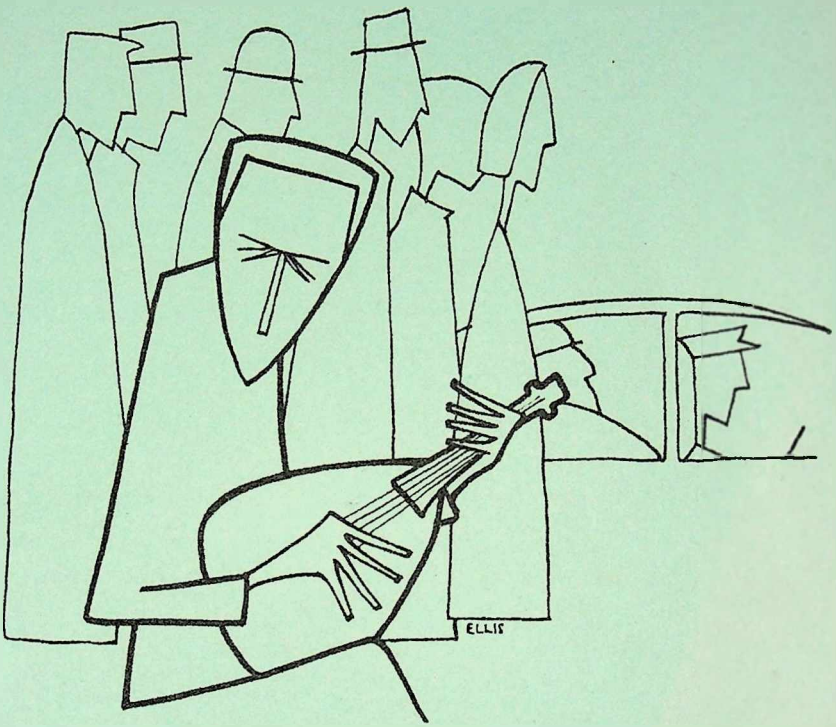

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

Twelfth Anniversary Issue

TRAVELLING

Use is grace.
Spirit in constancy
finds voice, binds space.

Silence of absence: heart
seeks to speak, but faint,
strained, among strangers.
Alone is all constraint.
Cell self O prison! — free
is not to be
but to be part.

Ursula K. Le Guin

PARERGON PAPERS

are published when the mood takes him by John Bangsund PO Box 434 Norwood SA 5067 Australia. So far the mood has taken him eight times in nine months, so it would be reasonable to say that the publication schedule is ten issues per year. The subscription is A$5.00 for ten issues. Contributions, especially letters of comment, are preferred to subscriptions. Trades by arrangement. Stencils by Morgan. Printing by accident. The Australian National Library advises that Parergon Papers are known to computers the world over as ISSN 0155-0713. This issue should confuse them no end.

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The Twelfth Anniversary Issue of
AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW

Artwork by Jim Ellis (front cover: from ASFR 10) and Morris Meredith Williams (back cover)

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Earlier issues of Parergon Papers are available, up to a point. The point is that many have been printed but few have been posted. I have a mailing list, but many of the people on it have yet to see an issue. ASFR used to be a bit like this, too, so no-one can say I'm not keeping up a grand tradition. This issue has a much higher print-run than usual, and will be much more widely distributed. If you would like to have the earlier issues, please let me know which issues you have, and I will do my best to supply you with the issues you don't have. This applies to people on the free list as well as subscribers. At present (take a bow, Leanne) I have one subscriber.

This issue will be distributed through ANZAPA and FAPA. If John McPharlin has room in his suitcase, 100 copies will be offered for sale at the National Convention in Melbourne.

BRIAN ALDISS

ADDRESS TO THE MELBOURNE SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION, EASTER 1966

IT WOULD BE a waste of your tape and your time if I didn't say something about science fiction today, dwell ponderously for a minute or two on future trends, and have a hand at a little home-made philosophizing and extrapolation. But I'm always careful about doing this. When a writer does it, you'll generally see the same processes at work: either he's a raw and unashamed egotist and will just tell you what *he's* going to do, or he's subtler and wraps up what he's going to do in such a way as to make it sound as if he's telling you what everyone else is going to do. I don't particularly want to do either of those things -- for one reason, because I don't know what I'm going to do — but I think a general principle might be aired. It's so obvious that it's often forgotten: that is, that science fiction would profit from being of a better literary standard. This is something quite outside all the various trends and platforms that various writers have.

Good writing is always worth attaining. Equally, there are all sorts of reasons why it should fail to be attained. We have seen some of these in science fiction — the factors that operate for and against good sf, and they change from time to time.

I think that in the early 1930s good sf was at a premium, not because it was a medium that hadn't been long established, but because the people who wrote it were interested in putting over scientific facts, or indulging in a scientific lecture. Now often these were exceptionally banal lectures; the points that were made were perhaps concerned with, shall we say, the fact that if you get it cold enough oxygen turns into a liquid. This is very exciting — but it only excites the first time.

As the 1930s wore along you got a period when the writers were writing for thrills and excitements, the solar system was being milked for every possible horror that could be dug up, and again the author's eye was not actually on the writing as such. Since then we've gone through various phases — sociology, radiation, telepathy, psi — and in all of these I think it is true to say that the major interest was directed away from the story-writing.

The point that is always brought up as militating against good writing is that sf is rottenly paid. In fact, a good writer works well however much or however little he is paid, all else

being equal, but I don't think it is true any longer that sf is badly paid. A science fiction writer is at least as regularly paid as many of his colleagues writing in other fields, and in many ways, since the 1960s anyway, is in a much better position than they are.

Science fiction today has no major preoccupations. By this I mean the situation where you can get a story into Magazine X simply because it happens to be about, shall we say, lycanthropy, and the editor of X happens to want only lycanthropy stories, and therefore he will take even a story that is poorly written, if it happens to be about a werewolf. There is less of this today, and in consequence I think writers are more likely to concentrate on the writing – and I'm quite convinced that this is the only possible thing that can make sf respected, worthwhile, better-selling, however you like to put it.

We are inside the field of sf, and we may love our Skylark Smiths and our Homer Eon Flints, but we shouldn't perduade ourselves that by any ordinary standards of literacy these writers write acceptable works of fiction. They don't. Their interest, in a way, is that they are so... I was going to say, so *unmitigatingly horrible!* but I flinch from it... they are so very poorly written. What these writers were concentrating on was something other than fiction, and in any form of fiction you just can't do that.

I would certainly be classed as a utopian, though, if I thought that improved standards of writing would greatly increase the audience for sf. I think that standards have improved – and yet I was told by a publisher last week that paperback sales of sf in Great Britain are decreasing by half-a-percent per month. How ominous this is, I don't know, but it does suggest at least that the public isn't flocking in.

There's only one way to deal with this, and you know what it is. It's to declare *prohibition* – to ban sf entirely, to stop publishers publishing it, hunt out the writers, shoot the agents against the wall. And then, then we would finally see the desired renascence for sf. Everyone would want it. Everyone would be printing bootleg copies on the sly. Sales would bound and bound as never before. I'm sure you would find that somewhere right out in the Outback, by Alice Springs, there would be a little illicit publisher who was printing genuine old vintage Heinleins, turning them out on a hand press in little limited editions that would sell for the earth in the big cities.

And all around the world it would be the same glorious story.

– Reprinted from Australian Science Fiction Review no.1, June 1966

BRUCE GILLESPIE

ON READING SCIENCE FICTION

— Guest of Honour Speech, Unicon II, University of Melbourne, Easter 1976

I AM NOT quite sure what the duties are of a Guest of Honour at a convention such as this, but I know very well that they include giving a speech. The convention committee told me that I could speak about any subject I liked — about what I really want to tell people, rather than what I feel I ought to say. Of course, I do have a chance to tell people exactly what I want to tell them. I have that opportunity when I publish my magazine *SF Commentary*, and I guess that publishing that magazine is the reason why I am here today. People who read my magazine know that what I say there is a weird collection of rantings, ravings, effusions and an occasional word or two of good sense. But somehow, in *SFC* I rarely take the opportunity to discourse on any one particular topic that interests me — to rave on, as they say. Here, then, is my chance to rave on.

The first question I asked myself was *What do I really want to say to you?* I made a quick list of likely topics, twenty-two of them, and decided that was too many, since Guest of Honour speeches that go over ten hours are a bit unpopular. So I struck a few items from my list. Love, Death, The Nature of the Universe — important, but perhaps some other time. I kept on deleting topics until I was left with two: The Writing of Science Fiction, and The Reading of Science Fiction. At first The Writing of Science Fiction seemed more interesting, but then I thought *Yes, but haven't we heard a few speeches on this subject before?* And of course, we have: it has been the main subject for speeches by Guests of Honour at Australian conventions during the last few years.

At the first convention I attended, the 1968 Melbourne Science Fiction Conference, Jack Wodhams, who was Guest of Honour, told us how he became Australia's first full-time science fiction writer almost by accident. Unfortunately, the same sort of accident seems to have removed Jack from the field altogether. Lee Harding was Guest of Honour at the 1969 convention, and in his speech he gave a succinct summary of sf writing in Australia to that time. A notable thing about this is that the audience included just about every Australian then writing and selling science fiction. That sort of speech, and the discussion after it, was very much from the writer's viewpoint.

During 1969 and 1970 there was a lot of optimism about the prospects for Australian science fiction, especially when Ron Graham launched his professional sf magazine *Vision of Tomorrow*. His editors, Phil Harbottle in England (where the magazine was published) and John Bangsund in Australia, encouraged a lot of new and dormant talent. *Vision* folded after a year or so, and for a time Australian sf seemed to have disappeared, but in recent years it has popped up again with renewed vigour. One of the new writers is David Grigg, who was Guest of Honour at the Rosebud Convention a few months ago. In a most entertaining talk he described how he had stopped writing for the fanzines and become a 'pro writer'.

In recent years we have also had a rather different type of discussion about writing science fiction. For instance, George Turner was the Guest of Honour at the 1973 Easter Convention. George is known to a few fans as a very good mainstream author. Recently he has written a science fiction novel that I consider to be rather better than this year's Nebula Award nominations. But he is best known for his reviews in the Melbourne *Age*, *SF Commentary*, John Bangsund's various magazines, and such overseas magazines as *Foundation* and *Algol*. In 1973 George told us about an extensive catalogue of sins perpetrated by most sf writers, and suggested some of the ways in which sf might really improve. In this speech I think George had in mind something that lies behind a lot that has been said and written about sf in recent years, and that is the assumption that if you show the writers the errors of their ways they will take enough notice to write better books. Behind this again is another assumption, that the general standard of science fiction, as literature, is pretty low — perhaps even as low as non-sf-readers think it is.

My last example of the kind of speech that Guests of Honour at Australian conventions have given us is the one presented by Ursula Le Guin at the 33rd World Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne last year. This was such a remarkable speech that it brought the entire audience to its feet in enthusiastic applause. The interesting thing is that, when you listen to the speech on tape, or read a transcript of it, you find that Ursula was saying almost exactly what George Turner said, though in very different words. What I take to be the heart of Ursula's speech lies in one paragraph, which I will read to you. I will read it because it summarizes everything that I have ever tried to say about the writing of science fiction, and what I think such great critics as James Blish, Damon Knight and George Turner have tried to say to us. Ursula was discussing the perennial notion in sf circles that 95 per cent of everything is trash. Theodore Sturgeon is supposed to have said that first, so it is called Sturgeon's Law. Ursula said

> How many books, *while they are being written*, are conceived of by their authors as trash? It's really an interesting question. I have no idea of the answer. It's not zero per cent — far from it. There are many many authors who

> deliberately write junk for money, and I have met others who, though less cynical, have spoken of their work as 'potboilers' or 'mere entertainment' — a little defensively, to be sure, because the ego is always involved in the work — but also honestly, realistically, in the full knowledge that they had not done, and had not tried to do, the best work they could do. And in art, from the artist's point of view, there are only two alternatives: the best you can do, or trash. It's a binary system: on-off, yes-no. Not from the reader's point of view, of course: from there there are infinite gradations between the best and the worst, all degrees of genius, talent and achievement between Shakespeare and the hack, and also within each work, even Shakespeare's. But from the writer's point of view, while writing, there are just two ways to go — to push towards the limit of your capacity, or to sit down and emit garbage. And the really unfair thing is that the intent, however good, guarantees nothing. You can try your heart out, work like a slave, and write drivel. But the opposite intent does carry its own guarantee. No artist ever set out to do less than his best and did something good by accident. You head for perfection and you may very well get trash. But you head towards trash, and by gum, you always get it. The quest for perfection fails at least 95 per cent of the time, but the search for garbage never fails.

Ursula says these things so well.

It is interesting that that paragraph in itself begs a lot of questions that you might like to discuss with me some time. But in general it sums up the sort of speech I would have liked to deliver here, if only people like Ursula and George had not delivered it before, in words rather better than mine. Their basic cry, as it was the cry of James Blish in his guise as William Atheling Jr, is the same: *Look upward, O, Science Fiction Writer! Stop scurrying along the ground after crumbs! Do your best instead of being content with second-best! Give us something satisfying, instead of rubbish!*

Why not (you might ask) simply repeat the message here?

I can think of three reasons why it is time to change the tune a bit.

1. There are far more readers than writers of sf, here in this audience as well as out there buying the books.

2. It's time you had a rest from being castigated for the collective sins of science fiction writers.

3. Talking about the writing of science fiction really does little for the writers themselves. Being told what to do really doesn't have much effect during that heart-stopping second when you actually sit down and begin to write a story or a novel.

I was reminded of this very forcibly last August when I attended

the Australian Science Fiction Writers' Workshop, which was held at Kallista, up in the Dandenong Ranges. Officially I was the Administrative Organizer, but somehow all the atmosphere of creative activity got to me, and I began writing as well. I found out that there comes a moment when you stop reaching out to all you know *about* science fiction and must begin to reach inwards, to what you are (one writer calls this 'digging to the back of your head'), to discover what did not exist at all before it is typed on a sheet of paper. In this atmosphere criticism seems curiously irrelevant. I began to realize that, rather than writing deliberately badly much of the time (as I have accused them of doing, in *SFC*), most writers could not keep at it unless they believed they were 'heading for perfection' in every story they write. If science fiction is bad, perhaps the answer lies elsewhere.

Quite specifically, I suspect that answer lies with you, the reader — which is why I am now going to talk about *reading* science fiction. Please note in passing that I have not dismissed the role of the critic, as many writers do. Instead, I say that the critic is the *reader's* friend, rather than the writer's, and that eventually the readers decide what gets published, what doesn't, what lasts, what perishes.

WHEN I AM sitting in my chair at night, quite often my cat likes to leap into my lap, curl up and go to sleep. Before he goes to sleep, though, he requires the due amount of stroking and tickling until he is purring loudly, and this process is interrupted if I pick up a book and begin to read. This annoys the cat no end. He tries to bat away the book with his paw. He looks at me reproachfully, as if to say *How could you possibly pay more attention to that inanimate wad of paper than to the important business of giving pleasure to a cat?*

That's what I call a fair question.

If you look at a person while he or she is reading, the activity scarcely rates as a form of behaviour at all. There is only an eyelid's movement between reading and falling asleep. One is not capable of doing anything else while reading, and it has no effect on people in the vicinity who might try to communicate with the reader. Yet the simple fact is that reading, particularly reading some kinds of science fiction, is one of the central pleasures of perhaps each person in this audience. It is a pleasure that involves no bodily movement or physical stimulation (unless you get off on the smell of good paper or well-bound books), and yet reading is a consistent and continuing pleasure that is matched by few others we have.

What *kind* of pleasure do we get from reading? It depends, as Alice might say, very much on where you want to go in your reading. I suppose there are people who gain pleasure from reading lists of facts, mathematical formulae or telephone directories. I don't get pleasure from these sources, but I

wouldn't be surprised if the people who do so gain the same kind of pleasure that we gain from reading science fiction.

Science fiction, as we all know, is a branch of prose fiction, which is a form of writing that has developed and grown up only during the last two hundred years or so. Prose fiction, in turn, is a branch of literature, which extends through such forms as poetry, plays and essays.

Now all this is rather obvious, I know, but a central point to remember about literature in general, or prose fiction in particular, is that at any time during the last two hundred years not a particularly large proportion of the population has read any of it, or gained pleasure from the action of reading. Just by picking up a book that may be classed as a novel or a collection of short stories, we place ourselves in a fairly small group of people – so small a group, in fact, that reading literature of any kind should perhaps be considered more as a minority fetish than as one of the accepted pleasures of the good life.

So what is involved in this fetish – apart from the perverse practice of sitting in solitude and silence and somehow gaining the impression that, while we are reading, we are somehow involved in a whole range of intense activities?

The main feature of most forms of fiction is that it describes a *series of events*. Why should a description of a series of events give satisfaction to the person who 'sees' them occurring in his or her mind?

Perhaps part of the answer is that the events *happen to someone* – either to one character in a story or to a whole group of characters. To be interested in the events we must be interested in the people. Marcel Proust, in his little book *On Reading*, tells of his great disappointment at finishing a favourite book, because at that point he must leave the company of a whole group of new-found friends.

To complicate the matter, in science fiction we find a further element: quite often the events and the people are part of an attempt to convey to us a *new idea* – an idea about some possible change in the universe, in the world, or in society itself. So why (we might ask) does the description of new ideas give us pleasure in reading science fiction?

What do you say when someone asks 'Why do you read science fiction?'? The first answer we are likely to give is that sf treats us to something entirely new. This includes not only novelties, but what I call the visionary – the sense of peeping through a keyhole in to an entirely different world, or universe, or way of seeing the world around us. An explosion in the head.

There is also the pleasure we gain from meeting new acquaintances among the characters in the books. Edgar Pangborn, say, or Fritz Leiber, have this power to introduce us to strange people and characters who also have recognizable identities.

At the simplest level, science fiction gives us the pleasure of being whirled through events so fast that the head spins. Keith Laumer, for instance, has found a plausible way of writing such stories.

The question that arises is: How long can anything stay novel, or even visionary, once the explosion has lit up the inside of our heads? When does the effect wear off — and what do we do then? I ask this because so often the newness in science fiction *is* limited and illusory. 'New' sf ideas turn out to be little more than dramatizations of ideas that we probably learnt in third or fourth form general science. The ideas in the average issue of *New Scientist* are much more exciting. The characters that entrance us so much when we meet them for the first time can so often turn out to be shallow, stock characters, not much more interesting than those we find in a standard adventure story or *Women's Weekly* story. Action-filled stories become merely repetitious and boring after reading the first thousand or so. As we read more and more sf, we find fewer and fewer elemental visions. We are looking for something more.

A word we could use to describe that 'something more' is *sentimental*. Sentimental is one of those odd words for which everybody seems to have a different meaning; for most people it probably has the connotation of a weepy story where the heroine dies at the end, while the hero blasts off to meet his fate at the hands of the Vegan space pirates or sails away to find a new life in the colonies or something. But my meaning of sentimental is more technical: it describes a story, or poem, or film, or work of art, the amount of feeling we derive from which is not justified by the actual words or images presented.

For instance, there is nothing about a dying heroine that automatically guarantees the quality of what we are reading or looking at. Yet a teacher friend of mine told me that she went with a group of schoolgirls to see the film *Sunshine*, which is about a long-dying heroine, and the girls began crying as soon as the film started and didn't stop until it was over. Now *Sunshine* is not a good film; if you consider that it was made by the same director who made *The Taking of Pelham 123*, it is astoundingly bad. Obviously those girls brought to the film a whole series of expectations and emotions already inside their heads, sentiments that were merely triggered off by the film.

Many science fiction readers gain the same kind of thrill from sf as those girls found in that film, or, at the other extreme, the pleasure that people gain from the car action sequences in films like *Bullitt*. We tend to be excited by what we expect to excite us. We might get a kick out of reading about spaceships, for instance, or about time travel or alien psychology. There is independent power in the idea of the vastness of space, or quasars, or DNA, going far beyond the stories in which the ideas appear. On a different level, some critics have explained the popularity of the later novels of Robert Heinlein by saying that they appeal to people who like being offered long, boring lectures by father-figures.

Perhaps this point can be made most clearly by conjuring up the name of J. R. R. Tolkien. I am going to quote from a piece written by Peter Nicholls, the expatriate Australian critic and editor, who edits a magazine in England called *Foundation*.

> I wrote in *Foundation* 5: 'Tolkien tends towards... images of a more abstract and general kind... a language imprecise, but sufficiently charged with emotion that the less experienced reader automatically fleshes out the details according to his own fantasies (or nightmares) and then innocently assumes the effect to be Tolkien's skill rather than the vividness of his own imaginings.' Ursula Le Guin (to whom I had sent a carbon of the article) wrote to me: 'The point is dead-centre correct, I think, and quite important; only I interpret it the other way around. It is a sign of Tolkien's fundamental superiority — his genuine, timeless power.'

I think much the same could be said by their admirers for many science fiction works. Take Isaac Asimov's Foundation trilogy. To me, ten years after reading it for the first time, the writing in that trilogy seems threadbare, the story badly constructed and hastily written — the whole catastrophe. Yet we know that it does retain its hold on people's imaginations, and for much the same reasons that Peter Nicholls lists for *The Lord of the Rings*. Readers can bring to the books a whole torrent of very strong yet previously inarticulate feelings about their own place in the universe, about the possibilities for human life and history.

So when we sit down to read a science fiction book, we can find two main sorts of pleasure — the pleasure of having a light turned on in our minds, and the pleasure of having released and brought to the surface emotions and thoughts that were already in us. The real danger in both pleasures is that they lead to complacency. If they are merely repeated, over and over again, without change or development, the pleasures of reading lead us nowhere, and eventually lose all the power they once had.

How can we gain something beyond vision or sentimentality?

There is a sense in which all imaginative literature is sentimental. Wordsworth's poetry or Hardy's novels appeal to a very deep feeling for all things English, and we lose much of the flavour of these works if we do not have some of this feeling already. In the same way, I have gained a much greater appreciation of Wilson Tucker's novels since I saw the extraordinarily wide landscape of the flat prairies of Illinois, where Tucker lives.

Vision is connected to sentiment through the medium of *metaphor*. Again I am using my own, technical, meaning of a word. In common usage a metaphor is simply a kind of literary shorthand by which a concrete object represents another object, or represents a more abstract, complex idea. You can find metaphor even in such a simple statement as 'I was chasing a tram.'

In science fiction, metaphor is pretty much what Ursula Le Guin means when she talks about 'moving the symbols'. The bits and pieces of the story — the characters, the ideas, the settings — don't give nearly as much pleasure in themselves as they do when they are made into a pattern of meaning. A metaphor is a way of relating everything to everything else, just as the parts of the body relate to each other. In turn, the most effective metaphors are those where all the 'bits' have independent high quality — which is why, for example, *The Dispossessed* is a more effective metaphor than the Foundation trilogy. The pleasure of metaphor is watching everything fit together to form something that really is new, and imaginative, because it affects each reader in a different way. A good metaphor disturbs people; it does not let them remain complacent.

One of the most perfect metaphors in science fiction is *The Year of the Quiet Sun* by Wilson Tucker. The book gives immediate pleasure at many levels. The story itself has many novelties. The main character finds himself sent forward in time from 1978 in order to make a survey of the near future. He finds himself stranded in the future where the world as he knew it has been destroyed. The makers of his time machine had forgotten one vital thing — that the machine needed power sources at both 'ends'. After an atomic war, the time-traveller finds, there is no power source available to get him back to his own time. He expected to solve a simple problem — to find out how society had changed over the years — and instead finds himself tackling a different problem, that of establishing a whole new society.

There are many attractive sentimental things in this book, too. American readers see their whole country destroyed and, in a miraculous way, returned to life, in the fine details of Tucker's writing. There is also a marvellous love story, the real centre of the story, which I invite you to discover for yourself.

But the book means something that extends beyond its bits and pieces. *The Year of the Quiet Sun* is, at base, the metaphor of death, transformation and resurrection, which we find in much of the greatest art throughout all time. Then there is the ironic metaphor that we will not have the chance to begin again if these events take place. The fact is that nobody is ever going to build a time machine, and that we are quite likely to slam into Tucker's imagined future unless we do something about it. The point of the book seems to me that we can allow our lives to be destroyed by inaction just as easily as by wrong action. So this metaphor invites us to enjoy the book, true — but it pushes us back out of the book with a new way of seeing the world, the world in which we must live.

This can happen if you *read* science fiction, rather than merely absorb it. A good book can shake you, change you. As Kafka said, reading a good book should have the effect of wielding an ice-axe to a frozen heart.

DAVID GRIGG

WHY I GAVE UP PUBLISHING FANZINES AND STARTED BEATING MY HEAD AGAINST THE WALL

— Guest of Honour Speech, Rosebudcon, 1975

IT'S ALL LEE HARDING'S FAULT. That's the short answer, anyway. But actually, what I want to do today is to have a look at the phenomenon of fandom and fanzine publishing, and at the related phenomenon of writing fiction, and to ask why it is that people get involved in either of these two activities.

I am especially interested in why some people find a lot of satisfaction in writing and publishing fanzines, and keep on doing it for a long time, while others, like myself, have to leave that behind and begin trying to write professionally — something, I can assure you, that is much less rewarding and far more frustrating at the beginning. I would like to do this by being pretty selfish and talking mostly about myself. Naturally I can't be at all objective about this thing, because it's what I've done myself — start out by publishing fanzines and then go on to writing fiction.

Where to start? It was all John Bangsund's fault that I started publishing fanzines. No, it's still not as clear cut as that: in a way it was also really Bangsund who was involved in getting me writing fiction today. You see, I started out as a writer, not as a fan.

After years of putting up with my pleading, my parents gave in and bought me a second-hand typewriter for my 12th birthday, and I sat down then and there to peck out my first novel. It was terrific stuff, all about a lost colony of Atlantis that settled on a world in a solar system with 64 planets, and Doc Smith would have been proud of me. That didn't get anywhere, of course. But I kept on writing bits and pieces of fiction all the way through high school, all of it absolutely turgid and unreadable. In my last year at school, Carey Handfield — who must have seen *ASFR* — told me that this chap Bangsund was the editor of a forthcoming Australian sf magazine, to be called *Vision of Tomorrow*. So I gathered up bits and pieces of my fiction, under Carey's stubborn command (he had some idea he was going to make a million by reaping 10 per cent of my profits), and sent them off to Bangsund. He kept writing back and saying that they were interesting but they weren't stories — no plot, you know, that sort of thing — which was perfectly correct. But one day I got a letter from Bangsund saying that Lee Harding, famous author,

had been reading through the material, and had read one of my pieces and liked the idea, and would I like to collaborate? Now, I'd heard of Lee Harding. I mean, the *Pacific Book of Australian Science Fiction* had referred to him as 'perhaps Australia's best known sf author', so I was pretty impressed, and also filled with fear and trembling (being a modest lad). Anyway, Carey pushed me into ringing up the number given, and eventually I was speaking to Lee Harding. And of course, Lee had only expressed mild interest to John, and wasn't really interested in collaborating. But he told me that 900 words was too short for a story, and that 5000 was more on the mark. It's perhaps of historical interest that the first story I sold was 4750 words long. And I sold it to Lee Harding. But that was six years later.

Well, what happened in those six years? To put it briefly, I discovered fandom. John Bangsund didn't become editor of *Vision* * but one day Carey dragged me along to Bangsund's biannual bankruptcy book sale and... Come to think of it, maybe most of this is more Carey's fault than anyone else's. We got to the Clifton Hilton and met this short, bearded chap, and started to talk. Among other events of that afternoon, the name ANZAPA came up, and I got the smell of duplicating paper in my nostrils.

Fanzines! When you've been used to having your own quiet thoughts, used to trying to express yourself in any way possible, having an urge to write, to scribble, to be heard — fanzines are irresistible. Magazines circulated by people containing only their own thoughts, work, opinions, chatter: that's what fanzines were to me. And it was fun. I was lucky, I think, to come across this strange thing called fandom by entering an amateur publishing association. It enabled me to put these people at a bit of a distance, so to speak, before I met them. Gary Mason was the official editor of ANZAPA at the time, and the members included Bangsund, John Foyster, Leigh Edmonds, Bruce Gillespie and Gary Woodman. Fascinating, crazy people. People who knew how to put things down interestingly on paper. I used to hang out the window, waiting for the postman, to see if he brought a new ANZAPA.

And I attended my first convention. It was held in a picture theatre at Murrumbeena, and was run by Mervyn Binns. Leigh Edmonds, as tall as he is now, sold me a copy of *Rataplan*. Shayne McCormack was a neofan. And a motion was put that we bid for the World Convention for 1975...

What happened to me was that I stopped writing fiction and started publishing fanzines. From writing fiction and having no success at it, to suddenly having a captive audience to whom you could say what you liked, was an inevitable step. Anything you wrote you could type up on stencil and have people read, and they

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* I was Australian Editor of *Vision* until shortly before the first issue was published. *(JB)*

would tell you what they thought of it. And of course, this was a big ego boost. (I can see a similar sort of thing happening to one of the people who was at the writers' workshop. Ever since the workshop he's been putting out a regular bulletin with all his thoughts in it to all the workshop members. He claims he's still writing fiction, but I don't know.)

So I started to publish fanzines and forgot about fiction. I don't want to go into great detail about my career as a fanzine editor. I'm slowly getting to my point. Eventually I started to put out a general-interest fanzine, outside of ANZAPA, available to anyone who wanted it. It was called *The Fanarchist*, and it wasn't really much good. Later I started another one, better I think, called *Touchstone*, and in this one especially I started to develop a real style of writing. I was producing fan writing — more or less anecdotal material, but framed so as to be amusing and interesting. And I found that I enjoyed doing this more when I tried to do as well as I could at it, not just being sloppy. I was trying for a bit of quality, trying to give shape to what I wrote, limiting my ramblings, giving them a beginning and an end. And I think that this is where I really learnt to write. The actual kind of thing I was trying to write wasn't anything like fiction, and it was certainly somewhat introverted, turned in to the field of fandom. But in these fanzines I gained confidence that I could write, and that people were interested in reading what I wrote.

Here's where I start getting to my point. I don't know how many current sf writers got their start in fanzines. Certainly not 100 per cent, but certainly more than 50 per cent. I'm not saying that writing for fanzines is the best way to become a great writer. I'm sure there are many disadvantages to coming up in this way. Fandom can easily lead a writer into being lazy. Very many fanzine writers are lazy. It's easy to fall in to the trap of thinking This is only first-draft, it's only a fanzine, who cares? Anybody can write. But I think that many people, without the stimulus and encouragement of fanzine writing, would never try to write fiction at all, would stay shy and forgotten. It's easy to give up when you try to write fiction. It's a very discouraging process. But with fanzines you are guaranteed an audience. You learn by doing.

Well, what happened to me was that in 1974 I quit publishing fanzines. I'm not sure why, now, except that I think I felt that there was something else I should be doing. I felt a bit restless. And when, later in the year, a short story workshop and competition was announced in connexion with a convention, I suddenly woke up and found that that was really what I wanted to do, and that now I had the skill and the confidence. I shared the prize at the workshop, and the story I wrote, the first fiction I had written in nearly six years, was accepted for publication. After that, other things came along, and I've kept writing.

Now we come to my second point. Why did I take up fiction and drop fanzine publishing? Why do others do the same? And why do so many people go on publishing fanzines who could probably write very good fiction?

There's no doubt that publishing fanzines is enormously rewarding: you get letters from all over the world, people write you articles, people comment on what you are doing. People *talk* to you. But what happens to the struggling writer? He gets rejection slips. You've heard before about rejection slips. It can be pretty discouraging. So why, then, ***did*** I give up publishing fanzines and start beating my head against the wall?

You'll have gathered by now that I don't really know. But in a sense, I think it's like this: in fanzine writing you are only trying to please yourself. If your readers don't like what you write, that's their privilege. They don't have to read it. But in writing fiction you are also out to please someone else. Generally an editor. That little word *also* is important, though. You always have to please yourself as well, or there is no point in writing. But if you don't please that other person, you don't get published. So that's one thing: by trying to please someone else you are becoming more professional, less introverted in what you write. There's more challenge in it.

But what is the reward? Being published, I think. You see, I haven't had anything published yet, though I've sold two stories and a short book. Just selling something is a pretty big boost. But to see something in print, to know you are reaching a vastly bigger audience than you could ever do with a fanzine — that's a big part of what writing is about, I think. But it's not mere vanity that's involved. Writing is just too much hard work for that to be the biggest motivation. It's not the money: you'd make more sweeping floors.

Well, I don't know. But although writing is very hard work, there is a great deal of pleasure involved in just doing it, as there is in most creative acts. So perhaps I shouldn't go further than that. Perhaps the real reason I write fiction now is the process itself. In a way, fanzine writing is too easy, too swift, too self-centred, to be fully satisfying as a process.

And in the long run, I think this is why I gave up publishing fanzines. There comes a time when the response from that is just not the kind of response you are seeking. To be a big fish in a small pond is gratifying and pleasant. It would be easy to stay in that pond all your life, and who could condemn anyone who did? But, well... the whole ocean is waiting.

— Reprinted from The Hag and the Hungry Goblin (published by Christine and Derrick Ashby, 1976)

BRIAN ALDISS

ADRIFT IN THE CRYPTOZOIC

This article, being written at a moment of disillusion, is probably ill-advised. So I address it only to other writers, Lee, John et al., who will sympathize.

I am writing a novel, my first since *Greybeard* in 1963 (for I do not count *Earthworks*, which was simply an extension of a novelette written some while before). The omens seemed to be set fair for this one. The theme is not well-trodden; indeed I would say it is pretty original as themes go these days; and even better, I have mulled it over for a long time and let it gather body in whatever obscure cellar the wines of imagination mature. The characters seemed clear in my head, particularly the central figure, Bush, who is an artist in the depths of an uncreative period after some years when his name was well known. He is by no means the typical hero of an sf novel. Then the girl chiefly involved with him, Ann, interested me a lot. She's a dirty, scruffy character, not much of a looker, untrustworthy, but good in bed and sharp as a knife.

I really enjoyed writing about these two people and their goings on. The result is more fornication and beating-up than I generally allow myself, but no more than necessary.

But something has gone wrong. The situation at present is this. I have a title for the book: it was *Undermind*, currently it's *The Walkers of the Cryptozoic*. I have written the first draft, some 50,000 words. Now I'm doing the second. In fact, I have done the first three chapters, rewriting painstakingly where necessary. And it feels as if I am putting cosmetics on a corpse to try and make it look like a living thing. I'm bogged down. The thing doesn't live.

It is possible, even probable, that I can take care of that when I have gone through the whole thing again. It is possible that the way I feel at present is not so much the result of shrewd judgement as a simple failure of confidence. All writers will surely know what I mean there. Always during the writing of a novel comes the time when you groan and die and know you should have a more congenial job, like muck-shifting or road-mending.

The trouble is partly in my way of working, although I can work no other way. I write my novels slowly and carefully, doing as well as I can (although knowing extensive revision will most

likely be needed later), and never look back at what I have written until the end. In this fashion I am carried along not only by the interest of planning the next paragraph, revealing what comes next and so on, but with the feeling of contentment for the wonder of what I have already written; the past supports me, as well as the future. The let-down comes when I have finished that draft and go back. The wonder has evaporated!

There on the page lie poor limping words, only words. It's the old trouble: of all that was in my head, only ten per cent has leaked through on to the paper. The chunks of fine writing lie like pools of mud, while the rest is too thin for words; the characters are inarticulate; an air of stale contrivance hangs over all.

A further difficulty presents itself with *Cryptozoic*. I am a critic as well as a story-teller, and the one gets in the way of the other. I shall never be a 'born story-teller' for this reason (and if any ignoble reader thinks this article is a camouflaged attempt to boost my own wares, let him now get stuffed, for I have never said anything so appalling about myself in print before!). I have theories. One theory I had was that the aura of tiredness that hangs over much contemporary sf is caused by us writers clinging to the notion of a closed, over-plotted novel — an idea taken over, I suppose, from the thrillers and detective novels of the 1930s. I thought: Get away from that, write an open-ended novel that relies more on delights, surprises, conceits, characters' sensations and so on, rather than plot twists, and you should have something fresh.

Here I sit with the results of my theory on my hands: a novel that does not even begin till half-way through. The plot commenced on page 80 and is shot by page 135!

This may only mean that I should have had the courage of my convictions and abandoned plot altogether. What seems more likely is that my type of writing is most suitably supported by the structuring a plot gives, though I believe I need an endo-skeleton rather than an exo-skeleton that encases the whole thing. (To illustrate: *Earthworks* was all exo-skeleton, concealed by a few frills; *Greybeard* was endo-skeleton — in fact the passing of time carried much of the burden of plot.) This is the way you learn. Next novel, I should have the plot proportions right — only to have something else go awry!

Anyhow, here we are with the first three chapters. Not only have they no forward momentum, but each seems disconnected from the others. And I know there is worse to come. And yet, the trouble is that I have saddled myself with this structure because the meaning of the book demands this sort of fragmentation. I can see that what should hold it together despite all this is the interest in Bush, who sails through it all in his own way, snapping and being snapped at, suffering and hoping. But unfortunately, Bush too has to change considerably (since another tiresome belief of mine is that a novel is not a novel unless its characters are seen to alter and develop). He falls in love, has

a punch-up, hobnobs with his old father, gets conscripted into a private army, goes off on a sulk to a private corner of the world. He makes it very difficult for a writer.

I have handicapped myself further by trying to demonstrate, *inter alia*, that the art of every age must reflect that age. Bush being an artist, there is a fair bit of material about the art of his future age (end of next century). I became very engrossed inventing it first time round, but now that I'm correcting, I ask myself whether readers will be particularly interested — and once you let that sort of cold wind blow in from outside, you are done. It's the critic and the story-teller struggling for the upper hand again.

Well, some bits of the future you can predict. I predict that having blown off steam with this article, I shall return to *Cryptozoic* and plod slowly through it, improving it as I go along, and then, when I reach the end, feel strong enough to heave the beginning into a better structure. I shall be encouraged on my way by the thought that the last few chapters are utterly terrific, amazing, transcendental. I should have written them in verse rather than prose (now there's an idea). And I just hope they won't seem too lame when I reach them.

A few paragraphs back, I mentioned the meaning of the book. I hope *Cryptozoic* has a meaning; I think you get to it the way you get to the heart of an onion, by peeling off layer after layer. With that analogy in mind, I hope to repair the sad thing I have on my hands at the moment. I must get it into working order, because I still feel I have something potentially great on my hands, the theme of which (I will not be more specific) stands all human life upside down to reveal its god-like nature.

Working order... That at least is not beyond me. But I see I have here another case of the writer's old trouble. You begin with a masterpiece; you write it down; you are left with something merely — marketable.

— *Reprinted from Australian Science Fiction Review no.3, September 1966*

REVIEWS

AS WE KNOW, Brian Aldiss emerged from the Cryptozoic with a marvellous book, published first as *An Age* and more recently under its author's preferred title.

The next book we had from Brian was a rather odd novel called *Report on Probability A*. I reviewed it, in a way, in one of my fanzines in 1968 ('a jolly parody', Brian said), and this review was reprinted in the Monash University SF Association's fanzine, with a postscript — mainly because I felt that people could see only the parody and not the review. Among other things I added this:

> To those readers who are cheerfully unafraid of 'difficult' or 'obscure' writing, *Report on Probability A* can be recommended. To anyone who is fascinated by, loves, and is constantly grateful for, the continually unfolding panorama of the mind and soul of Brian Aldiss, the book is indispensable. And to anyone who enjoys science fiction more than he enjoys Brian Aldiss, I can only say: Where is your sense of wonder?

I'll stand by that statement, even though I found Brian's next book so bloody difficult and obscure that I've never been able to finish it. The book was *Barefoot in the Head*. I read a few reviews of it, and wondered whether the reviewers were talking about the book I had tried to read. The only people I knew who claimed to understand the book had apparently been stoned when they read it, and when they tried to explain it to me, they couldn't. And there the matter rested until now.

If you get the impression that this issue is largely a celebration of Brian Aldiss, you are right. The news that Brian would be coming to Melbourne this easter sparked it off. I decided first to reprint everything he had ever written for me, then everything anyone had ever written for me about him; then I thought it would be nice to have a few people talk about books of his that I hadn't previously published reviews of, and maybe round the whole thing out with a few appreciations of Aldiss by eminent persons in the field. What a fabulous fanzine! — an issue of truly *Gillespian* stature! But you know how it is... You begin with a masterpiece; you type the first stencil; you realize that the rest will take two years to type; you are left with something merely — enjoyable.

Okay. On we go, into the reviews, bare feet and all.

ALDISS UNZIPPED

JOHN McPHARLIN reviews

Barefoot in the Head
The Hand-Reared Boy
A Soldier Erect

BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD is not a book about 'minds set free', in spite of its title.

After a brief war in which the Arab countries have bombed the rest of the world with massive doses of psychotropic drugs, the expected follow-up invasion fails to materialize, and the survivors are left to stumble, walking-wounded, through the remnants of their shattered reality. That is the background. Against it, Aldiss uses the sprawling motorways of Europe as a metaphor for the neural pathways of the brain, concentrating on one man's odyssey through the multicolour twilight of collective insanity.

Taking his name from Leslie Charteris (author of thrillers featuring Simon Templar, 'The Saint'), multilingual Colin Charteris, self-proclaimed hero, saint, visionary and philosopher, journeys from his birthplace in Eastern Europe to England, which does not turn out to be quite the place that his dreams and his reading about The Saint's exploits have led him to expect. (Later in the book we learn that Charteris's original name was Dusan. A short quote from Aldiss's travel book *Cities and Stones* may prove illuminating: 'The great Dusan died, one legend says, on the march to Constantinople, the city which he dreamed of ruling, although by his time it was little more than a half-empty ruin.')

The whole of western Europe is in ruins, and by the time Charteris reaches France the residual drugs in the atmosphere have begun to affect him; in a moment of visionary insight he sees life as a complex pattern, himself the web that holds it together. In England the visions increase; one particularly potent one reveals that he will be hailed as a messiah and lead a motorcade. Soon afterwards he meets a messiah named Brasher, who has a small following. Brasher recognizes Charteris as a rival and isn't satisfied with Charteris's denial of any designs on his flock (which he largely inherited from another messiah, named Robbins). There is cut-throat competition in the messiah business. Eventually Charteris ends an argument with Brasher by casually pushing him in the way of oncoming traffic, and takes over the business. Managed by Burton, Brasher's former manager, Charteris uses his charisma and oratory to take over and expand Brasher's congregation.

Charteris sees himself as a deliverer rather than a leader. His masterwork, 'Man the Driver', is intended to provide the path to self-awareness for all. But his followers see him only as leader, and willingly trade self-awareness for activity. His

crusade through Europe turns into an aimless motorcade several miles long as motion replaces thought. A documentary film of the crusade (in which Charteris does not actually appear) is made by an avant-garde film director, and the film's world premiere (at which the film is not actually shown, though only the director seems to notice this) results in Brussels being set alight. Soon after the events in Brussels, the motorcade grinds to a halt in Germany. Charteris has run out of steam, the consciousness he sought to awake in his followers still lies dormant, and the very 'mechanicalness' of human nature that he has preached against now reigns supreme. After one last false 'miracle' he leaves the motorcade and drifts back to the East, disenchanted.

That at least is the basic plot. Around it Aldiss has taken great pains to construct a book that enhances and illustrates it. The book is divided into seven chapters (= Ouspensky's seven categories of man?), which are separated by poems and songs. (There is also a three-page blank-verse poem within the narrative of one chapter.) Since these poems and songs serve a variety of purposes, it may be useful to examine some of them briefly.

The first group of five, immediately following the first chapter, appear to have been written by Aldiss, Charteris, Aldiss, Charteris and Angelina respectively. 'Metz Cathedral' takes some details from the second page of the novel and presents them solely from Aldiss's viewpoint — that is, totally detached from Charteris. (Several poems later in the book are written in the same way. They begin with details taken from the story, often a sentence or two taken directly from the text, and allow Aldiss to re-present ideas or descriptions from the story in a completely different way. All of the verse sections are complementary to the novel, rather than integral with it, but 'Metz Cathedral', 'The Shuttered Street Girl', 'The Poison that Powered their Scrutinies' and 'Bridging Hour in Wesciv' fall in to a distinct sub-group.)

'Night-Time' shows Charteris's feelings from his viewpoint. 'The Girl at the Inn' is an alternative to the whole novel: Charteris falls in love with Angelina (the girl at the inn) and becomes a 'captive' of the city, remaining there instead of going on to England to achieve his destiny. 'The Knowledge that the Car is going to Crash' is prophecy, encompassing most of the rest of the book. In particular, the discussion of Brasher's experience on the plane (which Charteris won't even hear about for another two chapters) indicates that Charteris's acceptance of his own divinity leaves him no room for consideration of the possibility of anyone else's. By the time the reader arrives at these events in the story, the drugs Charteris has absorbed have taken a firm hold on his brain and his thought processes are less easily grasped. Within the format of the poem the commentary is clear but more limited. 'Zimmer Twenty' gives Angelina the last comment on the first chapter. Only a minor character, Angelina does not appear in the novel again (except in the form of Angeline, Brasher's wife/widow, who is much more the sort of girl that

Charteris has been dreaming of), but with the exception of Angeline herself, Angelina appears through this poem to be the most sensitive character in the book.

The second group consists of three songs. 'Rosemary Left Me', credited to The Genocides, is the oldest (in chapter 3 Burton tells Charteris that The Genocides, whom he used to manage, have since changed their name to the Nova Scotia Treadmill Orchestra); it concerns the loss of a girlfriend and her replacement with another. It is this song that echoes through Charteris's mind as he wakes from the dream (also in chapter 3) about the two women, one who was maimed, the other who 'burst out from a window for some sort of freedom' (Angeline and Marta?). Likewise, a line from 'Small Dogs Howling' (in the fourth group) is echoed almost word for word by Angeline in chapter 6. Travelling with a rock group, the music becomes an accepted and necessary part of their daily life; by the time they enter Brussels it has also become a potent weapon. (On a complete sidetrack, the continual references to howling dogs make me wonder whether David Bowie was influenced by this book when he wrote 'Future Legend / Diamond Dogs'.)

'Time Never Goes By' is by The Genocides under their new name, and would be roughly contemporary with 'Little Paper Faces', The Escalation's first song about Charteris. 'Time Never Goes By' contains the lines 'Novelty wears off.../Characters change events rearrange / Plot seems to wear real thin' – which does tie in with the theme of recurrence, but otherwise seems more tongue-in-cheek than anything else; as does a 'poem' in the last group, 'The Miraculous by Numbers', which is just a section from an index to a book by or about Ouspensky (perhaps his *In Search of the Miraculous*?).

One type of poetry that appears in the book is the type that John Bangsund disrespectfully refers to as pre-stressed concrete poetry. Charteris comes to see lives not as linear (from birth to death) but as patterns of alternatives. In attempting to reflect this, Aldiss has constructed several poems in which the words are laid out according to the pattern they make on the page, rather than in normal word order. It is not a form for which I have much sympathy, so I will restrict my comments to the first one, 'Formal Topolatry of Aspiring Forms'. Before you get to the poem itself, the title gives you some idea of the kind of word games Aldiss is playing. (If you make 'place-worship' out of 'topolatry', you're just about there.) The words that make up the poem include angel, birth, after, death, waver, vigil, anvil – and they're laid out in the shape of a church. The base of the building is 'Loughborough', where Charteris founds his new religion.

Unfortunately, I do not have sufficient space to discuss each of the fifty-odd poems and songs in the detail that some of them warrant, but I hope I have said enough to give readers unfamiliar with the book some idea of their function in the book.

Quite apart from its unusual structure, *Barefoot in the Head* is a difficult book to come to grips with. Charteris is hardly a sympathetic character, and the language used, both in the narrative

and direct speech, has been slanted to reflect his altered mental state, particularly towards the very end of the book, when his speech merges completely with the narrative. As Charteris perceives all possibilities and alternatives, even the more drug-wasted characters appear to spout endless streams of puns and portmanteau words when their speech is relayed to the reader through his head. At the beginning of the book we see that Charteris has a good knowledge of several languages, but for an untravelled nineteen-year-old, the range and depth of his vocabulary is nothing short of astounding. When Aldiss shifts into top gear, the richness of the language leaves one breathless with admiration.

You could ask two questions about this use of language: whether it is realistic and whether it is relevant. In so doing, you should keep in mind that the answers depend on what you consider the book to be. If this is simply another novel of the British post-cataclysmic school, the answer is probably no in both cases: the language is far too clever for a bunch of freaked-out hippies, and even if it wasn't, the book should have been written for the readers, not the characters, and as such should be in a form that readers are accustomed to and can readily understand. But any work of fiction is by its very nature artificial, and (as Arthur C. Clarke has said) the only limits ever placed on an author are his own failures of nerve or imagination. I accept the view that a novel is merely a concrete extension of an author's mind, and that Aldiss is therefore at liberty to exercise his mind in any direction he chooses. In *Barefoot in the Head* he has done that, and the result is a joy to read. I think I have said enough to indicate that it is not conventional science fiction.

I mentioned rock music. The reference to 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' in the dedication of the book is not without reason, since phrases from that song appear in various forms, and its mood is one that Aldiss seems to have been trying to capture. Several other Procol Harum songs ('Homburg', 'Conquistador' and 'Shine on Brightly' in particular) may have had some influence on the book.

Certain phrases ('the city was open to the nomad', for example) permeate the story like a haunting refrain, helping to underline the theme of recurrence. Aldiss mentions Ouspensky frequently in the book. I hadn't heard of him before, so I visited a library and borrowed the only book of his I could find — *The Fourth Way*. I found it pretty indigestible, but I get the impression that recurrence governs each individual's life cycle and is often still going on despite all external appearances; that it is self-reinforcing, although it allows for some variation, and the only way to break free of its circle is to 'wake up' and stay awake. Charteris fails first to awaken his followers, then compounds his failure by deliberately emphasizing all of the wrong elements of his philosophy to the German police chief who also has ideas of breaking into the messiah business. When it becomes clear to all that Charteris is not indispensable to the religion that he has founded (or at least

their understanding of it), the police chief takes over and leads Charteris's followers on a crusade to turn Western Europe into a police state under German rule, in Charteris's name. By the end of the book this is well on the way to being accomplished in Europe. Recurrence has been reinforced and history is repeating itself yet again (one is reminded of Hitler's wilful abuse of Nietzsche's similar philosophy to similar ends), but only Charteris knows that this need not have been so.

Christianity repeats itself, on a smaller scale, with Cass playing Judas to Charteris's Christ; only Charteris's disenchanted withdrawal saves him from crucifixion. Recurrence is also manifest in the four car crashes in which Charteris is involved. In the first (Milan) he is observer; in the second (Brasher's death in London) he is contributing cause. In the third (at Aalter, where Burton is killed driving Charteris's car), he narrowly avoids being the victim, and this is the most important of the four: it fulfils the prophecy that death will swallow him and throw him back; and Aalter may be taken as a pun on 'altar' (the altar on which his sacrifice should have occurred) or 'alter' (since not-dying alters recurrence for him). Finally he dies in effigy: in the re-creation of the third crash for Nick Boreas's film, Ranceville dies believing that by taking Charteris's place he, too, will be assured of resurrection.

Aldiss was in the wordplay business, I imagine, long before he read Ouspensky, but my next comment is not made easy by either of them (not in print, that is). Let's acknowledge that the plural of 'I' is 'Is' — and try not to read that as 'is'!

Because the most spectacular incident in the book is the 'peeling of the Is', which begins when Charteris reaches England. Ouspensky has it that each person has a number of 'Is', or motivating forces, and to attain true waking consciousness, some of these Is (the bad traits) must be discarded and the rest melded into one controlling I. This is dramatized superbly as Charteris sees these Is, mainly in the form of lifeless replicas of himself, falling discarded behind him as he moves along. But not all of these Is are lifeless, so he must always take care not to deflect from the correct path, lest he become himself a discarded I of another Charteris.

Almost all of chapter 2 is devoted to just such an I, who is lured off course by 'the waiting man', only to see himself drive away, leaving him behind. Although the hallucinatory imagery of the later chapters has not been used here, the writing is just as effective, because Aldiss is careful to gain the reader's acceptance of each vision as a real event (and the whole thing is certainly real enough to Charteris). This also paves the way for acceptance of Charteris's self-doubts in later chapters, when he begins to waver and to wonder whether he may be nothing more than a discarded I.

Serious in intent as the book is, Aldiss has given it characteristic humorous touches, some of which have been hinted at already. There is black humour, as in the description of the ambulance

attendants, trying to get to a crash victim trapped in his car, 'doing their instant archaeology, digging down through the thin metallic strata where life had pulsed a few tiny eons ago'. At one stage Aldiss takes time out to discuss the functioning of the Belgian parliament, the members of which, like everyone else, are stoned out of their brains. Recent laws they have passed include one 'to make Belgian hounds sing the night away like nightingales, with an amendment asking cats to try their best in that melodious direction too'. But the bulk of the humour is far more subtle, and it is allusive and verbal. There are science-fictional references and there are private references that Aldiss doesn't bother to explain. But mainly Aldiss plays with words, tearing them apart and reassembling them continuously, so that any one word may convey several quite divergent meanings. Thus the reader has to be constantly aware of all possibilities just to keep pace with Aldiss, and if you aren't prepared to play the game you are wasting your time trying to read the book.

Some of the best humour is saved for the final chapter, probably to underline the very bleak ending. Angeline and Angelina are taken for granted by Charteris. Angeline was not affected by the drugs (in which sense she is 'maimed'), and although she cannot perceive all of the possibilities that he can, she *is* able to see most of what is really happening. When he abandons her, she remains true to him, but by the time he realizes that he has always loved her, and tries to tell her so, it has ceased to matter to either of them.

Charteris seems to have known all along that suffering would not break the sleep from which he sought to wake Europe, yet he still did many things that caused people to be hurt. Ultimately he is no more equipped to be a saviour than anyone else, and his final insight is that it was merely his actions that all of his followers copied — but they already knew how to act: what he should have been teaching them was how to think and feel, before acting. But teaching is much harder and slower than just leading, and like everyone else, he was trying to have it both ways. Aldiss ends the book on that note, twice, and leaves it to the reader to decide whether Charteris was a saint or a fake.

THE HAND-REARED BOY and *A SOLDIER ERECT* are the first two volumes in what is or was to be an 'autobiographical' quartet covering the carnal development of Horatio Stubbs, from his teens in the 1930s to middle age in the 1960s. Since at no time during these two books does Stubbs get around to reading science fiction, I assume that Aldiss does not intend the work to be regarded as his own autobiography.

The Hand-Reared Boy begins with the tea party that marked the end of the period of Stubbs's sexual awakening, then moves back in time to cover chronologically the events that led him to that point. Since Stubbs is bored by just about any subject except

sex, the book is concerned almost exclusively with sex, but the overall portrait of a youth growing up in the 1930s is not as unbalanced as might be expected. With the possible exception of Alexander Portnoy, Stubbs may be the randiest rod-walloper in English literature, but he still emerges as a real and sympathetic character because Aldiss has captured and reproduced the style of a maturing youth without a hint of condescension. At the same time, he does not treat Stubbs as exceptional, and the implication is that even Billy Bunter must have been at it as often as Stubbs.

To begin with, Stubbs's sexual explorations are born out of curiosity, and even when they lead to gratification, there is no affection involved. Later, in the public-school dormitory, gratification without experimentation is an end in itself, and the school's unwritten code of behaviour acts as a safeguard to prevent messy emotional entanglements. Stubbs finds that most schoolboys' sex lives are active but unambitious, and so is his until he has his first real emotional involvement (with the school matron, a woman in her thirties). Unlike the legendary A. K. Dancer before him, he finds neither happiness nor notoriety in this, for he is not the first to enjoy Sister Traven's favours, nor the last. While neither of them is exactly naive about sex, they are both immature in other ways. By the end of the book, when the affair has left him a little wiser, without his emotions being permanently scarred, it is a blow to him to find that she has not been affected at all. She lives in her own paranoid fantasy world in which she will never mature. Her affairs, on her own terms, with adolescent schoolboys are the closest she can ever come to adult emotional involvements. Though he still shows an eagerness to rush blindly into situations that he has not properly considered, he has at least learnt that there is more to sex and love than a hand in the pants.

A Soldier Erect is a far better book than the first, and certainly not the *'Carry On Wanking'* that might have been anticipated. It covers two years (1943-44) and deals with the beginning of Stubbs's military service in the East. By this time he has already been to France, but saw no action there, and was recalled to England before France fell to the Germans. Now twenty years old, he feels cut off from family ties, and his whole attitude is more cynical than in the previous book. He doesn't see action until the final third of the novel, and India is a completely alien world with which he finds it virtually impossible to come to grips.

After twenty years in England, he is shocked to see that the surface differences of the Indians (colour, language) serve to underline the basic similarities between the two peoples. Only their circumstances divide them, and for the good of the Empire this division is reinforced at every turn.

Sexual curiosity and experimentation have largely given way to desperation, brought on by the knowledge that at any time the

orders that will send him into the fighting could come through. Outside of his own trousers, sex is no longer quite so attractive either (with one burning exception — the young prostitute in the red light area). He finds his one new sexual experience, oral sex, at once thrilling and degrading, and most of the thrill is in the degradation, not the act itself. It does not cause him to lose his instinctive lust, but he now perceives more strongly than ever that it is just a hollow substitute for something better, something in which, because of the uncertainty of the future, he feels it is best not to place too much hope. His vague desire to desert from the army and be swallowed up by one of the teeming Indian cities, to become a part of Indian daily life, is hopeless, and he knows it. In his position as a soldier passing through a foreign country, the only women he has access to are prostitutes. In spite of his surface cynicism, he is looking for love and affection, or even a little friendliness, but the prostitutes are old and tired and the whole thing is just a business transaction to them. In the degradation that necessity has forced on them, they cannot afford the luxury of feelings; their example he begins to follow as the possibility of sudden death increases.

Moving into the war zone at last, Stubbs is playing a game that has become frighteningly real. No matter how much he had felt before that doom was hanging over his head, the interminable waiting had given it an element of distance and unreality that evaporates the moment he is within earshot of gunfire. When he finally does see action, he finds that the rain and mud are as tough an enemy as the Japanese, most of whom are in a far worse condition than their British opponents. Need I say that the battles that climax the book are not a pleasant experience for Stubbs? He is involved in capturing a small section of mountainside from the Japanese, and considered against the whole Burma campaign it would probably rate only as a small skirmish. Those taking part may have some idea that what they will be dying for is only of marginal importance, a small speck in the grand design, but they are beyond caring. Whatever its significance, the best they can hope for is survival, and they go on because there is nowhere else to go.

Aldiss saw action in this theatre of war, and his eye-witness account of the British and Japanese soldiers driven to their limits of endurance effectively conveys the emotions and reactions of those who found themselves in the front lines. After the battle Stubbs is left tired, sore and emotionally drained, but there is still room to feel relief at the fact that he has survived, and he congratulates himself the best way he knows how. The end of the war is still fourteen months away, and there will be many more battles, but for Stubbs the secret of staying sane lies in savouring each fleeting moment for whatever it may be worth, without thinking of what may come in the future or of what is already past.

As I have indicated earlier, Aldiss has a fine eye for style

and detail, and it is not confined to the battle scenes. In both books there is a wealth of incidental detail. These little observations and passing asides may not appear important when taken individually, but together they act to provide an overwhelming sense of documentary accuracy. If I start quoting I'll be here all night, but the style of the two books does make for an interesting comparison with the only other autobiographical writing of his that I have read, *The Shape of Further Things*. That book was written in diary form, and is ultimately more concerned with ideas than events (and so ends up reading more like a huge fanzine than anything else). But in the Stubbs books ideas are subservient to impressions and emotions, and the end result is a much more personal memoir. The writing is clear and concise, while still retaining the humanity that one expects of Aldiss, and both books (the second in particular) amply demonstrate his ability at conventional, non-sf narrative.

In case I haven't made it clear, I should add that *The Hand-Reared Boy* and *A Soldier Erect* are very funny. The humour is often ribald, sometimes very black, and occasionally quite dry, but rarely as academic or literary as that in *Barefoot in the Head*. Still, Aldiss could not resist a nod in Ballard's direction (Traven had become a standard Ballard character name by the time *The Hand-Reared Boy* was written), and he has included two very familiar Australian names — Harding and Gillespie — in his platoon, which can hardly have been coincidental.

When fans gather and the discussion turns to these books, most of what I have said above does not usually come into the conversation; it is more likely to centre instead on the sexual aspects of the books (although these are hardly as bizarre or remarkable as in the work of Farmer, Ballard or even Ellison). In the introduction to his story in *Dangerous Visions* Aldiss says that he 'wrote pornography at boarding school before (he) knew what it was all about'. Now that he knows what it is all about, he has come full circle and written pornography about boarding school... All of which may just be missing the point a little. The word 'pornography' has a number of pejorative connotations, few if any of which apply to these books. Aldiss has tried to present an honest picture of youth, and in so doing may have dwelt overlong on details that others ignore altogether, but his intent is rarely to titillate or arouse. Aldiss, and Stubbs, display no guilt about sex. Stubbs says 'I — who never looked on any sexual exercise as other than the use of organs there for the purpose — I never suffered mental or physical trouble on any occasion.' This seems a very sensible attitude.

I have said that I assume Aldiss does not intend us to regard this autobiography as his own, but so much of the writing is so personal that I find it impossible to accept that even someone of his ability could create the whole thing without there being some basis for it in fact. In much of his work during the past

ten years his own presence has been noticeably close to the surface, and he has even made personal appearances in some of his stories (e.g. 'That Uncomfortable Pause Between Life and Art' and 'Swastika!'), and the autobiographical form seems to have attracted him from the beginning: his first novel, *The Brightfount Diaries*, I gather was largely autobiographical.

What has happened to that book? The story is that he will not allow it to be reprinted. And what has happened to the next two volumes in the Stubbs quartet? Is it that, since he has gone out of his way to expose activities and emotions that less dedicated autobiographers tend to gloss over, he feels that the two volumes covering the 1950s might be too close to the bone? There could be any number of reasons. Perhaps we will learn them in Melbourne this Easter.

THE ENIGMA OF MALACIA

CHERRY WILDER reviews

The Malacia Tapestry

Here is Malacia... a city-state planted firmly somewhere or another: on the heights of the Renaissance or the outskirts of the eighteenth century. It shows traces of Venice, Florence, even Vienna. It has a stunning realism: the streets, attics, workshops, mansions are brought before us with great clarity and detail. We can smell the breakfast coffee or the reek of incense and burnt offerings from the street-corner sorcerer. In the clear light of morning a few winged humans can be seen flying around a tall bell-tower; in the golden light of afternoon we might see a parade of 'ancestral animals', giant saurians, winding to its close; on festive evenings heretics are burnt. Brian Aldiss lavishes imagination upon his changeless city; the saurian fauna, for example, are perfectly graded and expertly placed in the narrative.

The hero, Perian de Chirolo, is an actor who tells his own story. He is that first-rate first-person character, the man we know a little better than he knows himself. Perian is never less than flesh and blood: his predecessors can be found in 'real' knockabout memoirs by Cellini, Casanova, Boswell.

The story might be summarized as Perian's brush with Progress. He agrees to act in some new-fangled cinematic tableaux out of love for Armida de Hoytola, daughter of a rich and arrogant merchant. On the one hand he is drawn into a circle of Progressives, dangerous subversives, including Otto Bengtsohn, the expert who operates a 'zahnoscope', his confederate Bonihatch and the poor young seamstress Letitia. On the other hand Perian swaggers with some uncertainty into the company of the rich and powerful; he nourishes an ambition to marry Armida and can only hope to do so by becoming eminent in his

profession. Perian is transparently self-seeking, an incorrigible wencher and a braggart, but it is the touch of Progress that dooms all his ventures. The dark hand of the Supreme Council lies over Malacia; a zahnoscope, a hot-air balloon, are bound to be banned in the end.

Perian's fall, step by step to the gutter outside a mansion where he is mercilessly stripped by beggars, is a measure of the decadence of Malacia. For Perian, in spite of his caddish ways, is a real hero who always does a little better than anyone expects. He is braver, more honourable, more loyal and much more trusting than his lush Armida and his worldly friend de Lambant. He turns away instinctively on the one occasion when he could be drawn into the circle of power; he will not become an assassin. Malacian high society is one of intrigue and debauchery; young ladies evade their chaperons with contemptuous ease. (One wonders what would really have compromised Armida, and how the Malacians handled unwanted pregnancies.)

The story is worked out in a series of *tableaux vivants*, several with deliberately static titles: 'Mountebanks in an Urban Landscape', 'Woman with Mandoline in Sunlight'. The pictorial effects are marvellous. There can be few episodes more striking and beautiful in modern speculative fiction than, for example, the flight of the balloon, the cat and the cavort birds.

Certain images and ideas are skilfully used to show Malacia as a static society. The survival of the saurians, the presence of satyrs and lizard men, suggest a world trapped between the Mesozoic era and the Golden Age. There is the haunting symbol of the flighted people, whose females lose the power of flight as they grow older. Malacia is a non-Christian society in which the priests of the Higher Religion worship God and Minerva and acknowledge Satan as creator of the world. Malacia is a peaceful society that makes a show of keeping everyone in his proper station. There is a certain amount of swashbuckling when the Turks come along for one of their regular sieges, but the Turks have been infected with Malacia's decadence as well as its plague.

So much care has been spent on the enigma of Malacia that we find it difficult to accept Perian's story as the whole purpose of the book. This is surely much more than a tale of social climbing and sexual jealousy. If the powers that be, the Supreme Council, expressly forbid change and make Progress a dirty word then the reader's attention is also directed to the possibility of change. Science fiction readers in particular do have a streak of iconoclasm, and by the end of this story many of them will secretly long to put a bomb under the eternal city, or at least to give the Bishop Elect a hotfoot.

The Malacia Tapestry is not a crude allegory of modern society and it is not a simple alternate-world story in which part of

reader's fun is to glimpse in one society traces of another. We scan Perian's murky visions hoping to see a familiar face or two and meet only the inscrutable figures of the Tiepolo drawings that illustrate the book. The false beliefs of Malacia are as unconvincing as those of the world we know: we do not believe in the Primal Curse forbidding change any more than we believe in Original Sin.

In chapter 10 of *Billion Year Spree* Aldiss says 'Our understanding of human behaviour continues to broaden and deepen, as it has since Darwin's time. ... We used to hang people for stealing bread; now we pay unemployment benefits. We used to allow children to be used as slave labour; now we are extending the school-leaving age. ... This moral progress comes as a result of scientific developments — a positive thing science does, often forgotten in a time when science's failures claim our attention.' He goes on to discuss 'a post-war range of fiction in which man's performance in an authoritarian society is examined'. His list includes *1984*, *The Space Merchants*, *Fahrenheit 451* — and we could certainly add *The Malacia Tapestry* to the list. The creation of an authoritarian society with old-world trappings and limited technology is a daring stroke.

There is no suggestion that Aldiss intends to tell us more about Malacia or work out its 'moral progress'. We have no illusions about Perian de Chirolo's decision to meet the Progressives and become a revolutionary. But we know that the story of change in Malacia is there for the telling.

INSTEAD OF AN EDITORIAL

Well, who needs it? I have written most of the material in the first seven Parergon Papers, and it's about time regular readers had a break. And you have here Aldiss, LeGuin, Gillespie, Grigg, McPharlin and Wilder to read. It should be enough.

But there might have been more, yes. There was supposed to be more.

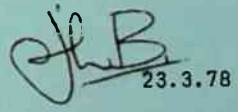
As I write, the seventeenth Australian National Science Fiction Convention is a little over thirty hours away. Sadly, Sally and I will not be at the convention. Since the convention is the sole reason for publishing this special issue, I want *it* to be there, incomplete though it is. I am most unhappy that the issue is missing three important and timely articles, but I would be unhappier still if you were to miss what I *have* been able to publish.

Two of the missing articles will appear in the next issue: John Foyster's review of Lee Harding's *The Weeping Sky* and Michael Clark's review of George Turner's *Beloved Son*. The third article, a survey by Perry Middlemiss of Roger Zelazny's Amber series of novels, I am a little relieved not to be able to publish here, because the series is incomplete (for Australian readers) and Perry's assessment is necessarily provisional. Lee, George, Roger: I'm sorry you're not here.

George especially. I wanted to be at this convention, to surprise you with this fake-ASFR, and to bask in the reflected glory not only of your magnificent novel but also of Mike Clark's superb review of it.

Mike, John, John, Perry, Ursula and Cherry responded to my request for material (at short notice, as usual) promptly and splendidly. I hope they will not be too disappointed by this rather skinny and badly printed celebratory issue. Bruce and David: thank you for permission to reprint your speeches. Brian: forgive me for not asking your permission!

Enjoy the convention, folks.
Enjoy the issue, dear readers (but don't expect too much of this crazy sf stuff in future issues).
Please keep in touch.



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