

SF COMMENTARY 85

October 2013

92 pages

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AND MANY
MORE!



Cover: 'The Alien Race' by Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)

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Front cover: Ditmar (Dick Jenssen): 'The Alien Race'.

Back cover: Steve Stiles: 'Lovecraft's Fever Dream'.

Artwork

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Photographs

Peggyann Chevalier (p. 3); Murray and Natalie MacLachlan (p. 4); Helena Binns (p. 26); Barbara Lamar (p. 46); Mervyn and Helena Binns (p. 56); Harold Cazneaux, courtesy Ray Wood (p. 71).

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I must be talking to my friends

This issue of *SF Commentary* is 10 months late. Sorry about that. I had a faint hope that I could retire from paying work and do nothing but publish fanzines, listen to music, and watch films, but that's not possible. In order to survive, I need to take on any and all paying work (indexing and editing) that's offered. Fortunately some of my clients remember me, and have sent me some very interesting jobs during 2012 and 2013.

So instead of publishing during 2013 the planned four issues of *SF Commentary*, *Treasure* (as it is now named), and my mailing-comments fanzine for ANZAPA, I've only published *Treasure* 1. That's my magazine that covers material that freewheels outside the SF/fantasy field. It's had many names over the years, including *The Metaphysical Review* (1984–1998), but in

the last 20 years it has appeared as **brg** in ANZAPA (Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association), *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life* in Acnestis (1995–2005), and *Scratch Pad* in the PDF version <<http://efanzines.com>>. From now on I will publish all versions, print and electronic, under the same name. Already I've received many interesting letters of comment for the first *Treasure* chest.

I ask people to download my magazines if possible, but for the time being I can continue to print a small number of copies of *SF Commentary* for people who send me printed fanzines, books for review, articles, artwork, and substantial letters of comment, and those who cannot access it on the internet. And, of course, for people who send me subscriptions (\$100) and donations.

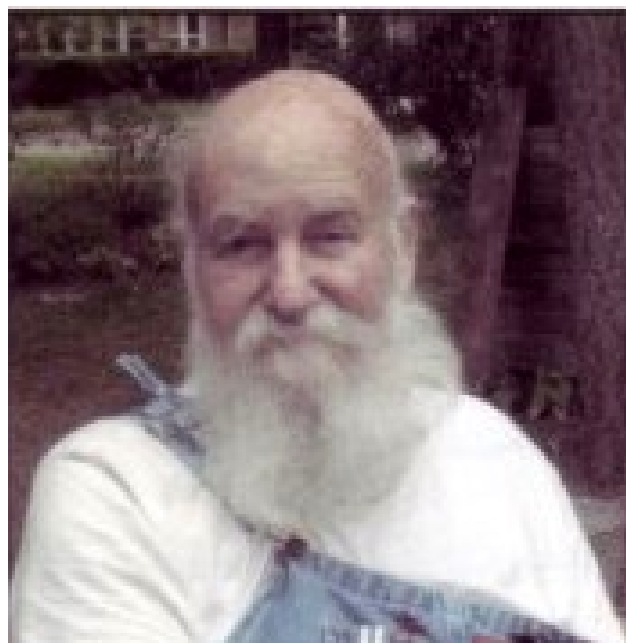
Friends lost in 2013

We lost many members of the SF community during the last year. Some, such as Jack Vance and Frederik Pohl, had reached their nineties, and had contributed a vast amount to science fiction during much of the twentieth century. **Jack Vance** had finally retired from writing, but **Frederik Pohl** was working on a novel and a second volume of *The Way the Future Was* when he died. He won the Hugo Award for Best Fan Writer in 2010. His most recent novel is *All the Lives He Led* (2011).

One month after he announced that he was severely affected by aggressive cancer, **Iain Banks** left us. He was 59. His novels fill a large section of one of my shelves, but most of us expected him to be published steadily and successfully for the next 30 years. He had already achieved fame with *The Wasp Factory* and two other novels before an enterprising fan (Rog Peyton from Birmingham, much mentioned later in this issue) invited Iain to an SF convention. When Iain discovered that fans' drinking capacity matched his own, he adopted fandom and it adopted him. He was to be the British Pro Guest of Honour at Loncon 3, next year's world convention to be held in London.

Two fans you might not have heard of were Michael Waite from Ypsilanti, Michigan, who died on 1 January at the age of 77, and Dan McCarthy from Dunedin, New Zealand, who died on 7 August at the age of 79. Their deaths greatly upset me and his other close friends, but they were less well known than might be expected.

Michael Waite was known to the members of FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Press Association, America's oldest and most venerable SF apa) and a few other people to whom he sent his very fine fanzine *Trial and Air*. He was a reticent man, and I found it hard to keep up an email



Michael Waite during the last months of his life. (Photo: Peggyann Chevalier.)

conversation with him. He stayed in touch with his Australian friends mainly through *SF Commentary* cover artist and writer **Dick Jenssen**. He also liked to send presents of fine books and magazines. We knew little about him until after he died, when his friend and neighbour **Peggyann Chevalier** gathered together quite a bit of information about his life and times into a publication *Missing Michael*, including an account of the funeral gathering at his home. Michael collected books and cats,



Dan McCarthy. (Photo supplied by Natalie and Murray MacLachlan.)

and, as Peggyann tells us, he knew his books well. **Robert Lichtman** gathered together material about him for FAPA, and **Dick Jenssen** and **Bill Wright** prepared a wonderful tribute to Michael for efanzines.com, ANZAPA, and other interested fans.

Dan McCarthy was the grand old man of New Zealand fandom, having been a member of Aotearapa for 25 years, awarded the Sir Julius Vogel Award, and also been made a Fan Guest of Honour at the national NZ convention. We (mostly Australian) members of ANZAPA were very lucky, because Dan sent us 77 issues of his fanzine *Panopticon* during the last decades of Dan's life. The covers of *Panopticon* featured his wonderful paintings and colour graphics, plus wise and witty comments about his family, New Zealand and its literature, life, and, of course, the fanzines of other members of ANZAPA. Still, it was only after Murray MacLachlan, a Dunediner who has been living in Melbourne since 2000, prepared an account of his and his wife Natalie's memories of Dan that we gained any idea of his life and achievements.

The Sea and Summer returns

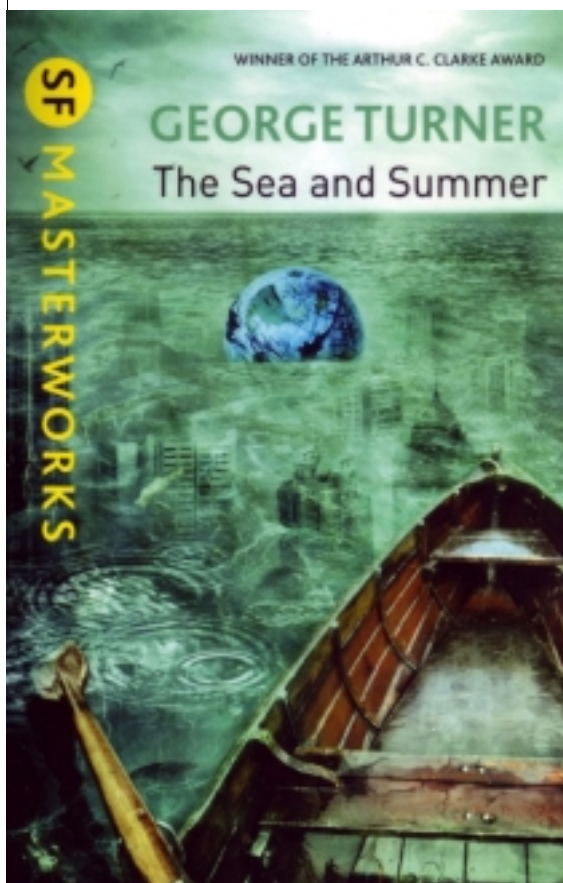
George Turner was an Australian critic, novelist, short story writer and fan who is still much missed. When he

died in 1997 at the age of 79, he had been a mainstream Australian novelist (including a Miles Franklin Award in 1962), SF novelist, SF critic, short story writer, and essayist. He had agreed to become the Australian Pro Guest of Honour at Aussiecon 3 (the third world SF convention to be held in Melbourne) in 1999.

George Turner's career as an SF novelist comprised two series: the trilogy that began with *Beloved Son* in 1978, and the novels that began with *The Sea and Summer* (*Drowning Towers* in the American edition) in 1987 and finished with *Down There in Darkness* (posthumously in 2000).

After he died, I discovered that he had made me his literary executor and heir — which surprised me greatly. I doubt if I've been the best possible promoter of his works. Neither I nor my American agent have been able to re-sell his books in America, but we were very pleased when Malcolm Edwards, in his role as Orion/Gollancz executive head of the SF Gateway project, offered to republish Turner's best SF novel *The Sea and Summer* (*Drowning Towers*) in print and e-book editions. The rest of his SF novels may yet reappear in e-book editions.

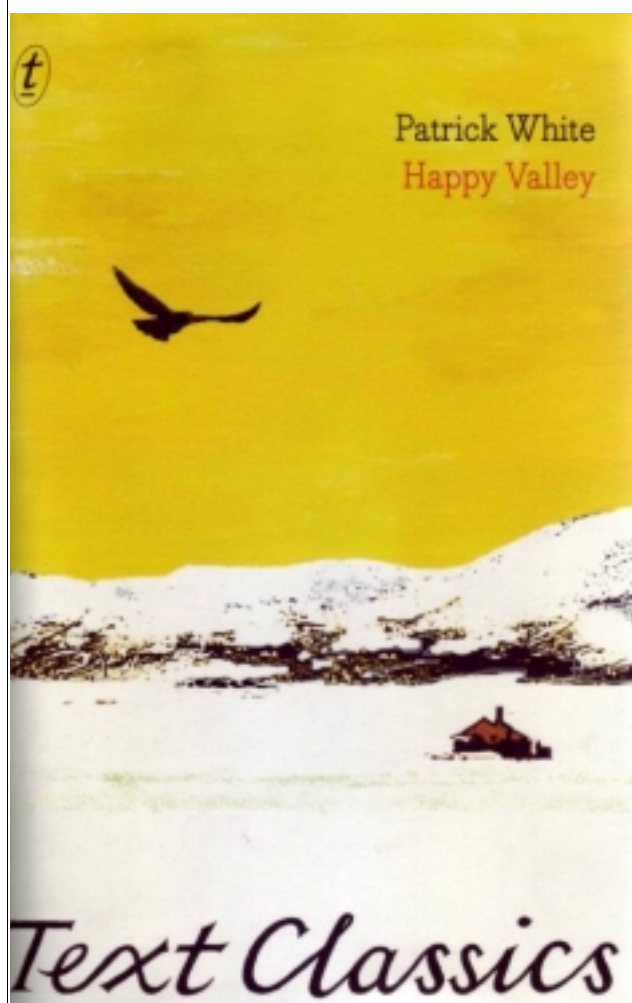
I had hoped that this republication would lead to widespread distribution of *The Sea and Summer* for the first time in Australia, but I haven't seen it in any bookshops yet. I'm assured by Hachette in Sydney that copies exist, and I'm sure Justin Ackroyd at Slow Glass Books can find you a copy if nobody else can. *The Sea and Summer* is one of the first novels to look at climate change in a realistic way, so remains relevant. It still reads very well as a serious piece of Australian literature. I will return to it in a forthcoming issue of *SF Commentary*.



Favourites 2012

Favourite books of 2012

I've been feeling irritated about most current fiction that I've been reading. Instead I've been devouring films and TV series, mainly on DVDs and Blu-rays, with an appetite not matched by my taste for novels and short stories. Why? I write about books; usually I don't write about movies or TV. But when I want to relax, movies let me forget completely my minor ailments and dissatisfactions. The mundane world disappears; the world of the movie is my world for two hours or so. Movies are a drug, but a very pleasant one. I don't get tired of the effect, although I have become annoyed by some kinds of movies I used to enjoy. A good movie at the end of the day is sufficient reward for crawling through the rest of the day (if it has been that sort of day). When reading books, I stay aware of the world around me. I'm easily distracted by outside events and bored by lousy writing or story-telling. I put aside the book and fall asleep in my chair.



But my enjoyment of reading noticeably increased during 2012. I can't explain this change of viewpoint. I did not have a sudden Road-to-Mount-Helicon experience. But I did discover a series of novels and short fiction collections that stayed in my hand and stopped me turning on the plasma screen. What had buoyed me up during the year was finding in the collection a series of short fiction collections that contained treasures as well as dud stories.

Between tick and tock

I also read some poetry collections that gave much satisfaction, although the only consistently brilliant poetry anthology is my Top Book of the Year, **Rosemary Dobson's *Collected***. This compact version of Dobson's life's work appeared in 2012 within a few weeks of her death at the age of 92.

Rosemary Dobson is one of the few Australian poets I've met (briefly). In 1982, Gerald Murnane's *The Plains*, published by Carey Handfield, Rob Gerrand, and me, as Norstrilia Press, was a finalist for *The Age* Book of the Year. Rob, Carey, and I (with Maggie and Elaine) went to the presentation ceremony, and were standing around looking a bit glum after *The Plains* lost. Rosemary Dobson, one of the judges, came over to us and said, '*The Plains* would have won if it had not been for one of the judges. He disliked it so much that he vetoed it. I thought it was a wonderful book.' When Rosemary Dobson died during 2012, many of the obituaries told stories of her kindness to individuals, and her lifelong support for Australian literature.

When eventually I read 350 pages of her poems in the new *Collected*, I was not prepared for the enjoyment I received from the poise, precision, and perception of her poetry, especially from her early collections. In her earliest book, *In a Convex Mirror* (1944), published when she was in her early twenties, she shows a voluminous knowledge of European modernist poetry, as well as a heartfelt response to all the arts. She seems not to have been as interested in Australian landscape as many of the other poets of her generation were. Instead she already shows an encyclopaedic knowledge of painting and sculpture, not just for their own sake but as a method of discovering all the possibilities of her own place in the world. Dobson never seems naïve or simplistic, but her response to the world is openhearted. My favourite stanza of hers can be found in 'In a Convex Mirror', the first poem in the collection. Two people face each other, reflected in a mirror. The mirror image makes them appear as 'pictured angels touching wings', as in a painting. 'The room is still and brushed with dusk: / Shall we not disregard



the clock / Or let alone be eloquent / The silence between tick and tock?' Most of the poems are about that 'silence between tick and tock', that heartbeat of perception, the tiny period between falling into a situation and realising its possibilities.

Mr Sneyd and Mr Garner

Some of my readers might receive copies of a fanzine called *Data Dump* from Steve Sneyd in Britain. This is the last handwritten fanzine. Steve *can* type, because he has sent me typed copies of some of his articles, but for some reason he does not type his fanzines, and he seems to have no intention of buying a computer. Steve's handwriting is not unreadable, but I cannot persuade him to allow extra space between the lines of his writing. I did explain to him the importance of the concept of leading, but he ignores me. No matter. Steve Sneyd's *Data Dump* is, as far as know, the only fanzine devoted to science fiction and fantasy poetry. Steve combs the fannish and professional press for evidence of fantasy and SF activity anywhere in the world. Nothing escapes his notice.

Therefore Steve remembered that I had published some material about British fantasy writer Alan Garner in *Steam Engine Time* a few years ago. When Alan Garner's new novel, *Boneland*, was released during 2012, Steve sent me a variety of reviews from British newspapers, including one by Ursula Le Guin, in which she confessed that she really didn't understand the book.

What Steve did not know is that until that moment I had received no evidence of the existence of *Boneland*. As far as I was aware, Garner's *Thursbitch*, published nine years before, was his most recent novel. *Boneland* could not be found in any Australian bookshop. It still cannot be found in any Australian bookshop.

I was just trying to work out how to obtain a copy when I made my quarterly pilgrimage to the hidden depths of Justin Ackroyd's book cave, known as Slow Glass Books. He handed me a copy of *Boneland* — for purchase, of course. Justin had indented one of the very few copies to reach Australia.

Given the book, I accepted the challenge of reading and understanding it. Despite the relatively small size of my brain compared with Ursula Le Guin's, I had to find out for myself whether *Boneland* can be understood. Yes, it can be, if you accept that one half of the story, told about a character living in prehistoric times, is a kind of legendary being rather than a real man. The story of the twenty-first-century characters can be understood, but turns out to be part of the same legendary landscape.

Rediscovering Garner after many years (that is, since *Strandloper*), I decided to make another attempt to read *Thursbitch*. When I printed in *Steam Engine Time* a few years ago my 1977 article about some early Garner novels, accompanied by Robert Mapson's review of *Thursbitch*, I had to admit to him that I couldn't get past its page 2.

In 2012, I braved the rapids of *Boneland*. Now I could return to *Thursbitch*. And after that difficult first chapter, I had no problems with it. It is an even more involving novel than *Boneland*, and its ending is very moving.

Intrigued, I thought the best way to make sense of *Boneland* completely would be to re-read *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Moon of Gomerath* after 40 years. The blurb for *Boneland* claims that it is a sequel to those novels, written for children in the 1960s. Surprise! *Boneland* does actually continue the story of Colin, lost in a kind of magic landscape at the end of *Gomerath*, parted from his sister Susan during the last pages of that novel. I found the early books far more powerful than when I first read them. *Moon of Gomerath*, in particular, haunts the mind. I returned to *Boneland*, finding that many of its more obscure images now make sense.

Reading Garner again is an exhilarating experience. This is what reading fiction was all about. I usually don't re-read books, but I gain an enormous amount from returning to early Garner. *Elidor* (Garner's third children's novel) proves to be even more powerful than *Weirdstone* and *Gomerath*. *Elidor* is a rare achievement in English fiction, let alone 'children's fiction' or 'YA fiction', or whatever label it bore on first publication.

So what's wrong with British fiction that neither *Strandloper* nor *Thursbitch* was nominated for the Man Booker Prize? They, and *Boneland*, make the rest of current British writing seem very pallid.

Signs of brilliance

Patrick White's first novel *Happy Valley* was published in 1939. When all the copies were sold, he forbade its republication. Those who had bought copies hung onto them, and nobody could make White change his mind

while he was alive. In 2012, the enterprising publishers of Text Classics have given us back this extraordinary novel. (In a hardback!) It's difficult to think of a better first novel from an Australian writer. I can think of some I *like* better, but that's different. In *Happy Valley*, White shows all the skills of exposition, plotting, and character development that one would expect from a major novelist in mid career. His skills are just there. Add to them the full array of purely Patrick White skills: that perception of the tiny intimate distances between people that most affect their fates. Relations between people in this novel are fully felt because they happen to us in real time while we're reading about them.

Happy Valley has faults, of course, but they are only annoyances, made minor by the robust confidence of everything else in the book. *Happy Valley* has a brilliant climactic scene, then keeps going for another 100 pages. In his later great novels, such as *The Tree of Man* and *Riders in the Chariot*, he organises his material better — but the writing in the later novels is merely an amplification of everything that can be found in his first. Thanks to the people at Text for this one.

Stories about stories

Why read fiction? I know this is an old question, but writers as well as readers need to keep asking it. Now that people can self-publish on the internet, there is a vast amount of new fiction out there somewhere, pounded out on millions of keyboards, and not really a great number of people who want to read it. So why should we dip into any of this vast torrent of crap? Merely because people like writing it?

It seems a trite thing to say, but most readers want good stories from their writers. If you read fiction today, your parent, guardian, or teacher probably read you entrancing yarns during your early childhood: interesting yarns that happen to interesting people. Throughout the rest of your life, you probably enjoy the books that best reproduce the thrill you received from listening to those yarns from childhood. If you grow up at all — inside your head — your definition of 'story' changes over the years, as do your perceptions of concepts such as 'characters' and 'plot'. You pick up a concept of 'style', but you realise that stylish clothes often cover a boring story. Fundamentally you want in a book an experience that is as different as possible from the squelchy boring events of your daily life. If you have an exciting, structured, vividly useful life, rich with self-congratulation, you probably don't read fiction.

Some of my favourite books of 2012 are by authors who have thought a bit about 'story' and what fiction means to them. **Jo Walton**, in *Among Others*, tells the story of a Welsh girl growing up, finding it hard to get along with the rest of the world (a) because she sees fairies and other people don't, and (b) because she reads vast quantities of science fiction and fantasy books. In turn, this reading leads her to discover people she would never otherwise have met. *Among Others* is a book about reading fiction, which includes the main character's discovery of fandom. There has been plenty of fiction about fans over the years, but I can't think of another story, told in realistic style, that features the main character's discov-

ery of fandom. The main character remains an unreliable narrator to me because she doesn't like the work of Philip K. Dick. Really! To write the story of the development of my adolescence I would have to write mainly about the works of Philip K. Dick and their influence on me.

An even more riveting story, this time featuring a main character who has been captured by fairies, is **Graham Joyce's** *Some Kind of Fairy Tale*, the most recent of his recent series of novels that have won awards all over the place. The main character appears on the doorstep twenty years after disappearing. To her, only six months have elapsed. She remembers those six months in a kind of hippy fairy commune, but can't convince her listeners. While she's been away, her family and old boyfriend have grown old and dispirited. The story is about pain and redemption, as all such tales are, and it is a story told very well.

Most of the books on both my Novels and Books lists are fantasies. How do I justify reading fantasy? I don't. The backbone of all imaginative writing is fantasy. People say they are telling us 'the truth' in their writing, but they are telling us only their truths. Fantasy becomes literature when we leap out of the prison cells of our 'real' lives; 'realism' is the web of fine details that give substance to our fantasies. Novels like **Peter S. Beagle's** *The Last Unicorn* (already 47 years old) and **Kenneth Grahame's** *The Wind in the Willows* (107 years old) seem as fresh as when they first appeared. Both are novels I had been expecting to read for many years. I've been hearing about *The Last Unicorn* since the early 1970s, but nobody told me what a deep, ambiguous, dark, interesting fantasy it is. It is a story of various characters who undergo various tribulations. These tribulations form the structure of the story, offering (of course) redemption at the end of the journey. Beagle was a fine prose stylist, even in his twenties, and has improved since.

When I was a child, I heard several times the BBC radio serial called *Toad of Toad Hall*, read by Norman Shelley, which was based on Kenneth Grahame's classic children's story *The Wind in the Willows*. My aunt read me the book aloud. But not until 2012 did I take down the book from the shelf and read it through from cover to cover. This reading reveals two secret chapters, absent from the old radio serial, and not read to us by my aunt: the chapter called 'Piper at the Gates of Dawn' and the one called 'Wayfarers All'. If it were not for these interludes, the book would mainly feature the misadventures of Toad, obviously based on some friend of the author, one of the most irritating characters in English fiction. Add in the interlude chapters, as well as the first chapter, and the novel becomes one of the great prose poems about the English countryside.

Not a fantasy, not a novel, and for many readers not even particularly entertaining, **Gerald Murnane's** latest book, *A History of Books*, is, like all his work of the last thirty years, a fiction about fiction. His main character, stripped of a name, looks at his book collection and wonders why he should keep any of the volumes on the shelves. He finds that he can remember, at most, a line of prose from any of them, and can remember little

about their contents. However, as he considers the books, he remembers that each book still has some value to him not so much because of which it says but because of the memory-images about events in his own life that come to mind when he thinks about each book. These images eventually become a powerful chain that might make one wonder why one keeps one's favourite books. My temptation is to repeat the process described in *A History of Books* while looking through my own collection.

Fine lives

A fine biography and a hilarious autobiography were outstanding features of the year's reading. **Meryle Secrest's *Stephen Sondheim: A Life*** is one of those few biographies that examine the life of an artist in terms of the development of that artist's work. Most biographers merely explicate the work as a kind of footnote to the daily events of the artist's life. In the case of Stephen Sondheim, we would never have known about his work if he had not taken up a series of artistic challenges unglimped by any artist in his field, and solved them. The challenge was: what to do with the Broadway musical? When Sondheim started work in the fifties, it was a form ironbound by conventions, many of them imposed by its audiences. People went to a Broadway musical to have their cares taken away, and to give them tunes to whistle for the rest of the week. Sondheim had a difficult mind; he could not write easy popular melodies, and his lyrics were sardonic and deep. Funny, too. His early successes included *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, just revived in a Melbourne theatre. After that, he invented a new artform, the 'Stephen Sondheim musical', more a type of glittering modern opera than musical comedy, populated by characters with agonising problems, lyrics that demanded careful listening, and

tunes that owed more to Britten and Barber than to Oscar Hammerstein II, who was Sondheim's musical godfather. Sondheim would not have succeeded without being blessed with personal charm and an almost infinite capacity for hard work, but in the end it is the originality of his art we value — and Secrest reveals the nature of that originality.

Much like Sondheim, **Anna Russell** (*I'm Not Making This Up, You Know*) developed her artform, musical parody, because of her limitations rather than because of easy strengths. Her mother hated her because she was not born pretty, so she had to prove she could succeed without good looks. She desperately wanted to be a top soprano, but a weakness in her voice condemned her to the back row of the chorus.

Anna Russell did have huge reserves of good humour and resilience. She heard Florence Foster Jenkins, the soprano with a powerful but awful voice, who hired concert halls to prove her skills to sceptical audiences. Florence Foster Jenkins did not have the gift of humour. Anna Russell took the same vocal skills, added explanatory commentaries to such classics as Wagner's *Ring Cycle*, and found that people rolled around in the aisles. The more complex the piece of music (such as Mozart's *Magic Flute*), and the more completely Anna Russell understood the work itself, the more amusing was the effect on audiences. Concert tours and bestselling records followed, but as Russell admits ruefully, she was not very good at marriage (two divorces). Perpetually restless, she even lived in Sydney for eight years, but found, like others before her, that Australians will hail a visiting hero, but have little time for a talented resident. Anna Russell lived out her retirement in Canada. Her great gift was having no illusions about herself or her talents, and wonderful tales to tell.

Favourite novels read for the first time in 2012

- 1 *Happy Valley* (1939 republ. 2012) Patrick White (Text Classics; 407 pp.)
- 2 *Thursbitch* (2003) Alan Garner (Vintage; 158 pp.)
- 3 *Boneland* (2012) Alan Garner (Fourth Estate; 149 pp.)
- 4 *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* (2012) Graham Joyce (Gollancz; 393 pp.)
- 5 *The Last Unicorn* (1968) Peter S. Beagle (Roc; 294 pp.)
- 6 *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) Kenneth Grahame (Methuen; 256 pp.)
- 7 *Among Others* (2011) Jo Walton (Tor; 302 pp.)
- 8 *A History of Books* (2012) Gerald Murnane (Giramondo; 206 pp.)
- 9 *The Fall of the Sparrow* (1958) Nigel Balchin (Readers Book Club; 320 pp.)
- 10 *Human Croquet* (1997) Kate Atkinson (Black Swan; 445 pp.)
- 11 *World Enough and Time: A Romantic Novel* (1950) Robert Penn Warren (Random House; 465 pp.)

- 12 *The Courier's New Bicycle* (2011) Kim Westwood (Harper Voyager; 328 pp.)

Other four-star contenders, in order of reading:

- Yellowcake Springs* (2011) Guy Salvidge (Glasshouse; 230 pp.)
The Knife of Never Letting Go (2008) Patrick Ness (Candlewick; 479 pp.)
To the Lighthouse (1927) Virginia Woolf (Penguin Modern Classics; 237 pp.)
The Eye of the Storm (1973) Patrick White (Viking; 608 pp.)
The Last Tycoon (1941/1965) F. Scott Fitzgerald (Penguin; 196 pp.)
Even the Wicked (1996) Lawrence Sanders (Orion; 340 pp.)
The Snowman (2007) Jo Nesbo (Vintage; 550 pp.)
Bitter Seeds (2010) Ian Tregillis (Orbit; 398 pp.)
The Vanishing Point (2012) Val McDermid (Little, Brown)

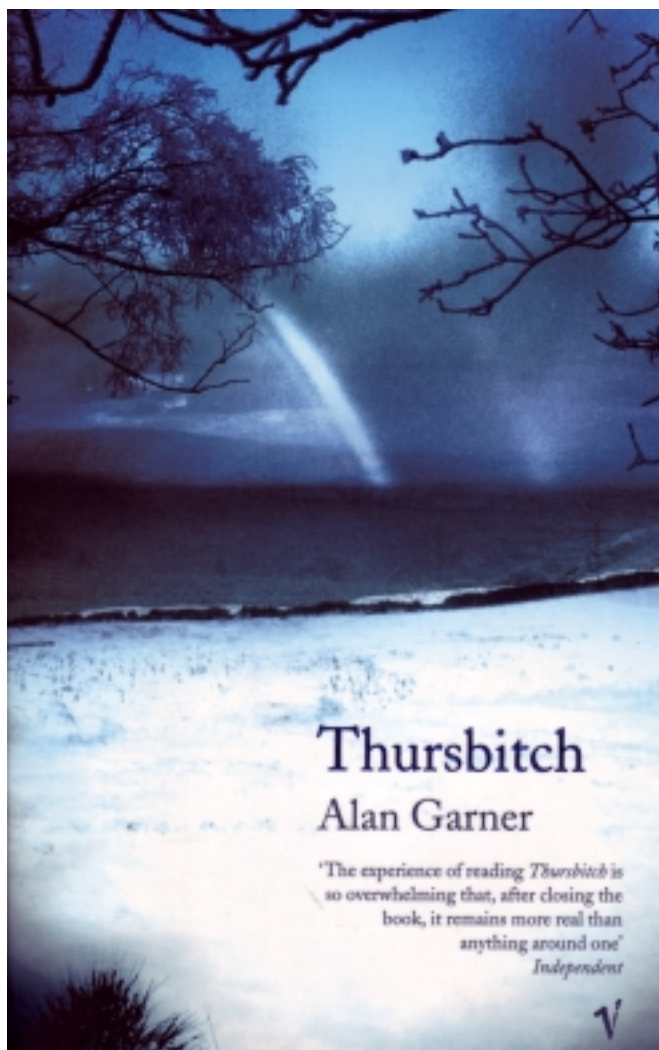
Favourite books read for the first time in 2012

- 1 *Collected* (2012) Rosemary Dobson (University of Queensland Press; 358 pp.)
- 2 *Happy Valley* (1939 repub. 2012) Patrick White (details in Novels list)
- 3 *Lovedeath* (1993) Dan Simmons (Warner Books; 310 pp.)
- 4 *Thursbitch* (2003) Alan Garner (details in Novels list)
- 5 *Boneland* (2012) Alan Garner (details in Novels list)
- 6 *Some Kind of Fairy Tale* (2012) Graham Joyce (details in Novels list)
- 7 *The Last Unicorn* (1968) Peter S. Beagle (details in Novels list)
- 8 *Dangerous Laughter* (2008) Steven Millhauser (Knopf; 244 pp.)
- 9 *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) Kenneth Grahame (details in Novels list)
- 10 *Among Others* (2011) Jo Walton (details in Novels list)
- 11 *Sleight of Hand* (2011) Peter S. Beagle (Tachyon; 287 pp.)
- 12 *Stephen Sondheim: A Life* (1998) Meryle Secrest (Bloomsbury; 461 pp.)
- 13 *'I'm Not Making This Up, You Know': An Autobiography of the Queen of Musical Parody* (1985) Anna Russell (Continuum; 246 pp.)
- 14 *A History of Books* (2012) Gerald Murnane (details in Novels list)
- 15 *The Fall of the Sparrow* (1958) Nigel Balchin (details in Novels list)
- 16 *Human Croquet* (1997) Kate Atkinson (details in Novels list)
- 17 *World Enough and Time: A Romantic Novel* (1950) Robert Penn Warren (details in Novels list)
- 18 *Dead Sea Fruit* (2010) Kaaron Warren (Ticonderonga; 424 pp.)
- 19 *Ishtar* (2011) ed. Amanda Pillar and K. V. Taylor (Gilgamesh; 248 pp.)
- 20 *The Courier's New Bicycle* (2011) Kim Westwood (details in Novels list)
- 21 *Ghosts by Gaslight: Stories of Steampunk and Supernatural Suspense* (2011) ed. Jack Dann and Nick Gevers (Harper Voyager; 389 pp.)
- 22 *A Book of Horrors* (2011) ed. Stephen Jones (Jo Fletcher; 429 pp.)
- 23 *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror 22* (2011) ed. Stephen Jones (Robinson; 575 pp.)
- 24 *The Secret History of Fantasy* (2010) ed. Peter S. Beagle (Tachyon; 379 pp.)
- 25 *The Secret History of Science Fiction* (2009) ed. James Patrick Kelley and John Kessel (Tachyon; 382 pp.)
- 26 *Through Splintered Walls* (2012) Kaaron Warren (Twelfth Planet; 183 pp.)
- 27 *An Exile on Planet Earth: Articles and Reflections* (2012) Brian Aldiss (Bodleian Library; 179 pp.)

- 28 *Bad Power* (2011) Deborah Biancotti (Twelfth Planet; 131 pp.)
- 29 *Fragments that Remain* (2010) John Litchen (Yanbu; 239 pp.)

Other four-star contenders, in order of reading:

- Thief of Lives* (2011) Lucy Sussex (Twelfth Planet; 105 pp.)
- My Favorite Fantasy Story* (2000) ed. Martin H. Greenberg (Daw Fantasy; 423 pp.)
- In the Penny Arcade* (1998) Steven Millhauser (Dalkey Archive; 164 pp.)
- Taller When Prone* (2010) Les Murray (Black Inc; 86 pp.)
- Metro Winds* (2012) Isobelle Carmody (Allen & Unwin; 386 pp.)
- Havergal Brian: The Making of a Composer* (1976) Kenneth Eastaugh (Harrap; 337 pp.)



Favourite short stories read for the first time in 2012

Why is this the first year for some time that I have made a list of Favourite Short Stories?

Short story writers or their editors like to be clever-clever and give their stories enigmatic titles. When I get to the end of the year, I am faced with lists of short stories that have little ticks beside them, and I cannot remember which story fits which title. Yes, I could read them all again. But most years, I have a fair bit of paying work in late December and early January. Not this year. During the last week of 2012 I sat down and re-read all the ticked stories for the year, and had a wonderful time remembering my favourites. I'm pleased that the short story is still a very healthy artform.

The horror!

Gillespie reading horror fiction? The horror! I'm supposed to be the bloke who reads all the science fiction. But in recent years I've found that my favourite Australian short story writers have been publishing their fiction under the label of 'horror' or 'dark fantasy' rather than 'science fiction'. The stories I like do not fit the clichés of the horror genre as I understand it, but they are not science fiction stories, either. Most of **Kaaron Warren's** stories in her first volume *The Grinding House* do not fit categories. Some remind me of stories in that other startling first volume by an Australian author, Peter Carey's *The Fat Man in History* (1974). Most of my other favourite Australian authors, including **Cat Sparks**, **Angela Slatter**, **Deborah Biancotti**, and **Lucy Sussex**, are publishing individual works that tend to be grabbed by the energetic editors of horror anthologies.

The downside is that, with a few exceptions, such as **Sean Williams**, **Sean McMullen**, **Kim Westwood**, and newcomer **Guy Salvidge**, Australian writers have almost lost interest in the foreseeable future. We see no sign here of the emergence of any Geoff Rymans, Iain Banks, or Ian McDonalds. I hope I'm proved wrong soon.

Among American and British books, I find I'm reaching for books marked 'horror' to find fantasy and SF writers who are pushing their limits. No story I've read in recent years pushes the limits more than **Dan Simmons'** novella 'The Great Lover', from the 1993 anthology *Lovedeath*. All the stories in this volume are memorable, but nothing surpasses Simmons' exploration of the true horror of being a soldier in the trenches on the Western Front during World War I. Many have written about this experience, but Simmons' forensic development of his material, using an effective supernatural element, provides greater riches than another story I've read during 2012.

'The Ziggurat' shows that **Gene Wolfe** remains a fine writer of fiction, although I've noticed that some critics have disliked his recent novels. 'The Ziggurat' seems to

be about a forest hunter whose expedition goes wrong. It develops very slowly into a science fiction story of great sensitivity and depth.

Steven Millhauser's stories often veer very close to science fiction, but it's not often that he writes a straightforward story of deepening mystery, such as 'The Room in the Attic'. The story is about the ultimate testing of limits, including a hair-raising scene in the 'room in the attic' of the title. The other stories in the 2008 collection *Dangerous Laughter* are well written, but fit more readily into the Millhauser territory we know well.

Ishtar, edited by Australians **Amanda Pillar** and **K. V. Taylor**, is a collection that has cumulative power, generated initially by its major story, **Kaaron Warren's** long novella 'The Five Loves of Ishtar'. (The other stories are by **Deborah Biancotti** — 'And the Dead Shall Outnumber the Living' — and **Cat Sparks**.) Warren uses all the legends about the goddess Ishtar to provide an affecting personal story that stretches over many years. Lovers come and go, nations rise and sink, but Ishtar soldiers on. Warren is one of the few storytellers who has a



viewpoint so alien from the ordinary that she can recreate a society in which Ishtar's arbitrary decisions and cruelties can be understood. There is nothing cute or reassuring about her Ishtar; no modern person would want to meet her without being well armed.

Every few years I notice a fine fantasy story by **Elizabeth Hand** in some anthology, but I haven't yet tracked down her own collections. '**Near Zennor**' is an engrossing ghost story set in that wild area of Cornwall that a friend of ours once explored by walking around the coast. The area contains very early British ruins and, it seems, some powerful ghosts. A dark tale; very satisfying.

Dan Simmons published a good run of short fiction in the 1990s. He has been hard to beat for intensity of vision or clarity of story-telling exposition. In '**All Dracula's Children**', Simmons punches as large a hole as possible in the cliché vampire tradition. Where are all the horrors of the world to be found? Not in the actions of simpering vampires, shambling zombies, crazy werewolves, or any of the other yawn-provoking images. The horror of our world is generated daily by a wide variety of dreadful political regimes in the world, of both the right and the left. One of the worst of them was Ceausescu's regime in Rumania before 1990. After it falls, visiting American experts travel through darkened, frozen streets try to make sense of a society bent on destroying as many of its own people as possible. Within even that scenario of horror can be found a worse horror.

Simmons also sees the wilder parts of US cities as brutal, offering little hope to their inhabitants. In '**The Counselor**', his storyteller tries to alleviate the worst abuses of children, while knowing the task is unending. Joanna Russ once defined genre fiction as 'wish fulfilment made plausible'. Simmons is very good at plausibility.

The rest of the story-tellers on my list owe much to the anthologists who collected them. I know nothing about **Stephen Jones**, for instance, except that his *A Book of Horror* is an outstanding collection from 2011, and his annual *Mammoth Books of Best New Horror* sets high standards of achievement. In No 22 of this series, **Brian Hodge's** '**Just Outside Our Windows, Deep Inside Our Walls**' reminds me of that chilliest of all 1950s short stories, Jerome Bixby's '*It's a Good Life*'. In Hodge's story, we see the world from the twisted viewpoint of the child with strange powers, and have to guess how the rest of the world might be coping. The centre of the story, though, is the friendship between a boy and a girl who can communicate only from the window of one tall building to the window of another.

Another delicious story from the same volume is **Angela Slatter's** '**Lavendar and Lychgates**', a complex ghost story set around a graveyard, where the relationship between the dead and the living is never quite clear. Angela Slatter writes fine sentences.

Peter S. Beagle dominates today's fantasy field, although he has been publishing since the early 1960s, and had almost given up writing short stories until recently. His collection *Sleight of Hand* contains many stories I had

read the year before in his *Magic Kingdoms* collection (especially '*The Rabbi's Hobby*', my favourite story for many years), but it also has a few new items, including '**Dirae**' and '**The Bridge Partner**'.

'Dirae' has some similarities to Dan Simmons' '*The Counselor*'. Can any individual make much of a difference in a world of violence and personal abuse? Simmons creates a character who tries to do *something*, however small, to help. Peter Beagle's character has no choice but to try to help, and then try to guess at the nature of the mission. The solution to the puzzle is very satisfying.

Peter Beagle has also been the editor of several theme anthologies during recent years, especially *The Secret History of Fantasy*. (**James Patrick Kelly** and **John Kessel** edited the companion volume, *The Secret History of Science Fiction*.) From Beagle's anthology one of the few stories new to me is **Jeffrey Ford's** '**The Empire of Ice Cream**'. A lonely boy finds himself a companion, but only when he eats a forbidden fruit, coffee ice cream, from the local store the Empire of Ice Cream. He hopes to keep the friendship going through this unlikely method, but discovers that the ghostly visitor is very different from what he had imagined. I will look out for more stories by Jeffrey Ford.

I realise a lot of the other stories on my list could be called ghost stories rather than 'horror', being free of the gimcrack horror clichés. These writers of fantasy seem to have a much more astute view of the human condition than any of the 'realist' writers I've read for awhile. In both '**Chinandega**' and '**Salvador**', for instance, **Lucius Shepard** uses his experience of Central and South America to present steamy fables about hope and loss. 'Salvador' became, I think, an important SF novel called *Life During Wartime*, but the tone of Shepard's fiction is intensely supernatural rather than documentary and extrapolative.

In recent years I've found it difficult to read Sydney writer **Margo Lanagan's** rich tales, which are usually based on Celtic myth. Reading her recent stories is as if Hans Christian Andersen suddenly turned into James Joyce, while tapping the same sources of myth. '**The Proving of Smollet Standforth**' is a satisfying ghost story, made original by Lanagan's ability to plunge back into the assumptions and peculiarities of the nineteenth century. Like Kaaron Warren, Margo Lanagan has that special ability to disconnect herself from the limitations of twenty-first century assumptions.

Several stories listed are from an enterprising set of short books issued recently by **Twelfth Planet Press** from Western Australia. Each volume is about 100 pages, and contains four stories, each of which can be read separately. But the whole book can be seen as a novel, or nearly a novel. The two I've enjoyed most have been **Kaaron Warren's** *Through Splintered Walls* (in which each story works well on its own) and **Deborah Biancotti's** *Bad Power*, which works best as a short novel. Look out for the rest of the series.

- 1 'The Great Lover' (1993) Dan Simmons: *Lovedeath*
- 2 'The Ziggurat' (Gene Wolfe) (1995) James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel (eds): *The Secret History of Science Fiction*
- 3 'The Room in the Attic' (2008) Steven Millhauser: *Dangerous Laughter*
- 4 'The Five Loves of Ishtar' (Kaaron Warren) (2011) Amanda Pillar & K. V. Taylor eds: *Ishtar*
- 5 'Near Zennor' (Elizabeth Hand) (2011) Stephen Jones ed.: *A Book of Horrors*
- 6 'All Dracula's Children' (Dan Simmons) (1991) Byron Priess ed.: *The Ultimate Dracula*
- 7 'The Counselor' (Dan Simmons) (1991) Gary Raisor, ed: *Obsessions*
- 8 'Mrs Todd's Shortcut' (Stephen King) (2010) Peter S. Beagle ed.: *The Secret History of Fantasy*
- 9 'Dirae' (2010) Peter S. Beagle: *Sleight of Hand*
- 10 'Just Outside Our Windows, Deep Inside Our Walls' (Brian Hodge) (2011) Stephen Jones ed.: *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror 22*
- 11 'The Breakthrough' (Paul Park) (1995) Jennifer Hershey, Tom Dupree, and Janna Silverstein eds: *Full Spectrum 5*
- 12 'The Bridge Partner' (2011) Peter S. Beagle: *Sleight of Hand*
- 13 'The Empire of Ice Cream' (Jeffrey Ford) (2003) Peter S. Beagle ed.: *The Secret History of Fantasy*
- 14 'The Proving of Smollet Standforth' (Margo Lanagan) (2011) Jack Dann and Nick Gevers eds: *Ghosts by Gaslight*
- 15 'Chinandega' (Lucius Shepard) (2007) George Mann ed.: *The Solaris Book of New Fantasy*
- 16 'Lavendar and Lychgates' (Angela Slatter) Stephen Jones ed.: *The Mammoth Book of Best New Horror 22*
- 17 'A Child's Problem' (Reggie Oliver) (2011) Stephen Jones ed.: *A Book of Horrors*
- 18 'Mountain' (2012) Kaaron Warren: *Through Splintered Walls*
- 19 '10¹⁶ To 1' (James Patrick Kelly) (2009) James Patrick Kelly & John Kessel eds: *The Secret History of Science Fiction*
- 20 'And the Dead Shall Outnumber the Living' (Deborah Biancotti) (2011) Amanda Pillar and K. V. Taylor eds: *Ishtar*

Other four-star contenders, in order of reading

- 'Entropy's Bed at Midnight' (1993) Dan Simmons: *Lovedeath*
- 'Dying in Bangkok' (1993) Dan Simmons: *Lovedeath*
- 'Sleeping with Teeth Women' (1993) Dan Simmons: *Lovedeath*
- 'Flashback' (1993) Dan Simmons: *Lovedeath*
- 'Alchemy' (2011) Lucy Sussex: *Thief of Lives*
- 'Sammarynda Deep' (2008) (Cat Sparks) Ekaterina Sedia ed.: *Paper Cities*
- 'Down to the Silver Spirits' (2008) (Kaaron Warren) Ekaterina Sedia ed.: *Paper Cities*
- 'Guarding The Mound' (2010) Karren Warren: *Dead Sea Fruit*
- 'Tontine Mary' (2010) Karren Warren: *Dead Sea Fruit*
- 'The Tale of Hauk' (2000) (Poul Anderson) Martin H. Greenberg ed.: *My Favorite Fantasy Story*
- 'The Dancer from the Dance' (2000) (M. John Harrison) Martin H. Greenberg ed.: *My Favorite Fantasy Story*
- 'Salvador' (Lucius Shepard) (2009) James Patrick Kelly & John Kessel eds: *The Secret History of Science Fiction*
- 'The Martian Agent, A Planetary Romance' (Michael Chabon) (2009) James Patrick Kelly & John Kessel eds: *The Secret History of Science Fiction*
- 'History of a Disturbance' (2008) Steven Millhauser: *Dangerous Laughter*
- 'Smithers and the Ghosts of the Thar' (Robert Silverberg) (2011) Jack Dann and Nick Gevers eds: *Ghosts by Gaslight*
- 'The Unbearable Proximity of Mr Dunn's Balloons' (John Langan) (2011) Jack Dann and Nick Gevers eds: *Ghosts by Gaslight*
- 'Blackwoods Baby' (Laird Barron) (2011) Jack Dann and Nick Gevers eds: *Ghosts by Gaslight*
- 'Cross that Bridge' (2011) Deborah Biancotti: *Bad Power*
- 'Cathay' (1998) Steven Millhauser: *In the Penny Arcade*
- 'The Third Always Beside You' (John Langan) (2011) Ellen Datlow ed.: *Blood and Other Cravings*
- 'Metro Winds' (2012) Isobelle Carmody: *Metro Winds*
- 'The Girl Who Could See The Wind' (2012) Isobelle Carmody: *Metro Winds*
- 'Creek' (2012) Kaaron Warren: *Through Splintered Walls*

Favourite films seen for the first time in 2012

As I've already written, during 2012 I returned to reading fiction with real enjoyment. At the same time I became a bit less enthusiastic about many of the films I tried to watch during 2012. I watched many films half way through, then abandoned them. Many of them became dull at the halfway mark. Most script writing is sloppy these days; films are too long. Other films were repellent because the script writer and director put the boot into the main characters, and hence show their contempt for audiences. Critics talk a lot about the violence and sa-

dism in current movies. Those qualities have always been there. But in the last ten years or more film makers have been increasingly violent and sadistic towards their own main characters. The worse example I can think of right now is *In Bruges* from a few years ago, where the director leaves nobody alive at the end. In many other recent films the wipeout of the main characters starts about an hour from the end. More bodies on the floor than in a Shakespeare tragedy. Cinema audiences seem to love these films, but I don't.



Hugo, on the other hand, is top of 2012's Favourites list because it is the most visually exciting new film of the year, and because of its great love of its subject matter. To me it is Martin Scorsese's most personal film, although its script follows scene for scene Brian Selznick's graphic novel *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007). It is a journey of self-discovery and transformation for the main characters, most vividly George Méliès (played by Ben Kingsley), the pioneering filmmaker who thought his life's work had been wasted. Two orphans and a film historian give back lives to him and his wife. Is film an expression of visual magic, or merely an outcrop of drama? To me, it's the former. 'We are all magicians,' says Méliès at the end of the film. Indeed. Scorsese is the best of today's cinema magicians.

This is the second year in a row I've discovered a brilliant British film that is not only based upon a Charles Dickens classic story, but also recreates the ambience of Dickens' mind and time. (Last year I discovered the 1940s version of *Nicholas Nickleby*.) In *Scrooge*, Victorian melodrama is re-created in spectacular black-and-white photography, and Alastair Sim is the best Scrooge of all time. Hurst shows, as Dickens tried to, how truly desperate the lives of ordinary people had become in the mid nineteenth century. Because of *A Christmas Carol*, the novella on which *Scrooge* is based, Dickens is often derided for popularising the modern version of Christmas — but this film shows the importance of having one free day per year, when the rest of one's life is nothing but sixteen-hour working days. *A Christmas Carol* is usually treated as merely a sentimental tale where a man's soul is saved by supernatural means. While watching this

version I realised that Scrooge always had the power to save himself.

The rest of my favourite films are divided between those I remember best for the brilliant script and those I remember best for the spectacular photography and production values.

Thanks to Frank and John, who bring along films to our place for a monthly film night, I've discovered some unexpected gems during the year. The best of them has been **Philip Kaufman's** *Rising Sun*. Now available on Blu-ray, it was derided as 'racist' by local reviewers when it first appeared. Instead, it is a brilliant satire on racism, with Sean Connery leading two different gangs of criminals who believe they are outdoing each other, each believing themselves members of the 'superior race'. The script is funny, convoluted, and paranoid. I defy anybody to spell out exactly what the true situation is at the end of the film, but reaching it an enjoyable ride.

Midnight in Paris looks good, with Owen Wilson and the other characters sashaying around one of director **Woody Allen's** favourite cities, but the success of the film rests on its splendid script. What seems like a wish-fulfilment fantasy tale of travelling into the past becomes something more complex toward the end.

Luc Besson is French, and his scripts (especially that for *The Fifth Element*) rarely make much sense. However, when I saw a Blu-ray of *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec*, adorned with that magical name 'Luc Besson', I had to buy it. I found myself watching a film that should have been top of the box office. It is a romp of a movie, with spectacular scenery and stunts, and far more life in it than any Indiana Jones movie. Why was it not even shown in Australian cinemas, let alone released widely on DVD or Blu-ray here? Why was it judged box office poison by distributors? Because the main character is a woman, Adèle Blanc-Sec. That's the only reason I can think of.

I suppose Shakespeare purists also didn't like **Julie Taymor's** film of *The Tempest* because it stars a woman, Helen Mirren, as 'Prospera', instead of a man, Prospero, as its main character. Wipe away this prejudice and you find Helen Mirren's best performance (of the films I've seen her in). Her guardianship of Miranda makes even more sense than in the original play, and the sight of Prospera the magician wiping the board with the silly twits who land on her island is funny and awe-inspiring. Ben Whishaw, CGIed, is an impressive Ariel. Photographed in a wild part of Hawaii, the film is a splendid example of cinematic art. Born 400 years later, Shakespeare would have had a great career as a screenwriter.

Much as I enjoy an eye-romp (such as Sam Mendes' pop masterpiece *Skyfall*, Morten Tyldum's vigorous play with Jo Nesbo's suspense novel *Headhunters*, and Wes Anderson's return to form in *Moonrise Kingdom*), I can be beguiled by great drama in a film. I don't find such drama often, but last year brought to me (thanks, John, for lending me the Blu-ray set) unknown films by **Ingmar Bergman**, whose qualities I had enjoyed during the 1960s, but which I had almost forgotten over the years. It's very hard to believe that *Sawdust and Tinsel* and *Summer with Monika* were made in the early 1950s. Maybe during the height of the European New Wave of the early 1960s. But as early as 1953?

In *Summer with Monika*, Harriet Andersson portrays Monika, a very modern girl for the time, who snaps up a local boy who takes her boating around the islands of Sweden during midsummer. This summer is one of honest lust and dishonest belief in an easy escape from a narrow society. Nobody escapes the consequences, but no viewer of the time could have forgotten the rich evocation of both landscape and two people trying to navigate a rapidly changing society.

Sawdust and Tinsel portrays a ferocious personal battle between characters who live all their lives on the road. The Hollywood dramatic clichés of the period are absent. People just battle it out in front of us, and try to make something of their lives. The black-and-white photography of back-country Sweden is very exciting.

In *The Deep Blue Sea*, loosely based on a play by Terence Rattigan, **Terence Davies** drops his characters back into 1953. In Davies' case, his 2012 viewpoint on 1953 is composed equally of nostalgia and a kind of horror. Nothing had improved in British life since World War II. Characters who found themselves married at the end of that war can barely scratch a living, either material or spiritual, by the early fifties. Rich meat, as always with Terence Davies' films.

A very similar film is **Colin Grigg's** *To the Lighthouse*, which I bought years ago on DVD. I read Virginia Woolf's novel for the first time during 2012. To me it seemed diffuse, vague, not quite there, although I knew it must have been based on the author's childhood experience of holidays on the English coast. The film takes all the events in the book, inhabits them with the best of British actors, and gives events an impact they do not have in the book. One of those rare films that are much better than the novel or short story on which it is based.

Dick Jenssen made available **Charles Chaplin's** *City*

Lights and *The Gold Rush*, and **Teinosuke Kinugasa's** *Gate of Hell*. *City Lights*, usually known as the last of the 'silent' movies, is a film in which almost every movement and gesture, including Chaplin pratfalls, is a dance movement. A story about a man down on his luck (who has temporary good luck) and a blind girl is saved from sentimentality by the fastidious poeticism of the photography. *City Lights* and the earlier Chaplin film *The Gold Rush* make a more recent 'silent' movie, Oscar winner *The Artist*, seem very awkward by comparison.

Dick Jenssen tells me that *Gate of Hell* was the first Japanese movie to be shown in Australian cinemas. Audiences must have been puzzled by the extreme restraint and stylisation of the actions of the characters. Dick tells me they were far more puzzled by their first experience of Japanese music. *Gate of Hell* is still a very powerful drama of thwarted love in the era of the samurai (eleventh century), but most striking is the careful colour design of every shot in the film. Aristocratic Japanese warlords and their ladies dressed well.

A real surprise has been **Ron Howard's** *Frost Nixon*, which John brought over to our monthly film night. From my memories of reviews when the film was in the cinemas, I knew that it is based on the series of television interviews between David Frost and President Richard Nixon in 1974. During these interviews Frost surprised Nixon into confessing that he believed that anything a president did in defence of his country (in this case, the Watergate Building break-in) could be regarded as legal. The film contains recreated excerpts from the interviews, plus the suspenseful tale of how David Frost put together a television event that the networks did not want to touch. Nixon is brought to life as vividly as is Frost; both are seen as desperate men on the verge of losing their careers and reputations. Only one could win.

- 1 *Hugo* (2011) Martin Scorsese
- 2 *Scrooge* (1951) Brian Desmond Hurst
- 3 *Rising Sun* (1993) Philip Kaufman
- 4 *The Tempest* (2010) Julie Taymor
- 5 *Midnight In Paris* (2011) Woody Allen
- 6 *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec* (2010) Luc Besson
- 7 *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953) Ingmar Bergman
- 8 *Headhunters* (2011) Morten Tyldum
- 9 *The Deep Blue Sea* (2011) Terence Davies
- 10 *To the Lighthouse* (1983) Colin Grigg
- 11 *City Lights* (1931) Charles Chaplin
- 12 *Skyfall* (2012) Sam Mendes
- 13 *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) Wes Anderson
- 14 *Frost Nixon* (2008) Ron Howard
- 15 *The Hunter* (2011) David Nettheim
- 16 *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980) Michael Apted
- 17 *Summer with Monika* (1953) Ingmar Bergman
- 18 *Gate of Hell* (1953) Teinosuke Kinugasa
- 19 *The Gold Rush* (1925) Charles Chaplin

Other four-star contenders, in order of viewing:

Mad as Hell: Peter Finch (2010) Robert De Young
Hammett (1982) Wim Wenders
The Lion in Winter (1968) Anthony Harvey
Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy (2011) Tomas Alfredson
The Suspicions of Mr Whicker (2011) James Hawes
The Ides of March (2011) George Clooney
The Skin I Live In (2011) Pedro Almodovar
Wings of the Dove (1997) Ian Softley
Alice in Wonderland (1933) Norman Macleod
Planes Trains and Automobiles (1987) John Hughes
Of Gods and Men (2010) Xavier Beauvoir
A Trip to the Moon (1902) Georges Méliès
An Extraordinary Voyage (2011) Serge Bromberg and Eric Large
The Last Tycoon (1976) Elia Kazan
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2011) David Fincher
Marathon Man (1979) John Schlesinger
Woody Allen: A Documentary (2011) Robert B. Weide
The Tempest (1979) Derek Jarman
The Crucible (1996) Nicholas Hytner
Evil Roy Slade (1972) Jerry Paris
The Dark Knight (2008) Christopher Nolan
Men In Black 3 (2012) Barry Sonnenfeld

Jack Irish: Bad Debts (2012) Jeffrey Walker and Matt Cameron
Jack Irish: Black Tide (2012) Jeffrey Walker and Matt Cameron
Looper (2012) Rian Johnson
Jason and the Argonauts (1963) Don Chaffey and Ray

Harryhausen
Kingdom of Plants 3D (2012) Martin Williams
Safety Not Guaranteed (2012) Colin Trevorrow
The Master (2012) (Paul Thomas Anderson)
The Uninvited (1944) Lewis Allen

Favourite films re-seen in 2012



Not a lot to say about these films that I didn't say when I saw them for the first time. During 2012, either the Blu-ray became available for the first time (thanks to Dick Jenssen for making them available to me), or the DVDs were finally released. In the case of *Lawrence of Arabia*, I was able to see it both in a 4K digital print on the giant screen at the Astor, where it looked the best it has since its first release in the early 1960s, and from the new Blu-ray release. Magnificent as this experience was,

it does not quite match the experience of watching *2001: A Space Odyssey* (the 'Don Bradman of films', according to ABC announcer Peter Cave) on Race Mathews' new LCD screen; or watching *The Trial*, my favourite Orson Welles film, also now finally available on Blu-ray.

The surprise of this list was **John Huston's** *Freud*, a 1962 film that I once half-saw on television, a film that has all the passionate commitment to Freud's quest that is so conspicuously missing in David Cronenberg's recent film *A Dangerous Method* (about Freud and Jung). Huston's film also has some of the most poetic black-and-white photography I've seen other than in Orson Welles's films.

The film I was most pleased to discover on DVD was **John Schlesinger's** *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which I had assumed would never appear on DVD. Despite memorable performances from Peter Finch, Julie Christie, Alan Bates, and Terence Stamp, it is not quite as dazzling as I remember it from my most recent viewing in 1971. Its score, by Richard Rodney Bennett (who died on Christmas Eve 2012), is as enjoyable as I remember, but the film itself now seems too long, perhaps because its script stays a little too faithful to Thomas Hardy's novel. The evocation of the English countryside and people of the late 1800s is unique among British movies of the period.

Visual-feast movies on the list include **Powell and Pressburger's** most opulent movie, *Tales of Hoffman*, and **Tarsem Singh's** psycho-thriller *The Cell*. In the case of the two 1950s **Hitchcock** movies on my list, finally Blu-ray restorations have returned to us the colour riches of *To Catch a Thief* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, which still looked tatty when they were last released on DVD.

It would be great to see *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines* again in 70 mm on the big screen at the Astor, but until that event takes place I can enjoy the Blu-ray version, thanks to Dick Jenssen. It restores the colour values of the original, and lets us re-enjoy some of the most original and exciting aerial photography in cinema. I had not seen this film since it was first released.

- 1 *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) Stanley Kubrick
- 2 *The Trial* (1962) Orson Welles
- 3 *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) David Lean
- 4 *Freud* (1962) John Huston
- 5 *The Conversation* (1974) Francis Ford Coppola
- 6 *Tales of Hoffman* (1951) Michael Powell and Emric Pressburger
- 7 *Radio Days* (1987) Woody Allen

- 8 *The Cell* (2000) Tarsem Singh
- 9 *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967) John Schlesinger
- 10 *Enigma* (2001) Michael Apted
- 11 *The Ghost Writer* (2011) Roman Polanski
- 12 *To Catch A Thief* (1955) Alfred Hitchcock
- 13 *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956) Alfred Hitchcock

- 14 *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines* (1965) Ken Annakin

Other four-star contenders, in order of viewing:

- Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001) Chris Columbus
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (2002) Chris Columbus

- Robinson Crusoe on Mars* (1964) Byron Haskin
Gormenghast (2000)
Anatomy of a Murder (1959) Otto Preminger
The Journey to the Centre of the Earth (1959) Henry Levin
Rififi (1954) Jules Dassin
The Flight of the Phoenix (1965) Robert Aldrich
Total Recall (1990) Paul Verhoeven
Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977) Steven Spielberg
Gimme Shelter (1970) David and Albert Maysles and Charlotte Zwerin

Television (!?) 2012

Bruce Gillespie doesn't watch television, surely? Series television? Not in real time. And not anything on commercial TV. I watch only ABC TV.

The only program I watched regularly in real time during 2012 was *At the Movies* (Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton review the new film releases for the week). I also watched in real time several Australian shows that I thought might not be released on DVD: *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*, *Outland*, and the two *Jack Irish* full-length TV films (which turn up on my Favourite Films list).

Otherwise, I picked up series on DVD or Blu-ray, or Dick Jenssen lent me them. In no particular order:

- ***Outland***: made by a Melbourne cooperative, including members of the Melbourne SF Club, about young members of a gay media SF club who are far more worried about being outed as SF fans than being outed as gay. Only six half-hour episodes, but very funny and also poignant.
- ***Poirot***: not the recent, rather stodgy one-and-a-half-hour-long-episode series currently being rerun endlessly on ABC TV, but the first six series, starring **David Suchet**, **Hugh Fraser**, **Philip Jackson**, and **Pauline Moran**, from the 1980s and early 90s. The production designs are dazzling, especially when viewed on Blu-ray, the acting is great, and the humour is delicious, but some of the episodes seem not to have originated from Agatha Christie stories. Thanks to Dick Jenssen for lending me these American Blu-rays.
- ***Sherlock***: the first episode of this twenty-first-century take on Sherlock Holmes, starring **Benedict Cumberbatch** and **Martin Green**, is probably the best single TV episode I've ever seen. The other episodes are a bit less interesting, and the cliffhanger on episode 6 is unforgivable, especially as there is still no sign of Series 3.
- ***Bergerac***: I had to buy this, **John Nettles**' first successful TV series, because it has John Nettles in it. He is hard to recognise in this 1980s series as the avuncular and heavy-set actor who has starred in *Midsomer Murders* for years, but the voice is the same. Delicious scenery in this series set on the Channel Islands, and

some memorable episodes in Series 1. The program was already becoming routine by the end of Series 2, so I did not buy the complete boxed set.

- ***The Miss Fisher Murder Mysteries*** is the Australian series I would most recommend to overseas viewers. **Essie Davis** shines as Phryne Fisher, the fearless, beautiful, brilliant lady detective from 1920s Melbourne, who is the product of the fertile mind of local author **Kerry Greenwood**. Some of us heard Kerry talking about the series at a Nova Mob meeting during the year; she emphasises the effort that ABC TV's production department took to make the series look as authentic as possible. The first two episodes are a bit lame, but most of the 13 episodes of Series 1 are very entertaining, and the last two episodes are brilliant. Much of Melbourne awaits Series 2, promised for mid 2013.
- ***Minuscules*** is the animated TV series that David Attenborough might have made if he were not so dedicated to slopping around in gumboots in dangerous parts of the world. This French series shows short encounters between various insects of the field. The photographed backgrounds are delicious, and the little beasties are hilarious. Thanks to Dick Jenssen for supplying us with all episodes.
- I've also been able to follow **Lewis**, successor to *Inspector Morse*, thanks to the efforts of Dick Jenssen. I'm very grateful, because the various series have been shown in real time in Australia only on commercial TV. **Kevin Whateley** does a good job as Morse's successor plodding the mean streets among Oxford's dreaming towers, but he is always overshadowed by **Lawrence Fox** as his sardonic, melancholic sidekick, Hathaway.
- Best of all are the ***Jack Irish*** thrillers, ***Black Tide*** and ***Bad Debts***, two full-length movies starring **Guy Pearce**, based on **Peter Temple**'s novels, filmed in and around Melbourne. If they had been released as cinema movies, they would have doubled the quality of all Australian movies released in 2012. These have all the sharp action, humour, sex, and whatever else you want from a good thriller: qualities missing from most 2012 cinema releases.

Favourite filmed music documentaries and performances 2012

Havergal Brian, Part 1

In mid 2012 I saw at the Nova Cinema the Australian documentary *The Curse of the Gothic Symphony*. I saw it again at the end of the year on ABC television. A Google search tells me it will appear soon on DVD. When it does, buy it. Perhaps you will not share my long-time interest in the legendary twentieth-century British composer **Havergal Brian** or his even more legendary first symphony, *The Gothic*, which holds the *Guinness Book of Records* listing as the largest, longest symphony. But it would be hard not to become fully engaged with the 28-year quest by Brisbane broadcaster **Gary Thorpe** to stage a performance of the Gothic in his home city. The task seemed impossible. It had been performed only six times in public since it was composed in 1927. How in Australia, let alone in Brisbane, could anyone assemble anything like the specified 750 performers (a minimum of 150 instrumentalists and 600 choristers) in one place at one time for one project? In 2005, it seemed as if he had finally gathered the funds and the personnel to make his dream come true, but the project fell through. At this stage, Brisbane documentary filmmakers **Randall Wood** and **Veronica Fury** began to film his quest — and themselves become enthusiastic members of the team still trying to mount a performance. A new chorus leader is found. John Curro begins to put together the orchestra. Gary Thorpe persuades his own radio station, community broadcaster 4MBS, to provide the funds. The Queensland Performing Arts Complex is booked for the end of December 2010. But where could they get enough choristers or musicians? The suspense increases. John Curro complains that the project is impossible even while putting it together. Two weeks before the performance there are still performance and staging problems and nowhere near enough singers. As a viewer, you know they must have succeeded or else the film would never have been made. But how? (Continued in 'Havergal Brian, Part 2' ... see 'Favourite Classical CDs'.)

Two British greats

None of the other films on this list gave me the same

sense of lip-licking fun as I found in *Curse of the Gothic Symphony*, but each offers special pleasures. As the story of a composer, **Tony Palmer's** *William Walton: At the Haunted End of Day* can be compared with the story of Havergal Brian. Brian was born to the lower class in classbound Britain, therefore had great trouble raising funds or interest in performing his works. He gave up trying to find sponsorship or performers; but he still wrote most of his 32 symphonies after the age of 74. William Walton, also not from the top drawer, was adopted by aristocrats, the Sitwells. They enabled performances of his finest works, such as his Symphony No 1, and made him a celebrity through staging his *Façade* suite, starring Edith Sitwell as the narrator. But they also held him virtually as an economic prisoner for many years, so the second half of the film is the tale of how he escaped the Sitwells, married, achieved fame and fortune, and built a new life (and garden) in Italy.

In *Kathleen Ferrier*, **Diane Perelsztejn** makes a valiant attempt to reconstruct the life of the twentieth century's greatest singer despite a general lack of visual materials about Ferrier. She tells a very powerful story of a woman some people might have thought rather ordinary and down to earth, but who developed all her talents until cancer killed her in the early 1950s. Until I saw this film I had not realised that Ferrier was one of those few performers, such as Vera Lynn and Dame Myra Hess, who symbolised the war effort for much-bombed Britons. Ferrier's performance of the main aria from Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice* is not just a favourite of mine; it went to the top of the British hit parade during the War. This film includes some interesting gossip: the filmmaker managed to unearth letters from Ferrier to her secret lover, a serviceman she spent weekends with until she ended the affair. Ferrier's life was her work. The most moving parts of the film tell of her struggle to keep working until several weeks before she died.

Long musical lives

Old age and endless extension of their careers have added nothing to the lustre of the **Rolling Stones**. Their best years were from 1962 until 1974, as *Charlie Is My*



Darling proves. It's not clear why **Peter Whitehead's** dynamic record of the Stones' tour of Ireland in 1965 disappeared for nearly 50 years, but we poor fans can only be grateful that it has been found, remastered, and issued on DVD and Blu-ray. The film proves many things: that Mick, Keef, Bill, and Charlie were much more interesting people in 1965 than after the drugs got them during the mid 1960s; that Brian Jones was the magical musical element in the band, never really replaced after his death in 1969; and that the band played very well on stage in 1965, despite primitive equipment and performing conditions. Also, they were brave, or stupid. On one night, shown here, despite the best efforts of a dozen bobbies, they were pleased because they had been knocked over by fans only once each.

A much more personable survivor than Mick Jagger is Australia's own **Joe Camilleri**, whose story is told in *Australia's Maltese Falcon*. Beginning in bands in the 1960s, Joe started to have hit records with his band Jo Jo Zep and the Falcons in the mid 1970s. Restless, he went solo, had some more hits, almost went broke, then slowly developed a little band (of the genre we would now call alt.country, Americana, or even TexMex) called the Black Sorrows. Suddenly this band hatched *Hold On to Me*, one of the most successful rock and roll albums in Australian history, in the mid 1980s. Success seems never to have changed Joe much. He comes from a culturally rich Maltese migrant background. He gathers friends, family, and musicians around him and keeps them as a permanent performing circus. He makes great jokes and writes great songs, and all for the sake of making music, not money. He sets up Woodstock Studios, divides himself and his songs into a variety of bands, such as the Reverberators, Bakelite Radio, and a revived Falcons. He remains Australia's musical force of nature.

Joe Camilleri may be one of Australia's finest record producers, but he could hardly claim to be another **George Martin**, whose fifty years at EMI Records in Britain are well summarised in *Produced by George Martin*.

Martin comes across as immoderately modest. Very young, in the 1950s he was kicked upstairs to run Parlophone Records, the embarrassing novelty label of EMI. So he gathered around him performers such as Peter Sellers and the other Goons, Sophia Loren, Bernard Cribbins, and other comedy celebrities of the early 1960s. In 1962 Decca rejected an incompetent little group called the Beatles, but Martin saw something in them. As he reminds us, the 'Beatles years' were only eight years of a 50-year career, but we remember the brilliance with which he draw out the best of these musicians. In the 1970s, Martin became an independent, lost everything during a hurricane on the island of Monserrat, then rebuilt his studio and his career. Unhappily, his hearing has deteriorated in recent years, so his son is running the studio. *Produced by George Martin* reminds us of the pleasure of sitting in a room with this fine man and listening to him tell stories of great times.

Most of the other items on this list are rousing concerts. *The Watsons* is a concert given by the family that is made up of some of the greatest folk musicians in British music history. **Norma Waterson** presides over the whole family as they performing together or individually. They are a riotous bunch, but very serious about their music.

Crosby Stills and Nash: 2012 provides a record of a recent concert by these performers, at least two of whom should have been dead years ago. **Stephen Stills** doesn't look well, and it's hard to hear the words of his songs, but his guitar playing is still brilliant. **David Crosby** seems to be thriving on his new liver. His voice is still as rich as ever, and his energy levels never higher. And **Graham Nash**, the foundation stone of the group since 1968, looks smooth and sings well and tells great stories. Nothing can beat the feeling of triumph the three of them show when they perform on stage for the first time in many years the intricate harmonies of 'Suite: Judy Blue Eyes'.

- 1 *The Curse of the Gothic Symphony* (2012) Randall Wood and Veronica Fury
- 2 *William Walton: At the Haunted End of Day* (1980) Tony Palmer
- 3 *Kathleen Ferrier* (2012) Diane Perelsztejn
- 4 *The Rolling Stones: Charlie Is My Darling: Ireland 1965* (1965/2012) Peter Whitehead
- 5 *Joe Camilleri: Australia's Maltese Falcon* (2011) Fiona Cochrane and Zbigniew Phiedrich
- 6 *The Waterson Family* (2011)
- 7 *Crosby Stills and Nash: 2012* (2012) Hank Lena and Graham Nash
- 8 *Produced by George Martin* (2012) Francis Hanly
- 9 *Big Easy Express: Mumford and Son/Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeroes/Old Crow Medicine Show* (2012) Emmett Malloy
- 10 *The Bridge School Concerts: 25th Anniversary Edition* (2011) Pegi Young and Elliott Roberts

Other four-star contenders, in order of viewing:

Randy Newman: Live in London (2008/2011) Nick Wickham
George Harrison: Living in the Material World (2011) Martin Scorsese
Classic Albums: The Making of The Dark Side of the Moon (2003) Matthew Longfellow
Music Is the Language of the Soul: A Portrait of Mariss Jansons (2011) Robert Neumiller
Mahler's Symphony No 2: Mariss Jansons and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (2011) Jorst Honselaou
Muddy Waters and the Rolling Stones: Live at Checkerboard Lounge Chicago 1981 (1981/2012) Lindsay Brown and Dave Tre Hood
Magical Mystery Tour (1967) The Beatles
Celebration Day: Led Zeppelin (2012) Dick Carruthers
Paul Simon: Live in New York City (2012) Martyn Atkins

Favourite classical music CDs heard for the first time in 2012

Gothic Symphony, Part 2

(Continuing my rant about the music of Havergal Brian from 'Best Filmed Music Documentaries'): Is the music of Havergal Brian, as revealed in his *Symphony No 1 (The Gothic)* worth all the effort? Only six public performances had occurred before the Brisbane concert of December 2010. In July 2011, during the London Proms, another performance took place, conducted by Martyn Brabbins. It's hard to make a definitive judgment about the music itself. Until recently, the only double CD available was the 1990 performance by the **Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra** version, under **Ondrej Lenard**. Gigantic forces were assembled, but at a sonic cost. The microphones are placed so far back in the hall that even the greatest crescendos sound a bit tame. Major orchestral passages are slightly muffled on CD, although they probably sounded crisp in the hall.

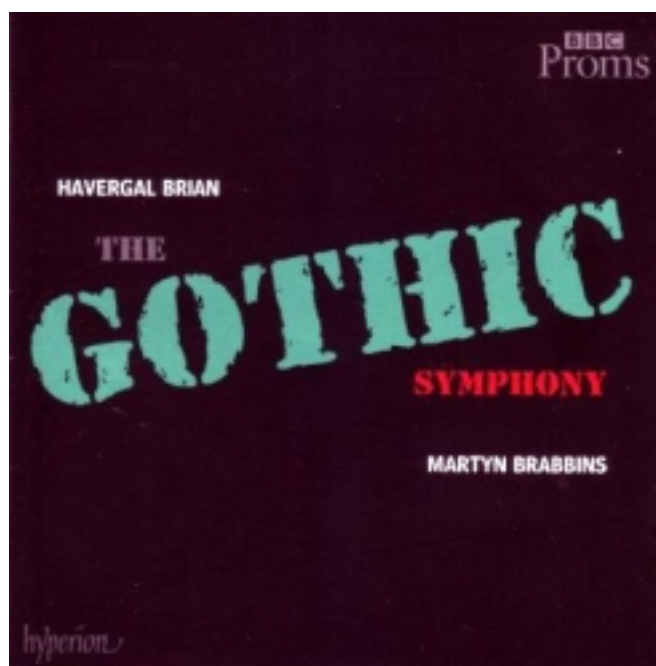
On the **Brabbins** version, performed in the Albert Hall, close-miking techniques are used. The choral waves now become speaker-destroying tsunamis, with some orchestral passages made to sound a bit cluttered. As a piece of unified music-making, the Slovak solution sounds better.

The music itself belongs to the craggy-British tradition. The *Gothic* resembles music by such composers as Edmund Rubbra and Arnold Bax, also not much performed these days, or the 'big' symphonies of Vaughan Williams (the 4th, 6th, 7th, and 9th). The instrumental sections of the *Gothic* — the first three movements —

contain many blocks of beautiful sound, and not many whistleable melodies. The three choral movements, nearly two-thirds of the symphony, contain many passages reminiscent of Mahler's 2nd or 9th symphonies or Vaughan Williams' 1st. But Mahler was supremely theatrical; he knew how to shape his vast forces to deliver exciting climaxes when audiences would appreciate them. Brian's climactic choral movement, the 'Judex' of the Latin mass, is in the *middle* of the symphony, not the end. Parts of the last movement, with long sections for children's chorus, are almost jolly. I suspect one has to listen to this symphony repeatedly, much as we listened to Mahler with great attention during the 1960s and 1970s to find out what we were listening to. There are few other Brian symphonies on record to allow comparisons, as many of them have never been recorded or performed.

Pick a box

If the rest of the CDs on my Favourite Classics list for 2012 seem a little unsurprising, it's because of the parlous state of classical music radio in Australia. For reasons unexplained, ABC FM, the national classical music network, had stopped playing music from CDs during most of the day. Instead, it plays concerts from equivalent radio networks from all over the world. The result? Look at the programs for the state symphony orchestras in Australia. Look at the vast number of repetitions of a few



Beethoven symphonies and concertos, a few Brahms symphonies, a couple of Sibelius symphonies, Dvorak's 'New World', and a few others. Multiply this effect across concerts from the world's crowd-pleasing orchestras, and the result is a stupefying narrowness of programming on ABC Radio. True, in Melbourne, community broadcaster 3MBS has a much more adventurous music policy than the ABC's, but I suspect it has limited funds to buy new CDs from overseas. Meanwhile, I buy *Gramophone* every month to gain some idea of what is happening in music overseas, but few of the CDs reviewed in *Gramophone* appear in our few remaining classical music CD shops because few people are asking for them because they don't hear them on ABC Radio!

Meanwhile, the old classical music major studios have closed up shop or been taken over. Such labels as Sony, DG, EMI, and Decca issue 'crossover' CDs, if they are making new records at all. Most of the old reliables have been bought by Universal Music, which isn't much interested in classical music. To make a little bit of extra money from the classical archives, it is issuing huge boxed sets of collected CDs from the major performers. In this way, consumers can now buy many touchstone versions of their favourite pieces for \$2 a CD or less.

Like most consumers, though, I cannot afford more than a few of these boxed sets. If I buy them and put them on the shelf, I have to find the time to listen to them. Which brings us back to my Favourite Classical CDs list.

All I can do is point to the interesting boxed sets that you might find in Readings or Thomas' (in Melbourne),

especially any sets by the great conductors, such as Toscanini or Nikolaus Harnoncourt. Seek out Harnoncourt's great baroque recordings, especially his Bach. Look for the sets by the great pianists or other instrumentalists. Thanks to **Dave Clarke** at Readings for the **Wilhelm Kempff** and **Violin Masterpieces** boxed sets.

Hints of the new

Despite my despair at finding anything interesting in the CD stores and my unwillingness to buy stuff online, I did find some interesting individual CDs. The new CD of the year is **John Eliot Gardiner's** muscular, scintillating version of **Brahms' German Requiem**, a piece of music usually performed at the excitement level of massed snails crawling up cliffs. Gardiner's stimulating version of this great work matches the quality of his recent set of Brahms symphonies.

Also worth seeking out is any piece of music by **Pieteris Vasks**. The fourth of the CDs I've found is his choral work **Plainscapes**. His violin concerto *Distant Light* is even better.

In the last 10 years I've been willing to buy new CDs from Australian composers without hearing them first on the radio. **Nigel Westlake's Missa Solis: Requiem for Eli** is not quite as exciting as, say, a piece by John Adams, but Westlake has become a composer always worth listening for. The **Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Chorus** sound magnificent on this new CD.

- 1 Ondrej Lenard/Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra: Havergal Brian: Symphony No 1 (*Gothic*) (1990/2004)
- 2 Martyn Brabbins/BBC National Orchestra of Wales/BBC Concert Orchestra: Havergal Brian: Symphony No 1 (*Gothic*) (2011)
- 3 Wilhelm Kempf: Bach: *Goldberg Variations* (Wilhelm Kempf, Vol. 1) (1969/2012)
- 4 John Eliot Gardiner/Monteverdi Choir/Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique: Brahms: *Ein Deutsches Requiem*/Schütz: *Welieblich Sind Deine Wohnungen* (2011)
- 5 David Willcocks/George Guest/Choir of Kings College Cambridge/Choir of St John's College: Haydn: *Nelson Mass/Mass in Time of War (Paukenmesse)* (1962/1970/2011) (Decca Sound, Vol. 25)
- 6 Tokyo Quartet: Beethoven: String Quartet No 14; *Grosse Fugue* (Late Quartets, Vol. 3) (2010)
- 7 Nikolaus Harnoncourt/Concentus Musicus Wien/Arnold Schoenberg Choir: Bach: *Christmas Oratorio* (2007) (2 CDs)
- 8 Nikolaus Harnoncourt/Concert Orchestra of Vienna State Opera: Mozart: Mass in C K427 (*Great Mass*) (1985/1994)
- 9 Ferenc Fricsay/RIAS Choir and Symphony Orchestra: Mozart: *Requiem/Adagio and Fugue* (1950/1960/1994)
- 10 Sigvards Klava/Latvian Radio Choir: Peteris Vasks: *Plainscapes* (2012)
- 11 Joshua Bell/David Zinman/Baltimore Symphony Orchestra: Barber: Violin Concerto/Bloch: *Baal*

- Shem*/Walton: Violin Concerto (1997/2011) (Decca Sound, Vol. 6)
- 12 Libor Peek/Royal Philharmonic Orchestra: Britten: *Sinfonia Da Requiem* Op. 20/*Four Sea Interludes and Passacaglia* from 'Peter Grimes' Op. 33/*The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* Op. 34 (Benjamin Britten Collectors' Edition Vol. 1)
- 13 Mariss Jansons/Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra: Tchaikovsky: Symphony No 4 (1985)
- 14 Nigel Westlake/Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: Westlake: *Missa Solis: Requiem for Eli* (2012)

Other four-star contenders, in order of listening:

- Antal Dorati/Philharmonia Hungarica: Haydn: Symphonies 96, 97, 98 (1971/1972/1974) (Haydn Symphonies boxed set)
- Alfred Brendel/Colin Davis/Hans Zender: *Alfred Brendel: A Birthday Tribute*. Brahms: Piano Concerto No 1/Mozart: Piano Concerto No 25/Beethoven: Piano Sonata No 31/Schubert: Impromptu in F Minor (2012)
- Gennadi Rozhdestvensky/USSR Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra: Shostakovich: Symphony No 8 Op. 65/Satires from Op. 109 (1987)
- Kyung-Wha Chung/Rudolf Kempe/Royal Philharmonic Orchestra//Charles Dutoit/Montreal Symphony Orchestra: Bruch: Violin Concerto No 1/Bruch: *Scottish Fantasia* (1972)/Mendelssohn: Violin

Concerto (1982) (2011) (Decca Sound Vol. 12)
 Angela Hewitt: *Not Bach* (2010)
 Jean Martinon/French Radio National Orchestra: Saint
 Saens: Symphonies 1, 2 (LP)
 Ruggieri Ricci/Pierino Gamba/London Symphony
 Orchestra: Mendelssohn: Violin Concerto/Bruch:
 Violin Concerto/Saint Saens: *Havanaise*
 Op. 83/*Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* Op. 28
 Clifford Curzon/Georg Szell/Vienna Philharmonic
 Orchestra: Mozart: Piano Concertos 23, 27 (Clifford
 Curzon Vol. 3)
 Clifford Curzon/Istvan Kertesz/London Symphony
 Orchestra: Mozart: Piano Concerto No 26
 ('*Coronation*')/No 27 (1967/2011) (Clifford Curzon,
 Vol. 16)

JoAnn Falletta/Ulster Orchestra: Holst: *Walt Whitman
 Overture*/Symphony in F Major ('*The Cotswolds*')/*A
 Winter Idyll*/*Japanese Suite*/*Indra* (Symphonic Poem)
 (2012)
 Artur Grumiaux/Arriago Pellisia/Colin Davis/ London
 Symphony Orchestra//Raymond Leppard: National
 Philharmonic Orchestra: Mozart: Violin Concertos
 Nos 2 and 5/*Sinfonia Concertante* (1962/1964/2009)
 (Violin Masterpieces)
 Angela Hewitt: Bach: *Goldberg Variations* (2000/2007)
 (Angela Hewitt Plays Bach Vol. 13)
 Gidon Kremer/Academy of St Martin in the Fields: Bach:
 Double Concerto No 1/Violin Concertos Nos 1, 2
 ((1984/2001) (Violin Masterpieces Vol. 1)

Favourite classical boxed sets 2012

Arturo Toscanini: *Complete RCA Recordings* (72 CDs + DVD)
 Clifford Curzon: *Complete Recordings* (23 CDs + DVD)

Wilhelm Kempff: *Piano: The Solo Repertoire* (2009) (35 CDs)
 Various: *Violin Masterpieces* (37 CDs)



Favourite popular music CDs heard for the first time in 2012

Fall at their feet

I was in the local branch of the retailer JB Hi Fi, the home of cheap, popular music and DVDs in Australia, when I heard playing over the PA system a song that made me swing around and say to myself, 'That's good!' This does not happen very often in a JB Hi Fi store.

I asked one of the staff what was that song. 'I don't know,' she said. Sniff. 'Boy and Bear, I think.' I name-checked 'Boy and Bear'. An Australian group. I hadn't heard anything by them, but they were mentioned in the *Age's* EG Friday music supplement.

I hear little current popular music on the radio, because I don't listen to commercial radio. However, on the ABC's local station 774 I heard one night a track that amazed me. '**Fall At Your Feet**'. The group was **Boy and Bear**. Soaring harmonies, and no instruments except a bass guitar and a ukelele. No bloody synthesisers. Not even drums. All I had been told on radio that it was a cover version of a song by **Tim** and/or **Neil Finn** (the lead singers and songwriters of New Zealand group Crowded House). A Google search found me the source of the track: a double CD of Australian and New Zealand cover versions, *They Will Have Their Way: The Songs of Tim and Neil Finn*, which I found in my local branch of JB Hi Fi. Few of the other tracks were much good, but Boy and Bear's track made it worthwhile to buy the set.

In searching for further CDs by this group, I found that they were not alone. Other pop groups in recent times had returned to singing and playing real instruments. My favourite kind of music was being heard on radio at last. The group that turned out to be even more Boy and Bear than Boy and Bear is, as you would have guessed because you are hip and listen to the pop stations, **Mumford and Son** from Britain. So I bought two of their albums as well, *Sigh No More* and *Babel*. Very

enjoyable. Again, no synthesisers, very spare instrumentation, and no drums. And the kind of soaring harmonies we've been waiting for in pop music since the Byrds shut up shop in 1974.

But wait. There's more. During the year I had bought a CD (*Nothing Is Wrong*) by the American group **Dawes**, thinking them an oddball group of young blokes who could harmonise. Later I discovered that Dawes is also part of this pop movement I thought I would never live long enough to hear.

Wait long enough, and there is always hope. I'm not saying that these new groups are better than the people whose work I usually collect. But for the first time in many years, quality singing and interesting instrumentation are fashionable.

The return of Neil and Crazy Horse

Psychedelic Pill, the new double CD by **Neil Young and Crazy Horse**, has been well received by CD buyers all over Australia. Many of us see Neil Young combined with Crazy Horse as the best band in the world, but it's a long time since they've released a CD full of brilliant new Neil Young songs. *Americana*, released early in 2012, filled with Neil Young's selection of classic American songs, was a bit of a dud. *Year of the Horse* (1997) was inconsistent. You'd have to stretch back to *Sleeps With Angels* (1994) to find an album of Neil Young and Crazy Horse at their best.

Neil and the band stretch out the songs on *Psychedelic Pill*. One is 27 minutes long, and several are 16 minutes long. The only weak song is 'Psychedelic Pill', which gives the CD set its name. Turn the amplifier way up and bask in the grungy brilliance.

The strength of great women

The style of music I enjoy most is now a recognisable genre. It is called alt.country, country punk, alt.blues, or Americana. I think of this music as a bonfire around which great singers and musos sit, harmonising and jamming as they exchange songs and cook up new ones. Guitars, dobros, fiddles, banjos, ukeleles, shakers, and drums. Not a synthesiser in sight.

Recently the best reviewed of these singers, both overseas and in Australia, have been ambitious young women. Some of them are still just names to me, such as Australians Liz Stringer and Lisa Mitchell. Others, such as Melbourne's **Lisa Miller**, produced a great album (*Meet the Misses*) in 2012.

Listening to Swedish duo female singers **First Aid Kit** is like listening to Emmylou Harris doubled. One of their songs pays tribute to Emmylou, who didn't put out a CD in 2012. *The Lion's Roar* provides intensely melodic songs, powerful backings, and addictive voices. I hope



First Aid Kit is planning to release a new CD in 2013.

Other addictive voices in my list include those of **Kimmie Rhodes** and **Mollie O'Brien**. Both are Texans, and both write very good songs. Kimmie Rhodes is a very sweet singer, her songs full of pathos and longing. Mollie O'Brien has a much tarter, funnier sound, but she also sings fine ballads. Many of her earlier CDs were collaborations with Tim O'Brien, but on *Saints and Sinners* she is joined by **Rich Moore**. I hadn't heard of him, but if I saw a solo album by him I would buy it. These are, as the album's title implies, funny, bluesy American folksongs about people on the edge of society.

Tributes

In the group that calls itself the **O'Brien Party of 7**, Mollie O'Brien joins with friends to pay tribute to songwriter **Roger Miller**, who died a while ago. Most of Miller's hit records in the early 1960s were comedy novelty songs, with titles like 'Dang Me' and 'Do Wacka Do', but this group explores his ballads as well.

The most distinguished recent tribute record is the double CD *This One's for Him: A Tribute to Guy Clark*. **Guy Clark** has been writing brilliant songs all his life, and his first album appeared in 1972. Many of his songs were collaborations with his wife Susannah, who died recently. His most famous song is 'Desperadoes Waiting on a Train' (performed here by Willie Nelson), written when he was in his twenties, about a group of old men sitting around a train station waiting for a nonexistent train to take them to nowhere. All these songs are melancholic, nostalgic, sweet, and funny. To judge from the quality of the performers on this double CD (Rodney Crowell, Lyle Lovett, Shawn Colvin, Rosanne Cash, Kevin Welch, James McMurtry, Joe Ely, Steve Earle, Patty Griffin, and many many others), Guy Clark is close to God in Nashville. The standout track is 'Magnolia Wind', where Emmylou Harris sings with John Prine. Close enough to heaven for me.

Chuck Leavall's *Back to the Woods* is a tribute to the great blues piano players of American recording history. The vocals are not great, but the piano playing is delicious. (Chuck Leavall these days is known as the Rolling Stones' keyboard player, but he also has an independent performing career.)

The other great jazz-rock and roll piano CD of the year is *The A, B, C and D of Boogie Woogie*. **Ben Waters**, **Charlie Watts**, **Axel Zwingenberger**, and **Dave Green** got together in a small club in Paris and pounded out a whole lot of boogie woogie classics. Since Charlie Watts from the Rolling Stones is the drummer, the group offers jazzy versions of 'Route 66' and 'Down the Road Apiece'. New compositions include the eight-minute 'More Sympathy for the Drummer'.

On *...First Came Memphis Minnie*, **Maria Muldaur** organises a tribute to **Memphis Minnie**, a pioneer of the blues. Today we remember her for her racy lyrics, but the liner notes remind us that in the years before 1920 she invented what we call the 'country blues' guitar style. Maria Muldaur's blues voice does not have the resonance of Memphis Minnie's, so she gives guest spots to people such well-known blues people as Rory Block, Ruthie Foster, Bonnie Raitt, Phoebe Snow, Koko Taylor, Alvin

Youngblood Hart, and Roy Rogers.

I think of **Nick Lowe** as being the epitome of cool British singers who during the 1970s played good-time rock and roll but rode the New Wave. Lowe's recent CDs have featured laidback, rueful ballads of love'n'loss, but I still would not have described him as a country performer. The people who put together *Lowe Country* beg to differ. 1970s songs, such as 'I Love the Sound of Breaking Glass' sit beside with recent songs such as 'Lately I've Let Things Slide'. The most notable new performer is Robert Ellis.

Favourites

On his program 'Off the Record' (3RRR, Saturday mornings 9 a.m.–noon) **Brian Wise** joked that he could fill the program with new CDs by performers who are over 60. And did so, for an hour. All the tracks sounded fresh to me. For 2012, I bought new records by old favourites who just seem to get better.

Highly recommended is **Bill Fay's** *Life Is People*. Fay hasn't made a record for about 40 years, so he's saved decades of songs for this CD. His voice does not lift much above a smooth growl, but the lyrics and arrangements make compelling listening.

Melbourne performer **Jim Keays** (best known as the lead singer of the Masters Apprentices in the 1960s and early 70s) hasn't made a CD for years. He's been very ill, but he went into the studio to make 2012's best straightforward rock and roll record, *Dirty, Dirty*, featuring lots of favourite songs that have been hits in Australia since the early 1960s. The highlight is Keays' version of Betty McQuade's classic Australian hit 'Midnight Bus' (written by John D. Loudermilk).

All I can say about the other veteran singer-songwriters on my list is that their new CDs maintain their own standards. **John Hiatt** is still rocking out as firmly as ever on *Mystic Fireball* (with some songs with very twisted lyrics); **Ray Wylie Hubbard's** lyrics remain as poetically redneck as ever on *The Grifter's Hymnal*; **Mary Chapin Carpenter** is even more lyrical and deeply melancholy than ever on *Ashes and Roses*; and **Willie Nelson** on *Heroes* sings some songs written recently by his son **Lukas**.

I enjoyed very much *Kin* by **Rodney Crowell** and **Mary Karr**. They wrote the songs between them. As they say in the liner notes, he was a top country artist and she was a poetry professor at Sarah Lawrence College when they met in a coffee shop and discovered they came from the same tiny area of back-country Texas. To celebrate their home territory, they wrote songs about everything they remember as being best and worst about growing up there. Guest singers include Norah Jones, Lucinda Williams, Kris Kristofferson, and Emmylou Harris.

It's great that **Little Feat** returns to form on *Rooster Rag*, but disappointing to find **Iris DeMent** not up to her best on *Sing the Delta*. I had I hoped that her first CD of new songs for a decade would yield richer fruit.

Disappointment

Usually I would place any new **Loudon Wainwright III** CD in my top 10 for the year. Loudon Wainwright is a few months older than I am (66). He's now older than

older than my old man now



LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III



his father was when he died. He's survived well. On the record sleeve he doesn't look a day over 50. ***Older Than My Old Man Now*** has a great concept. But he's filled the songs on this CD with nothing but presentiments of death and dying! Hang on, Loudon. If I were looking as good as you, I would be out on the squash court or climbing mountains and wondering why the girls didn't think I was still 30.

Loudon sings about such deathbed topics as 'My Meds' ('If the side effects don't kill me, all my meds might save my life') and disappearing sex ('I Remember Sex', a duet with Dame Edna Everage). 'Somebody Else I Knew Just Died' is a duet with Chris Smither. In future years I'll probably recognise this CD as a work of genius — if I outlive Loudon.

- 1 Neil Young & Crazy Horse: *Psychedelic Pill* (2 CDs) (2012)
- 2 First Aid Kit: *The Lion's Roar* (2012)
- 3 Kimmie Rhodes: *Dreams of Flying* (2010)
- 4 Mollie O'Brien & Rich Moore: *Saints and Sinners* (2010)
- 5 Various: *This One's For Him: A Tribute to Guy Clark* (2011) (2 CDs)
- 6 Bill Fay: *Life Is People* (2012)
- 7 Jim Keays: *Dirty, Dirty* (2012)
- 8 Dawes: *Nothing Is Wrong* (2011)
- 9 O'Brien Party of 7: *Reincarnation: The Songs of Roger Miller* (2012)
- 10 John Hiatt: *Mystic Fireball* (2012)
- 11 Ray Wylie Hubbard: *The Grifter's Hymnal* (2012)
- 12 Chuck Leavall: *Back to the Woods* (2012)
- 13 Crosby Stills & Nash: *2012* (2 CDs)
- 14 Boy and Bear: *Moonfire* (2011)
- 15 Mumford and Son: *Sigh No More* (2009)
- 16 Mary Chapin Carpenter: *Ashes and Roses* (2012)
- 17 Ben Waters, Charlie Watts, Axel Zwingenberger and Dave Green: *The A, B, C and D of Boogie Woogie* (2012)
- 18 Willie Nelson: *Heroes* (2012)
- 19 Loudon Wainwright III: *Older Than My Old Man Now* (2012)
- 20 Rodney Crowell & Mary Karr: *Kin* (2012)
- 21 Avett Brothers: *The Carpenter* (2012)
- 22 Caexico: *Algiers* (2012)
- 23 Mumford and Son: *Babel* (2012)
- 24 Tom Jones: *Spirit in the Room* (2012)
- 25 Various: *First Came Memphis Minnie* (2012)

- 26 Midnight Choir: *Amsterdam Stranded* (1998/2003) (2 CDs)
- 27 Little Feat: *Rooster Rag* (2012)
- 28 Iris Dement: *Sing the Delta* (2012)
- 29 Various: *Lowe Country: The Songs of Nick Lowe* (2012)
- 30 Mia Dyson: *The Moment* (2012)
- 31 Jerry Douglas: *Traveler* (2012)
- 32 Dr John: *Locked Down* (2012)
- 33 Lisa Miller: *Meet the Misses* (2012)
- 34 Ry Cooder: *Election Special* (2012)
- 35 Various: *Chimes of Freedom: The Songs of Bob Dylan Honoring 50 Years of Amnesty International* (2012) (4 CDs)

Other four-star contenders, in order of listening:

- Eliza Gilkyson: *Roses at the End of Time* (2011)
- Dave Bromberg Quartet: *Live in New York City 1982* (2008)
- Various: *Gotta Serve Somebody: The Gospel Songs of Bob Dylan* (2003)
- Carolina Chocolate Drops: *Leaving Eden* (2012)
- Bap Kennedy: *The Sailor's Revenge* (2011) (2)
- White Stripes: *Elephant* (2002)
- Hot Club of Cowtown: *Wishful Thinking* (2009)
- Commander Cody: *Dopers, Drunks and Everyday Losers* (2009)
- James McMurtry: *Saint Mary of the Woods* (2007)
- Joe Chindamo and Zoe Black: *Reimaginings* (2012)
- Jack White: *Blunderbuss* (2012)

Various: *They Will Have Their Way: The Songs of Tim and Neil Finn* (2011) (2 CDs)
 Archie Roach: *Sensual Being* (2002)
 Joe Jackson: *The Duke* (2012)
 Todd Snider: *Time As We Know It: The Songs of Jerry Jeff Walker* (2012)
 Waterboys: *An Appointment with Mr Yeats* (2011)
 Brewster Brothers: *Play Bob Dylan* (2010)
 Bob Dylan: *Tempest* (2012)

Paul Kelly: *Spring and Fall* (2012)
 Betty Lavette: *Thankful 'n' Thoughtful* (2012)
 Jimmie Dale Gilmore: *Fair and Square* (1988/2012)
 Jimmie Dale Gilmore: *Jimmie Dale Gilmore* (1989/2012)
 Soundtrack: *Lawless* (2012)
 Heritage Blues Orchestra: *And Still I Rise* (2012)
 Gary Clark Jr: *Blak and Blu* (2012)
 Diana Krall: *Glad Rag Doll* (2012)

Favourite popular music boxed sets 2012



Until this year, popular boxed sets have usually been selections from the entire career of their subjects. A *Whole Lotta Jerry Lewis* fits this description: 4 CDs of selections from both his greatest hits period 1957–1962, and the 40 years of Jerry Lee’s music that followed. Jerry Lee Lewis is, as he likes to tell us, ‘the last man standing’ from his generation of rock and roll singers. He still sounds as good as ever.

The Universal Music supergiant, which seems to have swallowed every other international label, has begun issuing a new style of boxed set: his or her first five albums in a little box. No liner notes, but the price is right (\$20 for five CDs in a slipcase), and often the packets contain

albums that have never been issued on CD, or have been unavailable for 20 or more years. Sets I’m really pleased to have in the collection at last include those by **Dr John** (released in 2011), **Patti Smith** (I still have most of these only on LP), **Jeff Beck** (most of whose early solo albums I’ve never owned), **Cyndi Lauper** (I have the first two, but nothing else), John McLaughlin’s **Mahavishnu Orchestra** (it’s great to replace those clapped-out 40-year-old LPs), the **Pogues** (all new stuff to me), and **ZZ Top** (to test the theory that they were a great blues band before they went pop in the 1980s).

Joni Mitchell: The Studio Albums 1968–1979, all 10 of them, is a special treat. The lyrics on the CD covers are now so minitaturised that the set should be issued with a magnifying glass, but these replace the first set of Joni Mitchell albums on CD, which were not remastered. The little box occupies much less space on the shelf than my earlier set of CDs.

An independent American label issuing small boxed sets of the great jazz performers of the 1950s and 1960s. I was pleased to find their set of the first eight albums of organist **Jimmy Smith**.

During 2011 I was tempted to spend money I did not have on the 15-CD boxed set of the complete **Sandy Denny**. Since only 1000 boxes were issued for the world, luckily I was too late to buy one of the two sets that Readings of Carlton imported. However, in 2012, the material that was actually new to the huge boxed set has been released on a 4-CD set called *The Notes and the Words: A Collection of Demos and Rareties*. Combined with two other Sandy Denny CD boxed sets I’ve bought over the last twenty years, that completes my Denny collection.

- 1 Joni Mitchell: *The Studio Albums 1968–79* (10 CDs)
- 2 Sandy Denny: *The Notes and the Words: A Collection of Demos and Rareties* (4 CDs)
- 3 Jerry Lee Lewis: *A Whole Lotta ...* (4 CDs)
- 4 Patti Smith: *Original Album Classics* (5 CDs)
- 5 Jimmy Smith: *Eight Classic Albums* (4 CDs)
- 6 Art Garfunkel: *The Singer* (2 CDs)
- 7 Billy Bragg & Wilco: *Mermaid Avenue: The Complete Sessions* (3 CDs + DVD)

Other four-star contenders:

Jeff Beck: *Original Albums* (5 CDs)
 Cyndi Lauper: *Original Albums* (5 CDs)
 Mahavishnu Orchestra: *Original Album Classics* (5 CDs)
 Pogues: *Original Album Series* (5 CDs)
 ZZ Top: *Original Album Series* (5 CDs)
 Preservation Hall Jazz Band: *50th Anniversary Collection* (4 CDs)

Continued on page 45

Jennifer Bryce lives in Melbourne. As can be seen from the lists provided she reads very little, if any, science fiction. Well into her sixties, she is now 'transitioning to retirement', as superannuation companies say. This involves working in a paid job three days a week and spending the other two writing fiction and sometimes practising her oboe. The paid job enables her to take holidays, and in February she will fulfil a long held dream to go to India. She has just finished the first draft of her first novel — she expects there will be at least five drafts.

Jennifer Bryce

Aide-mémoire: 2012

Jennifer Bryce writes: For some time now this sexagenarian has been horrified at how easily you can forget the detail of books you've read, films you've seen, concerts you've heard ... So, my 2012 New Year's resolution was to follow Bruce's example and make lists of what I read, etcetera during the year. Here is the result of that exercise.

I'll present the lists with some fairly brief comments and impressions. As you will see, there is no logic to the choice or order of reading, and the films, plays, and concerts are presented in the order of attendance throughout the year.



Jennifer Bryce.
(Photo: Helena Binns.)

What I read (in order of reading)

Alan Bennett: *A Life Like Other People's*

I started to read this book only because I'd borrowed it from the library for my nonagenarian mother and thought I'd dip into it before returning it. As I read it I thought, this is a very mediocre account of growing up in 1940s England — surely everyone thinks that their family is unusual. Then, near the end, there is a description of Bennett's demented mother who is confined to a nursing home for 15 years — so poignantly written — where the son reacts to his mother's having assumed a completely different personality where she responds better to the seemingly inappropriate attentions of the nursing staff than to him. The mother is in a (shared) room that looks out onto a beautiful view. But the chairs all have their backs to the view and no one looks at it (except Bennett). They could open the windows for fresh sea air, but instead the staff spray air freshener from a can.

W. D. Wetherell: *A Century of November*

'November' is the November at the end of World War I. Marden's son Billy is killed in the war and his wife is killed by the Spanish flu. Marden wants to experience the place where his son was killed. I loved the beginning: 'He judged men and he grew apples and it was a perilous

autumn for both.’ I also loved a description of a cheap boardinghouse where Marden stays on his travels: ‘There was a boardinghouse near the station and this was where he spent the night, in a room with religious pictures on the walls, rubber sheets on the bed, and, wafting down the corridor, the fake moans of whores.’

The description of the grim devastation of the battle fields is powerful.

Hilary Mantel: *Beyond Black*

I really wanted to read Mantel’s *Eight Months on Gazzah Street* because I was going to Saudi Arabia — but couldn’t track it down in time (it appears later in this list).

This book, set in an environment of spiritualism, was my first venture into Hilary Mantel. She writes poignantly of a character Al, who is excessively fat and has an horrendous past. I picture Al physically as a gross overstatement of those business women with long fingernails and lots of gold jewellery, who have probably ‘risen up’ from working-class backgrounds. I loved this character depiction and the wry comments about how our civilisation is changing the English countryside — Tudor pubs, no longer pubs but hamburger chains — and the ghastliness of housing estates.

Hilary Mantel: *Vacant Possession*

I was ready for more Hilary Mantel. Here she gets inside the head of a person (Muriel) with huge psychological problems (vacant possession). Inspiration for this may have come from the fact that Mantel lives in a flat in what was a big mental asylum. Muriel seems to be a person without a central being — she can only imitate people, not actually be a self-possessed person. Thus she takes on many guises. She seems to have no morality. There are almost too many connections in the story — every character seems to link into the complex plot, much of which is set in a context of a dysfunctional family.

Helen Garner: *Cosmo Cosmolino*

Helen Garner is my hero — I wish I could write just like her. Maybe it’s because she writes so well about people — and people like my friends. Garner said that *Monkey Grip* was her journal with the boring bits left out. I find much of Garner’s writing resembles poetry. I savour phrases she has used because they are such perfect descriptions. This book is about a collection of people (middle-aged) in an old terrace house — and you can hear the plumbing groan.

Sulari Gentill: *A Few Right Thinking Men*

Tony Thomas had recommended this book because it is set in Australia in the early 1930s (and I’m writing a piece set in that time). It is obviously very popular and I had to be on a waiting list to obtain it from the library. *A Few Right Thinking Men* is set in 1932 in Sydney — the time of the opening of the Harbour Bridge when left-wing Jack Lang was premier. The novel stresses the incredible fear of communist influence and the lengths that the

right wing — right-thinking men — took to ensure that New South Wales was rid of such influence. I found it fascinating to see how Gentill works historical fact around her fictitious character Rowland Sinclair, who is from a very establishment family but who keeps three of his artistic, left-leaning friends in the family’s Sydney mansion. Gentill has clearly undertaken a lot of contemporary newspaper reading and it seems that the historical detail is accurate, bound around a compelling mystery or two.

Charles Dickens: *Hard Times*

I unearthed a beautifully leather-bound collection of Dickens that had belonged to my grandmother. She won *Hard Times* as a golf prize in May 1910.

What a depressing picture of the industrial revolution. Coketown is bleak and filthy, leaving blots of dirt on the surrounding countryside.

One of the main ‘messages’ is in keeping with current discussion; the importance of feelings and how facts on their own, without the support of feelings, can be ineffectual.

Julian Barnes: *The Sense of an Ending*

What a superb book — no wonder Barnes won the Man Booker Prize. I can hear the narrator’s voice so clearly, it’s as though he’s sitting next to you having a conversation. One of the many ideas addressed is that of remorse, and how we change with the passing of time — the things that can’t be ‘undone’.

Ian McEwan: *Solar*

I do admire Ian McEwan. He undertakes a huge amount of research for his novels, in this case, into climate change and physics. I found this a gripping read and I marvelled at McEwan’s powerful descriptions of thoroughly unpleasant people and places; greasy diners, and the main character who gets fatter as the novel progresses.

Somerset Maugham: *The Moon and Sixpence*

I read this short novel of Somerset Maugham because I bought a beautiful edition of his novels (two-volume set) at The Merchant of Fairness, in the South Melbourne Market.

The Moon and Sixpence is supposed to be loosely based on the life of Gauguin. I almost wish I hadn’t known this, as I found it difficult to transform a stockbroker with the very English name of Charles Strickland into the French artist. It is suggested that the title refers to the fact that if you spend your time looking for a sixpence on the ground, you will miss the moon. Strickland is certainly concerned only about his moon and is ruthless in his relationships with others. We learn very little about the narrator, only that he is free to follow Strickland from London to France and later, after Strickland’s death, to Tahiti.

Elizabeth Harrower: *The Watch Tower*

I discovered this book by attending the Clunes Book Festival, where there was a discussion on the Australian literary canon in which it was mentioned that the writer Elizabeth Harrower has been overlooked. This book was originally published in 1966 but has now been brought out in a series by Text: Text Classics.

I found this compelling reading although I was sometimes irritated by the structure, because the narrative seemed to jump around a great deal and Harrower skips from one viewpoint to another almost within a paragraph. But the way she portrays the psychology of entrapment is gripping. The person in the 'watch tower' is one of two sisters. At the very end of the novel she is on a train gradually shedding the shackles of the city as she is carried into the countryside.

Martin Boyd: *A Difficult Young Man*

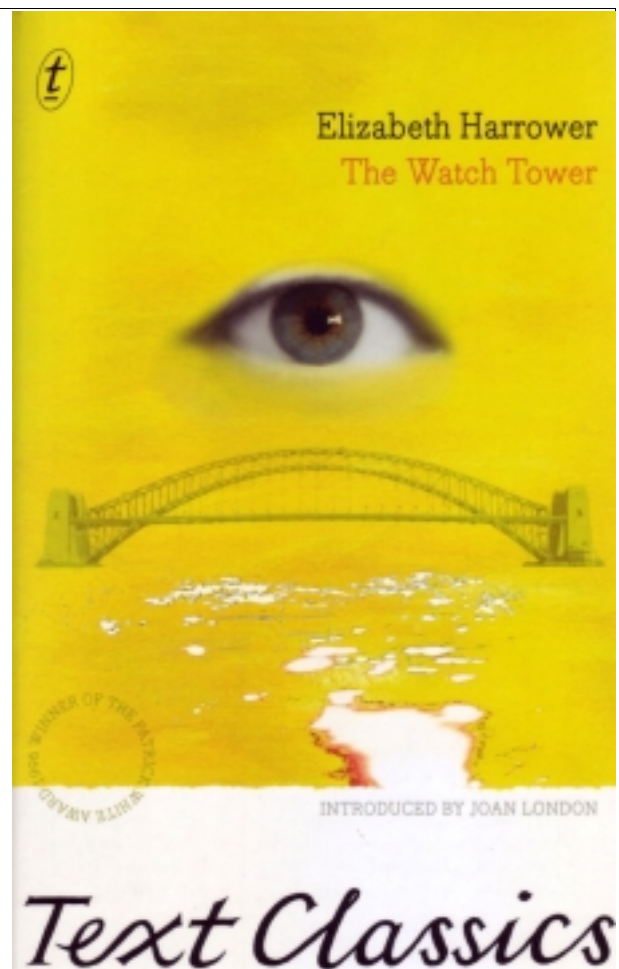
This is another of the Text Classics. It is a mixture of biography, autobiography, and fiction — Martin Boyd's portrayal of his brother, the potter Merrick Boyd. It seemed that the only fiction was the changing of names. It gives a very clear account of upper middle-class life (where money was not always readily available) around the turn of the twentieth century.

Henry Handel Richardson: *Maurice Guest*

This was Henry Handel Richardson's first novel. It is quite a tome. I probably wouldn't have chosen to read it except that I wanted to enter a short story competition where the story had to have some connection with Henry Handel Richardson, so I needed to become better acquainted with her work. The novel is set in a period that fascinates me — 1890s Europe — in this case, Leipzig — music students and interesting liberated young women. Although reviewers don't seem to mention it, I found a lot of moralising: she who gives herself freely suffers. Maurice Guest is infatuated with the 'free woman' in an all-consuming and desperate way. It ruins his musical studies and ultimately his life. I was in awe of HHR's description of his suicide: 'Without allowing himself another second in which to reason or reflect, he caught up the revolver from the seat, and pressed the cold little nozzle to his chest. Simultaneously he received a sharp blow, and heard the crack of a report — but far away ... in the distance. He was on his back, without knowing how he had got there; straight overhead waved the bare branches of a tree; behind them a grey morning cloud was sailing. For still the fraction of a second, he heard the familiar melody, to which the soldiers marched; and the branch swayed ... swayed ... Then suddenly as the flame of a candle is puffed out by the wind, his life went from him.'

Henry Handel Richardson: *The Young Cosima*

This was H. H. Richardson's last novel. It delves into the ménage à trois between Cosima, daughter of Liszt, Hans



von Bulow, and Richard Wagner. It appears to be factually accurate, with HHR inferring the thoughts and conversations between the main characters. Interesting that this was published in 1939, yet this kind of genre is popular now — a kind of 'faction'. Although it is a study of a young woman asserting her independence in the early nineteenth century and it delves into the emotions of the man who wrote the incredibly poignant music of *Tristan and Isolde*, I did not find it a gripping read. The writing reminded me of books of the lives of composers I had read as a child.

Hilary Mantel: *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street*

As noted above, I couldn't get hold of this novel when I was about to go to Saudi Arabia. It was interesting to read after the event. Although first published in 1988, it seems a true account of what the stricter Middle Eastern countries are like today. The description of everyday life in Jeddah brought back memories of my time in Jordan and particularly in Riyadh. Of course I only heard what it was like to live as an expat; I didn't live as one, as I wasn't there for long enough. Mantel depicts how wary we are of other cultures, how untrusting of people who live in a radically different way, with radically different beliefs from ours. It is not just a blast against what we may see as the inhumanity of Islam. Woven into the story is a gripping detective aspect. What is going on in the upper apartment?

Anna Funder: *All That I Am*

This is the first of Anna Funder's books I have read — what a writer! She manages to weave seamlessly the voices of three characters as narrators — the young Ruth, the old Ruth looking back, and Toller. I found the voice of the old Ruth particularly convincing — an older intelligent woman, who ultimately dies: the carer finds her and the trinkets that meant so much to Ruth become immediately meaningless. And what a description of Toller's suicide: 'I feel the exact same feeling — hesitation and blind purpose — as before jumping into a cold pool. The fall off the block. Nothing more'. Yet possibly the main interest of this novel is the detailed history of what it was like in Germany when the Nazis were coming to power before World War II. The novel describes the passionate dedication of a group of young people in their resistance to Nazism. They were even hunted down in London. It is an enthralling read.

Brenda Niall: *True North*

This is a story of the Durack family, who settled in North Western Australia in the early part of the twentieth century. Brenda Niall is considered to be an excellent biographer, but I must say there were bits that I found tedious. What was interesting was to consider the Durack family's relationships with the Aboriginal people in those days. The flaw in this relationship came later when Elizabeth successfully passed off some of her work as done by a fictitious Aboriginal artist — this, because it would be better recognised. Reading this book made me aware of how very difficult it must be to write a readable biography that is accurately documented.

Cate Kennedy: *The World Beneath*

Until now I have read and admired Cate Kennedy's short stories. This is about the relationship of a fifteen-year-old girl, Sophie, with her father, from whom she has been estranged since soon after her birth. After about fourteen years of absence, Rich decides he would like to get to know his daughter and takes her on a challenging trek in the Cradle Mountain area of Tasmania. Others on the trek seem to learn more about Sophie than her self-centred father. There is loads of tension in the relationship but we are led to believe, at the very end, that father and daughter have got to know each other and will keep in touch. Woven into the story is Sandy, the mother, a beautiful send-up, I think, of the ageing hippy, natural-healing kind of woman.

Sulari Gentill: *Miles Off Course*

I didn't enjoy this novel as much as the other two in the Rowland Sinclair series. This seemed to be just more of the same, although 'the same' is certainly readable. In this novel we are in 1933 — there are still a lot of worries

about communist infiltration. A contemporary of Rowland's at his English boarding school turns out to be a communist spy — almost implausible, as he seems to have been such a wimp. I'll continue to read Gentill's novels as I'm fascinated by her skill at dealing with history (particularly having 'real' people, such as Norman Lindsay and Miles Franklin, pop up) but I did find this a little disappointing.

E. M. Forster: *A Passage to India*

This is one of the many books I've intended to read and not got around to reading. Now seemed the time, with my own prospect of a trip to India. In his prefatory note Forster is almost apologetic that the novel depicts an India very different from that time (post-British rule) — but of course that is what makes it so fascinating for me: a picture of how the British evidently behaved around the turn of the twentieth century. He started writing it just before the outbreak of World War I. It seems that Forster has beautifully captured the mystical qualities of India, especially the eerie depiction of the Marabar Caves, the evening shadows making them appear to take over the whole of the countryside, and phrases such as at the end of one of the early chapters, where Mrs Moore's voice 'floated out, to swell the night's uneasiness'.

Irene Nemirovsky: *The Dogs and the Wolves*

I had read Nemirovsky's *Suite Française* a few years ago, so was attracted to this novel, which was translated from the French very recently, although originally published in 1940 before the author was killed in a concentration camp. The story depicts the contrast between people in the one family with the name 'Sinner' — the English meaning having significance — some of whom live in a Jewish ghetto and the others are rich Jewish financiers. At the end of the novel, Ada, an artist, originally from the ghetto, is pregnant with Harry's (rich financier family) child and the novel ends with the birth of a son and Ada seeing this as her redemption and promise of a good new life: 'Like a child listing all the precious things he owns, she counted on her fingers: "Painting, the baby, courage: with those things you can live. You can live a good life."'

I had to return *Wolf Hall* to the Library before I had finished it (a waiting list) and right now on 28 December I am reading concurrently *Emma* and Janet Frame's three (small) volume autobiography.

The three books that influenced me most? I might give a different answer on another occasion, but I think:

- **Anna Funder: *All That I Am***
- **Julian Barnes: *The Sense of an Ending***
- **Janet Frame's autobiography** might come third, although I haven't finished it yet.

Films I saw (in order of viewing)

Albert Nobbs

Set in Ireland on the mid nineteenth century (well, before electricity was common), about sexual identity. Poor lost Albert Nobbs is a woman working as a male waiter in Morris's hotel. There is another character, Hubert, also a woman masquerading as a man, who does this far more confidently than Albert. In the end, when Albert dies of a knock on the head and his identity is revealed, one thinks it is just as well he died.

The Artist

A fascinating film because it is shot in black and white and it focuses (excuse pun) on the time when sound was being introduced to movies. Inevitably some actors just weren't up to it. This is the case with the leading character, who is ultimately 'rescued' after severe and degrading depression by a beautiful heroine who is a successful actress in the talkies. This film made me aware of how very different acting for silent movies had to be — what we would now see as over-acting.

A Separation

This is an Iranian film about a couple who want to separate because of irreconcilable differences. They have an eleven-year-old daughter, and the mother thinks the girl would have a better life outside of Iran. She has a visa to leave, but it will run out soon. The bureaucracy, dispensed from dull grey run-down 1960s-looking buildings, is unflinching and totally devoid of sentiment. It is a very bleak, depressing film, in which there seems to be no hope. We are right there, sitting tensely with the parents.

Hotel Marigold

This was a light-hearted highly entertaining movie about a group of elderly English people finding themselves holidaying together in an Indian hotel that turns out to

be not quite how it was written up on the Internet. The movie is sustained by excellent acting from the likes of Maggie Smith and Judi Dench. The oldies triumph, with the Maggie Smith character, who arrived in a wheelchair and

would not tolerate a 'coloured' doctor, running the hotel.

A Dangerous Method

This movie explores the differences between Freud and Jung by exploring the contemporary story of Sabina Spielrein, played brilliantly by Keira Knightley. Spielrein arrives as a patient of Jung — her 'problem' is sexual and she and Jung ultimately have an affair. There is far more emphasis on Spielrein than on the Freud-Jung controversy re 'talking therapy'. I was transported by the setting of pre World War I Vienna and Switzerland.

Trishna

This film is described as an Indian version of Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. I guess I mainly went to see some of the Indian countryside — which one does, particularly around Rajasthan and parts of Mumbai (which is called Bombay in the film). I guess the main point being made is that many Indian women today are as vulnerable as was Tess in the nineteenth century. Trishna has little choice but to accept what is offered by the young man she ultimately kills (and then herself commits suicide) and to obey her father. She is, indeed, a caged bird.

Mozart's Sister

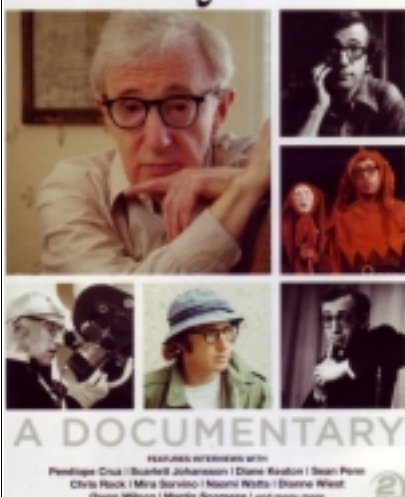
This is a 'what if ...' story. What if Mozart's sister Nannerl had been as good a composer as he was? This is very likely, given that both children were superbly talented. In those days it wasn't even seemly for a young lady to play the violin. The film suggests that Nannerl was inspired to compose by King Louis' son, but when she ultimately realised she would have to conform to a life expected of a young woman of those times she burned all of her compositions.

Careless Love

This is John Duigan's latest film — made on a shoestring, apparently. Lovely to see family participating. John acts a university professor. It was particularly diverting for me as John's sister is a great friend of mine, and I recognised quite a few of the film sets. We are taken into the world of a fairly classy sex worker (Linh, played by Nammi Le), a university student earning extra money to send home to her Vietnamese family — so an entirely worthy reason for this work. She is studying Law, which is a device for introducing theory about sex workers. Some of her clients treat her very well — in fact one genuinely loves her and she seems to have quite strong feelings for him. We also see the crude treatment from immature students and footballers. The only bit I found implausible was how Linh managed to use her intelligence to escape a 'gang bang'. There is fabulous cinematography, especially a beautiful opening shot of the Sydney Harbour with a



Woody Allen



storm brewing — the bridge and a ferry going across the foreground. Another superb shot pans away from Linh and her new boyfriend on a rooftop (ugly city buildings) under a beach umbrella, and there is another of Linh walking down a long driveway in a large cemetery where the client who loved her has just been

buried. The film asks, can you separate personal love and sex and professional sex? It suggests that, in the end, you can't.

Woody Allen: A Documentary

This was a loving tribute to Woody Allen — most of the time spent in laughter. Very well put together; brief comments from Allen, members of his family, his wives/partners and appropriate excerpts from his films. I realised that there are still many of his films I haven't seen and that there will be more to look forward to.

Elena

A slow-paced, grim Russian film. Wonderful use of sounds — to start with, the early morning sounds as we watch a well-to-do apartment in Moscow gradually coming to life: bird sounds, then traffic sounds, an electric razor. In some ways the slow pace reminded me of Eastern European films of years ago at the Melbourne Film Festival. I was also interested to see how well-to-do a retired Moscow businessman can be — driving a late model Audi to the gym. It is a second marriage and seems to be tense. They sleep separately, although there is one episode of sex (which we don't see). The film shows how a woman can be driven to desperate measures for her children. Phillip Glass's third symphony pounds through the film, helping to create an atmosphere of grim desperation.

Hysteria

This was a light-hearted but entertaining film set in 1880s London, apparently based on true events. A forward-thinking young doctor finds himself working in an upper-class medical practice where most of the exclusively female patients seem to suffer from hysteria: lack of sexual fulfilment. The young doctor has a good friend who experiments with electricity and together they in-

vent the first vibrator.

Naqoyqatsi, from the Qatsi Trilogy

This shouldn't necessarily be classified as 'a film'. It was an experience — an event, maybe; a fusion of film composed by director Godfrey Reggio and music by Philip Glass, played live at the newly renovated Hamer Hall by the Philip Glass Ensemble. 'Qatsi' means life, from the language of the Hopi people. The complete trilogy was performed on three consecutive nights, but I was free for only the last night, for *Naqoyqatsi: Life as War*.

I walked out feeling as though I'd been 'blown away' and there is no way to say what it is 'about'. You are given an experience and you make of it what you will. One reason it can't be described could be that Reggio has said, 'language, tragically, no longer describes the world'. It was an amazing creation of cinematic images and music: we are technology; we don't just use technology. One is reduced to talking about technical aspects of this creation as it is impossible to do justice to describing the personal impact. I found the whole experience both exciting and depressing. It made me think that we are moving into new forms of expression that can't be sustained by the conventional media of language, art, music.

Monsieur Lazhar

A French Canadian film that sometimes threw me into the trap of trying to follow the French, which I do with French films. The film focuses on a grade 6 class — that interesting age where children are on the brink of adolescence; still young enough to be innocent and malleable but old enough to be sensitive and understanding. Their teacher committed suicide and two of the children saw the body hanging from the rafters in the classroom. Understandably they are deeply disturbed. M. Lazhar happens upon the school at the right time. He is a refugee from Algeria with his own tragedy, about which he keeps quiet. The school does all the right things for the grieving children, including provision of a psychologist who has regular sessions with the class. But it is the untrained M. Lazhar, who, with his own background of grief, can understand and provide some solace to these children.

The Sapphires

This movie about the Aboriginal pop group the Sapphires was fun for me, because it harks back to the music of the late 1950s, the 1960s, and the time of the Vietnam War. But I didn't think it was especially good. There were scenes of the Vietnam War that I felt could have been lifted from *Good Morning Vietnam*, and I felt that the racial prejudice in Australia was clumsily — far too obviously — handled.

To Rome with Love

Only Woody Allen could get away with this movie, which contains really nothing new. But I thoroughly enjoyed it. It seemed to me classic Woody Allen: all kinds of crazy

predicaments that end up happily sorted. His love of Rome is palpable — and nostalgic. The film opens and closes with the song ‘Volare’. He has a dig at celebrity, where a timid office worker becomes a celebrity overnight — followed persistently by paparazzi in a very Italian way, promoting all kinds of trivial things about him (because there’s nothing else). There is also the brilliant idea of an opera singer who can only sing under the shower.

Quartet

This film was directed by Dustin Hoffman. Some say it will be the first and only film he directs. The idea of a nursing home for elderly musicians appeals to me, al-

though not enough is made of the frustration of being physically unable to perform at one’s peak. There is of course a lot of humour about memory loss and incontinence — an apt comment from the Maggie Smith character of the inappropriateness of naming a nursing home after Sir Thomas Beecham (the conductor), whose family had made their money from Beecham’s pills. The plot is weak and predictable, and for me the film was carried by Maggie Smith’s superb acting.

What for me were the three best films?

- *Naqoyqatsi* (if it’s a ‘film’)/ *A Separation*
- *Elena*
- *Careless Love*

Theatre viewed (in order of viewing)

***The Seed* by Kate Mulvaney (Melbourne Theatre Company)**

This play apparently draws on Kate Mulvaney’s own family life. I was struck by the use of metaphors and themes winding through the dialogue. The Kate character and her father Danny travel to England (near Sherwood forest) for her to meet and for Danny to see after 30 years their father/grandfather (who must be called ‘Grandah’). Grandah has been deeply affected by his support of the IRA and Danny by his time in Vietnam (Agent Orange having caused miscarriages and his daughter’s infertility). It certainly stood up to the test of keeping me awake and diverted on a Friday evening.

***Red* by John Logan (MTC)**

This play takes place in the studio of the artist Rothko who, for \$35,000 each, is painting red murals for a prestigious New York restaurant. The entire play is a dialogue between Rothko and his new assistant, who represents what is promising and new in the art world. Rothko eats at the classy restaurant and describes the gnashing, superficial chatter of the diners. He decides that even for that good money he doesn’t want to hang his red murals there. He releases his assistant to develop in all that the outside world has to offer (the ‘outside world’ is presented by sound — recorded conversation and street noises, sometimes soft jazz underpinning it). For me it suggested how age can restrict and confine an artist and, although the Rothko character doesn’t mention it, how lonely it is. The text of the dialogue was very dense — lots of observations about art in the 1950s that would be better read. The audience can only retain fleeting phrases. Music is used possibly to represent Rothko’s mature and set outlook (I’m not sure). He had to select music (vinyl records played on stage) and it was often Brahms’s 4th symphony or Mozart’s Haffner. I found hearing the same music again and again irritating, but I think it may have been intended to represent the rut that Rothko was in.

***The Girls in Grey* by Carolyn Bock and Helen Hopkins (Theatreworks)**

This is a play about nurses in World War I: just three nurses, and one man, who plays the roles of various soldiers. It is based on letters, journals, and diaries of nurses who were involved and the words of the pledge nurses had to recite. The play cleverly covers a time span of the whole war without scene change, and represents the different outcomes: one nurse dies of Spanish flu, one’s fiancé is killed, and one goes home to start a new life with her husband.

***The Laramie Project — 10 Years Later* (Red Stitch)**

This play is a fascinating conception: a reconstruction, looking at the people of Laramie, Wisconsin and how they have been affected by the brutal killing of gay man Matthew Shepard. It is a reporting of social research, based on the words of the local people who were interviewed for ‘The Laramie Project’, but at the same time it is a tribute to Matthew Shepard and other victims of hatred. The way these two strands are blended is extraordinary: the reportage; ‘moving on’, ‘permanently changed by it’, etc. together with the mother and others for whom this loss was shattering.

The director did a fabulous job of covering many people with only nine actors, seamlessly moving from one character to another by changing a scarf or putting on glasses.

***National Interest* by Aidan Fennessy (MTC)**

This is a play about the Balibo massacre in East Timor in 1975: the murder of journalists in modern times. The play is about grief — revisiting it more than twenty years after the event; how it essentially intrudes upon all aspects of that family’s lives. The story of the massacre has been told many times, but this treatment was new and

personalised, stressing how the mother lives with the ghosts and will always live with them. It is impossible to 'move on'.

***Queen Lear* (MTC)**

This was very disappointing. I had looked forward to seeing what Robyn Nevin would make of *Lear*. She and the sets and costuming were about the only good things.

In some strange way 'the Fool' was absorbed into other characters, which I didn't 'get'. The actors delivered their lines in a way that seemed to show no appreciation for the poetry of the language. The final scene with *Lear* and the dead *Cordelia* was hardly moving at all.

***The Pride* by Alexi Kaye Campbell (Red Stitch)**

This play is mainly about the experience and outcomes of repressed homosexuality, focusing on a conventionally married gay man in the late 1950s and his ultimate coming out. There is a second, present-day drama of infidelity between two gay men. I didn't immediately 'get' that the time change signified the 'coming out'. The play deftly — but perhaps too deftly — changes from 1950s to present time. I thought they were different characters being played by the same actors and initially found it confusing. But the terrible frustration of the repressed gay man is portrayed very powerfully.

***The Kitchen Sink* by Tom Wells (Red Stitch)**

This play was not very good. No fault of the actors — I think it was just that the play focused on something fairly mundane and predictable. Each member of a family is undergoing a change or challenge. The father's role as a milkman is becoming redundant. The son is gay and finding that art school doesn't suit him (thank goodness the fact that he's gay is not a big issue). The daughter seems to be at a crossroads, breaking up with her reliable

plumber boyfriend. The mother holds everything together (of course) but no one takes notice until she bashes up the plumbing that has just fixed the kitchen sink.

***Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill (MTC)**

While this play had extraordinary ideas, excellent dialogue, and superb acting, I felt it somehow didn't hang together very well. The first act is a brilliant dream sequence in which the main character — who has pretty much got to 'the top' in her work — dreams of a banquet with various successful women throughout history, including Pope Joan of the ninth century (who, it is believed, concealed her gender so that she could study). At the dinner party the women keep talking over each other. It took a bit of adjustment for the members of the audience, but in fact that's what women do on such occasions. The segue into the real-time (1970s) story seemed rather clumsy. It turns out (and we don't discover to very near the end) that the main character became pregnant at 17 and her sister looked after the girl who has turned out to be pretty much the opposite of her mother. We are left asking: is it worth getting to the top?

***Wittenberg* by David Davalos (Red Stitch)**

It seemed that everyone in the audience except me thought that this play was highly amusing. It was saved, I thought, by the good actors. It takes place at Wittenberg University at the time of Martin Luther. The characters are Luther, Faustus, and Hamlet, and 'the Eternal Feminine'. The main thing I seem to remember (some weeks later) is a grey stone set with a perpetually running open drain. There seemed to be student-review type humour. I am getting a bit tired of the humour of anachronism.

Three plays?

- *Red*
- *The Laramie Project — 10 Years Later*
- *Top Girls/The Girls in Grey*

Concerts or opera attended (in order of attendance)

***The Rake's Progress* by Stravinsky**

For many years I have proclaimed that I do not like opera. But I think the truth is that I do not like grand opera — those obvious, tedious stories used by Mozart and Rossini. Maybe I will even come to like traditional operas. But I do find twentieth- and twenty-first-century opera interesting, so I subscribed to a few operas put on by the revamped Victorian Opera. On this occasion the conductor was Richard Gill, for whom I have tremendous respect.

The opera was inspired by Stravinsky's viewing of the eight paintings by Hogarth entitled *A Rake's Progress*. The

story is about the decline and fall of Tim Rakewell who, at the beginning of the story, is in love with his virtuous girlfriend Anne Trulove but, influenced by Nick Shadow, who turns out to be the devil, he ends up in Bedlam — a psychiatric hospital in London.

Auden combined with another writer, Chester Kallman, to write the libretto.

St Lawrence String Quartet and Diana Doherty

This concert was a part of the Musica Viva season — I booked it to hear Diana Doherty playing the Mozart

Oboe Quartet.

The concert started with a Haydn string quartet (in F Minor, op. 20 no 5) and it was followed by an Elegy for String Quartet by Gordon Kerry, commissioned by the Australian Youth Orchestra.

Both these pieces demonstrated that the St Lawrence is a fine quartet able to create magically subtle dynamics — we are so spoiled these days that we come to expect superb playing at concerts such as this. Then came what had brought me to the Elisabeth Murdoch Hall: the Mozart Oboe Quartet. Diana Doherty executes this playfully, as if it were no effort. I particularly liked her almost staccato playing of the last cadence in the first movement, as if to say to the violinist, 'got ya!'. The semiquaver passages were perfectly smooth — it was velvet, as though nothing were tongued. She certainly gave the impression that she was enjoying herself.

I was glad that for this program after interval was a Dvorak string quartet (op 105 in A_b major). The alternative program had Beethoven. I think the Dvorak provided a greater contrast to the Mozart, which was needed. The players sank into the mellow harmonies and one realised, yet again, the importance of folk song as a basis for much Western music.

The final piece was *Rush* for oboe and string quartet, by Matthew Hindson, an Australian composer based at Sydney Conservatorium. I liked the piece very much. It seemed as though the oboe were a machine, flutter tonguing with even precision and executing sharp, rhythmic, biting phrases — not something you might associate with superb oboe playing, but the effect was exciting. The piece was originally written for guitar and quartet. I suspect that the more dominating sound of the oboe works better.

Macedon Music: Zoe Black and Joe Chindamo

This couple are 'an item' and their love is poignant in the music they play. Jo, a jazz pianist, is paired with Zoe, a highly accomplished classical violinist. If someone said that I'd enjoy a jazz arrangement of Mozart's 40th symphony, I would have laughed with disbelief. But I did. And many other improvisations on Handel, Copeland, and others.

Midnight Son, music by Gordon Kerry, libretto by Louis Nowra

This new opera, performed at the Malthouse, is based on events that happened quite recently in Melbourne: the murder of Maria Korp, who was found near dead in the boot of a car. Husband Joe Korp blamed his mistress Tania Herman for the murder. (Maria died later in hospital.) This could all be pretty gruesome, but I was entranced. Must say, I didn't notice the music much, although the dying Maria sings in a key clashing with her husband's. The names are changed in the libretto; in the opera she is Marisa.

The stage set was brilliant, with the use of a garage roller door to provide the scene of where Joe (called Ray) hangs himself and where Marisa is strangled by the

mistress.

The medium of opera in a sense removes us from the immediacy of the gruesome details. Also, the story is presented in reverse. It starts with Ray hanging himself and we work back through the major events to end with the time when Ray and Marisa first met — yet the hang rope and the mistress are lurking there. This device (telling backwards) makes it a story about love rather than one about murder or a whodunit. And this encourages us to feel sympathy for Ray.

Australian Chamber Choir, conducted by Douglas Lawrence

Apart from an exceedingly cold venue — Our Lady of Mt Carmel Church in Middle Park — this was an uplifting concert; a mixture of the medieval — Thomas Morley and Gregorio Allegri — and the new: Penderecki, Brenton Broadstock, Steven Hodgson (born 1981), and Filipino composer Robin Estrada. The choir can achieve a bell-like, boy-soprano quality, which suited this music. I loved the effects of the Penderecki, where a kind of percussive vibration was achieved in the unaccompanied *Miserere*. There was enjoyment of a different kind in the seemingly perfect rendition of *Six Seasonal Motets* by Mendelssohn.

The Emperor of Atlantis

This was more than an opera; it became an amazing combination of photography, opera, and chamber music. *The Emperor of Atlantis* was written in Terezin concentration camp by Viktor Ullmann, in 1943. Soon after its completion, Ullmann was deported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered. In the opera, 'the emperor' is Hitler, and the worst fate that occurs in the opera is that people are no longer able to die. They are executed but they don't die. Death — a character (played superbly by Jerzy Koslowski) — pronounces that people will only be able to die again if the emperor goes first. This will mitigate the present evils of the world, he accurately predicts.

It is impossible to do justice to this work in a brief summary. We started off by walking through the exhibition of ghetto images. We then sat as observers in a dictatorship asylum for mentally ill. Before the opera proper started there were performances of two works (a viola solo and a string quartet) by German Jewish composers, signifying the survival of Jewish culture.

Master Peter's Puppet Show by Manuel de Falla and What Next? by Elliott Carter

Master Peter's Puppet Show is based on the *Don Quixote* story. Shadow puppets convey a 'traditional' tale of a lonely wife being seduced by a Moor. Don Quixote arrives and destroys the puppet show. I was intrigued by the use of shadow puppets, although at times I didn't know where to look: at the puppets, the singers, or the subtitles (it was sung in Spanish).

On the same program was *What Next?*, Elliott Carter's first opera, composed when he was ninety. (He died in 2012, at the age of 103). I warmed to this short opera

more than to the de Falla. The opera starts with a percussive car accident. For the rest of the opera the six 'victims' are gradually coming back to reality. But not this reality; maybe they have all been killed, but they don't realise it. There is a bride, a groom, and the mother — the most down-to-earth — and a young boy who maybe is saved. He remains on the stage at the end and says: 'What?' I would have liked to study the libretto more; it is by Paul Griffiths.

Postcards from Prague, Seraphim Trio with Diana Doherty

This was a great combination of players who still possess a youthful zest, coupled with years of experience. Some of the programming seemed a little strange, however, stretching things to fit in with the theme of 'Prague'. (It irritates me that these days so many concerts are given a theme.) The main culprit was Hummel's arrangement of Mozart's Prague symphony (no 38, K504). It seems to me that arrangements like this were made to compensate for the fact that gramophones didn't exist in those days, so it was a means of hearing the symphony within the confines of the salon. The piano just fills in the orchestral bits not covered by violin, cello, and flute — or, at least, it is scored for flute, but because Diana Doherty was on the program with her oboe, the flute part was played by oboe. It says something for Diana Doherty's superb command of the oboe that she was able to do this, as much of it is in the oboe's highest register; she was able to accomplish this with a mellow tone, but it still sounded too high.

An interesting piece that seemed to have nothing to do with Prague was Andrew Ford's *Spirit of the Staircase*. It was pointed out to me that there is a term 'esprit d'escalier', which means, the point of the argument you forgot until you were just leaving. At the end a well-known extract from a Brahms piano trio (I think) is included. Was that the point forgotten?

For me the highlight was Diana Doherty's performance of the Martinu quartet, written in 1947, possibly for Jiri Tancibudek (who established a fine school of oboe playing in Melbourne after the war). Diana's interest in jazz showed through here, coupled with her great musicality and technique.

To Whomever Finds this Note, The Consort of Melbourne

I was given this ticket by a friend; otherwise I wouldn't have been attracted to a choral program. But I enjoyed this one. The conductor was Jonathan Grieves-Smith, who has worked with various prestigious English choirs and Rome's Academy of St Cecilia. It is a new choir (started 2008) and young, which does seem to add a vitality to the music. It was an intimate setting: the Salon of the Elisabeth Murdoch Recital Centre. Well-known

composers were Parry, Samuel Barber, and Benjamin Britten (*Carry Her Over the Water*). The concert focused on some new composers. My impression is that this is something that choirs do well: commission new music, which they then perform; a great encouragement to local composers. For example, Andrew Anderson, a Melbourne composer born in 1971 wrote *To Whomever Finds This Note*. It is based on an anonymous note that was found after horrific mass suicide in a Guyanese community. Anderson used the note as his text. Calvin Bowman, born 1972, had set Kenneth Slessor's *Beach Burial*, and there was an item from a young New Zealand-trained, South African-born composer, Megan Nelson. The concert ended with a mass by a Latvian composer (born 1957).

Behind Closed Doors, Flinders Quartet

It's interesting these days that there are arts experiences that can't be classified clearly as 'concert' or 'play'. I am describing this 'experience' as a concert because the second half was a performance of Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' quartet, and it took place in the Elisabeth Murdoch Recital Centre.

Adam J. A. Cass has written a play 'for and with' the Flinders Quartet and Red Stitch Theatre: *Behind Closed Doors*. It is about the quartet's preparation for a performance at Wigmore Hall. I like the idea of doing this, but I found the play itself rather implausible. I felt that there wasn't as much discussion about the music as you would find at a rehearsal, and there were overriding personality issues: the female lead violinist (an actor) had slept with all three other players. It would have been more interesting to explore the immensely close relationship that musicians can have that almost transcends a sexual experience. I realise that a dialogue based purely on the music might have been tedious for members of the audience unfamiliar with music, yet it could have been done in a not too technical way. Long chunks of music were played without obvious purpose. So — it didn't quite come off for me, although I think it's a brilliant idea for a play. Each performer had an actor, so the Flinders Quartet did the actual playing. The actors did the acting and speaking.

After interval Flinders Quartet performed the complete quartet, *Death and the Maiden*. It was very good, although I felt it lacked magic, perhaps because of the treatment in the play.

Three music 'experiences'?

- *The Emperor of Atlantis*
- *St Lawrence String Quartet and Diana Doherty*
- *Postcards from Prague, Seraphim Trio with Diana Doherty*. I'm tempted to put *Midnight Son*, but I didn't find the music itself memorable.

— Jennifer Bryce, 28 December 2012

The real gosh! wow!

Some books about physics

Elaine Cochrane

Elaine Cochrane delivered a version of the first part of this article as a talk to the Nova Mob, Melbourne's science fiction discussion group, on Wednesday, 7 March 2012. In preparing the talk, she consulted with **Dick Jenssen (Ditmar)** about books worth including in her coverage, and borrowed quite a few from him. Dick also wrote his own discussion of interesting and approachable recent books about science, especially cosmology.

'My own suspicion is that the Universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose.' (J. B. S. Haldane: *Possible Worlds and Other Papers* (1927), p. 286)

'I'm not making this up, you know.' (Anna Russell, title of autobiography)

Out of context, both, but those two quotations come to the nub of it. Good science fiction stretches the imagination, but for the real gosh-wow you can't beat science fact. And for really mind-stretching, brain-boggling ideas, go to theoretical physics. If you are not a physicist, and I most definitely am not, you need to go to the explainers of physics to feed your sensawunda.

My first sense of the gosh-wow of real physics was when I learnt about the Maxwell equations. It was known before Maxwell (from the work of Faraday and others) that if you moved a magnet near a wire you created an electric current (not that anyone knew what an electric current was). Since the moving magnet didn't need to touch the wire, its influence was described in terms of creating an 'electric field'. It was also known, from work by the Danish physicist Hans Christian Ørsted, that a changing electric current would deflect a nearby compass needle, so the changing electric current was described as generating a magnetic field. So a changing magnetic field would generate an electric field, and a changing electric field would generate a magnetic field. Maxwell combined these experimental discoveries and calculated under what conditions the system could become self-perpetuating. What came out of the maths was that the oscillating magnetic and electric fields would have to propagate at a constant speed remarkably close to the experimentally measured speed of light — and that was the first clue that light was an electromagnetic wave.

Explaining books have a long history. The Greek philo-

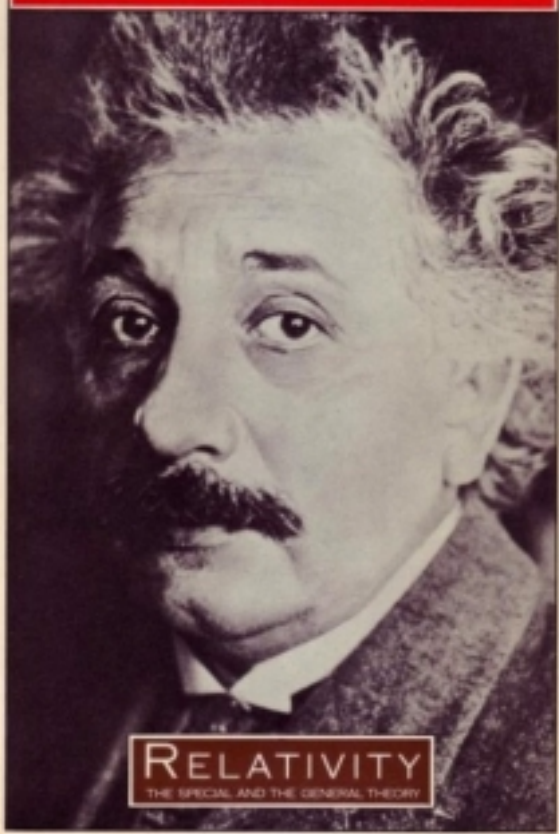
sophers used dialogues to set out their arguments, and when Pope Urban VIII asked Galileo to give arguments for and against the idea that the Sun was the centre of the solar system with everything else orbiting around it, Galileo employed that format (*Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*). Galileo was not known for subtlety. The character who spoke in defence of the geocentric system, and who repeated the Pope's views (and therefore had to win the argument), was given the name Simplicio. Maybe Simplicius was indeed the name of a real Aristotelian philosopher, as Galileo claimed, but 'simplicio' in Italian also means simpleton.

Some writers use fiction to explain ideas from mathematics or physics. An example from 1884 is *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, by 'A. Square' (Edwin Abbott). You can download this from the internet if you wish; there's also a recent film.

More recently, Greg Egan uses fiction to try to convey some of the intellectual excitement that science gives him. In between, we are all familiar with the scene in which the Professor leans back in his chair, taps his teeth with a pencil, pulls out a slide rule, and launches an expository lump. Depending on the knowledge and integrity of the author and the exigencies of the plot, this may, or may not, contain good science. It is usually boring.

Writing about science *per se*, rather than dressing it up as fiction, allows the writer and the reader the freedom to concentrate on the scientific ideas themselves and their implications. Some of the science fiction magazines ran a regular science column, and when it was written by the likes of Isaac Asimov (*F&SF*, 1958 to 1992) or Gregory Benford (*Amazing*, from 1969) it would have contained good science. On the other hand, *Astounding*, May 1950, contained an article on Dianetics by L. Ron Hubbard that very quickly developed into Scientology, and *Astounding* in the 1950s and 1960s also publicised the Hieronymus machine, that wonderful detector of eloptic radiation. You can now buy Hieronymus

Albert Einstein



machines from many internet sites.

Likewise, among the books on physics, there is enormous variety in quality. There are, of course, those written by the deluded or the unscrupulous, but the books I want to discuss are written by people who know their science.

The writers of such books face a major difficulty at the outset, and that is that they have to leave out most of the maths. The physicist **Eugene Wigner** (Nobel prize 1963) wrote about ‘the unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics’: mathematics is the language in which physics is written, and it is playing around with the maths that enables physicists to extend their theories and make predictions. Wigner (and others) suggested that mathematics is effective because the structure of the universe itself is mathematical. Others have suggested that rather it’s the human brain that is hardwired to interpret the world in mathematical terms. Either way, it takes a deep understanding to explain complex ideas in a simple, non-mathematical way, and many of the best books for the lay reader are written by top people in their fields.

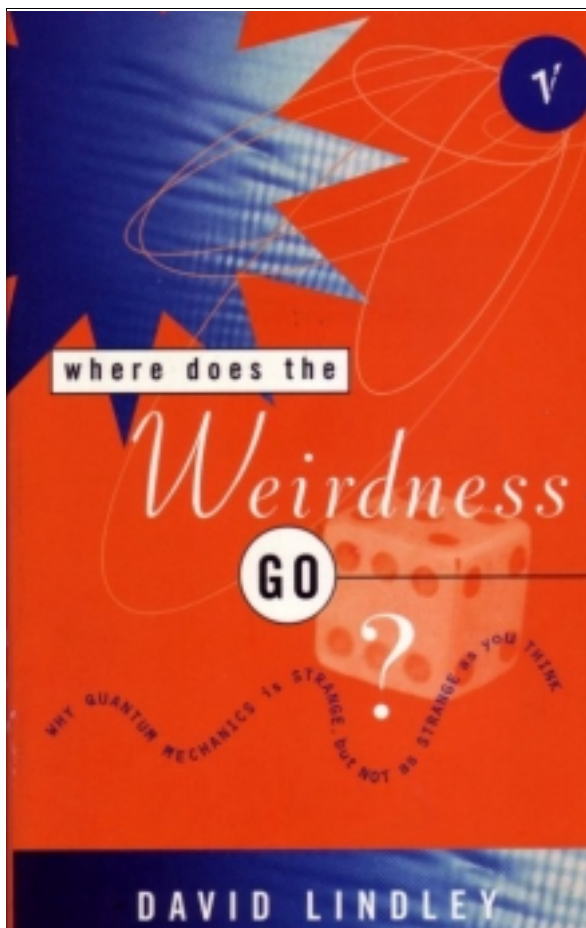
There is an apocryphal story that tells of a journalist who asks a newly announced physics Nobel winner if he could describe his work in simple terms. The physicist retorts ‘No. If I could it wouldn’t be worth a Nobel Prize.’ Gleick tells a variant of this about Feynman; Pais says the same story was told about Einstein — and both Feynman and Einstein wrote excellent popular accounts of their work.

Albert Einstein’s *Relativity: The Special and General Theory* was first published in German in 1916 and appeared in

English translation in 1920. This does contain maths, but very little, most of it no worse than about Year 10 level. Einstein starts from one known — that the speed of light in a vacuum is constant — and the premise (not his) that the laws of physics are universal, so that what is true in one region is true in all others. By careful reasoning and much use of rods of fixed length and trains and clocks and lanterns, he demonstrates that the logical consequences are the ideas of length contraction and time dilation and the impossibility of faster-than-light travel, ideas that we are familiar with from SF. The *Special Theory* (1905) dealt with the special case of uniform motion and was an extension of work by Lorentz, Fitzgerald, and others. (One very strange consequence of Einstein’s unification of space and time is that if the past is fixed, then so is the future: everything just *is*.)

The *General Theory* (1915) extended the concepts to non-uniform motion, and in particular to acceleration under gravity. Although it described gravitation as a curvature in space and therefore predicted gravitational lensing, Einstein balked at some of the weirder implications of the *General Theory*. You will find no mention in this book of the even more gosh-wow black holes (predicted when Schwarzschild found an exact solution to Einstein’s equations in 1916) or big bangs. He also postulates a connection between the only two fundamental forces known at the time, electromagnetism and gravitation. Physicists believe that such a connection must exist, but they are still trying to find it. The writing style of the translation is a bit fusty and the book takes a fair bit of concentration, but it’s worth persisting with it, because most of the more recent books take relativity as given and just look at the implications. You can download it from Project Gutenberg or as an eBook, but make sure you download a version with the diagrams.

The other mind-bender from the early twentieth century is quantum mechanics, which deals with Schrödinger’s undead cat and how a particle like an electron can pass through two slits at the same time and interfere with itself. Quantum mechanics is so seriously weird that Niels Bohr declared that ‘Anyone who is not shocked by quantum theory has not understood it.’ (This quotation has many variants.) A basic concept is that light, an electromagnetic wave, can behave like particles, and that particles can behave like waves (hence the interfering electron). Quantum mechanics is also horrendously mathematical, and from the wave equations for particles comes Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle. This states that there is an absolute limit to the accuracy to which pairs of properties of a particle can be known, most famously position and momentum, but also energy and time, and that properties can therefore be described exactly only in terms of probability. It was this idea that led Einstein to object that ‘God does not play dice’ and Bohr to retort, ‘Einstein, stop telling God what to do.’ An excellent descriptive introduction (a few diagrams, no maths) is **David Lindley’s *Where Does the Weirdness Go? Why Quantum Mechanics Is Strange But Not as Strange as You Think*** (1996). Lindley attempts to explain why we do not observe quantum weirdness in everyday life, taking the Copenhagen explanation of Bohr and others that interaction with light, or other particles (the ‘observer’,



or ‘act of measurement’) forces a particle to ‘choose’ among possible paths or values.

Lindley’s argument can be summed up by a famous pair of limericks:

There was a young man who said ‘God
must think it exceedingly odd
if he finds that the tree
continues to be
when no one’s about in the quad.’

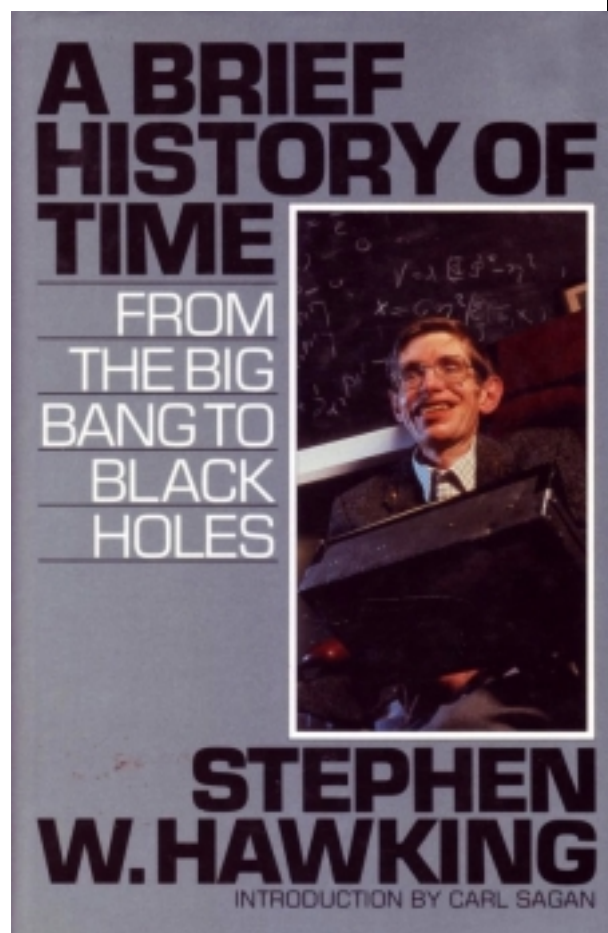
‘Dear Sir, your astonishment’s odd.
I am always about in the quad.
And that’s why the tree
continues to be
since observed by, Yours faithfully, God.’

Just substitute ‘the universe’ for ‘God’ and you have Lindley’s explanation.

Richard Feynman’s *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter* (1985) is a much more challenging read. In describing the apparently simple refraction or bending of the path of a light ray (stream of photons) through a glass block, Feynman argues that the particle does not choose a path; instead it takes all possible paths. The least likely paths tend to cancel each other out and the most likely paths reinforce each other, with a slight fuzz (the uncertainty principle); the resultant path is the path we observe. He also provides a good explanation of what is meant by interactions occurring through an exchange of particles.

Quantum mechanics and relativity come together in the many books about the origin and evolution of the universe, of which **Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*** (1988) is probably the most famous. Although the language used is clear and simple, it has a pretty high concept density and needs to be read slowly. There are lots of useful diagrams but these also need to be read carefully to extract the essential information. It’s worth reading for a clear, no-frills account, particularly of relativity. At first glance ***The Universe in a Nutshell*** (2001) is his *Brief History* lite, updated (the last chapter is on *M*-theory): lots of colour pictures and sprinkled with jokes. Like *Brief History*, though, it contains a lot to get your head around in very few pages, and must be read slowly enough for each idea to sink in and make room for the next. Rather than recapping on *Brief History*, though, it is a broad-sweep description of some of the theories cosmologists were kicking around at the time of writing. One chapter seems very out of place: chapter 6, ‘Our future? *Star Trek* or not? How biological and electronic life will go on developing in complexity at an ever-increasing rate’.

Coming of Age in the Milky Way (Timothy Ferris) was also first published in 1988, and covers much the same ground as *Brief History*. Ferris starts with Aristotle and his crystal spheres, focusing on the people involved to show the development of ideas as a human activity, and how successive ideas about the cosmos evolved from recognition of the shortcomings of earlier models. It’s immensely readable, and the historical approach provides a logic and a thread that is easy to follow.



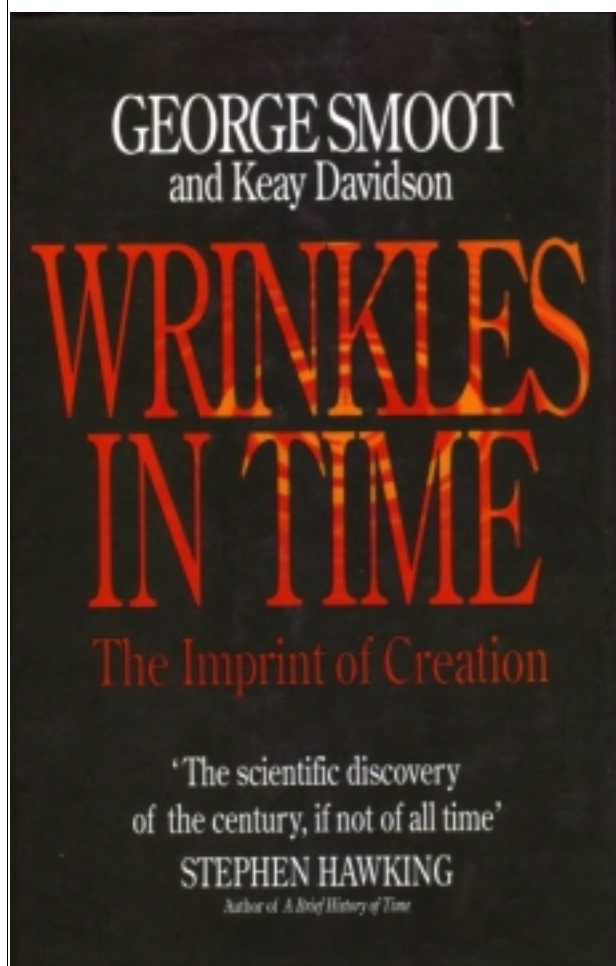
One strange result of the uncertainty principle is that there is no such thing as empty space, because truly empty space by definition would have exactly zero energy, and the uncertainty principle doesn't allow the energy to be defined exactly. Instead, physicists postulate that particles are popping into and out of existence all the time. There's even experimental evidence for this. From quantum mechanics, everything has a wavelength, but a particle can only exist within a region of space if its wavelength fits inside it. The Dutch physicists Hendrik Casimir and Dirk Polder suggested in 1948 that if you make a space small enough it will limit the number of particles that can pop into and out of existence inside it, while there would be no such limits outside that space. Therefore pressure inside the small space will be less than the pressure outside. This difference in pressure has actually been measured, first in 1958 with very limited accuracy and a number of times since with much improved accuracy. In *Universe in a Nutshell*, Hawking points out that if a pair of particles pops into existence near a black hole such that one particle disappears into the black hole and the other escapes, the escaping particle effectively steals energy from the black hole. In time, given enough such events, the black hole will evaporate. (I should mention here that some physicists explain the Casimir effect differently, pointing out that the vacuum energy predicted by the standard explanation is too high by a small factor of about 10^{120} .)

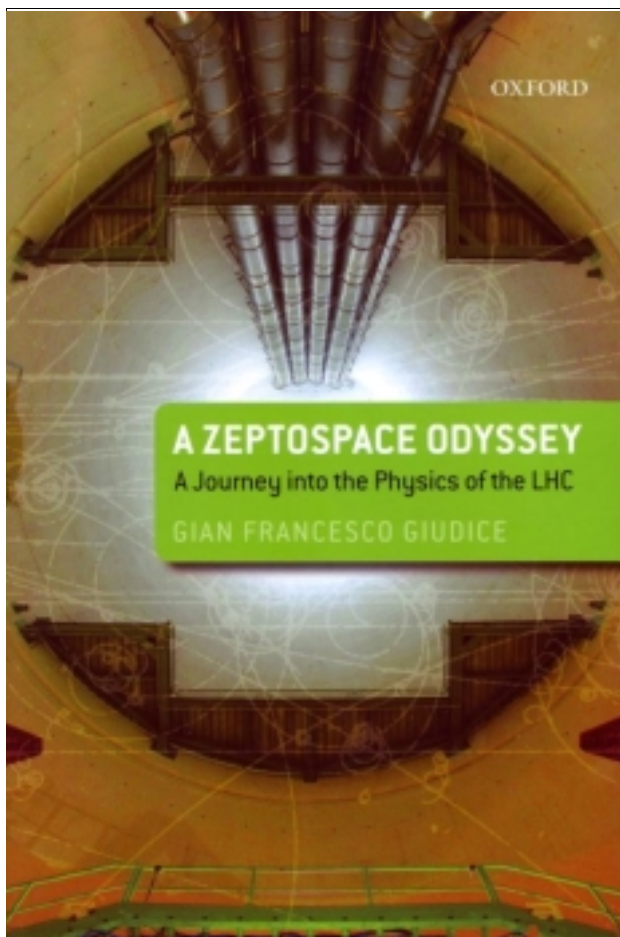
Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's Outrageous Legacy (Kip Thorne, 1994) begins with an SF scenario to illus-

trate how the extreme conditions at the edge of a black hole distort space and time. It then sketches the evolution of the theory of relativity before heading into the implications and interpretations. The concept density makes it hard going at first, with the introduction of Einstein's basic ideas, but it is very readable thereafter. It was written before the accelerated expansion of the universe ('dark energy') was discovered, and it would have been interesting to read Thorne's take on that and its implications.

All the books so far have described theories and discoveries, and where experiments are described it's in terms of results. **George Smoot** and **Keay Davidson's** *Wrinkles in Time: The Imprint of Creation* (1993) is a wonderful account of the interplay between theory and experiment, very light on the heavy stuff and very good on the frustrations and excitement of research. The idea of the Big Bang came out of relativity and the observed expansion of the universe, and the cosmic microwave background radiation detected in 1964 provided strong evidence for it. Smoot describes how the problem of explaining the proportions of the elements created in the Big Bang and the distribution of matter through space gave rise to theories such as inflation and dark matter, and how those theories gave rise to predictions that could be put to experimental test. New observations demanded refinements to the theories, and so on. His 2006 Nobel prize was for COBE, that widely published pink-and-blue map of the temperature fluctuations in the microwave background that was a precise match for his theoretical predictions and the result of many, many years of hard slog. His earlier experiments, using balloons, had demonstrated that the galaxy is moving relative to the cosmic background. As with the Thorne, it's a pity the book was written before dark energy was discovered: it would have fitted right in with his unstated theme that there's always going to be something in the observations that sends you back to revise your theories.

In *Just Six Numbers* (1999), **Martin Rees** discusses six numbers that must be plugged into mathematical models of the universe for those models to work. These numbers are derived from observation and are not yet derivable from theory, and Rees argues that if any value were even slightly different it would give rise to a universe so different from ours that we could not exist. The numbers relate to the strength of gravity, the reactions inside stars that forge the elements, the rate of expansion of the universe, the proportions of the elements, dark matter, and so on, and the challenge is to explain why they should have the values they do. In stating this challenge, Rees provides some good, descriptive, simple accounts of the conditions or processes modelled by the relevant maths. Almost incidentally, he explains why many physicists think space must be grainy — why they think there is an absolute minimum possible unit of space (the Planck volume). It's partly quantum mechanics, but really it all goes back to Einstein and $E = mc^2$. From quantum mechanics, the shorter the wavelength of a particle or radiation the higher its energy, but according to $E = mc^2$ energy has mass. If the unit of space is smaller than the Planck volume, the wavelength of anything that





would fit into it is so small that its energy — its mass — packed into that volume is so large that poof! it collapses into a black hole.

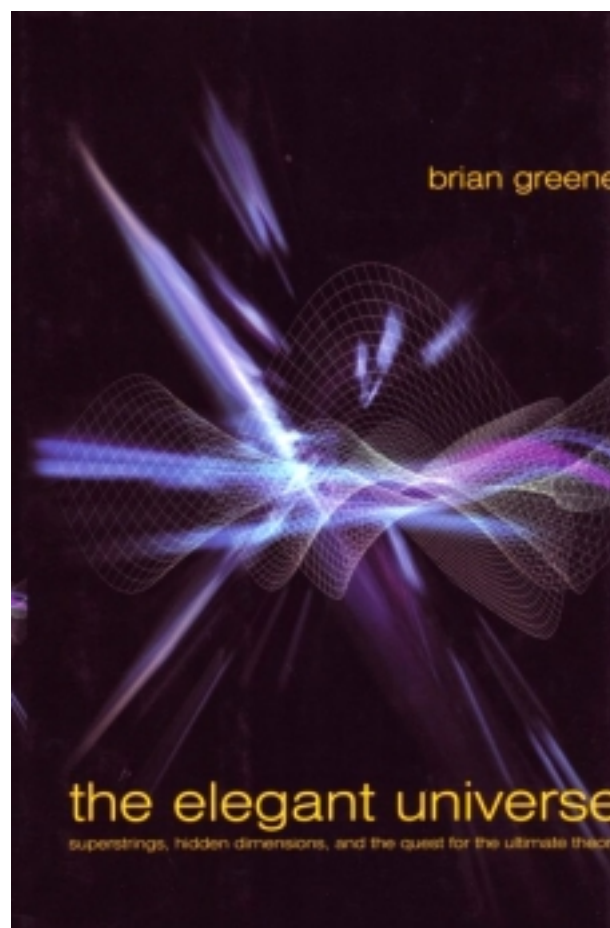
Understanding the reactions inside stars means understanding the weird goings on inside atomic nuclei and inside nuclear particles. **Abraham Pais's** *Inward Bound: Of Matter and Forces in the Physical World* (1986) is his account, heavily laced with maths, of how that understanding has accrued and of his researches in particle physics. Although the maths is way over my head, I found I could skip through it and still get a feel for the excitement of the research process.

Particle physics brings us to that monster banger-together-of-bits the Large Hadron Collider. In *A Zeptospace Odyssey: A Journey into the Physics of the LHC* (2010), **Gian Francesco Giudice** describes the building of the beast and what physicists hope it will allow them to discover. The LHC, like space, is big, really big. The energy stored in the dipole magnets is the equivalent of 2.4 tonnes of TNT, or the calories in 460 kg of chocolate, and the heaviest piece of the CMS detector weighs as much as 400 African elephants. After a while you find yourself wondering what all this is in blue whales, but when he gets round to discussing the physics itself Giudice is very, very good. For example, he produces the first explanation that's made any sense to me of why physicists think that particles get their mass from interactions with another particle, the Higgs boson. As Giudice makes clear, there's more to the LHC than the

hunt for the Higgs boson. Most physicists hope that string theory will reconcile relativity and quantum mechanics, and some versions of string theory predict the existence of new particles that could be produced by the LHC, so it could either rule out or provide support for those theories.

In July 2012, the teams at the LHC announced that they had detected a particle 'consistent with the Higgs'. One of the first books off the block was **Jim Baggott's** *Higgs: The Invention and Discovery of the 'God Particle'* (2012). Baggott covers some 100 years of physics in a little over 200 pages, scooting through theory and experiment to reach that announcement in the last few pages. All very readable if you skate over the bits where the language gets too technical. Baggott provides a picture of why a Higgs field and Higgs particle were needed, and why, until more data accumulates, no one can claim that the new particle is *the* Higgs, instead of just *a* Higgs, one of up to five predicted by some versions of string theory.

And so to string theory itself. String theory replaces point-like particles with one-dimensional 'strings' vibrating in ten-dimensional space-time. In *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory* (1999), **Brian Greene** recaps on the problems that he hopes string theory will resolve, and describes the structure of string theory as very much a work in progress. In *The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality* (2004) he provides another account of space, time, relativity, quantum mechanics, and the Big Bang, and of later ideas from string theory. *Fabric of the Cosmos* also exists as a four-episode DVD; light



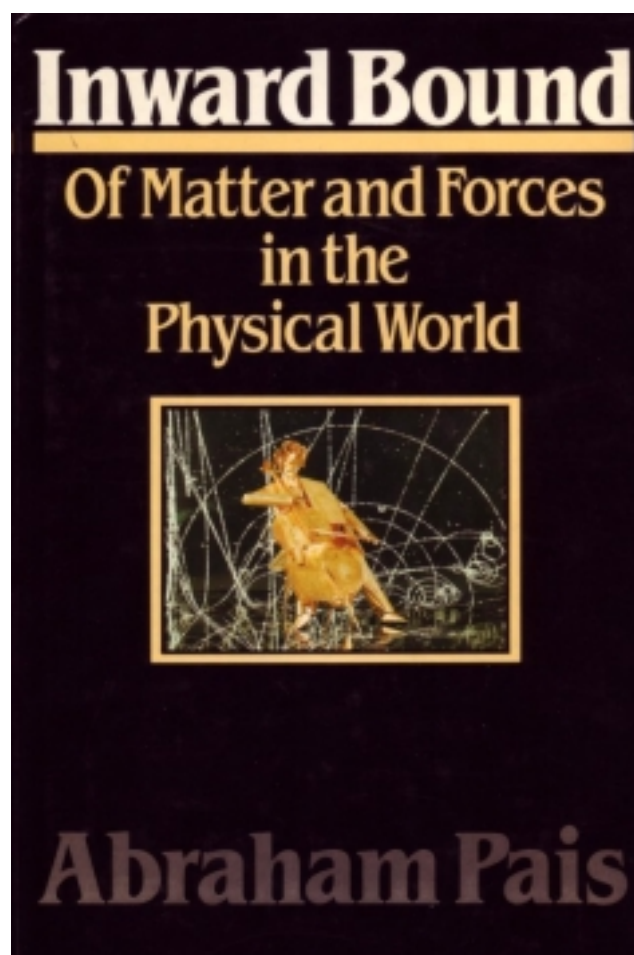
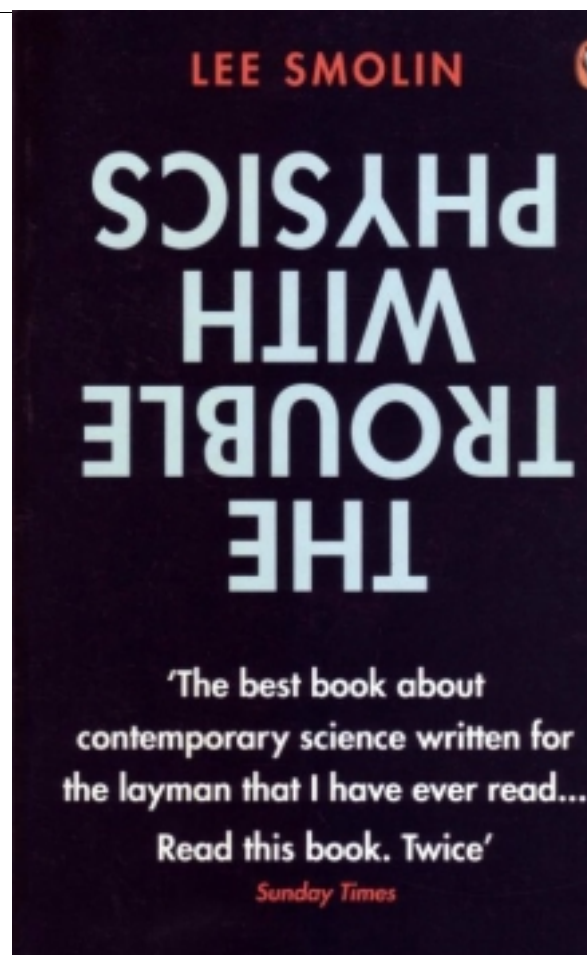
on content but high on quality computer graphics. His most recent book, *The Hidden Reality: Parallel Universes and the Deep Laws of the Cosmos* (2011), surveys the many different ways in which physics can accommodate, or require, parallel universes — and there are many besides quantum mechanics and the 10^{500} solutions to the equations of string theory. (Some theorists get around the probabilities of quantum mechanics by arguing that each possibility corresponds to a different universe.) Along the way he provides an excellent explanation of why some ideas about the Big Bang (such as inflation, in which space expanded faster than light) are essential, not a fix-up, but I wouldn't have minded some discussion about how the various predictions of multiverses do or do not agree or conflict.

While string theory may ultimately resolve many of the outstanding problems in physics, it is not the only theory to combine relativity and quantum mechanics. **Lee Smolin's** *Three Roads to Quantum Gravity: A New Understanding of Space, Time and the Universe* (2000) once more sets out a description of the problems to be solved and then describes string theory, *M* theory (in which as well as strings there are multidimensional membranes), and loop quantum gravity. I'm afraid that although the book is very readable I don't come away with any clear mental images other than that he is arguing that string theory is not the only game in town. In *The Trouble with Physics* (2006) he argues that research thrives best when theories are challenged, and that consensus can stifle research into less popular theories by starving it of people and funding.

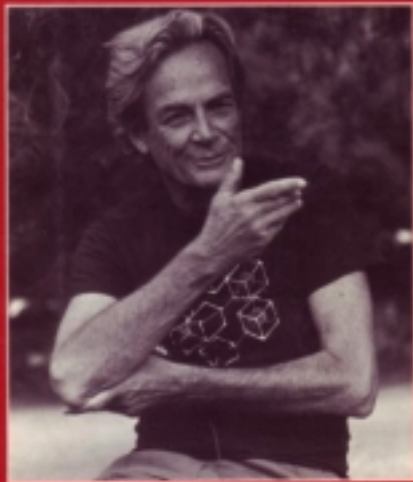
Books on physicists are another potential source of information. These can be hard work, such as **Abraham Pais's** account of Einstein, *Subtle is the Lord: The Science and the Life of Albert Einstein* (1982), which is by a physicist for physicists: 'Hence the main purpose of this section: to give the main ideas of this calculus in one easy lesson. A simple way of doing this is first to consider a number of standard equations and results of Riemannian geometry, found in any good textbook on general relativity, and then to generalise from there' (p. 337). It does, however, give a good sense of Einstein as a human being as well as some sense of the context of his work and the breadth of his many contributions to physicists' understanding.

At the other extreme of accessibility are **Richard Feynman's** breezy *What Do You Care What Other People Think?* (1988) and *Surely You're Joking, Mr Feynman* (1985), with their serious subtext of intellectual curiosity. Good, and poor, biographies of many other physicists are around, so many that they could easily be the subject of another paper.

This is just a sample of the books around. It's worth reading several books on the same topic because each will provide slightly different insights on the really mind-bending and stretching concepts. It's wonderful that so many good books are out there, and that more continue to be written — not only for the enjoyment they give non-physicists like me, but also because they indicate a public appetite for and interest in real science.



RICHARD P. FEYNMAN



**"What Do You Care
What Other People
Think?"**

**Further Adventures of
a Curious Character**

Books discussed, and more

Note that this is a sample, not a survey.

Jim Baggott: *Higgs: The Invention and Discovery of the 'God Particle'*. 2012.

Sean Carroll: *The Particle at the End of the Universe: How the Hunt for the Higgs Boson Leads Us to the Edge of a New World*. 2012. Breezy style, good explanations.

Frank Close: *The Infinity Puzzle: Quantum Field Theory and the Hunt for an Orderly Universe*. 2011. Boasts a cover blurb from Peter Higgs. A very readable history of theoretical particle physics traced through the people who developed the theories, their rivalries and collaborations. The physics itself is introduced in very small chunks in line with physicists' incremental growth in understanding. Finishes just before the LHC got properly fired up, but well worth reading — if the book is difficult in places it's because the concepts are difficult. (No maths.) The writing and explanations are excellent — must look out for Close's other books.

Brian Cox and Jeff Forshaw: *The Quantum Universe: Everything That Can Happen Does Happen*. 2011. I haven't read this, but from a quick flick in a bookshop it looks like a very approachable, non-mathematical introduction.

Albert Einstein: *Relativity*. First English 1920; first

German 1916.

Timothy Ferris: *Coming of Age in the Milky Way*. 1988. Ferris has written a number of books and if they are as clear and well-written as this they'd be well worth finding.

Richard Feynman: *QED*. 1985. Based on a series of lectures Feynman gave to a non-physicist audience.

Richard Feynman: *Six Easy Pieces*. 1994/1965. I cannot recommend this. It is a cheat, a posthumous exploitation of a famous name. Six lectures from Feynman's two-year undergrad course from Caltech; not particularly mathematical but the last in particular (quantum behaviour) is badly out of context, e.g. (p. 122) 'You will remember that the quantitative relationship between I_1 , I_2 , and I_{12} — the instantaneous height of the water wave — can be written as (the real part) of $\hat{h}_1 e^{-i\omega t}$. No, you won't remember that, because it doesn't reference anything in the book. The cover claims Feynman was physics' most brilliant teacher, but the intro by Caltech people says that the undergrads hated the course and many dropped out, their places taken by grad students and faculty members.

Richard Feynman: *Six Not-so-easy Pieces*. 1997/1965. Also a collection from his Caltech lectures, but this time they are a coherent whole — his explanation of relativity. I haven't read it yet, only skimmed it, but it looks good. Maths alert: some calculus involved.

Richard Feynman: *The Meaning of It All* (1963/1998). Three lectures on the meaning and values of science. No maths.

Gian Francesco Giudice: *A Zeptospace Odyssey*. 2010.

Brian Greene: *The Elegant Universe*. 1999.

Brian Greene: *The Fabric of the Cosmos*. 2004.

Brian Greene: *The Hidden Reality*. 2011.

Stephen Hawking: *The Universe in a Nutshell*. 2001.

Stephen Hawking: *A Brief History of Time*. 1988. Later revised editions were published in 1996 and 2005.

Rudolf Kippenhahn: *100 Billion Suns*. First English 1983; first German 1980. The birth, life and death of stars — and in the stars, the birth of the elements of which we are made.

David Lindley: *Where Does the Weirdness Go?* 1997.

Abraham Pais: *Inward Bound*. 1986. As much a memoir as an account of the physics.

Lisa Randall: *Knocking on Heaven's Door: How Physics and Scientific Thinking Illuminate the Universe and the Modern World*. 2011. Randall is a leading string theorist, but the book is dull, and doesn't really say anything that isn't in the much more readable *Zeptospace Odyssey*.

Martin Rees: *Just Six Numbers*. 1999.

Lee Smolin: *Three Roads to Quantum Gravity*. 2000.

Lee Smolin: *The Trouble with Physics*. 2006.

George Smoot: *Wrinkles in Time*. 1993.

Kip Thorne: *Black Holes and Time Warps*. 1994.

Biographies and memoirs (again, there are lots out there)

Paul Dirac

The Strangest Man: The Hidden Life of Paul Dirac Quantum Genius (Graham Farmelo). 2009. Dirac *was* a strange man, very literal-minded and famously monosyllabic. He also wrote an equation that provided a (special) relativistic quantum mechanical description of the electron and as a by-product predicted the existence of antimatter. Despite the many Dirac stories this is a sensitive biography and well worth reading.

Albert Einstein

Subtle is the Lord (Abraham Pais). 1982.

Richard Feynman

Eugene Wigner (Dirac's brother-in-law) said of Feynman, 'He's just like Dirac, only human'.

Murray Gell-Mann said: 'Dick [Feynman]'s method is this. You write down the problem. You think very hard. Then you write down the answer.'

Genius: The Life and Science of Richard Feynman (James Gleick). 1992.

More a hagiography than a biography, and there is

very little science. Lots of anecdotes and Feynman certainly comes across as an interesting character, but he deserves better. (Freeman Dyson described Feynman as half genius, half buffoon, then amended that to all genius, all buffoon. This book describes the buffoon in detail and tells you over and over that he's a genius.)

Quantum Man: Richard Feynman's Life in Science (Lawrence Krauss). 2011. His work, his infinite curiosity, and his compulsion to develop a deep understanding by working out everything for himself starting from the very basics, often taking an unorthodox approach that gave new insights, but it doesn't give much of a feel for Feynman himself. Krauss is not an elegant writer.

Richard Feynman: A Life in Science (John Gribbin and Mary Gribbin) 1997. Less technical than the Krauss so doesn't replace it, but it is a good complement to it and is very well written.

Surely You're Joking, Mr Feynman! (with Ralph Leighton). 1985.

What Do You Care What Other People Think? (with Gweneth Feynman and Ralph Leyton). 1988.

These last two books are collections of Feynman's writings rather than memoirs *per se*. They are highly enjoyable and give a better insight into Feynman's thought processes than any of the biographies, but they do not replace the biographies.

— Elaine Cochrane, March 2012, with extra items

Dick Jensen

More gosh! wow! suggestions

Books which I found as *gosh! wow!* as science fiction can be at its best, and which I have not forgotten. And are on my bookshelves. I have tried to limit the selection to recently published books. Many of the contents of these books can be explored at Amazon, using the 'Search Inside' facility.

* = Authors who are Nobel Prize winners or Fields Medallists.

Richard Panek, *The 4% Universe* (2011)

Deals with 'dark matter' and 'dark energy', and with the 2011 Nobel Prize work concerning these which led to the discovery that the expansion of the universe (our universe, that is) is, in fact accelerating. The story covers a lot of ground, and is treated in some detail, but without esoteric mathematics or physics.

Frank Close, *Antimatter* (2010)

Contra-terrene matter discussed, and given a verifiable basis. A short, most enjoyable book.

Jim Baggott, *Atomic* (2009)

The latest edition (2010) is titled *The First War of Physics* in the USA. This is about the efforts of the Allies and the Nazis to develop an atomic bomb. It deals with the theories involved, and especially the personalities and their machinations. It reads like an SF story in which character is as important as plot.

Leonard Susskind, *The Black Hole Wars* (2009)

About some of the theoretical problems and controversy concerning the physics of black holes, and how Susskind won his bet with Steven Hawking concerning these. Hardly an equation in sight, so it is a relatively undemanding read. But, as Susskind

shows, if the information inside a black hole is ‘mirrored’ on its event horizon, are we just holographic projections? (Just one of the many SF ideas which now seem supportable.)

John Barrow, *Constants of Nature* (2004)

The numbers — the physical constants — which determine why the universe is what it is. These are the numbers whose value can neither be explained nor justified. The search for justification is a major avenue of research now. Perhaps these constants may not be constant, and may never be uniquely determined (especially if ‘multiverses’ exist).

Roland Omnès, *Converging Realities* (2004)

Foundations of quantum theory, from a mathematical viewpoint (largely without any equations, though!), and so may not be to all tastes. Careful reading is required. It beautifully discusses the problem of ‘Schrödinger’s cat’ and decoherence.

Craig Wheeler, *Cosmic Catastrophes* (2007)

A lot about black holes, which is not easily found elsewhere in as easily digestible form — including the bizarre properties of Kerr black holes — supernovae, binary stars, accretion disks.

Leonard Susskind, *The Cosmic Landscape* (2006)

One of the initial creators of String Theory explains how those ideas lead to the possibility that our universe may be just one of a possible 10^{500} — give or take a few trillion trillion possible universes. We may be just one of a ‘multiverse’. Which is a glorious idea for SF — Captain Future may exist, after all.

Kees Boeke, *Cosmic View* (1957)

P. and P. Morrison, *Powers of Ten* (1994)

The two books above ‘jump’ through nature from the atom to the universe, each ‘jump’ being a power of ten larger than the previous.

***Frank Wilczek, *Fantastic Realities* (2006)**

A collection of essays and articles on a wide variety of topics in physics. The range in readability is from ‘simpler than *New Scientist*’ to ‘maybe some calculus required’. Overall, though, this is highly recommended.

***Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes* (1993)**

Some years old now, but still immensely readable and wonderfully impressive in its discussion as to just how we can explore the birth of the universe.

Frank Close, *The Infinity Puzzle* (2011)

How ‘infinities’ were removed from quantum electrodynamic theories and from theories of the weak and strong nuclear forces. But it’s much more — covering the Higgs field and boson, the Large Hadron Collider, and, especially, the personalities and intrigue involved in the background to Nobel Prizes.

Ian Guth, *The Inflationary Universe* (1998)

How the ‘Big Bang’ came about, as described by its discoverer. A few years old now, but still full of wonder.

Alex Vilenkin, *Many Worlds in One* (2007)

Vilenkin proposes that the ‘Big Bang’ may not be a unique event — in fact, there is no theoretical reason why it should be so — and hence universes may be continually budding off from universes. Again, this means that alternate universe SF stories could be reality — in at least one possible universe.

***Shin-Tung Yau and Steve Nadis, *The Shape of Inner Space* (2010)**

About as gosh-wow as possible — spaces without mass, but because they have shape, they also have gravity. Be warned, though, it requires careful and thoughtful reading.

Graham Farmelo, *The Strangest Man* (2011)

A biography of Paul Dirac, but which also discusses his scientific work in some, very readable, detail. Dirac’s theory of the ‘relativistic’ electron was one of the most beautiful experiences I have had (final year physics).

Paul Nahin, *Time Machines* (1998)

Paul Nahin, *Time Travel* (2011)

These two books essentially cover the same territory — the physics, theory and logic of time travel — and discuss many SF stories. The earlier book has extensive appendices covering the details of the mathematics and physics, and treats many more stories. The later volume is a much ‘easier’ read, and much cheaper — however, I prefer the former book.

Lawrence Krauss, *A Universe From Nothing* (2012)

‘Nothing’ does not exist — not even empty space, devoid of any object, is ‘nothing’. There is always ‘something’ there, such as the *energy* of ‘empty space’. (Or the Higgs field.) Krauss argues, and supports his argument by current physics, that from this ‘nothing’, universe(s) must evolve. A *very* easy read — unfortunately without notes, bibliography, or ‘further reading’ list.

Palle Yourgrau, *A World Without Time* (2006)

Is time an illusion? Is time travel possible? Palle tells about the dialogue between friends (Einstein and Gödel) concerning these and other matters. Gödel proved that in some universes, consistent with General Relativity, closed time-like loops *do* exist. In space-time, every point can be regarded as the past, so time-travellers can *effect* the past, but not *affect* it — that is, create the past, but not change it. (See Nahin’s two books).

— Dick Jenssen, December 2012

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS (continued from page 23)

DOUG BARBOUR

**11655-72nd Avenue, Edmonton,
Alberta T6G 0B9, Canada**

The long letters from your friends, such as Stephen Campbell and Leigh Edmonds (I remember with some delight his *Ornithopter* zines from way back when), suggest the 'must be talking to' very well, as does Damien Broderick's reminder of how he remembers times past. I was prepared to rant a bit against some of Patrick McGuire's comments, especially his dismissal of Damien's 'contrived, mannered language', since even the examples he chooses to denigrate seem to me to be full of juice and humour. I read Patrick's remark as a general attack on 'academic' writing, but even if one might tend to agree about its faults, that's precisely what Damien tries to avoid, partly by making clear his likes and dislikes.

I do like Patrick's advocacy of multiple-genre work. But I think many have argued, over the years, the connections between SF and mysteries, although I agree with Brian McHale that they tend to have somewhat different philosophical grounds. Still, I've read quite a few SF or fantasy mysteries (and a good sub-genre of SF is the one that offers a mystery within an alternate history).

I enjoy the lists that appear in your zines, so I found Peter Kerans's list interesting, although I believe the real first edition and printing of *They Fly at Ciron* is that of Incunabula 1993, when I ordered it from that small press.

I like Cy Chauvin's finding himself back inside *The Man in the High Castle*: a good recommendation, indeed. And enjoyed Terence M. Green's review of *A Scanner Darkly* from 1977 (oh, those were the days!). And George Zebrowski's little rant. But one of the things that, almost subliminally, entered my consciousness as I read all the interesting letters, was that just about all your correspondents, much like me, while still enjoying the conversation, the books new and old, are themselves getting on, and remembering good things past as much as, or even more than what's happening now.

(12 February 2012)

(I am listening to Beth Hart's *Leave the Light On*, a terrific CD, as is her blues CD with Joe Bonamassa, *Don't Explain*.)

Your long piece on recent fanzines made clear to me just how little a trufan I am. I used to get *Trap Door*, and am not sure why I don't any more, as I'm sure I sent in locs. Your comments on the best essays and how they work reminded me of long ago reading the wonderful piece by Teresa Nielsen Hayden on being excommunicated from the Church of Latter Day Saints: so very funny, yet also so intelligent about all that was wrong about that faux religion. Rather pertinent today, when apparently half the US population believes Mitt Romney

would actually be good for it and the world. But then, they believe so many odd things that aren't real. It's a wonder, sometimes, that the USA ever became the scientific and technological leader of the world, given so many of its citizens are so sturdily anti-intellectual, anti-science, etc. Sadder than usual for a lot of us is to be reminded by his death this past week of Neil Armstrong stepping onto the moon, and all the hopes for space exploration we held then.

(Now I'm listening to a Canadian, Rose Cousins: *We Have Made a Spark*.)

As someone who has enjoyed a lot of Terence M. Green's work (although I've missed his recent work, it seems), I enjoyed his little memoir. How nice that he is thoroughly enjoying his life now. I hope he keeps writing. He'll probably be most remembered best for *Shadow of Ashland*, but much of the other work stands up, too.

Ian Watson does a fun interview. He's another whose work I really liked when I kept up with it — the first 10 novels or so. Somehow, review copies of his books stopped arriving in Canada, at least to me.

That's a neat trilogy of pieces on Clute (even mine). He does keep his readers on their toes. I reviewed *Appleseed*, and thought it funny, dark, and profound fiction. But his major work may be the way he keeps SF itself on its toes.

The other reviews mostly will help me pick out some books to read that I've missed: *The Last Witchfinder*, for example. Possibly that Nix trilogy. I was intrigued by Jenny Blackford's take on Tim Powers's early *The Drawing of the Dark*, which I certainly enjoyed when I read it, but which does, now, feel like an early and immature attempt at the kind of fiction he would do an ever better job of as he matured as a writer. I think he has constructed some very interesting women in later novels; certainly he has constructed much more complex ones. I too prefer his more recent novels (as I think some of the reviews I sent you show). I'll just have to get hold of *The Somnambulist*, given Steve Jeffery's review.

(31 August 2012)

My busy times include other reading and editing. I edited three of the six books that NeWest published this spring, and two of the novels for the coming fall. You might enjoy at least one of them, *Belinda's Rings* by Corinna Chong <<http://www.newestpress.com/books/belindas-rings>>.

This the week I heard of the (sadly expected) death of Iain M. Banks, two of whose recent novels I read in the last few months, one a Culture novel, the other a multi-world thriller, and both full of Banks's wit, intelligence, provocations, and solid, generative plotting. I'm going to miss the possibility of new work, but will enjoy rereading at least the best of them. RIP. I've thoroughly enjoyed his kind of SF, and its influence on the exciting new British SF of the past decade or two.

I've been reading Patricia Meyer Spacks's fine and intelligent *On Rereading*, a delightful exploration of the whys and wherefores of that activity. Admittedly, she rereads some material I may never read for the first time, but also some, like Jane Austen, I have reread a lot over the years. The way she sees the act in its various manifestations feels right to me.

Guy Salvidge's various takes on all those books by and

about Philip K. Dick reminded me of my readings of many of Dick's works, and may send me back to a few of them. He's certainly a good example of a rereader. But I'm not what he calls a fan or completist, so won't be tracking down all the books on Dick he reviews here, glad as I am to know about them. Too many books, too little time.

I wanted to let you know, in case you don't, about another terrific Texas singer-songwriter, Robyn Ludwick, whose *Out of These Blues* is one of those records I just play and play. And a bunch of fine classical CDs has come my way over the past six months.

(12 June 2013)

I like the letter columns in fanzines the most. So much happens there. Certainly, Patrick McGuire seems to have far too much time on his loc-writing hands in retirement. I can't be sure if he's defending High Literature or making the right attack upon it. It seems to me that what lasts has value, not always the same kind. Sherlock Holmes may work as much as a kind of legendary icon as specific texts. People still read the stories, but also see the TV shows, and now the adaptations in various ways: Sharon and I have enjoyed both the new British *Sherlock* and the US show *Elementary*. But the canon keeps changing and adapting.

I also found Franz Rottensteiner's long revelatory memoir (almost) of his trials with Lem fascinating. Lem seems to have been a great artist who was, a lot of the time, an asshole. What else is new? Still, Franz tells us much that someone who hadn't done much research into Lem just did not know.

Thanks for the responses to Yvonne Rousseau's already incredibly thick critique of those two Connie Willis novels, *Blackout/All Clear* (or one, if they say so), which had already convinced me that I probably have not the time to get into them. These locs (McGuire again, especially) only further convinced me that I need not put them near the top of my already too large 'to read' pile. Certainly, McGuire does a fine job on the origins of 'disinformation'. I still enjoy Willis's original story, 'Firewatch', and liked the earlier time travel books, without (being North American) being too bothered by her failure of English tone. And, not completely contra Mark Plummer, while I agree that a lot of books today could do with a heavy editorial cut (about half), not all would, and there are a very few writers who need all the space they take. I think Neil Stephenson usually passes that test in SF, given the example of the wonderful *Anathem*, and in fantasy, most definitely Steven Erikson in his magnificent *Tales of the Malazan Fallen*.

Each of us has our own list of top 100 SF books, and mine would only occasionally match Rog Peyton's. I was astonished to see only one Iain Banks book, and that not one of the Iain M. Banks SF novels. Although I've been reading SF since around 1950, I think I'd have a lot more recent work in there, including the aforementioned *Anathem*. But of course, Delany, LeGuin, Russ. And, for sure, some Gibson. But then the list would change every day most likely (which is why I so seldom make them).

(28 June 2013)



Damien Broderick, Australia's most senior SF writer (living in San Antonio, Texas), and Chandler Award Winner, with one of the cats mentioned in recent letters. (Photo: Barbara Lamar.)

DAMIEN BRODERICK **San Antonio TX 78212, USA**

Three of the 2012 titles shown as 'forthcoming' on your Damien Broderick publications list are now in print — the short story collection *Adrift in the Noosphere*, and the two radio script collections *Restore Point* and *Gaia to Galaxy*.

There'll be at least one more (with John Boston, on *Science Fantasy*, which is now typeset by Borgo and awaits only indexing), and probably word about the collaboration with Silverberg.

Did I mention that as well three or possibly four adult cats (if one counts in the Devil Cat, a very weird and skittish drifter), and three in the country, we have five unbelievably adorable kittens — well, young cats, I suppose, by now — from the same very young mother cat, each of a different colour and temperament, all entirely delightful. They're still indoor critters, which means they're cluttering up the laundry and Barbara's large bathroom, because we're afraid they'll get run over or beaten up by some of the ferocious local animals (including our new hyper-energetic puppy).

(10 October 2012)

TARAL WAYNE **245 Dunn Avenue, Apt 2111,** **Toronto, Ontario M6K 1S6, Canada**

I didn't even know there was a US refilming of *Let the*

Right One In. Bob Wilson (Robert Charles Wilson) lent me his copy of the Swedish film, which is the only one I've seen. It's a rather fresh retelling of the old vampire tale, and I thought the ending was sufficiently ambiguous that it wasn't altogether clear that the kid would grow up to be the vampire's 'new' father. Times change. Maybe instead of murdering people he'd break into blood banks? Or maybe it will shortly be possible to transplant some bone marrow so she can manufacture her own blood? Vampirism could become a treatable condition, with the beneficial side effects of having superpowers and immortality. Everybody will want to eat from a dirty spoon or share the needle, so to speak, in hopes of becoming undead. The avoidance of sunlight thing is a drag, though. Even with vitamin D supplements, wouldn't depression be a problem if they only went out after the sun went down? Perhaps better sun blockers would do the trick.

But, what am I talking about? All this is logical extrapolation, and vampirism is all about magical states of being and powers that cannot be explained by science. A bone marrow transplant would likely be rejected, or cause the vampire to melt into a puddle of slime. Blood transfusions might fare better, but give the vampire a high he or she cannot control, so the patient goes on a binge of blood sucking that exsanguinates whole suburbs of Stockholm.

(28 September 2012)

Mark Plummer's list of your publications was a remarkable feat of research that I hope to spare my future biographers (hopefully, a number somewhat larger than 0). I have already a complete list of my fanzines, all my publications elsewhere (hopefully 99.9 percent complete), and all my artwork. The weak spot is the artwork. I've only catalogued the inked or coloured material. I have at least 1500 unlisted, uncatalogued, unrecorded-in-any-way pencil sketches of finished quality — many of which have been published in fanzines (such as the *Uncle*



Scrooge page in the Chicon *Daily Funnies*). I really should do something about that, someday, but as most have no titles, it's likely to be tough.

The one thing a catalogue doesn't do is help you find anything that it catalogues.

(28 September 2012)

JOHN LITCHEN

PO Box 3503, Robina Town Centre QLD 4230

I read somewhere that you were unable to get a copy of Brian Aldiss's recent book *The Cretan Teat*. So here is a copy for you. I hope you enjoy it. I certainly did.

(23 November 2012)

It is sad that Aldiss can't find a major publisher for most of his books these days. I saw in a magazine at the local newsagency that he has published his 'final' SF novel, which is about the colonisation of Mars. It's called *The Finches of Mars*. It was released this month, and I ordered a copy via the Book Depository. It may not come for some time since copies could be not available until next January, but we'll see. It could very well be the very last book he writes. I hope not, because he has always been one of my favourite authors.

(26 November 2012)

[*brg* Thank you very much for the copies of *The Cretan Teat* and *The Finches of Mars* you sent me.

The hardback *The Cretan Teat* seemed to go out of print as soon as it appeared, and I did not realise there was a paperback. If Brian had published this just after the Horatio Stubbs trilogy, it would have been a bestseller. It seems that no matter how brilliantly he still writes, nobody major publisher does his books because he is assumed to have dropped off the radar. Very sad for the Aldiss fan, and frustrating for Brian. I'll ask my friend Mark Plummer in England to track down *Walcott* for me, which, it seems, is a major 500-page book that came out some years ago. I only heard about it about a year ago.

MICHAEL BISHOP

PO Box 646, Pine Mountain GA 31822, USA

I learned yesterday that Subterranean Press has only about 30 copies of my most recent collection still in inventory, but if it sells out there, it may still be possible to pick up copies at Amazon.com, either new (for \$40-plus-some) or used from subsidiary sellers.

(3 October 2013)

YVONNE ROUSSEAU

Po Box 3086, Rundle Mall, Adelaide SA 5000

How miserable that one or more of Tim Marion's cats vomited all over *SFCs* 81 and 82 (Carol Kewley might add this kind of mishap to 'why cats don't get to sleep on instrument panels on spaceships'), but how heartening to read on and to learn that you provided him with

replacement copies.

I'm delighted to find that Steve Jeffery has been reading Richard Holmes (the self-styled 'Romantic Biographer', not the Richard Holmes who writes histories of war and who was a guest of the Adelaide Festival Writer's Week in 2008). I'm utterly charmed by Holmes the biographer, but have so far read only *Footsteps* (1985) and *Dr Johnson and Mr. Savage* (1993). When William Breiding comments (in 'We Also Heard From') that at present 'Men writing emotionally about men seems a non-no unless it has gay leanings', I remember how deftly Richard Holmes dealt with this when writing about the eighteenth-century Richard Savage: 'something about his physical elegance, his supple wit and his moments of childlike vulnerability and vanity appealed to a protective instinct in his male companions and patrons.'

(5 October 2012)

KAARON WARREN Downer ACT 2602

Did Alisa Krasnostein ever send you a copy of *Through Splintered Walls*? If not, I'd like to send you one as a thank you for all the issues you've sent me, and all the support as well.

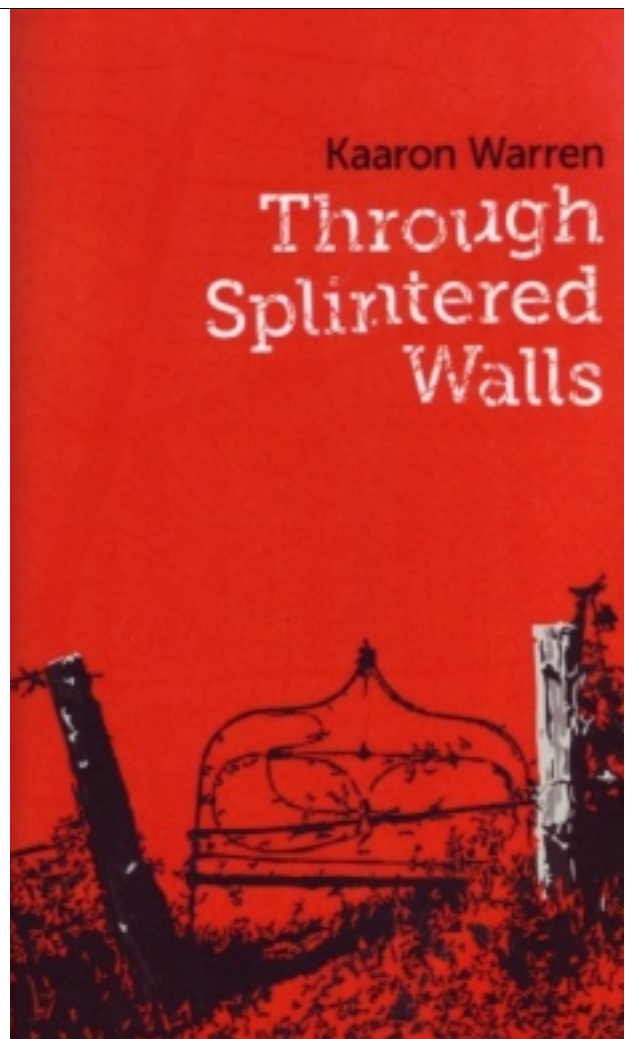
(5 October 2012)

[*brg* I didn't receive a review copy of your new book *Through Splintered Walls* from Alisa Krasnostein at Twelfth Planet Press. I don't receive review copies from the Australian small publishers. I would like to keep up to date with the books from Austrian small press, but it's often difficult to find out that particular books exist, let alone finding a copy. You would have given me a copy of TSW at Continuum 8, but you had already discovered that all the copies delivered to the convention were misprinted. Thanks very much for making sure that I received a copy after the misprint was corrected.

Congratulations on the success of this book in various awards. I like the idea of a four-novelette book very much, and each of the stories works well. *Through Splintered Walls* is not a fix-up, but it's more than a collection; it's four stories that fit together well.

'Sky', from *Through Splintered Walls*, had the distinct sections, each almost complete on its own. The last one; yes, a sudden, abrupt ending, and if I were writing the novel (which I may well do if you encourage me enough! And if my agent thinks it's a goer!) I would take the story further along. For the purposes of the novella, I thought that that final awful event laid out for the reader what Zed's life was going to be like; how he'd have to live. I do absolutely take your point about it finishing soon. But I actually wrote this in a rather crazy two-day session, and it felt as if this was the finishing spot.

I'm so glad you liked 'Ishtar' from the collection *Ishtar*! I'm very, very proud of it, and love it myself. I loved writing it, researching it, and I loved building the character of Ishtar. I am fascinated by history and the roles people play in it, so was happy to use the washer-



woman here. She may well appear in yet another novel I'd like to write, about the washerwoman in history. we shall see!

(19 October 2012)

**TIM MARION
c/o Kleinbard, 266 East Broadway, Apt
1201B, New York NY 10002, USA**

I appreciate very much your printing my stuff, but there were at least two major errors. I don't know if you can correct them now on the online version or not, since you said that was already posted. 'The Prisoner in Literature' is missing at least the last line of text, which probably occurred if and when you re-sized the box it was in. Also, and I'm certain I mentioned this before (maybe even twice!), but you need to take the Jack Kirby comic art and put it with 'The Prisoner in Comics Part ONE' (emphasis presently mine) — I really think those two parts should be re-laid-out.

(8 October 2012)

[*brg* Apologies for the stuff-ups. I failed Desktop Publisher Design (again). All those boxes for bits of your article, and trying to keep them all shipshape and on the page in the right order. I tried to correct the problems for the onscreen versions, but each

corrections I made caused further problems.*]

I admit I haven't read very much Eando Binder also, but don't consider him to be a 'prehistoric author'. He was the main writer on most of the 'Captain Marvel' stories my Dad read as a kid. Don't get the wrong idea about my Dad from my saying that — he has, for many years, been unfamiliar with the concept of reading for pleasure or recreation. For the past 50–60 years he has read little more than the newspaper and The Bible. So I'm not trying to say I'm a second-generation fan.

Binder also created and wrote the 'Adam Link, Robot' stories, which I seem to recall enjoying. If I didn't read them, I at least watched very intriguing TV adaptations of them — once on the original *Outer Limits*, and then later on a revived *Outer Limits*. And he wrote one of the first novels I ever read, *Avengers Battle The Earth Wrecker*, featuring Marvel's Avengers. This was 1968, I think.

By the time I read the 'Mars' books by Edgar Rice Burroughs, I was already an experienced heroic fantasy reader. Adventures of John Carter actually seemed weak and anaemic compared to Robert E. Howard's Conan, or even compared to Lin Carter's imitations of Howard and Burroughs rolled together — the latter actually had more *bite* than Burroughs' original fiction! I actually picked up the last few Mars books. When I was 15, I read only the first five books, and felt that basically Burroughs was telling the same story over and over. With these latter books, read only recently, I appreciate them in a totally new way. One of the books, either *Master Mind of Mars* or *Llana of Gathol*, had a supremely ascerbic and sarcastic hero who had me laughing hysterically at some of his rejoinders to stupid questions other characters would ask him. I'm still thinking about getting a couple of the old books from the 1960s, which were illustrated by EC Comics artist Reed Crandall.

As for comics, it's hard to define taste. I remember feeling as though I 'outgrew' funny animal and funny human comicbooks some time around pubescence, but still kept an interest in the more 'realistic' superhero comics. And many of those 'realistic' comics seemed very realistic indeed, and you're short-changing them if you think otherwise. Innovations Stan Lee made into the personalities of his characters was surely only the vaguest inspiration for such stirring stories as Alan Moore, Mike Mignola, Joss Whedon, Joe Straczynski, Grant Morrison, and even Neil Gaiman have created.

As a teenager, still having an interest in comics (for a few years I swore off superheroes and was merely buying kung fu or sword-and-sorcery comics), I couldn't understand other adults, even literate fans, who still had an interest in the funny animal books. Sure, Carl Barks was a nice painter, but those paintings just didn't send me. The stories didn't even amuse me that much. But many fans saw a lot of value in his work and others'.

I dare say that there are many comics, written in the last 20 years, which you would enjoy, if you had the time and patience to sit down and read them. I have noticed that my two correspondents who seem to have a prejudice against comics, Elaine and Ned, fervently disavow this prejudice and start talking about the comics they read as a kid. But the fact of the matter is, I think that

they are basically too impatient with the comic book, or graphic story, format. It's too much effort to follow which word balloon to read next, when one can simply read straight, linear text — that's much easier to follow.

And of course, much of my desire to read the old comics is a nostalgia craze — not only remembering how much I first enjoyed those comics, but getting to read the missing, intermediary issues in order to constitute for the first time the entire story arc in my head. And much of the art — Colan, Kirby, Adams, whew!

For the past 20 years I have gotten back into reading superhero comicbooks in a big way, and yes, they are totally unrealistic, but in a way, that's what makes them so appealing. Nowhere else will you find such a huge disconnect from reality. This removal to hyper-reality also causes me to become more sexually suggestable. Superheroines are sex goddesses, able to arouse and titillate in a way no actress on TV or a movie can. Special effects, explosions, interplanetary scenes, you name it — all of that is easier to portray with drawings than with a camera.

But ... Time passes and tastes change, as you well know. Just as there are adults who still like, read and collect funny animal comics; there are likewise fans whom we think of as literate who would rather read a wrestling magazine than anything else.

(27 October 2012)

[*brg* The trouble with comic books/graphic novels for someone over 12 years old is that there are not enough words. I'm not a visual person, except for photography (especially films with great photography), don't collect paintings, although we do collect books of paintings, and am not even all that interested in book covers (although I do like the sensual feel of good hardbacks and good covers). So most comic art has always seemed very crude and badly drawn to me, even when I was a kid. I liked the stories then, because I didn't have access to any other science fiction.

And I loved the Carl Barks work for Disney because of the wit and social commentary in his work — and also those brilliant 'Uncle Scrooge' stories in which Scrooge drags Donald and the boys go off for amazing adventures all over the world. Those comics stretched my vision of the world when I was in second and third grade. The very first comic I remember reading right through was 'Uncle Scrooge and the Horseradish', in which I never quite got what horseradish was or why the little box of it was so valuable to Scrooge, but the sea adventures and the battle with the Beagle Boys were better than anything I would see on film for some years. The best Scrooge comic was 'The Seven Cities of Cibola', whose main scene was stolen wonderfully for the first 'Lost Raiders' film. If anybody would know his Carl Barks, it would be Steven Spielberg!

But the only adventure comics I ever saw that were really well drawn were *Prince Valiant*, and some comic books drawn by Australian artist Keith Chatto. I recall that one of them was a Western called *El Lobo*, where each page was a full panel, with no words appearing in the panel but only at the foot of the page, and every line meticulously

drawn as if for a nineteenth-century engraving. Even better were the British Classics Illustrated comics, done by Farringdon Library, in digest size. The artist, whoever he was, adopted the full style of nineteenth-century engraving when drawing nineteenth-century novels for the series — his version of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* was the greatest single comic I ever saw, but has long since disappeared from my stock of comics from childhood.

When I turned twelve I faced a pocket money crisis, because I discovered the SF magazines. *New Worlds* and *Science Fiction Adventures* initially (both British), and slowly coming across the American SF magazines. However, they were up to twice the price of English magazines, so I could buy them only sporadically. The one I had to have was *Galaxy*. The first issue I bought included Cordwainer Smith's 'A Planet Named Shayol', still one of the greatest SF stories of all time.

Since we had moved away from the Melbourne suburb of Oakleigh, I could no longer swap comics at the Oakleigh movie theatres on Saturday afternoons, so I gave up on comics altogether. (Not entirely; I remember that the best present my mother could bring me when I spent a week in hospital at the end of 1961 was a comic each time; and I remember drawing fake Mickey Mouses on serviettes for the nurses while lying in bed.)

Science fiction was what I had always been searching for. Each novel of the John Carter series contained, apart from the swordplay and derring-do, one or two really good science fiction ideas. And those mind-blowing future ideas were what I was looking for, when I started borrowing real SF books from the local library.

The first time I saw some Conan stories were in those all-reprint issues of *Amazing* and *Fantastic* that Sol Cohen perpetrated when he took over the magazines in the late sixties. I couldn't believe that SF people had anything to do with such crap — backward-looking, dedicated to the primitive, lots of blood, nothing but adventure fiction, almost no SF ideas ... That's a side of SF I've tried to avoid.

My ideal SF novel is a realistic novel (or even literary novel) that happens to be set in the future (or alternative present) rather than the present or past. Highest standards of writing plus most brilliant, penetrating ideas about science and society. I don't find these very often these days.

I'm not sure why I'm at all interested in the genres that still call themselves 'horror' or 'dark fantasy'. I hate the *idea* of horror, and all its clichés, but it's in that field I find the most extraordinary writing these days. The recent Stephen Jones anthology *A Book of Horror* includes a fabulous Elizabeth Hand story that would go well in any Best of American Short Fiction anthology. In the end, aesthetics über alles — there's nothing better than a superb story superbly told.*]

STEVE SNEYD

4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield,
West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England

I found the long article on the film *Let Me In* fascinating; gripping even though I had not seen the film. Ray Wood has written it ingeniously such that it could be followed clearly without the film having been viewed.

I was also caught up by the piece on *The Prisoner*, mainly because of a nostalgia for both enjoying the original and being baffled by it. My son went on a coach tour to see Port Meirion, where *The Prisoner* was filmed. Being pedantic, it is not, as Tim Marion repeats, an island, let alone off the north coast of Wales. It is a peninsula on the west coast of Wales.

Re the order of episodes: the theory is that the head of ITV (Lew Grade?) felt the company had been tricked into make a non-commercial audience-loser, and out of spite ordered that the episodes be shown out of sequence. Now, of course, the series has its own big cult, with Prisoner conventions being held at Port Meirion.

(11 October 2012)

GEORGE ZEBROWSKI

New York, USA

Franz Rottensteiner appears to know little of my critical views of Lem, about whom I have often stated that agreement with Lem's views or not was never an issue for me, only in how he was treated, and what the effects of this were — back in the 70s and 80s.

But it's clear that R.'s falling out with Lem continues to lead him into comments that remind me of the ex-boyfriend, or ex-husband, who just can't say a good thing about his other after the separation; the facts of his broken relationship with Lem speak for themselves, as you suggest in your note to his letter without having to say it.

As to my Polish 'patriotism', I have never been a nationalist of any kind. I was raised to six in England, and since then in the US. I speak, read, and write Polish, but I can't help that, or English.

I have admired Rottensteiner's view of Lovecraft as a Stapledonian; but hearing all this other nonsense makes me doubt Rottensteiner's intelligence. Lem was 'silenced', not in being published, but in being neglected despite publication, and in being used as a bludgeon to beat other writers with by the Mainstream of opinion. His many astute criticisms of SF, mostly Campbellian, were neglected, and anyone who defended him was looked upon with suspicion. R. simply doesn't know everything that went on, or what I said about it, and I am not about to waste time enlightening him when he has so well muddled his own plausibility.

Happily, all of this died away by 2000. Lem himself began saying that he had lost interest in the failures of serious SF and preferred only the wild junky kind.

(12 October 2012)

Rottensteiner's piece in *SFC* 83 would take at least a year of documentation to refute, which is what he counts on in his compromised state of mind and character. There

is not one sentence that is not open to question. Fortunately, no one I know has ever taken him seriously, not even academics who said a few kind words but said otherwise behind his back. As for taking me for some kind of patriot, this is laughable, since I detest all nationalisms. I often disagreed with Lem in letters, of which I have quite a few, and argued only that he had a right to say what he thought without being punished for it; his ouster from SFWA for his views was concealed with another excuse. It hurt him with New York publishing, which is easily proven. Did he suffer greatly? Not outwardly, where the victory went to him, and can no longer be taken away, which is what R. is still trying to do in grotesque fashion, since he knows that few in any will judge him for it.

(6 August 2013)

Despite what R. says, I do know most everything about Lem, including a ream of material about R.'s relationship with him, which R. has worked hard at falsifying. He loves shifting the discussion from substance to manners. I also have all the original documents and letters involving the Lem Affair with SFWA, which all those involved are not aware that I have. It all eddied into my possession over time, and which together make a picture not available to any one personage. They would be horrified if they saw it.

But it's unlikely that I will ever write a book called *The Lem Affair*, primarily because it would be the sacrifice of the years left to me for my own work, whose merits have slipped by most everyone, given the styles and expectations of readers and American SF. Much like Budrys, and a few others. I do have a Campbell Prize for *Brute Orbits*, three Nebula nominations, and a Sturgeon nomination. You might like to see my new story in *Interzone*, and three in recent *Natures*.

(7 August 2013)

[*brg* By placing the following letters from Franz Rottensteiner below, I've implied that they are an answer to George Zebrowski's comments above. Not so. Franz had not seen those comments, but only my email to him that these comments would be appearing.*]

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER
Marchettigasse 9/17, A-1060 Wien, Austria

You will know that unfortunately Boris Strugatsky passed away in November of last year, leaving his wife Adelaida and a son Andrei. They have entrusted me further with the representation of the Strugatsky copyrights, and I must say that it looks like a major Strugatsky revival in English. It's a pity that Boris just lived to see the beginning of it. And it is a welcome change from Lem's royalty statements, which showed mostly unearned advances and/or returns exceeding sales.

Roadside Picnic, published last May in a new unexpurgated translation by Chicago Review Press, is a gratifying success. It sold out a first edition of 4000 copies in trade paperback on the day of publication, has been reprinted since several times, and sold 12,000 copies in 2012, and

a further 7500 in e-books. It keeps selling wildly, and Chicago Review Press have now also contracted for *Hard to Be a God*, which will be published next year in a new translation, with a foreword by Hari Kunzru, who had recommended *Roadside Picnic* strongly in *The Guardian*. They will also do *The Doomed City*, a never before published (in English) Strugatsky novel. I am optimistic that both books will also appear in the UK, where Malcolm Edwards has just taken *Monday Starts on Saturday*. Melville House, a small publisher, will re-publish *Definitely Maybe* next year (in the old, revised translation by Antonina W. Bouis), and do later *Dead Mountaineer's Inn* aka *Inspector Glebsky's Puzzle*, an sf mystery.

The Aleksei German film of *Hard to Be a God* aka *History of the Arkanar Massacre* has now been finished by his son and will be released later this year. To judge from preliminary reports this promises to be a great film, and I hope that it will reach the international screens.

So I have been very busy, but I must say that everything takes now much more time. So many friends from the old days have already passed away, and this gets you to wonder when it is your turn. I have been undeservedly fortunate in my life, and have no reason to complain. I hope that you are also content and happy, although opportunities in Australia must be harder to come by.

(28 August 2013)

Too bad that you cannot yet retire. I *am* retired, but at nearly 72 still working, although I do not need to; and, although things have greatly changed in publishing, and not for the better, I could still make a living from it, if I wanted to. But I have had great luck all my life, although I made my share of mistakes. But I could always do the things I wanted to do and have never cared much whether it was paid or how much it was paid.

Yes, many of the old fans have either died or retired from SF, and there are ever more obituaries. My family is okay, my son is better off than I ever was, and I cannot complain: especially when I hear what problems other families often have with their offspring.

Since you mention Lem's newly translated *Summa Technologiae*. I wonder whether you have noticed that there is a new translation of *Solaris* (but only as an ebook). I don't think that Lem has been served ill by his translators. True, *Solaris* has been translated from French, but this translation could have been far worse. Withe Strugatsky it is very different, and you must be among the very few persons who thought the translation of *Hard to Be a God* any good. The German translation from which it was made already contains a number of ridiculous misunderstandings. I can inform you of new Strugatsky editions as they appear, and I remember that you sought that you would get the new Gollancz edition? It was published last fall, but apparently without any indication that it was a new translation made from the unexpurgated text.

You are right in assuming that I am not interested any more in Lem's work. In principle I agree with you that the work is what matters, not the person who wrote it, and I have never sought much personal contact with SF writers (or other authors), probably because I thought that it might influence my opinion of their works. The greatest mistake I made was that I encouraged Lem to

come to Austria when he left Poland, and discovered in him a very small person I would not have cared to have contact with if he hadn't been a great writer. But now it is hard to forget that he was a habitual liar and a cheat. I believe that he was essentially a coward who felt himself to be strong only when he thought that his opponent was weak. I am firmly convinced that he brought forward his law-suit against me (and what came before it), because a) he thought that I was afraid of him, and b) that I could not afford it. If I had lost it would have cost me money, but not ruined me. If he had won it would have gained him really nothing, it was just designed to cost me a lot of money. Some day I will probably write about it, for the whole thing has its amusing aspects and shows how much Lem was out of touch with reality. But even giving that he was not quite healthy, he was a person only interested in his own advantage (and not necessarily his objective advantage, he acknowledged no authority beyond his own, often ridiculously irrational will). In an early piece in *Der Spiegel* about him he declared 'I am a slave of logics', which was how he liked to appear in the world, but which was a big lie.

(30 August 2013)

I am overweight, I have a little diabetes, and my blood pressure is too high. But aside from that, everything is okay, and I am moving a lot around when I am in Vienna — from flea market to flea market. It's a good exercise to get away from the computer, and there is always the expectation that I might find some interesting books.

I wonder whether anyone aside from Zebrowski cares about the SFWA and Lem. That they chucked Lem out was irrelevant then and is more so now. If they did it because they thought he was a Communist, it was in error. He was an opportunist, not a Communist. If they did it because they thought him arrogant and disdainful of SF authors, they were right. He was arrogant, thought SF authors lousy writers, and didn't care about their opinions. After publishing *Fantastyka i Futurologia* he read almost no SF, and was completely ignorant of the developments in SF since about 1970. He was firm in his opinion that SF authors were ignorant of science, and used *Scientific American* only, if at all, to wipe their arses with, notwithstanding the fact that there are many SF writers who can and do read genuine scientific papers, and not just popularisations of science. In mathematics he was completely illiterate. His arrogance and ignorance went so far to deny Gregory Bedford the right to say anything about cosmology! Lem just skimmed over some popular articles, and during the time I knew him in Vienna, he read almost no science; he just professed his love for it.

He sometimes claimed that he read only the books of Nobel Prize winners, i.e. only the best in science. But by the time scientists get a Nobel Prize, they are usually well past the height of their achievements, and the crop of current science is not to be found in books, which usually come a long time after scientific papers. And from Einstein's books you could hardly gauge the importance of his achievements.

Lem claimed knowledge in many things that he was really ignorant of, and what he claimed had often little relationship with truth. For instance, in a selection of his

letters to various people he described me as somebody who visited various cons and kept his mouth tightly shut, only to return home to his typewriter to write acerbic articles to turn people against him. The astonishing thing about this is less that I visited very few cons in my life, and none at that time, but that he apparently thought that it would make any difference what I did or did not do at cons or in fanzines. What a curious idea to think that SF conventions have any influence on the fate of a writer!

(31 August 2013)

PAUL ANDERSON 17 Baker Street, Grange SA 5022

The news about changing over to the e-version of *SFC* was sort of expected but sort of annoying as well. I like the feel of the printed issue.

Hopefully the PDF file when accessed can be saved as a Word file to our PC so I don't have to access the net every time. There is no way I am reading any issue from top to bottom in one sitting. However also I will not pay \$100 for a rare print edition. Those bills are restricted to the Salvos or UNICEF.

Around six weeks ago I missed the bus back from West Lakes and chose to set off on the 30-minute walk home. Bad move this time, as part way there I was met by a young kid on a bicycle. A shared pathway but the kid did not steer around me in time. One minute I was walking; the next I was on the grass verge getting up to a sitting position with a small crowd around me. I had no recollection of how I got there at all. I must have blacked out for a moment.

The bruises told me I was hit by the bike in the upper right side of the shoulder area and landed on my back and lefthand side.

One of the crowd called for an ambulance, and they



checked me over and let me go in the care of Brenda, who had been called by the woman at the same time. My GP confirmed the next day that no bones seemed to have been broken as all limbs were functioning normally without pain. The pain was in the impact zones.

The impact area was in precisely the best spot for minimum damage, therefore no broken bones, head fractures, or spinal paralysis. All of which would have been likely with just a minor shift to the focal points. The deep bruise to my side was exactly halfway between my waist and the spine. The shoulder was badly bruised but nothing was broken.

I now have to exercise to make sure I continue to return to normal function — a slow process for six weeks and counting but probably a lot better than I could have been if I had a lower bonecalcium level.

Not too bad for somebody 69 years old, but I don't want a rerun any time soon. A 92-year-old woman from our church stepped on to a step that wasn't there and broke her shoulder: a lot more pain than I had.

So remember to boost your calcium levels with as good a diet you can manage.

I bought the the Baen reprints of all of Christopher Anvil's works. I loved them in *Analog/ASF*. Now they have been reissued in themed books I have a lot of fun in store. Then on to the ordered editions of James H. Schmitz and Telzey. I might then take a break before tackling the Poul Anderson future history saga from Falkayn to Starfog.

(16 October 2012)

My basic income is the Commonwealth's superannuation scheme that I had to contribute to during my 48

years of service. That gave me an income of 52.5% of the final year's salary. It is supposed to be increased in line with inflation, but we both know the CPI doesn't necessarily show the real increase in home costs. Retirees are mostly concerned with the inflation of food and utility costs but not the other offset costs that affect the younger set of the community.

I also have a top-up from the usual pension. Crucial to the survival but still cut back by the \$50 a fortnight after Brenda took on some casual work. She won't qualify for the pension in her own right for another five years because of the increase in the entry age to 67.

Keating was told all this way back in the early 90s when he introduced the Superannuation Guarantee Charge of the then 9 per cent.

(17 October 2012)

SUE BURSTZYNSKI St Kilda VIC

My novel *Wolfborn* is Young Adult fiction, which they do review that the *Age*, but they've cut their reviewing right back to about one a week. I doubt anyone likely to buy my novel would read *Australian Book Review*. The publisher is more likely to send my book to the children's and YA magazines, *Magpies* and *Viewpoint*, which are bought by school libraries.

Amazing where reviews do turn up, though; on my fridge door I have a gorgeous little review from the *Melbourne Times*!

Funny you should mention *Overland*: Anthony Panegyres sold them his first SF story, which turned up on the AA shortlist (I think it won).

And I sold my very first story, a fantasy tale, to *Family Circle*! :-)

(24 October 2012)

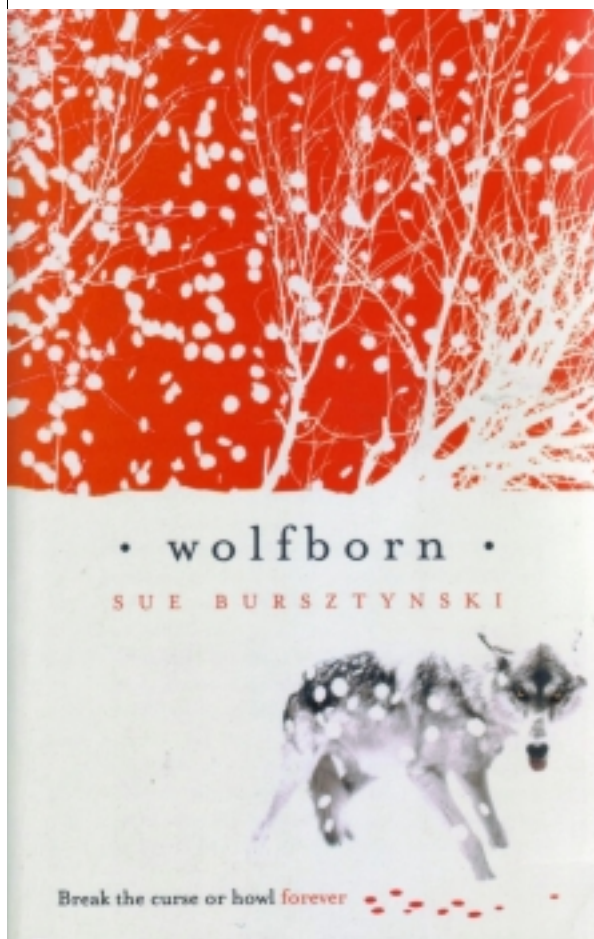
I remember Paul Collins as a bookseller in St Kilda. That's how I met him. He did very well with that bookshop, long before Penny and David Syber came along. Even after he left, he was working for other publishers as an editor, which is how I sold my first short fiction to him. What Paul discovered was the children's market; I have almost forgotten him as a straight SF person. It was, I think, meeting Meredith that did it. And it was having an education publishing company annoy him over what became the anthology *Trust Me!*, which made him decide to publish it himself and set up Ford Street Publishing.

(25 October 2012)

MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER PO Box 8093, Silver Spring, MD 20907, USA

In *SFC* 83, Guy Salvidge is a critic new to me, and I look forward to reading him again. Unfortunately, I don't have a deep enough knowledge of Dick's novels to comment on what Salvidge has to say. I've read a lot of nonfiction about Dick, though, and can comment on that.

I haven't read Tessa Dick's book, but Anne Dick's *The Search for Philip K. Dick* is a very good book that sheds a lot of light on what Philip K. Dick was like. As for the



editions, Edwin Mellen Press, an academic publisher who specialises in very expensive books, published the first 'obscure and expensive' edition. I think Anne Dick revised the book between her first edition in 1993 and the second edition of 2009. Tachyon then decided to reprint her book, and the Tachyon edition is now the easiest one to get.

A book Salvadge should track down is *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*, edited by Lawrence Sutin and published by Pantheon in 1995. This collects Dick's fanzine articles, including one or two (I think) from *SF Commentary*. Dick was a very good nonfiction writer, and this book gives a good understanding of his thought. I bet it's out of print, but easily findable.

As for Emmanuel Carrère, the problem with Carrère is that his book is a 'novelised biography', and we don't really know which parts Carrère made up. I think of the book as a novel about Philip K. Dick and nothing more.

I thought Colin Steele's reviews this time were better than those in *SFC* 81 because they were longer. For an American, what Steele is good at is providing information on British books that have not been published in the US. For example, I have the first edition of Kim Newman's *Nightmare Movies*, which I never got around to reading. I had no idea that the book had appeared in a second edition and was twice as long! I also knew about Mike Ashley's *Out of This World*, but didn't know that the book had an accompanying CD. I wish Steele would say if the short selections of interviews on Science Fiction Writers are primarily from British sources or American ones.

I'm one of the few Americans who have read John Baxter's *The Inner Man*, because the book did not have an American edition. (Book dealer and publisher Michael Walsh imported a few copies.) I understand that many of Baxter's sources and Ballard's family have attacked this book, but to accuse Baxter of 'over-the-top vehemence' goes too far. It's fairer to say that *The Inner Man* is an indictment, a sort of brief for the prosecution. Hopefully Baxter's book will provoke Ballard's friends and family to come up with their own books to provide a more balanced look at Ballard and his work. It would be great if Christopher Priest and Charles Platt could edit *The J. G. Ballard I Knew* and collect other reminiscences of Ballard. I also believe Steele's charge that *The Inner Man* is 'ultimately more about Baxter's inner self than Ballard's' is also unfair. I know a little about Baxter's inner self because I read and enjoyed *A Pound of Paper*. I didn't detect anything in *The Inner Man* that tells me anything about the inner self of John Baxter.

In his letter, John Baxter talks about how the value of collectible books 'has plunged with the advent of the Internet'. I can understand why this would give high-spot book dealers heartburn, since it's a lot harder for them to make a living. But shouldn't this trend be celebrated by more ordinary literary fans who are looking for favourite books that they couldn't otherwise afford to buy? I'm sorry, for example, that my copy of Terry Pratchett's *Once More, With Footnotes* is a \$300 book and not a \$2000 one. But people who are really dedicated Pratchett lovers and who want to read everything Pratchett writes can more easily find Pratchett's book today than they would in the pre-Internet days, when it would only be available from

a limited number of dealers at high prices.

The fact that you did not receive by email one of Mark Plummer's letters makes me glad I still print out and mail my letters! Postal services have a bad reputation these days, and mail is far slower than it used to be, but I find that very few books and packages are ever completely lost in the mail. (And the day I received your package of *SF Commentary* was also a day I received *Locus* and *Interzone*. It's still a red-letter day when sf publications from three continents end up in my mailbox on the same day!)

Your memoir of starting out in fandom in the 1960s reminds me that I have been seeing bits and pieces of my writing from over 30 years ago. I started out writing reviews for Don Miller's *SF&F Journal* and his mystery fanzines in 1975, when I was 17. (Some people start selling short stories when they were teenagers; I started writing book reviews.) Thanks to Google Books, I can see large pieces of letters mentioning me that were published in *The Mystery Fancier*, a very good mystery fanzine of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Because I've always used my full name as a writer I don't think people back then realised I was 19 and 20 when I wrote those reviews. In fact, one mystery fanzine editor wrote when I was 19 that he thought I was a 55-year-old retired clergyman with a spinster sister and seven cats! But looking back on my teenage self, I wondered, 'Why did I think I would be taken more seriously if I spelled names the British rather than the American way?' But I realised that back then, I was pretty talented. What do you think about what you wrote and the way you wrote 40 years ago? Do you think your writing has changed? Are you a better critic now than you were in 1970? Have your tastes in sf changed — and how have they changed?

(5 November 2013)

ANDY ROBSON

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I seem to have lost three months of summer this year, and not just because of the weather. Apologies for not having responded to your final issue of *Steam Engine Time*. I liked the Theodore Sturgeon article. I'm sure I met him once at some book fair but can't recall where exactly. It was one of those 'Where's the coffee-bar?' kind of conversations. I was very young, and ignorant of who he was!

We all know the impossibility of running several titles without some aid, whatever form you choose to do them in. This year seems to have really flattened dozens of zines — but we're intending to float a couple more issues of *Krax* in paper format, although prices have gone up (the cover price includes postage).

For me there is no point to doing an electronic magazine. If there were feedback I wouldn't have time to read it, and there would only be those self-appointed geniuses sending in poetry material that I've worked 20 years to drive away.

I wasn't expecting to receive the issues of *SF Commentary*, as you said you were cutting down on overseas mailings, and I hadn't ordered them (not being a fan of Philip K. Dick). Please find enclosed a few pennies for postage.

My co-editor probably has a CD list nearer to yours

than mine. He's a big fan of Tom Russell (who occasionally plays a local dive) and Joe Ely, who lie on the back burner for me — not forgetting the current Neil Young, Dave Alvin, and others in the zone of self-indulgence.

(22 October 2012)

Re *SFC* 83: Philip K. Dick material is as inaccessible to me as a Brisbane Cricket Club score card or Alice Springs Car Club meetings reports 1980–2008.

I hope you're staying with a print edition. A fanzine needs that thump factor of being able to be thrown on the floor whenever life gets in the way of reading time — which, in my case, is nearly always.

SFC 84 gives a great insight into where it all began, and also alerted me to why print-on-demand will never work. (Common sense, really. What magazine was ever published initially due to 'demand'?)

As for Mark Plummer's list of your publications: I was shocked to find I had no recollection of something I published in 1982 until it was listed in someone else's bibliography. Even now I can only recall the mugshot that accompanied it, not any of the contents.

The Prisoner I recall with much amusement. I watched only the occasional episode, and did not worry about understanding the supposed plot. Some said smugly, 'Aha, we've read Kafka, we've been to Port Meirion, we know it's all an illusion, you'll see.' To me the giant pushball that followed McGoochan everywhere made the whole series into more of an Alice Through the Looking Glass. (Do they still have pushball in Australia? I haven't seen a game in 40 years.) The ending of the series was maybe a copout, but I liked the way in which the boardroom was both a huge hangar and an intimate office, something nobody else noticed. I think all the comic book versions rejected the ending, and gave their own, much duller responses, thus disregarding all the side characters.

(3 March 2013)

JERRY KAUFMAN
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I would have thought there's nothing new to say about Phil Dick and his work, but plainly I thought wrong. Guy Salvidge makes a few new points, and even the old same points were interesting. Maybe I'm just a Dick fan. However, he convinces me that I'm not enough of a Dick fan to read any of the recently published mainstream novels. Thinking of a better term for them, I'll call them non-genre, or maybe dirty realist. They sound very unappealing.

[*brg* They are appealing; well, most of them are. And often very funny. I wrote a long article about Philip Dick's non-SF novels, and it has been reprinted more often than anything else I've ever written. On the internet, you can find it in *Scratch Pad No 1* and in one of the other very early issues. And I'm pretty sure it's floating around somewhere on the net as a Word document, waiting to be googled.*]

As I recall, the sense of an underlying reality in *The Man in the High Castle* is only perceived by Mr Tagomi. I remember a scene in a park in which Tagomi seems to see our own world for a moment. His own timeline, and even that in *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, are both illusions. (As I recall, although *Grasshopper* is a novel in which the Allies win the war, it still doesn't correspond to our own version of history.)

On page 14, Guy quotes a line from *Ubik*, a description of a character named G. G. Ashwood, which Guy says is a crime against both fashion and grammar. I'm pretty sure that Dick loved making up bizarre clothing combinations in several other books. On the other hand, I've read the sentence several times and still fail to find the grammatical error. I don't see any misplaced modifiers or other mistakes I can usually recognise.

'Phocomelus' is a strange word, isn't it? I stumbled over it, every time it appeared in *Dr Bloodmoney* and in Guy's review. I don't know how it's pronounced, and wonder how well the word slips off the tongue and through the teeth of the characters in the book.

I was surprised to see Lou Stathis pop up in the review of *Time Out of Joint*. Lou was part of the Fanoclast crowd during the years I lived in New York, and was a man of strong and acerbic opinions. I will have to attempt to find a copy of the book so I can read his comments.

[*brg* And wasn't Lou Stathis a member with us in APA-45 in the early seventies?*

I have a copy of the first edition of *Ubik: The Screenplay*, published in 1985, and would like to give a shout-out to Corroboree Press of Minneapolis, Minnesota, the publisher. The owners of this press were Rhip and Ira 'Mitch' Thornhill. The inside back flap of the dust jacket says they also published a small slew of books by Lafferty.

One of Dick's ideas about the meaning of the pink light still baffles me — what gave him the idea that all our lives and history for the past 2000 years or so are illusion and we're 'really' still in the Roman Empire of 70 AD? (Do I have that date right?) Makes absolutely no sense to me.

I must remember to go to Amazon and get *The Owl in Daylight*. Thanks to Guy for discussing it. (Although I am rather conflicted about buying anything from Amazon. At least I'll be helping Tessa Dick and maybe putting a little towards the large grants Amazon has been giving to the Clarion West Writers Workshop and other writer organizations and causes.)

(29 October 2012)

RICK KENNETT
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I was particularly interested in Tim Marion's review of *The Prisoner* DVDs. You just have to love a show that features feral killer beach balls, no matter how wilfully cryptic it becomes.

The photo of Space Age Books in Swanston Street nearly brought a tear to the eye. Shop of my misspent youth! (Admittedly I also misspent my youth in pool halls.) I remember the day I discovered Space Age. It was



Merv Binns' SF shop SPACE AGE BOOKS (Melbourne's first SF bookshop)

hosted MSFC meetings and was the centre of much Worldcon bid related activity,
including the making of the 'Aussiefan/Antifan' film.

1973 and I was working at the Carlton Brewery at the north end of Melbourne. One lunch time I took a walk down Swanston Street and found myself confronted by a shopfront full of science fiction books. I pressed my face up to the window, went 'Gawd!' and made a note of the address. Many, many Saturdays afterward found me there buying armloads of books, most of which are still on my shelves today.

Electronic zines used to be the bane of my life, but circumstances beyond my control have recently propelled me into the 21st century where I am now the reasonably proud owner of a laptop equipped with USB sticks and the ability to open and display electronic publications such as *SF Commentary* with ease. This had not been the case with my previous clockwork, steam-driven desktop computer, a product of the cyber Stone Age. The USB stick in particular has been a revelation, though I understand they've been around for a few years. In a way they remind me of the glass fingers the title character of Harlan Ellison's *Outer Limits* story 'Demon With a Glass Hand' fits into his computerised hand in order to increase its knowledge. Good to see present day technology is finally catching up with the 1960s.

In the last couple of years I've become greatly interested in podcasts, especially the fiction ones, which I see as a kind of modern revival of old time radio drama. I've also found them a wonderful market, especially for reprints. With my discovery of the newfangled USB stick I'm now at the local cyber café every weekend downloading like mad and gradually building up a goodly collection of genre audio works, both fiction and non-fiction.

(2 November 2012)

What have I published lately? No, not even a story in the obligatory small press Australian anthology. Well, not an Australian one anyway. Last week brought in a copy of a

UK/French antho *The Ghosts and Scholars Book of Shadows*, with a story of mine therein. Published by Sarob Press in France in English, if that doesn't sound double Dutch. Last year I entered a competition to write a prequel or sequel to any of M. R. James's ghost stories. My entry 'Anningley Hall, Early Morning' — a prequel to James's 'The Mezzotint' — didn't win, but was selected to appear with the winner and ten other runners-up in this neat little hardback of 150 pages with a print run of 340 copies. The cover — lacking any text denoting title or editor probably because it was being sold on-line and didn't have to shout 'Buy me! Buy me!' from a bookshop shelf — shows an Edwardian gentleman hiding from a ghost pursuing him down a beach, a scene from one of James's best known stories, 'Oh Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad'. The artist is Paul Lowe, who did the cover for the Carnacki book I wrote with Chico Kidd, *472 Cheyne Walk*. And like all Paul Lowe's work, his illustration for this book is rather fine. Why he hasn't been picked up by some of the larger publishing houses I don't know — unless he has been. But an unjustly underrated artist if he hasn't.

Last March I had a space opera 'Thirty Minutes for New Hell' in *Aurealis* 48. 'A ripping deep-space yarn' as it was described in the editorial. When I'm not channeling M. R. James it appears I'm giving E. E. 'Doc' Smith a run for his money.

Last March also saw my 2008 Ditmar-winning story 'The Dark and What It Said' podcast on Pseudopod — its sixth publication.

A couple of further podcasts are coming up, one from *19 Nocturne Boulevard* (a solicited story no less) and one from *Dunestee Audio Fiction Magazine*. *Dunestee* is a particular favourite, not least because they seem to accept most of what I send them. I enjoy their rambling talks after the stories too. The show's American hosts take

great pleasure in introducing my stories in dodgy cod Australian accents picked up from Monty Python. Where most podcasts will generally have an upper limit of 4000 words on submissions — their perceived market is often the iPod-equipped commuter — *Dunesteef* is willing to look at longer stories. Their guidelines ask that for all submissions over 8000 words the first 1000 words only be sent with a synopsis. This I did when submitting a 9000-word story. Came their deathless reply, 'Dude, just send the whole thing. Like the hot chick on the non-topless beach, the rules don't apply to you.' One of my more gratifying editorial responses.

Something unusual on the horizon, perhaps, maybe, could be. For the last five years a movie project's been bubbling away under my novella 'In Quinn's Paddock', which appeared in Bill Congreve's *Southern Blood*. It's based on the still unsolved Gatton Mystery. On the night of 26 December 1898, a man and his two sisters were brutally murdered in a paddock outside the country town of Gatton, about 100 kilometres west of Brisbane. Speculation as to who did it and why continues to this day. The script of the movie version of my story is done. Actors and tech people and even some locations and equipment have been lined up. All that's lacking is finance. We've been here, we've been there, and though we've had interest in places nobody's willing to back us. All we need is a few million. Is that too much to ask?

An article about Space Age Books? Doubt I could do more than a few lines of reminiscence. I recall my surprise and delight when I found the shop one lunch time in 1973. I would wander in most Saturday afternoons during the 1970s, prowling up and down, making my choices but not immediately picking them up. After half an hour of this browsing I'd then rush back to the various books and collect them. Fronting up to the counter with my purchases I'd always look to see if the latest edition of *Australian SF News* was there, and if it was would plunk down an extra 50c for it. I found Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War* at Space Age, one of only a few books I ever bought just on the strength of its blurb. Another such was Robert Bloch's collection *The Opener of the Way*, which attracted my attention because of 'The author of PSYCHO' on the cover. 'The publishers regret to announce that there is no blurb to inform prospective readers about the contents of *The Opener of the Way*. Unfortunately the person designated to write the blurb was found dead after reading the book, having apparently suffered some mysterious kind of severe shock.' A book by the author of *Psycho* that could scare me to death? Grab!

Circa 1984 I began co-producing an SF radio show at 3PBS in St Kilda. My partner in radio crime, Glen Matthews, somehow organised an interview with Space Age Books 'identity' Paul Stevens. The interview, recorded on cassette, was conducted at the back of the shop, dim and oddly quiet in the after hours. Paul talked of the practicalities of running an SF bookshop and of the then state of Australian science fiction in general. I don't recall the interview ever airing on our radio show, and where the tapes are today — if they still exist — is anyone's guess.

The good vibes produced by AussieCon II in 1985 were tempered by the closure soon after of Space Age. A

sad day when I went in for the last time and availed myself of their closing down sale. There was another genre-related bookshop further down Swanston Street, Mino-taur Books, and it still blazed away. But though they catered to SF they were too diffuse in their broader 'popular culture' orientation. They were not Space Age Books.

Somewhere in my back room – The Room Into Which You Must Never Go – I still have a Space Age Books paper bag. If ever I should have a house fire that paper bag and my Ditmar will be the two things I'll rescue.

(4 November 2012)

You asked if I'd considered submitting work to Twelfth Planet or Ticonderoga. Earlier this year Twelfth Planet rejected an SF novella submission, but I still have a collection of eight ghost stories, including two novellas, under consideration with Ticonderoga. By mad coincidence last night a friend of mine, Carole Nomarhas (author of 'Soul Horizon' in *Alien Shores*) phoned to run by me the idea of starting her own electrical press. The possibility of re-publishing my 2001 POD *Book 13: A Collection of Ghost Stories* was aired, along with the publication of a second, larger collection. As John Lennon once said, 'Strange days indeed, mama. Most peculiar.'

(11 November 2012)

LLOYD PENNEY

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Time has been at a premium lately because I have finally gotten myself some editorial work. I'm at a newsletter company just north of Toronto, so that, plus the evening the job and the commute from one to the other, makes sure I've little time for writing. Yet ...

SFC 83: Brian Aldiss has it right ... if it wasn't for the science fiction fans being as vocal and visible as they've been all these decades, SF writers may have had a difficult time marketing their products, and the genre may have been much more ghettoised than it's already been. I have called fandom SF's marketing department before, but only when fandom is being responsible and constructive.

Loading fanzines on eFanzines.com bring many zines together, but makes it one of the few places, if indeed, the only place, to get fresh zines, baked daily. I hope Bill Burns has the whole site backed up somewhere. I can only imagine that a fanzine fan from the '40s or '50s would see electronic zines and a place to store them as pure science fiction, but us jaded modern fans would rather go back to paper zines, and complain about those phoney e-zines ... For readers of such a far-seeing literature, we sure can be short-sighted and conservative.

I could never write up my impressions of Phil Dick's writings the way Guy Salvidge has. Obviously, Dick's novels have made a lasting impression on him, and good for both him and Phil Dick, and good for us, too. I remember thinking when *Blade Runner* came out, how much of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* had been trimmed out or ignored? I wonder if a remake is in order, something that would keep more of the novel, or at least

be more explanatory than the original? Like most, reading the works of Phil Dick is a ride, full of ups and downs, and stops and starts, with the odd gem in the gravel. I'd like to read more about Dick, and some of the associated books on him do look very interesting.

I can't tell you how many locs I've written over the years have been sent out via the Internet, and promptly eaten by same. The Net gets hungry, and will graze on some of the most important documents you can imagine. I do keep track of what I send out, so if you are missing letters of comment from me, Bruce, let me know, and I will find them and send them to you.

I wish I'd been able to meet Susan Wood. The late Mike Glicksohn told me a lot about her, and I've certainly read a lot about her, and some of her writing. No matter the interest or the field, it seems sometimes that our best die early. If the good die young, some of us will live forever.

SFC 84: I know how difficult it is to keep track of friends, especially if you made those friends in the pre-computer era. For me, Facebook has been a blessing for finding those friends from public school, high school, radio, university and early fannish days. That feeling of 'Ah, I have found you again!' is great. Some friends have passed away in the meantime, but at least there is the satisfaction of knowing what happened, combined with the sorrow of not being able to say goodbye.

I sometimes wonder ... did we all have lonely childhoods? Fandom has provided us with the friendships, both short-term and long-term, that we may have craved over the years. Perhaps that's the reason Facebook has been a blessing to me. All my fannish friends help to make up for not having any in public school ... they didn't understand what I liked, and smart kids were at the bottom of everyone's social chart.

Literally yesterday, the World Fantasy Convention was staged in Toronto, and we weren't there. With WFC, I'm never really certain whether members of fandom or readers are welcome there. I know the committee worked hard on staging this, and the response has been universally positive. We know the chairman, have a little history with him, and were sure we wouldn't get through the front door, anyway. No time available to take off, as well. This coming weekend is the big local literary convention, and it might be a little author-thin, but what can you do?

I was able to purchase an advance copy of *The Weird* by the VanderMeers, and while I didn't read everything in it, I was pleased to see there was a lot in it I'd already read. That truly is a monster book, and I was pleased to see it had won a WFC Award for Best Anthology in Toronto just a few days ago.

(8 November 2012)

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

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Somewhere in one of these two issues you mention the difficulty of obtaining some of Brian Aldiss's most recent works ... and then list a number of titles of which I had



hitherto never heard. One likes to think that one is keeping up with what one's favourite authors are producing, even if one is only noting the titles on a list for later purchase, but in this case obviously not. But then you yourself are presumably equally unsighted on much of Damien Broderick's recent output, and perhaps for the same reasons I hadn't heard of the Aldiss works you reference: the fragmentary — even niche-like — nature of modern publishing, in which the gaps left by the multinational conglomerates are being filled by specialist publishers, print-on-demand outfits, and e-books; a way of reaching audiences, perhaps, but much of it seems to be undertaken with a remarkable lack of publicity — only those who are already in the know (already subscribed to these outfits' e-mail lists) will be aware of what's available, but less committed audiences are being left gradually behind. Which perhaps raises questions as to how contemporary writers can possibly support themselves; but on that I won't speculate.

Nevertheless, we do seem to be in something of a transitional period for fiction publishing, and I boldly predict that by the end of this decade there will be almost no fiction at all still being published in physical form, except for special collector's editions in slipcases with silk bookmarks, marbled end-papers, hand-tooled rhinoceros covers, and all the other folderol that justifies the inflated price per volume that is the consequence of a small print run. Fiction, which is (after all) just text and nothing but text, is eminently suited to e-publishing; it's non-fiction, with its non-text appurtenances — tables, plans, diagrams, maps, photographs, artist's reconstructions, etc. — that are difficult to grasp and cross-refer if available only electronically that I think will still be published in physical form for many years to come. The irony of this transition is that today's shelves of paper-

backs, which now have almost no secondhand value, will in ten years' time be as rare as hen's teeth and therefore command a significant premium ... if anyone could be persuaded to store the stuff for long enough to realise such a value. But most people probably won't (why clutter your house with yellowing paper which, very speculatively, may have a future value?), and landfill seems the most likely option. (We recently cleared out my late father's library in preparation for moving my mother into a smaller retirement flat, but while the aviation history found a ready buyer the paperback and hardback fiction went straight to a charity shop, which doubtless keeps a note of what doesn't sell and every three months or so empties its shelves into the recycling bins.)

The transition to electronic publishing — or, more importantly, the demise of the typewriter in favour of the word processor — is doubtless also responsible for the increasing length of contemporary novels, as complained about by Mark Plummer (who voiced similar views in a recent issue of *Banana Wings*). In an earlier epoch, authors had to physically type out a manuscript, correct and redraft it by hand, and then physically type it out again (and perhaps, if an especially complex or taxing work, repeat the hand-correction-and-retyping process to produce a third version). Such laborious, not to mention tedious, work would surely have encouraged brevity on the part of the creator — whereas now, when texts exist wholly electronically, revision requires next to no physical effort; it is easy to just Add More Stuff. And then Add Yet More Stuff, just because. And go on revising and expanding the text until one ends up with doorstep-sized two parters of the likes of Connie Willis's *Black Out/Clear Off*, which has lately been exercising some of *SFC*'s readers.

Elsewhere, Gregory Benford quotes William Gibson's observation that science fiction 'has been overtaken by the future it looked towards, and 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' but dismisses both Gibson as having 'turned into more a reporter on style than on any useful ideas for our dark futures' and Gibson's view of SF on the grounds that 'our major problems are still sfinal, and SF has a larger role than ever in envisioning our choices and futures ahead'. I disagree. Benford's view of science fiction as having some sort of blueprint function for addressing the future is a particularly US one, perhaps derivative of its genre origins, and unlikely to be shared by the SF writers of other nations and cultures (except, perhaps, and for a short period, SF writers in the old Soviet Union, who were pretty much required to look towards the future, to demonstrate the ineluctable triumph of Marxism-Leninism and inspire communist youth to rededicate themselves to the heroic struggle against decadent western capitalism (etc. etc.) — but no one outside the old Soviet Union would ever have taken that seriously). Science fiction, just like any other artistic endeavour, is primarily addressed to the present, and any ur-future it might concoct for the purpose of story is simply a vehicle for the dramatisation of present experiences and expectations. (Even the 'radical, hard SF' novels of Iain M. Banks, Peter Hamil-

ton, Alastair Reynolds, and Charles Stross — these are responses to contemporary advances in scientific knowledge and its technological application, not attempts to imagine what a future or futures might look like.)

As I argued in another fanzine a couple of years ago (*Chunga* 17, November 2010), science fiction as we have typically understood it has indeed been overtaken by the futures it once imagined — but even as those futures were being aborted as unachievably expensive, SF was mutating and ramifying, and has now so thoroughly penetrated popular culture (television, advertising, fashion, gaming, the cinema, even elements of the modern mainstream novel) that in many cases it no longer looks like science fiction at all. To quote one reviewer for *The Guardian* newspaper, science fiction has now 'powered its way to full-spectrum dominance of the cultural battlefield', and having done so demands that we do (as Gibson says) 'read the world as SF'. Science fiction is a style, and as such is much more interesting than the (rather dull) post-Gernsbackian theorising about how to cope with peak oil or climate change that Benford would appear to prefer. Indeed, as a style, SF is not just more interesting but more powerful: because it now provides the context for so much of modern life, it makes the addressing of these 'sfinal problems' much easier, because the genre clutter that would otherwise have got in the way has been sidelined.

One other point which might be worth making about the 'blueprint function' of US science fiction is that the US is not the global power that it once was, and (as have all imperial powers before it) has begun to lose its preeminence — and thus its cultural dominance. The rising powers of the twenty-first century (China, India, Brazil) have entirely different outlooks and cultural histories; if they ever saw any congruency in US science fiction in decades past (which I doubt), they certainly won't in the decades to come.

(27 November 2012)

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I keep worrying I didn't send my letter of comment of the Sturgeon issue of *Steam Engine Time* — I sure hope I did.

[*brg* You sent it — a two-part letter. Thanks.*]

I am very sorry there will be no more paper zines, though I utterly understand and support you in your decision. I just know me — I have tried a number of times to read things online and I just don't finish them (usually I don't even start them). To me it is a rare and exotic pleasure to curl up with a zine, but it is annoying to have the computer on, so I do what I have to do there and then get out, much the wearier for the experience, generally. Maybe sheer withdrawal from your zines will force me to change my ways.

I had an awful thought while walking away from the PKD issue the other day. One day you will die. (Or I might go first, and never have to hear of this.) That shook

me. I have read your zines for so long, and life has brought with it many changes. You have lost many friends, parents even, and so have I. But somehow I think of you as timeless, unchanging to some degree, just as I have thought of your zines. Now your zines are forever altered, and maybe that is why I got suddenly that you, too, will not be with me forever.

So for sure let's hang out when I get to Melbourne, and enjoy our little slice of eternity together for a little while.

(15 December 2012)

[*brg* Thanks for visiting us in Melbourne a few months ago — a very enjoyable couple of days. :: You did spook me with your sudden thought, 'One day you will die.' I had thought of this, especially as my father died when he was three years older than I am now. I keep thinking: 'How will I keep publishing *SF Commentary* when I'm dead? And how can I keep listening to Beethoven, Roy Orbison, and the Rolling Stones?']*]

MURRAY MOORE

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'Guy Salvidge on the Novels of Philip K. Dick' is the banner title on the cover of *SF Commentary* 83. Poor PDK; ditto poor H.P. Lovecraft: two writers discovered by the world post-mortem.

I have seen a full shelf of Dick fiction in both new book and used book bookstores. Lovecraft's name must be equally well known to a wide swathe of people, many of whom have not read his fiction. And in the first letter, Brian Aldiss, citing Virginia Woolf, muses that if he (Aldiss) is read two centuries hence, far-future readers might be reading his journal (72 volumes to date), not his fiction. Harry Warner maintained that historians would discover fanzines as a source of information about people's feelings and beliefs, how people lived and so on.

I had unread books sort of arranged in four rooms of our house, as one does. In late December I spent hours shifting and rearranging. In the process of bringing order I found that I was able to part with books, hard-cover and trade paper and paperback books, sufficient in number that, if piled atop each other, the resulting tower of books would be taller than my six-foot-tall self.

One of the purged books was my 803-page copy of *The Concise Pepys Diary*. Never got around to reading it, never mind the longer, unconcise, version. I am optimistic that Brian Aldiss's *Journal* might be more interesting, but I won't be alive in 200 years.

Unfiltered autobiographies written by Dave Hartwell and Ted White would be fascinating: I suggested as much to Hartwell but he demurred telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth: he knows too much that others would be embarrassed to have revealed, was my impression of his answer.

But, Bruce, if Aldiss has mentioned you in his *Journal*, what a mystery you will be to readers of the *Aldiss Journal* in 200 years. Yes, you might be mentioned in the

twentieth-to-twenty-first century's *Domedays Book* and *PepysDiary*, the *Aldiss Journal*.

I knew the word 'kipple' but I did not know, or if I did know I had forgotten, that PKD was the coiner of the word. US fan Ted Pauls published a personalzine named *Kipple*, I recall.

Shifting books made me determined to read more books, but here I lie on our blue couch, reading and locating a fanzine. I blame you, Bruce. Most readers go through phases, or streaks if you will, of reading an author's output. I see that I have read twelve Dick novels; six of them are anointed as Library of America novels. I rarely re-read but I remember that I have read twice *The Game-Players of Titan*. The other twice-read Dick novel is either *Valis* or *Radio Free Albemuth*, circa 25 years ago.

I envy Guy Salvidge's purity of interest in Dick, and I commend you Bruce for doing what an editor should do, selecting material and presenting it to us, your friends, saying, in effect, 'Here. I think you'll like this.'

Perhaps my brain is no longer sufficiently elastic to appreciate Late Period Dick. I could re-read *Game-Players*, which begins 'It had been a bad night, and when he tried to drive home he had a terrible argument with his car.' Perhaps Marcel Proust would be more widely read if he had begun *Remembrance of Things Past* with a similarly snappy first line, not 'For a long time I used to go to bed early.' Really? That's Proust's idea of a snappy first line? I confess I am not a Proust expert: perhaps Proust's editor is partially responsible.

(5 January 2013)

JEFF HAMILL

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If you think that getting a letter from me once or twice a year is bad, in my e-mail to you of last June I just today noticed I had left out most of what I wanted to say — just this morning I found my outline that I had drafted for that June letter.

During the last two months I have been closely involved in helping prepare the graphics of four new Pathfinder books (one on women and the Cuban revolution, and the other on Cuba and Angola — both books are appearing in both English and Spanish). Just yesterday I worked on what I hope is the final round of corrections before the first printing. So I should have a little more time to catch up on my correspondence. (Not that I always use my time wisely.)

I've hardly read much for months — my book log for 2012 shows only 15 books read, the lowest number for me in probably 50 years. (By 'read much' I only mean completed books; of course, I have read a lot of technical, graphics design-ish this and that.) I should read Iain M. Banks's *Use of Weapons* for my next science fiction novel, but right now I'm working my way through Gogol's collected stories; Leo Tolstoy's *What Is Art?*; Terry Jones's *Evil Machines*; Victor J. Stenger's *The Fallacy of Fine-Tuning* (why the universe is not designed for us); and Michael Shermer's *The Believing Brain*. Should keep me busy for a bit.

Writing an article about Banks seems to be getting

increasingly remote. I read *Matter* last year, and I didn't care for it. For some reason that I can't quite pin down, Banks's novel reminded me too much of *The Lord of the Rings* in an unpleasant way. But I still plan to make my next SF novel to read *Use of Weapons*.

I enjoyed Hary Buerkett's comments, although his take on Marx is not what I had in mind.

Similarly, I appreciated what Yvonne Rousseau had to say. One of my favourite books is Joanna Russ's *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, and I suspect that it may be one of Yvonne's as well.

Steve Jeffery's letter I also found most interesting, and it showed me that I had not expressed myself very well (or, what amounts to the same thing, not thought matters through fully) when I muddled up how I tried to use the word 'literature'. Also, I looked through my letters to you, and I can't find where I wrote, 'SF is different because it deals with humanity's relationship to science and technology.' Maybe this is Steve's paraphrasing. But it should say, 'SF is different because it *allegedly* deals with humanity's relationship to science and technology.'

Since Steve mentioned Charles Stross, I read his online-published collection of short stories, *Toast*. Overall, I thought that the stories were entertaining and sharply written. But when he says in his introduction, 'Both fascism and Bolshevism were expressions of belief in a utopian ideal, however misplaced and bloody their methodologies', I have to take exception. (Presumably he meant the ideologies of fascism and Bolshevism were expressions of belief in a utopian ideal, but I don't agree with that either.)

Fascism and Bolshevism and any other political movement are expressions of class interest. Fascism began as a movement of the frustrated middle class, directed and financed by big capitalist banks and industries, ready to blame (and demonise) anyone and everyone (especially immigrants and the Jews) for the unfolding economic and social devastation in the world. In 1933, when Hitler came to power, the counter-revolution of the industrialists and bankers against the workers began.

Bolshevism, on the other hand, began as a movement of the working class, even though its best-known leaders were not themselves working-class in origin. The 1917 revolution was the workers' revolution — supported by the peasants — against the rule of the capitalists.

During the 1920s, the middle-class hangers-on of the Russian revolution began their own counter-revolution against the workers, all in the name of communism; Bolshevism was transformed into a horrible caricature of itself. That was all about class interests too.

I can't track down who recommended Ken MacLeod's novels to me, and I tried reading a few of them: *The Execution Channel*, and the 'Engines of Light' trilogy. I was disappointed; I wanted to like and enjoy them, but I didn't. They smelled too much of Realpolitik thinking for me. Well, not exactly, but I am having a very hard time formulating exactly why I didn't care for them.

Any science, any art, any workplace, even, has to use some common, specialised vocabulary to get the work done. It takes some effort and involvement in the work — practice — to learn this vocabulary in a meaningful and useful way. So I must apologise to Darko Suvin for my crack about translation into English — it's up to me

to learn more about science fiction and literary criticism.

Finally, I used Wikipedia to put together summaries of all the Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's books, which I plan to begin systematically re-reading later this year. Right after I read *Use of Weapons*.

(14 January 2013)

[*brg* I hope you are not continuing with the Banks reading program purely out of duty. If that's so, I relieve you of your duty. If the SF books are not enjoyable, then let the project go, and put it down to a 'learning experience' (euphemism for wasted time). I have read lots of Banks non-SF books, at least until he became extremely careless about 10 years ago, but I'm way behind on the SF books. I really do the job myself, instead of wishing it on to others.]

Thanks for various comments, especially some answer to the general ignorance about politics that characterises almost everybody in SF (well, everybody everywhere; I can't see that SF people are really all that much less familiar with political ideas than the general reading public). Somebody like you who is familiar with Marx's original writings should write a few choice paragraphs about the current consequences of failing to apply Marxian analysis to current social movements, especially in American and Europe. How are vast numbers of people persuaded to follow ideologies and politicians whose policies are in direct conflict with those of the working and unemployed class? How, in fact, has a permanent unemployed class been made acceptable, and how is it used? In Australia, the myth is that we have low unemployment, despite the evidence felt by every person who has been put out of a job over the last 40 years. There has been no period of low unemployment here since the early 1970s, but everybody is softened up to think that 5 per cent (official, not actual) is 'low'.*]

I was planning to read some of Banks's early SF novels in any case, so there's no sense of obligation there. If I like *Use of Weapons*, then I will read more of him. And make comments on them, but maybe not as systematically as you or I would like. One of my favorite SF-fantasy stories which I read ages ago was Brian W. Aldiss' 'Let's Be Frank', in which the protagonist (see, I do know some literary jargon!) shares his consciousness with his descendants — that would give me a chance to complete a few of my projects ...!

You're right that SF people are not worse than the rest of the general public in their political ignorance — but it rankles more, since one would think that the subject matter demands a wider view of the world.

As for writing 'a few choice paragraphs about the current consequences of failing to apply Marxian analysis to current social movements, especially in American and Europe. How are vast numbers of people persuaded to follow ideologies and politicians whose policies are in direct conflict with those of the working and unemployed class?' — well, Lenin beat me to it by nearly a century (see his *Imperialism*, for example). For more

contemporary writers, I would refer you to the Pathfinder catalogue (which you can see online if you like). The very rich own and control the means of expression as they do everything else; the middle classes in ordinary times follow the lead of their 'betters' because that's how you make a career for yourself.

The workers and the oppressed generally — the great majority — are not necessarily persuaded to follow these policies and politicians so much as they see no alternative. The destructive effects of middle-class 'socialism' — and the worst offender by far is Stalinism — cannot be overestimated. All the movements for the liberation of the working class, of toiling humanity — socialism, anarchism, communism — in the twentieth century have been shipwrecked by the corruption of their leaderships. No wonder the workers don't trust them, and rightly so. But without their own political movement, their own party that represents and fights for them, the working class will always remain at the mercy of middle class hucksters — and the capitalists can reap the benefits. The capitalists have all the weight of 'public opinion' and tradition and all that garbage behind them — and all they have to do is to keep the workers disorganised.

(14 January 2013)

DAVID LAKE

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It must be 40 years since I first read Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*. At that time (in the '70s) I thought it was a very clever novel, one of Dick's best. Yesterday and today I read it again — and was deeply moved, bowled over. It is a religious novel. Mercer is a Christ figure (even though he may be a fake, people can merge with him). He also physically saves Rick's life, after he has been exposed as a 'fake'. And near the end, Rick merges with him, feels his passion (the hill is Calvary, and Mercer 'descends into Hell' — the 'tomb world', and restores the dead bones to life) (cf Ezekiel Chap. 37). But his victory is only temporary. In the end 'kipple' — entropy — will get us all. And the animals Mercer resurrects will live out their natural life span, and die like the rest of us.

The androids are forces of death. Not really alive — they feel no empathy for us, but Rick feels empathy for them. And they only 'live' 4 years. I ended up, though an atheist, wishing some parts of Christianity were true.

And then I realised, I am partly an android. I have few 'friends' because I am highly introverted. And sometimes (not now) I wish Death to win — that the universe will be destroyed. It will, anyway. I am nearing 84, but I am quite healthy. I am wondering what to do with the rest of my life. I wish we had a 'cut-off' point like the androids — four years more for me strike me as *too much*.

(19 January 2013)

Thank you for your reply to my moan. You are right — one must seek out *newness*. And I've been trying hard: for over 14 years, since my wife's death. The trouble is, a couple of years back I came to a complete stop. I had been writing poems — then suddenly I knew I could never write anything again. And I haven't: I have said all

I need to say, achieved all I wanted to do in life. Do you know, I used to paint pictures — always murals, in the rough area under my main floor. There are big walls, and pillars, and over 45 years I painted almost every surface, including the pillars, with scenes from mythology or frivolous things — always on the side of life and optimism. A couple of years back I painted one section of a pillar with the naked figure of a brown woman, back view, reaching up to a red flaming sun. I had no special meaning (I think) when I did it. Then a few weeks back I saw that I could make a meaning. On the surface left of the woman I painted a dead brown tree. And without planning, the dead hands were reaching out to the sun and woman in a menacing way. Now it meant the end of life on earth — and now I can't paint anything more. I had made my final statement. But above and below the picture I wrote the words in black LIFE IS ENDING and in red BUT IT WAS WORTH IT. Oddly enough, in 1959, aged 30, I wrote a play for radio about a mad scientist destroying the world — and the last words, from a girl, were BUT IT WAS WORTH IT.

I am still struggling. But I don't like any music written after 1950, and I don't read contemporary novels. I am trying to escape into the world of my childhood — the 1930s. That was another planet, which I loved. This planet is so different — it's ugly, and getting worse. All I can do now is read old texts. I am reading with a German friend the libretto of *The Magic Flute* — in German, of course. When we finish this we will go on to the poems of Heine, which I love. For me Heine is a much better poet than Goethe, and I have translated some of his work into rhymed English verse. So you see, I have not given up...

Wish me luck. And good luck to you with the magazines.

(21 January 2013)

[*brg* Translating poetry from German doesn't sound like giving up to me. I've never had the facility with languages I would like to have had, so I doubt if I could ever set about such an enterprise. Elaine began reading books in French nearly 30 years ago, and she still finds it hard to get into to a new book each time. But then, she is reading Proust in French ... gradually.]

I suspect the end of the human race as we know it is coming faster than we could have suspected, but that's because we simply did not know how much we had stuffed up the planet until the statistics started coming in within the last two decades. Changes will be very sudden, I suspect; blows that people can't recover from. The worst threat seems to be to the oceans themselves, from carbonification. Some have estimated that the planet could simply turn into Venus very quickly if the sea cannot keep absorbing carbon dioxide. Much worse effects than simple overheating of the atmosphere. It's all like being part of a scientific experiment that one didn't know had been started 200 years ago. I wonder if there will be witnesses left to read the records of the changes.*]

Bruce, your most recent email stunned me a bit. I knew

things were going that way — but not quite so fast. Yes, we are losing the battle, but the thing is to fight on ... My favourite poetry (which I have learnt by heart) is battle-field poetry, where the speaker knows all is lost, but he will fight on till he is slain. Oddly enough, the best pieces are not in (modern) English, but in Old English or Homeric Greek. 'The Battle of Maldon' — it was written soon after a real battle, in 991, which the English lost to the Vikings. Near the end the old retainer Byrhtwold says he will not escape, but die by his lord:

Thought shall be harder heart the keener
Courage the greater as our strength lessens ...
[my translation]

Eight lines. I have painted one line on my front fence:

Ic eom frod feores; fram ic ne wille... [I am old in
years; I will not go hence].

This is one good thing about our lot: we don't celebrate victories, only brave defeats. Gallipoli, yes; Waterloo, no.

One of my little battles is reading three times a week to my partner Ann. She is almost blind (macular degeneration) so I am always searching for cheerful books to read to her. She is a good battler — better than I.

Good fighting, while the planet lasts.

(23 January 2013)

PETE YOUNG

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On 25 January 2013, Phil Stephensen-Payne wrote: 'Bruce was talking about indexing his *SF Commentary*.'

It's worth mentioning that as a moderating editor at the ISFDb, as a long-term project I began indexing *SF Commentary* a few months ago, starting with paper issues at hand and the more recent editions currently up at efanzines.com.

SF COMMENTARY: <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/seriesgrid.cgi?32684>

BG: <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/ea.cgi?19631>

Needless to say, there's still a l-o-o-o-n-g way to go, Bruce, but it's enjoyable bibliographic work.

(26 January 2013)

[*brg* Your bibliographical guide to my magazines is pretty astonishing — but I wish you had told me you were doing this work; otherwise I might have duplicated it. Luckily I have not done any indexing for these issues, but was vaguely thinking about starting from the beginning of *SF Commentary*.*]

Of course it's always been my intention to let you know I'd begun, sooner rather than later, but as usual the urgent ends up taking priority over the important, or some things just end up sliding forever into tomorrow.

ISFDb get about 32,000 visits a month and the database is currently around 20 Gb. It's probably the biggest (although I believe there is a similar but smaller German database), and having as substantial a bibliography there as possible that's searchable and connected to other entries is an obvious advantage over other indexes and databases.

[*brg* How widely spread is the knowledge that you are doing this work? I can alert people each time they want to find material, especially in *Steam Engine Time*.*]

Only a few fen know of it at the moment (Mark and Claire, Tony Keen plus maybe one or two others) as I've only recently begun indexing *SF Commentary*, *Steam Engine Time*, and *The Metaphysical Review*, plus of course other editors at the ISFDb probably know of this project. While looking around for fanzines there I realised there is a rather large gap in fanzine presence at the ISFDb, but there is already the facility to add fanzines under the ISFDb's 'Rules of Acquisition'. I reckoned *SF Commentary* was probably the most important missing current fanzine that needed to be added, plus of course *Banana Wings*, *Chunga*, and a few others I'll eventually get around to, so that's where I've started.

I keep a constantly-updated list of my projects at the ISFDb Wiki: <http://www.isfdb.org/wiki/index.php/User:PeteYoung> (the ISFDb has a less-known and probably less-used second half, the 'Wiki' side). From there these link to the ISFDb Wiki pages I've created for the fanzines/magazines, which then link directly to the listings for the publications themselves as they are listed at the ISFDb. One of the best projects I completed recently was indexing the entire run of the *PKDS Newsletter*, which Paul Williams sent to me a few years ago: http://www.isfdb.org/wiki/index.php/Fanzine:The_Philip_K._Dick_Society_Newsletter

If I've got paper issues in hand I can work perfectly well from those, but I've now indexed all my paper copies! (I didn't have many). Word files would certainly help in adding basic information, but to do the indexing properly a PDF that I can see and refer to readily is certainly the best, in absence of a paper copy. So, what would help enormously is having PDFs of older *SFC* issues. Is it possible you could you send me copies of whatever earlier PDFs you have, please, then I can start making some proper progress now that the basic ground work is already done, and *SFC* (and your other fanzines) have a presence there that can be added to.

Just some personal info, as I know we've only met the once at Corflu in San Francisco several years ago, and I've probably not featured much on your radar! I'm now living in Thailand with wife and three-year-old son, but I'm also back in the UK every other month. I get down to Australia about once or twice a year; however, unfortunately, it's only Sydney I get to visit with the job (I'm cabin crew for BA), and I never get to Melbourne these days.

I would certainly very much appreciate paper copies of *SFC*, and it's a little known fact I'm also working on a new fanzine which will appear some time this year (April, possibly later).

(26 January 2013)

GARY HOFF
Perth WA

Have only missed the first two SwanCons when I was going to Den Hague for ConFiction in 1990. From 1992 to 2006 I have been to 11 worldcons — mainly in the USA and mostly working in committees. I started very early to add to my superannuation fund, and two years ago decided I had enough. Since I never married, I was able to pay off my house many years ago. I have now put my application through for the Commonwealth Senior Health card, which means 50% off Council, water, and electricity rates, as well as free public transport from 9 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays, which are great savings. I also still manage now a two- to three-month yearly trip back to Germany — as long as my mother is still alive (she's 93 now). Unfortunately that means no more other trips east for conventions.

(1 February 2013)

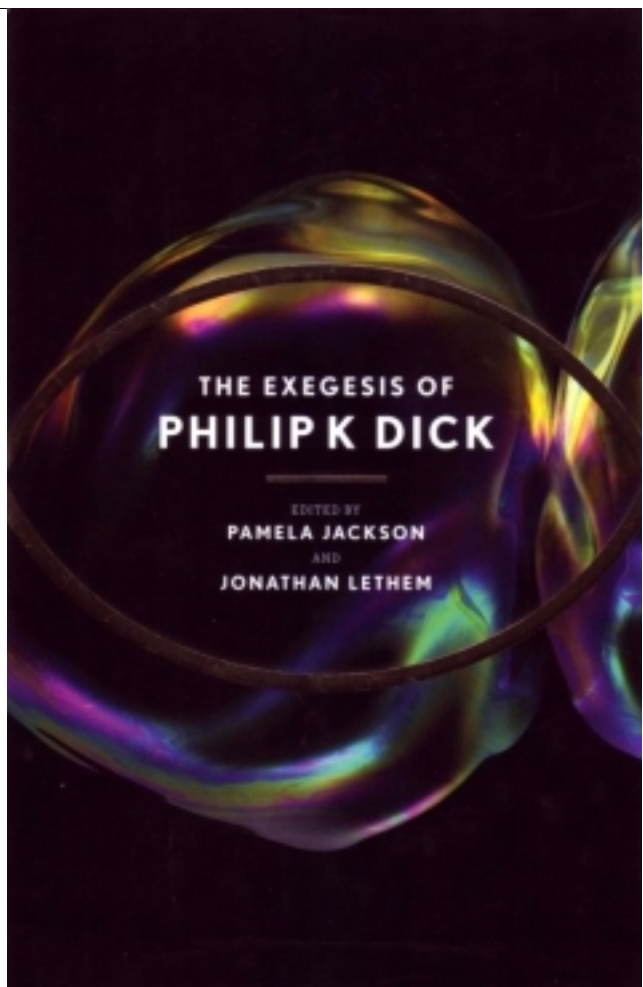
[*brg* Great to catch up, Gary. I should remind readers that Gary used to be the untiring unofficial colour photographer of conventions during the early 1970s, when he sent me some of my most valued sets of convention photos. However, I've seen him only a few times in the last forty years — until we have been sort of reunited by the internet.*]

STEPHEN CAMPBELL
52 Aitkins Road, Warrnambool VIC 3280

David Russell gave me as a gift a copy of Philip K. Dick's *Exegesis*, which gives insight into his particular reasons for writing his most important novels, and the transcendental qualities of such. This work is very heavy going, mainly because of a repetitive self-dialogue that arises from a revelatory experience that he had. Sometimes distressingly he reverts to a messianic flavour, but I cannot doubt the sincerity of his translation of his experience, because of some of the self-effacing honesties he is willing to reveal. *SF Commentary* actually gets a mention in one of his few down-to-earth reminiscences. I'm hard pressed to recognise any divine providence. Many of Dick's arguments are justifications for and reference to his own written fiction. Possibly all creativity has divine origins, but it does make the creator of the work divine in himself. Man invents God because he is not God itself.

Of inventing: I have almost completed the story trilogy of *Tumul of Orbits* that does not require a three-page glossary to read, although suspension of belief and attention to detail are required. I am half way through another 80-page story of black-and-white panels with dialogue and very little narrative. This is similar to writing a play, except that the players (in the panels) can offer no interpretation. Unlike a film with a timeline, pages can be turned back of the attention to the story becomes confused.

I just found out that Micheline's son Reynah is now president of the Victorian Law Institute, and I am sad that Miche didn't survive to witness her child's success. By your unknowing influence I met Micheline at the 1973 Melbourne Easter convention, and lived with her



and Reynah for ten years. I will always remember his embarrassment when a bearded, long-haired bohemian artist turned up at this school to escort him home. While in sight of his schoolmates he would walk three or four steps ahead of me, but when at home he was like my own loving child. I remain in contact with him and his wife and two children.

[*brg* Stephen and I both met Micheline and her then five-year-old son at the 1973 Easter Convention in Melbourne. Later that year, she and Reynah called in at my place in Carlton Street a week before I was due to leave for America for my trip to Torcon 2, Canada, USA, and England. I was in the middle of collating the 150-page issue of SF Commentary that I did indeed publish and post before I set out. The whole magazine was lying in 75 little piles of paper all over the floor of two rooms. 'Look!' said Reynah. 'He's making a book!' :: I wonder if Reynah, now 45 years old and a successful lawyer, would recognise me now.*]

I am still attempting to do oil paintings, but only of subjects that seem worthy of putting in such a lengthy and refined effort. The new curator (Irish, progressive) of the Warrnambool Regional Gallery had expressed interest in showing my work, but insists that it must be for sale rather than just exhibition. I find my own reluctance bemusing, considering my pension income, but the turning of my art works into commodities still baffles

me. I would rather be able to sell reproductions of my stories, since they are already in an appropriate format for commerce.

(21 March 2013)

JOHN-HENRI HOLMBERG
PO Box 94, S-260 40, Viken, Sweden

In Connie Willis's *Blackout/All Clear* novel, she falls prey to a variant of the same trap Follett stepped into with his twentieth-century novels, which I mentioned recently here: his research was meticulous and he couldn't really bear to leave out too much of it, so he had to rush his characters through everything, much to the detriment of characterisation, believability, pacing, realism and writing. Willis, it seems, has gathered such an immense amount of eyewitness accounts, fascinating minutiae, often moving stories and testimony from the war years in London that she simply couldn't force herself to leave it out. And so produced a sadly indifferent novel, where my suggestion would have been to write a good one at 300 pages and try to find a publisher for an 800-page collection of Blitz stories. She easily could have; World War II is perennially popular, to the absurd point that a couple of months ago I translated the *fifth* book to be published in Sweden about the British attempts to sink the German battleship *Tirpitz*, one of the most drawn-out, costly, and ultimately totally pointless operations of the entire war.

(16 May 2013)

DAVID BOUTLAND (David Rome)
405 The Ridgway, Lisarow NSW 2250

Hope all goes well for you. I never have thanked you for giving David Rome a mention and that did produce a small flurry of sales. Thank you.

I won't go into the dismal experience of putting my books on Kindle again. I've bored you already with that. Right now, I have a couple of David Rome paperback crime thrillers up, but am exploring the alternative possibility of getting an omnibus of four crime-themed paperbacks published by a real publisher. I've borrowed the four books from a collector (my nephew), and have done a bit of rewriting. I reckon they're not a bad read. Got a working title and maybe a cover blurb: 'Four killer novels from the golden days of pulp'.

It's not about making money; it's just the nostalgia. I went to relieve it all again: postmen's palpitations, the lot.

Speaking of nostalgia, I resold my short story 'Charley's Chair' (first published in *New Writings in Horror & the Supernatural*) to David Sutton of Shadow Publishing. He was the original editor, and has reproduced the whole collection from 1 and 2 under the title *Horror! Under the Tombstone*. He tells me in a recent letter that 14 of the contributors have passed away, including E. C. Tubb, Ken Bulmer, R. W. Mackelworth, and Michael G. Coney.

You may already know this, but it came as a shock to me. I've never considered the fact that when I was writing for Nova, I was only 23 years old, and those like Bulmer

and Tubb were probably many years older. I'll be 75 in December. So will David Rome, coincidentally.

(13 August 2013)

[*brg* Your name came up recently on one of the fannish e-lists, Fictionmags, and again during a talk by Andrew Nette at the Nova Mob, so I was going to write to you. And then your letter arrived ...

Good to hear that my piece on David Rome did lead to a few enquiries, and in turn that has led to more publishing on the internet.*]

MATTHEW DAVIS
15 Impney Close, Church Hill North,
Redditch B98 9LZ, England

Why did I write the Theodore Sturgeon article (in *Steam Engine Time* 13) with you in mind? The reasons were twofold.

Once I had a firm idea of what I wanted the essay to do and the territory I would cover I knew its length would be a problem. I expected it to be at least 20,000 words plus, with the notes alone probably almost as long as a short article. That it ended up almost half as long again seemed almost immaterial at that point. I suspect the entire piece would probably have been a little longer than a complete issue of *New York Review of Science Fiction*. 30,000 words is half a short novel. *Horizon* devoted a couple of issues to printing an entire large work and so has *The New Yorker* but it's very rare. You've published some very long articles already in your various zines so I hoped you might not be too appalled at the mass of it. So thank you for that. Also as you put a copy online that would make it just a little more accessible to direct to and pickup readers.

Second, it was a generalist article — not addressing a particular theme or theory-propelled viewpoint, which is what much of the academic SF critical magazines deliver. There's a theme, viewpoint, and conclusion to my article, but for me it was more about the credible organisation and presentation of Sturgeon's life and work. Maybe the section on *More Than Human* and its relation to his contemporary work would have been publishable independently, but the challenge for me was to see if I could make the whole damn thing cohere without exhausting the reader's patience. Others may think otherwise. The critical and biographical essays of Saintsbury, Leslie Stephens, Macaulay, and Lytton Strachey may not be everybody's models but they were mine in this case.

I haven't seen a physical issue of *Foundation* in about three or four years. Unless one has survived unannounced, all of the sf bookshops of Birmingham and London have closed. My large local library ceased taking the magazine at about the same time. The Foundation Collection at Liverpool University Library, though, has been incredibly useful and I suspect I've exhausted some of the library staff's patience over the years, and particularly over the last six months, with large requests for photocopies of Fritz Leiber's work in fanzines.

Thanks for letting me know that people are reading the essay. I've seen people talk about Fictionmags here and there but I've never seen an obvious link. Glad you

have regular work in these precarious times. I currently hold what is the stupidest job I've ever had to date (and this includes the time when I had to video-record a number of elderly women having their perilabial areas inexpertly depilated for a national competition), and unfortunately the lengthy commuting leaves me just a little too fatigued most days to do much than read and note-take.

(16 August 2013)

[*brg* The members of the Fictionmags e-list include people from every aspect of science fiction: writers, collectors, editors, bibliographers, and even some ordinary fans such as me. When a lengthy discussion of the work of Theodore Sturgeon started, I had to remind the members of your brilliant essay on Sturgeon in *Steam Engine Time* 13. :: And why did I not save this letter for the last *SET* letter column? (a) Because I have no idea when I will have the time to produce that fabled issue; and (b) I want to keep alive the idea that *SF Commentary* is the last remaining place where people can send long, serious, but not-too-academic articles about some aspect of science fiction literature. Unless, of course, *NYRSF* is now taking much longer articles now that it is online. (But I haven't seen a copy since it went online.)*]

WILLIAM BREIDING

PO Box 961, Dellslow WV 26531, USA

I have been reading from the *SFC Reprint Edition: First Year 1969*. I think was impressed most so far about *First Year 1969* really is your own writing. It shows a side of you with which I wasn't familiar — you were riding high on the wave of your own literacy and youthful energy. I can promise you I will be reading it all the way through. It may take a while, but It'll happen. Overall I find these early issues way more to my tastes than Hartwell's *NYRSF*. I passed on all the the early issues of *NYRSF* I'd ordered to the Clarion West auction to benefit writers too poor to attend on their own.

Your 'True in 1969, but no longer correct' interlineation at the bottom of every page has become my mantra, and if I ever do another fanzine it will appear as a (credited) interlino somewhere.

Your writing made me want to know more — about your childhood, and formative reading experiences, along the lines of the piece ('How I Got Here') I wrote for *Outworlds* back in the 90s.

(14 October 2012)

Last night I finished reading the *Reprint*. As I've grown older I no longer sleep the night through, usually waking a number of times. Last night each time I awoke and drifted back off to sleep I dreamed about you. These were not dreams of you in your sixties or of you pubbing your ish. You and I and a number of other people were having strange adventures gallivanting about in weird landscapes. You looked as you did in 1969, all moody and broody. I'm afraid we were doing nothing socially conscious and you would have considered my dream badly

S F COMMENTARY REPRINT EDITION: FIRST YEAR 1969

SF Commentary Nos. 1-8

Edited by Bruce Gillespie

BRUCE GILLESPIE
Publisher

written, ill-conceived, and horribly transitioned.

The final dream left me amused. As I made coffee I recalled that you and I were in a small, scruffy, third world store looking at a wide variety of grapes to take on our adventures. You were your 1969 self. The proprietor was Leigh Edmunds as he looks today.

In 1969 I was 13 and very unsophisticated. I was reading fantasy literature then, but wouldn't discover fandom until I was 15, and not become noticed by fandom at large until I was 17 when *Starfire*, my fanzine, was born of my necessity to communicate, in any way possible, my fairly inarticulate interior, which had zero critical facility.

As I made my way through the 145 pages of (what, 8 point?) reduced type, the term that arose, fondly, was 'it's the sercon boys at play'. This was particularly true of the panel discussions. Although you all seemed to be serious young men there was a sense of lively minds playing in the land of make believe and trying to make it real. Often the critical facility was so deeply entrenched and the negative aspects so far to the fore that I wondered why you all even bothered to read science fiction. None of you seemed capable of just enjoying a piece of writing on its own level or terms.

Obviously this was a false impression. The given had to be that you loved science fiction. Because of that love you had the need to see science fiction improved. And, of course, over 40 years later you, and many of the original participants from 1969, are still at it, playing in the fields of criticism.

I read every word of the *Reprint* with one exception. I skipped your roundup of PKD's novels (as current 1969). I will likely go back and read it at some point. The reason

I skipped it was that before jumping into the deep waters of 1969 I'd read *SFCs* 83 and 84, which included Guy Salvidge's PKD overview. And to tell you the truth I'm about sick to death of reading about PKD.

The best thing about the *Reprint* is you, your presence, and your shaping of the fanzine. I think it was either Foyster or Bangsund that mentioned this in one of the late letter columns. Your 'Beginnings' historical recollections helped solidify all of it.

A few comments:

(1) Jack Wodhams seemed to be a very odd and inarticulate guy. Something apparently got lost in translation from his in-person self to his written self. Before this point I was vaguely aware of Jack, historically, as an Australian sf writer. Did he ever go on to write novels?

(2) George Turner appears as a man of manners, an almost Victorian Era persona, among such cool cats as Damien Broderick, Lee Harding, John Bangsund, and John Foyster. (You may very well have been the link between George's formality and the other boys' modern guise.)

I will have to go back and reread the first 17 pages of *SF Commentary* 84 where you revisit with Damien Broderick and David Boutland. After reading the *Reprint* it will likely take on new dimensions.

I have long mourned that I never saw an issue of *ASFR* in either incarnation. At year's end I may assess my financial situation and then go on-line to see about the availability of the volumes of the 'best' that Damien Broderick edited from *ASFR*. I should probably send you some folding money as well.

I read everything but Ray Woods' piece on *Let Me In*. I have seen the original Swedish *Let The Right One In*, but not this American version, and wanted to wait until I saw it before I read Ray Woods deconstruction of the film. He does go on. And you never flinch away from length! *SFC* must be 'the *New Yorker* of fanzines'. (How's that for a blurb?)

All for now. If we made it past 21 December 2012, I'm guessing 2013 will prove to be an interesting and fucked-up year. All of John Brunner's predictions from his novels of the sixties and seventies appear to be coming true as we humans devolve, and religion rears its ugly head and proves Bertrand Russell right, that 'all organised religions are an active evil in the world'.

(18 December 2012)

I've been feeling guilty about not sending you folding money, but have justified it by just having recently laid out \$2000 for dentistry work. (And I have no medical insurance.)

(23 March 2013)

[*brg* Thanks for the comments on the *Reprint*, which includes the re-set issues 1 to 8 of *SF Commentary*, plus new features such as my long introduction, index, and photo pages. I didn't receive many when it first appeared in the early 1980s, when I published it at the outrageous cost of \$40 per copy. However, it doesn't date, because it captures the essence of an era of Australian SF and fannish history. Copies are still available. :: As you have perceived from reading the *Reprint*, in

1969 we all thought we were going to set the SF critical world on fire. We were inspired by an elder ghod, George Turner, who was 53 when I first met him, and people such as John Bangsund, Damien Broderick, John Foyster, and Lee Harding who, to me, might just as well have been elder ghods, such was the immensity of their experience of the SF field and the depth of their knowledge of it. :: William, you do get the point, though; we really hoped we could improve the level of taste within the SF field, much as our favourite literary critics, such as Edmund Wilson, had attempted to raise the level of public taste in Britain and America during the twentieth century. A laughable objective? Well, anything's better than today's situation, however you interpret today's situation. And we no longer have George Turner and John Foyster to upbraid us for our lack of grim mental toughness.*]

We also heard from ...

ROBERT LICHTMAN (Oakland, California) was 'glad to see myself represented in No 83 with a short comment — and with John-Henri's generous pairing of your fanzine and mine as important ones, each in its own way. And also in No 84 in Mark Plummer's article on the Ultimate BRG Fanzine List reprinted from *Banana Wings* 45'.

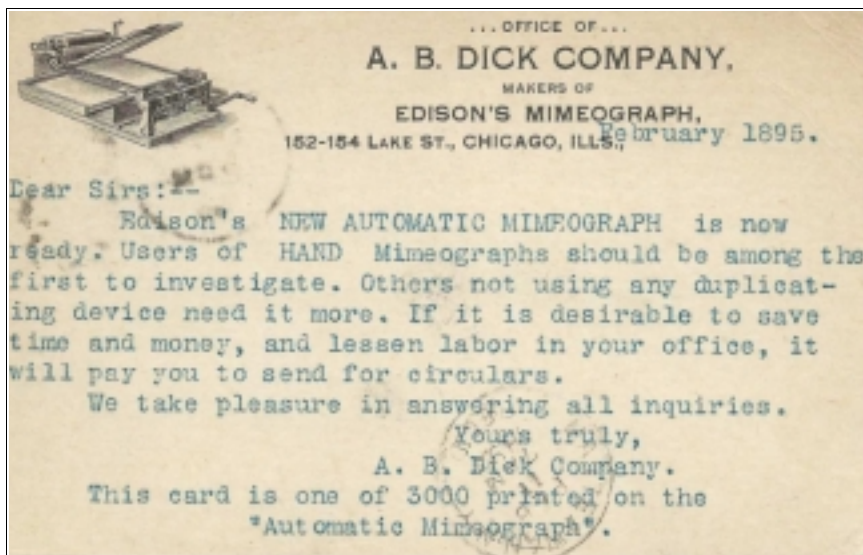
DAVID HYDE (somewhere in USA) had just read Brian Aldiss's comments on the passing of Harry Harrison: 'Of course we are desolate that this bright and rampageous spirit is no longer with us. More than desolate. Rocked to the foundations. The Stainless Steel Rat will live on!'

GARY FARBER (somewhere in USA) alerted his readers on Facebook not only about the most recent issues of *SF Commentary*, but also about Matthew Davis's long article on Theodore Sturgeon in the last issue of *Steam Engine Time*. Thanks, Gary.

CAROL KEWLEY (Sunshine, Victoria), GUY SALVIDGE (York, Western Australia), CHERRY WEINER (Manalapan, New Jersey, but recently moved house to Dacula, Georgia), PAULINE DICKINSON (Sydney, NSW), PETER AND ELIZABETH DARLING (Kyneton, Victoria), FRANK BERTRAND (Manchester, New Hampshire), and DEREK KEW (Bulleen, Victoria), were among many readers who sent greetings when they received or downloaded their copies of *SF Commentaries* 83 and 84. Derek's health has been fragile over the last year or so, so it was great to catch up with him for a Luncheon of Comment at the beginning of the year. This LoC tradition began in the 1970s, and has continued once or twice a year ever since.

ALEX SKOVRON (North Cauffield, Victoria), COLIN STEELE (Hawker, ACT), MURRAY MOORE (Mississauga, Canada), and GIAN PAOLO COSSATO (Venice, Italy) sent top-ups to their subscriptions, although they are such faithful correspondents that they hardly needed to.

MARIANN MacNAMARA (Adelaide, South Australia) sent greetings, and her annual Christmas letter. Thanks to other people who keep sending us



Treasure 1), but he has also sent me several boxes of books. These are critical books from the era before SF criticism became a major industry (about 1973-74, when *Science Fiction Studies* and *Foundation* began publication). Many of them I own already, but lots I don't. I feel the spare copies would be the ideal basis for a criticism section of the Meteor, Inc. collection. Otherwise, there may be Australian fans who are interested in such books; if so, please get in touch with me. I can't afford the current

similar letters every year. Some years, Elaine and I publish one of our own, but didn't feel like it for 2012, since the death of our beloved six-year-old black fluffy cat Archie (from kidney failure) was the main event of the year.

RICH COAD (Santa Rosa, California), fan about town and publisher of America's last sercon fanzine *Sense of Wonder Stories*, was amused that I mentioned that Chris Nelson's *Mumblings from Munchkinland* is Australia's best fanzine. 'Gosh, and here was I thinking *SF Commentary* was the best Australian fanzine. Just goes to show how wrong we can be! But I agree, *Mumblings from Munchkinland* is very good. Meeting Chris Nelson was one of the highlights of Aussiecon 4 for me.'

ROB GERRAND (St Kilda, Victoria), sent greetings when he downloaded *SFCs* 83 and 84, and particularly was looking forward to reading Guy Salvidge's article about the novels of Philip K. Dick. 'Congratulations on the exceptional talent you manage to gather consistently, issue after issue, who write intelligently and thoughtfully, and who are so well informed, about some of the most interesting writing of the last 100 years or so.'

DICK JENSSEN (Carnegie, Victoria) liked *SFCs* 83 and 84, 'especially a superb cover by — who else — Ditmar'.

WERNER KOOPMANN (Buchholz, Germany) is one of my great finds of recent years. But he found me through the internet, rather than me finding him. In 1973, he translated for me the most important Stanislaw Lem article I ever published in *SFC*, 'Science Fiction: A Hopeless Case: With Exceptions'. Not only does he send frequent postcards and letters about what he and his wife ULLA are up to (see the jaw-dropping photos of their garden in

postage rates to send them overseas.

GRAEME PHILLIPS (7 The Haining, Renfrew, PA4 0AQ, Scotland) sent me a copy of his H. P. Lovecraft fanzine *Cyäegha* 3. It includes four stories by pioneering Sydney writer Vol Molesworth, plus an appreciation, 'Vol Molesworth's Lovecraftian Tales', by Canberra scholar James Doig. He also enclosed a spare copy of Cardinal Cox's poetry chapbooks. More and more people are now becoming interested in the 1950s era of Australian SF and fantasy publishing, so this is an unexpected treasure.

— Bruce Gillespie, 8 September 2013



Feature letters

Ray Wood

Walking song

RAY WOOD
PO Box 188, Quorn SA 5433

It's mainstream literature that's my thing, and most of my library's devoted to it. The majority of my books are literary criticism: English, Aussie, French, Russian, Italian, German, and the classical Latin and Greek. And History. And Photography. And Art. I also collect reference books: can't resist them! Have a fair library of Theology, too. Altogether around 10,000 books. I've run out of walls to stick bookshelves against, unfortunately. There's half a room full of videos and DVDs of films, too. Nowadays books keep on piling up on my floors for lack of shelving.

I love Randolph Stow's work, both poetry and fiction. He's one of the chief three AusLit writers who write transcendental fiction. Grant Watson and Patrick White are the other two, though there are hangers-on such as Shaw Neilson, Henry Handel Richardson (I've been a member of the HHR Society since it was founded; it's based in the town of Chiltern in Victoria's north-east), and Martin Boyd, who've all touched upon the mystical in their work.

Stow's most mystical work is his fourth novel, *Tourmaline*, which is based on that beautiful ancient Chinese poem, the *Tao Te Ching*. But *To the Islands* is his finest novel. One of his poems, 'The Land's Meaning', is for me one of the most important poems ever written by an Aussie.

What I'm reading at the moment in mainstream lit are the great Argentinean writer Julio Cortazar's short stories (Antonioni's film *Blow-Up* is based on one of them, 'The Drool of the Devil'), and the US poet Gary Snyder's long poem, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, which grew out of the Sung Dynasty painting, *Streams and Mountains Without End*. It took him 40 years to write. He was one of the Beats, but unlike them, who were all city folk, he's always been a country lad, which they were in awe of about him. He's been a hiker since boyhood, like me. I love where he says, 'walking the landscape can become both ritual and meditation'. He took Kerouac and Ginsberg hiking, too, much to their astonishment. He talks about 'the play between the tough spirit of willed self-discipline and the generous and loving spirit of concern for all beings'.

I'm also re-reading Marc Tralbaut's great and massive book on Vincent Van Gogh. That's partly because I

needed to for a recent short story I wrote called '7'. I got involved in a lot of re-reading for that, including Zola's most popular novel, *The Masterpiece*, and a lot about Picasso. (For me, the three greatest painters who have ever lived are Botticelli, Rembrandt — but only his later portraits — and Picasso. And the greatest age of art for me is neither the European Renaissance nor the Classical Greek, but the Ancient Egyptian Renaissance at the beginning of the New Kingdom.)

But I also love some of the fiction genres : SF, of course, and Fantasy-SF though not pure Fantasy. And I love Westerns, and Thrillers.

I write essays purely for my own interest, and have piles of them going back to my youth. I write them on all kinds of subjects. And of course I write fiction non-stop, but also only for my own interest. I am my only reader. What's the use of publication? When we humans are all gone, what will Shakespeare amount to then? Absolutely nothing at all.

I get huge amusement out of being alive. It seems so laughable to me. Well, autism runs in my family, and autists find everything that there is, is funny.

Right at this moment I should be cleaning my house for my friend who's arriving this evening to stay until Monday. But typing these meandering musings is much more fun than doing that.

Tonight we're going to be watching ancient slides of our big hikes done half a century ago. Big nostalgia trip. Tomorrow we'll be out hiking, she with her third hip replacement done only recently. I'm going to take her up Chute Creek to the four-tier waterfall in there, and then up to the Chute itself, where half-a-dozen creeks all come together, and have bored a hole right through the rock itself to shoot out into space when those creeks are running; and it has dug a big waterhole underneath it from the force of that water. It's a secret place of mine, in a great cliff-lined gorge deep in virgin bushland in the mountains nearby. You have to scramble over half-a-dozen small waterfalls to get there. Hope her newest hip can take it! She thinks it will.

Yeah, it's sad that all those old trains and buses have all but disappeared. In 1947, trains left Bridgewater in the Adelaide Hills for Adelaide in the mornings alone at 5.07, 5.36, 5.59, 6.18, 6.27, 6.50, 7.34, 8.30, 8.48, 9.03, 10.35, and 10.54 a.m. — twelve altogether. And by 1957 there were still nine of those running. But today there are no passenger trains to and from Bridgewater at all,

though vastly more people live in The Hills.

In 1948 I remember one evening standing on the bridge over the Mt Lofty Railway Station up in The Hills, and watching four steam trains arrive simultaneously in the station, three passenger and one goods (one had to wait just outside the station because there were only the three lines). The station was staffed by around half-a-dozen people. Today it isn't staffed or used at all. A valley's high forested walls close in around it, and its stone buildings reek of old age, but it's empty now.

About hiking. I love this passage :

Centuries come and go, but the traffic of the desert path is still the same. Three miles an hour is the accepted pace for the traveller ...

It is difficult for the Westerner, accustomed to the tempo of modern life and the conditions of its civilization, to adapt himself to the simplicities of this life which has remained untouched by the pressure of mechanical transport. Yet once he is committed to it he inherits a freedom which he has never known before. His mentality is released from the timepiece with its relentless ticking, and from the dread reproach of its neglect. The flickering needle of a speedometer is not there to urge him to greater effort, and there is no concentration on speed as an objective in itself. He has ample time for observation and nothing of interest need escape his attention. This is the pace of talk, and no desert wayfarer is jarred by the annoyance of a hurried companion nor delayed by the slackness of a fellow traveller. The human body, having found its natural swing, becomes strangely unconscious of itself and releases the mind to its normal function of transmuting incident into experience. These are conditions in which the wayfarer becomes, according to his own measure, an observer, a philosopher, a thinker, a poet or a seer.

I got it from an article titled, 'Travelling Across the Gobi Desert', but unfortunately never wrote down its source.

Yeah, the world at three miles an hour. It's now become so alien to modern first-world people. And their mania for rushing everywhere hardly goes along with meditating any more. And today people's minds are so filled with 'What to I have to do next? and then after that?' that the Here and Now of actually living have just about vanished for ever. I remember the actor Michael Caine saying in a TV interview that people today are so busy thinking about the next (theoretical only) life that they scarcely even live this one.

What am I? What is anyone? I think of myself as a tiny collection of molecules come together by happenchance for a few moments, and for those few moments so utterly insignificant on the scale of the universe; and once I die I'll return those molecules to where they really belong. I'll become the Universe again. But while this incredibly tiny cluster of molecules that's become 'me' continues I'll live, like this:

I ignite the beauty of the plains,
I sparkle the waters,
I burn in the sun, and the moon, and the stars,
I adorn all of the Earth,

I am the breeze that nurtures all things green,
I am the rain coming from the dew that causes
the grasses to laugh with the joy of life.

Which was written by a twelfth-century mystic, Hildegard of Bingen. The 'grasses' she writes about always remind me of a long-ago poetic friend of mine, Roger McKnight:

You can hear grass grow.
'I don't believe you,' you'll say;
but if you go out after autumn rain —
and pick the right day —
bend down and listen,
you'll hear it, in old dry grass, grow,
quietly, in odd little patches
a man doesn't dig or mow.

It's a faintest of shufflings,
a slipping of tension on last year's straw.
To be on my knees has seemed fitting
whenever I've heard it, in awe.

He was a dairy farmer. He also fought in the Second World War, in New Guinea, and told me that he could never bring himself to shoot at the Japs. He always aimed above their heads.

Hildegard's poem also reminds me of something I got from an old pagan in the early days of Christianity, when the Christians all over Europe were murdering every pagan and his family that refused to convert:

I know that I am one with beauty
And that my comrades are one.
Let our souls be mountains,
Let our spirits be stars,
Let our hearts be worlds.

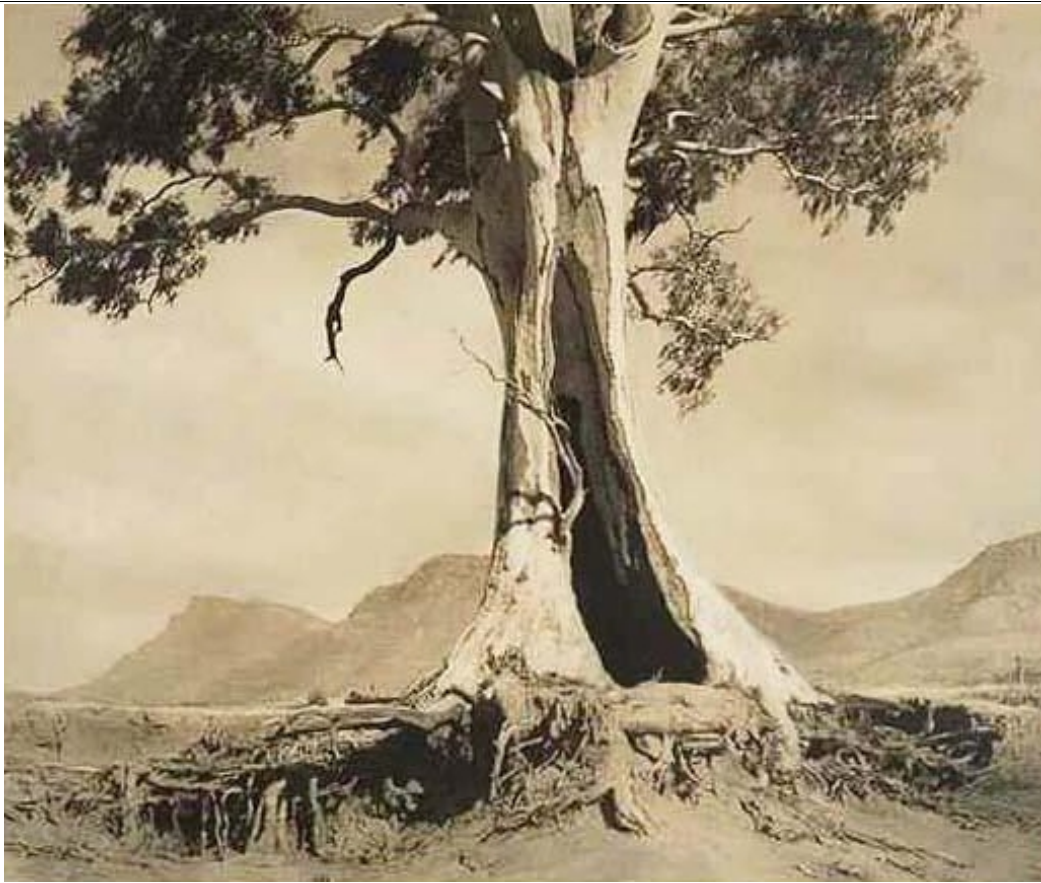
Did you see that big survey made in the US that found that the most important thing in people's lives there was their cars? And that most of them would be prepared to murder to get petrol for them? More than they would for anything else? And yet when people are driving, they can't live with their own thoughts, and have to turn on their radios. Can you even buy a car any longer that doesn't have a radio?

They can't even walk in the wilderness any longer — what little there is that's left of it, anyway. They have to take their city along with them surrounding them in the form of their cars.

Do you know what I remember most about *Pride and Prejudice*? It's the walking to get anywhere, to get everywhere. Walking's a lost art these days. I've watched people here in Quorn park their cars outside our Post Office, get their mail, and then drive all of 25 metres from there to park outside our supermarket!

Just before he died recently, Randolph Stow wrote in a letter to an old friend who said she wanted to call on him:

I'm old and ailing nowadays, rather an unsavoury old bachelor, and people understand that I don't like to be seen like this and prefer to be left alone.



Two photographs by Harold Cazneaux, sent by Ray Wood.



Which I have tacked up on the inside door of my living room, and think sometimes of having put on a plaque I can hang out on my front verandah beside my front door. You should send it to your mate John Bangsund: he'd appreciate it, I imagine.

I've wandered all over the place in this post (as well as in my life). And now a last wandering. You seem deeply into music and if you've never heard this little three-part round before, it may appeal to you. On our long hikes we so often sing around a campfire at night, and this little round has always been one that we love the most:

All things shall perish from under the sky.
Music alone shall live, music alone shall live,
Music alone shall live, never to die.

(26 August 2012)

[*brg* You can see from my annual lists that I have a wide range of interests in my reading. We were having great storage problems at our old place in Collingwood, but built enough shelves in the new place to (we hoped) hold all further purchases. But already we've run out of room. I feel I must keep up with the interesting stuff, but I am way behind with reading the old stuff. Recently I read a book I bought in 1973, a hardback of Robert Penn Warren's *World Enough and Time*, which I bought for a dollar in the Collins Basement in the city. That was the era for stocking up on hardback books, when American returns flooded into Australia. Shortly after that, American book and record shops adopted sale-or-return policies, and that vast amount of new-but-unsold stuff stopped arriving here.

I've never heard of Grant Watson — but I think a lot of Australian writers would like to think they write transcendental fiction. I always thought of Stow as one of those writers who couldn't possibly have got published if White hadn't been there first, but I did not find Stow's fiction interesting. Somebody who I think is transcendental in a peculiar way is Gerald Murnane — especially parts of his first novel *Tamarisk Row* and his third, *The Plains*. Carey, Rob and I (as Norstrilia Press) published Gerald's *The Plains* and *Landscape with Landscape* in the early eighties. His other major novel is *Inland*, and there have been several collections since then, and a new book, *A History of Books*, that includes the novella of the same name. Some people find Murnane impossible to read, but I keep finding people who have loved his books since the 1970s.

Some 'magic realist' writers I enjoy, but not the ones who wrote rather bare realist prose to accompany magic events. I do like really poetic writers, such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Alejo Carpentier, but got stuck on Vargas Llosa and some of the others. I don't know how one would pin down Borges, probably the best of the lot, but far ahead, both in era and quality, of the 'magic realists'. And there are plenty of non-South Americans who would fit the label, especially later Italo Calvino. *Cosmicomics* and *T Zero (Time and the Hunter)* are two of my favourite books of the last 50 years.

I don't have the same interest in the visual arts as you have; indeed, my favourite visual art is black-and-white photography, of the Ansel Adams/Walker Evans type. But we have quite a few books on the visual arts; it's just that I rarely go to the shelf to look at them, so have not bought many in the last 20 years. I could not resist the recent huge book on the paintings of Fred Williams.

The big influence in my life was an art teacher in Form 5 (Year 11). He had little luck in getting me to paint and draw well, but he taught a superb art history course (one had to pass both sections to pass the subject, but I failed the practical). He enlightened me to many aspects of art, but the bulb really lit up when I came to late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century art. The idea of abstract art, pure colour, was very exciting to me, and still is. In a similar way, I was bored by nineteenth-century poetry, but the bulb really lit up when a brilliant teacher read to us one day T. S. Eliot's 'The Hollow Men'. Most of the poetry books I've read have been from twentieth-century poets.

Thanks for the Harold Carneaux photos. And thoughts about hiking. I also find that walking is the only way to get any idea of a suburban area. Elaine and I have found all sorts of hidden treasure spots around Greensborough, things we could never have found if we had not been walking a lot. The other day I walked the most direct route from one station on our line to another station, and discovered all sorts of aspects of the geography of the area that had puzzled me when viewed from the train. Each of the suburban shopping areas around here is quite different from other, too, and this can only be discovered by walking.

The only reason we would like a car is so we could go up to certain country towns, and walk around there. Or reach the Lerderderg Gorge walk, for instance, which people talked about when we lived at Bacchus Marsh (my family and I, long before I met Elaine), but which I never did. As you say, the train service has been withdrawn from most places we value, but not all. I could easily visit my sister near Maldon, which is near Castlemaine, which has a good rail service to Melbourne, but never organise myself to do so.*]

Book shelves are a huge problem when you insist on buying more books all the time. I seem to buy around three books a week. And as I suppose anyone like me does, when I run out of shelf space itself to hold books upright, I squeeze them in side on above the others until every available space is occupied. Then I start rearranging them to open up further small gaps to squeeze yet more books in until my entire bookshelf system is a crazy jigsaw. After that, just getting at a book sometimes entails a fair bit of digging around. Finally they start to pile up on the floor everywhere.

Then it's time to get a carpenter friend here in Quorn to make me a new bookshelf. Except that I've now run out of wall space to put them up against, and so I'm starting to have them freestanding out into the rooms. I'll end up having to negotiate my way through my house

as if through a maze.

Elliott Lovegood Grant Watson was an Englishman who visited Australia early in the twentieth century, a scientist who took part in an anthropological expedition with Radcliffe-Brown (and, would you believe, Daisy Bates?) in the north-west of WA with the Aborigines there. He wasn't in Australia all that long, but his visit here had a huge and lifelong impact on him. He had two mystical experiences, one on the ship bringing him to Perth, and the other in the bush near the Southern Cross mine not far from Kalgoorlie.

I suspect he was at a loss in the intellectual climate of the day, as a scientist, how to come to terms with those experiences, and so he set out to deal with them through writing novels. He set six novels in Australia dealing with it, starting with *Where Bonds are Loosed* in 1914 (helped by a neighbour in England, who was none other than Joseph Conrad), finally achieving what he wanted to, in 1935, with the rather luridly named *The Nun and the Bandit*. That was filmed by Paul Cox in 1990, and Paul Brennan's Primavera Press reissued that novel at the same time. The rest have been out of print for decades.

He wrote six other novels not set in Australia, some of which also deal with mystical experience, especially *Moonlight in Ur* and *Shadow and Sunlight*. But he was never a successful fiction writer, and his novels aren't great ones. He became famous in England for his many books about nature, and for being a popular radio broadcaster on nature with the BBC.

Henry Green, in the first volume of his 1961 *A History of Australian Literature* (p. 649) opts out of dealing with *The Nun and the Bandit* by saying:

He followed the road of the mystics, and only those who walk that road can accept literally what he has to say; but there remains in any case the fact that no writer has translated so effectively the moods of 'The Tomorrow', the Never Never.

Dorothy Green edited an anthology of Grant Watson's work, *Descent of the Spirit: Writings of E. L. Grant Watson*, which the Primavera Press issued in 1990, a miscellany of both his fiction and scientific writings. She was actually writing his biography when she died, but didn't get far with it owing to her illness at the end. But Suzanne Falkiner did write an excellent and thorough biography, *The Imago: E. L. Grant Watson and Australia*, which came out early last year. Suzanne's busy at the moment writing a biography of Randolph Stow, and has just finished her research, and has begun the writing itself.

For me the three great writers of what I call 'transcendental fiction in Australian literature' are Grant Watson (1885–1970), Patrick White (1912–91), and Randolph Stow (1935–2011). They are the three whose fiction to a considerable extent concerns mystical experience. Of course, White and Stow wrote magnificently, and Watson rather pedestrianly as far as fiction itself goes, but Grant Watson of the three is the only one who succeeded in expressing the mystical with complete success.

And insofar as the mystical heart of Australia goes, no other Aussie writer has ever got close to Grant Watson in

that way, except Stow in his 1963 novel, *Tourmaline*, the one that Aussie critics of the day savaged so brutally that (I'm fairly sure it was the chief reason), he moved off to England and spent most of the rest of his life there, though he was Western Australian born and bred (from Geraldton).

Grant Watson and Stow are two of my 'Inlanders', but White is completely one of my 'East-Coasters'.

Anyway, all of that is far more than you'd ever want to know about Grant Watson! If you ever did want to get a taste of his writing, read his very popular (and easy-to-obtain from libraries) 1968 *Journey Under the Southern Stars*, which is autobiographical, non-fiction, and not very long — and a delightful read.

Randolph Stow was only 21 when he began putting out his first three novels, in 1956, 1957, and 1958; the third of those was the one usually considered his finest, *To the Islands*. Then it was six years before *Tourmaline* came out.

He was an intensely shy bloke. My friend who was staying with me last weekend, Alison McDonald, had him as a tutor for English Literature at Adelaide Uni in 1958, a tutorial consisting of all young women, she says, and he was totally embarrassed by them. So you can imagine what the savagery by even the best of Aussie critics towards his SF novel *Tourmaline* did to him. They were too dumb to even understand it. None of them even saw that it was based on Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, for example. In desperation he even wrote a five-page poem titled 'From the Testament of Tourmaline: Variations on Themes of the Tao Te Ching' in an effort to help them understand it.

It wasn't until A. D. Hope wrote intelligently about it that Stow received a favourable crit. He did put out one further novel, *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, in 1965, but for me it was a sort of timid step back towards something more acceptable to his critics, though it's a delightful novel all the same. I remember being utterly infuriated by one of his critics, Alice Oppen (*Southerly*, 1967/2), who wrote about *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*:

This latest novel gives a more fully documented story of a more recognisable human being, and a somewhat narrower scope of search. One suspects that Mr. Stow took the risk of reading his critics (p. 82).

How any literary critic can even say such an idiotic thing as that last sentence does, beats me. Utter arrogance!

Stow wrote no more novels until *Visitants* in 1979, *The Girl Green as Elderflower* in 1980, and his last gasp, *The Suburbs of Hell*, in 1984. Silenced largely by his extreme shyness, and his idiotic Aussie critics, I suspect.

For me, *Tourmaline* is the finest SF novel ever published by an Aussie or about Australia. It's a post-apocalypse novel. It's also superbly well written, stylistically and structurally. And it's interesting to me that there's a slowly growing opinion that on the whole Stow was a better writer than Patrick White. But I think the long drought between the two groups of novels he wrote meant he largely disappeared from view, especially today when writers try to keep their novels piling up annually or close to it for much of their lives.

Tourmaline is the name of a tiny town in a vast endless

desert, with hardly enough water to keep it alive. That seems to be all that's left of civilisation, except that every now and then a truck arrives from the outside bringing vague hints that other places might also still exist. One day the truck brings in a near-dead man whom the driver found by the side of the track. They save his life, and he turns out to be a water diviner, who offers the town hope for the first time in ages. And like a Christian Revivalist he sets up a new religion that revivifies almost everyone. And so on ...

Tom Spring, who's one who doesn't believe in this great new redeemer, explains to The Law, who's the chronicler of these events, what he thinks instead. The Law says:

He unveiled his God to me, and his God had names like the nameless, the sum of all, the ground of being. He spoke of the unity of opposites, and of the overwhelming power of inaction. He talked of becoming a stream, to carve out canyons without ceasing always to yield; of being a tree to grow without thinking; of being a rock to be shaped by winds and tides. He said I must become empty in order to be filled, must unlearn everything, must accept the role of fool. And with curious, fumbling passion he told me of a gate leading into darkness, which was both a valley and a woman, the source and sap of life, the temple of revelation. At moments I thought I glimpsed, through the inept words, something of his vision of fullness and peace; the power and the darkness. Then it was hidden again, obscured behind his battles with the language, and I understood nothing, nothing at all; and I let my mind wander away from him to the diviner, at the altar, brilliant by flamelight, praising a familiar God, through the voice of a ritual bell (Chapter 13).

It's very *Tao Te Ching*. Stow's belief was that Christianity was the wrong belief system for Australians in the kind of land Australia is, and is leading us to destroy our country. And he looks to the Tao as providing a better way of looking at our country, and therefore of treating it better too.

After this novel, it's as if the stuffing had been knocked out of him, and he wrote nothing more of such tremendous power and value.

Oh, if you've not read the *Tao Te Ching*, translations I'd recommend are Stephen Michell's (which you can get on the Internet, with only a couple of punctuation errors in it), and H. G. Ostwald's translation into English of Richard Wilhelm's into German (Penguin books have it). That's out of the thirteen translations that I have of it.

The *Tao* is very short: only 81 fairly brief poems, you might call them. The famous opening poem in Mitchell's translation is :

The tao that can be told
is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named
is not the eternal Name.

The unnamable is the eternally real.

Naming is the origin
of all particular things.

Free from desire, you realise the mystery.
Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations.

Yet mystery and manifestations
arise from the same source.
This source is called darkness.

Darkness within darkness.
The gateway to all understanding.

You mention Gerald Murnane. It's a name I've often come across, but I've not read any of his books, and would like to. Going by the titles you list, *Landscape with Landscape* sounds as if it might interest me deeply. I'm fascinated by art mirroring art mirroring art; and am reading Christian Metz's *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* at present, and am especially moved by the ninth article collected in it, about 'Mirror Construction'. He talks about paintings that show a second painting, novels written about a novel, and films within films. Metz uses the French technical term *construction en abyme*, literally inescutcheon construction, or what his translator, Michael Taylor calls mirror construction. It's akin to those 'switch images' that I talk about in that article I wrote, 'The Dancing Cyborg', or to that almost unbelievably complex image in the US film *Let Me In*, of Owen hiding behind a semi-transparent mask showing the face of Abby's old protector, threatening his masked self in the mirror, saying, 'Hey, little girl! Are you a little girl? Huh? Are you scared?'

I'm interested in that your favourite visual art is black-and-white photography. I was deeply into black-and-white photography for most of my life. I exhibited my 20' by 16' photos in shows around the country for many years. I operated three studios during my life: one in the 1960s, one in the 1970s, and one in the 1980s, the last called 'Studio Three'.

Studio photography especially interested me. There were many years when I took on average 10,000 negatives in the year. I was sort of semi-professional, in that I sold a lot of large framed prints, usually for around \$500, but sometimes more. And I occasionally did deals with businesses, licensing images to them.

So I have a large collection of photography books, including Ansel Adams's great three-volume set.

I did all my own darkroom work. I used mostly six Asahi Pentax 35 mm Spotmatic cameras for many years, they being what I thought of as the T Model Ford of cameras. But I also used a 4' by 5' View Camera for landscape work in particular. With a negative that big, you get incredibly fine detail in a 20' x 16' print. And photography with one of those is quite the opposite of the scatter-gun nature of 35 mm work. Going out all day in the field with that big camera I might return after five or six hours' work with only half-a-dozen negatives!

I had a huge floor-standing Durst Laborator enlarger for handling those 4' x 5' negatives. I was into seven-bath archival processing, too, even going so far as changing the silver chlorides, bromides, and chlorobromides into selenides so they'd last as long as possible (theoretically

a hundred years). I was deeply involved in darkroom chemistry. I also loved OrthoLith work.

I had the six Pentaxes so I could have a different film in each. So in one I'd have Tri-X at 400 ASA, in the second Tri-X at 800 ASA, in the third Tri-X at 1600 ASA, and occasionally Tri-X at 3200 ASA. But I also always had one or two loaded with Kodak 2475, their special film for detectives and spies that you can shoot at almost any speed you like, even by low streetlighting at night, without flash. I have shot it at 100,000 ASA, but usually shot it at 6400 ASA and 12,800 ASA. You get superlative grain at those higher speeds.

But I was so dismayed when digital photography came in. In one huge blow a lifetime's intense collecting of technical photographic knowhow got wiped out. Digital photography hasn't caught my fancy yet, though I do have a digital camera (which offends me hugely; also I can't make it get up and dance for me as I could my old cmaeras).

I love the Magic Realists too. Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is brilliant, my favourite of all the MRs.

Borges' stories don't impress me as much as they seem to impress others. I think of him as a writer who has brilliant story ideas, but doesn't always work them thoroughly into stories themselves, but gives them to us too soon, half-digested you might say, as if he grew impatient with the difficulties of embedding them properly. The Argentinean writer who's generally regarded as better than him is Julio Cortazar. Read his brilliant little SF story, 'Axolotl', for example. Now he does take all the trouble to embed his ideas properly, similarly to that greatest of all short story writers, Anton Chekhov.

I think the very reason that attracts so many SF fans and intellectuals to Borges is just that, that his ideas aren't embedded deeply enough, and they're very much attracted to ideas in stories.

You say: 'I was bored by nineteenth-century poetry when I was a teenager, but the bulb really lit up when a brilliant teacher read to us one day T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men".'

Yes, I love Eliot's work, both prose and verse. For me his greatest poem is that quite short one, 'Marina'. In fact, as I do with so much, I wrote an essay on it a long time ago, and do happen to have digitised it a few years back as well to send it to my wife, who was dying at the time. The date at the end of it is the date it was digitised and therefore revised at the same time. I'm always revising and adding to my multitude of essays. It's not for publication, as most of my essays are not, but I attach it just in case it interests you. It's simply an exegesis of the poem.

When I had a good memory when I was younger, I memorised an enormous amount of poetry, even very long poems. For example, I could recite Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* by heart, and that supremely beautiful Sanskrit poem of the Kashmiri court poet Bilhana, his eleventh-century *Chauraspanchastika* (in translation, *Black Marigolds*). I knew great slabs of Eliot's poems, but today I can no longer even recite 'Marina' from memory.

I would always carry poems on bits of paper with me

everywhere I went so I could memorise them as I walked, or drove, or whatever. I probably looked very weird pulling a bit of paper out of my pocket every several yards as I walked!

You said: 'I find that walking is the only way to get any idea of a suburban area as well.'

I've always thought how it's only a child who can ever get to know a town or suburb fully. When you're a child you know every odd little corner, every hidey-hole, every drain you can crawl into, every empty house and shed and hut you can wriggle into, every curious bump in the pavement, every bough of every tree that you can climb on to. Adults can never acquire such knowledge of towns and suburbs they've moved into only as adults.

And as you get older and more infirm, you reach that age when you measure time instead of in weeks, in trips to chemists to get your prescriptions filled; instead of in years, in stays in hospitals for operations; and you now know the geography of doctors' and other's waiting rooms better than the geography of the suburbs or towns that you live in.

(27 August 2012)

Don't try looking for Grant Watson books! As a fiction writer he's minor; it's the other qualities of his work that count for me. Anyway, I've photocopied his very first published work, a short story that had quite an impact in Britain when it appeared in *The English Review* in 1912, 'Out There'. And I also photocopied another very brief one that's a kind of essay-short story, 'The Sacred Dance: Corroboree of natives of North-West Australia', published in the same magazine in 1924. And I'll post them to you tomorrow.

I'd recommend his short story collection, *Innocent Desires*, which you'd have to get on Inter-Library Loan, I'd say.

But of all the books I discussed, it's *Tourmaline* that I reckon is one of the most must-read novels in OzLit, and not just because it's SF.

(29 August 2012)

Odd things sometimes happen to my articles. When in the 1980s I was teaching at Quorn Area School, a young phys. ed. teacher joined our staff who hadn't been long out of uni. She said to me she had an article about *King Lear* that they'd been given by a lecturer, and that might be useful to me in my teaching English. She showed it to me. It'd been duplicated originally, and then photocopied.

Well, I recognised it all right, and turned to its last page, and pointed out the writer's name there, which was mine. She was most surprised. How her lecturer had somehow got hold of it, and his cheek in using it as he had without any permission from me, were beyond me.

And a few times back many decades ago I found schools where poems of mine had been duplicated or photocopied to be taught in classes, also entirely without my permission.

Of course there's no way of controlling that, and in the end I don't really mind, I suppose.

(1 September 2012)

Feature letters

Mark Plummer

Falling Woman days

MARK PLUMMER

59 Shirley Road, Croydon,
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I was sitting on the sofa in the early hours of Sunday morning, drinking scotch, listening to Led Zeppelin, and reading *SF Commentary*. And I was briefly transported to the 1970s.

Not anything resembling my personal experience of the seventies, you understand. The decade ended with me just under a month shy of my sixteenth birthday. Now, yes, I had certainly discovered Led Zeppelin by then, although probably only a couple of years earlier, and I'd been aware of them well before that although

very much as part of a genre of music listened to by older kids: album bands like Pink Floyd, Deep Purple, and Jethro Tull who rarely if ever troubled the Top Forty. By the end of the seventies I'd seen my first proper rock band play live — Hawkwind (now there's an *sf* fan cliché) at the Ipswich Gaumont on 4 December 1979 — but Led Zeppelin had already played their last British shows. In 1980 I was picking up friends' guitars and working my through incredibly rudimentary and really rather inept renditions of 'Communication Breakdown' and 'Tangerine', and then John Bonham was dead and that was it for Led Zeppelin, at least for the time being.

Scotch seems rather like a 1970s drink to me, one of the better options from those dark days before the CAMRA warriors turned the tide against chemicalised keg beer and when British wine drinkers rarely progressed beyond Liebfraumilch or, if they were feeling especially sophisticated, Blue Nun. I had discovered alcohol by the end of the seventies, mostly in the form of generic canned lager, but I didn't really appreciate scotch until 1995. Somebody left a mostly full bottle in one of the Glasgow YMCA flats that some friends and I had been calling home for over a week before, during, and after the Worldcon. Whoever was responsible was a good fairy who knew just what was required for that post-Worldcon mood.

The 1970s seem to have been the boom years for *SF Commentary*, from No 9 in February 1970 to No 57 in November 1979, not that you need me to tell you this. I didn't experience any of those issues as contemporary events; rather I discovered *SF Commentary* at about the same time as I discovered scotch, although beyond that there's no real connection that I'm aware of. Greg Pickersgill sent me a bundle of sercon fanzines in the mid nineties, intended as an inspiration for an optimistic if ultimately doomed plan to produce a real, modern British sercon fanzine. Ultimately that plan gave rise to *Steam Engine Time*, albeit without me. Aha, just found the letter: it's dated April 1995, thus placing *SF Commentary* about four months before scotch in my personal chronology. Greg noted that your fanzine remained a going concern, unlike most of the other samples he provided. Production sometimes a bit variable, he said, but the text is excellent.

But my mood wasn't entirely retro. The sounds of Led Zeppelin were emitting from a DVD, a compilation of previously unreleased — well, as of 2003 — live perform-



ances, the very existence of which in such a convenient format would probably have boggled my pre-fannish brain in 1979. And, I could come at the evening from a totally different direction, to refocus on the evening to emphasise its Australian dimensions. *SF Commentary* — well, obviously. And the scotch had been given to us by Sue Ann Barber and Trevor Clark when they passed through here last year (a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black Label, not Australian scotch; let's be realistic here). And part of the Zeppelin DVD was billed as 'Down Under', a performance from the Australian tour in 1972.

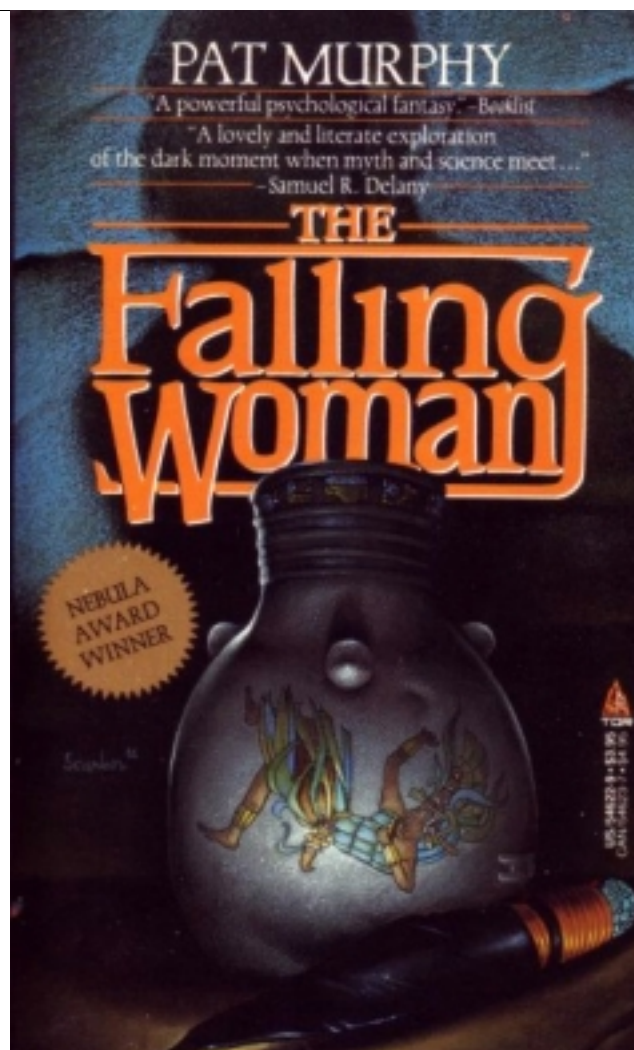
A little research — I even looked this up one of those quaint little paper book thingies we used to have back before the internet, perhaps unconsciously harking back to my earlier seventies theme — suggests Led Zep played shows in Australia and New Zealand in February and March of that year, performing in front of 26,000 people in Sydney and an estimated 5 per cent of the population of Perth. The sleeve notes don't say which gig made it to the DVD, but there's a short booklet in the box which suggests it's the one at the Sydney Showground, which would make it 4 March 1972, according to my book (Howard Mylett's *Led Zeppelin* (1976, revised 1981)) although the internet disagrees with it and says it was 27 February. In a blow for traditionalism, I think the internet is right.

There's only a short excerpt from the Australian performance, just one song, 'Rock and Roll', from the fourth album. It's actually a pretty decent rendition with a good strong sound, all the more remarkable because the performing conditions look rather rudimentary by modern standards. There's a basic, uncovered stage in what looks like the middle of a sports arena, with an enthusiastic crowd clustered in front while more sedate spectators fill the surrounding stands. At first I wondered if it was an amateur recording, but apparently it was filmed by the ABC.

And as ever when something Australian comes on, it did briefly occur to me to wonder whether I might catch a fleeting glimpse of you, Bruce. You know, totally disregarding the size of your country and its millions of inhabitants, and the fact that it's a Sydney show and thus several hundred miles away from where you lived and live. I don't even recall whether you like Led Zeppelin. All that said, though, I thought I saw this bloke who, from the right angle, might have been Leigh Edmonds.

But it was probably my imagination. And I wasn't even watching that closely because — and this is the real point of this letter — I was reading *SF Commentaries* 83 and 84, two issues for the price of one and probably the best value in the supermarket this morning. And, harking back to my earlier point about the seventies, I should note once again how *SF Commentary* has come on in the intervening years. Production is not variable at all now, oh no. Not that the seventies issues were especially bad — and we gloss over some of those really early numbers from the sixties — but the twenty-first century incarnation is a slick product indeed. And I now know better than to say something that might be interpreted as, 'Gosh, big, isn't it?'

Lots of things to think about. Like Eric Mayer, who seems to feel that those fans who still produce print fanzines 'don't want to cede their "advantage"'. I wonder



whether Eric feels that those fan writers who write well and on interesting topics should cede their advantage over those fans who don't or can't do either, you know, as we're talking about being equitable. There's a really rather depressing view of fanzines coming out of Eric's letter, especially when considered alongside Taral's undoubtedly true contention that some people who are ostensibly interested in fanzines really aren't and only receive fanzines at all because if you want to give then I suppose you have to receive as well. It points to a community where some people are busily putting out journals of what they fondly regard as fine fannish writing to an audience that is variously entirely uninterested or, *pace* Eric, merely seemingly interested and only writing letters in response because they've been guilt-tripped into it by these flash fans with their hugely expensive printed fanzines, and what we really need is for these print fanzines to just go away and then everybody will write letters to efanzines because they'll have no bloody choice. What a healthy little ecosystem.

Fortunately, though, there is still *SF Commentary* as a light in the darkness and a forum to introduce me to Rog Peyton's list of 100 favourite novels.

I've been buying books from Rog for about a quarter of a century now (time always seems extended when you can express it in fractions of a century, don't you find?). I only visited his old Andromeda store two or three times and wasn't a mail-order customer, so our transactions

were almost always across a convention dealers' room table, whether on his home turf of Novacon or at the Eastercon. For all the advantages of online booksellers and ebooks, I continue to regret the diminution of the convention dealers' room, and think fondly of the days — not all that long ago — when Rog (and Ken Slater and Forbidden Planet) would deploy neat rows of shiny new sci-fi across banks of six-by-three trestle tables, books that in many cases I never even knew existed or had at least never seen before. And not only that, but Rog would cheerfully help me spend my money, minimising the need for me to make choices by indicating precisely what I should buy, a process that for me reached a pinnacle in 1997 when seemingly every customer buying anything at all would be asked, 'And of course you'll be getting a copy of *The Sparrow* to go with that, won't you?'

I have many of the titles on Rog's list, in several cases bought from him on his recommendation: *Elleander Morning*, *Flicker*, the two Mary Doria Russells, and *Earth Abides* certainly, and maybe others. I always find him to be one of the most reliable recommenders of books such that I'm now inclined to seek out the couple of titles on this list I've never heard of: Raylyn Moore's *What Happened to Emily Goode after the Great Exhibition* (great title) and Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael*.

Although I know — or thought I knew — Rog's tastes quite well through several years of recommendations, conversations, and even some elist discussions, there's still room for surprises. I'm not wholly startled to find that Eric Brown is burdened with being the sole representative of the twenty-first century, and I knew that Rog has long been a champion of those classic era Silverberg novels, but not that he was such a fan of Octavia Butler. I clearly need to read more of her books then.

You may recall, Bruce, that a few years ago I produced a list of my hundred favourite songs. I padded it out with some commentary to about 25,000 words, and then printed copies of the result and sent it to, oh, maybe as many as three or four people. Well, possibly a dozen — or perhaps twenty. Probably no more.

Having done that, I did vaguely consider trying something similar with a hundred favourite books or novels, but I quickly stalled and the issue was memory.

Songs weren't a problem. I'd heard those 100 songs many times, each one on at least dozens if not hundreds of occasions spread across up to 45 years, and if that weren't enough I could easily re-listen to each one several times in the time it took me to compose a paragraph about it. I know many of those songs inside out, can replay them note for note in my head.

But it's rare for me to read a book more than once. *The Lord of the Rings*; some of George Orwell: those may have had as many as half-a-dozen re-reads across 30-something years. A handful of books have had a second pass: when I was a Clarke Award judge, for instance, or occasionally for a review, and very occasionally for no particular reason. Most of my books, though, are read once and then shelved. So really, how meaningful is any attempt to list my favourites?

As a case study, I'll advance Pat Murphy's second novel, *The Falling Woman*. It was first published in the US in 1986 and won a Nebula in 1988 due to those weird extended eligibility rules the Nebulas have. Murphy also

won the 1988 novelette award for 'Rachel in Love' (*Asimov's*, April 1987).

The Nebula winners were announced in May 1988 and I remember reading the results in one of those quaint little paper newsletter thingies we used to have back before the internet. It can't have been *Ansible*, as 1988 was during the interregnum between the first and second series. Maybe it was in the BSFA's *Matrix*, or Steve Green and Martin Tudor's *Critical Wave*. Maybe it was Margaret Austin and Martin Easterbrook's one-page *Small Mammal*, if that was around in those days. Any or all of those.

Wherever I read the news, though, I remember thinking that while I had at least heard of the other Nebula winners that year (Kate Wilhelm and Kim Stanley Robinson) I had heard of neither the winning novel nor its author. *The Falling Woman* had been published in the UK as a paperback original in January 1988 but it didn't get reviewed by the BSFA until June, which was quite probably the same mailing that carried the Nebula results. So the fact that I hadn't heard of the book wasn't really all that surprising, especially as I didn't then follow the field anyway near as closely as I did later. But anyway, here's this book, I thought, and it's just won a major award, and its author has just won another award in the same suite, so clearly she's got something going for her. I had a naïve and trusting view of awards back then. It's just as well there weren't as many of them around. I should view this as an opportunity to broaden my reading horizons, I thought.

I bought a copy of *The Falling Woman*. It wasn't especially difficult to acquire. I found it in the science fiction and fantasy section in Books Etc on Victoria Street in London, possibly just around the corner from where I was living at the time. I say 'possibly', because I moved out of central London to the suburb of West Norwood in the second half of 1988, so depending on exactly when this happened I may already have moved. But I think it was before. I'm also pretty sure that I bought a copy of Michael Moorcock's *The Dragon in the Sword* at the same time and, as the publication date for its mass market paperback suggests, this is at least possible, I'm inclined to trust my memory on the point.

Now I can't say for sure when I read the book, although I can narrow it down to between May and December 1988. It must have been after the Nebula result and at the beginning of 1989 I started my still-maintained list of all-the-books-and-fiction-magazines-I've-read and it doesn't figure on that so it must pre-date it. My best guess is that I read it pretty much immediately on buying it. I certainly know I was dead impressed, and bought Murphy's only other novel, *The Shadow Hunter*, pretty much immediately afterwards. I read that in 1988 too, again deduced from its absence from the 1989-and-onwards list.

I also got to read 'Rachel in Love' at about the same time, when it was anthologised by David Garnett in *The Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook 1*. That one came out in November of 1988 as a B-format paperback for £4.99, and I bought it — perhaps from Rog Peyton at Novacon? — and read it before the year was out. God, what a cracking anthology that was: 'Forever Yours, Anna' by Kate Wilhelm, 'The Sun Spider' by Lucius Shepard,

'Goodbye Houston Street, Goodbye' by Richard Kadrey, 'Friend's Best Man' by Jonathan Carroll, 'The Wound' by Lisa Tuttle, 'E-Ticket to 'Namland' by Dan Simmons, 'Ménage à Super-Trois' by Felix C. Gotschalk, 'Agents' by Paul Di Filippo, 'Lapidary Nights' by Marta Randall, 'Murderers Walk' by Garry Kilworth, 'Thirty Minutes Over Broadway!' by Howard Waldrop, plus essays by Aldiss and Clute.

Murphy's third novel was *The City, Not Long After*, published as a US hardcover by Bantam in 1989. I'd never have dreamed of buying a US hardback in 1989, so I waited with some enthusiasm for a paperback edition to show up in Forbidden Planet or The Fantasy Inn. One was duly published in February 1990, and I bought it and read it at the first opportunity, and it reinforced my enthusiasm for Murphy's writing — so it was rather unfortunate that it was at this point that she stopped producing novels for several years.

But I remained a real evangelist for Pat Murphy in general and *The Falling Woman* in particular. I bought several other copies of the book in subsequent years — that Headline edition was remaindered and so was often available for not very much at all — and pressed them on friends: here, read this, it's dead good, won a Nebula and everything. Pat Murphy was at the top of my mental list of Potential UK Convention Guests of Honour in the highly unlikely event I was ever able to influence such things which I never really was, but in 2003 she came to the UK anyway, when the Eastercon was hosting the presentation of the Tiptree Award. I took along our copies of all her books — I'm not sure I've done that for any other author — and probably babbled at her. She was very pleasant and inscribed them all for us.

Now all of this is really a preamble, leading up to the question: so, what was it about *The Falling Woman* that so seized my imagination in 1988? Well, I could make something out of that almost instinctive purchase of a book about which I knew nothing at all beyond the fact that some nebulous organisation had given it a Nebula. Yes, yes, sure, but that can't be all it was. What was the book about, tell us why you liked it so much, you might say. And there's the problem. Because honestly I can't tell you anything about the words between the covers beyond a very ill-defined sense that there's something about archaeology in central or southern America. And in 1988 I thought it was dead good. Really, that's it.

Now maybe it's striking that I can remember why, when and where I bought it, often in quite conspicuous detail. There were two doors in that branch of Books Etc. I would have gone in the left-hand door, the first one you come to going up Victoria Street from the station. There were floor-to-ceiling book cases around the outside walls of the shop, and lower units in the middle. The sf and fantasy section was on some of the lower units nearest that left-hand door facing the left-hand wall. Now, sure, I went into that shop probably hundreds of times, but the mental image of picking up my copy of *The Falling Woman* (and the Michael Moorcock book) is really quite distinct and sharp. It could be wholly false, I suppose, but it feels pretty real.

I just took *The Falling Woman* down from the shelf. It's an A-format paperback, published by Headline with a cover price of £2.95 and that'd be what I would have paid

for it back in days of the Net Book Agreement. And now I note that quite significant price differential between this and the contemporary Garnett anthology. The cover design is by Norma Bergin, a name that's unfamiliar to me, and indeed she has no other cover credits on ISFDB. My cursory researches with Google suggest that her name coupled with the word 'artist' often leads to on-line listings for *The Falling Woman*, so I almost wonder if there's a story in that: was it really the only book jacket she ever did, and if so, why didn't she do any more? There's a cover blurb by Samuel Delany. He liked it, although I guess that's self-evident, it being a cover blurb.

It's surprising to me how dated it now seems as an artefact. It's obviously not as one with the old Ballantines, Digits, and Ace books, but it's obviously if indefinably a product of a the past. Perhaps it's simply that it's 24 years old — or rather, and for maximum effect, nearly a quarter of a century — that it's been with me through three or four changes of address, but I think there's something about the printing and the paper that places it in an earlier age. The title page is now inscribed, 'For Claire and Mark — Pat Murphy', with a little drawing of what looks like a Mayan sigil or something like that. It does occur to me briefly that this moment probably represents only the second time since 1988 that the book has been opened. I just read the first sentence: 'There are no rivers in Mexico's Yucatán peninsula.'

I often think about re-reading *The Falling Woman*: all of it, not just the first sentence. As already mentioned, I rarely re-read books — because I have so many books as yet entirely unread — but at the same time I've been thinking just lately that there's really very little point in keeping a book collection if I entirely discount the prospect of ever re-reading anything in it. So why not revisit a book like *The Falling Woman*?

Honestly, I'm a little apprehensive, because the reality is that it almost inevitably can't live up to its reputation in my mind. So why not leave it where it is, as an indistinct yet positive memory? Same goes for any number of other books, including Rog Peyton's faves *Replay*, *Elleander Morning*, and *The Sparrow*.

So that's why I shy away from trying to compile a personal top one hundred sf novels, or even books. But if I ever succumb I'd like to reassure you that you'll be the first to know ...

(14 October 2012)

[*brg* I don't know of anybody else, apart from Claire Brialey and Brian Aldiss, who could send me a letter of comment as long as this and I would read it immediately instead of copying it from Elaine's computer, then putting it on my hard disk, then transferring it to Word file, then printing it, then perhaps finding time to read it.

It is a pity you missed the seventies in fandom. That is indeed my decade, as can be seen from the diary-like 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' through that decade. Of course, I was miserable for most of that period until I got together with Elaine, but my misery makes great copy, even now when I re-read the entries.

You will have noticed that I have updated your splendid list of Gillespie fanzines. I've added 'guest

edited by John Foyster' to the eight or so issues to which that applies. I've found the details of the phantom issue of *SFC* from 1974, of which I have one copy. And all the details of *SFC* 19, which strictly speaking was entirely edited by Foyster a year before I reprinted *exploding madonna* and *Journal of Omphalistic Epistemology*. Also, I've extended the list into 2012. The list doesn't include any reference to the issues that also ran through FAPA, but that's because in ten years of being in FAPA I did not write any mailing comments, and just sent to FAPA editions of magazines running in ANZAPA. Also, another whole list is needed for *Scratch Pad* on efanazines.com, which contains the non-mailing comments sections from various issues of *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life* and **brg**. Too complicated by far.

Rog Peyton's list is very interesting, because I mainly agree with it, but he won't have a bar of Philip K. Dick or my favourite SF novel, Brian Aldiss's *Hothouse*. I do remember that I enjoyed Pat Murphy's *The Falling Woman* a great deal, but cannot remember any details of it. But it is sitting there waiting to be re-read. *The City, Not Long After* is also sitting there in hardback, and never has been read. Whatever happened to Pat Murphy?

I must try to remember to send you a copy of Gerald Murnane's latest book, *A History of Books*. It is based around the proposition that books on the shelf have no value apart from what one can remember of them, which isn't much. If one is lucky, one might remember an entire line of text from some great book. The real importance is the way the reading of the book ties in with events of one's own life at the time one was reading the book. The result is that even our 'memory' of ourselves from the period of time is a kind of fiction. I must have a go at an essay, in my own style, based on the same proposition. Or you might like to try something similar (as you have in this letter of comment) based on various important books in your life.

It was Ed Cagle who printed and co-edited the mysterious first edition of *SFC* 40 in the middle of Kansas in October 1973. Ed died only a few years later, of a heart attack, at the age of 40. If there had been any copies left of that first edition left at his house, they would have been thrown out.

I've never written the story of Gillespie and alcohol, because I feel awkward doing so. My family were very much against the partaking of alcohol, so it was not until 1972, at the age of 25, when my friend Owen Webster, quite a bit older than me, shoved a glass of fine Australian red in front of me, that finally I partook a drop. I drink little from then on for a few years, because I was living at home for another six months, and also because any quantity of wine made me feel depressed rather than lightened up. I didn't taste beer until Ed Cagle, the same one, during my trip to Kansas in 1973, shoved a glass of Coors in front of me, and I quite enjoyed it. I doubt if I would like Coors now. Partaking of spirits is entirely the fault of Bob Tucker, when we

visited him in Illinois during the same trip. I could hardly refuse to take part in the Smoooooth ceremony, could I? From then on I enjoyed Beam's Choice, and spirits in general, but in small quantities.

My years of drinking coincide with my years of feeling miserable enough about the lack of female companionship to become very social and attend lots of parties. I got stuck into spirits, mainly with the help of Roger Weddall, and despite the fact that because of federal excise taxes Australian spirits cost about five times their US equivalent.

My second period of enjoying grog was after Elaine and I got together, and we started to discover restaurants and really good wines. Most of the wine I had consumed up to that point had been of poor quality, so hardly addictive. In the early eighties I also put on a lot of weight, mainly because of the process of discovering fine restaurants and wines (then at affordable prices). We pulled back only in the late nineties, when Elaine found she could no longer stand the taste of wine. We ran our cellar, such as it was, down to nothing, and I found that beer at dinner was a very good substitute for soft drink, which I'm no longer allowed to drink at all (because of diabetes II).

All of which reminds me that I would never have drunk anything stronger than Coke for my entire life if I had not entered fandom. But I would never have done any of the other things I most enjoy doing. Raise a glass to fandom.*]

I think that's the first time I've ever been brigaded with Brian Aldiss! I am boggled and flattered.

I'll whisper a confession: among the 15 or 20 Aldiss books on the shelves we don't have and I've never read *Hothouse*. I suspect that there would be a few Dick novels in a hypothetical mdp top 100. I would at one point, probably about 10 to 15 years ago, claim him as my favourite sf writer, although I always found that a stunningly difficult question to answer. But referring back to my letter, I did find when I re-read some of them on the back of their Masterworks reissue that the years had somehow diminished them.

Back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, before I had an all-London-zones season ticket, I would use bus tickets as bookmarks and then would leave the ticket in the book once I'd finished it. There was thus a tangible record or time-and-place preserved within the book itself.

A few years back I picked a 1950s issue of *Galaxy* off a bookshop shelf in Hay on Wye and found a handwritten invoice from Ken Slater who'd sold the magazine to its original purchaser over 50 years previously. And this year at Eastercon we sold a book to another dealer who was fairly sure he knew from whom Andy Richards had acquired it, as he remembered selling it. We did rather regret that the specialist sf booksellers had never developed a series of subtle code marks, a bit like those messages supposedly left on gate posts by tramps to identify potentially friendly or unfriendly households, which would enable us to reliably track the journey of older books throughout the community.

(15 October 2012)

Feature letters

Steve Jeffery

From a psychedelic hedgehog

STEVE JEFFERY

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I find it almost horrifyingly easy to point and click at things on a website and add them to the wish list or shopping basket. At the moment there is a constant stream of little brown boxes coming back here as I work my way through the list of fantasy books Vikki has marked with a highlighter in *Locus*'s New and Forthcoming Books section.

And Amazon has all sort of stuff besides books and CDs/DVDs. Vikki bought me a couple of nice little Danelectro guitar effects pedals for my last birthday, and I'm currently dithering over whether I can justify a Behringer echo machine to replace my vintage 1970s WEB Copicat tape echo unit (which itself may be worth a bit on eBay, as musicians start to hanker over the sound of old analog devices).

Thanks again for *SFC*s 83 and 84. Work's got a bit on top of me at present and I haven't managed to read more than the first few articles and reviews in the PKD issue.

I'm also currently sidetracked by Ian McDonald's *The Dervish House* (last year's BSFA Awards winner), which I found in the local library, and is another of those books that seems to consolidate a lot of stuff serendipitously that I've been reading beforehand, in this case springboarding off ideas in information theory (Gleick's *The Information*, and also Pr Jim Al Khalili's current BBC4 programs on maths, entropy, and information). It's strangely satisfying when a series of books or programs, all selected seemingly at random, seem to cohere around a central topic like that, and you start to suspect a spooky Guiding Hand is directing your reading.

(27 October 2012)

In *SFC* 83, I just read Guy Salvidge's review of *The Owl in Daylight* by Tessa Dick, which I didn't even know existed. So naturally I googled it. It appears that no one else, at least on the internet, knows anything about it either, apart from Guy, Amazon, and, presumably, Tessa Dick herself. I scored precisely two hits in Google: one to Guy's online review of the book, and the other to an Amazon page. While apparently no longer available from Amazon (which is odd, since Guy implies it was published using their own CreateSpace system) the Amazon page has a preview of the cover (rather nice) and the first and last

10 pages of the paperback, plus a pointer to secondhand retailers and an estimated price of £263. I probably won't be adding this to my Xmas wish list for Vikki. It currently ranks 3,013,003 on Amazon's bestseller list.

I've no idea why this seems unavailable through Amazon, since two other memoirs by Tessa Dick, *Philip K Dick: Remembering Firebright*, and *My Life on the Edge of Reality, and Quachi: And Other Stories And Poems*, all published via CreateSpace, are all still shown as available and ranging from £4-£9 for paperback.

Strange, and slightly annoying, since Guy's review made *Owl* sound like a really good novel. Was its removal from sale due to the threats of litigation and censorship by the PKD Trust? If so, what irony.

(12 November 2012)

[*brg* Tessa Dick must be wondering why she is not selling copies at the moment, or perhaps has withdrawn the book from some unknown reason. But Guy was able to get his copy, and probably so was Steve Cameron, another real PKD fan who lives in Melbourne. He buys everything related to Dick, whereas I've long since given up trying to keep up.*]

On the basis that I regard scribbling in fanzines and books as a crime only slightly less heinous than burning them, my copy of *SFC* 83 is decorated with enough of those handy coloured tabs that it resembles a psychedelic hedgehog.

(The Psychedelic Hedgehogs: A minor and largely forgotten prog rock band of the early '70s, not to be confused with the even more short-lived and obscure Sonic Tapirs, who existed for a brief two weeks in 1980 in the back bedroom of a flat in Murray Road, Ealing, and whose sole legacy is a single surviving copy of a C30 cassette tape.)

Guy Salvidge's study of the PDK's novels and the various critical and biographical works about the author is an obvious labour of love, and a neat and worthy addition to the Gillespie canon on Dick's work. It's still a matter of huge regret that I came to the party too late to learn about the existence of your own *Philip K Dick: Electric Shepherd*, though a quick google shows it listed on two different sites selling at \$200. Umberto Rossi's critical book about Dick's works is available, but it's a tad on the expensive side.

[*brg* Nice to have a price quoted for copies of Philip K. Dick: *Electric Shepherd*. I have about five file copies left, and I will not let any more go, even for \$200 each. When it hits \$1000 a copy, I might reconsider, but I've found that are actually people who declare that I am their friend for life, obtain a copy of *Electric Shepherd* from me, and I never hear from them again.*]

Whoa, that's a character assassination of Stanislaw Lem by Franz Rottensteiner. When I was young and naïve I used to take much of Lem's pronouncements at face value. Older, possibly no less naïve but more guardedly cynical, I reread a lot of them as the bluster of a man trying to impress others (and perhaps himself) of his own importance. Lem's assertion, quoted by Rottensteiner, that he could talk for half an hour to a scientist in any field before they could determine he was an outsider is laughable from even the first 20 pages of cod scientific handwaving in *Solaris*, before the book develops into what seems almost an attack on scientific method or orthodoxy towards the end. Clearly Lem sees no problems in attacking science fiction for not being rigorous enough in its science while simultaneously attacking science for not being open enough to 'visionary' (for which, read 'crackpot or deranged') ideas.

Another highlight of this issue must surely be the four-handed dissection of Connie Willis's *Blackout/All Clear* time travel novels, by Patrick McGuire, Yvonne Rousseau, Murray MacLachan, and Mark Plummer, in a splendid example of a critical turkey shoot. (Albeit one where a couple of the shooters occasionally have a shot at each other, just to bring a more sporting element to the thing.) And in this same spirit, I rather suspect Patrick actually meant 'Willis the Anglophile' rather than 'Willis the Anglophone' midway down the first column on page 54. Or maybe, in the context it appears, he is suggesting Willis is not so much Anglophone as Anglo-monolingual to expect her to be able to research sources on German or Japanese experiences of war.

Yvonne's defence that the mistitling of Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* is a mistake by Willis rather than a deliberate alt-hist ploy sounds convincing to me. Until now, I wasn't even aware of this variant title.

But the star turn in all of this has to be Murray MacLachan's splendid digressive rant into the authoritarian media control of the Star Wars Galactic Republic and the culpable villainy of RD-D2, which is reminiscent of Mark Plummer's more surreal excursions when he ponders the Higher Mathematical Thoughts inhabiting the big brain of Damien Warman ('The Mathematics Man' in *Banana Wings* 44), identifying a specific edition of a rare fanzine from a two-inch scrap of cover art, or detailing the past life of Nic Farey as a one-time international cheese smuggler.

No wonder you decided you weren't cut out to be a teacher, Bruce, if you accept Tim Marion's 'I'm sorry Sir, but the cat was sick on my fanzine' as an excuse for not handing in his loc on time. You must have been a pushover for late or missing homework. Re leaving the SF in *SF Commentary* open to interpretation. When you type the initials into a browser like that it's more likely to turn up references to a San Francisco newspaper.

In the letters column, Greg Benford quotes me from a review quoting Clute quoting Gibson. Now that's a wonderful infinite textual regress that mirrors (sorry!) Dick Jenssen's wonderful cover for *SFC* 84. Which I owe you another loc on.

(15 November 2012)

[*brg* In retrospect, the falling out between Lem and Rottensteiner could be anticipated, especially as Franz hero-worshipped Lem for all those years. But this doesn't make me enjoy Lem's best work any the less. All we know now is that Lem was just as fallible a personality as any other writer who is overpraised in his or her own lifetime. I find very few writers with an ironic or dispassionate viewpoint on the worth of their own writing. Some writers would have been much better if their work hadn't been overpraised by the wrong kind of loquacious academic early in the career. And it can go the other way ... David Ireland, an Australian writer many of us have enjoyed greatly since the 1960s, has seven unsold novels lying on his shelf! A recent article in the *Australian* tried to find out why they don't sell, but all the shy and retiring Ireland can think of is that they are un-PC; they represent older Australians who are judged, I assume, by publishers as not being book buyers. Phtoey! — as a result, most of today's Australian fiction is as bland as curdled milk.*]

I wonder if Steve Sneyd knows that Tessa Dick also writes poetry (though I don't know if any is sf/f related), and this may be of interest to him for *Data Dump*. I owe him a response for the last batch, so I'll let him know when I next write.

I still owe you some loc comments on *SFC*, especially the responses (and responses to responses) around Willis's two (or one, depending how you're counting) time travel novels, *Blackout* and *All Clear*. I admit I picked up the second of these off the shelf in the library, looked at the size of it, then realised it was a sequel to other books I hadn't read (and weren't on the shelves) and put it back. I wasn't hugely enamoured by the Oxford future/time travel thread of *Doomsday Book*, which I found unconvincing, and which undermined the more interesting and gripping historical sections.

I know Willis is a fan of screwball comedy, but I wish she wouldn't mix the two genres. It's as if Chris Priest suddenly put a music hall turn in the middle of *The Separation*. And despite Priest's jibes at Stross, Stross is one person who can pull this off, going from bureaucratic farce to moments of chilling horror in works such as *The Atrocity Archives*. But part of that is because I recognise the ridiculous bureaucracy Charlie lampoons so well because I'm mired in it every weekday, as are many people who work in large organisations where the rules themselves have become more important than the ends they were designed to achieve.

I found something similar recently in Magnus Mills's slim novel *The Maintenance of Headway*, which reads like an episode of *On the Buses* scripted by Samuel Beckett. (Admit it. You going to have to read this now, aren't you?) I must look for more of his stuff. I seem to recall

The Restraint of Beasts was long listed on one of the UK awards sometime back.

Do you know, or have you even watched, Pedro Almodóvar's *The Skin I Live In*? (Apologies if this was listed or reviewed in a previous *SFC*. I've not got them to hand to check at the moment). I've just read the book it was based on, Thierry Jonquet's *Tarantula*. OK, I knew what the plot twist was before I started (there are disadvantages to reviews and Wiki being so readily accessible), but it's a vicious little book that put me in mind halfway through of a less well-written version of Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*.

(14 November 2012)

Dick Jenssen's cover for *SFC* 84 is something special, and thanks for Vida Weiss for inspiring it. I've been fascinated by internal reflections like this for ages. Back in the pre-computer days, when I was about 10 or 11, I attempted something of the sort using a camera, a toy soldier, and three mirrors from the bathroom cabinet. I should have used my Action Man astronaut but suspect it was too big. I never got it work satisfactorily; the camera kept intruding into the view. Nowadays, you could probably do it with a small enough webcam in the same plane as the mirrors. Or, if you had the mathematical and modelling skill of Dick Jenssen, using Vue 8.

It also brought to mind a short story by Terry Dowling, 'One Thing about the Night', that has remained with me since I read it in Ellen Datlow's ghost story anthology *The Dark* (Tor, 2003). In Dowling's story, a trio of investigators discovers a hidden hexagonal room in the middle of a bricked-up house. The room is completely lined with mirrors on walls, floor, and ceiling. A single chair sits at the exact centre of the room. It is a psychomantium, a scrying place. The idea is that if you sit long enough looking in to the furthest regress of the multiple reflected images, you will see something at the very far reaches.

One of Dowling's character remarks that the French have a phrase for this effect: *mise en abyme*, 'placed in the abyss'. I looked the phrase up in *Wikipedia*, which says that 'the commonplace usage of this phrase is describing the visual experience of standing between two mirrors, seeing an infinite reproduction of one's image, but it has several other meanings in the realm of the creative arts and literary theory. In Western art history, "mise en abyme" is a formal technique in which an image contains a smaller copy of itself, the sequence appearing to recur infinitely.'

In 'Talking to My Friends' in *SFC* 84 you write, 'Most Australian writers would not know about me or *SF Commentary*, although the magazine has been going for 43 years. I do not recognise most of the newer writers at conventions. [...] My own friends are largely people I've known for thirty or forty years, including the people who still love writing and publishing fanzines (in ANZAPA). Most of the people who recognise what we are doing here in *SFC* live overseas.'

I think this is bound to happen to all of us at some point, even if we don't go so far as gaffiating, or don't completely, as St Paul rather dismissively phrased it 'put away childish things'. We find a point of balance, or perhaps a comfort zone, centred around a group of

friends, interests, likes and dislikes, and tend to settle there, occasionally making forays to check what new things might be happening that we might want to add to our interests, rather than continually hurling ourselves against the cultural Zeitgeist (which becomes wearing as you grow older).

Since we stopped going to conventions and signings over the last few years (we haven't had a car since around 2010, an experiment that is proving generally workable if occasionally constraining for journeys outside of work or the monthly pubmeet), I've tended to rely on fanzines or the web to keep up with new books and authors. But the BSFA and Write Fantastic sites seem to be dormant, *Vector's* Torque Control mainly a poster listing for the London meetings, and we don't Facebook, I almost feel I'm back to pre-internet days for news of what happening. It's not a complaint. I still have more books and movies than I have time to read or watch them, and with Christmas coming up and Vikki and I ticking titles in the Locus Forthcoming Books list or adding them our Amazon Wish List, I don't see this situation going away very soon.

And you're not helping, Bruce, when you publish things like that impressively long list of books written or edited by Damien Broderick, especially when it contains a title as intriguing as *Skiffy and Mimesis*. Idly typing some of these as search terms into Amazon and Google, I discovered that there is another book with a similar title to Damien's 1994 *The Architecture of Babel*. This is *The Architectures of Babel: Creation, Extinctions and Intercessions in the Languages of the Global World* (eds. T. Fabbri, P. Migliore, 2011). Should he sue?

Back in *Banana Wings* 47, while wishing Mark luck with his attempt at the Definitive Bruce Gillespie Fanzine Bibliography, I noted that I had only managed to sustain a misnumbering lacuna across a mere three issues of my *Prophecy* apazine, all in the same year, and was therefore a rank amateur compared to Mark, who managed this feat for three years between 1994 and 1997, and both us are as mere dust at the feet of the Master, who took the numbering of **brg** into realms of almost Godelian indeterminacy for 15 years. That Mark has managed to unravel this must rank as a feat comparable to the solution of Fermat's Last Theorem. On the other hand, I am still mystified and constantly impressed by Mark's ability to identify fanzines and magazines from incomplete scraps of cover art or detached pages. Is this a by-product of his work as a deep cover investigative sleuth in HMRC, I wonder? In which case should we all be worried. 'Dear Mr Jeffery, I note that your travel and sustenance expense returns for tax year 1981–1982 include a claim of 18p for a Mint Wispa bar purchased at an outlet of W. H. Smith. As our investigations show that this particular confection was only launched in North-East England in 1981 with a recommended retail price of 17p, we demand knowledge of your whereabouts and travel receipts for the period Apr–Aug 1981.'

Thank God the Fishlifter Detective Agency, when not tracking down missing fragments of fanzines, only walks dogs. Or squirrels.

I wonder how many of those fanzines and apazines I have? All of the Acnestis *Great Cosmic Donut of Life* apazines, I think, and issues of *Steam Engine Time*, and most

of the later issues of **brg** and *SF Commentary* from the mid-to-late 1990s onwards. Somewhere, I'm sure, a couple of issues of *Metaphysical Review* (second series). Someday I might risk life and limb by hauling the dozen or so boxes of assorted fanzines and apas off the shelves in the library and going through them properly. Maybe. My filing and indexing for these woefully nonexistent.

I'm starting to believe an alternate title for *SF Commentary* should be 'Labour of Love', not only for the effort and cost involved in producing and mailing them, but also for contributors like Mark and Ray Wood. I've commented here and elsewhere on Ray's 'Dancing Cyborg' article (the first season of *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* was recently shown on the UK 5*Freeview channel, and we are now about a third of the way into season two which followed immediately after). And now Ray turns his extraordinary close reading (or viewing) to the two film versions of Lindqvist's *Let the Right One In*. When I turned to this my initial reaction rather echoed Mark's comment to you about *TMR*, 'Gosh, long isn't it?' I've only read the first few pages of Ray's article because I still have a recording of the Swedish version of *Let the Right One In* on the Freeview box hard drive which I haven't got round to watching yet, and didn't want to run across any spoilers, but I'm sure I will want to revisit this article properly afterwards. And quite likely see if I can find a copy of the US version, *Let Me In*, which sounds like one of those rare remakes which holds up to the original. Scrolling through the stored recordings, I also discovered I had taped Bekmametov's adaptation of Lukyanenko's *Day Watch*, and really ought to watch this again after reading the novels.

The Prisoner Handbook by Steven Paul Davies (2002, Pan) lists the episodes in this order:

- 'Arrival'
- 'The Chimes of Big Ben'

- 'A, B & C'
- 'Free For All'
- 'The Schizoid Man'
- 'The General'
- 'Many Happy Returns'
- 'Dance of the Dead'
- 'Checkmate'
- 'Hammer into Anvil'
- 'It's Your Funeral'
- 'A Change of Mind'
- 'Do Not Forsake Me, Oh My Darling'
- 'Living in Harmony'
- 'The Girl Who Was Death'
- 'Once Upon a Time'
- 'Fall Out'.

This differs from the ordering Tim Marion gives them based on internal chronology, when he says 'Schizoid Man' must precede 'Many Happy Returns' but come after 'The General'. Davies suggests that 'Dance of the Dead' may originally have been written as the second episode, but notes this is true of several others, since a number of scriptwriters were given the opening script of episode 1, 'Arrival', and asked to come up with another story. It may go some way to explaining the tangled internal chronology and references to the first half of the series. It's a long time since I watched any of these. I did see a video of the first four episodes in a charity shop last week, but resisted. (Instead I handed over my pound coin for a DVD of the most bonkers anime I've ever seen, *Excel Saga*, sat through it alternately openmouthed and in stitches that afternoon, and went straight back to buy the second disk.)

Does anyone else think that photo of McGoohan in deerstalker, dark glasses, and moustache makes him look uncommonly like a young Peter Cook?

(19 November 2012)

Feature letters

Patrick McGuire

P. K. Dick to McGoohan to Rousseau to Bujold

PATRICK MCGUIRE

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Here is my loc on *SFC* 83. Page references are to the landscape (aka screen) version, and are not accurate for the portrait/printable version.

In your response to Brian Aldiss, you mention (p. 6) the recent disappearance of bookstores in Austra-

lia from 'most suburban shopping centres'. In contemporary American English, a 'shopping centre', as distinct from a 'mall', probably means the local agglomeration of stores that is anchored (as the trade jargon has it) by a supermarket. Where I live, the Big Box bookstores such as Borders killed off the last of that class of bookstore decades ago, although I admit it was not a huge personal loss since I rarely found anything interesting in that sort of store.

Before the Big Box, I always made a point of stocking up on books whenever I was on a trip to a big city with large new- and used-book stores. The heyday of the Big Box, back when they made a point of carrying not only a lot of genre fiction, but also semiprozines, scholarly books, and even a few foreign titles, was the time when I found physical book shopping easiest, and it accounts for a large percentage of the books currently on my shelves. Then the Internet started killing off both the Big Box stores and those chain stores, often owned by the same companies as the Big Boxes, that had smaller outlets in shopping malls. What I have left in Columbia at present (unless something has changed since the last time I noticed) comes down to a few book racks in other kinds of stores, one unremarkable used-book store, one Books-A-Million that took over the vacated premises of a deceased Borders but has a smaller and more restricted inventory, and (by a stroke of luck) the local outlet attached to the warehouse of a remaindered-book dealer that actually does most of its business through internet orders. (That listing covers about a five-mile radius; there are a few additional bookstores a little farther afield.) I now acquire most of my books, whether electronic or print, over the internet, although as always I also do a lot of my reading through the public library.

In a loc published in *SFC* 81, I said, 'Phil Dick is not one of my favorite authors, the nearest exception being some of his early work that most nearly resembles standard sf, although I'm fairly sure he did not mean it that way. For instance, *The Man in a High Castle* fascinated me as a teenager in its capacity as an alternate history, whereas for Dick it was probably really more of some sort of head trip.' Guy Salvidge's discussion of *High Castle* in *SFC* 83 (p. 13) makes me wonder if I should have had more faith in my teenage perceptions. Maybe Dick really did intend the book as a serious alternate history that more nearly approximated standard sf than did most of his work. I have indeed reread *High Castle* as an adult, but not recently. Perhaps I should dig it out and have another read.

As to the other Phil Dick novels surveyed by Guy (some of which I read in my younger and more omnivorous days, and some not), it is obvious from his article that they spoke to Guy's condition. But, sure as there are drugheads in California, the novels, and/or Guy's descriptions of the ones I left unread, did not speak to mine. Guy still leaves me wondering why anyone would be invest nontrivial lifespan in reading, much less studying, this kind of thing. And how it is that some of the same people who are attracted to this confused and illogical muddle, the product of mental illness and recreational drug use, can also enjoy the rational and self-consistent world-building of more orthodox sf and genre fantasy. (I know it isn't just Guy and you, Bruce. There are multiple Phildickians even in my local sf group. But I still don't grasp the how or why.)

In the original of a loc published in *SFC* 83, I referred to the author of the Sherlock Holmes stories as 'Doyle.' You have altered this to 'Conan Doyle' (p. 62), Bruce. 'Conan' was Arthur Conan Doyle's middle name, and he never used it as a first name. Instead, Doyle (and the editors of *The Strand*) sometimes liked to convey the impression that Conan was part of an aristocratic double

surname — but the author is still alphabetised as 'Doyle', so this affectation never became an accepted name change or official pseudonym. I have no desire to assist Doyle's posthumous social climbing, and I am surprised and disappointed that you apparently do, Bruce. On the other hand, alas, the misspelling on the same page of (S. M.) Stirling's name as 'Sterling' was my own — presumably a typo, since I know better.

Those inhabiting what Bruce (probably correctly) believes to be the small intersection of readership between *SFC* and *NYRSF* will note that some of my loc's musings on electronic self-publishing as the future refuge of real sf (p. 65) got recycled within an article, written months later but published sooner, in the May 2012 *NYRSF*. It concerned Wesley Allison, an e-published sf and fantasy author who I think deserves wider attention in the genre-sf community. His readership does seem to be slowly growing, but, sad to say, my article does not seem to have done much to attract interest to him from within the traditional sf world. Come on people! You can try some of his stuff free at Smashwords.com or Feedbooks.com, and the works at the Kindle Store start at under a dollar.

In fairness to Yvonne Rousseau and contrary to Murray MacLachlan's assertion (p. 78), the fact that *Blackout/All Clear* won a Hugo does not mean that the voters considered it sf, since in Yvonne's view it is a 'fairytale love story'. Fairy tales are a subset of fantasy, and fantasy is also eligible under Hugo rules. I myself remain unconvinced by Yvonne's argument in this particular case, although I admit the principle that some work often considered to be sf is really fantasy. I certainly hold *Star Wars* to be science fantasy (or something) rather than sf. Moreover, I would assert that much of Ray Bradbury's so-called sf (most of *The Martian Chronicles*, for instance), is not sf, since the pseudoscience in it was not merely wrong, but surely known by Bradbury and his contemporary readership to be wrong, and was offered without rationalisation. (I say this without prejudice to the quality of Bradbury's fiction. I am merely discussing its genre.) But I don't think that Willis's implausibilities here rise to that level.

Speaking of Hugo eligibility, I belatedly got around to viewing the DVD of the 2012 second-place Long Form Dramatic Presentation contender, *Hugo*. I don't think it was sf or fantasy or horror, meaning (unless the official definition of the category is very strange) that it was Hugo-ineligible and that the Chicon committee never should have allowed it on the ballot. The only non-realistic element was in the depiction of how the clocks in the railroad station worked, which I think was far too minor an aspect to qualify the film. The sf/f flavor of the film really came from the fact that it centred on a fictionalised version of Georges Méliès, a pioneer maker of fantasy films, some of them sf-tinged. Come to think of it, by the same logic, in Short Form, the *Drink Tank* Acceptance Speech should similarly have been disqualified. Or both could have been moved to the Best Related Work category, since they were both about sf/f.

Mark Plummer notes (p. 82) that the cover depiction of B-29s bombing London would imply a very different history from our timelines. I do vaguely recall that some Andre Norton novel includes a reference to the One-

Way Raid, in which, on another timeline and previous to the time of the story, the Americans had learned that Hitler and other Nazi leaders were touring conquered London, and had sent a massive one-way air fleet there to try to kill them all. (The title might be *The Crossroads of Time*.)

At a panel at Chicon 7 on an unrelated topic, the subject of Willis's errors in depicting things British somehow arose. As I recall, I thereupon interjected from the audience something like, 'Wouldn't you think she would have had British beta readers?' and Jo Walton on the panel responded, 'She had British editors!' Walton (British born but now living in Canada), a prominent author with experience in such things, thereby confirmed the supposition expressed in my loc (p. 72) that the British editors would have been involved in the process at an early stage and that it would not have gone beyond their remit to try to spare Willis this kind of problem. Walton did go on to say that British editors did sometimes try to do strange things, such as changing her (Walton's) British word 'hoardings' to the Yankspeak 'billboards', I presume on the theory that the Brits could handle 'billboards' but the Yanks would be clueless as to 'hoardings'. Walton said she put it back to 'hoardings', since it was what her British character would say and the meaning was clear enough from context.

Americans have been setting novels in Britain, and getting details wrong, at least since James Fenimore Cooper's *Precaution* (1820), which did have a British edition that reportedly was fairly well received. The practice seems particularly prevalent in mystery fiction. One of my favorite US mystery writers, Jeanne M. Dams, has a series narrated by an American protagonist living in Britain, which gives her an excuse for Americanisms. Dams is currently published by Severn House in both the US and UK, with the books printed in Britain. This is an interesting publishing trend that we are seeing a little more of lately. I can't think of other genre print publishers doing the precisely same (just a few non-fiction ones), but some Gollancz sf e-books are available from the publisher in the US, as, I understand, are most or all Angry Robot ebooks. Dams's heroine is getting a little more British in vocabulary ('boot' instead of 'trunk', for instance), and other characters note that her accent is fading to 'Transatlantic'. This could be realistic (I have known such cases among Americans living in the UK, or just back from a prolonged stay there, although some people pick up new accents and vocabulary much more readily than others), but it might also be a concession to the British market, if a high proportion of Severn House's sales are there.

On sf poems (Steve Sneyd, p. 92), one more for the list: C. S. Lewis's narrative poem *Dymer*, published in 1926 under the pseudonym Clive Hamilton, seems, from the secondary accounts and quoted snippets that I've seen, to have a strong sfnal (dystopian) element, although it evidently finishes up as a straight fantasy. This is a work of Lewis's atheist days.

Like John-Henri Holmberg (p. 104), and although I would like to be proven wrong, I suspect that sf fanzines will not long survive the Baby Boom generation. Patrick O'Brian fandom has been net based from its inception. I'm currently somewhat out of touch with mystery fan-

dom, which I once followed more closely. However, as far as I know, there are no longer any print mystery fanzines, and only one print nonfiction mystery semiprozine. Nor am I aware even of any mystery fanzines that have, like a number of sf fanzines, retreated to the Web but maintained a magazine format. And although both *NYRSF* (by Hugo definition, evidently actually a semiprozine) and *SFC* are hanging on for now (the revived *SFC* replacing the defunct *Steam Engine Time*), I'm unaware of any new venues that similarly seek serious but non-scholarly writing about sf. (Which has led to the fact that *SFC*, at least, has a significantly overstocked inventory.) Nonfiction on sf seems largely to have moved to blogs and podcasts, where the treatments are generally shorter and more off the cuff.

Has anyone else, incidentally, run across the mostly-fiction, eclectic steampunk/sf/f/games/etc. fanzine *Theaker's Quarterly Fiction*? Its content is generally not up my alley, but I want to discuss its format. Along with a .pdf edition, it publishes in an ebook format that I think would work well for nonfiction sf fanzines, and, if widely adopted, might put some new life into the kind of fanzine containing lengthy articles, since it can be comfortably read on an ebook reader. (In my experience, as softcopy, fanzines in .pdf format only work on a computer screen.) As I write this, near the end of September, *NYRSF* still has not published its September issue, which is to be the first also offered in .epub format. I will be curious to see how well that works.

If things get a little worse in the sercon fanzine world, or if that world stays the same but I manage to get my production rate a little higher, I may be forced to create my own blog, and/or to get into electronic self-publishing, just to have somewhere to place the kind of stuff I write. But then I would be confronted with the problem of publicising it, and the opportunities for feedback would probably fall off. So I would much prefer to see a revival of sercon fanzines (which admittedly for practical reasons would have to take place in softcopy rather than print).

By my standards this is a short loc, but then, half the issue was taken up with PKD, in whom I am uninterested, and evidently there are fewer topics unrelated to the issue at hand that I feel like discussing than is sometimes the case. But I am about to turn to *SFC* 84, in any event.
(2 October 2012)

Completion of this loc on *SFC* 84 has been delayed by outside events, most notably Superstorm Sandy (which I suspect made the news even in Oz). I lost power for about 28 hours and landline phone service for about two days, but things were not as bad as in metro New York and points northward. Only a few days after the event did I discover that my ancient upstairs computer and its surge protector seem to have been fried by power fluctuations associated with the storm. It wasn't a huge loss — I think I had all important files backed up, and the things that the machine was still good for in the modern environment were severely limited. But it was my best computer for word processing, since it had the largest screen and the most comfortable keyboard attached to it. I've now replaced the computer. Fortunately, the monitor and keyboard (neither one original with the computer) seem

to be more or less compatible with the new computer (some non-standard buttons on the keyboard no longer work). I'm by no means finished with setting up the new machine and reloading the backup files, let alone with comprehending Windows 8, but I do now seem to be far enough along that I can get back to my loc.

You, Bruce, discuss (pp. 8–10) changes in Australian fandom, and especially how serious sf criticism such as you engage in has been pushed into the background. I think that a lot of this alteration has to do with the fact that changes in technology and in the nature of the now inaptly titled 'science fiction' publishing category have made Oz and its fandom more similar to the rest of the Anglosphere than it was when you began. When you started out, there were not enough selling Australian sf writers to form a critical mass. Now there are sufficient sf/f writers to do so, and Oz fandom has reoriented around fiction writers, just as fandom had long been oriented elsewhere in the world.

I recall that, in a previous loc some decades back, perhaps to you or to *ASFR Second Series*, I theorised that so much excellent criticism came out of Australia because (considering that sf is inherently a minority taste) the local market was not big enough to support sf publishing, and submitting to markets in the US or U. was an expensive and time-consuming pain in the neck: instead, the efforts of the best Australian sfnal minds tended to be channeled into not-for-profit criticism. I remarked, however, that technology was changing. Even then, one could write something on a computer and inexpensively print it out (photocopying long texts at the time was still costly), and then send it on a one-way submission (with instructions to destroy the printout if it was rejected), so that expensive International Reply Coupons were becoming less of an issue. I theorised that this might make it easier for Australian authors. It did, and then full email submission became an accepted method.

Other factors appeared that I did not mention in that loc, or indeed recognise until they were firmly established. Throughout the Anglophone world, fantasy completed its takeover of what previously had been the sf publishing category and its associated fandom, leaving sf itself as the poor relation. It turned out that now a somewhat higher proportion of the public was willing to regularly buy fantasy than was ever true of sf. This meant that there now existed a domestic Australian market for fantasy, particularly in YA. Next, publishing technology evolved to permit small print runs, print-on-demand, and ebooks. Thus we arrived at where we are today, where although Australia still has only a tiny number of established sf writers, it has rather more established fantasy writers, and an even larger number of small-press or self-published writers working in the category that they themselves would likely term 'spec fic.' Thus fiction writers, rather than critics, are now the centre of Australian fandom. This may not be a good thing, but the experience of the rest of the Anglosphere (and, as far as I know of sf fandoms in other languages) suggests that it is the normal thing, and that Australian fandom's former state, favorable to producing the a disproportionate number of the world's best nonfiction writers on sf, was an abnormality imposed by distance and the relatively

small size of the local market.

Harry Harrison's death inspired a variety of personal reminiscences in various places that I've seen, with more undoubtedly to come after publishing lags. As with many writers, especially but not exclusively genre ones, he wrote many works, with only a few seeming to be better than routine. But probably those few will form the basis of his reputation in the future. I just read the online *SF Encyclopedia* entry for him, and I see nothing there to disagree with. He led a colourful life and did important things for sf as a community and genre, especially in its international aspects, but I suspect that in the long run he will be chiefly remembered for his best works of fiction.

The remarks of Mark Plummer and of Bruce (pp. 25–7) make it clear that *Tomorrow And* was indeed, as per one alternative I presented in my loc in *SFC83*, published considerably after the point where I remember receiving it. So quite possibly I was dropped from the mailing list, or indeed I may never have made the list, and only had received it as a handout while Jerry Lapidus and I were at the same university. I attended Torcon 2 in 1973, and first met Bruce there, but I don't think I ran across Jerry, even though Bruce did. Even at the size of Worldcons of the seventies, it was perhaps more usual than otherwise to miss any given person at a Worldcon unless there had been prior planning. The recent Chicon 7 had a program item 'SF at the University of Chicago over the Years'. Not surprisingly, it was attended mostly by former university students and other associated people who remained active enough in fandom or prodrom to be attending the Worldcon, and not by all such people at that. (It was scheduled in conflict with the convention's interview with GoH and UC dropout Mike Resnick, for instance.) Jerry Lapidus's name came up in the UC discussion. Evidently the university sf group died and was revived at several points after Jerry's revival, however, so that other people besides him also had the honour of restoring the sf group. Rumor had it that the university group still exists, but no current member attended the program item.

I enjoyed Tim Marion's article on *The Prisoner*. I was in college when the show first aired, although I may have first seen it in reruns during university vacation, since I seem to associate viewing it with my parents' house rather than with my dorm. I do vaguely remember discussing the show with other university science-fiction society members, and telling a Russian about it on my first trip to the USSR soon after I started grad school. I remember finding the show enjoyable even in its obscurities and ambiguities. I'm not sure if I'd have the same reaction today, now that so many other shows have tried being similarly obscure and ambiguous. I've had the opportunity to view some individual *Prisoner* episodes at later times, but, as far as I recall, not to see the whole thing all the way through. I seem to recall that when I lived in Germany in the mid 80s, some TV network (possibly Austrian rather than German, since I could also get a couple of Austrian channels) would every so often run an episode as a filler. I'm not sure they even showed them in order. (And of course they were dubbed into German, which I did not speak well.) Some of the episodes that Tim describes ring no bells at all, so I may have

never seen them. I'll have to check if the DVDs are available from my public library.

The Colin Steele reviews in this issue did sometimes run to multiple paragraphs, but they were nonetheless barely more elaborate than capsule reviews and were addressed to a general audience, not to experienced genre readers. Tens of thousands of people had (I presume) already seen them in *The Canberra Times* (which is to be commended for running sf reviews at a time when US papers generally no longer do so). Given the nature of the material and the exposure it had already enjoyed, I'm not sure that reprinting it was the best use of space in *SFC*. On the other hand, unlike the reviews in *SFC*80A, this batch was fairly recent, and I did note down a couple of titles to look for.

In fact, I believe that Steele's review was the one that caused me to chase down Brin's *Existence* (although I did belatedly see it reviewed and discussed in various other venues). I enjoyed the Brin book for its novel solution to the Fermi paradox. It did have a weak ending. It looks as if once he had finished writing page 507, Brin realised that unless he did something drastic, he was going to be buried in the novel forever (or would have to write a second volume just as long, à la Connie Willis's *Blackout/All Clear*), so he wrapped things up in a decidedly sketchy and hasty-looking manner, in less than 50 pages.

I've heard Kim Westwood's *The Courier's New Bicycle* praised in various quarters in addition to Steele's review. If memory serves, it even got a review in *Locus*, despite the fact that it is not yet available in the US. I am not sure that the present market partitioning of the world, highly frustrating to readers, even makes commercial sense. By the time a US edition does appear, I imagine that a lot of the buzz will have died down. If I could have bought the novel as an ebook (at a reasonable price) at the height of the buzz, I would probably have done so. Now I've had time for second thoughts to settle in. The plot sounds needlessly recomplicated and the national and international setup sounds implausible. By the time a US edition does show up, I will probably just read it from the public library, assuming they acquire it.

Steele makes a point of saying that a heroine of Australian technothriller *Rotten Gods* is an intelligence officer 'with an ANU degree' (that is, from the Australian National University, whose main campus lies in a suburb of Canberra). Was this mentioned as a local reference likely to endear the novel to *Canberra Times* readers? If I were writing a capsule review of a US thriller for the Washington Post, I doubt that I would have taken the space to note that the intelligence-officer heroine had a Georgetown degree. I would have thought that it would be fairly common that someone with that sort of job would have earned a degree in the national capital and from a fairly demanding university.

I question Steele's characterisation (p. 87) of *Reamde* as 'an SF thriller.' I read or skimmed the whole thing, and to my mind the novel is no more sf than are most other technothrillers (which is to say just barely, in some theoretical sense, but not at all as a practical matter). As far as I can see, it was only Stephensen's reputation, and no significant part of the book's actual content, that got it reviewed as if it were sf and that put it on genre-sf bestseller lists such as *Locus*'s.

In the unlikely event that someone was willing to undertake the task and could secure the necessary permissions, it would be nice to see sample collections of the sf reviews of various other personages, and possibly more than samples, if the reviews proved to retain interest long after their immediate purpose was past. A. J. Budrys reviewed sf for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, a job taken over by Roland Green. Anthony Boucher reviewed both mystery fiction and sf for various papers. I recently learned that Edmund Cooper had for many years reviewed sf for the *Sunday Times* in London. If any of them have had their reviews collected in fanzines or elsewhere, I am unaware of it.

(17 November 2012)

I said I would see if my local library had DVDs of *The Prisoner*. It turns out that the library system has the collection, although not my local branch. The library repackaged them as two DVDs per double jewelcase, which is a reasonable or even excessive amount of viewing to attempt in one loan period. So far I have obtained by request, and finished, the first jewelcase. The series seems to have aged fairly well. I did note that Number Six seems a bit on the histrionic side, in a way that reminds me of Captain Kirk; perhaps this was the fashion in the late 1960s. Most of the clothing is Village-issue, divorced from the outside world, so the glaringly dated elements are the women's hairstyles and some of the technology (bulky electronics, etc.). In one episode, Number Two tells a henchman to give her regards to 'the homeland', which suggests the Village has a state sponsor (rather than the sponsor being an international secret organisation, such as UNCLE's foe THRUSH or James Bond's foe SPECTRE). After the first jewelcase (three episodes plus the alternate version of 'Chimes'), I have concluded that (even ignoring the surreal final series episode), if there is any rational explanation at all for the show's events, it has to involve either extraterrestrials or parallel worlds. Some of the depicted technology, such as the rover balloons, is far in advance of the 1960s, or even the 2010s, on our Earth. Moreover, seasonal day length and stars must put the Village's latitude about right for the filming location in Wales (in 'Chimes,' Number Six accepts the cover story that the Village is on an island in the Baltic off the coast of Poland), but on our Earth the Village's mild climate at that northern latitude would require a site warmed by either the Gulf Stream or the Japanese Current (and thus on the coast of the British Isles, British Columbia, or, less plausibly, somewhere in the North Sea or the Baltic), which does not leave a huge amount of room to hide such a site. So we need a parallel world and/or highly advanced technology to duplicate or fake the Village's apparent location, or to hide the site from outsiders if it is, in fact in, say, Britain or Canada. But I doubt that the writers bothered to give the puzzle a rational solution.

I have also just read Bujold's recent *Captain Vorpatrik's Alliance*, and I noted there a couple of possible *Prisoner* allusions, neither one conclusive. However, Bujold is about my age, so it is entirely plausible that she might have seen the show in her impressionable years. (True, in *The Vorkosigan Companion* she does not list it among her influential TV shows.) In 'The Chimes of Big Ben',

Number Six discovers that he cannot turn off the evidently battery-powered single-frequency radio in his cottage, so he finally stuffs it into the refrigerator. Ivan Vorpatriel does the same thing when his wristcom won't stop ringing. Later in the novel, a technician uses the nickname Rover for his antigrav camera drone. This could be from the use of Rover as a dog's name, and the technician clearly addresses the drone as if it were a living being, but Rover is not a name associated in the US with search dogs or hunting dogs. (More with a child's pet, as reflected in Tom Lehrer's line, 'since my brother's dog Rover got run over'.) The name does, however, recall the Rover balloons of *The Prisoner*, which, like the drone, move with considerable autonomy and which similarly locate people (if only to keep them within the Village).

In an essay in *The Vorkosigan Companion*, Bujold says that although many of her readers seem to think that Ivan has hidden depths, in her view (at the time of the essay), what you see is what you get. However in several of the articles and interviews by other people within the *Companion*, people expressed a desire to see Ivan married off. Bujold evidently eventually came around to granting the readers' wish, and presumably decided that Ivan would have to be endowed with hidden depths first to make it an interesting story. She accomplishes this by a personality upgrade strikingly similar to what Dorothy L. Sayers (a cited influence on Bujold) did to Peter Wimsey in the later novels. That is, in a manner consistent with previously expounded background, she endows Ivan with a more humanising back story, and provides an explanation of why he should have been giving the impression (largely subconsciously) of being more superficial than he really is.

Bujold also rationalises what might seem to have been an inconsistent use of 'Lord' and 'Lady' in a way that makes me wonder if she had read Yvonne Rousseau's article on *Blackout/All Clear*, with its criticism of Willis's errors on that score. Bujold, fortunately for her, is making up her own universe (although extrapolating from ours, and positing that Barrayar was settled primarily by British, French, Russians, and Greeks), and so she can devise rules that (hopefully) make everything turn out to have been right all along.

Like all the Vorkosiverse books, *Alliance* is written so that it can be read independently, but it does make a large number of allusions to things that happened earlier, many of which I remembered only vaguely, so I was enticed into an orgy of Vorkosiverse rereading, both from my own shelves and from the library. One of these allusions reaches back about 235 years: in *Falling Free*, set 200 Earth years before Miles's birth, a ruthless corporation called GalacTech has gene-engineered the zero-g-adapted quaddie race. The corporation is still around, and still ruthless, in *Alliance*, where they supply another genetic plot-driver.

All of the Miles print editions that I have looked at in my recent retrospective research have (in my opinion) pretty awful covers, which is actually encouraging in a way, since it would indicate that an author can become popular and successful with no help from the cover artists. Besides being unattractive, the latest novel's cover continues a sorry industry-wide tradition of whitewashing characters on sf covers — the dustjacket for *Alliance*

lightens the skin tones of both Ivan, who like most Barrayarans is supposed to be 'olive-skinned', and our heroine Tej, who is supposed to have 'cinnamon' skin darker than her 'sherry' eyes. (Indeed, in what seems to be the scene depicted, Tej is said to be suntanned to the normal shade of her father, elsewhere described as 'mahogany'.) At least Tej is shown on the cover to be a little darker-skinned than Ivan. The cover for the paperback of *A Civil Campaign* shows two dancers at a ball: a tall man who appears to be Ivan Vorpatriel and a blonde woman who seems to be one of the Koudelka sisters, from a very minor scene (although I suppose the artist gets credit for not just making something up). The novel deals instead primarily with Miles and Ekaterin, but Miles's shortness apparently made him too non-photogenic to be portrayed. Other novels in the series have just his face, not his undersized body, on the cover.

One thing I picked up on in this rereading of the series was that Bujold deliberately avoids the expression 'to steeple one's fingers', because Barrayar is mostly non-Christian. She at least once makes it 'to temple one's fingers', but in later works settles on 'to tent one's fingers'. Considering that Barrayar culture is essentially non-Christian, the stories do make a surprising number of allusions to God and to expressions from the Bible. Some of this can be rationalised because Miles's immigrant Betan mother is some sort of very liberal Christian, so that Miles may have picked up language from her. Some of it is less easily explained, such as, in *Alliance*, the nickname for four military inspectors as the Vor Horsemen, or the Biblical allusions in passages from Ivan's viewpoint. (Like the late Poul Anderson, Bujold is an agnostic/atheist who is not hostile to religion in general or Christianity in particular.)

We now have in the real world better ebook readers than the ones that Bujold has been describing in the Vorkosiverse since the mid 1980s. A lot of other sf writers had also described primitive e-readers (or, earlier, portable microfilm readers serving the same purpose), but I'm not sure if any important series besides Bujold's straddles the actual appearance of the technology. The Vorkosiverse e-readers use 'book-discs', such that only one book can be inserted into a reader at a time, and what is termed a 'library' is a physical holder for a large number of such discs (each relatively small — coin-sized, maybe). There might be a way to rationalise this, but to date Bujold has not tried an explanation.

In order to convey to American readers how short Miles actually is, Bujold often gives his height in feet and inches, despite the fact that she generally uses the metric system. I haven't read closely enough to see if this could be rationalised as an unofficial survival of traditional measures on Barrayar. Similarly, despite being set something like 900 years from now, *Alliance* gives Ivan's American shoe size! (I suppose we are to regard it as translated from the standard actually used in the Vorkosiverse.)

On two occasions, Miles is said to have gained a few centimetres in height — once from a little deliberate stretching at the time he had his leg bones replaced by artificial ones, and once from having his spine straightened as a side benefit of the surgery during his cryorevival. I suspect that the figure given in late books for his

height does not reflect these improvements, although I have not actually run down the figures.

It seems that in the Vorkosiverse, at least among Barrayarans, and evidently more widely, birthdays are celebrated by standard (Earth) years. (We already knew that ages are expressed in standard years, and in *Alliance*, Ivan twice has his age notched up by a year older right after celebrating a birthday.) We have never been told how long the astronomical year is on Barrayar: I would imagine it is not hugely different from Earth's, since the flow of the seasons seems to be about the same. But even a difference of a few days will mean that birthdays will gradually drift around the Barrayaran astronomical year, not unlike the situation on Earth with feast days in the 360-day Muslim religious year. If Bujold has realised the existence of this birthday drift, she has made nothing of it. The Emperor's Birthday is an Imperium-wide public holiday. I wonder if that is fixed to Earth years as well, or if convention attaches it to a date in the astronomical year. Using the neutral standard year would make sense for a three-planet empire, but Barrayar is supposedly much more heavily populated than Komarr or Sergyar, and Barrayar annexed the other two planets only 40 years or so before *Alliance*, so traditions might well have been set before then. In any case, presumably at least some other holidays such as Winterfair (the replacement for Christmas) are tied to the Barrayaran year. (Otherwise, Winterfair would not always be in winter. Even so, as with Christmas in Oz on Earth, Winterfair presumably is celebrated in summer on Barrayar's lightly populated South Continent, where Ekaterin grew up. I don't recall that Ekaterin has ever remarked on the oddly different weather during the holiday now that she lives in the Northern Hemisphere.)

So much for mere curiosities and unexplored implications. I also found quite a few continuity errors in the Vorkosigan saga in my (still incomplete) rereading, having been encouraged to notice such things by the example Yvonne Rousseau had set in her article on *Blackout/All Clear*. Of course, since Bujold avoids time travel, inconsistencies constitute merely a minor blow against verisimilitude, annoying flaws in an otherwise impressive edifice of world-building, not the kind of problem raised in the Willis work, where the characters are worried about changes to the continuum, so that inconsistencies could in principle be intentional rather than errors, and the reader may become confused which is which.

There seems to be a contradiction even within *Alliance*. In one scene, Ivan is able to supply his new bride Tej and her companion with a very effective medicine relieving the symptoms of 'jump-sickness', a malady frequently mentioned in earlier novels. Earlier, susceptible travellers simply had to suffer (such as Madame Vorthys in *Komarr*, set about five years earlier). The reader must conclude that such an effective remedy has just been developed. (*Cryoburn* was published earlier than *Alliance* but is set later; I don't remember mention of jump-sickness there one way or the other.) But in *Alliance's* epilogue, Tej has been reduced to a 'quivering heap' by repeated wormhole jumps, and the effective medicine goes unmentioned. But now let us turn to contradictions between books.

In *Alliance*, much is made of the fact that the ImpSec Headquarters Building is windowless. This was mentioned more briefly in *Mirror Dance*. However, in a still earlier book, *The Vor Game*, the building simply has few windows, or perhaps merely few that Miles, who at the moment is in detention, is allowed access to. He does, even so, eventually find a window where he can look outside (Chapter 7). Moreover, in the same chapter, ImpSec chief Illyan's office is described as a 'spartan windowless inner chamber', wording that suggests that if Illyan had been less spartan or security conscious, rather than an inner room, he would have had taken an outer office where he would have had a window.

In *Alliance*, we are repeatedly told of the difficulty that Ivan and, separately, Tej have in adjusting to the Komarran rotational period, said to be a bit over 19 hours. But in view of the many other medical wonders of the Vorkosiverse, it is next to impossible to believe that no drug exists to make this adjustment. Moreover, no previous novel has raised the diurnal cycle as an issue (for instance, when Miles arrives for a short stay in Komarr he experiences no problems analogous to Ivan's).

An earlier book (*Diplomatic Immunity?*) says that a starship has gradually shifted on-board day length from that of the flight's point of origin to that of the point of arrival, but in *Alliance*, on departure the passengers immediately shift from Komarran day length to Barrayan. (Possibly this could be rationalised by the short stay of Ivan and his boss on Komarr, so that they had never really adjusted to the Komarran cycle in the first place.)

And if the Komarran rotational period is only a bit over 19 hours, what are we to make of the fact that in Komarr, Ekaterin receives a message 'just after 1900 hours', and that the time of day is nowhere near midnight, much less of the fact that she arrives to rescue Miles at '2100' (US hardcover, p. 149)? It has been previously explained that Barrayarran clocks measure standard (Terran) hours and have been specially designed to accommodate the fact that the last period before midnight is only .7 hours long, so that the minute after 26:41 is midnight. The only way to reconcile a rotation period of 19-plus standard hours with a 2100 on Komarr would seem to be to posit that Komarr has, by contrast with Barrayar, chosen to retain from Terran tradition a day divided into 24 parts, so that each Komarran hour has about 48 standard minutes. But in several novels there have been allusions to 'hours' on Komarr, without any distinguishing between Komarran hours and standard ones; moreover it is odd, although not impossible, that Barrayar has not imposed the standard hour on Komarr as part of its effort to culturally assimilate its conquest.

In *Alliance*, and presumably in some earlier published title (since the figure is also given in *The Vorkosigan Companion*, published before *Alliance*), there are 116 Great Houses on Jackson's Whole, but in an earlier work (unfortunately, I did not write down the reference — possibly 'Labyrinth' or *Ethan of Athos*), there were only about 48 Great Houses.

In *Diplomatic Immunity*, the expression 'with his own breath and voice' is one used by the Cetagandan Emperor to express a particularly high degree of personal attention and regard. In *Alliance*, the formula has sud-

denly become Barrayaran, part of the marriage vows. (It might be possible to rationalise this: perhaps the Cetagandan Imperial rescript honouring Miles in the earlier novel has been intentionally expressed in Barrayaran terms — but I think it would be a stretch, considering Cetagandan ethnocentrism.)

In an earlier work (I can't recall which), the story of the peasant who tosses his children one by one off his sleigh to keep pursuing wolves distracted is given in modified form as a Barrayaran folk tale. In *Alliance*, Ivan recalls it as a story from Earth (something he read about, or encountered on his time on Earth), with no reference to its having a descendant in Barrayaran tradition.

In *Memory* (US hardcover, p. 296, of *Illyan*), time at the academy counts as part of Barrayaran military service time (for instance in calculating the end date of a 20-year enlistment), consistent with what Vorthys says of Miles's 13 years of service time in Komarr (US hardcover, p. 11). However, when Ivan is contemplating the eventual end of his 20 years in the Epilogue of *Alliance*, the end date can be correct only if we posit that solely post-academy time counts.

A few parenthetical comments on Ivan's career path: I am not delivering much of a spoiler by saying that by the Epilogue of *Alliance*, Ivan is a military attaché, and is contemplating a possible diplomatic career after military retirement. In Cetaganda it appeared that, as in our time, the duties of the diplomatic corps include a lot of schmoozing with other diplomats and with local officials in an attempt to pick up information and to sense the local mood. This is definitely not how Ivan executes his attaché assignment in the Epilogue (although there may be special circumstances), and even after his personality upgrade in *Alliance*, I see no reason to believe that Ivan would be successful as a civilian diplomat under normal conditions. Even so, given Ivan's musings, I suspect a rather contrived career change is impending in a forthcoming novel. Bujold did something similar in the past, when she started Mark Vorkosigan off as an ImpSec desk analyst, and then implausibly turned him into a cut-throat entrepreneur: not the same personality type at all.

But to get back to the continuity errors: if I can spot that many without having been looking particularly hard, one has to ask questions similar to those I and others were raising earlier about Connie Willis. What have Bujold's beta readers and editors been doing? I know Bujold has beta readers because she has said so in print. I also know that these days editors are overworked and cannot provide the kind of detailed assistance in putting a manuscript into shape that they once could. But has Bujold gotten a new editor for her every Miles book? Considering that Bujold might be Baen's most important current author, had none the editors working on *Alliance* in various capacities thought it worthwhile even to reread the Miles saga before tackling the manuscript? Bujold is not cavalier about continuity errors —

she in the past has thanked her beta readers for spotting them. Deliberately letting errors stand would be particularly foolish in a novel that harks back to earlier ones as often as *Alliance* does. So why has Baen let Bujold down so badly in this respect?

If publishers and their editors want to retain a market niche at a time when it has become possible for authors, particularly ones already well known, to market and publish their work independently, perhaps it is time that publishers allocated enough resources that house editors could start providing added value, such as knowing a series well enough to be able to warn an author about overlooked inconsistencies, or (in Willis's case) vetting a work in such a way that her British editors would have time to spot and fix embarrassing gaffes about the UK in advance of US (and UK) publication.

On another topic, in a previous loc, I made some remarks on the pseudo double surname 'Conan Doyle'. I more recently noticed that Doyle himself refers to 'Fenimore Cooper' (in *Through the Magic Door*), and somewhere, I think in the same book, I recently saw a reference to 'Beecher Stowe.' (Fenimore and Beecher were of course, like Conan, just the authors' middle names.) But this Victorian confusion seems not to have been general. I can't recall a reference to 'Allan Poe' or 'Wollstonecraft Shelley'. 'Barrett Browning' does not sound quite as strange, so I may or may not have encountered that as a pseudo-surname.

(21 January 2013)

[*brg* Many thanks, Patrick ... although I must admit to a complete ignorance of the works of Bujold. Jan Stinson did an article about her works for *Steam Engine Time* 11, but not in enough detail to convince me she was worth reading. I'm not sure whether or not Yvonne has read Bujold, either. However, I'm sure readers will take up the comparisons between Bujold and Willis.*]

If you do decide to read Bujold, I would suggest starting with something other than the Miles stories. Particularly the early ones strike me as fairly standard space opera (possibly written when Bujold was trying to appeal to Baen's target audience). The non-Miles stories in the Vorkosiverse strike me as better (although I have only reread *Shards of Honor* at this point). I thought the Miles stories improved greatly with *Memory* and later, at which point they stopped being military sf and were modeled after other genres such as detective fiction and Regency romance. I think Bujold's fantasy works are on the whole more consistently well crafted, although I like fantasy less as a genre. Nothing of Bujold's is highly 'literary,' but I know you sometimes like fiction outside of that box, so I am not positive how you would react.

(23 January 2013)

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AND MANY
MORE!