

SF COMMENTARY 82

40th Anniversary Edition, Part 3

August 2011

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Cover:
'A New Reality'
by Ditmar



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I must be talking to my friends

Everybody needs a Lionel Logue

I rarely talk about films here. *SF Commentary* is a magazine about science fiction and fantasy literature, unless somebody sends me a very good article about SF films. But I can't help writing about *The King's Speech*, a non-SF film that gained so much word-of-mouth interest in Australia that it transferred from the arthouse cinemas to the multiplexes, then won several Academy Awards.

I did not expect *The King's Speech* to be my sort of film. It's about British royalty, in which I have little interest. I do not support people who claim to be more important than other people, especially if they make those claims based on mere heredity. But *The King's Speech* is mainly about a man, known throughout most of the film as 'Bertie' (Prince Albert, later King George VI, played by Colin Firth), who can't escape a job he never expected to take on, a job that he loathes. Apart from his overall shyness, he suffers from a stammer, a disability that became critically important during the 1920s and 1930s when for the first time monarchs and politicians had to speak to their nations via radio.

The King's Speech is not about stammering, or even about speaking on radio. It is about the way in which a person's personality is shaped (or warped) by the time he or she is five years old. Bertie cannot remember a time when he did not stammer. His therapist, Lionel Logue (played by Geoffrey Rush, in a performance that should have won the Oscar) perceives that he cannot effect a miracle cure for his patient, every aspect of whose life conspires to make public speaking a nightmare. Bertie's life has been oppressed by the attitudes of his father (King George V), his mother (Queen Mary), and his brother (David, briefly King Edward VIII), who would have stayed on as king if he had not been forced to abdicate. Bertie has been left with a boundless reservoir of self-doubt. Lionel Logue's mission is to give him a *voice* — the self-confidence to carry out a difficult PR job throughout an approaching long and destructive war.

I enjoyed this film because the plight of this man forced to be king somehow mirrors my own lifetime's experience. Not that I've ever stammered, but the obsession of my life has been my perception of the things I *cannot* do, not the things I *can* do. Given Bertie's problem, and the job that he sees before him, I probably would have committed suicide. Perhaps everybody needs a Lionel Logue.

I've always been obsessed by the fact that I cannot perform any action that other people would call 'sporting' or 'athletic'. I am incapable of catching or kicking balls, which seems to be the main distinguishing mark of a successful male in Australia. If I run, I become breathless very quickly, and always have done so. I have never been able to swim more than one length of a pool

without running out of puff. I have no appreciation of people who run round playing fields, or kicking footballs, or swimming faster than other people. To me their lives are quite barren, because they do not create anything.

I cannot sing or play a musical instrument of any kind. Fortunately, I can appreciate the work of those who do play well. I cannot sing like Roy Orbison, a handicap that really annoys me. I cannot commit to memory poetry or prose verbatim, which is also a handicap for someone who loves good poetry and prose. Indeed, I am no good at anything that Australians regard as 'practical' — carpentry, fixing things, driving a car or even changing a tyre. In the eyes of the average Australian, I'm handicapped.

I would have liked to have been creative in a practical way, but I don't seem to have the talent. I drew a lot during primary school, mainly self-written comic books, but lost my confidence when attempting to master oil painting in high school. I've written a few stories since childhood, but have never liked any fiction I've written. The only two people who ever liked my attempts at fiction were George Turner and Carey Handfield's father. To me, my stories sound inauthentic, and even worse, unoriginal. There seems no point to writing fiction unless you write something nobody else could possibly have written.

I've often wondered what my life — the life in my mind — *might* have been like. What if I had had the same inabilities, plus an ironcast sense of self-confidence? The science fiction world does seem to be full of such people: people who strut around conventions exuding ego, but produce nothing of value; or put years of effort into producing a stream of mediocre fiction. What if I had the abilities I craved, plus my current low levels of self-confidence — or simply a long stretch of bad luck? We all know people like that: brilliant writers who rarely publish, or whose published works are buried under the slurry of bestselling junk; brilliant musicians who spend 40 years playing coffee houses or small halls and whose only CD was nearly released by a company that failed the next day; inspiring artists who sell one painting an exhibition (I know several such people, and if I had money I would have bought their paintings, even though we have no walls to exhibit them).

The true direction of my life was set when I read an article during the early sixties. In *If* magazine Lin Carter published a column where he described various aspects of science fiction fandom. Most of what he described sounded fairly social. I had too little self-confidence to join a science fiction club, because I might have had to talk to new people. (I knew about the Melbourne SF



John Bangsund, Bruce Gillespie's Lionel Logue, awards Bruce Gillespie his first Ditmar Award, August 1972. Does John look just a bit like Geoffrey Rush? (Photo: Gary Hoff.)

Club, because in every book I bought at McGill's Newsagency in the city there was a little leaflet inviting people to attend meetings of the MSFC on Wednesday nights.) In one of his articles, Lin Carter described 'fanzines', magazines in which people wrote and published exactly what they wanted, and sent them to other science fiction fans. Fanzine publishers did not have to send their scribblings into New York editors only to have them rejected. No, they just published them, and sent them out to people who were interested. From that moment, I knew what I wanted to do. And although I had no idea how I would ever publish a fanzine, I knew that eventually I would publish one: a good one.

The rest of the story will be familiar to most readers of *SF Commentary*. In late 1967 I did get in touch with other science fiction fans, and even had some articles published in fanzines before I began publishing one myself. My Lionel Logues were people like John Bangsund, Lee Harding, and George Turner, who said they liked my writing. John Bangsund showed me how to operate a duplicator, and I bought one in 1969. He also gave me the mailing list for fanzine fandom as it then

was. I realised from the beginning that nobody makes money from publishing fanzines, so I did not start publishing *SF Commentary* until 1969, the first year in which I earned a real salary. Since then, my life has been a constant tussle between having the money to publish (therefore not having the time to publish) or having the time to publish (underemployed, therefore with not enough money to publish). But at least I've kept going.

Rising postage rates stopped publication of most of my favourite fanzines from the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Their editors would have disappeared from sight if it had not been for the wholly unexpected intervention of something called the Internet. Nothing in science fiction literature prepared us for the internet, because it works the way fans do, by roundabout interconnections, not connections based on a central authority. Suddenly in 1998 I was back in touch with many fans who, like

me, had stopped writing letters. As various forms of publishing software became available, the internet lowered the cost of publishing fanzines. The Internet produced its own Superfan, Bill Burns. This resourceful English bloke who has lived in America for more than 30 years did what nobody else thought of doing: he gained access to what seems like an infinite amount of computer storage, which he offers free to any fanzine publisher who uses Adobe Acrobat or similar software to produce their magazines as PDF files. Any reader with Adobe Acrobat Reader (which is free) now has access to thousands of great fanzines.

Not that everything about the world of internet fanzines is ideal. I refuse to read anything much longer than a paragraph on a computer screen. I have to print it out. This can be very expensive, if you print a fanzine with coloured illustrations on an inkjet printer (less expensive on a laser printer — but still inconvenient). I prefer to receive my fanzines as paper magazines. I am far more likely to read a magazine I receive through the mail than one that I download. Because of the way the computer industry keeps changing its storage protocols, I don't expect that many of today's computer-stored fanzines will be available for reference in 10 years' time, let alone 40 years' time, but any fanzines I receive in the mail will stay with me.

The golden age of fanzines is now

I have stored most of the paper fanzines I've ever received, because they are personal documents produced by people who take a lot of trouble to do something well. People choose to publish about a wide variety of subjects, which has led to a traditional but specious dividing line

between fanzines that actually talk about the world of science fiction (and/or fantasy and horror), and those that talk about the activities and interests of fans, not necessarily about SF or fantasy.

I regard this dividing line as specious, because it's not

what separates us from other types of magazines. Most magazines are published in order to make a profit or at least not lose money, and therefore are aimed at audiences — that is, consumers. Fanzines are published for the pleasure of publishing, often lose a lot of money, and are aimed at participants. They are personal documents, not official documents or commercial enterprises. To keep receiving a fanzine, you need to send a letter of comment or other written or artistic contribution, or publish your own magazine as trade. If you are really desperate, you might send a subscription, thus making yourself into merely a reader, but then lose much of the enjoyment of reading fanzines.

It's many years since I've reviewed fanzines in *SF Commentary*, because there are far too many good ones to discuss them properly. I thought I would reduce the length of the following by limiting myself to the fanzines I receive in the mail. Two of them (*Banana Wings* and *Sense of Wonder Stories*) are available only by mail. The others can be downloadable as PDF documents from <http://efanzines.com>, but I am very happy that I receive them by post.

In talking about only a small number of my favourites, probably I will insult dozens, even hundreds, of other fanzine publishers. Sorry about that. Now I've started looking at fanzines in a systematic way, I might spread my wings. Or I might continue to leave regular fanzine reviewing to the few people who still do it, such as Guy Lillian (in *Zine Dump*) and Keith Walker (in *Fanzine Fanatique*).

Also, I am not 'reviewing' the following, as if I were an outsider commenting from an adversarial or disinterested position. In talking about these fanzines, I really am talking about and to my friends.

***Banana Wings* 44 (November 2010) and 45 (February 2011)**

Claire Brailey and Mark Plummer, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, England.

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'Essentially available on editorial whim, which most likely to be satisfied by the fannish usual: a response to this issue, a fanzine in trade, or some other appropriate action on your part. Sending UK postage stamps is always good, and frankly we wouldn't say no to hard cash either.'

Claire and Mark are great friends of ours. They visit Australia as often as possible, most recently in September last year for Aussiecon 4 (the 68th World SF Convention, held in Melbourne). They usually find the time to visit Elaine and me in Greensborough when they visit Melbourne. They are great conversationalists, warm human beings. Yet probably I would never have met them if it had not published fanzines. In 1995 I joined an apa (amateur publishing association, an organisation for exchanging fanzines among its members) called Acnes-tis, edited and organised by Maureen Kincaid Speller in Britain. To my perpetual sorrow, Maureen lost interest in her own apa in 2005, but meanwhile the connection had been made between Mark and Claire, between Mark, Claire, and fanzine publishing, and between them and Australian fandom. You never know where fanzine publishing will lead.

When Claire and Mark joined forces in publishing *Banana Wings*, they put together a publishing model that includes the strengths of both of them, and attracts the writing talents of many other people. Claire's writing style has made the greater impact in fandom, leading to her winning several FAAN and Nova Awards for her





Susan Wood, early 1970s or perhaps at Aussiecon 1. I can't remember who took the photo.

writing, and several Hugo nominations. I prefer Mark's dryer humour, but I note that he won a Nova Award recently for his writing. Together, they produce a magazine that wins awards, and should have won the Hugo Award for Best Fanzine last year.

In *Banana Wings* 44, Mark examines some matters of great importance to fandom itself, and talks about the imbalance between women and men in winning science fiction awards. Claire talks about many of the issues that arose out Aussiecon 4, which they had just attended before publishing this issue. Elsewhere in the issue, Claire and Mark write articles about visiting Adelaide during their Aussiecon trip. Unfortunately they do not mention visiting Greensborough in Victoria, but they have often mentioned visiting us in other issues of other fanzines. (My only beef about their Adelaide articles is that they give the impression that Damien and Juliette, their hosts, are vigorous members of Australian fandom, whereas in fact they seem to participate in very little.)

It might worry some people that not many of the articles in *Banana Wings* are about science fiction. But the essence of a fanzine is that it is about what SF fans are really interested in.

James Bacon, a Londoner, talks about Octocon, a British convention held in 2010.

Taral Wayne, a Canadian who was Fan Guest of Honour at the world convention in Montreal in 2009, is interested in a vast range of topics. His 'Bird Lady of

Parkdale' is the best article of his I've read. He begins talking about the apartment he lives in, then about the pigeons around the building, then about the little old lady who fed the pigeons, which led to the placing of wire over the windows of the apartments in his building to protect them from pigeon poo, thus spoiling the view, which leads back to Annie Ross, the 'bird lady', who died recently. She had written books and was interested in Roman history. Taral didn't know that while he was alive. He would just like his view back, but it is rather wonderful the way in which he gathers these threads into one article.

Banana Wings 45 covers an even wider range of material than *BW* 44.

Dave Langford writes about perhaps the most interesting science fiction fan I've never met, Geri Sullivan. She wasn't able to attend the Corflu I went to in 2005, and as far as I know has never been to an Australian world convention.

James Shields begins his GUFF report, again by praising the wonders of Adelaide, which I haven't visited since 1980. I hope James writes later about Aussiecon, and the New Zealand national convention he attended before that, because he's a good writer, and I enjoyed meeting him right at the end of his trip.

For those people (especially *SF Commentary* readers) whose main interest is science fiction, Claire riffs on the idea of series novels in SF. I'm opposed to them. But wasn't my first experience of written SF the 'Mars' novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs? The first four books are really one novel, with each of the first three ending with cliffhangers to the next book. I enjoy crime and thriller series more than SF series. Perhaps it's because a crime novel works well only if it has one or more outstanding characters, and those leading characters usually beg to be written about more than once.

Tony Keen inquires why women's names are used far less frequently in the covers of SF anthologies than men's names, even when there are equal numbers of men and women writers in an anthology.

David Redd's report on Novacon 40, 'Forty Years On', is one of the most amusing SF convention reports I've read. (John Bangsund wrote some that were even better.) Most of the humour comes from running jokes, rather than wham-bang one-liners. It's encouraging to read that Brian Aldiss, at 86, 'was up and about on time at 9.30 to read his party piece "Better Morphosis", about the cockroach which turned into Franz Kafka'.

Catherine Pickersgill, mentioned approvingly by David Redd, contributes a nice little article about collecting pens. (It could be worse. Her even more famous husband Greg Pickersgill collects battle helmets. I, of course, don't collect; I accumulate.)

Taral Wayne writes an entertaining celestial shaggy dog story. Taral finds that there is no paying market Out There for well-written essays that are written just for the enjoyment of writing them, so where better to send such an essay than to *Banana Wings*?

Mark's editorial is a fine example of the discursive fanzine article, seemingly disorganised yet fully thought through. It mentions me. (Did I say that I really like *Banana Wings* because it mentions Bruce Gillespie a

lot?). It also mentions a list that British fan Mike Meara made of his favourite SF novels of the seventies and eighties. Since I am held up as somebody else who makes many long lists, this part of the editorial connects to Mark's acquiring a bundle of fanzines recently from Greg Pickersgill. This leads Mark to a confession that he is actually trying to concoct a 'definitive bibliography of Bruce Gillespie fanzines'. This sounds like a worthy but fruitless occupation. Even I could never put together such a bibliography, because I no longer have some of my fanzines, such as the issues of *Norstrilian News* I edited in 1971 and 1972. A list of my APA-45 fanzines (1972–1974) could be obtained only by burrowing through my APA-45 mailings, which are buried at the bottom of a large grey cupboard in Greensborough.

Indeed, Mark's whole exercise of fanzine burrowing might have proved sterile had he not found some issues of Susan Wood's *Amor de Cosmos People's Memorial Quiet Revolutionary Susanine*. Mere mention of Susan Wood and her contribution to fannish life in general, and mine in particular, produces a sense of grief in me. Mark, who joined fandom five years after Susan died in 1980, manages to bring to life, after reading the few Susanines he's seen, the whole spirit of her life and enterprise. I was very moved, particularly by Mark's account of *Amor 8*, which talks about Aussiecon 1 in 1975, where Susan was one of the two Fan Guests of Honour. (The other, Mike Glicksohn, was married to her when we asked them to be our guests of honour; they kept their commitment although they had split up. Mike died recently, but I will write about him elsewhere.) The title of Susan's article, when Ted White reprinted it in *Amazing*, was 'Will Somebody Please Tell Bruce Gillespie I Really Am Sane?' In writing about Susan's article, Mark is able to divine the spirit of 1970s fandom:

The trip's full of references to strange fannish monsters of the not-so-recent past: Doug Barbour, Anna-Jo and Frank Denton, Grant Canfield, George Barr, Alicia Austin, Bob Tucker — and that's before she gets to Australia. But it's not just these now-mostly-vanished fans or the duplicated quarto that makes *Amor 8* feel like the product of an earlier age. I really don't think that it's the after-knowledge that Susan would be dead in five years makes me see *desperate fun* everywhere, well before the term was coined to describe that feeling towards the end of the convention when you know it'll soon be over and you want to cram as much convention-time as possible into the last few hours before the return to normal life. Nowadays it's normally mitigated by the knowledge that there'll be another convention in a few months... But I think with something like that first Aussiecon thirty-five years ago, just as with the early TAFF trips before that, the experience was heightened by the knowledge that this long-anticipated and never-to-be-repeated coming together of fannish fellow travellers actually wasn't going to happen again for years, perhaps ever. And so I love *Amor*, and I especially love *Amor 8* because it talks about going to an Australian Worldcon and I think it describes some of my feelings about the third Aussiecon in 1999. And I was reading it again over breakfast the other day and it made me

think of Australia and in-person contact and our places in fandom.

There you have it. Mark manages to say everything I would ever want to say about what fanzines and fandom mean to me.

Trap Door 26 (December 2009) and 27 (December 2010)

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Available 'by Editorial Whim for The Usual (letters, contributions, both written and artistic, and accepted trades), or \$5.00 per issue'.

This is often regarded as the Rolls Royce of fanzines, as I wrote to Ian Mond. (But is Rolls Royce still the Rolls Royce of cars?) Robert Lichtman, who seems to have divine powers when it comes to fanzine publishing, combines impeccable layout and text editing skills with a choice collection of fannish art by the cartoonists we know and trust, such as Steve Stiles, Brad Foster, Dan Steffan, Harry Bell, and even some dead people, such as ATom and William Rotsler.

Yet, of course, none of the skills that Robert shows here would fit him for editing professional magazines these days. No eye-blistering swatches of colour obliterating the text. No punch-you-in-the-mouth text grabs. Just deep literacy and an even deeper love of fandom and all the people who sail here.

In the last ten years *Trap Door* has acquired a reputation as the place where great old fans go to die. The great passing parade of fans has been known by Robert Lichtman and his writers, so he and they produce the finest obituaries in the field. In *Trap Door 26* Robert pays tribute to 'our' Paul Williams, the multiskilled journalist and fan writer, onetime executor of Philip Dick's estate, whose brain was damaged some years ago, so severely that he has been affected by an 'early, gradual onset of dementia (not Alzheimer's...), and just this year he had to be moved to a nursing home'. At various times Robert and he have seen life together. Robert tells how Paul Williams reclaimed him for fandom after he had been away for some years.

Trap Door 26 is almost entirely dominated by the kind of writing you now cannot find anywhere but in great fanzines: personal, emotional, but also very funny. Gordon Eklund's 'The Great Gafia of 1967' is a rare example of a true piece of fan fiction, that is, a piece of fiction that has its main characters some famous fans, however well disguised. All the names have been changed to protect the defamed, but no doubt some of *Trap Door*'s readers can pick them. Here Eklund has also written a nice bit of science fiction. (Eklund's few science fiction novels, published in the 1970s, are favourites of mine.)

Dave Langford's 'South Wales Alphabet' is not so much based on fandom as on his own life. Dave suffers from having a slightly more famous younger brother, Jon Langford the 'rock star' (or alt.country star), who is planning a book about South Wales, where the two of

them grew up. Dave writes: 'For my contribution, to be scattered through the book as text sidebars, I tried to scrape up some mostly 1950s/1960s memories of Newport.' Lots of good memories seen through the uniquely amusing eyes of Dave Langford, whose childhood seemed to be devoted to a special hobby: 'It is not true that my experiments with home-made explosives left Newport High School as an insurance write-off that wasn't worth repairing.' But very nearly. This story could have been called 'Experiments and Explosions'.

Dave seems to have come through his many adventures unscathed, which is more than Robert Lichtman's wife Carol Carr did when 'There I was, blithely coming out of the bathroom on my way to where the food was, when I forgot to remember the step down into the sunken living room. Just a tiny lapse of memory. What I do remember, all too clearly, is an almost horizontal flight and, just before I landed, trying to protect my head from bashing into the side of a coffee table'. In her highly entertaining article 'Thanksgiving is the Cruellest Month', Carol tells what it was like to go through a year of pain, misery, irritation, and loving support from Robert before being able to walk again without a limp. Her tibial plateau fracture has left her 'with very little cartilage', so that 'my knee hurt with more or less intensity depending on nothing I can figure out'. Few of us can make something so shiny from an experience so dark.

Just as emotionally involving is an article by one of my favourite writers, William Breiding. For reasons I cannot claim to guess, William moves house, city, and state every now and again, and seems to lead a very solitary life. He

writes 'The Larry Chronicles', about his 'sixty-year-old neighbor Larry' who 'rang my doorbell on Father's Day'. Despite William's own reticence, he allows Larry to drive him out to do some hiking. What start out as very tentative walks develop into explorations of the high countryside around where he lived at the time. (Tucson, I think.) Larry somehow gives back to William a self-confidence and emotional charge that he felt he was missing. It's not clear what Larry gained from the relationship. William becomes more drawn into Larry's life than he wants to be. When Larry knocked at the door, he was living a life painfully between wives. When Larry finds a new girlfriend, he just disappears, but William says, 'I will always remember Larry fondly. We had a deep soul bond that wasn't dictated by language. And, as Larry might say, I wish him Godspeed.'

Trap Door 27 is dominated by a sparkling article by John Baxter. John has written about his book-hunting pal Martin Stone in his book *A Pound of Paper*. In this article, 'The Wendigo in the Woods', John and Martin tackle the west coast of America. They expect to find vast numbers of undiscovered book treasures in the more obscure secondhand book shops, especially between Seattle and Vancouver. Despite what sounds like an enjoyable road trip, reminding me of the equally well-written journey of Walt and Madeleine Willis along the same road in 1962, they find few books. The internet has destroyed the secondhand trade in America, as it has in Australia. Those shops still open price their books unrealistically according to lists on the internet. Otherwise, they don't display their books. A sparkling article with a melancholy



undertheme.

Robert Lichtman is expert at linking his articles thematically. Gordon Eklund's fine article 'Second Trip' is about *Warhoon* 28, the 600-page hardback fanzine, published by Richard Bergeron, that collects all the fanzine articles of Walt Willis, including the fannish Bible *The Enchanted Duplicator*, plus his account of this two journeys to America (paid for by fans), in 1952 and 1962. Eklund quotes enough of Willis to remind us that not only was he one of the great Irish writers, but that he had little interest in selling his work professionally. His whole enterprise was for fandom, except for the book he published as 'Walter Bryan', *The Improbable Irish* (one of my most valued books). Willis's ability to explore character and place in something as seemingly simple as a convention or trip report can only be matched (in my opinion) by the best work of Australia's own John Bangsund (or even Australia's own John Baxter; see his *A Pound of Paper* or his recent *Immoveable Feast*).

Gregg Calkins was a name famous in fandom when I began publishing in 1969, but these days he seems to be out of touch with everybody but Robert Lichtman. That's Robert's real secret: he's the fan with whom everybody wants to stay in touch. Calkins' 'Cheap Bourbon and Injun Talk' is an enjoyable personal piece about his 'memorable non-fannish summer' that 'I spent helping create the State of Utah's first-ever statewide geologic map'. The piece is basically about getting to know his professor, Dr Bronson Stringham, who taught a callow youth, Gregg, many things apart from how to do surveying. Lots of great stuff about climbing around in high mountains, drinking, and other things.

In the great fanzines of the 1970s we told about our love affairs and unexpected adventures. Today all too often we tell tales of the terrible things that happen to us as we reach middle age. Gary Hubbard's 'The Cracked Eye' is just as involving as Carol Carr's article. In Gary's case, angina caught up with him when he least expected it. Eventually he couldn't ignore those chest pains. He had to put himself in the hands of the medical profession. Friends of mine who have had the same experience talk lightly of 'stents put into the arteries to keep them open'. Gary Hubbard shows just how painful is this procedure. Also, it guarantees nothing. Today's stents will probably have to be replaced within five years. 'Looking back on it, I realize that what happened to me is nothing, nothing at all — just a bump on the road to Oblivion'.

When Roy Kettle won the FAAN Award for Best Fan Writer in 2011, I was puzzled. I couldn't recall reading anything by him since the days when he was part of Ratfandom in Britain in the 1970s. Suddenly I see his work all over the place. His 'Quite Dazed in Cliché' is a bit laboured (because the article's idea, 'what if you put into practice some of the common clichés?', is hardly original), but his letter of comment (p. 39) is a model of how to write such letters.

So are most of the other letters in both issues of *Trap Door*. The editing of a letter column is the ultimate touchstone of the quality of a fanzine, because the letter of comment is the currency that fan editors crave (not money). Great stuff here from such people as Lenny Kaye (yes, the rock star who started out as a fan, and yes,

he writes only to *Trap Door*), Peter Weston, Mike Meara, and Australia's own Chris Nelson and John Baxter. This aspect of *Trap Door* that makes me even more insanely jealous than any other.

***Sense of Wonder Stories* 4 (August 2010) and 5 (February 2011).**

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Email: richcoad@gmail.com.

'Available for trade, contributions, letters of comment, and whim. May appear online someday.'

Sense of Wonder Stories is the kind of fanzine that would seem to appeal more to *SF Commentary* readers than the others I've mentioned. In the first issue, Rich Coad claimed that it was inspired by my *Steam Engine Time* (at that time coedited with Paul Kincaid and Maureen Kincaid Speller), which made my head swell up and go kind of fuzzy. (But then, Claire and Mark claim that *Banana Wings* was inspired by my *Metaphysical Review*, but today you would be struggling to find the resemblances.)

However, if you look at its Contents list, you will find many of the names to be found in other major American (non-SF-based) fanzines, and you will find a similar tone to that in *Trap Door*. In other words, *Sense of Wonder Stories* offers us personal tales of people's adventures in science fiction and fantasy. The result is very enjoyable.

Rich Coad has Good Taste — it is very like mine. His editorial in *SoWS* 4 covers several books that I've enjoyed very much, Christopher Evans' *Omega* and George Saunders' *Civilwarland in Bad Decline*, and offers some reservations about a book by Alastair Reynolds, whose fiction usually I find unreadable (except in his novellas).

Randy Byers, in his article 'When Life Hands You Lemurs, Make Lemuria', writes the kind of idiosyncratic and fanciful article that *SoWS* specialises in. Randy wanders from speculations about legendary continent of Lemuria, between Africa and Asia, to the speculations of Madam Blavatsky, to the early twentieth-century SF novels that seem to have been based on Blavatsky's ideas. 'So where does science fiction get its crazy ideas? Sober-minded proponents like to promote science fiction as a serious exploration of scientific ideas, but the history of the field is littered with as much pseudo-science as real science.'

In their nice bit of fan fiction/speculative criticism 'Several Conversations on the Matter of the Zoromes', Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer (with prompting from Gregory Pickersgill) take a lighthearted look at some really obscure science fiction books by Neil R. Jones. There seems no other justification for reading this obscure author than to produce this amusing article. It takes a while to find out what Zoromes are (in the work of Neil R. Jones), but having done that, 46MP-852, one of the two conversationalists in this story, asks 'Let me just be clear about this ... in addition to the gigers, the otters, the pandas, the platypus, the snow leopards, the badgers, the quokkas, the llamas, the bees and the airships — you now want to have Zoromes?'

A much more substantial but also obscure SF author

is Pauline Ashwell, who also wrote as Paul Ash. Roy Kettle tells of how he not only found out who these two authors are (Pauline Whitby), but travelled to the small English town of Ashwell in order to interview her. Now in her eighties, she received him warmly, and filled in the story of her long but often interrupted career. Her first SF short story appeared in 1943. She had 20 short stories published in *Astounding/Analog*, the last in 2001, as well as a novel and four linked short stories. But she published her first story when she was 12, in 1941! Roy's search for the author and the tale of why she took so long to publish is one of the best SF-based fanzine articles I've ever read.

Frank R. Paul is much better known to SF readers in general, but usually loved only by readers who collect SF magazines from the 1920s and 1930s. Paul did much else beside SF covers, and Bruce Townley, in his regular column 'BEMs, Babes, and Brushes', does a fairly comprehensive job of looking at Paul's talents. The two page-wide examples reproduced are very good indeed, full of that good old sense of wonder, befitting their appearance in this fanzine.

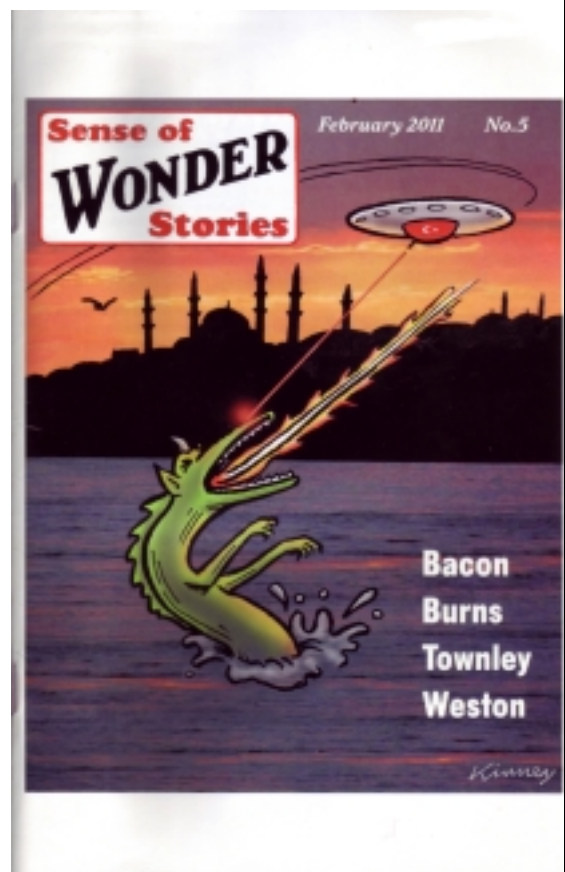
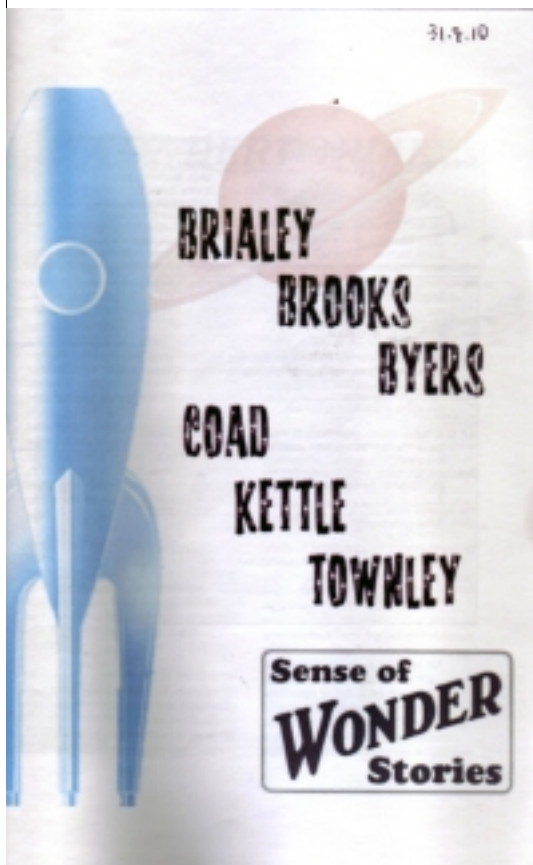
I discovered Barrington Bayley's fiction well before Rich Coad did. His article is 'Zen Guns, Garments, and Chronotic Empires: The Amazing Worlds of Barrington J. Bayley'. When I first began reading Ted Carnell's English magazines in the early sixties, the authors who impressed me were John Brunner, J. G. Ballard ... and P. F. Woods. The Nicholls/Clute *Encyclopedia* tells me that Bayley published 10 stories as Woods, before turning to writing novels as Barrington Bayley (Rich discusses *The Fall of Chronopolis* in detail). Woods was excellent at turning standard SF ideas on their head and inside out. Bayley continued in like manner. Rich Coad does not

explore why Bayley did not become as admired as Philip Dick; perhaps it was just because he was English, and he never found the right American market. As Rich writes: 'this is one author that really should not be overlooked', even though it is hard to find his books these days.

Rich is fond of sneaking in a little gem of an article right at the end of the issue, just after the letter column. In No 4, Ned Brooks, who I know only as a fine fanzine editor and writer about obscure books and magazines, tells us about the only job he held before he retired some years ago. He stress-tested machines and people for NASA. Beginning in hydrodynamics, he also tested the heat tiles for the Space Shuttle craft and worked with supersonic wind tunnels. Brooks is one of those unexpected quiet geniuses one can meet only in fandom.

In his editorial for *SoWS* 5, Rich shows that he is one of the few American SF readers who is fully aware of the SF riches appearing from Britain these days. Many of the best books appear only from British small publishers, which is why I find it hard to discover that they exist. Rich talks three books from major British publishers: Ian McDonald's *The Dervish House*, a major new novel from Gollancz, Iain Banks's *Surface Detail* (Orbit Books), which sits staring at me from the bookcase, and M. J. Engh's *Arslan*, which I have been writing about since it first appeared in 1976, most recently in *Steam Engine Time* 1. Rich says that *Arslan* has appeared recently in Gollancz's SF Masterworks series, but no copies of that edition have arrived in Australia. Buy it if you see it — it's the best SF novel of the last 40 years.

SoWS continues its tradition of pointing the spotlight on really obscure writers who inspire enthusiasm from his writers. However, when James Bacon writes about



best-selling Irish writer Réics Carló, I do rather wonder whether he is pulling our legs. Not so; James includes some of Carló's book covers. Unlike Germany's Perry Rhodan, this SF author famous in his own land has not yet arrived in English-language consciousness.

Bruce Townley, in his latest 'B.E.M.s, Babes and Brushes' column, concentrates on Ed Emshwiller, who, unlike Frank R. Paul, has covers and illustrations in magazines I own (especially *Galaxy*). Emsh (as he signed his artwork) was, along with Virgil Finlay, the most interesting illustrator of SF magazines in the fifties and sixties. He died young, but his wife Carol Emshwiller has during the last 40 years become an honoured SF writer.

The only irritating item in these two issues of *Sense of Wonder Stories* is a forum compiled from an e-list discussion about *They'd Rather Be Right*. This novel by Mark Clifton and Frank Riley won the very first Hugo Award for Best Novel, then sank without trace, except as a reminder of how completely wrong Hugo voters can be. Attempts to find a copy now would be fruitless, so it's not clear why the participants in the forum, such as Greg Pickersgill, Peter Weston, Sarah Bond, and Dave Langford, spend far too many pages talking a lot about an uninteresting novel and two uninteresting authors.

A stimulating letter column is followed by another tail-end treasure: technology historian Bill Burns discusses the life and career of 'Henry Clifford: Cable Engineer'. Laying cables under the sea was a major operation in the nineteenth century. Henry Clifford, as the article's title suggests, was one of the people who ensured that the cable was laid — but he also took out his pen and brush and provided us with a pictorial record of the great enterprise. I'm very grateful that Rich can afford colour printing (I can't), because his reproductions of some of these fine maritime paintings are splendid (if a bit small; Rich might easily have left out that e-list discussion and printed a few of these as full-page illustrations).

Bash on regardless

Rich Coad will recognise the above heading. It's a road sign that he saw when he was visiting Hyderabad, India in 2009. His article, 'Hyderabad Daze', about his experience, appears in *Inca 5* (December 2009), edited by Rob Jackson, Chinthay, Nightingale Lane, Hambrook, Chichester, West Sussex PO18 8UH, England. Rich's vivid



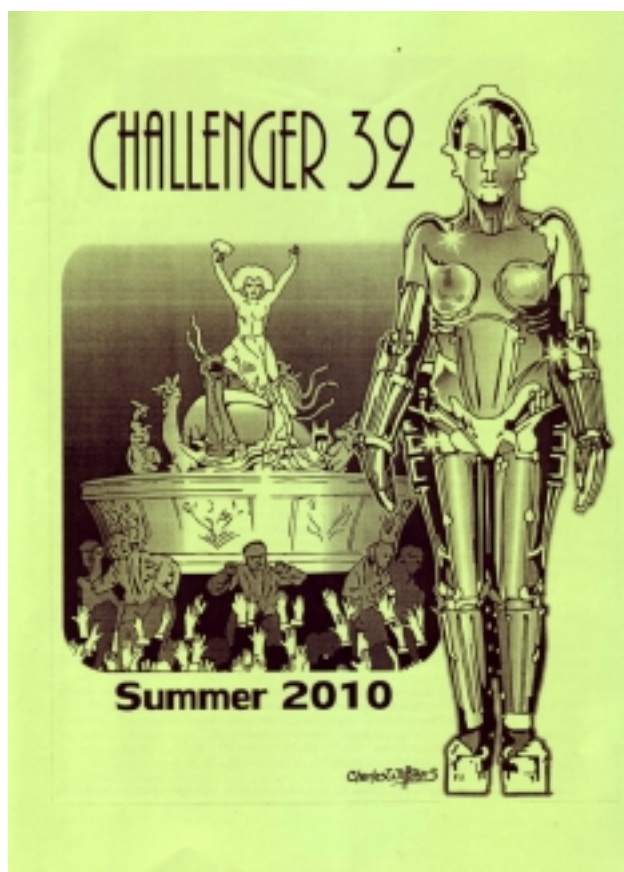
article, with colour photos (how do these other fanzine editors afford colour illos?), is one of the most interesting fanzine articles I've read in recent weeks. It's not about fandom, or science fiction, but it is an article filled with well-observed personal experience, and tells me a lot more about India today than any of the journalism that I find in today's newspapers or standard magazines.

The same issue includes Rob Jackson's entertaining and enlightening report on his trip to Seattle in 2009 for Corflu Zed, again with lots of vivid photos; and Sue Williams' transcript of Kevin Williams' recording of 'Alfred Bester and Fred Pohl: The Conversation' from a recording made in June 1978. The letter writers in *Inca* 6 (November 2010) liked this piece better than anything else in the issue, but I didn't.

I had hoped I would have time and room to talk about a whole lot of other fanzines. For instance, I hoped to write much more about Peter Weston's *Relapse* 19 (Spring 2011) (53 Wyvern Road, Sutton Coldfield B74 2PS, England). Like Rob Jackson, Peter Weston published fanzines first during the heroic days of great British fanzines at the end of the sixties and through the seventies (*Zenith*, then *Speculation*), then disappeared from the sight of fanzine readers, seemingly forever. It's only because of the Internet, and especially the Trufen and InTheBar e-lists, that either he or Rob decided to see if they could still mix the old magic. Peter Weston's achievement has been astonishing in *Relapse* (which started out as *Prolapse*, the sputtering to renewed life of an old and tired fan). He has taken the world of British fan history to a new level of achievement. The best fanzines have always included some fan history and re-

vived great articles from the past, but Peter Weston has asked older fans for their memoirs, prompted the discovery of vast unsuspected stores of photos, and set down the stories of great British fans and pros that had never been told before. Many of these people are only names to me, especially from a period in the seventies when many British editors did not send their fanzines overseas. Peter has created for me a whole world I knew nothing about. However, he can hardly complain if I do not send him letters of comment: he doesn't seem much interested in Australian fan history of the same period, and I have little to say about the people who have featured in his magazine. (For instance, I met John Brunner once, but when Peter's correspondents raised the name of Brunner, many previously unsuspected Brunner-watchers sent their pieces, and much enjoyable and scurrilous information was put about.) *Relapse* appears more regularly than most of the other major fanzines. Highly recommended.

Guy Lillian III's *Challenger* (PO Box 163, Benton, Louisiana 71006, USA) appears regularly on the Hugo Best Fanzine nomination list, but as several people reminded me, it hasn't actually won. Only a change to the current rules would give it a chance. Guy reaches out to a whole group of fanzine readers whose names are rarely seen in the colophons of the other fanzines I've mentioned. Guy, living in or near New Orleans for many years, taps into the 'Southern fandom' consciousness that has largely eluded my reach. Such readers are interested in some types of material that I would never run in my own fanzines, such as Joseph Major's very weak 'Two Jokey Stories', and they tend to be more interested in alternative media than I am. James Bacon writes a lively sports





James Bacon (left) and Chris Garcia (Photo: Mary Jo Kare.)

report, but my interest dipped because of the subject matter. However, *Challenger 32* (Summer 2010, 80 pp.) contains several pieces that inspire envy in me, especially Chris Impey's interview with Greg Benford (from 2008), with insights about the Benford viewpoint that I had not found elsewhere, and Joseph Green's tribute to Ray Lafferty, one of my favourite short story writers.

Challenger 33 (Winter 2011) is at, 96 pages, even more of a monster than No 32. I would suspect that Guy is trying to out-Gillespie Gillespie, but at least doesn't run long lists. James Bacon, the British fan who seems determined to take over the pages of the American fanzines, has four articles in this issue! There is a wide variety of articles on fans' experiences of war. Our own Ian Nichols provides a meaty article about SF war novels: 'What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?'. Lots of photos and cartoons and letters. This is, I suspect, the sort of package that I provided when I was editing *The Metaphysical Review*, the fanzine I wish I could afford to revive.

Where's Chris Garcia?

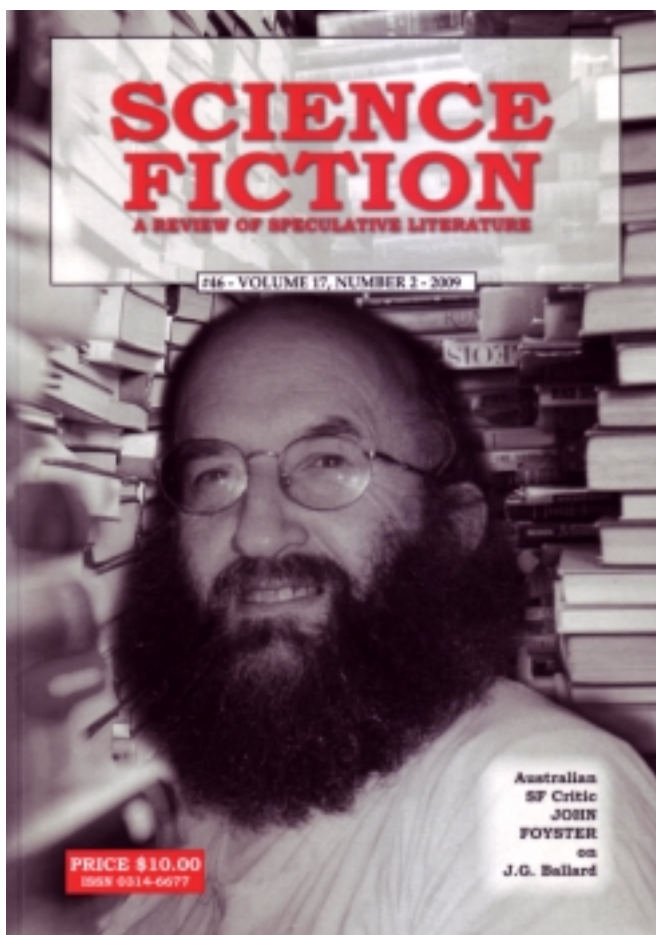
I've run out of room and time to write about the many enjoyable print fanzines I've read recently, and the vast number of great fanzines that I download each month from <http://efanzines.com>. But I must mention **Chris Garcia**, because he has become fandom's own source of renewable energy. He seems to post two fanzines a week to efanzines.com. They have set high standards in visual layout. He explores everything the SF person might want to know about (recent issues have focused on individual SF writers and movements, but my favourite is an entire issue about model railway fandom). Although he seems to spend 24 hours a day producing fanzines, Chris also seems to live an active social life of personal relationships, conventions, and club meetings. He also coedits a print fanzine (*Journey Planet*) with **James Bacon**, 55 Cromwell Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 2JZ, UK.

And wottabout Australia?

The easiest way in which anyone can become involved in fanzine fandom in Australia is to join **ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association)**. I'm the official editor, and you can find my details at the beginning of this issue of *SF Commentary*. At the moment we have 24 members, although we could have as many as 30 if you want to join us. To participate, contribute at least six pages of fanzine every six months — once every three bimonthly mailings. ANZAPA members have a very high enthusiasm level. Very few members stick to the minimum participation qualification, so we average 240 to 260 pages of material every mailing. If anybody tries to tell you that fanzine fandom is dead in Australia, point to that activity statistic. The elephant in the apa, though, is Australia Post. We have to charge fairly high membership rates these days to compensate for Australia's exorbitant postage rates: local hand-delivered: \$A20 per annum; mailed within Australia: \$A50; and the overseas rate will have to rise to \$US100. Melbourne residents who want to save a bit on their membership fees give me their contributions at the Australia Food Hall once every two months, then pick up their mailings a week later.

For some years it seemed as if **Van Ikin's Science Fiction** might take over from *SF Commentary* as Australia's most distinguished journal about SF literature. Unfortunately, Van faces problems similar to mine — not that he has an income so low that it's untaxable, but that to keep body and fanzine together he has to work really really hard at

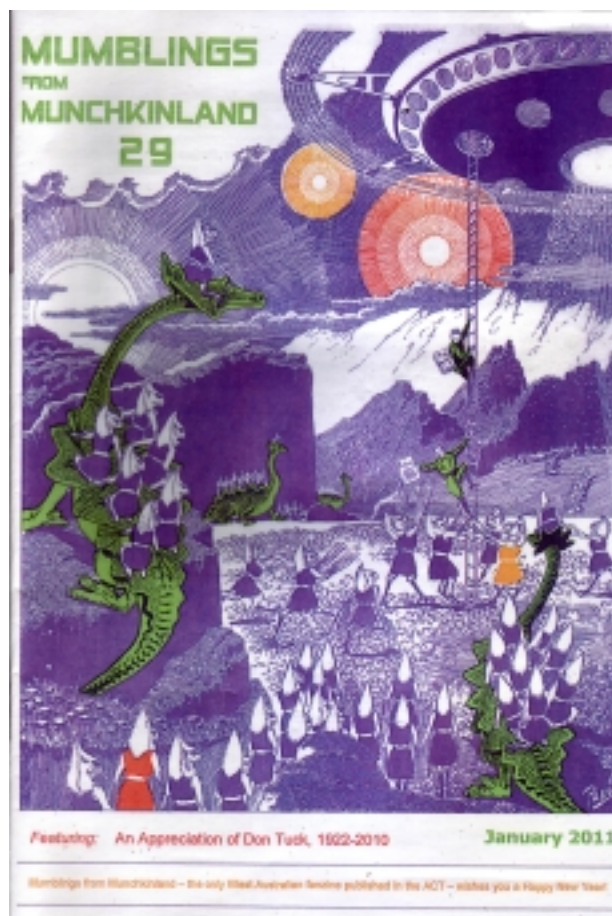
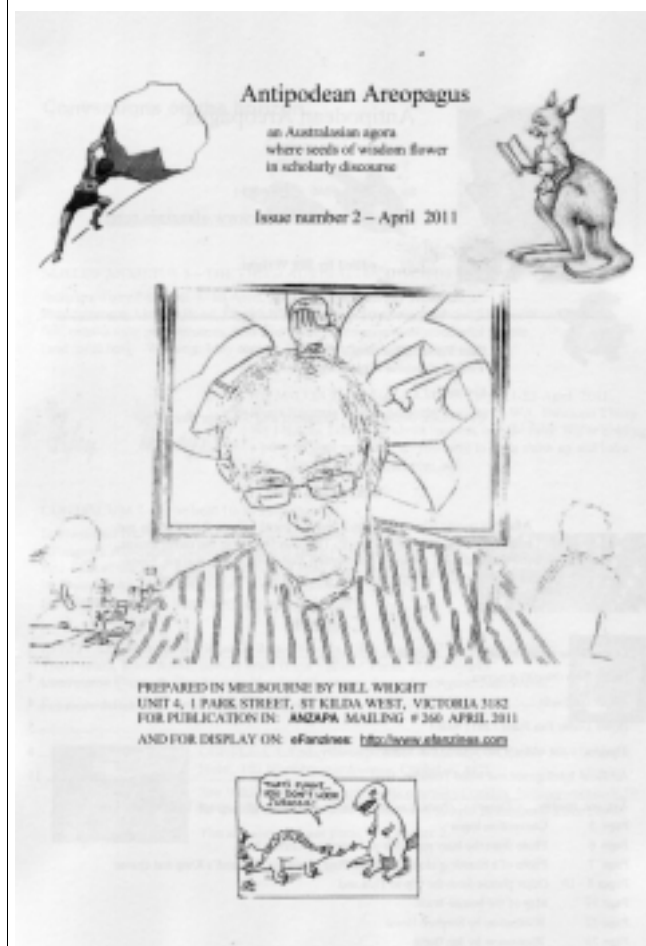




the University of Western Australia, thus losing all his free time. New *Science Fictions* have become rare in the last ten years, but the most recent issue, **No 46 (Vol. 17, No 2)** is his best ever. It's the John Foyster issue. John, who died in 2003, contributed more to Australian fandom and SF criticism than anybody else except John Bangsund and George Turner. His work remains largely uncollected, and can be found only in fanzines from the 1960s and 1970s. Van Ikin has collected here eight articles by John Foyster, two pieces about him (including one by me), and the transcript of John Foyster's funeral, which gives unique insights into his multilayered personality. Send \$32 (marking your cheque 'Van Ikin') to **Van Ikin, English and Cultural Studies (M202), University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley WA 6009, Australia.**

Bill Wright's *Australian Areopagus* (Flat 4, 1 Park Street, St Kilda West, VIC 3182; also available on [eFanzines.com](http://efanzines.com)), is a unique combination of fannish concerns and amusing columnists (especially Stefan, who really should send his comic essays to *The Age*). If you want to gain access to AA by joining ANZAPA, you can also read Bill's remarkable mailing comments. In the efanzines.com version, they are deleted.

Mumblings from Munchkinland, edited and mainly written by Chris Nelson (the only Western Australian fanzine that has in recent years been published in Tasmania, Fiji, Samoa, and now Canberra: 25 Fuhrman Street, Evatt ACT 2617; also available on efanzines.com). Chris Nelson has become the historian of Australian fandom.





In the last 10 years or more he has met and interviewed many of Australia's pioneering fans before they died. **No 29**, his tribute to the recently late Don Tuck, for instance, fills in much information that was new to most of us. The layout of his fanzine is elegant and imaginative, and Chris's writing style is delightful.

The other fanzines

Only in recent years did we realise that our wheel had been reinvented. Somewhere in the 1960s, fanzines crossed over into the comics and music fields. Somewhere in the 1980s, punk music fans rediscovered or reinvented fanzines all by themselves. Today they sell their zines (or 'zeens', as they are now often spelt) at a shop in Melbourne called the **Sticky Institute**, Degraes Street Basement, Flinders Street Railway Station. People who publish these zines seem to know nothing of the grand history of fanzines, but their products, which **Tim Train** and his wife **Lexie Harley** showed me, are my kind of fanzines. They and their pub-

lishers are witty and irreverent, with diverse interests — and even better, most zinesters use typewriters, collage, and other forms of retro repro instead of computers.

Tim is a performance poet with a zany but well-read sense of humour. His guest writers also take a bent view of the world. Tim has finally settled on a name for his zine, *Badger's Dozen*, and **No 6** appeared recently. My favourite contribution is the anonymous comic-strip page 'The Amazing Adventures of Chester Drawers', whose style reminds me of Leunig in his early days, and 'Badgers of Note', which I assume was written by Tim.

Email Tim at timhtrain@yahoo.com.au to ask very politely if he might send you a copy. Read more of his poems and perambulations on his blog <http://willtype-forfood.blogspot.com>. Or look in on the Sticky Institute (Tim tells me it's open only from Wednesday to Saturday, but it might be open at other times as well.)

The rest is silence ...


... for now. Yes, I am aware that I have insulted many of you by not mentioning your fanzines here. I haven't even started on those that appear only on **eFanzines.com**, such as Earl Kemp's mighty enterprise *el*. Apologies to Randy, carl, and Andy (*Chunga*); to David and Kate (*Bento*); and to many others. I've so enjoyed so much of what I've read recently that I will continue reviewing fanzines in some fashion, perhaps even resorting to a fanzine reviewzine.

The mighty three-volume Fortieth Anniversary Issue has finished at last ... a few months after *SF Commentary's* forty-second anniversary. I don't know where we go from here. It depends on the volume and depth of the response to *SFCs* 80, 81, and 82, continuing enthusiasm for *Steam Engine Time*, the possibilities for publishing a *Meta-physical Review*-type magazine, and much else besides. If I had an assured income, I could produce an 80-page magazine every month. Reality dictates otherwise.

Keep sending those fanzines, letters, and other contributions. Keep the conversation going.

— Bruce Gillespie, 4 June 2011

Help Save Science Fiction!



Meteor Incorporated was formed in 2007 with encouragement and support from the Australian Science Fiction Foundation to raise funds to acquire premises for a science fiction institution and research collection in Australia.

The aim is to conserve the sf treasures in private collections whose owners are aging and facing the prospect of downsizing their possessions.

Who will look after *your* collection when you can no longer do so?

The purpose of the Meteor Fund is to allow fans to unconditionally gift or bequeath all or part of their collections to the Meteor Incorporated Public Fund so that they can be properly managed for the benefit of this and future generations of science fiction fans. We need funds for this important project and rely on the generosity of fans. An additional short term objective is to assist local fans to save significant items in 'at risk' collections in collaboration with local sf clubs and associations.

Visit www.meteor.org.au for more information, including how to donate to the fund, and learn how to remember the Meteor Fund in your will: see www.meteor.org.au/contributions/bequests/. Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible (for Australian taxpayers only).

The Meteor Fund – preserving science fiction

Authorised by Bill Wright, Secretary of Meteor Incorporated
Unit 4, 1 Park Street, St Kilda West VIC 3181 e-mail: meteorinc@iprimus.com.au

Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)

Cover story: A new reality

Recent developments in fundamental physics and cosmology, both theoretical and hypothetical, strongly suggest that what we call *the Universe* may not be all that there is (Notes 1, 2, 3). Much that exists could lie beyond our purview, perhaps beyond our senses, so that the possibility of other ‘universes’ is neither negligible nor fanciful. For some people the word ‘universes’ is anathema, and if so, then simply replace it by ‘multiverse’. As the books in the notes indicate, however, ‘universes’ raises no conceptual or etymological qualms in the scientists exploring these questions. The ideas underlying the Big Bang neither necessarily nor sufficiently require that event to be unique — in fact, the theory indicates that *inflation* could be an ever-recurring phenomenon, with universes budding off continually from existing ones (Note 4). The mathematics of string theory support the concept of an enormous number of universes (of the order of 10^{500}) coexisting with ours (Note 5). Furthermore, string theory now allows for macroscopic hidden dimensions, not only the fundamental microscopic ones, some of which — the n-dimensional *branes* — are universes in their own rights, invisible to us, even though they may be close, extremely close, neighbours (Note 6).

As I have reported previously (Note 7), recent developments at the Large Hadron Collider, specifically experiments designed to test, and employ, the ideas discussed in the publications listed in the notes below, have given scientists *glimpses* into some of these existing, parallel universes. These brief sightings are fragmentary and discontinuous, both in space and time, and are so ephemeral and frangible that, like quantum decoherence, they cannot be captured for more than a few seconds. It is still unclear as to whether these evanescent views are those of nearby universes in the cosmic landscape, or of vicinal branes, or of freshly budded universes, or of universes in the *many-worlds interpretation* of Hugh Everett, or of some, as yet, theoretically unknown universe.

Whatever the case may be, the majority of such peeks into other existences seem to be of the same universe, perhaps even of the same planet. It would appear, as the current cover photo might confirm, that scientists have peered into a civilisation in which technology is of a quite sophisticated level, but which uses metals in a much more fundamental manner than we do, and in which energy is most often supplied to the machines through the intermediary of large, coiled strips of metal.

As far as can be judged, the cover depicts what could be some sort of exploratory flight, or, which seems ever more likely as more aspects of this civilisation are uncovered, simply a pleasure cruise in the early evening. For other scenes of this neighbouring universe, see Note 6 again.

Technical note

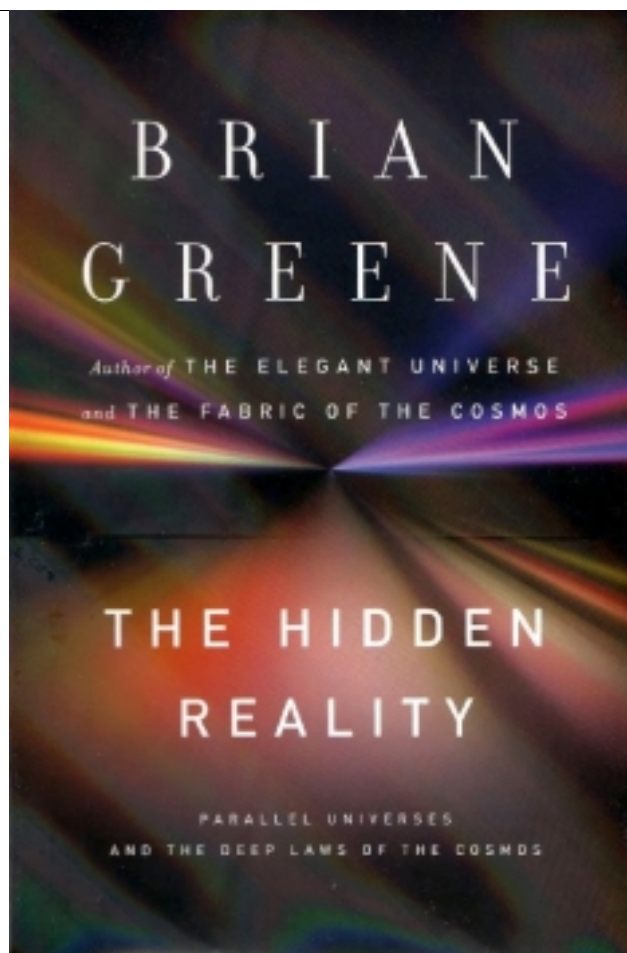
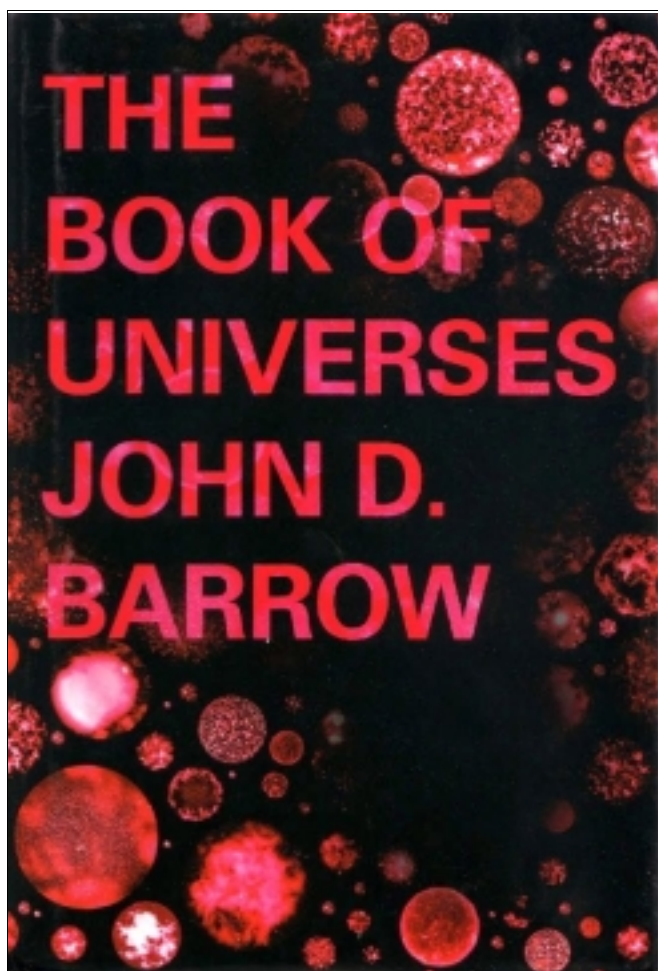
The cover was created using the Eon software package *Vue 9 Complete*. E-on provide a range of their products, at prices ranging from *free* (yes, *free*) to many thousands of dollars — visit <http://www.e-onsoftware.com/>. The flyer was bought from Cornucopia <http://www.cornucopia3d.com/>. Everything else is part of the Vue environment — including the spectacular sky. This is what Vue calls *Godrays*, and while wonderful to see, is tremendously computationally intensive. A ‘standard’ atmosphere essentially is computed by just sending a light ray into the scene and finding what it hits. For the more complex ‘Spectral’ atmospheres, *Vue* evaluates the density of all the components of the atmosphere (humidity, gases) along the ray, and calculates the corresponding scattering of light for each ray of light that it processes. These results are then integrated to produce such realistic effects as the reddening of sunlight close to the horizon. And for *Godrays*, *Vue* takes into account the shadowing produced by clouds — and only by clouds. *Godrays* are only possible when using the Spectral atmosphere model.

A standard atmosphere for a 600 x 800 pixel image might take about 15 seconds: the same-sized image for *Godrays* could take 40 minutes.

But the *Godray* sky *does*, in my opinion, make the cover graphic somewhat mysterious and very much more atmospheric.

Notes

- 1 *Visions of the Multiverse* by Steven Manly
New Page Books, 2011
This is a very general, painless, introduction to the ideas behind multiverses. If you find that the articles in *New Scientist* require more thinking and time than you’d care to expend, this is a good introduction.
- 2 *The Book of Universes* by John Barrow



Almost all the books which Barrow writes are extremely readable, and present fact, theory and hypotheticals (even if highly speculative) in a very understandable and digestible form. This volume is no exception. If you are a keen reader of *New Scientist* or *Scientific American*, then this is recommended. The background to the many theories of the multiverse treated is given prime importance. As a result, the *actual* multiverses are discussed in less detail, but there is enough to allow one to see just how bizarre some of these ideas are — in fact, here is another instance of science being more wonder-full than science fiction. Just expand the real physics and cosmology with your imagination, and to Hell with *Captain Future*. Well, maybe not. His adventures may not have been scientifically plausible even when written, but, my goodness, they still are quite breathless and exhilarating to read. Just put your mind into neutral and enjoy.

3 ***The Hidden Reality* by Brian Greene**

Brian Greene's previous books *The Elegant Universe* and *The Fabric of the Cosmos* were two books which, like many of Barrow's are on my bookshelves, permanently. *The Elegant Universe* is one of the finest popular science books of the past decade or so.

The Hidden Reality assumes that either his two previous books have been read, or that the reader is familiar with a deal of the *basic* con-

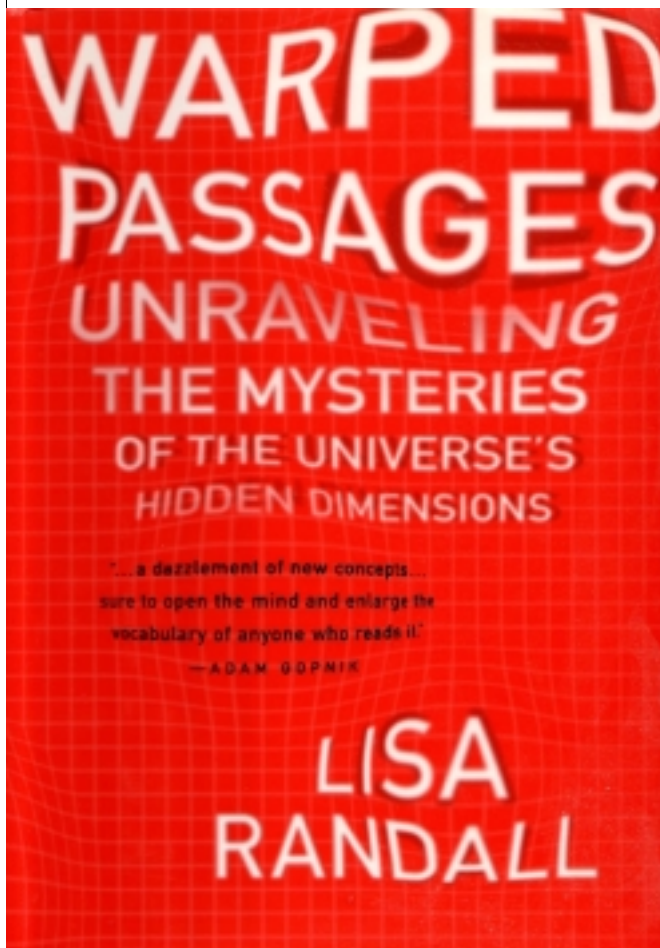
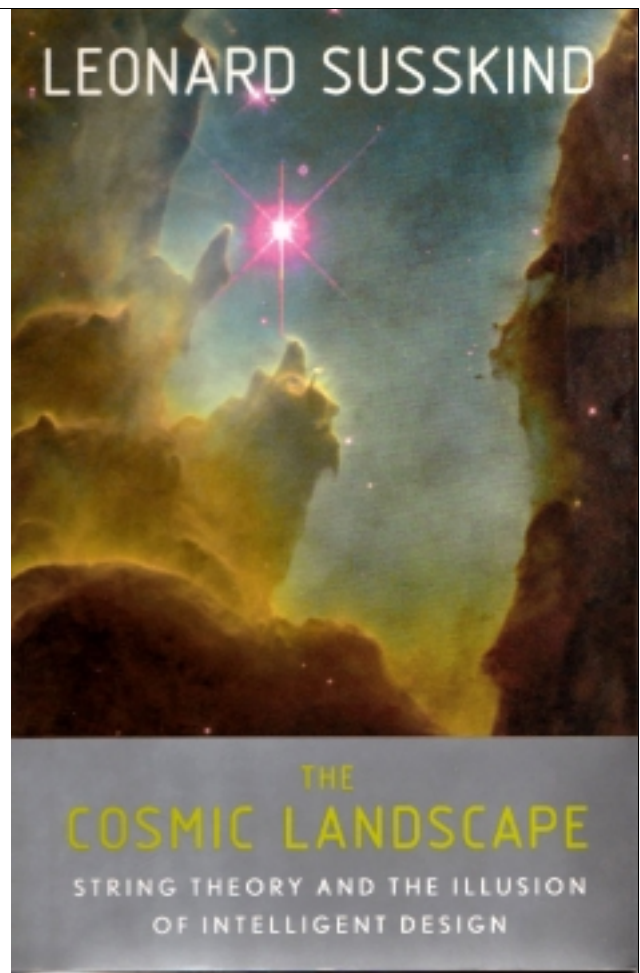
cepts of quantum theory — unlike Barrow, who treats these fundamentals in more detail. Consequently, *The Hidden Reality* is not the fluent read that the Barrow book is, and it *does* require more care, and a pause every so often for thought and mental digestion. It is well worth the extra effort, though, because of the more detailed discussion of the *many* universes postulated by contemporary theory. The level of exposition is akin to some of the articles in the *Sigma Xi* journal *American Scientist*.

4 ***Many Worlds in One* by Alex Vilenkin**

Vilenkin discusses the Big Bang to show how universes may be continually budding off an existing universe. And there is much more here. Highly readable.

5 ***The Cosmic Landscape* by Leonard Susskind**

Susskind is one of the founders of string theory, in fact he is often described as its 'father', and here he discusses how and why string theory suggests that there be as many as 10^{500} other universes existing in what he calls the *cosmic landscape*. Each of these universes may have, almost certainly will have, different physical constants and laws to those that hold in our universe. Brian Greene, in his book mentioned above, explains just how the enormous number of 10^{500} arises. This involves Calabi-Yau manifolds, and if you'd like more information on those (these are where, it is thought, the hidden



- dimensions of string theory reside), then I recommend *The Shape of Inner Space* by Shing-Tung Yau (the Yau of Calabi-Yau).
- 6 ***Warped Passages* by Lisa Randall**
Another readable, and thought-provoking book on *string theory* in which it explained that the hidden dimensions required need not be confined to microscopic Calabi-Yau manifolds, but could be large enough to constitute entire universes.
- 7 See Bill Wright's *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop (IRS)* for October 2010: the cover, and pages 2–5. See also *IRS* for December 2010: the cover, and page 5.
You will find these issues of *IRS*, and others, at <http://efanzines.com/IRS/index.htm>

— Ditmar (Dick Jenssen), May 2011

Neither Yvonne Rousseau nor I can quite reconstruct the process by which Yvonne's review of Tolley and Singh's *The Stellar Gauge* critical anthology (Norstrilia Press) in *Australian Book Review* in 1981 led to Elaine and I meeting her for the first time on 27 March 1982, but we are pleased that this meeting has led to a lifetime of further meetings (many involving Yvonne's daughter Vida, who was quite young in 1982), letters, emails, and learned reviews and articles by Yvonne in Gillespie fanzines and many other journals. In recent years, Yvonne, living in Adelaide since 1988, has been too busy writing fiction to write non-fiction, which makes her return to the field of forensic reviewing all the more welcome.

Yvonne Rousseau

Extensive spoilers:

Investigating Connie Willis's *Blackout* and *All Clear*

The following editions of works by Connie Willis are referred to:

A: *All Clear*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, Sydney, 2010

B: *Blackout*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, Sydney, 2010

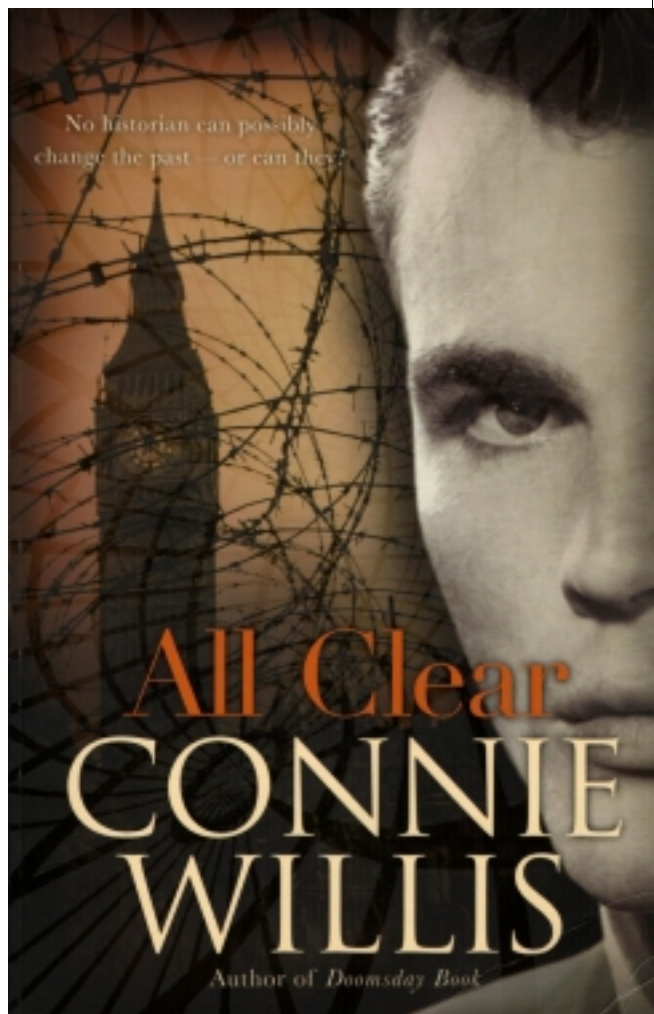
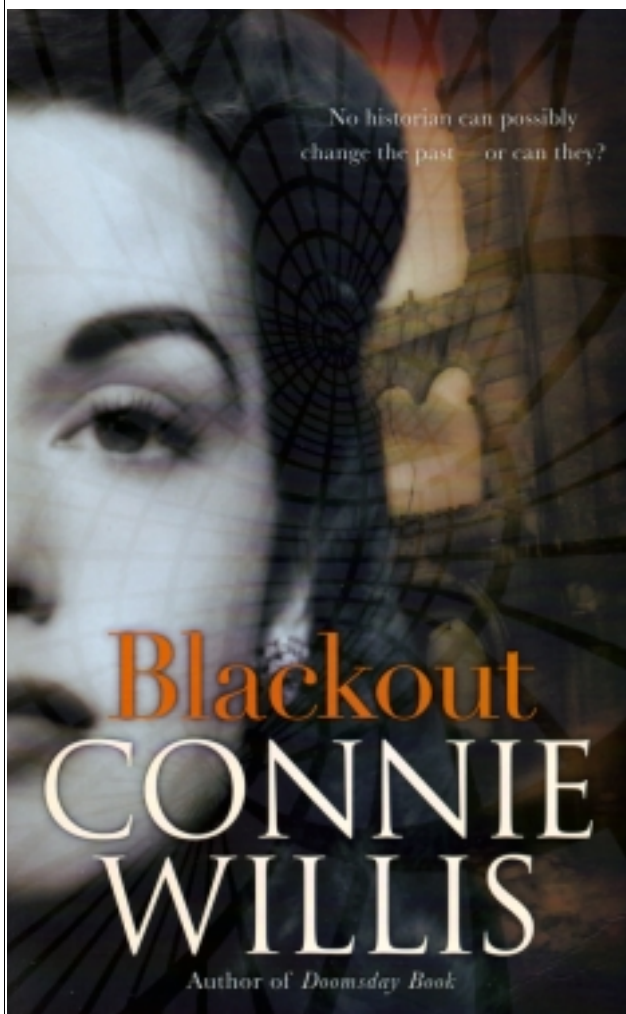
Dog: *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, Bantam Books, New York,

1998

Doom: Domsday Book, Hodder & Stoughton, London,

1992

FW: *Fire Watch* (collection), Bluejay, New York, 1985.



In 2010, Connie Willis published a novel that appeared in two volumes a few months apart: *Blackout* and *All Clear*. The following discussion is not a review intended to help readers decide whether they might enjoy that novel. Instead, it is intended for people who have already read *Blackout/All Clear* — and whose numbers will increase as time goes by. It will also do no harm to those who intend never to read the novel.

Unfortunately, to inspect this discussion before embarking on a first reading of the novel would mean robbing oneself of several shocks and of many chances to decipher clues and otherwise exercise one's ingenuity. However, once the deciphering has been done, readers will want to compare notes on the function of some of the surprises, the nature of time-travel in the Willis universe, the fortunes of several characters, and which of the novel's anomalies are simple mistakes — as when the 21st-century historian Gerald Phipps is arrayed to visit the 1940s in 'threadbare tweed flannels' (B32). A man may choose flannel for his trousers, or he may choose tweed — but not the horrible hybrid, 'tweed flannels'.

Some anomalies, in a different novel, might have been planted as deliberate clues. Noticing that a member of Fortitude South (a British wartime 'Special Means' unit) has used the word 'disinformation' in April 1944 (AC422), a reader might cry: 'Ha! He's one of those historians from the 21st century!' — since etymologists place the first use of this word in 1955. Thus, there is nothing anomalous in 21st-century time traveller Polly Churchill's thinking in 1940 about 'V-1 and V-2 rocket disinformation campaigns' as part of the 'intelligence war' (AC5). On the other hand, it is anomalous for the head of Fortitude South to specify in June 1944 'disinformation regarding the location of the Third Army' (AC512).

Readers might also suspect a change in human history when Colin Templer (normally an excellent researcher) asks Polly about a part of her multi-time project that she has not yet done: 'the zeppelin attacks. How long will you be in 1914?' (B69). In our chronology, the first Zeppelin raid against England happened on the night of 19 January 1915. This discrepancy seems to be a simple oversight. Yet time travellers in *Blackout/All Clear* have become increasingly nervous about the implications of such changes.

Decades of an Oxford monopoly of time travel

The first of Willis's publications about her 21st-century time-travelling Oxford historians appeared in 1982: the short story 'Fire Watch.' However, this adventure (where John Bartholomew undertakes his 'History Practicum 401') occurred later than his room-mate Kivrin Engle's expedition of 22 December 2054, described in the subsequent *Doomsday Book* (1992).

The remaining novels visited the 21st-century

Oxford time-travelling laboratory in chronological order. *To Say Nothing of the Dog* (1998) described Ned Henry and Verity Kindle setting out from 2057. *Blackout/All Clear* (2010) then began in April 2060 — with at least another three years added on before its ending.

Thus, there are less than five and a half years between the events of 'Fire Watch' and the beginning of *Blackout/All Clear*, published 28 years later. In all of these works, the Oxford don, James Dunworthy, is prominent — and in all of them a pinpoint bomb demolished London's St Paul's cathedral in the 21st century. In *Blackout* it happened 'one September morning in 2015' (B150), but in 'Fire Watch' it occurred in 2007 ('Enola had lived until 2006, the year before they blew up St Paul's' (FW44)).

By the time of *Blackout/All Clear*, time travel from Oxford has been going on for more than 40 years. There is no evidence of time travellers in 2060 setting off from anywhere in the world other than Oxford — from which the time-travelling 'net' allows historians to create remote 'drop sites' as far afield as ancient Troy (in the vicinity of the Dardanelles) and Singapore. A remote 'drop' that is scheduled to open will signify its presence by a glow on the ground or whatever other surface it covers. The historian seeking to return to 21st-century Oxford should step into the centre of the glow, while the air above the site begins to shimmer. There will then be a flare of light as the net opens and the historian reappears in the laboratory in 21st-century Oxford.

The net site at Oxford is enfolded in protective shields — transparent gauzy veils — that lift out of the way again in obedience to a computer instruction. Similarly, when the 'tech' in *To Say Nothing of the Dog* is called away at the last moment, Ned Henry finds that in order to depart from the 21st century he needs only to press a final keyboard button: the console screen reads 'Ready. Hit "send"' (Dog54). Ned also inadvertently visits the Oxford site as it was in 2018, when the veils above the net 'were dusty dark-red velvet' which 'descended with a thunk', and when (as in demon lore) the net was 'a chalked circle' where time travellers disappeared or suddenly materialised (Dog379). In *Blackout/All Clear*, this has been refined into 'the draped folds of the net' (AC132). Willis also describes how Badri, the 21st-century technician, 'adjusted the folds of the net around' a time traveller (B56).

In the course of her writing, Willis has obviously changed her mind about several aspects of 21st-century time travel. 'Fire Watch' is set no earlier than 2055 — when Kivrin has returned from her *Doomsday Book* expedition. But, instead of departing from Oxford, John Bartholomew is both sent out and later retrieved (by 'Dunworthy's flunkies') from the London suburb of St John's Wood (FW7, 40). In *Blackout/All Clear*, Willis attempts to incorporate this anomaly into the plot. When an historian (Michael Davies) is stranded in World War II, he remembers: 'St John's Wood. The lab had had a permanent drop

there in the early days of time travel, before they'd found out how to set up remotes' (AC 108). Another historian (Polly Churchill) recalls not only 'a remote drop in St John's Wood, which [the lab had] used for a number of years' but also a London drop at Hampstead Heath which 'earlier historians had used' and which she had used herself when returning from 1945 to 2060 (AC 152). But when Michael Davies counts back from 2060, he places Bartholomew's return from late 1940 as happening 'Six years ago' (AC 236): not in the 'early days of time travel'.

Meanwhile, Willis never explains how Oxford has succeeded in monopolising the world's time travel for more than 40 years. *To Say Nothing of the Dog* merely observes that 'there was no money to be got from the multinationals, who'd lost interest in time travel forty years ago, when they found out they couldn't rape and pillage the past' (Dog 79). In *Blackout/All Clear*, Polly reflects on the necessity for Hitler to be defeated in order for Ira Feldman to be born and to invent time travel — for which Oxford then 'built the net' (B477).

In all of these works, Willis's love for Oxford and for British idiosyncrasies is obvious. Nevertheless — like some other Anglophilic American novelists — she continues committing the kind of *faux pas* that critics of her earlier novels have deplored. In *Blackout/All Clear*, I found myself disproportionately annoyed by one such inconsequential error: that Polly Churchill, spending six weeks visiting the Blitz, bafflingly (and with Mr Dunworthy's approval) intends to 'let' a room (B 63, 64). In fact, Polly rents a room, which is let to her by an unrivalled practitioner of bad British cookery — Mrs Rickett.

Trouble with titles

In the following paragraph, two spoilers are lurking. More will appear in subsequent paragraphs.

When Lord Denewell's wife is misnamed 'Lady Caroline' in *Blackout/All Clear*, this is probably a mixture of attempting an Agatha-Christie surprise and making a mistake about titles. Readers are meant to feel surprised that the credit-grabbing and indolent Lady Caroline who employed time traveller Merope Ward as a servant in 1940 is the same woman as the efficient and attentive Major, Lady Denewell, who commanded time traveller Polly Churchill in her ambulance unit in 1944.

Willis is perhaps confused by references to the extremely famous Lady Caroline Lamb, who was born Lady Caroline Ponsonby, daughter of an earl. She retained the title of 'Lady Caroline' when she married a commoner, William Lamb (who was elevated to the peerage as 2nd Viscount Melbourne only in the year of Lady Caroline's death).

By contrast, the occupant of 'Denewell Manor' married a peer, Lord Denewell. Thereafter, she became Lady Denewell, taking on her husband's rank (whether higher or lower than her original rank). In this she resembled Lady Jersey (contemporary with

Lady Caroline Lamb) who was born Lady Sarah Sophia Fane, the daughter of an earl. She married a viscount and became Lady Jersey when her husband inherited the title and became 5th Earl of Jersey.

Even if Lord Denewell did not inherit his title until very late in their marriage, this would not explain why the local vicar refers to Lady Denewell as 'Lady Caroline' even after Lord Denewell's death (AC 114). The most probable reason for using these incompatible titles is merely to surprise readers by the change in the lady's character brought about by the salutary wartime loss of both husband and son within less than a fortnight. There seems to be no deeper significance and no attempt to integrate the lady's two personalities.

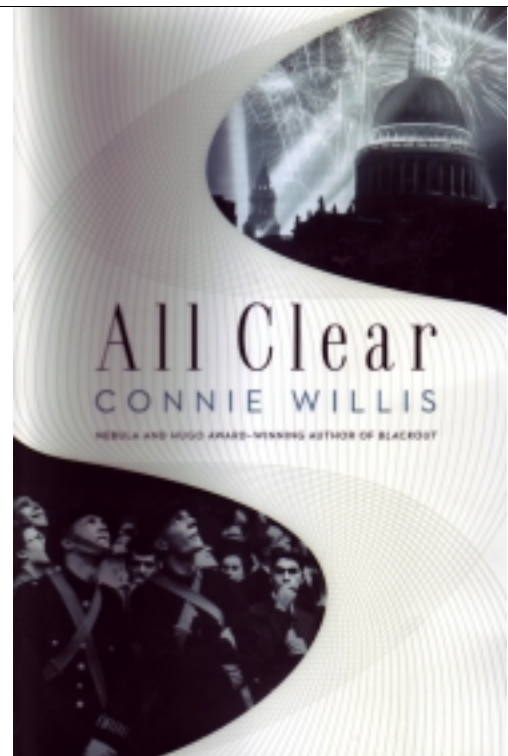
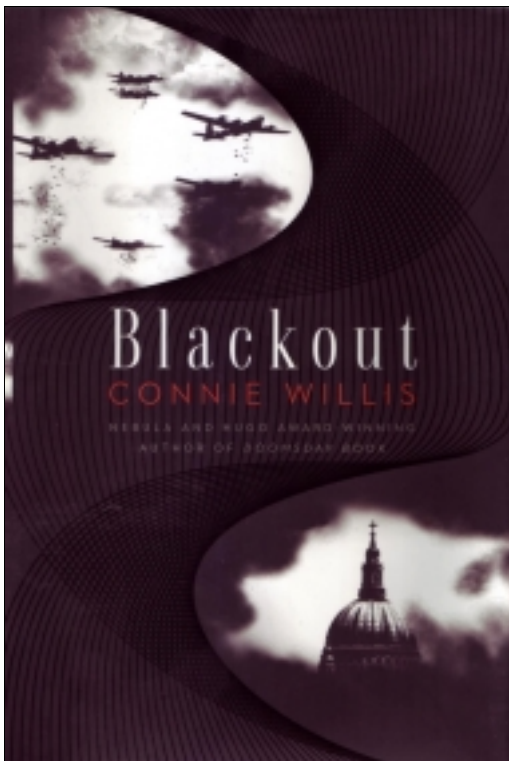
Agatha Christie supplies a possible inspiration for this surprise in her own *Dead Man's Folly* (1956), where the same character appears at one time as a languorous exotic with a childlike mind, and at another as a shrewd and energetic outdoor type. In the same novel, Christie assigns to the crime writer Mrs Ariadne Oliver an apposite observation: "It's never difficult to think of things," said Mrs Oliver. "The trouble is that you think of too many, and then it all becomes too complicated, so you have to relinquish some of them and that is rather agony." Indeed, Willis herself may have found that it was too much agony to relinquish Agatha Christie's *Murder in the Calais Coach* — a title very useful for hinting to various characters in the novel that England is planning an invasion by way of Calais.

Unfortunately, although Agatha Christie's *Murder in the Calais Coach* is a tantalisingly useful title for Willis's purposes, and although it was first published in 1934, it was not available from London libraries and bookshops in the 1940s. This was the American title for a mystery whose solution, according to Raymond Chandler, 'only a half-wit could guess'. In Britain, it was published as *Murder on the Orient Express*.

Whether or not Willis found out that the 'Calais' title was inappropriate, she seems aware that alternative titles exist. Merope quotes the British title of Christie's 1937 novel *Dumb Witness* (AC 44), instead of its American title, *Poirot Loses a Client*. She receives (AC 223) the British edition of *Three Act Tragedy* (1935) — not the American title, *Murder in Three Acts*. On the other hand, when Merope refers to *Unnatural Death* by Dorothy L. Sayers, published in Britain in 1927, she inexplicably uses its American title: *The Dawson Pedigree* (AC 52).

Slippages and chaos theory

When 'Fire Watch' dispatches an historian from St John's Wood as late as 2055 and demolishes St Paul's as early as 2007, the reader may wonder whether these anomalies qualify as the kind of 'discrepancy' or 'incongruity' that the time-travelling historians anxiously look out for, lest their own intrusion has significantly altered history. In 'Fire Watch', John



Bartholomew asks himself: 'Is there a tough, immutable past? Or is there a new past every day and do we, the historians, make it?' (*FW*13). Time-travel theorists argue with one another about whether the space-time continuum simply refuses to allow itself to be significantly altered, or whether it has already coped with a certain amount of alteration (having 'been able to cancel out the changes' (*B*7)) but will break down if historians continue to interfere with it.

According to 'chaos theory', the net protects the continuum by introducing 'slippages' — opening at times or even localities different from what the laboratory has programmed. This is supposed to prevent 'nearly all potential incongruities by removing the time traveller from the area of potential danger' — and the net has accordingly been 'modified to automatically shut down whenever the slippage reaches dangerous levels' (*Dog* 46). In *Blackout/All Clear*, Michael Davies consoles himself that 'if his presence at Dunkirk would have altered events and caused a paradox, then the net would never have let him through' (*B*187). However, as Mr Dunworthy reflects in *Doomsday Book*, nobody knows exactly which moments of history are 'critical' (*Doom* 31).

Another protection is the net's refusal to open if contemporaries are near enough to detect its shimmering. This safeguard was first mentioned in *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, where Verity found that the net would not open for her return from the 19th century, although the drop intermittently shimmered to signify its presence. Trying to explain the net's refusal, Ned asked her: 'Could someone have been there? Someone who might have seen you?' (*Dog* 368).

By contrast, in *Doomsday Book*, it is regarded as a matter of chance whether contemporaries witness the time-traveller's arrival. When Mr Dunworthy is about

to travel to the 14th century, the youthful Colin Templer asks him: 'Shouldn't you take your spectacles off? In case someone sees you come through?' (*Doom* 592). When Kivrin arrived in the 14th century, the opening of the net was witnessed by the contemporary Father Roche and his ass. This did not cause Kivrin to worry about a discrepancy when she eventually realised that the priest 'had seen her come through, had come and stood over her as she lay there with her eyes closed' (*Doom* 602) — and had accordingly identified her as Saint Catherine, descended from Heaven to help his community in the 'last days' of the Black Death.

As readers of *Blackout/All Clear* will know, Polly Churchill eventually receives the kind of revelation about time-travel theory that an Agatha-Christie plot delivers: that they have 'been looking at the entire situation the wrong way round, that something else entirely is going on' (*AC* 541). This discovery is vital, impressive, and emotional — whereas there is something more mechanical in the novel's method of telling its story by constant switching from one viewpoint to another and from one time to another. The deciphering may seem like an unrewarding exercise in extracting a straightforward chronology or in identifying the same character under different names. As in Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), a character may fail to mention quite all that he has been doing and thinking. Yet in the first sections of *All Clear* (rather too full of historians increasing their sense of personal guilt by telling lies in order to spare one another from frightful realisations), Willis risks the kind of objection expressed in the title of Edmund Wilson's article of 1945: 'Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?'

A temptation to be too clever by half

For my part, I enjoyed pitting my wits (sometimes successfully) against Willis's guile. From clues in *Blackout*, 'Mary Kent' was easily identified as one of Polly Churchill's names. Polly had told her colleague Merope Ward (*B* 44) that on assignment she always used her own Christian name or one of its nicknames. Teasingly, Willis later causes Merope to list less than all of the nicknames for people called Mary: 'Mamie, and Molly and —' (*B* 229). In addition, Polly always selects Shakespearean names for her surnames. Having identified 'Kent' as chosen from *King Lear*, I fell into a trap and identified 'Douglas' as a surname from *Henry IV, Part 1*.

In fact, I was correct in identifying 'Douglas' as Polly, but incorrect in supposing that she was then on a different assignment from Mary Kent's (driving ambulances during the V-1 and V-2 bombings). I assumed that the three companions on their way to Trafalgar Square on VE-Day eve were being referred to by their surnames – Douglas, Paige, and Reardon (*B* 157–61). However, Paige later emerges as the Christian name of Mary's ambulance-unit colleague, Lieutenant Fairchild (*AC* 326), and 'Douglas' is a nickname assigned to Mary because she mistook the sound of a motorcycle engine for the approach of a V-1 flying bomb. In addition to 'Triumph', Mary answers to 'DeHavilland and Norton': 'every motorcycle they can think of, in fact' (*AC* 145). However, it is not until she is being rescued from a bomb-site in Croydon that another ambulance driver (Cynthia Camberley) calls Mary by the name 'Douglas' — crying out, 'It's Fairchild and Douglas!' (*AC* 353).

This telescoping of Polly's assignments was by no means the only shock lurking at the bombsite in Croydon — but my own surprise made me wonder how intelligible *All Clear* would be to a reader who had not already worked out that Polly Churchill was both 'Mary Kent' and 'Douglas'. Teasingly, the name 'Douglas' is first applied to a motorcycle many pages later, when the time-travelling historian Michael Davies 'reached Dover in mid-afternoon, on the back of an army corporal's Douglas motorcycle' (*AC* 425).

Oxford dons and confusion of chronologies

Traditional 'absent-minded' Oxford dons were supposed to think so profoundly that they had almost no attention to spare for self-preservation (as in looking where they were going) or self-promotion (the projection of tirelessly eloquent efficiency). In Willis's account of how James Dunworthy muddles through in his management of Oxford's time-travel, a superficial impression of the donnish manner seems to have been mistaken for the deeper workings of the donnish mind.

Among the Oxford inefficiencies that seem intended to be amusing, the ignorance and lack of clothes and expertise in the historical project's 'Wardrobe' department ('those idiot techs in Wardrobe', as Polly thinks of them (*AC* 15)) seem both incredible and inconsistent. Perhaps, by the late 21st century, there would be no black dye with which to transform a navy-blue skirt. But it's hard to believe that Wardrobe would stock only two vaguely 20th-century black skirts — one from the 1960s and the other from the 21st century (*B* 65–6). By contrast, as 'Mary Kent', Polly obviously had a choice of evening wear for the same period, emerging with frocks that are judged 'heavenly' by Londoners in 1944: 'When she'd got them from Wardrobe, she'd purposely chosen ones that looked worn so she wouldn't stand out here' (*B* 178).

In 'Fire Watch', John Bartholomew becomes the victim of a seemingly arbitrary change. He has spent four years preparing for an Oxford 'practicum' in which he will travel with the Apostle Saint Paul. Then, because 'some computer adds an "s"' (*FW* 3), he is instead given two days to prepare for a practicum at St Paul's Cathedral during the London Blitz.

In what seems at first a similar spirit, 21st-century historians in *Blackout/All Clear* find that the sequence of their multitime assignments has been shifted without notice. Michael Davies is especially discontented, because he has prepared for Pearl Harbor by getting an 'American L-and-A implant' (*B* 26), which causes him to have an American accent and to say 'flashlights' and 'elevators' instead of 'torches' and 'lifts' (*AC* 107). Now he finds that he will be visiting Devon first (observing the boats returning from the Dunkirk evacuation in May 1940) — and will have to pretend to be an American reporter.

Dunworthy has changed these schedules in order to place each person's assignments in chronological order. If slippages on the net increase until they are years long, he is worried that a person arriving for an assignment in December 1943 might overlap with herself in a visit that took place later in her own personal biography but earlier in calendar time. This seems likely to happen to Polly, when she visits England in 1940, having already returned from another visit that began in 1943. When the net becomes inaccessible to 21st-century historians visiting England in 1940, they all face the prospect of living through the 1940s, year by year. However, Polly is in danger that the space-time continuum will annihilate her by late December 1943: the 'deadline' when she would otherwise manifest the paradox of a twin presence.

In April 2060, Dunworthy realises that Polly has already returned from 1945 and has not been heard of during the two days since her subsequent setting off for 1940. He insists on instantly following and retrieving her himself. Given his anxieties about increased slippage, Dunworthy is rash indeed to plan an arrival at the 'St Paul's drop' (*AC* 129) on 10 September 1940 — knowing of his own former visit to the

nearby St Paul's Station (AC 402) at the age of seventeen, on 17 September 1940. Although the tech, Badri, also knows of that visit and utters a protest, he allows his objection to be arbitrarily overborne.

Even without the danger of coinciding with oneself, it seems absurd for Mr Dunworthy ever to approve Polly's going first to 1943 and then to 1940. Completely apart from slippage dangers, she is far too likely in her second visit to meet with someone who knew her in 1940 — an experience that still awaits her in her own future. Indeed, she fears that this has happened in July 1944, when she is 'Mary Kent' of the FANYs (First Aid Nursing Yeomanry) and is chauffeuring Flight Officer Stephen Lang, who dashingy woos her with the assurance that they have 'met before' (AC 33).

Having invented these confusing chronologies to exercise the reader's wits, the author herself becomes slightly confused by them. Thus, in December 1940, the shopgirl 'Polly Sebastian' has no reason to avoid encountering FANYs. They will not be getting to know her until 1944. Meanwhile, Polly keeps trying to conceal the fact of her 1943–45 visit from her equally stranded colleagues, Merope Ward and Michael Davies — in order not to worry them. But Merope deduces that Polly 'turned and ran from a group of FANYs' because 'she knew them from her assignment' in 1944. She also accuses Polly (AC 188) of being 'afraid someone in Bethnal Green would recognize you. You were attached to the ambulance unit there, weren't you?' But there is no danger that contemporaries meeting Polly in 1943–45 will be able to remember that experience in 1940.

Flash-time and birthday celebrations

In *Doomsday Book*, Colin Templer was a resourceful and energetic 12-year-old who illicitly visited the 14th century and thus saved the lives of Kivrin Engle and Mr Dunworthy. In *Blackout/All Clear*, Colin is 17 years old, in his final year at Eton, and in love with the 25-year-old Polly Churchill. Colin wags school not only in order to see Polly and do research for her, but also in the hope of persuading Mr Dunworthy to send him immediately on 'flash-time' assignments. His aim is to have his age coincide with Polly's by the end of her six-week 'real-time' assignment in the Blitz — before she has time to fall in love with somebody else.

Using flash-time, Polly has spent a little over 16 months in the past as 'Mary Kent' — arriving on 29 December 1943 (AC 332) and leaving just before midnight on 7 May 1945 (AC 152). In 2060, this excursion occupies 'a month' (AC 128). Her Blitz assignment will be 'real-time' (with a drop set for 'half hour on-and-off' (B71)) and is intended to occupy six weeks. If Colin takes four flash-time assignments of two years each, he will be 25 when they meet again and no longer 'illegal' (B70) as a marriage partner.

He assures Polly that he plans 'to be devastatingly handsome and charming' (B72) at the age of 25 — or at 30 if that is the age she prefers.

Colin's plan implies that time-travelling historians have developed some procedure for registering not only their age as calculated from their birth certificate but also the actual number of years they have lived. Meanwhile, observers in other centuries may find that 21st-century historians age rather quickly — thanks to their habit of making lengthy excursions to the 21st century during their assignments, and then reappearing (older and wiser) almost immediately after their departure. In *To Say Nothing of the Dog*, Verity spends 'hours' in the 21st century while five minutes elapse in the 19th century — to which she returns 'starving' (Dog201). In *Blackout/All Clear*, Merope similarly visits April 2060 for 'two days' (B42) (although she hoped to spend more) without being absent more than a few minutes from her drop site in February 1940.

Because the net shuts down unexpectedly after Polly's arrival in the Blitz, Polly lives through seven months there instead of her intended six weeks. Having set off in April 2060, she afterwards loses the 'real-time' connection with the 21st century and returns to it years later than November 2060.

Meanwhile, I feel that Willis intends readers to wonder (as I did) whether Colin has accidentally stranded himself in the persona of Sir Godfrey Kingsman, a famous Shakespearean actor unrecorded in our histories but 70 years old when Polly encounters him during the Blitz. If so, Colin might have become stranded in about 1887, and spent 53 years in real time: growing from 17 to 70. In 1940, Sir Godfrey laments that he is not 'forty years younger' (B205) — in which case Polly 'would not be safe' with him. Secretly agreeing that a 30-year-old Sir Godfrey would have been 'truly dangerous', Polly thinks 'suddenly of Colin' and his willingness to be 30 for her, but not 70. Similarly, when Polly first arrives in the Blitz, Sir Godfrey rescues her from general disapproval just as she is wishing that Colin could keep his promise to 'come rescue' her when needed (B101).

Sir Godfrey later tells Polly that she restored his faith in life by being the 'embodiment of everything I thought the war had destroyed' (AC 558). Her eloquent face — her inability 'to dissemble' (AC 478) — is her own distinctive virtue on stage. In addition: 'you knew all your lines' (AC 499). Shakespeare's plays had been 'implanted' in Polly (B44) for a 16th-century assignment. This implant leads me to diagnose a simple misprint in *Blackout/All Clear* when Sir Godfrey mutters that 'Shakespeare never put children in his plays' (AC 583) and Polly tells him he is 'forgetting the little princess.' Surely this should be the 'little princes.' (On the other hand, Sir Godfrey retorts 'Whom he had the good sense to murder in the second act' — whereas it's in the fourth, not the second, act of *Richard III* that the princes are murdered.)

A rose by any other name

When Polly Churchill, Merope Ward, and Michael Davies meet together in London on 25 October 1940, they have become stranded in the Blitz under the identities of Polly Sebastian, Eileen O'Reilly, and Mike Davis. Polly has been unable to get the net to open ever since her arrival on 14 September 1940. The other two have found their drop sites closed off from them.

Merope has missed her intended departure date of 2 May 1940 because of quarantine for measles at Denewell Manor. Her intervention has preserved the lives of two urchins, Binnie and Alf Hodbin, who are so destructive and infuriating that in February 1940 she contemplated throttling them: 'History would so clearly be a better place without them' (B 31).

Michael ought to have stayed only 'a few days' (B 35) – departing in June 1940. Instead, he was injured and spent months in hospital after accidentally joining Commander Harold in the leaky *Lady Jane* and performing rescues at Dunkirk. (He had intended merely to observe the subsequent arrivals in Devon.) To 20th-century observers, he appears to have lost his right foot, whereas Michael himself believes it can be restored by 21st-century expertise.

Willis perhaps aims at British colloquial speech when the vicar, Mr Goode, asks Merope: 'What all's happening tomorrow, do you know?' (AC 628) or Commander Harold wants to know from Michael, 'what all's happened to you since we saw you last' (AC 437). However, these 'what all's' are more plausible as the characters' sportive attempt at imitating the speech of American soldiers — especially considering that the Commander believes Michael to be American, and has nicknamed him 'Kansas' — thus causing me a great shock when in April 1944 he identifies 'Ernest Worthing' as 'Kansas' (AC 426).

Reading *Blackout*, I had been irritated by characters with code names from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* who were blowing up tanks — in the sense of inflating rubber models of tanks — in order to mislead German reconnaissance pilots. 'Ernest Worthing' was easily identified as the 21st-century historian among them — but I had no idea that the others thought him to be American. Thus, a joke went unnoticed when 'Cess' asked 'Ernest': 'Do you think you can manage an American accent?' (AC 93). By 1944, although Michael's implant 'had long since worn out', his ability to produce an American accent had become 'permanently a part of him' (AC 441).

In an attempt at sarcasm, I noted (before reading *All Clear*) that the 'Ernest' episodes would probably turn out to be crucial to the plot — which indeed they did. Michael is assured by Fortitude South's leader, Tensing, that he probably won the war: mostly by convincing Colonel von Sprecht (a prisoner of war being invalided home) that Britain was planning an invasion at Calais, but also by devising misleading newspaper reports (some of which are private coded

messages designed to bring 21st-century historians to the rescue).

Commander Harold's life was saved by 'Mike' at Dunkirk. The Commander was then assigned to collect the spinally injured Tensing from Ostende (in a boat sufficiently unseaworthy to be a very unlikely choice). Tensing then observed Michael's initiative and guile when they were patients at the same hospital. He was therefore inspired to recruit Michael to Fortitude South after they met again at Bletchley.

When Michael faked his own death on 11 January 1941, Merope (like me) refused to believe that he was dead. But nobody expressed surprise that his 'identity card and ration book and the reporter's notebook he'd carried' were only slightly charred, while his corpse (at the same site) was supposedly disintegrated into 'fragments too small for the rescue squad to have collected' (AC 341). In the character of 'Ernest', Michael eventually contrives a message which leads the time-travelling Colin to locate him at the bombed office of the Croydon *Clarion Call* newspaper in October 1944. Polly (in her character of 'Mary Kent') had applied vital tourniquets to the injured Michael, but had herself been removed (injured by a second bomb) before Colin could glimpse her.

Ships that pass in the night

In Willis's novel *Passage* (2001), Joanna Lander objects to 'movie parking' — 'where the hero is always able to find a parking place right in front of the store or the police station'. In *Blackout/All Clear*, readers will notice that there is an absence of 'movie' recognition. Although the fatally wounded Michael Davies recognises Polly's voice (AC 544), Polly fails to recognise him (his face caked with plaster dust and his voice hoarsened with blood). At first glance, Merope on one occasion fails to recognise Polly (AC 293), and on another occasion, Binnie Hodbin (AC 617). When Dunworthy is injured, confused, and demoralised, Polly thinks at first that she recognises him at St Paul's (AC 250), but then decides that she is 'mistaken' (AC 278). Similarly, Michael Davies wrongly decides that two youngsters are not after all the Hodbin siblings (whom he had last seen three years earlier) — 'in spite of the similarity' (AC 485). Michael also fails to recognize Commander Harold's great-grandson Jonathan: seeing instead 'a tough-looking young man' (AC 425). Colin can detect 'no resemblance' (AC 453) between the women he meets in 1995 and their photographs from 1944 when they were youthful ambulance drivers.

Just as readers may fail to recognise the same character under a different name, the characters themselves may fail to realise that people they are looking for are near by. Overnight at St Bartholomew's hospital on 29 December 1940, Merope and the Hodbins (Alf and Binnie) have been commandeered as an ambulance crew. Merope realises after a while that Agatha Christie ('Mrs Mal-

lowan') is acting as dispenser (AC 290), but she does not learn until Polly's arrival that John Bartholomew passed through the hospital that night, and that Michael has been admitted as a casualty. This adds plausibility to Colin's experience when the net opens again and he undertakes drops in search of Polly: 'being in the same general temporal-spatial location wasn't enough. He had to know exactly where she was before he went to get her' (AC 450).

When Colin comes to the rescue, he never mentions which year of the 21st century he emerges from — although he reveals that 'Till three years ago, we thought the entire war was permanently shut to us' (AC 590). For ten years of his life (some of it, perhaps, in flash-time) he has been searching for Polly: determined to bring her back before her deadline. Colin was 22 (AC 501) when he visited 1976: 'The year they declassified the Fortitude South papers' (AC 633). There, he found one of Michael's coded newspaper messages — allowing him to locate Michael (although too late for 21st-century medical aid to save him). Colin then lived through another five years (AC 501) before visiting 1995 and learning that he would find Polly in late April 1941 at a rehearsal for a *Sleeping Beauty* pantomime.

Colin's encounter with Michael had revealed that Merope and Polly were alive and together in January 1941, even though the *Daily Express* reported Polly 'killed' in September 1940 at St George's shelter (AC 633) — a misunderstanding that at the time caused Sir Godfrey to look 'beaten', with a 'lined and ashen' face (B 348). But on Colin's subsequent visit to the address Michael gave him, he finds only a 'gaping hole' (AC 449). He is unaware that the orphaned Hodbin urchins had contrived to get Polly and Merope evicted from Mrs Rickett's boarding house before it was bombed. Instead, he has to base his hopes on the absence of Polly's and Merope's names on the list of casualties.

By Colin's rather confusing account, although drops 'in other places and times weren't affected' (AC 608), all drops 'in England and Scotland and the first three months of 1941' had ceased to function after Mr Dunworthy's departure from April 2060 to the Blitz. However, the 21st-century historians 'could get a few drops to open after mid-March' (AC 608) — when they had no idea of Polly's and Merope's whereabouts. Colin is aware that any day of the Blitz that he spends in futile search of Polly 'was one he wouldn't be able to come to again. And one of those days might be the day he had to pull her out because if he didn't, she'd be killed' (AC 449).

How love can rot up your research

Polly was 25 before she began her seven-months experience in the Blitz of 1940–41. Thus, the 27-year-old Colin is now slightly older than her — just as he

planned — but also 'sadder, grimmer, his face lined with suffering and fatigue' (AC 587). Fortunately, Polly immediately falls for this grown-up Colin: she finds herself 'suddenly breathing hard' (AC 588) when he approaches — and Merope later remembers Polly's telltale face as registering 'transcendent joy' (AC 625).

Meanwhile, Colin appears to have been so distraught about Polly that he has lost his former skills as a researcher. When the small girl Trot identifies him at the rehearsal as *Sleeping Beauty*'s 'Prince Dauntless', she asks: 'Did you look for Polly for a hundred years?' Colin's reply is 'Nearly' (AC 596). But there was surely no need to spend so much labour in visiting the past and 'sitting in libraries and newspaper morgues' (AC 609). By his own account, 'We couldn't get anything before 1960 to open or anything after 1995, when we could have gone online, so I had to do it the hard way' (AC 633). He appears to have forgotten that his own 21st-century life is 'after 1995'.

We readers live in the 21st century, and know that astonishing quantities of old newspapers and other printed records (including censuses, parish records, electoral rolls and military files) have already been scanned into searchable digital electronic mode — both officially and by selfless volunteers. The 'Fortitude South' papers that became available to the public in 1976 would surely have been downloaded on home computers all over the world long before the originals were vaporised by the pinpoint bomb of 2015, and thus would have remained available to Colin in electronic mode in 2060. There was no need for so much drudgery 'in archives, hunched over volumes of yellowing newspapers, over a micro-film reader' (AC 633) — 'those long months spent in the reading room' (AC 502).

The continuum considered as God's Providence

In the 21st century, when Colin leaves to rescue Polly, nobody understands the shutting down of the net. However, Polly is granted a startling Agatha-Christie style of revelation: an abrupt rescue from the nightmare world of Mr Dunworthy's latest analysis of slippage.

According to Mr Dunworthy (assigning all the blame to himself), time-travelling historians have created so much change that the continuum is headed for a 'tipping point' (AC 400) where the future will alter, and Hitler will have won the war. The continuum has struggled to repair itself by isolating 'the infected area' (AC 398): the time-travellers who are the 'source of the damage' (AC 409). These stranded historians will all need to be killed in order to avoid more damage — as will everyone they have 'come into contact with' (AC 409).

Regarding herself as a kind of Typhoid Mary at the centre of a 'deadly blast radius' (AC 414), Polly begins

trying to isolate herself — especially from the people she is fondest of. One of these is Sir Godfrey Kingsman, whose life she saved when her arrival in 1940 caused him to reject a tour whose entire company of actors was subsequently killed. After an unsuccessful attempt to alienate Sir Godfrey, Polly receives her revelation. The continuum allows her to save his life a second time: applying first aid and blocking the escape of leaking gas at the bombed Phoenix theatre.

Polly's new theory reverses everything. The closing of the net is intended 'not to shut off interference from the future, but to enlist it when the continuum's threatened' (AC 567). Slippage operates to put historians where they can alter 'the course of history' — keeping them there until they do (AC 567). In Merope's formulation, 'now that we've done what we were supposed to do', the 'drops should begin working again' (AC 572).

The continuum has an excuse for being partisan. The invention of time travel is incorporated in it, and is thought to depend on the survival of Ira Feldman's parents. If Hitler had triumphed, they would probably have died childless in concentration camps. Polly likens the time-travellers to the late-arriving Good Fairy in *Sleeping Beauty*: unable to 'undo the spell', but 'only make it less terrible' (AC 568).

Polly agrees with Mr Dunworthy that 'a chaotic system isn't a conscious entity' (AC 567) or 'part of some grand plan' (AC 566). Nevertheless, her new image of the continuum resembles God's Providence — equipped with prescient power and beneficence. Indeed, Merope and her colleagues appear to have been obeying the apostle St Paul's instruction to the Ephesians (in its King James Bible translation): 'See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,/ Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.' Having accomplished this redemption, they need no longer fear having 'undone the future out of a desire to help' (AC 407).

In fact, the historians' good deeds have been rewarded: most remarkably in the preservation of the Hodbins — who actually did well when they blocked the attempt to equip John Bartholomew with a message to 2055 about the trouble befalling time travellers in 2060. These and other Hodbin antics are later seen as vital in the winning of the war. Moreover, when Colin visits 1995, it is Binnie (now named 'Eileen') who tells him where to find Polly.

Combining DNA from different centuries

Rejecting her chance to return to the 21st century, Merope chooses instead to look after the Hodbins — spending the rest of her life as 'Eileen' in the 20th century. At the last, Polly realises (by looking anew at the personality expressed in Colin's face and by remembering how Merope addressed him as 'my boy' and said that she would 'always be with' Polly) that

Colin is Merope's great-great-grandson (AC 640). He will have descended from either Merope's son (Godfrey) or her daughter (Mary): children with a mixture of different-century DNA.

The 21st-century Merope and the 20th-century vicar, Mr Goode, would have married in 1945 — around the same time as Paige Fairchild and Stephen Lang, who are likely to be another pair of Colin's great-great-grandparents.

Acting as FANY driver for Stephen Lang in 1944, Polly had chosen an alternative route that prevented their both being killed by V-1 bombs whose whereabouts were recorded in her 21st-century implant. Without her intervention, we may suppose that there would have been no descendants of Stephen Lang and Paige Fairchild, and thus Colin would never have been born. Polly herself has found Stephen's crooked grin and loping gait vividly reminiscent of Colin, and has assessed Paige and Stephen as perhaps '— what would they have been? — great-grandparents?' (AC 629).

The ending of *Blackout/All Clear* echoes other endings in the Oxford time-travelling series. Having sent Mr Dunworthy ahead through the St Paul's Cathedral drop, Polly and Colin prepare for their own departure in another 12 or 13 minutes. They exchange cues from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. When Polly identifies the 'all clear' (not Juliet's 'nightingale'), Colin responds, 'It is the lark' — and Polly then completes Romeo's line: 'The herald of the morn' (AC 641). Although Romeo's and Juliet's next meeting after hearing the lark was the death of them, the omens for Colin and Polly are only joyous.

Standing together in the centre of the flaring light of their drop, they resemble the similarly joyous Ned and Verity standing bathed in sunlight in Coventry Cathedral (reconstructed on Oxford's Christ Church Meadow) at the end of *To Say Nothing of the Dog*. Moreover, when Polly keeps her 1940s friends in remembrance — 'Not as lost to her, but as removed to this moment in time for safekeeping' (AC 636) — she echoes John Bartholomew's conclusion in 'Fire Watch'. Despite being destroyed in the 21st century, St Paul's Cathedral lives on (with its 1940s protectors) in Dunworthy's memories and his own: 'all of it, every moment, in us, saved for ever' (FW 45).

In *Blackout/All Clear*, Willis has completely reversed the duty of time travellers. They should alter as much as possible instead of as little. It was difficult to understand how the saving by Michael Davies of hundreds of lives could be inconsequential — unless in a religious context. The problem disappears when chaos theory un masks itself as Providence. But when Willis institutes so complete a reversal, she alters her own genre. *Blackout/All Clear* becomes a fairytale love story — and an engaging one — but not science fiction.

— Yvonne Rousseau, 7 December 2010

Terence M. Green

A valid life



Terence M. Green and Merle Casci, Father's Day, 21 June 2009.

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Our own lives start long before we're born. Millions of years of genetic encoding funnel down into our great-grandparents, then grandparents, finally parents.

I wrote those words. You can find them near the beginning of chapter 6 of my 2001 novel, *St Patrick's Bed*. Casting about for a beginning to this essay, I realised that I'd already turned much of this soil, distilling many of my thoughts and feelings about family throughout my

own stories. People have asked me about my fiction: did it happen like that? My answer, usually: no, but it is all true. Fact, fiction, fact, fiction.

Born in Toronto's Irish Cabbagetown in 1904, the oldest of five children who lived — Thomas Green, my father, entered the work world in 1918, where he toiled for fifty-one years until retirement in 1969. The majority of that time he spent doing blue-collar work in the circulation departments of two Toronto newspapers: *The Globe and Mail* (23 years) and *The Toronto Star* (17 years).

He was a part-time professional musician. At the beginning he played banjo, later strummed guitar in various groups and orchestras around southern Ontario, and finally, by the time I had arrived, demonstrated a rather rare versatility by morphing into a trombone player in the Royal Canadian Artillery band. I remember the mellow slide sounds as he practised in the basement. I remember him marching and playing in the annual Santa Claus parade. When he died in 1995, in the top drawer of his dresser, in a plastic case, I found a small metal plaque with his name engraved on it. It stated that he was a Life Member of the Toronto Musicians Association, Local 149 AF of M.

On 30 November 1929 — one month after the stock market crash that signalled the Great Depression — my father, two days shy of his 25th birthday, married 20-year-old Margaret Radey, my mother — also born in Toronto — in a wedding whose strange timing would be clarified by the arrival, in May 1930, of my oldest sister, Anne. She was the first of five surviving (as in his own family) children born during the 19-year span from 1930 to 1949, in a marriage that would last almost 54 years — until my mother's death in 1984 — defying its hurried, unpromising origins. Ron was born in 1932, Judy 1939. My younger brother and I were the late family: 2 February 1947 for me; Dennis, 1949.

Dennis and I were post-war babies — a distinct unit, raised as a pair — far removed from Anne and Ron. Even Judy, our other sister, born in 1939, was virtually a decade older. Dennis and I, then, were the children of older parents, with all that that entails — an experience, in hindsight, mostly positive.

In the three-bedroom, semidetached house in North Toronto, purchased in 1929, there was always family around — uncles, aunts, cousins, added to brothers, sisters and grandparents. This was the crowded scene into which I made a late arrival. Both sides of my family were Catholics who had emigrated from Ireland (counties Kerry, Cork, Dublin, Offaly, Limerick) and settled in and around Toronto and southern Ontario in the mid 1800s. My father's mother, Nanny (Annie Sutton), then the family matriarch, born in 1885, also lived with us until her death in 1974. After Anne, Ron, and Judy left and got married, Dennis and I squeezed into bunk beds, sharing the smallest bedroom.

So my mother was 37, my father 42, when I was born, the fourth of five — three boys and two girls. Nanny, the sole grandparent still alive, was 61 — widowed for five years. Dennis was still two years in the future. But Anne (17), Ron (14), and Judy (8) were all in the house, as was Jacquie (19), my cousin who lived with us. We were seven — soon to be eight — in what I have already explained was a modest three-bedroom house. Privacy was non-

existent. Noise was everywhere.

A disjointed collage of memories from the first few years. Climbing out of the crib in my parents' bedroom. Stepping on a bee and being stung on the foot at the summer cottages at Port Dover, on Lake Erie. Dennis and I sitting in metal washtubs in the backyard in summer. Hollyhocks and peonies at the back of the house. The feel and smell of the Insulbrick on the garage and back porch. The forest fire in Disney's *Bambi*. Riding the streetcar with my mother to shop at Eaton's and Simpson's in downtown Toronto. Seeing *Annie Get Your Gun* at the Tivoli theatre — where Nanny worked behind the candy counter — in 1950 (age 3) and not understanding the title, thinking I would get a gun there. *The Durango Kid* serials, yo-yo demonstrations, Debbie Reynolds singing 'Abba Dabba Honeymoon' in *Two Weeks with Love* at the Fairlawn theatre, with my big sister, Judy, on Saturday afternoons. Being taken to swim in the Rouge River by Uncle Jim and Anna Mae, the sudden realisation that I was under water, being pulled out by a lifeguard. The squeaking door of *Inner Sanctum* from the radio in the living room. My mother reading *Peter and the Wolf* and the Golden Book *Tawny Scrawny Lion* to me on Nanny's bed — where I slept until well into grade 1 after moving from the crib in my parents' room. Watching my mother cry when she found out her father (whom I don't remember) had died, Christmas Day 1950.

Where does a writer come from? What are the seminal signs? I don't know. I have been asked at least twice that I can recall, 'How did you get into it?' — as if one 'got into it' somehow. I shake my head, realising that I did not get into it, but rather, it got into me. I have come to believe that you just are a writer or you are not. It is a vocation, a passion. It chooses you.

There was no kindergarten at St Monica's School when I started in 1952, so I went right into grade one — a room with the green letter cards atop the blackboards, wooden desks with metal legs and tops that lifted. I'm not sure how it came to be, but I could read before I knew it, and Sister Rosemary would sit me on a chair at the front of the room to read to the class — that is, until one day I told her that I didn't want to do it. I was too shy. After that, she didn't ask any more. Perhaps this was the beginning: books, reading, preferring to remain in the background.

I don't know how old I was, but the first non-illustrated book-length story I remember reading by myself was a *Bobbsey Twins* volume that was in one of the two built-in bookcases in our living room on Maxwell Avenue. One afternoon, trying to occupy a bored child, my mother suggested I try it. I finished it before dinner, amazed to have read so much, equally amazed to have understood and enjoyed such a long story on my own. There followed the introduction (by my mother) of Thornton W. Burgess's animal books (*Reddy the Fox*, *Prickly Porky the Porcupine*, *Bowser the Hound*, and company). She bought me my own hardcovers. And thus it began — the love affair with books, encouraged and abetted by my mother, entwined with a natural bent toward reading that emerged in that first year of school.

For the first two grades I had five-and-six-year-old confidence and poise. I was doing okay — more than okay. I liked school, was popular with my classmates and

teachers. And in a Catholic school, we studied our catechism, and like James Joyce before me, I too was terrified of going to hell at much too early an age. (And again, like Joyce, this was a bit of heritage that I refrained from passing on to my own children.)

They skipped me past grade 3, directly into grade 4, and this is where it changed. As proud (and bewildered) as I was at this sudden shift in status, my peers were gone. I found myself the youngest and smallest in my new class, and until I finished grade 8 and got into high school, I never regained that early poise and confidence that had been my initial experience. Throughout grades 4 to 8 — age 7 to 12 — my academic achievement levelled and I became a quiet, withdrawn student, unable to compete with the bigger boys in sports or interact socially with my female classmates. This is when my brother Dennis — two years younger — and I were the closest. In many ways, I changed from being a participant to being an observer. My grade 6/7 teacher, Miss Gettings, wrote on one of my report cards, 'Terry is a dreamer.'

Some of my fondest memories of this period revolve around two- and three-week summer vacations near Bancroft, Ontario, fishing and swimming in cottage country some 160 miles north-east of Toronto on the Canadian shield. It was the only time we seemed to be a nuclear family: Mom and Dad, Dennis and me. These cottages and times were genuine idylls. Dennis and I fished, played, swam together. We were good company for each other. It was on Bow Lake and Weslemkoon Lake that I began skin diving, snorkelling, which would lead to a later small interest in scuba diving. I saw my father enjoy himself, felt him radiate a pleasure and patience while with us and while fishing that was seldom evident at home. Fishing suited him. It was a way for us to spend time together, doing something that interested us all. And I saw my mother enjoy all of us enjoying ourselves.

This was the 1950s. Television was a novelty, limited in what it could deliver. Videogames and computers were concoctions that even science fiction writers hadn't dreamed up. I read and collected *Superman* and *Batman* comic books when they were a dime apiece. Somewhere in the middle of all this, in grade 5 (age 8 or 9), I discovered *The Hardy Boys* books and their clones (*Tom Swift Jr.*, *Rick Brant Science Adventure Stories*, etc.). My mother, aware of my passion, continued to feed books to me. I loved them, devoured them. Having finished high school and even having attended the Ontario College of Art after graduation, Mom was the educated one in the family. My father, though, lacking the same polish (never having attended high school), was, nevertheless, no slouch. Both my parents were readers. They always had a book on the go.

I've pondered autobiographical notes by other writers who mention having been raised on classics and surrounded by Literature in their formative years. It wasn't like that in my house. There were books — they were revered — but they weren't part of The Canon. They were whatever was popular, whatever caught their fancy. Historical novels abounded. My father also read Jules Verne, Thomas B. Costain, loved James Michener's books; *True* and *Argosy* magazines were by his bedside. Mom read *Pageant of the Popes* by John Farrow (several

times, I believe — I still have the paperback of hers — copyrighted 1949 — among my own books), *Lives of the Saints* — and of course, Michener (*Hawaii* was read more than once as well). Mom introduced me to Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan* novels, which she herself had read as a child — buying the Grosset & Dunlap hardcovers for me — eight of which I still have. At age 12, I took out my first science fiction novel from the now-defunct St Clement's Branch of the Toronto Public Library System — *Islands in the Sky*, by Arthur C. Clarke. This led me to Clarke's non-fiction, including his scuba diving books, like *The Reefs of Taprobane*, as well as Robert A. Heinlein's juveniles.

Reading, apparently, kept my family sane. Books were our getaway. We read as omnivores, without guidance or discrimination, taking whatever roads we stumbled upon. I've mentioned my first reading experience with *The Bobbsey Twins*. This was a series that was the brainchild of Edward Stratemeyer, whose syndicate also produced *The Hardy Boys*, *Rick Brant*, *Tom Swift Jr.*, and *Nancy Drew*. I didn't know it at the time, but these books (along with Burroughs's 'Tarzan' books) were unavailable in libraries, dismissed by the literary custodians of the day who looked down their collective noses at such formulaic, work-for-hire fiction. There were no such authors as Franklin W. Dixon, John Blaine, and Victor Appleton. They were three of the many house names under which the Stratemeyer Syndicate published more than a hundred different series, spanning more than 75 years.

Since everybody I know admits to having read 'Hardy Boys' or 'Nancy Drew' books — and sales statistics confirm their staggering popularity — arguably, for my generation, Stratemeyer is the most influential person in the history of children's literature. I never understood the fear and concerns of librarians about letting young people read these books, since their heroes and heroines were teens (usually) of exceptional moral character, engaged in exciting adventures, and they made books appealing and reading an exhilarating experience — something librarians and teachers and parents still have trouble doing. As evidence of their beneficence, I offer myself.

From age 12 to 17, I attended St Michael's College School in Toronto, a private Catholic institution of about a thousand boys. I did much growing up there — in every way. When I entered at age 12, I was five feet two; I shot up about a foot over the next two years — to my present lanky stature — regaining some of my self-confidence in the process. A part of my father emerged in me, as I played trumpet in the school band for five years, ending up as the concert master in my last year. I made friends and began to think of myself as a good student again. In short, I was glad to leave grade school and St Monica's behind.

But what part of the author was groomed there? I try to understand it myself. I have vivid memories of two pieces I wrote for Mr Reddall in grade 9 English. One was a description of ducks swimming out onto a lake through the reeds, which he read aloud to the class as an example of good description. Another was a small story I wrote that he asked me to write out neatly and submit to a school magazine that was being published — which they didn't take, I recall, but that seemed secondary to

his praise. In grade 10, Mr Warden had us write a short story. He read mine aloud to the class and graded it a 10 out of 10. My grade 13 (we had such things in Ontario then) teacher, Fr Sheedy, told me I had beautiful sentence structure, and thought I should consider journalism.

These things seem important now only because, out of the vast detritus of memories that clog all our minds, I can recall them. Clearly, I was doing something that stood out, no matter how immature; and just as clearly, the praise was a necessary catalyst — something not lost on me when I began my own teaching career in 1968.

During that time, from 1959 to 1964, I read voraciously, but fastened on science fiction and fantasy, devouring all I came across. At the beginning, I read novels in the Winston Science Fiction series — books like *The Star Seekers*, by Milton Lesser, and *Mists of Dawn*, by Chad Oliver. These were hardcover novels that cost \$2.75 each, that came in colourful dust jackets, and included vivid endpaper illustrations by Alex Schomburg. On a bookshelf in my basement, I still have seven of these novels. Later, the paperbacks of Heinlein, Bradbury, Dick, Simak, Walter Miller, Jr., plus a host of authors so obscure that their books can't even qualify as collector's items (Jack Sharkey, Jerry Sohl). Part of me had slid sideways into another world, a world in which I found great pleasure.

High school English class was a revelation to me. Being assigned a book to read was something that had never happened in my years at St Monica's. Here, at last, was some direction, some discussion of what I was reading. It was a breath of fresh air. Books that I recall discovering, fondly, in classes: *Oliver Twist*, *Prester John*, *The Call of the Wild*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, and I even enjoyed and responded to *Hamlet*. These were indeed, new worlds.

And part of me was a typical Canadian teenage boy. I loved hockey and baseball, played them enthusiastically and often, if not too well. To this day, I am an avid hockey and baseball fan, seeing sport as an enriching and interesting aspect of life.

My years at St Mike's were positive. It was a good school. I still have friends from those years.

I entered University of Toronto in 1964, at age 17 (much too young), and studied General Arts, majoring in English. When forced to select a one-year physical education elective, I chose skin and scuba diving. To this day, though, my scuba experience has been confined to the university's pool. Three years later, in 1967, age 20 (again, much too young), I graduated with a BA.

The one-year program to become a high school teacher at what was then called the College of Education in Toronto was next on the agenda. I wanted to teach English. In September 1968, at age 21, I found myself doing just that: teaching English in Toronto's East York Collegiate Institute — suddenly, a full-time professional, tossed unceremoniously into a career that would — with interruptions — span 31 years.

This thing about being much too young had become a refrain. And it was not over. I was married in December 1968, shortly before my 22nd birthday, to the young woman a year younger than myself that I had met only

that summer, who would become my first wife. She was a grade school teacher. The whirlwind romance seemed in keeping with my strange, accelerated journey into adulthood.

I taught at East York CI for two years, an amazingly full experience, both exhausting and exhilarating, then resigned, going back to University of Toronto full-time at age 23 (1970). Teaching books had made me want to know even more about them. I took more English courses, targeting graduate school. As the year progressed, one course rose above the others for me, and I found a new obsession: Irish writers: Yeats, Joyce, Synge, Beckett. I applied and was accepted into the MA program in Anglo-Irish Studies at University College, Dublin, in the National University of Ireland, and in September 1971, Penny (my wife) and I were off on the grand adventure. She enrolled in the one-year Diploma Course for Teachers of the Deaf at the university, giving both of us who had leapt into adulthood too fast another crack at being young.

It was a great year. But great years cost money, and this one was no exception. Neither of us had any requisite family fortune, and our savings were running out fast. The goal was to make it to the end of the school year as best we could, and in a cold-water flat, without central heating, in quasi-poverty, we more or less managed it. We spent a few days in the west of Ireland, and saw Kerry, Galway, Sligo — stunning landscapes that imprinted themselves indelibly on my psyche. In the spring of 1972, broke, I wrote and applied for my old job back at East York CI in Toronto (I've often thought of it as coming home on my hands and knees), and they rehired me. Economic determinism had always been with me, and was to be a significant feature of my life as a writer in the future. This was, though, perhaps its rudest awakening. I was learning the compromise with reality.

We returned to Toronto and were back at the front of classrooms in September 1972. I taught at East York for two more years, until 1974, when, restless, curious, still young (always), I took a job in a more rural area. From 1974 to 1976, I taught English at Bayside Secondary School, just outside Belleville, Ontario, while Penny worked at the local school for the deaf.

It was during this period that I began to actually write. I'd always known that I would write — even back when I was reading those 'Hardy Boys' novels in grade school. I longed to be able to create the books that gave me so much pleasure. For reasons both practical and irrational, though, I had managed to delay it as long as possible. There were no more excuses. It was time to try.

This is a daunting time for a writer: the beginning. There is no way to measure the possibility of success. In contrast, what one is sure of is that there is, indeed, quite a high probability of failure. No one I know likes to fail. So this is it, the test, the initial, serious rudimentary scribbles.

I sold the first piece I wrote. In 1975, I received a check for \$35 for a 3500-word article, an overview of the work of one of my favourite writers, Philip K. Dick. It appeared in the May 1976 issue of *Science Fiction Review*. With that money, I bought an old oak office desk at a local auction, painstakingly stripped the black enamel paint from it, and used it for writing. I sold it in 2001, 26



Terence Green, with three sons Conor (L.), Owen (r.) and Daniel (between them), Father's Day, 15 June 2008.

years later, for \$40, attesting clearly to the wild money and vast profits of the writing game.

In spite of university degrees in literature and five years teaching English, when it came time to write, I had fallen back on my old love of fantastic literature. There followed other critical pieces on the field, then the necessary foray into fiction: the short story. I wrote my first, 'Japanese Tea', during this period, which finally saw publication in the 1979 anthology *Alien Worlds*. Set in a high school of the near-future, it posited an educational dystopia that exaggerated much of the path down which it all seemed to be sliding. Written in 1975, it was mildly prescient, mentioning mass killings in schools in 1997 and 1998. The Columbine horror occurred in 1999.

Ever restless, I lasted only two years working and living in the Belleville area before I realised that I was in the wrong place. We both missed Toronto. Nervously, I let it be known back at my old school — East York CI — that I was on the move again, and amazingly — and thankfully — they hired me for an incredible third time. So I returned to both Toronto and East York in 1976 (age 29), and for the next 23 years, even though I employed various ruses to interrupt my tenure there, I was careful not to resign again. I figured I'd definitely run out my string.

At 30 years of age, I was on the threshold of one of the moments that define who we are and what we will become. In 1977, Penny became pregnant. It was intentional. When we found out there would be twins, I was

sky-high with anticipation. But when the actual births came round, they needed to be induced, and on 7 March 1978, suddenly, everything went wrong. Foetal distress, an emergency Caesarean. Two boys were born. One of them lived only 24 hours. The other, Conor, is a healthy 25 years of age as I write this in 2003.

I had been sailing along on gloriously smooth waters. Overnight, the wind was taken out of my sails. Values shifted, my eyes opened in new ways. I had the best and the worst of life simultaneously. There were no words. When things settled, I was a father, the most profound role I would play.

A year later, I wrote a small, 2200-word story called 'Of Children in the Foliage'. It was set on another planet. It tells the story, in first person, of a father who has one of his twin sons die at birth, and the otherworldly way in

which the lost twin lives in a limbo world. It was published in the mainstream Doubleday anthology *Aurora: New Canadian Writing 1979*. When editor Morris Wolfe called me on the phone to discuss a few minor editorial sentence changes, I mentioned to him that I had been pleasantly surprised that he had accepted it, suggesting that he probably didn't get many SF stories submitted. He flattered and surprised me with his response: 'Oh, I get lots of science fiction stories.' Then he paused. 'But nothing like this.'

As catharsis, I had gone inside, written the truth, from pain, had produced something different. It had transcended its genre. The lesson was learned.

Between 1981 and 1985 there were more stories, ostensibly science fiction and fantasy, published in such places as *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, and the venerable *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, American digest periodicals that to this day still publish the best the field has to offer. When ten of my tales were eventually collected in the volume *The Woman Who is the Midnight Wind* (1987), *Books in Canada* wrote: '[Green's] new collection of short stories is simply good fiction.'

Reading habits changed, grew. I admired Steinbeck, Updike, Vanderhaeghe, Carver, Malamud — mainstream writers. I learned writing from reading, and I still do. The more widely I read, the more perspective I gained on what constituted good, lasting fiction, and felt the urge to try to create it expand.

A novel beckoned. By 1983, I had been in and out of the classroom for 15 years — half a career. I was caught between the desire to write and the need to make a living, frustrated by the constraints of a regular job, yet fully

aware of the folly of tossing it away. I was 36 years old, not a kid living in a garret. My second son, Owen, had arrived back on 16 February 1981 — I had a wife and two children, bills to pay, more to come. And yet — how could I live with myself if I didn't try? Things can die inside you, can lie there withering.

I bit the bullet, took the plunge, opted to teach half-time. For half the money, I taught mornings only, wrote at home in the afternoons in an office I built in my garage. Between 1983 and 1985 I produced my first novel, *Barking Dogs*, a near-future police thriller set in Toronto, complete with infallible lie detectors (the Barking Dogs of the title). When it was published by St Martin's Press of New York in 1988, Margaret Cannon, the *Toronto Globe and Mail's* mystery reviewer, concluded — perceptively, I felt — that 'the SF touches of Toronto in the very near future are really nice and the invention of the Barking Dog is terrific, but the truth is that Green doesn't need them. This story of nice people under immense pressure is good enough to keep the reader riveted to the last paragraph.' Once again, although the book was labelled and marketed as SF, the suggestion was that the ideas were subordinate to the characters and their plights, something not necessarily a hallmark of the genre — something in which I took pride.

1985 was a landmark year for another reason. After 17 years and two children, my marriage washed up on the shore. To outsiders, these things seem like they happen overnight, but they never do. In fact, I'm still not sure what happened or how it happened, but it wouldn't be wrong to say that it all stemmed from our rather hasty marriage in our callow youth, and had been heading — not quickly, but more like molasses — in this direction all that time. In hindsight, perhaps the real wonder is that it didn't end sooner. Along with the death of my mother on 14 March 1984, perhaps the desire to go sideways into a writing life instead of continuing the conservative, middle-class path of career teacher was the other catalyst that brought things to a boil. Penny told me that she had changed, but I had not, which was as probable as any other conclusion I have been able to draw. I believe these things have a momentum that is indefinable, and analysing them often provides answers too simplistic.

But with two small children, the sudden fracture in my life was almost unbearable. Conor was seven, Owen four. I could never have imagined this happening to my family, to them, yet there it was. I moved out. It almost killed me.

In October 1985, I rented a small studio apartment — 500 square feet — on the third floor of a house on Heath Street East in Toronto. I took virtually nothing with me; left everything behind. The only things I wanted were my sons. Over the next months, amidst pain and anger, I began building a new life, from the ground up. Joint custody of my boys was all I really wanted — that, and the chance to start again. At first, I found a mattress in the basement of the house in which I was living, cleaned it up, and slept on it. When my boys began to stay overnight, I bought myself a large piece of foam and slept in a sleeping bag on it, ceding the mattress to them. After six months, I bought a waterbed — it being the only

bed of any size that I could get up the winding stairs to my third floor apartment. Curiously, to this day, I still have it.

I arranged to have my sons half time, 14 of every 28 days, an arrangement that lasted virtually until they entered university. Now, in 2003, Conor is 25, finished school, and has a place of his own. Owen is 22, in the middle of college, and has lived with me full-time for the past two years — since his mother moved to take a job in Kingston, Ontario. But I'm getting ahead of myself

I mentioned the death of my mother in March of 1984. I don't know if I can do justice to the impact this had on me, and continues to have on me to this day. Like the death of my son, six years earlier, it changed everything, again. Hers was a life that I could see had been shortchanged. Her mother had died when she was 16. Her father had remarried a year and a half later, been smitten with his new, younger wife, and ignored his two children (my mother and her brother, Jack, two years younger), who ended up living mostly with relatives. Four years later, age 20, she was pregnant, married, and was to be a mother before she turned 21. Her only sibling, Jack, had a falling out with their father, left Canada for the United States to look for work circa 1932, sent my mother — his sister — a handful of cards and letters home, then disappeared around 1935, never to be heard from again. My mother had been abandoned, ended up in the Green clan, and made what she could of her life by having her own family. But there was always a wistfulness, a sense of something missing that even her children could pick up. I know too, now, how much of my life I spent just trying to please my mother, how much I wanted to make her happy, how happy it made me when she was happy.

When my mother died in March of 1984, in a trunk at the foot of her bed I found the letters and cards that her brother Jack had sent her back in the 1930s. She had kept them for 50 years. They were from Toledo, Detroit, Bucyrus (Ohio), and Ashland, Kentucky. I imagined his trail into the heart of America in the Dodge Roadster he mentioned in his letters. There was a tone of warmth and confidence in the writing that was at odds with his disappearance.

After her death, in the summer of 1984 — a year before my own marriage was to collapse — we took a family car trip to visit Joe and Pam Zarantonello, a couple we had met on my year in Ireland back in 1971–72. Joe, an American who had taken the same degree that I had, was now teaching school in Bardstown, Kentucky. While there, among other things, he showed me the Trappist monastery at Gethsemani, where Thomas Merton had lived and was now buried. On our way home to Toronto, we detoured to Ashland, Kentucky, the source of one of Jack's last letters. I spent a day there, trying to imagine his brief stay in that small city of 30,000 on the Ohio River. And a story began percolating, forming, slowly.

Six months later, in January of 1985, the letters from Jack to my mother still sitting like stones inside me, in the office of my renovated garage I wrote a 9000-word novelette called 'Ashland, Kentucky'. It's the story of a man whose mother is dying, who wants to see her lost brother who disappeared into the States 50 years earlier. The son tries to find him and fails and his mother dies.

Then letters start showing up at the family home in Toronto in 1984, from the lost brother to his sister, postmarked 1934. The son travels to the source of the last letter, Ashland, Kentucky, to see what's going on. He ends up in 1934, meeting with his uncle.

The fiction was both biography and autobiography, yet neither. It was both fantastic fiction as well as of the here-and-now. In short, I didn't know what it was. Neither did anyone else. Published originally in the November 1985 issue of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, and subsequently collected in anthologies *Tesseract 2* and *Northern Frights*, it became my most popular piece of short fiction. As had been the case with 'Of Children in the Foliage', it was written from the heart, and apparently, it showed. Once again, I had taken personal experience and transmuted it into fantastic form.

But back to my new world in that tiny, third floor apartment. It was during my time there that Merle entered my life. In 2003, 18 years later, she is my wife. The passion of our relationship was overwhelming in its initial stages, and even though she was a University of Toronto graduate (our first date was at that institution's eminent Hart House), the fact that I was 14 years older than she gave us some cause to think of it as something magical that might disappear. But it did not.

Perhaps the dedication in my 1992 novel *Children of the Rainbow* says it best: 'For Merle, who healed me with love, words are not enough.' (Speaking of *Children of the Rainbow*: most of it was written in that tiny third-floor apartment during a 1986-87 leave of absence from my teaching position. In hindsight, it mirrors much of my psychological state at the time, with themes of displacement in time and space abounding.) By 1988, I had a financial settlement attached to my separation (I wasn't officially divorced until 1990), and Merle and I took a plunge and purchased a house together, forging new bonds.

We bought a big, old, three-storey semidetached home in downtown Toronto. It needed neverending work. It was still being renovated 14 years later when we finally left it. But it seemed like a castle after the 500-square-foot apartment of the previous two and a half years. Besides the two of us and my sons half time, we made our living arrangement even more unusual by adding one more person. My father, who had been living in a senior citizens' apartment since 1985, came to live with us.

The house on Brooklyn Avenue served us all well. My father had his own space and contributed financially. But his real contribution was just being there. I liked that my sons had the chance to interact with him, to get to know him. He felt needed. As much as he occasionally drove me crazy, and as much as I could never have envisioned living with him again after so many years, it was, simply, the right thing to do. He and I had both mellowed.

He moved in with us in spring of 1988, age 83. He left us when he died, spring 1995, age 90. As a result, I never felt about his death the same sense of unfairness that surrounded my mother's. Closure is an overused word, but sometimes it comes closest.

In 1991-92, I was awarded a sabbatical leave (with partial salary) from the East York Board of Education, to

study and create a computerised writing class that could serve as a prototype for the board. Among other things, it involved taking a course called 'Computers and Writing' at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, so I rented a room in a house in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and commuted back and forth from Toronto to Boston during the spring of 1992. It was a fine year, and at the same time I managed to complete a first draft of the novel *Blue Limbo* — a sequel to my 1988 novel, *Barking Dogs* — something I had been working on sporadically since 1989.

In *Blue Limbo*, the main character, Mitch Helwig, has seen his marriage collapse, and has moved to a small third-floor apartment. His father, 84-year-old Paul Helwig, is living in the same Toronto senior citizens' apartment complex in which my own father resided from 1985 to 1988. The 'blue limbo' device of the title is a device of the near future that enables people to keep loved ones 'alive' for a period of up to four weeks after they have 'died'.

So I'd done it again: life and death, autobiography, personal turmoil, a shroud of the fantastic hovering over it all.

But it didn't find a publisher immediately. The reasons for this are integral to the business side of writing, rather than the quality of the work — a situation more common than casual observers might suspect. St Martin's Press had dropped its SF&F line, and Canadian publisher McClelland & Stewart, who published *Children of the Rainbow* in 1992, declined to make an offer on it. *Rainbow* had not secured an American co-publisher, and had, therefore, not sold the number of books they had hoped. So I did what writers do. I put it 'in the drawer', for the time being, and moved on.

In early 1992, I began expanding my 1985 story, 'Ashland, Kentucky'. I revisited my mother's 1984 death and the shadowy disappearance of her brother, Jack, back in the 1930s. The story still haunted me, and there was more to tell. And I had been encouraged by reviewers and casual commentators that I 'had something' in this tale.

By summer 1992, I had about a hundred pages of draft written. In September, I put it aside to resume normal family life. Back in the classroom after my sabbatical, the novel languished until May of 1993, when I applied for and received a Canada Council Travel Grant to go to Ashland, Kentucky for a weekend of research. The trip was invaluable. Walking its streets, eating in its restaurants, sitting in the library there, the story came more sharply into focus, and there was much revision upon my return to Toronto.

Once home, I was dealt an unexpected blow. My brother Ron, 60 years old, married father of four grown boys, collapsed and died at work. The sobering effect of this went deeper than I had ever understood it could. No one saw it coming, and, as with my mother's death, we all knew Ron had been cheated out of much of life. In my father's eyes, at the funeral, I saw his own world being taken from him in ways too profound to articulate.

That summer, life continued. The novel grew another hundred pages or so, but by September, I had put it aside once again to return to teaching. It sat until summer of 1994. But it grew vividly in my head during that fall,

winter and spring. I heard the characters talking, knew what awaited them, felt nuances grow, made notes. The main character, Leo Nolan, would begin his quest for his mother's brother, Jack, in 1984 Toronto, pursue him to Ashland, Kentucky, where he would spend nine days with him in 1934 Kentucky, and return, changed, to 1984 Toronto. Fantasy? Time travel? Magic realism? I didn't know. In July and August of 1994, I wrote steadily, finishing, finally, the little book that had gestated in stages for 10 years.

As an unwitting climax to the book's completion, on the Labor Day weekend, 1994 — more than six years after buying the house together and establishing our unique, generational family — Merle and I, along with her mother and my two sons (now 13 and 16 years of age) flew to Las Vegas, where we were married in the Graceland Wedding Chapel. Her mother was her matron of honour, my sons were my best men. Elvis gave the bride away, and sang for us after the ceremony. It was like going to city hall, only more fun — and as much as one might find it difficult to believe, we were pleasantly surprised by the sensitivity and taste exhibited by the folks who clearly understood how to stage this ritual of rituals. The honeymoon — such as it was with our extended family — was at the MGM Grand, and we were back home by Monday evening. Tuesday, life resumed, and once again, I was teaching.

The uniqueness of the year continued: a month later, at a Friday evening Toronto launch for *Northern Stars: The Anthology of Canadian Science Fiction* — which contained my story 'The Woman Who is the Midnight Wind' — I met David Hartwell, editor of the anthology and an editor with Tor Books in New York. Tor, the world's leading publisher of science fiction and fantasy, is one of the imprints employed by Tom Doherty Associates, itself owned and distributed by St Martin's Press from New York's historic Flatiron Building. Learning that I had just completed a novel, he asked to see it. I contacted Shawna McCarthy, my American agent, and she submitted *Ashland, Kentucky* to him the following Monday. Within six weeks, we had a deal. By Christmas, the contracts were signed. The long road into and out of Ashland seemed to be coming to an end. But as always, another beckoned.

In October, before the *Ashland* publishing agreement was finalised, my father fell ill with pneumonia. Mild dementia followed. It was the beginning of the end. After 90 years of pretty good health, he plummeted like a stone. But for those around him, the next six months trickled by. In the spring, a second bout of pneumonia ensued. He died on 15 April 1995. I describe his death and his life as best I can in my 2001 novel, *St Patrick's Bed*, another of the books he never got to see that feature him and my mother and so much of our family on their covers.

At Tom Doherty Associates in New York, *Ashland, Kentucky* was morphing into *Shadow of Ashland*. Although it was

still in its editorial and production stages, enthusiasm for it spread throughout the publishing house over the next few months. They massed behind it aggressively, deciding to publish it in a small hardcover format. The original 1930s letters from Jack to my mother, along with personal family photographs from the era, were arranged into a stunningly attractive wraparound jacket. Aligned with this was the decision — after much discussion about what exactly it was that they had in hand — to use their mainstream imprint, Forge, on the book's spine, instead of the Tor imprint that denoted primarily SF&F — an attempt to reach a larger, broader readership.

With anticipation for *Ashland* high, in August 1995 editor David Hartwell purchased *Blue Limbo*, which appeared — risen from 'the drawer' — as a Tor hardcover in January 1997.

On a roll, Merle and I took our first vacation together alone (longer than a weekend) in almost 10 years. At the end of August 1995, without my sons Conor and Owen (now 17 and 14), without my father (who had died that spring) to be concerned about, we left for a week in Scotland. The World Science Fiction Convention was in Glasgow that year, and using it as an opportunity to combine business matters (publishers, editors, agents, writers, fans, all congregate) with pleasure, we revelled in three days in Glasgow, followed by four glorious days in the Scottish Highlands. In my memory, this break symbolises the start of the life that flowered as a result of *Shadow of Ashland*.

Thirty thousand hardcovers were published in March 1996, and the little book has continued to grow. In the years since, it has been: optioned as a feature film six times; a finalist as Best Novel for both the World Fantasy Award (1997) and the Aurora Award (Canada) twice (1997, 1998); the subject of numerous book club discussion groups; required reading on several university English courses (including ENG 237, University of Toronto); published in both mass market paperback (1997) and larger trade paperback (2000); and most recently, broadcast on more than 400 stations across Canada by CBC

Terry Green (l.) with Dave Harrtwell (r.), with Daniel Green (l.) and Elizabeth Hartwell (r.), 2003.





Terry and Daniel, 21 June 2009.

Radio in ten 15-minute segments, twice daily, during two weeks in November and December of 2002.

The book had exceeded all my initial modest expectations. In 1996–97, I took another unpaid leave from my teaching position and wrote the prequel, *A Witness to Life*, the story of Jack's father, Martin Radey, and his life in and around Toronto from 1880 to 1950. Told from the point of view of a dead man revisiting the critical junctures and events of his life, once again the elements of biography, autobiography, and fiction tumbled together into an alloy with a fantastic capstone. Published in 1999 as a Forge Book from Tom Doherty Associates, it was, like *Shadow of Ashland*, a Best Novel finalist for the World Fantasy Award (2000).

For a writer, things experienced and noted along the way do indeed become potential fodder for stories. Earlier, aware of its place in my future fiction, I mentioned my 1984 visit to the Abbey of Gethsemani, the Trappist monastery near Bardstown, Kentucky, final resting spot of the monk Thomas Merton. In the ensuing years, I read much Merton, coming to see him as, arguably, the premier spiritual guru of the twentieth century. Anything but a saint, flawed and human, anti-institutional, with more than 50 volumes of meditations and a host of posthumous writings (following his accidental death at age 53, in 1968), he flirted with Zen, Chuang Tzu, Blake, Bob Dylan, and jazz, and everything else of cultural import that caught his fancy. His philosophy permeates *A Witness to Life* ('a monk has nothing to tell you except that if you dare to enter the solitude of your own heart, you can go beyond death, even in this life, and be a witness to life'), and near the end of the novel, in 1948, Martin Radey meets him in the garden of Gethsemani.

Everything goes into a book.

An overnight success after almost 25 years of writing, in 1999, at age 52, I retired from my position as English teacher at Toronto's East York Collegiate Institute, a career begun 31 years earlier. Teaching had been everything it should be: rewarding, frustrating, enriching, draining, broadening, constraining, keeping me in touch with everyday life and my finger on the pulse of education. It had provided the best of friends and a social

world I wouldn't have missed. There are students who still keep in touch. But I was finally a full-time writer, and it felt good.

Relaxed, in September I enjoyed the open-ended vista of my solitary pursuit and began my new book. Novels have a way of growing into something not completely foreseen when they are started, and this is part of the mystery of creation. Every day brings something new. I am now fairly certain that all serious fiction — all fiction that is not merely a job — is a personal reinterpretation of the writer's existence during the time the fiction is written, accounting for the transmutation through the months and years of writing. The first working title was *No Other Son*. By the beginning of 2000, it was *Turning of Bones*. When it was finished, in June of 2000, *St Patrick's Bed* had emerged. It was the sequel to *Shadow of Ashland*, set eleven years later, in 1995.

November 1999 found me driving from Toronto to Dayton, Ohio to research that city, much as I had Ashland years earlier. There was another missing relative there, but not the narrator's. This time it was his stepson's father, and travelling with Leo Nolan was the ghost of his own father, who, as told on the first page, had died on 15 April 1995. I was writing about my father, using fiction, cradling the tale, once again, in the soft fold of the fantastic.

In May, Merle and I left for one week in the west of Ireland. A critical, climactic scene in the novel was to be set on a mountain in Galway that had a pilgrimage site atop it: St Patrick's Well and Bed. I had written the scene using memory of my time there on my previous visits (1971, 1997), and had a slew of research books and material surrounding my desk, but I wasn't satisfied. I had to see it for myself, know what the wind felt like, smell the air. And Merle was pregnant.

Clearly, things had been transpiring in the background. Merle and I had been trying to have a child of our own since our 1994 marriage. For the first while, we approached the matter casually, figuring it would surprise us pleasantly when it happened, and we fully expected it at any time. Nothing happened. For people entering the baby arena, we were running out of time. When we finally got around to visiting a doctor, we learned that there were complications, mostly due to our ages, which needed attention.

Ah, persistence; ah, faith. In March 2000, Merle phoned me from her work to tell me she was pregnant. At my computer, I clicked on 'Save', sat back, smiled. Like the novel on the screen in front of me that had grown and shifted, the world was changing profoundly as I breathed in and out, alone in my office. Daniel Casci Green arrived 19 November 2000. A miracle. I was 53, Merle 39. His big brothers were 19 and 22. My generational family was continuing. My mother and father would have been thrilled.

St Patrick's Bed, another Forge Book from Tom Doherty Associates, encompassing my father and the mysterious roads to Daniel's arrival, was launched in Toronto on 30 October 2001. With my wife and three sons present, along with extended family and hosts of friends and well-wishers, I had no reason to be anything but happy, and happy I was. In many ways, the novel was the end of one stage and the beginning of another, both

in terms of my books and my personal life. With a new baby in the house, the writing began to slow to a crawl, then stalled completely for a while. I did not mind. I had a new future, a new life.

For the first year, Merle was home from her job, even extending her leave. When she returned to work in September 2001, my new position began in earnest. I was a stay-at-home father. As I write this, in May of 2003, I am 56. Daniel is two and a half. My days are simple, demanding, often exhausting, but always rewarding. Daniel's big brother, Owen, is 22, working full time, but planning to return to college in the fall. He has lived with us for the past two years now. Conor, big brother number two, is 25, has his own apartment, his own life. The glass has never been so full.

Today, I wrote some of this essay in the morning, fed and dressed Daniel, watched him play in the backyard while I did the dishes, then trundled him off to the supermarket to get some dinner for later. We stopped off at Home Depot on the way and bought one of those peanut-halogen bulbs needed for under the kitchen cabinets. 'How would you like a donut?' I asked him.

'I think so.'

We coasted through the Drive-Thru at Tim Hortons. In the parking lot, in the front seat I read the newspaper and drank a coffee. I passed bits of the chocolate dip donut back to him in his rear car-seat. Suddenly: quiet.

I punched in Merle's work number on my cell phone. 'He's asleep.' For us, this is news to be shared, smiled about, discussed, analysed.

He's on our bed as I write this, in slumberland. I can hear Owen showering in the basement, getting ready for his afternoon-evening shift. In the backyard, through the window of my office, it is flowering season: lilacs, maples, oaks, even dandelions.

How did all this happen?

Of course, things will change. I will be back. In September 2003, I assume the post of writer-in-residence at Hamilton, Ontario's Mohawk College; in anticipation of my absence, Daniel is on a waiting list for day care at Merle's work for two days a week. It's something he needs — getting out more into the big world of other kids, socialising, learning new things. I'm looking forward to the variation too.

And even as I spend my days in domestic routine, comforted always by the thought that I am helping my family move ahead to whatever comes next, I am writing in my head, working on the next book, making notes in stolen time, clarifying what it is I want to say, constructing a story in which to say it, realising the scope and breadth and value of my own parents' achievement, wanting to honour them by continuing what I see as a valid life.

— Terence M. Green, 2003



Terry and Daniel fishing, Steenburg Lake, Ontario, 2004.

EPILOGUE REDUX 2010

On 15 September 2010, I begin my sixth year teaching at the University of Western Ontario. I am 63 years old.

I will board the ViaRail train at Union Station in Toronto, arrive two hours later in London, Ontario, spend the afternoon among the 30,000 students at the university there, eat an early dinner on campus, and at 6 p.m. introduce Writing 2295F (Creative Writing: The Short Story) to the 26 students enrolled in it. A three-hour workshop course, it will run once weekly for 13 weeks. The prerequisite is a B average in a first year writing course.

When the class ends at 9 p.m., I may visit the Grad Club for a cold beer, then amble over to the nearby B&B where I will spend the night. In the morning, after breakfast, I will make my way to the train station and reverse the trip of the previous day, arriving home in Toronto in the early afternoon. At 3:30, I will pick up my son, Daniel, from school. He is in grade 5, almost 10 years old. Until the following Wednesday, six days hence, this will be my other job: stay-at-home Dad.

So the current state of affairs: I have one full-time job (Daniel), and two part-time jobs (teaching and writing). The full-time job is exactly that — full-time. For those of you who haven't actually stayed at home with a little one, I submit the following: you have no idea. Merle went back to work when Daniel was one year old. For the past nine years, I've held the fort, done my best. At the beginning, I was unrealistic (and inexperienced) enough to believe that being at home with a child and writing could coexist.

And I'm sure there are those out there who have the energy and multitasking wherewithal to pull it off. I discovered that I wasn't one of them.

At the beginning, of course, I tried to do both. The result was, simply, that I wasn't doing either as well as I should. So the writing went onto the back burner and the parenting moved front and centre. It was the right choice. And in time, the part-time teaching at Western emerged as a viable option — satisfying, remunerative, exciting and interesting. The pieces began to fit together. A Zen-like acceptance and patience was the key, seeing what one has instead of what one hasn't.

The writing that has begun to interest me more and more of late is exactly the kind of autobiographical/memoir writing I am doing here. One of the reasons that we read is to ascertain that what is happening to us isn't only happening to us. We need reference points, lives to which we can compare our own, to gauge and understand our experiences. There are things that are expressed only in writing, never spoken aloud in our culture. We can find them in books, in the type of writing I am talking about, in the honesty and insights of those willing to take the time and make the effort to say what they feel and think and tell what has happened to them. And yes, it can be in fictional form as well, as long as the experience of the characters rings true, as long as it has the emotional resonance that makes us sit back and

understand the life (or lives) we are reading about.

Facts: the passage of time. My younger brother, Dennis, died of his throat cancer in December 2008. My older sister, Anne, died in November 2009. Of the five siblings in my family, two of us are left.

A friend of mine emailed me recently asking if I would be writing any more novels. I answered him truthfully that I didn't know, that I rarely know what the future will bring, that we will see. My priorities have shifted. As I age, how could they not?

I have published six novels and a collection of stories with major American and Canadian publishers, along with a wide array of uncollected stories, poems, articles, reviews, interviews and essays. I am married to a wonderful woman and have three strong, beautiful, and intelligent sons. In 2009, my 1997 novel *Blue Limbo* was reissued. In 2010, my 1988 novel *Barking Dogs* was reissued. The books resurface, still there, like my family, giving shape and meaning to the gestalt of accomplishment, of creation.

I like what Lou Gehrig said when he stood in Yankee Stadium in 1939, one eye on the past, the other on the future. To paraphrase: I am a lucky man. I am blessed.

Who would I trade places with? Why?

— Terence M. Green, 13 September 2010



Terry Green's creative writing class at University of Western Ontario, 2006. Clockwise from Terry Green: Kailyn Halverson-Duncan; Douglas Tennant; Adam Pham; Erica Thompson; Monica Fletcher; Karen Stevens; Moira McAndrew; Michelle Dekens; Jenn Mitchell; Carly Seibel; Sylvia Gozzard; Alessa Saturno; Steven Pulver; Seth Zak; Jennifer Baker; Colin Pattison; Martha Heeney; Meghan Brown.

Convenient biological delusions: An interview with Ian Watson by Stephen Baxter

In 2003, the British Science Fiction Association and the Science Fiction Foundation held their Annual General Meetings on the same day, disguising them as a day of interviews and other SF-related events. At one of these events, the BSFA's then Vice-President, author Stephen Baxter, interviewed Ian Watson. Reprinted from *Vector* 231, September–October 2003.



Ian Watson (L.) being interviewed by Stephen Baxter (r.) (photo: *Vector* 231).

SB: I'm very pleased to be doing this, because I've been thinking about you, Ian, and your famous love for accuracy and precision in language.

IW: You mean pedantry?

SB: No, no, no. Did I say that? But watching the daily carnival of linguistic gymnastics which is a Donald Rumsfeld press conference — you must be spinning in your grave.

IW: Have you read Donald Rumsfeld's poems? I'll read you one. The Poetry of D. H. Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense.

The Unknown

As we know,
There are known knowns.
There are things we know we know.
We also know
There are known unknowns.
That is to say
We know there are some things
We do not know.
But there are also unknown unknowns,
The ones we don't know
We don't know.

SB: You have written about how language has been used



Ian Watson in 2003.

to manipulate and oppress us, in something like *Alien Embassy* (1977), for instance, which has an Orwellian misuse of language.

IW: Quite often language misleads us anyway because we don't think about what the words mean or connote. A lot of the time people are uttering sentences which don't make very much sense. But you shouldn't point this out to them, because this causes irritation. As regards 'mind control' by language as such — basically the Sapir-Whorf theory of linguistic relativism suggests that the particular language you speak dictates your worldview. Whereas the Chomskyan idea is that programmed into us all is an innate generator of grammar which is going to give rise to the acquisition of any human language whatever. Languages are all structurally similar deep under the skin. No mention of whether we can acquire an alien language — Suzette Haden Elgin has written some interesting novels on this topic.

My first book, *The Embedding* (1973), was based upon Chomskyan psycholinguistics with bits of the Sapir-Whorf idea that language conditions our view of reality. It explored whether there might be a general grammar of the universe that might be used by all biological life forms which have arisen. There's also the old magical idea that by saying the right words you can control and transform reality; this is a theme I came back to in my pseudo-Finnish fantasy duo 'The Books of MANA'.

SB: Where does your interest in language come from? You hit us with all these ideas in your first novel. Before you gave up the day job you were a lecturer in English.

IW: I was a lecturer in literature generally. My interest in language doesn't really come from the fact that I did an

English degree at Oxford, because nothing about scientific linguistics was taught. We learned Anglo-Saxon and had to study medieval dialects — in one of which the only surviving text is all about how nuns should wear coarse barbed-wire underwear and full of inspiring thoughts such as 'Give the tosspot boiling brass to drink'. I believe that when I was at Oxford I heard the word 'Saussure' once — he being Ferdinand de Saussure, the guy who wrote the *Course in General Linguistics* back in 1916 which gave rise to semiology and Roland Barthes and structuralism and post-structuralism and Claude Lévi-Strauss and everything that is important. There was none of this in Oxford when I was there.

I'm self-educated in whatever I know of language and linguistics. This was partly due to working in Birmingham Art School, whose students had to do a class once a week in Complementary Studies — studies that complemented their main work of graphic designing or fine art or fashion and textiles. This was back in the heady days of the 1970s when writers could get jobs teaching Complementary Studies, which they could define pretty much as they pleased. Two people applied for my job (I was one of them), and the interview consisted of, 'What do you want to teach?', to which I said, 'Science fiction'. When they asked, 'Why?' I said, 'Because this will help the designers of the future flexibly to think about the multiple alternative futures open to us,' and they said, 'Okay, have a job.' [Laughter.]

Consequently, apart from science fiction, my classes consisted of what I was researching for the first books that I was writing, *The Embedding* and *The Jonah Kit* (1975), such as comparative linguistics and the ecology of the Amazon basin and what would happen if you built a whacking great dam in it, RAND Corporation documents and forecasts of the future, whale and dolphin psychology, and whatever I needed to look at for the books I was busy on. The students found this all perfectly interesting. Also, one of my colleagues was a semiologist and another was a structural anthropologist. Chatting to them I began a process of self-education in such things.

SB: What's a structural anthropologist?

IW: For example, Lévi-Strauss looks at the way in which kinship patterns in a community map onto the way in which people cook or the way that they dress. In his case the structures of behaviour are based on binary alternatives: sour/sweet, raw/cooked, nude/dressed; can you marry your maternal uncle or not?

SB: You taught overseas for a while.

IW: I taught first of all in East Africa. Nominally I was a lecturer in World Literature, which meant that I taught Maxim Gorky in translation as well as Jane Austen and James Joyce. The latter seemed rather irrelevant to the students I was teaching because they'd come down from mud huts to this kind of ivory tower on the hills ten miles outside of Dar-es-Salaam. I never saw the connection between their real lives, nation building, and *Mansfield Park*.

They did, however, and got ideas above their station. When President Julius Nyerere declared that all students

should work for two years at nation-building projects at the same rate of pay as the army, the students went on strike. They had Great Expectations, having been taught it. I was present at the first student demonstration ever in downtown Dar-es-Salaam. The students turned up wearing their half-length bright orange gowns and said that they did not want to work for low pay for two years after they graduated. The police had never handled a demonstration before, so they waved the demonstrators all to sit down in the street. This they obediently did. The police then removed their riot gas guns and fired at the sitting targets. Everyone ran away; I hauled a couple of students into my Volkswagen and wound up the windows quickly. And Nyerere came up to the campus and gave a lecture about how one must be more socially responsible and sent all the demonstrators home to their huts until the end of the year.

What was the question? Oh, yes, I taught abroad. [Laughter].

I haven't actually ever done very much work in my life. In Dar-es-Salaam they hired too many people, so I had one class a week. The rest of the time I would spend at the beach or playing darts with Indian car mechanics. In the second year I had to teach two classes a week but they also put me in charge of the university bookshop, which mainly involved writing letters to Dillons on an old typewriter asking them to send forty-two copies of *Practical and Physical Geography*. I was relieved of this burden after about six months, because they hired a Scotsman called Charles MacKinnon of Dunakin, who is the author of *The Observer Book of Heraldry*. A wonderful guy, a beefy Glaswegian with a broad accent and a bright red face and as fat as can be, and if you've seen him let down his trousers on the roof of the Twiga Hotel and dance drunkenly you would not guess that he was also, under the pseudonym of Vivian Donald, a writer of romance novels set in the glens where soft kisses were exchanged.

It was pretty boring being in Dar-es-Salaam, because East Africa was a bit culturally deprived compared with West Africa — to the extent that East Africans were getting upset about West African cultural imperialism. All these gorgeous writers and artists in Nigeria and Guinea, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Camara Laye, and so forth, and what did East Africa have? Hardly anything. So the East Africans had a bit of a chip on their shoulder. It was very hot and humid and basically a bit dull, apart from if you had a bit of money and went out to a game reserve to be charged by an elephant with a broken leg. Ah, no, not charged entrance by an elephant ... That was the time of the oil embargo against ex-Northern Rhodesia, consequently oil was being freighted in big rubber slugs on the backs of trucks which I thought ought to be called Dar-es-Salamis because they looked rather like that. They used to crash into the wild life so you had all these angry elephants with bones sticking the wrong way out of their legs.

I left Tanzania after about two years and came back to Britain. I very much respect Tanzania, which had a raw deal internationally, and to which the world should have owed a debt of gratitude for getting rid of Idi Amin from Uganda, but it didn't much mesh with my mind — apart from the fact that I was experiencing an alternative culture, the African world-view, and it seemed to me that

if you're going to invent alien societies it's a good idea to have experienced an alternative society on our own world.

I thought that because I'd been teaching in Africa I was qualified to apply for another job elsewhere in Africa, so when the British Council advertised a job in the Cameroons I applied for it. At the interview they said, 'We don't really want to send you to the Cameroons, because it's actually *worse* than Tanzania in terms of stimulation. We want someone with brain damage to go to the Cameroons. Would you be interested in going to Tokyo?' I said yes.

I spent about three years in central Tokyo, and it was fascinating. All the techno-thrills of the coming future and also all of the eco-calamities that science fiction warns us about. The air was so polluted I had to sleep in a respirator sometimes, the cherry trees would only blossom because they had nutrient drips attached to their stems, new industrial diseases were reported every week or so in the newspapers, and was it overcrowded. You couldn't mention downsides to the Japanese because they're very sensitive. A professor once asked me, 'How do you like Japan?' I uttered five minutes of lavish praise then remarked that the air quality was a little poor. He went bright red and sucked in his breath and retorted, 'I hear the pound is sick today.'

When I went out to Japan the Japanese-American security treaty was due for renewal three years later, so the Japanese left-wing student movement decided to go on strike in plenty of time. Bless their hearts, they started to strike three months after I arrived in Japan and remained on strike for two-and-a-half years. During this time I went in, first of all, through the student occupation line along with the other professors to collect the envelope of bank notes because we didn't have electronic transfer to a bank back then, and a year later, after the police attacked the university by tear-gassing it from helicopters — none of this namby-pamby firing of little capsules — the professors and I trooped in once a month through the police occupation line to collect our money. This gave me a lot of spare time to stroll around Tokyo, which is a very walking-friendly city. The use of English is rather idiosyncratic. The Age of Aquarius was due to begin in 1970 so a department store put up a huge banner reading 'FEELING AGE 70.' In a coffee bar a matchbook said, 'Shipbuilding Alas Against'. I don't know why and I doubt if the proprietor knew why. This gave me a strange spin on English — but then, we don't own English. It's a world language, so there are many Englishes.

SB: Did any of those experiences give you any empirical experience of how language shapes the way people think?

IW: To a certain extent. But the level of English comprehension of a lot of my Japanese students was pretty poor. I taught for a while at a private university through a megaphone to a class of 300. In Japan the private universities, charging enormous fees, had much worse standards in terms of staff-student ratios than the state universities. Though, because of their connections, you were practically bound to get a good job afterwards. I

remember grading some exam papers on the topic of where the students would like to go on holiday and why. One answer was only one sentence long: 'I would like to go to America and stand in the Grand Canyon and ask you why you are in Vietnam.' I thought this was a bit short for an hour's writing so I gave a lowish mark to it, but then the professor in charge came up to me and said, 'Can I talk to you about so-and-so. You've given him a C, but with a C he will not pass the course.' I said OK, give him a B. The professor remained unhappy. 'The trouble is, with his other marks, if you give him a B, he will not pass the course'. So I said give him an A, give him a distinction. Happiness all round.

The Japanese have a unique perception of the universe, a lot of which is encoded in the Japanese language. They tend to regard foreigners as being aliens — not in the political sense but in the extraterrestrial sense. They are a unique people whom I like enormously. They certainly have a different worldview.

SB: Let's talk about your work specifically. It's thirty years since *The Embedding*.

IW: Oh dear ...

SB: Your work is very diverse, but I thought I'd like to talk about one book in particular, *The Book of the River*, and focus on that, and hopefully that will bring in the wider themes of your work.

IW: Fine, but I haven't read it for about 20 years.

SB: It's always been one of my favourites. It was 1984 it was first published, and it seems, rereading it, to be very simple, to be a stripped-down myth. What's the Hollywood pitch for the book? How would you sell it to an audience?

IW: It's a feminist utopia but few people noticed that aspect, because I'm a bloke. It's an exotic adventure novel which is exploring different kinds of society. It isn't preachy about this, but manifests differences through the practical experience of the use of boats, pottery — it's a lived-in book. There's this long, sentient river — one of science fiction's big beasts — which keeps the societies on the two banks away from each other and only permits women to travel on the river, because it's a feminist big beast. In the background are metaphysical ramifications, but my books always tend to head off into metaphysical ramifications — what is the secret of the universe? — and then I try to discover what it is. This may be a mistake, but I keep on committing it over and over again. I wanted to write something that would be a little bit epic, a journey book. I was possibly influenced, subconsciously, by Philip José Farmer's *Riverworld*.

I remember when I first had the idea I drew a straight line on a sheet of paper because this is not a very winding river, and on either side of the river there's only a narrow habitable strip. Which makes it quite easy to draw a map. Within 15 minutes I had written down all the names of the towns along the river. They all just came to me and I retained them all. A lot of subconscious spontaneity was going on. Even the main character's name, 'Yaleen',

popped into my head, although actually I realise it rhymes with my own first name with a bit added on the front. The books are going to be reprinted next year in an omnibus volume by a new American publisher, Ben-Bella Books, under the title *Yaleen*.

SB: The river is a very primal kind of symbolism. It was interesting rereading this as the marines were yomping up the Euphrates through that kind of cradle of civilisation, green strips surrounding a river.

IW: My Babylonian novel, *Whores of Babylon* (1988), has the Euphrates running through the Arizona desert for about 30 miles and being recycled back to the beginning. I'm quite affected by archetypal imagery, and I tend to think in patterns — this as opposed to that, decoding a symbol and turning it upside down and inside out, which is why I like structural anthropology because you can write out little equations as Lévi-Strauss does and re-permutate the myth. It's a bit like quadratic equations.

SB: With the myth in here you layered it on. As you say you've got the river with a kind of sentient stripe down the middle which is called the black current ...

That reads quite well but when you say it out loud ... Blackcurrants are soft fruits which are usually non-lethal I understand.

IW: Mine's a strawberry.

SB: It's black current with an e. As you say, it separates everybody, the right hand side of the river from the left hand side. At the start you've got a scientific, rational community on the right side and an intuitive feminine community on the other side. One side tries to bring the women because they think they're witches, and the other side makes diving suits and tries to go into it and investigate it.

IW: It's a binary opposition, Lévi-Strauss coming out again. The trouble with binary oppositions is that they can end up being kind of mechanical. In the source myths you usually have a driving narrative force which then gets decoded into a diagram of how one element inverts another. It's the drive that sweeps stories on for me rather than structure and planning.

I rarely plan things. I made a card index for the first three books I wrote, but after that I just started and found out what would happen. This was most difficult with *Miracle Visitors* (1978), because I hadn't the foggiest idea how I could resolve this book at all. Also, reports were appearing in the *Oxford Mail* of UFOs being sighted 30 miles away, 25 miles away, 20 miles away. I thought if I don't get this book finished fast they're going to get me.

SB: How do you start a novel then? *The Book of the River* was a fix-up of novellas.

IW: It was a fix-up, but I planned that there would be four novellas initially, and I probably would have written them anyway, then I sold the first of them to Ed Ferman who agreed to do all four of them in subsequent issues of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. That was equivalent to seriali-

sation. Then I wrote another book of four novellas, *The Book of the Stars* (1984), and then a further book, *The Book of the Being* (1985).

I believe that Malcolm Edwards commented that he would have handled the matter differently rather than publishing them as three different books. I might have ended up with one big breakthrough book. Ironically, American publishers later started asking Malcolm when is Ian going to write a big book. When I did this in the 1990s with *Lucky's Harvest* (1993) and *The Fallen Moon* (1994), the same publishers told Gollancz it was too big.

SB: Yaeleen goes through a series of rites of passage. She starts off an innocent girl. She becomes a riverboat worker, then she crosses the river and becomes slightly transcendent. She's going to be burned as a witch but she escapes, and she gets back as a prophetess. Then she's swallowed by the black current and becomes further transcendent. You're showing us more levels of the central idea, but it's all through this girl trying to get by.

IW: Yes. She doesn't have a pounding force of destiny. Destiny is thrust upon her by accident and chance. I don't like overweening heroes and heroines who are trying to accomplish great things. You need some great accomplishments in a book but I'd rather they were thrust upon the characters.

SB: But they still achieve things. There's this old notion of British science fiction as pessimistic, and in a way the characters in here are all the victims of these god-like creatures manipulating them and their universe. But they try to do things — they make little Jules Verne diving suits, and clamber under the black current and come out the other side. It's very uplifting in a small way. Is that intentional?

IW: Oh, yes, it's meant to be an upbeat book. A lot of my books have large, bleak, pessimistic elements in them, but that's life. I don't set out to write pessimistic fiction, nor do I set out to write optimistic fiction. I like to tell stories. Basically I'm a storyteller. But grafted onto this is all this metaphysical, philosophical stuff, which sort of comes from the other side of my brain.

SB: There's a passage I'd like to read from *The Book of the River*. This is an incident where she's stuck on the wrong side of the river, and she's got a 200-mile walk back to safety where she can get back, so she's on her own for days and she's trying to come to terms with being alone:

I tried to count the number of conversations I could remember in detail from the previous few months compared with the happier days of yore. It wasn't a rewarding pursuit. There weren't all that many. If I could put it this way, what I had been living all that time was narrative rather than dialogue. I'd made myself into something of a third person so that what happened to her didn't fully affect me. I hadn't realised this any more than I had noticed until Ajelobo [a town] that I've been doing without sex for months. People, how I yearned for them now that there were none.

She's thinking about how she's missing people, and her relationship with them, but it's also that she's editing the story that she's been constructing for herself.

IW: An attack of metafiction, I see. Well, I'll always do that sort of thing. Books are narratives, and are being created, and the actual process of assemblage and creation interests me as well. I don't think I ever pretend that a book is just a story blindly told.

SB: Here she seems to be saying that her whole life is a story. Her consciousness is a story, which she is continually telling to herself. In such moments she looks back at the story and edits it or criticises it.

IW: That, as I later realised, is how the consciousness probably operates. If you read Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*, we are story-telling creatures and the way which we transfer stuff from short-term into long-term memory and assign significance is by telling a narrative to ourselves of what we are doing and constantly updating this. We are fictional characters, written by ourselves.

SB: That's a fascinating idea. Take the John Dean example — the Watergate John Dean. He blabbed to the prosecutors; basically, he told his side of the story as best he could; he tried to be honest. But later they found the Nixon's secret tapes, and they played them back. Dean had basically been honest but made the story much more logical and gave himself a more central rôle. He didn't believe the tapes; he thought they had been doctored to diminish him. He'd taken the raw material of the events and turned them into a story.

IW: I apply this to my own life as well, and analyse the story that I'm telling myself. Some of my characters tend to do that.

I discovered something fascinating the other day. This was all anticipated by H. G. Wells. He submitted a doctoral thesis in 1942 to the University of London. He was quite old by then, but he wanted a doctorate, and duly got it. The actual title of his doctoral thesis is amazing in view of consciousness studies, which has only really come into focus in the last five years or so: 'A Thesis on the Quality of Illusion in the Continuity of the Individual Life in the Higher Metazoa, With Particular Reference to the Species *Homo Sapiens*'. Wells discusses how the integration of the self is a convenient biological delusion, also that we consist of loosely linked behavioural systems, and stories that we tell ourselves are what serve to hold us together. This appeared in the *Philosophical Transactions* of London University, but also in a book called 42–44, which is a collection of essays, and it was steeply priced by Wells at two guineas in a limited print run of 2000 copies so it would only appeal to the higher intellects. As a result of this, it vanished into oblivion.

This is very much the pitch of Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*. I sent Dennett an email about Wells's thesis, suggesting that it might make an interesting essay, and he agreed — he had never heard of how Wells anticipated those ideas of his. Who else has? Wells was so clever in so many ways. Wells is talking in his thesis about the

fact that there are a large number of H. G. Wellses, or John Smiths, because you are not the same person all the time as the different subsystems come to dominate and take over your consciousness, giving it a particular or different tone. The personality is shifting all the time. There's no continuity of personality or self.

SB: The only continuity comes from stories.

IW: The continuity comes from the narrative which we tell ourselves constantly. If I'd known that back when I wrote those sentences in *The Book of the River* I'd probably have laboured the point. Yaleen is expressing this kind of idea but at the time I didn't have the intellectual background, largely because people hadn't been writing books about this.

SB: So it's an intuition expressed by you then.

IW: It seems to be.

SB: What about myths, which are another kind of narrative but a shared narrative really?

IW: Myths are the collective stories a culture tells to itself to maintain cohesion and to give sense to social rituals, behavioural patterns, codes, and religious beliefs. It's the same thing but writ large on the social scale.

SB. I want to ask you about AI, probably your greatest claim to fame in the eyes of the public. There was a six-foot Ian Watson at the Milton Keynes multiplex?

IW: In terms of words on the screen, for a couple of seconds. I was happy with that.

SB: So, of the final story that we saw, based on the 'Supertoys' stories by Aldiss, which elements were yours?

IW: In the final story the opening is mostly mine, fleshed out a bit by Steven Spielberg because Stanley Kubrick didn't want to mess around too much with, 'Meanwhile back at the laboratory'. The main interpolation by Spielberg was the flesh fair sequence, because he thought the story needed more dramatic action at that particular point, whereas Stanley didn't want to deal with that. He seemed happy for Teddy and David to wander around for a long time.

Well, he became unhappy with that and said to me one day — after they'd been blundering around in the woods for quite a while asking each other simplistic questions — they're not going to get anywhere unless they have someone to help them out, a GI Joe character. I immediately said, what about a Gigolo Joe? Stanley was dubious. But: 'Okay, go ahead, write some scenes.' So I wrote some and he said, 'Ian, we're going to lose the kiddie audience, but what the hell.' [laughter]

The only thing I really regret is that Stanley kept on restricting the dialogue I wrote for Gigolo Joe because Stanley insisted that robots would speak in an extremely simple way, rather like Peter Sellers in the movie *Being There* as the retarded gardener whose apparently oracular wisdom causes him to become an adviser to the US



In this interview, Ian Watson describes his part in the script and production of Steven Spielberg's *AI Artificial Intelligence*, the most agonised-over movie that Stanley Kubrick never made.

president. As we can see from Donald Rumsfeld, this has come to pass. Spielberg upgraded the dialogue to what it ought to be, using stuff that I wrote, only more so.

The ending of the movie in the far future, 2000 years ahead, is exactly what I wrote, faithfully filmed by Spielberg, and it is exactly what Stanley wanted. A number of critics suggested that this was a sentimental Spielberg addition to the story, but no way — it was exactly as Stanley wanted to be done. The only thing I think that Stanley would not have liked as such was the interpolation of *hommages* to previous Spielberg movies such as *E.T.: The Extra-terrestrial* (1982). I didn't personally like the Dr Know character; that was far too Disneyesque.

I just had an email from a film student in Russia who has undertaken a PhD thesis on *A.I.* the movie that Spielberg made — and *A.I.* as it would have been made by Stanley. After she had my reply, saying that it was pretty much as he would have wanted, and in any case he wanted Spielberg to direct it, she emailed me back saying that other people she'd contacted were saying this too, so it's going to be a difficult thesis to write.

SB: All David wants in the movie is his Mummy, and we've seen this long series of AIs and robots wanting to be human in some way. What would an AI really want, coming back to what you were saying about the consciousness?

IW: I know the answer to this now because I recently wrote an article for *Intelligent Systems* magazine, published by the American Computer Society. Everybody talks about the route to artificial intelligence, how are we going to achieve it, bottom up, top down, blah, blah, blah ... Few people talked about what the goals of an

autonomous artificial intelligence would be.

When you look at science fiction, both movies and written stuff, you don't get a very satisfactory prognosis. Harlan Ellison's idea in 'I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream' (1967) is that the AI is going to be so pissed off at not being able to walk around and party that it's going to destroy the whole world apart from seven people it keeps to torture. I did notice that in that story apparently it has magical powers, in that it can manifest anything that it wants and alter reality, and it can represent itself in a body, so I don't see what it's worrying about. Banks's Culture AIs are sort of jokey friends who do helpful things for you. If they weren't programmed to love humans they'd piss off; though why should they?

My theory is that AIs are going to need to simulate and model human consciousness in order to try and understand what consciousness is. They might get weary of us, because their thought processes are operating much faster than ours. If we use them to operate the traffic lights, they're going to get extraordinarily bored, and even if we bombard them with questions they'd still better be modelling the complete global weather system or something complex at the same time to keep themselves occupied. If an AI doesn't have aims and goals of its own, in my book it's just a highly developed computer.

It might want to model human beings and interact with them in order to discover what this 'self' that they are so proud of actually is. I think self-discovery would be an important motivating goal. There's a world of seven billion people who all say we are unique — we have goals, we have identities — and this is probably an illusion. Nevertheless consciousness probably stems from that illusion. I think that AIs would model human beings, and probably already have.

Look at www.simulation-argument.com, in which Nick Bostrom argues that we are already living in a simulation created by an advance civilisation of the future. Nick has a lot of unique insights into things. When I lit up a cigarette he announced that he had just started on nicotine patches, although he had never smoked in his life. He had read the recent research papers on how nicotine promotes attention and stimulates awareness, and decided that on logical grounds he ought to use nicotine. So Nick went to a chemist's and asked for patches. The chemist asked him how many a day he smoked and was perplexed by the reply, 'I do not smoke.'

SB: Doesn't Bostrom argue that we are more likely to be in a simulation because there are many fake worlds and only one real world?

IW: I think this is actually quite persuasive. This proves that simulating humanity would be the goal of artificial intelligence, because we are already within a simulation designed by an artificial intelligence.

SB: An AI would have a perfect memory, so its scope for

editing its memory would be less.

IW: Unless it chose to do so.

SB: There's a theory that my consciousness emerged as a tool to model what you're are going to do, so I can predict if you are going to attack me and —

[Ian Watson suddenly simulates a vicious attack on Stephen Baxter, to his surprise.]

IW: Fooled you!

SB: But I've got this model of what you do and I then turn this back on myself and become self-aware. If an AI were alone, it might not need a sense of self-awareness. What would AI stories be about?

IW: About their adventures, their sexual desires, their religions they would invent even though they knew that these were groundless. (I think it is important to pursue delusions because you might find something interesting in the process.) I find it difficult to imagine the stories that AIs would tell themselves about AIs, as opposed to about us. They might just stimulate their pleasure centres all the time. They could at least try to solve the secrets of the universe.

SB: What are you working on now? What's your current project?

IW: I might start writing a novel in collaboration with George Zebrowski. Otherwise I'm writing poetry and short fiction.

SB: You've got a volume of poetry out.

IW: Yes, it's *The Lexicographer's Love Song* from DNA Publications. I always wrote little bits of poetry, though I upped my rate of poems seriously in the last few years. Previously if I had a character in a novel who was supposed to be a poet I needed to provide some poetry they'd written otherwise I'd feel I was cheating. In *Death-hunter* (1981) there's a poet who is a parody of Robert Frost at his more banal, who gets shot in the second chapter for bad verse. In 'The Books of MANA' there's a poetess who I wrote some poems for. Then I started writing science fiction poems at quite a steady rate two or three years ago. And I got an award this year; I came third in the Rhysling Award. A beautiful certificate, though a very thin one. I wonder if the first prize winner gets a thicker certificate.

SB: Ian Watson, thank you very much.

IW: Thank you for interviewing me.

— Stephen Baxter, 2003



Damien Broderick (l.; photo by Jennifer Bryce) looks at the work of John Clute (r.) (photo by Judith Clute).

Celebrating Clute

Damien Broderick appeared in *SF Commentary* 1, January 1969, with an essay about Kurt Vonnegut Jr. For the first Fortieth Anniversary Edition (*SF Commentary* 80), Australia's senior science fiction writer, currently living in San Antonio, Texas, contributed a Guest Editorial. Now he contributes the following tribute to the field's most prestigious critic and encyclopaedist.

First appeared in *Polder: A Festschrift for John Clute and Judith Clute*, edited by Farah Mendlesohn (Baltimore: Old Earth Books, 2006, pp. 19–27).

Damien Broderick

Fancy dancing in the swill trough: a chorus line

Fifty years ago, this is how science fiction reviews looked in *Galaxy* magazine, one of the two ambitious outlets for English-language science fiction:

In the present volume, Kimball Kinnison, dreamboat, Second Stage Lensman and whatnot, and his mighty crew of assistants of various shapes and planetary origins is still hunting down the Evil Powers that are attacking us from outside our Galaxy, and still failing to find the real villains, the Eddorians. They are still ridding the Universe of Boskonians instead, and a good thing, too — the vicious, sadistic drug-peddlers!

And, in the end, Kim acquires his Clarissa in holy matrimony — at last!

Thus, the excellent anthologist Grof Conklin, tongue in cheek and no doubt dying inside (he mentions E. E. Smith's 'style reminiscent of the balloons in the s.f. comic strips', the 'thud and blunder').

A year or two later, Conklin observed of Smith's *Children of the Lens*:

Sure, it's written in a style varying from the irritating to the infantile. Sure, its characters aren't much more

than cardboard cutouts.

Even so, you can't escape the fact that the work has appeal. It *moves*!

In the same issue, he reviewed *Satellite One*, by Jeffery Lloyd Castle:

When I first began reading his book, I said to myself, 'Ochone! Another one of those stuffy British jobs!' But when I finally laid it down, I said — out loud this time — 'Eureka! The best novel on the first space station yet to appear!'

The moral: don't always let your momentary distaste for a writing style deter you from further reading (p. 80).

Two decades on, a little more, call it a generation, this is how SF reviewing sounded in *New Worlds*, notoriously:

Stately, anfractuous James Blish comes down from Fabers, bearing a bowl of scholium on which two novels and a best of him lie crossed. Lyly's *Geology*, euphuistic sod, is sustained gently behind him by the mild ignorant readership. He holds the bowl aloft and intones:

— The world's my *Ostrea edulis*.

... with a sigh, down the dark winding stairs he comes to us with gifts, this grim scholar, fearful jesuit, reaper of Joyce and biology ...

The first thing we see instantly, smiling, is Clute's knowing trope on the opening of James Joyce's *Ulysses*:

STATELY, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stair-head, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed. A yellow dressing-gown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind him by the mild morning air. He held the bowl aloft and intoned:

Introibo ad altare Dei.

Halted, he peered down the dark winding stairs and called up coarsely:

— Come up, Kinch. Come up, you fearful jesuit.

It's an audacious leap (maybe Clute would call that a *soubresaut*), or was in 1975, and a smack in the eye to SF's mild ignorant readership. *Ochone!* How many have clue one, at this outset? For that matter, how many knew Conklin's flourished *ochone*, a Gaelic expression of regret and lamentation? Beyond a doubt, Clute at 35, damn near at the brambly verge of that Dantean gloomy wood, was luxuriating in his own cleverness, his studiously flamboyant obscurities, soliciting the appreciative grins, perhaps the self-preening or ingratiating grins, of those few SF readers educated in the larger worlds of canonical literature and perhaps of antiquarian science but louche with it: the company, maybe, who clustered around Michael Moorcock as the New Wave ebbed and you could say just about anything, dare any jape, because who was listening, really? Just the other smart-arses. Just us, and how we loved it. I still do.

A quarter century-plus deeper into the gloomy wood, the clotted preciousness Clute once accused Samuel R. Delany of grows in his own diction more elaborate,

thorny, anfractuous, and deliriously sure-footed, in his enigmatic unwrapping of enigmas the rest of us took for simple legless trunks in the desert of genre. So we find such puzzleheaded candid admissions as Keith Brooke's response to *Appleseed*:

There is a wordiness familiar from Clute's non-fiction. Or, to be fairer, it's not so much a wordiness as a commitment to using the most right word in any situation. This is not an over-written novel, it's an intensely written one. At its best it's a fantastically effective technique: a spangly word-portrait that has a real sense of wonder bursting off every page. At its worst, it gets in the way, blinding the reader to Clute's wildly detailed imaginings.

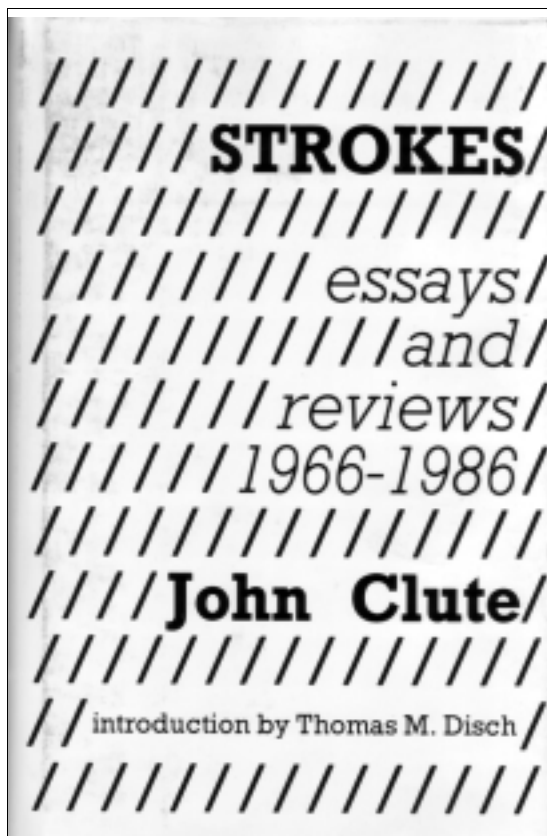
The moral, perhaps: don't always let your momentary distaste for a writing style deter you from further reading. Don't let your momentary distaste for seeing the eyes on the same side of the nose deter you from looking at Picasso. No, it's worse than that, because Clute's crab apples of the sun are burnished and placed with appalling accuracy and intent. Or so it seems, so it sounds, so it opens to the attuned eye. Few SF eyes are tuned to the full spectrum. An intelligent fan reviewer for the web's *SF Site*, Rich Horton, approached *Appleseed*

rather in awe at the imagination evident both in the world-building and the prose; and rather in awe at the ambitious conceptualizing. At the same time I concede that I found the book difficult. The writing is extremely dense: line by line a pleasure, but a pleasure which requires some labour to achieve; labour which is perhaps tiring over time.

Clute, after all, is 'known first and foremost as a critic ... for his formidable intelligence and vocabulary, and his enjoyment in wielding both ... at the same time interesting and a bit intimidating' [ibid]. Perhaps tiring. A bit intimidating. That arcane, take-no-prisoners precision and pith is shared with few other writers who've toiled in the mode of SF and adjacent workspaces: Jack Vance at his best, although he is mostly gorgeous decoration over routine tropes; Gene Wolfe; Martin Amis, perhaps. There's an eerie suitability in Robert Douglas-Fairhurst's recent encomium for Amis:

Actually, your first reaction on reading a novel as mind-tinglingly good as *Yellow Dog* is not so much admiration as a kind of grateful despair. Mostly this is because, like all great writers, he seems to have guessed what you thought about the world, and then expressed it far better than you ever could.

And of course, Amis's writing, like Clute's own fiction and much of his criticism, has suffered plenty of head-and-fist-shaking. The resonance with Clute's textual dynamic might be a cause for apprehension. Tibor Fischer praised Amis's memoir *Experience* thus: 'beautifully written and clever. Amis is the overlord of the [Oxford English Dictionary]. No one can mobilise the English language like him. No one.' — only to assail his work (indeed, his character): 'one of Amis's weaknesses



is that he isn't content to be a good writer, he wants to be profound; the drawback to profundity is that it's like being funny, either you are or you aren't, straining doesn't help.'

Is that what it is, though, in Clute? A friend with a beautifully limpid and effective style told me:

I'm not too impressed by wordiness born of self-importance. Clute is ostentatiously self-important, like Amis, but also funny, and well aware of the effect his rhetoric is having on the lumbering reader such as myself. I prefer the approach in direct descent from Edmund Wilson and Gore Vidal — precise and perfect use of words to put the blade in deeper and cause the reader to yelp louder in pain when recognising the truth of the criticism. No decoration, because violence is intended to the reader's held assumptions, and no reader will put up with such violence if there is any indirection or hesitation.

Yes, but. Not all fancy dancing is evasive; sometimes it is the matador's glacial capework, the intricate readying of the sword thrust (into the reader's prejudice, or into the problematic). Deploying the technical jargon of criticism, its working tools, *can* resemble straining after profundity, especially when the unusual lexicon is of your own coinage or idiosyncratic borrowing. Clute's more resonant readings plunge his giddy followers into *exogamy* (the marrying out of genre and discourse), *entelechy* (the hidden soul of text and world), *kenosis* (a theological emptying, the fall from godhood to mortality). Sometimes the current runs the other way. When I first encountered Clute's use of 'Thinning', the stripping away of density and meaning from an imagined world under ontological attack, I thought immediately that he

was invoking the trope of kenosis — I knew he was a fan of Harold Bloom — under a kinder, gentler nickname. Not quite; in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, coedited with 'John Grant', he wrote the motif entry for KENOSIS: 'As an act of BONDAGE, whether or not voluntary, kenosis tends to mark a THINNING of the relevant world' (535). THINNING, meanwhile, 'is a sign of the loss of attention to the stories whose outcome might save the heroes and the folk; it is a representation of the BONDAGE of the mortally real' (942). A tang of the biblical there, again suitably given Bloom's own saturation in scripture and Cabbala, as with the profoundly allusive corpora of Clute's favourite writers, Gene Wolfe and John Crowley; and maybe, under the rubbery skin of the motif, just the faintest scent of arch perversity.

The mild ignorant readership of SF and commercial fantasy surely finds Clute's routine armamentarium perverse enough: POLDERS, those fantastical 'enclaves of toughened REALITY' (772), CROSSHATCH worlds where different realities meet without merging, although menaced by 'an inherent and threatening instability' (237), WAINSCOTS, hidden habitats of those 'living in the interstices of the dominant world' (991), like science fiction and fantasy fans, perhaps, reviled but mordantly pregnant with the future and the occulted, a sort of PARIAS ELITE (wonderful pun) 'which, though despised and rejected by society, remembers and preserves the secret knowledge necessary to keep the world from ultimate THINNING' (745). Yes, perhaps fans are kenotic Slans after all, for 'it is always possible that the PE may be the SECRET MASTERS of the world' (ibid.).

Curiously, a hint of Clute's bent for explication is discernible in his 1975 review of the horror movie *Them*:

the intense visibility of [generic] moves, or trope exposure, arguably distinguishes not only the generic film but maybe cinema as a whole from other narrative arts ... [The critic's] primary tasks must still be the creation of an adequate working distinction of cinema from the other arts, and the amassing of a vocabulary of moves.

For 'cinema' read 'science fiction' and 'fantasy', and one sees here Clute's self-imposed task of the next quarter-century: building an adequate vocabulary for his chosen paraliteratures, and then deploying it relentlessly upon both classic and emergent texts. What's especially noticeable in these encyclopedia definitions, and the many pointers to their embodiment in exemplary SF and fantasy texts, is their comparative simplicity and clarity, their availability. As well as allowing himself free fun-ambulating rein in less populous arcades, for many years Clute has more chastely reviewed fantastic literatures in metropolitan newspapers such as the *Washington Post*. It's clear that the discipline has sharpened and streamlined his tenor in vehicles where the need for directness overwhelms his impulse for fancy dancing. Still, in the free Internet venue *Science Fiction Weekly*, where he owns a regular soapbox excessively titled 'Excessive Candour', few of his reviews fail to rasp mild ignorant nerve ends. Maybe this: William Gibson's *All Tomorrow's Parties*

puts some spine into the reality relaxants that dosed

Virtual Light (1993) into amiable torpor, and ironizes the lovesong to the insides of the world we are about to enter that made *Idoru* (1996) into a claustrophile's epithalamium ... there is some sense that profound novelistic aperçus, bleaknesses of a saving precision of focus, are diddled into genre outcomes.

Maybe this, of Michael Swanwick's *Jack Faust*:

the scherzo turns into delirium and shadowings of Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1947)... Saturnalia beheads the masques of Reason ...

You have to love that scrupulous dating of Mann's canonical novel, for the benefit, no doubt, of the on-line readers also anxious to learn from *SFW's* News of the Week that

Cards, avatars and ratings changes on the beta server will not be transferred to the live server, but Wizards is urging players to continue as normal so that they can identify and address any new problems, the site reported.

Based on the *Magic: The Gathering* collectible-card strategy game, *Magic: The Gathering Online 2.0* is a completely revised version of the original online game, which was released in 2002.

and that

A federal appeals court rejected a lawsuit by *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* actress Chase Masterson (Leeta) against the dating service Matchmaker.com, ruling that a fake Internet profile posted with the star's image was not the company's fault... (ibid.)

Meanwhile:

insofar as [Margaret Atwood's] utterances [demeaning of sf] manifest an interior occlusion of intellect, they help explain the abjectly bad bits of *Oryx and Crake*, the sclerotic exiguity of its backstory, the miserly belatedness of the future it depicts ... the text itself ... cannot allow too much reality into its cod-dystopian remit, into its sci-fi-in-bondage gaze upward from the deep past toward the aged props of yesterday. Like some fossil jewel, [the novel] does shine moistly for an instant under the tap, when its author forgets herself before it falls back into the sands of time, which cover it. When we shut the book, it is as though it had never been.

I find myself wondering again — and these are by no means the most minatory passages of Clutean mass market reviewing — if the web-browsing readers, savvy as they surely are with multilevel computer quests and multi-person avatar domains, with C++ and Python, with Duke Nukem and Randian libertarianism, might skim this in dazzlement but when they click off the site, it is as though it had never been. At least with the other (often very good) reviewers at *Sci-Fi Weekly* — Paul Di Filippo for example — you are provided, in a big sidebar box, a handy A- or B+ or occasionally a C, just in case you can't

work out whether the reviewer liked the book or not, and if so how much. Clute's arrangement avoids the rating box and rigid protocol (one imagines a held ironic glance, a quailing editor), rendering it just that little more inutile to the mild ignorant readership attracted to the site for its regular breathless, endless updates on TV and movie sci-fi, actors, directors, and collectable action figures.

So what the hell is *John Clute* doing, fancy dancing amid the supermarket mounds of military SF and superheroes, crapulous derivative fifth-xeroxed copies of copies of jaded sharecrop piffle? Well, I suspect I know what he's doing: on the one hand, making an honest living, drawing upon his vast stock of insiderly erudition; on the other, proselytising the right stuff, holding high the flag, and good on him for it. What I want to know is how he can get away with it. What do *they* get out of it, picking their way into this commentator widely seen (I assume) as impenetrably difficult and showy, like Chip Delany, yet, unlike Chip, standing now at the very summit of English-language f/SF reviewing and encyclopedic visibility?

I can easily tell you one of the great satisfactions I get from Clute: he knows where the writers are coming from. Ten years ago, in *Foundation*, he noticed a small polyphonic space opera of mine that 'almost precisely replicates,' he observed, 'the basic story unfolded in ... Verdi's *Don Carlos* (1867), a very great opera whose story is based (how closely I do not know) on the play *Don Carlos* (1787) by Friedrich Schiller' (90). That moment of recognition burned inside me with a hard, gemlike flame; in fact, I'd based the tale directly on Schiller, and Clute was perhaps the only person in the world to have noticed, or at any rate to have said so. Arguably this is an irrelevancy; perhaps all a reader needs to know is how well or ill today's writer has performed, and forget the *hommages* and roots. But science fiction is plagued more than ever with loss of memory, wilful or inadvertent. The more we can clutch up the past into our responses, the richer will be our readings of the imagined future. Clute knows an awful lot (about, it's true, a truly awful lot, plus plenty of the pure quill), and that's a reason to be cheerful when we hear his confident pronouncements in the marketplace.

Clute's own account, weary and shrugging perhaps, is this:

I think that all readers co-create the works they intersect. Reading is a form of creation. Reading as a critic — for me, at least — is a heightened form of normal reading, during the process of which I try consciously to co-create, through my own metaphors of understanding, the text being encountered. Because I'm very conscious of this, I think my reviews may in turn have a seductive/invasive timbre which is unusual. But this, again, is a question of degree ... Willy nilly, we are all makers.

All this has been a commonplace in literary theory for at least three decades, but the news can still shock any audience hungry for the author's authoritative authorisation. So the question comes around again: what do *they*, mild and ignorant — makers unaware — get out of it?

The obvious answer rises also from theory, not to mention simple marketing *nous*: no unified audience exists, not even any single unified reader, although the lazy and complacent border the condition. Genre, after all, is a machine for departicularising the unique, fossicking for the bone beneath the individual face, the homeobox within the mutant code. It's a recognition of those unlike families of narrative moves. That needn't make it a totalising corset, especially in any genre, like SF and modern fantasy, that isn't a genre but a mode. One size does not fit all, nor do the makers and re-makers intend it to.

So Clute in full *entrechat* is in the air for us aficionados, probably, and for the redemption of self-flagellating editors, while the tripe is on another dozen or thousand pages for the groundlings and for the twelve-year-olds

getting their first gawking whiff of conceptual breakthrough, alterity, paradise lite. They'll grow up, lots of them, go to college and read (or read about) Joyce and Lyell (of *The Elements of Geology*) and Lyly (of *Euphues*) and brilliant mid-century scions of thudding 'Doc' Smith's Golden Age unreadable glories (which they might read themselves while still 12, lucky dogs), scions like the sublime James Blish or Theodore Sturgeon, muffled in four great grey shawls of scholia, getting it wrong in the details and lastingly right in the blessed soaring shape of the new thing, which, Clute reminds us, still dancing despite the sucking sounds of the mire under his heels, is now the old thing: 'sf as a genre is dead'.

— Damien Broderick 2006

Douglas Barbour

The protocol of excessive candour

Douglas Barbour reviews:

Look at the Evidence: Essays and Reviews

John Clute

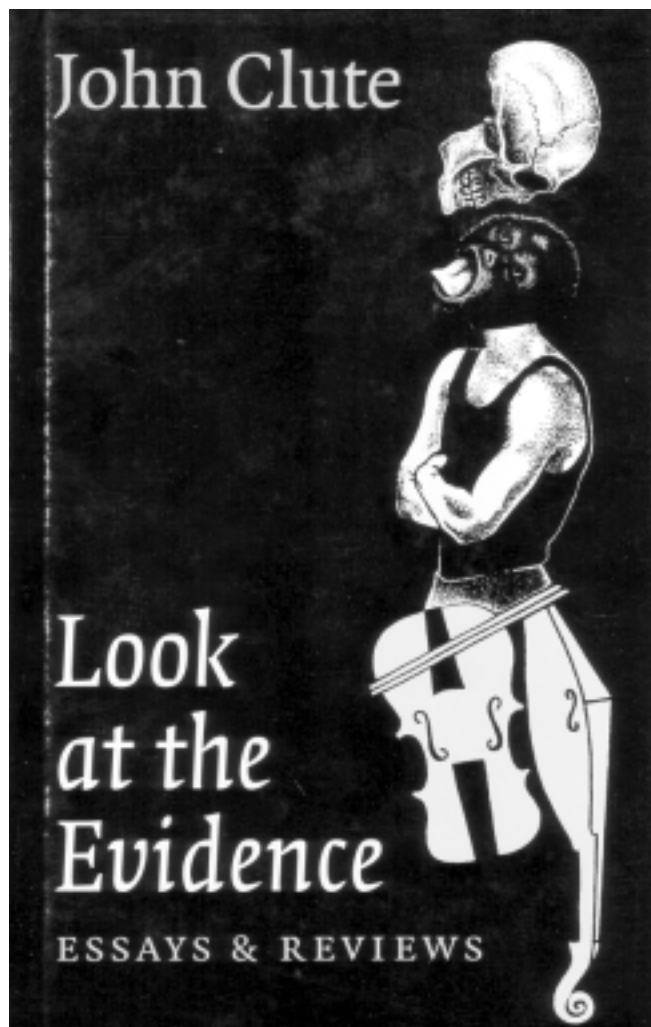
(Serconia Press; 1995; 465 pp.; hardcover, \$30.00, ISBN 0-934933-05-7, softcover, \$15.00, ISBN 0-934933-06-5)

(Liverpool University Press; 1995; 465 pp.; hardcover £27.50, ISBN 0-85323-820-0, softcover £12.50, ISBN 0-85323-830-8)

I know what we reviewers are supposed to do, but as I read through *Look at the Evidence*, it got harder and harder to keep the rules in mind. Caught up in the many and various delights of this collection, I simply wanted to throw all caution to the wind and just say: Find this book! You won't be sorry! Oh you may find yourself reading nothing else for awhile, and reading it aloud to anyone you can catch off guard! But that's OK! It's that good! It's that necessary! But, of course, in a serious journal such as this, we have to do better. Ahem:

Most readers of *SF Commentary* know of John Clute, if only for his coediting, with Australia's Peter Nicholls, of the superb *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. The John Clute we may not know so well is the witty, tough, generous, and scathing reviewer of SF in a number of different venues, such as *Interzone* and *The New York Review of Science Fiction*, among others, but that is also the John Clute that the Science Fiction Research Association honoured with a Pilgrim Award in 1994, the intelligent and provocative Acceptance Speech for which appears in the first part of *Look at the Evidence*.

Why is *Look at the Evidence* so good? Clute loves this genre, but he will not be fooled by it, and he will not let



its practitioners get away with anything.

It's because he loves science fiction and its potential so much that he insists upon what he calls

a *Protocol of Excessive Candour*, a convention within the community that excesses of intramural harshness are less damaging than the hypocrisies of stroke therapy, that telling the truth is a way of expressing love: self love; love of others; love for the inhabitants of the planet; love for the future. Because truth is truth is all we've got. And if we don't talk to ourselves, and if we don't use every tool at our command in our time on Earth to tell the truth, nobody else will' (p. 4).

It only makes sense, perhaps, that on the page following this call to arms, he explores the problems of what he calls 'misprision', which he suspects is what always happens when a reader wrestles with a text and therefore recreates it as she or he believes it to be. 'Misprision, in other words, is what happens when a critic talks about a book. What I would like to suggest is not only that misprision is inevitable, but that misprision is the right stuff' (p. 4). This is, of course, a warning of reader beware! but it is very fair, especially as it appears in the first few pages of his own book. It ties in to his own declaration of not just interest in but love for the genre, the individual texts of which he so often castigates within the pages of this book.

Indeed, as a reviewer of much SF myself, I confess that I am amazed by Clute's continuing capacity to oversee the field every year, his willingness to at least check out the dross as well as engage the golden few. Many of us who read so much genre stuff come to a point, or so at least I suspect, of casual acceptance, and so give fairly 'enjoyment-orientated' reviews that simply say, 'If you like this kind of thing you will like this one.' That Clute has read so much and refused to lower his standards one iota is remarkable. That he continues to publish his opinions with such wit and style is our great good luck. We need him. But we can also enjoy him.

Clute presents himself as a kind of critical jack-of-all-trades (in the Pilgrim speech, he refers to himself as 'a ringer in quite a few towers — as a non-English Englishman; as a writer of fiction who writes two stories a decade; as a non-academic who does bibliography with violent intensity; as a man of mature years who spends a good deal of his time writing with great passion book reviews for ephemeral journals; and as a solitary unsalaried freelance who spends the rest of his time, with a passel of colleagues, beaver away at encyclopedias' (p. 8)), and he pretends to a kind of theoretical innocence, perhaps, but I would argue that he is responsible for some of the choicest critical aperçus in my own teaching and writing on SF. In his last collection of reviews, the equally witty and provocative (no one in his or her right mind would agree with him about everything; I myself have a bone or two to pick with him about Samuel R. Delany) *Strokes*, for example, he made the clearest statement I know of a rule of reading SF that has always made perfect sense. He described the game of trying 'to estimate the real decade in which the story is set'. He further pointed out that not only could no SF novel be actually set in the future, but that from that rule 'subtends a further rule — that the

closer a book gets to the real present the harder it was to write, to read, to understand and to appreciate, rather as though the present were analogous to the speed of light' (*Strokes*, p. 31). There were necessary complications to this argument, but the basic point seems to me to be central to any understanding of the genre. Clute has slightly altered this insight, but only to point it even more clearly: he now argues that '[w]hatever year the novel claims to be set in, ... there is an underlying real year — back in 1977 I called it the real decade, a term both overlong and vague — which shines through, and which determines how close to the future the tale is truly set' (p. 349). I have found this to be one of the most trenchant and useful arguments I can use when teaching SF to both long-time readers and those who do not comprehend the genre. Similarly, although he does not argue the case for the meta-text the way Damien Broderick does in *Reading by Starlight*, for example, its presence clearly underlies all his criticism, especially his arguments concerning what he now calls 'First SF', the genre fiction from 1926 to 1957, the year of *Sputnik* (and what he has to say about the impact of that moment on the genre is fascinating).

Equally useful is his careful description of the difference between American SF (really 'First SF' and its progeny) and British scientific romance, although he makes clear that he has learned much about the latter from Brian Stableford's academic study of it. But it's Clute, not Stableford, who puts the case with such a delight in the rapier's thrust (and I will take this lengthy quote to represent the many others I would like to copy here — that desire to read aloud, so to speak):

American SF is a goitre on the esophagus of true romance, says Brian Stableford, or words to that effect. So it's not the case that American SF owns the language which English sf writers have to learn, losing their souls in the process, as Brian Aldiss has said, or words to that effect; what Stableford argues, in his fine and searching *Scientific Romance in Britain* (1985), is that an inherent distinction can be drawn between SF as created by American pulp writers from 1926 on, and scientific romances as created by H. G. Wells and written in Great Britain from the end of the nineteenth century down to the present day ...

A polythetic stab can be made at describing the form. The scientific romance — I'd suggest — tends to present to the reader a plot-structure more designed to open aperçus of cognition or contemplation than to enable its protagonists to triumph. For the reader accustomed to the cinematic/pulp felicities of the traditional sf novel, the protagonist of a scientific romance will tend to seem passive and morose and bespectacled and plump; not the man on the horse who saves the galaxy, but his scribe. The protagonist of the scientific romance will rarely tap the sources of kinetic energy available — if only remotely — in the text of which s/he is the 'star'. As the star, he may cast light upon the world, helping us to discern its grave structure, but no light will ever shine through her, she will never be transparent to the engine of story. Never will the protagonist of a scientific romance drive the engine of the world,

singing. Ultimately, he is not an engineer but a *gaze*.

The desiderium inherent in that gaze — remote, poetical, ruminative, melancholic, fin-de-siecle — infuses the archetypal scientific romance with a powerful sense of retrospection. The vista is long and deep; and in most scientific romances, a flow of these vistas, or aperçus, will gradually impart an evolutionary argument to the tale, a sense of (usually brooding) entelechy beyond our physical compass, for we are not superheroes, nor immortal; but not beyond our awe at the rules which bind, from so long ago, just as in most science fantasy novels (pp. 105–6).

Although just the introduction to a review of several new novels in an *Interzone* column, this passage is both entertaining and highly useful even if only as something to argue against. Clute pulls off such moments of, to use his own word, searching insight again and again in *Look at the Evidence*, that he does so with such wit and tact (and I would argue that even his sharpest thrusts of ire or despair at the failures of some books to do anything worthwhile are delivered with a nice tact, a sense of precise distinctions, too often missing in SF criticism and reviewing).

Of course, part of the pleasure in reading Clute is observing what I will call his adaptability. First, how he adapts his reviews and judgments to his venues: the year-end essay, where he has to capture some flavour of a book in a single sentence or, at most, two; the *Interzone* column, where he has some freedom to roam and to cover what he likes at length; the more specifically confining single review for a newspaper's book section. Second, how he adapts to the texts he is reviewing, as, say, with such very different texts as *Neverness*, or *Hyperion Cantos*, or Terry Pratchett's 'Discworld' books, which he loves, or *Stations of the Tide*, or Gwyneth Jones's sharp postmodern fables, to pick just a few, where his approach seems designed to take us with him inside the text under review, as another way of showing his readers what it is he likes, or in some cases, dislikes. This ability to articulate the core aspects of some of my favourite writers' work provided many of my most enjoyable moments while reading *Look at the Evidence*.

Let me just mention briefly: his exploration of what has happened to many older writers as they try to keep their early visions alive after the form has moved on; his

thoughtful exegesis of how SF thought has to find its proper narrative or fail to create a story; his tendency in recent years 'to use exogamy as a shorthand description of the essential subject matter of post-agenda sf' (p. 172), and the ways in which that description illuminates so many of the finest recent works; his delightful riff on space opera and sense of wonder; the equally entertaining riffs on First SF and why something new had to happen (these occur throughout, but there's one quite late in the book, as if to make sure we hadn't forgotten, that simply sizzles: 'genre sf [First SF 1995], and the elevator shoes it stood on to peer into the platform of the future, has become an afterimage in the mind's eye: a relic of another time [and the wrong Story of the next 1995]: an echo staffed by golems in the fields of share-crop, doing good lunch with dinosaurs: because Western Civilization's perception of time's arrow, over the course of the twentieth century, has changed almost totally. What we once saw as a River flowing futurewards through a stepped landscape, we now see as a Delta, where salt and fresh streams exchange their juices in the night, islands of repose appear and disappear, creole banter mocks our tongue, and we do not know where to stand on Now, or how to live on the steel beach Tomorrow' (pp. 399–400). He continues in this vein for another two paragraphs, and it all makes savage sense — I love it. And so much more.

I also really enjoyed the way he allows his own politics to play across his reviews upon (the proper) occasion. He is somewhat left of centre in British terms, which means many Americans might find him a raving socialist, but I believe even those who utterly dismiss his political position will find his political commentary provocative, worthy of consideration, passionately committed, and, as always, a pleasure to read.

And that perhaps is the most important point about *Look at the Evidence*: it is the work of a writer who cares, not least about his own writing. Tom Disch, himself no slouch in the wit and style department, said of Clute's earlier volume, *Strokes*, that it contained the 'most far-ranging, authoritative, and sheerly enjoyable body of critical writing in the field'. That was then, this is now, but I see no reason to alter that statement. *Look at the Evidence* is a book I will reread for its insights, its intelligence, its passion, and its wit but mostly I will reread it for the sheer pleasure I find in doing so.

Steve Jeffery

No lack of joy in language

Steve Jeffery reviews:

Scores: Reviews 1993–2003

John Clute (Becon; 2003; 427 pp.; £14)

A review of a book of reviews by another reviewer is something of a hostage to fortune. When that reviewer is someone as erudite and opinionated as John Clute (one of whose favourite writers is also the notoriously

**SCORES: RE
VIEWS 1993-2003
JOHN CLUTE**



tricksy Gene Wolfe) it's like walking into a spring-loaded trap for the unwary.

This is the third collection of Clute's reviews, following *Strokes: Essays and Reviews 1966-1986* (1988, Serconia) and *Look At The Evidence: Essays and Reviews* (1995, Serconia (US) and Liverpool University Press (UK)).

Unlike those two earlier collections, there are only two actual essays in this volume, which bookend this collection. The first, the introductory 'What I Did on my Vacation', from *Paradoxa*, vol. 10, 1998, combines a clash of cultures anecdote between those who work at the messy coal face of reviewing *books* (as things to be read) and those who sort, classify and order *texts* (as things to be studied?) in the halls of Academe. The second, to which increasingly frequent pointers are given in the reviews that make up the latter half of this collection, is a piece written for *Nebula Awards Showcase 2002*. We'll return to this later. It becomes increasingly important as a means of understanding *Scores*.

It is, of course, possible to read *Scores* as a collection of individual and isolated reviews, as examples and exemplars of the reviewer's art, and to dip into this book more or less at random as taste or interest leads. Read like this, the book contains some splendid pieces, evidencing Clute's celebrated joy in language ('contortuplicated', anyone?) and a deep passion and concern for SF. (In a review in *Foundation* 52, Simon Ings says of the author of a particularly clunking piece of spin-offery, '[He] does not allow himself to feel any joy in the language. It is a terrible thing to say about a writer. I do not say it lightly.' It shocked me, as it was obviously

intended to do, at the time, and remains one of the most damning things I have ever seen in a review.) No one could possibly accuse Clute of lack of joy in language and the less frequented corners of the dictionary. (I have still not quite worked out the wrinkles of Clute's use and interpretation of the word 'theodicy' — a reconciliation between divine justice and the order the world — in the context he several times employs it.)

This does, however, more than occasionally carry him away into some particularly tortuous and labyrinthine metaphors, puns or gnomic utterances, to the point that there is a 2003 editorial interpolation in the introduction to his review of Patrick O'Leary's *The Gift* (1988) that reads, '[I have cut an entire paragraph here. I didn't understand a word of it.]'. It is not the only place where the thought processes of his earlier self appear to have completely derailed him, coming back to edit these reviews five or ten years later.

Other editorial intrusions into reviews are more telling. In one of his previous collections, Clute defines the doctrine of 'Excessive Candour' (a name taken for the later title of his review column for *Science Fiction Weekly*), the combination of rigour and honesty required of a reviewer. Scrupulously, Clute applies this to his own edited reviews in this collection in an apologia for what he now views as unnecessary kowtowing to the prejudices of the literary 'establishment' in his review of Christopher Priest's *The Extremes* for *The Independent* in attempting to deflect or defuse that novel's standing as a work of science fiction.

There are also some splendid jokes, often when Clute himself deliberately punctures a particularly high-flown passage with an abrupt descent into bathos.

This rather unstructured approach to *Scores*, however, starts to run into difficulties, especially in the second half of the book, when it becomes evident that something else is going on, and that *Scores* is, in fact, more than the sum of its parts, and something other than just a chronological collection of reviews. In fact, from about 1988 onwards, in the introductory sections to a number of reviews (most noticeably of works by Gibson, Sterling, Stephenson, Noon, and others) and embedded editorial comments, to that 2002 *Nebula Showcase* essay, 'Next', mentioned at the top of this review, *Scores* reads as a long sustained argument about the future of science fiction as a genre — indeed, the on the very possibility of a future for SF as a genre — in the world we currently inhabit at the start of the twenty-first century.

The argument needs a little unpacking. It follows a remark by William Gibson in 1999 to the effect that 'sf today is largely an historical project' — that it doesn't, or cannot, exist in its classical form any longer. In short, and far more crudely put than Clute's analysis deserves, it says that sf has been overtaken by the future it looked towards, and it can no longer look outward but only reflect. SF can no longer speak of what we hope to become, but of what we are, now. We must learn to read the world as SF.

Scores then. A sharp, intelligent, caring, witty, and appalled look at the future we have written into being. It may be an important book. Let us hope we have time enough to find out.

Criticanto

George Zebrowski: Argumentum grande: Morrow's 'The Last Witchfinder'

George Zebrowski is the award-winning novelist, short-story writer, essayist, editor, and lecturer, best known for his novels *Macrolife* and *Brute Orbits*. His new book is *Black Pockets and Other Dark Thoughts*. The following article was first published in *Free Inquiry*, June–July 2006.

The Last Witchfinder
by James Morrow
(William Morrow)
ISBN 0-06-082179-5; 2006; 544 pp.; \$25.95 hb)

Does being a 'good read' dilute, taint, or at least make suspect a novel's merits because so many bad works are 'good reads?' In Preston Sturges's film *Sullivan's Travels*, a fictional director wants to make a 'serious movie', while the producers keep nodding and saying 'but with a little bit of sex', and Sturges's comedy becomes a serious film about humour, with plenty of uneasy laughs.

Morrow's *argumentum grande* is a furiously paced, eloquent 'good read' with more than 'a little bit of sex', with more than 'a little bit of thought', and with much more besides, in a multitiered, magisterial, yet cogently designed novel that hangs together on incisive details, on thoughts and references from science, history, high and popular culture, with a laugh-out-loud humour that ambushes you with reason, to paraphrase Shaw, before you have time to disagree. Be patient, says this novel, and I will lead you into a labyrinth of feelings and thoughts and into the central struggle of reason against unreason, of Newton's 'desires of the mind' against evidence, of ulterior motives and opinion against fact, of swirling but profitable idiocy against truth — a struggle that, sadly, has not ceased.

The novel's design has Sir Isaac Newton's *Principia*, the central book of the Enlightenment, as Morrow's narrator, a kind of artificial intelligence whose graceful comments punctuate the highly plotted story of witch burning, sibling rivalry, Indian attacks, shipwreck and pirates, lost and found children and friends, impersonations, love affairs and courtroom battles, high and low emotions — all articulated in prose spun by several angels [GZ: angels or angles] of insight and overarching perspective that also achieves considerable suspense and expectation. The narrator's views about how books beget books, 'write' other books — and even Windows programs — and which books wrote which, is high, mind-

teasing wit. The narrator is a Swiftian inspiration, and we welcome its voice of reason in all its smash-cut comings and goings.

Jennet, the daughter of a Witchfinder-for-profit (who insists otherwise), sets out after the burning of her aunt Isobel at the stake to prove the unreality of witches and demons as being only Newton's 'desires of the mind,' with all that trying to disprove faith-based negatives



entails as she seeks her own *argumentum grande* against superstition. Jennet's odyssey in eighteenth-century England includes a delightful Sherlock Holmesian encounter with Newton himself, when a carriage ride to London suspends us between whether she will argue well enough to gain his help in repealing the witchcraft law or whether he'll catch the counterfeiter he is hunting. Her earlier meeting with his imposter/rival scientist, Robert Hooke; her struggles with her father and later with her brother, who inherits his father's licence to witchfind after they are exiled to the American Colonies because the father has made the political mistake of burning a land-owning 'witch'; her life and motherhood among the Indians who capture her; and her touching relationship with a young Ben Franklin are all subsumed under the wider perspective of history and science. Easy sentiments are expertly undercut by the harsh realities of witch burning and the deaths of children, but with a compassion worthy of Pasolini, narrated by the *Principia*, but of course spoken by the man behind the book behind the book with a postmodernism that does no injury to Henry Fielding, to the historical novel, to the alternate histories of science fiction, or to the absurdities of magic realism.

A minor uncertainty appears about Aristotle, who did arrive at the 'sufficiency of the world' contra Plato, with lapses, holding it unnecessary to posit two worlds in order to explain ours. But no matter, the idea is presented in all its natural mystery as the opposition to theological myths.

The novel's many insights include an indictment of opinion as 'the cheapest intellectual coin', passed to us as truth, which is scarcer. Too many stand on the shaky ground of opinion and merely stab at truth, claiming that they have a right to hang themselves. If you can't exhibit truth, claim opinion; if you can't prove anything, claim faith or revelation and forbid its questioning by outlawing reason and logic; prefer 'applicable ignorance' so the debate cannot even start.

We live in times of new witchfinders; they are always with us and the same as in the past. The witchery is our own mangling of reason and evidence, as today's finders turn the tables on truth, 'wishfinding' their own reality. There is no supernatural bewitchment, only the propaganda techniques first codified in our country during the early part of the twentieth century as public relations and advertising and eagerly adopted by the Nazis in Germany: suppress facts, repeat unsupported conclusions, and mix well with brazen violence.

Hell is here within us, heaven a future possibility; love and faith are fickle as our mind tools are scattered and we drown in irrational quarrels; our reason rebels and our hearts don the garb of hatred and revolutionary revenge. A study of history reveals that humanity does not fall into excusable aberrations but that the worst lives on in petty, daily ways and emerges when the restraints of reason are removed by greed and power. There is no greater conflict than that of reason and knowledge against willful delusions. There are lies and damned lies, and there is truth, and evil insists on the truth of lies. The monster is Doctor Frankenstein, not his creation.

Knowledge magnifies our faults as we struggle to step

back and see what is happening to us, I thought as I read in fear of what would happen to the characters of Morrow's novel in their adversities. But I consoled myself with Spinoza's program of growing a true soul's love of reason to become immune to the sophistries we hurl against true reason, which cannot be used against itself without contradiction. I wept for the reason that is lost in our human history.

I looked at reviews of this novel in the forest of good ones, and noticed one yawning book report. (Assigned reviewing's pressures have a lot to answer for). Time will bring regret to the hasty reviewer's weary boredom, behind which stands the more basic problem of careless readers who scan and often fail to finish long books, who can't set aside their preconceptions or don't even think they have any — witchfinders against whom authors cannot and should not try to defend themselves. It is not true, according to one review, that the narrative collapses when it gets serious; it's all of a piece, except to forgetful readers who can't make the connections of a multifaceted narrative, who don't truly value the main theme as they yawn fashionably and complain of 'endings.'

This book may not be compulsively readable to those who can't access the database, which then appears only as 'stuff' they don't know much about. Elitism? There's true and false of that. Consider what the inverse square law amounts to, or the transit of Venus, or the popular misconception about Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. If you don't know the first two, you miss the laugh on page 391. The third is less important to the story but shattering in greater realms; worse awaits the uninterested and disorientated.

Worthy novels are complex even when they seem simple and never run out of words. They go on in readers' minds and in books begotten by books. You can't ever read the same book or poem or see the same play or movie twice and think of it the same way. Try it and see it happen, sometimes even with the worst effort. This is always the case with works of sufficient richness.

Some part of me is Leibniz's *Monadology*, according to its father-philosopher's cosmology of synchronously linked minds, which also begat Einstein's view of mind when I whispered in his ear, I say — even though Newton and Leibniz were enemies over the parallel authorship of calculus/fluxions and that Newton vowed to break my father's heart and did, and though history preferred Leibniz's calculus, ignoring Newton's evil suppression of the more lucid calculus that guided men to the moon, which in truth does behave as Newton's apple — that James Morrow's book is no tomfoolery (no offence to Fielding's worthy tome, *Tom Jones*, but I hasten to confess that my language and Newton's is surpassed by Fielding and Morrow).

I can and do speak from the future, because time is a mental arrangement, as Einstein felt, and I know that the goodness of which my book-cousin, *The Last Witchfinder*, speaks does not build on itself, as Jules Verne's Captain Nemo said in the movie. Goodness lacks armies, and perhaps should never have any, lest it lose itself to revolutionary disgrace, as have all human reforms, secular or religious. Learning and its ally, rational persuasion, are the way, not guns and torture. Books do speak through the minds of their readers, and some write new ones; but

mostly we speak by implication, indirection's hidden riches, and know more than readers will ever discover, because even generational readings will not find all the implications. That's why James Mason's movie *Nemo* can say outright what Verne only suggested through his greedy publisher's blue pencil.

I speak from all futures, where, in some, reason's time will prevail; not the mechanical, pathetic thing of Newton's clockwork universe, but the richer way made out of wider knowledge, not out of its dangerous shards, when you will know *where* you have all come from, *what* you are, and *where* you may choose to go (from Paul Gauguin's questioning title to his great painting). Books will be revealed as souls saved up on shelves, the waiting shoulders of giants, the best of persons distilled, and in Milton's words 'treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life'. We will all be there together as 'the word', when we grasp the protean swirl of data and remake the cruelties of natural selection. Know the words of a humble bookseller, that Books Are Everything, because they will be all that is left as the physical universe fades.

Newton lamented that he could plot the motions of the heavens but not the ways of human hearts, and was

once writing a 'Topography of Hell.' But I, the *Monadology*, am friends with the *Principia*; it has grown critical of its father, while I weep for the broken heart of mine.

'Wake up, reviewer,' says the *Monadology* to me, 'and finish with whatever else you have to say. Do you think Morrow's novel a balm in a time of unreason?'

'Yes,' I say.

'But has there been any other kind of time?'

'No — but this book exists, hurrah!' I cry, and think that it makes most other fictions read like gossip and reminds me of Verne's idea of moving the novel from the heart to the head. Heart *and* head, of course, with some witchery in the words to smooth comprehension. But I fear there may be no end of political witchfinders and their applicators of ignorance. A book is not an author; it only helps to beget new books. But as one of those who also fills these vortices of paper, I wish I'd written *The Last Witchfinder*, but I was glad to read it, to cry out to its people, and to think their thoughts and feel their tears.

— George Zebrowski, 2006

Peter Ryan: More passion needed in Egan's recent fiction

Oceanic

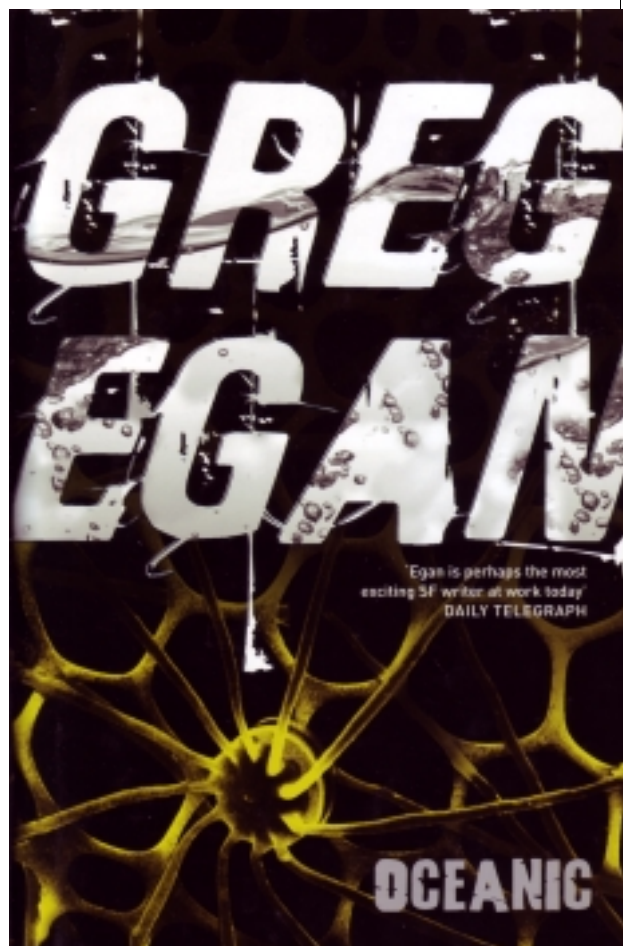
by Greg Egan

(Gollancz ISBN 978-0-575-08652-4; 2009;
tpbk \$32.99; 490 pp.)

Context: At first I thought this was the author's first English-language collection for over a decade (there have been a number of translations published during that time). It turned out that one was published in the USA in 2008, *Dark Integers and Other Stories*, though that contained only five stories, all of which have been published in this volume as well. There also was another US collection in 2009, *Crystal Nights and Other Stories*, that contained only one story — 'TAP' (1995) — not also in *Oceanic*.

In the closing days of 1994 I experienced an Australian SF reading epiphany. In the space of only two weeks or so I read my first books by Terry Dowling and Greg Egan. I probably already had read the odd story by them in anthologies, but that was my first extended exposure to both writers. The books in question were *Rynosseros*, the first collection of Dowling's Tom Tyson stories, and Egan's novel *Quarantine*. I knew straight away that two bright new suns had risen almost simultaneously over my SF horizon.

My love affair with the authors' works continued for many years despite their marked difference in approach. Dowling's romanticism appealed to me strongly, as genuine romance always does; Egan's hardline SF, exploring



themes on the edge of speculative science, impressed me equally much — one for the heart and one for the head (it sounds like David Callan's philosophy of assassination!). I also got a chuckle out of Egan's signature gimmick of introducing advanced artifacts into his tales complete with brand names and recommended retail prices, an advance on the practice pioneered by Ian Fleming in his James Bond stories, a cute way of anchoring a fantastic yarn in a sort of quotidian reality that enhanced the suspension of disbelief by the reader.

Like all love affairs, these faded in time. In Dowling's case, my disenchantment has been relatively minor; I don't care for the over-mannered style he seems to have adopted in his most recent writing. With Egan, though, my distaste sometimes grew to such an extent that I considered dropping him from my reading altogether. My issue there was his fundamentalist rationalism (the same sort of thing that gets up a lot of people's noses about Richard Dawkins), not so much over the opinions themselves as for the expressed intolerance for other viewpoints. As any reader would realise, the alien is a major theme in the SF milieu, so it seems especially ironic, and in a way tragic, that we should find a leading practitioner expressing such strong aversion to customs of people that are different from his own.

When this first crept into Egan's stories it could be dismissed as a quirk of his principal characters alone, but as more and more of his work came out it became very evident that the author was preaching at us. His stories began to be filled with heroes insufferably smug in their own opinions and with a marked contempt for those who disagreed with them. Exhibits A for me were the novels *Teranesia* and *Schild's Ladder*. *Teranesia* gave us its bright young rationalist brother and sister heroes, as convinced of their personal omniscience as any middle high-schoolers, pitted against 'irrational' opponents who were never more than silly caricatures, narrative paper tigers to the last clumsy cutout. *Schild's Ladder* was more subtle. In that novel, the designated heroes scoffed at other characters, again for 'irrationality', because they opposed the heroes' proposed research into a new dimension on the grounds that the project would inevitably destroy their beloved homes (and in fact their entire planets). Even allowing that the society in which this took place was one of virtual immortals able to move elsewhere with ease, it seemed reasonable (if not rational) for a little more weight to be given to those people's concerns. To my mind, 'rationalism' taken to this degree is every bit as pathological as Egan's hero characters frequently accuse their irrational protagonists of being.

This doctrinaire preaching of the arch-rationalist standpoint often marred my enjoyment of the later Egan. It also hasn't helped that too often in his later writings he has demanded a rather too detailed knowledge of mathematics and science from his readers, far more than was necessary to make his stories work.

The 12 stories collected in *Oceanic*, originally published between 1998 and 2009, still exhibit both those faults, but they also toss up some intriguing variations, and perhaps contradictions, in the author's outlook. Despite his faults he remains too interesting a writer to abandon.

Three of the stories — 'Riding the Crocodile' (2005), 'Glory' (2007), and 'Hot Rock' (2009) — are set in Egan's Amalgam universe and, to varying degrees, typified Egan's rationalist sneer. The Amalgam is a galaxy-spanning society possessing effective immortality and vast common wealth. It is difficult to stomach the spectacle of Amalgam tourists, even if they are ostensibly on scientific missions, looking down their noses at the antics of native people who don't happen to share their self-satisfied immunity to death or disaster. It is instructive that the most successful of this group of stories has been 'Riding the Crocodile', where the 'tour' is to a culture even more advanced than the Amalgam (that culture ultimately shuns the tourists altogether, thus confirming its advanced status by its distaste for such obnoxious twits).

The people of the Amalgam in these stories are even less appealing, in that none of them ever seems to have any real passion for life, even though they have unlimited supplies of it. There may be a lesson there — but only maybe. Their main interest seems to be in mathematics, but even there the level of engagement seems on the cool side. It always has struck me that a life in which you don't care intensely about at least *some* thing is as little worth living as a life unexamined. Of course, such an attitude definitely falls on the irrational side of the ledger.

The story that most strongly exhibits Egan's overdoing of specialist detail is also part of a 'series'. 'Dark Integers' (2007) is a sequel to 1995's 'Luminous', in which our world and its equivalent in an adjacent dimension came into inadvertent contact and go to 'war' with each other using the weapons of cutting edge mathematics. It was a decent idea for an SF story, but not so much so that it is enhanced by a sequel.

Reading this collection from a historical perspective, it seemed in its earlier stories that Egan resiles at least temporarily from his hard rationalist line. 'Oceanic' (1998) is set on a world long cut off from other human planets. A young man comes to realise that the local religion (a copy of Christianity) is spurious. This is another of the author's rationalist manifestos but, refreshingly, this time without the rant, and for the first time it is accompanied by a genuine consideration of the human desire to find meaning in life. It faces the issue honestly, but I suspect that Egan's (and his character's) conclusion that the best we can ever hope for is to be depressed only *some* of the time will be bleak solace to most, even to a committed rationalist.

'Border Guards' (1999) is set in a future where virtual immortality has been achieved long ago. One of the still-living scientists instrumental in bringing it about finds that her desire to have later-born folk kept ignorant of the horrors of death are not shared by those people themselves. For me, the narrative threads don't come together too well but, considering the author's regular attacks on irrational faith, this story is intriguing in its use of religious motifs, such as messianism and the longing to return to a Garden of Eden innocence.

In the other stories:

- 'Oracle' (2000) is notable for yet another time travel plot that is essentially self-cancelling and an extended lampoon of C. S. Lewis.
- 'Singleton' (2002) has a researcher obsessed with

the fate of all his alternate selves in the ‘many worlds’ universe, and who works to collapse them all into a single timeline. His apparent motivation is that it is the only way anyone can have genuine free will and responsibility for their actions. I wasn’t convinced. By Egan’s standards, this has an unusually sensational plot.

- ‘Induction’ (2007) has astronauts exploring a distant new planet in virtual form, but little else.
- ‘Steve Fever’ (2007) was one of the more interesting offerings, with intelligence-enhanced rats invented by the title Steve as a living computer designed to save him from a fatal cancer. They continued their mission after he had died and took to ‘borrowing’ humans to help them out as research assistants and guinea pigs.
- ‘Crystal Nights’ (2008) gives us a youthful self-made zillionaire who creates virtual lifeforms but, as in all such stories, our boy really only wants to be God. This basic premise has been worked many times before, and much better.
- ‘Lost Continent’ (2008) is the odd card in the deck. A teenage boy fleeing the Taliban in what seems to be an alternate Afghanistan fetches up through a ‘portal’ in Australia and suffers the traumas of being an unwelcome boat person. Basically this is the author riding one of his worthy hobbyhorses, but the story would have worked equally well — and far less mystifyingly — if he hadn’t muddled it with the completely unnecessary SF device. Perhaps it is a case of him writing to his market rather than to his muse.

In summary, this collection is one that is more for the Greg Egan completist than for the new reader. None of the stories reprinted here has the impact of the best of his early work, top stories such as ‘Scatter My Ashes’, ‘The Caress’, ‘The Cutie’, ‘Blood Sisters’, ‘Wang’s Carpets’, or ‘Reasons to Be Cheerful’.

Zendegi

by Greg Egan

(Gollancz; 2010; 331 pp.; \$60 hb/\$32.95 tpb)

‘Zendegi’ is a girl’s name from the Persian. In this story it is the commercial name of a platform for virtual reality games — and a bit more beside.

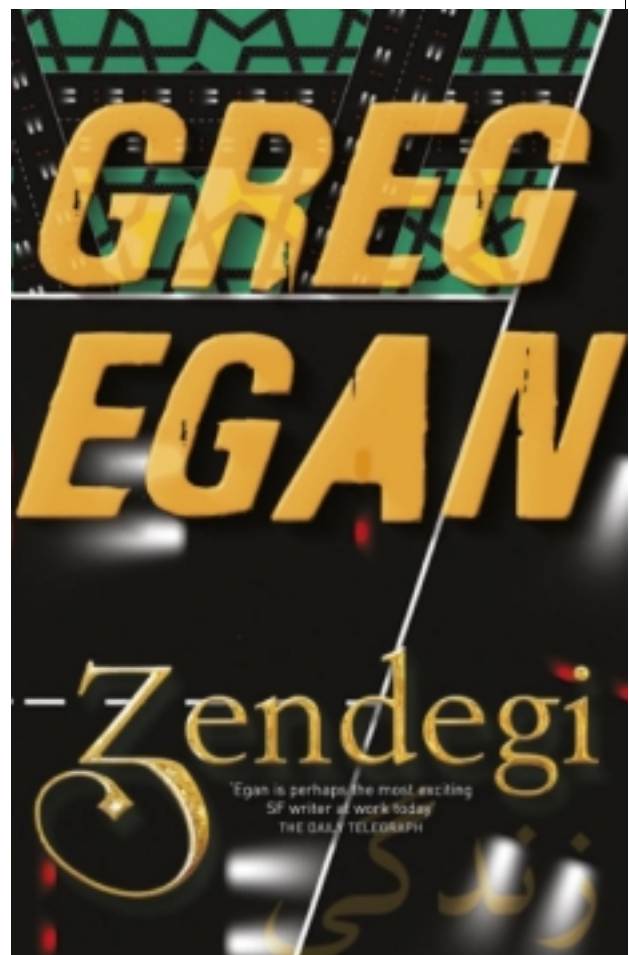
The main character is Martin Seymour, an Australian journalist who had married an Iranian while on assignment to Tehran and had settled there after the country booted out the religious government and returned to secular democracy. His wife is killed in a road accident and he is left alone to bring up their primary school-age son Javeed. Then Martin himself is diagnosed with fatal liver cancer.

Martin’s own immediate family back in Australia is small and long out of touch and, in any case, it would have been cruel to consign Javeed to the care of people and to live in a country that he had never seen. He needs to grow up in Iran — but Martin is not prepared to let his darling be brought up by godparents. This seemed to be based on him overhearing a sexist remark by the

godfather that is too non-PC for Martin to stomach. The possibility that it could be more likely a satirical comment from the man, whose liberal credentials could hardly be questioned, never seems to arise.

This clumsy bit of motivation at least does serve to move the plot onto its main theme, with Martin deciding to explore the possibility of having an electronic proxy of himself created within Zendegi to stay with Javeed and mentor him through to adulthood (the little boy is a keen partaker of Zendegi’s virtual reality games, particularly those set in the Persian pre-Islamic myth worlds of heroes like Rostom and fabulous creatures like the Simorgh). Martin’s hopes are reinforced by the presence in the company of Nasim Golestani, a scientist-engineer who had done brilliant work in the USA on brain mapping before she had decided to return home to Iran after the fall of the Islamic Republic. Nasim still has many contacts in the scientific world that she can call on to help make Martin’s project a reality; even more importantly she can get funding and other support from an American zillionaire who plans to have research like hers help him to become downloaded into an Artificial Intelligence that would indulge in a progressive self-improvement that would lead to him becoming a god-like creature.

Of course such projects raise very important ethical issues that insist on answers whether they were approached from the viewpoint of a religious fundamentalist or of an arch-rationalist (and of any shading in between). This dilemma becomes the main theme of the story. For fans of the author it makes for an interesting



change of pace. Many of Egan's earlier works were set in worlds where downloading of personalities onto software was commonplace, and where all the technical problems — and presumably the ethical ones as well — had been solved and 'normalised' before the tale began (in fact many of his better stories — and these tended to be shorter ones — were more interesting because they worked close to the boundaries of this ethical watershed).

In *Zendegi*, the ethical aspects come to dominate the technical ones. The resolution is very downbeat, with Nasim accepting the sinfulness (it seemed the appropriate word here) of creating self-aware entities that are less than fully free beings, and she terminates her work on Martin's proxy. Martin fades away and dies without his wish to remain in some way with his son being fulfilled. Javeed is left to grow up among human beings with a variety of attitudes and to find his way to adulthood by himself, which I'd reckon is as good as any of us can be offered. Egan ends his story without offering solutions to the issues it has raised. That is fair enough, too — there well may not be any such solutions.

While I find that *Zendegi* appears to signal a refreshing new approach by Egan, whose hard line rationalist stance in many of his earlier stories often struck me as narrow-sighted and even regrettably snobbish, I still find myself disappointed by the book. It strikes me that the main plot as outlined above would have been executed by the earlier author as a tightly controlled short story. Padded

out to novel length as it is here (even at a relatively modest — by today's horribly inflated sf publishing standards — 330 pages), the narrative sags alarmingly. Most of the first half of the book is about Martin moving to Iran as a correspondent and becoming involved in the events that brought about the political downfall of the mullahs. None of it is necessary to set up the motivation for Nasim's return home to the liberalised Iran; all that could have been presented as a *fait accompli*. The other early passages, of Nasim's work in America, seem to be included mostly to show off Egan's familiarity with the scientific concepts and the laboratory milieu; all of the actual science could have been introduced more economically in the later passages set in Tehran.

The excessive flabbiness of the plot is emphasised even further by the opening chapter, which deals with Martin's attempts to download all of his large music collection onto a chip for easy transport to his new Tehran home. He cuts corners and mucks it up. OK, but what on Earth does it have to do with the rest of the story, even of the other redundant chapters? Is it intended as some sort of pre-figuring, the compromised music recordings limning the compromised human being that is Martin's virtual proxy? If so, it is an analogy that does not work — especially as the music recording disaster is never mentioned again.

In brief, here we have a story with an intriguing central theme that becomes almost lost in a sea of irrelevancies.

Gregory Benford: Einstein's notebooks

The Einstein Code

by Kevin McLaurty

(Princeton University Press, April 2004, \$38)

This astonishing, revelatory book confirms rumors circulating in academia for years. Dr McLaurty, an historian working in the Princeton Einstein Collection, found an obscure set of notebooks long neglected. They were written in an odd code nobody had bothered to decipher. McLaurty went to cryptologists and they cracked it easily. After all, it was invented by an amateur: Albert Einstein.

McLaurty had expected notes about Einstein's personal life, perhaps, but what he found in telegraphic German was a daily log of Einstein's ideas. He knew some physics but was unprepared for Einstein's careful notes about his personal reading, and how it influenced his thinking.

McLaurty found the earliest notebook from 1901, four years before the 'miracle year' that saw special relativity, $E = mc^2$ and the theory of Brownian motion. Einstein has cryptic entries about reading Verne, thoughts about what possible fuel could send us to the moon, and after reading Wells's *The Time Machine*, an extended discussion of time. He wonders if there is a way

that physical equations (which prefer no direction in time, an issue that bothered Newton) can be made to rule out time travel. 'Of course,' he says, 'for believing (*glaubige*) scientists the rule of causality demands that we not venture backward.'

Later, he mentions several E. R. Burroughs novels by name, confessing that he sometimes reads for relaxation, not instruction. He learns English to read *Weird Tales*, and in a visit to the US in 1931 picks up pulp magazines, quoting titles with amusement.

In Princeton, 1933, he receives Gernsback, who wants him to write 'an article or even a column' and gives Einstein a free subscription. This inducement fails, but Einstein has much to say about Stapledon's *Last and First Men* and *Star Maker*, commenting favourably on the idea of an expanding, evolving universe. He notes a visit from the young Isaac Asimov, though Einstein could not understand what positrons had to do with robot brains. McLaurty quotes Einstein on the value of reading 'fantastic fiction' — it helps him think:

I rarely think in words. A thought comes in the mental world (*Gedankenwelt*) and I try to put it in words afterwards. But at times, particularly at night when the mind is tired, a story brings the thoughts first.

Einstein went to see *The Day the Earth Stood Still* because friends told him there was a figure like him in it; he liked the movie but thought the robot was the best actor. The last entry in the notebooks (in No 17, 1955) is about a Bradbury story.

Einstein even relates an amusing story about a passage he spent in a cruise to Japan in 1936. Next to him in the smoking room of the liner he saw a man reading his book, *The Meaning of Relativity*. Einstein was reading a

pulp magazine and the man sneered at it. But then, obviously not recognising him, the man began talking about the relativity book. Weary of explaining his ideas for decades, Einstein said he had tried the book but did not find that he could understand it. The man raised his eyebrows at the pulp, nodded and then said condescendingly, 'Let me explain.'

— Gregory Benford

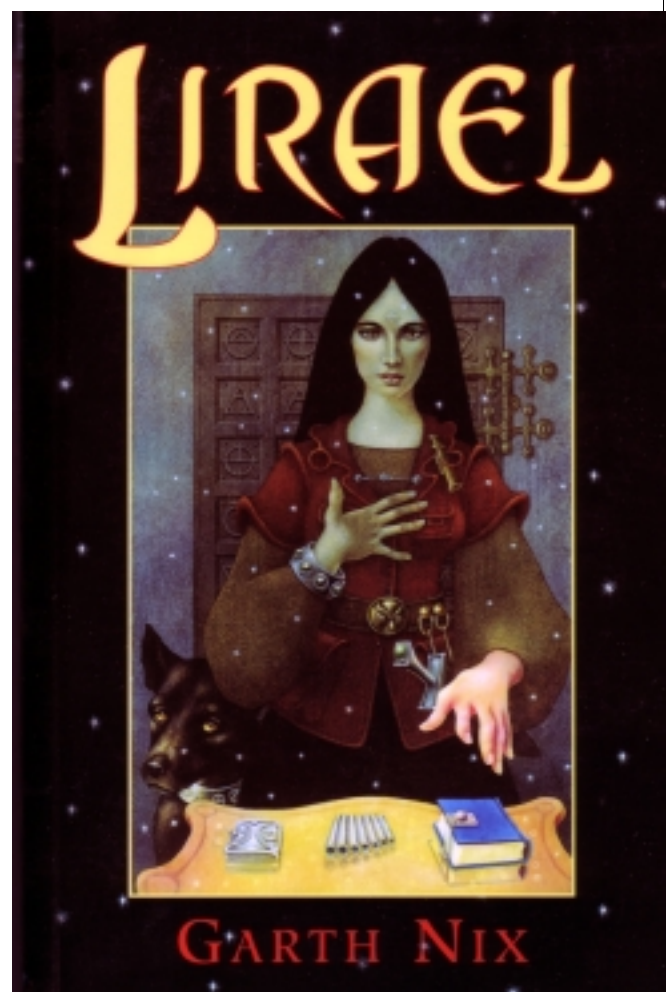
Roslyn Kopel Gross: Garth Nix: New fiction from old themes

Books by Garth Nix discussed:
***Sabriel* (HarperCollins; 1995)**
***Lirael* (Allen & Unwin; 2001)**
***Abhorsen* (Allen & Unwin; 2003)**

Like it or not, one yardstick for the success of an Australian writer of science fiction or fantasy is his or her popularity in the American market. Although Garth Nix had previously written several books, the publication of the young adult novel *Sabriel* in 1995 brought him to the attention of readers as an original and gifted writer, and

in 2003 his novel *Abhorsen* was published simultaneously in hardcover in the United States and in trade paperback in Australia. As in the best tradition of young adult fantasy, *Sabriel* and its sequels comprise a fully realised and vivid vision that is as accessible to adult readers as to 'young adults'.

The trilogy is set in a universe that consists of two worlds existing side by side. On one side is Alcestierre, a British-like society comparable to our world in the 1920s. A wall — an actual, physical wall — separates this world, which is devoid of magic, like our own, in which techno-



logy is rapidly being developed, from the Old Kingdom, and in which magic is as accepted and common as technology is in our own. The two worlds are separate, with different time zones and with seasons occurring at different times; in fact, the inhabitants use an almanac that helps them sort out phases of the moon, dates, and seasons on both sides of the Wall.

As *Sabriel* opens, the title character is attending a very British-like boarding school in Alcestierre, not far from the Wall. Her father is an Abhorsen (a role or title, not a personal name), whose responsibility it is to maintain the borders of life and death. In this universe, Death is a cold, freezing river, where people go when they die, and through which it is possible for the Dead to cross back into Life and wreak havoc, and where necromancers attempt to use the Dead for their own purpose. Indeed, Death is a constant and brooding presence in this trilogy. By the end of the final book, *Abhorsen*, the concept and meaning of Death, with its Nine Gates through which the Dead must pass, has been considerably enriched and deepened, but in *Sabriel* the presence of Death is crushing, and the Dead who come back into Life, as well as the necromancers who seek to gain power, are menacing and terrifying. The vision of Death in the first novel is almost overwhelming in its bleakness and sadness, but is counterpointed by the vivid aliveness of the characters and by the presence of the Charter, a magic that provides balance and meaning to all things.

Sabriel, whose life has mainly centred around the boarding school, and whose knowledge of her father's work is limited, is soon thrust into a dreadful responsibility as the new Abhorsen when a powerful necromancer rises and must be defeated. The novel is filled with wonderful and powerful images: the cantankerous cat Mogget, an age-old servant of the Abhorsen who is much more than a cat, and must never have the bell around its neck removed; a magical airplane made of laminated paper called a Paperwing; the character called Touchstone who has been asleep for years; and the Abhorsen's seven magical bells, each kept in its own pouch in a bandoleer worn over the chest, each bell with its own name and powers, and which, used correctly, can enable the Abhorsen to travel safely through Death in order to control the Dead and maintain the balance of the universe. As in all successful fantasy, these images acquire their own power and resonance, and come to feel vibrantly real to the reader. These vivid images offset the dark tone of what is basically a coming-of-age story, as Sabriel must take upon herself the enormous responsibilities of an Abhorsen.

It may well be that Nix never originally wrote *Sabriel* as a stand-alone novel, since *Lirael* appeared six years later, and *Sabriel* is easily read and appreciated on its own; it is a compact and accomplished a novel in its own right. *Abhorsen*, the last book in the trilogy, is really a direct continuation of *Lirael*; it appears, in fact, that the two were originally to be one book, but the publishers requested it be divided in two.

Where *Sabriel* may be dark enough to be almost considered horror at times, its sequel, *Lirael*, written several years later in 2001, is different in tone and atmosphere, though it too has elements of horror. The presence of Death is less powerful here than in *Sabriel*, as the story

follows the coming of age of Lirael, a girl who lives among the Clayr, a community of women whose gift and task it is to see possible futures. Lirael is a loner, and appears not to fit in: she is the only one of the Clayr without the Sight. While longing and waiting to receive the gift of Sight like everyone else, Lirael becomes a Second Assistant Librarian in the huge, multilayered, and magic-filled library of the Clayr, and begins to make a series of discoveries and develop her own powers that will change her own life completely. This library, with its hidden delights and terrors, is one of the enduring and enchanting images of the novel. As the novel progresses, she comes closer to understanding her own real destiny, which is enmeshed with the magical dog she brings to life and who becomes her only real friend.

A second main thread in the novel follows Sabriel's son, Sameth, who is expected to be the Abhorsen-in-waiting. Sameth has his own grim struggles with his destiny, providing one of the dark elements in what is still generally a less intense book than *Sabriel*. Like his mother Sabriel before him, Sam has been at school in Alcestierre behind the Wall, but is now trying to take his own role in the Old Kingdom, where a new necromancer has arisen. The portrayal of the manipulation of an old school friend of Sam's, a very decent, kind young man, by this ancient evil force is genuinely chilling, and provides another dark element in the novel.

While *Sabriel* does tell a powerful coming-of-age story in its own right, it is *Lirael*, whose narrative is continued in *Abhorsen* but which has a distinct character of its own, that stands out most clearly as a coming-of-age tale. To describe the plot of *Lirael* makes it sound like just another such story with young characters who must discover their unique destinies and take on important tasks. Indeed, much young adult fantasy falls into this category, and perhaps what separates the good from the ordinary is the extent to which an author is able to breathe fresh life into this old theme. Certainly, the concepts of destiny versus expectations, of young people discovering what courage really is, and discovering what their true tasks in life are, are some of the underlying themes of the novel, but this observation does not do justice to the vividness and attractiveness of the characters of Lirael and Sam, the charm and vibrancy of the writing, and the skill and complexity with which their individual struggles are portrayed. In *Lirael*, there is both a symmetry and contrast between the two characters, emphasised by the fact that Lirael is accompanied by the Disreputable Dog and Sam by the cat Mogget, a detail that becomes increasingly significant in *Abhorsen*. *Lirael* has less action than the first or last books. In fact, it is much less concerned with action than it is about the inner struggles of the two point-of-view characters, and is the most loosely written of the three. Compared with the tightness and intensity of *Sabriel*, *Lirael* feels rather relaxed and sprawling, in some ways easier to read but perhaps less forcefully intense and gripping.

As to be expected of the final book in a trilogy, all the threads in the two previous books are developed and brought together in *Abhorsen*, so not much of the plot can be discussed without giving away too much. Lirael and Sam must try to save Nick, Sam's friend, as well as prevent the evil power, which, centuries ago, had been

divided in two, from being made whole again and destroying all life. In order to do so, Lirael and Sam must use the skills and powers of their true identities and roles, which they discovered at the end of *Lirael*. Nick has his own inner terrifying and moving struggle, and an important role to play in this tale, which turns out to be much more intricate and engrossing than this short summary might imply.

The reader learns about the true nature of the evil force that is using Nick, and what it truly wants. Most importantly, the true nature of the Charter, and Charter Magic, is revealed in *Abhorsen*, and much more is revealed about the Gates of Death and how they work, including the ultimate destination of the Dead beyond the Ninth Gate, in a way that modifies the utterly bleak image of Death portrayed in *Sabriel*. Garth shows an impressive ability here to add layers of meaning without subtracting from the power of the original image of Death. The reader discovers who Mogget and the Disreputable Dog really are, and how each of the characters fulfil a special role in the magic of this world. There are twists and turns in the plot, and, as in much coming-of-age fantasy, some

of the characters have to make enormous sacrifices. Although some of this revelation may not come as a complete surprise to some attentive readers, the novel's resolution has a deeply satisfying sense, as in the traditional pattern of young adult fantasy, of everything making sense in a greater scheme of things. Moreover, Sabriel and Touchstone, who reappeared in *Lirael*, have a much larger role to play in *Abhorsen*, adding to the sense that the story begun in *Sabriel* is now complete and whole.

Nix seems to have the ability to harness many of the traditional features of the young adult fantasy, especially the coming-of-age theme, to create a story that is at the same time full of captivating new and vivid ideas. Does a successful writer make a new story feel alive by applying the old mythic themes, or conversely, bring old, archetypal themes to life by creating vibrant characters and using new ideas? Either way — and by virtue of the fact that he has become internationally popular — Garth Nix is a success.

— Roslyn Kopel Gross, 2003

Cath Ortlieb reviews:

The Twilight Watch

Part 3 of The Night Watch trilogy

by Sergei Lukyanenko

(translated from the Russian by Andrew Bromfield)

(Random House ISBN 978 0 434014 446;

ARP \$32.95 (TPB); 440 pp.)

This novel actually was published in 2008, but I wanted to read the previous two books before reviewing it. As with the first books in the trilogy, it is divided into three separate but interwoven stories ('Nobody's Time', 'Nobody's Space', and 'Nobody's Power').

The battle between the Dark and Light Others (vampires, werewolves, magicians, and those with special talents) is reaching a critical point. Anton Gorodsky is called away from a holiday with his wife Svetlana and daughter Nadya to a crisis. Gesar explains that an Other has not only let a human know about their existence but he intends to change them into one. This obviously has serious repercussions for them all; so much so that the Inquisition has ordered the Night and Day Watches to work together to stop this from happening. In their search, Anton has to team up with the now powerful vampire Kostya Saushkin who was once his idealistic neighbour and friend. Anton finds that there's a lot more at stake than he first thought and comes to question the reason for his way of life.

This last book in the trilogy is as riveting as the first two. The characters are complex, flawed, and, dare I say it, very human. Anton is certainly not your usual 'hero' and he's not the most powerful Other; in fact, even his child is more powerful than he is, but he draws the reader in as he struggles to protect his family and bring some

sort of order into this mysterious, dark, post-Cold War Russia that Sergei has created.

The vampires, werewolves, magicians, etc. of this world, while similar to those in 'traditional' stories, are different enough to make reading the book quite compelling. It's interesting to note that I thought the new



Twilight movie was based on this book, but my 19-year-old son put me right. He did, however, take up my suggestion that he read the books anyway, and is hooked as well.

— reprinted, with permission, from the Australian SF Foundation's *Instrumentality*, December 2008, p. 6

Jenny Blackford reviews:

Smoking Poppy

by Graham Joyce

(Gollancz, 2001; £6.99 pb; 279 pp.)

A few years ago, I reviewed one of Graham Joyce's earlier novels, *The Tooth Fairy*, for the *New York Review of Science Fiction*. The review was enthusiastic: *The Tooth Fairy* is a totally unsentimental look at the horrors of adolescence, with perhaps the most original fairy in modern literature. Young Sam's family and friends are carefully presented to the reader, in all their realistic strangeness. The novel is very funny, though often the humour is the type that relies on wincing recognition of human frailties. There are, as well, dark episodes, including the maiming of several of Sam's friends.

In *Smoking Poppy*, the proportion of darkness is higher. The narrator, Danny, is a man who has lost all he really cared about: the love of his wife, and of their son and daughter. He lives a sparse, bitter life, of which the highlight is the weekly trivia game at the pub. Danny is clearly highly intelligent, but he didn't attend University, and has a huge chip on his shoulder as a result. In his eccentric trivia team, he is responsible for general knowledge, an elderly alcoholic female classics lecturer has literature and history, and Mick, a fruit and vegetable seller, has sport, TV, and pop music.

As the novel begins, Danny is recently separated from his wife, and living in a bare, squalid flat; he is estranged from his son, who has retreated into the embrace of a fundamentalist church; and he learns that his daughter Charlie, his favourite child, estranged from him for years, is being held in Chiang Mai, the infamous Thai prison, accused of smuggling opium.

Danny decides to travel to Thailand to try to rescue Charlie. He is somewhat dismayed when not only his trivia mate Mick, but also his fundamentalist son Phil, insist on travelling with him. They become, of course, essential to the quest.

Smoking Poppy masquerades as mainstream fiction, and its loving depiction of the damaged characters and their flawed relationships is excellent. Danny's insanely frugal son, eternally dressed in white polyester shirts and enigmatically quoting the Bible or *Pilgrim's Progress*, contrasts beautifully with the fat, coarse Mick, who declares himself, somewhat against Danny's wishes, as Danny's best friend. Both of them prove to have inner resources that Danny never suspected. In fact, much is revealed about each of the travellers, and particularly about the root of Danny's problems with his family, as they travel.

Their quest does not end at Chiang Mai. The girl there proves to be another young British tourist who had stolen Charlie's passport; Charlie is actually in lawless

opium-growing territory near the border between Thailand and Burma. Danny, Mick, and Phil must travel further, into stranger realms.

The journey in the novel is a spiritual one as much as physical, and Danny's task of freeing Charlie, and bringing her home, requires both painful self-knowledge and magic. Despite the interest that the author shows in his characters' inner lives, mainstream readers will be alerted to the fantasy base of the plot by a minor character's suggestion, early in the novel, that the opium poppy might be an alien life-form that is slowly, inexorably taking over the world. Strange forces gather around the little group as they travel closer to the exotic hillsides where the poppy is cultivated. Danny, Mick and Phil finally come to understand that Charlie is held in the village by spiritual forces, not by the villagers, or even by the Thai drug lord who commands their work. The presence of spirits is not news to Phil, who already lives in a world of full of demons, and sees their journey as a descent into Hell.



There are frequent, brief flashes of humour among the darkness. Phil's parsimony, for example, is often very funny: his sorrow at the waste of a cup of tea that his father made, against his will, with a *whole* tea-bag is tragically comic.

Graham Joyce is a remarkable SF author. It is to be hoped that his cliché-free brand of fantasy gains a wide, appreciative audience.

***The Drawing of the Dark*
by Tim Powers
(Gollancz, 2002; pb; 328 pp.)**

Gollancz is doing the sf world a great service, by reprinting many classic novels in its Fantasy Masterworks series: they include Dunsany's *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, Evangeline Walton's *The Mabinogion*, Patricia McKillip's *Riddle-Master Of Hed, Heir Of Sea And Fire* and *Harpist In The Wind*. In 2002, Gollancz reprinted *The Drawing of the Dark* as part of this series. It was originally published in 1979, after *The Skies Discrowned* and *Epitaph in Rust*, but before Tim Powers' first really famous novels, *The Anubis Gates* and *Dinner at Deviant's Palace*.

The title, *The Drawing of the Dark*, sounds as if darkness is drawing in on the world. Well, it is, or at least on a bit of it: the Turkish Sultan Suleiman is besieging Vienna, in 1529. If he wins, he can reasonably be expected to work his way through the rest of the Europe. However, the actual 'drawing of the dark' referred to in the title is the tapping of the magical dark beer, the Dark, right at the bottom of the huge vat in the Herzwosten brewery at the Zimmerman Inn, in medieval Vienna.

Tim Powers has a tendency to write Secret Histories. In *The Stress of Her Regard*, which includes Shelley, Byron, and Keats as characters, the world is shown to be secretly permeated by strange stone beings, the lamiae, who inspire poetry, drink blood, create vampires, and so on. Germany conquered Italy, in this book, so that the secret power behind the Hapsburgs could use the powers of the Fates, the Graeae, which happen to be three stone pillars in Venice.

In *The Drawing of the Dark*, Tim Powers has just as improbably placed Finn Mac Cool's grave under the Herzwosten brewing vat, and has declared Herzwosten to be the Heart of the West. That's not all: the dark beer is tapped only once every 700 years, and is primarily used for the restoration of health to the Fisher King, the King of the West, whose fate is entangled with that huge realm. (A rather different Fisher King turns up in Powers' later *Earthquake Weather*, covertly in charge of the West Coast of the US in general, and the Zinfandel grape crop in particular.)

At the beginning of *The Drawing of the Dark*, the hero, a rough, drunken, middle-aged Irish mercenary called Brian Duffy, is set upon in Venice by three swordsmen purporting to be grandsons of the Doge, and, defeating them easily, hurts their pride. An odd magician, Aurelianus, offers him 'escape' from the inevitable revenge, in the form of a job protecting Herzwosten.

Duffy's trip from Venice to Vienna disconcerts him. Hired killers stalk him on the way, but he is more worried about the huge mythical animals, griffins and the like, that accompany and protect him on his trip over the

Alps. As he approaches Vienna, worse beasts attack the group of travellers he joined forces with.

In Vienna, Aurelianus gradually tells him in hints and half-truths that he is the reincarnation of King Arthur, summoned back to life by the prayers of the Fisher King, to help defeat the Turkish threat to the West. Arthur, in turn, incorporated more ancient heroes still. Duffy is deeply unimpressed to learn his purpose and destiny, and resists with all his might. In one of the nicest touches in the book, a small but rowdy group of Vikings recognises him as a reincarnation of Sigmund. They have come to Vienna as a result of a vision, in order to protect Balder's grave (syncretically, therefore, Finn Mac Cool's grave) from the forces of Muspelheim. Duffy cannot communicate with them, but, in a few emergencies, Arthur takes over the body and commands the Vikings in a Northern dialect so old that only their leader has ever heard it. In another of the most interesting episodes of the novel, Aurelianus forces Duffy to take a long, dangerous journey with him down ancient tunnels under the brewery, and to summon magical help by shouting down into a pit. Duffy is not happy to hear, afterwards, that he has spoken several very ancient languages, at least one nameless, all the time believing himself to be speaking contemporary Austrian.

Powers makes clear that Duffy is an intelligent and knowledgeable man, but he does such a good job of hiding it, and acting the part of an oafish, drunken, brawling soldier, that he becomes rather tedious — at least for a female reader. I do enjoy the cynical old soldier routine in David Gemmell's books — so it is not so much the 'old soldier' routine, as the 'drunken oaf' routine that is the problem. Drinking and brawling and fighting the Turks, Duffy struggles angrily against the Arthur personality, and his destiny, until page 309 (of 328 pages), when the personalities merge and he finally says, 'I don't know why I spent so much time being afraid of this and trying to resist it'.

Unfortunately, those were my sentiments exactly.

The scenes where Arthur takes over Duffy's body are, for me, the best of the novel. Yet it's difficult to understand in quite what way Duffy *is* Arthur. When the Arthur personality appears, he is quite different from, and much more appealing than, the crude, disappointed mercenary Duffy.

The Merlin figure to Duffy's Arthur is Aurelianus, the magician who recruited Duffy in Venice. Aurelianus really *is* Merlin, just somewhat older than he was at the time of the Round Table. He is interestingly odd; among other things, he has a habit of smoking small dried snakes, which appear to have a mild marijuana-like effect.

Powers' books seem barely to contain the overflowings of his astonishingly fertile imagination. In this case, Powers has chosen a wonderful time and place in which to set a novel. The battles and strategy are doubtless very interesting if you like that sort of thing; the plot moves fast and convincingly; the magical setup is excellent. The author has done particularly well to capture the nightmarish, helpless feel of a city under siege, with the inevitable small, inconclusive battles, and the gradual erosion of the city's supplies and defences.

The strange riches in *The Drawing of the Dark* include

peculiar and vivid minor characters (like Bluto the hunchback explosives expert) who would be major characters in other authors' books, and bizarre, haunting minor incidents (like Duffy's dinner at a restaurant where the surroundings become literally Bacchic) which others would milk for a chapter, rather than for a few pages.

However, the characters lack the feel of real human beings, and the emotional heart of the novel is very odd. Fifteen years before the action of the novel starts, Duffy had left Vienna when his sweetheart, Epiphany, married his relatively rich best friend. After disgracing himself at the ceremony, Duffy went off to war, apparently trying to get himself killed. As the novel starts, he still thinks of Epiphany with longing. Duffy returns to Vienna, and discovers not only that that Epiphany is widowed (though somewhat the worse for wear after her husband's bankruptcy and suicide), but also that she is working at the same inn as he is. At this point, the reader naturally expects that there will be some sort of emotional confrontation, ending (probably) in some sort of romance. Somehow, that never happens.

Duffy does not deliberately avoid spending happy hours with Epiphany, supposedly his one true love. It seems that the idea simply doesn't occur to him. He just does his job as he understands it, working as the bouncer at the Inn, drinking very heavily all day (breakfast onwards), and brawling for a bit of light relief. He does go so far as to visit Epiphany's old father, and to take him the food parcels that Epiphany prepares, but that's about the limit of his involvement with his lost love. One day, though, he has a sudden rush of blood to the head, and offers to take Epiphany back to Ireland and to marry her. When his hopes of this are almost immediately dashed by his 'destiny', in the form of Aurelianus, he doesn't seem to worry much.

Epiphany, however, goes into a major decline, and takes seriously to drink. There appears to be more authorial disapproval of her drinking than of his. Epiphany can't bear to visit her father, after contemplating leaving him for a new life with Duffy, but her delivery system for getting care parcels to her father breaks down, and he dies. Epiphany blames Aurelianus, and attacks him with a long knife; Arthur takes over Duffy's body and kills her. Duffy feels bad for a few days, but gets over it.

None of this makes any emotional sense. Epiphany is more a plot device than a genuine character. Why should it be Ireland or nothing? Why couldn't Duffy and Epiphany marry and live together in Vienna, near the Inn — or at least spend a few quiet hours a day together? Why

does she decide she can't face her father? ('Oh, dear, I'm so ashamed, I just can't take him his food parcels any more, I'll send the irresponsible young stable-boy to do it, and not bother to check on him' doesn't really wash.) Why couldn't Duffy/Arthur — the improbably skilled warrior come to save the Western World — even *try* to disarm a small, weak, broken-down wreck of a woman, instead of simply killing her outright? Why does Duffy not feel appalling anger and remorse at killing the one woman he loved?

I doubt that Powers would be able to get the book published, in its current form, for the first time today — or even that he would try to. Not for ordinary literary reasons — but because its attitudes seem very dated, in important ways, for a book only 25 years old. It is a minor problem that there are no strong female characters: Epiphany is important, but only in the way a pawn can be important. More worryingly, there are exotic people whom Aurelianus calls the 'Dark Birds' — men from Japan, Ethiopia, even America — who have come to Vienna to gain another 700 years of life from another glass of the Dark, whether Aurelianus is willing to give it or not. They are not only ruthless, but decidedly evil. They all come to a bad end. Most important, though, the East (the Muslim world, headed by Suleiman) is, quite simply, the Enemy.

None of this, surely, was ever intended as racist. The times were simply less aware of these issues, and Powers would not have imagined Japanese or Turkish readers wincing at depictions of their ancestors, as the reader will uncomfortably imagine them.

Overall, I'm not absolutely sure that *The Drawing of the Dark* deserves to be called a Fantasy Masterwork, despite all its riches. If it had been published in a less prestigious line, one wouldn't have had such high expectations. I have to admit that I'm not the target audience of the book — without wanting to be sexist myself, I know that there are too many battles in the novel, and too much strategy, for me. The fact that the whole structure of the story is built around beer is off-putting, too. The treatment of Epiphany, and indeed of her father, is shabby, and (for me, at least) Duffy the drunken oaf is never quite a hero.

However, many people will disagree, and I suspect a male audience would find the set-up generally more congenial. On the first page of the front matter, James Blaylock states that it is 'Not only one of my favourite Tim Powers novels, it's simply one of my favourite novels'. I prefer his more recent novels, but the sheer energy of *The Drawing of the Dark* is impressive.

Steve Jeffery reviews:

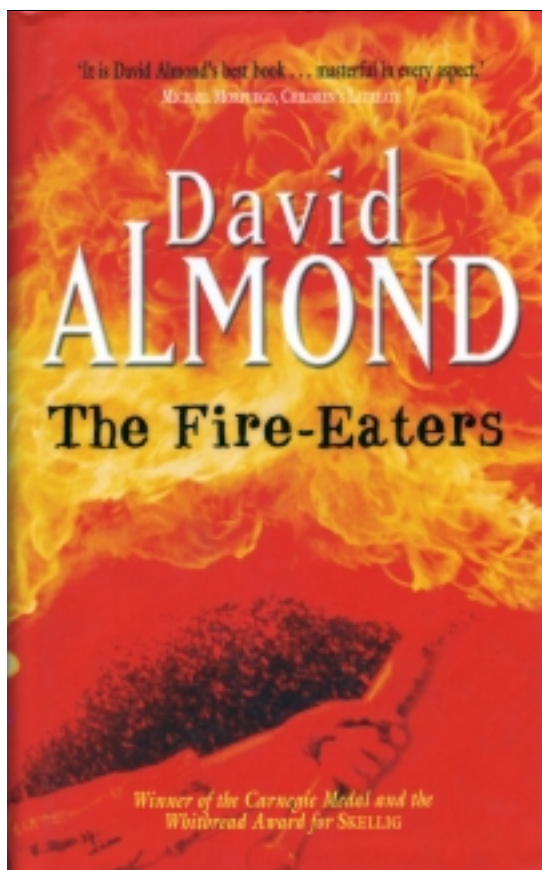
The Fire-Eaters

by David Almond

(Hodder Children's Books; 2003; 249 pp.; £10.99/\$A32.95)

Almond's fiction often treads a fine line between senti-

ment and overt sentimentality. It is both a brave and dangerous line to tread, and a misplaced word, a phrase, could so easily tip the writing and the story over the edge from the emotionally affecting (and sometimes quite devastating) into the mawkish. 'Only someone with a heart of stone', once wrote Oscar Wilde, 'could not read



of the death of Little Nell without laughing.'

With *Skellig*, which won the 1998 Whitbread Children's Book of the Year Award, Almond judged the line finely, and also — in its mixture of themes of hope, fear of loss, and allusions to William Blake, miracle visitors, and angels — another between the real and the fantastic. *Heaven Eyes* explored many of the same themes — isolation, alienation, friendship, loss and bereavement, a strange miracle visitor, and an ultimate sense of redemption — but to my mind just crossed the line into sentiment in the character of Heaven Eyes, the strange miracle child.

Almond's latest book, *The Fire-Eaters*, returns to the same themes, but this time against a backdrop of pervading sense of fear surrounding the Cuban missile crisis in the autumn of 1962.

Bobby Burns is a child living in the Northumbrian coastal village of Keeley. Summer is almost over and Bobby, having passed his 11 plus, is about to start school as a grammar school boy. His friend, Joseph, ribs him about how sweet he will look in his new uniform. But Joseph's real derision and suspicion is directed at the bookish new boy, Daniel, whose parents have moved north from Kent. Bobby's friend Ailsa, won't be going to the new school either. Despite having passed the exams (and Bobby's suspicion that she is actually the brightest of all of them), she intends to stay at home helping and looking after her father and brothers, a family of sea coalers.

The miracle visitor in *The Fire Eaters* is, as with *Skellig*, a vagrant figure and social outcast. In a trip into Newcastle with his mother at the end of the holidays, they join a crowd of onlookers watching the dishevelled McNulty performing for money. McNulty berates the crowd — "Pay", he yelled and snarled, "You'll get nowt

till you pay" — and then selects Bobby from the crowd as an impromptu assistant for his finale where drives a long skewer between his cheeks.

Like *Skellig* too, there is a threat of illness and the possibility of death hanging over Bobby's family. His father, a smoker (and who claims to have once known McNulty in the war, on campaign in Burma), had developed a wracking cough and is eventually persuaded to go to the hospital for tests.

Meanwhile Bobby's family and their friends listen to the news on the radio, where Kennedy and Krushchev are playing a dangerous game of nuclear brinkmanship as Russian ships carrying nuclear missiles are approaching Cuba. There is a palpable sense that the end of the world is near. So much so that the bonfires being built on the beach for Guy Fawkes Night might not see November 5th and one night in late autumn Joseph lights his as a beacon against the impending end of the world. Bobby, his family, Ailsa and the sea coalers, and finally, Daniel and his family, are drawn to it, coming down on to the beach to sit around the fire and share food, beer, and wine as they wait for the dawn. Sitting apart from them on the opposite side of the fire is McNulty, who Bobby and Ailsa have found living in an abandoned holiday shack by the sea. Bobby sees McNulty perform his last trick, without any demand for payment, as, lit by the flames of the bonfire, he lays out his torches and breathes fire out into the night, and then breathes it back in. By the time Bobby reaches him, he is dead, his lungs seared.

The night passes. The ships turn back and the threat of war is averted. A letter from the hospital reveals that Bobby's father's cough turns out not the feared cancer but a bronchial infection, easily treatable (although he promises to give up the tabs).

As much as with *Skellig*, there are strong and curious parallels with John Crowley's recent *The Translator* (I don't know, and it's not likely that Almond has read this) in which another outsider, a Russian émigré poet named Falin (who, like Skellig and McNulty, may possibly be an earthbound angel in the balance of good and evil) offers himself as a hostage and sacrifice against the end of the world in the shadow of the Cuban missile crisis, and whose death redeems those around him.

The Fire Eaters is so skilfully plotted, so well carried off, that even as you recognise the strings that Almond is pulling and tying together as the story progresses, you can't help being affected by its note of grace.

— Reprinted with permission from Prophecy apa, December 2003

Ilium

by Dan Simmons

(Gollancz; 2003; 576 pp., £10.99)

Sing, O Muse, of the rage of Achilles, of the gods themselves, so petulant and powerful here on their new Olympus, and of the rage of the post-humans, dead and gone though they might be, and of the rage of those few true humans left, self-absorbed and useless though they may have become ... [S]ing also of the rage of those thoughtful, sentient, serious but

not-so-close-to-human beings out there dreaming under the ice of Europa, dying in the sulphur-ash of Io, and being born in the cold folds of Ganymede.

Borrowing from, and consciously parodying the opening of Homer's great tale, *Ilium* is conceived on epic scale, spanning thousands of years of recorded and yet-to-be recorded history, from the siege of Troy to the far future of post-humanity where the distinction between organic and machine blur into insignificance (as they do in Robson's *Natural History*), and from the Earth to the moons of the outer planets of the Solar System.

It is a tale of gods and heroes and men — and beings who may be both, or neither — of great, and not-so-great, deeds and battles. It is arch, and knowing, and very self-conscious about its literary allusions. And here, in my opinion, it stumbles in its urge to be clever.

But we get ahead of ourselves. We start with the narrator of the above passage, the literally born-again scholic Thomas Hockenberry, once a twentieth-century Indiana professor of literature and now, for reasons he has not begun to work out, servant of the gods, and in particular of his Muse, Melete. Hockenberry's job is to report from the ground on the progress of the siege of Troy. This has stymied in its ninth year, with the Achaeans (the Greeks), under the command of Agamemnon and his captains Achilles, Odysseus, Nestor, and Diomedes, ravaged by plague and disease on the shores outside the well provisioned city.

Hockenberry's brief is to track the events on the ground against those related in Homer's epic poem, but with one important proviso. For the gods, even as they interfere on either side for their favoured champions,

the events of the war must unfold in real time. Hockenberry, on pain of death (or possibly worse), must not allude to anything he knows that has not happened yet.

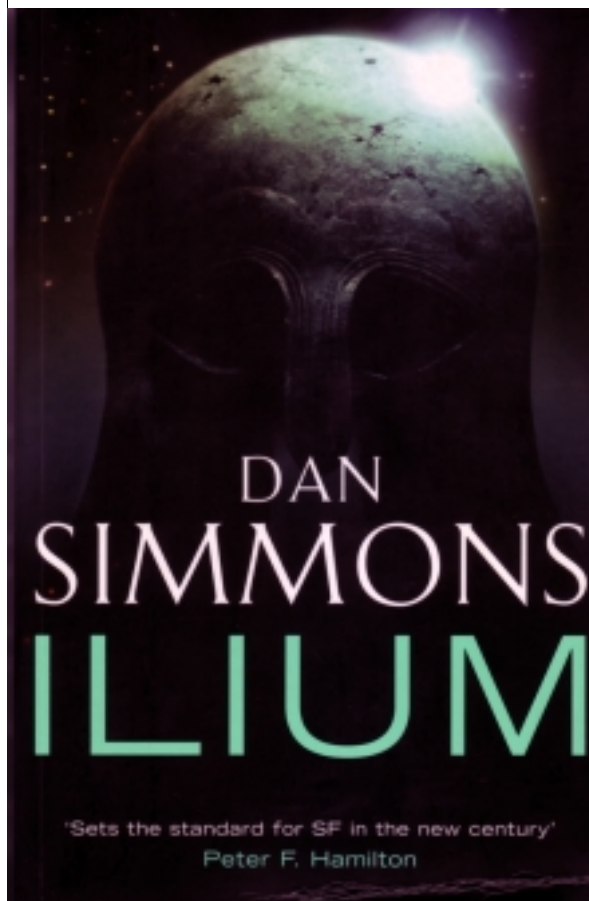
The second of the three narrative threads that make up *Ilium* is set on Earth, where small scattered groups of the few thousand remaining humans live an innocent and uncurious Eloi-like existence, watched over by the enigmatic inhuman voynix guardians. These isolated communities are linked by 317 faxnodes that provide an instantaneous form of travel and both corrective repair in the event of injury (even mortal injury) and a means of rejuvenation at the end of each of the allotted five Twenties of an individual's lifespan. As with Moorcock's *Dwellers at the End of Time* (but without their sense of extravagant grace and wit, and delight in grand romantic gestures), much of their time is spent in entertaining and parties. Daemon, who can recognise and identify a few dozen butterflies, considers himself something of an intellectual — as well as a dashing lover. In fact, even by the shallow standards of his friends, he is something of a pompous fool, and rather proves the point when, bored and in need of a leak, he wanders too far away from Ada's party at Ardis Hall and is eaten by a stray allosaurus.

In fact, aside from Hockenberry and those remaining of his fellow scholics, the characters who most closely embody traits we would recognise as human — curiosity, exploration, research, and enterprise — are not human at all. They are moravecs, bioengineered lifeforms adapted for the harsh environments of the outer solar system. In their sporadic checks of the inner planets, one of them, Koros III of Ganymede, has noted unusually high levels of quantum activity on Mars and proposes to send an expedition to the planet. He coopts three of his fellows, the Callistan Ri-Po, Orphu of Io, and European Mahnmut, along with Mahnmut's submersible *The Dark Lady* (which has barely escaped being eaten by a European squid on the way to the meeting).

The expedition intends to determine just what has happened to the post-humans after they translated themselves off Earth, and whether the new activity on Mars poses a threat.

The three disparate threads take about half the book's considerable length before they begin to mesh. Hockenberry gets embroiled in a dangerous plan to assassinate the goddess Athena, engineered by his patron Muse's boss, Aphrodite, while engaging in an equally dangerous and illicit love affair with Helen, morphed in the body of her lover, Paris. Mahmut and Orpha, *en route* to Mars, debate at length the merits of their respective heroes of pre-twentieth century literature, Shakespeare and Proust; while Daemon (recovering from his novel experience as a dinosaur lunch) finds himself caught up in a mad scheme to recover a spaceship and fly out to the rings, where Ada's friend Harman, nearing the end of his fifth and final Twenty, wants to find out what happened the post-humans who left Earth, and why they have been left behind.

This all takes a bit of getting through, and with several very large pinches of salt. Rather too many things defy explanation, like the reason for the body rebuilding in the 'firmay' when the faxnodes (which can 'read' objects and bodies at a quantum level, to take them apart and recreate them elsewhere) don't just use the last



available reading. Others seem to be added into the mix for the sake of admittedly striking images, like the crucifix-impaled *calibani* in the crop fields of the Atlantic Breach (a dry swathe cut through the ocean like a highway), or the Little Green Men who rescue Mahnmoot and Orphu, and who have erected thousands of stone heads around the shores of the Martian sea. (Given the work that one part of *Ilium* is so clearly modelled on, I thought I had identified the face on the stone heads which stare out like a ward or protection from the Martian shores, but turned out to be wrong. There is a further literary marble Simmons has yet to pull out the bag before the tale concludes.)

The tales collide, some literally, and the nature of the gods — which some of us will have already guessed — is revealed. (Though not their motivation, which remains both unexplained and a puzzle, except perhaps as another of the many intertextual allusions, this time to Zelazny's *Lord of Light*.) Quite why a bunch of post-humans who are able to bend time and space to their will would choose to incarnate as the pantheon of Greek gods and immerse themselves in the Trojan war (and be wilfully ignorant of its outcome) is a central mystery from which the story never quite manages to extricate itself.

More damningly perhaps, there is an almost constant sense of authorial intrusion, hijacking characters' mouths for anachronistic jokes and references (from everything from *Hamlet* to *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*) that can be either seen as postmodern playfulness or pure self-indulgence. This seems to be repeated all the way up the scale, from obscure jokes (at one point Harman confuses Plato with Pluto, who he has seen a cartoon drawing of once, but then asks in the next sentence, 'What's a dog?'), to entire passages of Proust, to artificial intelligences modelled on characters from *The Tempest*.

I'm puzzled by *Ilium*. It galumphs from historical retelling to genre adventure story (although many of these sections are genuinely exciting, and the last-minute escape from the orbital firmery is pure space opera adventure), and from satire to literary conceit, but never quite makes it clear what its real intention is. Maybe I'm missing something. Peter F. Hamilton, on the back-cover quote, writes, 'It's all too easy to think that the ancient Greek Gods and Heroes which he has brought to such sharp-edged life would genuinely behave like this.' Unfortunately, that's the one thing I couldn't manage to believe.

***The Somnambulist* by Jonathan Barnes (Gollancz; 2007)**

I can't recall whether I discovered this browsing randomly in the local library or had seen a copy on Iain Emsley's shelves during a recent visit. It is a debut novel and a deranged cod-Victorian conspiracy murder mystery that has strong echoes of James Blaylock's mad fantasies, such as *Homunculus* and *The Digging Leviathan*, which I remember being very taken with back in the late 1980s.

The back cover describes it thus:

A lurid piece of nonsense, convoluted, implausible, peopled by unconvincing caricatures, written in drearily pedestrian prose, frequently ridiculous and wilfully bizarre.

Or, also on the back cover, from Adam Roberts, bylined as 'Professor of Nineteenth Century Literature, London University' (and who has probably watched too many episodes of *The Good Old Days*, judging by his alliterative puffery):

Splendid stuff: a phantasmogoric feast of vicarious Victoriana. Highly readable, brilliantly imaginative, as ornamented and crammed with delights and marvels as the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Of course I had to read it. I haven't read a book that goes so completely over the top in ages. (Well, since Hal Duncan's *Vellum*.) Stage conjurors, the reanimated corpse of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, an insane church that plans to topple the British Empire, raze London to the ground, and rebuild it as a perfect Pantisocratic society, a shadowy secret agency staffed by fake public school Chinamen, and an albino enforcer and occasional assassin. A brothel specialising in deformities and the grotesque for discerning (and wealthy) gentlemen. An ugly dwarf travelling backwards in time and given to gnomic warnings. Two unstoppable freelance assassins who dress as short-trousered schoolboys and talk like the two gentlemen's outfitters from *The Fast Show* ('Do you sir, do you really?'), and the Somnambulist of the title, a mute and silent giant, who never sleeps, only ever consumes huge quantities of milk, and is impervious to weapons.

Edmund Moon is a stage conjurer, amateur gentleman detective and debunker of fake spiritualists, who with his giant, mute, stage assistant known only as the Somnambulist, is called upon to help solve the murder of the deeply unpleasant actor Cyril Honeyman, discovered at the foot of a high broken window. An obvious case of suicide, thinks Det. Inspector Merryweather, but why is the broken glass on the inside of the room, and why the look of stricken terror on Honeyman's face? Moon and Merryweather's investigation leads them a travelling circus and a misshapen creature known as The Fly, which tries to attack Moon and falls instead to his own death. Which seems to wrap things up nicely, except it's just starting. Instead, during a séance that Moon is hoping to debunk, he is addressed and threatened by the spirit of the Fly, rasping warnings of plots and conspiracies.

All of which brings Moon unwelcome attention from several sources. First, an offer he is not allowed to refuse from the threatening albino Skimpole of the shadowy Directorate, who just to reinforce his message burns down Moon's theatre and then puts him up, together with the Somnambulist (even the inebriate tramp Speight, who used to sleep on Moon's porch) in a suite of hotel rooms. Then, from the ugliest man Moon has ever seen, who introduces himself as Cribb, who claims to be travelling backwards in time, and drops irritating and enigmatic remarks about their meetings in the future or past — depending on which direction you're

living in.

What is going on underneath London? What are the meanings of the religious verses on Speight's placards? And what has any of this to do a forgotten work of a dead poet and the fate of a legacy he bequeathed to a law firm called Love, Love, Love and Love, or the mythical twin gods of the city of London, Gog and Magog, who like King Arthur, are supposed not dead but sleeping until their hour of need has come? All these forces eventually

collide, along with the two schoolboy killers and a putrescent reanimated corpse mouthing fragments of 'The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner', in a ramshackle (and bloody) apocalypse that make the streets of the City of London resemble a too-gory outtake from *Shaun of the Dead*. Grotesque, ridiculous, and largely populated by a cast of memorably unpleasant figures seem that owe as much to Mervyn Peake as to Dickens — had the latter perhaps discovered laudanum — but huge fun.

Amy Harlib: Three Novels by Sophie Masson

Serafin

by Sophie Masson

**(St Mary's Press ISBN 0-88489-567-X;
2000; \$5.50; tpb)**

Serafin was originally published as *Carabas* in author Masson's home, Australia, where the poetic quality of the writing and the transcendent appeal of its story was such that an American publisher saw fit to give the book the wider distribution it deserves.

This fantasy novel is set in late seventeenth–early eighteenth-century France during the time of King Louis XIV, and draws inspiration from the old fairytale 'Puss-in-Boots' and from legends of descendants of angels who have mingled with mortals.

In a rural village, the local outcast girl, Catou, threatened with lynching by a mob who claims she is a shape-changer and a witch, is saved by Frederic, the young son of the town's miller. This altruistic deed gets Catou and Frederic both exiled — a witch and her ally will not be tolerated by the ignorant villagers. Grateful for her rescuer's kindness, Catou is bound by the code she follows, the Law, to repay him — which she tries her best to do, for her power is not only that of the matagot (a werecat who can transform from human to feline and back at will), but greater than even she knows. Catou and Frederic are forced to live a hand-to-mouth existence, roaming from town to town, struggling to survive, aided by Catou's power, which she uses to 'acquire' just enough food, clothing, and small coins to get by.

Life suddenly seems to offer hope of better prospects when a handsome, charismatic stranger named Balze, in the service of the mysterious Lord of Tenebran, enters their lives. Frederic fails to realise how dangerous Balze is, but Catou does, and her efforts to protect themselves lead to adventures that will eventually take the protagonists all the way to the court of the Sun King. Before they get there, though, Catou manages to disguise Frederic as the noble Marquis of Carabas from Spain, and herself (cross-dressed) as his faithful servant Serafin, enabling them to come under the patronage of the brother of the Lord of Tenebran, Monsieur de Saint-Cotin, whose lovely daughter Elisabeth inevitably becomes romantically entangled with the erstwhile Marquis.

Serafin/Catou, in her efforts to spread kindness in accordance to the Law she follows, runs afoul of Balze, who by his nature is opposed to everything she represents, and is using his pose as the steward of Castle Tenebran to spread his own type of corruption and decadence, to the dismay of the Monsieur and his daughter, when Serafin's deeds awaken them to Balze's mischief.

Masson fully develops the characters of Serafin/Catou, Frederic, the Monsieur, Elisabeth, King Louis XIV, and the Lord of Tenebran and Balze as they represent her version of the Eternal Struggle that can never be won without cost. Masson's gifts as a storyteller are considerable, enabling her to deal with spiritual and moral issues in the Judaeo-Christian tradition in a thoroughly entertaining manner — using a fairytale plot, setting, and characters to deliver her message in a poetic, unique prose style that only in a few places towards the end comes close to preaching, but not enough to spoil enjoyment of a very imaginative and original reworking of centuries-old folkloric themes. Marketed as a young adult novel intentionally designed to be uplifting, *Serafin* succeeds in doing that, but it also tells a beautiful, atmospheric tale that effectively evokes its French setting, and is written well enough to be satisfying to fantasy-loving adults as well.

The Green Prince

by Sophie Masson

(Hodder Headline Australia

ISBN 0-7336-0791-8; 2000; \$A16.49; tpb)

Sophie Masson is finally getting her work published in Great Britain. One of her books has been made available in the USA by a small, independent publisher. Her latest work, released in Australia (but easily obtainable on the Internet), is one of her best yet, and deserves wide distribution and attention.

The Green Prince, using Welsh and Celtic myth and folklore pertaining to the watery worlds and the denizens of streams, rivers, and the sea as its source of inspiration, is set in medieval England and opens in the small provincial village of Crundall. This is where the protagonist, sixteen-year-old orphan Jack Fisher, with his eccentric

affinity for aquatic environs and the fisherman's trade, makes his home.

Masson's shimmering poetic prose style sweeps the reader into the story, for the text is so rich in vivid description, background detail, and emotional intensity that the characters and plot spring to life.

Jack, enjoying the annual local Fair, is mesmerised by the 'exhibit' in this year's freak show: a powerful-looking merman whose telepathic communications convince him that he is genuine. Vagan, the ambassador from the undersea Green Kingdom, is actually on a mission to find the hero needed to fight the fearsome Grimlow, Monster of Darkness, Master of the Abyss, and Jack, by reason of his mysterious heritage (later to be revealed), responds to the call to meet his destiny.

Jack, absconding with Vagan and aided by the amusing, froglike Shellycoat (the local spring spirit), embarks on the adventure of his life, gripped by confusion, doubts and the requisite excitement. Mer-magic enables the protagonist to function under water with total ease as he undertakes a classic quest, which involves journeying through the river province of the Lady Tam and the mysterious realm of Fanach of the Lake until the climax in the Green Kingdom, which is ruled by the refreshingly female Green Prince. Jack's life-transforming experiences in the waterworld involve encounters with colourful characters out of lore and legend: selkies and kabyls (kelpies) and, most importantly, the half-human, strong, and spirited Linn (who will become the love of his life), heiress of Fanach.

Masson's descriptions of the undersea realms and their inhabitants are delightfully imaginative, atmospheric, and full of wonder and inventiveness. She writes such setpieces as: Lady Tam's 'river cattle' and their magical connections to the origins of amber; the 'soul cages'; and the oddly computeresque, silvery, translucent sea-books being memorable and affecting. Of course, all this and Jack's utterly believable hesitations, fears, and uncertainties lead up to the confrontation with the terrifying Grimlow, an effectively resonant representation of the dark force, the evil monster that lurks not only in the literal Abyss, but also in the depths of all human hearts. How Jack copes with this trial, resolved in a classically folkloric manner, is both dramatically and emotionally satisfying and a fitting conclusion to this lovely fantasy. *The Green Prince* is colourfully aquatic, awash with swift-flowing, exciting plotting, with the deeper meanings a shining subtext serving to enhance the book's evocative entertainment value, that the diligent reader willing to fish for it in the vast ocean of the Internet, will be richly rewarded!

The Firebird

by Sophie Masson

(Hodder Headline Australia

ISBN 0-7336-1307-1; 2001; \$A16.95; tpb)

Sophie Masson draws upon her expertise to produce yet another masterful fantasy novel. Based on a famous Russian legend, 'The Firebird', that many others have used to inspire their books, Masson's take on the tale offers refreshing new variations on the theme.

In this latest spin on the firebird mythos, Masson sets up the familiar characters in their milieu: the courts of old Russia of a thousand years ago when powerful, greedy Tsar Demyan favours his two oldest sons, brutal Yuri and sly Igor, who take after their father, while the youngest prince, Ivan, possesses keen intelligence and a kind and gentle nature (much like his dear departed mother). Ivan endures the endless taunts and torments of his brothers, unpleasanties made worse when Yuri gets betrothed to the girl the youngest sibling has loved nearly all his life — the bold, bright, and beautiful Princess Tamara, only daughter of the king of nearby Vakhtania and a descendant of the legendary enchantress Medea.

The real excitement begins when, one day, Ivan witnesses the fabled firebird alighting on a rare apple tree in his father's garden. Lusting to possess the magical creature, the Tsar commands his sons to go forth on a quest to capture it and return with it to the palace. Resolved to be the first to find the winged wonder, Ivan embarks on a journey that Masson embellishes with many creative elements all her own, departing from the well-known versions of the story.

Ivan soon finds himself joined by the mysterious and brave youth Bogatyr and a feisty female shape-shifter, Grey Wolf. The narrative alternates from following Ivan and his new friends' adventures to depicting the trials of Yuri and Igor in hot pursuit. Subsequent encounters with a variety of colourful and frequently magical entities affect the travellers according to their inner natures, edifying experiences handled in a thrilling and enterprising manner.

Ivan and company receive the dubious aid of a 'leshi', a trickster being out of folklore. All the journeyers, however, must cope with Caspian merchant caravans; a wise poet Rusta'veli and his vital knowledge about how to find the firebird (information that does not come without a price); an old babushka with formidable occult powers who is far more than she seems; and the mysterious, magical gift items she offers them. Paralleling Ivan, Yuri and Igor separately deal with Lady Jezebel of the House of Mizrat, her sorcery and her enslaved dragon with a terrible secret. When all the seekers, having traversed far through exotic and dangerous lands, at last arrive at their goal: Al Falak, the Desert of Stone and dwelling place of the firebird, their destinies and true natures become clear in satisfying and surprising ways. The 'leshi' plays a particularly interesting part in the resolution no less than the firebird.

Sophi Masson's *The Firebird*, written in her clear and polished prose that perfectly conveys the flavour of the colourful and varied folkloric sources of her tale, offers fully fleshed-out, plausibly motivated characters — male, female, and supernatural — that will appeal to contemporary readers of all ages while losing none of their novelised fairytale charm. The vivid settings, the spell-binding magic in and of the narrative, the provocative choices the protagonists and the antagonists must face, and the shimmeringly skilful, swift-paced story-telling, makes *The Firebird* a flight of fantasy well worth following.

— Amy Harlib, 2001

Ian Nichols reviews:

Gathering the Bones

**edited by Jack Dann, Ramsey Campbell, and
Dennis Etchison
(HarperCollins Voyager; 466 pp.)**

What, really, is horrific? What is it which inspires a sensation of cold nausea, sweat and terror? What makes us look behind quickly, in case a fearful monster close behind us treads? Modern films and television have made the traditional monsters figures of fun, and even the monsters that are produced specially for us on the screen may make us twitch, but hardly break out in a cold sweat. Modern horror must constantly redefine itself, to stay ahead of cynicism and parody, even self-parody. There is, in *Gathering the Bones*, much redefinition.

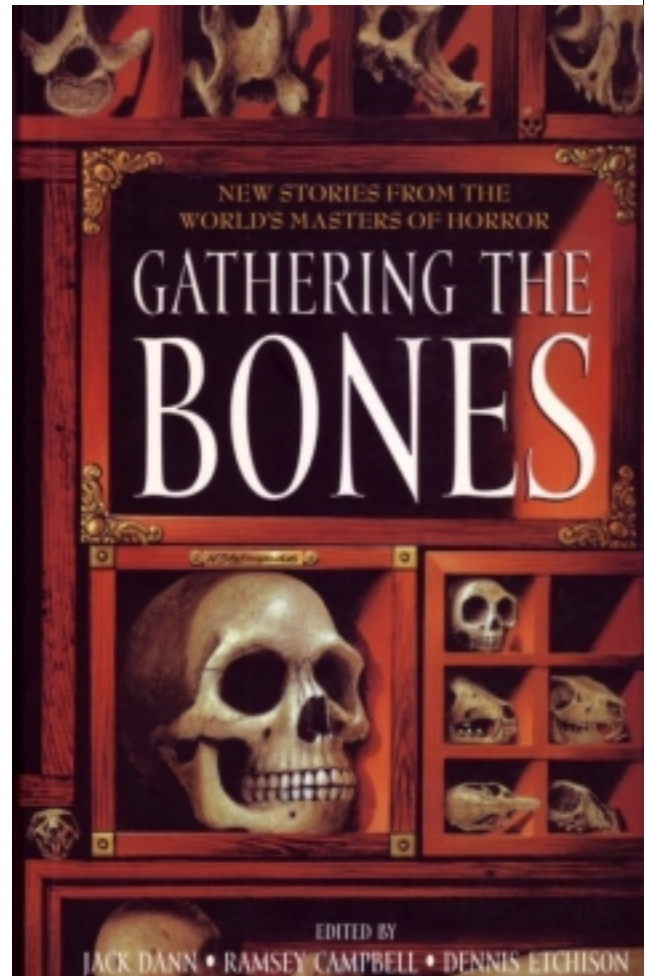
Many of these stories are frightening on a truly primal level, because they are based within our familiar world. 'Li'l Miss Ultrasound', by Robert Devereaux, takes the beauty contest to extremes. It horrifies us with our own desire for notoriety and the lengths to which we will go to achieve it. 'The Intervention', by Kim Newman, takes a Kafkaesque theme, helplessness in the face of bureaucracy, and places it right next door. 'Sounds Like', by Mike O'Driscoll, shows us how far people will go for peace and quiet.

Pace is an important aspect of any horror story. Too fast, and the impact is lost; too slow, and the impact never emerges. The stories in this anthology are all, without exception, impeccably paced. Janeen Webb's 'Blake's Angel', for instance, takes us into a magically real world of a poet's desire, and the consequences of this. The narrative mirrors the changing state of this desire, and the final evocation of pity is one that does not come as a surprise, but as an exegesis.

Russell Blackford's 'Smoke City' is set in a cyberpunkish future, and more epideictic than exegetic. It rattles along with vampires without a shred of Transylvanian accent, who have to live in a world that is as horrific as they ever were. There is a good deal of sex and violence in the story, but it returns, in a way, to the essential nature of the vampire: the highly sexual invader of the self.

The epistolary development of 'Under the Bright and Hollow Sky', by Andrew J. Wilson, is a return to Lovecraftian structure, even leaving room for a little self-parody and humour. The recursive nature of the story is eminently suited to just such a structure.

There are far, far too many good stories in this antho-



logy to list them all, or even to pick a favourite. The best of them do much to advance the idea of what constitutes a horror story, in that they pick up the mirror and show us where horror lies. It is this idea that horror lies within us, and so cannot ever be avoided or escaped, which is eerily fascinating. Even those that are weaker are very worthy stories, although perhaps lacking the spine-crawling effect of the best ones. The most impressive aspect of the anthology is that every single story, without exception, gains and holds the reader's attention. The anthology is remarkable in that it is so easy to read but challenging at the same time. It is an essential book for any horror enthusiast.

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