

SF COMMENTARY 39

This is S F COMMENTARY #39, NOVEMBER 1973, which is edited, typed, and published by BRUCE GILLESPIE, who usually occupies GPO BOX 5195AA, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA 3001, AUSTRALIA, where all mail should be sent.

This is the first (and almost certainly the last) American edition of this magazine, and is being produced with the co-operation, stencils, typewriter, and duplicator of David and Betsey Gorman, 337 North Main St., New Castle, Indiana 47362, USA. They produce an excellent fanzine, GORBETT, which you should write for.

Subscriptions? Well, if you are still on my mailing list, you have received this issue. Send a letter of comment to ensure that you stay there. When I return to Australia, I will need to change the subscription rates considerably - probably to \$US 1 per copy. SFC 39 is 24 pages long, because that is all you can post now third-class for 16¢ per copy. For Americans, at least, I suspect that the Day of the Large Fanzine has ended.

NOW I'M REALLY TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

Everybody who receives this issue of SFC and knows that for the past two months I have been travelling on the American continent will expect to find a Trip Report. (That's not strictly correct. First you will want to know whatever happened to SFCs 35-38. #35/36/37, all 148 pages of it, does not seem to have arrived anywhere yet, and David Grigg said that he would publish #38 while I was overseas. Nothing heard yet about that one.)

However: I'm wary about beginning a Report on a trip that hasn't finished yet.

I'm very wary of making generalisations about these countries while I am still in them.

I'm wary of talking about all the marvellous people I've met so far.

Which doesn't leave me much to talk about.

Will I ever write a real Trip Report? Maybe not: all the fine details are merging into one pleasant haze of memory. Can I ever pay sufficient compliments to the people who have already befriended, transported, and fed me? Of course not.

Which doesn't leave me much to talk about.

But as my regular readers realise, I never talk more volubly than when I "have nothing to say" (e.g. IMBTTIE, SFC 35). So I will indulge myself in a few observations.

* I picked the best time of the year to visit USA and Canada. Until the end of last week (October 26) I had had two days of rain during my whole journey and about sixty days of sunshine. Except for Torcon, when temperatures reached 95°, I've had seemingly endless weeks of sunny days and picture-postcard views of autumn colouring. (I've never seen a scarlet red tree before in my life.) Rain has arrived now, as was inevitable,

and somebody mentioned snow falling in Ontario and Wisconsin. But the sun might come out again before Christmas.

* Even the weather has not been as kind as the people I've met, especially as I always feel a bit of an intruder into people's homes whenever I stay with them. From a very long list of names, I can only mention such special friends and hosts as (in chronological order) Phyrne Bacon, John Millard, Susan and Michael Glicksohn, Angus Taylor, Judy Merrill, Kate McLean, Judy, Roger, and Devin Zelazny, Jack Chalker, Jeff Smith, Don Miller, Harry Warner Jr, Linda and Ron Bushyager, Linda Lounsbury, Barry Gillam, Jerry Kaufman, Suzanne Tompkins, Sheryl and Mrs Birkhead, Sandra, John, Chirp (you're cute too, Chirp), Mite, and Peter Miesel, Juanita, Buck, and Bruce Coulson, and David and Betsey Gorman (and twins). I'd fill up the magazine everybody I've enjoyed meeting.

* Right now I'm in New Castle, Indiana. New Castle is the fabled home of Claude Degler, and is due east of Indianapolis, a city which spent a vast sum on the ugliest civic monument in America, but is the birthplace of Booth Tarkington and Kurt Vonnegut, and the present home of the Miesel family.

Some two long, action-packed months ago I began my journey in Toronto. I didn't see much of Canada, but I saw a fair bit of Toronto, probably the pleasantest city I've visited (other than Adelaide, South Australia). Of course I saw little of Toronto (except for the interior of the Royal York Hotel) until Torcon had finished. By now most readers of this magazine will realise that the 31st World SF Convention, Torcon 2, was a great success. 3000 people attended, the hotel gave excellent service, the banquet food was edible, and Australia won its bid to hold the 33rd Worldcon in Melbourne in 1975. Unfortunately, making arrangements for our bid and collection of membership fees took much of my time during the convention. Time after time somebody I have always wanted to meet would approach me, shake hands, and exchange a couple of sentences. Then I would say, 'I'm sorry, but I have to arrange This and That and The Other; see you later.' Unfortunately, I never did see most of those people later. I met Richard Delap for two minutes, apologised for not using his ADV article in SFC 35 - and could never find him again to talk about more important matters. The mysterious Cy Chauvin shook hands with me! But I could not find time to talk to him. Several people told me that Phil Farmer was at the convention. But I could not find him anywhere.

To compensate, there were other people I kept bumping into all the time, people such as John Millard, the genial and ever-dependable convention chairman, and Susan and Michael Glicksohn, Australia's Fan Guests of Honour in 1975. I managed to get a long talk with John Berry, one of the most civilised gentlemen I've met. Nothing could have been arranged for our bid without the help of the other Australians at Torcon, especially Barry Salpam. On the Friday morning of the convention, Barry and I scoured Toronto to look for enough beer, spirits, and soft drink to last through two parties. We raided the ice machines on four floors of the Royal York to find enough ice to keep the booze cold. About midday we realised that we could not escape publishing PROGRESS REPORT 0, so I sat down all afternoon to write and type it. Barry arranged for it to be printed in the Gestetner room in time to distribute it next morning after the bidding session when, we hoped, we would win the bid. Meanwhile Phyrne Bacon did a huge amount of work to organise the bidding table and, after we had won, the collection of membership fees. She also kept most of the accounts, which is something I could never have done. Roger Zelazny was very co-operative in helping with our bidding presentation, and now he has an Aussiefan hat as a memento of the occasion. Last and foremost, nothing would have gone right if Robin Johnson had not arranged so many important details in Australia long before any of us set out for Canada.

The Torcon Committee inflated my ego considerably by letting me, as leader of the

Australian delegation, sit on the main table during the Hugo Awards Banquet. During most of the meal I sat looking out at 800 people, and tried to get used to the dizzying feeling of reaching this improbable position. Then John Millard asked me to make a speech. About three sentences long, it seemed to go over quite well. The evening was made perfect however, when Sue and Mike Glicksohn bounded up to the rostrum to receive the Fanzine Hugo Award for ENERGUMEN. Justice had been done.

* I could tell innumerable stories about Torcon, but I don't have room here. Sandra Miesel didn't murder me, as Sue Glicksohn expected. The Luttrells did speak to me, which I didn't expect. In fact we managed to arrange a DUFF race for 1974, despite the competition from TAFF and the Mae Strelkov Fund. Lesleigh is going to raise funds for DUFF by selling copies of her long-awaited 1972 DUFF Report.

When Torcon ended, the hot weather also finished, and I checked out of the Royal York and stayed with Mike Glicksohn for about a week. (Sue had had to hurtle off to Regina, Saskatchewan, to begin a new teaching job on the day after the convention ended.) Mike was a splendid host, and we managed to trade many fannish stories. Judy Merrill, ex-anthologist and very-much-expatriate American, who currently writes and directs radio programs for CBC, and Kate McLean, famous s f writer, showed me some of their favourite places in Toronto. Judy arranged for CBC to interview me, and took me to her favourite Japanese restaurant in Toronto. I could not rise to the occasion: I had to eat with a fork instead of with chopsticks, which I found unmanageable. Angus Taylor showed me other parts of Toronto, and one fine summer night we accidentally came upon a free open-air rock concert in the university grounds. The group, Copper Penny, was several times better than most rock groups in Australia.

* This is turning into a Trip Report, isn't it? Enough, enough. Briefly (and without too many explanations):

September 5-12: Stayed at Mike Glicksohn's.

September 12: Travelled to Baltimore, Maryland. Was picked up from the airport by Roger Zelazny and two-year-old son Devin.

September 13-17: Secondary Universe Convention at State College, Pennsylvania. Very much enjoyed the company of the Zelaznys, Ted Sturgeon's talk, Leslie Fiedler's harangue, papers given by Robert Philmus, David Larsen, and Stuart Stocks, and the opportunity to deliver, without notes or preparation, a twenty-minute paper entitled BRIAN ALDISS AND NEW WORLDS: AN AUSTRALIAN VIEW OF SIXTIES S F. College Park, Pennsylvania, population 30,000 students-and-staff, is a beautiful town even if, as Phil Klass put it, it's "equally inaccessible from all parts of the state".

September 18-25: Stayed with Zelaznys, who are Good People. Judy took Devin and I to Washington one day. (There isn't a great deal to see in downtown Baltimore.) We had a drink at the Watergate (which should be famous as a beautiful building, not notorious as a venue for political hanky-panky) and went to the top of the Washington Monument. Another day Jeff Smith took me to Washington, and through some as-yet-unexplained miracle, we did not get lost. Well, not for long. Explored Georgetown, the Carlton of Washington, found an enormous bookstore, Seville's, and visited Don Miller, where we were as fascinated by his son's electric-train set as by Don's splendid book collection. One night Jack Chalker took Ted Pauls, Karen Townley, and I to an enjoyable WSEA meeting.

(September 23: Went by bus to visit Harry Warner in Hagerstown. Harry gave me a guided tour of Hagerstown, and we had a good talk. marvelled at his legendary attic and record collection.)

TRAPS

George Turner reviews

THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS

by GENE WOLFE

Gollancz :: 1973

244 pages :: \$A 5.35

Bruce gave me no happiness by sending me THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS for review. For one thing I don't much enjoy reviewing and for another it required only a few pages of reading to make me aware that here was something unusual; at the end of half an hour I felt queasily that it was also loaded with traps for the unwary reviewer. The only thing to do with such a work is to read it once for general impression, let it simmer awhile and read it again for detailed understanding -

knowing that the second attempt may be drudgery. As it happens it wasn't, and indeed left a suspicion that a third reading in a year or so may reveal much that I have so far missed.

And so to the review - with the proviso that the book is one of the more complex products of s f, open to a deal of opinion and interpretation.

THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS is not a novel in the commonest sense of the term: a progression of events occurring to a specific group of characters, leading to the discussion or statement of a theme.

Superficially it is a group of related novellas and there is some internal evidence (but not conclusive evidence) that the three were not conceived as a whole. This, if true, might account for some of the peculiarities of structure which make the work difficult to grasp whole at a first reading. But the final interrelationship is intimate and the result is not a set of variations on a theme but a total structure wherein the theme is observed in various lights and perspectives.

The theme itself flits in and out of the three stories, always there but never obtrusive, almost as though Wolfe himself had only observed its implications and ramifications as he worked and followed it to the end in order to discover for himself just what he was doing. This sort of speculation is apt to be utterly incorrect but I include it in an attempt to convey something of the exploratory feeling of the book. The final impression is not of planning but of a line of thought pursued to a satisfactory conclusion.

Discussion of the theme must wait on some description of the action and plan of the book.

In the general setting twin planets - Sainte Croix and Sainte Anne - circle a common

centre of gravity in orbit about a far star. They were settled by the French (I don't think the nationality has significance, but with this book it doesn't pay to be sure) who destroyed the native race of Sainte Anne in typical white-race fashion, moved on to Sainte Croix and were themselves subordinated in power by the flux of history. Folklore says that the abos (this is Wolfe's word, not merely our Australian contraction) of Sainte Anne were shape-changers, able to assume the appearance of others, but it is held that they are extinct.

The first, the title story, is set on Sainte Croix, a backwater planet where starships still call but civilisation lingers in a queer mixture of spasmodic technology - mainly biological - and an atmosphere of the eighteenth century; I found myself thinking of old New Orleans, although I have never seen that city save in Hollywood versions. That this atmosphere is so powerful is one of many tributes that might be paid to Wolfe's writing, for he does not set out obviously to create it.

On Sainte Croix a boy grows up in revolting circumstances. With a brother, who turns out to be not quite a brother, he is raised in the expensive brothel by means of which his "father" subjects him to a brutal and repellent training and education. The boy's contacts with any real world are minimal.

As he comes to maturity he deduces the truth, that he is the fifth head of Cerberus, the fifth in a line of cloned individuals.

And here Wolfe quietly states his theme, so quietly that almost it could pass the reader by.

If a clone be taken from a man, does the new individual become his son? His twin? Or merely an extension - an extra body and brain?

Who is he? Or what?

Wolfe is posing that old problem of identity (so popular among novelists since the bedevilled Kafka formulated it with the terror of despair) and posing it with a force and ingenuity unequalled since Budrys put it with such violence in ROGUE MOON.

While there is more than one of him, and neither is the whole he, the boy lives in a psychological limbo. His escape-solution is to kill his "father", just as his "father" had killed the "father" before him.

Is this truly a solution? Read the book and make up your own mind. The novelist's business is to make sure a problem is understood, not to provide slick answers.

Part II is called 'A STORY' BY J V MARSH, and is an ingeniously designed fiction within a fiction. It has its origin in an incident in Part I, wherein an anthropologist, Marsh, makes enquiries concerning Veil's Hypothesis. This is a theory that the original inhabitants of Sainte Anne, where the first colonists landed, were shape-changers and that they, instead of being wiped out, in fact took the places of the colonists after wiping them out.

Part II, then, purports to be a fiction (but is it in fact a fiction? - this is one of the book's minor problems) based on Veil's Hypothesis, and tells the tale of a young... man? shape-changer? something else?... coming to maturity in the days after the first colonisation. He moves among various types of Hillmen and Marshmen and some mysterious beings called Shadow Children, who may or may not be descendants of the shape-changers.

They themselves do not certainly know. They have lost identity because when one becomes another is he then the second man, or the first in the second, or both, or neither?

This aspect of the theme is beautifully stated in a short scene wherein an ancient Shadow Child bewails the loss of an identity he cannot be sure he ever possessed.

Part III returns to the present to tell how anthropologist Marsh locates a youngster reputed to be a genuine descendant of the shape-changers and goes with him into the wastelands of Sainte Anne to seek the aboriginals in whose existence others do not believe.

The Marsh who goes out is not the Marsh who returns, and the takeover by the shape-changer boy (who wants to be an anthropologist and thus neatly becomes one) is so subtly managed that after two readings I am still not sure that I can place the precise point in the text where one becomes aware that it has happened. It is achieved without description, by a gradual change of style and a gentle phasing-in of revelatory references.

Pseudo-Marsh voyages to Sainte Croix and is promptly arrested for the murder of the brothel-keeping clone who was in fact murdered by his "son" in Part I.

Sainte Croix is very much a police state, and once in prison "Marsh" has no hope of release as he becomes a political pawn - as he becomes something less than that, something known to more cynical regimes than ours as a non-person.

So the final irony is achieved. The shape-changer who stole an identity has lost even the one he stole. He has become nothing at all.

Behind, around, and parallelling the identity theme is the slow revelation of the real state of anthropological affairs on the twin planets, and it is not for me to tell you the answers because the business of ferreting them out is one of the major charms of the book. The answers are there, but Wolfe does not throw them at you; you must read with care and attention because sometimes the clues lie in a word or a phrase buried in a sentence ostensibly about something else. He has not offered a baffling, exhausting puzzle, but rather has laid his trail with marvellous care so that there is an exhilaration in keeping up with the pace he sets.

Please don't feel that in outlining the major plot points I have revealed all that is worth telling, for this is a work fantastically rich in sub-plot and detail. There has been no mention yet of Mr Million or the criminal children or the Observatory of trees or the fighting slaves or the fabulous crippled lady or the mysterious person called Lastvoice - or of a hundred other attractions, decorations, and devices. Or of some minor puzzles such as: Who wrote the story which is Part II - Marsh or pseudo-Marsh? And is it truth or conjecture? (The answers are there for the careful reader.)

James Blish has called this a "complex, highly original, and moving novel" - "novel" for want of a better word - and I can only add that it is a very beautiful one. It is like nothing else I can recall in science fiction.

And yet -

The danger in a review of this kind is to leave the impression that here is perfection, simply because one has been seduced by the fascinations of novelty. The book is indeed

far from perfect. It is in many senses unnecessarily complex, there is some literarily tasteless tuckerisation in Part I which jars and irritates, and Part II is written in that fake simplistic style perfected by Kipling to cast an aura of romance over his JUNGLE BOOKS.

And yet -

It is a lovely book. The identity theme is not one which has ever interested me because it seems a philosophical dead end - a meaningless question shouted into the void, like, "What was before God?" or, "How can an infinite creation have a beginning?" But while Wolfe cast his spell I was interested in it, vitally. And that is one of the things good writing is about. If I was sucked in, I was sucked in gladly and THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS takes my present vote as one of the most attractive of all s f books written. It belongs to no group or sub-genre. It is unique. Little s f stands the test of time, but this one may. I hope so.

MORE THAN SHATTERED ARTIFACTS

Trying to write this review reminded me again how much easier it is to explain why good fiction is good than why bad fiction is bad.

Gerald Murnane reviews

BEST S F STORIES OF BRIAN W ALDISS
(REVISED EDITION)

The good stories in this anthology include one, OLD HUNDREDTH, that equals any s f story I have read. I suppose it's a further tribute to this story to point out that while I read it I never once had to remind myself that I was reading s f. I mean that OLD HUNDREDTH is a fine story that one doesn't have to make allowances for because it happens to be in an s f anthology.

Faber ::: 1972
260 pp.

OLD HUNDREDTH certainly has all the inventiveness that one expects of s f. The story is set in a distant future. Its chief character is a sloth "as big as an elephant", who rides abroad on a "rhino-like creature, eighteen feet at the shoulder" and acknowledges that she can never hope to think at a human level. The mind of this creature, Dandi Lashadusa by name, is occupied for much of the time by her "mentor" - a blind old dolphin who lives permanently in "one cell of a cathedral pile of coral under tropical seas".

This parasitic mentor and others like him are the highest intelligences left on earth. Man has gone from the planet - not destroyed by one of the disasters so common in s f, but transmuted (of his own free will) into "Involute", iridescent shapes that hang poised above the almost deserted landscapes. Each involute is composed of millions of personalities. Humble animals such as Dandi can only stare at the strange prismatic complexities of these involutes and wonder what sort of existence the human personalities lead, locked away forever inside. Dandi's mentor, watching over her thoughts from his dark retreat on the other side of the world, reminds her that men formed themselves into involutes when they had discovered at last that the Universe was a vast pattern that embraced them too. They eagerly "merged with the texture of space itself" - projected themselves forever into the eternal pattern which included both the creator and the created.

With mankind visible only as a collection of ethereal columns in the air, the earth is inhabited mainly by mutant animals like Dandi and her steed. These mutants and their dolphin-mentors have a history of their own which is bound up with the story of Man's last days on earth. Aldiss tells that story unobtrusively as part of the scene-setting of OLD HUNDREDTH. It is part of his craftsmanship as a story-teller that he fits this and all the rest of his information into the brief narrative. Actually, not much happens within the timespan of OLD HUNDREDTH. Not much, that is, by the usual standards of s f. OLD HUNDREDTH is largely the evocation of a world that has played itself out. For all the wisdom of the mentors and the near-human emotions of Dandi and her kind, there is more obviously something missing from earth. That something, of course, is Man.

No doubt there are many s f stories that contain no human characters. But few of them can have such a haunting sense of Man's lingering presence as this story has. I don't intend to give away the "plot", such as it is, except to say that the last few paragraphs left me with a profound sense of the depths of meaning in the term "culture". To read these paragraphs attentively is to experience something like the reverent awe that must have overcome the first thoughtful European to see the statues of Easter Island staring out across their windswept hills. The essential quality of OLD HUNDREDTH as a story is its richness. A few sentences of description can suggest a whole process of history. Time and again one wants to stop and savour the possibilities that lie behind a paragraph, or even a sentence. (The reader who tackles the stories in the order in which they appear in this anthology will find himself on a peak from which, unfortunately, he can only descend.)

In OLD HUNDREDTH Aldiss achieves the sort of insight that I can only call profound. He shows an understanding of what I would call the tragic imperfections of human culture and history. It is a commonplace observation that Man's works often survive their creator. Every generation has looked at the paintings and statuary and tombs, or read the writings, or heard the music of earlier ages with a wonder that is mixed with regret. The regret, of course, comes from the impossibility of ever knowing what the work of art meant in its time. What urged its creator to create it? What did he hope to express by it? What dream of his was it meant to equal (and yet to fall short of)? Did he really intend it as a message for the future?

Paradoxically, this regret is often heightened by the knowledge that we can, and often do, acquire of the facts surrounding the art of earlier times. For all I know some scholar steeped in the history of Polynesia could tell us the century or even the precise years in which the Easter Island statues were erected. But even supposing that such a scholar were to find, buried near the statues, a tablet inscribed with an eye-witness account of their construction and a plain statement of the reasons for it, how much wiser would we be?

We will always remain shut out of the mental and spiritual territory that our forebears inhabited. Of all the "lost worlds" that s f and fantasy writers have dreamed of, the most tantalising are those that other ages took for their real worlds. They were once as palpable as our own world of technology and progress and affluence is for us. But they are now as impossible to reach as the farthest galaxy.

All this and more is expressed in OLD HUNDREDTH. Dandi Lashadusa, the ugly, pathetic, sub-human creature wandering through the forlorn landscape of a dying earth, comes across a few works of Man. Aldiss' inventiveness is such that he makes these works far more than lifeless stones or shattered artifacts. They are the involutes - actually composed of the personalities of millions of "departed" men and women. Dandi "feels" the impact of these personalities as she stands near the silent chromatic monuments. But what is she to make of them?

The mentor in his distant cave offers Dandi one way of understanding the lost history of Man. He has an encyclopedic knowledge of the raw data of human history. He can trace back for Dandi's benefit the various stands of human culture. But he is utterly unable to respond to the spirit of the past.

Finally Dandi, the great ugly mutant (who owes her existence, in fact, to some whim of Man's last days, when he bred tribes of bizarre animals with almost-human characteristics) responds in her own simple way to the lingering inspiration of Man's history. In doing so she rejects her mentor's way of knowing the world - and so comes that superb final scene that I have already mentioned.

It is not hard to say why such a story is great. How does one explain the comparative dullness of some of the other stories in this anthology?

Perhaps it comes from the difficulty that all writers must cope with when they write about future ages. We of the twentieth century can easily invent the stage scenery of the future - the technology and architecture and landscapes of distant ages. But the most significant changes in store for Man are those that will take place in his mental and spiritual worlds - his mythology, if you like. The question, "How will the world look in x centuries from now?", cannot be answered by simply describing what it would look like to someone of our age. An adequate answer would have to include a description of the world picture of someone in the (20 + x)th century.

The trouble with stories like THE IMPOSSIBLE STAR or ANOTHER LITTLE BOY is that brilliantly imagined futures are inhabited by twentieth-century people - and rather cloddish, unresponsive twentieth-century fellows at that. The result is that these worlds lack the vibrancy of real worlds, which surely depend for their existence as much on the life that their inhabitants breathe into them as on their mere material qualities.

But this anthology is still well worth reading. At the 1973 Easter S F Convention in Melbourne, someone asked George Turner why he read s f stories, despite all their drawbacks. "Because it gives us ideas to play around with," was the answer. Aldiss' anthology certainly gave me plenty.

While travelling around, I've read a few books.

I sent back to Australia Kurt Vonnegut's BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS before I copied down publication details, but no doubt you can

find copies in any bookshop, so the absence of such details should not worry you too much. BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS is the most brilliantly bad book I've read for some time; it has some great jokes, many illuminating images, and even some great pages. But, unlike SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE, it seems to have been written off the top of his head and not from the bottom of his heart. Vonnegut makes fun of himself so often in this book that in the end we forget what he is making fun of, and the strained metaphysics of the ending, rather like those in REPORT ON PROBABILITY A, do not make me admire the book any better. I'm glad that Vonnegut wrote all those other, really great books. :: While Silverberg's NEW DIMENSIONS picks up, Damon Knight's ORBIT series goes steadily downhill. ORBIT 12 (ed. Damon Knight; Putnam/SFBC; 1973; 216 pp.) is the latest volume and, for me, it contains one good story, Ursula Le Guin's DIRECTION OF THE ROAD (which postulates that trees are really super-athletes which move around constantly so that we will see them as stationary). Brian Aldiss writes a series of four stories which are designed to read like miniature paintings set to words, but somehow they seem just too miniature to me. The other stories in the volume are dull, or bad, or both.

GEORGE TURNER

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

George Turner discusses

NEW DIMENSIONS I

edited by ROBERT SILVERBERG

Doubleday :: 1971
246 pages :: \$A 6.40

Whatever I may occasionally say and think about Robert Silverberg's novels and stories - and my thoughts vary from highly appreciative to potentially libellous, as is inevitable with so productive an author - I have always been a staunch supporter of his work as an anthologist. Some such introduction seems required, for there is mayhem to follow, and I protest that in spite of it, my respect for Silverberg-the-anthologist remains untarnished.

LETTER 1

Yours resentfully,
(sgd.) Indignant Reader.

Now that Silverberg has begun producing anthologies of original material, which is a matter rather different from skinning off a bookful of time-hallowed "classics", he will have discovered that much more than selection, arrangement, and comment is required of him. Some real editorial activity is needed.

Here I propose to poke a finger at his editorial eye. At this distance, and in view of his barrage of successes, my finger won't hurt his eye in the least, but the exercise will allow me to interpose some thoughts on fiction, the fiction writer, and the fiction editor - and to ask a question or two at the end which will be more important than all the literary slaughter between here and there.

I wish to examine one story from Editor Silverberg's anthology, NEW DIMENSIONS I. It is called A SPECIAL KIND OF MORNING, it runs to about 17,000 words, it is written by Gardner R Dozois, and it is placed first in the collection.

Dozois would have been about twenty-three or -four when he wrote the yarn (this is relevant) and he had then been for a few years one of those names that cropped up here and there as one whose work was not-bad-not-specially-good-but-promising.

On the strength of certain indications in A SPECIAL KIND OF MORNING, which is an extremely bad story, Dozois will one day be a very good writer indeed. My questions, to come later, will home in on the matter of why he isn't a pretty good writer as of here and now, which he should be.

His story begins with this first paragraph:

Did y'ever hear the one about the old man and the sea? Halt a minute, lordling; stop and listen. It's a fine story, full of balance and point and social pith; short and direct. It's not mine. Mine are long and rambling and parenthetical and they corrode the moral fibre right out of a man. Come to think, I won't tell you that one after all. A man of my age has a right to prefer his own material, and let the critics be damned. I've a prejudice now for webs of my own weaving.

Such rambling is all right if it can be seen that it will lead somewhere. This, alas, leads nowhere, but extends itself for about 1,600 words before it slides, almost unnoticeably, into the story. It isn't altogether uninteresting per se but does nothing to establish the nature of what is to follow or to plant points for development. It does establish that the narrator is an "old soak" (sic) who has cornered some socialite youngster into listening while he drools on. "Fix'd him with his glittering eye"? Not a bit of it. Even this possible reference to the Ancient Mariner is a red herring, possibly unintentional.

The monologue also tells us a little about Dozois - certainly unintentionally. For instance, let's listen to the "old soak" talk:

The world's your friend this morning, a toy for you to play with and examine and stuff in your mouth to taste, and you're letting your benevolence slop over onto the old degenerate you've met on the street. You're even happy enough to listen, though you're being quizzical about it, and you're sitting over there feeling benignly superior. And I'm sitting over here feeling benignly superior. A nice arrangement and everyone content.

Old soaks, old degenerates, don't talk like that - because they can't. The story of the stinking old alky who speaks and behaves like a cultured gentleman is a purely literary invention. He doesn't exist. As an ex-alcoholic who has come out the other side to talk about it, as one who has jostled skid row on its own terms, I say that Dozois is a young man who still believes what he reads in other men's fictions and so perpetuates the myriad legends of which fiction is guilty. (You wouldn't want to know what the alky cultured or intellectual type is really like, unless you're a ghoul.)

And the old soak says:

Life's strange - wet-eared as you are, you've probably had that thought a dozen times already... well, I've four times your age, and a team more experience, and I still can't think of anything better to sum up the world: life's strange.

Drivelling old nit! Only young men and elderly morons think life is strange. For the old, strangeness has long ago worn off; even at fifty-seven, which is not desperately old, I find life absorbing and occasionally unexpected, but no longer strange. With the accumulation of experience (which has nothing to do with wisdom) you achieve not so much an immunity to strangeness as a realisation that it is all perfectly explicable in terms of common knowledge; even the occasional fixations and ecstasies and apparent paradoxes and coincidences are part of the pattern. Only to the young man still seeking a pattern (or the old man too dim to create one) is "strangeness" confounding to the point of trying to make a philosophic mystery of it. As he grows older he absorbs it without effort into his world vision; a UFO in the front garden might frighten or excite him, but it wouldn't disturb his sense of rightness - life and vicarious life have readied him for the unexpected.

So Dozois has been playing a young man's pretence at being an old man. The moral is, of course, that the writer should have some sort of relevant experience or source of information before he writes away from his own parameters. This is why young men generally write badly about old men, men write badly about women, and vice versa.

The old soak says also:

...It reeks of it, as of blood. And I've smelt blood, buck. It has a very distinct odour; you know it when you smell it.

Dozois hasn't smelt much blood, or he would know that except in most unusual concentrations the smell isn't very noticeable; in the open it is scarcely noticeable at all; indoors it is liable to masking by any other moderate smell. Only when it begins to decay does the smell of blood become overpowering - overpoweringly rotten. I know. I've been there - in a war, in an abbatoir, in hospitals. The "reeking altars" of Greek epic poetry reeked mostly of animal sweat and the spilling contents of the victims' guts.

Writers have social and historical value in their role as recorders of life-as-it-is. Unfortunately they record too much as it isn't, and younger writers (who can't be expected to experience everything in their first thirty years) take their handmedowns for granted and perpetuate the line of error down the generations. One can't hold it against Dozois that he didn't know, but with an alert editor to exercise, watch, and ward...

Without such editing his first 1600 words become not only unnecessary but largely nonsense.

At last the story starts, and at once we are faced with a different kind of nonsense. Such as this:

And D'kotta-on-the-Blackfriars was indescribable, a seventy-mile swathe of smoking insanity, capped by boiling umbrellas of smoke... At night it pulsed with molten scum, ugly as a lanced blister, lighting up the cloud cover across the entire horizon...

When a writer, from Dickens and Tolstoy downwards, uses words like "indescribable" (shades of Lovecraft!) in a descriptive passage - or "ineffable" or "unimaginable" - get your defences ready, for you are about to be conned.

Here Dozois has reached for powerful phrases to put across a vision he has not in fact formed properly in his own mind. (If he had, he would have done it differently.) What does "smoking insanity" look like? And what is the connection between the appearance of molten scum and the dull rubbish exuded from a lanced blister?

Here's another "description" of the scene:

So we watched it all from beginning to end; two hours that became a single second lasting for eons. Like a still photograph of time twisted into a scream - the scream reverberating forever and yet taking no duration at all to experience.

You can see it now? You can? Good for you, you liar.

It's all a young writer's excess of metaphor in reaching for the Big Effect. He will learn that simple language, skilfully handled, hits twice as hard. He will learn it

faster if some kindly editor beats him over the head with the fact.

Well, the story is in some sort of motion. We have learned that a war is going on somewhere in the universe (where, is not really important). The ruling Combine is being fought by the rebel Quaestors, of whom the old soak, now a young man, is one. The Quaestors have just won a major battle. And so -

And so we get a 2,500 - yes, 2,500 - word flashback describing the course of the battle to that point. Followed by another 2,500 words flashing further back to outline the course of the war before the battle. So, after some 6,500 words one point has been established - that the Quaestors have won a battle. What happens in the remaining 10,000 odd can be told quickly:

The Combine specialises in biological constructs, and so rules a world of clones, sentients, insentients, nulls, and zombies. (The hero is a zombie - a sort of super-regimented slave - who has escaped and become humanised.) After the battle the hero's squad is sent to intercept Combine reinforcements by shooting down the robot spaceship bringing them. In the process they are discovered by a null - a computer-directed biological construct possessing only such limbs, organs, and senses as it needs to do its work, plus some perceptions and no intelligence. The hero is ordered to kill it and fails (emotional rebellion) just as the robot ship arrives and fresh violence begins. He is injured and his life is saved by the null (unintentionally because it has no thought processes) which is in turn routinely killed by a medic who, in the fashion of the day, does not consider the thing human. This experience turns the boy into a different man, one with empathy for all things living. And eventually, apparently, into a degenerate old soak.

Well, plots don't matter much, so long as they support the theme. Dozois' plot is acceptable and his theme is the dependable old all-men-are-brothers. (I notice that this always points out that the underprivileged are acceptable as brothers in spite of their environment-engendered frailty, degradation, and bestiality but the overprivileged are not acceptable in spite of their environment-engendered frailty, degradation, and bestiality. It is therefore necessary for the Quaestors to destroy the Combine. Anybody for empathy?)

But Dozois' handling is clumsy and defaced by faults which should not have appeared. Aside from two more flashbacks totalling about 1,600 words we get observational errors which grate. One example:

....started to take a piss... At the sound of the first shot the executive had whirled - penis still dangling from pantaloons, piss spraying wildly - and dodged for the back of the van...

One of the effects of shock-alert is to freeze such physical processes as will interfere with fight or flight. There would be no piss spraying wildly.

Later they are positioning lasers to destroy the robot relief ship, and we read:

The hardest thing was figuring out elevation and trajectory, but we finally got them all zeroed on a spot about a hundred feet above the centre of the valley floor.

"Trajectory"? With a laser? What does he think a laser does? Describe a howitzer arc? What they are setting up is known in military language as a fixed-line fire plan

and Dozois, who according to the introduction has been a military journalist, should have known it. And known, too, that there are simple rule-of-thumb methods of achieving such zeroes, even in mid-air.

A few paragraphs later:

Heynith was in the middle, straddling the operator's saddle of the laser.

Saddle? What for? Even a powerful laser is not a ten-ton field piece. According to Dozois, these lasers were not manoeuvrable, but had to be positioned by sweat and shoving; but all the really heavy equipment needed would be a power source (battery, accumulator, or what-have-you) complete with button for pressing. Why, particularly with a fixed line the commander (of all people!) should straddle a saddle like an operator at a complex manual control system is incomprehensible. Either Dozois has not visualised what he is writing about or he simply hasn't bothered to do even five minutes' research on the subject of lasers and feels that the bug-eyed readers wouldn't know anyway.

But the editor should have noticed - and slapped him down hard.

And some more science fiction:

...I slipped the infrared lenses down over my eyes, activated them. The world came back in shades of grey.

Infrared lenses can only operate by detecting heat radiated from a body and stepping it up into the light spectrum. Seen any grey light lately?

And still more science fiction, showing how well Dozois has researched his material and how little it has been edited:

Heynith had been the only survivor. The Combine had expressed mild sympathy, and told him that they planned to cut another clone from him to replace the destroyed Six; he, of course, would be placed in charge of the new Six, by reason of his seniority.

The implication is that the Combine was willing to hold up its affairs for a generation or so while a new clone grew up. Or could it be that a writer fondly imagined that a clone is produced at maturity in a sort of high-velocity bottle without an intervening growth process? Cloned material takes just as long to grow as the original, does not possess all the original's knowledge and experience, starts as a baby, and has to grow up and be educated like anyone else. You don't just chip a bit off and hey presto! a set of quins!

I hate to report that in the interests of space and out of concern for your patience, I have omitted mention of a dozen or so other passages I marked for comment.

Now for the questions:

- 1 Should a young and promising writer be given the encouragement of publication simply because he has produced a story which will "get by" with an indiscriminating public?
- 2 Should an editor who is prepared to write, "He has the essential gift of the born master of narrative" back up his statement by printing a story which demonstrates

an utter lack of narrative skill?

- 3 Should he also write, "Watching him develop is going to be an exciting experience", but do nothing to ensure that such development occurs? Printing a man's failures is one way of making him sure that rubbish is good enough.
- 4 Should an editor put himself behind a young writer of promise (and in spite of all that goes before, Dezois is certainly that) even to the point of refusing his work until he weeps with the effort of improving?
- 5 Where would s f be today if Campbell hadn't done just that?

LETTER II

Yours appreciatively,
(sgd.) Hopelessly Biassed But Approving Reviewer

After all that, how the hell am I going to sell you the idea that this book is worth your attention, particularly as there are further grouches to come?

The point is that Silverberg has produced two of the most exciting anthologies since ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE, i.e. SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME and THE MIRROR OF INFINITY, and that, despite my screams of outrage, he does the anthology bit better than anyone else in the current scene.

But (why can't a reviewer be nice to anyone without beginning the next sentence with "but"?) in NEW DIMENSIONS I he has taken on the touchier business of soliciting and presenting new stories. So he can't simply grab the best from a big heap, he can't be sure his chosen contributors will really provide the goods, and almost certainly his final grouping will be exasperatingly just short of the ambition with which he began.

So let me say now that, warts and all, ND I is more worthwhile than the snide, strident, petulant, exhibitionist DANGEROUS VISIONS which presented a great deal of innocuous dim-viewing under a widescreen, technicolour title.

A lot of ND I I didn't like. So what? You may like the very items that turned me off. My business as reviewer is to display the wares and discuss them as honestly as I can; you see, I believe that a reviewer should be able occasionally to say, "I recognise that this is a competent, properly crafted tale which leaves me emotionally cold because my attitudes do not recognise its themes and premises as being of any interest. It is, nonetheless, a competent and well-crafted tale, and I cannot honestly damn it out of hand."

I found this a necessary gambit quite often when considering ND I, mainly because of the variety of tastes and interests covered.

In his INTRODUCTION Silverberg writes, "NEW DIMENSIONS... attempts to negotiate the difficult middle course between the old and the new." And, lower down the page, "I think they also display the vigour and freshness of the contemporary s f mode, free of the preciousness and emptiness that disfigure too much of the recent product."

It does and they do (although the "preciousness and emptiness" bit could swing on a

matter of approach). But sheer variety - from quite heavily traditional S F to the involutions of Ellison and the inconclusions of Lafferty - makes for a compilation that cannot hope to please everyone, and for me the result is critically interesting rather than totally entertaining. As a survey of the art it has some passing value: such an anthology had sooner or later to be attempted and Silverberg is to be congratulated on even partial success in a field so lacking even in definition, but viability as a series has to be proved.

There are fourteen stories, of which the first has been discussed at length. It is followed by two time stories coupled, I imagine, to highlight the old way and the new.

THE TROUBLE WITH THE PAST (the first professionally published story by Alex and Phyllis Eisenstein) is a traditional paradox comedy, ringing the changes on time-duplication and its attendant absurdities. It belongs unashamedly to a sub-genre that was with us before BY HIS BOOTSTRAPS was a pup and is always worth an appreciative grin, but it is a little raw in technique for the company it keeps here.

Josephine Saxton's THE POWER OF TIME is very much in the new style - a time story that does away with time travel and substitutes a haunting sense of connection between events centuries apart. Her wholly normal and smilingly compassionate little love story of today is presented in alternating sequences with the totally fantastic activities of a long-range descendant of that affair. The connection between events is implied rather than stated, and the tale is a fine example of what the new techniques can do in the borderland between fantasy and reality.

THE GIBEREL is possibly included because its writer is the prestigious Doris Pitkin Buck, but the story has been written in variation too often before. Still, it has charm and literary quality and should not be summarily dismissed.

VASTER THAN EMPIRES AND MORE SLOW, by Ursula Le Guin (where doesn't that lady show up these days?) is expectably one of the book's superior contributions, and is another of her investigations of communication and the nature of alienness. "He had learned the love of the Other, and thereby had been given his whole self. But this is not the vocabulary of reason." That quotation is the core of one of the few stories which will probably please all readers.

THE GREAT A, by Robert C. Malstrom, is another "first" story and is a surrealist parable of the creative artist at work. I find the conventional savagery of the satire wearisome and the imagery coarse and overblown. "You bastards drain my soul for pelf!" is a worn-out attitude which the true artist was usually too busy to have time for, and still is. No one should write about great artists until he has met a couple, and they are mighty hard to come by. And when you've met one you won't be sure you know enough to write about him.

Harlan Ellison's AT THE HOUSE CARNIVAL is of course more surrealist still. It contains some fascinating imagery which adds up to very little - or adds up irritatingly to any total you care to make it. It has all the elements of hallucination and none of the art which relates vision to life, and the mind-blowing writers have so far offered us no insights we had not already achieved by less questionable means. Ellison and Moorcock must battle it out some day for the title of Hollowest Reputation In S F. (So I'm a twit-witted reactionary old bastard, am I? Wait twenty years and ponder my judgment. I've seen 'em come and go and am hard to impress.)

Leonard Tushnet's A PLAGUE OF CARS has a genial laugh about America's abandoned-car

cemeteries and the miserliness of local administrations. Its forefather is THE PIED PIPER OF HAVELIN and it is a pleasant relief after the surrealists. Nothing wonderful, but good average middle-of-the-road s f.

But with SKY we are in a typical R A Lafferty splurge. Sometimes, as in CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK, Lafferty is utterly fascinating and sometimes, as in SKY, he just runs out of steam and what starts as fascination ends in boredom. It is a picture of 'consciousness-expanding chemistry', i.e. hallucination and the impression that you are really with it, whatever it is. (We never do find that out, do we? Another of those incommunicable, indescribable, ineffable things - as in 'complete confusion'.) The final vision of the drug-destroyed old woman is a touch of magnificence, worth the trouble of all the wordage leading up to it.

Ed Bryant's LOVE SONG OF HERSELF is interesting, beautifully written, original, and finally disappointing. It is a delicate vision of activities bearing little relation to life; like KUBLA KHAN it breaks off at the moment of beginning to say something. But it is lovely while it lasts.

Harry Harrison's THE WICKED FLEE is typical Harrison - a good yarn with a beginning, a middle, and a twist at the end. It is one of the better stories of the book, but Silverberg's introduction may make you wonder: 'Having mastered the novel of extra-terrestrial adventure... and the novel of social criticism... and the novel of technological farce... seems currently to be investigating the possibilities of the science fiction short story... Mastered indeed! Ideas of mastery must have changed. Harrison is often quite good but never a master and is often clumsy. In this tale, for instance, his hero, left alone at the finish, is forced to deliver a twenty-line monologue to the empty air in order to inform the reader what the story is really about.

Next comes Philip Jose Farmer's THE SLICED-CROSSWISE ONLY-ON-TUESDAY WORLD, which I suppose is all right if you like Farmer and those coy, gimmicky titles. This is a re-working of the idea Wyman Guin said just about the last word on many years ago in BEYOND BEDLAM and features a switcheroo ending you can see coming from about the fourth page.

Introducing Barry N Malzberg's CONQUEST, Silverberg writes, 'In the maturity of any art form arrive the specialists in the put-on and the put-down: cold-eyed, acidulous commentators on the idiocies and follies of earlier practitioners.' True, but I wish that he had added the rider, almost inescapable, that these commentators die before their targets, save for the very greatest. Satire is a vehicle few can ride safely, and s f history is dotted with the tombstones of those who tried once and gave it up. But take comfort in the thought that Malzberg's commentary is mild, his satire less than vicious, and his story strong enough to stand on its own legs. To discuss it in detail would be to reveal too much, and revelation is the kicker here.

And last, but most beautifully not least, comes 'the elegant and buoyant Tom Disch', with EMANCIPATION: A ROMANCE OF THE TIMES TO COME. If you know H G Wells' STORY OF THE DAYS TO COME you may enjoy the joke better, but, even if you haven't, Disch's high-spirited satire on women's lib finally cutting its own throat and (mixing the metaphor) by upturning the apple cart completely and showering us with a whole new crop of domestic problems will send you away laughing. I will tell you nothing about it. The best should always come as a surprise. Buy the book, or borrow it from a friend or other sucker, and have a little joy with one of the few good writers washed up by the new wave of s f.

So we have three really excellent stories - numbers 3, 5, and 14 in order of review --

seven quite satisfactory tales and four reviewer's-hackle-raisers. That isn't a bad result for an anthology of new goods, particularly as the top three represent nearly forty per cent of the wordage of the volume.

In the long run your overall reaction may well be dictated by your reaction to new wavery. I can't help it if I find most of the new wave a slick, sleight-of-hand bore, with the occasional joymaker like Disch or Aldiss to render it bearable.

Present signs are that, save for a few noisy stalwarts furiously splashing, the new wave has begun to ebb and in the next year or two we will be able to see more clearly what remainder of value it has washed up on the s f shore.

Quite a lot, I imagine. It just takes time to see what is worth preserving and how much that seemed marvellous dissipates in spume.

- George Turner July 1973

BRUCE GILLESPIE

A LATER LETTER TO THE EDITOR

LETTER III

Yours enthusiastically

(sgd.) Finally Convinced Reviewer

George Turner should have stayed around to read NEW DIMENSIONS 3 (ed. Robert Silverberg; Doubleday/Book Club 212 pp.: 1973) before he showed us the cracks in the edifice of his faith in Silverberg as an editor. ND 3 shows that Silverberg has become the best original-fiction-anthology editor, and this book answers many of the shots that George fired at the first in the series.

Gardner Dozois has improved with the series itself. THE LAST DAY OF JULY is, to put it crudely, a haunted-house story. Dozois' main character, just named John, takes up temporary residence in a house which then proceeds to cut him off from the world. This would be banal enough if Dozois had not corrected most of those faults George accuses him of (or did Silverberg the editor perform his advisory job better than we know?). In this story Dozois stays within the compass of common experience - an old building and the surrounding vegetation. Here Dozois' language is direct and crunchy, so that the reader feels himself inside the house and the main character. The long story works because the author conveys the double sense of horror and pleasure as the main character observes himself dissolving, mentally and physically. He hates the house and loves its growing oblivion at the same time. ("John wades to the centre of the lawn with his notebook, and sits down determinedly, in the sun. Sitting, the grass comes up above his waist, and he has the illusion that he has just lowered himself into a tub of sun-warmed green water." Very nice.)

Of the other stories, I thought that W Macfarlane's HOW SHALL WE CONQUER? was brilliant. Maybe Macfarlane simply appeals to my prejudices: I liked his modest main character, a man irritated by great power given to him, yet determined to use it responsibly. This story is one of those rare s f stories with an ending that is breath-taking because it depends entirely on the moral quality of the main character himself. Slightly less enjoyed, but still marvellous: Ursula Le Guin's THE ONES WHO WALK AWAY FROM OMELAS, Lafferty's DAYS OF GRASS, DAYS OF STRAW, and Eklund's THREE COMEDIANS, plus high-quality minor items. Silverberg is still America's best anthologist.

brg November 1973

NOW I'M REALLY TALKING TO MY FRIENDS - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

September 25-October 7: Stayed with Linda and Ron Bushyager at Prospect Park, near Philadelphia. Went into Philadelphia by commuter train, but couldn't find any good bookshops. Saw Michael Crichton's entertaining WESTWORLD.

(September 28-30: Linda Lounsbury drove Linda and Ron and I in her VW 300 miles to Pittsburgh for Pghlange. For me this proved to be a Big Mistake. I felt sick, tired, and disconnected during the entire convention. With 80-100 attending, and good facilities, everybody else had a great convention. Particularly enjoyed meeting Jodie and Andy Offut.)

Arrived back from Pghlange and felt like catching the first plane back home to Australia. I just didn't feel like travelling anywhere anymore. I decided to put off this radical step: had a complete rest at the Bushyagers' very comfortable house (central air-conditioning as well as central heating?: my mind boggled) and listened to classical music on a Philadelphia FM stereo twenty-four-hour classical music station. (FM radio is one luxury that Australians should not be forced to do without.) Maybe I had just been starved for music. Recovered. Thanks, Linda and Ron, for that very important rest.

October 6: Linda Lounsbury picked me up from Wilmington station and drove me around some of the very beautiful countryside outside the Wilmington-Philadelphia area. Visited the Hagley Museum, and walked through the university grounds of Newark, Delaware (not to be confused with the non-beautiful Newark, New Jersey). Linda and Ken Fletcher and I went back to Bushyagers' for a good meal and entertaining slides of old conventions.

October 7-21: New York!! Treasure-house of the world! Utterly unique phenomenon! The place every conscientious film buff and book collector in the world must visit. Home of the world's most colourful (and noisiest) subway system. New York the splendiferous! Barry Gillam, Mrs Gillam, and Ron, a friend of Barry's, met me at 34th St station. Next day I began my film binge (fifteen films in two weeks: at the New York Film Festival, Chabrol's JUST BEFORE NIGHTFALL and Tarkovsky's AMOREI RUBLEV; plus, at some of New York's hundreds of cinemas, LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL (Levin and Abel), THE LAST AMERICAN HERO (Lamont Johnson), THE LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE (John Hough) (everybody must see this), MONSIEUR VERDOUX (Charles Chaplin), GENEVIEVE (Henry Cornelius, William Rose) (last seen in 1956 when I was in fourth grade), SEVEN SINNERS (Tay Garnett), HEAVY TRAFFIC (Ralph Bakshi), SINGING IN THE RAIN (Stanley Donen), BANDWAGON (Vincente Minelli) (cringe with envy, Lee Harding!), AMERICAN GPAFFITI (George Lucas), FANTASIA (Walt Disney) (proper ratio this time: no more stretched-out Cinemascope fatties), LITTLE CAESAR (Le Roy Jones), and Chaplin's THE GREAT DICTATOR (which I've wanted to see again ever since 1953, when it last came to Australia). Also bought \$60 worth of books, including many hardbacks at \$1 each, went to the top of the Empire State Building, travelled around Manhattan Island (thirty-five miles in three hours) on the Circle Line ferry, and visited the Guggenheim Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Mrs Gillam took Parry and me to Stonybrook College, elegantly sprawled out over north Long Island, where April, Barry's sister, attends. Another day had a pleasant Chinese meal with Jerry Kaufman, Suzle, and the Avocado Pit people. And for all this, I did not really see much of that infinite city, New York, and saw even less of its fan population (sorry, Andy).

(Interlude, October 16-18: Sheryl Birkhead had asked me to visit (and who am I to refuse the request of a lady?) so I retraced my steps briefly -nd stayed for a few days with the Birkheads on their farm "near" Washington (twenty-five miles but one-and-a-half hours driving). My first real taste of rural life in America. Technicolour autumn foliage. Sheryl and I visited the Smithsonian and saw the space exhibits. If we had stayed for several days, we might have seen all the Smithsonian.)

October 21-28: Travelled west of the Hudson to Indianapolis and the Miesels'. One week
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of splendid conversation, a quick course in western and eastern art, and a severe test of my minimal abilities to entertain three very sharp children. Sandra is beautiful and witty and always interesting, even if we still don't agree on anything, John keeps up his side of a fannish conversation very well, and Chirp, Mite, and Peter are three of the most entertaining and civilised children I've met anywhere. Also they have a proper perception of the sterling personal qualities of yours truly. They introduced me to SESAME STREET, the only intelligent American tv program I've seen.

And (October 29) here I am where I started my account - at Gormans'. On Sunday we had an interesting day at the Coulsons', saw fan photos from as far back as 1953, inspected the Coulsons' vast library and collections, and heard lots of fan gossip. Two days ago, I typed fourteen stencils, and felt very Gillespieish again. With a bit of luck, yet another SFC will hit the US post office in a few days time.

* But that's not really a Trip Report. The blueprint for one, maybe. For me, a proper Trip Report would contain innumerable observations, digressions, epigrams, anecdotes, and generalisations, and stretch for at least 100 pages. Would you even want to read such a document?

Or are you waiting to find out what I think of America?

When I arrived here, I was both disappointed and reassured to find that USA is so very much like Australia. In my mental scheme of things, a place on one side of the world should be much different from a place right on the other side of the world. As I've travelled, I've noticed some real differences which I didn't notice at first, but I find it hard to pin them down in print.

Fortunately, in New York I happened to pick up a copy of a book which nails down USA '73 much better than I ever could. Stanley Elkin's new book, SEARCHES AND SEIZURES (Random House: 304 pp.; \$3.45) comprises three novellas, two of which, THE BAILBONDSMAN and THE CONDOMINIUM contain particularly penetrating analyses of the surface of contemporary America. I don't aim to review this book, but merely quote passages which echo my own observations:

((In Cincinnati)) I enter a new office block and refer to the huge directory that takes up almost the entire width of one black marble wall. I locate the number of Avila's suite - I have never been here before - and tell the operator I want the eighteenth floor. ... The secretary says I may go in and I head down a corridor like a hallway of bedrooms. Avila greets me outside a door, a man in his mid-thirties, jacketless in black trousers and vest, long lengths of bright white shirt-sleeve dropping through its armholes like acetylene. He shakes my hand and leads me by it into his office - how passive I have become - which looks as if it has been decorated by emptying three or four of those store windows. His desk is a drawerless slab of white marble five feet long and a yard deep on legs of Rhodesian chrome. At the wall to my right is an antique breakfront, old lawbooks behind golden grillwork like a priest crosshatched in a confessional. A cigarette lighter on his desk like a silver brick. A large round standless lamp white as a shirt-front bubbles on the marble, and the carpet, long pelts of creamy wool, has the appearance of bleached floorboard. An eighteenth-century French console table doubles itself against a mirror. Only the chair I sit on is invisible to me. Taste. Taste everywhere. A tasteful office in a city pickled in taste.

The final few sentences are marvellously effective. Already I've written to people in letters that if Americans have one national art, it is architecture. (Add to that the

complementary skills of "interior decoration".) To drive through a ritzy Washington suburb, or even through the "better" areas of Baltimore or Philadelphia or Indianapolis is to drive through an art gallery of architecture. When not covered by smog, Washington (for instance) is a feast of visual bon-bons.

All this is most intimidating. The rumour in Australia is that America is some kind of synonym for bad taste; instead, by contrast, Australian "design", such as it isn't, comprises mainly Suburban Australian Slipshod. American offices and shops, public buildings and private houses, all boast individuality of thought and uncompromising solidity of construction. Americans don't seem to jerry-build very often. They don't like their myriad machines to break down.

But I can't help feeling as uneasy as Elkin's bailbondsman:

I see myself caromed off the mirrors, fractured in space like a break shot in pool. I see the checkered reflection of my checkered jacket. It is expensive, even new, but it is gross. I have no taste, only hunger. I have never been fashionable, and it's astonishing to me that so much has happened in the world. The changes I perceive leave me breathless. I am more astonished by what remains to happen. I have erratic, sudden premonitions of new packaging techniques - breakfast cereal in spray cans, insulated boxes of frozen beer, egg yolk in squeezable tubes.

That really is very funny, and painfully true. Sometimes the ingenuity of America, the detailed attempts to keep people comfortable, leave me breathless. Of course, the aims of Australians are not much different - it's just that Australians never quite get these things right. If they do, they've copied them from America. I suspect that Elkin comes very close to diagnosing the exact reason why America functions as it does:

"It was an age of developers, fast talkers who had the ear of bankers, insurance companies, financiers, boards of directors - all those mysterious resources where the money was, all those who sat in judgment of the feasible... Solomons of the daily life who, surer than legislators or artists, gives its look to whatever age they live in wherever they happen to live it."

This just another version of the old adage that in USA "the difficult we do at once; the impossible takes a little longer". Or perhaps a bit more than that: Elkin pinpoints the way in which one group of people may create their visions of what ought to be in terms of concrete, bricks, and wood. By contrast, it seems to me that Australia has never had a consistent vision of itself, and so nothing consistent has ever been created. In Australia many people sit in judgment of the feasible and decide that nothing is feasible there except for what governments might do and foreign companies might rip out of the ground.

In the back of my mind, I'm trying to account for the reasons why life in America is so much different from the public image that America gives to other countries. I didn't feel too threatened when I travelled by subway in New York, I walked the streets there at night, and nobody seems more fearful of muggers-who-go-clunk-in-the-night than they do in Australia. Whoever was talking about the Apocalypse here during the sixties seems to have disappeared entirely. I'm not saying that people should believe in the general consensus of opinion that America is doing very well indeed; I'm just saying that such a consensus is very persuasive indeed.

For I've found Americans to be politer on the streets than Australians; less loud, more considerate of other citizens, less boorish. They are less good-looking than Australians; eat more, worse food (particularly if they eat at restaurants; home cooking is

good), and most of the Americans I've met here have more money to spend than most of the Australians I know. The Australians I know are more radical and more aware of political and artistic issues than a lot of the American fans I've met, but, as with so many things, this might simply show a difference between the two fandoms, rather than a difference between Americans as a group and Australians as a group.

Enough generalisations. The real puzzle is why such a gap seems to divide Mr Nice Guy, the suburban/urban American I've met, and the Amerikan, the lunatic politician whose activities have taken all the news space ever since I've been in the country. On this subject

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Since I last wrote you, the magnitude of the despotic gang of professional, organised criminals who came to power legally (as did Hitler in Germany) is increasingly revealed to the US public. We Americans are now faced precisely with the situation the German people of the 1930s faced: we elected a criminal government to 'save us from Communism,' and are stuck with that government. It has the power to destroy those who would overthrow it, whether legally or illegally. I myself feel that when you discover you have a government committing an almost endless list of crimes, and which when caught will not own up and resign, then whatever crime you commit against this government to overthrow it is in only a legal sense a crime, not in a moral sense. On the authority of Nixon we have secretly (to us, anyhow) been bombing a neutral country. This alone, especially since forged documents were produced for Congress and the people, makes the executive branch party to a felony of the highest order: there is no law, no legal mandate, allowing them to do this, and every dead and injured man in Cambodia destroyed by these bombings is as much a victim of criminal action as if he had as a US citizen been shot on the streets of New York. Are their lives less valuable than ours? What we do, under statute law, when we apprehend the man who shot an innocent person on the streets of a US city is to try him and then most likely to send him to jail. As I see it, of all the crimes the Nixon crowd has done, this bombing secretly year after year of a neutral country is the worst.

This brings up the question of proper moral response and attitude of the US citizen who did not know this - like Germans who, after World War Two, discovered, and I think on the most part sincerely for the first time, the existence of the extermination camps. Suppose he, the average German, had found out about it when Hitler and his crowd were still in office? What loyalty did he, this citizen, owe his Fuhrer? Of course, one thinks at once, what could he do in any effectual sense? Write to the newspapers? Tell his friends? Hire a lawyer and instruct him to indict Hitler? Well, what can we do here, we Americans? Individually? Certainly, the practical issue prints out the answer: nothing. But morally - this is another question. The two must be separated. Often in life these two issues confront each other. 'I feel morally,' a man says, 'that I should or should not do this, but they can make me do it, or as they saying goes, they can't make me do it but they can make me wish I had.' Under these circumstances, the normal person, understandably, capitulates. And yet - there is the fundamental philosophical dictum that goes, 'I should behave in such a way that if everyone did it, good would come of it, rather than evil.' I believe this supercedes all other wise sayings such as, 'Don't stick your neck out' or, 'Nothing will come of it and you'll be in a heap of trouble.'

I think that we Americans must now face the fact that although the Nixon government came to power legally, this fact is not important, any more than it was regarding

Hitler. We must face the fact that we have a criminal mob running this country, doing an incredible number of illegal things all the way up to murder, and, this being so, we owe them nothing, nothing at all, in the way of complying with their laws. When you discover you have this sort of syndicate government, then you must (one) withdraw all support, and (two) fight it in any way you can. I do not mean merely through the ballot box; this criminal mob has something like three and a half years to go, and there is no real difficulty in creating a dynasty: they simply get one of their number in as the next tyrant. What I advocate is anything that will pull them down. They are not our leaders; they are our tormentors and they are now and have been for some time bleeding us and ripping us off and using us and oppressing us. Their great national political secret police is probably powerful beyond our ability to imagine, and by their own admission they infiltrated - and beguiled into overt illegal acts - every anti-war group in this country. They beguiled the anti-war left, which is to say the Opposition, into breaking the law so that the members of the left could then be arrested and the left destroyed. As I understand it, no single conviction has yet been obtained in court against anti-war agitators because again and again it came out in testimony that these undercover infiltrators were not merely police informers but were in fact agents provocateurs. (And earning good money for this, too; many were paid \$1,000 a week, which would make such activity an enticing profession, at least to those lacking in any sense of honour.) To be enticed into breaking the law by an undercover agent of the US government posing as your friend, and then, when you have been convinced and do so break a law, you find him no longer wearing a beard and jeans but with a tie and suit, testifying against you in court. This turns a nation into a paranoid camp of frightened hostility, because the girl you love, the friend you trust - who, which, how many of them, maybe everyone you know, is being paid not only to watch you but to egg you into breaking the law. This dissolves the cement that binds men together. And I suppose this fact is favourable to government policy, too. This aids in dissolving political opposition, and hastens the setting up of the totalitarian state, which, as with Hitler, is the final goal.

Well, when I read my Vancouver speech, printed in SFC, I see that I was right in at least one assertion: the tyranny of the 1984-type is here. I may be wrong that the kids are our best bet in combatting it (look what happened at Kent State: flowers against guns, and the guns won), but then let me alter my original speech and say this: let us all, here in the US, of whatever age, adopt the view, the behaviour of the kids which I described. In my speech I told of a bright-eyed girl who stole several cases of Coca Cola from a truck and then after she and her friends had drunk all the Coke, she took the empties back and traded them in for the deposit. A number of letters to SFC criticised my lauding this girl for this act, but I laud her still and would say, let us all do this in a sense, not a literal sense but in the sense that we will not do honest business with a mob syndicate that has taken over our government. I have no specific act in mind. What I do have in mind, though, may shed light on why I saw in that girl, and in the bizarre rip-offs she got into, a quality of transcendent value. Because of my anti-war views, expressions, and activities, the authorities decided they could do without me, and after spending a long (and probably quite expensive time) trying to catch me breaking the law, they at last went to this girl, who they knew to be my closest friend, and asked her to give perjured testimony against me. They - the police - pointed out to her that, my house having just been robbed, they could put together a good case and indict her for that, were she not to comply with what they wanted. "No," she said. "I won't say Phil did anything he didn't do." The police inspector said, "Then you may go to jail." The girl thought it over and then once more said, "No, I wouldn't be telling the truth." And, I found out later, she waited for weeks in fear of being arraigned. My point is obvious: you can't lean on that sort of person: you can't convince them that stealing crates of Coca Cola is wrong and you

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can't convince her that giving perjured testimony against a friend in order to save herself is right. She decides inside, an inner-directed person, and that is that. Even if the consequences to her are quite serious. And - she did not ever tell me about this at all, voluntarily, this act on her part which I would call heroic, until months later by chance I found out.

So I am saying: okay, the kids can't overthrow the tyranny. But the tyranny is there, and far more dreadful than we had ever imagined. But I say, let us sabotage that tyranny in whatever manner, legal or illegal, that seems viable. We owe nothing to the Nixon despotism; they are admitted criminals. I'm not trying to lay forth a blueprint for revolution. But that is the key word, unless the courts turn the bastards out, which is not likely. We may have to revolt; we should, if they remain in office. They may not be, in an individual sense, practical; they will mow us down. But I think they are mowing us down now, not only the 'us' here in the US but Asian people who are also "us". I would hate to think that my money bought a bomb that a B-52 dropped on a hospital or village in a neutral country; would this not make me culpable? Just as culpable as the pilot who dropped it? After all, he was "only following orders". How are we distinct? I bought it; he dropped it. And the people are dead. People who in no sense whatsoever harmed us.
(September 1, 1973) *

* Sign on a cool-drink machine at Penn Central Station: "Please do not use bent, mutilated, foreign, Canadian, or dirty coins - or slugs - they will make this machine operative." So believeth Nixon? G'bye. Nov 1 '73.

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