gray.

When he commits suicide, Cordelia Gray's boss bequeaths to her his detective agency. In *Unsuitable Job*, Cordelia Gray tries to save the firm from bankruptcy by agreeing to find out why the son of a rich family killed himself. He didn't, of course. He was murdered. Soon everybody is trying to stop Gray finding out anything. By novel's end we and Cordelia Gray know the murdered son better than we ever get to know any of the characters who remain alive.

*The Skull Beneath the Skin* bears no such charms. In this all-too-typical of the British murder mystery, Cordelia Gray is just another detective hired to investigate a murder among a group of snobby and nasty upper-class British

twits. Gray's methods are ingenious, but by the novel's end we could hardly care less if none of them survived the experience.

Read this book, then with a sigh of relief proceed to the novels of Martha Grimes and Elizabeth George. Or even back to Agatha Christie or Dorothy Sayers, who were much more fun than anybody writing today.

**CHRISTINA STEAD:  
A BIOGRAPHY  
Hazel Rowley  
(William Heinemann  
Australia hb; \$A49.95)**

So rapturous have been the other reviewers for Hazel Rowley's biography of Christina Stead that surely it remains only for me to add the footnote 'I agree. Buy this book.' Or can any review be as simple as that?

Every other reviewer assumes, it seems to me, Christina Stead's importance in the pantheon of Australian great novelists, yet she remains the least read of them. Until the mid 1970s, only *The Man Who Loved Children* could be found easily in Australian bookshops, and some of Stead's books are still hard to find. For decades Australian critics dismissed her work because she lived in and wrote about America, Britain and Europe. Pressed to describe why Stead is great, even the most articulate of our current critics might find themselves mumbling.

It is Hazel Rowley's great achievement that not only does she let us feel that we have met Christina Stead at each stage of her long life but that she demands we become reacquainted with the books. Yet the single word that describes both Stead and her works is 'difficult'.

"Christina Stead was the most uncomfortable guest we have ever had," says Clem Christesen candidly. This one sentence (page 531) summarises Stead, the most uncomfortable guest this world has ever had. Born in 1902 to an extrovert father and a mother who died when her daughter was very young, Christina seems always to have been a stranger in the world. Her hatred for her stepmother is reflected in the demonic character of Henny in *The Man Who Loved Children*. The garrulous Sam Pollitt of that novel, the man who loved to instruct and smother children rather than listen to them, seems to have been an accurate

if bitter portrait of David Stead.

Christina escaped to Europe as soon as she could, but she seems never to have achieved that mellow English contentment that often settles on the shoulders of expatriate Australian writers and artists. Her stay in London allowed her to meet William Blake (then called Blech), an agent for a Parisian bank. Blake and Christina Stead lived together for more than twenty years before he obtained a divorce and married her. They became wanderers, settling in Paris until Blake's bank disintegrated in 1935, then escaping Hitlerism to America, then after World War II escaping McCarthyism back to a worn-out Europe. The two of them somehow survived extreme poverty until the renewed fame of Stead's work in the 1970s coincided with the illness and death of Blake. Return to Australia brought no contentment, but only more wandering until her death.

Hazel Rowley's story of Christina Stead is disconcerting. This is the true story of a writer: neither romance nor riches, no lucky breaks, no reward other than the chance to go on writing. For this is what Christina Stead did all her life: write. Only the death of William Blake stopped her. Into her writing went everybody she met and all of her experiences. Friends whose lives were raided for books sometimes did not speak to her again. In the books, Stead is always the ironic and ferocious commentator, always the outsider. The unalleviated power of the books won much admiration from critics, but little success after 1946 (*Letty Fox: Her Luck*).

Stead's sense of being an outsider was only strengthened by the commitment she and Blake had to Communism. In Hollywood in the 1930s they found themselves among sympathisers; in New York in 1950 they found themselves ostracised, deprived of work and forced to leave the country. Yet Blake never wavered in his Communist faith, and if Stead wavered, she kept this a secret from him and her friends.

Rowley's greatest difficulty is reconciling the many facets of Stead's personality and work. How could so resolute an individualist support a collectivist cause? How could a supporter of the working classes fit so easily among the denizens of well-off society?

The answer is in the writing. If Stead had been merely a recorder of other people's conversations (the most common accusation of unfriendly

critics) her work would not have lasted. If she had been merely a 1930s social realist novelist, her work circumscribed by dogma, her work would have disappeared as utterly as that of many of her contemporaries. Stead's vision was to see any person as both a unique individual and typical of every social force that he or she represented. Stead makes her characters into mythic figures, filled with her own scorn, anger, love and irony. The awful characters are so awful that they are unmissable; the more sympathetic characters are ripe for tragedy. Stead's eyes bore into everything she sees; nothing is softened; in her books the world gains an enormous solidarity that has little to do with the greyness of 'ordinary life'.

Rowley's portrait gives her subject more life than we find in most people we meet. She also gives an account of the books that makes us reach for them, even if we were sure we wouldn't like them much.

*Christina Stead: A Biography* is a wonderful story, to be read in a few sittings, about an uncomfortable subject. With its 100 pages of notes and index, it is also essential for the scholar. All I can do is join the other reviewers in begging you to buy it and read it.

#### CROSSTOWN TRAFFIC

edited by Stuart Coupe,  
Julie Ogden and Robert  
Hood  
(Five Islands Press/Mean  
Streets magazine  
1pb; \$A 16.95)

Australian fiction publishing often seems like an inverted triangle: heavy-weight literary fiction at the top, trying to make ends meet by balancing on the tiny tip of popular fiction at the bottom. In other publishing centres, the triangle is the other way up: popular fiction pays the bills while literary fiction provides the glamour.

*Crosstown Traffic* is a new anthology that thumbs its nose at the old assumptions about Australian fiction. It is an enthusiastic celebration of genre fiction, produced by the editors of the exciting *Mean Streets* magazine.

Better still, it is a celebration of all types of genre fiction: mystery, crime, romance, horror, fantasy, science fiction and the western. The editors, Stuart Coupe, Julie Ogden and Robert Hood, asked their authors to contri-

bute short stories that combine two or more of the popular genres. Since nobody in Australia has attempted this before, I find it disappointing to report that the experiment does not work completely.

Marele Day and Garry Disher, who open the anthology, do not quite enter into its spirit. Day's 'The Kid and the Man from Pinkertons' and Disher's 'My Brother Jack' are more post-modernist meditations on genre fiction than genre stories in themselves. Day makes clever fun of the western in her story; Disher makes fun of Wyatt, his own gritty hero. Entertaining but peripheral pieces.

Steve Wright and Dominic Cadden almost wreck the anthology with their stories. Wright's 'And Then She Kissed Him' is a very crude combination of *Pix/People* humour and a silly wish-fulfilment theme. Surely, I thought, no editor in the 1990s would accept a story as rotten as this!

Cadden's 'The Big Fairy Tale Sleep' is also crude humour, but of the poorly made variety rather than the semi-pornographic. Combine the crime story and the fairy tale, and you should get a better story than this.

Fortunately I did not give up in despair before I discovered Robert Wallace's 'Blue Groper'. This is one of the best Australian short stories of the year. Wallace introduces his forger/criminal/adventurer hero Essington Holt (*To Catch a Forger* and other crime novels) at the age of ten. How did Holt become such an attractively twisted human being? As a child Holt is invited for summers at a secluded Portsea beach frequented by his rich patrons, the Cassidys. Holt nearly drowns in a rock pool, at the same time undergoing a visionary experience that maims his spirit permanently. His life and innocence are injured. Later, one of his hosts dies near the same pool. Wallace's sinuous prose only helps to undermine Holt's and our assumptions about what 'really' happened to him near that beach. 'Blue Groper' is a brilliant combination of mystery and literary fiction, with just a hint of the supernatural.

If more of the stories had been as well made as Wallace's, I would have liked *Crosstown Traffic* better. Only Bill Congreve's 'I Am My Father's Daughter', an vigorous and convincing Australian vampire tale, has anything like the same pizzazz.

But if some of the stories are limp, the anthology is splendidly produced (if atrociously proofread) and the cover



strikes just the right balance between self-mockery and strutting. I trust that Volume 2 will actually deliver those riches. The *Crosstown Traffic* idea is too good to disappear before it has begun properly.

**FORCE AND FRAUD:  
A TALE OF THE BUSH**  
by Ellen Davitt  
(Mulini Press hpb; \$A29.95)

Where do our favourite books spring from? If we read Tolkien, which fantasists preceded Tolkien? If Asimov, who came before him? If Conan Doyle, who made Sherlock Holmes possible?

It's not very long since university departments began to delve into the origins of the great genre literatures—detective and mystery fiction, fantasy, science fiction, western fiction, and children's books. Often this research has been carried out by isolated enthusiastic scholars who break through the barriers of prejudice that thrown up against 'non-literary' fiction.

Lucy Sussex, a researcher from the University of Melbourne, has already been responsible for the discovery of one precursor of detective fiction: Mary Fortune, who wrote more than 500 short stories for Australian magazines in the mid-nineteenth century.

Now Sussex has found and arranged the republication of Ellen Davitt's *Force and Fraud* (1865), 'outstanding as an early murder mystery novel, almost certainly the first by an Australian. Her achievement is extraordinary when it is considered that Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, generally regarded as the first full-length English mystery novel, was only published in 1860.'

It seems, indeed, that Australia was very important for the invention of the mystery novel. Fergus Hume's famous *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* turns out to be merely one of a number of deft novels that determined the path that mystery fiction would take.

Lucy Sussex's introduction to *Force and Fraud* makes enthralling reading, since it is also the story of the researcher's researches. Davitt was known as a pioneer educationist, but she was also 'a writer, an exhibited artist, and sister-in-law of the famous Victorian novelist Anthony Trollope'. I can't place as much importance on the

latter point as Sussex does, but I found great interest in the story of Davitt's struggles to be an artist and writer, and her struggles to remain alive in an era before the old age pension.

After that introduction, *Force and Fraud* seems not quite as remarkable as Sussex's claims for it, but it is still a notable achievement. Davitt manages that essential mind-shift that transformed the Gothic novel into the mystery novel: she treats the murder as a source of an intriguing puzzle rather than as an occasion for horror. The crusty old squatter of the district is murdered in the bush; nobody regrets his death much, but a visitor who has been courting the squatter's daughter is arrested and charged with the crime.

Davitt's book is not yet entirely a mystery novel, since it's fairly clear from the first few pages who the real culprit must be. However, the spectacular trial of the first suspect could have come from any modern mystery novel; only the fussy and over-long denouement seems dated now.

*Force and Fraud* has many features that have almost disappeared from the modern mystery novel: for example, a lively wit, and a Dickensian enjoyment of ordinary people going about their ordinary lives. I enjoyed most the scenes that show the antics of the people at the inn, who comfort and brighten the lives of the main characters. By contrast, the main characters are a bit solemn.

I can't help wondering where Lucy Sussex's researches will take her next. It would be interesting to know, for instance, the exact path that takes the mystery novel from Davitt and Fortune, through Fergus Hume, to Conan Doyle. Perhaps all the real hard work was done by Australians.

(If *Force and Fraud* is hard to find, write to Mulini Press, PO Box 82, Jamison Centre, ACT 2614.)

**THE GANGES AND ITS  
TRIBUTARIES**  
Christopher Cyrill  
(McPhee Gribble  
pb; \$A14.95)

Twenty-three-year-old Christopher Cyrill's first novel *The Ganges and its Tributaries* is so obviously influenced by the pioneering style of Gerald Murnane, one of his writing teachers at Victoria College, that I found it difficult to read it for its own virtues. But read

it I did, and discovered an author who has triumphed over his training.

Murnane's methodology is so distinctive that it must be difficult for any his students to break free from it. That odd but rigorous combination of self-reference, self-abnegation, indirection and straight-faced whimsy that many of us have enjoyed since the mid-1970s is now becoming an entire school of Australian writing. Christopher Cyrill may well become its most illustrious graduate.

*The Ganges and its Tributaries* is not a story at all, yet it is perhaps the best-told story so far of the extraordinary process by which millions of 'New Australians' have become all-too-obviously Australian in one generation. Perhaps only Judith Waten's *Alien Son* can be compared with it for piquant flavour.

On the day in which the narrator moves from one south-east Melbourne suburb to another, he constructs a pattern in his mind of everything in his life that led to such a simple, yet important move. Born in Australia, he has been surrounded all his life by Indian-born uncles and aunts, who eat and talk grandly. For many years, images of India are at the centre of his life, yet at the moment when he breaks free from it and them, he finds that his entire family has broken free from India. The looming ghost, pictured ingeniously as a cardboard map floating in a pool, decomposes into a soggy paper ghost left lying in a deserted back yard.

None of this is spelled out, of course. The narrator is too busy to spell out anything. Obsessed with Sussanah, the blonde Jewish girl who finally goes 'home' to England, and obsessed by cricket and the possibility that he might be sterile, he seems to sink beneath all the possibilities of his own life. Yet inside him is a peculiar springiness, a refusal to be sucked into the interior meaning of things, that saves him and the novel.

Christopher Cyrill will obviously become a major Australian author, although perhaps not before he has escaped the influence of his illustrious teacher. His own wit and infectious delight in the silliness of life will take him on a long and fruitful journey, I know not where. But what a spectacular send-off!

UP ON ALL FOURS  
Philip Hodgins  
(Angus & Robertson  
pb: \$A16.95)

The best collections of poetry contain some line or couplet or even an entire poem that both summarises everything the poet stands for and surpasses the rest of his or her achievement. In *Up On All Fours*, Philip Hodgins' fourth book of poetry, the poem is 'The New Floor', and the wonderful line emerges in this way:

The poet describes how the hard work of building a new floor gradually catches up with the worker, but the pain is justified by 'the pleasure of knowing how things work and a reminder of the ordinary details involved'. Big technology is no use here; you either get a floor right or you don't.

And, that of course, is a process that resembles writing poetry: 'the lines fit into logics of their own: / ... red gum stumps, then tin caps, bearers, joists, and finally the bare pine boards.'

And here you have it: a collection made up of perfect craft applied to the 'bare pine boards' of words and sentences, experiences and thoughts. In 'The New Floor' Hodgins shows what it's like to work at a poem (or any other piece of art or craft) and get it just right: both the pleasure and the power are on the page in front of us.

This could be said of most of the other poems in this collection. Hodgins does not indulge in obscurity, yet nothing in his poems is simple. But if nothing is simple, neither is anything hidden from the careful reader. In 'A Note from Mindi Station' we are involved in the lonely trek out to the farthest base camp of huge property. You begin to notice much that has slipped your attention: the colours of the soil, the depth of the sky, the flight path of 'the tiny jets ... eight miles up'. Abruptly all your attention is drawn to 'a sparrow hawk hovering there ... the wings had worked themselves into a blur'. Out there on the lonely track you realise that the sparrow hawk's attention is 'fixed in place' on 'one small bird, / which might have been the pivot of the world'.

Each poem in this collection has its own word-pivot, some axis that gives meaning to all other detail. In the first part of *Up On All Fours*, Hodgins is mainly concerned with the cruelty and correctness of life on the Australian

land. It offers few comforts to its participants, but provides endless material for the poet.

Other sections of the collection are a little less interesting. I don't share Hodgins' interest in sport, for instance, and find that some of his attempts at satire are merely that: clever pieces of satire that many other Australian poets could well have written.

Only in the section appropriately called 'The End' does Hodgins return to the subject he has made his own: death and dissolution. 'The Pier' is a complex metaphor for everybody's last days. In 'A Memorial Service', Hodgins tells of a country funeral where the mourners don hackneyed phrases and 'muted fifties suits'. All the dead person leaves behind are the events described in the eulogy, yet even these bald facts enable people to 'think about / their own peculiar list'. The funeral service is justified.

*Up On All Fours* proves again that Philip Hodgins has become Australia's Philip Larkin. I can offer no finer compliment, yet I feel that Hodgins is more interesting than Larkin: he has none of the Englishman's sourness and fear of life; his gaze is more piercing.

Hodgins is a more rewarding poet than anybody else I've read; I can always step with confidence on those 'bare pine boards'.

MURDER AT HOME:  
CRIMES FOR A SUMMER  
CHRISTMAS NO. 4  
edited by Stephen Knight  
(Allen & Unwin pb: \$A16.95)

Recently Professor Stephen Knight has moved from Melbourne to Leicester in England, but somehow he's keeping up with the latest Australian crime and mystery short stories. The fourth of his 'Crimes for a Summer Christmas' series, called *Murder at Home* is the most consistently satisfying of them yet.

Not that this is necessarily a volume by or for the mystery specialist. Most of the stories come from Australian writers with illustrious literary reputations. Only a few of the contributors (Peter Corris, Penelope Rowe and Kerry Greenwood among them) could be called crime 'specialists'. The result is that the reader can take for granted a standard of prose not usually to be found in other popular fiction collections.

But as a reader of crime stories, do

you care a jot about the careful prose style of each story and the literary credentials of its author? Surely the mystery's the thing. Perhaps.

Garry Disher's 'Trusthouse', the best story in the collection, hits the reader with great power because the author has taken the trouble to shape each sentence meticulously. Every year a group of well-off country children take their holidays at a South Australian seaside resort. Every year they play with and taunt the family of poor children who also attend the same resort. A strange man follows them around. They agree to be wary of him, but are as fascinated by him as he is by them. The last paragraph is a masterpiece of indirect shock: what really happened, and to whom?

My other favourite story, Elizabeth Stead's 'Twisty Turny Bertie Twine', is also a masterpiece of inferred horror. The storyteller seems innocent enough, but we also realise he's round the twist. We're poised for the ending, but we're knocked from our feet anyway.

As the book's subtitle infers, these are stories of crime rather than detection. There are a few exceptions. Kerry Greenwood's 'The Voice is Jacob's Voice' is as light and well-made as the other Phryne Fisher soufflés. Nice, but unsatisfying.

Far more interesting is a story like Robert Wallace's 'Inheritance', in which the implications of the crime do not hit us until well after we've finished reading the story.

Other contributors include John Baxter, Gillian Mears, Marion Halligan, John Sligo, Marele Day ('Mavis Levack's One Night Stand', a jolly piece of illicit fun), Brian Castro, Michael Stephens, Archie Weller, and Lucy Sussex ('The Monster Regiment', a romp from an author who relishes crime's comic possibilities). They all have a taste for flavoursome language as well as derring-do. Every home should have *Murder at Home*.

INTIMATE ARMAGEDDONS  
edited by Bill Congreve  
(Five Islands Press pb;  
\$A14.95)

I wish I could like *Intimate Armageddons* better than I do. Bill Congreve is one of a band of enthusiastic writers and editors who are seeking to make horror fiction a major force in Australian writing. *Intimate Armageddons*

includes most of the people are currently working in the field. If their enterprise is to succeed, they will need to make major improvements.

Perhaps the fault lies in this particular reviewer. When it comes to horror fiction, I represent the general reader, not the aficionado. It seems to me that there are certain clichés of the field that the diehard horror fan expects and enjoys. These clichés are littered through these stories: gory death that is signalled so that you can enjoy it when it arrives; the ritual stalking of the entirely innocent victim; the catch in the writer's throat as his hulk is about to hurl itself at you. I won't name particular stories for fear of arousing their authors to retribution.

The kind of horror story I like is the piece of fiction in which all seems safe on the surface; in which the surface is troubled, then broken only in the most subtle patterns; in which the true horror of emerging nemesis bursts upon the reader only in the story's last few sentences. Subtlety is all.

Unfortunately, few of Congreve's authors have heard of subtlety. Murders are violent, graphic and inconsequential. Horrors don't mean much. The only satisfying story in the book, Rosaleen Love's 'Holiness' is so subtle that it should not be called a horror story at all. Terry Dowling ('They Found *The Angry Moon*') does his best with creaking material, but even his skill cannot patch together a story out of tattered old rags.

The others? It's their choice to write junk. It's my choice to recommend other people not to read it. If Congreve's authors want to appeal to an unformed adolescent mind whose ideas of life and death are derived entirely from late-night movies and old comics, they can go that direction, and sink. If they have any ambitions to break into the general literary market, they will have to improve enormously.

**COMPLICITY**  
by Iain Banks  
(Little Brown hb; \$A29.95)

More than any other part of Britain, Scotland did worst out of the Thatcher era. The economists said so. The voters said so. (The Conservatives almost disappeared from the Scottish electoral map). And now here's Scottish novelist Iain Banks to say so.

Not that Banks's new novel *Com-*

*plicity* seems to mention politics. Cameron Colley, its viewpoint character, is too busy ingesting drugs, chasing women, and writing flashy newspaper stories to worry about the state of the nation.

Which is the author's point, of course. Banks allows us to glimpse inside the fascinatingly awful mind of Cameron Colley while giving us a clear idea of how much Colley never sees. Colley is so busy protecting his own back that he cannot detect the vulnerability of himself or the few people he values.

Colley's narrative is interrupted by fragments of a viewpoint that is even more ghastly. Someone, perhaps male, perhaps female, perhaps even Cameron Colley, is murdering well-known British people. The murders are well planned. They are usually preceded by intricate forms of torture. Banks tells us about them in detail. We wait until the end of the novel to find out the murderer.

We know, but the police don't, that Colley cannot be the murderer. But he might be. He has no scruples in his public or private life. He'll do anything for a story or a sample of a new leisure drug. He screws his best friend's wife. His life revolves around himself, his love affair, and a computer game. The murderer's life, we guess, revolves around choosing a victim and inventing some bizarre form of execution. Colley is the only one who can track down the murderer because he is the only person who can second-guess his or her way of thinking.

In concentrating on obsessive characters, Banks portrays a fragmented nation, a world of ferocious individuals who no longer have a sense of one another. Some people are rich; some merely ambitious; many others have become fringe dwellers. Banks does not say that this world of the late 1980s was created by its leaders; indeed, he hints that the leaders were created by a nation of bankrupt souls.

Is Banks also part of the complicity? Probably. When he visited Australia, he confessed during an interview to a love of mayhem in his novels. An evil Britain provides a sardonic playground for such mayhem. Nothing and nobody is nice here, but *Complicity* is very entertaining.

**ANGELS & INSECTS**  
by A. S. Byatt  
(Vintage pb; \$A14)

Like many readers, I came to *Angels and Insects* soon after reading A. S. Byatt's Booker Prize-winning novel *Possession*, and was very disappointed. Surely, it seemed to me, the two novellas 'Morpho Eugenia' and 'The Conjugal Angel' that comprise *Angels & Insects* were written before *Possession*, and not after it?

Several months after reading both books, my sense of disappointment has not diminished. *Angels & Insects*, both of whose novellas are set in mid-Victorian Britain, arises from the same interests that gave enormous energy to *Possession*. But why is *Angels & Insects* very much the inferior book of the two?

In both *Possession* and *Angels & Insects*, A. S. Byatt is concerned with that conflict between high-mindedness and sensuousness during the mid-nineteenth century, a conflict that broke people apart and often made them seem mad when they were trying to be audacious and serious. In *Possession*, sexual fidelity and poetic ambition were the millstones that crushed its Victorian lovers. In 'Morpho Eugenia', sexual fidelity is part of a three-cornered contest of which the other two contestants are scientific ambition and the mundane need to survive. In 'The Conjugal Angel', madness and sanity contend. Madness is represented by spiritualism; sanity, again, by a mournful kind of sexual fidelity.

In *Possession*, however, Byatt finds a perfect story to contain all the forces she lets loose. The story of the modern lovers, whose researches lead them to found out about the Victorian lovers, contains mystery upon mystery, with each revelation leading to further questions and surprising answers. In *Angels & Insects*, neither story is strong enough to make use of its material.

In 'Morpho Eugenia', William Adamson is a scientific explorer who needs to raise funds for his next expedition. He studies exotic insects. Without funds, he finds himself adopted by the Alabasters, a rich family who occupy an estate in the country. The adoption becomes permanent; he marries Eugenia, one of the daughters of the family. Somehow he never quite returns to his voyages. He continues his researches, however, and comes to realise that the household

that has absorbed him resembles an ant's nest. At the end of the story he discovers the horrifying truth of this metaphor.

The trouble with the story is that Byatt's principal interest, like Adamson's, is the world of insects. Take away the metaphor, and the story and its characters become part of a very conventional romance with a twisted 'surprise' end. The people have little of the independent life that Byatt gives her characters in *Possession*.

'The Conjugal Angel' is even more difficult to like. Lilius Papagay is a down-to-earth spiritual medium who finds herself surrounded by loony clients. The works of Swedenborg are their Bible; spiritualism has taken over the energy that many Victorians otherwise gave to conventional religion. Swedenborg's world is densely populated by angels, demons, and the wandering souls of the dead. When these souls begin to take shape during Mrs Papagay's seances, she becomes distressed, and so does the reader. The monstrous angels are very weird; since I don't know my Swedenborg, I can only guess their significance. In places sanity almost disappears from the narrative.

Again, Byatt seems to have become so entranced by Victorian researches that she has had great trouble absorbing esoteric information into a coherent structure. In 'The Conjugal Angel', the story disappears for pages at a time. So did my attention level.

I hope that *Angels & Insects* was actually written before *Possession*, since like many readers I am awaiting a worthy successor to the latter book. *Angels & Insects* is not it.

WHERE I'M CALLING FROM:  
THE SELECTED STORIES  
Raymond Carver  
(Harvill/HarperCollins hb;  
\$A35)

I must admit that I've put off writing this review for a month or two. What can I say about the stories of Raymond Carver that has not been said before? Since Robert Altman picked nine Carver stories to be filmed as *Short Cuts*, almost everybody, including

Altman himself, has become an instant expert on this American author.

Where *I'm Calling From: The Selected Stories* was, I'm sure, planned and published before Robert Altman's film *Short Cuts* was released. Don't confine yourself to the nine stories, but tackle *Where I'm Calling From*, 431 pages of work from every period of Carver's writing life.

And don't believe everything that other people say about these stories. He's much more interesting than that.

Carver's fiction, we are often told, comes from the school of 'realism', or even 'dirty realism'. Carver's importance, we are led to believe, is in the way he accumulates details to give us a picture of ordinary life among lower-middle class American people during the last quarter-century. Just another bloody journalist?

This view is nothing more than a variation on the old saw that the upper and middle classes are interesting and the lower classes are boring. If you take this view, fiction about the upper and middle classes can be romantic, introspective, or deeply intellectual. Stories about the lower orders can only be 'realistic'; in other words, boring but well observed.

Now Raymond Carver was a lower-middle class man who suffered from alcoholism and hard times: what Australians call a 'battler'. He had no reason to 'study' his fellow creatures. If he featured them in fiction, it was because they were the people he knew. Carver fiction was Carver fiction, not 'lower-middle class fiction'.

What do we actually find in Carver's fiction? Intense romanticism rather than dissection. He catches people at the moment when their lives change, when they become aware of each other and of what is happening in their own minds.

'The Student's Wife' abruptly realises the emptiness of her marriage. Carver gives to her waking moment the intensity of that similar moment in James Joyce's 'The Dead'.

In 'Put Yourself in My Shoes' a couple turn up at a gathering. To the host couple, they are acquaintances whose significance has been forgotten over time. To the guests, the hosts are malevolent petty criminals, their crime as fresh in memory as the moment when the two couples last saw each

other. The moment of confrontation is disturbing.

In 'What's in Alaska?', two couples get together to share a hookah. To the rich literature of drunkenness, Carver adds a very funny marijuana story.

In 'So Much Water So Close to Home', a story made famous by Paul Kelly's CD of the same name, an insensitive action of the husband leads a woman to reconsider every aspect of her marriage. She comes to see it as a kind of horror story, but we feel that this revelation will enable her to change the shape of the rest of her life.

Carver's stories are about those moments, both dazzling and dark, when the mind changes itself, when a person becomes something else, perhaps worse, perhaps better. Intense excitement is their tone, not the dull notations of the sociologist.

Not that I'm berating you and the critics for being imperceptive about Carver. You can be excused for not catching the drift of these stories. Most of them are very short. You notice the pasted-on details, the flat declaration of the short sentences, the rejection of obvious emotions. The early stories finish abruptly: life sliced off in thin bits.

But look again at the stories: the way in which every sentence adds to and deepens the intensity of the feeling; the sudden surprises in the action; the extraordinary distance that the writer, characters and reader travel in a few pages. And what about the endings? To me they feel like shooting off the end of a ski jump. Fly or fall; it's up to the reader.

In his last few years, Carver changed his approach slightly. The stories become longer, and the endings are extended and given new shape. The best story in *Where I'm Calling From* is 'Elephant', one of Carver's last stories. 'I kept on walking,' says his main character at the story's ending. 'Then I began to whistle. I felt I had the right to whistle if I wanted to. I let my arms swing as I walked.' This is a new Carver, a writer I wish had stayed alive. Death claimed him recently at the age of 50, but he leaves us these astonishing stories.

— Bruce Gillespie, 1991-94

**DAVE LANGFORD**, who has won several Hugo Awards for Best Fan Writer, is best known in Australia for editing and publishing *Ansible*, the monthly British sf newsletter, and for his column 'Critical Mass' that has been appearing in *SF Commentary*. Dave is a professional writer, computer consultant, and probably much else beside.

The following columns were written for *Million* magazine, which has now merged with *Interzone*. *Million* dealt with all the genre literatures: hence the width of range of subject matter in these pieces.

CRIME & MYSTERY FICTION, FANTASY,  
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, HUMOUR,  
AWFUL VERSE

## Slightly foxed: the 'Million' columns

by Dave Langford

### Thud and blunder

ELLERY QUEEN  
JOHN DICKSON CARR  
DOROTHY SAYERS  
SIR ARTHUR CONAN  
DOYLE

The essence of 'Golden Age' detective fiction was that the author should outsmart the reader. However, after smiting your forehead once too often in admiration of all that ingenuity, you could begin to develop a slight headache and hope that sooner or later the wretched authors would outsmart themselves.

It happened fairly often, of course. Dorothy Sayers's fictional mouthpiece Harriet Vane confessed quite cheerfully that she never wrote a whodunit without six major howlers. Some authors would chart their corpse's steady drift down the Thames to sea, forgetting the complications produced by the fact that (as A. P. Herbert testily told them in the 1930s) the river below Teddington is tidal. Others planned murder with electrified doorknobs, chessmen, teapots — with never a thought for a decent earth or return circuit, without which the victim is apt to say, 'I felt a funny tingle', and stroll

on.

Mistakes big enough to ruin the story are rare. Here, though, are four examples from famous authors...

In its early days, the Ellery Queen writing team made a point of using remorseless, watertight logic and playing utterly fair with the reader. It was thus fun to catch the Queens in a massive error of pure logic.

Sure enough, this happened in *The Greek Coffin Mystery* (1932), one of those confections of elaborate false clues and solutions. An important red herring depends on the colour of a red or possibly green silk tie. The confusion arises because... wait for it... a minor character is colour-blind and therefore (the Queens insist) consistently and unambiguously sees red ties as green ones *and vice-versa*.

This is reminiscent of that theory that abnormally tall, thin figures in El Greco's paintings show that the artist suffered from an eye defect, presumably astigmatism, which caused him to see people as oddly tall and thin. Obviously the questions to ask are (a) Assuming the eye trouble, how did El Greco see his own canvas? (b) If someone can always tell red from green, how could he ever get their names mixed up? Having thus reasoned that the 'colour-blind' chap must be a liar and villain, I was disap-

pointed when the inexorable logical analysis never again mentioned him.

It was equally dismaying to fall through the flaw in a book by the late great John Dickson Carr, whose macabre working-up of suspense might sometimes have become clichéd, but who outstripped everyone else in the ingenuity of his eighty-odd variants on the Impossible Crime in the Locked Room.

In *The Case of the Constant Suicides*, alas, Carr's research slipped. 'Carbonic acid gas... one of the deadliest and quickest-acting gases there is' is cunningly administered in a chamber with no gas fittings, no gas cylinders, no chemicals or apparatus which could have produced gas. The idea looked promising and, in 1941, novel. The snag was that Carr got carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide mixed up, and the evil mastermind was supposed to have done his deed by placing, under the bed, a deadly block of quick-acting dry ice.

(In fact, since CO<sub>2</sub> will eventually suffocate you quite as handily as any other near-inert gas, the book could easily have been patched up by dropping the rubbish about 'deadly' and 'quick-acting', and the scene where someone nearly faints at one whiff of the fatal vapour.)



Sometimes, as above, the author's gimmick is no neat that to invoke the real world seems cruel and unfair. The great tragedy of science — the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact. The same tragedy afflicts the book which I suspect is Dorothy Sayers's best, *The Documents in the Case* (1930).

The gimmick of *Documents* appeals hugely to my personal technophilia. Its plot turns on the proving of the 'unprovable' — whether the organic poison in the fatal fungi was natural (making the death a mere misadventure) or a deliberately added, chemically identical synthetic. Enter that little used forensic gadget, the polariscope...

The technical points are that asymmetric, organic molecules will twist the polarisation of transmitted light according to their 'handedness'; that only one of the two mirror-image forms of such a molecule is produced in living tissue; that a synthetic will be an equal mixture of both forms with the left-hand and right-hand 'twists' cancelling out; and that, viewed in the polariscope, the natural poison is thus optically active while the synthetic is inert. No wonder the book's last page has the Director of Public Prosecutions gloomily imagining 'expert witnesses displaying an asymmetric molecule to a jury of honest tradesmen'.

Poor Dorothy Sayers. 'There was nothing wrong with the plot', she said bitterly in 1932, 'except those infernal toadstools.' The selected poison was muscarine, being the reason why the Fly Agaric fungus is not a reliable health food. And muscarine isn't optically active: no version of it, natural or synthetic, would do anything exciting in a polariscope at all.

Sherlock Holmes seemed to have a far

more, dare we say it, elementary lapse in 'The Priory School', where he deduces the direction of travel of a long-gone bicycle from its tracks on open ground: 'The more deeply sunk impression is, of course, the hind wheel, upon which the weight rests. You perceive several places where it has passed across and obliterated the more shallow mark of the front one. It was undoubtedly heading away from the school.'

Presumably, had the front-wheel track overlaid the back one, that would have indicated the opposite direction. But few criminals are so fiendishly cunning as to ride their bicycles backwards.

This time, there's an extra twist. After years of being taunted about these tracks, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle finally went out and experimented with his own bicycle. While admitting that the original deduction was flawed, he defiantly pointed out that 'on an undulating moor the wheels make a deeper impression uphill and a more shallow one downhill, so Holmes was justified of his wisdom after all'.

You know my methods, Watson...

— January–February 1991

## Banned in New York

James Branch Cabell's  
**JURGEN**

There's no more painful route to popularity than having your book clash with real-world prejudice. *The Satanic Verses* is too uncomfortably familiar; the *Lady*

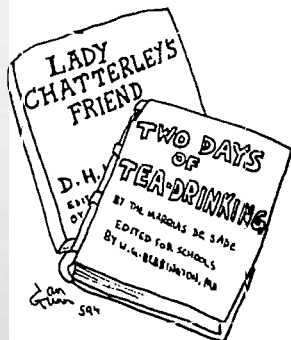
*Chatterley's Lover* trial is still talked about after three decades. But does anyone remember the 1920s prosecution of James Branch Cabell's *Jurgen: a Comedy of Justice*?

This is one of the finest fantasy novels ever written, though now somewhat lost in the modern genre's turbid flood of trilogies. Its tone is polished and ironic, its erudition wonderfully silly (Evelyn Waugh called the book 'that preposterously spurious artefact'), and its message severely moral.

In brief: Jurgen, a failed poet turned pawnbroker, regains his youth and spends it as unwisely as he did the first time round, in a series of regrettable affairs beginning with a Guinevere not yet married to King Arthur. He shamelessly promotes himself from chapter to chapter: 'Preliminary Tactics of Duke Jurgen', 'Shortcomings of Prince Jurgen', 'Economics of King Jurgen', 'How Emperor Jurgen Fared Infernally', 'The Ascension of Pope Jurgen'... Despite having his pick of beauties, he finally chooses to return to the familiar scolding of his wife Dame Lisa, an undoubted ratbag.

How could any moralist object? Enter John S. Sumner of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, who in January 1920 persuaded a Grand Jury to indict Cabell's publishers for selling 'a lewd, lascivious, indecent, obscene and disgusting book entitled *Jurgen*, a more particular description of which said book would be offensive to this Court and improper to be spread upon the records thereof...'. From that point Cabell's fame rose, and his royalties ceased, until the trial in October 1922.

Although *Jurgen* contains not one unequivocally naughty passage, there is a vein of amusing double entendre when Jurgen is (in his favourite phrase) dealing justly with some woman. As Cabell put it in a private letter of 1919, 'Much can be done by starting off the reader with the honest belief that a





sword or a staff is actually being discussed, and then permitting the evildoer, such as you, to become suspicious.'

A casual reader might think it prophetic that in Chapter XXXII the hero is condemned by invaders from 'Philitia' led by a huge, prurient dung-beetle with a retinue of black-and-white-clad pages carrying weapons: 'You are offensive because this page has a sword which I choose to say is not a sword. You are lewd because that page has a lance which I prefer to think is not a lance...' This bit was actually published later as *The Judging of Jurgen*, a joke on Sumner, and incorporated into subsequent editions of *Jurgen* itself.

The publishers, McBride & Co., had already had misgivings, and before publication the author offered a cunning plan: 'I am making six expurgations, with modest asterisks to mark them, in six of the immaculately proper chapters, and am calling attention thereto in the preface as all that was necessary to conform the book to the standards of the most squeamish. Result, the reader will imagine something very horrible indeed to fill in these lacunae, and will take the really ticklish portions for granted as having passed the censor...'

It didn't work. Sumner himself might never have noticed a book which for three editions had been appreciated and reviewed as mere literature. Unfortunately, a troublemaker got into the New York *Tribune* with a gleeful piece about how *Jurgen* 'gets away with murder', and the hunt was on.

The taint of lawsuits like this is that they force defendants into a false position. In 1920 one couldn't say, 'Yes, there are some harmlessly rude double

meanings, and so what?' The defence brief had to insist otherwise, with endless evasions like: 'There is no reason for taking in a wrong sense the reference in the sceptre.'

(Context: 'Emperor' Jurgen is cohabiting with a lovely vampire in Hell. It is pitch dark. 'I was in the beginning suspicious of your majesty', she says, 'because I had always heard that every emperor carried a magnificent sceptre, and you then displayed nothing of the sort. But now, somehow, I do not doubt you any longer.')

So the defence was a tissue of fibs. Had the case gone to the jury, there was a plan to put dodgy passages in context by reading out the entire book. 'The recitation would have taken six and one-half hours,' explained Cabell's friend Louis Untermeyer. 'At the very conclusion, just as [the reader] was tottering from the stand and the jury was being waked by the clerk of the court, I was to tower to my five feet seven and cry *Encore! Encore!*'

But, to balance the bad luck of *Jurgen*'s spicy press coverage, the case was concluded by unexpected good fortune when the judge accepted the plea for a directed acquittal. Yes, he allowed, certain passages were suggestive in a veiled way of immorality, but 'it is doubtful if the book could be read or understood at all by more than a very limited number of readers'. Ah, that's all right then.

Best of all... *Jurgen* pretends to be a translation of mediaeval tales from 'Poictesme' recorded by the non-existent scholar Gottfried Johannes Bulg. Cabell and a pal had in all innocence published a spoof controversy about Bulg. Clearly the judge had read this, and his summing up was influenced by the book's being 'based on the mediaeval legends of Jurgen'. Might he have taken a different line had he known that Cabell made it all up himself, naughty parts included?

Prosecuted by a ridiculous prude, defended by untruths and quite possibly acquitted by mistake, *Jurgen* went on through countless editions. Cabell's next book was respectfully dedicated to his benefactor, John S. Sumner.

A final echo appears in his *Figures of Earth* (1921), whose hero obtains children by a magical ceremony to which not even Sumner could object. He draws three asterisks on the floor and, with his wife, steps decorously over them. Both then await the coming of the stork.

— March–April 1991

## Bound and gagged

Leslie Charteris's  
THE SAINT

Once upon a time, being regularly tied up with stout ropes was not so much a luxury offered by strict disciplinarians in Soho, but more a regular occupational hazard of thriller heroes. And, of course, their girlfriends.

As a plot mechanism, having our hero tied up serves several useful purposes. The writer gets a rest from the exhausting work of writing action-packed adventure. The villain can gloat sinisterly about how this locked cellar will shortly fill with water, gas or rabid hamsters, while the Iron Maiden swings inexorably closed, the concealed time bomb ticks towards detonation, etc. And our hero will presently display his ingenuity by freeing himself with one mighty bound.

But how many ways are there to escape a scientifically knotted cocoon of stout manila rope? For my instant survey I passed over James Bond (who despite his name is not trussed up often enough to be statistically significant) in favour of Leslie Charteris's hero Simon Templar — the Saint. Anticipating postmodernism, the tied-up Saint likes to harangue gloating villains: 'I've got such a lot more to do before the end of the volume, and it'd wreck the whole show if I went and got bumped off in the first story...' (*The Saint vs Scotland Yard*, 1932).

Let us be statistical.

Excluding omnibus volumes, ghastly tv-series and comic-strip fictionalisations, and one disappointing novel ghosted by Harry Harrison of sf fame (*Vendetta for the Saint*, 1965), there are thirty-six 'canonical' Saint books stretched from 1928 to 1964. Over such a period anyone might change, and the Saint certainly does. Progressing from beer-drinking dealer of rough justice to suave jet-setter and wine connoisseur, he put away childish things, among them the simple pleasure of being roped and tied.

World War II marks the division. Up to 1945 there are twenty-five books in which the Saint is tied up (by my count) no fewer than seventeen times, averaging a 68 per cent bondage factor per volume. If you add notable occasions on which he's locked away (in

jails, cellars, one ship's cabin and one ordinary room), the figure rises to 92 per cent. After the war Templar doesn't seem to get tied up at all.

Did Charteris tire of the good old routine? Perhaps, but my suspicion that these episodes exist mainly as narrative padding is supported by the fact that the Saint is never tied up in short stories. Ritual trussing and escape use too many of a mere few thousand words, and after 1948 all the canonical Saint stories are shorts. (Before, many were novellas — much roomier, at two or three per volume.)

Any Charteris villain would have been glad of the following data, showing precisely what tactics to avoid:

Before you tie up Simon Templar, it's most advisable to search him. Fifty-nine per cent of his amazing escapes involve simply cutting the ropes, since in a rather un-English way he keeps a knife up his sleeve. Arch-criminals neglect the importance of taking this implement away, perhaps because the ploy was tried in the Saint's first book (*The Saint Meets the Tiger*, 1928), and the impudent fellow proved to have a razor-edged cigarette case in reserve.

Admittedly the Saint is versatile with his knife. On two occasions, even while the arch-fiend is gloating over him, he keeps up a stream of repartee while imperceptibly slicing away behind his back. When dropped into the Thames, securely attached to fifty pounds of scrap iron, he holds his breath and patiently works the knife free (*The Saint Goes On*, 1934).

Suspended from an iron ring with a hundredweight block of stone roped to his feet, he goads the villain into using his knife to cut the rope which supports Templar by the wrists — whereupon, rather than plummet to death, he grabs the ring one-handed, pulls his other hand loose and, while supporting his own weight and the stone's with his right hand, puts a firm half-nelson on the Napoleon of Crime with his left. Blimey. (*The Ace of Knives*, 1937.)

Dangling by his tied hands from another iron ring in traditional dungeon style, he abandons shoes and socks to wield the inevitable knife with his toes (*The Saint on Guard*, 1945.)

Other errors for the Ungodly to avoid are:

- Being bluffed into releasing your victims and hauling them out of range of the bomb you have placed under the floor (*Enter the Saint*, 1930.)

NOW I'LL JUST TAKE A DEEP BREATH, SQUEEZE OUT THE ARC WELDING EQUIPMENT CUNNINGLY CONCEALED IN MY ARMPIT, CATCH IT WITH MY TOES, AND...



- Accidentally dropping your key to the mantrap in which you have caught the Saint, within his reach (*The Saint Meets His Match*, 1931.)
- Allowing your attention to stray as you mix tons of cement to entomb him, thus permitting him to char his bonds with a girlfriend's cigarette lighter and escape without your knowledge from the deep pit you are in the process of filling up (*The Saint vs Scotland Yard*).
- Having him whipped by a gigantic black torturer; the first lash will so enrage him that he bursts thick leather straps with insane strength (*ibid*).

Elsewhere, Templar relies on confederates to free him, abrades his bonds by conventional use of rough brickwork, or — mystifyingly — distracts his captors with a trick exploding cigarette, invokes the spirit of Houdini, and slips free of formerly quite secure knots.

Those who merely lock him up do no better, since they madly allow him to retain a palmed lockpick (*Saint Overboard*, 1936), a complete set of burglar's tools (*The Saint in London*, 1934), or two beer bottles which he can fill with earth as a makeshift respirator to survive the poison gas while digging his way out of the cellar (*Alias the Saint*, 1931).

One hardly likes to complain about these plot devices being incredibly crude, when the tales themselves are usually great fun. Far more soothing to call it sportsmanship; any villain with

a sense of style leaves some loophole in his trap.

Indeed, this also applies to heroes. Simon Templar himself is not terribly good at holding on to prisoners. After one ruffian in *The Saint vs Scotland Yard* has spent all night hacking a huge hole through our hero's own massive cellar door, we are told: 'Simon realized that he had been incredibly careless.' You bet. What totally unexpected means of escape had he overlooked? He'd left his captive with a knife. ....

— May-June 1991

## The worst crime in the world

PRONZINI ON  
APPALLINGNESS IN CRIME  
FICTION

There's an eerie, phosphorescent glamour in dire writing. The legendary *The Stuffed Owl: An Anthology of Bad Verse* has been endlessly reprinted and imitated since 1930. Bad movies and bad sf (especially bad sf movies) have had similar loving attention in recent years. What about rotten crime fiction?

S. J. Perelman pioneered its study with his 1930s squib 'Somewhere a Roscoe', extolling Robert Leslie Bellem's work for pulp magazines like *Spicy Detective*. This private-eye genre was highly formalised. A gun was always a roscoe, and never went Bang but said — or sneezed, belched, stuttered or barked — 'Kachow!', 'Chow-chow!', 'Chow!', 'Kachowp!', 'Wh-r-rang!' or in extreme cases 'Blooley — Blooley — Blooley!'

Similarly, the corpses (mostly voluptuous: 'the warmth of her slim young form set fire to my arterial system', etc.) all got variants of the same stylised epitaph. 'She was dead as': a pork chop, a stuffed mongoose, an iced catfish, a fried oyster, six buckets of fish bait, vaudeville, George Washington's cherry tree. ....

A later scholar, Bill Pronzini, has widened the investigation in *Gun in Cheek* (Mysterious Press, 1982) and *Son of Gun in Cheek* (ditto, 1987). Sometimes he struggles to extract humour from material which is merely Godawful, but many unspeakable





gems are unearthed, and Pronzini has the affection for his victims without which no celebration of appallingness can succeed.

Here's a tiny selection, illustrating the special qualities needed by what Pronzini calls 'alternate crime classics':

**Emotional excess.** 'He rushed to the canal, sobbing, and, with a prayer . . . threw himself into the water. Happily, in his despair, the poor child had forgotten that he knew how to swim' (Gaston Leroux, *The Perfume of the Lady in Black*). The fire from my ears, my eyes and my throat congregated into a lump and shoved off the top of my head' (Michael Morgan, *Decoy*).

**Genre incestuousness.** 'Zarzur looked like a murderer — he acted like one — and he kept talking about committing the perfect crime. Now according to every precept of mystery fiction, he definitely should not have been the actual killer!' (Eric Heath, *Murder of a Mystery Writer*).

**Striking women.** 'She was as lovely as a girl could be without bludgeoning your endocrines' (Stephen Marlowe, *Killers Are My Meat*). She . . . unearthed one of her fantastic breasts from the folds of her sheath skirt' (Michael Avallone, *The Horrible Man*). I looked at her breasts jutting against the soft fabric of her dress, nipples like split infinitives' (Max Byrd, *Fly Away Jū*).

**Profound deductions.** 'It was evident by the look of fear in his eyes that he was frightened' (Thomas K. Makagon, *All Killers Aren't Ugly*). 'He had been shot, poisoned, stabbed and strangled. Either someone had really had it in for him or four people had killed him. Or else it was the cleverest suicide I'd ever heard of' (Richard S. Prather, *Take a Murder, Darling*). 'Let's not forget, in the midst of all this fun, that whoever killed this guy is a killer' (Shelley Singer, *Free Draw*).

**Sinisterly malformed villains.** 'I feel it in my hump that something is going to happen!' (Edward Wood-

ward, *The House of Terror*). 'Freddie's tongue shot out from between this lips like the fangs of a poisonous snake' (J. C. Lenehan, *The Tunnel Mystery*).

**The investigator getting knocked out.** 'Someone stuck a red-hot poker in my ear and all my brains ran out of the hole. My bones turned into macaroni and I sank down into a gooey mass of tomato sauce that looked like blood. Then somebody began rubbing the end of my nose with sandpaper and there was a big balloon of pain tied to my ear' (Carl D. Hodges, *Naked Villainy*).

**Atmosphere.** 'The air was surcharged with an invisible something which seemed to surround the house. Even that phlegmatic, nerve-proof group were not immune to the tuning in of the premonitory cross-currents' (Florence M. Pettee, *The Palgrave Mummy*). 'That was my first look at Merriwether Manor, where Murder had rented a room ahead of me' (Jeremy Lane, *Death to Drumbeat*). The anticlimax was terrific, it was catastrophic' (Arthur M. Chase, *Peril at the Spy Nest*).

**Handgun expertise.** 'Lieutenant Freevich had fired almost a complete round of ammunition' (Hugh Pentecost, *The Steel Palace*).

**Detective introspection.** 'Inspiration splattered me in the face like a custard pie' (Michael Morgan, *Nine More Lives*).

**Dramatic tautology.** 'What?' I monosyllabbed' (Florence M. Pettee, *The Clue from the Tempest*). 'Simeon Taylor was killed — beheaded and left to die . . .' (Hugh Pentecost, *Slow Death, Reap Death*).

**Cunning murder methods.** By fire extinguisher: 'They . . . stuck a nozzle in each ear while they held her down and turned the extinguishers on' (Ennis Willie, *The Case of the Loaded Garter Holster*). By vacuum cleaner: 'He held it there until he had drawn every drop of air from her body' (Sidney A. Porcelain, *The Crimson Cat Murders*).

**Stiff upper lip (Brits only).** 'I say, Fitzhugh, why not go to the club?

Nobody could touch you at the club?' Fitzhugh's lips twitched queerly. 'I — er — I imagine I'd be asked to resign if a gang of Chinese murderers came into the club after me' (Murray Leinster, *Murder Will Out*).

Enough. Pronzini offers several hundred pages of similar treats, recommended to all crime fans and/or masochists. People who like books like these will like these books.

Some masters of awful detection do emerge, so outrageous they're arguably good: McGonagall's of crime. Perelman's favourite, Bellem, is just one. The hideously productive Michael Avallone pushes the wise-guy school of cliché to fresh depths ('My bewilderment took on a couple of new glands'). My own soft spot is for the stupefying plots of Harry Stephen Keeler, driven by creaky engines of implausibility and coincidence . . . like the one where the Hidden Last Will and Testament (I think it was) is splashed across the country on garish advertising posters which reveal their message only through *The Blue Spectacles* of the title. Another typical Keeler plot turn, which thrilled me when I was about fifteen, features a night train hurtling to destruction — unless the fugitive hero can contrive a warning light, his entire worldly goods consisting of a match and a thousand-dollar bill . . .

And speaking of diabolical plots, a future column will discuss the most unbelievable solutions ever offered for the traditional Impossible Crime in the Locked Room. The reader is warned.

July–August 1991

## Ancient images

BIGGLES.  
ENID BLYTON

Years ago at an sf writers' conference a visiting American invited the massed authors to embarrass themselves. 'I want you to cast your minds back', he said hypnotically, 'to the very first image from literature that you can remember.' This would apparently be Significant, though where the Significance lay was — and remained — unclear.

Around the circle, people started nervously responding with lofty

scenes from noted works. It was like a job interview conducted by some company that had fallen for graphology, with candidates struggling to produce handwriting which clearly indicated uprightness, perseverance, loyalty, discreet ambition and absolutely no tendency to fall about in hysterical laughter at the idea of taking this test seriously. When it came to me, I felt it practically my duty to lower the tone with coarse honesty. Unfortunately I couldn't remember a decent flagellation scene from Billy Bunter, or anything beyond the title of the controversial (in my family, anyway) comicbook *Goom: The Thing from Planet X*. Instead it would have to be...

No, not that!

In the event I did a brief rhapsody about *Biggles Hits the Trail* by Captain W. E. Johns, one of the ace pilot's rare excursions in the direction of sf. The plot was centred on a lost Tibetan mountain made mostly of radium. Inevitably this feature of the landscape was honeycombed with the dwellings of countless mad monks, who had harnessed the awesome force of radioactivity to their sinister ends.

For example, they used it to generate an innovative sort of static electricity that glued unwanted visitors' feet to the ground (much later I realised this was a pinch from Kipling's 1912 sf story 'As Easy as ABC'). Some of my best schoolday nightmares involved the scene where Biggles and intrepid companions are pinned, just barely able to drag their feet in a crackle of sparks, while the monks' favourite pets advance fluidly on them — an inexhaustible stream of albino electric centipedes with enormous fangs.

But the image that remained was simply that of the brooding 'Mountain of Light' itself, glowing fitfully amid the Himalayas. Good picture. Lousy physics, but a good picture.

The keen-eyed reader may have noticed a slight hesitation above. What, when Billy Bunter and even *Goom: The Thing from Planet X* were toyed with, was too embarrassing to relate?

Confessional time: the answer is Enid Blyton, and the remembered scene was simply a loft full of apples, some of them rotten. Later I confided this to other writers, and one or two did say, shiftyly, 'Oh yes, I remember that.'

This column's usual bibliographical rigour is being abandoned, as I can no longer place the short story involved. (A largish Blyton omnibus, illustrated? Please don't anyone sully

the delicate bloom of my ignorance.)

Blyton was a highly visual writer, and that piece sticks in the mind as a thoroughly and even maddeningly memorable use of an image for didactic purposes. The context: some kids are helping an older female relative, no doubt an aunt, to store apples in the loft for winter. Only perfect, unbruised apples need apply. Of course one of the children bumbles and admits one apple with the tiniest possible bruise.

The curtain is lowered to indicate some lapse of time, and rises on a scene of moral horror. Sadly the aunt shows the kids what has come to pass, with the flawed apple now a seething mound of corruption, spreading rot to dozens of others around it. The tableau had a suppurating intensity that H. P. Lovecraft would have been hard put to match. Unforgettable.

But perhaps I'd have forgotten Biggles's Mountain of Light without the underpinning horror of that slow-motion, dream-clogged flight from multi-legged peril, and perhaps the apple scene would slide quite easily from memory without its dreadful ensuing moral.

The point of Blyton's story was that between the two visits to the loft, the kids have been wanting a school friend to come and stay. A naughty one with a bad reputation. It's admitted, but they promise to set him a good example and reform him out of recognition. Sadly but kindly the aunt discloses the scene of fruity necrosis and pronounces her awful judgment. The bad always corrupts the good. That acquaintance might have only a tiny bruise of naughtiness on his soul now; but if you good kids associate with him, this will be the grim result. Shades of the prison-house...

One doesn't want to make too much of one brief story in Enid Blyton's colossal output. Elsewhere she has plenty of effective if not particularly memorable imagery: a quarter-century since I last looked at them, the Famous Five books conjure up a jolly montage of mildly exciting things like caves, darkness, lonely houses, secret passages, midnight feasts and conclaves...

But those blasted apples refuse to be forgotten because, I rather believe, that was the first time I'd ever resented a piece of writing as being both effective and unfair. Come to think of it, there were plenty of little bruises on my youthful soul, and Blyton was evidently condemning me to total running-sore status by about the age of

fifteen. No appeal allowed. You can't argue when someone else has craftily picked the analogy beforehand, especially when it might contain a smidgen of truth. (I've never investigated whether this particular sentence of damnation was one reason why librarians later took against Blyton.)

Inoculation confers immunity, at least a bit and at least sometimes. My own favourite great-aunt, who never stored apples and who did me a huge favour at age twelve by giving me the old Methuen G. K. Chesterton Omnibus, later took an interest in my mildly rotten soul and tried me on some pop theology by C. S. Lewis. It was all there: deviously chosen analogies, plausible wheedling, yawning logical gaps. The Blyton blight once again. If that was what Christianity was all about, I wanted no part of it.

Although I've never encountered the awesome sight of a radium mountain burning gently in the twilight, any old rotten apple can still make me wince.

— September–October 1991

## The reader is warned

### SEMINALLY DOTTY FACTS ABOUT CRIME NOVELS

Elsewhere in *Million*, people kept doing nostalgia pieces on 'Classic Books about Popular Fiction'. How undemocratic. Hunting through my endless, tottering piles of non-fiction, I find an overwhelming preponderance of non-classics. Isn't it our duty to acknowledge these works too? Perhaps not...

For example, who now remembers my simultaneous nomination for Most Boring Book about Crime Fiction and Filmiest Effort to Capitalise on a Popular Success — *The Wimsey Family* by C. W. Scott-Giles, Fitzalan Pursuivant of Arms Extraordinary (1977)? Its slender 95 pages of cod history and genealogy shed a truly astonishing lack of light on the Lord Peter Wimsey stories. Perhaps it appeals more to heraldry buffs than to lowbrows like myself who thought the Arms of Harriet Vane (pictured here) were features attached to her shoulders.

Ellery Queen is bigger game, being much respected as a crime author, or authors. Thanks to this and other factors, including a highly visible platform in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* editorials, the Queen opinions once carried great critical weight.

But look at the 'classic' *Queen's Quorum* (1951, revised 1969). 'A History of the Detective-Crime Short Story as Revealed by the 125 Most Important Books Published in this Field, 1845-1967'. Anyone can argue with a Best Of list, but what makes this one so frequently embarrassing is the way its enthusiasm spills over into gush:

Melville Davisson Post's *Uncle Abner* is second only to Poe's *Tales* among all the books of detective short stories written by American authors. This statement is made dogmatically and without reservation: a cold-blooded and calculated critical opinion which we believe will be as true in the year 2000 as we wholeheartedly believe it to be true today. These four books [the other three are by Doyle, Chesterton and Poe] are the finest in their field — the *crème du crime*. They are an out-of-this world target for future detective-story writers to take shots at — but it will be like throwing pebbles at the Pyramids.

You glean the impression that the Queens liked the Post book. If you were waiting for some actual justification of so much windy hyperbole, tough luck: this level of critical analysis is quite literally all you get.

Third time lucky, though: the next book to hand is so fascinatingly eccentric and useless as to deserve 'classic' status in a category all its own. *Locked Room Murders* by Robert Adey (1979) consists of a long numbered list of 1280 stories about impossible crimes, with an appendix giving all the solutions. Some of these terse plot giveaways make boggling reading, and often induce a powerful urge never ever to read the book. Here's a selection of personal favourites.

64. Victim, while in bath, was tricked into handling a copper spider through which an electric current was passed.

(One of Colin Watson's novels had an even nastier trick with an electrified



beetle attached to a wall. The wall was made of porcelain and formed the back of a gents' public lavatory. According to Watson, there's an irresistible psychological urge to aim for any foreign body such as a beetle . . . whereupon, fzzzzzzt.)

68. After killing, the murderer stepped into an incinerator and incinerated himself.

75. The killer, a midget was still in the room hidden in a leather hatbox when the door was broken down. (See 366.)

91. The deaths were engineered by a person dressed as a werewolf . . .

100. The killer bought and left a block of frozen nitroglycerin which exploded as the fishmonger attempted to break it with his hammer.

131. The killer entered the house disguised as an elephant, and escaped down a secret tunnel which he later mailed shut . . .

132. Victim accidentally threw a live cartridge into a live electric light socket. The metal base of the cartridge melted and it was fired as though from a revolver.

139. The mask had been smuggled out in the pouch of a stuffed kangaroo . . .

146. A ventilator above the corpse was removed leaving a small hole through which an armadillo, rolled into a ball, was lowered. It proceeded to deface the dead man. (Literally, I understand.)

147. Murderers got past guard to victim by impersonating a horse.

366. The killer, an African pygmy, was hidden in a coal basket when the entrance was forced. (See 75.)

369. The victims were strangled by

a hybrid creeper.

519. The victim was killed by the lid of the old Victorian Bath in which he was sitting, which fell on him when he piked up a rigged loofah.

534. The jewels had been stolen by a trained white rat whose hideaway was a footstool with a false compartment.

540. Webs spun across the magnifying lens of a telescope by a pet Venusian spider caused brain damage to the victim when he looked through it . . .

542. The bus was hidden under a stairway with a secret opening.

574. The house was built around the corpse.

634. Dagger was made from a plastic ashtray which after it had been used reverted on application of hot water (in a teapot) to its original shape.

706. The victim was being poisoned by a faulty central heating system and, in rising with desperate suddenness to escape it, struck his head on the painted base of a chandelier.

787. The murderer wore a tartan kilt and blended in with the scenery.

855. A line was looped under the victim's armpits and was attached at the other end to a captive shark. When the shark was released it raced off and dragged the victim overboard.

861. Victim is dehydrated, stuffed through the cell bars and then, once back inside, rehydrated.

890. The murderer drank the water in which he drowned his victim.

954. The victim, who had the peculiar habit of eating grapes from the wallpaper design, was poisoned by someone who knew of the habit and put cyanide on [them].

972. The stabbing was done by an already present diabolical floating machine which afterwards burnt itself out.

977. The poison had been administered by a red ant enticed by a scent on an envelope delivered to the victim.

1281. After reading 1280 mind-boggling puzzle solutions, the reader's brain dissolved and oozed in twin streams from his ears.

One of the above is not authentic. I'm delighted to report that a new, expanded edition of this seminally dotty work is expected from an American publisher. Stay tuned.

— November–December 1991

## On the twilight edge

### THE SUPERNATURAL IN DETECTIVE FICTION

In classical detective stories, according to conventional wisdom, the supernatural may be introduced only to be explained away in the harsh light of rationalism. Stands to reason, doesn't it?

Thus Father Brown, whom unwary readers might suspect of mystical credulity, is always firmly reasonable about impossibilities: 'I believe in miracles. I believe in man-eating tigers, but I don't seem them running around everywhere. If I want any miracles, I know where to get them' ('The Miracle of Moon Crescent'). Conan Doyle, to his everlasting credit, never infected super-rational Holmes with his own spiritualist beliefs. The Great Detective's closest approach to mysticism is a vaguely Kantian observation in the late story 'The Veiled Lodger': 'If there is not some compensation hereafter, then the world is a cruel jest.'

All fictional rules are breakable, and if a supernatural build-up was good enough, explaining it away can be irritating. Thus Greg Cox's recent *The Transylvanian Library: A Consumer's Guide to Vampire Fiction* includes *He Who Whispers* by John Dickson Carr on grounds of atmosphere, but deplores the way its vampire menace dissolves at Dr Fell's rational touch.

Interestingly enough, the fabled Detection Club of the golden years was less dogmatic about fantastic elements. According to Chesterton, after solemnly swearing never to conceal a vital clue from the reader, the new Club initiate was asked: 'Do you promise to observe to observe a *seemly moderation* in the use of Gangs, Conspiracies, Death Rays, Ghosts, Hypnotism, Trap-Doors, Chinamen, Super-Criminals and Lunatics; and utterly and for ever to forswear Mysterious Poisons unknown to Science?' My italics.

True to this promise, many authors did indeed indulge with moderation in ghostly plot elements. Ernest Bramah's blind detective Max Carrados would sometimes meet a bit of the dark world, such as electrically transmitted emanations from a plague pit...

In the same way, H. C. Bailey's undeservedly forgotten Mr Fortune

has a couple of such cases. The Profiteers' (Mr Fortune's Trials) features unpleasant heavies who die inexplicably at locations where their ancestors flogged and burnt women to death... whereupon forensic expert Fortune notes that the bodies carry marks resembling the flogging and the burning, and the story ends uneasily.

Another twilit tale, 'The Rock Garden' (Mr Fortune Explains) has a 'maybe it was, maybe it wasn't' apparition which sabotages a nasty and thoroughly modern scheme.

It's less surprising that the verbenasquinting Moris Klaw (of Sax Rhomer's *The Dream Detective*), with all his immoderate apparatus of psychic dreams and aetheric photography to solve mundane puzzles in a welter of italics and exclamation marks, should just come up against the real thing in 'The Veil of Isis'. So, one is inclined to remark, what?

Such stories gain from their shock value when you meet them unexpectedly amid other, classically correct tales of detection. Anthologists who like the supernatural are often tempted to gather these pieces together. Sometimes it works, sometimes the collection falls prey to what I once christened the Vampire Effect. This happens when an editor is delighted by the impact of a normally staid author's one story which unexpectedly introduces a real vampire. When the anthology is published, the editor reads lovingly through it and wonders why that piece seems somehow to lack punch as part of *Fifty Great Tales In Which The Heroine Turns Out To Be A Vampire*...

The Vampire Effect exerts its baleful spell in several existing anthologies. *The Fantastic Saint*, for example, gathers the Leslie Charteris shorts in which Simon Templar meets something extraordinary. Too often, the mere context is deflating: when Simon encounters another apparent conman



with a marvellous gadget, you know that this time the gadget will work, and when he investigates the Loch Ness Monster... At least it's always fun.

A similar collection, *The Fantastic Stories of Cornell Woolrich*, does the late author a real disservice. Woolrich's best thrillers conjure alarm and dread from real-world shadows; he didn't need occult props and did not himself choose to reprint potboilers about slinky snake-priestesses, accursed dresses commissioned by Satan (I kid you not) and rotting revenants. The better stories here try to be ambiguous about their supernatural elements, but the dead weight of the book's title prevents this. Nudge nudge, fantastic stories, geddit?

One way of keeping the reader agreeably confused is to mix 'real' and spooky detection in the same volume... running the risk of irritating genre fans who prefer to read only one or the other. Dorothy Sayers's famous *Detection, Mystery and Horror* collections kept their genres segregated. A notable book that doesn't is *Carmack the Ghost-Finder* by William Hope Hodgson, where on first reading you don't know which four cases will be solved 'rationally' if rather clumsily. Since my old Panther edition promises 'nine chilling supernatural hunts into the icy realms of other-worldly terror', anyone buying it on the strength of the blurb would presumably have been disappointed by nearly half the contents.

There are plenty more examples of detective authors dipping a cautious toe into unknown deeps — like 'Word in Season', Margery Allingham's whimsical Campion story about a talking dog; or John Dickson Carr's celebrated *The Burning Court*, where the rational solution is meticulously explained only to be overturned in a vertiginous final chapter; or that nicely creepy children's disease with tele-

pathic side effects in Peter Dickinson's *Sleep and His Brother*.

Let's end with a particularly neat example of 'seemly moderation'.

This is Dorothy Sayers's short 'The Bone of Contention' in *Lord Peter Views the Body*, where Wimsey shows himself versatile enough to base rational deductions on spectral premises. The reasoning goes: (a) his horse shied violently at the supposedly haunted 'Dead Man's Post' on the common; (b) when he earlier encountered the apparition of a death-coach drawn by headless horses (and remained open-minded about the supernatural possibilities), this sensitive horse was unaffected; (c) therefore the phantom coach was a tangible hoax. There's something satisfying about the quiet assimilation of a 'real' haunt as touchstone for the fake one, even if many of us might have suspected (c) without any need for steps (a) and (b)...

But then, his insufferable lordship was full of whisky at the time.

January-February 1992

## Gorey stories

### THE ART OF EDWARD GOREY

Archipelago, cardamon,  
obloquy, tacks,  
Ignavia, samisen, bandages,  
wax...

A welcome recent event in publishing was the long-delayed appearance of Edward Gorey's collection of fifteen picture stories, or storied pictures, *Amphigorey* (Penguin, £9.99). Since this column has never soiled its hands by being immediate or topical, we move in haste to the collections as yet unpublished in Britain — twenty further little books in *Amphigorey Too* (1975) and seventeen more in *Amphigorey Also* (1983).

For many years Edward Gorey has saturated himself in popular fiction, from Victorian melodrama and moral instruction through Edward splendours to golden-age detective stories. His laborious ink drawings and captions (the latter usually hand-drawn to look like print) tend to be both sinister

and highly subversive of their fictional sources.

Children's stories, for example. 'The Beastly Baby' echoes the secret if momentary thoughts of every long-suffering parent, with deadpan captions like 'When it was taken bathing, it always floated back to shore, festooned with slimy green weed'. Or, as the parents attempt in vain to slip away: 'In public places, some officious person was certain to point out that it was in danger of being left behind.'

The hero of 'The Pious Infant', doomed from the outset to an edifying but fatal illness, is barely more appalling than Victorian moral exemplars: 'He used to go through books and carefully blot out any places where there was a frivolous mention of the Deity'.

'(The Untitled Book)' offers a surreal reworking of the one about glimpsing fairies at the bottom of the garden. To an accompaniment of nonsense captions ('Hippity wippity, Oxiborick; Flappity flippity, Saragashum...') the impassive infant watches a succession of not altogether cuddly creatures emerging to dance. These include a large hat, a giant ant and what appears to be a kind of featureless fetish-doll. Suddenly the sky darkens as something indistinct but clearly very horrid passes overhead, and one by one the dancers disperse in panic while the unconcerned captions continue their cheery gibberish. Guaranteed to give alarming dreams to sensitive children, I'm sure, and a good thing too.

Opopanax, thunder,  
dismemberment, baize,  
Hellebore, obelus, cartilage,  
maize...

Gorey's special interests of opera, ballet and crime — not to mention fur coats and white tennis shoes — colour many of the books. The most appalling of the lot must be 'The Loathsome Couple', with its allusions to the Moors murders. Elaborate, murky panels like soiled etchings tell the story of the unspeakable but also pathetic pair, not without black comedy: we see them collapsed and far too overdressed for the legend, 'When they tried to make love, their strenuous and prolonged efforts came to nothing.' Instead they begin their dreadful 'life's work', of which I only say that no detail is shown... the horrors are always delicately offstage and your imagination is left to throb.

The crime fans' favourite is the

much sunnier 'The Awdrey-Gore Legacy', whose frame story about vanished novelist Miss D. Awdrey-Gore (one of many similar anagrams in the works) parodies Agatha Christie's famous disappearance and encloses a devastating set of 'rough notes' for a Golden Age mystery. It's all here: the panel-by-panel evolution of the Great Detective from blandness to a seething mass of quirks ('His deductions concerning each case are given in the form of a linked series of Haiku in Gaelic of his own composition')... the picture-gallery of suspects ('Heroine. If she turns out to be the murderer, have a second with different hair colour')... possible scenes of the crime and classified murder weapons ('GRADUAL: arsenical buns. INSTANTANEOUS: boulder. INEXPLICABLE: confetti')... maps, clues and alternatives for What The Murderer Failed To Realise ('that yellow stitchbane is not yellow at all, but a pale mauve')... the great revelation scene, and after. All very funny and allusive. Meanwhile the frame story has tantalising links with the internal 'novel notes' — what is the all-pervading significance of the condiment Cad's Relish? It ends in cryptic yet almost meaningful postcard clues and a message to chill any mystery-lover's heart: 'And what if then we don't find out / What all of it has been about?'

Ligament, exequies, spandrel,  
chandoo,  
Gehenna, etui, anamorphosis,  
glue...

Gorey excels at dry wit, teasing cross-references and period gloom; it is entirely in character that his merchandising company should be called Doomed Enterprises Inc. A self-taught artist, he's a master of both elaborately overdone backgrounds and the layout and balance which make a very sparsely populated drawing look satisfying. (Though his characters' faces always look a bit skimpy or scamped, except for those chaps lost in splendiferous beards.) The few words of caption he allows himself are carefully selected. I treasure the kitchen scene of 'Les Urnes Utiles', depicting an ornate urn evidently about eight feet high, labelled in beautiful script: 'Hundreds & Thousands'.

His eye for words is most peculiarly evident in a personal favourite, 'The Nursery Frieze'. No cuddly 'C is for Cat' animals in the Gorey nursery: this is an endless strip of dreary, mono-

chrome landscape, enlivened only by the odd desolate tower or blasted oak, whose foreground shows a procession of mournful, black and vaguely tapir-like animals (another Gorey speciality). Some weirder relatives of these creatures fill his cover for Frank Belknap Long's supernatural collection *The Dark Beasts*, which 1964 Belmont edition must now be quite rare). In scroll-like speech balloons, each beast utters a single word for the edification of the child audience: most are obscure, few are cheerful, but they do form a little rhyme. Extracts appear above, and on the following merry note the frieze concludes:

Wapentake, orrery, aspic,  
mistrust,  
Ichor, ganosis, velleity, dust.

Dust to dust... Macabre themes? The artist protests: 'I write about everyday life.' In the same self-interview (in *The Gorey Posters*, 1979), he explained: 'The books are about something, not what they seem to be about... but I don't know what that other thing is.' Nor do I, but I recommend them and collect them assiduously. Does anyone have a copy of *The Other Statue*? Seriously, now.

March–April 1992

## The missing bits

### BOWDLER'S RAZOR

I went on holiday with — and rather enjoyed — an advance proof of Patricia Craig's *The Penguin Book of Comic Writing* (406 pp., £15.99), acquired by the devious route of opening parcels addressed to me by our editor. Unlike the Frank Muir *Oxford Book of Humorous Prose*, this one doesn't give you a sprained wrist: huge drifts of biographical, critical and transatlantic material are omitted, and funny fiction (as opposed to, er, funny stories) left to the 1990 companion volume *The Penguin Book of British Comic Stories*.

In brief: sixty-odd items, twenty-three already familiar to me. Familiarity doesn't have to breed contempt; old favourites are often cheering, and sometimes old unfavourites look better out of context — A. P. Herbert's babbling 'Topsy' monologues are off-

putting at book length (Trix darling I've made the *most* voluminous error I've alienated the editor of *Undies* and...) but succeed in small doses. There are mild surprises from noted humorists, like Wodehouse's essay on thriller clichés; slightly unexpected inclusions like Dylan Thomas being parodic and Germaine Greer polemical (a bit from *The Female Eunuch*), and a sprinkling of 'yes, very worthy but not actually nor even intendedly funny' items, such as Orwell's much-reprinted 'Boys' Weeklies', V. S. Pritchett's going on about the hilarious writings of Dostoyevsky, A. J. P. Taylor's diary entries on his droll broken leg, etc.

I thought of putting Bernard Levin's assault on pretentious concert program notes into this category, but eventually concluded that his silly anagrams of the offending note-writer's name are supposedly to be mirthful. Considered as humour, taking advantage of an easily anagrammatised name seems on a par with the side-splitting childhood discovery that the phone book contains people called Bottom, Bugg and Smellie...

Overall it's a good collection. Traditionally reviewers are expected to whinge over missing items which should have been included, and to deplore book extracts torn raw and bleeding from their context. But in one 'familiar' extract, what caught my eye was a passage I'd never seen before.

This was from Gerald Durrell's *My Family and Other Animals*, with the author's extraordinary family arriving in Corfu, the dog Roger widdling at inconvenient length on the nearest lamp-post, some rancid repartee about which family stomachs have been misbehaving: all very characteristic, but I knew the book fairly well and was convinced this must be a spurious interpolation by some unknown hand. How peculiar. Research in secondhand shops produced an old Penguin edition, which agreed with *British Comic Writing* and refuted the Langford memory.

After my holiday the mystery solved itself. I never buy *Readers Digest* condensed editions or suchlike, but my perfectly respectable-looking 1964 hardback of *My Family and Other Animals* proved to be sixty pages shorter than the Penguin paperback despite larger print, with 17 and not 18 chapters, and on its title page the dread words 'Edited for Schools by W. G. Bebbington, MA'.

Blimey. W. G. Bebbington certainly made sure no whiff of corruption could reach innocent schoolkids. At one stage the entire Durrell family moves house in order not to have room for Great-aunt Hermione, 'that evil old camel, smelling of mothballs and singing hymns in the lavatory' (in brother Lawrence Durrell's phrase). This description is another of many, many censored bits. In the introduction, accounting for four offspring and no visible father: 'My mother also insists that I explain she is a widow for, as she so penetratingly observed, you never know what people might think.' W. G. Bebbington has sternly blue-pencilled all the words after 'widow'...

(Paul Fussell had an essay on the 1965 re-issue of Booth Tarkington's sub-Twain novel of US boyhood, *Pennrod*, in which episodes like the proper punishment of an offensive racist have been made meaningless by the toning down or removal of his racist abuse. All this years before 'Political Correctness', in a volume claiming to reprint the 'complete text' of the 1914 original!)

It's weirdly disconcerting to find that a well-known book is incomplete like this. I felt wrong-footed a few years back when a science-fiction line re-issued Eric Frank Russell's wisecracking thriller *Wasp*, and some damn fool editor had taken peculiar pains to reproduce 'the original magazine serialisation'... that is, a version that had been savagely cut to fit, with the fun and wisecracks suffering most.

Then there's A. P. Herbert and *Uncommon Law*, the omnibus volume of the three classic *Misleading Cases* collections. (There are further collections without 'Misleading Cases' in the title — *Codd's last Case* and *Bardot MP?*) This is a splendid and very funny omnibus, with many improvements and added silly footnotes, but it omits several items collected in the original trilogy of small books. Some omissions seem to be to avoid repetition (for example, yet another go at the awfulness of the Inland Revenue and its forms), some because the spoof cases are unusually weak (a curious *Coroner's Court* item about a dog which is maddened by political broadcasts into killing its master) and one because... well, could there have been some tiny trace of censorship?

This case, lost since its appearance in *More Misleading Cases in the Common Law* (1930), is a joke libel action against the British publishers of the Catholic *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, of which

Mr Justice Wool querulously asks: 'By whom have these books been prohibited? Who has judged them to be blasphemous or obscene? — and declares that British law provides no special privilege to 'a religious body which has its headquarters in Italy' allowing it to libel authors by calling their books corrupting and harmful. 'Who is the Pope?' He has not been called in evidence . . . Ho ho, very satirical.

This is all happily out of date, since the *Index* (a thorough pest since 1559) was finally abolished in 1966 — though the Irish government seemed not to notice. But *Uncommon Law* was assembled in 1935. Had someone leaned on Herbert to omit this contentious piece? Is it a coincidence that 1935 was the year he entered Parliament and started pushing through his Marriage Bill (to ease the unfairness of the divorce laws), a task requiring tireless diplomacy in the face of strong Catholic opposition? I wonder.

But I have more urgent worries — such as searching my library for other cut books. Only yesterday I found that my copy of John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (better known as *Fanny Hill*) says on the title page, in tiny print, 'Edited for Schools by W. G. Bebbington, MA'. What else have I been missing all these years?

November—December 1992

## Owl stuffing time

### ASTONISHINGLY BAD POETRY

It's 63 years since the first edition of *The Stuffed Owl: An Anthology of Bad Verse* edited by D. B. Wyndham Lewis and Charles Lee. (Various expanded editions followed.) This must be among the most popular anthologies of all time, full of one-line brilliances like Wordsworth's invocation 'Spade! with which Wilkinson hath tilled his lands . . .' However, the *Owl* is avowedly incomplete since it spares 'eminent living English poets' of 1930. Later anthologists offer updated collections — most recently Nicholas Parsons with *The Joy of Bad Verse* (1988) — but contemporaries still get off lightly.

The cat leapt from the bag in *Pegasus Descending: A Treasury of the Best Bad Poems in English* edited by

James Camp, X. J. Kennedy and Keith Waldrop (1971). 'A letter to Exposition Press, asking permission to reprint lines from one of their authors, and pointing out that it would seem no shame to keep company with such immortals as Keats and Tennyson, was returned with the superscription, "Who are you kidding?"' Robert Frost's publishers said approximately the same when asked for permission to reprint that poet's 'A Girl's Garden'. Bad-verse anthologies are doomed to incompleteness. Even, I suppose, the one I've never seen but covet for its title: Richard Walser's *Nematodes in my Garden of Verse* (1959).

This issue I offer a tiny personal anthology, beginning with the anatomically explicit Emily Dickinson lyric unearthed in *Pegasus Descending*:

A Dying Tiger — moaned for  
drink —  
I hunted all the Sand —  
I caught the Dripping of a Rock  
And bore it in my Hand —  
His Mighty Balls — in death were  
thick —  
But searching — I could see  
A Vision on the Retina  
Of Water — and of me —  
'Twas not my blame — who sped  
too slow —  
'Twas not his blame — who died  
While I was reaching him —  
But 'twas — the fact that He was  
dead —

Somehow the argument of the last verse is even more vaguely worrying than the double-take in the second. But onward, with further thrilling categories of verse to be described (for Political Correctness) as 'differently good' . . .

Anticlimactic. Inspired by *The Stuffed Owl*, G.K. Chesterton wrote an essay on bad poetry (in *All I Survey*, 1933) ascribing the Brontë sisters' depression to the acute torment of listening to the poems of their father the Rev. Patrick (actually printed alongside the sisters' in one edition of their works). The Reverend had patented his own maddening verse form, a near-limerick in which the last word invariably lets you down:

Religion makes beauty  
enchanted;  
And even where beauty is  
wanting,  
The temper and mind  
Religion-refined

Will shine through the veil with  
sweet lustre.

Plonk!

Political. In the early eighties King Fahd of Saudi Arabia had his Court Poet eulogise the Briton who most awed him:

Venus was sculpted by man,  
But the far more attractive  
woman, Margaret Thatcher,  
Was sculpted by Allah . . .

Possibly it loses in translation. Further lines, including 'Her figure is more attractive than the figure of any cherished wife', appear in John Julius Norwich's anthology *More Christmas Crackers* (1990).

Mathematical. Frederick Soddy the Nobel-winning chemist went bananas in 1936 and published formulae for the radii of mutually touching circles and spheres as deathless verse, in *Nature*. A brief extract:

Four circles to the kissing come.  
The smaller are the benter.  
The bend is just the inverse of  
The distance from the centre.  
Though their intrigue left Euclid  
dumb  
There's now no need for rule of  
thumb.  
Since zero bend's a dead straight  
line  
And concave bends have minus  
sign,  
The sum of the squares of all four  
bends  
Is half the square of their sum.

Self-confessed. W. H. Auden admitted an early line he'd wisely suppressed but which, he pointed out, would have made a perfect Thurber cartoon caption: 'And Isobel who with her leaping breasts pursued me through a summer.' (Little did she know.)

Evolutionary. Another forgotten epic poem is Victor Purcell's *Cadmus* (1944), which indicates that when creating life on Earth, God was at risk of going blind:

The shallow threshold of the  
sounding sea  
Was floored with crumbled layers  
of debris,  
A liquid mass of silicates and lime,  
And with this mud was other  
mud, a slime,  
A viscous ooze, a dimly vibrant  
plasm,



A pungent, flowing mass — Great  
God's orgasm!

Edmund Wilson quotes lots more  
of this in *The Bit Between My Teeth*  
(1965).

Science-fictional. Many sf authors  
are under a false impression that they  
can dash off incidental verse. Damon  
Knight records a stanza from the  
tautologous *Starship Through Space* by  
Lee Correy, which Sums Things Up:

We who have tasted alien stream  
And done what others only  
dream;  
We who with earth-dirt on our  
shoes  
Have walked the path the  
sunbeams use;  
We will trod the Milky Way.

Royal. The thuddingly sycophantic  
paean to Elizabeth II called *Lilibet*  
(1985) is by 'a loyal subject of Her  
Majesty' whose anonymity is strictly  
guarded and whose alleged relation to  
A. N. Wilson must be a thing of mere

fantasy. Of its 1000 lines the most  
grimly memorable are perhaps:

Delay and disappointment could  
not flatten  
The ardour of Lieutenant P.  
Mountbatten.

(Who also rhymes with 'hat on' — and  
Bernard Levin claims to have traced  
the rhymes 'plano'/'manner',  
'novelty'/'duty', 'sins are'/'Wind-  
sor'...)

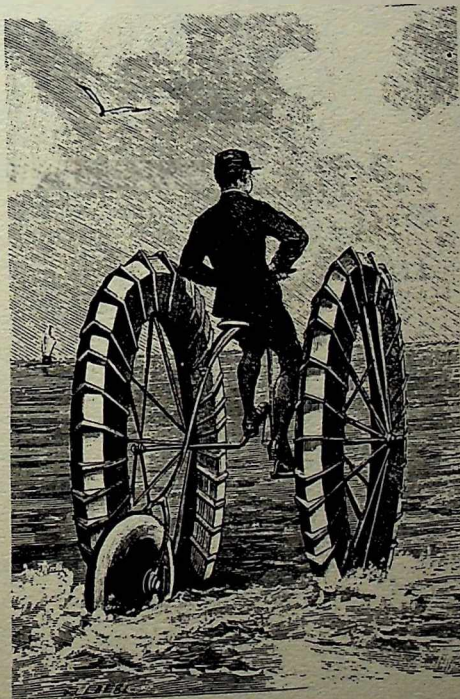
Lipogrammatic

'Twas a night, almost Christmas,  
And all through that room,  
A warm joy is stirring;  
No sign of a gloom....

This 'translation' of Clement  
Moore's "Twas the night before Christ-  
mas" limps along for much the same  
reason that Olympic sprinters would if  
their legs were manacled together. It's  
from one of the century's least  
probable novels, *Gadsby* by Ernest  
Vincent Wright (1938), which for

50,000 words avoids the most common  
English letter. The entire manuscript  
of this story was written with the E  
type-bar of the typewriter tied  
down... After all that you'd think the  
author would have adopted an E-less  
pseudonym (such as David Langford)  
rather than sully the cover with his  
name.

Vignettes. 'Who prop, thou ask'st,  
in these bad days, my mind?' (Matthew  
Arnold). 'Is this, ye Gods, the Cap-  
itolian Hill?' (Wordsworth). 'He  
viewed the uncovered bottom of the  
abyss...' (Dyer). 'I love the dead!'  
(Tupper: an opening line). 'Mother of  
God! no lady thou...' (Mary Elizabeth  
Coleridge). 'Irks care the crop-full  
bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed  
beast?' (Browning). 'The press  
restrained! nefandous thought!' (Mat-  
thew Green, 'The Spleen'). 'And when  
Life's prospects may at times appear  
dreary to ye, / Remember Alois Sen-  
felder, the discoverer of lithography.'  
(McConagall).



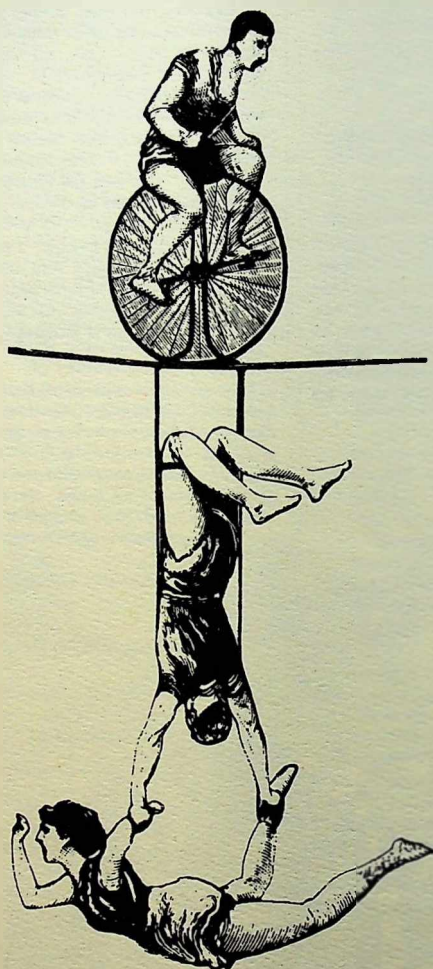


# THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW

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