

PERRY SCOPE 6



PERRYSCOPE 6, January 2021, is an issue of the personalzine published, whenever the mood takes him, by **Perry Middlemiss**, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3122. E: perry@middlemiss.org
Produced initially for ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) and then whoever else unlucky enough to receive it. Also available for download at efanzines.com with thanks to Bill Burns.
Unless otherwise specified all material is written by me. Cover photo by Robyn Mills, Bali, December 2015.

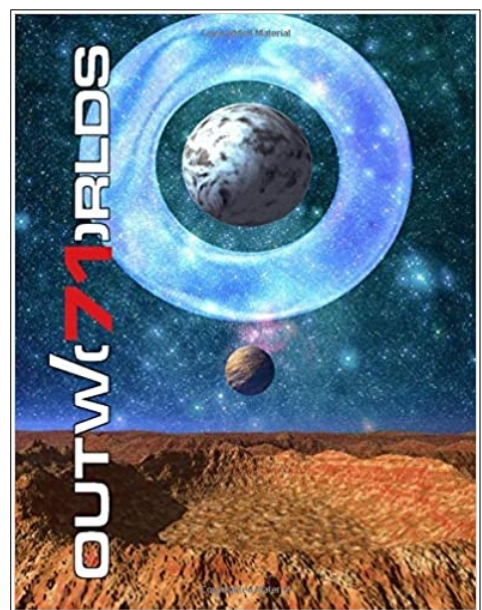
INTRODUCTION

In early December I experienced the highs, lows and highs again of this fanzine publishing business.

The first “high” came with the publication of PERRYSCOPE 5. It’s always good to get an issue out into the world, to finish off a few thoughts and to try some new ideas. I was especially satisfied with my work on the two poetry pages mid-issue. There are certainly some things I could have done a bit better – giving an indication to the reader of where the lead essay continued is one that springs to mind – but overall I thought it worked well; a technique I intend to use again. I feel I am starting to get the hang of using this new LibreOffice Writer software, will continue to do so and will send them a donation in the New Year after the Christmas expenses are out of the way.

So the new software gave me one high and then gave me a “low” within a few days. I had a reason to check the final pdf version of the issue after it had been released into the world and came across a book cover that had “slipped” from its intended place to one where it was partly obscured. “Bloody software”, I thought. Actually, it really wasn’t the software’s fault. It was probably doing exactly what it had been designed to do, my error was in not checking the final product before distribution. You would have thought I would have learnt this from my working years, but no, I just continue making the same mistakes all over again. Still we can only learn from experience and make plans not to repeat the mistake. It also tells me that I should delve deeper into the inner workings of image placement within this word processor.

And then, like an invigorating pick-me-up, a couple of days after that the mighty tome that is the 71st issue of OUTWORLDS arrived, and a return “high” attained. For those not aware of this legendary fanzine it was edited and published by US fan Bill Bowers from 1970 until his death in 2005. Unfortunately Bill had left issue 71 uncompleted and in 2020 a group of four fanzine editors (Pat Virzi, Jeanne Bowman, Alan Rosenthal and Rich Coad) got together and finished it off. For good



measure they also added a festschrift titled AFTERWORLDS.

So what's so interesting about that you may ask. Simply that the fanzine issue is 213 pages long and approximately 132,000 words, and the festschrift is an additional 290 pages. It is huge, and will surely rank as one of the greatest fan publications of all-time in the years ahead. You'll need to shelve it next to WARHOON 28.

It represents an era of fanzine publication that is now passed into history, and I'm talking about the original OUTWORLDS here not this new publication.

I think it was Irwin Hirsh who told me about it originally – he has a letter-of-comment in OUTWORLDS and hence received a free copy. I got mine through the designated print-on-demand service set up for this publication for the grand price of \$US20, excess proceeds of which will go to various fannish charities. I see that Bruce Gillespie is another with a printed letter, and Alan Stewart has since told me that he was on Bowers' fanzine trading list twenty years ago so he got a copy as well.

This is going to take me some time to work my way through; it's way bigger than some of the novels or story anthologies I'll be reading over summer though I suspect that I'll be picking it up quite a bit when the cricket gets a little slow and I want to be reminded again what this funny little hobby of ours is capable of.



December was also a rather busy month for me fanzine publishing-wise with three different publications being released. You will be aware of PERRYSCOPE 5, the previous issue in this series, though maybe less aware of the other two.

The first of these, LITTLE BLUE NUMBER (LBN), is not for wide distribution because it deals with a very specific topic for a very specific audience. I believe I have mentioned here, and also noted in the colophon above, that this publication is distributed through ANZAPA (the Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association). It is the general tradition of such apas that members make comments on other members' contributions, rather like comment threads on Facebook or Twitter. In this case the comment turn-around time is 2 months so it can take a long time to get an ongoing conversation to its conclusion. On the other hand it does have the bonus of allowing you time to provide a considered response if so desired.

Some apa members produce one contribution and include all of their mailing comments in with the rest. In my case the comments are confined to LBN and distributed only there. The comments would be completely

*Small Steps
Across
a Foreign
Land 1*



incomprehensible to anyone not familiar with the original writing or the original writers, so I don't distribute that outside the apa membership.

The second publication I put together was a trip report based on Robyn's and my travels in Iceland in August 2019. I originally published daily reports of our time there in our travel blog (<http://perryandrobyntravelblog.blogspot.com/>). These were only first-draft descriptions which I always hoped to come back to to re-write, expand, amend and re-furbish with extra photos. That is now done and published as SMALL STEPS ACROSS A FOREIGN LAND 1. The fact that it came in at 30 pages was a bit of a shock. I hadn't realised I'd written that much. The other problem is that, with all the photos, it's around 5.0Mgb which is too big for some people's email accounts. So it has been uploaded to efanzines.com and you can access it via pdf download from there. (<https://efanzines.com/Perryscope/index.htm>)

I've sent copies out to a few people who also get this publication, plus a number of others; I won't be running it through ANZAPA for a number of reasons. If you would prefer to receive a copy as a pdf attached to an email then let me know and I'll send one along.

I hope there will be more of these in the future, I'm just not exactly sure when. It took a fair amount of work to wrangle this thing into shape so it will just have to find its place in the publishing schedule.



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MY PERSONAL LIFE

A READER'S JOURNEY: 2. SHORT SF&F

Spreadsheets are one thing, a plan is another thing entirely. It's okay to know where you're aiming to get to, that's a big help, but the main problem is the route. Or, more specifically, the starting point.

In 2018 I'd started to settle into a steady daily reading pattern that generally went as follows: 15-20 minutes on the train to work, 30 minutes or so at lunch time, 15-20 minutes on the train home, and maybe an hour at night before I went to bed. At around a page per minute that would give me roughly 100 pages a day, or the equivalent of 2 novels a week. So, maybe, about 0.37 of a Neal Stephenson brick.

Some of that reading time could be aimed at novels (generally the hour at night), and some of it could be used to read shorter fiction.

I had already begun to read some shorter sf&f over the past few years as I tackled the Hugo ballots, mostly getting through the full set of nominees and therefore feeling qualified enough to vote, even if my selections were usually at odds with the final results. But just reading the Hugo nominees gave me only 5 or 6 stories in each category each year. The Locus recommended reading lists since 2015 were usually including 15-20 novellas, 35-45 novelettes, and 60-70 short stories. Clearly I was not even scratching the surface.

I just needed a year to get started. 2014 struck me as being a bit of a strange year as that was the period covered by the Hugo Awards that were impacted by the Puppies. I didn't quite know what to do about that so I thought I'd skip that year for a bit. Sure I'd come back to it, just not yet.

2013 seemed just a touch too far back as a starting point. 2015 seemed close enough to touch so I settled on that.

Listing all of the stories nominated for all the awards I was looking at presented me with another problem: how the hell could I track these things down without spending a fortune? I wanted to concentrate on just reading those stories that appeared on ballots. Maybe the "Best of..." collections in a year might provide a way in. So I started adding in the stories anthologised there.

Dozois and Strahan I knew of, but who was Horton and who was Clarke? The fantastic resource at The Internet Speculative Fiction DataBase (isfdb.org) turned out to be invaluable. The spreadsheets were updated, the Nebula Showcase series was noted, Datlow and Guran anthologies discovered, and horror and weird fantasy were added. (Paula Guran also edited an anthology of Best Novellas for 2015 which I found very helpful. Unfortunately that series has been discontinued.)

By now, though, the numbers were somewhat higher than I had first thought. For works published in 2015 I finally settled on 33 novellas, 58 novelettes, and 132 short stories, representing ballots from the awards and the contents of the 8 or 9 anthologies. I knew I wasn't going to be able to get through all of it, a representative sample would have to do. As I said above I'd read the Hugo nominated works which provided very little cross-over with the Nebula nominees – 1 novella, 1 novelette, and 1 short story – with only the novella (Nnedi Okorafor's *Binti*) being a joint winner. ***The Nebula Award Showcase 2017*** anthology filled in the Nebula winners (yes, now always dated two years after the actual year) and then it was down to the "Best of"s.

By mid 2019 I'd read 7 major anthologies representing work from 2015, plus various other shorter pieces from online sources, in other single-author collections and in other anthologies that I didn't finish. That represented 23 or 33 novellas, 41 of 58 novelettes, and 70 of 133 short stories. And that seemed like quite enough.

My work circumstances changed at the end of 2019 from full-time work to full-time retirement. As a result I can't see myself being able to get back to that sort of reading regime again. How Strahan, Horton and Clarke do it I have no idea.

2015 is probably going to be my best short fiction year. Other than the works nominated for the Hugo Awards each year these days I tend to concentrate more on novels that David Grigg and I discuss on the podcast. It's about all I can handle.



WHAT I'M DOING TO KEEP MYSELF BUSY

Podcasting – TWO CHAIRS TALKING, co-hosted with David Grigg

Notes from this month's podcast

Episode 42: Life, the Universe and Everything (7 December 2020)

We're back in the Hugo Time Machine this episode with a look at the shortlisted works for the 1965 Hugo Awards, covering publications from 1964. We are both of the view that the three short fiction pieces weren't much and only two of the novels (not including the winner) were anywhere near good enough. Looks

like 1964 was not a great year for sf, at least as represented by the Hugo Awards. Three of the books have capsule reviews below.



Only the one episode this month as David and I have decided to take a bit of a break over the New Year period. We'll be back in mid-January 2021, starting with our Best of the Year selections in books and TV/film.

Notes from this year's podcasts

In 2020 David and I settled into a steady groove with this podcast, we seemed to get the recordings working properly, though I will admit there were some episodes which still sounded a little "echoey". I think this is more a matter of which room I record in as opposed to anything David does. He's settled down to one particular room in his house which seems very well suited to the purpose, I've had to move around a little to accommodate the changing arrangements in my house due to everyone else working from home. The room I've ended up in is good from an internet-connection point-of-view but not so good in terms of reducing the echo. Put this down to being a work in progress.

As to the content we were strong on book reviews but lacking in some of the other areas we'd like to cover. Again this was mainly due to the lock-down nature of Melbourne life during the year. Not being able to get out and see people meant we weren't able to interview them face-to-face, which is still a method that most people prefer. It seems that a lot of people didn't like the concepts of Zoom or Skype, either because they weren't used to the applications or because they found them intimidating. I suspect that if we were to go through another round of hard lock-downs then the bulk of people would just become resigned to the necessity of communicating this way. Hopefully there won't be a need for that.

There were parts of our reading schedules in 2020 that I enjoyed and some I didn't. Luckily enough David and I are in agreement about where we needed to change our approach. Basically we felt we weren't giving ourselves enough time to read the books we wanted to read, either in the sf and crime genres or not, so we were finding that some of the programs became a bit of a struggle to get through. Our aim in 2021 is to allow ourselves more free

time to roam widely and explore the books, film and television we are interested in. We'll still be running specific programs like the Hugo Time Machine, just not as often.

And with the easing of restrictions in Australia, and in Melbourne in particular, we'll be able to get round to people's houses and interview them *in situ* (so to speak.) We are looking at some program concentrating on specific authors, rather than larger, wider subjects like "Megastructures in SF". We were always going to struggle with that one and, as was pointed out, we did miss some works that maybe should have been included. We had our reasons.

In conclusion then, we will be back in 2021. This podcasting business is part of what we do on a fortnightly basis now, and I can't see us dropping it any time soon.

You can access the current, and all past podcast episodes at www.rightword.com.au or you can subscribe through any podcast subscription service.



WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

2020 targets met this month: none.

Codes – F: format (e for electronic, blank for paper); R: rating, out of 5.0.

Abbr – Hugo – Hugo Award winner; WFA – World Fantasy award winner; coll – single-author collection; nvla – novella; Aust – Australian.

December 2020 books read

Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Notes
<i>The Planet Buyer</i>	Cordwainer Smith	Sf	Dec 1		4.0	
<i>The Wanderer</i>	Fritz Leiber	Sf	Dec 2		3.4	Hugo
<i>Davy</i>	Edgar Pangborn	Sf	Dec 7		3.3	
<i>The Ministry of the Future</i>	Kim Stanley Robinson	Sf	Dec 16		4.8	
<i>If It Bleeds</i>	Stephen King	Horror	Dec 22		3.4	coll
<i>Blacktop Wasteland</i>	S. A. Cosby	Crime	Dec 27	e	3.4	
<i>Silver in the Wood</i>	Emily Tesh	Fantasy	Dec 27	e	3.8	nvla, WFA
<i>A Rose for Ecclesiastes</i>	Roger Zelazny	Sf	Dec 30		4.2	coll
<i>The Children's Bach</i>	Helen Garner	Lit	Dec 31		4.4	Aust

Books read in the month: 9

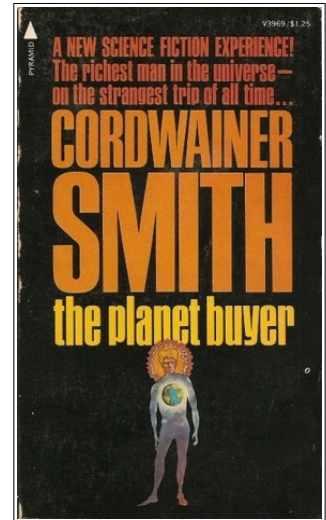
Yearly total to end of month: 119

A correction: last issue I noted that *The Whole Man* by John Brunner starts in a future unnamed American city. After thinking about that for a bit, and doing some extra reading I'm not so sure that the city is in America after all. It may be Britain. Let's just say it's a future city somewhere.

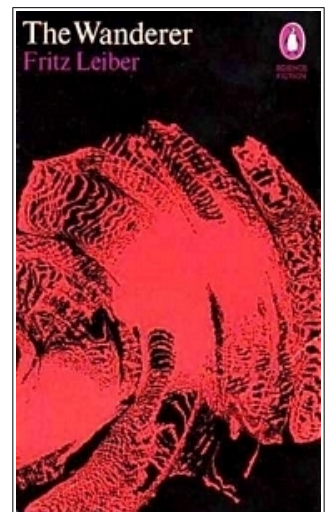
Notes:

The Planet Buyer (1964) – This short novel forms the first half of the 1975 Smith novel ***Norstrilia***. Roderick Frederick Ronald Arnold William MacArthur McBan the hundred and fifty-first is a sheep farmer on the planet of Old North Australia. The sheep there are sick and in their sickness produce the santaclara drug, also known as “stroon”, which prolongs human life indefinitely. As a result, Rod and all his fellow Norstrilians are very, very rich. And telepathic, though Rod’s abilities are intermittent. He also has access to the only all-mechanical computer on the planet, which helps him one day to gamble on the interplanetary stock exchange, make the largest fortune ever seen in the universe and then buy Old Earth: buildings, oceans, forests, the lot. No-one wrote like Smith then, and no-one does now. Although the story is slight and rather basic, he adds lustre and imagination to it in such a way that it shines out from the general ruck even 55 years down the track. Wonderful stuff.

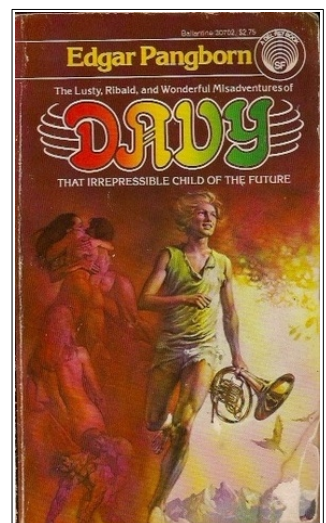
Discussed on the podcast in episode 42. Nominated for a Hugo Award. R: 4.0/5.0



The Wanderer (1964) – Hugo Award winner for Best Novel 1965, Leiber’s second win in that category. An Earth-sized planet suddenly appears in the solar system and settles between the Earth and the Moon. The impact of this is the breakup of the Moon, and massive tides, earthquakes and tsunami on Earth. The novel follows numerous groups of people around the world, and including on astronaut on the Moon who makes a narrow escape, as the dreadful impact of the planet’s arrival threatens to devastate human civilisation. This may be the first use of the multiple narrative device in sf, especially on this scale. In this case it’s hard to be interested in any of the characters depicted and the novel suffers because of that. Certainly not the best sf of its year. It’s too loose, too padded, and rather bland. Discussed on the podcast in episode 42. R: 3.4/5.0

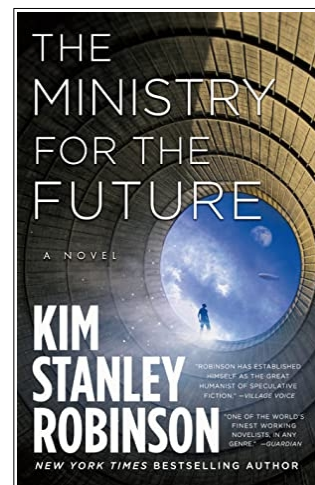


Davy (1964) – Set some three hundred years after an unspecified apocalypse has returned North America back to medieval times this novel follows the early life of Davy, an orphaned boy full of life. This is basically a coming-of-age novel and, as such, doesn’t have much of a plot. It appears that the author’s main aim was to show aspects of every-day life in a such a world. I didn’t find this engaging at all. Maybe it’s just a scenario I have seen too often for it to have much impact. I suspect that I would have been much more taken with it if I had read it in the 1960s when the concept and style would have been comparatively new. It reminded me a lot of Richard Cowper’s stories about a post-apocalyptic Britain, such as “The Piper at the Gates of Dawn”. Unfortunately it suffers by comparison. I have a memory of reading Pangborn’s *A MIRROR FOR OBSERVERS* that I really liked, but I was disappointed by this one. Discussed on the

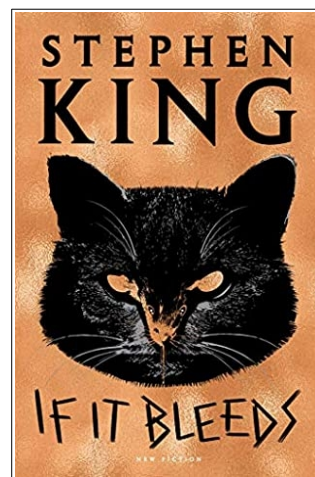


podcast in episode 42. R: 3.3/5.0

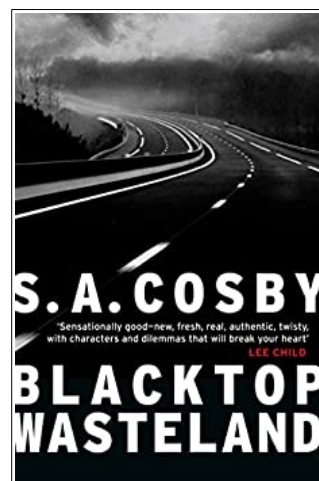
The Ministry of the Future (2020) – Robinson’s optimistic novel about the fight against climate change and its impacts set in the 2030s may well be the best sf novel of the year. Told in 106 short story or vignette chapters the book covers the big world picture as well as the individual struggles involved in moving a world away from a carbon-based economy to one that places its major emphasis on the health and well-being of the planet itself. Some of these chapters are written almost like ancient riddles from the point-of-view of such items as a photon, the sun, history, the market, and a carbon atom. No one else in the field writes like this and I doubt whether there are any that could. I feel safe in saying that if you don’t read this novel then you won’t be able to get a picture of what modern sf is capable of. R: 4.8/5.0



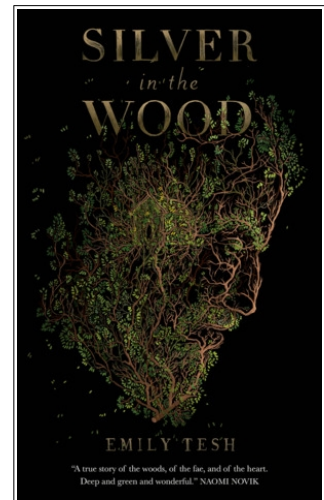
If It Bleeds (2020) – A collection of four horror novellas, all of which are very flat. This is probably the most unsatisfying of King’s collections. The major and title story here returns us to King’s current favourite character of Holly Gibbons – who appeared in the Bill Hodges trilogy and in ***The Outsider***. This novella is a variant on that later novel featuring another type of Outsider, one who feeds on the grief of the relatives of the recently deceased. But he’s been spotted by both Holly and someone else who is able to supply Holly with the creature’s background and abilities. As much as King attempts to ratchet up the tension in the story it just doesn’t work, and you are left wondering why he bothered. The other three are very minor works indeed. If you haven’t read any collection of King’s longer stories before then I would heartily recommend ***Different Seasons*** – now’s that’s a horror collection. Skip this, unless you’re a King completist. R: 3.4/5.0



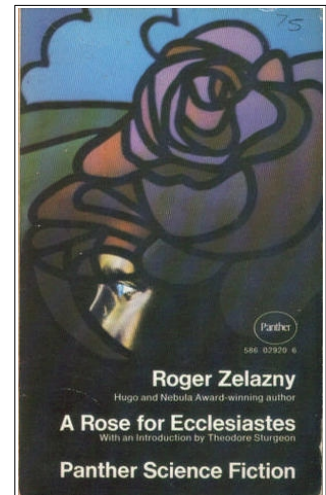
Blacktop Wasteland (2020) – There’s a line in a Springsteen song that runs: “I had debts no honest man could pay.” It’s a line that resonated with me throughout this novel. Beauregard (“Bug”) Montage is two men: the loving husband and father, car mechanic and street racer; and a getaway-driving criminal. His personal and business debts pile up on him to absurd levels until he is forced to accept a part in a diamond heist with a pair of low-life white trash brothers. It doesn’t go as planned even though they get away with the diamonds. And when Bug hears that the crime is being described as an “attempted” robbery he knows there is more going on than he is aware of. The novel takes some time to get started and then still has some flat points, which seems odd as there are a lot of high-action sequences here. This shows a lot of talent that needed to be honed to a sharper edge for it to shine as it should have done. I have no doubt this will make a better film-script, as all the padding will be cut away. Great title. R: 3.4/5.0



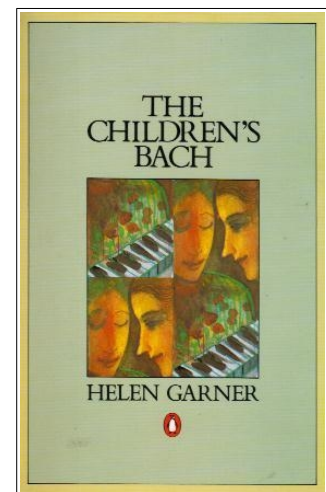
Silver in the Wood (2019) – World Fantasy Award winner for best novella in 2020. Tobias Finch is a four-hundred-year old Green Man living in and protecting Greenhollow Wood. He meets and befriends the new owner of the local manor house, Henry Silver, and his whole life begins to change. There are other forces in the woods, more malevolent forces, such as the Lord of Summer who takes a shine to Silver and takes him out of this world. Finch, along with the formidable and knowing Mrs Silver, Henry's mother, must make some radical decisions and actions in order to get Henry back. This is a short novella written in the classic woodland British tradition of Tolkein (a bit) and Holdstock (a lot). Tesh shows a lot of talent and will be a writer to watch in the years ahead. This is the first part of a duology of novellas. R: 3.8/5.0



A Rose for Ecclesiastes (1969) – A collection of four shorter works by Zelazny from his most creative period. The title story and "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth" were on the ballots for the Hugo Award in their respective years, but didn't win ("Rose" was by far the best story on the 1964 list – discussed on episode 37 of the podcast), while "Doors" won a Nebula in 1966. Both show Zelazny at his best and deserve to be re-read. Of the others in the collection, "The Furies" is a strange story of three handicapped but gifted hunters who track down a planet-burning space pirate (it is way better than that description sounds), and "The Graveyard Heart" concerning a group of elites who travel through life experiencing only three or four days a year of real time, the rest taken up by deep sleep. This collection contains some of Zelazny's best work and works as a perfect introduction to his style. R: 4.2/5.0



The Children's Bach (1986) – Garner's episodic novella revolves around the Fox family in Bunker Street, in inner-suburban Melbourne: Dexter and Athena and their sons Arthur and Billy, who is autistic. Into this grouping come Elizabeth, an old house-mate of Dexter's; Vicky, her much younger sister; Philip, Elizabeth's lover; and Poppy, Philip's twelve-year-old daughter. Before long the reader sees the major contrast between Dexter, solid and reliable, and Philip, amoral and sexually predatory, with Athena as the prize between them. Garner's pared-back prose is perfect for this type of novel, one that she has made her own over the years. In the hands of many other authors, this novella would be a long drawn-out novel sucked dry of all life. Here the gaps between episodes speak almost as loudly as the words they surround. R: 4.4/5.0



REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS 1

The Women in Black (1993) by Madeleine St John
Genre: Literary

Madeleine St John (1941-2006) was educated at Sydney University and was a part of the graduating year that included Clive James, Germaine Greer, Robert Hughes and Bruce Beresford. Like them she left Australia soon after graduating but moved to the USA after marrying filmmaker Christopher Tillman. When that marriage ended she settled in England in 1968, though she doesn't appear to have had much social interaction with her compatriots.

The Women in Black is her debut novel written when she was 52. She only wrote another 3 novels, which is a pity given the quality of this one.



The book is set in the 1950s in and around the Ladies' Frock Department of the fictitious F. G. Goode department store in Sydney. Lesley Miles, who changes her name to Lisa, is a young schoolgirl who takes a summer job in the Cocktail Frocks section while she waits for her Leaving results to be announced. Her coming of age coincides with major changes for the sales staff in Frocks, as one after another undergoes a momentous life event. Lisa is taken under the wing of the cosmopolitan Magda, a glamorous European refugee who runs the Model Gowns section of the Frock Department, and, as the novel progresses, you watch Lisa change from a shy but determined young schoolgirl into a young woman on the verge of a major change in her life.

Each of the major players in the Department are treated with care and compassion by the author and you slowly get the feeling that she has a genuine love for all of them. Each finds themselves in difficulties at various times during the book though, given the author's obvious feelings about her characters, only the most cynical of readers would assume that any of their stories would end badly.

The novel is as joyous and bright as the Sydney weather, with not a step out of place. And there is some genuine writing skill on show here. In one section Magda announces and then runs a New Year's party in her North Shore flat and, during the life of the party, the author concentrates purely on Magda, describing the action of the party from her point-of-view and her part of the dialogue alone. In four pages of flawless writing you have it all laid out: the welcomes, the introductions, the manoeuvring of one person next to another, the offerings of food and drink, the future plans and the good-byes. A beautiful piece of work.

Such is the feeling of faultlessness here that there is a real autobiographical sense to the novel. It reads like a series of lives well-lived, and lives on the brink of major change; lives worth knowing.

[Filmed by Bruce Beresford as *Ladies in Black* in 2018.]

Rating: 4.6/5.0

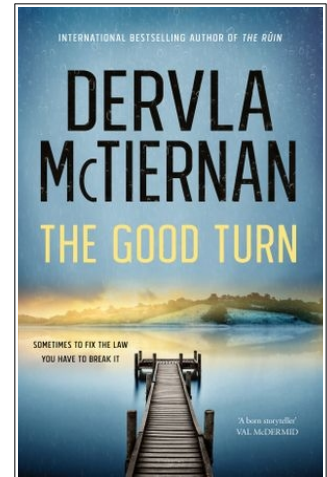


REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS 2

The Good Turn (2020) by Dervla McTiernan

Genre: Crime

This is the third in Dervla McTiernan's series of crime novels featuring Irish policeman Detective Sergeant Cormac Reilly. In the first of these, ***The Ruin***, Reilly has decided to give up his job in a special crimes unit in Dublin to follow his partner Emma back to Galway where he started as a young garda some twenty years previously. That first novel followed Reilly as he investigated the death of a young man who apparently committed suicide. This novel made an immediate impact winning the Ned Kelly Best First Novel, the Davitt and Barry Awards. The follow-up, ***The Scholar***, found Emma possibly implicated in the death of a young woman identified as the heir to Darcy Therapeutics, Ireland's most successful pharmaceutical company. This novel won the International Thriller Award for Best Paperback.



Having enjoyed the previous two entries in this series I was looking forward to catching up with Reilly again in this third instalment. I was not disappointed.

Reilly is on the outer in Galway – hated by his superiors and disliked by his co-workers, none of whom can understand the reasons behind his transfer from Dublin to the backwaters of Galway. They distrust his motives, and actively badmouth him behind his back to all members of the force. While the Galway police are carrying out a surveillance and then raid on a suspected drug smuggling ring, Reilly and his off-sider Peter Fisher are sent off to investigate the alleged abduction of a young girl off a Galway street. While Reilly is interviewing the family and witness Fisher takes matters into his own hands and follows a car suspected of being involved in the girl's disappearance. Things rapidly get out of hand and Fisher is forced to shoot the driver of the car when he attempts to run Fisher down. The driver dies and things go rapidly downhill from there.

Fisher is shuffled off to work with his father at a country police station while Reilly is put on suspension. As his life starts to unravel Reilly keeps investigating his suspicions of police corruption in Galway while Fisher stumbles onto a devastating crime in the small village. After the events of the second novel Reilly's partner has decided to take up a job in Brussels, firstly on a temporary basis, and then, as the novel progresses, becomes increasingly likely never to return. Reilly fumbles his way through his own personal crisis as well as his ongoing, illegal investigation.

Very well plotted, this is an excellent entry in the series. While it isn't really necessary to have read the previous books featuring this character, the extra background provided makes this book more enjoyable. The author is building a very well rounded character here; a character of high moral standing who is willing to risk their career on their sense of what is right, and at the same time human enough to make mistakes that threaten to derail everything.

I was mildly critical of the author's first two novels in that I didn't feel she had provided enough local colour or background. The novels' background environment felt mostly sketched in, missing one of the major delineating components of a great crime novel from a merely good one. But she has turned that around with this book and you do get the feeling that the action of this novel could only have taken place in this way, in this place.

It also shows a lot more authorial confidence with a willingness to put the heat on her central characters. The author now knows full well that her character will survive any of the trials and pitfalls she can throw at him. I'll certainly be on board to read any further books featuring Cormac Reilly.

Rating: 4.3/5.0.



WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

TELEVISION

THE SPY (7 episodes)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Spy, thriller

R: 3.8/5.0

This Israeli espionage miniseries features Sasha Baron Cohen in the lead role of Eli Cohen, a Mossad spy in the 1960s. Supposedly inspired by real-life events leading up to the Six-Days War in 1967. Picked up as an Army reject Cohen is trained as a spy by Mossad with the aim of infiltrating him into the higher levels of the Syrian government. After he moves to Damascus by way of Argentina, the material he returns to Israel is of the highest order and he takes more and more risky chances to obtain access to both people and documents. He is finally appointed to the position of Syria's Deputy Defence Minister and becomes a close confidant of the country's future president. But his attempts to get more intelligence material and his increasingly cavalier style finally see him uncovered. This series has some dull patches in the middle as Cohen builds his contacts and identity in Syria, though it provides a good insight into the intelligence services of that time. Cohen, as Cohen, does a very good job dealing with the dual life he needs to lead in order to survive.



STREET FOOD : LATIN AMERICA (6 episodes)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Food/Travel

R: 3.7/5.0

This is the second volume of Netflix's documentary series concerning street food – the first being Asia which I haven't finished as yet. Each program features four store owners and four or five specific dishes in a new city each episode. The cities depicted here are: Buenos Aires, Argentina; Salvador, Brazil; Oaxaca, Mexico; Lima, Peru; Bogota, Columbia; and La Paz, Bolivia. It is interesting to note that the majority of store owners depicted are women, and their back stories follow a common thread of wayward husbands who either desert the family or are kicked out, with the women then utilising their cooking skills to provide for themselves and their families. So in many ways it's as much a social commentary as food doco. My only query with the concept is that some of the food depicted is not what I would consider street food. I believe it has to be sold in the street and not in restaurants, and should be aimed at those who want to eat and walk at the same time. But that's picking a rather small nit. Very diverting in a year of little or not travel.



FILM

Not much watched by way of film throughout 2020. The cinemas were open at the start of the year, then closed, then very briefly opened again, and then closed as Melbourne went into full-on lock-down for 3 months. They are now starting to get back to a regular schedule so I'm hoping that I can get back to that cinema watching experience again in the new year.

Thankfully streaming services were available.

ENOLA HOLMES

Venue: at home on Netflix

Genre: YA adventure

R: 3.7/5.0

The conceit behind this movie is that Enola is the much younger sister of Mycroft and Sherlock (Henry Cavill) Holmes. Based on the YA stories written by Nancy Springer, Enola is a feisty resourceful young woman who goes looking for her mother (Helena Bonham Carter) after she goes missing around Enola's 16th birthday. Forced into a strict boarding school for girls, Enola escapes to London and thwarts an attempt to kidnap a handsome young aristocrat who has a crush on her. The film starts with high energy and fun but slowly heads towards a tad too much sentimentality. The lead actress is perfect and the supporting cast handle their parts with style – Carter is particularly good in this sort of role. A minor diversion more pitched at an audience of the heroine's age.



THE GENTLEMEN

Venue: at home on Foxtel

Genre: Action/Comedy

R: 3.4/5.0

Guy Ritchie directs another entry in that visually appealing though rather tired genre of Guy Ritchie films. The first entry in that genre, *LOCK STOCK AND TWO SMOKING BARRELS*, was the best of the bunch. This one is better than most but really just more of the same. Matthew McConaughey plays Micky Pearson, a US born and UK resident cannabis drug baron, who falls foul of Big Dave, editor of the *Daily Print* tabloid newspaper. Hugh Grant's comic camp private investigator Fletcher is hired by Dave to get the dirt on Pearson and uncovers an attempt by a Chinese consortium to thwart Pearson's sale of his business to a competitor. This is an amusing film featuring some fine acting by Grant, Colin Farrell, Michelle Dockery, Charlie Hunnam and some of the supporting cast, but McConaughey isn't convincing, and the script is mostly predictable.



PERRYSCOPE Responses

Perryscope 5:

Martin Field: "*Unreliable Memoirs* – laugh out loud is right – I remember reading it not long after publication – and laughing – I thought *sotto voce* – on a plane – much to Lucy's annoyance. In later years I sometimes found Clive a tad pretentious playing the old man of letters. A low point was him coming the high horse (on *Aspel* or *Parkinson*) asking Oliver Reed why he drank."

[PM: James had a lot of vices in his life, though I seem to recall that drinking wasn't one of them. He may well have been genuinely interested in why Reed drank, especially seeing as it slowly destroying him. Then again, he may well have let the whole celebrity thing get to him as you suggest.]

"If today's students have difficulty with Dennis – how do they cope with the language in Shakespeare, *The King James Bible*, *Beowulf*, *Ulysses* – Both Homer's and Joyce's version?"

[PM: I don't think they do. At least not well. The Bloke does have the added difficulty of being in slang, which can tend to date rather quickly.]

"I agree about the Pinsker book. I thought it got off to a rollicking start but then slowly got mired down in performance description..."

[PM: There is certainly a lot to like about the book, but it does have some issues.]

Carey Handfield: "While I am sure there are other Carey Handfield's in the world I was named after a Carey Handfield who was born in Dublin in the early 1800 s. He was a brother to my great grand father Federick Oliver Handfield. He was a captain in her majesty's 29th Regiment of foot of Meerut, East Indies."

[PM: Always worth following up on your own name on Google. Even if it is just a chance to see what others are saying about you.]

Spike: “When I interviewed Banks back in the day (at Mexican II or III)(the one in Nottingham) he told me that ***Consider Phlebas*** was written first. He wrote more than one SF novel in his college years (or so? before his move to London anyhow), when he and his pal Ken McLeod were both aspiring writers. After his success with ***The Wasp Factory***, and discovering fandom, Banksie dusted off (and presumably re-worked) ***Consider Phlebas***. Someone like John Jarrold found out about the misspent youth and expressed interest. A couple of years later, after re-writing another of his old novels, Banks told me he thought it harder to resurrect an old novel than to start fresh. Maturity.”

[**PM:** The order of writing as you describe it was my understanding as well until I read in Paul Kincaid’s book on Banks that “Moreover, the next novel Banks wrote after ***The Wasp Factory*** was ***Consider Phlebas***, which he put aside without submitting for publication only because ***The Wasp Factory*** had been accepted.” (p9) All very confusing.]

I also heard from: Tineke Hazel (who told me about Dad’s agreement to take on the “Middlemiss” name); **Werner Koopmann**; – thank you one and all.

