S F COMMENTARY 41/42

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for the

GEORGE TURNER

GERALD MURNANE

URSULA LE GUIN

Special Sections

and

lots of the best

of everything else

S F COMMENTARY FLYER: AWARD NOMINATION LISTS

HUGO NOMINATION LIST - released by the Organising Committee, 33rd World Science Fiction Convention (Aussiecon); awarded by members of Aussiecon.

BEST NOVEL
THE DISPOSSESSED (Ursula Le Guin) Gollancz; Harper & Row; FIRE TIME (Poul Anderson) Doubleday; FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID (Philip Dick) Gollancz; Doubleday; THE INVERTED WORLD (Christopher Priest) Faber & Faber; Harper & Row; THE MOTE IN GOD'S EYE (Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle) Simon & Schuster.

BEST NOVELLA
ASSAULT ON A CITY (Jack Vance) UNIVERSE 4; BORN WITH THE DEAD (Robert Silverberg) F&SF April; RIDING THE TORCH (Norman Spinrad) THREADS OF TIME; A SONG FOR LYA (George R R Martin) ANALOG June; STRANGERS (Gardner Dozois) NEW DIMENSIONS 4.

BEST NOVELETTE
ADRIFT JUST OFF THE ISLETS OF LANGERHANS: LATITUDE 38°54'N, LONGITUDE 77°00'13"W (Harlan Ellison); AFTER THE DREAMTIME (Richard Lupoff) NEW DIMENSIONS 4; A BROTHER TO DRAGONS, A COMPANION TO OWLS (Kate Wilhelm) ORBIT 14; EXTREME PREJUDICE (Jerry Pournelle) ANALOG July; MIDNIGHT BY THE MORPHY WATCH (Fritz Leiber) IF August; NIX OLYMPICA (William Walling) ANALOG December; THAT THOU ART MINDFUL OF HIM (Isaac Asimov) F&SF May.

BEST SHORT STORY
A CATHADONIAN ODYSSEY (Michael Bishop) F&SF Sep 74; THE DAY BEFORE THE REVOLUTION (Ursula Le Guin) GALAXY August; THE FOUR HOUR FUGUE (Alfred Bester) ANALOG June; THE HOLE MAN (Larry Niven) ANALOG January; SCHWARTZ BETWEEN THE GALAXIES (Robert Silverberg) STELLAR 1.

BEST EDITOR
Jim Baen; Ben Bova; Terry Carr; Ed Ferman; Robert Silverberg; Ted White.

BEST FAN WRITER
John Bangsund; Richard Geis; Sandra Miesel; Don Thompson; Susan Wood.

BEST FANZINE
THE ALIEN CRITIC (Richard Geis); ALGOL (Andrew Porter); LOCUS (Dena and Charlie Brown); OUTWORLDS (Bill Bowers); S F COMMENTARY (Bruce Gillespie); STARLING (Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell).

BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION
FLESH GORDON; PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE; QUESTOR TAPES; YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN; ZARDOZ.

BEST PRO ARTIST
Stephen Fabian; Kelly Freas; Tim Kirk; John Schoenherr; Rick Sternbach.

BEST FAN ARTIST
George Barr; Grant Canfield; Bill Rotsler; James Shull.

(Special Award - not a Hugo) GANDALF AWARD- GRAND MASTER OF FANTASY
Poul Anderson; L Sprague De Camp; Fritz Leiber; C S Lewis; Ursula Le Guin.

** ** **

NEBULA NOMINATION LIST - issued by the Science Fiction Writers of America; awarded by members of that organisation.

BEST NOVEL
THE DISPOSSESSED (Ursula Le Guin) Harper & Row; FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID (Philip Dick) Doubleday; THE GODWHALE (T J Bass) Ballantine; 334 (Thomas Disch) Avon.

BEST NOVELLA
A SONG FOR LYA (George R R Martin) ANALOG June; BORN WITH THE DEAD (Robert Silverberg) F&SF April; ON THE STREET OF SERPENTS (Michael Bishop) EMPHASIS 1.

BEST NOVELETTE
THE REST IS SILENCE (C L Grant) F&SF August; IF THE STARS ARE GODS (Gregory Benford & Gordon Eklund) UNIVERSE 4; TWILLA (Tom Reamy) F&SF September.

BEST SHORT STORY
AFTER KING KONG FELL (Philip Jose Farmer) OMEGA ; THE ENGINE AT HEARTSPRING'S CENTRE (Roger Zelazny) ANALOG July; THE DAY BEFORE THE REVOLUTION (Ursula Le Guin) GALAXY July.

BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION
SLEEPER; FANTASTIC PLANET; FRANKENSTEIN: THE TRUE STORY.

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SPECIAL THANKS to Tony Thomas, for his transcriptions from Eastercon 73; to John Foyster and Carey Handfield, for help in production; and again to Carey, who nagged this issue into existence.

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I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

NON YEAR

* 1974 was a real non-year. It wasn't particularly bad; it's just that not much happened during it. When I hear the stories that some of my friends tell about their 1974s, I see I had a good year. But I arrived back in Australia at the beginning of February, and since then I seemed to have written half a dozen letters, published two S F COMMENTARYs (where are the S F COMMENTARYs of yesteryear?), and written almost nothing but the long essay in this issue. Of course, I went freelance and stayed alive, if not rich. So I suppose I spent most of the year convincing people I was worth paying for writing and editorial services. Somehow that's not quite enough.

1974 was a bad, bad year in one respect. Postage rates went up. Not just a little bit, in previous years, but by more than a third on all the categories which affect S F COMMENTARY. I still haven't discovered any way to beat the postage increases; all I can do is adopt survival measures. I've had to cancel all my airmail subscriptions, and won't accept any more. Most of them were paid at the rate new subscribers are paying for surface-mail subscriptions, anyway - but I still feel guilty about backing out. I apologise to people who might be annoyed. An "ordinary" SFC (48 pages) will cost an absolute minimum of $74 per issue to post. If I put two issues together, as here, I pay a minimum of $132 in postage. And no doubt rates will rise again next October. Somehow, I suspect that the Australian Government doesn't want people to communicate in writing anymore. (Of course, I could shut down SFC altogether, which I've felt like doing most of this year, but I can't afford to pay back all those subscriptions. Besides, I need a Purpose For Living.

During 1974, I failed to write a huge number of necessary letters. Again, I apologise for people who were really expecting replies to their letters. Forget 1974. It didn't exist. One minute it was February, and the next minute it was December. 75 is the Year of the Convention, so that will disappear too. Oh well. Who's for a happy 1976?

WHAT S F COMMENTARY IS ABOUT:
These people said it best

In the arts, the critic is the only independent source of information. The rest is advertising.
- Pauline Kael

The style, of course, is the book. If you remove the cake, all you have left is a recipe. If you remove the style, all you have left is a synopsis of the plot. Style isn't just how you say English when you write... It isn't something you can do without... you can't do without it. There is no "is", without it. Style is how you as a writer see and speak. It is how you see: your vision, your understanding of the world, your voice.
- Ursula Le Guin, FROM ELFLAND TO POUGHKEEPSIE

If the book we are reading does not wake us, as with a fist hammering on our skull, why then do we read it? So that it shall make us happy? Good God, we would also be happy if we had no books and such books as make us happy we could, if need be, write ourselves. But what we must have are those books which come upon us like ill-fortune, and distress us deeply like the death of one we love better than ourselves, like suicide. A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us.
- Franz Kafka

Books are to be called for and supplied on the assumption that the process of reading is not a half-sleep, but in the highest sense an exercise, a gymnastic struggle; that the reader is to do something for himself.
- Walt Whitman

I realised, of course, that it is stupidity to expect every science fiction writer also to be a great writer. It is not stupidity, perhaps, to hope that a first-rate man of ideas might use some of his energy for that part of his work which needs it: the writing.
- Josephine Saxton, FOUNDATION 5

The just popular style: When the author has had his own eye fixed steadily on the abstract, yet permits his readers to see only the concrete.
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

Books, too, he treated as friends, with whom he carried on conversations.
- Donald Stauffer, of Coleridge

(In a work of art): The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself.
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

How small the cosmos (a kangaroo's puch would hold it), how paltry and puny in comparison to human consciousness, to a single individual recollection and its expression in words.
- Vladimir Nabokov, SPEAK, MEMORY

UNSHELVED

* I'm feeling particularly irritated about the new postage rates because, for a few weeks, I felt that I had finally resurrected SFC into an admittedly cadaverous image of its previous glorious shape. I've had in my files some material which I received two years ago or more, and at last I felt that I could reveal it to the world. And now - hope blighted again! During the last two years SFC has fallen down particullarly in the field where once it was supreme - in-depth reviewing of s f books. Therefore, I have a large collection of excellent reviews on file - and an equally large collection of unreviewed books. I have my excuses/reasons. Once I began to publish fewer reviews, SFC's "team" of reviewers drifted away. I hope they will drift back again. So:

APPEAL TO S F REVIEWERS: Wanted... several people to review current s f titles from a literary/sceptical point of view. Reviewers must be willing to discuss books in some detail and at some level above that of plot/characters/setting synopses. Reviewer keeps the book reviewed, but must be prompt in submitting review after receiving book. Payment: minimal (your copy of the book, several free issues of SFC, and the satisfaction of being read by the Right People, including the authors of the books you review. Replies... please! The number's (03)347 8902.

Meanwhile, book companies keep sending me review copies, and SFC keeps not publishing reviews of them. We're trying to catch up, but meanwhile here is as much as I can reasonably say about the books which I have here at the moment. If I don't mention any particular book, probably it is out for review. If I mention a book here, probably I still need a proper review from one of the kind people who answer my advertisement above. AFR = Available For Review/

From CHILTON BOOK COMPANY, Radnor, Pennsylvania

HIERO'S JOURNEY: A ROMANCE OF THE FUTURE, by Sterling E Lanier (1973; 280 pp; $US5.95). Robin Johnson read this because he dotes on Sterling Lanier's stories of the indomitable Brigadier Ffellowes. I don't know whether Hiero is equally indomitable, and in fact Robin didn't say much about the book when he returned it to me, unreviewed (first nasty hint of this issue). Available for review (AFR).

THE MANY WORLDS OF POUL ANDERSON, edited by Roger Elwood (1974; 324 pp; $US6.95).
I should mention that the Chilton books are extraordinarily beautiful to feel and look at. Possibly they are the finest books I see these days. So far, this volume is the handsomest of them: a cover illustrating Poul Anderson's story, THE QUEEN OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS, good paper, glossy cover. I've read only one of these stories before (QOLD) and didn't like

[illegible] fifties when (as far as I can tell) Mr Anderson was writing a lot better than he does today. The book also contains essays by Sandra Miesel (on Anderson's work in general) and Patrick McGuire (a long essay, originally sent to SFC, on QUEEN OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS). Not available for review, since I want to review, and keep, this one for myself.

THE MANY WORLDS OF ANDRE NORTON, edited by Roger Elwood (1974; 208 pp; $US6.95). This book is also very well produced. I've never read an Andre Norton novel in my life, and I'll mess familiar with her short fiction. I can only let Norton fans know that this book exists. As far as I know, it's the only available collection of her short fiction. As well as seven stories there is the essay ON WRITING FANTASY by Andre Norton, a NORTON BIBLIOGRAPHY, and Rick Brooks' essay, ANDRE NORTON: LOSS OF FAITH. AFR

INHERITORS OF EARTH, by Gordon Eklund and Poul Anderson (1974; 190 pp; $US6.50). This looks quite good, especially as I like Gordon Eklund's work very much. However, the overseas reviewers have not been kind to this book - they've said that it reads like an updating of an old Poul Anderson story, and doesn't have many of the virtues of either Eklund or Anderson. You'll have to try it for yourself. AFR

From Brian Aldiss:

THE ASTOUNDING-ANALOG READER, edited by Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss (Vol I - Doubleday; 1972; 530 pp; $US7.95; Vol II - Doubleday; 1972; 458 pp; $US7.95).
Most people will have read most of these stories. I've read very few of them, so I'm looking forward to these volumes. THE ASTOUNDING-ANALOG READER presents stories which represent the entire history of John W Campbell's magazine, first as ASTOUNDING and then as ANALOG. I suspect that the introductions (either by Harry Harrison wiritng like Brian Aldiss, or vice-versa) are even more entertaining than bbe stories.

FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND, by Brian Aldiss (Jonathan Cape; 184 pp; £2.25; 1973).
This has some claim to be Brian Aldiss' best novel, if only THE EIGHTY-MINUTE HOUR did not have much the same claim. Brian has never written better than in his recent work - a spare, vivid style which recalls Wells more than the New Wave, an urgent sense of chaos and passion, and lots of very funny jokes. A proper review later - but meanwhile, don't miss out on the best novel of 1973.

From THOMAS NELSON (AUSTRALIA) PTY LTD, 29-39 Jeffcott Street, West Melbourne, Victoria 3003.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?, edited by Isaac Asimov (Michael Joseph; 1973; 415 pp; $A9.25; original US publication 1971).

Thisis one of the few books I've seen to appeal directly to the many schools which now include s f in their courses or teach it directly. It has even a type of teachers' notes at the end of each story! Good stories, though, even if Asimov must concentrate on the stories' scientific aspects rather than their literary values. Of those stories I've read, my favourites are A MARTIAN ODYSSEY, NIGHT, SURFACE TENSION (to think of students labouring over this exciting piece!; kick s f out of the classroom before it dies altogether), and NEUTRON STAR.

PENDULUM, by John Christopher (originally published 1968; 1974; 254 pp; $A5.75).
A WRINKLE IN THE SKIN, by John Christopher (originally published 1965; 1974; 220 pp; $A5.75).
I've read very little of John Christopher's work, so I can't offer any opinion about these. Michael Joseph has issued these books as juveniles, so I asked a ten-year-old friend of mine for an expert opinion. He said that he liked Christopher's books very much, but hadn't read these two. Well. Christopher's juveniles do very well in Puffins, and these books look good, but until my ten-year-old friend reads them, I'll be stuck for anything more to say. AFR

STOWAWAY TO MARS, by John Wyndham (John Beynon) (originally published 1935 as PLANET PLANE; 1974; 190 pp; $A6.50).
THE SECRET PEOPLE, by John Wyndham (John Beynon) (originally published 1935; 1974; 224 pp; $A6.50).
Michael Joseph has published these as juveniles as well, although I presume that John Beynon, as he was known then, wrote them as straight 1935-style s f. I can't say much about them, except that it doesn't seem fair of anybody to resurrect books that appeared fifteen years before Beynon/Wyndham's international success with DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS. Still, Wyndham's short stories from the thirties and forties were very good, so I suppose the man learned his craft long before the general public noticed him. Take a look at these, but read the rest of Wyndham first. AFR

UNCANNY TALES 1, selected by Dennis Wheatley (Sphere 7221 9036; 1974; 223 pp; $A1.25).
THE WEREWOLF OF PARIS, by Guy Endore (Sphere 7221 3332; originally published 1934; 1974; 258 pp; $A1.25).
Both these books appear in THE DENNIS WHEATLEY LIBRARY OF THE OCCULT, published by Sphere. I'm not quite sure what the s f in S F COMMENTARY suggests to people; this is certainly not my usual area. However, anybody who wants to review these books is welcome. The UNCANNY TALES volume contains such pieces as Wilkie Collins' THE DREAM WOMAN, Sir Walter Scott's THE TAPESTRIED CHAMBER, and Edgar Allan Poe's LIBEIA, and similar creaking stories of creaking doors. According to the blurb, THE WEREWOLF OF PARIS is "half human...half wolf"; "he stalked the streets of Paris in search of prey. Born of an unholy union he was cursed, doomed to live in the netherworld of the werewolf, a man by day... a wolf by night, his victims the eager women of the Parisian streets." I'm tempted to be sarcastic, but this might actually be a good book if I had the time to read it. AFR

DRAGONQUEST, by Anne McCaffrey (Sphere 7221 5904; originally published 1971; 1973; 304 pp; $A1.25).
In S F COMMENTARY 4 I described the work of Anne McCaffrey as "impeccably boring", but lots of people in the s f world disagree with me. DRAGONQUEST came within a statistic of winning the Hugo in 1972 (it probably would have won if Fred Patten's pocket calculator had blown a transistor) and I have even met people who understand these books. All I remember is that no writer, in or out of s f, so effectively cures insomnia as Anne McC! Available for review for a reader sympathetic to telepathic dragons.

THE BEST OF FRITZ LEIBER (Sphere 7221 5474; 1974; 368 pp; $A1.90). As far as I can tell, this is a special BEST OF prepared by Sphere Books, and not the American volume of the same name. Somebody unnamed has put a lot of hard work into making sure that this is the best, or at least the most representative, short fiction of Fritz Leiber. The stories are even in chronological order. If I can't persuade Rob Gerrand to review this soon, I'll plunge into it myself. Stories in here which are already favourites of mine include A DESKFUL OF GIRLS and AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL. I can see in the contents lots of other Leiber stories I should have read long ago, but haven't yet.

From KAKABEKA PUBLISHING COMPANY, 2200 Yonge St., Suite 709, Toronto, Ontario M4S 2C6, Can.

SURVIVAL SHIP AND OTHER STORIES, by Judith Merril (1973; 229 pp; $Can1.95).
Judy Merril wrote most of these stories before I began to read s f, so all of them are unfamiliar to me. However, when I was in Toronto I did have the pleasure of meeting this legendary lady of science fiction. I knew how important it was to her that she should publish this volume in Canada, rather than in USA, where everything else is published. I guess Judy calls herself a Canadian now; I hope Canada recognises the privilege extended to it. NAFR, since I'm definitely keeping this for my own book collection.

From SIDGWICK AND JACKSON, 1 Tavistock Chambers, Bloomsbury Way, London WC1A 2SG.

THE BEST OF JOHN W CAMPBELL, foreword by James Blish (1973; 278 pp; £2.50).
This is one of those books which has a history even more interesting than its contents. For some dark reason, the book does not say that it was edited by George Hay, although it does say, "A Science Riction Foundation Collection". At one stage, the Foundation (the same organisation that publishes FOUNDATION magazine) decided to co-sponsor a series of books with Sidgwick and Jackson. This was the first, and somehow there has never been a second. George, who has helped

SFC many times during the years, sent me a copy during early 1973, but it never reached me. I picked up this copy in London, and I'm going to ruin George Hay's sleep when I say that I still haven't read this particular volume although, of course, I've read many of the stories before. THE BEST OF JOHN W CAMPBELL is one of those volumes for the library shelf, especially as it includes some early thud-and-blunder Campbell (THE DOUBLE MINDS) as well as representatives of the more meditative "Don A Stuart" Campbell (FORGETFULNESS). Definitely AFR, if only to encourage the Foundation to venture into other publishing fields.

From T-K GRAPHICS, PO Box 1951, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, USA:

NEW WORLDS FOR OLD: THE APOCALYPTIC IMAGINATION, SCIENCE FICTION, AND AMERICAN LITERATURE, by David Kettorer (Doubleday Anchor Original A921; 1974; 347 pp; $US2.95).
I suppose I like this book so much because I agree with so many of its judgments. In fact, this is the best general book about s f to appear so far. I should spend several pages on it, and probably will in some future issue, but for now I can list some of the pleasures of NEW WORLDS FOR OLD. It's modest, for a start; it does not essay a history of s f, as Aldiss tried, rather unwisely. It has a specific theme (the apocalyptic imagination in s f) and scope (American s f, with discussions of some English and European books) and it is a work of criticism. Ketterer's discussions of individual books, especially his breathtaking illumination of THE SIRENS OF TITAN, make this a book of constant excitement (I couldn't count the number of times I said to myself, "But I never realised that before."). Ketterer's theme is a favourite of mine - that s f is a literature of transformations (or of "apocalypse") rather than one of aesthetic beauty. He likes the authors I like - Dick, Aldiss, Vonnegut, etc. But he annoys me in the same way Aldiss jarred in BILLION YEAR SPREE - Ketterer's account of Melville's THE CONFIDENCE MAN is as exciting as Aldiss' of some very obscure nineteenth-century writers, but they all fall by the wayside when one wants to talk about the hard stuff - real science fiction. Mistakenly, Ketterer concentrates on American s f. I agree with Aldiss that the river of English s f, although it nearly dried up at times, has run deeper and clearer for most of s f's history, however you calculate that period. I can think of several good arguments why Ketterer might say that s f is a peculiarly American phenonemon, but he doesn't advance them. :: Enough. This is not supposed to be a review. George Turner could discuss this book much better than I can, and I hope he does. But I did want to point it out to book buyers as soon as possible.

From LEIGH EDMONDS, PO Box 74, Balaclava, Victoria 3183, Australia, and LESLEIGH LUTTRELL, 525 West Main, Madison, Wisconsin 53703, USA:

LESLEIGH'S ADVENTURES DOWN UNDER (AND WHAT SHE FOUND THERE, by Lesleigh Luttrell (Australian edition from Leigh Edmonds; 33 pp; $1; 1974). I hope that either Leigh or Lesleigh have copies of this still. It's worth buying, even if I am praising the Australian edition, for which I typed the stencils. Lesleigh travelled to Australia in 1972 as the first winner of the Down Under Fan Fund, and this is her report of her journey. It's a masterpiece of circumspection; lots of things you always wanted to know about Australia and Aussiefans but didn't even know were worth asking; and even more left out. Highly entertaining, richly detailed, and with a caste of at least twenty or thirty people... and the indefatigable Lesleigh as star. If any copies remain, proceeds for 1975 DUFF.

From JOHN BANGSUND, PO Box 357, Kingston, ACT 2604:

JOHN W CAMPBELL: AN AUSTRALIAN TRIBUTE, edited by John Bangsund (published by Ronald E Graham and John Bangsund; 100 pp; $A2, $US3; from Space Age Books, 305-307 Swanston St., Melbourne, Victoria 3000, Australia.

I must give this book more than a mention (for I meant to keep book notices short in this column, but I don't want to consign it to the fate of waiting for a Proper Review. So consider this as a review - and that this section of SFC has, despite itself, turned into a review section.

In August 1971, about thirty people gathered in one of the dowdier lecture theatres of Melbourne University to participate in a Symposium about John W Campbell. In publishing the proceedings, plus submitted contributions from people such as Jack Williamson, John Pinkney, and George Turner. John has given s f one of its more valuable pieces of history. Also, John has produced a beautiful book, and everybody should buy it. When you do, you will find the words of the five main speakers at the Campbell Symposium (George Turner, John Foyster, Redd Boggs disguised as John Bangsund, Wynne Whiteford, and Henry Couchman), the question time (which is how I became a contributor to the book), and a number of other essays. Of the latter I liked best the contribution by Eric Harries-Harris. At one time, John Bangsund asked me to write something for this TRIBUTE, and I didn't must because I don't have the emotional ties to Campbell mentioned by Eric. However, I have similar ties to s f as a whole, so I suppose that even I, who found little of worth in ANLOG's last ten years of publication, owe as much to Campbell as anyone.

From TOM DISCH, somewhere in America, or Europe, or possibly on his way to Australia:

THE RIGHT WAY TO FIGURE PLUMBING: POEMS BY THOMAS M DISCH (Basilisk Press, Fredonia NY; 76 pp; 1972; $US1.95).

It's a long time since I read a book of poems from cover to cover, and I'm not sure whether I finished the last one I tried. But I think Tom Disch is worth breaking old habits for, and I enjoyed some of these poems very much indeed. Mind you, I don't think many of them are very good, and very few of them remind me of Disch's mastery of prose. My favourite poem is the only certifiably science fictional piece, A VACATION ON EARTH: (In part):

> ...I did not come to Earth
> to dredge up these worthless, weary myths.
> There was no mother at my birth -
> I do not need one now.
>
> Yesterday I visited Italy: Rome,
> Florence, Venice, and the famous church
> museum. There was little I missed.
> But, tomorrow, thank God, I go home.

So much for tourism. The best poem is ON HEARING RUMOURS OF THE EMPIRE'S COLLAPSE, but it hardly balances Disch's general penchant for prose-sentences-punctuated-as-poetry. At least, I can judge Disch as a Rising American Poet, and not merely wince, as when faced by the verse productions of other s f authors. Some nice things here, but 334 is better.

From GRANADA PUBLISHING, Toga House, 117 York St., Sydney, NSW 2000:

Granada send me very odd items indeed. THE GODS THEMSELVES, by Isaac Asimov (Panther 586 03772; 1973; 252 pp; $A1.35) hardly needs extra publicity, but I'm trying to beat a review out of a friend at the moment. Despite the Hugo and Nebula Awards, it's still a dull book. :: Two copies received of NEBULA AWARDS 6, edited by Clifford D Simak (Panther 586 03797; 1973; 192 pp; $A1.20) so it is definitely AFR. Original US publication was 1971, so these are the SFWA's pick of The Best of 1970. I suppose this book illustrates the faults of British publishing in general, rather than any fault in particular of overworked Granada representatives in Australia; British publishers - especially paperback publishers; especially Granada - are always years behind their American equivalent, so no wonder they have lost so much ground in Australia to the Americans. When George Turner reviewed this book in the May 1972 edition of SFC, he said, in part, that Theodore Sturgeon's SLOW SCULPTURE was "the same old Sturgeon love affair between two twisted people"; R A Lafferty's CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK was "a gem" although "I can't criticise or discuss it; I can only report on how it affected me"; in THE SECOND INQUISITION, Joanna Russ' "management of language is a joy, and her story is my choice for best in the book"; Keith Laumer's IN THE QUEUE "is an almost Kafkaesque fantasy at a far remove from (Laumer's) usual blood-and-guts conceptions"; Harry Harrison's BY THE FALLS: "a preliminary sketch for a larger theme"; Gene Wolfe's THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR DEATH AND OTHER STORIES "recounts a short period in the life of a small boy in a house where some fairly unpleasant events take place"; and Fritz Leiber's ILL MET IN LANKHMAR is a "spiteful and bloody adventure of two gutter-group heroes who deserve victory no more than their defeated opponent". I liked BY THE FALLS and CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK, but little else. :: I received Volume 3 of THE EARLY ASIMOV (Panther 586 03937; 1974; 192 pp; $A1.20). Meanwhile, Gollancz has sent the entire work, and I haven't had time to read that, either.

From WREN PUBLISHING PTY LTD, 33 Lonsdale St., Melbourne, Victoria 3000.

THE BITTER PILL, by A Bertram Chandler (1974; 158 pp; $A4.95). This is the first genre s f book to be published in Australia since 1968, and so I must celebrate its publication. Also, it's written by one of the finest men and wittiest story-tellers I've met. If it succeeds, science fiction might actually become part of the Australian fiction-publishing scene, which has expanded considerably during the last two years. But I must warn you that at least two reviewers haven't liked it at all. I wouldn't expect Carolyn Egerton in NATION REVIEW to like any s f, but John Bangsund, in NEW MILLENIAL HARBINGER 12, has read the original short story upon which the novel is based (and liked it) and doesn't like the novel-length version. I've never actually seen John take apart a book before, so I read fascinated as he pointed out some obvious errors in the book and implied that it might have been written hastily and carelessly. I leave a final verdict to readers, who should buy this out of patriotic duty. (The inside back cover has a picture of Bert Chandler, and another one of the Ditmar Award he won for the short story. How can you afford not to buy it?)

From POCKET BOOKS, Simon and Schuster Inc., 630 Fifth Ave., New York, New York 10020, USA:

(Somebody Out There really likes me. I've been receiving books from Pocket Books for some months now. Whoever started sending them to me really knows the kind of "s f" I'm interested in. Thanks, whoever you are.)

THE LION OF BOAZ-JACHIN AND JACHIN-BOAZ, by Russell Hoban (Pocket Books 78392; 1974; 192 pp; $US1.25). As soon as I received this book, Carey Handfield whisked it out of the house and I didn't see it for a few weeks (the book, not Carey Handfield). When returned, it looked a bit dog-eared. Carey had read it quickly and enthusiastically. He gave it to Anne Sydenham (The Girl in The Shop, who shall remain nameless) who read it quickly and enthusiastically. I don't know who else collared it before it arrived back with me. Evidently, Russell Hoban is a big-name writer in children's literature, which is why Carey and Anne seized this book so quickly. But apart from its advance reputation, it looks good. The cover shows a lion with mystic eyes (sort of like Ken Ford's when he's

inspired) and two gentlemen standing on an eerie hill. The blurb says that this is "a fable. A fantasy. An adventure. An idyll. An odyssey." (Don't they have commas on their typewriter?) Auberon Waugh raved about it in the SPECTATOR. Carey Handfield raved about it in Degraves Tavern. AFR, but not before I've read it.

HEROVIT'S WORLD, by Barry Malzberg (Pocket Books 77753; 1974; 159 pp; US95c).
ON A PLANET ALIEN, by Barry Malzberg (Pocket Books 77766; 1974; 144 pp; US95c).
In a recent issue of LOCUS, Charlie Brown pointed out that Barry Malzberg had more new books published in 1974 than any other s f author. I'm not sure who's buying them. I can't give away my review copies to anybody, especially not to reviewers. Barry Malzberg is the only American s f writer who really attempted the English New Wave style found in NEW WORLDS during its most esoteric period. The trouble is that Barry Malzberg isn't a very good writer, and lots of the English writers are/were. Giles Gordon or Lang Jones could write sentences which would surpass the entire contents of some of Malzberg's "novels". As far as I can tell, Malzberg has a crush on suffering astronauts and the folks they left behind, so he tends to repeat himself. This obsession is balanced by his obsession with giving other s f writers a quick kick in the crotch. As far as I can tell, he does this in HEROVIT'S WORLD. It's about Jonathan Herovit, who begins the novel "at the second annual cocktail party of the New League for Science-Fiction Professionals". Malzberg's sarcasm may be lost on fellow s f writers, but it seems to sell books, AFR, if you dare.

THE TEACHINGS OF DON JUAN: A YAQUI WAY OF KNOWLEDGE, by Carlos Castaneda (Pocket Books 78748; original publication 1968; 1974; 256 pages; $US1.50).
A SEPARATE REALITY, by Carlos Castaneda (Pocket Books 78749; first published 1972; 1974; 263 pp; $US1.50).
JOURNEY TO IXTLAN, by Carlos Castaneda (Pocket Books 78706; 1974; 268 pp; $US1.50).
I must be the last person under thirty who has not read these books. I just never got around to it. Anyway, I'm glad that the Unknown Person at Pocket Books complimented SFC so graciously by perceiving that this was the sort of magazine where these books would be received with appreciation. I must read these Real Soon Now, and tell you what I find. TIME magazine gave Castaneda the highest praise I've seem him receive from anywhere; it said, in effect, that Carlos Castaneda is either one of the world's great anthropologists or he is one of its great novelists. Fiction or fact, these look enticing, even if you've read them three times already.

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Last, but actually best - books from VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD, 14 Henrietta St., London WC2E 8QJ, England.

I should apologise to Gollancz, and especially to its splendid and amiable Managing Director, for the number of Gollancz books which SFC has not reviewed during recent years. The absence of the CRITICANTO column has had much to do with this; also the fact that I haven't had time to review books which other people also had no time to review. Worse, the fewer Gollancz books I've reviewed, the better its list has become. (For instance, it had two of last year's four good s f novels.) So, here's a listing of books for which I will still try to find reviewers:

KULDESAK, by Richard Cowper (Gollancz; 1972; 187 pp; £1.80).
TIME OUT OF MIND, by Richard Cowper (Gollancz; 1973; 159 pp; £1.90).
THE TWILIGHT OF BRIAREUS, by Richard Cowper (1974; 255 pp; £2.25).
I've no idea whether these are any good or not; certainly Gollancz seems to believe in Mr Cowper, so try one of these. AFR

MIRROR IMAGE, by Michael G Coney (1972; 223 pp; £2.20).
FRIENDS COME IN BOXES, by Michael G Coney (1973; 189 pp; £2.10).
WINTER'S CHILDREN, by Michael Coney (1974; 192 pp; £2.30).
Michael Coney is one of the best short-story writers in the world, and reviews I've seen make me think that MIRROR IMAGE is just as good. Coney has an English gift for understatement and what the Americans call the "slow build"; I'll be interested to see whether he can sustain these qualities through several hundred pages. All AFR, since I've already bought them in paperback.

TWO NOVELS, by Damon Knight (THE EARTH QUARTER and DOUBLE MEANING) (originally published 1961, as THE SUN SABOTEURS, and 1965; 1974; 223 pp; £2.20). I can't say much about these at all. I have a sinking feeling that DOUBLE MEANING is another name for the awful THE RITHIAN TERROR, which is the last novel Damon Knight wrote, as far as I know. THE EARTH QUARTER doesn't look too inviting either. Now why doesn't Gollancz republish HELL'S PAVEMENT instead.

THE GOLDEN ROAD: GREAT TALES OF FANTASY AND THE SUPERNATURAL, edited by Damon Knight (1974; 342 pages; £3.00). This looks good, and if I read it in time, I will review it along with Knight's A SCIENCE FICTION ARGOSY and A POCKETFUL OF STARS and Carol and Frderick Pohl's SCIENCE FICTION: THE GREAT YEARS. I had a deprived childhood as I did not discover the "hard" s f and fantasy until I was twelve or thirteen. Therefore, big books of old favourites help me to

catch up the stories I should have been reading during the fifties. In THE GOLDEN ROAD, stories I've already read, and remember with affection include R A Lafferty's ENTIRE AND PERFECT CHRYSOLITE, H G Wells' THE TRUTH ABOUT PYECRAFT, and Larry Niven's NOT LONG BEFORE THE END. I'm not sure whether I would still like Robert Heinlein's MAGIC, INC, but it's here and it takes up quite a few pages in the book. A nice balance between older stories and some quite recent.

INCONSTANT MOON, by Larry Niven (1973; 251 pp; £2.20). Lots of these stories appeared in Niven's excellent Ballantine collection, ALL THE MYRIAD WAYS, but some disappear here and (I think) there are a few new ones. INCONSTANT MOON is one of the very best short stories of recent years - very much, "What would happen to you if...?" Most of the others make pleasant reading. AFR

THE EARLY ASIMOV (1972; 540 pp; £2.75). When I mentioned this before, I should have said that Panther have really ripped off the avid Asimov-reading masses by dividing this volume into three parts. Still, in Gollancz' yellow covers, it is a huge volume. The question is - and I can't answer the question until I've read the book - whether anyone should have reprinted Asimov stories that hadn't been printed before. I mean, in the current boom market for Asimov, why did these stories stay unreprinted for so long? The answer that occurs to me is that they were so rough and amateurish that only an enormous interest in Asimov could justify their publication. When I read the book, I'll tell you whether I'm right or not. (But if Gollancz has judged the market correctly, you've all bought this book already.) AFR

THE ROBERT SHECKLEY OMNIBUS, edited and introduced by Robert Conquest (1973; 320 pp; £2.75). I've read none of these, so I can only quote from a highly favourable review which Brian Aldiss wrote for VECTOR 67/68: "(During the H L Gold GALAXY era) Sheckley kept his madness honed to a fine point by writing clear English about utterly convincing possibilities... it was marvellous to read a man whose characters never scored victories (though they rarely suffered utter defeat), whose planets were lunatic and draughty, whose aliens pursued totally inane rituals (like the Dance of the Reciprocal Trade Agreement), whose technologies were generally dedicated to perfecting robots which lurched and squeaked, and whose spaceships were never airtight... The nice, the odd, thing about Sheckley's preoccupations is that they are all counterbalanced by their very opposites... (His) madness is presented with a disarming reasonableness. At least his future's no worse than the present. He's telling you a story, no presenting a case." Like Aldiss, I've enjoyed the Sheckley I've read; I haven't read much because he stopped writing much s f about the time I discovered the magazines. The book is NAFR before I catch up on my essential reading.

THE WIND FROM THE SUN: STORIES OF THE SPACE AGE, by Arthur C Clarke (1972; 193 pp; £1.75). Reviewers have not liked this book very much; they seem to agree that it has too many examples of short-short, snigger vignettes and Boys Own S F (the title story appeared first in a magazine called BOYS LIFE). But that's Arthur Calrke for you; RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA is a marvellous book - that is, full of marvels - and a Boys Own adventure. The same goes for A MEETING WITH MEDUSA, the collection's prize-winning novella. I liked it very much. At any rate, this book contains all the short fiction Clarke has written during recent years, so probably you can't afford not to buy it anyway. AFR.

Some novels:

PSTALEMATE, by Lester Del Rey (1971; 190 pp; £1.80). The cover quotes James Blish as saying that this is "The telepathy novel against which all others will be weighed and found wanting", but in some magazine which I can't find at the moment (FOUNDATION, I think) Chris Priest says it isn't. AFR

OTHER DAYS, OTHER EYES, by Bob Shaw (1972; 160 pp; £1.80). This has some good things in it, and it's only laziness which has stopped me reviewing it before now. The best "things" in it are the interpolated short stories, added as "chapters" to explain the world of slow glass. LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS, a prize winner from ANALOG of some years ago, is the best of them. The main story of the book is more pedestrian, but still very readable. AFR, if you can forgive my notes-to-myself in the margin.

Already I've talked about the Best S F Novel of 1973. Here are the other two of the Three Best:

RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA, by Arthur C Clarke (1973; 256 pp; £2.00). This book has won every award known to the s f world, from the ditist-prestigious, the John W Campbell Memorial Award, to the democratic-prestigious, the fans' Hugo Award. Within its limits, it is quite perfect; in the words of the main character, the interior of the artificial planet Rama is the "realisation of a childhood dream". In literary terms, it is an adventure imagined more clearly and delightfully than 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, and Clarke has left room for innumerable sequels. I will review this as soon as possible, along with:

THE EMBEDDING, by Ian Watson (1973; 254 pp; £2.20). I can't describe this without the benefit of the pages of a long review. It's about language, alienation, and aliens; it weaves together the children who are victims of a particularly chilling experiment, the inhabitants of the Amazon valley, victims of a continental experiment, and the people who (sort of) know what's going on and go further round the bend as they discover more. It's the book for which the adjective frenetic was invented; after reading it, one feels like playing a quick game of

squash for relaxation. This is the best s f "first novel" I can remember reading.

Also I have some books published in Gollancz' children's list, but I hope for reviews soon.

For a while, I didn't receive books from FABER AND FABER, because the firm changed distributors in Australia. Still, I have received the following during the last year or so:

THE DOORS OF HIS FACE, THE LAMPS OF HIS MOUTH AND OTHER STORIES, by Roger Zelazny (1971; 229 pp; $A6.55). Faber has published this as a real prestige item, and so they should. Few s f authors have had a debut as auspicious as the novelette A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES (actually written before stories which were published earlier) and most of the other stories here had a similar effect in s f circles. It's almost unimportant that I disliked many of them at the time; I'll be interested to see how my opinions have changed after ten years. A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES is a spectacular word waterfall, so rich and refreshing that one forgives its romanticism. Also famous: THE DOORS OF HIS FACE, THE LAMPS OF HIS MOUTH, THE KEYS TO DECEMBER, THIS MORTAL MOUNTAIN, THIS MOMENT OF STORM, and THE GREAT SLOW KINGS. The books is beautifully produced.

NINE PRINCES IN AMBER, by Roger Zelazny (1970; 188 pp; $A5.60). S f fandom does not forgive its heroes when they reveal themselves as mortals even if not-so-mere. Lots of people don't like this book, or other Zelazny fantasies of recent years. But Bill Wright likes it, so everybody else must be wrong. AFR

BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF JAMES BLISH (Revised edition) (1973; 216 pp; $A5.60).
ANYWHEN, by James Blish (1971; 185 pp; £1.75).
MIDSUMMER CENTURY, by James Blish (1973; 106 pp; $A5.25).
JACK OF EAGLES, by James Blish (1973; original US publication 1952; 256 pp; $A6.50).
A CLASH OF CYMBALS, by James Blish (1972; original US publication 1959; 199 pp; $A5.90).
AND ALL THE STARS A STAGE, by James Blish (1972; original US publication 1960; 206 pp; $A5.95).
The rapid publication of these books has brought back into print an extraordinary amount of James Blish's best and so-so work - so much that I feel constrained to undertake some revaluation of Blish. (Or would George do it for me? The books are here.) I talked about the first two items in SFC 34 - many good stories here. MIDSUMMER CENTURY is pretty awful; why, Jim, why? A CLASH OF CYMBALS has a legendary significance in the group memory that is fandom; several new editions of the whole CITIES IN FLIGHT series should keep this famous. The other two are unknowns to me; the first fifty pages of AND ALL THE STARS A STAGE fit the "juvenile s f" label, and it's not too bad. Before Blish, I feel inadequate as a review; unhappily, so does everybody else, which is why these books have not been reviewed yet. AFR

ONE STEP FROM EARTH, by Harry Harrison (1972; 210 pp; $A5.60). Odd item. It's individual stories about matter transmitters. I can't work out whether Harry wrote them together, or over a long period of time. For the juvenile library?

From SPACE AGE BOOKS, 305 Swanston Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3001:

FALLEN SPACEMAN, by Lee Harding (Patchwork Paperbacks/Cassell Australia; 1973; 99 pp; $A1). I know too much about the author and the history of this book to view it objectively. I know, for instance, that it was written to fairly strict specifications - a book with vocabulary that would suit children, but material that would please a teenager. I know that in the past Lee Harding has shown a certain awkwardness of style, an offputting quality which has often spoiled otherwise interesting stories. The format of FALLEN SPACEMAN appears to have imposed so much discipline on Lee that he has eliminated most of these faults.

In other words, this is a good yarn and very well told. Lee Har to write it in fairly short lines, so some pages turn out at least as poetic as those Disch "poems" I was discussing a few pages back. A few Hardingisms remain (Harding characters tend to "shiver" in times of danger and lapse into panicked italics) but not many. Lee is preparing a few more of these, and I get the impression that they could sell well overseas.

STORIES OF FIVE DECADES, by Hermann Hesse (Noonday N455; 1973; 328 pp; $US2.95).
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS, by Hermann Hesse (Noonday N417; 1973; 291 pp; $US2.65).
Originally Space Age gave me these to review for the SPACE AGE NEWSLETTER (the fanzine which the Shop pays Lee Harding to edit; you can receive it if you are a good customer) but I'm not sure whether I can review them in Space Age style (I'm a controversialist, Lee, not a publicist). Anyway, the 600 pages of these volumes contain much so-so Hesse and several of his very best stories: A GUEST AT THE SPA and FOR MARULLA from AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS; THE MARBLE WORKS, WALTER KOMPFF, ROBERT AGHION, and THE HOMECOMING from the stories. Most of the time, Hesse writes wish-fulfillment stories of one kind or another. He's different from s f author in that most of his wishes are actually worth fulfilling, compared with the despotic megalomania of a Van Vogt or Silverberg. Here, the reader has genuine anxiety about the fates of the people, and can only be happy when and if the stories have happy endings. As usual with Hesse, the prose is faultless from beginning to end of each of these books.

I've just remembered that I should acknowledge some other books received:

When I was visiting USA, ROGER ZELAZNY gave me

copies of some of his books. I must confess that so far I've read only LORD OF LIGHT. After reading the preceding pages of as-yet-unread books, Roger might understand that he has not been unfairly discriminated against. By now, you would have bought and read these books, but I will list them anyhow:

LORD OF LIGHT (Doubleday; 1967; 257 pp; $US4.95).
CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS (Doubleday; 1969; 187 pp; $US4.50).
THE GUNS OF AVALON (Doubleday; 1972; 180 pp; $US5.95).
TO DIE IN ITALBAR (Doubleday; 1973; 183 pp; $US5.95).
TODAY WE CHOOSE FACES (Signet Q4355; April 1973; 174 pp; US95c).

I'm not in a position to send these books out for review, as they were presents, but I'll lend them for a limited period to anybody who wants to write something serious about the recent novels of Roger Zelazny. I think somebody should do it, but for now I don't have as much time as the job requires.

The people at SEABURY PRESS/CONTINUUM BOOKS (815 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA) are no doubt already annoyed at the length of time I have taken so far to review their books in the way I intended. Several months ago, the editor of their line of European s f, Franz Rottensteiner, asked me to wait until THE CYBERIAD appeared before reviewing the whole series. Well, I agree that THE CYBERIAD is a most remarkable book, but unfortunately Trurl and Klapaucious, those two ingenious inventors, have not suggested to me a way to find the time to do these books justice. Okay; I'm repeating myself, so I will stop this booklist soon. But I do believe that if one reviews a book, one does it properly. For me, that's many hours of work. I want to take days to consider these books properly. I don't even have hours. I want to do it, because I haven't found much evidence that the s f world in general has taken this series to its bosom. So - a Seabury issue of SFC in No 43? I'm doing my best. Meanwhile, for about the third time, here are the books that have appeared so far in the series. I've now read all of them except one, so I'll include brief comments:

THE INVINCIBLE, by Stanislaw Lem (1973; original Polish publication 1964; 183 pp; $US6.95).
MEMOIRS FOUND IN A BATHTUB, by Stanislaw Lem (1973; original Polish publication 1961; 188 pp; $US6.95).
Both of these have faded rather in my memory since I read them, but I'm not sure whether the heat of my initial enthusiasm has not been doused by the cold waters of hostile criticism in USA and England. As I remember them, and before I examine them properly: THE INVINCIBLE begins as a dull adventure story, introduces some mysterious elements, and concludes with a visionary last four chapters. MEMOIRS FOUND IN A BATHTUB is nightmarish enough, and has some brilliant rhetoric in the centre. Unfortunately, Lem fills it out with too much to-ing and fro-ing and false feints. Not a lot in either book to remind me of the delights of SOLARIS.

VIEW FROM ANOTHER SHORE, edited by Franz Rottensteiner (1973; 234 pp; $US6.95).
This anthology of European short fiction includes the best piece of Lem fiction I have read so far: the Trurl/Klapaucicus story, IN HOT PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS, which made me feel very much better because I was feeling unhappy before I read it. Basically this has the same notion as Ursula Le Guin's THE LATHE OF HEAVEN - that even opposites and intolerables look much like each other when examined closely enough. SISYPHUS, THE SON OF ABOLUS is not science fiction, but is the second-best story in the volume. Probably the story from here that will gain the most general popularity is A MODEST GENIUS, a sweet, modest story which, like Lem's piece, made life seem more enjoyable and the possibilities of the universe minutely larger. I enjoyed most of the stories here but, except for the Lem, it hardly proves any general superiority of European s f over US/UK s f. Equality, maybe.

THE CYBERIAD, by Stanislaw Lem (1974; original Polish publication 1967; 295 pp).
THE CYBERIAD is a work of genius in some quite absolute sense. No author could write these stories without the erudition, authority, and verbal dexterity shown here. The quality of brilliance, of conceiving what one could not see for oneself, carried it above the sort of petty carping which has greeted it already in USA. By genre, these stories are children's fables rather than science fiction; their impact places them outside limitations. I don't want to examine the book here, but I can say that in this book Lem takes ideas for a walk, turns them inside out, amplifies them, illuminates them, and gives them back to us as ideas and visions looking all new. THE CYBERIAD presents what I read science fiction for, and find so rarely - pure ideas, glittering and delightful. Michael Kandel's translation is excellent - but I won't begin on the topic of translations here.

HARD TO BE A GOD, by Arkadi and Boris Strugatski (1973; original USSR publication 1964; 219 pp; $US6.95).
This is also a splendid book, but it comes from an entirely different tradition - the stream of realistic fiction that still flows in Russia, despite everything. This book has the power of verisimilitude rather than extrapolation - the world visited by these people comes to life and eventually involves the reader in all of its problems. This is a novel of character rather than refined ideas, and works completely successfully within its assumptions.

FUTURE WITHOUT FUTURE, by Jacques Sternberg (1973; original French publication 1971; 210 pp; $US6.95).
I'm reading this at the moment. Sternberg takes fairly traditional motifs of US and Britisn s f and works them into new patterns which are subtly, not obviously, different from the original models. In one way the difference is ob-

vious: Sternberg can write compelling prose which is much better than the words you find in American s f. More subtly, Sternberg trots through the s f cliches until he finds a point of poignancy, which penetrates the heart of the story. This is a book which I would want to examine in some detail.

THE INVESTIGATION, by Stanislaw Lem (originally published in Polish in 1959; 1974; 216 pp; $US7.95).
THE INVESTIGATION is one of the weirdest books I've read, and all the more interesting for its oddity. Here Lem writes about an English detective who tries to find out why and how dead bodies are hopping about and between graveyards. The rest of the book, much like SOLARIS, is filled with clues and portents rather than solutions. The book becomes gripping because, even while he stares down dark corridors towards the sought "solution" of his puzzle, the main character keeps catching reflections of himself on the sides of the corridor. In other words, this is partly a novel of character and partly a novel of hair-raising creepiness. Splendid stuff, even if I couldn't say what it was all about.

THE TEMPLE OF THE PAST, by Stefan Wul (1973; first French publication 1970; 137 pp; $US6.95). The only one of the series I haven't read yet.

* That's all, folks. I've left out a few books which have been sent to reviewers, and I've not talked about some books which have just arrived. But that's not a bad rundown of all the books I haven't been reading lately (except this last section).

So, what have I been reading recently? I must give some reason why I haven't been unburdening my shelves of review books. I'll summarise things in the next bit of this column. It's called.

NORSTRILIAN REVIEWS
What I've been reading recently

* Already discussed: HARD TO BE A GOD, CYBERIAD, INVESTIGATION, and NEW WORLDS FOR OLD. Also:

THE CITY IN THE SEA, by Wilson Tucker (Galaxy Novels 11; 1951; 159 pp; 35c). This is an historical document. Who remembers when books were 35 cents each? And who remembers the original series of Galaxy Novels? Well, I do, because I picked up some of them at Franklins a few years ago; for instance, the GN edition of ODD JOHN is still the only copy I have. I read this book because I'm rereading Bob Tucker at the moment and, as far as I can tell, this was his first s f novel. It's quite good, but lacks the intricacy of most of the later books. It's very pastoral, like most of the later ones, and has pleasant characters (all women, except one), which makes it an oddity, even now. Indescribable, except I'll need to describe it when I do that Tucker article.

RECALLED TO LIFE, by Robert Silverberg (Gollancz; 1972; original US publication 1958; 184 pp; £2). I think I will save my remarks for the CRITICANTO column.

WHAT MAD UNIVERSE, by Fredric Brown (TV Boardman; 1951; 223 pp). Charles Taylor lent me this - it's one of those books I should have read about ten years earlier, especially so that I could understand the novels of Philip Dick more clearly. This book contains some pointed commentary on the 1940s world of pulp magazines, but it's even more effective as a guide to the mentality of McCarthyism. WHAT MAD UNIVERSE contains some great s f ideas, including the dimout, or brownout, or whatever it's called, and a much more exact sense of story-telling than one finds in most of today's s f. After reading CITY IN THE SEA and this book within a week of each other, I think I will explore even more of the s f of the early fifties; it seems to have been the most prolific and proficient era. Meanwhile, s f has now reached the stage where it boasts several series of "S F Classics" - WHAT MAD UNIVERSE should be reprinted with the best of the rest.

THE UNSLEEPING EYE, by D G Compton (Daw UY 1110; 1974; 221 pp; $US1.25). This is called THE CONTINUOUS KATHERINE MORTENHOE in England, and I'm a bit suprised that I haven't received the Gollancz English edition yet. Those who have read this book in either edition have been cooing about it ever since, but I don't share the same enthusiasm. I suppose it's just too much like all those English novels written by English graduate ladies with names like Margaret and Muriel and so on. It lacks a sense of humour; time and again I longed for a Dischian quip or aphorism to give point to all the strenuous and worthy emotions sloshing around in this book. On the other hand, UNSLEEPING EYE is very well written, and I would need to examine the book carefully to discover exactly what I find false in it. Buy it anyway and coo with the rest of them.

THE INVISIBLE MAN, by H G Wells (Penguin 151; first published 1897; 184 pp).
THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU, by H G Wells (Penguin 571; first published 1896; 192 pp).
THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON, by H G Wells (Dell 2552; first published 1901; 192 pp).
At the staid old age of twenty-seven, I'm almost afraid to admit that I've never read these books before. I get the impression that most true s f fans have read all Wells before they reach puberty. Well, I didn't, and I don't enjoy him less for reading him now. INVISIBLE MAN and THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU, in particular, are visionary books: the former for the scene when the invisible man runs around the hero's house kicking in all the windows, making it look as if the house is imploding; the latter for the

sense of total disorientation which overtakes the book during its final chapters. And Wells wrote so well. Here are these models of clarity of vision and diction, yet even twenty or thirty years later, s f writers persisted with constipated, pseudo-nineteenth-century styles. More and more I believe George Turner's thesis that s f's Golden Age was Wells, and it's been going downhill ever since. Maybe - for 1974 has brought the publication of...

THE DISPOSSESSED, by Ursula K Le Guin (Harper & Row; 1974; 338 pp). Any year in which this book is published must be a great year for s f (and I even think that we might see, before the year ends, books which are even better). Probably you've read so many reviews of this by now that you know the story backwards. I was most impressed by the fact that, for her first sentence, Ursula Le Guin writes, "There is a wall", and then relates everything else in the entire novel to that sentence. Gawd! S f writers just don't take that sort of trouble. Well, Ursula Le Guin does. I want to write lots and lots about this book; especially about the hint the author gives in a later story that her "utopia" owes much to the ideas of Paul Goodman, who happens to be one of my favourite American non-fiction writers. This is a stately, gracious, but troubling book; one really shouldn't do anything but admire it and keep quiet.

THE CASTLE, by Franz Kafka (Penguin Modern Classics 14001235; original publication 1926; 298 pp; $A1.20).
AMERICA, by Franz Kafka (Penguin Modern Classics 14002639; original publication 1927; 268 pp; $A1.20). I have a lunatic notion to write (yet another) long article about the works of Franz Kafka. Before I could write about, or even read, such recent volumes as LETTERS TO FELICE or Janouch's CONVERSATIONS WITH KAFKA, I had to finish reading the fiction. I found some surprises. I did not realise how different THE CASTLE was from THE TRIAL, although people often group them together. I did not realise how delightfully strange is AMERICA; it's not even a Czech's-eye view of America, but a European's dream of the place, making it seem much cosier and greener than it really is. Both books have the genuine air of nightmare to them; in THE CASTLE, K- and his mistress must spend one night sleeping on the floor in the school classroom; they wake to find a class of children staring at them, and the teaching shooing them out into the snow. Excruciating things like this happen in my dreams, anyway. Critics have tried to find all kinds of overt or covert meanings to Kafka's prose, but after reading THE CASTLE, I get the impression that the surface maning is most correct: that Kafka didn't like bureaucrats very much. Since a sizeable percentage of the Australian population have come to share this view during recent months, perhaps they should read this book to find out what they might be in for.

THE MULATTA AND MR FLY, by Miguel Asturias (Penguin 14003089; 1963; 333 pp; $A1.35). Very few books are so alien that they defeat me, but this South American classic did. Asturias is a super-Lafferty in this book; anybody who can tread safely through FOURTH MANSIONS should read this book with ease. But I found few markers in the world of multiple transformations and toruous metaphysical strains. This really is a secondary universe, but I don't think any of the Tolkien addicts would feel at home in it.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE, by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Penguin Modern Classics 14003524; 1967; 383 pp; $A1.70). This is another classic from South America - and my second-favourite book for the year so far. Marquez has a far more accessible approach to fantasy than has Asturias; Marquez shows that the fine details of somebody else's "ordinary life", seen through the eyes of an artist, have all the characteristics of fantasy. Peter Mathers put it better: "If you can imagine it, it's happening somewhere." In ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE, it all happens in one town, stuck away in the jungles of Central America, and it all happens to one family, endless generations of which adopt new combinations of the names of previous generations. When I finished reading the book, I felt that I had undergone the entire history of the world, or certainly anything that could have happened to anybody during that history. A great book.

THE FARTHEST SHORE, by Ursula Le Guin (Gollancz; 1973; 206 pp; $A4.55). If ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE is my second favourite book for 1974, THE FARTHEST SHORE is by far my favourite. No book has ever made a greater immediate emotional impact upon me; I can still remember finishing the book at about 12.30 in the morning, attempting to stand up, and finding that reading the book had exhausted me so much that I could barely walk. I don't usually judge books by the extent of my physiological reactions to them - but then, very few books jostle me as much as this. I feel so strongly about THE FARTHEST SHORE that I doubt whether I can ever write a review at any level other than idiot adoration; meanwhile Peter Nicholls has offered an excellent reading in FOUNDATION 5 (reprinted in this issue of SFC).

Well, you say, what's so shattering about it? Mainly, I think, that when I reached a certain stage in the book I though that no author could go beyond that limit... and Ursula Le Guin did - she takes one directly into death itself and back again. I just couldn't absorb the extraordinariness of the last pages of the book. I'm not sure that I've absorbed it yet. Even stranger, I don't even know what effect this book has had on my life, except that it must have had some deep effect. Other books which have had a similar emotional force have had some easily recognised tangible effect - but so far I can't point to something in THE FARTHEST SHORE and say, That's the point of influence. If

I hadn't leant my copy, I would quote copiously from this book (for a gift for aphorism, the poetry of prose, is one of Ursula Le Guin's most notable achievements). One sentence means much to me and summarises one element of the novel: "And the truth is that as a man's real power grows and his knowledge widens, ever the way he can follow grows narrower until at last he chooses nothing but does only and wholly what he must do..." But when can one by sure of that path?

OTHER WORLDS, OTHER SEAS, edited by Darko Suvin (Random House; 1970; 217 pp; $US6.95).is a book I bought and should have reviewed some years ago. Before Seabury began their books of European s f, Suvin edited this volume as some attempt to show American readers what their transatlantic colleagues were doing. I suspect that the Americans did not react with enthusiasm, mainly because few of these stories are any good. My favourite is THE ISLAND OF CRABS by Anatoliy Dneprov, a sort of variation on Phil Dick's AUTOFAC of the fifties, with a similar edge of horror/humour. The four Lem stories are whimsical and ingenious, but give little sign of the brilliance of the CYBERIAD tales. However, I recommend the first page of the first Lem story, THE PATROL, as one of the best pages of prose I have found in s f. I would hope that Darko Suvin might edit something for Seabury, or at least take advantages of new sources of translation to present a new set of European s f stories. Much better ones, next time.

THE EIGHTY-MINUTE HOUR, by Brian Aldiss (Jonathan Cape; 1974; 286 pp; $A5.75). When I was in England, Brian seemed apprehensive that I might not like this book because it is told from a multiple viewpoint, like THE DARK LIGHT YEARS (see SFC 29). Well, I didn't spot any relationship with THE DARK LIGHT YEARS (which I dislike for reasons which go beyond the merely technical), and I found good jokes on every page of EIGHTY-MINUTE HOUR. I think this is one of the best Aldiss novels ever. Even more delightfully, I found at the end that it is told from a single viewpoint all along, and that the carefully hidden "hero" contrives to save the world without batting an eyelid. It's hard to fit this book in a category; I suppose it's a disaster novel in which everybody who is left has a lot of fun. Bits of the world hurtle off into other time zones; people ricochet around the universe; improbable things happen to improbable people (my favourite characters' names are Glamis Fevertrees and Monty Zoomer, but there are plenty more); and Aldiss shows us just how grand a writer he is. After one particular section of the book, I wrote in my scrawled review notes, "Spider soup!!" Devotees of this book will know what I mean. Also, I think Brian must have been reading an SFC just before he wrote his description of "The Dread Brain Mist". I was so pleased that Brian had identified and labelled this common phenomenon that I nearly changed the name of SFC to THE DREAD BRAIN MIST.

Some quotes:
"That night he was too drunk to do anything but drink."
"The Hereafter's here again!"
"The ventilator shaft! The traditional ventilator shaft as featuring in traditional thrillers."
"The sun's last westering strains, which died the piling alto-cumulus sheet like a purple prose passage."
"The human mind is never more curiously constituted than in the way by which it continues to be amazed at the workings of chance, so that it tolerates gross coincidences and lacunae in life which it would never countenance in the writings of even popular novelists."
"'PARADISE LOST - what's this, porn?'"
"'You'll never get away with this!'" But he does.

TOTAL ECLIPSE, by John Brunner (Doubleday; 1974; 188 pp; $US5.40). This is a very strange book indeed. In structure, it is a mystery novel - what or who killed the race on a planet explored by a wandering group of Earthmen? But the book includes a sub-plot which fizzles out: will the Earth authorities grant the expedition enough funds to stay on the planet to work out the puzzle? They do, of course, or there wouldn't have been a book. Ian Macauley, the book's main character, is a real loner who sets out to discover The Solution after everybody else has given up. So, for a few chapters, the novel of scientific discovery turns into quite a moving piece of self-discovery. Then, right at the end, the whole novel turns into something else again. I must confess that I just could not understand Brunner's "solution" to the puzzle: all I could say to myself after the Revelation at the end was, "So what?" But even though I felt by the end that TOTAL ECLIPSE promised more than it delivered, it is still a solid, intricate s f thriller which not many people can or try to write these days.

TIME-X, by Wilson Tucker (originally issued as THE SCIENCE-FICTION SUBTREASURY in 1954; Bantam 1400; 140 pp; 25c). Another byproduct of my long-winded Tucker researches. The only two stories I really liked were MY BROTHER'S WIFE and THE JOB IS ENDED. Much more obviously than in the novels, Tucker gets a kick from writing about vampirish, man-eating women (literally, in one story, if I remember correctly). The two best stories are creepy indeed. Most of the others make fun of traditional s f ploys.

TIGER! TIGER!,.. by Alfred Bester (Penguin 2620; originally published 1955 as THE STARS MY DESTINATION; 249 pp; A80c).
MORE THAN HUMAN, by Theodore Sturgeon (Penguin 2509; originally published 1953; 235 pp; A65c). In any list of the all-time greats of s f, these two books appear much higher than the books I was discussing earlier. Yet, although I enjoyed all of WHAT MAD UNIVERSE, for instance, I was bored stiff by TIGER! TIGER! and disappointed by large sections of MORE THAN HUMAN. (Sometimes I think that the American fans and I are not even talking about the same thing when we mention the words "science fiction".) To me,

reading it about ten years later than I should have, TIGER! TIGER! reads like nothing more than the continuity for a comic strip. One thing flashed after another, like the bits of a jigsaw that looked as if they would look magnificent when solved. But Bester never put the bits together. What interested me most was the resemblance between this "classic" of s f and recent works of Silverberg and Ellison in particular. The only trouble is that neither writer can manage even the surface glitter of TIGER! TIGER!, and Bester himself has done far better in his short stories. :: MORE THAN HUMAN is quite sophisticated in a kinky way. I'm told that the middle section, BABY IS THREE, appeared first. However, I enjoyed the first section best, especially the impressionistic flashes of experience which match the impressions received by each of the main characters. BABY IS THREE consists mainly of a boy's confessions on a psychiatrist's couch, and has enough corny dialogue and Freudian jargon to detract from the real sense of claustrophobia and hysteria which gives it so much power. I can't remember much about the last section except that it's awful, and must have been tacked onto the first two parts. The main trouble with MORE THAN HUMAN is that it has little cumulative effect: the three parts are too different from each other, and it's difficult to identify with the grotesque grimacing figures which are the book's main "characters".

A DUTIFUL DAUGHTER, by Thomas Kenneally (Angus and Robertson; 1971; 183 pp; $A3.95). Elizabeth Foyster lent me this book, implying that it was a better book about growing up than is TAMARISK ROW. Well, I wrote 9,000 words about TAMARISK ROW and didn't feel tempted to write much about A DUTIFUL DAUGHTER, so I guess Elizabeth didn't convince me. But I'm grateful that she lent it to me, since it's what is usually called a rattling good yarn, based on a fine fantasy premise. (I hadn't thought anybody in mainstream Australian literature could write fantasy.) Barbara Glover's parents have turned into cattle, so the family hides away in the bush and Barbara protects her parents from prying eyes. Her brother arrives home, followed closely by a girl bent on marriage, it begins to rain, a flood threatens, and a randy truck driver keeps his eye out for the strange girl he sometimes sees beside the road. Of course, that's not much to do with the interior story of the book but it's a nice, gripping plot. The critics regard this as one of Kenneally's minor novels, so I must catch up on the novels with which he made his reputation. He's no Patrick White (but who is?), but he's one of Australia's few world-class novelists.

MALEVIL, by Robert Merle (Simon and Schuster; original French publication 1972; 1973; 575 pp; $US10). I want to review this book at length, so I won't say too much here. MALEVIL is an enormous book - about 300 pages too long, by my reckoning - and unputdownable. It's a frightening book; it describes what happens to a group of people who survive the atomic attack on France in Easter 1977, people who just happen to be in a safe place, because they receive no advance warning of the attack at all. MALEVIL is also a refreshing book; it tells the story of a man who cannot be suppressed even by an atomic attack. Emmanuel Comte inspires the people who survive in Malevil, the old castle whose deepest cellars saved them. They put together a new kind of life, which looks suspiciously like life in medieval France, with Comte as king of the castle. I have many doubts about MALEVIL, especially because the main character is such a Heinleinian, smug, know-all. But its scope and feel is Tolstoyan; it does reaffirm the commitment to continued life, even in the middle of random death. I bought this book because the committee of the John W Campbell Memorial Award gave it equal first prize for the Best S F Novel of 1973. It's not my Best of 73, but I'm glad the Campbell committee found this book and publicised it, so that we could all enjoy it.

FRANKENSTEIN, by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (Signet Classics CP618; originally published in 1816; 211 pp; US60c). I finally caught up on the book which Brian Aldiss calls the first s f novel. Well, it certainly isn't that, but it's very enjoyable. Also, it has little or nothing to do with either the James Whale movies or my expectations about the book. The atmosphere of FRANKENSTEIN is more like that in Kafka's novels than in anything science-fictional. It's an endless dream sequence in which the monster springs out of nowhere (Shelley spends less than half a page on the actual sequence when the monster comes to life) and collides with his maker every now and again. The book becomes a dance of death between the two of them. For instance, Frankenstein relates that the monster commits four murders. Yet the book is constructed in such a way that Frankenstein could have committed the murders himself and then blamed them on the monster, who becomes a matical, superhuman figure by the end of the novel. The only other character who sees the monster, although only at a distance, is Robert Walton, the explorer who picks up Frankenstein from the northern ice and listens to his story. When the monster tells his story, he sounds like a paragon of earnest, suffering humanity; the rest of the book is so exhausting because Frankenstein himself sounds dingbats. I suppose Brian Aldiss and I could argue the matter forever, but it seems to me that FRANKENSTEIN is important to s f only as far as it inpired THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU. FRANKENSTEIN owes more to Milton, Coleridge and the gothics than s f owes to it.

THE POLITICS OF AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRACY, by Hugh V Emy (Macmillan Australia; 1974; 603 pp; $A9).
COLE OF THE BOOK ARCADE, by Cole Turnley (Cole Publications; 1974; 190 pp; $A5.95).
I can say confidently that I've read these books more carefully than I've read any of the other books reviewed here. I subedited them for publication. In the case of Hugh Emy's THE POLITICS OF DEMOCRACY, I had the job of

(PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 81)

EDITOR

GEORGE TURNER
BARRY GILLAM
VIVIEN CARROL
KEN FORD
BRUCE GILLESPIE
DAVID GRIGG

CAVIAR, BUT...

George Turner reviews

THE SCIENCE FICTION HALL OF FAME
(VOLUMES 2 AND 3)

edited by Ben Bova

Gollancz :: 1973
422 pages & 440 pages :: £2.90 & £3.20

Doubleday :: 1973
486 pages & 466 pages :: $US9.95 each

Like their Silverberg-edited predecessor, volumes 2 and 3 (in USA, volumes 2A and 2B) are very much an amble down one of the most exciting memory lanes in s f publishing. The twenty novellas in these two volumes are the foie gras and caviar over which fans of the forties and fifties (the books span 1938-62) mumble in their s f dotage. As before, the stories were chosen by the members of the SFWA and, as before, their choice was probably decided more by affectionate memory than by real considerations of lasting value. No matter - the result remains one of the small handful of anthologies the s f specialist simply must have.

But...

Well, you know about reviewers by now. They are the people who complain of the lack of high-quality work - then give their knives a finer honing when it appears. So, as I wrote when reviewing volume 1, "This is a bloody marvellous collection. Everything that follows is mere carping."

Yet I can't complain much about the ten tales in volume 2, which begins with the most solidly imagined story Poul Anderson ever wrote, CALL ME JOE (though I'll bet there were some SFWA votes for SAM HALL) and follows with Campbell's WHO GOES THERE which, despite manifest weaknesses, sits firmly at the head of the s f spine-tingler list and safely defies criticism.

Del Rey's NERVES and Heinlein's UNIVERSE follow - and where would s f be without them? Kornbluth's MARCHING MORONS, next up, made me wish they had preferred GOMEZ, but the Kuttner and Moore VINTAGE SEASON probably represented the finest flowering of that partnership, just as Eric Frank Russell's ...AND THEN THERE WERE NONE has no equal among his other rather patchy work.

I can't guess what made THE BALLAD OF LOST C'MELL the Cordwainer Smith choice, but would myself have preferred any of half a dozen other of his stories - which would, I suppose, have satisfied nobody but me. THE BALLAD, incidentally, is only a 9,000-worder, surely a little short for novella choice. One thinks of THE DEAD LADY OF CLOWN TOWN, but it isn't there, so that's that.

BABY IS THREE is the Sturgeon offering, and this novella, which he down-graded unforgivably in providing a faked-up bowl of slop for an ending in the novel expansion, is probably the best ESP story ever written. The volume closes on WITH FOLDED HANDS, also part of a novel, which is almost certainly Jack Williamson's best work and shows what a man who habitually ground 'em out on the production line could do when a theme really engaged him.

** ** **

Volume 3 opens with Asimov's THE MARTIAN WAY and Blish's EARTHMAN COME HOME. The Asimov choice is, I suppose, fair enough (NIGHTFALL, at 15,000 words, somehow got itself into the short story collection of volume 1 - some editorial sleight of hand in the length department) but Blish could have been better represented by - say, A DUSK OF IDOLS or AND SOME WERE SAVAGES, both better and more typical stories. But there's no accounting for voters any more than for reviewers.

Next comes Budrys' ROGUE MOON, in the version published in F&SF, which had some 25,000 words chopped out of it. There was no need to do this to one of s f's finest novels; Budrys has done plenty of novellas to match the standard of his collection, for example, THE REAL PEOPLE. To read ROGUE MOON go to the novel; much flavour is missing from the slaughterhouse version.

Theodore Cogswell's THE SPECTRE GENERAL was an unexpected choice though its originality (then) laid us in the aisles on first publication. In retrospect it is a typical ASTOUNDING product and very ill-written, while the forced humour raises nary a smile; below par for the company. Pohl's THE MIDAS PLAGUE has been too often roasted for a load of codswallop for me to bother pointing out its socio-economic idiocies; it probably retains its place in SFWA memories for its genuinely delightful comedy sequences. But Pohl has done better.

With Schmitz's THE WITCHES OF KARRES we are returned to the middle of that abominable period when no story was complete without its troupe of omniscient telepaths, peerless espers, and fulminating pyrotics. But Schmitz did it with a lightness that matched the inbuilt absurdities; unfortunately he is still doing it, minus the lightness, with that dreary Telzey brat. On second glance THE WITCHES OF KARRES holds its place only because memory holds the impression of delight at first discovery; today it is just a nice little time-passer. (You see why I persist in assuming that the voters did not in fact check back on their choices.)

T L Sherred wrote E FOR EFFORT in 1947 and has never produced anything half as good since. Properly conceived and thoughtfully handled, it has not dated - and twenty-seven years is a healthy age for a magazine story. (Yes, I know there are others - about 1 per cent of the field. Magazine fiction is mostly written to feed a gulper's market, not to live forever.)

Wilmar H Shiras' IN HIDING was one of the first magazine stories to consider the problems concerned with the emergence of a mutant strain, in this case a high-intelligence variant. (English novelist C S Beresford had done it a generation earlier in THE HAMPDENSHIRE WONDER - a seminal s f novel - but how many have ever been able to unearth a copy of this extraordinary work?) Today the conceptions are science-fictionally basic but the tale still has charm, probably because the incidents are small and human rather than big and portentous.

The success of Simak's THE BIG FRONT YARD has always puzzled me a little. It is typical Simak, with the stock Simak cliches and the over-emphasised "pastoral" atmosphere grafted willy-nilly onto an "alien" theme; it is also professional, literate, and eminently readable. But so is all save the very earliest Simak; in fact it gets difficult to tell them apart after the first dozen. But, even if they didn't get their wish, I hope a lot of voters remembered EMIGRANT (or was it IMMIGRANT?), his most perfectly tailored novella.

I seem to be taking the mickey out of volume 3 (just put it down to Reviewer's Ingrown Churlishness and bear in mind that even the worst are fun to read) but the last entry, Vance's THE MOON MOTH, simply doesn't belong in an s f collection. As tongue-in-cheek fantasy it does very nicely; as s f it is merely the irresponsible description of a society which could never exist even in the hothouse environment of supersaturated fandom. Just read it for fun, and wonder what happened to his real (possibly only) essay in s f, THE GIFT OF GAB.

Editor Bova restricts himself in his Introduction to a brief resume of how the selection was made, and while one does not envy him his task of final winnowing, one quotation cries out to be noticed: "The stories... represent the best that science fiction has to offer, by some of the best writers working in this or any other field of literature."

The underlinement is mine. Observe and ponder the peculiarly ingrown isolation (insulation?) of the truly dedicated science fictionist; only a man so deeply immersed in his specialty as to be improperly aware of realities around him could have passed those three unguarded words, which are so untrue as to be laughable. Once s f suffered unjustly at the hands of uninformed criticism; today it suffers much more justly at the hands of its own uncritical self-adulation. The ASTOUNDING-ANALOG stable was never noted for seeing itself as less than twice life-size, and the literary snobbism of some of our "new waveries" is pretty repellent, but it will all settle down in time. Meanwhile it is heatening to note the sober, realistic attitudes of those who really can write - the Disches, Le Guins, and Aldisses who are the brains and guts of s f.

One last note: Of the twenty-four stories voted into the final list four were unavailable for reprint, presumably because of copyright problems. One of the four was H G Wells' THE TIME MACHINE, written in 1895, forty-three years before the earliest story in this collection. For remembering and voting powerfully enough to include it one can forgive the SFWA its failure to really come to grips with other choices. It was the first major time-travel story; seventy-nine years later it is still the best.

And who in the s f business can write so well today?

GRIEF & LOVE & THE WHOLE DAMN THING

Barry Gillam reviews

FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID

by Philip K Dick

Doubleday :: 1974
231 pages :: $US6.95

Gollancz :: 1974
231 pages :: £2.20

Philip K Dick's heroes often find themselves in the position of criminals. They remember some-

thing from a previous reality that no one else does. This knowledge, though innocuous in itself, threatens those who regulate the world in which the hero is stranded. As an alien to the standard reality, he is outside society. The only group he can go to for help is the outlaw class. Thus many of Dick's novels take on the form of a policier.

This is the situation in Dick's first novel since 1970: FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID. Jason Taverner is a reigning TV show host who, after a brief chapter establishing his position and power, wakes up to a world in which he has not been born. The money in his pockets solves one problem but his lack of ID papers creates another for he lives in a rigid police state. Taverner uses his charisma and money (mostly the latter) to obtain papers and in the process is put under surveillance by the police. They are as puzzled as he is by his legal non-existence. While he goes from one old mistress to another, trying to find someone who remembers him, the police search their files and try to explain how Taverner managed to pull all evidence of his existence from their computers.

Several changes have taken place in the four-year hiatus between novels. The gadgetry and humour that were so prominent in Dick's recent work have all but vanished. The alternate universe - a mixture of the familiar and strange - is also absent. Taverner's two worlds are identical except for his lack of place in the second. FLOW MY TEARS is thus a more straightforward work than one expects from Dick.

The major shift seems to be a substitution of characters for talking machines. Where the mechanical devices used to be prey to entropy and a kind of cosmic depreciation, the characters in the new novel are constantly concerned with age and its problems. In FLOW MY TEARS it is the people rather than the things that are wearing down. There are references to the health fads of actors and actresses eager to appear young.

And it is these characters who embody the choices that Taverner must make. Like the women in a Raoul Walsh film, Taverner's female friends represent a spectrum of ways of life: an actress sharing his fame, a disgruntled groupie, an idealistic underground forger, the freaked-out sister of a police commissioner, an old flame; an aging singer, a young potter. Other women are brought into the novel in the dialogue.

Unfortunately, FLOW MY TEARS is overschematic. The world-weariness that the characters are assigned seems Dick's more than theirs. A quote from FINNEGANS WAKE ("I feel as old as yonder elm.") touches the feeling in a way that none of the characters can. And the figures in the novel are types of no great distinction.

Taverner himself is a shallow, uninteresting, and unsympathetic viewpoint character. Clearly, Dick realises this because, halfway through the novel, the focus shifts to the title character, Police General Felix Buchman. A shrewd, intuitive man, Buckman has worked within the system for small reforms. His mixture of success and failure makes one believe (in retrospect) his opening quotation of Gray's ELEGY: "And leaves the world to darkness and to me." Buckman is a man of the twelight, aware of his role, however grey and stalwart, in holding together a coherent society. But he intersects the police procedural world with that of grand opera. He refers to DIE WALKURE at one point in explaining his incestuous marriage to his sister, Alys.

Dick skirts the schematic again, as well as the outrageously romantic, in their pairing. For Alys, frequently dressed in leather and frequently taking female lovers, is a past master of illicit drugs. In this marriage of opposites the meeting ground consists of the arts, their mutual connections, and their mutual respect. Hating what each other represents, the two nevertheless have forged a love that withstands all outside pressure.

Above the usual message of paranoia ("To live is to be hunted"), Dick has placed another message in FLOW MY TEARS. Almost exactly midway through the novel there is an extensive conversation between Taverner and Ruth Rae (the aging singer) on love and loss. The little tract, including the parable of Emily Fusselman's rabbit, which I will not repat here, concludes with a number of homilies important mainly for their absence from Dick's previous fiction: "'When you love you cease to live for yourself; you live for another person.'... 'Grief is the most powerful emotion a man or child or animal can feel... you can't feel grief unless you've had love before it - grief is the final outcome of love, because it's love lost.'"

These strictures are exactly what distinguishes Buckman from Taverner: Buckman's love is stronger than any emotion the egoistic Taverner can summon. And Buckman, significantly, is the only character in the novel vouchsafed the experience of grief.

FLOW MY TEARS, THE POLICEMAN SAID is a minor Dick novel that is interesting for its major departure in subject and treatment. For the first time that I am aware of, Dick cares enough about his characters to add an epilogue in which their fates are related, as in a Victorian novel. And the reality shift's ultimate explanation is just so much mumbo jumbo. One no longer has the sense of the sleight-of-hand man that hovers over all his previous work. There are still the manipulators and the manipulated, but the relationship is blurring and the characters are granted a responsibility for their actions that was possessed by none of their predecessors. I will be interested to see where he goes from here.

BARRY GILLAM

BEYOND THE VEIL
or
WHAT THE BUTLER THOUGHT HE SAW

Vivien Caroll reviews

CASEY AGONISTES AND
SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY STORIES

by Richard McKenna

Gollancz :: 1973
150 pages :: £2.00

Harper & Row :: 1973
150 pages :: $US5.95

Nothing like a good hot soak

Ever pick up a book and - somehow - immediately luxuriate in its warmth, its rightness, like coming home on a wet day, or sliding into the arms of a favourite lover, or snuggling into an old pullover? That was me and this book.

Now comfortable lovers and old pullovers are legitimate pleasures; not so comfortable books. But it's a great way to practise psycho-analysis! Finding instant rapport with a book invariably signifies that you are regressing to an earlier, more secure period.

Golden days of youth

Superficially, this is the hard stuff - a real fifties trip. (How felicitous to hindsight the passage of a couple of decades is.) McKenna mirrors the folksy, mid-western America of the Cold War era, now degenerated into Nixon's Silent Majority. (I said nostalgia is dangerous.)

Ah, sigh for the days when good America farmboys became servicemen, quietly and modestly plugging away, just doing their jobs, holding back the Red hordes for a grateful world. (There is a bunch of them in the title story, stoically awaiting death from tuberculosis, each a rough diamond with a heart of gold.)

The women were softer, dewier then. How could these rough men of action hope to understand them, elemental creatures akin with Nature? (All but one of the stories has its Earth Mother.)

Their keen intellects pitted against the terrible mysteries of Life, on behalf of themselves and their own, our heroes venture into the world. Back home the women nurture the tenderer domestic virtues (HUNTER COME HOME and FIDDLER'S GREEN). They enfold their men to their breasts, the better to purge away wilful violence (HUNTER COME HOME) or, by acting the fair damsel in distress (TYE SECRET PLACE), to spur the hero on to noble endeavour.

Of course, give women an inch... Those of MINE OWN WAYS ride the supportive role into the ground to become your plain old overprotective nags, stifling the noble aspirations of men and emasculating their manhood.

Aside

(Yes, folks! Your humble reviewer has discovered Women's Lib. Better pray for another fad soon, otherwise, gracious reader, you are in for a fair old feminist belting for the next couple of issues.)

Here we go again

A writer would cringe today at producing an excruciating sterotype of femininity like Mary Chadwick, an Australian who exclaims "Bonzer!" at odd intervals in FIDDLER'S GREEN. The connoisseur of slang listens with dread fascination as she cries "Good-oh!", "Too bloody right!", and - this one a ring-in - "You stringybark jojo!" (?) Which shows the dangers for writers who obtain authenticity from Australian sailors in San Francisco pubs.

It's a WASP world, folks. All dem n------ knows dere place - and are kept in the wings, well away from stage centre; so much so that in FIDDLERS GREEN they are only glimpsed distantly as black kabeiroi, nature spirits slipping through the brush. (And ah bets dey's done got real nat'rul rhythm.)

Kruger, the maleficent daemon of his same story, is a German, not an American. However, we all knew Germans were suspect from the start, and finally they gave themselves away bo killing all those Jews. (But isn't Friedrich von Lankenau a German too? Well yes, but where Kruger is fat, von Lankenau is aesthetically lean, a man of culture and possibly of aristocratic lineage as well. Of course.)

The writer's writer?

Examining McKenna's writing through the tunnel vision of current liberal notions does him an injustice. These trappings, unpalatable to our times, merely indicate that he is as culture-bound as any of us; perhaps this explains why he may always be considered a minor writer.

Three of the stories (CASEY AGONISTES, THE SECRET PLACE, and FIDDLER'S GREEN) deal with tho philosophical problems raised by the act of perception, or with the nature of reality and being. (When kids, each of us probably wondered of the world existed while it was not being observed - even attempting to turn around quickly to catch reality hurriedly reforming behind our backs. Not many writers of s f can distil this level of abstraction into a short story.)

Another story (HUNTER COME HOME) asks for co-operation instead of confrontation, firstly as a principle for society, and secondly, as the

way mankind should partner the environment. The remaining story, MINE OWN WAYS, is a clever study in anthropology which, as plausibly as the writings of Margaret Mead, elegantly explains the "forced" evolution of human intelligence.

Danger: Carftsman at work

The aspiring writer could do worse than to subject these stories to detailed structural analysis. More instructive would be attempts to write parodies, or to try to cut the stories further without losing their kernels.

Admire the economy of the style, with not a single phrase parasitic, or the way in which complex social relationships and technologies are deftly suggested in a few throwaway asides. McKenna has the self-discipline not to follow up these tantalising hints to explain, explain, explain, thereby to take from the reader his own responsibility to participate in the creative activity, imaginatively extapolating those hints. An example from HUNTER COME HOME:

> "Could he ((a blanky)) get a wife?"
>
> "Maybe. She'd be some woman that's gave up hope of being even number three wife to a red dot. ... She'd hate him all her life for her bad luck."

In a stroke we are told that the second speaker is ill-educated, that red dots have more status than blankies and that Mordin society is polygamous. Brilliant!

In FIDDLER'S GREEN, see how the author carefully works in Kruger's story of the soldiers of Tibesti - the foundation on which the entire plot rests - while moving the narrative along and preparing us to accept the improbable twist soon to come. By throwing in bits of information as the plot develops, McKenna achieves his objectives without once betraying our belief in the situation. Yet how many palpably flase technical explanations have you read, cast as conversations between characters, to whom the data would be common knowledge. They always obstruct the plot and stand out like the contrived set pieces they are.

Consider his powers of imagination. A ward of tuberculosis patients waiting to die is presented drolly as a training squad learning to die, with graduation imminent; there are a number of poetic pastoral scenes of wholly non-existent landscapes (see especially the evolving countryside in FIDDLER'S GREEN); the life forms and alien technologies of HUNTER COME HOME are feats of pure imatination which owe nothing to some gloss of a SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN article.

There are lapses, one being the terrible characterisation of Mary Chadwick, already referred to. Another is Midori Blake wearing a blouse, bead necklace and flared skirt, for God's sakes, on know-knows-what remote planet in some unfathomably distant future.

In short

Get this book to use as a benchmark against which to measure the turgid space operas of the technoids.

And to enjoy, of course!

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CHRISTMAS RIBBON

Ken Ford reviews

RINGWORLD

by Larry Niven

Original US publication 1970
Gollancz :: 1972 :: 288 pages

Two humans and two aliens set out on a trip destined to change the future of the galaxy.

In RINGWORLD, Niven has set up an involved and extremely sensawonderish plot.

On the fly-leaf, Fred Pohl says, "RINGWORLD is the best of the newest wave, the return to classical hard science fiction of the kind popular in the Golden Age of the '30s and '40s, plus the fuller treatment of human personality of the '60s." Even the aliens get a full character treatment. And RINGWORLD is one hell of a good book to read.

A Pierson's Puppeteer comes to Earth to find crew members for a mysterious expedition. Puppeteers have three legs and two flat heads, one each on top of a snakelike neck. He picks for the crew Louis Wu, a restless and resourceful type who knows how to survive; Teela Brown, a pretty, shallow, and extremely lucky girl; and Speaker-to-animals, a kzin, a quarter of a ton of tough, vicious, orange-furred, eight-foot tabby cat.

To induce the humans and the kzin to go on the mission, Messus (the human rendition of the Puppeteer's name) offers them the plans of a ship which will travel one light year in seventy-five seconds. This is a tantalising prospect, since conventional ships travel one light year in three days.

The prospect becomes even more tantalising: in twenty thousand years, the radiation from an explosion at the galactic core will reach the area of known space. This radiation threatens to destroy all life unless somebody finds an effective means of escaping than is known already.

The foursome set out in the new ship, and eventually encounter the Ringworld:

> He had been right to think of inch-wide Christmas ribbon, balanced on edge and strung in a loop. The ring was more than

> ninety million miles in radius - about six hundred million miles long, he estimated - but less than a million miles across, edge to edge. (page 71)

Work out for yourself if the maths is right. Think of it; let it sink in. Three million times the surface area of Earth. Later we find that its surface is Earthlike - airwise, landwise, gravitywise, and even vegetation- and lifewise. So Ringworld is not just three million times the surface area of Earth; it is three million times Earth.

Immediately we ask - How? Why? And, as the main characters think to themselves, Who? "...And man has met superior beings - again." (page 72)

At about this stage, I became disillusioned with the book. The story does not live up to my expectations. After the group crashes onto the Ringworld, they do not find a superior race. Signs of it, yes, but only the primitive remnants of a humaoid race who treat them as gods.

Most of the characters' conversation is speculation about the Ringworld, and then about its builders and their civilisation's downfall. The conflicts within the group show us more about Niven's future history. But none of the problems of known space measure up to the problem created by Ringworld. On the Ringworld, for a time, descriptions of physical marvels take over. For a time - sense of wonder.

We read on.

Even after we encounter perhaps the only survivor of the Ringworld engineers' race, we do not really know what the book is all about. Still many pages to go. And Niven, however much he disappoints us because he does not write the story we would have written, still keeps us spellbound.

Especially when we find out the nature of the Puppeteer. Towards the end of the book, Louis and the Speaker come to accept the reality of the situation:

> "I just wondered if the puppeteers didn't get their name by playing god with species around them. They've treated humans and kzinti like puppets; there's no denying that."
>
> "But Teela's luck made a puppet of Nessus."
>
> We've all been playing god at various levels." (page 279)

The characters find that their position is similar to that of Oedipus: his whole life was mapped out for him, and he knew it.

Even more mind-boggling are the characters' speculations about Ringworld itself. Why is it so Earthlike? Were the Ringworlders ever on Earth? Was Earth a byproduct of a once-great, now-decayed superior race? Is there a Plan?

The climax of the story comes when Teela falls in love with a native and decides to stay on Ringworld. Teela Brown, the new type of human, is so lucky that she suffers discomfort only when it is to her advantage. But without her experiences on Ringworld, she feels nothing for the rest of humanity. Before she faced a new unknown, Teela and the others could not sympathise with the unlucky. For them, and for all humankind, Ringworld is a salvation. It is so big that the Kzinti can also fit on its surface. Ringworld abosorbs neutrinos, so it is safe from galactic-core radiation.

Ringworld is rather convenient. Was it planned?

We do not escape into Niven's future, but rest in it for awhile. RINGWORLD is mainly adventure, and so it is real escape literature, but it is also a book we cannot help reading. It contains some real problems as well. Niven's universe is not as poetic as Cordwainer Smith's, but it is as interesting, as large, and sometimes more real. RINGWORLD leaves out so many unanswered questions at its end: Who are the Slavers? the Outsiders? the Trinocs? What about the man-kzinti wars? the exodus of the Puppeteers? Who did build Ringworld? Etc, etc, etc.

Three million Earths stretched flat. How many more novels, Larry?

SON OF RINGWORLD

Bruce Gillespie reviews

ORBITSVILLE

by Bob Shaw

Gollancz :: 1975
224 pages :: £2.60

ORBITSVILLE is about the man who offends the most powerful person in the world. Left temporarily in charge of Elizabeth Lindstrom's son, Vance Garamond looks away for a moment. The boy falls to the ground and dies, and his mother is willing to chase the careless space captain to the stars to get her revenge.

ORBITSVILLE is also about the man who discovered the largest land area in the universe - a Dyson sphere which encloses a sun. The surface area (facing inward) is 625 million times that of the Earth. Escaping from Elizabeth Lindstrom, Vance Garamond, his family, and the ship's crew, enter the sphere through what seems the only entrance and gain the opportunity to explore at least a small section of the vast interior area.

The trouble with ORBITSVILLE is that it makes no necessary connections between the two Vance Garamonds - the hunted and the explorer. I can understand that Garamond, the careless baby-

sitter, would want to escape from the gnomish, paranoid ruler of the solar system. But I find it difficult to believe that the ruler, Elizabeth Lindstrom, who wields absolute, arbitrary power, could afford the political risks of chasing him far into space and waiting around for months for her revenge. I kept waiting (a) for Garamond to invent some simple, time-saving way to escape Elizabeth altogether; and (b) a Terrestrial coup by which Earth's citizens would get rid of the ruler they all detest. Without these neat tricks, the book imposes the batty dictator on us until the end.

When Bob Shaw allows him, Garamond the explorer really goes places. But why couldn't he have just discovered Orbitsville, without enduring panic, escape, and necessarily haphazard exploration methods? Once Garamond finds his way onto the plains of grass which stretch across the planet's interior surface, he quite enjoys himself. Of course, he and his crew still need to build a fleet of makeshift aircraft to fly back to base to rescue his wife and kids from the clutches of Elizabeth. Still, author, main character, and reader enjoy the cosmic Lindbergh jaunt more than anything else in the book. Bob Shaw could have so easily written this section at much greater length and left out the tedious, meandering "events" which clutter up the first half and final chapters of the book.

The problem with ORBITSVILLE is that it is the "answer book" to, the son of RINGWORLD, and that it has appeared only a year after the publication of Arthur Clarke's RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA. Readers do make odious comparisons, no matter what authors say.

For instance, RINGWORLD is an extraordinarily careless jumble of events, conversations, and fuzzy pictures, but Larry Niven did introduce the Dyson sphere structure into s f. Shaw shows clearly that he does not have the kind of ingenuity with which he might suggest genuinely new variations on Niven's premise. Instead, Shaw fakes some fresh scenery.

That wouldn't matter too much if Shaw had taken the trouble to visualise his scenery clearly. After I read ORBITSVILLE, I still had only a vague idea of the appearance of the place. Mostly it seems like a Canadian prairie in summer, multiplied several thousand million times. Larry Niven made the same kind of mistake in RINGWORLD (it was all like somebody's well-watered big backyard), which is all the more reason why Shaw should have gone to some trouble to suggest the infinite possibilities of such a world. Contrast both ORBITSVILLE and RINGWORLD with RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA. Clarke's main characters set out to explore a somewhat smaller space than either Ringworld or Orbitsville, but Clarke makes Rama into a much larger place than either of them. In RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA, we can actually see and feel every feature and variation of the topography, "vegetation", and "weather". Clarke knows his world intimately; Shaw has only built his and not lived in it.

Having said all that, I should say that ORBITSVILLE is a very enjoyable book to read. Bob Shaw can stock an s f book with lots of helter-skelter adventures, changes of scenery and characters, and brisk little lectures about strange notions. Shaw's books are good, exhilarating adventures which "take their implications lightly", as Nik Cohn once said about rock 'n' roll. For instance, in ORBITSVILLE Shaw lets loose a splendid, E E Smithish effect when Garamond's spaceship hurtles from outer space past the Terrestrial fleet, through the "skin" of Orbitsville, deep into its centre, only to land back on the inside surface. ORBITSVILLE is a chocolate box in which every chocolate is different and you eat them quickly, one after the other. You finish the box almost as soon as you've started eating. So you've barely started reading ORBITSVILLE when you find that it's finished. It was the kind of relaxing reading I needed badly at the time I picked it up.

But ORBITSVILLE could have been better. Bob Shaw could have selected one flavour of chocolate from the box and invented subtle variations on that. I regretted leaving Orbitsville because I still knew little about it at the end of the book. Lots of bits and pieces, but nothing really to think about. Worse, I knew little about Vance Garamond, because Shaw kept forcing him to do things. Garamond never sat down to think or talk about anything very important. Maybe Shaw will, eventually, let us explore Orbitsville and meet its citizens.

(I must add that the only new idea in the book - the only one that might have given it a real sense of direction - lies buried in the last paragraph. Shaw waited until the end of the book to suggest any answer to the question - why should anybody want to build something like Orbitsville?)

GET TO KNOW YOUR SPACESHIP

Bruce Gillespie reviews

DARK INFERNO

by James White

GALAXY magazine :: Jan 72-March 72
120 pages

Corgi 552 09438 :: 1974
158 pages :: A95c

THE DREAM MILLENIUM

by James White

Michael Joseph :: 1974
222 pages :: $A6.50

Ballantine 24012 :: 1974
217 pages :: $US1.25

James White has been one of the most skilful writers of science fiction for as long as I've

been reading the stuff and, no doubt, for years before that. When I began reading ASFR, its writers were discussing THE WATCH BELOW; in 1968 I gave a favourable review to ALL JUDGMENT FLED.

Yet James White's literary voice is so unobtrusive and the tone of his books so understated that most s f readers have been as quietly ignoring his novels as he has been quietly and consistently writing them. Two recent books, DARK INFERNO and THE DREAM MILLENIUM, show why his reputation should be much higher than it is.

In DARK INFERNO, Mercer is a ship's officer taking his first trip into space. He has medical training, but has been hired mainly to pacify and entertain the passengers of the Eurydice during the long, tedious voyage to one of Jupiter's moons. Soon after the journey has begun, he has been reduced to the passenger who most needs help. The other ship's officers give him the cold shoulder, he sprawls into most undignified poses while trying to teach himself to move in free fall in a spaceship, and he must try to amuse a whole group of people, none of whom he has met before.

I can only guess that other readers of science fiction still get the same thrill of pleasure as I had at the age of six, and still get, when an author takes us Out There and we really feel that we are flying through space to some distant planet, star, or galaxy. James White brought back that sense of exhilaration - and an anticipation of enjoyment to come - within the first few pages of DARK INFERNO. As readers, we experience everything from under Mercer's skin. We discover for ourselves how to walk, talk, and think within this new environment. With Mercer, we must meet and solve the minor, irritating problems which keep him on his feet - except - when he is awkwardly flying through the air.

The sense of exhilaration at the beginning of DARK INFERNO is all the more satisfying because Mercer is that scarcest of all characters in s f - the level-headed, non-assuming, adaptable bloke who meets life with balance and an agile sense of humour. We trust his judgment about situations and people because we trust him. Like him, we are annoyed by Prescott, for whom Mercer can do nothing right. But, like Mercer, we see no reason to entertain murderous thoughts of resentment, as might so many characters in so many bad s f books. Mercer keeps his nose clean and keeps trying to sort out situations.

But even a likable sort of chap need not stay likable in the same way forever. DARK INFERNO is the story of a man who finds the strength to meet adversity and who is matured by the powers of compassion and love for other people which he finds in himself. Soon after the foyage begins, Mercer conducts the ship's first "life-raft" drill. In case of emergency, which has never happened before in the history of commercial space flight, the passengers can tumble quickly into self-sustaining pods which can break away from the main ship. While Mercer conducts a demonstration, a faulty component in the nuclear engines disintegrates, the water coolers begin to overheat, and the pile threatens to go critical. The drill changes into an escape operation: three to each pod, the passengers leave the ship and disperse in their tiny, self-contained vehicles to a safe distance from the ship. The ship's captain, hurt in the accident during which the fault was discovered, and Mercer share the "sick bay" pod while Prescott and another ship's officer break away in the other crew pod. Fortunately the nuclear engines do not explode until everybody has reached a safe enough distance. The passengers and crew now fly in formation. Sixteen scattered survival vehicles form the circumference of a circle which must wait for a rescue vehicle from Earth. And Mercer must keep them sane until it arrives.

James White does not simply write about nice or believable people, although he does this very well. As a science fiction writer, he knows how to construct ingenious, delicate, and suggestive technical devices. In DARK INFERNO, he writes about a "spaceship" divided into sixteen specks in space. The inhabitants of each pod are jostling each other for elbow room, and soon both water and air begin to stink. (This is particularly galling because the technical manuals had promised that each pod would recycle water and clean air adequately for a fortnight.) Nobody from any pod can reach any other pod, except by radio. Mercer monitors radio communication from his pod. Each passenger can talk to him or to the others through him. But Mercer bears the unexpected responsibility of controlling intimate communications so that the confined people do not send each other mad. Even worse, he needs to send spoken instructions which will enable the pod passengers to steer their vehicles back to the centre of the circle when help arrives.

James White writes magnificently about the ache of cramped conditions and the paradoxes of human communication. In ALL JUDGMENT FLED, the astronauts were confined in a small spaceship, headed towards an alien, possibly dangerous hip which had parked itself near Jupiter. The alien destination did not worry the astronauts as much as the insistent, yammering radio voices from control headquarters on Earth, always giving them orders and offering smug "psychological" advice. In THE WATCH BELOW, White compared two groups of people trying to survive in contrasting conditions of acute confinement - people in a spaceship, and people in a submarine on Earth.

I'm not sure whether White himself is claustrophobic or agorophobic. Mercer thinks to himself, "He was in hell and in hell everybody acted like the devil." White is not interested merely in ingenious torture chambers called spaceships. Physical conditions become bad, but ordinary people make them worse. For every Mercer there is a Kirk, who picks fights with the two people

who are forced to share a pod with him. The theme of DARK INFERNO is all the more sombre because: (a) At the start of the novel, Mercer expects nothing but an uneventful journey, its boredom relieved only by his own flat-footed attempts to do his job. No sooner has he started to feel familiar with the ship and his job than he must face a new set of tasks. Now the passengers' lives, and not just their comfort, depend on his competence. (b) At the start of the novel, the reader expects little more than an illustrated space voyage to Ganymede. No sooner do we settle down in our seats and begin to enjoy the company, than James White boots us out of our seats and shoots us off into space, just like the passengers. We are there; soon we feel uncomfortable ourselves, and even acutely distressed.

But James White has no interest in distressing people for the sake of the exercise. DARK INFERNO is a skilful suspense story, more gripping than all those dreary AIRPORT/EARTHQUAKE movies we've had recently. Early in the voyage, Mercer notices out of the corner of his eye Mrs Mathewson and her ten-year-old son, Bobby, the only child on the voyage. Mercer treats Bobby like a cadet instead of a kid. When Bobby becomes stranded alone in the fourteenth pod, Mercer's trust and precise instructions enable Bobby to steer unaided back to safety. Mrs Mathewson cheers up Mercer while he still faces Prescott's cold shoulder, and later she must share a pod with two murderous men. So throughout the story Mercer worries a lot about her and Bobby, and not himself. The reader chews his nails on everybody's behalf, but in particular for Mercer, Bobby, and his mother.

We also want to find out how Mercer meets each ticklish situation. James White has written a novel and not just a thriller; he shows how one person becomes a deeper, greater person. As Mercer recognises in the novel's last line, "he had already changed in many ways." Even as only a voice from the radio, he has to care for a whole group of frightened and suffocating people for nearly a fortnight. He, who had never thought much of love, falls in love with a woman, Mrs Mathewson, who was too afraid to love again. Perhaps the end of the story is too reassuring - but Mercer sounds like the kind of person who will keep getting into scrapes and learning from each one; and White disturbs us as well as reassures us.

** ** **

THE DREAM MILLENIUM is a much simpler book, and I can't think of too much to say about it. It justifies itself. A fan of James White will find all the usual elements here - a sense of confinement, disrupted communications, ambiguities of understanding, and technical ingenuity. And, of course, that clipped, clear style with which White can express more in a sentence than most of the pyrotechnicians can say in a chapter. Perhaps the worst I can say about this book is that it is merely a skilful thriller and not a good minor novel, like DARK INFERNO.

John Devlin is stuck on one of those interminable space-voyages-into-nowhere which s f writers still find fascinating. The computer wakes him up every hundred years or so, and he must check the ship's functions. He never stays up for more than twenty-four hours, as the ship carries no extra supplies of food, water, and air to support a normal crew.

The trouble with the voyage is that each time Devlin returns to "sleep" he suffers from overvivid, nightmarish dreams. Each dream ends as some fierce beast or fiercer human kills him. He experiences the death agonies just as clearly as he experiences every detail of every lifetime (as a trilobite, dinosaur, barbarian, or whatever) in every dream. It all becomes very wearying. Even worse, the nosy old computer orders him to recite details of his dreams each time he wakes up. Also he must recall details of the violent, ghastly life on Earth which led him to volunteer for star exploration. (These episodes read as if they were taken directly from White's country of residence, Northern Ireland.)

Devlin cannot begin to solve the puzzle of the dreams until he wakes up Patricia Morley, another passenger, the person who originally told him about the starship project. She has also suffered from vivid, violent dreams. Together, they find that one passenger has already killed himself rather than go back to his dream-filled casket. (All passengers are woken regularly, but at differnt times.) During his "waking period", Devlin drifts off into natural sleep. When he wakes up, he rediscovers some of his lost energy. Now he can face the nightmare compulsory "rest periods". Encouraged because he and Patricia have found one clue to the puzzle, the two of them spend the rest of the novel trying the solve the meaning of their voyage and ways to survive it.

In THE DREAM MILLENIUM, James White has written a well-told, intriguing suspense story. What do the dreams mean? Are they really dreams, or might they form real "reality", leaving the experience of "waking" every hundred years only an illusion? Presuming that they are travelling in a spaceship, is it really moving or are all the passengers part of a strange Terrestrial experiement? (Obviously, Devlin must have read as much science fiction as his creator.) Can Devlin and Patricia discover enough practical answers to save the passengers who might die before the end of the voyage?

The trouble with THE DREAM MILLENIUM is that these are the only kind of questions which White sets the reader. Devlin remains so much a standard space explorer that we cannot ask the same questions about him as we can about Mercer in DARK INFERNO. White constructs THE DREAM MILLENIUM with skill, but he does not breathe into it any independent life. Even when White retells Devlin's life as a medico on a disint-

egrating Earth, he does not reveal anything as genuinely apocalyptic as scenes from, say, Mike Moorcock's THE BLACK CORRIDOR. Most disappointingly, White provides ludicrous, quasi-scientological "solutions" to the puzzles he sets in the book.. I enjoyed reading THE DREAM MILLENIUM but couldn't help feeling let down at the end. Still, I can always look forward to the next James White novel, or catch up on some I haven't read yet.

THE WORM IN ADAM'S APPLE

David Grigg reviews

THE SUN GROWS COLD

by Howard Berk

Gollancz :: 1971
245 pages :: £1.60

I've never heard of Howard Berk before, tut I think we will be hearing more of him in future. The fly-leaf indicates that this is the first time Gollancz have published him, but I can't believe that THE SUN GROWS COLD is his first novel; it's too good for that.

This is a novel about acquiring knowledge and, ultimately, being destroyed by it: Adam eating the forbidden fruit and being poisoned.

The novel begins in what appears to be a lunatic asylum. Patients are treated by having their entire memories removed, and gradually being given new personalities. The insanity of the patients is epidemic, and more and more of them are being treated by the centre, which is located in a massive single building, the Complex.

From the beginning we see the anguish of Korman, the head of the centre, as he walks through the waiting room full of insane people. But one patient is making a fantastic recovery. He has been given the name of Alex Parnell. Korman has no idea who Parnell was before he became insane, but he has a vague idea that he must be someone special (Korman's superior gives special attention to Parnell).

Parnell outstrips the standard procedures for treating and rehabilitating patients. He becomes outraged and frustrated when he can be told nothing about the Complex or the world outside, who he was, and why he is here.

So Parnell learns. He forces the centre to speed up the treatment program. He makes radical, violent steps towards finding out about his environment. Bit by bit, he finds out information about the world, and we learn with him; our eyes are opened with his.

Parnell is different from the other patients; they are docile, and learn only what they are told. They have no curiosity about what they have been or why they are there. To remember their previous life is a regression; they might slip backward into insanity, which terrifies them. Parnell snatches at glimpses of past memory with an urgent desire. He develops, and the book becomes a radical searching for truth. With him, we aspire to find out every relevant fact about what the Complex really is, what lies outside it, and what has happened. But each step is so difficult and fraught with obstacles that Parnell worries that he will never discover the truth. He faces danger: Laird, the security chief, insists that Parnell undergo a second mind wipe-out - an untried process which has killed many laboratory animals. There must be no danger, says Laird, that Parnell will remember his past.

Parnell strikes out at the system at every opportunity. Finding no satisfaction, he becomes furious and destructive. On his first day of occupational therapy, Parnell is linked to a computer terminal, supposedly classifying facts from books into the computer index:

> WHO ARE YOU Parnell asked.
>
> REJECT
>
> As though encouraged, Parnell grinned and punched out:
>
> HELP AM PRISONER IN ASYLUM
>
> REJECT
>
> PARNELLS MY NAME AMERICAS MY NATION COMPLEX IS MY HOMETOWN HEAVENS MY DESTINATION
>
> REJECT
>
> LET US PRAY
>
> REJECT
>
> TRANSIENT FAST RUNNER DESIRES MEET SYMPATHETIC GATEKEEPER OBJECT ESCAPE
>
> REJECT
>
> WHERE IS MENS ROOM
>
> REJECT
>
> IF NO MENS ROOM WILL CAUSE SHORT
>
> REJECT
>
> WHAT TIME LUNCH
>
> REJECT
>
> READ ANY GOOD BOOKS LATELY
>
> REJECT
>
> This time REJECT maintained its flashing disapproval; Parnell kept tapping the keys but they would no longer override.

REJECT disappeared; the screen remained dark for a second or two. Then a new, flashing message: STATE PROBLEM.

Parnell promptly tapped out CONFUSED

REQUIRE SPECIFIC INFORMATION

HAVE NO SPECIFIC INFORMATION

REQUIRE SPECIFIC INFORMATION

APPLE A DAY KEEPS THE DOCTOR AWAY

REQUIRE SPECIFIC INFORMATION

GO FUCK YOURSELF. (page 69)

Parnell rises through the ranks of the treatment procedure until he reaches the final stage where, it seems, he must spend at least six months. Then he will be released into the outside. By now Parnell knows a number of facts which he had to find out by violent action. There has been an atomic war; outside the Complex (built upon the ruins of Washington) are a few other Complexes scattered throughout America, and narrow bands of radiation-cleared land, but the rest is rubble and radioactive waste. In a few years the radiation should all be gone; but America's greatness is gone, and the population has been vastly reduced.

Parnell meets Julia, another "transient" or patient, and they form a close relationship. She too seems to lack any desire to know more about their circumstances, but Parnell's desire for knowledge is still at full blaze.

In his job at the library, accidentally he finds a plan of another floor of the Complex, where the Archives are located. After much planning, he escapes from his treatment centre and finds his way to the Archives. Old, pre-treatment memories surface in his mind. Almost, but not quite, he punches out the correct combination of the vault where the War records are located. Obviously, at one time he knew the combination.

Laird clamps down. Parnell must be re-processed, live or die. But Parnell finally manages to escape with Julie from the Complex and head out into America. The radical finally bursts free from his society. But eventually he comes back and demands reprocessing for himself. And escapes from his cell and, this time with certain knowledge, lets himself into the Archives and finds out what he has been seeking vainly throughout the novel. The knowledge, fully known, destroys him as, in fact, he knew it must.

It's hard to indicate in a review just how Parnell's quest fully captures the reader, and how well-delineated is the struggle. For one thing, Berk draws portraits of Parnell and Korman, the treatment-centre leader, which are much clearer than any found in the majority of science fiction.

And the theme of the book is something that perhaps is as deep an urge in us as sex: the quest for knowledge. When Korman interviews Parnell after his first assault on the Archives:

"Alex - what were you looking for in the Archives?"

"I don't know. I knew someone would finally ask me, but I don't know."

"Then why did you go there?"

"What I don't know is right there, doc. Inside the Vault." He studied Korman for a second. "Nobody's told you, have they?"

"No," Korman said.

"I was close, doc," Parnell said. It was quite intimate, something said in confidence to an old friend.

"You're an idiot," Korman said gruffly. "Someday you'll find out, and you'll revert - about 20 seconds later. Haven't you ever bothered to think about that?"

"Just give me the 20 seconds," Parnell said.

He got the twenty seconds. The shock of who he was, and what has really happened in America and the world, does exactly what Korman predicted. It's a nasty shock for the reader, too.

VICTORIAN MELODRAMA

George Turner reviews

CANDY MAN

by Vincent King

Gollancz :: 1971
191 pages :: £1.80

Sphere 7221 5264 :: 1973
186 pages :: $A1.10

The peculiar thing about CANDY MAN is that it is quite readable. It has no right to be. And if a thoroughly unworthy novel is readable, then it behoves the critic to hunt down the anomaly.

In the case of CANDY MAN the readability agent is, I suppose, suspense. Not plot-suspense, because your experience of Van Vogt and allied future-mongers will tip you off to that about chapter 2. It is simply that one wants to know how author King will finally resolve the contradictions of the great fantasy edifice he has spent some 70,000 words abuilding. At the same time one suspects it will be by the old Van Vogtian sleight-of-typewriter, but there's always the chance that he'll come up with something arresting and new. He doesn't.

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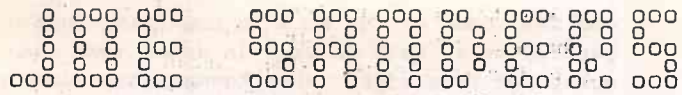

RE-VISIONS

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Joe Sanders has been contributing the column, WITH MALICE TOWARDS ALL, to Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell's STARLING magazine ever since I began to receive it in 1969. So far as I know, he has contributed to no other recent fanzines until he began to write a few new pieces for different editors during 1974. He was rather a mystery man. The Luttrells had never met him, even though he had singled out their magazine for special treatment. I've always thought that Joe was one of the best, if not the best, of American s f critics appearing in fanzines. Now I'm very pleased that he has chosen S F COMMENTARY as one of the magazines to receive his new works. Here's the first episode of RE-VISIONS.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

This column is the result of a college education, a long-distance move, and a flood. School work, especially my dissertation, broke the fairly close and constant familiarity with stf that I'd maintained through high school and into college; there was a time when all I seemed to be reading were scholarly tomes, awful novels that my advisor suggested, or drafts of dissertation chapters. Then we moved from North Dakota to Ohio, which involved loading all my books and magazines - packing the ones in the bookcases and lugging out all the boxes that never had been unpacked. And I wondered: How did I accumulate all this: what's in these stories? Finally, in early 1973, our basement was flooded twice. I threw away three garbage cans full of stuff that was too far gone even to go through and list as a tax deduction. For several weeks, sodden books and magazines hung from clothes-lines zig-zagging across the garage. And again, as I sorted damaged and undamaged things, I found myself stopping to finger through something I'd read years before or scan the cover of a thing I'd never read. I wanted to read some of them, to unread others, to catch up on some things I'd neglected until now - to revisit, with what I tell myself are mature faculties, some places that once gave me pleasure and/or puzzlement.

So here: this column. For the past several years, I've been reviewing mostly current books for Hank Luttrell's STARLING. I enjoy that and expect to continue it for awhile. But I feel that I also need a place (and excuse) to talk about stories from other times. I don't intend to concentrate primarily on classics, neglected goodies, or historically important pieces. I read for pleasure, and the things covered in this column will be ones I've chosen to read for enjoyment of one kind or another. I don't plan any comprehensive overviews - for that kind of survey check back through the pieces by F M Busby (as Renfrew Pemberton), THE SCIENCE FICTION FIELD PLOWED UNDER, in CRY, or Buck Coulson's excellent brief book reviews in YANDRO. I do plan to look at writers, works, groups of works in whatever length seems appropriate, using whatever approaches seem useful. In future columns I expect to discuss Van Vogt's early novels, David Lindsay's DEVIL'S TOR, Douglas West's DEAD WEIGHT (an AUTHENTIC serial), and others. Lots of others. Primarily, I'll be reading and talking about what I've read in as independent, consistent, and clear-sighted a manner as I can.

Joe Sanders discusses

FRANKENSTEIN

by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

edited by James Rieger
Bobbs-Merrill 1974

FRANKENSTEIN is a good book to begin with, although it already has received a great deal of serious attention recently. Unfortunately, the novel's higher reputation has come not just from its qualities as a novel but partly from recognition (especially in Women's Studies circles) that Mary Shelley is a strange, interesting person and that the book is an interesting product of her consciousness, and partly from the belief that the book is an early example of science fiction. The former notion is true; the latter is not. But beyond other considerations, the novel itself is still worth reading.

A word about this edition first. When I was associated with Bobbs-Merrill, I was always impressed with the care they gave to college texts. This one is a lovely job. First-rate editing and production. Besides this excuse for yet another edition of the novel, Rieger takes as his text the 1818 first edition, as corrected and revised by Mary Shelley in a copy given to an acquaintance in 1823. Most modern editions reproduce her 1831 revision, but Rieger argues that the later version is rather removed from her original intent - and anyway it's good to make the original version available, too. He's right; it is interesting to see what Mary Shelley wrote as an excited eighteen-year-old.

However, though it's not irrelevant that a young person wrote the book hastily, FRANKENSTEIN somehow works as a novel. Perhaps we should try to find an interpretation that tries to show how, intentionally or not, apparent fumblings become part of the impact. One such seeming flaw is the opening section. The framing story is promising enough - Walton, a young Englishman, is sailing toward the North Pole in search of useful knowledge and glory, when he rescues the exhausted Victor Frankenstein from a drifting ice chunk - but the early part of Frankenstein's own story is tedious. The description of his childhood is necessary to introduce his family members and his friend Clarel, but incidents seem to be selected and thrown together randomly. Fortunately, this section doesn't last long; it is almost as if Frankenstein himself isn't much interested in remembering his happy growing up; at least that's a possibility to keep in mind. The story becomes more effective as Frankenstein delves deeper and deeper into his studies at the university, prepares to create life in a human body he has constructed, and withdraws in horror from the ugly creature he has activated. Instead of going through the motions, as it had earlier, the novel develops real narrative drive. In addition, the story reveals itself as a much more complex drama than it originally appeared; that is, the relationship between Frankenstein and his creation is much more involved than the runrunthemonsters-loose stereotype.

Consider the pattern of the action. Frankenstein, a young man raised in what he consciously pictures as an open, happy family, devotes himself to an increasingly private and solitary project for the sake of what he calls fame. Though he says that his researches horrify him, he turns away from the things he says he loves. When he sees the horrible thing he has created, he rejects it - yet he never can get clear of it, never fit back into serene, living society. His conscious desires and values prove weaker than the product of his secret, selfish drives.

Digression here, into the difference between magic and science. Magic, under its paraphenalia, is an attempt to control the world as perceived by an individual's desires and fears. In a world where magic works, desires can take effect directly, without examination or censorship. Whether they really function as tools or not, the rituals and trappings of magic have power over us <u>because</u> they correspond to our emotional and mental patterns. We want magic to work - so we work to believe it does. In such a world, fears can be destroyed, and desires - even the most socially undesirable or deliciously self-destructive - can triumph. Science, on the other hand, is an attempt to understand what the world is in itself, not just what the researcher would like it to be. We must reshape and adapt our goals to achieve them through science. The distinction is important in FRANKENSTEIN. Though he says he's studying science, Frankenstein begins his studies by reading mystic and occult writers in order to control the world according to his heart's desires; moreover, his description of his studies at the university shows no details of what he learned in the classroom or through his secret research. What the description does show is the overmastering will that drives him to achieve this project of his solitary cravings. Certainly, as he tells the story Frankenstein deliberately conceals details of his activities to prevent anyone else from creating a monster; certainly, in the narrative "natural philosphy" is an ambiguous term that might refer forward toward modern science or backwards toward alchemy. But the <u>feel</u> of the action is much closer to magic than to science. Unable to follow exactly what Frankenstein is doing, we still can observe that his state of mind is that of the magician, conjruing in secret. That's one major reason why FRANKENSTEIN is not a science fiction novel.[1] It also suggests one reason for Frankenstein's inability to deal effectively with his creation: the creature is, literally, his creation.

1 By contrast, in Garrett P Serbice's early, godawful science fiction novel A COLUMBUS OF SPACE (1909), the narrator admiringly characterises the scientist hero as "the greatest accepter and defender of facts as he found them that I have ever known."

I don't want to get into a TURN OF THE SCREW brouhaha by suggesting that in the plot the supernatural menace comes purely from Frankenstein's distraught mind. But much of the book's power comes from Frankenstein's emotional turmoil, and I think that the turmoil is objectified rather than created by the monster.

In fiction, a writer may create characters that have concrete existence within the action, yet echo ideas and feelings in other characters. The fantasy novel is particularly suited for this kind of split characterisation. It may be, as I've suggested above, that in a universe that accepts magic one is encouraged to liberate parts of his personality that he does not want to recognise publicly. DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE is an outstanding example. So is FRANKENSTEIN, except that two conflicting sides of Frankenstein both have their expression in characters ostensibly apart from him. It's not accidental that at the moment Frankenstein turns away from his secret monster, his friend Clarel appears. Clarel is, after all, the embodiment of the public, social world in which Frankenstein grew up. Frankenstein loves him as he loves that world: "A selfish persuit had cramped and narrowed me, until your gentleness and affection warmed and opened my senses; I became the happy creature who, a few years ago, loving and beloved by all, had no sorrow or care" (page 65). Clarel is deeply in tune with at least a part of Frankenstein's nature; as Frankenstein says, "In Clarel I saw the image of my former self" (page 155). And Clarel loves Frankenstein, too, though he is by nature incapable of understanding why his dear friend cannot find the same joy in life that he does. He is incapable of conceiving such a monster as Frankenstein's; he is unaware that such black depths of nature exist. When he does encounter the thing face to face, he is snuffed out.

If Clarel - in action and as felt by Frankenstein - embodies a part of his nature, what of the monster? Here there is no doubt. In echoes of language's repetition of images, Frankenstein and his monster show their oneness. Both see themselves as mixed in nature but with strong positive traits; however, both restate several times the remark by Marlowe's Mephistopheles and Milton's Satan; they are in hell wherever they go, for their hell is within them. Like Frankenstein, the monster believes himself created with gifts that fit him for a singularly useful life spent in pleasant society; also like him, he feels unjustly cut off from that life. Each blames the other. Their relationship shows an intricate symmetrical pattern of sympathy and misunderstanding, love of humanity and insane hatred, self-love and self-loathing. They think alike. Their minds work in the same way.

How did Frankenstein come to create the monster - or perhaps the real question is, What in Frankenstein became the monster? That's a difficult question, considering the amount of hatred Frankenstein gives his creation, but we can get some clues by studying the monster's position. He is absolutely solitary. As such he lives in perpetual, lonely pain, but he also feels justiried (almost excused) in his resulting rage and misanthropy. For his is completely singular; there is no one like him. At first glance, as noted above, Frankenstein appears to have grown up as part of a free, joyous society. Actually, like the monster (page 106), he seems to be more of an observer than a participant in that joy. He feels apart from the others, a superior being. It's not that Frankenstein hates the others, but he feels that he must separate himself from them by going away to the university and burying himself in his research; as he later comments, "I could not rank myself with the herd of common projectors" (page 208). He may consciously reject this isolation (page 48), but he cannot give it up. He is pulled two ways simultaneously. His conscious life beckons in the person of Clarel, but he also is drawn the other way. He cannot resist this unadmitted drive: "Through the whole period during which I was preparing for myself a deadly torture; but I was the slave, not the master of an impulse, which I detested, yet could not disobey" (page 218). The monster Frankenstein had created his himself, and he cannot deny its existence while he lives. Indeed, I think it's at least questionable how much Frankenstein could give up the joy of being hated, tormented - and alone.

It is questionable. The whole issue is open for discussion. That's what gives the book its power. Reaction against being one of the common herd, when it leads to selfish isolation, ultimately is self-destructive. Yet the drive remains powerful even to the novel's end. Toward the very end, as Frankenstein had give up everything in pursuit of revenge, Mary Shelley removes us from the fever heat of his subjectivity by getting back to Walton, the English explorer. But Walton isn't really outside the drama. Initially he responds to Frankenstein's character with rapture, and Frankenstein himself compares their outlooks: "You seek for knowledge and wsdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been!" (page 24). Beyond that, Walton shows almost superhuman physical endurance (page 11), like Frankenstein (page 92) and like... Yes. But Walton, I think, unites the sides of human nature that have been split off from Frankenstein in the story. As the book opens, he glories in his singularity; shortly later he bemoans his solitude (page 13). Although he goes on the expedition, he writes letters to his sister because he cares for their relationship. (Frankenstein, in contrast, sends no letters when he gets into his project - pages 50-51).) Walton feels, as the ship encounters bad weather, that he should turn back because of his responsibility to the other aboard (pages 211 and 213). (Frankenstein does refuse to build the monster a mate because of a sense of responsibility to the human race, but on Walton's ship he harangues the men to go onward to any cost - page 212. He finds it easier to obey a general principle than to care for the

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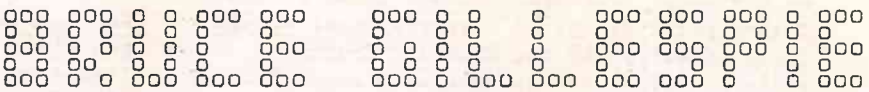


SOMETHING MARVELLOUS THAT NO ONE ELSE HAD DISCOVERED:
An Appreciation of TAMARISK ROW

Bruce Gillespie discusses

TAMARISK ROW

by Gerald Murnane

Heinemann Australia :: 1974
188 pages :: $A5.40

I THE KILLEATONS

My motives for writing at length about TAMARISK ROW are simple. For me, it is a book which retrieves and justifies aspects of my own childhood so completely that I feel for it the same bond as I would feel for a personal friend. It is a brilliant novel, worth considerable discussion at the highest level. It's not so simple to justify the inclusion here of a review of a book which, superficially, has little to do with the subjects usually discussed in S F COMMENTARY. Later I hope to show that TAMARISK ROW has much to do with that literary quality common to all forms of speculative fiction - the lively imagination.

TAMARISK ROW is by Gerald Murnane, a writer who has appeared before in SFC, and has an article in this issue. The book, and its author, entered my life during early 1971, when I joined the Publications Branch of the Education Department of Victoria, where Gerald Murnane was working. During 1971 and the early part of 1972, Gerald was still completing the hand-written final draft. I read a typed version of that draft during the spring of 1972, and nearly a year later, Heinemann accepted the novel for publication. About the same time, Gerald resigned his position as Assistant Editor of Publications to become a full-time writer. Heinemann's editor insisted that the author should cut about a third from the original text. This done, the final, published version of the novel appeared in October 1974. Since then, the book has been nominated for the AGE Book of the Year Award and the author has received an ACA grant to continue writing. The most favourable review of the book, John Tittensor's in NATION REVIEW, called it "the best novel to come out of Australia for many years".

TAMARISK ROW is divided into a number of short sections, most of them no more than a page or two long, and each written as a single paragraph. Therefore the book still crowds about 100,000 words into 188 pages without offending the eye or comprehension. Superficially described, the book is the story of the Killeaton family - Augustine and Jean and their son Clement - during the last year (1947/48) when they lived in a rented weatherboard house in a quiet side street of Bassett, a city on the northern plains of Victoria, Australia. The Killeatons have little money and this, as well as the fact that they are Catholics in a section of Bassett where most other people are Protestants, divides them from their surroundings. Mrs Killeaton is a former Protestant, proselytised into the Catholic Church when she married Augustine, and with few ties with anybody but her husband and son. Augustine works

on the farm at the local mental home, and spends most of his free time working out systems to win at the races or tending to his flock of Rhode Island pullets. He is fiercely loyal to his Irish ancestry and the Catholic Church, does not smoke or drink, and is generally suspicious of most of the people he meets. Clement is an extraordinarily introspective and lonely nine-year-old, connected by little but mutual antipathy with other children at school, told to keep away from neighbouring Protestant children by his parents, who alternately influence or repel his opinions in general, and devoted to his own esoteric games, particularly the "landscape" called Tamarisk Row which he has built in the back yard.

There is scarcely any way of summarising the "story" of TAMARISK ROW without sounding banal, particularly because the "story" is not the real story of the book. During the year of time during which TAMARISK ROW takes place, Augustine Killeaton buys a racehorse named Sternie. It is a maiden at the beginning of the novel and shows less and less racing talent as the story progresses. Finally Augustine sells Sternie to meet some racing debts, and eventually he falls victim to one of the largest and best-organised betting coups in racing history. Meanwhile, Clement endures schooling at St Boniface's Primary School, and from the next February until the Killeatons leave Bassett, another half year at the Brothers College. Clement tries to satisfy his curiosity about the physiognomy of girls and of nearly everything else, falls foul of the terrifying Launder gang of school bullies, and invents one of the most complex and esoteric children's games ever described in children's literature. Mrs Killeaton stands by her husband, staunchly and often bitterly, as his racing debts increase. Within this almost paranoid little family, the members seem to derive their main energies from alternately thwarting and feeding each other's imaginations. A fourth "character" is Bassett itself, its people and the kind of countryside it represents, the sleepy, dusty, sun-dominated landscape where "the people who first came to look for gold beneath the soil... stayed to sit behind drawn blinds during long, silent afternoons when anything might have happened but nothing did."

This superficial description of TAMARISK ROW would make it seem that Clement Killeaton and I had little in common, so how can I say that the illumination of Clement's childhood illuminates my own? Clement was in third grade in 1947; I in 1955 (although that's not as great a difference as, say, between 1966 and 1974). Clement spent the period of the novel in a country town, while I spent my entire childhood and most of my adolescence in suburbs of Melbourne (population 2 million plus). Clement's family belonged to the Roman Catholic Church; mine to the Churches of Christ, an evangelical Protestant group. I went to a state primary school; Clement to Catholic parochial schools. Clement's world was dominated by horseracing, an activity which my family abhorred. Clement spent his early childhood, it seems, without many books, while I lived on them.

But opposing circumstances like these, often two sides of the one coin anyway, give little idea of Clement's way of experiencing these circumstances, and the way in which Gerald Murnane's prose expresses those aspects of an Australian childhood which I thought were inexpressible. For me, childhood was a continuous traumatic experience, which I attempted to alleviate in several ways, mainly by escaping into various worlds of the imagination. I had no way of expressing my permanent rage at the impotence of childhood while I was a child, so I vowed to "remember it all" and some day to find a way to write it all down. Now that I earn my living as an occasional freelance writer, I find that I cannot clasp enough complete threads of childhood memory to weave together the account of my experience which I always meant to create. I will never write the book of my vow. Instead, Gerald Murnane has written it for me. In particular, he has managed to show just how rottenly awful growing up can be for any child, but especially for a child from poor, lower-middle-class origins, forced to survive the intense, crippling relationships found in a small family and twelve years of free, compulsory, and/or secular education in the Australian state of Victoria. I'm even more grateful to the author of TAMARISK ROW for showing just how children can survive, and even transcend, a poverty-stricken, sterile environment. In other words, people kept telling me all my childhood that I had to see things their way and become the sort of person they wanted me to be - the example of Clement Killeaton shows me that I was "right" all along, or at least had grasped the only means available to wriggle out of the suffocating box of childhood fears.

I associate most of the truly terrifying experiences of childhood with school. When we were children, our own legends told us that life in the "Catholic school" half a mile away was a pit of hell. They wore school uniforms, and we did not, and we heard the rumour that They were forced to spend a whole half-hour a day on Catholic religion. How, we wondered, did those poor kids survive? The answer, I was delighted to find in TAMARISK ROW, is that being taught at a Catholic parochial school in Australia is just as conformist, unstimulating, and downright boring as the years I spent being taught in an average Victorian state primary school - and that the "Catholic children" had as many doubts about us. The teachers in Clement Killeaton's school strapped the children just as hard as we were strapped, had the same reverence for silence in class and pretty pictures drawn on the blackboard, and just as keenly reduced the whole world to neat, British-Empired, and native-tribed accounts of foreign countries seen through the complacent insularity of Australian eyes. Schools have "open classrooms" these days, and at least some nine-year-olds are now allowed to speak in class without being hit across the knuckles with a ruler, but I cannot help thinking

that TAMARISK ROW will remain a more-than-adequate account of Australian schools, state and parochial, free and fee-paying, for some time to come.

The principle terrors of school lay outside the classroom. As we look through Clement's eyes, we enter a savage jungle made up of the menacing limbs of other children, a battleground where everybody might be a traitor or assailant, and the strong win all. "During all his years at St Boniface's school, Clement goes in fear of Barry Launder and his gang," is how Gerald Murnane begins the most enthralling chapter in the book, its content understated in the chapter heading, "Barry Launder and his feathered friends". The flourish at the beginning of the chapter suggests that Barry Launder is a legendary figure - omnipotent, omniscient, and very dangerous. He is all that. He's a monster more terrifying than Grimms' man-eating giants or wicked witches. "It is a common sight to see two or three feathered friends dragging a whimpering pleading offender towards the quiet corner under the cypresses behind the boys' lavatory where Launder waits, blowing gently on his knuckles to cool them if the day is hot or holding them inside his pants against his balls if the weather is cold." If a child has displeased Launder and his "feathered friends", "Launder punches with all his strength once or twice into the victim's guts until he makes the horse gasping noise that means he is winded. Sometimes the noise of the victim as he rolls on the ground draws a small solemn crowd of watchers." Launder is a gangster as cool, arbitrary, and crippling as any in a Hollywood movie.

Launder's methods reminded me of the divide-and-rule tactics of demoralisation employed by the guards in Nazi concentration camps. "(The members of Launder's gang) remember and forget in unpredictable ways. A boy may be warned as he leaves the schoolground one afternoon that the gang will half-kill him the next day. Yet if he arrives just before the bell next morning and plays incons picuously, he may well be ignored. Yet again he may be playing quietly with his own friends days later when he looks up to see two or three feathered friends sidling up to him. Their first words are a terrifying formula - remember that day son - which is meant to set the victim wondering what past crime he is about to pay for." Capricious but well-organised violence can control a whole class, even under the noses of teachers. When the Launder gang pulls off its greatest stunt ever (and I leave the awful and awe-inspiring ingenuity of the whole episode to your perusal), "The nun says she doesn't want to hear any of that nonsense about boys making other boys do certain things because no boy can make another boy do anything. She gives (all the boys) each two stinging cuts and sends them back to their class with instructions to stay in for the whole of every lunchtime for the next week." Clement and the other boys are caught between two sources of power - that of the Launders, who rule entirely by unwritten, violence-justified rules, and that of the rule-hallowed, but in many ways just as arbitrary, teachers and school authorities. The central fact of childhood is physical impotence, and Gerald Murnane shows just how its mechanism works.

Like most children, especially those who are shy by nature, Clement lacks power in his own family, except that in a family all the members mutually limit each other's powers. Augustine is as limited by the lack of influence he seems to have over his son, as Clement is limited by his inability to tell his father what he really feels and thinks. Mrs Killeaton is most trapped in the small family - her husband's debts mount, and while her son obeys her in a fairly conventional way, she fears that he will become as barmy about racing as his father.

While living in Bassett, the Killeatons find that their neighbourhood is the aspect of their lives which most sharply circumscribes their activities. As I've mentioned above, the Killeatons don't think much of their neighbours, either because they are scruffy and poor and drunken, or because they are "Protestants". Leslie Street, Bassett, comprises "a row of small houses that were built with a few feet of front yard so that the clerks and shop assistants and tradesmen who first lived in them might plant a rose or a lilac between the parlour window and the picket fence... (Augustine) picks his way along the vague track through the gravel and weeds to the back door walks into the tiny kitchen and sees the wooden table covered with blue linoleum frayed to the edges, the four unsteady wooden chairs bound around their legs with fencing wire, the pea-green wooden ice-chest with its legs resting in jar-lids full of water to keep out the ants, and the cupboard of varnished plywood where his wife keeps the remains of the only dinner-set that they have ever owned and the assortment of odd cups and saucers and plates that she buys at Coles as replacements." That's not a mere catalogue; that's my whole childhood as well. I can still remember when we could actually afford to buy a refrigerator instead of an ice-chest, long after everybody else seemed to have bought their second refrigerator, and our "only dinner-set" still served us until a few years ago. I could recount more rooms from my own memories, rooms I need not re-enter and describe, because this books talks about them so much better.

I can always trot out some story about Bishop Street, Oakleigh, the rundown weatherboard houses around which we played, the gutters on the street which were rivers of adventure to us, the street itself on which we played cricket until some car hurtled around the corner, or the small triangular park, opposite our house, where I was beaten up several times by other children. But I remember more vividly the attrition of the spirit that comes from being told during one's entire childhood that "No, you can't have that because we can't afford it." Any my parents couldn't, either, and I supect that neither

could large numbers of other parents who lived through the post-war, Menzies era. The government patted people on the head and they were told, like the British, that they had never had it so good, and would not realise until later how little the Average Australian Family of the forties and fifties had advanced beyond the Depression.

But I resort to generalisations when I think of those times; Gerald Murnane is more precise. While Augustine is surrounded by "Catholic racing men" after church one Sunday morning, Clement asks him for the money to go over the road to buy a copy of the SPORTING GLOBE (containing the racing results). Augustine is too embarrassed to show everybody that he can't really afford a paper, so he "pulls a ten-shilling note out of his pocket and hands it to his son. The boy then asks in a voice that is meant to sound innocent and girlish - can I buy myself a chocolate malted milk too please Dad? Augustine looks around at the men and says - why not - it's the bookmakers you're robbing - not me. Clement hurries to the shop across the road and asks for a chocolate malted milk and a SPORTING GLOBE. While the young woman with her apron over her Sunday Mass clothes is mixing the malted milk, Clement asks her how much that will be. She tells him - a shilling. He answers that he'd better have a sixpenny cake of fruit-and-nut chocolate too. He chews the chocolate two squares at a time on his back teeth while he sucks the cold milk and the gritty sediment of malt through his straw. As he finishes the last of the cholate his straw makes a roaring noise among the layers of sluggish bubbles at the bottom of the tall metal cup." How better to describe the sensual pleasures of fully realised wickedness! Clement knows, and Augustine knows that he knows that the loose change left over from this piece of trickery is the only money Augustine has left to take home with him. (This reminds me of the ingenious excuses we found to wheedle money from our parents to buy fish and chips, a great luxury because they were bought from a shop, not cooked at home by mum.)

But if the Killeaton's world is delapidated and poverty-stricken, it is also the world Augustine chose for himself. He lost so much money in racing that this was the only place he could bring hisbride. But we discover this through Clement's observations, even though Clement himself makes no direct judgments about the worth or otherwise of any of Augustine's actions. In this way a child can think that his parents are perfect while noting accurately all the ways in which they are not. Clement can see Augustine as alternately a clown and a hero, and he cannot communicate adequately with either.

Clement's fond observation of his father's idiosyncrasies can be quite poignant. "Augustine eats his tea with the Club racing paper spread out in front of him. As soon as the meal is finished he goes to his bedroom to put on his best suit and tie and hat. He folds the Club neatly into his inside coat pocket, checks the lead in his propelling pencil, fastens his bike clips around his shins, checks the lights on his bike, and sets out for the main streets of Bassett." The Don Quixote of the Northern Plains! In particular I like such details as checking the lead in his propelling pencil; it's the kind of thing my own father might have done, except that propelling pencils were already passe in the 1950s, and probably even at the time this novel takes place. I remember quite clearly the action of my father as he did fasten his bicycle clips around his shins; at one time he could put either me or my sisters on the back of his bicycle to ride pillion, and he rode a bike to work to save on petrol long after he bought the family car.

When Augustine rides out into Bassett to battle with the forces, holy and infernal, which control racing, he is quite precise about the armour he chooses to wear. "Augustine has always owned one expensive suit, one soft grey hat with carefully composed dents and creases and a fiery-green peacock feather in its band, and one pair of shoes with gleaming uppers, so that in the crush of the betting ring or in the open spaces of the mounting yard he appears the equal of any Goodchild or Riordan... He has travelled long distances in taxis rather than admit to some of his racing acquaintances that he has no car." Not at all similar to my own father who, although he might have said occasionally, What will the neighbours say?, never actually based any decision on their supposed opinion. (In fact, Augustine's stubborn obsessiveness sounds far more like my grandfather, who now exists only in legends.) Augustine's main desire is to impress the leading men of racing, people who are gods, the Master and his disciples, or at least representatives of a holy order, to him. "Augustine has never even considered whether he ought to live from just his wages as assistant farm manager at the Bassett Mental Asylum... He believes that there is only one place where a man with little money behind him but with more than average brains and cunning can hope to win for himself his rightful share of the wealth that he sees every day in the possession of men much less able than him... (He) has gone on trying to wrest from graziers and factory-owners and bookmakers just a little of the wealth that allows them to sit in cool houses..." In this passage, Gerald Murnane summarises what drives Augustine onwards, and again I remember much of this driving force in my own upbringing. Being strict evangelical Protestants, we Did Not Believe In Gambling. Instead, we put all Augustine's sublimated religious energies directly into our religion. We did have much the same attitude to money. The patronising rulers of the fifties and the occasional evidences of wealth reminded us that a small group did not have the right to claim a high proportion of a country's wealth. In our case, we denigrated money itself and said that the rich shouldn't have it, rather than we should. In TAMARISK ROW, Augustine never really expected to sit in those "cool houses"; none of the Gillespies ever expected to see a time when

we needn't bite our nails over money, so we still do.

It's the relationship between Clement and his parents which reminds me so much of my own childhood, rather than any special aspect of either him or them. When Clement moves from St Bonface's to the Brothers school, one of his favourite teachers, Brother Cosmas, gives Clement some comics as a present. Augustine is shocked: "I'm surprised that a religious brother approves of his pupils wasting their time with such trash." Even when I once skimmed through hundreds of the things when I was a child, comics were still not at all respectable in families with religious leanings. Comics were "worldly" and - shudder! - American. "When his parents are out of the room Clement turns his face towards the back of the couch and reads again his Devil Doone comics... He studies every line in the drawings of Devil Doone and a beautiful woman in a penthouse and even tries with a pencil to embellish the meagre, faintly disappointing, outlines and unfinished pen-strokes to help him visualise more clearly the dazzling sheets of plate-glass that keep out the least breeze from the roof garden, the elongated couches set among thickets of greenery from potted plants and piled absurdly high with satiny cushions, and the ornate cages of exotic birds and tanks of brilliant fish." During the forties and fifties comics, like American films, showed us a world that was quite different from our own. Clark Kent's Metropolis, with its skyscrapers, or Batman's Batmobile and mansion, or even Uncle Scrooge's riches made up the furniture that stocked a dream world where people need not worry about every last penny, a gleaming landscape in which they could move effortlessly, and a luxury which seemed to evade even the richest people in Australia. Everything was possible in "America", but nothing was reachable. For Clement, even the motives of the characters in the comic books are "still some secret hidden from him". In the last panel of one particular story "Devil Doone... stands on a mountain that ought to have been in the Rockies and tells a woman who has been the most evasive of all his girl-friends that she must come and look at his etchings. Clement asks his mother what etchings are. She claims she does not know. He asks his father, and Augustine wants to know where he read the word. Clement has to show him the Devil Doone comic. Augustine burns all the stories of the Devil in the stove and tells the boy to stop reading American trash and to find something worthwhile in his own bookshelf." This reminds me of the stuttering silence of my parents when I first asked, in my first version of the tradition question, "Why do ladies have babies only when they are married?" (All my childhood I thought that babies were produced by spontaneous generation, and therefore women could have them just as easily when unmarried. In our family there were no unmarried mothers - or shutgun weddings or divorces - so I was horrified to find some years later that men and women actually had to touch each other to get babies.)

We see less of Clement's mother through his eyes than we see of his father, but Mrs Killeaton becomes the staunch heroine of the book. She battles with Augustine's obsessions as surely as he battles with the Powers that control racing. But even though she hates racing so fervently, during the running of any important race, she "stands up with her face pressed against the wireless... She kneels down and makes Clement kneel beside her to pray. He repeats each few words after her to thank God for letting Augustine win enough to pay all his debts... She tells the boy how lucky he is that his father doesn't come home drunk and chase him like Mr Glassock."

By the end of the novel, Mrs Killeaton's patience has disappeared. Before the running of the most important Flemington race described in the book, "Mrs Killeaton says - are you trying to say that your friends wouldn't trust you after all these years when you've been running messages for them all over Victoria? and come to think of it when is Mr Goodchild going to send you the money that you had on for him last week - it strikes me he's got a lot more to be embarrassed about than you if you ring him. Augustine says - you'll never understand will you?" But we get the feeling that Mrs Killeaton understands everything right throughout the novel; she senses exactly when Augustine has been double-crossed by his racing colleagues; she knew all along that the horse Sternie would be a failure; although she hopes against hope, she sees through all of Augustine's self-delusions and is frightened by the evidence she sees that Clement might have imitated the same obsessions. When Augustine's dream horse loses, "Mrs Killeaton laughs with an odd cackling sound and gets up to leave the room. At the door she turns and says to her husband - there's just one favour I want to ask you - I want you to sit down now with a pencil and paper and work out to the last penny just how much we owe everybody in this town." The failure which Augustine won't admit to himself strikes his wife directly. If she speaks like a shrew through much of the novel, she has every reason to. When she and Augustine were married, he forced her to become a Catholic. Jean Killeaton, then a shy country girl who (it seems) married the first man who asked her, "whispers that now she is a proper Catholic they can go to the same heaven at last." Augustine makes sure of that; he takes her to Communion every day of their honeymoon! By the period when the novel takes place, the sun and wind have sharpened Jean Killeaton's voice, made her resilient as the tamarisk themselves, and Augustine's antics and obsessions have sealed her into a hell more tormenting than any her new religion could have described to her. Many Australian housewives might recognise their positions as much like hers.

If Augustine Killeaton is a Don Quixote, then he must seem like a clown. And we see him as one because of the impenetrable barrier of incomprehension that divides father and son, and husband and wife. Clement never laughs directly

at his father; he just observes and listens to him. "Clement has known for a long time that his father is very different from the fathers of other boys he knows. Augustine's telephone conversations with important men in Melbourne, the many Saturdays when he is away from early morning until late at night, the great wealth of racing knowledge that keeps him continually frowning into the distance during meals or sitting at his desk in the evening... - all these remind Clement that he must not expect his father to play cricket in the backyard as Mr Glasscock does or to take his wife and son out walking on Sunday afternoons or to have friends who might come to visit them on Sunday nights or to listen to the wireless for more than a few minutes without tapping a pencil against his teeth or crossing his legs and swinging his feet restlessly to and fro or reaching for a piece of paper to scribble on or going down the street to make a phone call." Clement takes it as an absolute that his father is different from other boys' fathers. He sees the fact with that clear-sighted lack of acrimony which is one of the qualities I like most in this book. But the racing men of Melbourne are important only to Augustine; they cheat him continually, and probably in Melbourne they are regarded merely as cheap crooks. Augustine's "great wealth of racing knowledge" does not stop his debts mounting, does not support his faith in Sternie, and completely lets him down when he faces the crucial race which might have saved him. The heart-breaking "joke" is that the point of Augustine's strange activity is not really racing but the liberty to "continually frown into the distance during meals"; the excuse to evade communication with his own family. "Clement understands that his father's racing business is the reason why Augustine has never been with his wife to the pictures since they were married, why he never learned to dance as a young man, and why he never brings home a bottle of beer or wastes his money on cigarettes or tobacco like ordinary men." If humour is a scalpel, Gerald Murnane slices to the bone with those last three words. Clement won't admit that he would like his father to be just a bit more "like ordinary men", that his father's restrictions leave him feeling very lonely although he won't admit it, and that his mother has been treated insensitively for all her married life. In one sense, Augustine is too stupid to take part in the "real world"; in other parts of the book he is too intelligent for his peers and the baroque inventions of his imagination leave us delighted and awed. He is a genuine accentric, with all the faults and strengths that term implies.

On this particular night, Augustine actually consents to go with his wife and child to see a movie. While Clement avidly watches the first feature, the first movie he has ever seen, "Augustine whispers to his wife that he won't be long but he has just remembered a phone call that he has to make and he thinks he'd better save his eyes for The Sullivans because the film they're watching now is pretty dry." I find the notion of Augustine "saving his eyes" very funny in the same way as many other deadpan details in the novel are very funny. While watching the beginning of the main feature, THE SULLIVANS, "Clement...decides that the Killeaton family, whose quarrels last for days, leads a life so different from the true American life that it would be useless to try to learn any lessons from the Sullivans." Again the scalpel; in one sentence, Gerald Murnane allows Clement's naivety to expose the brooding, incoherent tensions which divide families and the cliches of forties American movies which Australians eventually began to believe. Augustine's reaction to the entire film is "Don't worry about them son - it was only a story that some Yanks made up."

Meanwhile, Clement watches THE SULLIVANS very carefully. His conclusions would have puzzled any one of the millions of its other viewers, then or since. The Sullivans' sons go off to war and are killed. Clement does not weep for them, for for their father who is left behind. Mr Sullivan drives a "train" around a city (I take it that Clement has simply never seen a tram before), even after all his sons have been killed. "Clement decides that Mr Sullivan is the real hero of the film... Clement's throat and nose fill up with a great load of tears and snot for the sake of the tired old lonely man who still looks around the same old city for some place that he can stare at and believe that all his life he was driving his train towards a view of something marvellous that no one else had discovered." Clement, at the age of nine, feels sympathy for someone who is condemned to stay alive - and in this way shows that he is not just another ordinary little boy and that Clement cannot describe his viewpoint to his father because his unique thoughts - what I call "Clementisms" - cannot be told to anyone. If Augustine is an eccentric - off centre - then Clement is an epicentre, hidden so deep under the crust of ordinary existence that we can discover him only in the pages of this novel.

II TAMARISK ROW

"Parenthood is a gift. Few women make good mothers and few men make good fathers. Most parents find this out eventually and most children find it out right away." With his usual admirable precision, Gore Vidal recently summarised a perception which illuminates TAMARISK ROW's most easily engaging sections. Read at one level, this is What The Book Is All About. What Clement "found out right away" is what attracted me most immediately to the novel, so I have concentrated on what TAMARISK ROW means to me. If it had not matched my own recollections of childhood and engaged my emotions so completely, I might not have taken the trouble to discover more. For the range of TAMARISK ROW's explorations extends far beyond the tiny backyards of individual childhoods; it dares to stride into territories of which few other

authors have scouted the borders.

Everything I have said so far has suggested that TAMARISK ROW is merely another example of the Australian realist novel, despite the accuracy of its observation of people and a lost era, and the wandering structures of the sentences. We've had our recollected or fictionalised childhoods before - in fact, they seem to form much of Australian fiction since the turn of the century. We've also had our tales of bullockies, explorers, wild animals, and rugged adolescences fought out in depression-stricken cities. Laconic, gutsy, easy to read, and submerged in dusty and sweat - these are some of the distinguishing characteristics of the type of novel TAMARISK ROW might have been. But if it had been, I wouldn't be discussing it here.

So far, I've gone to some trouble to imply that TAMARISK ROW is a continuous narrative, and that most of its yarns concern racing, schools,, and the type of detailed nostalgia which has recently appeared in such movies as AMERICAN GRAFFITI. In fact, if you start the book at page 1 and try to find the Gripping Story, you will stop short. "If you could fill each square on a calendar with a picture instead of a number," reads the Author's Note, "and if each picture could show clearly some event or landscape or recollection or dream that made each day memorable, then after a long time and from a great distance the hundreds of pictures might rearrange themselves to form surprising patterns. TAMARISK ROW is such a pattern."

So, from the beginning of the novel, the author tells us clearly that TAMARISK ROW should be taken as a metaphor, not a narrative; it is a pattern, not a straight beam of light. Moreover, he introduces the book with what I find the most difficult metaphor of them all, the calendar which Clement and his father are looking at on page 1. "The first page of the calendar is headed January 1940 and has a picture of Jesus and his parents resting on their journey from Palestine to Egypt." The rest of the novel supplies implications to this sentimental, Missionary Society image, but does not mention the image itself again until the last pages (although many other metaphors refer to calendars or patterns of squares). The squares of the calendar are all in yellow, a colour which picks up a whole palette of meanings as the book proceeds. At this point, we cannot see any point to the image, especially as immediately it refracts into a series of seeming fragments. Why, for instance, does the "boy-hero" of their religion look out across journeys of people the size of fly-specks across paper the colour of sunlight in years he can never forget."? Who are these people? What can a mere thirty-one squares represent?

Although the author keeps flashing incongruous images and sensations at the unwary reader, he does introduce Clement and Augustine Killeaton on the first page, and at least lets us know that most of the novel will concern Clement. So at once we begin to ask questions about Clement. Why is he so curious about Mr Wallace's aviary and pulling a girl's pants down? At the age of nine? What is the strange game he is playing? Why does he gather a small bundle of sticks and smooth the earth in the backyard of 42 Leslie Street and mark out "an elliptical shape with two straight sides"? "Just before his mother calls him inside for the night he scratches with his fingernails in the hard-packed earth at the edge of his cleared place, shaping the first few yards of a road that will lead from the racecourse under the lilac tree, by way of leisurely loops and confusing junctions, past many unkempt shrubs and through tangles of weeds to the farthest corner where the tamarisks lean." As happens so often in TAMARISK ROW, we learn what Clement is doing without being told what he means to be doing. Why "leisurely loops and confusing junctions"? Is this how Clement means to set out these paths in the earth, or is this an observation by the author of the child's unconscious playing? So early in the novel, Gerald Murnane has established the book's unique style, which describes in detail events and possibilities without revealing fixed meanings or directions. Follow the lead of my sentences, he seems to be saying, and you will find my meaning, but only when I show it to you.

By the end of the section titled "Clement builds a racecourse", we still do not know exactly what he was doing or why. Instead, he discovers a marble in the sand. The next section seems to set off in quite a different direction. Clement conceals farmhouses behind the tamarisks in the backyard. He has pushed into the soil small blocks which he pretends are farmhouses. And who are "the people who... chose the row of tamarisks because (they) can endure the fiercest heat and the driest desert soils, and how people who are setting out to cross desert country always know that when they have passed the last tamarisk they are entering the most desolate land of all."? Is Clement thinking of the people of Bassett? Is he inventing an elaborate metaphor for the fortunes of his own family? "The lonely place beneath the tamarisk is the farthest of all farms from the racecourse. The husband and wife who live there..." Who? Which husband and wife? Where did they come from? Are they Clement's mother and father? Who is the parish priest who talks to them about racing? "The married couple tell the priest about the horse named after their property Tamarisk Row." But Mr and Mrs Killeaton live in Bassett, not somewhere called Tamarisk Row!

Here, Gerald Murnane has adopted a technique which is familiar to readers of science fiction. As when we're reading the first pages of a novel by Philip Dick or Cordwainer Smith, TAMARISK ROW pulls enough of the rug of our normal expectations from under our literary feet for us to trip and watch our step, but does not let us fall. We begin to read much more carefully. The author has taken the risk of puzzling us too much too soon so that we will be sufficiently amazed later on.

The author does not return to the strange landscape until he has told us about Augustine's marriage, his first ventures into racing, and his ever-increasing mania for the mystique of the sport. Already we can see that racing menas much more than a sport to Augustine, but as yet we cannot assess that extra meaning. Gerald Murnane even hints, somewhat misleadingly, that Augustine's mania is merely sublimated sexuality.

We see the real vision which lights up the interior of Augustine's unworldly head when he sits on the edge of the bed and tells his son about a racecourse that encompasses all the folds of hills and prospects of plains that the boy has ever seen from high places in Bassett. At its farthest side there is still a horse, obscurely placed near the tail-end of a big field, whose rider has only just begun to urge it forward with tentative thrusts of his arms, and whose owner, if its long run from that seemingly hopeless position brings it home too late after all, will send it around still another course which reaches even farther back, whose far-flung curves and stupendous straights allow even the least likely straggler to come from behind and win, and where a race sometimes takes so long to be decided that many of the crowd who came to watch have left and are far away before the leaders come into view but the truest stayer will always win." I suspect that some time in the future, sentences like these will be called "Murnanian sentences", and that the insistent and tantalising vision of this book might be called the "Murnanian viewpoint". Augustine relates here an impossible geography whose contours elude our gaze even while we look at them, and yet somehow form a comprehensible map. How can a single racecourse "encompass all the folds of hills and prospects of plains that the boy has ever seen from high places in Bassett"? Why "all"? Is this racecourse an infinite mobius strip? Does it exist in another dimension, like something from Van Vogt? Why "ever"? How can one boy see all? Which boy remains forever in the same spot and age? We see clearly the horse near the tail end and we sense the excitement as the rider begins "to urge it forward with tentative thrusts of his arms". But Augustine stops talking about the horse and begins to describe the owner. And how can the owner send the horse around "still another course" while it still runs the race that Augustine began to describe - and what are the "far-flung curves and stupendous straights" that "allow even the least likely straggler to come from behind and win"?

Well, you might say, now I see it. It's all allegorical. Augustine is describing the Race of Life in which "the truest stayer will always win". The "still another course" is the great racecourse in the sky. Augustine is nothing but a sentimental wind-bag with a nice turn of phrase. He thinks that any horse he runs, including himself against every other person, is bound to win sometime, and that no matter how foolishly he wastes money and other people's lives, all will turn out for the best in the end. He sounds like an eschatological Mr Micawber, investing in his vision of racing and life nothing more than a fond hope that Something Will Turn Up.

There's a lot more to Augustine's profound daydreams than that; certainly enough to arouse our curiosity. But that's not the point. The important thing is that he sits down one day and talks to his son. From his father's fancies, Clement takes skerricks of ideas and creates from them the world of Tamarisk Row.

It was not until I read TAMARISK ROW four times that I realised that nearly all the "bits" of Clement's world are suggested first by Augustine. Most obviously, Clement gains his interest in horseracing and the results of chance. Clement finds in racing a grand image to summarise a whole feeling about life. When he steps into his backyard and begins to doodle in the sand, his first idea is to "build" a racecourse.

Augustine suggests, "It might be an idea if you just played with your marbles behind the lilac - you could call the marbles men and race them in heats of the Stawell Gift." Instead, Clement calls his marbles racehorses, and imagines that they are competing against each other along the racecourse of Tamarisk Row. Each "racehorse" carried a "set of coloured silks... designed by the horse's owner and his wife or girlfriend to tell the story of his life." At last we return to the mysterious people we met first in the strange landscape near the beginning of the novel. They are Clement's creations, based on all the people he has met so far during his life, and prophetic of the people he might meet during the rest of his life. The "inhabitants" of Tamarisk Row live in a world not much different from the dry despair of Bassett. "She tells him how she sat all afternoon in the lounge-room while a north wind thrust through the cracks under the doors. The sound branches sweeping the walls and windows was the only noise in all the wide space between the empty back paddocks and the road where no car passed all day." The Australian countryside during summer, caught in one sentence. Clement's creations may be phantoms, but when he looks at them he can examine his parents' sense of isolation far more effectively than when he merely observes their day-to-day lives.

Augustine keeps feeding Clement quite abstract notions. Any other child would have given an embarrassed giggle and fled. Because the local radio station, 3BT, plays many American songs, Clement becomes interested in America and studies his atlas to find the location of the American place names mentioned in the songs. (As a child I was also an Americanophile and an addict of maps. Once we based a model-railway layout, spread all over the back lawn, on a map of USA.) "His father discovers what he is doing and tells him that some of the first Killeatons in Australia were pioneers who rode out looking for land in places where there were no

crowds to cheer them on. They rode on, not needing people to watch who could not even tell which of the two places, the one that the pioneers were riding towards and the one that the watchers could turn around and go home to, was the real country and which was only a place that people watched others riding towards." I still find this image elusive, even after reading it many times. Elsewhere in the book, Augustine's view of geography is more specific. "Although the Catholic men of Ireland got to Australia as soon as they could, it was already too late and they found the same Protestant police and magistrates and landlords and wealthy shopkeepers who used to imprison and fine and rob them back in Ireland already in control of even the isolated inland places like Bassett." Perhaps this view sounds paranoic, but it's easy to see how Australians of Irish extraction, even today, could hold such a view. When I was teaching in the Victorian country town of Ararat, many of the boys who attended school had Irish surnames, had attended the Catholic primary school, and came literally from "the wrong side of the tracks". The railway line divided the town neatly into at least two social classes. Anglo-Saxon Protestants, people such as myself, were not even aware that non-migrant Australians formed anything but a "British" population. So - and I'm guessing here - I take it that Augustine believes that the Irish are heading towards a true haven, or heaven, that other Australians don't even know about. Augustine is describing to Clement a surrealistic vision: on a plain a huge crowd of people is standing in motionless groups. People stare at each other or into the middle distance, while a straggling group of persecuted people trudges past them toward a vague horizon tinged with green. The band of wanderers must strive to find a track which winds between the blind groups of the plain, who might knock over any one of the wanderers without realising it. The blissfully blind glare at the malevolently (but impotent) resigned. Like most of the more esoteric notions in this novel, it reminds me of the ideas in familiar science fiction books, particularly the watchers watching the watchers in REPORT ON PROBABILITY A.

Augustine limits his vision to narrow categories of people and possible ways of living. When Clement catches it from his father, he begins to widen and deepen it into the controlling image of the book. Clement becomes interested in all types of wanderers, including the Arabs and gipsies, and not just the Irish. "The Arabs... set out to cross hundreds of miles of country and had to turn back from wherever they were heading for towards a place where in the comfortless shade of three unlikely trees they saw a shallow pool that hardly anyone believes would ever be found in such a barren place." The Arabs can survive against all odds, but they never reach anywhere. Even the comfort of an oasis is only a rest before continuing the journey. The gipsies lead an even more hopeless existence; all other people chase them away and they can wander only along paths which no one else knows about, so they have no resting-place at all.

In the Tamarisk Row landscape, Clement changes the "wanderers" until they have quite a different function from that which Augustine gave to them. In Tamarisk Row, we found a group of people who either (a) have horses racing for them, or (b) are themselves running along the track. The people on the plain, the anonymous crowds, become the watchers of the race. However, the watchers have wagered their existences on the "horses", so they are also participants. In Clement's landscape "There is a city isolated by plains where on every day of every summer, every man, woman and child and every priest and brother and nun finds a vantage point on a long slope of trampled grass beside the straight of a racecourse where the Gold Cup race will be run... These people wait until they arrive at the course before they each choose a horse and bet a small sum that they can afford to lose. Others keep glancing up at the sky all morning and feel a keen pleasure at the thought of the long fierce afternoon to come... The horses that these people back in the Gold Cup are their own, the same ones that they have hauled home across miles of strange country and led back to their sheds late at night after races in which they have failed by one thrust of their legs to earn their connections hundreds of pounds in stakes and bets." As the Gold Cup begins, the people of Tamarisk Row feel great exhilaration and little hope. Only one of them can win this race and most of them have never won at all.

Augustine would whistle his happy tune about this: "Even the least likely straggler" can "come from behind and win, and... a race sometimes takes so long to be decided that many of the crowd who come to watch have left and are far away before the leaders come into view but the truest stayer will always win." Well, if Clement knows anything about life already, he knows quite well that the truest stayer hardly ever wins. You can never win during the Gold Cup. Instead, your favourite horse will "finish on the heels of the winner after a desperate but unlucky finishing run that perhaps only his owners will see and appreciate." A compensation, but like everything else in Clement's world, a compensation that nobody else knows about. Clement has taken Augustine's idea, thrown aside the soft outer padding of reassurance, and has begun to play with the gritty notions inside. The people of Tamarisk Row live by principles and motives which are not only hidden from each other but intrinsically cannot be revealed. The thrill of secrecy gives strength to their struggles. Their lives, like Clement's, are composed of what nobody ever knows for certain, what they couldn't tell anybody even if they did know, and what others would not want to be told about anyway.

Augustine suggests to Clement the mechanism of the Gold Cup as well as many of the elements of Tamarisk Row. Augustine devotes much time to raising Rhode Island pullets. He claims that

he knows the pedigrees of them all. He reads books on genetics so that he can improve the breed of his birds. (Actually the cocks set about the hens quite indiscriminately and with much gusto, as the book mentions from time to time.) When Clement asks, Augustine can recite a lengthy list of the pedigrees of all the hens. "Clement asks his father again to write it all down before he forgets. Augustine says again that he will never forget the important bloodlines... Clement regrets that the true history of the long ages they have spent in this and other countries will never be recorded... because no one sat down and wrote out their story." So "he sits down and writes about his marbles."

Nobody but Clement Killeaton would have applied ancestry, one of his father's main fetishes, to a set of marbles, pretending that the marbles are racehorses. Yet this conceit, worthy of a Donne or Marvell, gives Clement an image for his imaginative world and, incidentally, the idea for the book's jacket design. "The few thousands of ((marbles)) that circulate among the boys of Bassett, wherever they may have come from originally, may never be replaced or added to, so that whenever a marble is lost it diminishes the total of marbles that a boy might collect in his lifetime... For hours some evenings he dwells on the story of a single marble - how it might be older than the city of Bassett because it had been brought to Australia by early settlers from England or Ireland... and how Clement Killeaton, the one boy in all Bassett who would take proper care of it, caught sight of one faint gleam from its misty depths, prised it up from the soil, washed and dried it and thought up a name for it. At night he sits looking up at the electric light globe with a marble held close to his eye, trying to explore all the wine- or flame- or honey- or blood- or ocean- or lake- or stained-glass-coloured skies or plains where winds or clouds or ranges of hills or curls of smoke are trapped forever... in the heart of the glass..."

Clement can see the whole world and all its possibilities in a single marble. (The book cover shows a marble photographed so that it looks like the Earth photographed from space.) If each marble represents a person as well, it can include all potentialities, just as a molecule of DNA contains all the potentialities of life. All these potentialities derive from simpler elements which, through heredity, can fall into complex patterns called animals and plants. Nobody knows, or can know, the million-year-journeys each element of life took to reach its present position. As in DNA, certain colours, or elements, predominate over others to distinguish one from the other and to ensure that each marble, like each animal or plant, is different from any other. Each marble represents all its possibilities, as does each person, but can realise only a few of them at one time. Each is unique, but anonymous, like the people we meet in TAMARISK ROW. As the chapter heading reads, Clement does "see wonderful things in marbles."

The marbles actually "run" the Gold Cup. Clement "pours out the sixteen chosen marbles onto the mat and arranges them in a neat line. He lowers a length of timber into place behind the line of marbles and fixes his eyes on the wall at the far end of the room. Carefully, and without once lowering his eyes towards the marbles, he slides the timber back from the line then moves it forward again with enough force to send the sixteen rolling forward along the mat. ...All sixteen form a loosely bunched mass with several already clearly ahead just as a field of horses appears at the end of the first furlong of a long race. Still without looking at the marbles, he touches them one by one and discovers with a thrill of pleasure that three of them are loosely spaced ahead of the main bunch while two others are clearly tailed off." So the race upon which so much depends does not operate simply upon Clement's wish fulfillment. Like the outside world, this world runs on chance, the laws of physics, or whatever else makes life risky but interesting. This physical mechanism makes something really happen, but only Clement can see what these happenings mean. (I remember that I became just as excited when I used to annotate hit parades, of all things. As in horseraces, the entries on the hit parade compete with each other for a set number of positions, and only one can "reach the top" each week. I calculated my own hit parade by adding together lists from all the radio stations and lots of magazines. At the end of each week I compiled the points, placed a piece of paper over the names of the "competitors", and found which had the highest number of points, which the second highest, and so on down to 40. Then I removed the piece of paper and read off the new list, looking for surprise shifts of position and new entries. Like the Gold Cup, it was a system where the results were important to the person who invented the system, but whose results could not be predicted by that person. According to the Biblical story, that's exactly how the original Creation was set up.)

So Tamarisk Row is a severe country. Its creator cannot influence it even as far as a chess or bridge player can influence games of chess or bridge. Events in Tamarisk Row have more significance than the results of games of pure chance, for in Clement's mind the players are real people with real sufferings and pleasures. From Augustine's fertile but disorganised suggestions, Clement has begun to construct a landscape which has meaning, fertility, but no easy reassurance. It is not an "alternate universe" or that kind of cosy wonderland that, in many children's fantasies, would lie just beyond the tamarisks. So far I've tried to show that it is a kind of universe-in-the-mind, but in the mind of someone quite aware of everything outside his own mind:

> Mr McCormack sees Clement resting on his haunches beside a road that he has smoothed with his hands in the dirt, and says he'll stay outside and talk to the boy for a while. When Clement learns that

> the man is a relation of his father, he confides to him the true meaning of his system of roads and farms. He explains to the man how the network extends all along the least-used side of the backyard, how each of the dozens of properties forms a pattern of paddocks from any single one of which a man who stood there staring outwards might see a view, across fences and trees towards a stretch of road, different from any other that another man might see and so singular that even the boy who laid out the whole system can never properly appreciate it, even when he lies down on his belly and puts his face as near as he can to the place where the man might stand, and how each man who stood looking outwards across his own unique view of paddocks might believe all his life that somewhere, far out of sight, the great tracery of fences and roads came to an end and wonder what other country began there while the boy who arranged the whole pattern knows that if only he could break down the fences between fifty or a hundred of the yards in that one small part of Bassett that he knows he might lay out such a country that none of its inhabitants would discover in his lifetime any end to it.

This is how Clement replies when a cousin of his father's, a grazier from the Western District, sees him playing in the dirt and asks him to explain his game. This is the most we ever see of Clement's complete notion of Tamarisk Row.

The most obvious feature of Clement's explanation - and the feature of the whole book which puzzles me most - is that it comprises a single sentence, nearly half a printed page in the book. (Some of the book's sentences are as long as a page each.) This is not the kind of rambling sentence, connected by endless "ands", which appears frequently in nineteenth-century novels. Instead, it is a string of subsidiary sections, each of which changes the meaning of the whole sentence, but together leading back to the original statement. Clement's "system of roads and farms...extend all along the least-used side of the backyard." We find the two contrasting notions of miniaturisation and hugeness which dominate Clement's other accounts of Tamarisk Row. After "a pattern of paddocks", the sentences walk off in a new, distracting direction. The scale of the landscape expands eye-blinkingly fast. Clement is no longer a boy smoothing the dirt with his hands under the tamarisks. He sees "a view... different from any other that another man might see." We rediscover the landscape of isolated figures standing still, looking past each other, each unable to take his eyes off a grand view which is not the same as any other isolated figure sees.

The sentence subtly changes direction again. Now it springs away from the word "view" instead of "pattern of paddocks". Nobody can completely appreciate the vista of Tamarisk Row, not even "the boy who laid out the whole system". He can explore it only if he "lies down on his belly and puts his face as near as he can to the place where the man might stand." It is a vista which only a child can see, and another reminder that TAMARISK ROW shows us the whole world from a child's-eye viewpoint. An adult cannot see this view because he or she rarely crouches close enough to the ground. Clement, looking upwards and outwards from his own perspective, imagines that each inhabitant of Tamarisk Row has "his own unique view of paddocks" which itself can change into something else. He might "wonder what other country" began at the horizon; like Clement, the watchers want to find that unthinkable, as-yet-unglimpsed other universe, "such a country that none of its inhabitants would discover in his lifetime any end of it". For this reason above all, it can exist only in the mind. It could lie at an infinite distance, or it could be around the next corner. Only the person watching for it would see it. One might find it, for instance, simply by breaking through some fences. Physically, Clement can do this, because he built the fences, but he wants so much for other people of Bassett to see the view as well. No physical action of his can automatically show them what he sees.

This miniature world, seen from the right angle, is awe-inspriing. But its materials of construction, the sentences of the book itself, are just as intriguing. Gerald once described how he composed them. He would write down the stem of each sentence, followed by a series of alternate subisidiary clauses, each enclosed within brackets. He would move around the bracketed clauses until he had composed a complete sentence in which each part followed each other meaningfully and grammatically. Then he would delete the brackets and leave exposed the complete structure.

But this information does not answer the real question - what is the artistic justification for such long, exasperating sentences? How should one speak them? Should the reader gabble them as if they were the breathless outpourings of a child? I doubt it, because in some passages Gerald deliberately makes the prose sound gabbled, as when Clement pretends to be a radio racecaster. However, Gerald Murnane did write for children for some years, and parts of the novel, especially the school episodes, have all the superficial characteristics of children's fiction - concrete rather than abstract words, unambiguous syntax, and no Latinisms. Many of the longer sentences gain great power because they generate abstract meanings from very simple elements. But children usually speak in short bursts of sound, not page-long sentences, and this is a book about a child, not a book for children. No answer here.

I cannot believe that any nine-year-old can formulate his ideas as intensely and precisely as Clement seems to. Also, parts of the novel show a direct knowledge of life in Bassett and

of events in Augustine's life which Clement could not have had. Despite appearances, Clement does not speak directly to us. Just as everything we know about Augustine is supposedly information Clement must have overheard, guessed at, or have been told, so everything Clement perceives is refined by the author as material for a piece of art. (This point may sound banal, but in many passages of the book we really begin to think we are listening to a telepathic broadcast from the inside of Clement's head.) So what is the author trying to do? One newspaper reviewer wrote that TAMARISK ROW reminded him of James Joyce; so should we read the novel in the elevated, droning tone of voice which boring English lecturers seem to reserve for the works of Gaelic poets and James Joyce? Not so, if I've read the book correctly. Everything here emphasises the dry, corner-of-the-mouth, understated Australian accent. People of Irish extraction in Australia do not speak with Irish accents. To suppress any rumours, I must say that Gerald Murnane did not write the long sentences under the influence of Proust: he had not read REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST when he wrote TAMARISK ROW.

I know that I'm being unduly exasperating in the way I'm conducting this investigation. Still no answers. However, I know few of the answers to this book's most intruguing puzzles, although I enjoy looking for the answers. So I'll put myself out on a limb and invent a fairly shaky hypothesis about the form of the novel.

I found a clue for my hypothesis in a phrase from a passage which I've looked at already. At the beginning of the novel, when Clement first "builds" the racecourse in the backyard "he scratches with his fingernails in the hard-packed earth at the edge of his cleared space, shaping the first few yards of a road that will lead from a racecourse under the lilac tree, by way of leisurely loops and confusing junctions, past many unkempt shrubs and through tangles of weeds to the farthest corner where the tamarisks lean." Those leisurely loops and confusing junctions! - a great phrase. My theory is that Gerald Murnane has constructed the book like the long, devious racecourse described in the book. The reader must race along between the fences of the sentences. He must follow the path set before him, but cannot evaluate the landscape which has flashed past until he has finished the race. By the time the reader has completed each "race" - has finished each long sentence - he has followed all the turns and deviations of a course that appears more like a mobius strip or maze than the simple straights and turns of a Flemington Racecourse. It's the style of TAMARISK ROW, as much as Clement's ideas, which most effectively lines up the book's characters and readers in a long, gruelling, exciting race, and evaluates their positions at every turn.

But if these racecourses look like mazes, why shouldn't the author have directly modelled the sentences on labyrinths or mazes? If you reread the account of Tamarisk Row which Clement tells to the Western District grazier, you will find that the sense of the sentence not only strays far from the original premise, but also returns to it. This sentence, like many in the book, is like a picture maze, where one begins to draw a line at point A, follows the pattern through the whole, long maze, and discovers that after such a long journey, the solution point of the maze is right next to the point of entry. Paradoxes and puzzles in the prose show yet more clearly Clement's elusive world.

III STRANGE CREATURES IN COLOURED GLASS

No matter how much I write about TAMARISK ROW, I'm still conscious that I've said very little about it. One really needs an essay as long as the novel itself.

So far I've discussed only two central aspects of the book: its value as a redeemer of an Australian childhood; and some of the ways in which it draws the contours of a map of the landscape of an intricate, imaginary country. I have not even said everything I wanted to say about Tamarisk Row! I haven't written enough about its principle of secrecy. For instance, Clement's mother forbids him to play games connected with horseracing because she is afraid that he will grow up as obsessed as his father. Therefore Clement uses tiny sticks and the faintest traces of paths in the dust to mark out the racecourse and paddocks of the landscape in his backyard. Anybody else, such as his mother and his father's cousin, to whom he described it, should never know it is there. Later, when Barry Launder, of all people, jumps into the Killeatons' backyard from the house behind, Clement is so frightened by this invasion of privacy that he reduces the visible signs of his creation even further so that "the only farms and roads that he can safely build will be tiny lumps and faint reads... absurdly small." From now on he must follow the journeys of the inhabitants "without plucking out a single weed or altering the lie of the least patch of dust."

So far in this essay I've failed to point out just how few of the book's pages actually describe Tamarisk Row. In fact, most of the book is about everything else in Clement's life - but shows that he sees everything else in much the same way. In his penetrating review in NATION REVIEW, John Tittensor writes of "Dreary Bassett, unknowing host to Clement Killeaton's extraord9nary, lifesaving vision". Clement's mind is the only oasis of creative thought in this pitilessly dry physical and mental environment. Certainly, he taps the reservoir of his father's notions, but only Clement can make these notions spring upwards into a lifegiving fountain.

Seen in isolation, some of Clement's notions are so bizarre that I call them "Clementisms". I've discussed already the most striking

example in the book, the episode when the Killeaton family visits the local cinema to see THE SULLIVANS. To me it seems a great joke that Hollywood film-makers should have gone to so much effort to wring a tear out of the death of the Sullivans' sons only to have a boy in Bassett weep about the fate of their father who is left behind.

While Clement is taking tests at school, the teacher writes the average results for all the tests each boy has taken so far on the blackboard. Clement imagines that the changing averages are changing positions in a race. He makes his winning run too early in the "race", fails an art test and so slips behind, and desperately tries to win on the final test. But "Maggs won by only two marks from Killeaton who almost caught him at the finish." (I used to make the same calculations about exam averages, but ended up about fourth in any class. I really enjoyed finding that somebody else could recall doing the same thing.) The Clementism appears in the final sentence: "Clement realises that no one but himself will know the true story of his great finish and decides that perhaps the best way to run a race is to lead all the way and go further ahead the further the race goes on."

My favourite Clementism is Clement's reaction when Brother Cosmas visits the Killeatons to give Clement, who has been ill, some fruit and those Devil Doone comics I discussed earlier. "Mrs Killeaton is embarrassed because the house is untidy and Clement is ashamed that the house is so simply designed that merely by walking into the front passage Brother Cosmas can see where all the rooms are and could not suspect that other rooms might lie hidden from his sight."

Clement Killeaton, like most children, looks right through the cliches which most people advance as original thoughts. He takes words for what they say, and ignores what others want them to mean. Because he is an only, exceptionally isolated child, he does not share the alternative language of kids' cliches. Clement sees things differently simply because often he must invent his own language and ideals for behaviour.

So he does not need to think about racecourses to see things uniquely. He needs only to sit in the hall at home and look out through the front door. "When the sun is low in the sky west of Bassett, a peculiar light shines in the panel of greenish-gold glass in the Killeatons' front door." In the light, Clement sees "creatures neither green nor gold but more richly coloured than any grass or sun." The panel of glass breaks up the light so that it looks like a landscape as multifaceted as that of Tamarisk Row. There Clement sees "cities of unpredictable shapes and colours" and "plains of fiery haze". Its "inhabitants flee towards promises of other plains." Clement just misses seeing, darting among the light shapes, "a creature" which "keeps the boy watching and hoping... he sees it waver and flicker and has to narrow his eyes and tilt his head but cannot see it across those last slopes or cliffs and loses sight of it."

This first passage about the "strange creatures in coloured glass" contains one of the few places where Gerald Murnane squeezes out the essence of everything else in the book:

> While Clement watches the creatures, the sun moves away from Bassett but not before it has exposed across every plain and beneath every hill and through every city and within every creature, and even perhaps in the inaccessible region beyond all countries, streaks or tinges of a colour that none of the creatures seems to have seen although it alone might easily obliterate them all and countries they love. As the very last light leaves his front door the boy realises that if only the creatures had discovered this colour things might have gone differently with their journeys.

As in all the passages about Tamarisk Row itself, this extract contains all the strains and paradoxes implied in a conflict between potentiality and impotence, between infinite space and the limited individual path, between waht might be and what is. Clement can never quite catch sight of those "streaks or tinges of a colour that none of the creatures seems to have seen." Even while he looks, "the sun moves away from Bassett." Clement keeps looking for a something which he cannot describe. Would it transform his life or "obliterate them all"? If "things might have gone differently", would the change in direction have shown the creatures something greater, or merely something different? Clement keeps searching for some kind of truth, or at least a colour that gives a clue to the truth. He even keeps looking though he, unlike his father, never really expects to find the truth.

Just what is Clement looking for? Is he looking for God, as in all those tedious allegorical novels? Before I can even make an informed guess about the answer to this question, I must reach back to the beginning of this essay, and re-examine the relationship between Clement and his father. Augustine named Clement after Clementia, the only one of his racehorses which ever won a race. (Immediately afterward, it went lame and had to be destroyed.) Augustine concentrates his eccentric genius into his view of religion, which he tries to describe to Clement. Racing is a major part of Augustine's religion: Augustine performs errands for Len Goodchild, a man he calls The Master, although his blessing is more like Judas' than Christ's. Irish Catholic transcendentalism forms most of the rest of Augustine's religion. In one strange passage in the original version of TAMARISK ROW, Augustine has a dream in which he ascends into a heaven where he passes a pageant of Irish saints, various green-coloured religious objects, and picture-postcard angels. Augustine

believes in a heaven somewhere at the end of life's long run. Something will turn up for Augustine, if only after death.

As we might expect by now, Clement's religious wonderings are far more sceptical. The Arabs and the gipsies, who represent humanity's lifetime journeys, never actually arrive anywhere. Although they find occasional resting places, they must always leave one place and proceed to another. In one of the book's great passages (headed "Clement sees no mystery in the Western district") Clement actually contrasts his own religious views with those of his father. He thinks of the metaphor of the calendar, introduced on page 1, and decides that Augustine's religious search is "but a journey across a great grid of perfectly regular angles and interstices whose only mystery was that they seemed to stretch back so far in a uniform sequence beyond the place that Augustine called the true end of it all, with still only the overhanging scenes of holy people in dim countries to distinguish any row of rows from any others." Truly Clementian to the last, he sees that conventional religious scenery, in which Augustine sees the "true end of it all", may give comfort but remains only scenery, its bits cut out of pretty paper.

Clement is looking for "any gap through which a traveller might wander into the other squares that surely lay somewhere only a little apart from the yellow squares..." This is the same gap through which he tries to see "that other huge watchful figure" in the coloured glass, or the secrets of Margaret Wallace's aviary, or the hills beyond the paddocks in Tamarisk Row. What are these "other squares"? In science-fictional terms, they are alternative universes, simultaneous with and right next door to our own, but unreachable. S f writers have reduced this concept to a cliche, but, re-invented by Clement, its excitement returns. Not only Augustine, but most people Clement meets, think in "grids of perfectly regular angles and interstiches". Each of these grids is different from the other, so each person's view of the world, or religious viewpoint, is different from every other person's. Clement is looking for the gap between them all, where he might catch just a glimpse of something nobody else ever saw.

No, Clement is not looking for God, or even a god. He is looking for a being, an idea, or merely a flash of colour which can show something far more interesting. He is, if I dare say it, looking for something as simple as love. Or for himself.

Because, although Clement has a "lifesaving vision", it remains bleak, even in its most romantic manifestations. Clement is forced to give life to a world that lacks love and generosity. Their lives prevent his parents from expressing love to each other or to Clement. Tamarisk Row is the way Clement tries to show his love for his father, who does not recognise any direct gesture of affection. Because he is so isolated, Clement burrows into the twists and turns of his own mind, and finds there a metaphor for all the feelings he cannot express, the thoughts he cannot speak, and the actions he cannot carry out. He has an obsession with discovering the topography of the most alien territory of all - the space between a girl's legs. He has no brothers or sisters, so the most common aspects of life remain most alien. Like most children, he cannot imagine that he will grow up or beyond the bounds of Bassett, so it's possible that if he travels far enough in Tamarisk Row, he will discover the older version of himself who will be able to love and be loved. To me, that is the real secret promise of TAMARISK ROW - that Clement, like all of us, has the power to explore, reach the limits of, and step beyond the only real landscape any of us has - his own inexhaustible self.

APPENDIX — TWO OR THREE MORE THINGS I WANT TO SAY ABOUT TAMARISK ROW

Well, that was the end of my essay, and I said about a quarter of what I had planned to say. Now I had better set down a few things which need to be written about TAMARISK ROW and its author, things you may not find anywhere else.

Is Clement Killeaton really Gerald Murnane? This is the sort of question which readers-who-know-the-author always ask the author, only to receive the usual noncommittal answers. Of course Clement Killeaton "is" Gerald Murnane, and of course he could not possibly be. Gerald has two brothers and a sister, for instance, but much in the novel depends on the fact that Clement Killeaton is an only child. Gerald himself has said that TAMARISK ROW contains not a record of events as they were, but events as they might have been. Similarly, the casual traveller in Victoria will recognise the city of Bassett and even some of the streets and people, but I doubt whether this will help them read the book more carefully.

For one thing, Heinemann's TAMARISK ROW is not the TAMARISK ROW which I first read. The published version is one third shorter than the original. I read the original 160,000-word manuscript more than two years ago, and I still reserve my greatest affections for that sprawling, confusing version of the book. It is interesting that Gerald's overall intentions were much clearer in the original version because the first section was nearly incomprehensible. It contained no visible plot until the section now marked "Barry Launder and his feathered friends". The first sections wandered backwards and forwards between the lives of Clement, Augustine, Jean, Augustine's father and grandfather, and some of the other characters. In other words, the original TAMARISK ROW was more obviously a pattern. I'm told that it was planned as a mandala of isolated incidents, each out of chronological order, each contributing to the overall novel rather than to any

particular story-line. The original TAMARISK ROW reminded me most of the best stories published in NEW WORLDS, especially Langdon Jones' THE TIME MACHINE or Aldiss' BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD stories. Now it is a much more approachable book, but also simpler and less breathtaking. The original TAMARISK ROW read more like a medieval myth than does the current version. Gerald showed clearly that everybody lives in his or her own world; these worlds do not necessarily (or often) intersect and even the points of intersection (or common human sympathy) look different to each person who views them. Even more than in the present version, the original version is filled with the romanticism of scepticism.

Even the original TAMARISK ROW was the first complete manuscript of a novel which had had at least five earlier versions. In effect, it has been ten years in the making. Perhaps this point will not interest anybody but literary historians, but I'm reassured to find that if an author has something to say, no matter how elusive the original idea, eventually he or she will find some way of saying it. I hope that Gerald's second novel does not take another ten years to write.

This essay is appearing in S F COMMENTARY because I'm interested in speculative fiction, not just science fiction. I seek out examples of the novel of ideas, no matter which form these examples take. TAMARISK ROW is one of the best novels of speculative fiction I've read. Many of its concepts remind me of those I find in Brian Aldiss' REPORT ON PROBABILITY A or BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD, or in Phil Dick's books. The structure of TAMARISK ROW is a lot like that of Christopher Priest's FUGUE FOR A DARKENING ISLAND, and its "landscapes of the mind" remind me of INVERTED WORLD. In that book, Chris Priest's main character lives in a material world based on an intellectual concept, which does not mean that he can escape his world simply by finding a different way of thinking. Priest's travelling city travels in the "space between the squares" of conventional views of the world.

But TAMARISK ROW is not genre science fiction or fantasy. It's wider than that, and I took some trouble to discover just how. Neitsche defined originality as "Not that one is the first to see something new, but that one sees as new what is old, long familiar, seen and overlooked by everybody." That certainly fits TAMARISK ROW. S f authors, on the other hand, search for objects which are intrinsically new. They found many during the early days of the genre, but now they have worked out that particular mine shaft. Larry Niven seems to be one of the few writers with new tricks, but he can't write well enough about them in first place, and everybody else dips into his ideas before his ink is dry. Forced to sift through the sand of already exhausted mines, s f writers have stopped giving a shine to even those bits and pieces they still find. In terms of TAMARISK ROW, they lack the ability to invent Clementisms - the ability to see the newness in immediate objects which everybody else has taken for granted. Gerald Murnane acknowledges as one of his major influences Robert Musil, who writes in his book THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES, "In the whole world there were only a few dozen people who thought alike about even as simple a thing as water... So it must be said that if a man just starts thinking a bit he gets into what one might call pretty disorderly company." Into the company of seers like Clement Killeaton, for instance.

The difference between TAMARISK ROW and s f lies in different interpretations of the word "imagination". When I began planning this essay, I remembered that someone, somewhere had once made some useful distinction about different meanings of the word. Where? When? I remembered that I had once heard one of my lecturers in English point out that imagination is the power to make images. It struck me that most s f writers do not take the trouble to make images of - to imagine - their ideas, so interesting abstractions remain abstracted. I spent nearly a week trying to find the passage referred to by that lecturer. He had delivered the lecture as part of English II at Melbourne University in 1966. Whatever the passage was, I knew I had never re-read it since then. At first I looked through my notes on MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES. I found some great aphorisms (several to each page) but no actual examination of the imagination. Surely in Proust! He said something illuminating about everything else. I looked through my annotations to REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST - but still no luck. During the same week I was reading Mary Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN as preparation for reviewing Brian Aldiss' FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND. In the edition I was reading, Harold Bloom's Afterword mentions in passing the personal association between the Shelleys and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Of course, that was where it was!

So I looked up Coleridge's BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA, which had been gathering dust since 1966 and found, at the end of chapter XIII, Coleridge's famous analysis of the Imagination:

> The IMAGINATION then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a reptition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where the process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

> FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space... The Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.

Coleridge's "primary imagination" is, I take it, simply the power to perceive at all (this section follows a long and illuminating examination of the whole history of Western philosophy). TAMARISK ROW is a work of Coleridge's "secondary imagination". Certainly it "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates" perceived phenomena "in order to re-create". Clement looks right through every conventional aspect of life, sees their "true" elements, and rebuilds them into new structures. The artist creates new patterns from separate, seemingly random objects and ideas. He sees, as many s f writers do not, that "all objects ((as objects)) are essentially fixed and dead". Spaceships or DNA or alternate worlds have no intrinsic artistic value, except as the artist makes them valuable. Without the life of the imagination, they remain grotesque, dead twigs.

To my regret, I find that most science fiction and fantasy fits only Coleridge's definition of the "fancy". Coleridge uses the term "fixities and definites" for the word I use usually - cliche - and which Stanislaw Lem calls "trash". S f fails because it accepts those aspects of itself which are most questionable. It has assembled a huge heap of predictable cliches, most of which were unsound in the first place but exciting to think about for awhile. Now they have rusted into useless mechanical scrap. "Fancy" can only reproduce itself; it cannot generate anything new or see anything new in what exists.

I think s f writers could learn a lot from a book like TAMARISK ROW, but I don't think they will. S f readers could learn much more from reading TAMARISK ROW as well as more standard speculative fiction. TAMARISK ROW still has more in common with THE FARTHEST SHORE (a book I liked better than TAMARISK ROW), INVERTED WORLD - or THE TIN DRUM - than it has with dozens of boring social comedies which are still published as novels. I enjoyed reading, then exploring, TAMARISK ROW because it has so much more than other books of that elusive visionary quality which I always want to find in any form of art. My explorations took me along paths I did not realise existed, and I've tried to tell you about those paths. There are plenty more which I haven't had room to mention. In Clement Killeaton's patterns I found "a view of something marvellous that no one else had discovered."

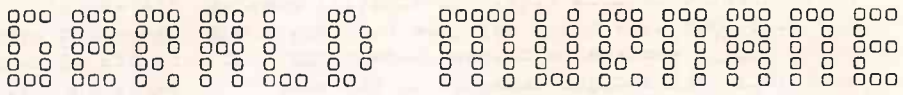
- Bruce Gillespie December 1974

RE-VISIONS - Continued from page 18

particular people around him.) Unlike Frankenstein, Walton is able to reconcile the drives in his nature and draw back in time. Frankenstein cannot. His last words illustrate the unresolved contradiction in hissoul, as he advises Walton to "seek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (page 215).

If I have flattened out FRANKENSTEIN into a safe, dead allegory, I apologise. It is a rough, imperfect work, not at all neatly programmatic. But it is alive. No matter what other, shinier monsters have lumbered after us lately, FRANKENSTEIN grips us with real terror, the dread of what we held monstrous in ourselves. It leaps at us unexpectedly. Frankenstein comments that "my heart overflowed with kindness, and the love of virtue, I have begun life with benevolent intentions and thirsted for the moment when I should put them into practice, and make myself useful to my follow beings. Now all was blasted" (page 85). The monster echoes, "'Once my fancy was soothed with dreams of virtue, of fame, and of enjoyment. Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings, who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of bringing forth. I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion'" (page 219). Something has gone wrong. How could we have known our actions would lead to this? How could it be our fault? Yet... Our dreams are broken, our lives laid waste, and we cannot save ourselves because the key is too close to see and too mortally painful to grasp. Considering the case of Justine, falsely condemned by superficial human justice because of the monster's incredibly skilful revenging impulses, Frankenstein's father says, "'Indeed I had rather have been forever ignorant than have discovered so much depravity and ingratitude in one I valued so highly'" (page 75), and Frankenstein's fiancee echoes, "'Alas. Who is safe, if she be convicted of crime?'" (page 76). They do not understand - they cannot - Frankenstein's torments and guilt. As Frankenstein writhes in a corner of Justine's cell, legally free but self-condemned, Elizabeth sobs to Justine, "'I will try to comfort you; but this, I fear, is an evil too deep and poignant to admit of consolation, for there is no hope.'" (page 82). True. And that fear not simply of what can get us from outside but what menaces us from within still speaks to us in FRANKENSTEIN.

- Joe Sanders December 1974



OTHER EYES, OTHER UNIVERSES

Transcribed by TONY THOMAS

(The 1973 Easter Convention. The afternoon of Saturday, April 21. The MC, Paul Stevens, introduces an item called THE CULTURAL VALUE OF S F.)

BRUCE GILLESPIE: I'm introducing Gerald Murnane, who has come along here firstly, as a friend of mine, and secondly, as that mythical creature, the "outsider" who has discovered or read s f and is willing to make some comments about it to s f fans. This may sound as if Gerald has come along to indite s f or to say that he's suddenly discovered the Truth and the Light. That is what we all hope, you see; that all those people outside s f are going to discover it some day.

But the real reason why I've asked Gerald to come along is that I've found during the two and a quarter years that I've known him that he is a witty commentator on things literary. I have heard him speak in public. I met Gerald first when I was introduced to the legendary Publications Branch of the Education Department of Victoria. I was put into an office - Gerald didn't know I was coming - and we spent most of the first two days just talking. While talking, we found that we had rather similar literary interests. Now, at any place where I've been, at school, university, or at work, I've never discovered anyone with literary interests so similar to mine. So, as you can imagine, we spent a fair amount of time talking about such things as books.

In the two years since then, Gerald has told me about a fair number of books. He put me onto some of the best books I've ever read. For instance, Gerald was the first person to tell me about Robert Musil's THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES. Having read it since then, I've found it the best book of the twentieth century. But since then I've discovered only a few people who've heard of it or have had it on their shelves. In the same way, at various times I have put books down on Gerald's desk and have said, "This is really worth reading." Usually, it is an s f book. Some of these books Gerald has read, and said he's enjoyed. Another time, Gerald showed me a book and said, "You may have heard of this; you might enjoy it; it seems to be rather similar to s f." And the book was SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE. At that time, I had not read it, so that was one s f book which Gerald showed me.

I'm not sure what else I can say about Gerald, except that he has read very widely in Australian literature, world literature, and has some very strong theories about current literature and publishing in general. I should mention that Gerald has written a novel, TAMARISK ROW, which I think will be immediately an Australian classic when it is published. But of couse, that's just my prejudice: I have read it.

So, on THE CULTURAL VALUE OF S F or whatever he wants to talk about - here is Gerald Murnane.

GERALD MURNANE: All that means is that I can take s f or leave it. I'm not a fan by definition, but I've had the experience, when Bruce first visited my house, of showing him along the bookshelves and discovering, although previously I had told him I had no s f in the house, that he picked out

about fifteen to twenty books, such as SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE and so on. And it intrigued me and puzzled me for a long time, and it still puzzles me: just what is s f and what isn't? That's not quite what I want to talk about today, but that sort of question might emerge. In the end, I just shrugged my shoulders and said: well, if I read a book and it turns out to be s f; well, that's that. But nothing that Bruce has ever shown me I've ever read or ever wanted to read just because it had that definition of s f hanging over it.

At the time when I was invited by Bruce to sit on this panel, I happened to be reading Marcel Proust's REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST, and I did not think that I would find in there anything to do with s f. But sure enough, this is one of the passages that struck me about a day after I began to search for ideas. By the way, this was written about 1920, before s f was a term that people used or understood:

> A pair of wings, a different mode of breathing, which would enable us to traverse infinite space would in no way help us, for if we visited Mars or Venus, keeping the same senses, they would clothe in the same aspect as the things of the Earth everything which we should be capable of seeing. The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of eternal youth would be not to visit strange lands, but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds, that of them is.

The theory, or the thesis, that I want to put up today is simply that: I want to pretend or assume for the time being that that is true - that the only real discoveries we make are the discovery that there are other universes which exist, you might say, by virtue of other people existing. I hope to show that this knocks on the head, maybe, a lot of the so-called attractions of s f. If it's true, there are many books which anybody ought to read, despite the fact that they've got nothing to do with science or s f; and I've brought along several of them today.

I'm told that one of the things which s f attempts to do is to expand our awareness, to create other universes - we'll keep talking in these terms for the time being. I'm sorry to say that some of the s f universes that I had hoped to find opened up for me were no different from the universes that I know already, the universe that's been my universe since I was aware of things going on. On the other hand, I've read books which, though nothing to do with s f, have been so marvellous that they've verified for me that there are other universes.

Of course, when I use this term "universe", I'm sticking by the definition that Marcel Proust would have had - that a universe is anything apart from ourselves. That isn't just a simple statement. The trouble with most of us, and I include myself, is that we don't realise how differently other people think. I'm not a travelled person, so I'll take the example of a friend of mine who came back two years ago from Saudi Arabia. He was fortunate enough to travel through some villages and districts where, as far as he could find out, he was the first foreigner ever to penetrate. He found a group of villagers who kept talking about the Turks. He knew from his scanty knowledge of history that the Turks had left Saudi Arabia after the first World War, but these people didn't know that. When they talked about the Turks, they meant "authorities". They said, "Big trucks came down a few days ago" - it could have been years, but they thought of it as a recent event - "and Turks were driving them." All they meant was that they were soldiers or some sort of para-military people from Saudi Arabia.

Now, it's a pretty trite thing to say to a group of intelligent people, but I think it needs saying sometimes: that we just don't realise that the world doesn't consist of s f fans, or it doesn't consist of people who speak English, and it doesn't consist, even among English-speaking people, of people who think like ourselves. One must challenge one's own ideas occasionally; sometimes we must come across people who don't think similarly to ourselves to realise the truth of this. And, people being so different, and the number of universes being so various and numerous, it's my opinion that the achievement of a great work of art is that it can bring this home to us; bring home the fact that - well, everything we've believed is quite possibly false; for every belief that we would be prepared to argue to the last breath in our body, for every one of those beliefs, there's an equal number of people, probably a greater number of people, than people who think similarly to ourselves; in other words, for anything that we think, there are thousands of people who think exactly the opposite.

The trouble with the sorts of worlds that s f creates - and I'll talk about this in more detail in a moment - is that they nearly all - at least the ones I'm aware of - even if they don't say so, depend on a scientific way of looking at things. Now I'm not here to knock science. In fact, I don't even like using the word loosely and bandying it around. But what I want to say is: the sort of marvellous world that might exist, we'll say, on another planet or another star is not every marvellous, or shouldn't be very marvellous to us, if all the marvels are just gadgets, or machines, computers, or whatever. The sort of world that might exist on a planet twenty million light years away or whatever is not very marvellous if the people on it are simply people who uniformly, without exception, think along scientific grooves.

In a book, LABYRINTHS, which is the title of a Penguin anthology, there are three or four pages which, when I read them, woke me up or expanded my awareness more than a three-hundred-page

volume of s f would, because the planet, or the world he was talking about, and the ways of thinking on that planet were completely and utterly different from scientific ways of thinking. In fact, the people there had a variety of philosophies, some of which denied that there was a material world; others which denied that there were things as such; that one saw only qualities; that I, for example, am not looking at a number of people, but I'm getting just a lot of pinky-grey impressions and they're floating past me, and if I go out of the room and come back, and I happen to see the same number of pinky-grey impressions in front of me, I'm not allowed to conclude that I've come back into the same room, and that the same number of people are sitting in front of me. Far from that, it's just one of the accidents of my life that on two occasions, roughly near each other in space and time, I happened to see two vaguely similar assemblies of pinky-grey shapes. There are many more marvellous things in it than that, and my summary of it is only a crude one. It's all there in about a paragraph and you don't just read over it - well, you could, but the thing to do is to take it away and think about it. The marvels of a thing like that, which, as far as I know, doesn't purport to be s f, are to me real marvels. It doesn't amaze me, or it doesn't turn me on, to read about a planet where gadgets enable people to move through walls or to reproduce 30,000 little superior beings in a test tube, or any of that sort of thing unless, accompanying all these marvels, there are marvels of what one might call thought patterns - of ways of seeing things.

I don't want to preach to anybody, but at this point I can't avoid saying that one of the reasons why I don't find stuff like this interesting is that I don't believe that science, technology, or gadgets are anything like as marvellous as the minds that create them. Perhaps I could say it better by saying this: that the existence of such marvels as space travel - well, anything; the existence of central heating, for instance - suggests to me the existence of much greater marvels which as yet we haven't been able to put our fingers on. If somebody asked me where to go to look for these things, I'd have to say, "In the human mind." The most common term is "inner space". One doesn't like talking in jargon on depending on common-currency ideas too often, but that's roughly what I'm getting at. To me, an author like Borges is one hundred times superior to an author who simply creates a planet and puts a whole lot of latter-day American scientists on it. On so many planets that one visits in s f, the people are just like ourselves, and to me, that's not what reading should put one in touch with.

If you happen to have read the essay on science in TIME magazine - this week's, I think - you might pick up a few of the common criticisms of the scientific way of thought. Beyond recommending the reading of that, all I want to say is: Bruce mentioned an author called Musil. He's a difficult author, and probably I understood only one hundredth of what he was saying in his book called THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES. It is in three paperback volumes in Panther. One of its marvellous ideas - and it's a simple one, really - is that science, religion, and all the -isms - well, there's no limit to the things one could name - are all human activities; they all depend on human beings. Science isn't the end of things; now that we have got to the scientific age, we haven't stopped developing. I'm not a prophet, and I wouldn't have a clue what's going to happen by the year 2000, but I'll bet that the whole veneration, or the fundamental trust that we place in science will have disappeared by then. Not that we won't be using scientific gadgets - probably we'll be far more advanced in our uses of science - but probably we'll just use them in the way that people use churches nowadays, for a variety of non-religious purposes. If anybody had predicted to the people of the nineteenth century, which was more-or-less a religious century, although science and industry and so on were developing, that there would come a time when people went around saying that God was dead, and selling off old churches, one would have been scoffed at. As I said, I don't want to buy into a prophetic dispute about what will happen to science, but if there's one common factor in human life, in human history, it's change. For example, who would have guessed twenty years ago that we'd be talking about the permissive society today? I dug up some old newspapers, twenty years old, and saw in TRUTH an account of the prosecution for obscenity - and a successful prosecution, too - of the publishers of some little booklet that had been selling secretly around Melbourne and Adelaide. The alleged obscenity in the booklet was something that would pass absolutely unnoticed in the columns of a daily newspaper today.

All I'm trying to say is that human beings are a restless crew. Their ideas are constantly being re-examined. As fast as you settle down and think - this is it; we've settled on science, all we want to do now is improve things - along comes some nut or trouble-maker who says, let's go back to point A and re-examine this whole business. Before you know where you are, the whole system has been overturned, and there's somebody raising a new science or a new way of life. If you think of science as I do, as nothing more than a human activity, the next thought you have is that one day we'll abandon it. Not completely; it will take its quiet little place among our other activities and ways of thinking, but there'll be other, more dominant ideas in our scheme of things.

If Bruce had given a complete list of things I've recommended him to read, he would have included this book called AUTO DA FE by Elias Canetti. On the back it is described by somebody called John Davenport as one of the few undoubted masterpieces of our time; "a novel of terrible power" by C Day Lewis, who was no authority anyway. This book is in Penguin too.

Elias Canetti is the author; he never wrote another novel; he's still alive; he's a strange old character, as far as I know; the only other book he wrote was CROWDS AND POWER, on the irrational behaviour of people in groups.

I'd love to entertain you with a complete run-down of this book, but I hope some of you are going to read it one day. Probably, you'll enjoy it even more without any dry run from me. I want to read about two paragraphs from a main scene. The hero of the book is a professor who is an expert in oriental studies, and by all common standards, he is totally and utterly insane. The word insane doesn't ever appear in the book to describe him; one just enters his mind and watches his mind, which is a powerful one, just completely going off the rails. His most prized possession is a library of about 8,000 volumes on his special field of interest, oriental studies. And he has a housekeeper, who is a slatternly, ignorant sort of woman who comes in and actually married the man without him realising it. He's so cut off from the world and so lost in his books that he gets dragged along to a registrar's office and married almost without knowing what he's doing. When he finds her asleep on a bed in his library the following night, sudeenly he discovers that something must have happened that day that gave her the right to be there. To overcome this, he actually keeps his eyes closed for three weeks - just forgets to open them - and learns to get around blind so that he doesn't have to see this bed, which is an offence to his eyes, in the middle of the room. He learns where every book is in the library and does all his work blind - well, I forget the details, since it's ten or twelve years since I've read it, and I don't know whether he actually did any writing. But he lives his whole life blind, until events come to such a pitch that he feels so threatened that he decides that a state of war exists between the books and himself on one side and this housekeeper on the other. One of the most remarkable things I've ever read is his speech to the books. It is a speech of about twenty pages in which he weeps and laughs with them, calls them by name, describes their histories and what thoughts are inside them, and he comes to a passage such as this:

> "Up to this moment, not a hand has been laid on one letter of your pages. I could never forgive myself if anyone were to charge me with the least neglect of my obligation for your physical welfare. If any of you have any complaint to make, let him speak."
>
> Kien paused and stared around him half challenging, half threatening. The books were as silent as he; not one stepped forward. Kien went on with his well-prepared speech. (Penguin edition, page 103)

And so on. Now at that point, "not one stepped forward", one is so wrapped in this that one thinks: well, they didn't step forward; fancy that. Then he goes on, After his dramatic speech to the books, he issues a sort of ultimatum:

> "I hereby declare:
>
> "1. That a state of war is now in existence.
>
> "2. That traitors will be shot out of hand.
>
> "3. That all authority is united in one hand. That I am commander-in-chief, sole leader and officer in command...
>
> "5. That the word is Kung." (page 106)

I don't know what that means, but that's the sort of non sequitur that just slips in occasionally and gives you the clue that the man is right off, if you didn't know already.

> With this statement he ended his brief manifesto. (page 106)

Then he occupied himself for an uncounted, or unexplained period of time, turning each book around so that its back was to the shelf and its face outwards, on the grounds that he wanted his soldiers to fight in the democratic fashion so that there would be no ranks in this army, and so that no enemy would come in and see which of the books was the officer of highest rank, and be able to attack that area. In the end, he has every book in the library facing inwards with white pages outwards. During this process, he cuts himself or injures himself in some way, in fact seriously. One doesn't realise - the power of the writing is so great - one thinks with Kien that this is only a trace of blood on his face or something, and finds at the end that he's almost cut his throat by accident stumbling on a ladder or some such thing.

Now there would be about twenty passages of equal power and equal attraction in that book. There's one marvellous part towards the end. Kien has a brother who's a psychiatrist in France, with whom he has had no dealings for many years. At the time when Kien is just about at the end of his tether, the book switches to France. The following has really no connection with Kien or his problems, but there is a remarkable section which has some bearing on what I'm talking about today, about people being the creators of universes. One day, this psychiatrist is called in by a woman who takes him to a wing of this mansion which has been sealed off from the rest. She introduces Kien's brother to a character who's known afterwards only as the Ape. The Ape is a person, a highly intelligent person, who decided that the world didn't fit in with his ideas of how a world should be, so he created his own world. By the time we find him he's absolutely beyond any sort of human contact; totally and irredeemably insane by all normal definitions. But he's an interesting character.

just the same, He has enclosed his world in this wing, sealed in without windows and so on, and he has invented several languages. He can't communicate with other people; he believes that giving things fixed names reduces the possibilities of the universe, so he names things by the state of his emotions at the time when he sees them. If he sees a chair when he's in X state of mind, he might call the chair goobah or something, but if he happens to see it later when he's feeling sad or feeling in a different state of mind, the chair is a completely different object so it has a different name. He does the same with people, so that one can never be sure... the fact that you're the same person on two successive visits has nothing to do with it; the problem is that he might be viewing you in two different frames of mind and therefore you're two different people as far as he's concerned.

And all of this, of course, to bring it back to the discussion, or to my thesis, is simply an example of the power of the human mind to create other universes. And I rate that sort of creation as inestimably superior to the sort of creation that just contents itself with one-hundred-storey skyscrapers filled with computerised brains, and so on and so on.

A different kind of book, with a different kind of marvellous creation in it is the three-volume Mervyn Peake which has now all appeared in Penguin Modern Classics. When I first read it - and this is one I have read twice - I thought it wasn't all that good, but then I came to read the whole three together... The first book is called TITUS GROAN; the second GORMENGHAST; and the third is TITUS ALONE. The third has an odd sort of ending to it; I think a lot of it was compiled from the author's notes after he dies (he dies a horrible death of a progressive disease at a fairly early age) and his widow did most of the work on the last book. It's not terribly satisfactory. The best book is the middle one, but you can't read it without having read the first. And in this he simply creates - well, I suppose the essential thing is that he's created a castle which, you finally discover after some several hundred pages, is about forty or fifty miles across, so vast - and for people like ourselves who are children at heart, this is a delightful discovery - that there are wings in this castle where nobody has been for centuries.

And one just walks around this castle. One doesn't have to leave this castle to go on voyages of discovery; the marvellous journeys and quests and so on can take place within this castle. At one point, there's a fearful scene or series of scenes where the villain of the book immures, locks up and seals up two people whom it doesn't serve hiw interests to keep alive. He looks them in a part of the castle which is so remote from other parts that there's no hope of them ever being discovered, and so periodically he visits them to check on their dying process, to see that their cries are getting feebler. It's this sort of horror that the vastness of the place accentuates. Again I rate... well, this isn't a sort of rating program, but the point of my coming along was to alert people, or to alert those who needed alerting, that one doesn't have to visit other planets or create other planets.

Peake never explains where this castle is, who the people are, or how they came to be there, but he has given the castle a marvellous history. It goes back sixty-something generations. The author is clever enough to invent things that are inexplicable in just the way that human affairs are inexplicable. For instance, most of the people's lives are taken up with ceremonies, but they don't remember the history of these ceremonies. They read old books which give, without any explanation, that if the day is rainy when the young prince, Titus Groan, has to go and stand on a certain side of a certain pool and throw a golden object in such a way that it skims down and hits the reflection of his mother, who should be standing at a certain window with the royal cat in her arms. If the day is too cloudy, the old books prescribe either that he should go to another part of the castle and cut a green elder leaf and wave it three times around his head - I'm mainly inventing this on what I've read, but my inventions don't approximate the real variety of the thing. One stops and wonders at this point: well, this is exactly the way real things happen; this is exactly the way the human mind works, I should have said.

The inventor of GORMENGHAST has had the ingenuity to see that we don't really think in fixed patterns. Too many of the people on the distant planets of s f think just as you could predict they would. X happens, and you know straight away what the reaction will be. They get into danger, and they must fight like mad to get out of danger, or they're threatened with this and their minds go or they break down or Freudian psychoanalysis sets in and the operation of Freudian theorems and so on are worked out. But in writers of genius, things happen with that uncertainty or that ambiguity, or there are areas of uncertainty or cloudiness. Why do they do these ceremonies in this funny way? They don't know. And there are so many things that we don't know in our own lives that this mirrors the pattern of our own lives exactly. To so many things we say, "Oh well, that's the sort of thing that happens", or "One does these things", or "Nations conduct their affairs in this way". In other words, he's invented a sort of traditional history.

I understand that Tolkien was the subject of some discussion at this seminar. I read Tolkien before I read GORMENGHAST and I think that I rate GORMENGHAST - or Mervyn Peake - quite a bit higher than I rate Tolkien. However, I'm a very keen fan of Tolkien. The thing in Tolkien which is equivalent in some ways to the power of this writer is... I think you'll find it in his early introduction, where he tries to give a

history of how the books about Middle Earth were discovered. The history is full of gaps and mysteries, and that gives fantastic credibility to the whole thing. It's not just a series of one thing happening and then another, but there are mysteries and doubts and ambiguities in the whole thing. And this is the stuff of human thought, of human invention.

Two s f books. Time probably doesn't allow me to give the same attention to them as I've given to GORMENGHAST and AUTO DA FE, but I will talk about SOLARIS, by Stanislaw Lem. Initially, Bruce forced it on me, but now I rate it as one of the finest books of this kind that I've read. There are many wonderful things one could find in SOLARIS, but the section that takes my prize for inventiveness other people might perhaps have thought tedious. It's a list, a whole historical account of this science called solaristics. Solaris, for those who are unaware of it, is a planet which nobody really knows the meaning of. In other words, one doesn't know what the planet is. There are various theories: I think the most common is that it's a giant brain just floating around, and that the surface, which is always involved in upheavals - it's like an ocean to look at - is just the cortex of this brain. According to this section, for hundreds of years scientists have invented theories on Earth about Solaris. This history of this science is exactly the sort of history that would exactly parallel a human science. First there was this school of thought, and everybody jumped on the bandwagon. They all thought Solaris was such-and-such a thing and they made minute studies. Suddenly, a rebel arose in their midst and said, "No, you're on the wrong track; Solaris isn't that sort of thing; one should study it this way." And then they all turn around and books - great tomes - are written, expeditions are made, and Solaris is studied through a certain framework; more sceptics arise, and so on. The pattern of give and take that is so common in human affairs takes place right through the battles about the true nature of Solaris.

To sum up - all that I've been saying is that there is a power in literature which I could call inventiveness, which needn't be found in s f, but often is, which is, in my opinion, the greatest thing that one can get out of literature. It enables one to discover other universes; they might be in fifty-mile-wide castles, in places where no one can locate them on a map; or it may be in a professor's library somewhere in Berlin, as in AUTO DA FE; it may be in a couple of little pages by Borges, supposing the existence of a planet where people think in ways other than ours; or it may be, as I said before, in s f. But the opposite of that, or the inferior version of that, is the sort of inventiveness that many s f writers try, and that is simply to invent a future or another world, and the reader finds to his sorrow that, really, there's been no new invention at all: it's just a new technology. The invention is not of a sort that Marcel Proust would have said is a new universe; there's no new patterns of thought; one doesn't really get the feeling that one is discovering something that one never really knew before.

The last book I'll refer to is a book which I rate reasonably highly - I hope I'm not being patronising towards it - Ursula Le Guin's THE LATHE OF HEAVEN:

> Outside the glass doors of the restaurant the crowds were thickening: people streaming towards the Portland Palace of Sport, a huge and lavish colliseum down on the river, for the afternoon show. People didn't sit home and watch TV much any more; Fed-peep television was on only two hours a day. The modern way of life was togetherness. This was Thursday; it would be the hand-to-hands, the biggest attraction of the week except for Saturday night football. More athletes actually got killed in the hand-to-hands, but they lacked the dramatic, cathartic aspects of football, the sheer carnage when 144 men were involved at once, the drenching of the arena stands with blood. The skill of the single fighters was fine, but lacked the splendid abreactive release of mass killing. (Avon edition, pages 130-131)

Now of course, for the many who know THE LATHE OF HEAVEN, that's not what the novel's about. That's just a little paragraph I lighted on, and I hope I'm not being unfair to the book when I say that that's funny, and it's a little bit mind-stretching, I suppose, to imagine a future where people actually watch spectacles like that, but hasn't it all happened before? Couldn't we imagine ourselves in only five or six years, or twenty years from hence, watching something like this? It's not much different from watching a fellow get only his leg broken. In other words, in trying to suggest a future, Ursula Le Guin hasn't really invented one that's terribly different from what we know. There are many other sections in the book that I could quote to the same effect.

That would be an example of what I'm trying to suggest is typical of much s f. The central idea of LATHE OF HEAVEN is quite a clever invention, but it just doesn't seem to ring true, or the thing isn't sustained. One doesn't get the feeling the whole time that one is in a different universe.

I'll close with the statement that really arose out of the title of this little talk, or discussion - THE CULTURAL VALUE OF S F. In theory, s f is the greatest literary mode, I suppose, that's ever been thought of. It gives one the freedom to set out and write about anything, without any restrictions whatsoever. I suppose. In fact, as we all know - and I don't for a minute think I'm telling you anything new - much of s f, in my opinion, doesn't really tell us anything new. It tells us a lot about ourselves nowadays, and perhaps next year, but it depends

too much on restrictive ways of thought. It depends on authors who haven't got the imagination to believe that there could be other ways of thinking apart from mid-twentieth-century scientific thinking. Even when they invent things, such as Ursula Le Guin's man whose dreams come true, the inventiveness still isn't the sort of character where, simply, a man sits alone in his library and talks to his books, or an ape-like man sits in a wing of a building and invents his own language.

One ought to look at s f with rigid criticism, and not condone it by saying, "It's s f; it's pretty good, just the same." I believe that there's just fiction; and there's good fiction, or there's bad fiction, or inferior types of fiction. I've found a lot of good fiction in s f, but overall, the more marvellous things I've found have had nothing to do with s f, anyway. But you've always got someone like Gillespie who'll come along and say, "But didn't you know it was s f all the time?", or, "S f people think that's marvellous." And fancy coming along to an s f convention to discover that s f people are seriously discussing Tolkien. Originally, I think this was simply my own ignorance, but I would be quite happy to see all barriers thrown down between s f and fiction, and anything that's marvellous passed from hand to hand. And that's why I've held up a few books, in the hope that people who swear they'd never read anything but s f might read a few other things. I'm certainly prepared to read a thing, no matter what the label that's hung on it.

Thank you.

(Applause)

((*brg* Some of the questions from the audience could not be heard on tape, so I've been able to print only some sections from the discussion that followed.*))

GEORGE TURNER — I haven't got so much a question, but I want to say that I hope this speech is transcribed and given as wide publicity within fandom as possible. Gerald Murnane has said, much better than I've been able to do, what I've been trying to say, the idea that I've been trying to push ever since I became involved with fandom, some four or five years ago. My angle has always been this: that everything s f has tried to say has already been said better in what s f so snottily calls the mainstream. It could be argued that it is not the business of s f to extend our philosophic appreciation of possibilities. I think that it is. The average s f writer, who is a professional intent on earning a living more than anything else, simply hasn't got the background, the training, or the intelligence required for that sort of thing. S f serves quite a few purposes in its own small way and, if it didn't take itself so damn seriously, probably it would serve them a bit better. But, in general, I think that s f, when you come to it young - say, in your teens - is as good an instrument as any for prising open the closed passages of your mind... But when it comes to the real questions, you have to go outside s f. Mr Murnane cites AUTO DA FE, GORMENGHAST, Tolkien, and the rest: I agree with him (I have a few reservations about SOLARIS, but never mind that). I'm also glad to see that he rates GORMENGHAST above THE LORD OF THE RINGS. But I think he's pointed out to us something I've been trying to do for years, and that is to say that when you've got as far as s f will take you, then go on to the real thing.

(Several indecipherable questions...)

GILLESPIE — Could I rephrase that. What would it be to invent a really successful alien?

MURNANE — Well, people have written about animals. Now don't get me wrong, but even writers for children do it this way. They're going to write about a dog. Now, they must use the English language. The real way to write how a dog spent his day is to use a tape recording. I would bring the tape here and say, "This is a story about an alien; it's a dog story." And I'd put on the tape recording and you'd hear: woof, woof, woof. Now that's all right; that's being smart. The challenge would be to actually write about a dog in such a way that one would believe one was understanding a dog's way of thinking. I use the example of a dog because it's a bit of a surprise to realise suddenly that there are aliens among us. I saw a few out in the street, and they're all around me in the suburb where I live.

There's another point, of course. Germans are aliens, or Indonesians are aliens, and one attempts to write about Indonesians or Germans in English words. The reader must assume that the thoughts that went on in the Indonesian's mind are such that they are equivalent to what's going on in the English words on the page. But if there was an alien that didn't think, in the sense that we understand thinking - and, heaven knows, there may be millions of them - I don't think one could write about them.

JOHN FOYSTER — Bruce, could you show Gerald THE DANCE OF THE CHANGER AND THREE, by Terry Carr? It doesn't actually represent an alien: we have an Earthman trying to describe an alien or a group of aliens, namely the Changer and the Three, and failing. I think that the author is unable to handle this very, very difficult theme, far more difficult than any of the themes tackled by Borges, and it's not suprising that Terry Carr failed. More trivially, I'm thinking of the radiation creature in Poul Anderson's KYRIE. There's an attempt to create something definitely alien. It seems to me that these attempts have been most successful in the short story because there's no need to sustain the imagery and the idea over a lengthy period of tiem. I really think that perhaps the problem with looking at an

s f novel and trying to get a great deal out of it is that there isn't much there, and in fact the best and most interesting part of s f is the short story. Perhaps Bruce hasn't been pushing those short stories at you.

GILLESPIE It's nearly time to wind up. I'm going to put the Devil's Advocate side. The s f viewpoint is that, like GORMENGHAST's castle, during the last fifty years, the world has assumed the dimensions of this castle. Because of science and technology, it is now a structure that no human being can understand. There are whole things in our culture which are like rooms five miles away that you take months to reach. It is the task of s f, even if it does fail;... there is some sort of imperative for it to go journeying through these rooms of the twentieth century's castle. The main thing that s f writers have had against contemporary fiction of the English school - who's the best examples? Margaret Drabble? Angus Wilson?; this sort of thing - is that it has, in fact, nothing whatsoever to do with the world as it is now. In other words, it's the opposite of your theory: the world has in fact become mad, and people are pretending all the time that it's sane; and that s f has this imperative to look at the world, regard it as alien, and to start exploring it. Even if they look at technological problems, they're looking at something that is in fact fairly alien and that nobody else has looked at.

LEE HARDING I don't know how much s f Gerald has read; I know George has read a considerable amount; so perhaps they could both answer this question. Have they, at any stage, discovered a special quality, a something in s f that they have not been able to find in other forms of literature?

MURNANE Generally speaking, the answer is no. But my attitude to s f is this: I think it's probably the most exciting... when I think about it without thinking of any specific book, I get rather excited. There seems to be this great freedom; and it raises questions about writing on aliens and so on. Now I've never attempted to write a word of s f, but one day I would like to attempt it. It sounds so exciting; there's this lack of limitations. But my very limited acquaintance with it has never realised that expectation.

TURNER For me, I do find a few qualities that I don't find in other fiction; sheer ingenuity, for a start. I love this for its own sake; in fact, I'm a real gimmickmonger. Aside from that, every now and then in s f - and this pays for a lot of the rubbish you have to wade your way through, particularly if, as I am, you're given quantities of stuff for reviewing - there's the occasional discovery of a point of view, an idea that is fresh to me. You find the same thing in the mainstream, of course, but in s f you find it generally expressed in a sudden and piercing fashion. It's done that way simply because the blokes who are writing it aren't good enough to be subtle. But they are through before the thing suddenly hits you, and starts a whole train of thought that may have nothing to do with the story or even the theme. Yes, s f is, I'd say, ninety per cent dull; so is ninety per cent of the mainstream; ninety per cent badly written, and so is ninety per cent of the mainstream; and the odd bit that is good is apt to be very good indeed; more than that, it's apt to be surprising and arresting.

HARDING I can rest happily now. George, finally I found some way to make you say something nice about s f.

GILLESPIE Thanks very much, Gerald.

(Applause. Afternoon tea.)

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The main reason why he (George Barker) has not left the rest of us is not, ironically enough, because he declined to be bought by the satanic impulses; it is simply that the satanic powers never offered to buy him.

- THE LISTENER

****

Life is for learning, and next time round I will make the same mistakes in a different manner.

****

The OSSERVATORE ROMANO, the papal daily, is a unique model of carefully misleading evasiveness, by comparison with which PRAVDA appears to bristle with information and even gossip.

- THE ECONOMIST

****

Sir Hugh Greene thought that "the one advantage" of giving free access to national pressure groups on tv "is that it would enormously decrease the amount of television viewing in this country."

- THE LISTENER

****

Love cannot be relied upon to recur seasonally - its sere days, when they come, seem to come forever.

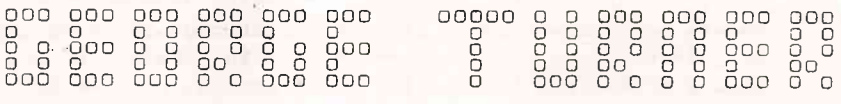
- Thomas Disch, COLOURS

****

Ulrich was a man whom something compelled to live against his own grain, although he seemed to let himself float along without any constraint... There was something attracting him to everything there was, and something stronger that would not let him get to it.

- Robert Musil, THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

THE



SECTION

THE GEORGE TURNER SECTION

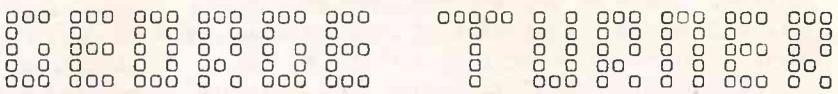
It's not necessary to praise George Turner (just read the following pages and praise him for yourself), but from time to time it is necessary to introduce him.

George's first appearance in a science fiction magazine occurred in naive youth when he praised the high literary qualities of E E Smith only a few years after the "Doc's" first serialised book appeared. So far as I can tell, he did not reappear before an audience of science fiction readers until 1967. In AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW No 10, he upset a number of readers by daring to demolish THE DEMOLISHED MAN. The book's reputation among s f readers was then, and still is, quite substantial. George continued to contribute to ASFR, and I met him for the first time in January 1968. (Insofar as George ever "joined fandom", he did so on the same weekend as I did.) In 1968, George published what is still his most substantial article and, seen in retrospect, his most important. ON WRITING ABOUT SCIENCE FICTION attempted to provide a primer about that particular form of writing, in the form of either reviews or criticisms. ON WRITING.. has been a guide to me ever since. During 1968 and 1969, John Foyster published his small-circulation magazines EXPLODING MADONNA and THE JOURNAL OF OMPHALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY (average print run of 15). Some of George's best articles, including an examination of Sturgeon's work, appeared there. Meanwhile, he had published fine reviews and articles for S F COMMENTARY. During late 1969 and 1970, George disappeared from everybody's sight. He announced his return to s f circles with his splendid BACK TO THE CACTUS, which appeared in SFC 17. George's pieces from EM/JOE were reprinted in SFC 19, and the flow of articles has scarcely ceased. Add to that his fiery verbal battles with Franz Rottensteiner and Stanislaw Lem in the correspondence columns, notable appearances in overseas magazines (including ALGOL), and his helpful advice to me and other people, and you find a record of achievement which deserves any Distinguished Service medal the s f world might hand out.

But even if you are a reasonably conscientious reader of the "serious" fanzines, probably you had not realised before just how much we all owe to George. Along with people like John Foyster and the notorious Lem and Rottensteiner, George has had most to do with keeping S F COMMENTARY alive and s f criticism a lively art and a pleasure to read.

What does George have to say in his many articles and reviews? (For no person can cast so much light without having some source of fuel for his fire.) George says it himself several times in this issue's articles. "(Wells) developed (s f ideas) to mean something about human beings..." "All problems are, in the long run, personal." "It is a relief to come upon a writer who can present human beings, however familiar, and show that they too can travel the stars and shake civilisations." Like Gerald Murnane, George believes that scientific ideas are marvellous, but nowhere near as marvellous as the people who thought of them.

People who praise George Turner don't think only of the quality of the perception in his wirting. We admire his generosity; he hasn't been paid for most of these hundreds of thousands of words. George contributed reviews to S F COMMENTARY before the first issue had been published - I still remember that as an act of faith in me. George has a novelist's ear and eye for getting to know the essence of people he meets (I nearly forgot to say that George has a perfectly respectable reputation as a mainstream novelist in Australia). I remember, with minor discomfort, the accuracy with which he "got" me in a piece he wrote for John Bangsund. George is one of those least appreciated of people - a true friend who tells the truth. Read on...



BACK TO THE MAINSTREAM

GUEST OF HONOUR SPEECH
EASTERCON, MELBOURNE 1973

Transcribed by TONY THOMAS

Well, do you know something? It all started with a big bang, or so they say.

I was talking to John Foyster about this a while back, and I said, "Well, now, listen. If the whole universe started with a big bang, that means all the matter was all collected into one bloody great lump in the middle, and that exploded. But how could it, because if it was that big, the gravitational effect would be so high that even radiation couldn't get away. So how the hell could it explode?" And John said, very sensibly too, that indications are that that is what happened; but as for the physics of the thing, we just don't know.

All right. Now there are a couple of gents over in America who have decided that there are quite a few possibilities there. Perhaps it didn't explode at all. Perhaps it just kept on imploding, and eventually appeared somewhere else. Parallel universes, good God! Nature imitating Art again. But somebody else has got another idea. It is that the whole affair oscillates. It sort of expands out to there, and whizzes back in and expands out again. And somebody asked, "Yes, but how does it know when to stop expanding?", which is a pretty silly thing to ask of the universe anyway. And another gent suggested that maybe time reverses, and it runs down that way.

So you see, you can take your pick of cosmologies; you can have a whale of a time. Do you care? Well, I'm buggered if I do. I mean, it's going to be some time in the future; I won't be around, I hope.

Well, science fiction's a bit like that, too - full of big ideas. Science fiction, as Brian Aldiss remarked a few years back, is nonexistent, or dead, or something. Well, it's at least moribund, and it might as well be dead because, frankly, it's a pretty fair sort of a fake. A few years back, Damon Knight - I think he was possibly trying to be funny; if so, it was a disaster - was asked by somebody to define s f and he delivered himself of that immortal line, "It's what I'm pointing at when I say it." Now that was about as stupid a remark as could ever come from an intelligent man. Unfortunately, it was picked up right throughout the world by s f fans who suddenly discovered that they could say anything was s f, and all rushed home and put DON QUIXOTE and CLARISSA on the s f shelf, and probably THE BIBLE.

What I'm trying to get at is that s f talks a great deal, but when it comes to putting up, it doesn't put up too much. It does a lot of justification, but no justifying, or the other way round if you like. It takes itself far too seriously. As a matter of fact, you still see people writing articles or letters to magazines or little outbursts in fanzines about how s f is still regarded as some sort of outcast by the literary establishment. Let me tell you two things, or perhaps three. One: there is no such thing as a literary establishment. Two: s f has never been outcast. Three: they invented the idea for themselves.

The whole trouble is that s f writers like to feel they're doing something that nobody else can do, which is a lot of nonsense, as we'll see very shortly; and secondly, the fans - and I'm sorry: that means you, you, you, and you, and maybe even me - help them to keep up this idea by treating their words and their works as seriously as these poor damn writers do.

Well, what is it that fandom and s f writers feel so seriously about? One thing they feel terribly, terribly seriously about is literary quality. Those of you who remember John Campbell's disastrous editorial of about fifteen or twenty years back on SCIENCE FICTION VS THE LITERARY ESTABLISHMENT will know just how much it has got under their skins to be told they can't write - which, in ninety per cent of cases is true; they can't. Neither can ninety per cent of mainstreamers, so it works out pretty evenly. Literary values, indeed! Do you know that Stanislaw Lem, the one-man saviour of s f in Europe (or so his agent, Rottensteiner, says) has actually written a book, called SCIENCE FICTION AND FUTUROLOGY which, it is claimed, will run in translation to some 1,500 pages. The coffee-table effort of all time - and any twit who reads it deserves to have his head read, unless he reads it one chapter at a time over a period of years. What is even more interesting is that Lem has discussed, or rather designated, s f as a refuge for the underprivileged, and he's going to write 1,500 pages about it. So much for literary pretensions of one sort.

And yet... and yet... There's a bloke called Brian Aldiss who really can write, and all around him, a pretentious little group of English tripe-writers, headed by Michael Moorcock. There was also Kingsley Amis, who wrote a whole book about s f. The book certainly proved that he didn't know much about s f, but it did prove that an intelligent man could hit the mark pretty often. The authors loathed it; he was right far too often. And lastly, we have such people as Bradbury: world-famous, known everywhere, marvellous writer, brilliant ideas. Will somebody tell me what one of his ideas was - any one? He never had an idea in his life. All he ever did was write rather pleasing little fairy tales which you weren't expected to believe but you were expected to pay for. He wrote very well, as a matter of fact, if you mean by good writing good syntax, reasonable prose, and what have you - and he put it across. That's good writing, as a matter of fact; it says nothing about the content of the work. But he's been held up, and is still held up as a marvellous writer. I rather agree with the bloke who said he's a monumental bore, who was good the first time, but should have stopped.

Literature? Damon Knight made a name as a critic and deserved it reasonably well - well, as a reviewer anyway. He tended to tear things to pieces without defining any particular justification for tearing them to pieces, but nonetheless at least he made a few people sit up and take notice. James Blish has done even better, but nobody likes Blish very much because he takes all the books you like and shows how lousy they are, and he's generally right, too. There are a few people who have said I do the same thing. Sorry, and I'm going to continue, too.

There are probably three people writing s f today who can be called writers of good prose. One is Brian Aldiss, one is James Blish, who has his weaknesses but still, on the whole, is pretty good, and the other is D G Compton. In deference to John Foyster and to prevent my eye getting blackened, I'll add J G Ballard, though I don't particularly like his work - but he certainly can write.

There is far too much concern with the things that don't matter. Get hold of a fanzine and read John Brunner, for God's sake, dilating on artistry, of all goddamn things. John Brunner won a Hugo, either last year or the year before or whenever it was, for a quarter-million-word abomination called STAND ON ZANZIBAR, which purports to be about the population problem. I'll defy you to find one word in all those 250,000 about the population problem. He says it's there and that's all you ever discover in that entire book. Fakery, friends, fakery. You get, in almost any fanmag you like to read, sooner or later, a tirade from Philip Jose Farmer, telling how much everybody misunderstands him and, recently, pointing out that one passage in one of his works which was modelled on James Joyce was actually rather better than James Joyce. Well, I suppose he's read ULYSSES and FINNEGANS WAKE. Frankly, I looked up the passage indicated and ran through a series of bad puns, three jokes that weren't particularly funny and discovered that it was based on the "Caves of the Wind" passage from ULYSSES, and that he appears to have misunderstood what it was about. So much for literature.

Well now, among these moderns, particularly the Moorcock crew and people like Farmer and Lem - no, there may be something to be said for Lem; we'll come to him later - there is a great deal of talk about "inner space". I think it was J G Ballard who popularised that phrase. Unfortunately, far too many people have picked it up. Precisely what inner space is, I don't know, unless it's the dark night of the soul, which for most of them it might as well be. But probably the original populariser of this type of s f was Theodore Sturgeon. Now I've said enough about Sturgeon in the past to let people know that I have no time whatsoever for his work. However, he did one good thing: he did make people realise that there was more to s f than discussions of ESP, time travel, and various technological improvements. He did, almost alone, turn the eyes of the modern s f writer inwards, and in his hands, s f, however badly, came to be fiction about people - which is what fiction is about, or should be about, anyway. Lots of people carried on from there; Bradbury, for instance, with his charming little "smiling-Irish-eyes" versions of a story; Philip Jose Farmer with what he fondly imagines to be investigations of the possibilities of sex - you'd do just as well down at Sammy Lee's if you really want to see anything peculiar. But Ballard really did bring "inner space" into prominence. Unfortunately, from my point of view, Mr Ballard has never looked at anything but the inside of his own head, and the inside of his head is not

nearly so tortuous a labyrinth as his prose would make it sound. However, who am I to complain when so many read him and say he's marvellous?

We'll get a few more of the same type, though, who deal with "inner space". At the moment, probably one of their greatest prophets is Robert Silverberg. I recommend you to get hold of his book, THE BOOK OF SKULLS, in which four assorted young Americans go looking for a monastery whose inhabitants have the secret of immortality. They're a rather nice little group. One of them is a homosexual who appears to be a compendium of everything that Silverberg ever read about homosexuals, because obviously he's never met one. Another character is a Jew and he makes great play with this - probably he does know something about Jews, but you'd never think so to read this book. His Jew is one of the nastiest, smarmiest, crawling little animals that you'll ever strike in fiction; and really, Jewry ought to do something about Silverberg, in spite of his name. A third is the son of wealthy parents, a good knockabout, extrovert type, who makes it quite plain that Silverberg has never met anyone who is the son of wealthy parents, but he has read quite a lot about them in books, and this is the one you get. And the fourth one is that good old standby, the farm boy who educated himself into something worthwhile. Now the whole idea of this pilgrimage to find immortality is that there's a hitch to it, because the prospectus they have to go on says that one of the four must be sacrificed and a second one must take his own life in order that the others may gain their immortality. Now all this is fairly easy symbolism, but I'm not going to tell you how it comes out; I advise you to read the book and discover who are the two who get their immortality, and then talk to me about "inner space". It is a fair sample of the sort of thing that's put across month after month by people who want to appear deep. Unfortunately, it is done mainly by the magazine writers, and the magazine writers are those who form the world's opinion about s f. The best of s f is written outside the magazines, but the world doesn't get around to them too much.

Silverberg also leads me into that other great falsehood of s f: that it investigates the world of tomorrow. S f writers don't give a bugger about the world of tomorrow, and frankly, neither do many of their readers. What they actually do is set up a gimmick idea. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, about five minutes of steady thinking will show you why their particular system could never come into operation, or if it did, it would last about twenty minutes before it strangled itself on its own inconsistencies - and if you don't believe me, read another of Silverberg's recent books, THE WORLD INSIDE, and then tell me just how the world he postulated in that could ever evolve.

As a matter of fact, some of the most popular novels in s f have been based on impossible societies. Start with THE DEMOLISHED MAN. When you've read it and enjoyed it, because it's a good, fast-moving thriller, sit back for a moment and try to imagine for yourself what a society would be like where about one quarter of the people are telepaths and the other three quarters are not, and tell me just how long that society would last. I'd give it a week before one side or the other was being killed off. You can read another book of his, also very popular, about the possibility of teleportation. Fortunately, he gets himself so tangled trying to explain how teleportation works that you don't believe it anyway - which is just as well.

Frederik Pohl was involved with Kornbluth, of course, in the fabulous GRAVY PLANET which, for some reason or other, is always supposed to have been a satire on advertising. Even the people who publish the book think it is. Pohl, who sits back and counts the royalties, doesn't bother to contradict them. What it is, as a matter of fact, is a very thorough-going satire on big-business methods, and advertising is a very small part of it. But just the same, once you get hold of the book and sit down and think about it for awhile, you find it almost impossible to imagine any series of operations whereby that world could have come into existence. As a matter of fact, you've only got to look around you at any time during the last fifty years to discover that world being very actively slapped down every time it shows its head. People are very much awake to the dangers; they are awake to <u>most</u> of the dangers.

Overpopulation, of course, is the popular one at the moment, together with a busted ecology and the fusion bomb. Does s f care? Not one lousy, little damn. S f doesn't even bother to write books about them; it just takes them as assumed and then writes a little blood-and-thunder story on that background. S f isn't even interested in facts; that is, magazine s f isn't, and magazine s f, unfortunately, is the backbone of most of the paperback trade, and this absolute rubbish - and ninety per cent of it is just that - is what the world sees as being s f.

The real s f has only been appreciated, as far as I can work out, at one or two odd periods since it began. Assuming that it began with Jules Verne, and as far as I'm concerned, it did - everything before that was really something else. Verne attracted an enormous public and interested it in technology at a time when an interest in technology was needed. Yes, he did a good job; he did what his particular world needed at the right moment. His contemporary - they didn't like each other very much - H G Wells, also did what was needed at the right moment. He knew perfectly well that the technology racket was over - Verne had already killed that, saturating the market - but Wells knew that what mattered was ideas, and so he wrote eight or ten novels which we loosely call s f, and which are generally discussed in terms of their gimmicks, and which were actually social tracts. And that is the reason why, seventy years later, they are still read - which is a

damn sight more than you'll ever be able to say for any s f writer living, unless I miss my guess very badly. And strangely enough, the ideas they're using, the gimmicks they're using, are still the same old ones that Wells used seventy years back, except that he developed them to mean something about human beings and very few people have done that since.

There are a few that have, people with their eye on tomorrow, worried about tomorrow, considering what tomorrow may be. One of them is a Russian called Amosoff, who is a cybernetics engineer on the one hand and a surgeon on the other - it's a most extraordinary combination - and he's written a novel, NOTES FROM THE FUTURE, suing both those disciplines. Superficially, the novel is about anabiosis, the preservation of life by freezing. Actually, it is a very sensitive, rather moving account of what it may be like to be jumped even thirty or forty years into the future. The author asks us a pretty severe philosophic question: is any man worth it?; is there anybody at all who is worth preserving when whatever he comes to will be something he can't understand?

Another foreigner, Kobo Abe, a Japanese, has written INTER ICE AGE FOUR. Now, it's not an easy novel to read. Again, it's a biological subject and, superficially, the novel seems to be about how man may be artifically changed to adapt to changing environments. Actually, it is the most searing indictment of racialism I have read anywhere. You have to read it to find out, because it would be far too complicated a matter to discuss here but briefly. If man changes himself, the result will be a hatred beyond anything that colour and race have produced so far. And Abe puts up a pretty good argument, too.

A gentleman named Tate wrote GARDENS 12345, which is more-or-less a fantasy - it is an s f novel, though it reads like a fantasy because in theend you discover what appears to be fantasy is actually part of an experiment. Tate takes four of some of the more controversial attitudes to existence of the present day and shows them all operating in isolation. The reading of it may give you a rather different idea of what some of the things actually are that we take for granted. And this, I say, is one of the things that s f is for, to examine scientifically... I don't mean boringly and deadeningly; there's nothing boring or deadening about 12345; it's the kind of novel which grabs you and holds. And there's nothing difficult about his lesson, either; he makes it plain; he doesn't do it by symbols and allusions for the critics to quarrel over.

There was another one, which seems to have fallen rather flat, called TRIAGE. Triage is the refuse of coffee grounds, and in the terms of this novel, a Triage Officer is a doctor who decides in a mass accident who shall live and who shall not. And the book is an exploration of the way in which, by simple public manipulation, the world might well be brought to solve the population problem by agreeing to be killed off. Offhand, it seems a fantastic theme. I advise you to read the book and observe how the conviction is carried, step by logical step, to the point where you are prepared to agree to your own death. In a world of propaganda, advertising, and politics you need this knowledge, and s f above all others is the genre that can present it in an assimilable fashion. Damn it all, it very rarely does. It takes somebody from outside the genre to do it. The people inside it can't, or won't; perhaps they think there's no money in it. THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN apparently taught them nothing.

The realities of the myths and the limitations of the s f writers can be brought home very strongly by reading the popularisations of science written by such people as Gordon Rattray Taylor - THE BIOLOGICAL TIME-BOMB is his famous one, of course - and to read that, you'll discover that the things the scientists are talking about in their common laboratory talk from day to day are far beyond anything that s f writers have dreamed up yet. And the s f writers aren't even sufficiently interested to pick up their ideas and examine them and make something of them.

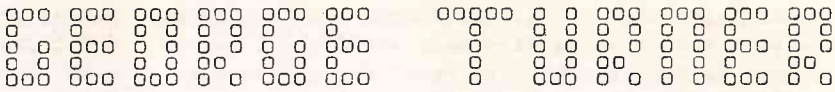
As for the "inner space" examination, no s f writer yet has done such a thorough job of observing the human psyche as has Norman Mailer, playing at being journalist/novelist in A FIRE ON THE MOON. It's the sort of thing that s f should be doing, and can be popularising - and it can be popularised with the greatest of ease - but they'd rather work for that lousy three cents a word, and some of the magazines don't even pay that.

That's why I say that s f couldn't care less about tomorrow. I don't think the fans do either; the fans want to be amused, And, frankly, as s f exists today, that's all I want of it too, because I know damn well that if I want anything more, if I want some real talk about tomorrow, some real talk about "inner space", some real consideration about where we're going in this world we live in, I don't need s f at all. Instead I read the mainstream writers, mainly because, when they choose to write a book on those subjects, they study them first.

Science fiction is dead? Yes, Aldiss was right about that. It's in the process of being absorbed into the mainstream, and when that process is completed, you will have two things left: firstly, the real s f indistinguishable from any other kind of fiction, because it will be simply the fiction of everyday concern in which science and progress and its problems are discussed simply because they are the everyday matter of our lives. The day when science was something that happened only in laboratories has been dead for thirty or forty years. The other thing that will be left will be something called s f, published by magazines and rather hopefully, selling about as well and on the same level as the western.

Thank you.

- George Turner April 1973



TOMORROW IS STILL WITH US

GEORGE TURNER discusses:

334

by THOMAS M DISCH

Avon :: 1974
272 pages :: $1.85

Sphere :: 1974
248 pages :: $1.25

2020 VISION

edited by JERRY POURNELLE

Avon :: 1974
192 pages :: $1.20

My ccontention that s f is rejoining the so-called "mainstream" of literature (which it never really separated from in the first place) is much strengthened by the feat of s f novelist Disch in writing a purely mainstream work in s f terms. Not only is 334 traditional in themeand development (though not in method) but it belongs to a definite "mainstream" group: the kitchen-sink drama of the 1940s and 1950s. So don't ever try to convince me that the wheel will not come full circle.

Let's get the reviewer's chore (description of the work) out of the way, then feel free to discuss the things that matter. No 334 is a tenement building in the New York of the third decade of the twenty-first century. That time is fairly close to home; some who read this may well be around to compare Disch's vision with the reality (God, the bomb, and nuclear biology willing); in general, his characters are perhaps our children's children. His period is about as different from ours in social terms (Disch shows little interest in merely technological change) as ours is from the third decade of this century; in fact, some of the resemblances are, to one who remembers that decade, startling. A fact to be set in its place later.

The structure of the work is highly individual. It begins with five novellae (about 10,000 words apiece), each one of which is concerned with a person or group dwelling in No 334. The importance of these novellae is that they show the major characters operating outside 334, that is, in their outward relationship with the world. The variety here of style and treatment likewise shows Disch in many aspects of his art. (And "art" - in its sense of superior creativity and technique - is a word I'll use for precious few s f writers. Ballard, occasionally Aldiss, and - and...?)

In the first tale, young Birdie Ludd has his troubles at the point where the educational system and the adult social system (which is, as always, a structure radically different from the adolescent one) begin their conflict in the no-mansland of the late teens. His problems are superficially different from yours today and mine yesterday, but his attitudes, his angers, and his errors, are eternal. While we writhe at his stupidity we remember that only a few years ago we also... Dammit!

In the second Ab Holt, a hospital worker, becomes involved in anarchic comedy when one of his illegal sidelines comes apart on the reef of official routine. It is Disch's only essay, in this book, in risible farce and we could do with more of the same; smiles are present in s f but laughter is rare.

In EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE LATER ROMAN EMPIRE, we tour the inner space of Alexa using one of the more ingenious escapist methods of s f and dealing with reality between whiles.

EMANCIPATION highlights some unexpected problems of sexual equality and provides a raucous answer which just might, in a few cases, be a real one.

Finally, ANGOULEME finds youthful violence thinking itslef out at a nodal point of personal development.

Then comes the novel, 334 (about 40,000 words) in which these characters, now adult, live out their dreary lives in the tenement, coping or not coping, dreaming or despairing, living as best they can or merely dying alive.

The novel requires a concentration not demanded by the novellae because of its involved but completely logical structure, which moves backwards and forwards in time as well as sideways from character to character. Here, Disch deals with the inner selves of the people we have seen in

their formative years in the novellae.

He tells no integrated story, but records how his major characters, freed from youth, come to terms with that middle-class world which is not poverty-stricken but has never enough, is not illiterate but has no useful knowledge. The conditions of his society are different from ours, the mores warped and redirected by forces which limit family size and living space but offer idiot solace in sexual freedom and palliatives and entertainment - drugs and tv instead of bread and circuses, with much the same resultant unrest that never reaches the cohesiveness of revolt. The people come to terms as we do and always did - by siding with the strength, by seeking reguge in intellectual attainment in order to ride above the jetsam, by rebelling until rebellion itself becomes a pointless exercise in noise, or by opting out even to the final option of suicide.

We know these people. Our daily newspapers are full of their bare bones; our fiction shudders to their internal grindings; our protesters state and overstate their cases on placards and walls; our social workers go into breakdown over the impossibility of alleviation or grow an official carapace in sheer self-protection.

There is a sense in which Disch unrolls the panorama of the future and asks, "So what's new?"

Is 334 therefore dull, unreadable, to be avoided? On the contrary, it is fascinating, eminently readable, and an essential part of one's s f education. It is one of the products wherewith s f comes of age, establishes its credentials and claims a minor but genuine triumph in the field of modern fiction.

If it doesn't take out the Nebula Award for 1975 the SFWA will come under suspicion as a gaggle of impostors. I can't see it being a fan-popular book in the manner of most winners, but equally I can't see much chance of a more important work coming to light in the meanwhile. It will be a vintage year in which another s f novel deserves to beat it. (Le Guin's THE DISPOSSESSED? Damned near, but not quite.)

A few lines back, I described 334 as important. It is important because it not only breaks new ground in s f but breaks it with the sureness of an excellent novelist. There are cavils, to be glanced at later, but in general it is a work of substance and truth, of artistic and moral integrity, and of both dramatic and cosmic power.

It is important because it challenges what we arrogantly term the "mainstream" novel on one of its favourite grounds - the realistic middle-class novel - and demonstrates that the s f approach can provide a fresh statement without the aid of space ships, telepaths, super-drugs, and gross over-writing.

This demonstration is the major consideration in a purely literary sense.

In detail, what has Disch done? He has simply written a novel of everyday life tomorrow. Do you feel, perhaps, that I am ignoring such stories as Silverberg's evocations of vast conurbs and termitary conditions or Harrison's MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM!? Not a bit of it. These books were strictly artificial creations, bearing little relation to the realities of human reaction or to the simple probability of their postulated conditions ever arising; and they were plotted and structured in that time-honoured fashion which keeps good s f ideas shackled in the second or third rank of appreciation.

Disch's novel has nothing in common with such works. It has much in common with the plays of Arnold Wesker, the slum novels of Farrell (STUDS LONIGAN), and the observed reality of Burgess and Darryl Ponicsan. (And if you don't know about Ponicsan, get hold of THE LAST DETAIL and read it. Forget the film, which is only excellent.)

The points around which Disch builds his future are sparse but deep-reaching:

Overpopulation has caused the termite structures of huge tenement buildings not only to remain as part of the city scene but to proliferate.

Family size is regulated by law, and floor space by an agency called, sinisterly enough, MODICUM, which ensures that everyone has at least the minimum necessary accommodation. "Minimum", unfortunately, cannot be varied much for the needs of individuals.

The educational system is hinted at rather than discussed. It seems to be more efficient than ours at force-feeding, but also to offer considerable variety of opportunity; the children appear to mature intellectually earlier than ours.

All kinds of marriage, homo and hetero, are recognised by the state.

And tv entertainment of high emotional content floods the networks day and night, invading conversation, dreams, attitudes, and thought.

These are small (compared with s f's wilder extrapolations - so-called), almost expectable mutations in our life style. We know them from way back. What we have not known before is Disch's probing, both delicate and indelicate, into the results of these moderate changes, and it is because of this that we are presented with something old in fiction but blindingly new in s f.

Consider Mrs Hanson, dispossessed by the MODICUM she thought was supposed to look after her, her furniture piled on the footpath and herself setting alight to it as a funeral pyre, pushed by her outdated ideas of the past, pulled by the unrecognised realities of the present and repelled by the eternally threatening future which everyone recognises and pretends does not exist - until the moment of apparition.

Or Little Mister Kissy Lips, at twelve years old planning his first murder (his rite of passage) and defeated by the simple fact of adults being adults and bearing mysterious authority which freezes intention.

Or Birdie Ludd raging against the "personal rating" system which denies him marriage, with never a coherent appreciation of any lack in himself.

Or Juan killing himself because his vintage car works and his marriage doesn't, although he loves his wife and she him...

These are today's cases seen through tomorrow's eyes, not the reverse, which is so much more usual in s f.

Nor are these the common ingredients of s f, which shuns reality like the plague, but I feel it safe to prophesy that more and more they will become such. Disch has attempted a work of considerable difficulty, but now that it is done and a template technique made available, others will think along these adult lines. (Others still will see the exploitable possibilities and set about obscuring the values Disch has revealed by cheapening them for mass consumption. It always happens; it is a recognised penalty of talent.)

It is, I suppose, a fair question if someone asks at this point, "But why the fuss, man? What's the value of this Dischy exercise? Why does it matter more than any other exercise in kitchen-sinkery?"

The answer lies in the nature of art and the pursuit of artistry.

Art, which has problems enough transforming/disfiguring/rejuvenating/obscuring/new-splendouring its current surface, has had to take the future into consideration. Literature began such consideration, drama took it up swiftly, and now the plastic arts and music are struggling (unsuccessfully as yet, but art is longer than life) to do otherwise. All of this is a growing consciousness of what many philosophers knew long ago: that the contemplation of time is not of time-now or time-when but of time as a totally present part of intellectual experience. Tomorrow is as important as today, though less easy to observe, and at least as important as that yesterday which will grow dim if efforts are not made to preserve it. Both are parts of our "passage" through time and must be regarded, existentially, as permanently present. (You are not asked to agree factually with this, but to consider it carefully as a function of our self-understanding as a species.)

To realise this theoretically is an easy exercise, but to practise it in aesthetic expression is not. But Disch has succeeded, almost miraculously, in seeing yesterday, today, and tomorrow in a single vision of a single time. He has produced a work whose essence is "for all time" rather than simply for this day and age.

Please don't take the quotation as meaning that I am confusing him with Shakespeare and Homer, but the fact is that 334 could have been read fifty years ago with the same understanding we can bring to it today, and I will stick my neck out to say that its meanings will still be current (even if the novel itself is not) long after humanity has solved superficial problems of overpopulation and administrative desperation. The deeply personal problems - of bias, loss, failure, concern, desire, triumph, and surrender - are eternal; only the physical details change. (Would the Roman legion cited for decimation see its fate as any less serious than that of the nation shuddering at its first fusion bomb? Try thinking of yourself as the tenth legionary.)

All problems are, in the long run, personal.

I repeat that Disch has succeeded in seeing today through tomorrow's eyes. That they turn out to be little different (but that little is crucial) from today's eyes is the measure of authorial honesty; anyone could have thrown in the additional touches which so often debase s f into fantasy, gimmickry, or melodrama, but Disch did not. He stuck to his vision.

I doubt if he will be much thanked for his honesty, save perhaps by a few critics and some of the more sensitive writers, but I believe and hope that 334 will remain in print, as Wells remains in print, in spite of all who did not hail it or even read it on its first appearance.

Disch is, of course, one of the unhappily termed "new wave" writers ("So what's new?") and now that the wave is settling to a ground swell he has nearly justified all that movement's excesses and stupidities by producing something utterly fresh in s f. Indeed, in literature.

Disch has contributed, not tremendously but quite definitely, to literature.

I wrote earlier about having a few carping notes to record. So I have, mainly about style, but have changed my mind about recording them. Read 334 and decide for yourself what they might have been. Read it. Go on, read it!

For myself, I intend to badger my non-s f-reading friends into trying it. Chances are, they will think better of it than will the great mass of fans.

Finally, you will have noticed that both American and English paperbacks are available. The English edition is cheaper, uses better paper, and is better bound.

So buy the dearer, hard-mucilage-bound American edition because it has a prime virtue of a far superior and more intelligent layout. This is a rare novel wherein layout, divisions, and chapter headings really matter, and for once the Yanks have done a more sensitive, more readable job.

** ** **

My point about the originality of Disch's presentation of the future cannot be better realised than by comparing it with the eight tales in 2020 VISION. They were commissioned from mostly capable writers with solid reader followings, and those writers were required to set their stories in 2020 AD, the same decade as the Disch volume, and to make predictions (reasonable predictions were, one hopes, required) for that period.

It is a matter for some tut-tutting that only four of eight stories fulfil the contract, that at least one (Harlan Ellison's) thumbs its nose at every requirement save the author's self-indulgence and that the only passable contribution to futurology is the editor's interesting, down-to-earth introduction. Pournelle is in the prediction business as a member of the World Future Society.

If you like competent, middle-of-the-road s f, 2020 VISION is casually commendable. But, judged as "vision", alongside the Disch work it scarcely exists. It makes one realise just how completely the bulk of s f writers refuse the implications of that word "future", and trust to gimmicks rather than attempt an interpretation of historical change.

Ben Bova's BUILD ME A MOUNTAIN makes a genuine bid at looking at the political future of space travel, which qualifies him as one who did honestly what he was asked. It is unfortunate that his dramatic technique does not match his vision; still, it is a satisfactory opener.

Larry Niven's CLOAK OF ANARCHY takes a look at protest against government, carried to its logical conslusion in a word that has, by 2020, had about enough of trying to give everybody what he thinks he wants. It is a wry little parable, effective but slight. (To see anarchy really inspected, you will have to wait for Ursula Le Guin's THE DISPOSSESSED.)

In SILENT IN GEHENNA - a title which means only that it makes an interesting Gothic-type title - Harlan Ellison forecasts exactly nothing and provides the most pointless climax to a plotless progress in some years. There are the usual breathless bits in italics and plenty of horror and heavy breathing, together with such mature statements as this: "...he was fourteen, then sixteen, then eighteen, and by that time he had discovered what the world was really all about." The story goes on to demonstrate that he had discovered nothing. However, the Ellison name is big business among the more bug-eyed fans, so turning the story down would have been bad politics on the editor's part.

Poul Anderson gives us pure Anderson in THE PUGILIST, built on a psychologically shaky gimmick. It purports to investigate the nature of one kind of treachery, but Anderson's character insight is not up to it. And it has little to do with 2020 or any other specific year.

With EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY, we come to a welcome piece of very feminine tongue-in-cheekery from Dian Girard. Is she really looking forward to the final shape of the slimming racket, when the omniscient state takes over? Read it, fatties, and beware.

David McDaniel's PROGNOSIS: TERMINAL offers little story, being more-or-less a "day in the life of...", but has some interesting observations on life in the age of computers, communications, and the welfare state. It is the only story in the collection which attempts a real picture of life. It isn't McDaniel's fault that he isn't Disch yet, but he has good makings.

Then there is Van Vogt's FUTURE PERFECT, which offers a future cut from whole cloth without a moment's consideration of probabilities. And the destruction of a civilisation in order that a couple of teenagers may marry hints somehow of scrambled priorities.

Norman Spinrad's A THING OF BEAUTY is a nicely told joke. It can be forgiven for having nothing to say about the future because the joke is a good one, and every serious collection is the better for letting its hair down once in a while.

The collection suffers most from having no single memorable story. An editor, of course, must finally rest content with what he gets, but it is unfair that he should get four out of eight making no attempt to honour their commission.

The future is not for scriveners turning an honest - or otherwise - s f dollar. It is for people who think deeply and regard their trade as an art as well as a living.

- George Turner June 1974

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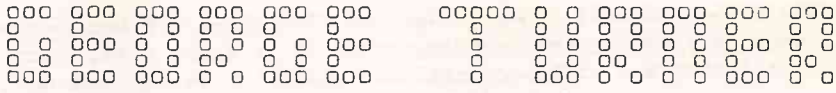
PARADIGM AND PATTERN - continued from p 74

in which it pushes their ideology to the limit of its capability to cope. As a result, one sees Anarres through the eyes of its inhabitants, and their activities take on a finer colour of realistic drama.

This seems to me a superior approach to Herbert's. Human activity is the supreme interest of fiction; background, however detailed and accurate, supports drama but does not create it. Only people create.

- George Turner December 1974



PARADIGM AND PATTERN
Form and meaning in THE DISPOSSESSED

George Turner discusses

THE DISPOSSESSED

by URSULA K LE GUIN

Victor Gollancz :: 1974
319 pages :: $A7.95

Harper & Row :: 1974
338 pages :: $US6.95

One of the problems confronting the reviewer of a novel that seeks to break fresh ground - and I contend that THE DISPOSSESSED does so seek, in its relationship to the general trends of s f - is a sense of his own probable inadequacy in fully grasping what the author has intended.

My reaction on first reading THE DISPOSSESSED was, "Yes! This is a novel of quality." But I was not prepared to say precisely why because I had that sense, which every thinking reader must come to at some stage in his pursuit of pleasure, of the superficial (mainly emotional) reaction not being the final one. That prose lay below the immediate acceptance. That thinking was necessary.

This is the process which led me years ago to modify my ecstatic reception of Alfred Bester into a wry grin at having been neatly conned, and more recently to appreciate the work of J G Ballard in the teeth of an instinctive rejection of his ideas.

A second reading of THE DISPOSSESSED showed me where my hesitations and misapprehensions lay, but it took the full discussion of the book at the first meeting of the reconstituted Nova Mob* to bring basic questions into the light and show me where my own thought was leading. A passing thought of DANIEL DERONDA - of all books! - dropped the last requirement into place, and now I feel I have some overall view of the novel - its attempts, successes, and failures.

My first reaction remains unchanged: It is a good novel as contemporary novels go; it is an important novel for the s f reader and more so for the s f writer.

And this in spite of the Nova Mob's general tone of disappointment.

What I write here was not said at that meeting. It had not then been thought out in coherent fashion.

** ** **

brg Held Thursday 5 December 1974 as the revival of Melbourne's s f discussion group. *

The Nova Mob objections centred, in the main, around the conception of THE DISPOSSESSED as a political novel, and everybody (self included) condmned it for political naivety. I recall making some mild objections, but hadn't thought the thing sufficiently through to see where the error lay.

They also condemned it on grounds of flat characterisation and conventional plotting,* of which more later. But nobody said outright that it is a bad novel. One had the feeling that they recognised their discussion as superficial but could not detect the way in to the sub-surface levels.

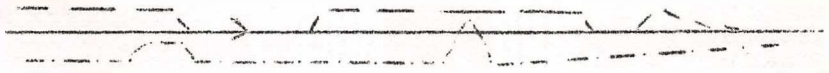
The "way in" lies in the form in which the novel is written. I was acutely aware of this at the time, but had not then tackled the problem in sufficient detail to make an argument of it.

So - here a short digression about "form".

I use the word to mean the diagrammatic shape of a story. For instance, the common adventure story runs in a straight line from beginning through development to a definite end. Thus:

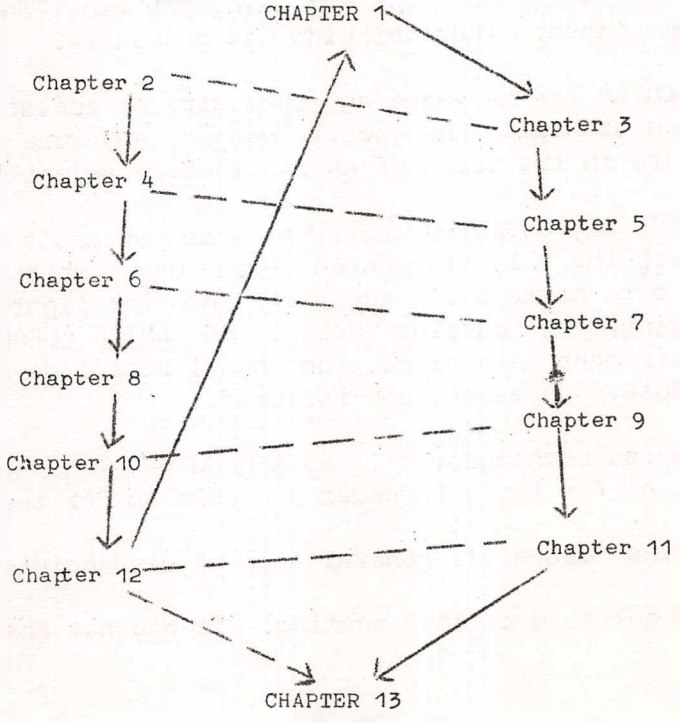
It may feature a few halts for flashbacks. One could represent them like this:

With some writers (Philip Dick notably) story lines are often parallel with different sets of characters whose paths intersect, separate, and converge for a finale. So:



Now, each of these patterns (and they can become very complex) is selected by the author as being the most useful frame on which his story-idea (theme) can be mounted. Once this frame is selected -- and most writers select with some deliberation before the actual writing begins - the frame has itself an effect on the nature of the final product. It exerts a definite pressure on the act of story-telling, and the more complex the frame, the more powerful the pressure - and the greater the art needed to produce an attractive result.

The framework of THE DISPOSSESSED is this shape (reading from the top down):



* brg - "Condemned" is too strong a word. I rather felt the discussion, for most people, started with the unstated prefix, "I liked THE DISPOSSESSED very much, but..." THE DISPOSSESSED was received with great enthusiasm in Melbourne when copies first circulated. *

This pattern is not as complex as the diagram would make it appear. The meaning of it is that in Chapter 1 a main plot is set up and continues through the odd-numbered chapters to a conclusion in Chapter 13. With Chapter 2 a long flashback is begun, which serves the overt purpose of describing how the set-up causing the main plot came into being. This flashback - really a separate and complementary novel - continues through the even-numbered chapters to Chapter 12, which brings the story to the point where Chapter 1 took off.

So you could read the novel in this order - Chapter 2 - 4 - 6 - 8 - 10 - 12 - 1 - 3 - 5 - 7 - 9 - 11 - 13. So why didn't Le Guin write the book in that straightforward order?

This is the question which should have been raised at the Nova Mob meeting but was not, and to my mind the answer to it contains a fair amount of refutation of the criticisms levelled. (With, of course, the slaphappy proviso that my ideas may be a light year or two off the mark. What I am up to is an attempt to enter Mrs Le Guin's mind as designer of the book - always a slippery slope to negotiate.)

The obvious answer to the question is that she was not writing a single continuous plot but two separate plots with themes which interact, and that the alternate chapters allowed her to display her parallels as they occurred.

(This is where the thought of DANIEL DERONDA came in, because this is precisely the form George Eliot adopted exactly 100 years before, even to the use of the same hero as connecting link, and for the same purpose - the display of two cultures, Jewry and upper-middle-class English, in similarity and opposition. For all I know Le Guin might never have read DERONDA, but this was the consideration which led me to consider form as an essential part of statement.)

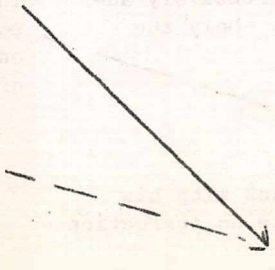
At this point there is nothing for it but to lay out the book in the design I have adopted, if only to show clearly the meaning of those dotted lines crossing the space between plots. And to bring in Chapter 13, which ties up both plots and all the themes and introduces something new which all the rest has led up to.

** ** **

First, the background. This account is spread through the chapters but can be summarised briefly: Two worlds, Urras and Anarres, orbit a common centre of gravity about the star Tau Ceti. Some two centuries before the story opens, only Urras is populated and is at the space-flight stage of technical progress. It would appear to be a Terra-type world with a culture similar to Twentieth-Century Western. Political dissidents seeking a new philosophy of freedom (ie equal opportunity and freedom from imposed government) flee to the desert world of Anarres and there strive to build a new civilisation based on anarchic principles (no oxymoron intended). Anarres is rich in metals and Urras has, Terra-fashion, been prodigal of hers, so the Anarresti support themselves by trading their metals for certain basics from Urras. But in the main they are self-supporting. Their position is much that of the kibbutzim of today - living hard while they force the desert to bloom. But there is no cultural contact. There is a spaceport - with a wall around it. The Urrastic spacemen are not permitted beyond the wall. The opening line of the novel is, "There was a wall", and this symbol recurs throughout the story. (This alone should have been enough to warn us all that the bias of the novel is philosophical, not political.)

Chapter 1

"There was a wall." Through the wall walks the physicist Shevek, an Anarrestic bent on visiting Urras and breaking down the real wall - the two-century-old cultural barrier between the planets. His voyage is not popular among his people, who see Urras as a dangerous psychological hell. He makes the trip in an Urrastic freighter, savagely on guard against advances by the Urrasti crew, and lands on Urras, where he is met by Urrasti scientists.



Chapter 2

This first chapter of the "Anarres novel" tells of Shevek's childhood on his desert planet, of his natural acceptance of the anarchist way of life, his joy in brotherhood of man and woman. Another boyk Tirin, mixes the popular view with

an unpopular hint of rebellion when he cries, "Informed! I've heard about Urras ever since nursery! I don't care if I never see another picture of foul Urrasti cities and greasy Urrasti bodies!" It is the first pale hint of discontent.

Chapter 4

Shevek's parents separate early in his life; marriage customs are not binding. The state rears him and he becomes a brilliant physicist. Invited to work with the scientific doyen, Sabul, he finds, instead of a brilliant physicist, a burned-out old man who steals the work of others and can manipulate records and usages to eliminate competition as ruthlessly as a boss of the Old World. Shevek discovers that the idea of a non-authoritarian state depends on human goodwill - but not all are men of goodwill.

Chapter 6

Sickness from overwork leads Shevek to join more in social life, and here he discovers that individuals can be unhappy under this system he has been reared to think of as perfect. Freedom of choice is not really free, but governed by habit and the power of group disapproval. Two creative artists, Tirin and Salas, playwright and musician, cannot obtain performance of their works, which are "ideologically unsound". "Are we so feeble we can't stand a little exposure?" Under non-authoritarian conditions the body is tended but the intellect is straitjacketed by majority opinion - meaning those who accept "what is" without thinking.

Chapter 8

This chapter does not feature deliberate parallels with Chapter 9 so far as I can see, but continues the story of Shevek's disillusionment. He marries and has a child. Then drought strikes Anarres and for years the family is scattered by the necessity to allocate talents where the state requires. In theory there are methods of hanging together as a family, but these involve sneers about slacking and selfishness. He has the satisfaction of duty done. but his private life is taken from him. The non-authoritarian state is as effectively authoritarian as capitalist Urras. Only the methods are different.

Chapter 10

The drought breaks; Shevek is back with his family, but now he knows there is no perfection

Chapter 3

On Urras the adult Shevek is growing up again, at the learning stage in an Urras which is not quite the world Anarresti educational propaganda has painted. "He had no right to the grace and bounty of this world, earned and maintained by the work... of its people... he did not belong ...the settlers of Anarres has turned their backs on the Old World... but to deny is not to achieve." Detecting untruth, he begins to see his Anarres more clearly.

Chapter 5

Shevek learns that these selfless scientists are not men of goodwill on beautiful Urras either. He is working on a total synthesis equation (the basic formula of energy/time) and this is the reason for his welcome. The Urrasti will use the equation for an FTL drive which will give Urras dominance over Terra and Hain. (This dates the action. The Le Guin Union of Worlds is in existence on a slower-than-light basis but the "ansible" has not yet been invented. There are embassies on Urras but none on isolationist Anarres.) So Shevek has learned that a different system does not mean different human natures.

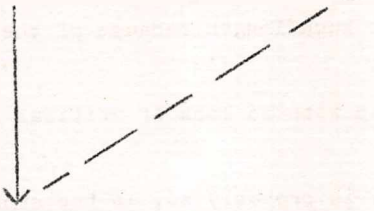
Chapter 7

Shevek must use subterfuge to protect his work on Urras just as he used it to maintain his right to research on Anarres. Conditions are different, but it is the same fight. He learns of the difference between rich and poor and of the subversive organisations which envy the "freedom" of Anarres.

Chapter 9

Shevek completes his equation but is determined that Urras shall not have it. He seeks out and contacts a subversive group, which shelters him. Involved in a public demonstration, he witnesses police brutality and finds himself hunted and on the run. Now he is seeing the true underside of the physical paradise of Urras.

in Anarres. He learns of Tirin the playwright, in an asylum, out of his mind with the treatment given to unstraitjacketed thought. He learns of the existence of cultural dropouts and realises the tyranny of the social conscience. Protest is in the air; he is not alone in his discoveries. This is the beginning of the Shevek who joined the subversives on Urras, who has seen the underside of the egalitarian paradise of Anarres.

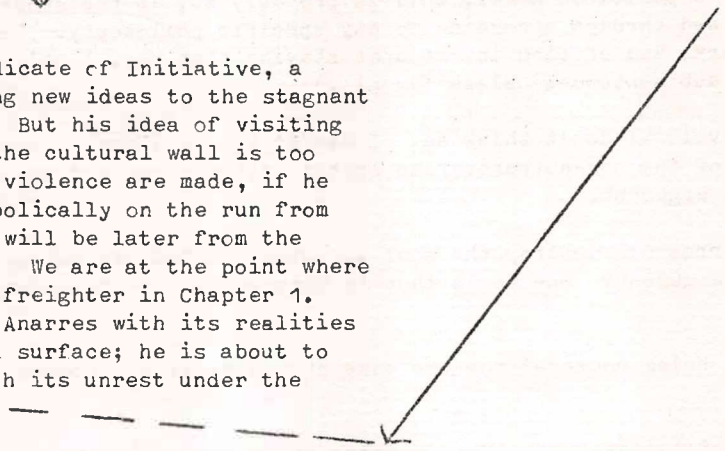


Chapter 11

Shevek seeks refuge in the Terran Embassy and there meets people to whom his doubts and discoveries are old troubles in their histories. He presents the Worlds with his equation for the use of all mankind. In return he asks only for transport home to Anarres. He has nowhere else to go. At least on Anarres he knows the system he is fighting. He has bucked both systems with success as an individual but really he is beaten. He has made a gesture for all the Worlds, but is no nearer his aim of breaking down The Wall.

Chapter 12

Shevek joins the Syndicate of Initiative, a group wishing to bring new ideas to the stagnant ideology of Anarres. But his idea of visiting Urras to break down the cultural wall is too extreme. Threats of violence are made, if he persists. He is symbolically on the run from his own people as he will be later from the bureaucrats of Urras. We are at the point where he joins the Urrasti freighter in Chapter 1. He has learned about Anarres with its realities under the ideological surface; he is about to learn about Urras with its unrest under the beautiful surface.



Chapter 13

A Hain spaceship carries Shevek back to Anarres. On the voyage he is questioned by a Hain officer, who is interested in the Anarresti philosophy. It has been tried on other worlds, he tells Shevek, but has never worked; yet it seems to hold more promise than any other philosophy. He would like to visit Anarres, to become Anarresti in order to study it at first hand. Shevek warns him grimly that he doesn't know what he is doing, but agrees to take him off the ship. The cycle of trial and error is about to begin again with a fresh protagonist.

Reducing all this detail to a more simple and probably more meaningful outline, we find something like this:

Brilliant physicist Shevek finds that the psychological attitudes engendered by the fierce isolationism of the non-authoritarian state make it impossible for him to have his work accepted. He has contacts on Urras and knows it will be accepted there, so he goes to Urras with a dual purpose - (a) to complete his work, and (b) to break down the cultural wall between planets. This dual purpose is symbolic of one theme in the book - the coexistence of personal and abstract needs, of the individual as individual and as member of the state. This conflict is as disruptive an internal force in both Anarres and Urras as is the external force of their mutual distrust.

Urras seems at first a marvel, not at all the cultural dungheap propagandised by Anarresti education. But Shevek eventually meets the same problems, blown to greater proportions because of the greater age of the Urrasti system. Once again he must discard a way of living and return to the old; at least he understands Anarres and can survive its problems more efficiently.

But he has come full circle, knowing that both authoritarianism and non-authoritarianism founder on the rock of individualist psychology, and that the wall cannot be breached where the two sides have no ground of mental contact.

Here, then, is the theme which permeates the bulk of Le Guin's writing - the need for meaningful

communication. It might seem that it has come to a dead end here, but in the last chapter a new cycle of endeavour begins. The Hainish officer, member of a world which has seen all the great political experiments come and go, including anarchism, feels that the answer may yet emerge from a fresh investigation of the non-authoritarian ideal.

He goes with Shevek to Anarres. History grinds into action again. Communication is not impossible if only a man of goodwill can find the way.

** ** **

It has been necessary to lay out the groundwork at such length because of the nature of the arguments urged against THE DISPOSSESSED.

The strongest objection from the Nova Mob - a group with no lack of critical acumen - was that it is politically naive.

If the book is regarded as a political novel, this is probably so, in the sense that political implications are not followed through according to any specific philosophy. (Being amazingly ignorant of political theory, and of firm intent upon staying that way, I rely upon the Nova Mob for the accuracy of that last sentence. Bless 'em all.)

But - is it a political novel? I don't think so. I did at first, if only because so much hinges upon the detailed working of the non-authoritarian system that one has a distinct feeling of involvement in a political argument.

However, the system of Anarres can destroy the soul as surely as the capitalism of Urras can starve the body, so where is the argument? One feels that Le Guin would like to defend Anarres, but in honesty cannot.

So the two systems are not being compared for the sake of the praising of one. Shevek is disillusioned with both.

Is it, then, a novel of disillusionment? (Very popular theme these days - among those who would rather whine about "the system" than take up moral or physical arms against it. Although well bloodied by five-plus decades of "the system", I still prefer the optimistic approach. We have some millions of years in which to make our mistakes.)

The plot is certainly about disillusionment (but don't neglect the gleam of light at the finish) but what is behind the plot?

It seems to me that I stated it a few paragraphs back - the mental ambiguity involved in being both an individual and a member of a state.

Duty is plain - as a member of the state which ruthlessly severs families, cuts short careers and subordinates all things to a "general welfare" but which somehow never seems successfully to bestow the egalitarianism it promises.

Duty is plain also as a husband, as a mother, or as an artist whose conception of serving the state is not that of the official ideology.

So Shevek is damned, whatever he does - and will be damned under any other system. Shevek is an individual discovering that he is not a nested ant.

There, I think, is Le Guin's real theme - the conflict between man the individual and man the group-member. She does not know the answer; she only presents the problem, with a hint that the way of Anarres may contain the seeds of resolution.

I do not say that Le Guin intended this as the theme; only she can know what was in her mind. I say that, whatever she intended, the dual-responsibility theme is what she has achieved.

THE DISPOSSESSED, whatever its origins, is not a political novel. It is about a human problem which every system, political or cultural or merely office-administrative, must face and fail to solve. Fail, because no system can cover all the variations of human self-determination.

Is some ideal form of non-authoritarianism the answer? The idea terrifies me because I have a lifetime of guidelines embedded in my thinking, but it seems the only grouping sufficiently elastic to allow full development of individual potential. (I leave it to others to suggest how such decentralisation will solve the food problem. That's the snag that undermines Anarres.) A non-authoritarian state involves a totally moral community But which morality?

Le Guin is posing questions to which we have no answers, but such are the questions that must be asked, year after year, until the beginnings of answers appear. She poses them very well, very clearly, and this is the value of THE DISPOSSESSED.

** ** **

On the literary side, we must go into this matter of the use of form and what it does to the novelist's work.

Usually the story to be told determines the manner of telling - the shape of the narrative - the form.

A fast action story is told usually in straightforward style, rushing on until the reader stops with a jolt of ending. An action story with more serious undertones - say DUNE or FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND - may proceed in a series of jerks (carefully smoothed and disguised) interspersed with quieter stretches of contemplation or revelatory dialogue. The novel of manners may often be diagrammed as spangles of wit and insight hanging from the mere thread of plot. The psychological novel can frequently be seen as a rising stem of personality shedding gobbets of incident as it moves towards revelation.

There is also another type of structure wherein the progress of a thematic idea is the main substance of the work and all other considerations - plot, characterisation, etc - must hang from the theme. This is the case where plot is not "character in action" but a carefully designed paradigm (in its proper sense of "example", not "analogy") into whose pattern all other elements of the work must fit. Characterisation in particular must be muted (not reduced to cardboard cut-outs) so that the reader's attention is not split along the many lines of interest; he must be able to identify with the characters but not to the point where he begins to take sides in the argument presented.

This is the commonest form of the s f presentation. How many memorable charcters have merged from s f? (Strangely, some of the most easily recalled - R Daneel Olivaw, Trweel, Anderson's Joe, Sturgeon's Daisy Etta - were not people. There's food for thought in this. Some other time.) It is probably what is meant by the cry of "the idea as hero" by those who find characterisation too difficult and use "the idea" to cover a multitude of sins. But it has its purpose and in THE DISPOSSESSED this purpose is fulfilled admirably.

Le Guin's use of the parallel stories is a stroke of excellence. As a pattern, it allows point-for-point comparisons between the two cultures, and by telling the same tale of disillusionment against two oppositely conceived backgrounds Le Guin makes her point about the failure of cultural systematisation without ever mentioning the idea.

In each parallel the same line unwinds, yet the two are not so similar as to make the pattern drearily obvious. The Anarres line stretches from birth to the moment of disillusion and action through years of learning what the world is about; in the Urras parallel the grown man perceives and learns much faster, until he comes to the same moment of disillusion and action. The curious Chapter 13, with its mixture of despair and cautious hope, does little for the plot, but serves to push the theme a stage further, to point out that the end of a story is not the end of the world, that there is more to come because every ending is also the threshold of a beginning. (This is what was meant by the critic - whose name I have forgotten - who pointed out that Dostoyevsky's crime novels begin where another man's thriller leaves off.) Le Guin may not be ready to write the novel which begins where the Hainish officer steps out on to the surface of Anarres, but somebody else may yet pick up the idea and take the theme from there.

Le Guin has exposed the possibility and so had done s f a service; as far as I can remember, this theme has not been used in s f previously, except as a passing remark.

Whether the service will be recognised is another matter. Tom Disch, in 334, also opened up a fesh approach to some s f problems, but one doesn't even hear of the book being appreciated, let alone hailed for excellence. And certainly not recognised for the milestone it is.

** ** **

Working to a pattern imposes subservience to the pattern. A theme is being stated, from a carefully descriptive beginning to a predetermined end. In such a work no character can take over at midpoint and overturn the author's intention with sheer individualism. As a writer, I get a terrific kick when this happens because it means the story has come alive, but whoever writes to a stern design cannot afford the luxury of loving some such creation too much to inhibit him.

The point I make here is that criticism of THE DISPOSSESSED on the ground of unadventurous

characterisation - and some of the Nova Mob did make this criticism - indicates a failure to recognise the nature and meaning of the novel. (Easy for me to be superior. I've got all their opinions and insights to work with as well as my own two readings and three months in which to mull it over.)

The characterisation is at all times fully adequate for its purpose. The characters are all types, all people of a kind one would expect to find in existence under the various sets of given circusmtances.

Shevek is the archetypal dedicated scientist - a genius in his field, vulnerable and almost ignorant outside his field, slow to action, prone to the intellectual sin of vacillating between the two sides of a question, angered by bureaucracy and prejudice and at the same time unable to recognise the stultifying beliefs and prejudices of which his own mind is stuffed full. That is quite a full character, really, but we know him - at least in outline - from a hundred failed protest operas.

So, also, we know his wife, Takver, the intelligent research worker who adapts to the system but still finds ways and means to be mother, wife, and helpmeet even in the days of separation and trial, and who loyally supports him when public opinion turns rancid.

And we know Tirin the playwright, who made the mistake of writing social criticism in a non-critical society, and Sabul the failed academic living on reputation and the work of his juniors, and Vea the Urrasti socialite whose attempted seduction becomes a rape by a drunken physicist. We know them all.

I portest, however, that Le Guin has not fobbed us off with a set of stick figures. She has gone to much trouble to build each one carefully to the point where his or her designed impact on the thematic structure is logical and perfectly placed. (Too perfect? Too designed? But this is a designed, patterned, constructed novel and must be read as such. If you read for what you expect instead of making the small effort to appreciate what you are given, you will never be satisfied by anything but the mixture as before. And then God help you - and all writers of novels.) More, she has breathed some life into her characters by not insisting on what they are. Each one grows gently into his or her final form, coaxed along with an undramatic realism of small events and unspectacular talk, but developing all the while.

It is unreasonable to complain that they don't develop into great diverse and memorable figures. They are, in general, far more like human beings than the usual screechings which s f's substitutes for characterisation prepare us to expect. In fact THE DISPOSSESSED, despite its blatant planning and patterning, is a far more realistic novel than s f can show in all its welter of Hugos and mind-blowings and fan adulations. It is a relief to come upon a writer who can present human beings, however familiar, and show that they too can travel the stars and shake civilisations. (Also Disch and Compton. Who else?)

I can't accept the complaint about characterisation. A closer look shows more characterisation in THE DISPOSSESSED than most s f writers inject into a lifetime of writing, and far more than most writers of any kind could produce within the limits of such a strict framework.

The great literary virtue of THE DISPOSSESSED is the illusion of realism. One can believe in desert Anarres, in the aims and beliefs and mental strictures of her people finally caught up in the realities of a stern ideology, in the slow realisation that there are other things in the cosmos than simple brotherhood and selflessness. Urras, paradigm of our western Earth, is less believable because Le Guin has expended less effort on the already known - and because there are elements of exaggeration here, stemming from the intrusion of her private beliefs. In particular, some overstressed women's-libbery seems uncomfortable in its setting; the points made about female equivalence on Anarres say all that needs to be said, and the underlining of their situation on Urras is coals to Newcastle.

This is my only real irritation about an excellent novel.

** ** **

On the matter of unoriginal plotting, I recall John Foyster complaining that THE DISPOSSESSED wound up like a STARTLING STORIES novel (which was, I feel, a little excessive for the usually accurate John) - and hastily adding that he will happily read STARTLING STORIES also. Perhaps he meant that it was not a really deep complaint.

And in fact it isn't. Plot, except in the superficial thriller, is less important than the handling of plot, and theme is the novelist's consideration rather than the mechanics of interaction which, ideally, should be disguised to the point of reader-unawareness. Where plot is paramount

you have - though there are exceptions - a superficial, immediately interesting but forgettable book. Where theme is paramount - and this is roughly the difference between the serious novel and the romance - the reader has some chance of a memorable experience.

An illustration? How about CINDERELLA? The plot is "boy meets girl", but the theme is "virtue triumphant", and it is the downfall of the Ugly Sisters which demands and retains attention rather than the wholly predictable activities of the Prince. He is only a bonus for Cinderella's being a good girl.

It is my own professional opinion that any old plot will do - and there are supposed to be only five basic plots - as long as you have something interesting to say. Plot should support the theme, not dominate it.

I think Le Guin did rightly in plotting without subtlety. We've had sufficient critical misapprehension about the book without being further side-tracked by ingenuities of manipulation. The simple plot had the virtue of inevitability with the single exception of the manner of Shevek's contact with the subversives of Urras, and even that was humanly and dramatically believable.

Look at the book for what it is - the patient exposition of a theme, presented in simple form and clothed in an unassumingly realistic method of writing - and most objections begin to wither. In fairness to the author one's appreciation should take account of what is there, not of what one would rather have found there. In looking for the kind of story you want, it is too easy to undervalue the story given you.

Do I hear someone muttering, "And now he wants us to appreciate a dressed-up diagram?"

Sure. Why not? What do you think you've been reading all your life but dressed-up diagrams? THE DISPOSSESSED just happens to be more diagrammatic than most, and this is precisely the trait that allows it to make its point. I salute the intelligence that saw this as the right and simple way to present the theme.

** ** **

One further point raised at the Nova Mob meeting deserves consideration. Bruce Gillespie asked something on the lines of, "Why are the publishers, both American and English, giving this book the VIP treatment?"

The implication was that THE DISPOSSESSED wasn't worth such treatment.* I disagree, because it is the sort of novel which could beguile the non-s f reader into a greater appreciation of s f. Gollancz has published its edition without the "s f" imprint. And why not, when the "s f" imprint involves, in the non-s f mind, too much that is unblushingly shoddy and an insult to the intelligence? S f at its worst can make Larry and Stretch look like intellectuals, so why should not a publisher quietly seek a wider public by suppression rather than advertisement, and by promotion on merits rather than on genre affiliation?

The s f reader - jaded with the ephemeral mind-blowings of the super-science boys and the tortured literary gymnastics of the Jerry Cornelius school - will probably get less out of THE DISPOSSESSED than the reader with a wider span of interest; its appeal is to the intellect rather than the emotions. (Which reminds me that I have not discussed Le Guin's ideas about non-authoritarian systems. Nor am I going to. I am not competent.)

Bruce's real complaint might lie perhaps in such enormities as the blurb on the jacket of the American edition of THE DISPOSSESSED. I quote it in full:

> THE DISPOSSESSED breathes life into the Utopian tradition for our ambiguous age of hope and terror and masterfully raises science fiction to major humanistic literature. It speaks in an angry, compassionate, wise, beautiful voice. A synthesis for our times, a literary and cultural event of the first order.

We know that even reputable writers tend to go a little overboard in producing quotable blurbs for publishers, and we discount them accordingly. But this one is attributed to the mandarin assuredness, the pontifical laying-down-of-the-literary-law of none other than Darko Suvin, Professor in the Department of English at McGill University. So it just has to be the right goods, huh?

Well, it isn't. Suvin, as a critic, should know better. And Suvin as a responsible Professor

* brg * Implication denied. My implication was that the last thing publishers (John Bush of Gollancz excepted) seem to consider in promoting books is quality. Therefore, what are the commercial qualities in THE DISPOSSESSED which let the publishers spend so much on it? *

should not undermine the credibility of his profession by making demonstrably overstuffed public announcements.

"...Breathes life into the utopian tradition..." THE DISPOSSESSED is totally anti-utopian, dystopian. Nor was I aware that the utopian tradition was in need of artificial respiration; it has always seemed pretty healthy.

"...Our ambiguous age of hope and terror..." is mere rhetoric. At best it is a description of every age in history. But it sounds impressive, doesn't it?

"...Masterfully..." It isn't the word I would have used or that the novel deserves. The treatment is interesting and competent and successful but too obtrusive for such a word as "masterfully".

"...Raises science fiction to major humanistic literature." That is, to the levels inhabited by Proust, Mann, Dickens, Tolstoy, Fielding, etc. Pardon me if I refuse further comment.

"A synthesis for our times..." I don't know what this means. Do you?

"...A literary and cultural event of the first order..." Balls! The first order is rare and marvellous and produces upheavals - and is usually missed by the intelligentsia until the enthusiastic mob has rubbed its nose in it.

THE DISPOSSESSED is not first-order anything. To see it with clarity we must first read it for what it is rather than for what we expect, and read it also without a burst of literary-mandarin stars in our eyes. What emerges is an originally conceived and executed novel operating on levels unfamiliar to conventional s f and leaning more towards the novel of intellectual apparatus. It is removed from the traditions of s f and could not in fact have been executed successfully within those traditions. It is an indication of the directions in which science-fictional thinking can travel when allied to a solid appreciation of the possibilities of form and structure. It is not a masterpiece; it is a solid and, in the main, successful attempt to break the mould. More than this, it speculates, which is more than can be said of 99 per cent of those who hopefully label their product "speculative fantasy".

The Suvin celebration is misplaced and is a fine example of the kind of addled adulation which causes serious-minded critics to view the s f field with justifiable distrust. I have no doubt that Ursula Le Guin, who seems to be a lady with her head screwed firmly right way round, knows this and treats it with tolderant forgetfulness. Or does she? There are few critics less forgivable than those who credit you with glories you know you have not achieved.

In sum: THE DISPOSSESSED is an excellent novel, well above the current ruck. It is not as totally successful a novel as Disch's 334, which displays a greater mastery of subject and technique, but it makes the rest of the year's product look smaller than it otherwise might.

All this is sufficient reason for publishers to promote a novel by one of s f's brightest stars, and one who shows signs of successfully bridging the gap between genre s f and the novel.

** ** **

As for the Nova Mob's doubts and settings down, I stick my neck out to diagree, to say that THE DISPOSSESSED is a better novel than they allowed. Remember, too, that no work, however good, will come out of a group discussion unscathed. This, I think, is a case where weaknesses were pointed with some reason but values went unassessed or unrecognised because the formal nature of the work has not been appreciated.

** ** **

P S

I thought I had finished, but re-reading shows much of what the literary- and philosophy-minded may expect of THE DISPOSSESSED, but little of what the science fiction reader will look for.

For him there is the beautifully worked-out de cription of the desert world of Anarres and the survival measures of the settlers. Comparisons with DUNE is almost inevitable here, but is not really germane. Herbert concentrated on the ecological aspects with surprisingly little consideration of the social echoes, and his characters acted out a melodrama which did not arise out of the physical conditions.

Le Guin offers a bare framework of factual description with only sufficient detail to pin down specific factors. Her interest is in the effect of the desert economy on the settlers and the way

(PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 64)

SHOWING CHILDREN THE VALUE OF DEATH

Peter Nicholls discusses:

THE FARTHEST SHORE

by URSULA K LE GUIN

Gollancz :: 1973
206 pp :: $A4.55

Puffin :: 1974
214 pp :: $A0.85

and

A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA

Gollancz ::

Ace 90075 :: 1968
204 pp :: $US0.95

Puffin :: 1971
202 pp :: $A0.85

THE TOMBS OF ATUAN

Gollancz :: 1972
160 pp ::

Puffin :: 1974
155 pp :: $A0.75

Original editions:

Parnassus Press (US)
1968, 1971, 1973

((*brg* Peter Nicholls is a former teacher of English at Melbourne and Sydney Universities, has spent two years in USA and a number of years in Britain, and is at present the Administrator of the Science Fiction Foundation, North East London Polytechnic. He also edits its magazine, FOUNDATION, where this article first appeared. FOUNDATION is available for £2.40 or $US7.50 from The Science Fiction Foundation, North East London Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Essex RM8 2AS, England. I hope that Peter will be able to return to Australia for a visit during Aussiecon. *))

The saga of Ged the Magician is ostensibly for children. It began with an epic, A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA. It continued with a romance (in the old sense), THE TOMBS OF ATUAN. And now it is ended with THE FARTHEST SHORE, which begins as a quest, and shades into a lament, and finishes appropriately, not as a paean, but as a muted triumph, a quiet lyric. Ursula La Guin is not a writer to rework earlier successes, it will be seen. Certainly not within the scope of a single trilogy. It is amazingly varied in tone, even though in theme the three books knit into a single, integrated work.

The last fifteen years, which have seen the decline of the traditional novel growing ever more marked, have been fortunate years for the children's book. The art has never been more healthy. In my own order of priorities, I would put Ursula Le Guin in the first rank, along with Alan Garner, and perhaps T H White from an earlier generation. They are closely followed by William Mayne, Phillipa Pearce, John Gordon, and J R R Tolkien. My own prejudices are probably revealed in that these are all writers of fantasy, though not to the exclusion of everything else. Fantasy is in a much fitter state

in children's literature than it is in the so-called adult version, where we find Thongor and Brak, and all those mindless bastard offspring of Conan and John Carter.

With writing of the order represented by Ursula Le Guin and Alan Garner, the distinction between books for children and books for adults becomes meaningless. Even the publishers become confused. In England, A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA is published by Puffin Books, as "for readers of eleven and over", but I understand that it has been published in the United States in an edition for adults. The same thing happened to Alan Garner's ELIDOR. These are books that deal with real feelings that are not the exclusive property of children or adults. They do not condescend or simplify, in feelings or ideas - unlike some earlier writers, even those as good as E Nesbit. The only things that really make them children's books is that they deal with subjects, such as magic, that are supposed to have a traditional appeal in childhood, that they are written in a language sufficiently lucid to be intelligible to children, and that at least one of the protagonists is either a child or an adolescent.

Oddly, the best children's books have never restricted themselves to those areas of experience which we may assume to be familiar to children. William Mayne and Alan Garner have both touched on sexuality, Garner's book THE OWL SERVICE is at moments quite heavy with passion, and Mrs Le Guin's most recent book, our subject here, deals much of the time with pain, impotence, loss, and death.

The Earthsea trilogy tells of the growth and adult power of a magician, Sparrowhawk. His secret name is Ged, but this is only revealed to a few, for a man who possesses the secret name of another knows his essence, and consequently has power over him. In our own world, laughingly known as the "real" world, the theory of secret names is very ancient, both in traditional magic and traditional religion. Mrs Le Guin can nowehre be faulted in her anthropology, by me at least; not surprisingly, as she is the daughter of the famous anthropologist A L Kroeber. (If only heredity were always so successful.) Her stories, however, are not about anthropology - not even the celebrated LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS - even though they use that expert knowledge to give body and texture to the societies they describe.

The world of Earthsea is smaller than our own. It consists of a complex archipelago (map provided) stretching maybe 2,000 miles from rim to rim, and consisting of about 400 islands. Beyond is open ocean, and its roar or mutter dominates the first and third books in the trilogy, though the second is thick with the heaviness of earth. (I have a totally unprovable and chauvinistic theory, coming as I do from the East Coast of Australia, that the ocean dominates the consciousness of the Pacific-born more strongly than that of the Atlantic peoples. One notes that Mrs Le Guin lives in Oregon.) The secular power of Earthsea is conventionally enough in the hands of princes, barons, burgesses, and pirates, but the power grown of knowledge rests with the magicians.

Being a magician is no easy matter. One may be born with an aptitude, but his power over the world of matter is possible only if he has a full knowledge of the nature of that world, and this knowledge is gained only by patience and hard work. The secret name theory, which is so prominent in the trilogy, seems to me a sort of shorthand for the understanding of essences - what Gerard Manley Hopkins used to call the "inscape" of things. In this respect the magicians of these stories are the same as the scientists of today. It is the rigour with which Mrs Le Guin deals with the magical laws she invokes that makes this a trilogy which can properly be reviewed in a journal devoted to science fiction. In all the essentials her magicians are indeed scientists. She never uses magic as a narrative gimmick, a cheap and easy way of working the impossible and allowing the reader the mild frisson of identifying with the superhuman. Indeed, she is at pains to show how difficult it is to upset the natural balance, the equilibrium of the created world, by magical or any other means. Only the greatest of magicians are shown as being able to harness real natural forces, and that at the cost of a sapping of energy. Most magic is of appearances only. A magnificent feast may be conjured up, but the illusion of nourishment will last only as long as the spell is maintained. It has no permanent effect. Protein is not conjured up where no protein was before.

Acclaim for A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA (published in 1968) was just about universal, but that book set up expectations in its readers which were not always fulfilled by the second, THE TOMBS OF ATUAN. In the latter book, our field of vision is narrower and more concentrated, the tone more sombre. The sphere of action has shrunk from that of a whole world to the walled-in darkness of the catacombs where an adolescent girl, perverted by her training, is using her new-found powers of womanhood to celebrate the old powers of earth and darkness. (In each of the three books a voyage into darkness is central.) The patience and understanding of the magician, Ged, now grown into a mature man, finally release the girl priestess from the bondage of her training and the warping of her own budding sexuality. We see all this through the eyes of the heroine, a girl who understands little of what she sees. Ged is seen from the outside, and takes on a kind of bulky strangeness, a little alarming for readers who have identified strongly with him in the first book of the trilogy. The sense of an oppressive spiritual danger, rendered with frightening immediacy and narrowly averted, is strong in this book. The book was deliberately different in kind from its predecessor, I would guess, but this confused many of the critics. Where the earlier book seemed expansive, this

concentrates all of its power into one single, massive metaphor.

THE FARTHEST SHORE is different again. It is barely possible to summarise the nature of this complex book in only a few paragraphs. Its subjects - maturity, death, ambition, balance, corruption, the significance of meaning itself - are so big. Far bigger than one has any right to expect in a book for children, and some might think too big to cope with, for writer as well as reader. Most of the themes, it's worth noting, are also present in Tolkien's THE LORD OF THE RINGS; they are, after all, the epic themes. Individual similarities with the Tolkien book are many. In both trilogies we find the traditional quest pattern, for instance, where the external voyage becomes the mirror of an internal movement towards maturity, acceptance, self-knowledge, and finally the ability to come to terms with one's own imagined death. Both writers, to take a more trivial example, are fascinated with dragons as symbols of ancient knowledge and power, although here Mrs Le Guin clearly has the better of it. Her dragons are more dignified than Tolkien's. Incidentally, unlike Tolkien, Mrs Le Guin makes almost no use (apart from dragons) of beasts and monsters. No wargs or orcs or balrogs here, only people, rarely seen in the morally absolute blacks and whites that Tolkien uses.

The important differences are these: where Tolkien is expansive, Ursula Le Guin is condensed; where he has a tendency to approach his wonders through allusiveness and indirection, she renders them with clarity and precision. I admire Tolkien very much, but I believe Mrs Le Guin has deeper resources of language than Tolkien possessed.

Quotation might help here. One of the most difficult tests occurs quite often, as both writers have a taste for the incantatory and poetic, and here the danger of over-writing is the strongest. Tolkien used regularly to succumb to a rather hollow "high" style, jerry-built from a number of medieval sources, sometimes looking as if they had been filtered through William Morris. It comes out with the elves, the men Gondor, and the Rohirrim, and sometimes, too, with Gandalf. Take Gandalf's descent into hell:

> Far, far below the deepest delvings of the Dwarves, the world is gnawed by nameless things. Even Sauron knows them not. They are older than he. Now I have walked there, but I will bring no report to darken the light of day.
>
> THE TWO TOWERS Chapter 5

Has anybody yet thought of tracing the similarities between Tolkien and Lovecraft? Compare Arren's descent into the land of the dead:

> All of those whom they saw...were whole and healed. They were healed of pain, and of life. They were not loathsome as Arren had feared they would be. Quiet were their faces, freed from anger and desire, and there was in their shadowed eyes no hope.
>
> Instead of fear, then, great pity rose up in Arren, and if fear underlay it, it was not for himself, but for us all. For he saw the mother and child who had died together; but the child did not run, nor did it cry, and the mother did not hold it, nor ever look at it. And those who had died for love passed each other in the streets.
>
> THE FARTHEST SHORE Chapter 12

Literary precedents for voyages to the underworld are many: Homer, Vergil, Dante, even the Bible. Dante above all others, and it is not a wholly ridiculous name to conjure up in the context of Ursula Le Guin. It would be less appropriate in Tolkien's case. In both Le Guin and Tolkien, of course, the literary impulse is considerably more romantic than it was with Dante, and even with the Le Guin passage above, some readers may be more reminded of the better pre-Raphaelites, say, than of Dante. Both Tolkien and Le Guin have a tendency to archaise, to claim a dignity of expression by evoking rhythms and word orders which themselves recall the great books of the past. Even Mrs Le Guin does it too much for my taste ("quiet were their faces", "there was in their shadowed eyes no hope") but she is a very mild offender when compared with Tolkien. She does have in common with Dante a telling precision of imagery, seen above in the remark about the mother not even looking at the child. Her language does not attain the ease or naturalness of Dante's, but she does understand, as he did, that the strongest emotional resonances are achieved through accuracy, by capturing the individuality of a particular situation or character. Tolkien tends more towards incantatory rhythms, and shadowy if noble images of a more abstract and general kind... a language imprecise, but sufficiently charged with emotion that the less experienced reader automatically fleshes out the details according to his own fantasies (or nightmares), and then innocently assumes the potency of the effect to be Tolkien's skill rather than the vividness of his own imaginings.

Some examples of the clarity of Mrs Le Guin's images:

> They stood in the boat, three of them, stalk-thin and angular, great-eyed, like strange dark herons or cranes. (page 120)
>
> He saw on the shore what he took for a moment to be a ruined fortress. It was a dragon. One black wing was bent under it and the other stretched out vast across the sand and into the water, so that the come and go of waves moved it a little to and fro in a mockery of flight.
>
> (page 158)

> ...the eyes he dared not look into, the eyes like oil coiling on water, like yellow smoke behind glass, the opaque, profound and yellow eyes watched Arren.
> (page 198)

These are not perfect, but they come close. The third example strains a fraction too hard for the exotic, perhaps. The first would be improved by the omission of "strange" which is redundant in the context, but how piercing an image it is, notwithstanding one adjective too many.

This does point, though, to a more general criticism. There are times when one wished that some of the adjectives, the ones that don't work hard enough, had been blue-pencilled. These are the moments that most remind me of Tolkien, usually in his graver mood - words like "strange", "dim", "vast", "fierce", "sad", "lean", "cold", "noble". The writing is never simply mechanical, but it is tauter and more attentive in some places than others. However, the reader is seldom given the chance to become impatient. Every few paragraphs a phrase here, a word there, astounds by its freshness and directness of vision.

Mrs Le Guin is a metaphysician. Her ultimate belief, at least as expressed in this series of books, is that dualities are mutually necessary, that only death gives meaning to life, that joy cannot exist in the total absence of its opposite. It is said that she has been much influenced in her writing by the Tao, and this may be. Certainly the philosophy seems more Chinese than, say, Indian, but I would have thought it more Western than either, in its emphasis on dualism. The still, intuitive centre that she so finely implies in Ged may seem Eastern, but his readiness to act seems alien to Taoism, which I take to be an essentially passive belief, but here I am aware of displaying a possibly massive ignorance.

Certainly, whatever the source of the beliefs expressed in her books, I am in profound agreement with them. I would guess that Mrs Le Guin (to continue evoking possibly grandiose comparisons) is a reader of Yeats and of Donne. Tricks of thoughtt and phraseology often recall those two poets whose concerns were so close to Mrs Le Guin's own. There are temperamental affinities too. Mrs Le Guin's trilogy is by no means as sombre as I may seem to be suggesting, with its constant awarness of death and pain, but as with Donne and Yeats happiness is rarely unalloyed.

The theme runs through all three books of the trilogy. It is expressed on page 1 of A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA, where the epigraph is a small poem:

> Only in silence the word,
> only in dark the light,
> only in dying life;
> bright the hawk's flight
> on the empty sky.

It is no coincidence that Ged is usually known as Sparrowhawk.

In THE TOMBS OF ATUAN the final knowledge is not that darkness is evil, but rather, that it gives meaning to light. (Ursula Le Guin is always careful not to see darkness and death as evil per se - that is part of the point of her books. Her dualism is not of that Zoroastrian variety that was later imported into Christianity, where the light simplistically signifies good, and the darkness, evil. She is not, I would think, a moral dualist.)

The plot of THE FARTHEST SHORE is based on the discovery by a warped magician that there is a way to ensure partial immortality. The whole balance of nature and being in Earthsea is upset by his actions, for if death is rendered meaningless, then life too, by a natural balancing out, is drained of meaning and desire. And if life is drained of meaning, then magic, which relies on the knowledge of meanings and the names of things, can no longer operate. Ged and his assistant, the young prince Arren, have ultimately to journey into Death themselves, not to attack it, but paradoxically, to renew its power. Death cannot be conquered by making it go away. The sense of oppression built up in the book by a profound misuse of power lingers even through the final triumph... a literary triumph too, in its finely rendered realisation that even good men acting on the side of right cannot expect to get somethkng for nothing. Ged is able to keep the natural powers alive and available for the use of men, but only at the cost of exhausting and losing his own powers - powers through which he had moved like a hawk through the sky, at home in his element. This summary of the theme of THE FARTHEST SHORE shows it, I hope, to be a wholly natural, even inevitable climax to the trilogy, though I am sure that many critics will once again accuse Mrs Le Guin of having changed direction.

The theme is not new. So well worn is it, in fact, that it may not even be supposed important. On the other hand, a theme that has endured some thousands of years may be allowed to have intrinsic staying power, and to many children it will be new. I hope that they make sense of the often beautiful but sometimes cryptic metaphors Mrs Le Guin uses to make her point, as where Ged explains to Arren:

> There is no safety. There is no end. The word must be heard in silence. There must be darkness to see the stars. The dance is always danced above the hollow place, above the terrible abyss. (page 130)

Again, there, just a touch of overwriting. I would have prferred "abyss" to have been unqualified by "terrible", but all in all, it is a moving and true statement. Again, too, we see that precision of metaphor, in this case given by the context, where two pages later, on midsummer eve, a dance is performed on a great raft, floating above the hollow of the deep,

open ocean, giving life retrospectively to what may have seemed a rather notional image.

All three books, incidentally, are quite deeply un-Christian, though not anti-Christian. The abode of the dead that Mrs Le Guin invents is neither heaven nor hell, but much closer to the Greek Hades. When she speaks of "only in dying life" she does not speak of a life after death. She means, I think, that the keenness of living is kept sharp by the imminence of death, and that is a very different point. The trilogy is certainly religious, and she speaks of "creation", but there is no sense of any Jehovah figure brooding over it, let alone ever interceding. (If that's what you want for your children, lead them to C S Lewis.) Ursula Le Guin's "philosophy" values this world highly, and one feels that the Eastern Nirvana and the Christian Heaven would be equally distasteful to her, as representing states which turn the spirit away from what it can make of itself in the here and now. For Mrs Le Guin's other great theme is the growth of the spirit - the "self", if a less loaded word is preferred - towards understanding its own nature, and the best way to bring that nature into interaction with the world it inhabits. (Yes, I know that Christians and Buddhists too encourage the growth of the spirit, but my own biases lead me to see the emphasis and purpose of this as being rather different from what I take Mrs Le Guin to be writing about.)

All of the above, no doubt, has the misleading effect of making the three books sound like heavy going, but in fact the brisk sweep of the narrative, with much sparkle and wit along the way, makes the stories compulsively readable, though always too intelligent to make for totally easy reading. I would like to know how much they appeal to children, and would be interested to read Mrs Le Guin's fan mail. It seems to me that they should appeal, but it is difficult for an adult to recapture the sort of thing that touched him most deeply as a child.

The Earthsea trilogy is Mrs Le Guin's finest achievement to date, I believe, but the themes are very similar to those we find in her recent science fiction - in THE LATHE OF HEAVEN, and notably in THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. Mrs Le Guin herself (in an article published in FOUNDATION 4) distinguishes between her fantasies and her science fiction, but it seems to me that the similarities are more essential than the differences. In both genres she uses metaphor to speak about what most matters to people in the real world.

It is tempting to over-praise her, and perhaps I have done so. The sensitivity and accuracy of her writing are so far beyond what we expect in adult fantasy, let alone children's, that by those standards she is made to seem amongst the greatest. She combines intelligence with feeling in a genre normally preoccupied with the most simplistic feelings to the near exclusion of thought. It is this that we value her for, and yet I feel that the honesty and depth of her feelings, and the transparently subtle intellect, have not yet found their wholly adequate form. In the Earthsea trilogy, and occasionally in THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, the quality of feeling drifts sometimes towards the plangent, and minor characters especially seem a little sentimentalised. I think of Vetch in A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA, whose rough sincerity and kindly solidity seem a bit too much like Horatio to Ged's Hamlet. But these faults, if such they are, are superficial matters of writerly control. For me, the inner impulse of the books is as lucid as crystal. I look forward to her next with genuine excitement.

- Peter Nicholls
FOUNDATION 5
January 1974

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S F INFLUENCES OZ POLITICS

Malcolm Fraser, a politician from the at-present-out-of-office Liberal Party, has made some attempts to gain control of his party, and will perhaps succeed quite soon now. NATION REVIEW's astute Canberra observer, Mungo McCallum, writes about Fraser's well-known reading tastes:

"Fraser sees one of his major political mentors as the philosopher-novelist Ayn Rand, but to say so as often as he does... can only mean that he assumes his readers are either illiterate or mad.

"The Rand philosophy, insofar as it can be interpreted as having any meaning at all in a post-medieval context, is based on the idea that leaders are born, not made, and that at no stage should they be concerned with their weaker brethren in their relentless march towards greatness. Government would be virtually non-existent, except in the sense of protecting the leader and his state from any attempt by the masses to use their numbers to get more than he felt appropriate. Business would work in a truly open market. There would be no income tax, beyond a sort of tithing to support the leader's private army - and any social welfare - including health, education, pensions, compensation, and so on - would be provided at the whim of the leader, and as a form of private charity...

"...It puts Fraser in with some of the more rabid nut groups in Australian politics, ranging from the League of Rights through the Australian Society of General Practitioners... All these express a more-or-less unqualified admiration for the Rand philosophy, and for her disciples such as the American science fiction writer Robert Heinlein, whose ideas of society are probably best exemplified in a rather disgusting book called DOOR INTO SUMMER... Exactly how the Rand view of Utopia fits in with the Liberal Party platform has yet to be determined." (NATION REVIEW, 17-23 January 1975, page 367)

CRITICANTO - COND FROM PAGE 27

So, if you like Van Vogt you won't be disappointed in King, but if you prefer your interests a little better rationalised you'll put it down with a sigh for the possibly original novel that isn't.

Also, it reads as though the plot details were never clear in the writer's mind and he kept tossing in ideas as they occurred to him, with the result that the final mess could only be sorted out by outbursts of pointless violence and a series of revelations wherein everybody turns out to be somebody or something else.

As in a Victorian melodrama.

And of course that's just what CANDY MAN is - a Victorian melodrama set in the year 20,000,000 or whatever. (The date is scarcely worth checking.) It has everything to set the groundlings on chair-edge:

(a) The world is run by computers and a small group of human "Teachers". The rest of humanity is "brainburned" and useless, living an animal existence. Since this rest of humanity never gets into the story at all, our setting is the aristocratic world of power and intrigue, with its traditional quota of luscious but bitchy sex symbols and paranoic males with hump-backed souls. (King's version was at first hard to recognise, but I think the parallel is valid. At any rate the reader is not asked to rub shoulders with the canaille.)

(b) Candy Man himself is the hero without a past, without a background, with only the idea that there is something important locked, forgotten, in his head. The s f adept will at once recognise the "lost will" theme in the messiah variation common to black utopias.

(c) But Candy Man belongs to nothing and nobody; he is homeless, rootless, and hasn't even a real name. Poor little darling. This is the "orphan" theme, beloved of matinee mums since long before EAST LYNNE. He's a pretty nasty little orphan, but this is the modern variety - you know, permissive. That means that he gets a bit of sex now and then; this turns out to be completely irrelevant to the central story, but what's new in that?

(d) The world preserves the legend that one day the Great Robot and/or the Saver will come and "put things right". This is, of course, the "mysterious stranger" theme. He's the one who turns out to be three other people in the last act and brings down the curtain on virtue triumphant. (And if you think you have guessed who or what Candy Man turns out to be, just keep going; practically all the possible guesses are right.)

There are also several "breathless chases", many "scenes of Gothic horror", a "tender love passage", a whole sequence of "dramatic confrontations", and the "unswerving devotion of the hero's (robot) dog".

There are also, in the Philip Dick vein, some symbolic duplications of some characters, including Candy Man. I don't know what they symbolise. Over to you.

After all this, why go on?

Well, the fact is that, as I stated earlier, the damned thing is quite compulsively readable. If the grand total is a pack of nonsense, some of the bits along the way are good fun.

For instance, the conception of the city, rising higher and higher until it fills the valleys and levels with the mountain tops, built one megalopolis atop another by the mindless robots in the basement, has its impressive moments.

And the discovery, in the sea under the city, of all the great architectural treasures of the past (the Taj Mahal, the Kremlin, the Sydney Opera House!) preserved in plastic against the day of renaissance, is a passage of genuine charm.

Damn it, but the book is full of things like those. Your attention is constantly snagged, your goodwill engaged, your expectation raised. And all for nothing.

How to write a really classy s f novel:

Characters and background by Alfred Bester.

Plot by A E Van Vogt.

Basic idea by the authors of the New Testament.

Sex scenes by almost anybody who's tried it and liked it.

Science by Laurel and Hardy.

What more can you ask in a fast, razzle-dazzle thriller?

And yet it just doesn't work. Because you don't believe in King's artificial, reasonless future. You get tired of a world in which everyone is warped to the point of dangerous lunacy. You weary of good ideas stuck in like raisins in a bun and left there without development. And in the long run you despair of a novel that finally reveals no point.

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Not very long after the invention of the novel, literature divided into two mighty streams, one in which wineglass-stem-snapping-during-moments-of-tension was impermissible and another in which it was obligatory.

- John Sleow, TIME

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TALKING TO MY FRIENDS - FROM PAGE 16

writing every sentence as well. The book is 20,000 words, so from April to August I typed 400,000 words - one version as a first draft, and the second version as a clean draft. It's the best account of the assumptions and workings of Australian democracy and its political life-style that anybody is likely to write for some time. The trouble is that it derives its excellence from the soundness of its argument and the wealth of its evidence, and not from its writing style. Even after I had finished with it, I wouldn't recommend it as light reading for anybody. :: Cole Turnley is the grandson of E W Cole, the famous Melbourne entrepreneur who ran an enormous book store for many years, and who contributed much to the style and life of Melbourne. The story of Cole is the story of the rise (during the 1870s and 1880s) and decline (from 1890 to 1920) of Melbourne, and Turnley "gets" the man in a series of anecdotes which sound much like Cole's own stories. The book has a quaint, whimsical air which I like very much; many of the pictures are valuable as well. I would like to have met a man who loved books and enjoyed people as much as Cole did. :: A fitting place to finish. I finished editing the Turnley book in March or April, and the Emy in August, but they're out already. And I feel as if I've just finished those jobs. 1975 couldn't be the same, could it?

* The best thing about writing the last few pages is that, while describing some of the books I've enjoyed most during the past two months, I've also summarised nearly everything that's happened to me during that time. I've rediscovered the pleasure of the printed page; or at least can make enough time to indulge myself quite often. However, last year I read even more and better books than I have so far this year - which is as good a cue as any for:

THE BEST OF EVERYTHING 1973/74

* To introduce/excuse the next few pages, I will begin with the first letter of comment for this issue:

* BERND FISCHER
D-5 Koeln 1, Moltkestr 49, West Germany

Thanks for SFC 40. I've read it with great interest, especially you piece on your 1973 tour d'horizon around the world (unfortunately you didn't visit the Continent!). That's what I like best in SFC: very personal statements and articles not necessarily dealing with s f. I would appreciate a fanzine dealing with all kinds of interesting things (cinema, life, music, literature (s f too), politics (?), arts, etc) more than a fanzine entirely dedicated to s f.

I'm twenty-eight, and living and working in Cologne. My interest in s f goes back to 1960, but I've never been really in fandom. Besides SFC, I've subscribed to ALGOL, SPECULATION, RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY, EXTRAPOLATION, QUARBER MERKUR, and S F TIMES (Germany's leading fanzine). Today I spend less time reading s f. I've discovered that there is so much else worth reading. My favourite s f authors are (in alphabetical order): Aldiss, Ballard, Dick, Disch, Lem, A&B Strugatski (no Heinlein, Anderson, Asimov, Silverberg, Delany, etc, but I've read them all). Of course, there are more authors (not mentioned above) I can "endure". My book list: SOLARIS and THE STAR DIARIES OF IJON TICHY (Lem), MONDAY BEGINS ON SATURDAY and DAS MARCHEN VON DER TROIKA (THE TROIKA FAIRY TALE) (A&B Strugatski), BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD and REPORT ON PROBABILITY A (Aldiss), THE DROWNED WORLD and THE CRYSTAL WORLD (Ballard), MARTIAN TIME SLIP and UBIK (Dick), THE DEMOLISHED MAN (Bester), and CITY (Simak).

Also I'm very much interested in cinema, paintings (Bosch, Piranesi, the Impressionists, the surrealists - Max Ernst and Yves Tanguy), and music. During the last year, the three films I liked most were THE LAST PICTURE SHOW, LA MAMAN ET LA PUTAIN (by Jean Eustache), and SOLARIS (by Tarkowski; I think this beautiful version of Lem's novel is superior to 2001 (and that was a fine movie!)). In music I prefer Dylan, Randy Newman, Loudon Wainwright III, Joni Mitchell, Mozart, Stones, Leo Kottke. So far this year the best albums have been: THE WILD, THE INNOCENT AND THE E STREET SHUFFLE by Bruce Springsteen and PARADISE AND LUNCH by Ry Cooder. I've forgotten to mention Van Morrison (ASTRAL WEEKS) in the list above. (September 12 1974)*

* So, you see, there is another Bruce Gillespie in the world out there. This letter cheered me up rather - not only because Bernd likes much the same things as I do (even to Loudon Wainwright and Ry Cooder) but also because he sees the wider possibilities of even a fanzine supposedly about speculative fiction. Of course, many times in the past, most notably in SFCs 30 and 31, I've tried to write about Life and Love and other subjects about which I know little. But somehow I've always got the feeling that the readers don't really want all that. Besides, even I get tired of talking about myself, and other people didn't send in their own life stories, as I'd hoped. Now I have the situation where postage and materials price increases have forced me to raise the price of SFC considerably. To do this, I need to market a guaranteed product; people complain when they don't get what they paid for. Recent publicity in AMAZING (thanks, Ed and Susan) has sealed SFC's reputation and fate as a ponderously serious magazine about s f, so I thought I had better fit the image, at least some of the time. But still, I and quite a few readers are interested in sub-

jects which extend beyond the boundaries of our small field. So each year, I list my Best Ofs for the previous year. This is my Best of 1973/74. (I should explain that I'm a lists fan, and will make up graded lists for almost anything for which I have enough information.)

FAVOURITE NOVELS 1973

1 STEPPENWOLF
Hermann Hesse (the edition I read was published by Penguin in its Modern Classics series; No 2332; the novel was first published in 1927; 253 pages)

2 JOURNEY TO THE EAST (DIE MORGENLANDFAHRT)
Hermann Hesse (Farrar/Noonday N109; 1932; 118 pp)

3 SPEAK, MEMORY
Vladimir Nabokov (Capricorn CAP 329; 1960/1966; 310 pp)

4 THE BAILBONDSMAN
from SEARCHES AND SEIZURES, by Stanley Elkin (Random House; 1973; 304 pp)

5 THE DICK GIBSON SHOW
Stanley Elkin (Weidenfeld; 1970; 335 pp)

6 MYSTERIES
Knut Hamsun (Farrar; 1892; 340 pp)

7 THE SCARLET LETTER
Nathaniel Hawthorne (Modern Library; 1850; 300 pp)

8 CAT'S CRADLE
Kurt Vonnegut (Penguin 2308; 1963; 179 pp)

9 FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND
Brian Aldiss (Cape; 1973; 184 pp)

10 WOMB TO LET
Joseph Johnson (National Press; 1973; 177 pp)

11 NARZISS AND GOLDMUND
Hermann Hesse (Penguin Modern Classics 14003260; 1930; 301 pp)

12 THE GOOD SOLDIER
Ford Madox Ford (Vintage V-45; 1915; 256 pp)

13 TRAP
Peter Mathers (Sphere 56909; 1966; 285 pp)

14 PLAYER PIANO
Kurt Vonnegut (Panther 26622; 1952; 285 pp)

15 THE WATCHER ON THE CAST-IRON BALCONY
Hal Porter (Faber; 1963; 255 pp)

16 THE SIRENS OF TITAN
Kurt Vonnegut (Hodder pb; 340 02876; 1959; 224 pp)

17 THE WORT PAPERS
Peter Mathers (Cassell Australia; 1972; 282 pp)

18 WILD TALENT
Wilson Tucker (Avon G1301; 1954; 176 pp)

19 WISE BLOOD
Flannery O'Connor (from - THREE BY FLANNERY O'CONNOR; Signet Y4764; 447 pp)

20 THE PRINCESS WITH THE GOLDEN HAIR
Edmund Wilson (from - MEMOIRS OF HECATE COUNTRY, Noonday N270; 1959; 447 pp)

Since I've been compiling these lists, this is the first year when I have been able to list twenty books, each of which I have liked about equally. In fact, Numbers 7-20 are all about equal, all remembered warmly, but some a bit more than others. STEPPENWOLF is the only clear "winner". It seems a very long time since I read that book, mainly because 1973 was such a long year for me. For instance, I mentioned STEPPENWOLF in the editorial I wrote for SFC 35/36/37, an editorial which I wrote not long after producing No 33 way back in January '73. Okay, this has nothing to do with literary qualities, but it has something to do with the way one remembers books. For instance, I've asked myself why I cannot summon more enthusiasm for NARZISS AND GOLDMUND, a book which features some of Hesse's greatest pages; a book which, on any "objective" assessment, is the equal of STEPPENWOLF - but somehow did not seem that way to me. :: 1973 was my Vonnegut/Hesse year, as you can see (these days, everybody has a Vonnegut/Hesse year; next year, we will probably rediscover Dickens or Borrow or somebody). It was also my Auslit year; I've never read so many Australian books in one year before. Joseph Johnson's first novel (reviewed in SFC 41) was the surprise of the year, but for me, so was the quality of TRAP and THE WORT PAPERS, by Peter Mathers. I've heard much of Mr Mathers, but never met him although he lives near me; I hope he's as pleasant as the persona who directs these two books. TRAP is the best book I know of dealing with the position of Australian Aborigines in today's society. :: To backtrack: it was my Vonnegut year, because the organisers of the 1973 Easter Convention in Melbourne asked me to give a talk about Vonnegut's books. At that stage, I had read one of them. Now I've read them all, and have placed him at the top of my s f ladder (well, again objectively; I still really like Dick's stuff best, but Vonnegut writes better; work that out if you can). :: 1973 was also the year when I discovered Stanley Elkin, the American writer least known in Australia. In fact, I have never seen one of his books on a shelf here. My friend Gerald, who puts me onto good books, had been talking about THE DICK GIBSON SHOW for a year or two; finally he lent it to me and I had much fun reading it. SEARCHES AND SEIZURES, Elkin's collection of three stories, appeared

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while I was in USA, so I bought it. THE BAIL-BONDSMAN is novel-length (although more a novella in mood) and even better written than DGS; I quoted a few snippets in SFC 39, and I must quote more when I have room. :: Gerald was also the first person to tell me about Vladimir Nabokov's SPEAK, MEMORY. He tends to talk about SPEAK, MEMORY in the same breath as Hal Porter's elegant memoir of Gippsland, THE WATCHER ON THE CAST-IRON BALCONY, but, as you can see from the list, I think Nabokov is the greater writer. When I reached New York last year, Barry Gillam was enthusiastic about all Nabokov's work, so, with his help, I'm slowly building up a collection. Imagine: a whole new author to read! :: MYSTERIES is one of those novels which took the English-reading world sixty or seventy years to discover. (Certainly, it was greeted like a new discovery when released recently in London.) It is obvious that Hamsun must have had quite some influence on Hesse which, no doubt, is the reason why publishers revived Hamsun at all. Hamsun's visions have the same consistency as Hesse's: magical happenings illuminated by the plainest, most poetic, prose. When it was first published, MYSTERIES must have made the rest of European literature look dowdy - which, no doubt, is the reason why nobody in the English literary scene looked at it. Think how many other great as-yet-undiscovered novels await translation or just the friction of literary fashion so that they might be revealed to us. :: That sounded horribly grandiose, didn't it? Well, FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND isn't, but I've talked about it already, or will talk about it when I write one of the ten articles I've promised so far in this column. :: And I'll praise WILD TALENT in my Tucker article. Real Soon Now.

FAVOURITE NOVELS 1974

1 THE FARTHEST SHORE
Ursula Le Guin (Gollancz; 1973; 206 pp)

2 ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE (CIEN ANOS DE SOLEDAD) Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Penguin Modern Classics 14003524; 1967; 383 pp)

3 TAMARISK ROW
Gerald Murnane (Heinemann Australia; 1974; 188 pp)

4 THE CASTLE (DAS SCHLOSS)
Franz Kafka (Penguin Modern Classics 1400 1235; 1926; 298 pp)

5 AMERICA
Franz Kafka (Penguin Modern Classics 1400 2639; 1927; 268 pp)

6 THE CYBERIAD (CYBERIADA)
Stanislaw Lem (Seabury/Continuum; 1967; 295 pp)

7 THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU
H G Wells (Penguin 571; 1896; 192 pp)

8 THE EIGHTY-MINUTE HOUR
Brian Aldiss (Cape; 1974; 286 pp)

9 INVERTED WORLD
Christopher Priest (Faber; 1974; 256 pp)

10 RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA
Arthur C Clarke (Gollancz; 1973; 256 pp)

OTHERS: THE INVISIBLE MAN (H G Wells); THE INVESTIGATION (Stanislaw Lem); HARD TO BE A GOD (Arkady and Boris Strugatsky); THE DISPOSSESSED (Ursula Le Guin); THE EMBEDDING (Ian Watson); FRANKENSTEIN (Mary Shelley); WHAT MAD UNIVERSE (Frederic Brown); DARK INFERNO (James White); SYNTHAJOY (D G Compton); BEYOND THE RESURRECTION (Gordon Eklund).

This is a list of books I enjoyed most, not those I thought the best. Obviously ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE is a better book than THE FARTHEST SHORE, but the latter book moved me in a way the former never could (although parts of it came close). Similarly, for reasons which should show clearly in the article elsewhere in this issue of SFC, TAMARISK ROW is a book that I liked better than either the two Kafka books, but only a fool would think that TAMARISK ROW is ever likely to acquire the same reputation as Kafka's. I've reviewed all these books already, but I could say that I've placed some books, such as THE CYBERIAD and THE EIGHTY-MINUTE HOUR, higher than others just for their dazzling ingenuity. I'm still not sure whether I like either book as much as I admire them. On the other hand, I could point out some obvious faults in INVERTED WORLD, but it's still a book that gives me pleasure whenever I think about it. RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA and THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU defy judgment; within their self-imposed limitations, they are quite perfect. I keep feeling that I should apologise because every book on my list is science fiction, speculative fiction, or fantasy to some extent or another. But I can't bring myself to make such an apology, for I read so many thoroughly enjoyable books in the year. Imaginative literature is a wide field these days.

FAVOURITE FILMS 1973

1 OTHELLO
directed by Orson Welles

2 RIVERRUN
John Yorty

3 WHITE NIGHTS (LE NOTTI BIANCHI)
Luchino Visconti

4 ANDREI RUBLEV
Andrei Tarkovsky

5 GOTO L'ISLE D'AMOUR
Walerian Borowczyk

6 THE LONG GOODBYE
Robert Altman

7 BANDWAGON
Vincente Minelli

8 SINGING IN THE RAIN
Stanley Donen

9 SOLARIS
Andrei Tarkovsky

10 THE YELLOW SUBMARINE
Dunning and Edelman

11 THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS
Orson Welles

12 THE STRANGER
Orson Welles

13 THE MERRY WIDOW
Ernst Lubitsch

14 FELLINI ROMA
Frederico Fellini

15 MAMMA ROMA
Pier Paolo Pasolini

16 MONSIEUR VERDOUX
Charles Chaplin

17 START THE REVOLUTION WITHOUT ME
Bud Yorkin

18 THE THIRD MAN
Carol Reed

19 TARGETS
Peter Bogdanovich

20 TOUCH OF EVIL
Orson Welles

1973 began with an Orson Welles season at NFT, as the list shows. Some might find it surprising that only one Welles film made the Top Ten. Partly that's because this list is even more competitive than the Book List, and every film from 7 to 20 is just about equal. Listings get fairly arbitrary in this way. Also, my favourite two Welles films are CITIZEN KANE and THE TRIAL, both of which I had seen in previous years (both in 1965, if I remember correctly). The only word I can use to describe the first eight films is "visionary". I know it's one of my favourite words, but it's exact. To take my lead from David Ketterer's handy book, NEW WORLDS FOR OLD, already discussed, for me art must have an apocalyptic quality for it to be really great. By this I mean it must either show us new things or show us the familiar in a completely new way. OTHELLO fits the former category; RIVERRUN the latter. OTHELLO may or may not have some relationship to Shakespeare's play; the important thing is that, despite the legendary problems in filming it, visually it is one of the most unified, bedazzling, and ravishing films ever to be shown. I've seen few films so continually and limitlessly beautiful; everything becomes part of the great pattern of light and shade. And one feels the tragedy all the more for the visual style of the film. On the other hand, RIVERRUN is about the birth of a baby - or the possible rebirth of a whole country, the jaded, faded USA, which is given new life by John Yorty's camera, overflowing with natural colours and graced by real people and conversations. Of all the films I've seen during recent years, this has had the greatest emotional effect on me; perhaps most of all because I had met all the people in it somewhere before, if only in the back of my head. John Yorty had a dream of a revitalised America, one that allowed all those qualities which previous generations had attempted to expunge; that very few people have seen RIVERRUN means that he must wait many years still for his dreams to come true. The Melbourne Film Society showed this in 1973, so at least one copy must be in the country somewhere. Find it and see it, if you can. :: Which is the reason why I've seen some fairly offbeat films during the last two years. My friends Reen and Rick invited me to one show of the Melbourne Film Society; I joined, and the Society has shown fine films since then. I joined National Film Theatre to see the Welles season, but didn't rejoin in 1974. My laziness, and loss. I saw most of the other films while I was travelling. It is so much easier to make time to watch films while travelling than when one is at home and trying to publish the next S F COMMENTARY. (Therefore, I saw few films during 1974). :: Visions... in WHITE NIGHTS, the marvellously, breathtakingly romantic plot, beautiful sets, and corny story which is quite true (the handsome hero always does get the girl; but then, I hated Jean Marais as soon as he walked through the door). :: ..in ANDREI RUBLEV, the Tartar takeover scene where somebody (subitled) shouts, "The Tartars are coming!" ("The Tartars are coming!"); and the making of the bell. Lots of water, mud, reeds, grass, sky, and stone: Tarkovsky revels in natural objects, so perhaps he is the only director who could film Ursula Le Guin's Earthsea trilogy successfully. For instance, in SOLARIS, which has many visionary moments, Tarkovsky is just not at home in a space station; he does not seem to know quite what he is doing until he can let his characters talk simply to each other, as in the great scene set in the library. And SOLARIS' colour sequences of natural objects surpass anything in TARKOVSKY. :: ..in GOTO L'ISLE D'AMOUR, a kingdom more alien to us than anything in science fiction... monstrous moronic musclemen, endlessly ugly people living in hovels which they called royal palaces, yet somewhere a great love story at the centre of the lunacy. :: ..in THE LONG GOODBYE, scenes which are seen; a director who uses every square inch of the screen as a motion-picture canvas, and presents California as an alien planet inhabited by lost souls, lost mainly because they try to remain human beings. Sterling Hayden and Elliott Gould are just two of the great actors in this film. Altman's masterpiece... until he makes his next film. :: SINGING IN THE RAIN and BANDWAGON are more Cultural Artifacts than movies these days; they are Examples of the Hollywood Musical. Such is culture these days.

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However, if one sees them for the first time in 1973, one finds that they are both great movies. SINGING IN THE RAIN is better, but BANDWAGON is deeper - a tribute to an ageing Fred Astaire in 1952, when he still had at least 23 years ahead of him! BW is moving, while SIR is dazzling.

I don't have room or energy (it's 11.30 pm and I've been typing all day) to cover each film. Briefly - THE YELLOW SUBMARINE is endlessly inventive but too long. :: THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS had its back broken fatally by the producer's changes made to the original film; a haunting reverie remains. :: THE STRANGER's silly script spoils the images, which in many ways are photographed as well as in the best of Welles. :: THE MERRY WIDOW is very funny and very sexy, all the more so for its implicitness and tomfoolery. :: FELLINI ROMA and MAMMA ROMA are two different cities, but the main difference is the one betweenn stalgia and contemporary observation; Fellini's papal fashion show and the death of the catacombs painitings are two of the finest sequences in cinema. :: Somebody told me that MONSIEUR VERDOUX has never been imported to Australia, which is a pity; far less boisterous than THE GREAT DICTATOR, it is more subtle, and its melodrama moves into authentic drama. :: We all saw START THE REVOLUTION WITHOUT ME at the '73 Eastercon, and even John Foyster laughed out loud; it's the funniest film I've seen for years. :: THE THIRD MAN includes everything that's best in the forties film, but still does not reach the heights of Welles' (one of the stars) own films; it has one of the best credit sequences I've ever seen. :: TARGETS contains everything that Bogdanovich has developed since then, but is too cold to extend its range into LAST PICTURE SHOW territory; but it should be cold, since it's about a bloke who likes shooting people. :: And TOUCH OF EVIL is ruined, for me, by being made within the limits of the harsh fifties film, rather than the resplendent style of the forties; many memorable scenes, anyway. :: Only just outside the Top Twenty: John Hough's LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE, Kurosawa's TORO NO OOFUMO OKOTOTACHI, Mervin LeRoy's LITTLE CAESAR, and Bergman's PERSONA.

FAVOURITE FILMS 1974

1 KWAIDAN
directed by Masaki Koboyashi

2 THE HIRELING
Allan Bridges

3 THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE
Luis Bunuel

4 AMACORD
Frederico Fellini

5 THIS IS YOUR LIFE
Jan Troell

6 THE CONVERSATION
Francis Ford Coppola

7 SLEUTH
Joseph Mankiewicz

8 THE LAST DETAIL
Hal Ashby

9 CHARLEY VARRICK
Don Siegel

10 GET TO KNOW YOUR RABBIT
Brian De Palma

KWAIDAN is the only one of these films which I might have included in my Top 8 for last year. In other words (and to repeat myself), it was the only visually visionary film I saw during 1974. In this film, Koboyashi assembles four traditional Japanese ghost tales, each longer and more haunting than the one before, except for the marvellous sting in the tale, the story of the writer who swallows a ghost face in the water. In the second part, THE WOMAN OF THE SNOWS, the skies are filled with huge, glowing eyes, and wreaths of colour wave over the snow and ice. In the third section, the best and most moving, Koboyashi recreates a legendary Japanese sea battle, making it look as if a medieval frieze had come to life. The blind minstrel, nine centuries later, sings to the ghosts of the people who died during that battle. Very few film-makers take so much trouble to create such splendid beauty. (I saw this at Melbourne Film Society, whose pamphlet informed us that Australia is the only country where all four episodes are shown, and that the three remaining are usually shown in the wrong order. However, I cannot praise MFS as highly as I could for 1973; the quality of their 1974 was much lower than for the year before, which mainly explains why the quality of the films on my '74 list is lower.) :: The rest of my films rely, to a greater or lesser extent, on the quality of the direction of actors, rather than direction of images. This is not my idea of great film-making, but I saw some good films, anyway. THE HIRELING is a great actor's and writer's piece. Wolf Mankowitz writes a script that is much denser, sharper, and more satisfying than Hartley's original novel. Under Allan Bridges' direction, Sarah Miles and Robert Shaw (and everybody else) give great performances. The last scenes are even better than the rest of the film, if possible. :: Bunuel makes a very good-looking film, but it is his humour and inventive direction of actors which give his films their special tang. Under Bunuel, any actor can tell us more about his or her role in a second than most tv actors convey during a whole series. DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE is also the funniest film I saw all year, and he has some creepy ghost scenes as decoration. :: The critics don't know whether to praise or damn Fellini for the restraint he shows in AMACORD. For me, it is his finest film since $8\frac{1}{2}$, and gains most from its pastoral, Renoir quality. Fellini can keep remembering his past ("Amacord" = "I remem-

ber") during the rest of his film career, and I'll keep watching. :: THIS IS YOUR LIFE is far more obviously a vivid work of memory of a bitter part of the director's life, or of the life of people when he was growing up. Better still, so many of the people in this film are like people I have met. At times, I thought I was watching the life story of a friend of mine. Troell uses colour sparingly and effectively; during most of the film his complex techniques concentrate emotional effects instead of dissipating them (as in technically similar Nouvelle Vague films). A film I must see again to judge properly. :: I could barely walk home after seeing THE CONVERSATION. I felt as if somebody had held up a much-too-clear mirror to my own face, and had shown me everything I dislike most about myself. But I felt anguish because neither Harry Caul (played by Gene Hackman giving one of the finest screen performances I've seen) nor I could be different than we are, even though the world might be much better. Harry Caul's great limitation is that he is the best in his field - electronic surveillance. He does the impossible in recording private conversations, but has never worried about the consequences of his actions before the episode which begins the film. The film shows what happens when he does realise that the results of his work must lead to murder. The irony is that Caul guards his own privacy obsessionally, and for this reason I identified most closely with him. In many scenes, I knew exactly how he felt and wouldn't have done anything else. I have not listed THE CONVERSATION as my No 1 because in many ways it is a stodgy film. Francis Ford Coppola has written a perfect script and he gains the best possible performances from his actors. Maybe he did it deliberately, but I found that his images were still not works of art - they did not bring everything together into a total viewpoint. I know it sounds polemical to say this, but THE CONVERSATION sums up everything I like best and least in good American cinema of the seventies. (AMERICAN GRAFFITI had a splendid script, but it looked awful. I could find plenty of other examples.) :: I could say much the same about THE LAST DETAIL, CHARLEY VARRICK, and GET TO KNOW YOUR RABBIT - fully realised concepts and splendid acting do not a great picture make, but merely a very enjoyable one. Jack Nicholson gives one of his finest performances in THE LAST DETAIL, ditto for Walter Matthau in CHARLEY VARRICK, and even Tom Smothers had some funny lines to play with in GET TO KNOW YOUR RABBIT, the most whimsical picture for years. SLEUTH is the exception here; as a stage play, it should have looked stodgy on screen, but the director came close to making one of the best-looking films of the year. Again, Laurence Olivier and Michael Caine give unbelievably good performances. :: For real film-making, all these directors should have turned back to one scene in THE BIG STORE. Harpo Marx, dressed in Regency finery, imagines that he is playing the harp of his dreams. At first he sees his image reflected in mirrors at the side. Then the Harpos in the mirror wave back at him, play duos and trios, and finally form a trio of harp, violin, and cello. The concept is completely visual and musical, and I didn't see anything like that during the rest of the year. THE BIG STORE nearly made my Top 10, as did DAY FOR NIGHT (Francois Truffaut), SLEEPER (Woody Allen), BREWSTER McCLOUD (Robert Altman), THE VIRGIN SPRING (Ingmar Bergman), and CRIES AND WHISPERS (Ingmar Bergman). The best film I saw all year was Altman's THE LONG GOODBYE, which I saw for the second time when it finally reached Melbourne in November. But I've already mentioned that for 73. I suppose it wasn't too bad a year, when you consider that I saw about six films during most of the year, and crowded the rest into January, November, and December. Let's see what 75 brings; maybe I'll even rejoin National Film Theatre or MFS's programs will pick up.

S F COMMENTARY AWARD OCT 71 - DEC 72

Every year at this time - usually a bit earlier - I announce the speculative fiction stories that should have been included in the BEST OF collections instead of all that stuff put together by Messrs Carr, Wollheim, Del Rey, etc. However, each year I face the same problem which must bedevil those venerable gentlepeople - how can anyone read a year's production of s f short fiction? The problem has become worse because the production of original fiction anthologies has increased while the magazines still publish vast amounts of fiction. I don't have time for all this reading. This time last year I was 2½ years behind, and now I'm only 2 years behind. No start on 73 yet, especially as two of that year's anthologies have not arrived yet.

But I did catch up on 1972. Usually I compile my lists from the October of one year to the September of the next. Since many anthologies do not list copyright dates by month, this system has broken down. I notice that Charlie Brown has swiped the idea of an "award" given by a fanzine; LOCUS offers a two-year subscription to its annual winner, so the least I can do is follow suit. Can anybody send me Ms Saxton's address? She was the star of '71-'72:

1 HEADS AFRICA, TAILS AMERICA, by Josephine Saxton (ORBIT 9, February 72)

2 THINGS LOST, by Thomas M Disch (AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS, March 72)

3 THINGS WHICH ARE CAESARS, by Gordon Dickson (THE DAY THE SUN STOOD STILL, 72)

4 THE POWER OF TIME, by Josephine Saxton (NEW DIMENSIONS 1, October 1971)

5 MERLIN STREET, by W McFarlane (INFINITY 2, May 72)

6 LIVING WILD, by Josephine Saxton (FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, October 71)

7 THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE, by B J Bayley (NEW WORLDS QUARTERLY 4, June 72)

8 COMMON DENOMINATOR, by David Lewis (ANALOG, October 72)

9 THE HEAD AND THE HAND, by Christopher Priest (NEW WORLDS QUARTERLY 3, January 72)

10 POWER COMPLEX, by Joe Haldeman (GALAXY, September 72)

and, in the running:

I LOSE MEDEA (Bevan) NWQ3, Jan 72
JULIO 204 (Pamela Sargent) NWQ3, Jan 72
WINDOWS (Jack Dann) NWQ3, Jan 72
THE GRAIN KINGS (Keith Roberts) NWQ3, Jan 72
WHEN ALL THE LANDS POUR OUT AGAIN (R A Lafferty) ORBIT 9, Feb 72
THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST (U K Le Guin) ADV, Mar 72
THE BISQUIT POSITION (Bernard Wolfe) ADV, Mar 72
HOW WE PASS THE TIME IN HELL (Gary Jennings) F&SF, Nov 71
WORLD ABOUNDING (R A Lafferty) F&SF, Dec 71
FOR WHOM THE GIRL WAITS (Gertrude Freidberg) F&SF, May 72
HERO (Joe Haldeman) ANLOG, Jun 72
GROANING HINGES OF THE WORLD (R A Lafferty) RUINS OF EARTH, Jun 72

No need for much comment - firstly, because I read most of these so long ago that I can remember only how much I enjoyed them, and little about the specific content. I must do a ORIGINAL FICTION ANTHOLOGIES column soon (that must be the twentieth article I've promised so far this issue) and I might cover some of these stories in that. :: Josephine Saxton was certainly the most able, complex, and subtle writer of the year. Since,she seems to have disappeared altogether from publication. Tom Disch came second for about the fourth year in a row; sorry about that. Gordy Dickson's story was the real surprise: I had left this particular anthology to last, and wasn't looking forward to it, but quite enjoyed it (even the Poul Anderson story). The Dickson story is a play more than anything else; it concentrates on the personal ramifications of a supernatural event, and has many fine pages. Someday somebody will sort out all Dickson's good stuff from his potboilers and show the s f world just how good he can be. I must re-read MERLIN STREET; all I remember about it is that it is indeed a magical experience. THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE is a sort of combination of English New Wave and Borges, quite amusing and intriguing. Bayley is a Writer To Watch, for anyone who has the time. THE HEAD AND THE HAND is the best "gimmick" story for some years, mainly because Chris writes it with typically English finesse and understatement. It's hard to believe that "David Lewis" and Joe Haldeman are not the same writer. COMMON DENOMINATOR, POWER COMPLEX, and HERO are all great "yarns" in a tradition which has been almost absent from the magazines ever since I started reading them. Certainly they are much better than usual ANALOG fare. I was most interested in the fact that Haldeman/"Lewis" (apologies to Mr Lewis if he has independent entity) pokes holes in Heinleinism using the same literary methods with which Heinlein made his reputation - breakneck action and scrupulous attention to "realistic" details. It seems that stories of this quality do more for s f than all the tirades against Heinlein - or perhaps this is a case where authors have reacted in their own way to critical opinion. From now on, I'll read anything new by Haldeman and/or Lewis.

AND NOW.....
A BRAND NEW LIST

Much cheering from readers - at least it saves you from reading my book reviews.

Because I had lagged so badly in my s f short story lists, it seemed to me that I should make some move to recognise short stories while you still had some hope of buying them. But (for instance) in the latest s f list, I read some of those stories when they appeared (in 1971) and some a few months ago (April 1974). So I looked through my old records and composed the following lists. However, I decided to place s f in contrast to everything else I read, just as I do with the list of novels. This produced some interesting results. For instance, I found that I read almost no short stories outside s f until 1969 (the year after I left university). From then on, the non-s f beat out the s f, but not by much. The length of the list for each year reflects the strength of the competition. 1967 must have been the worst year ever in s f: these were the only good stories I could find, even after reading the entire year's magazine production. By comparison, for the s f year Oct 70 - Sep 71, I had more than sixty contenders and was forced to compose a longer list. S f's on the upswing, if nothing else is. Make what you will of the following:

FAVOURITE SHORT STORIES

1964 (when I was seventeen; my last year at high school)

1 ALPHA RALPHA BOULEVARD (Cordwainer Smith), BEST FROM FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION 11TH SERIES
2 NO GREAT MAGIC (Fritz Leiber) GALAXY Dec 63
3 TIME LAG (Poul Anderson) BEST FROM F&SF 11TH SERIES
4 A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES (Roger Zelazny) F&SF Nov 63
5 WATERSPIDER (Philip Dick) IF Jan 64
6 DRUNKBOAT (Cordwainer Smith) AMAZING Oct 63
7 TO PLANT A SEED (Neal Barrett Jr) AMAZING Dec 63
8 SOURCES OF THE NILE (Avram Davidson) BEST FROM F&SF 11TH SERIES

1965

1 THE SALIVA TREE (Brian Aldiss) F&SF Sep 65
2 ALL YOU ZOMBIES (Robert Heinlein) BEST FROM F&SF 9TH SERIES
3 THE STARSLOGGERS (Harry Harrison) GALAXY Dec 64
4 WHAT'S THE NAME OF THAT TOWN? (R A Lafferty) GALAXY Oct 64
5 THE BOMB IN THE BATHTUB (Thomas Scortia) FOURTH GALAXY READER
6 FOUR BRANDS OF IMPOSSIBLE (Norman Kagan) F&SF Sep 64
7 THE UNTELEPORTED MAN (Philip Dick) FANTASTIC Dec 64
8 THE GREAT COSMIC DONUT OF LIFE (Ray Nelson) F&SF Sep 65
9 ON THE STORM PLANET (Cordwainer Smith) GALAXY Feb 65
10 THE WATCHERS IN THE GLADE (Richard Wilson) GALAXY Aug 64

1966

1 ON THE SAND PLANET (Cordwainer Smith) AMAZING Dec 65
2 THE THIRD GUEST (B Traven) FANTASTIC May 68
3 THE GAME OF RAT AND DRAGON (Cordwainer Smith) THIRD GALAXY READER
4 THE HEART OF DARKNESS (Joseph Conrad) CONRAD: THREE SHORT NOVELS
5 IDEAS DIE HARD (Isaac Asimov) THIRD GALAXY READER
6 THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS (Bob Shaw) ANALOG Aug 66
7 BY HIS BOOTSTRAPS (Robert Heinlein) SPECTRUM 1
8 A LONG WAY TO EARTH (John Brunner) IF Feb 66

1967

1 WAR GAME (Philip Dick) GB GALAXY No 77
2 SCANNERS LIVE IN VAIN (Cordwainer Smith) YOU WILL NEVER BE THE SAME
3 RANDY'S SYNDROME (Brian Aldiss) F&SF Apr 67
4 PROSPECTOR'S SPECIAL (Robert Sheckley) GB GALAXY No 77
5 A TASTE FOR DOSTOYEVSKY (Brian Aldiss) NEW WRITINGS 10

1968

1 THE HEAT DEATH OF THE UNIVERSE (P F Zoline) NEW WORLDS Jul 67
2 SEND HER VICTORIOUS (Brian Aldiss) AMAZING Apr 68
3 AUTO-ANCESTRAL FRACTURE (Brian Aldiss) NW Dec 67/Jan 68
4 THE GIRL AND THE ROBOT WITH FLOWERS (Brian Aldiss) THE SALIVA TREE AND OTHER STORIES
5 THE EGG OF THE GLAK (Harvey Jacobs) F&SF Mar 68
6 THE DAY OF THE DOOMED KING (Brian Aldiss) THE SALIVA TREE
7 MULTI-VALU MOTORWAY (Brian Aldiss) NW Aug 67
8 LEGENDS OF SMITHS BURST (Brian Aldiss) THE SALIVA TREE
9 IN SECLUSION (Harvey Jacobs) NW Feb 68
10 DESCENDING (Thomas Disch) UNDER COMPULSION

1969 (the division year, as mentioned above)

1 THE BEAST IN THE JUNGLE (Henry James) SELECTED TALES OF HENRY JAMES
2 A FIGURE IN THE CARPET (Henry James) SELECTED TALES OF HENRY JAMES
3 OUSPENSKI'S ASTRABAHN (Brian Aldiss) NW Jan 69
4 THE WORM THAT FLIES (Brian Aldiss) WORLD'S BEST S F 1968
5 AYE, AND GOMORRAH (Samuel Delany) DANGEROUS VISIONS
6 MASKS (Damon Knight) WORLD'S BEST S F 1968
7 MAN IN HIS TIME (Brian Aldiss) SCIENCE FANTASY Apr 65
8 CASABLANCA (Thomas Disch) NW Oct 68
9 SINCE THE ASSASSINATION (Brian Aldiss) INTANGIBLES INC AND OTHER STORIES
10 NERVES (Lester Del Rey) ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE
11 SUN PUSH (Graham Hall) ENGLAND SWINGS
12 IT'S SMART TO HAVE AN ENGLISH ADDRESS (D G Compton) WORLD'S BEST S F 1967

1970

1 PRISCILLA (Italo Calvino) TIME AND THE HUNTER
2 THE FORM OF SPACE (Italo Calvino) COSMICOMICS
3 THE NIGHT DRIVER (Italo Calvino) TIME AND THE HUNTER
4 BLOOD, SEA (Italo Calvino) TIME AND THE HUNTER
5 THE TIME MACHINE (Langdon Jones) ORBIT 5
6 THE ASIAN SHORE (Thomas Disch) ORBIT 6
7 THE CAGE OF SAND (J. G Ballard) DARK STARS
8 THE SIGN IN SPACE (Italo Calvino) COSMICOMICS
9 ALL AT ONE POINT (Italo Calvino) COSMICOMICS
10 THE MOMENT OF ECLIPSE (Brian Aldiss) NW May 69

1971

1 THE SECRET MIRACLE (Jorge Luis Borges) LABYRINTHS
2 PIERRE MENARD, AUTHOR OF THE QUIXOTE (Jorge Luis Borges) LABYRINTHS
3 TLON, UQBAR, ORBIS TERTIUS (Jorge Luis Borges) LABYRINTHS
4 IN THE PENAL SETTLEMENT (Franz Kafka) METAMORPHOSIS AND OTHER STORIES
5 THE BURROW (Franz Kafka) METAMORPHOSIS
6 THE VIEW FROM THIS WINDOW (Joanna Russ) QUARK/ 1
7 THE IMMORTAL (Jorge Luis Borges) LABYRINTHS
8 WHAT ROUGH BEAST (Damon Knight) OFF CENTRE
9 CONTINUED ON NEXT ROCK (R A Lafferty) ORBIT 7
10 BODIES (Thomas Disch) QUARK/ 4
11 THE ENCOUNTER (Kate Wilhelm) ORBIT 8
12 RAMONA, COME SOFTLY (Gordon Eklund) QUARK/ 1
13 LET US QUICKLY HASTEN TO THE GATE OF IVORY (Thomas Disch) QUARK/ 1
14 THE PRESSURE OF TIME (Thomas Disch) ORBIT 7

1972

1 THE RIVER (Flannery O'Connor) A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND

2 THE LAME SHALL ENTER FIRST (Flannery O'Connor) EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE
3 A LATE ENCOUNTER WITH THE ENEMY (Flannery O'Connor) A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND
4 GOOD COUNTRY PEOPLE (Flannery O'Connor) A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND
5 HEADS AFRICA TAILS AMERICA (Josephine Saxton) ORBIT 9
6 INCONSTANT MOON (Larry Niven) ALL THE MYRIAD WAYS
7 THINGS LOST (Thomas Disch) AGAIN DANGEROUS VISIONS
8 A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND (Flannery O'Connor) A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND
9 THE CIRCLE IN THE FIRE (Flannery O'Connor) A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND
10 THE POWER OF TIME (Josephine Saxton) NEW DIMENSIONS 1

1973

1 ELLEN TERHUNE (Edmund Wilson) MEMOIRS OF HECATE COUNTY
2 IN HOT PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS (Stanislaw Lem) VIEW FROM ANOTHER SHORE
3 THE MAKING OF ASHENDEN (Stanley Elkin) SEARCHES AND SEIZURES
4 THE GUEST (Stanley Elkin) CRIERS AND KIBITZERS, KIBITZERS AND CRIERS
5 THE CONDOMINIUM (Stanley Elkin) SEARCHES AND SEIZURES
6 AUGUSTUS (Hermann Hesse) STRANGE NEWS FROM ANOTHER STAR
7 FLUTE DREAM (Hermann Hesse) STRANGE NEWS FROM ANOTHER STAR
8 ON A FIELD, RAMPANT (Stanley Elkin) CRIERS AND KIBITZERS, KIBITZERS AND CRIERS
9 THE LAST DAY OF JULY (Gardner Dozois) NEW DIMENSIONS 3
10 MERLIN STREET (W McFarlane) INFINITY 4

Make what you like of that. My favourite story of the lists here would be Italo Calvino's PRISCILLA, followed closely by Flannery O'Connor's THE RIVER and THE LAME SHALL ENTER FIRST. Although their styles are quite different, O'Connor and Calvino (and Henry James) would represent the pinnacle of the short story as an art form as I've experienced it. Doubtless, I have many authors yet to discover. 1973 was very competitive: ELLEN TERHUNE is the best ghost story I've read, more subtle even than TURN OF THE SCREW, and all the more effective because I did not realise it was a ghost story until it had nearly finished. I've said a little about IN HOT PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS before in this issue. Stanley Elkin is magnificent, in either the form of the short story or that of the novel. Ed Cagle is also a great fan of THE MAKING OF ASHENDEN; I might summarise it best in saying that it does a Brian Aldiss, but even better. At his best, Hesse is near-perfect (I've written that before in this issue, too) and Kafka remains chilling, yet whimsical, in the shorter form. Listing IN HOT PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS and THE LAST DAY OF JULY gives you a sneak preview of two of the main contenders for the 1973 S F COMMENTARY AWARD.

1974 (at last!)

1 THE GUEST AT THE SPA (Hermann Hesse) AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS
2 THE HOMECOMING (Hermann Hesse) STORIES OF FIVE DECADES
3 ROBERT AGHION (Hermann Hesse) STORIES OF FIVE DECADES
4 THINGS WHICH ARE CAESAR'S (Gordon Dickson) THE DAY THE SUN STOOD STILL
5 COLOURS (Thomas Disch) GETTING INTO DEATH
6 THE SOUND SWEEP (J G Ballard) TOMORROW AND TOMORROW
7 AUTOFAC (Philip Dick) THE RUINS OF EARTH
8 AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL (Fritz Leiber) THE RUINS OF EARTH

* Probably you've discovered already that with this typewriter I can fit altogether too many words onto a page. So far, this episode of IMBTTMF has taken about four days to type (on preliminary layout sheets; I'm not looking forward to cutting the stencils). At approximately 650 words per page, that's (fill in the gap) words by me so far this issue. Time I gave somebody else a go:

* Firstly, more spitting at Mr Lem (SFC 35/36/37)!

* LELAND SAPIRO
Box 14451, University Station, Gainesville, Florida 32604, USA

Lem's comparison of himself to Robinson Crusoe is accurate - and partly explains why he's so often wrong: for he is "isolated", in the sense of being unacquainted with anything that's been said about s f during the past twenty years.

Several things are stated correctly - Lem's remark about Phil Dick, rather than A E Van Vogt, being the proponent of non-Aristotelian logic; or his characterisation of Lundwall's book as a traveller's guide rather than an instance of bona fide criticism - but so many of his facts and generalisations are false or meaningless.

Some examples of the former: The cognoscenti do not consider Wells' mundane fiction better than his s f; such a statement would apply only to the so-called Old Orthodoxy on Wells, predating Anthony West's DARK WORLD essay in a '57 HARPER'S. For a discussion of the New Orthodoxy on HGW, see Dale Mullen's review in RIVERSIDE QUARTERLY No 9 (or Jack Williamson's serial-essay on Wells beginning in that same issue), a magazine that Lem mentions but seems not to have read.

It's also false that s f publishers advertise their writers as The Greatest. The only such instance I recall is this claim being made for Lem himself by his own agent, Franz Rottensteiner.

And we no longer believe, as Lem does, that Hugo Gernsback is the father of American s f. Obviously Lem hasn't read Bruce Franklin's FUTURE TENSE, which notes that every major nineteenth-century US writer - from Poe, Melville, Hawthorne on down - tried his hand at s f. Lem also seems not to know of Sam Moskowitz's work on American newspaper s f writers (like Edward Page Mitchell) in the nineteenth century and on pre-Gernsback pulp s f novels in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

So many of Lem's generalisations are false or misleading - and sometimes he fails to make the obvious generalisation from "facts" presented in his own article. For instance, the job of s f criticism is not to turn a Phil Dick into a Thomas Mann, but to create an intellectual climate receptive to writers like Dick. Lem notes (twice) that s f readers can't tell a good novel from a bad one - but fails to note that here is one job of s f criticism: to show the reader the difference between good and bad s f, and thus promote an atmosphere in which more Philip Dicks will create (and be created).

Again, Lem is right in saying that Dick's works mirror a state of mind rather than any logically consistent sequence of external events - so that this author's "real" and hallucinatory worlds are indistinguishable - but fails to draw the obvious conclusion: that contradictions in Phil Dick matter less than they would for a more "linear" writer. Lem easily shows that one of Dick's novels is self-contradictory (cf Yogi Borel's review of STIGMATA in the RQ cited above), but he should also emphasise why such contradictions aren't really that important.

It's unnecessary to comment in detail on Lem's remarks about mainstream writers who "descend" into s f. In some cases the result is felicitous - as with George Orwell or some short stories of Rudyard Kipling - and in other cases, dreadful, as for a William Styron or a James T Farrell. Lem's remarks here are so over-simplified as to be worthless.

Well, I'll let the rest of SFC's readers fill in the details. (November 16, 1973)*

* And that's just what George Turner and John Foyster did in SFC 38. I stated my own position on page 27 of S F COMMENTARY 40. A few last words:

* PHILIP JOSE FARMER
4106 Devon Lane, Peoria, Illinois 61614, USA

You should get a vote of thanks from your readers for publishing Lem's article. It's the funniest article I've read in a long time. However, it's my opinion that no friend of Lem's, which you claim to be, would have let it see print. I don't think he intended it to be comical.(July 2 1974)*

* But these letters form only the tail of a group which began in SFC 40. To those, and in unwitting anticipation of SFC 38, here's:

* STANISLAW LEM
Krakow, Poland

I do not think my English has improved much while you were travelling in the US, but nevertheless I will comment in a general way on some letters published in your SFC 40. This letter will be, I fear, too long, just as my article was, in accordance with the saying, "Having no time at all, I am forced to write you a long letter instead of a short one." The process of compressing ideas into words takes a lot of time, especially if one uses a foreign language, and even the original version of the article concerned was written in German. So I must apologise for having annoyed the readers of my expose.

Was I biased? Does the essay contain a Big Lie at its heart? Yes; it is the idealisation of the Upper Kingdom of Literature. Gentlemen, I did have a task - I needed badly a standard of perfection, a measuring scale, a yardstick; so, for comparison's sake, I idealised the image of Literature - of the Upper Realm, taken as a whole. A shame, is it not? But when you want to convert a pagan to Christianity, you do not tell him about religious wars and Albigenses murdered in the name of brotherly love, of popes and antipopes; no, you show him the fine side of the creed, and while doing it, you do not realise for a moment that you are lying and pulling the leg of the poor man. No, you are sincere - in a way, of course - and so was I. I was sincere, since the "living conditions" are, taken as a whole, better in the Upper Realm than in literary ghettos. If you say that the lion is the king of the animal kingdom, then your statement will not be falsified by a man who shows you a scabby weakling of a lion. You can tell him that there are other lions as well, and this shall suffice. So, anticipating everything that could be criticised in my essay, may I pray: save your breath, gentlemen, if you try to convince me that a lot of very bad writers received many prizes in the Upper Realms, and what a pack of wolves are those editors, or God knows what. I know something about this myself. The Upper Realm is no paradise, s f is no hell, and there is no purgatory inbetween, with Lem as St Peter, with the know-how and power to introduce some chosen souls (such as Mr Dick) into paradise. My statements should cause no earthquake for no other reason than that; Mr Dick will remain where he sits now and there will be no change at all; rest easy.

The article was written by a man who very much likes to read original, intellectually mature, thought-and-distress-of-the-heart-provoking s f, something like Mrs Le Guin's THE DISPOSSESSED (a wonderful, great work, but a single case in a million). This man likes apples and coffee and cheese - but he does not like to have apples served as mysterious fruits imported directly from Arcadia, coffee given as divine nectar, and cheese presented as coming from the moon. Neither does he like all those edible things mixed up together - coffee with cheese and apples as an instant drink. So, when he is reading an unpalatable mixture of badly plagiarised fables, distorted historical motives, and wrenched myths, presented as science fiction, he becomes angry - a very natural state of mind, given such a situation of imposture, I think. Don't you think so too?

So then comes the curiosity - if that is the mass of s f, why can't one find any proper s f at all? The article was an attempt to answer this question. Of course, if you like a blend of "cheese and coffee and apples" served as "Drink of the Gods", that's your problem. You will simply consume the stuff in huge quantities and never think of asking for something more edible. So my article was not written for people who will not hear a word about the real universe, who do like mystified originality, and so on. Your pleasure, gentlemen, is your highest court of appeal. If you are satisfied with the state of affairs in s f, please avoid everything written by this author, since in this way you will preserve your comforting peace of mind.

Now enters Mr Dick. Of course, he is not the single soul redeemed from the s f hell. He is only much better than the average, and in some novels he is even better than the so-called deans of s f, who have for their flat the huge hall of fame, and who have shielded us perfectly from the real universe with the mountains of their books, which can be perceived instantly by any kind of mind, even the brainless one. Eventually one wonders whether the cosmos really exists, this original piece of matter which has no kilo-light-races of solitary heroes, no planets populated only by homosexuals, and no similar maddening stuff. Being a liberal, I am not even against pornography - that is, against pornography as a marginal phenomenon. But I am against pornography as The Thing, the General Solution of All Problems of Life and Civilisation, as a substitute for love, erotic bonds, etc. Because of my attitude, I am against the "mainstream of s f" - since you cannot say that THE DISPOSSESSED is a novel typical of the genre. Returning to Mr Dick: in some of his novels I found a possibility to be followed, a way, an exit from the petrified, little, mindless, poor universe of s f. I did not see Mr Dick as the Saviour. Perhaps I did not state what I think about the perspectives for further advance which can be found in Mr Dick's work, as I should have. This I have repaired in an essay concerned in the first place about those perspectives, and this essay (an afterword to the Polish edition of UBIK) shall be published in SCIENCE FICTION STUDIES next year. In this essay, I did not attempt to restate, or even to change what I have in my SFC article. No, this time I concentrated on the problem of further advance.

Now I shall tell you what occupies my mind today. I think about the limits to growth - not to the material growth of our civilisation, but the limits to cultural growth, where collective amnesia becomes the natural, normal, and self-evident state of affairs. Possibly the undoings of the Lower Realm can devour the whole Upper Realm. Why? I am glad that the answer to this question is really simple. The unpleasant truth is that if you have too much information, even of the best kind, and too many works, books, and ideas, even ideas of how the world might be saved, you don't have splendid growth, but only a big noise. All human beings are already overloaded as communications channels. But that is not all. Originators - authors etc - do not fall from the moon with their minds ready for creation - they are not preserved in special iceboxes. No, they are just part of this huge crowd rising here, and I see no possibility of the emergence of geniuses - Shakespeares, Melvilles, etc - in such a crowded place. There is no room for maturing, no possibility for the development of individuality, no selective resonance, no value-oriented selection of what is good, no filtering out the trash, but only haste, marketing, sales assessment, nth computer generation, and a lot of misery. Does a crowd have a history? It lives in the present only. This is the great danger; not the Aliens Among Us, be they and their originators damned together. We approach a world in which a book will have the longevity of Kleenex and the time-binding capability of a group-sex orgy. A world of punctual experiences, amnesiac, decapitated - since it lacks an awareness of its own history, dashed out as an unsaleable thing. Of course we can live in such a world. How does this prophecy connect with s f? Well, I think one of the tasks of s f is to depict this area of possibilities. My essay was written from the old-fashioned position: it took for granted that we badly need the kind of culture that is now undermined. Of course, I cannot change an atom of the ongoing process. So why do not I sit silent? Because I think it is valuable to diagnose the state of things, even if it is no remedy against the danger. Surely you know the parable of Pascal and his reed.

PS: Can you think of any s f book which discusses some Great Works of the future lit-

erature? I do not know a single book of this sort. (September 9 1974)*

* Anything more from me would be superfluous.

As you would have realised, nearly all the mail received on SFC 35/36/37 discussed Stanislaw Lem's article. But fortunately some people discussed the other 100 pages of that issue: *

* PATRICK McGUIRE
currently in USSR

Suvin's SURVEY OF SOVIET SCIENCE FICTION is useful, although idiosyncratic. For instance, in my own opinion THE HOUR OF THE BULL (Yefremov) is a somewhat superior book to the earlier ANDROMEDA. It is somewhat more consistent logically, and the ideation is better - if still not sufficiently - integrated with the fiction. In particular, the role of women is more plausibly - although again, still not sufficiently well - portrayed, and Yefremov has at least got beyond inserting footnotes, however stilted his dialogue remains. Also, I question whether it is proper to devote so much space to the Strugatskys in a general survey, though doubtless it was convenient for Suvin to do so, as he could use the research he had done for other articles, such as one in CANADIAN-AMERICAN SLAVIC STUDIES. Admittedly, the Strugatskys are the first people to be mentioned in any discussion of science fiction with Soviet citizens, but the second name to be mentioned will be Ray Bradbury, who is hardly typical of American s f. Indeed, his widespread popularity derives in part from his atypicality. I think that much the same is true of the Strugatskys. (I discuss several of their works in articles currently in the hands of various fanzine editors - including you, of course, Bruce.) ((*brg* Hint noted and acted upon - see the next few issues of SFC.*)) Of course, it is true that the third name you hear will be Asimov, who is much more "typical". Clearly, however, Suvin's grasp of the field of Soviet s f is far greater than mine is at this point, so I'll leave my comments at that.
(March 18 1974)*

* MIKE DUNN
903 Bellevue Place East, Apt 301, Seattle, Washington 98102, USA

In SFC 35/36/37, I am impressed by how sensible Lem sounds, despite the billing given him by his detractors as being "arrogant, contemptuous, etc". Lem is rightfully corrected by Chauvin and others, but I think his general criticism can be accepted by any realistic critic of s f (especially American s f): s f wants to be acknowledged as a serious literature, yet it doesn't want to face up to the responsibility of becoming a serious literature. The result is an amazing gulf between the best and the worst, with Le Guin and Silverberg on the one hand, and nothings like Stableford and the latter-day Heinlein on the other. In America, there seems to be a dichotomy between "serious" s f and "entertaining" s f, neither of which is ever adequately defined - nor their "irreconcilable" differences explained. There is endless talk of a return to the "sense of wonder", a more unexplained and inarticulate concept I have seldom heard. I often wish that if fans are going to complain and offer alternatives, then they should take the trouble to really think out their position - rather than point vaguely in the direction of the old ASTOUNDING and pine for days of yore.

One thing about Lem, though: His emphasis seems primarily on intellectual reaction (eg when confronted with the planet Solaris) rather than on emotional motivation. This puts him in the camp that views s f as mainly a vehicle for the presentation and assimilation of concepts, preferably mind-expanding concepts at that. But this overlooks a vital function of art: the ability to communicate an authentic emotional experience to the viewer, whether it be through literature, music, or graphic and tactile forms. Lem has little to say about the way in which s f may be used to communicate such experiences, except as how such an experience may arise from confrontation with some kind of epistemological mystery (as in SOLARIS). Those who would promote Lem ought to acknowledge his limitations, for s f is equally the exploration of the human subconscious, as well as the exploration of the exterior universe.

A word on Darko Suvin: Even after trying, I find myself incapable of appreciating Suvin's allusory style. I keep thinking, "Yes, yes, Suvin, but what in hell is the story about?" He writes of Russian s f just as if the readers were, after all, perfectly familiar with the titles at hand, and let's just dive into the criticism. To push Slavic s f is one thing; to think it the fare of fandom is another. In addition, I cannot help being infuriated at his asinine praise of "the admirable Soviet policy of cheap books". Either Suvin is ignorant of the system under which the Russian citizenry must live, and which makes possible "cheap" books - in which case he is a fool - or, he is perfectly aware of the situation beyond the Curtain - in which case he is morally bankrupt. How cheerful it is to know that the progressive Soviet Union publishes the Strugatsky brothers! Never mind that Solzhenitsyn was ignored, suppressed, and exiled for the "crime" of producing great literature. I have no gripe against Russian/Slavic s f and I am rather looking forward to reading more than just SOLARIS, but Suvin's slapdash thinking on the status of s f in the Soviet Union doesn't seem to understand realistically the implicit limitations under which all Russian writers must work. Well, enough of that.

To Murnane's review of SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE: I fail to understand Murnane's enthusiasm for Vonnegut when, even as Murnane admits, we get a depiction of the fundamental triviality of human experience. Is this a view to be endorsed? From time to time, I hear adulations of Vonnegut, praising his attention to the human condition and praising his compassion, etc, etc. I can only wonder. In SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE, the very premise of the story (the immutability of past and future time) entails determinism. Thus, it is irrelevant to comprehend the horrors of war, because such knoweledge can never have any causal influence over the actions of men in a deterministic world. There is no choice. Hence, there can be no hope. The future is equivalent to the past and we are trapped in the middle, between Scylla and Charybdis, waiting for strokes of fate to form our lives. How such a philosophy can be found attractive is beyond me. SIRENS OF TITAN was the same way: human history and evolution is reduced to irrelevant trivia, having been the absent-minded byproduct of alien goals and motives. Likewise, THE BIG SPACE RUCK, as it appeared in Ellison's AGAIN DANGEROUS VISIONS: Vonnegut's vision of the World as Pornographic Trivia. There's nothing magic in Vonnegut's experience of Dresden. Any person can emerge from a holocaust with the conviction that life is a cynical joke. It's the exceptional person who refuses to be so defeated.

The shadows of SFC 30 are long, indeed, and - despite the promptings of common sense and direction - I will pleasantly wish you prosperity and contentment. After all, they can't be bought. (December 4 1974)*

* I suppose Vonnegut fans like him because he is funny - not because of any point he proves, but because he refutes the solemnity of proving points. :: But you're a bit more sensible about Lem than some people have been recently. You may be right about his fiction; each new book shows Lem's weaknesses, as well as his strengths, more clearly. :: And the shadow of SFC 30 does still darken the edges of my life sometimes - and provides a silver lining at others.

* It's not every SFC correspondent who changes not only address but name between the time of sending a letter and the time of publication. Susan is still, I suppose, in law Susan Glicksohn, under which name she became one of the Fan Guests of Honour for this year's world convention, to be held in Australia. By degrees, Susan changed her name and, it seems, has changed herself or become far more herself, so that her recent magnificent series of fanzines (AMOR) and articles won her a Hugo this year for Best Fan Writer. This is the first year since I've been in fandom that there has been so definitely a best writer in our field. Enough. Here is one of the few letters that dealt with some of the things I was trying to say in my editorial for SFC 35/36/37: *

SUSAN WOOD
2920 Victoria Avenue, Apt 12, Regina, Saskatchewan S4T 1K7, Canada

It is totally impossible for me to comment on S F COMMENTARY 35. ((*brg* Susan called it, and still insists on calling it SCIENCE FICTION COMMENTARY, but I'll forgive her.*))

On one level-of-response, there is the "old" SFC, the serious journal of science fiction commentary which continues to awe me into silence. I simply do not have the background and/or intellectual ability to respond adequately to much of the material. ((*brg* Neither do I, but I fake it pretty well.*)) To take the most obvious example - I haven't seen the film of SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE. A more personal example - I simply have neither the time nor the energy to read Lem's article with care and attention, that is, to find if I could possibly say anything about it beyond, "Well, why must there be a 'theory of s f'?" The time to formulate an adquate response, even supposing I were intellectually capable of such a response, is totally lacking. Since I have been interrupted three times in the course of typing this paragraph, and have spent an hour trying to discover what has happened to the Canadian Literature anthology I am using as part of my second-year course (the book store, it turns out, ordered twenty-six copies for both sections of the course, some sixty-five students; so scrap my introductory lessons, and spend the weekend working up the presentation of a novel I didn't intend to teach until November) - anyway, since all these academic-type, work-type, hi-can-I-ask-you-for-help-with-this-thesis-on-Mordecai-Richler-type events are happening and demanding my full attention, I doubt that I will have the time to formulate any responses.

Which is part of the story of my relationship with the old SFC. Awe, a strong feeling of intimidation - what can I say that would possibly be intelligent enough to be an adequate response? And in the past two years of academic work and various problems, not enough time for in-depth intellectual analysis of s f topics. I admire the "old" SFC. I have, however, told you that before. That's not enough.

And then, since No 30, there is the "new" SFC.

Bruce, I simply cannot respond to a fanzine, a verbal construct, that tears out the insides of my head and heart and lays them out on the page. You realise all this is not for publication ((*brg* Fear not; but at least some parts of your letter should appear here*)). I don't have the courage, or honesty, or whatever, of you and Tom Collins, to share what you have shared. On a very real, personal level, SFC hurts and heals.

What has happened, since the printing of the Dick speech and your own self-revelations, is that the people of the "old" SFC who spent their time arguing have now let themselves be seen in a new light as people feeling, caring, reacting to the human situation they previously discussed intellectually.

I feel there is a split between "old" and "new" SFC; but I also feel (this is an emotional, rather than intellectual reaction) the gap lessening as the two forms of reaction becomes integrated in the personality of brg, the consciousness controlling the show. He was a disembodied brain, out there in Australia; and sudenly he was a hurting human being desperately trying to establish some sort of communication, through writing which, for me at least, was both an attempt to come to terms with a personal chaos and a search for reassurance: does anyone out there feel as I do, or am I really doomed to be alone? And now he's becoming some sort of new synthesis.

And what can we onlookers do but watch, and comment, and perhaps offer what support we can? ((*brg* No! The idea was that each "observer" should look back at her- or himself. But you for one did that, Susan, so I did not write in vain.*))

You are surprised at the nature of the response to your Gillespie's-feelings-under-a-microscope issues. (I don't think of them as "confessions" so much as self-examinations: what on earth is happening to me? I never knew I could feel such things; never knew there could be such despair and utter chaos - help! Help me get out of it, yes; but help me at least understand, so I can cope with it.)

I am not. But then, of course, I responded that way, didn't I? Your writing appears "self-pitying", I think, only to those fortunate ones who have not experienced your doubts in some form; or to those who have and were afraid to deal with them...

...A day has passed since I began this, actually a day-and-a-half full of the most marvellous positive experiences. The best (you as a former teacher will understand): I distributed one of my favourite Canadian poems, a poem which, I think, articulates many of the problems which exist in the study of the literature, the poem with which I begin my thesis, to my second-year class. An 8.30 am class of prairie teenagers, most of them not English majors. They read it. I explained a few references. I had made the point one must make, in a small class, that your opinion counts; please discuss things; I won't bite; also I pointed out that Canadian studies is/are an uncharted wilderness, so their opinion was doubly valid. I expected the usual silence, shyness, perhaps a tentative raising of a hand to express, blushing, an opinion.

They would not stop talking! Finally I had to say, "I'm sorry, but another class wants to use this room; we'll have to go."

And today two students came to me with, essentially, mini-essays: so excited by the poem, and others I'd assigned, they had set out their own thoughts and reactions! Not for credit, extra marks, anything. Out of sheer excitement about the literature, the ideas, and the very exciting situation of Canadian culture.

And I look back at the person who occupied this body, at this time, last year, and I want to reach out and touch her and say, "You will reach this plateau. You will."

I can't say it to that very different, very unhappy person, but I can say it to you. So I must. Which is why Tom wrote, and all those others. I cannot describe the effect of Collins' letter and especially your replies. I had heard it all before, with Collins played by a very beloved person, a very patient and generous person; and *brg* by that dreadful, dreary Susan. Especially *brg's* line at the top of page 79: "Impossible!"

I agreed with the person who told me I was unlovable, a failure, who never could give or receive love. And so I became what he said I was. When I desperately searched for reassurance, I ended up by hurting someone who could not love me, and almost destroying myself physically and mentally in the process. I was making jokes about my lack of sanity at Torcon - partly out of relief that I was, at last, sane or on the way there. Relief that I could be so totally, deliriously, hilariously flying after a year or more in the blackest depression. And the message from me and Collins and others is: we have been down through your valley of the shadow, too, and we have survived, and you can survive, and please, please, won't you stop torturing yourself? Won't you listen when we say there is hope?...

...You realise what I've done, of course; written a five-page letter on how I can't loc SFC. Well, this isn't a loc, of course; it's what SFC does to my head.

I must stop: so I will by sharing with you the last poem in the collected works of another favourite Canadian poet, F R Scott:

CARING

Caring is loving, motionless,
An interval of more and less
Between the stress and the distress.

After the present falls the past,
After the festival, the fast.
Always the deepest is the last.

This is the circle we must trace,
Not spiralled outward, but a space
Returning to its starting place.

Centre of all we mourn and bless,
Centre of calm beyond excess,
Who cares for caring, has caress.
(September 6 1973)*

* Now it is March 1974, but it doesn't seem very long since I received this letter while I was staying with David and Betsey Gorman in New Castle. Susan's letter (including the more-than-half that I haven't printed) moved me very much when I read it first seventeen months ago, but I find that it speaks more clearly now than it did then. For Susan, the year that followed the writing of this letter was magnificent - a list of public achievements and personal triumph: Best Fan Writer 1974, a post as fanzine reviewer for AMAZING, the success of AMOR, joint Fan Guest of Honour at Aussiecon, her teaching career, and now she has just become Associate Professor of English at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. Susan has seen herself as the marvellous person she always was. As in all passionate writing that speaks to others (in this case, me) I think Susan was speaking to herself as well, showing herself where to go. Even if I had not received gratifying mail about SFC 35/36/37 ever since it was published, this one letter would have made all that lunatic effort worthwhile.

But the only person who doesn't seem to have been able to take advantage of Susan's advice is me. If I received Tom Collins' letter right now and typed the stencils for another SFC 35/36/37, then I would write the same interjections. I slid off my bit of plateau. F R Scott's poem shows me what you were trying to say, but somehow I keep going in circles, not spiralling anywhere. I care for caring, but I need someone right here to care for. Or have I missed the message again? When I'm feeling at peace within my own aloneness, the same condition I was conscious of when I wrote much of SFC 35/36/37, I am assured by two of many wise sayings from THE DISPOSSESSED:

> You can go home again, so long as you understand that home is a place where you have never been.

And:

> Where, then, is truth? On the hill one happens to be sitting on.

But when I am conscious of the vacuum around me - self-caused, probably; impenetrable, certainly - I can only jeer at the world and myself with this superb miniature I found in ROLLING STONE:

> SLEEPING PILLS, by Jack Thibeau
>
> The dull get laid.
> The brilliant
> go home alone.

So bleech! to Happiness - but not to the happiness of my friends, especially yours, Susan.

Onward to S F COMMENTARY 39, now seventeen months old but still un-commented-upon: *

* BARRY GILLAM
4283 Katonah Avenue, Bronx, New York 10470, USA

As I said when you were here, Turner's review of THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS is excellent. I might make just one comment. Turner mentions that Wolfe's system of making the reader work to put together the stories and their hints and suggestions is part of Wolfe's plan. But he never actually states the connection between theme and method. The theme is not so much the problem of identity as the search for identity. Which takes the form of the series of cloned individuals, of Veil's Hypothesis, of the attempt in "A Story" to reconstruct the life of the abos, of Marsch's expedition, etc. Parallelling this is another search - for truth. Wolfe sees the first as necessary but practically doomed to failure. He sees the second as vaguely ludicrous. The young officer's perusal of the documents in "VRT" is shown to be a bad bureaucratic joke. The misshapen slaves in the market are the by-product of the "father's" attempt to perfect his knowledge of biology - and himself. Only the smallest of truths may ever be achieved, such as the narrator's recollection and deduction of Mr Million's hiding place for the reed pipes.

All of this is a progression, a grasping towards. The book's ambiguity (even, occasionally, its muteness) is carefully calculated. It forces the reader to think, and his reconstruction is what the book aims towards. His own investigation is the acting-out of the book's theme.

Turner's destruction of the Dozois story in NEW DIMENSIONS 1 is much appreciated also. I was amazed that some fans actually liked it and (what's worse) thought it was well written. (November 16 1973)*

* Some dissension from that fairly general opinion: *

* DOUG BARBOUR
10808-75th Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta T6E 1K2, Canada

I have my troubles with George Turner, whose writings I came across first in ALGOL, where his snap dismissal of some of my favourite books angered me just a little. In No 39 his long article concerning, mostly, Gardner Dozois' A SPECIAL KIND OF MORNING is a case in point, for it reveals certain weaknesses he has as a critic, in my opinion (on the other hand he can't be all bad, because he

does recognise the value of THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS). He seems to follow Blish's line of criticising the writing from a writer's technical point of view. This may be of help to Dozois, but tends to miss the forest for the trees (ah cliche, how I love thee!). To whit: although many of the points he makes are correct, such as the trajectory/laser point (at least, I'll grant that he's right, as I've never studied the problem (and by the way, there was still the problem of zeroing in on a target 100 feet above the centre of the valley)), and although he scores off Dozois on a number of tangibles, he seems to miss the intangibles completely; like tone, imagery, etc. Also, many of the things Turner attacks are conventions, which may be worth attacking for that reason (that Dozois relies too much on what others have done before), but he does not play that up enough; it's just the facts that bother him. Actually, I don't want to defend this story too much, as it was mildly enjoyable, did not give me trouble, and made some biting points about war (thought I, who have never seen it live). But your readers don't really get an idea of the flavour of the story from Turner, partly because, I suspect, he got so mad at certain things that he just could not talk about the whole story in a normal fashion. And then he did not leave much room to tell us about the good stories (why was Le Guin's story good? or Disch's? I'd really like to know.)

Let's put it this way. I feel that Gerald Murnane writes fine reviews the way they should be done. I learn something as a reader from him, and at the end I have a pretty good idea as to whether I'll like the book he has just reviewed. Both of his reviews in SFC 35/36/37 were good. But, not to be grumpy, George Turner's long article on some of the problems he had with SOLARIS was also interesting. (December 3 1973)*

* Another expression of the more general concensus of opinion about No 39:

* JERRY KAUFMAN
622 West 114th Street, Apt 52A, New York, New York 10025, USA

I hear you are back in Australia. What happened? The last we heard from was the S F COMMENTARY that you did in Indiana, and a letter from Susan, in which she mentioned that she had lined up a job for you. I remember that you were ready to leave the States after Pghlange, but look at the fine times you had soon after. So what happened to the plans you had to travel to Europe?

* Well, SFC 40 told most of the story. I will never know which was the more unbelievable: the crazier events of the trip itself or (perhaps) the even crazier rumours about its various stages. If I ever again propose a trip of more than five or six weeks anywhere, I hope somebody stops me before I set out. *

Finally I read the novelette, THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS, and loved it. It was very confusing at first, to be plunged into such an alien world, and from the viewpoint of a young boy, and in such rich and convoluted language - graceful, stately, and allusive. I was reminded strongly of ADA, or ARDOR, by Nabokov. I don't know if Wolfe reads Nabokov, or if he consciously aped him. If not, I am greatly pleased, because that makes two men who can write like that, from within their own resources.

I really enjoyed George Turner's review of A SPECIAL KIND OF MORNING. I didn't mind the story too much when I read it, but mainly I thought that it was a great gush of directed words, garrulous and expansive. I enjoy blood being drawn in reviews, if by a well-directed rapier. "On the last line, strike home." "A hit, a palpable hit." But I must admit I find life strange, I really do. I expect it to be strange; it's perfectly normal for it to be strange. Even if it is strange all the time.
(December 10 1973)*

* The last part of SFC 39 gained at least two reactions which have some historical interest after the events of the first eight months of last year. *

* BUCK COULSON
Route 3, Hartford City, Indiana 47348, USA

This is mostly to comment on Phil Dick's letter in SFC 39. I'm beginning to wonder a bit about Dick - in fact, I'm about through wondering and becoming convinced. In the first place, he is not promoting revolution or sabotage or any of the other concepts he says he's for; he's promoting anarchy. Now, promoting anarchy is his right if he wants to do it, but he doesn't seem to know the difference between anarchy and revolution, which is a bit worrisome in political writings. Anybody who thinks that stealing a case of Coke bottles is a blow against tyrannous government shouldn't be running around loose without a keeper.

Earlier on, he seems to endorse the philosophy that individuals should "behave in such a way that if everyone did it, good would come of it". In the next paragraph, he endorses breaking every law on the books. ("You owe them nothing, nothing at all, in the way of complying with their laws." Assuming that he doesn't feel that he has divine knowledge of which laws are Nixon's and which are the product of someone else's philosophy, that means that every law goes by the wayside, and we have total anarchy. In fact, in his defence of the Coke-thief, he supports this view.) Now, I suppose it's possible that Dick believes anarchy is a good thing, or that getting rid of Nixon and

friends is worth destroying society to accomplish. (He'll probably say it's a rotten society anyway.) If he doesn't believe either of these two propositions, he's being a hypocrite. If he does believe them, he threw out his powers of reason and replaced them with pure emotion - which is also quite possible, considering that he feels that provoking the left into illegal acts "destroys" it even though nobody has ever been convicted of such acts.

And to answer your question about why such a gap seems to divide the Americans you've met from the Amerikans you've read about - it's because you and the rest of the world read people like Phil Dick, who can work up powerful emotional binges in print without ever knowing what in hell they're writing about.

Of course, you met Americans at their best. What liberals never seem to understand, despite their constant platitudes about it, is that any person in the world can be either pleasant or an utter bastard, depending on the context in which you view him. Our neighbours and my co-workers are generous to charities, helpful if one's car breaks down or some other personal problem occurs, friendly, self-reliant, most of them voted against Nixon - and firm in their refusal to allow any blacks to reside in the county. When a tornado struck nearby Marion a few years ago, the residents (who do include a lot of blacks) rallied around to help out the victims - and also looted everything that the owners couldn't put a guard on. There is no basic goodness or badness in either a conservative or a liberal; they just don't agree on which crimes they excuse and which they object to. Call them all bastards with occasional redeeming qualities and you're closer to the truth than any partisan gets.

(November 11 1973)*

* Even more directly against Dick's SFC 39 letter:

* ALEXIS GILLILAND
4030 South 8th Street, Arlington, Virginia 22204, USA

SFC 39, page 22. Mr Philip K Dick says, "We Americans are now faced with precisely 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."

What naive stupidity. What abysmal ignorance. What unmitigated horseshit.

To test Mr Dick's assertion, compare Hitler in 1938 and Nixon in 1973 after both men had been in power for five years. It helps, of course, if you are not totally innocent of both history and current events.

And later, "...We have a criminal mob running this country..." is the wrong tense. The "criminal mob" so-called, surely consisted of Haldeman, Erlichman, Mitchell, Dean, Stans, Krogh, and about a score of others, all of whom have been forced to resign and/or have left the administration. Some are under indictment; others may be indicted. Only their chief is left, and his hold on office is precarious and uncertain.

Finally he calls for revolution. How utterly sciencefictional. The House Judiciary Committee, under Rep. Peter Rodine, is preparing a bill of impeachment against Nixon, and Dick thinks, "We may have to revolt." Why the hell not try writing your Congressman?

Which brings us round to one of Mr Dick's underlying assumptions, that the country is being run by the "Nixon government". At his distance, that may be how it looks, but in fact the country is run by the bureaucracy, and the reason it hasn't degenerated into a bureaucratic despotism, a la the Soviet Union, is that the bureaucracy is answerable to the courts and accountable to the GAO - the General Accounting Office - which is an arm of Congress.

Therefore Nixon found the bureaucracy unresponsive to his will. The leaks that have plagued him came from bureaucrats, his own people, "Nixon bureaucrats" in Mr Dick's view, who were dismayed and disgusted by the perfidy displayed by the Nixonite ruling clique.

The plumbers which he ordered set up to "fix" such leaks were a ludicrous parody of the SD under Heydrich, and in fact may have destroyed their creator. Nixon created the plumbers in the first place because he did not trust the FBI. And Mr Dick complains about paranoia on the left.

(November 22 1973)*

* This letter calls for a slightly different response than I would have offered if I had published it immediately after I arrived back in Australia. Events have proved Mr Gilliland more correct than I would have suspected; but even up to the moment of Nixon's resignation, I would have thought that Philip Dick's diagnosis of USA's near future was more likely to come true. For instance, even on the week when I published SFC 39 at the Gormans' place, I read the ROLLING STONE two-part interview with Daniel Ellsberg. His diagnosis of the Nixon administration's motives came very close to Dick's, whose view was based on personal experience. In other words, people dedicated to re-electing Nixon by all possible means did engage in all the snooping, bugging, and breaking in which Dick suspected them of. (Re science fiction: Ellsberg's account of secrecy at Presidential level reads much like the broad, horrific farce of Lem's MEMOIRS FOUND IN A BATHTUB and, more prosaically, the shenanigans in Nicholls'/Merle's DAY OF THE DOLPHIN.) Okay, so why did Nixon do it? Nobody has really

set about answering this question. Why did Nixon take so much trouble just to regain a four-year term, especially against an opponent who, as far as I could tell from conversations among Americans, had been dismissed by Middle America as early as three or four months before the elections? Two possible explanations: (1) that, when faced with a crisis similar to Watergate, Nixon could take the excuse to stage a military coup. CIA tactics in such places as the Philippines and Chile only strengthened such expectations; (2) that Nixon was stupid, and quite obsessed by power. This is the explanation favoured by Noam Chomsky, interviewed directly by the ABC's LATELINE program in what must surely be the most interesting radio program broadcast in Australia for some years. Chomsky's explanation was that Nixon erred by spying on his buddies, or at least the people one must not offend to stay in power. Therefore, said Chomsky, removal of Nixon changed nothing in America's basic power structure, and left Nixon unaccused of all the really ghastly things committed by the Administration (the '72 "Christmas bombing", Cambodia, and CIA sabotage in general). Chomsky sees little real difference between the liberal and conservative elements which divide up central power in USA.

So, Alexis, events have proved that the bureaucracy and (presumably) the Pentagon's willingness to stick to the Constitution, have staved off Mr Dick's fears. But disclosures have also shown that his fears were not groundless. Perhaps I should go back to Buck Coulson's letter, and admit that public indifference (in 1972, as many eligible Americans did not vote,as voted for Nixon) can be as destructive as any broad democratic movement. In rhe LATELINE interview mentioned above, Chomsky regretted the weakness of the left in America; I suppose it's weak for the same reason it has no real ideological punch in Australia: that whoever controls the government, life goes on much the same for most people. When powerful trends affect most people (inflation, etc) nobody can do much. For the man of conscience, anarchism is all that's left as guidance.

THE LATE NEWS

* Only about six months late. You know the old story - two months spent writing an article there; a month spent working for the Worldcon here; an article to write; a Sydney trip. It adds up to six months, anyway. Big Plans for the future, but I've planned big before. It's nice to think about.

Not nice to think about was the recent death (17 March) of Owen Webster. By his own hand, as they say. "He looked into the abyss, and one day the abyss looked back at him." He and his writings helped me a lot, but there doesn't seem much to do for his memory except to print, for the first time, a fine article he wrote in 1959. That's in SFC 44. And I must write that review of his book SO - a long-promised review which, I had presumed, would appear in Owen's lifetime. :: Much better news - and far more of a surprise -

CHECKLIST - continued from page 102

James Whale (16)
Dennis Wheatley (ed): UNCANNY TALES 1 (6)
James White (22-26)
James White: ALL JUDGMENT FLED (24)
James White: DARK INFERNO (24-25)
James White: THE DREAM MILLENIUM (25-26)
James White: THE WATCH BELOW (24)
T H White (75)
Walt Whitman (4)
Jack Williamson: H G WELLS: THE CRITIC OF PROGRESS (89)
Jack Williamson: WITH FOLDED HANDS (17)
Edmund Wilson: ELLEN TERHUNE (89)
Gene Wolfe: THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS (95-96)
Gene Wolfe: THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR DEATH AND OTHER STORIES (8)
Susan Wood (93-96)
Susan Wood (ed): AMOR (93)
Susan Wood: THE CLUBHOUSE (AMAZING) (81, 95)
Wren Publishing Co (8)
Stefan Wul: TEMPLE OF THE PAST (13)
John Wyndham: THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS (6)
John Wyndham: THE SECRET PEOPLE (6)
John Wyndham: STOWAWAY TO MARS (6)
W B Yeats (78)
Yefremov: THE HOUR OF THE BULL (92)
Bud Yorkin (dir): START THE REVOLUTION WITHOUT ME (84)
John Yorty (dir): RIVERRUN (84)
Roger Zelazny: CREATURES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS (12)
Roger Zelazny: THE DOORS OF HIS FACE, THE LAMPS OF HIS MOUTH AND OTHER STORIES (11)
Roger Zelazny: THE GUNS OF AVALON (12)
Roger Zelazny: LORD OF LIGHT (12)
Roger Zelazny: NINE PRINCES IN AMBER (11)
Roger Zelazny: A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES (11)
Roger Zelazny: TODAY WE CHOOSE FACES (11)
Roger Zelazny: TO DIE IN ITALBAR (11)

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was the news that the members of Aussiecon have given S F COMMENTARY its third Hugo nomination. "That my friends, even those closest friends who have known me in all my madness and eccentricity, nevertheless have remained loyal to me is the single valid justification tnat I could present for my somewhat comical existence." Particular credit to John Foyster, who produced half of SFC's 1974 production. Justice has been done this year: STARLING (edited by Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell, and one of the best fanzines for six years) and John Bangsund (the World's Best Fan Writer for nine years) have been nominated at last. I'll still find it hard to choose between John and Susan Wood, or between INVERTED WORLD and THE DISPOSSESSED for Best Novel. I haven't read any of the short fiction yet. More justice due - give Bill Rotsler the Hugo he's deserved for years - Rotsler for Best Fan Artist! YOUNG FRONKENSTEEN for Best Dramatic Presentation (and Gene Wilder for Most Fannish Personality?). Robert Silverberg for Best Editor, and my choice is Ursula Le Guin for the Frand Master of Fantasy.

G'bye til next time. Last stencil typed 3 April 1975.

EDITOR

MENTIONED IN THIS ISSUE - S F COMMENTARY 41/42 CHECKLIST

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