S F COMMENTARY 46

SPECIAL

PRESTIDIGITATIONS

ISSUE

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EXPOSITIONS AND EPISTLES

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

LET THERE BE TRIVIA

* This is the first guaranteed "catch up" issue since SFC 33. All the others since then have had Weighty Purposes, and procrustean layout plans, into which every detail has had to fit.

It is with some relief that I refuse to include in SFC 46 any item just because it "ought to" appear. No item is here for a Weighty Purpose. Everything is here because I like it and, very simply, want to publish it.

And "I Must Be Talking To My Friends"? Well, it's all self-indulgence, this time. I'll just include what suits my whim and pages available, and see what happens.

And, as every long-term reader of the magazine knows, I have one outstanding vice: Lists of Favourite Things...

THE BEST OF 1975

But first...

BEST SHORT SCIENCE FICTION OF 1973

* At several Australian s f conventions, I have received awards for publishing SFC and, last August, a valuable little token for being nominated for a Hugo Award. But, if anyone ever wants to give me some great award or other, I have one real achievement in my career which merits an accolade.

That is my achievement in reading (as nearly as possible) every piece of short science fiction to be published during 1973. I began the task in 1973, and finished last month. There were the usual magazines (plus Vertex) and the regular original fiction anthologies. But 1973 was the year in which Roger Elwood took it into his head to jump on the bandwagon and suffocate it under his editorial weight. There must have been about thirty more anthologies than usual to read. :: Which means that I am still keeping to my resolution to cover the short fiction field every year. I get further behind each year, and my searching uncovers fewer pearls in the silt. But I keep doing it because (a) I'm crazy, and (b) the so-called "Best of"

collections that appear annually give no idea of what is actually good in the field. Worthy people, like Terry Carr and Messrs Harrison and Aldiss, claim to cover the field. Year after year, they turn in whole volumes of guaranteed Grade-Z iron pyrites.

So this is in the nature of a challenge. If you are a publisher, and you like my choice of The Best of 1973 better than the selections which appeared in any of the six "Best of 1973" volumes which did appear, then I am available, for your usual modest retainer, to edit such a volume annually. Such a task would even repay me for keeping up with the field instead of falling three years behind. This current list, by the way, would add up to about 350 pages of the average book, and would actually be worth the money spent on it.

THE S F COMMENTARY AWARD 1973

1 "In Hot Pursuit of Happiness"
Stanislaw Lem (first appeared in English in View from Another Shore)
2 "The Making of Ashenden"
Stanley Elkin (Searches and Seizures)
3 "The Last Day of July"
Gardner Dozois (New Dimensions 3)
4 "The Direction of the Road"
Ursula K Le Guin (Orbit 12)
5 "Sisyphus, the Son of Aeolus"
Vsevolod Ivanov (View from Another Shore)
6 "We Are Dainty Little People"
Charles Naylor (Bad Moon Rising)
7 "The Proving Ground"
Sever Gansovski (View from Another Shore)
8 "Thy Blood Like Milk"
Ian Watson (New Worlds 6)
9 "The Women Men Don't See"
James Tiptree Jr (F&SF, Dec)
10 "The Shrine of Sebastian"
Gordon Eklund (Chains of the Sea)

That's the stories I would include in my hypothetical anthology. "In Hot Pursuit of Happiness" is way above everything else (it's the best piece of Lem to appear so far in English); then Elkin; then Numbers 3 to 10 all very close together (I mean, how could I think of the Tiptree story as anything but an Equal 3? - all these stories are excellent).

In fairness to the authors concerned, I should add that my real list is a Top 15, of which the next 5 are:

11 "A Modest Genius"
Vadim Shefner (View from Another Shore)
12 "How Shall We Conquer?"
W Macfarlane (New Dimensions 3)
13 "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas"
Ursula K Le Guin (New Dimensions 3)
14 "Feather Tigers"
Gene Wolfe (Edge)
15 "Observations and Thoughts of a Being Far From His Planet"
Henry-Luc Planchat (Edge)

View from Another Shore, edited by Franz Rottensteiner and published by Seabury Press/Continuum Books, is obviously the anthology of the year. It says a lot about the much-lauded State of S F that, at the moment, this particular anthology is no longer in print. I've talked already (in SFC 44/45) about the stories here which I like. Try to find a copy of this book if you can.

New Dimensions 3 has been by far the best US original fiction anthology of recent years, followed closely only by Orbit 14 (but that's still to be counted in 1974's reckoning). I plan a special review of this anthology for the Silverberg Issue. "The Last Day of July" has been ignored while Dozois' other, much inferior, stories continue to be praised. This is a complete experience in a story... a process of ontological transformation... ghostly possession... or something like it. Matter-of-fact narration plus a wide variety of tactile details give this story an immediacy which is lacking in most fiction in the field. :: "How Shall We Conquer?" has a very moving ending, the outcome of an intense and understated dilemma. A story which everybody else seems to have ignored. :: I didn't make much of "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" until Kristin read it to me aloud, and suddenly I saw what it was all about.

Meanwhile, Ursula Le Guin's "The Direction of the Road" appeared first in Orbit 12. It still has great power for me because in my mind remains the central image - of the trees by the roadside bending and swaying, swelling and thinning in a mad fandango, just to make humans think that the trees are standing still. It remains the most delightful s f idea-story that has appeared in years. :: Stanley Elkin is a particular favourite of mine, and "The Making of Ashenden" is one of the few undiluted fantasies which he has written. The fantasy ending would disgust many readers so, no doubt, my hypothetical publisher of this mythical anthology would feel obliged to leave it out. People with warped senses of humour, like me and Ed Cagle, enjoy this story very much. :: I must be the last person in the s f orbit who thinks that s f should be - sometimes, just to keep up appearances - about the probable future. In that case, Charles Naylor's "We Are Dainty Little People", with its stark account of trying to hold down an apartment in a future-city jungle, is the best story in the collection about a possible future. :: It's a long time since I've read "Thy Blood Like Milk", but I remember about it the same kind of things which remain in mind from Watson's first novel, The Embedding - that is, the sense of anticipation and excitement which can seize the participant caught in the middle of an apocalyptic series of unforeseeable events. In this story, the idea is: what happens when a worldwide pollution blanket begins to disperse? :: "The Women Men Don't See" is the only story on my list which received its fair share of praise from the rest of the field. Its outcome is zany and creepy enough for anybody, but my favourite

moments are those agonising pages at the beginning of the story when the main characters are forced to adjust to the unrelieved discomfort of the swamp-jungle environment of the Yucatan. Which goes to show that there is no real substitute for a writer knowing what he/she is talking about, and having something worth saying. ::
And here comes Gordon Eklund, right at the end, to disprove me. I wouldn't know what Eklund was on about in "The Shrine of Sebastian", but I do know that it trapped me completely in its own species of frenzy. Eklund is the only writer in the field who has Phil Dick's ability to remove from language everything but the details of action and observation best able to heat up a storm in the reader's head. Gordon Eklund is just one of the really good writers in the field to be ignored during recent years.

THE RUNNERS-UP

As I read through all those stories, I marked each one with a rating. The only stories which I wrote down as contenders were stories which received my **** rating. There were 60 of them. From them, I picked out a much smaller list of stories which were actually candidates for the Top 10:

From the anthologies:
"The World is a Sphere"
Edgar Pangborn (Universe 3)
"The Defenceless Dead"
Larry Niven (Ten Tomorrows)
"Symposium"
R A Lafferty (Omega)
"Saving the World"
Terry Carr (Saving Worlds)

From the magazines:
"To Walk With Thunder"
Dean McLaughlin (Amazing Aug)
"Field of Vision"
Ursula K Le Guin (Galaxy Oct)
"Lights Out"
Geo Alec Effinger (F&SF Oct)
"All the Sounds of the Rainbow"
Norman Spinrad (Vertex Jun)

FAVOURITE NOVELS 1975

1 Peace
Gene Wolfe
(first published 1975; Harper & Row; 264 pp)

2 The Three-Cornered World (Kusa Makura)
Natsume Soseki
(1906; Peter Owen; 184 pp)

3 A Bad Man
Stanley Elkin
(1967; Berkeley 21937; 351 pp)

4 Tender is the Night
F Scott Fitzgerald
(1939; Penguin Modern Classics 14 000906; 334 pp)

5 Ulysses
James Joyce
(1922; Penguin Modern Classics 14 003000; 704 pp)

6 The Little Prince
Antoine de Saint-Exupery
(1945; Piccolo 330 23945; 93 pp)

7 Galactic Pothealer
Philip K Dick
(1969; Berkeley X1705; 144 pp)

8 Ice and Iron
Wilson Tucker
(1974; Gollancz; 181 pp)

This is - as probably you have worked out by now - a peculiar list. It is mainly a product of the fact that I didn't read all that much of anything during 1975 (remember that busy year described in SFC 44/45?). If I were really honest, I would confess that it's only the Top 3 which would have reached a Top 10 list in any other year. Most people will find the low position of Ulysses quite incomprehensible. Well, I didn't understand large chunks of Ulysses, so I found it difficult to like the book as a whole. However, the parts I liked were very palatable indeed - particularly what is known as the Nausicaa episode, and the final two sections. The trouble is... well, I will leave that to SFC 47/48. Joyce fans will be pleased to know, however, that if I had included books which I had read for a second time (as well as books read for the first time in 1975), The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man would have rated as Number 2 or 3. When I read it for the first time, ten years ago, I didn't like it at all. In ten more years, I will return to Ulysses and see what I find.

I picked up The Three-Cornered World from a shelf at the Magic Pudding Club. Carey hadn't read it, of course, since he has the same trouble as I do in actually reading the books which he buys. Anyway, this appeared during the 1950s in a modest little Peter Owen edition in a series of Japanese novels. Neither The Three-Cornered World nor the rest of the series has been reprinted since, as far as I know. (This sounds like a case for Keith Curtis' super-sleuthing.) The novel itself is in the style which I tend to think of as "classically Japanese": a short narrative of lucid, sensitive prose; apparent simplicity which hides a complex psychological meaning. At one level, this is the story of how the wandering poet never quite makes it with the mysterious lady he meets at an inn in the hills. At another level...

I have little to add to George Turner's praise of Peace in SFC 44/45. Surely this must have been the best novel to be published in USA during 1975; it is so especially self-confident in its scope and complete in its details that it stands by itself like an immovable rock in the

middle of the great sludgy wash of current English-language fiction. Of the many interesting features of the book, most interesting to me is the fact that Peace tackles a very European theme - the non-participant, cold, faintly demonic figure around whom other people live and beat themselves to death. Yet this is, above all, an American Midwestern novel. Among other things, this is a story of the narrator's attempt to efface himself altogether, so every detail takes on extra coverings of mystery and deception. The book includes at least one good ghost story, and most of the other stories-within-a-story read like ghost stories. But I have one question which, Gene Wolfe being Gene Wolfe, the author is unlikely to answer: Did the narrator kill the school-teacher towards the end of the book? And was it that missing treasure which becomes the foundation of the narrator's personal fortune? Or should I read the whole book again? And there's one final question which several Australian readers of SFC are asking: How do we get a copy? As far as I know, I still have the only copy in Australia, and I'll let you read it if you don't take it out of the house.

A Bad Man is great Stanley Elkin, but not quite as good as The Dick Gibson Show. There's even a Mysterious Avenger-Figure here in this novel as well. His task is to punish the main character for his lack of penitence for his own evil. Feldman is a prancing clown of a figure who, in the words of the back-cover blurb, is "the prisoner of the state, sentenced to one year in jail for doing 'favours'." I suspect that Elkin himself must have written the blurb, since it describes the tone of the book so well: Feldman is a "man fighting to stay bad... He's the prisoner of an unborn, mysteriously murdered Siamese twin that lies across his heart, threatening death at any second...his fellow prisoners have condemned him to death. But Feldman may make it..." A Bad Man is, of course, filled with delicious language: who else but Elkin could characterise Woolworth's as "Nothing for something"?; or sum up a life's experience as "On this day, in this place, on this spot, nothing happened."?

1975 was my year for reading Scott Fitzgerald. I get these urges to read the entire works of author and, as happened to Kafka in 1974, I still haven't finished the lot. Tender is the Night is the Fitzgerald novel which I liked the most. It's less well-crafted than The Great Gatsby, but it is more inclusive. In fact, if you look at Tender is the Night with any objectivity at all, it comes out as a very awkward piece. But - to use the most appropriate cliche which springs to typewriter - it has an irrepressible sense of life - a sense of the author saying, "I know this; I was there; and much else happened besides." Fitzgerald has an infallible eye for the right detail that will create his luminescent, yet fading, world of rich people who are all going mad in one way or another. The only person who triumphs is the woman who is declared insane at the beginning of the book. Fitzgerald can give the essence of experiences: (Dick Diver): "'I want to give a really bad party ...I want to give a party where there's a brawl and seductions and people going home with their feelings hurt and women passed out in the cabinet de toilette.'" Or, to speak of "One of those uneventful times that seem at the moment only a link between past and future pleasure, but turn out to have been the pleasure itself." The Great Gatsby and This Side of Paradise are extraordinary books too, and see below for some comments on a few of the short stories.

I'm really going to dismay Gerald Murnane, who thinks much of Ulysses, if I say that I'm not sure that I shouldn't have exchanged its place with The Little Prince. I would never have read The Little Prince if Kristin hadn't asked me to, and... well, it means a lot. Like Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, the superstructure of the fable, or children's story, is just a way of expressing some fairly interesting ideas. I take The Little Prince as a critique of egoism - not just an attempt to show what are the evils in the twentieth-century world, but what are the sources of that evil. However, that would mean nothing without the author's creation of the Little Prince himself, who manages to say a lot without ever giving a straight answer. I take it that the line which best summarises the Little Prince's discoveries is, "What is essential is invisible to the eye". And, "It is the time that I have wasted for my rose that makes my rose so important."

Galactic Pothealer is impossible to describe, except that it fits my definition of the word, "visionary". It is also very funny. It is about a cathedral being lifted up from the depths of the sea, and any novel with that as a main idea could only be good.

I give a few of my ideas about Ice and Iron in the Tucker Issue of SFC. It's the ultimate expression of one side of the Tucker viewpoint; I'm not sure where he can go from here. And it's much better than the reviewers say it is.

OTHER CONTENDERS

Hello Summer, Goodbye by Michael Coney (Gollancz; 1975; 221 pp). The US version (DAW Books) has the unbelievable title of Rax.

The Lord of the Rings, by J R R Tolkien (1955; Allen & Unwin; 1077 pp)

Strangers, by Gardner Dozois (in New Dimensions 4; 1974; Signet Y6113)

The Great Gatsby, by F Scott Fitzgerald (1926; Penguin 14 00746; 188 pp)

This Side of Paradise, by F Scott Fitzgerald (1920; Penguin 14 001867; 254 pp)

The Futurological Congress, by Stanislaw Lem (Seabury/Continuum; 1971; 149 pp)

Invisible Cities, by Italo Calvino (1972; Harcourt Brace Janovich; 165 pp)

The Stochastic Man, by Robert Silverberg (1975; Harper & Row; 229 pp)

To the Tombaugh Station, by Wilson Tucker (Ace

D-479; 1960; 145 pp)
Winter's Children, by Michael Coney (Gollancz; 1974; 192 pp)

FAVOURITE SHORT STORIES 1975

This is a new list which I began last year - of all short stories actually read in a particular year, compared with the s f list (which is for all the short s f that was published in a specified year).

1 "The Dead" (James Joyce) from Dubliners
2 "A Painful Case" (James Joyce) Dubliners
3 "The Lees of Happiness" (F Scott Fitzgerald) The Diamond as Big as the Ritz and Other Stories
4 "Mr Hamadryad" (R A Lafferty) Stellar 1
5 "The Stars Below" (Ursula K Le Guin) Orbit 14
6 "The Watcher" (Italo Calvino) The Watcher and Other Stories
7 "The Rich Boy" (F Scott Fitzgerald) The Diamond as Big as the Ritz and Other Stories
8 "And He Built a Crooked House" (Robert A Heinlein) Where Do We Go From Here?

To me, "The Dead" is the finest piece of fiction which James Joyce ever wrote, if only for the fact that it seems very much an illumination of each reader's life; it is not remote and alien, like much of The Portrait and Ulysses and, of course, all of Finnegans Wake. "The Dead" is one of those delicious pieces, like the ballroom scene in Visconti's The Leopard, in which the main themes begin, scarcely noticeable, in the multiple details of a social gathering, and slowly grow and gather importance, til the story changes into something quite different at its end. So: I guess that "The Dead" is, at the one time, the most precise account available of petit-bourgeois life in Dublin towards the end of the nineteenth century; a love song from Joyce to his wife; and both a lament for and a castigation of the country which Joyce was to leave forever. Its authenticity springs from the liveliness and precision of its prose, and that so many of the deeply important things in the story have had their importance impressed on me since I read the story for the first time. Reading it for the second time is quite a moving experience.

"A Painful Case" reminds me a lot of Henry James' "The Beast in the Jungle", which is possibly the finest short story in English. At any rate, it has the same force of pathos based on irony and a perception of the way in which any life might pass unnoticed and wasted. :: "The Lees of Happiness" is also a story of desperate unhappiness (no, it's not just my temperament; most writers simply do write better about sadness and despair than they do about happiness), but it is also a story of courage and faithfulness. What does it have to say? That there are no guarantees at all in life? But whoever thought there were any, anyway? (Answer: me at the age of 19.) Back to my word visionary - or, to be pedantic, to the transformational element of fiction. Even though I've given respective ratings to "Mr Hamadryad" and "The Stars Below", I'm not sure which I like best. Lafferty's story is full of those multiple transformations and shifts of the mind and the eye which one can find only in Lafferty's work. But this story is just about The Ultimate Lafferty Story - it's even better than "Continued on Next Rock", believe it or not. :: "The Stars Below" shows us the mystical side of Ursula Le Guin's work - and I think she is best when she works towards that direction. At the same time, it is a story of precise details about a desperate adventure, but the adventure happens to somebody who can see further than others, and is looking in quite the opposite direction from everybody else in his world. The last few pages really do have visionary clarity.

"The Watcher" is early Calvino, and tends to remind me vaguely of lots of other European and South American fabulists while I am reading it. Still, this is a powerful fable and shows that, quite early in his career, Calvino had proceeded long past the barriers of naturalism which still seem to imprison nearly all English-language writing. :: "The Rich Boy" is vintage Fitzgerald, with its simultaneous air of tragedy, whimsy, and an exploration of the whole society which Fitzerald knew. :: And "And He Built a Crooked House" is the second-best Heinlein short story I've read. It comes from early enough in his career that it lacks all the repellent preachiness and nastiness of most of the later material, and aims solely to dazzle the reader with the paradoxical wonders of this multi-dimensional house, where you can't even go to the toilet and hope that you'll arrive back safely. Stories like this pose the inevitable question: why ever did Heinlein stop writing stories that were as good as this?

FAVOURITE FILMS 1975

1 The Conformist
directed by Bernardo Bertolucci

2 The Big Parade
King Vidor

3 Husbands
John Cassavetes

4 The Day of the Locust
John Schlesinger

5 Nashville
Robert Altman

6 Atalante
Jean Vigo

7 Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors
Sergei Paradjhanev

8 Walkabout
Nicholas Roeg

1975 might have been a poor year for books, but it was a worse one for films. In 1975, I saw more films (50+) than I've seen in any other year except 1965, but only one of those films, The Conformist, would have got into my Top 20 or 30 for 1965. New films from USA or England rarely drop below a certain competence, but there's so little about which I can enthusiastic. All the other films on this list had something remarkable about them, but only the Top 5 have that quality of the "visionary" which I mentioned in SFC 41/42. All of them have enough flaws to get me annoyed.

The one outstanding film, then. The Conformist is made up entirely of remarkable images: complex patterns of light, shade, blues, greens, yellows, as the "conformist" main character and his nondescript wife plan an unnecessary murder; statues carried to appear as if they are walking within the Italian Government offices; the Trintringant character caught in the middle of a spiral of dancers on a dance floor in Paris (photographed from the ceiling); the unnerving killing itself, all shown in speckled white and blue, with the blank faces of the killers staring through car windows at their victimes. Bertolucci makes this film into a frenetic ballet of ferociousness, with no dull images.

King Vidor's The Big Parade, released in 1926, gave me the same kind of heady feeling. The people who watched this film when it first appeared must have admired its real American patriotism as it tells all about the exploits of "their boys" in France during World War I. However, King Vidor's sense of absurdity and his eye for detail are so acute that these days the film seems almost like the first anti-war film. At any rate, it shows what the fighting was like for the ordinary guy, which offsets those endless series of films about war-time generals and spies. :: Husbands is so different from any other film I've seen that I don't know what to think about it. If I saw it again, I might well put it Number 1. It has no background music; it seems not to have a plot, but in fact unfolds its episodes in a very precise way; it seems not to have written dialogue, but careful listening detects superb dialogue (admittedly, more expertly hidden than even some of the talk in Altman's films); the actors seem not to be acting, but I should think this would have been the most difficult acting task that any of them would have undertaken. Without ever having lived the sort of super-affluent existence of the three "husbands", it seems to me that the film comes closer than most others to showing all the painful contradictions in that type of American life. When the three take their weekend trip to London, the meeting (eventually, confrontation) with the three prostitutes makes this almost into a Women's Lib film. For anyone who has the patience to try watching a unique film, Husbands is very effective indeed.

I saw The Day of the Locust and Nashville within a few days of each other, and still I cannot decide which I like better. Locust has the best photography I've seen in a commercial film for a long time (by Conrad Hall) and a remarkable script; Nashville has compassion, wit, pathos - but, regrettably, very ordinary photography. Donald Sutherland has never been better than in Locust; on the other hand, Nashville introduces a whole new group of actors who will probably never be better than working with Altman. I'm a fanatical admirer of Altman's work, but I cannot help wishing that he'd included more of the other 2½ hours of film which didn't get included in the final cut. On the other hand, Schlesinger does not do the last sequence of Locust correctly; from what I've heard, the book has a whole pattern of imagery which opens out into the last, apocalyptic scene. In the film, it settles on you like a head cold, and goes on too long. Both films have perfect moments: Donald Sutherland weeping in the enclosed garden after being stricken by love for the first time; Ronee Blakley attempting to begin her song on that open stage in Nashville; best of all, the collage of church services on Sunday morning, when all of Nashville's money-grubbers, shysters, hookers, mad people, and jus' folks, find some pew in which to justify their existence. America doesn't need all its sociologists, psychologists, or even most of its film-makers. It should just let Schlesinger and Altman loose in the country, equipped with nothing but a good camera team and plenty of film, and reveal the country for all time.

The other films on my list are all worthy, in one way or another, but I just don't remember them as favourably as I do the others: Atalante is an excellent piece of intense observation of a small number of delightful people, the kind of film that could have been made by Renoir. However, I kept looking for qualities which might have justified the exalted reputation which it has among film buffs, and couldn't find any. Yes, it is very good - but there are so many ways in which Vigo might have improved upon it, if he had lived. :: Shadows of Our Forgotten Ancestors has unforgettable colour photography and a tragic tale of unrequited love. But, as that phrase itself implies, this near-great film is just a bit too much of a traditional pageant to be taken seriously. But don't miss it if any cinema group or film society revives it. :: Walkabout is the only Roeg film that I've liked at all, even though, in each of his films, he shows much the same eye for the uneasy detail and the frightening perspective. However, Walkabout has a quality of joy, as well as mystery, about it, which makes it more likable than Roeg's two later films. It's a remarkable film about Australia, and shows many visual notions about the Australian desert which might not occur to an Australian cameraman.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING VERY MUCH THE SAME..

* I keep forgetting to list nonfiction books which I've enjoyed reading. I'm now three years behind. The reason why I'm reminded to make this list (without ratings; these are just enjoyable books listed in the order I read them) is that the the best book I read during 1975 was nonfiction. It is Andre Maurois' biography of Marcel Proust, A la Recherche de Marcel Proust, which has been translated under at least two different titles that I know of. Anyway, the translation I read was The Quest for Proust (Peregrine; 343 pp). It is so good because Maurois often comes close to recreating the tone of Proust's prose while talking about the man and his work. Also, it's a literary biography, rather than a chat; Maurois' aim is to trace the genesis of the work through the development of the creator. Currently this is out of print, but I hope that sometime, somehow, possibly under yet another name, it will appear back in the shops. (I read a borrowed copy.)

NON-FICTION

1973: The Death of the Family (David Cooper; 1970; Vintage V-233; 145 pp); "Neill! Neill! Orange Peel!", by A S Neill (1972; Hart; 516 pp); The Films of Orson Welles, by Charles Higham (1970; University of California Press; 204 pp); The House of Fiction, by Henry James (1957; Hart-Davis; 280 pp); A Portrait of Hesse, by Bernhard Zeller (1971; Herder and Herder; 176 pp); Language and Silence, by George Steiner (1967; Pelican 14 021165; 345 pp); Words or Blows: Racial Attitudes in Australia, by Lorna Lippmann (1973; Pelican 14 021712; 208 pp); The Billion Year Spree by Brian Aldiss (1973; Doubleday; 325 pp).

1974: Crowds and Power, by Elias Canetti (1966; Penguin 14 003616; 547 pp); The Dialectic of Sex, by Shulamith Firestone (1970; Jonathan Cape; 274 pp); The Tools of Conviviality, by Ivan Illich (1973; Calder & Boyars; 110 pp); New Worlds for Old, by David Ketterer (1973; Doubleday Anchor A921; 333 pp); The Politics of Australian Democracy, by Hugh Emy (1974; Macmillan; 603 pp).

1975: Think Tanks, by Peter Dickson (1971; Atheneum; 356 pp); Biographia Literaria, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (in Selected Poetry and Prose of Samuel Taylor Coleridge; Modern Library); James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses, by Frank Budgen (1934; Indiana University Press/Midland Books MB26; 328 pp); The Bayeux Tapestry, ed Stenton (1957; Phaidon; 194 pp); Medical Nemesis, by Ivan Illich (1975; Calder & Boyars; 169 pp); Emu Tracks, by Leigh Edmonds and Valma Brown (1975; U-Boat Publications; 100 pp); By Way of Sainte-Beuve, by Marcel Proust (1958; Chatto & Windus; 299 pp); and, of course, The Quest for Proust, described earlier.

LIFE GOES ON... AND ON...

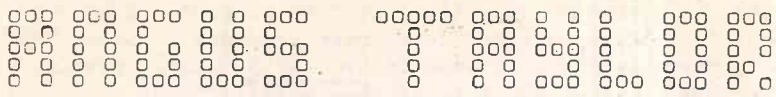
* From the tone of the letters I've received commenting on SFC 44/45, I get the idea that, from now on, SFC readers will expect luscious lashings of the private biography of BRGillespie in each issue. This trend must be stopped. I have news for you (chuckle... purr... whew!). Since the events mentioned in SFC 44/45, almost nothing has happened. This is such a relief that I go around knocking on wooden objects (my head, for example) like crazy. "Please don't let Anything Happen," I keep crying to the Nameless Deity Who Protects (or Doesn't Protect, As The Case Might Be) Us All. "Please don't make it so I have to write more of that mushy stuff in SFC." "Okay," said Nameless, "from now on I will make to grow on thy wart on the whatsit another wart, so that all female creatures of the land, whomever they might be and whithersoever they dwelleth, shall laugh thee to scorn, and thou shalt be a silly twit all the rest of thy days." And so it has been (except for the bit about the wart). It's a peaceful life - until the next blow strikes.

* Things Have Been Happening to everybody else. Or, to make a short story longer, things did happen just ten years ago. At Easter 1966, a great celebration was held. At this great celebration - the first s f convention in Australia for eight years - Lee Harding pointed the finger at John Bangsund and suggested subtly that that raw neo-fan should produce a magazine to represent science fiction readers and writers from Australia. John Bangsund didn't know that Lee was joking, and John Foyster was twisting John Bangsund's arm anyway, and so was begun the process of producing that legendary fanzine, Australian Science Fiction Review. The first issue was dated July 1966, and it appeared with decreasing regularity until late 1968. Somehow, through that magazine, John Bangsund (with a lot of help from some friends) was directly or indirectly responsible for everything that has happened in Australian science fiction since. Many people, including me, became mixed up in fandom and fanzine publishing because of ASFR. Sydney, Adelaide, and Brisbane fandoms owe much to it. The idea for a World Convention in Australia began in ASFR; it was John Bangsund who lobbied for Ursula Le Guin to be our Pro Guest of Honour. SFC has spent its entire existence trying to reach the standares set by ASFR. The tenth anniversaries of the 1966 Eastercon and of ASFR are worth celebrating. (There are even rumours, as yet unconfirmed by hard evidence, that John will revive ASFR this year. A good year for a revival.)

In October, it's ten years since Jenny's Cellar became Degraves Tavern. For most of the time since then, Degraves has been the unofficial meeting-place of Melbourne fandom. To celebrate the occasion, it seems that Henry and Gemma, the proprietors, are closing down at nights. Well, it's been a good ten years...but I can't think of anywhere else that would put up with ten to twenty s f fans once a week every week for ten mor years. Even Henry and Gemma have just barely survived the experience.

(PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 21)

PEREGRINATIONS



OP WEG

(EDITOR: Angus Taylor is a sort of perambulating gadfly of science fiction fandom. I can still remember that he caused an unjustified furore when he suggested, in the pages of Gegenschein, that perhaps Canadians are not ecstatic about their colonised role on the North American continent. He has perpetrated literary hoaxes on fandom (including, some would say, his scholarly articles for magazines like SFC) and said some unpopular truths. Or perhaps it's only that fandom is gadded easily. At any rate, pieces like "Op Weg" are a refr shing change from nearly everything else you read in fanzines, especially the SFC Editor's traveller's tales. Enjoy this one...)

"Non, je n'ai rien oublie" is the title of a song by Charles Azvanour, and is just about the ultimate in arisian romanticism. Ah, Paris! Where you can't walk on the grass and Napoleon's tomb is the most stupendous piece of kitsch I have ever seen, exceeding for sheer silliness even the Brighton Pavilion (firebombed recently by a pair of young art connoisseurs).

But Napoleon's tomb is merely symptomatic of Paris' love of the stupendous. Stupendous boulevards, stupendous buildings, stupendous statuary - everything is more stupendous than life. It's a city fit, in its public aspect, for heroes, but hardly for human beings. Hitler must have been overcome by a sneaking admiration for those inferior Latin types when he toured the conquered city. Those decadent Romans had pushed the frontiers of empire deep into the blonde, blue-eyed Nordic heartland, til the barbarians had stormed back in true heroic fashion. Even then, "Blood and Iron" had won the day, as it was to do when Bismarck put to flight the descendants of the little Corsican. Now Der Fuhrer of the Volk stood once again where the effete southern types had built their artificial civilisation.

You've all seen the pictures. Hitler and his cronies with the Eiffel Tower in the background. When does decadence become divine?, they must have asked themselves. Divinity was what the Nazis sought, not decadence. But how they must have admired those magnificent public spaces, fit for gods, not for puny humans! To hell with the cafes and those cramped little artists' garrets!

But now, don't misunderstand, says Der Fuhrer. We don't deny Art. Art is what we want! Art with a capital A. Statuary with a capital S. Boulevards with a capital B. Tombs with a capital T. Everything with a capital E!

In Amsterdam, the hippies are all over the Vondelpark in summer. Often it's easier to keep off the grass just to avoid stepping on all the people. But if you try to step on the grass in a Paris park, an obnoxious little man with a uniform starts blowing a whistle and making menacing gestures at you. They don't have keep-off-

the-grass signs, though. Just little wire fences all over, which you have to step over if you want to commit your crime. Parks are for looking at, not sitting in. You sit down on one of the chairs on one of the paths, and you admire the grassand trees from a suitable distance. Otherwise that man starts blowing his whistle. If Joni Mitchell was really "sittin' in a park in Paris, France", it's no wonder they wouldn't give peace a chance. They probably called out the riot squad. Back to Saskatoon, Joni, and sit on the prairie.

Now what's this got to do with those broad boulevards and Napoleon's Roman tomb?, I kept asking myself. The answer was not long in coming. It must be something to do with the French - or at least the Parisian - mentality. I mean, it all fits. It's la gloire. It's Building for the Ages. It's part of the Heroic Outlook on Life (Weltanschauung, for you crypto-fascists). Parks are not for people, any more than Arcs de Triomphe are. Parks are like the gardens at Versailles. To impress one. To make one contemplate what transcneds petty, everyday existence. Parks in Paris are monuments to abstract geometry. Parks in Paris are Works of Art with wire frames around them. I'm sure Der Fuhrer was impressed. Pity he never got the chance to do the same for Berlin. But he did have plans...

Now, take Hampstead Heath. Take London. Not much gloire. But a bit more human, I think, even if it seems rather dirty these days. Dirty compared with tidy Amsterdam, where the seventeenth century still lives in the grand old houses and the canals. Amsterdam is built on water and so, naturally, the city is building a metro - a subway, an underground. Exactly how this is done, I am not sure, but it's happening.

There's a subway in Lisbon, too, and you can ride downtown, under the Avenida da Liberdade, get off at Rossio, and see a demonstration or two if you're lucky. I wasn't lucky. All the good demonstrations were last Saturday or next Friday. But if there are no demonstrations at the moment, you can always pick up some free political literature from the sidewalk stands, and buy a button proclaiming your allegiance to one of umpteen factions, movements, parties. Or buy a poster from that girl over by the subway entrance - there's Karl, and Che, and Mao; there's Engels and Lenin and one or two more.

Posters, posters, posters. Portugal in the summer of 1975 was covered from head to foot, from mountains to ocean, from wall to wall and house to statue with posters. Demonstration Sunday. Vote PCP. Important Announcement. Vote Partido Socialista. Up with the Armed Forces Movement. Down with the Military Dictatorship. And slogans, exhortations, painted everywhere, on walls and road signs and on the trees by the highway and on the highway itself. Smash to Imperialism, Viva o Socialismo, Death to NATO. First prize for revolutionary art goes to the M PP, an extreme-left party whose red-and-yellow posters could be seen everywhere in the country. In Lisbon they had painted some extremely large murals of determined-looking working men and tough peasant women striding onwards and upwards into the bright revolutionary future.

In Portugal, the soldiers were everywhere, in jeeps on the streets of Lisbon, or flying off by helicopter from the mountain town of Guarda. Bearded, and with their patchwork-coloured uniforms, they looked as if they had just emerged from the jungles of Africa. But at roadblocks they were friendly - like student marshalls keeping order at a rowdy football match. In the Pyrenees, Franco's Guardia Civil waved their submachine-guns and ordered you to open your luggage. Then they'd motion you on, with never the flicker of a smile or the slightest change of expression. Before that, when you enter Spain from France, they check your passports at the border. As you start to drive off, you hear a whistle. You stop. They want you to open your luggage. But what happens if you don't hear the whistle? Perhaps you get a few bullets in your back. It's better to hear the whistle, I think.

In France, the food is terrible. In France they don't eat food. They exist on wine and bread. Long loaves of styrofoam, carried along the street unwrapped, or sticking out from the back ends of bicycles. In France, Spain, and Portugal, breakfast consists of coffee and rolls. The hotelkeeper may bring a large jug of milk and a large pot of coffee and pour two streams of liquid simultaneously into the great cup in front of you. I'm not sure that lunch exists. Everyone hangs out in cafes, drinking this, that, or the other. Doesn't anyone eat? Don't expect to get your supper before at least 9 o'clock in Spain. If you arrive before that, you'll find the dining room deserted.

Spaniards like to stay up late. Sunday evening in Logrono, the whole town was out on the streets til past midnight - old and young, the children too - everyone dressed up in their finest and strolling about, in and out of the cafes, in and out of the squares, up and down the alleyways. In Benavente I was awoken at 3 in the morning by a musical band careening down the dark street outside my hotel - the shouting and laughter dying away into the still night in no more than a minute.

In Spain, the highway cops always ride in twos. First one on his motorcycle. Then a hundred or so years back, the second. At 4 or 5 or 8 o'clock, several of these policemen will appear suddenly from nowhere at some intersection on the outskirts of town, or out in the country. Perhaps they expect the revolution. Or just rush hour, though it never seems to come. They will position themselves carefully at various points around the intersection and wave officially at occasional cars that pass. After an hour or so, they will climb back on their bikes and zoom off over the horizon.

Spain is covered in hills and mountains. Portugal is all hills, too, but the feeling is quite different. Portugal is green and closed-in, with red-tile roofs everywhere. Spain is wide-open, yellow and brown, and the sun burns down, burns down the buildings which stand huddled into fortress towns on the wide plains, burns the buildings down into the landscape. The sun burns down and fields of sunflowers lift their faces to the sun. Inside the towns the streets are often narrow, and the windows are always shuttered. Portugal is comfortable, Spain is spectacular. Much of Spain resembles the American Southwest - a perfect setting for all those Clint Eastwood flicks.

What you notice about the young people in Spain is the way they dress. Every day is Sunday and everyone is a la mode. As you pass through those small towns that straddle the highway you see teenage girls sitting in doorways. Dressed to kill. But where do they go? Who are their boyfriends? How big is the world for someone born and raised in one of those fortress towns? Madrid and Barcelona must be light-years away. Will these girls grow up, marry, have children, and die in those same small towns? What is the world to them? What is Spain? Who is Franco? Does the flame of the Civil War still burn here? But the cars go back and forth along the highway, and those shoes and clothes do come from somewhere else, after all...

In the Netherlands, everyone looks very Dutch. In Amsterdam the women dress in fashionable, studied casualness. Bright scarves and long skirts, or blue jeans and denim. Dutch girls are usually tall and blonde and, if you're looking for covergirls, you'll probably find more per acre in Amsterdam than just about anyplace else in the world you'd care to look. Don't be misled by all those short, dark people walking around, though. Those are the foreigners. Canadian and American and Australian students, or Portuguese or Turkish migrant workers.

The Dutch language is German re-invented by someone with a sense of humour. German may be a wonderful device with which to harangue crowds or discuss metaphysics, but how to you ask someone to pass the salt, please? Dutch is the perfect language to employ when sitting around a fire with good friends and a bottle of wine. Dutch is

also a very awkward-sounding language. Much more awkward even than German. Dutch is definitely uncouth - klop, klop, klop - like one of those moving, mechanical sculptures in the garden of a museum of modern art. That's the paradox; it's awkward and friendly at the same time. The proper word for it is gezellig (but don't try to pronounce it; you'll only get it wrong).

Britain has what may be the best daily newspaper in the English-speaking world - The Guardian; it also has innumerable rags that consist of nothing but sex, violence, and football. But speaking of English-speaking, why is it that the English can't pronounce the letter "r"? Why do they drop their "t"s so often? Not to mention their "h"s. Why are they under the illusion that only they (with all their lovely and ghastly dialects) speak the English language as it should be spoken? I have an idea that the Scots stole the "r" sound from the English, which explains why the Scots now have twice as much as they should have, and the English are left with only a faint residue, like the movement of a phantom-limb.

The two favourite expressions of the English are "Bloody 'ell!" and "Sod it!"

Travelling from the Netherlands to Britain is a bit like going into the past. Instead of the tidy, shining red brick-and-tile houses of the Dutch, you get crowded street after street of grey row housing. And there's a grey, sooty smell that pervades much of the air in Britain. Even the people dress differently - more soberly, it seems, and the colours are darker. The girls are generally very pretty, but many of them dress as if they were on their way to school. The influence of school uniforms infects clothing styles beyond the school grounds.

This isn't to say that all of Britain is crowded and grimy. Much of it is still wonderfully green and pleasant - an amazing amount, when you consider that some 55 million people are crowded onto the island. But there are all those people and, to a North American, the city streets - especially on a shopping day like Saturday - seem crowded almost beyond tolerance. Makes one want to run amuck with a good flame-thrower. How can so many people move about and interact in such a small space without the whole organisation collapsing into chaos?

Why don't the British stick to one side of the sidewalk? It would make things so much easier. They're generally so polite, and will queue for most anything - I've seen students line up to hitchhike. Ask a stranger for directions on the street and they're likely to take you there, or at least talk to you for such a time that you begin to wonder if you're going to get away ("...and mind the traffic over there; there's a terrible lot of it today and I wouldn't want anything to happen to you..."). But pedestrians walk all over the place; left, right, and centre, and the result is utter confusion. It's every person for themself.

In North America, most people stick to the right and everything is simple and orderly. There's no law (though I believe the Moose Jaw city council considered such a few years ago), and I don't think people are even told that they should walk on the right. Probably many people are not aware that they do so. It just seems to happen naturally. Could it be that there is some innate tendency to move to the right - associated with the right-handedness of most people - and that, as a result of being conditioned to drive on the left, the British, when left to their own devices on a sidewalk, wander all over the place?

Much of Britain is working class. The Netherlands is very bourgeois - a regular middle-class paradise, where most of the blue-collar workers seem to be migrants from southern Europe. As Europe becomes more integrated, an entire nation can take on the aspect of a single class within a supranational community. Within Britain, although the working class is everywhere, Scotland and Ireland have historically, to

brg I agree. It is.

an extra degree, assumed the aspect of working-class nations. Today the Scottish movement for some kind of autonomy or outright independence has become a real political issue, and as for Ireland - well, everyone has heard about that. It's a form of class war, though the news media don't like to admit it, and of course it's not simply class war. But it's certainly interesting to be told by loudspeaker that the underground train you're on won't be stopping at the next station because of a bomb threat, and to see in restaurants and other public places the signs warning you to be alert for suspicious-looking packages.

In Paris, there's another sort of class struggle on the metro; one or two cars on each train are reserved for first-class passengers. First- and second-class on the subway! But at least it's a single-fare system. In London, you pay according to the length of your journey (a pre-electronic throwback to the days of private cars and hired cabs), and when you hand in your ticket to the little old woman at the end, she's thanking all those strangers... "thank you, dearie, ta, thanks, luv..."

The big fad in Europe in the summer of '75 seemed to be the wearing of "American" t-shirts. There seems to be a special glamour attached to the English-language countries, and to the USA in particular - land of Chicago gangsters, Hollywood movie stars, tough cops, and crew-cut astronauts. The in-thing is to have a sweater with UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA or whatever on it. I even saw one sweater that said BASEBALL UNIVERSITY, complete with elaborate crest.

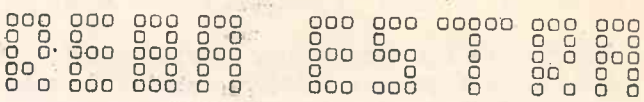
But the best t-short I came across was worn by a young man sitting at the next table at a cafe in north-eastern Spain. It proclaimed (I copied it all down on the spot):

OFFIAL (sic)
PROGRAM
Canton Bulldogs
World
Champion (sic)
Next Sunday 1920 (sic)

God, but the girls must have gone wild! Real Americana!

The trouble with travelling around, though, is that you can never see everything. And you can't keep it all - you can never be everywhere at the same time. But if you're ever in Portugal, try to spend a few hours in Obidos, the most perfectly picturesque little town I've ever seen. If you're on your way through the Cantabrica mountains of Spain, you can't go wrong if you spend a little while in a place called Potes. And if you get the chance, do listen to Charles Aznavour singing "Non, je n'ai rien oublie" (make sure it's the French version, though). That's the real Paris, and it almost makes up for all that inedible bread and all those unwalkable parks.

Angus M Taylor
December 1975



TOMORROW FOR NON-BELIEVERS:

A STUDY OF BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE BY ROBERT A HEINLEIN

EDITOR:
Way back in August 1975, Reba Estra sent along this article, saying, "For the past several weeks I have been a student in a science fiction class taught by Tom Disch at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. The paper resulted from Mr Disch's invitation to his class to write about teaching science fiction in our own schools. After he read it, Mr Disch suggested I send it along to you.

"My school, about which I was thinking when I wrote the paper, is in a small city in Eastern Connecticut, about ten miles inland from the ocean. The population is varied, so the student body of about 800 seventh- and eighth-graders is rather mixed too. I work with the most interesting part of our school, the poor readers. Most of them are boys; all of them are a bit hostile and often full of mischief. But from what I've heard from a close friend who worked in Australian schools for two years, ours are not much different from yours.

"Teaching was not my profession of first choice. I took a long detour and did not complete my education until my two daughters were well into their own school years. I live in a too small house with a too large dog in a small conservative city that has just built an open-plan junior high school.

"My work has been concentrated on developing ways to induce the most reluctant of our students to use their eyes occasionally instead of their mouths and fists. Short of pornographic texts, the only really effective approaches I've found to encourage reading range from use of unexpected materials, such as driver's manuals, to common techniques such as a phonics lesson developed from writing the kids' names down reversed and challenging them to pronounce the unpronounceable. If it works, I use it. If it doesn't, I record it in my lesson plans. Administrators only understand what they expect to see."

An article about the works of Robert A Heinlein is now what you would expect to find in S F Commentary. But Reba Estra's article has a fair bit to say, I expect, to a range of readers extending beyond those who are sympathetic to Heinlein's books. Anyway, I enjoyed the article, and I'm the Editor, so here it is. *

To live in the unique world of the junior high school is to live tumultuously, absurdly, fearfully, and outrageously in today. Yesterday never happened. And tomorrow probably won't. Today is it. All there is. The rest is only more adult lies. The yesterday when David nearly clipped me eyeless with his tire-tube rubber band and I exploded and kept exploding for at least ten minutes never really happened. Today he brought me a shy smile and homework. Two months' work of homework. All of

it written neatly in his mother's or sister's backhand, tidy as David's dyslectic scrawl will never be. It stays today all period long.

Tomorrow is the land of Oz. Mary, who has slid into and out of seven different desks in less than 5 minutes, tipped Joey's books onto the floor, sending him into a fury that ended only with three more sets of books crashing and papers afloat in the wake of his whirlwind, looked at me soberly from amid the wreckage of feelings and folders. "I'll be better tomorrow." Tomorrow is a story beginning with "Once upon a time." Tomorrow is always today for Mary.

A sense of time has a fragile reality for me slow-learning seventh graders. They have no tolerance for delay. Now is when they want the actual pass, the delivered promise, the immediate "yes". I am forced to arm myself with the delaying action of resorting to "yes, buts". "Yes, David, the homework is beautiful, but no checkers until today's work is done." Or, "Yes, Mary, you may have a library pass, but first help me pick up the mess." The word "later" is one more adult subterfuge too often used to drown their hopes. The word "tomorrow" usually means betrayal of their dreams.

If they refuse to recognise that tomorrow can ever possibly exist, why should I bother to add to all of the hazards of my day's work the persistent belief that they must be helped to see that they are wrong? I must persist because their tomorrow will, some day, become my today. I am afraid to live in a world of choices in which they will have some voice, however small because, if they cannot learn to accept the reality of tomorrow, how will they be able to help continue a world in which I can survive?

Each year I take time to help them, prod them, cajole them into considering that they will, some day, find themselves where a classroom is only a distant memory. "What will you be doing ten years from now?"

"I'll have a baby and the welfare will buy me everything for my own apartment."

"Food's easy to get. You don't got to work. Old Crazy Man on my street's got a cellar full. I'll steal it."

"I'm gone in the army. If I kin read some."

"My mother loves me. She'll take care of me."

A teacher's discouragement has to be like yesterday's rain. The memory will evaporate, but somewhere, somehow, the grass must continue to grow.

Does science fiction offer any help? Is it possible that, in stretching their imaginations to the breaking point and beyond, they will return to being more than they were? In a school system where, only a very few years ago, the social studies left World War II an undecided issue, maybe a dose of the future will break them into freedom and flexibility. It must be worth trying. My tomorrow and theirs is too important to ignore.

** ** **

The decision to teach some science fiction is the easy one. The harder one is to select what will be teachable. There are problems, many problems.

"But is it true?"

It's not just the question, it's also the asker. Rarely does this question reach out from wondering innocence. Mostly it is a jab from the suspicion that shapes every contact with the youngster well taught in adult deceit. The question is always honest. This one knows that all adults lie, even teachers. And he has no patience with anyone who would dare to treat him as a fool. So, before he will read or even listens, he insists on knowing all conditions. Fiction is always suspect.

Truth. What do they really know of it? In a single day a "fact" that someone says he's culled from print will flash through a school and the wild notion being spread never seems to be questioned. The last amazing story reported that on a certain spot of every female's hand would be a small wart - if she were still a virgin. More girls had their hands held that day. When a few of the more courageous boys tried to test this teacher, they were sent to the unabridged dictionary to learn a definition that obviously they didn't know. Yet they insisted the story was true. It had been printed in a book.

This unlikely combination of disbelief and belief in the remarkably unbelievable presents a problem to a teacher who would think of trying to use a science fiction novel with any group of the untrusting. They are hard enough to work with at anything, for invariably they lack any normal level of school work skills and have always had to trust someone else to guide them. Too often their guides have not been worthy ones. Also, they have learned that there is little use in trying anything for a teacher who will encourage them to function by a whole catalogue of promises and threats. The usual result is a dose of sarcasm or humiliation because the accomplishment was poor. By the time such a youngster reaches seventh grade, he wants to know the whole deal before he will even begin - if he will make any start at all.

But truth isn't the only problem. Any book they will work at with any relish must reach some secret centre of their interests, but these will vary with the time of the year, the temperature, day of the week, progress of puberty and, sometimes (I would swear to this), the phase of the moon. Not only must you interest the individual youngster, by some

professional magic, you must also set into parallel motion a whole group of students, all of whom are running at their own particular speed in answer to their own rhythms.

Not that this can't be done. Some books have held a special ability to trigger the inward dream for generations. Robinson Crusoe does this, along with Tom Sawyer and Treasure Island. What magic is in them I cannot say, but I have a sizable collection of "high interest" novels, most of them about sports or cars, which contain something that bores the kids as much as they revolt me. Will it be too much to ask of science fiction a novel that is good enough to awaken the dreams?

Yet truth and dreams alone are not enough, for no teacher or class works in a vacuum. The reading room is only a small part of the school day and now, at last, many schools, including mine, have recognised that learning can become more useful when all subjects work in concert, developing in each of the separate disciplines the material that connects in some way with a single thought, or purpose,opr possibly even a special book. So any book selected will need to be useful as a source of study in math, science, and social studies. The book had better be a good one. It's too much to ask of any student or teacher that he or she spend a month or more on a project that lacks excitement or sufficient content and intelligent challenge.

Part of the challenge of any really useful book must be the presence of some consideration of human values. The majority of my youngsters have only sporadic contact with any religious value system. Too many of them also come from homes where any parental figure usually has neither the patience nor time to consider with a child the subtleties of human relationships. So the books I need must, in some way, raise questions that deal with the problems of families, peer group rivalries, loyalty, honesty, the value of work, the need to love and be loved, and both respect and self-respect.

Then there are the practical problems. If a minimum of 100 books are needed, and they will be treated as most text books commonly are today, working as everything from pronography practice sheets to chewing-gum repositories, the books had better be cheap ones. Paperbacks. This rules out some fairly good books. Also, there had better be no sex. Violence is fine. Blood is beautiful. Murder is magnificent. The more and the gorier, the better they like it. But sex, the subject of total continual involvement in the junior high, is a nasty word, and a dirty one. So out goes an excellent novel by Alexei Panshin because of two pages which fittingly close a novel dealing with a Rite of Passage.

When a book has recognisable truth, reflects deeply set interest, is available, and speaks with meaning about what a youngster needs to know, there sometimes is no way to separate a youngster from it. Danny showed me that. Older than most others in his class, Danny's handsome face would turn stony whenever books were passed out. Library visits were a waste. There was always some trouble keeping Danny from handling the girls and more trouble trying to get him to touch a book. One day he slithered up to me in a temporarily quiet corner of the library. I almost missed what he said because I was so busy watching where his hands were. All females around Danny did that. Danny wanted a book. "The one that's got all about guys in it, you know?" I almost hesitated too long because his right hand was somewhere behind me. His request registered so I could grab him before he escaped with his customary exit line, "You rot." I realised that Danny was asking for a copy of the sex manual for boys. I interceded with the librarian for Danny and, by some miracle, she let him have the book without the usual parental note.

The next few days were exciting ones for him and a bit edgy for me. Where do you find privacy in a classroom to help someone translate formal sex terminology into street language? Finally we settled for writing; he listed the words and I worte the mostly four-letter definitions. He worked hard learning many things, including some he didn't expect to learn, like pronunciation of words with more than two syllables and reading sentences with more than ten words.

Then the book was stolen. His grief drove him, for perhaps the first time in his life, to complete and open honesty. He reported the loss, took his scolding with dignity, but was denied the use of another copy. To me he vowed to get back the book. With four stitches on his chin, a handful of split knuckles, and a fat bruise on his cheek, he arrived back to class after his three-day suspension for fighting. In his good hand he had the book.

I don't expect science fiction to provide me with a book that the Dannys of my class will fight for; I only hope it can provide me with one they will not use to fight me.

** ** **

There was really little question in my mind where I would look for a book that suited my special needs. I have been familiar with Robert A Heinlein's books for young people for some years. Those I had not read in the past were read for this article. In both my memory and in the recently read books, certain qualities of Heinlein's writint keep reappearing, qualities that make one of his books amost ideal for me.

The first need I spoke of was my concern for convincing my skeptics that there can be truth in fiction, even science fiction. Like the brand names on the hardware of the film 2001: A Space Odyssey, Heinlein has a special genius for touching the baseline of today, no matter how far away in time his characters may be living.

Small touches, like pancakes for breakfast on Venus, bicycles on one version of Mars, soap-opera instalments on the way to the asteroids, a terrible teacher in another version of Mars, problems with make-up, and pesty younger sisters all provide some foundation of reality in his books.

A youngster's interest in a book is sometimes difficult to judge without some real young people to test the book. Our school library contains a fairly decent selection of science fiction, and judgments of circulation are easy to make, since the librarian discovered the genre only five years ago. I stopped at the library last week to check some conclusions. Clarke and Bradbury look a bit used. Silverberg and Norton also seem to have been around. Le Guin's three Earthsea books stand in pristine tidiness, with more teachers' names on the cards than kids'. On the other hand, Heinlein's section of the shelf is full of scruffy-looking books. Several have already had to be rebound. The school even owns several titles with more than one copy of each. I can remember, from a conversation last spring, the librarian complain that she would purchase no more Heinlein paperbacks. They get lost too fast. So Heinlein, with little effort on my part, can and has sold himself to students. I tend to thrust the smudged-page test more than any rave review from a periodical or another teacher.

Another reason for looking to Heinlein is his handling of many of the areas in human relationships, often his especially deft but persuasive details that say important things. The problem of prejudice is one at which Heinlein works convincingly. It isn't expected, or possibly even necessary, for blackness and black culture to concern a citizen of Mars, but it adds special value to Podkayne's story. Attitudes towards aliens, Heinlein's strange-looking but usually intelligent and funny creations, are an important matter in several books. He preaches with occasional subtlety and dignity of all things and beings, and the right of all to exist and flourish. Even his one group of completely vile aliens, in Have Space Suit, Will Travel, are unpunished until a proper trial is held and all factors are weighed. The judgment is harsh, but still it is a verdict arrived at by law. This too adds value to his books.

Family relationships are another strong point in Heinlein's books. There are no ordinary proper mothers and fathers. The parents, where they exist, are always allowed a measure of individuality, however briefly their characters might touch the story. Complex families exist too, such as in The Rolling Stones, where three generations travel the solar system together. Even the problem of an unpleasant home occurs in Star Man Jones. I find it remarkable that Heinlein is able to move from a special world of young agony in this book out into vast distance and keep even a young reader's sense of belief alive.

Bless Heinlein, he always stresses the need for education. Formal schools aren't always necessary, but books and the willingness to work are essential, even if a good belt is required to settle a young hero into his learning mood. While some of the heroes are exceptionally clever in academic or mechanical skills, enough of them succeed only with the painful effort that the rest of us, including my kids, require.

Of course, Heinlein writes of a universe where sex, for humans at least, is non-existent. All of his heroes are boy scouts, more concerned with protection of females and assorted (but sometimes reluctant) bits of gallantry. I don't think there is ever so much as a kiss exchanged. Still, it isn't all bad. While the heroes are a bit insipid, except when physical trouble threatens, the girls are permitted to have spirit. Sometimes this verges on shrewishness, as the unimaginative hero has to be thrust bodily into the right direction by a smaller, younger female who can think rings around him. There is even a grandmother with wit, intellect, and a demon's share of mischief. So Heinlein's families are real, with good, bad, and odd situations where young people can somehow learn to survive and manage to mature. For many of my students, books are the only contact with any version of comfortable family life. From books, too, they need to learn that even a chaotic situation can be overcome.

One quality I have not been using to measure a book is an evaluation of how "good" the book should be. The critics who decide those things don't teach my kids. My kids need a book that is good for them.

** ** **

Each of Heinlein's books for young people has something interesting to offer. I spent time recalling those with which I was familiar, and reading the unfamiliar ones. The ones that I read for this article are listed at the end. The reasons why I rejected all but one of the books for my purposes may reveal more about me and my teaching style than they do about Heinlein. But my limitations in budget are real, acceptance of community codes necessary, and requirements for involving other disciplines a new challenge I'd like to meet. Here, then, are some brief reviews. Their order reflects their places in Heinlein's future history, not their order of appearance.

Rocket Ship Galileo

A group of boys solve many technical problems with ingenuity, managing to build a rocket that takes them to the moon. There they discover and eliminate a small colony of Nazis. Time has dated this book severely. Not only has technology made the story grossly improbable, but the villains are long buried, though not forgotten. Still, for its time, the late 1940s, it would have been an excellent teaching tool, concerned as it is with the intricacies of physics, which were left untaught in junior high until Sputnik beeped.

The paranoid Heinlein is visible here. Even a trip to the moon must be concerned with enemies of America. It amuses me to notice that this book has had new editions recently in both hard covers and paperback. It seems as if people who buy kids' books don't bother to read them.

Have Space Suit, Will Travel

Here is the same basic plot. The hero gets to the moon, to discover a colony of the enemy. This time it is hostile aliens. The complications of the plot, and the range of the novel through space, time, and alien cultures makes it complex, fascinating, and wildly imaginative, far beyond its earlier version. Heinlein the engineer wrote the first one, but the Heinlein who wrote this one is fully the writer. Even the paranoia shows less.

One of the special delights is the alien known as "the Mother Thing", whose native tongue is speech in fragile harmony. (A bit of Stapledon here.) It is an improbable story, yet somehow it has enough roots in the real world to sell me on the plausibility of its development. I like it. I wouldn't want to try to teach it. Perhaps after some practice helping my kids to reach a state where asking suspension of disbelief is not equivalent to betrayal of them, I will be able to try or, better yet, allow them to try for themselves.

The Star Beast

This book reminds me of a perennial favourite of the grade-school set, The Enormous Egg. In both books, an animal of unusual kind and size brings grief and legal problems to its young human owner. The Egg fizzles out. Heinlein's The Star Beast builds to a climax that is expected, but enjoyable. The beast is the lost child of a long-lived culture, and its return a requirement if Earth wants to survive. There is some exquisite satire of government obtuseness at national, local, and alien levels. The beast is one of Heinlein's kittens in monster's wrappings - funny, lovable, and almost believable. Some strong feelings are evoked by the book in terms of prejudice and the rights of the young to be heard with respect. It's a good book. It's also a bit too young for my chosen age group.

Red Planet Mars

Here again Heinlein works at a similar plot. A young Earth settler on Mars makes a pet of a basketball-shaped creature, whose ability to remember and repeat human conversation is only slightly less basic to the plot than his importance to the native race of Mars. What is superbly done is the visualisation of Martians, Martian civilisation and ecology. This is a much more elaborate development of the alien concepts. An added value is the evidence of respect for things native to Mars built, from early childhood, into those who use the planet with the native people's permission. The conflict at the core of the book occurs between the people who make Mars their home and the Earth-based government-sponsored company that controls the colony affairs. This plot element of colonials-in-conflict-with-Earth-control is also repeated in other books. The book is an acceptable one, but I would not want to teach it. Somehow the villains, as personified by two company officials, don't seem real and behave with a bit too much emphasis on their greed. I want better antagonists in a book I will enjoy using.

Between Planets

The conflict here is a war that actually breaks out between Earth and the settled planets of the system. The hero, on his way home to Mars, is stranded on Venus, penniless. The young man's coming-of-age consists of learning to face the realities of fending for himself, living with divided loyalties, yet managing to survive while providing, unknowingly, a key factor in the colonies' successful campaign for self-rule. The story develops believably. The bloodshed occurs offstage and with restraint. What is more enjoyable is the character of Sir Isaac Newton, a native Venerian physicist whose personality comes through like a cockney comic encased in dragon skin. There is action, mystery, and an acceptable alien atmosphere, so it is a readable book. There is also the militant Heinlein, solving problems and creating action with firepower. It's not worth teaching, but can be recommended for personal reading in my classes.

Podkayne of Mars

The main difference between this novel and those immediately preceding it in the discussion is that the most important character is female. Like most of Heinlein's females in his books for the young, this means that Podkayne is a good bit smarter, and a great deal more devious, than any male contemporary. The plot concerns political settlements which are being worked out between Earth and Mars, which is represented by Podkayne's grandfather. There are all kinds of overt and undercover machinations to upset the diplomacy, but Podkayne triumphs. The added extra here is the black culture element, introduced through Podkayne's family. It works well. Again, this would be a good personal-pleasure reading book. It is not quite enough for building a teaching unit.

The Rolling Stones

This is an amusing book about a future family of restless travellers. From grandmother, who can manage any kind of cookery in a spaceship galley or teach advanced calculus with ease, to the twin adolescent brothers who can assemble or dismantle anything mechanical, to the father who supports the whole venture through writing soap operas, this family is different. Their travels about the solar system show more of the inter-family workings and problems than of Mars colony. There is much that is pleasant in this book. The only real conflict is between the twins' goals and their elders' insistence that they arrive at them in some reasonably honest way. The view of discipline as a force for self-improvement, administered through reason and rules.

would be helpful to some youngsters. But again pleasure reading, because there isn't enough to teach.

Time for the Stars

I don't like this book. It is Heinlein's exploration of the time problem in faster-than-light travel. In order to continue communication between Earth and an experimental ship, a pair of twins who are telepathic with each other are separated, one going on the ship and one remaining to grow old on Earth. The characters are dwarfed by the events and the machinery. There is wonder in the discoveries made; there is a worthy antagonist in a universe where so much is unknown and unsafe. But Heinlein chose to hoke up the plot with a sick captain and a dead astrogator. Somehow everything never seems to work together. Also, his view of the universe is a creation of almost complete paranoia. Everything is out to get Man. I would only recommend this to a youngster who had become a rabid fan.

Star Man Jones

An unhappy home impels the young hero to escape, taking with him his only possession of value, his dead uncle's astrogation manuals. This novel is set farther into the future than the others, and reveals a changed Earth. New modes of surface travel are minor matters compared with the organisation of Earth's skilled workers into closed guilds. The intricate problems of finding a way into the Astrogators' Guild, then the work and pressure of learning the skill, occupy much of the book. While I like it, I expect that only the most able of my students could read it with any real interest or pleasure.

Citizen of the Galaxy

In a very distant future, where man has been spread so far throughout the galaxy for so long, many variations of human society have developed. In one of them, the hero is a slave. From slavery he is adopted by a beggar who is an undercover agent working in disguise. He is educated by the beggar/agent and, when discovery looms, the hero is placed into a new society, that of the long-distance traders.

The effects of time dilation in faster-than-light travel have made those who live as traders into a unique society which keeps to its own laws, customs, and time scale. The hero succeeds in this world of complex manners and rules, only to be thrust again into another new society.

This time his true identity is discovered and he is taken to Earth. Here he finds himself the sole heir of a vast financial empire. The intricate society of ship life begins to seem simple, compared with the deceit and betrayal he faces on Earth.

The plot is far-fetched, but the details are not. In the three-in-one view of the distant future, Heinlein has created three valid-seeming worlds, but it is the traders' world that is developed best. Building on known customs among the Finns, Heinlein extrapolates the complex family interrelationships and fuses them into the exotic setting of a far-ranging star ship, adding the laws made necessary for all to survive, both as a society and as individuals.

This book is worth close study. It deserves better than I can do with the students who work with me.

Farmer in the Sky

On an overcrowded Earth not too many years into the future, room for expansion lies on the Jovian moon, Ganymede. Bill Lermer's plans for after high school are upset suddenly when his father announces plans to remarry and join the settlers on Ganymede. Bill also emigrates and begins the work of trying to fashion an Earth-like home out of a ball of rock. There is help from the community of earlier settlers, but there are threats too. Here one antagonist is the planning unit on Earth that wants to dispose of excess population, and the other is the nature of the colony itself. Man and science have joined in a venture where the laws of physics are neither friend nor enemy; they require only that they be obeyed. Survival is a continual battle to sue the laws of nature to persuade the rock to yield what humans require for life. Heinlein makes this war very real, and even exciting.

There are many qualities in this book which make me feel that it will work well with my teaching needs. There is truth in the threat of overpopulation and food shortages. Even my classes have heard about this. Here, too, is some of the same quality that intensified my class's excitement in Robinson Crusoe: Man finding ways to deal with the necessities of life, even when cut off from the convenience of the corner supermarket. I think that some of Heinlein's inventive solutions will arouse the same intriguing dream of the beauty of literal independence. An added value is the study of the relationship between a father and his son. Twisted by the emigration decision, torn by some resentment of a step-mother and step-sister, Bill yet manages to adjust while also assuming the major burden of working into usefulness the family's land claim. These are the kinds of patterns my classes need to observe, even if only vicariously.

There is also a great deal here to use in other disciplines. Certainly the new planetarium will be used. Science also can deal with ecology and the extensive relationships between humble life forms and an environment for humans. Social studies can focus on the parallels between the pre-Revolutionary War period in American history and the tensions in Ganymede, both arising from too-distant administrations and too-disparate goals. Or some more inventive social studies person can proceed to work on a project of inventing a usable government for the colony, detailing divisions of responsibility, deciding

(PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 33)

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

(Continued from Page 9)

* As I started to say, things are still happening around Melbourne. The most basic change has been the end of the Magic Pudding Club. Don Ashby has moved to Richmond, Derrick Ashby has moved to St Kilda, John Ham has moved to the hills, and Carey is staying at Drummond Street. Magic Pudding Club was a good place while it lasted but, simply because of the pressures under which it existed, it could hardly have hoped to stay viable. For months at a time, it became an endless party for all sorts of people, of which s f fans were only one group. But a lot of people have become interested in s f activities because of The Pud, and everybody who ever has entered the place will remember the real generosity and easy-going atmosphere which kept it alive. Don Ashby has written a long account of the Magic Pudding Club and I hope that some, and even all, of this epic will appear in SFC.

Leigh and Valma have moved to Carlton. With Robin Johnson away in Europe, and most of the remaining St Kildans more interested in professional writing than fan writing, it looks as if the balance of power has shifted to the north of the city. I find my place in the centre (some would say, the dead centre) of fabulous fannish happenings here. To the north is Johnson Street - Charles, Ken, Elaine, and Frank. To the west is Leigh, Valma, and Carey. To the east is Moor Street - Roger, Claudia, Randal, and Tony.

Now that is a whole story in itself. I said that not a lot had been happening to me. What little has happened has been affected mainly by the all-pervading presence of Randal Flynn. Randal arrived in Melbourne for the Writers' Workshop last August. He went home to Brisbane, but returned in November. The Magic Pudding Club never quite recovered from harbouring him for some months. And it's mainly my fault that he met Claudia and Roger, from the Melbourne University S F Association, and began the process of setting up a household at 50 Moor Street, Fitzroy. By the time you receive this magazine, further moves might have happened. At any rate, Randal has simultaneous ambitions to be a writer, a student, a great thinker, and a gosh-wow person. Given enough time (since he's only 18½ at the moment) he might achieve some of these ambitions. Meanwhile, somehow he keeps organising people to do things. He even manages to persuade me to go on film parties, and break my vows of silence by going to dinner parties at Moor Street, etc, etc. Beware of this person, especially if he sends you a letter inviting you to join an organisation, or write some fiction, or stay at "his" place. Finally I've learned the secret of putting off enthusiastic people - say "No!" often enough, loudly enough, and the message gets through. (But I should say, in gratitude to all the members of Moor Street, that your hospitality has been most welcome.)

The other bit of personal news is that I have acquired a cat named Flodnap. He has taken over the house, and is quite friendly to visitors. A cat is a good pal, especially at dinner-time.

REVIEWERS WHO PASS IN THE NIGHT

* A grouch, now. But first, the good news.

My advertisement in SFC 41/42 for reviewers had success. A number of people offered to take books for reviewing. Even better, some overseas people, such as Mark Mumper and Terry Green, took the opportunity to send me unsolicited reviews. But the catch is that, no matter how much you warn people, they do not realise that reviewing is a lot of hard work. That's the only conclusion I can reach from the fact that most of the people who took books and promised to send back reviews "in a few days" have never been heard from since? Where are you, O Kindly Reviewers? Where are you, Tony McSherry, who never answers the phone, and Ken Ozanne, who was going to deliver some reviews before Christmas, and Don Ashby, who has some good excuses, and Christine McGowan, who fell in love shortly after receiving her swag of books, and Keith Curtis, who has had several books for more than a year, and Bernie Bernhouse, who disappeared from all human and fannish sight, seemingly forever, as soon as he received his books for review? I'm truly sorry that I put a curse on you when I gave you those books. But please write the reviews, or send back the books. Please.

And meanwhile, I still need reviewers. George is always ready to help but I don't feel like giving him any book that is less than promising. Some people, like Randal, seem to know more about reviewing by instinct at the age of 18½ than many literate people do, after long practice, at the age of 40. But even Randal's time seems to be limited these days. Van Ikin and Nev Angove from New South Wales have been very helpful, but both have academic and other commitments. Meanwhile, I want SFC to be a reliable buyer's guide, so I still need reviewers who are willing to do the actual work involved.

DOLLAR DOWN AND A CENT A WEEK

* Which just about describes how SFC is financed. A comment on SFC 44/45:

* JOAN DICK
379 Wantigong St, Albury, NSW 2640

My sub has expired. Enclosed is some ready cash. Have you ever thought of using Leigh Edmonds' method of keeping track of who is financial, and reminding them of how much further their sub will stretch?

Talking about that necessary evil, money: It is a very hard fact of life. How nice to be able to do without it, but it is a very necessary evil. And I don't see how you can possibly put out an edition of S F Commentary like the issue of 44/45 for $1 per copy. *

* The simple answer is, I don't. 44/45 was a double issue, so I was charging $2 per copy, or $2.50 in USA or Canada. *

So hence you must be publishing at a loss. Postage - the paper - the printing - and the time - your time and effort involved. Have you ever thought of putting up the price? If people - fans - want value, they should be prepared to pay for value, and S F Commentary is certainly value received.(18 March 1976)*

* The rest of Joan's letter will appear later in the issue. Meanwhile, she has raised a number of points that people have been saying to me in person.

Putting up the price? Okay, but how far? To cover costs, I would need to more than double the price. This has a lot to do with the fact that Australia has now the highest postage rates in the world. But it has more to do with what fanzines are all about. If every copy of SFC was paid for, I would not be making a loss. But only about half the copies are paid for. It all has to do with fannish ethics. Many of the copies go to "traders" - people who exchange fanzines. I've tried to be generous on this point, but I don't think the traditional fannish trading practice is going to stand up too much longer. Not when the postage bill for 44/45 was $180. And the bill for materials used wasn't much less. How long before each fanzine editor will just have to pay for another person's fanzine, then demand the appropriate payment for his or her magazine? Not long, I guess.

But that's still not the essence of the problem. I could provide trade copies, quite easily, and copies for all those people I want to receive the magazine but who steadily refuse hints to subscribe - if I printed 2000 copies and sold 1800 of them. But to do that I would need to print the magazine offset. And I would need to advertise widely to sell those 1800 copies. In short, I would need to sink $2000-$3000 of capital into the magazine in order to make a profit on it. And I just don't happen to know any people who have that sort of money for investing in an enterprise like mine.

And even if I had that money, would I have the time to put out a 24-page, photo-reduced offset issue once every 2 months - which is my aim? No. But how to pay for my time? I calculate that, at my current working rate, which is very low as professional hourly rates go in Australia at the moment, SFC 44/45 cost $3000 worth of time. How do I ever recover that sort of money? Or, to put it another way, how could I ever afford to publish SFC fulltime? It beats me. A number of friends have offered suggestions, but all are defeated eventually by the fact that fans don't have much money, and they do their own fanac as hobbies on low budgets. I'd like to get beyond that, or otherwise I will spend the rest of my life in the position I'm in now - trying to do a bit more professional work in order to pay the $350 bill to Roneo but, at the same time, trying to grab time to publish this SFC. I'm not giving up SFC, but it needs financial enthusiasm as well as letters of praise. (If you find an answer, tell Bill Bowers as well. He has even higher ambitions than I have.)

Talking of letters of praise or comment... *

SFC 47/48 LETTERCOLUMN - PART 1

* The response to SFC 44/45 has been astonishing. Who knows what the effect of one's writing will be? With some issues, I've tried to arouse people to write at depth about themselves, and have failed. Something in 44/45 was more effective than anything in 30 or 31, for instance.

I have so many letters already that they would look very impressive in the SFC 47/48 lettercolumn. But it seems unfair to keep them from publication until then. I hope that there are a few more letters by them, since copies of 44/45 have not yet reached USA.

But, before going on to 44/45, I still have some letters here about earlier issues. This letter ties in nicely with the beginning of this column:*

* BERND FISCHER
Hahnenstr 22, D-5000 Koeln 1, West Germany

Here's my list of the best of everything in 1975.

Films

1 Andrej Rublev (Tarkowski)
2 Celine et Julie vont le Bateau (Rivette)
3 1789 (Mnouchkine)
4 Jeder fur sich und Gott gegen alle ("Everyone for himself and God against all"; official English title, The Mystery of Kaspar Hauser) (W Herzog)
5 Scenes from a Marriage (Bergman)
6 Stavisky (Resnais)
7 Berlinger (Sinkel/Brustellin)
8 Chinatown (Polanski)
9 Love and Death (Woody Allen)
10 Limelight (Chaplin)
11 The Passenger (Antonioni)
12 Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore (Scorsese)
13 Lancelot of the Lake (Bresson)
14 Immoral Tales (Borowczyk)
15 Sleuth (Mankaweicz)
16 American Graffiti (Lucas)
17 Night Moves (Penn)
18 Black Windmills (Siegel)
19 Young Frankenstein (Brooks)
20 Cisco Pike (?)

No 3 is the best film of a theatre performance I've ever seen (1789 is a play on the French Revolution, performed by the Theatre du Soleil in the old factory hall in Paris). No 4 (as 7) is a good example of the so-called "New German Cinema", though I preferred

Herzog's preceding Aguirre, Wrath of God (with perhaps the most impressive initial shot in film history). I'm not sure if I saw Nicholas Roeg's Don't Look Now in 75. If so, I would put it somewhere around the 10th position.

S F

I haven't read much s f this year, so my list is very short:

1 The Fifth Head of Cerberus (Wolfe)
2 The Farthest Shore (Le Guin)
3 Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said (Dick)
4 Venus on the Half-Shell (Kilgore Trout)
5 Inverted World (Priest)

I'm not sure if No 1 is one of the masterpieces of s f in the 1970s. I have to reread it. Anyhow, I was quite impressed by the way Wolfe created an atmosphere of uncertainty and unreality. Thank you for praising No 2 in SFC 41/42; otherwise I would have missed a fine trilogy of fantasy. No 3 is not the strongest Dick novel, but a piece by Dick is always a joy to read. There was a long article on Dick in a recent issue of Rolling Stone. I hope that it will do some good for him in the States. No 4 is pure fun by Trout, the hero of Breakfast of Champions. My book of the year is non-fiction: The Savage God, a study of suicide by A Alvarez. The last chapter (in which Alvarez writes about his own experiences - he attempted suicide) I can only describe as mind-blowing; his ruthless sincerity, depressive as it may seem, gives hope to anybody who comes into a situation in which suicide seems to be the only way out of difficulties.

Some other books I'd like to mention: Doctor Frigo (Eric Ambler); Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy (John le Carre); a German reprint of Krazy Kat; and - especially recommended - Zeno Cosini (Italo Svevo), a masterpiece of twentieth-century European literature.

Music

1 Blood on the Tracks (Dylan)
2 Born to Run (Springsteen) (not as good as his second album)
3 Chieftains 5 (Irish folk music)
4 Judith (Judy Collins)
6 Commonsense (John Prine)
7 Ommadawn (Mike Oldfield)
8 A Musi, A Musi (Andre Heller) (folk songs from Vienna)
9 Late For the Sky (Jackson Browne)
10 Sailin' Shoes (Little Feat)
11 The Hissing of Summer Lawns (Joni Mitchell) (I bought this some days ago. It needs some time to get into the music, so the 11th position is perhaps not an adequate one.)

In 1976 I'm looking forward to new albums by Dylan, Ry Cooder, Randy Newman, Loudon Wainwright, Jackson Browne, Van Morrison, the live double-album by Bruce Springsteen (is he getting the popularity in Australia that he's now getting in the States and Europe?)...

Addendum:

12 Honky-Tonk Heroes (Waylon Jennings)
13 Natty Dread (Bob Marley and the Wailers)
14 Redheaded Stranger (Willy Nelson)

What's happened to SFC 43?

(29 December 1975)

* I mentioned in SFC 41/42 that there are few SFC readers whose tastes run closer to mine than Bernd's, even though, necessarily, we come from such different backgrounds and probably, if we ever met in person, are different in personality. Bernd's lists inspire in me nearly as much comment as my own.

Rublev was shown for less than a week at a commercial cinema in Melbourne. I get the impression that it was cut from even the version I saw in New York, which had been cut by 45 minutes in USSR before being released. Still, the skeleton of one of the world's great films remains. Most of the other films either haven't arrived here yet, or I have, perversely, missed seeing them. I haven't seen, for instance, Nos 5, 6, 12, 14, and 17, because of laziness. Lots of others haven't arrived yet. And I also liked Nos 9, 11, 15, and 19. The only two which I definitely did not like were Nos 8 and 16 - in the case of American Graffiti, simply because I disliked the grainy, murky photography.

I'm glad I could be of help in guiding you to a book like The Farthest Shore. The Fifth Head of Cerberus is one of those few books which just make me scratching my head. I kept thinking that if I could wwork out what was going on, I would like it very much indeed. Obviously, I should read it a second time. I would put Inverted World before Flow My Tears, but I suppose that you have worked that out already. I'm looking forward to Phil's new book. And yes, the Rolling Stone article did appear in the Australian edition, although without the strange coloured painting which appeared in the American edition.

The position in pop music is rather worrying. I agree that Blood on the Tracks was the best pop album of 1975, as Desire must be the best of 1976. And I'm interested that, independently, we bought Judith. But, in general, my favourite people, like Rod Stewart, the Stones, and Paul Simon, are recording nothing but dull, disappointing records. Still Crazy After All These Years has about as much craziness in it as a wet sock - in the music, that is. If you read the lyrics on the back and don't play the record, you would be excused for thinking that Paul Simon is still as good as ever. Black and Blue has about one good track. By Unrequited, poor old Loudon Wainwright isn't much better. Paradise and Lunch is overproduced, compared with Ry Cooder's earlier material. The only good news I've heard all year is in the latest issue of Rolling

tone: the original Animals have re-formed and recorded an album.

hich brings me to what I really wanted to say. The best five pop albums I've bought during the last year (except for Desire and Coney Island Baby), are the first five albums by Eric Burdon and various combinations of the Animals. The best is The Most of the Animals, with a whole Side 2 of slow blues songs. And then I bought a volume of The Best of the Easybeats. Nobody outside of Australia is going to remember the Easybeats - but they formed the best pop group in Australia during the entire 60s. In fact, nothing's been better here since except, perhaps, a few records by Russell Morris. It's good, at last, to have a copy of Are You Experienced?, although I keep meaning to get Electric Ladyland as well. And a pleasant surprise is Derek and the Dominoes in Concert, with Eric Clapton playing the best I've ever heard. In other words, a very high percentage of the money I've spent on pop (quite apart from the much higher amount I've spent on serious music) has gone on material recorded during the 1960s. And I'm buying it now because I couldn't afford it during the 60s, and most of this stuff is appearing on low-cost records anyway (for instance, Winds of Change and The Twain Shall Meet re-released for $9 as a package when, separately, they cost $12.50 in 1966). I've been buying up Eric Clapton material, all sorts of things I've always wanted, like a definitive collection of Marty Robbins' hits, and all the good records made by Peter and Gordon, and a two-record package of Duane Eddy (which includes much rubbish and leaves out his best single, "Saints and Sinners" b/w "Deep in the Heart of Texas"). With three records of Jerry Lee Lewis oldies, and a four-sided, complete Chuck Berry, and the definitive collection of Johnny O'Keefe, I'm starting to feel that that side of my collection is looking healthy. This all sounds crazy, I know, but I would guess that lots of people feel the same way, to judge from the popularity of "oldies" packages in record shops. Production standards for pop records have improved unbelievably during the last five years, but the quality of the material is falling rapidly. Going backwards, I find many singles which manage to pack more into 1 minute 54 seconds (or whatever) than most now spread across 7 minutes or so.

Collecting classical records has also become a matter of rounding out the collection. World Record Club is a useful source. The best buy has been the new Ole Schmidt recording of the Nielsen symphones (although I still like my Horenstein version of the 5th better than Schmidt's). I still haven't played some sets, like the Beethoven violin and piano sonatas, and I must admit to great satisfaction in having, at last, a copy of Eine Kleine Nachtmusik on the shelf. Mozart is still the only guaranteed composer for any occasion, with Vivaldi for effervescent occasions in particular. My most played record, however, is my version of Prokofiev's Violin Concertos, and my set of the Bach Unaccompanied Partitas and Sonatas. That's real music.

* Back to the real world now, or something close to it. When SFC is not raving about s f or book/record collections, it is about people. And the following letter, in response to 41/42, is also a good introduction to the "people letters" which follow it: *

* TERRY GREEN .
RR1, Carrying Place, Ontario KOK 1LO, Canada

I only wish that SFC 41/42 could talk and discuss its travels, its adventures, its imprisonments, its neglect - for, from the condition of its arrival, there is quite a tale to be told. Its physical condition was and incredible and disappointing shambles due, I guess, to the mysteries of its lengthy voyage and resting places. There was even a fungus growing on it. Honest. And an algae-like substance which gave it a unique and distinctive odour. Oh yes; it was quite wet.

But all this is the bad news. Now the good news.

When finally I managed to get the magazine into semi-readable condition, I was more than pleasantly overwhelmed with its overall excellence. I especially enjoyed the way you skilfully blended personal comments about your life and outlook and tastes with objective analyses of literature. This type of magazine is very enjoyable to me personally, because I get the feeling I'm meeting and talking with another person, one who would seem to share many of my experiences and tastes; it becomes more than a magazine.

I picked up, via inference in the magazine, your approximate age, education, background, occupation(s), interests, tastes, etc.

I will be 29 years old in February 1976, was born in Toronto. I have been married for seven years; my wife and I (both teachers) have no children. I have read s f avidly and copiously since about age 13 (circa 1960) and feel that I'm quite knowledgeable in the field; it is, in essence, my hobby.

Received BA in English from University of Toronto in 1967, taught high school in Toronto from '68-'70; quit, returned to school '70-'72, ending up at the University of Dublin, Ireland, where I absconded with an MA in Anglo-Irish Studies (Yeats, Joyce, Beckett and the boys, etc...) in 1972. Returned to Toronto. Taught high-school English there again for two more years, '72-'74; quit there in June '74. Moved about 100 miles east of Toronto to teach at a more sedate rural-type school where I am employed currently.

My wife has accompanied me (or I her) faith-

fully through our seven zany years of atypical marital behaviour. She is teaching multi-handicapped, emotionally disturbed deaf children right now. Actually, we would both prefer to retire to our small house here, she to crochet her way to oblivion, I to wirte unpublishable reams of personal nonsense.

I began reading fanzines regularly about two years ago - all American ones, though. Decided I had something to contribute. Philip K Dick has been my favourite author for years. I enjoy his books, and feel akin to his zany mind. I wrote a 3,500-word article on Dick, which was accepted by Dick Geis for SFR last April; it should be out around Feb 76 ((*brg* It has just appeared -- May '76.*)). It is a wild, informal, Western-point-of-view piece which I enjoyed writing.

Currently I am going the typical route of trying my hand at small fictions. So we'll see what happens.

All of which brings me around to another issue: Barry Gillam's review of Dick's Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said in SFC 41/42. This is a very interesting and perceptive review on many levels. The reality shift is, as Barry notes, "so much mumbo-jumbo"; but Dick writes s f as metaphor, not s f as Arthur Clarke does. Take it or leave it, I guess.

Barry notes the changes that have occurred since the lapse in Dick's pen in the early 1970s. Surely it is related directly to an intensity of personal emotion and experience on Dick's part (his own "persecution", his suicide attempt, his age), and thus the book is the more interesting as an art work produced under such conditions from such a mind. Barry is right to conclude that the world-weariness and grief that his characters express is more Dick's than theirs, and thus the artistic touch needs work here. But the sheer power of the vision of love associated with grief was one that moved me as a reader, drove into me quite deeply. The book, on one level, is Dick's statement and quest regarding his own function as Artist. Taverner is the artist (Dick) who fears being no longer recognised or known; who has become unsure of his own worth, of his own "art" products. The only art which survives is the blue vase made by Mary Anne Dominic, the simple, loved vase which has no publicity, no critical attention; it is this vase which receives Dick's final comment in the novel.

And I must differ from Barry's comment that "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." Surely their fates are not related to Dick's caring about his characters. What happens to characters in any Dick novel is in no way related to his caring or not caring about them. As a writer, he has a vision; his characters merely play his existential part. The degree to which Dick "cares" about each is not reflected in their fates. If Dick has any caring in the epilogue, it is for the blue vase, the tiny statement that is the artifact of love. It survives. Dick cares that such things survive. The characters' fates, in general, surely illustrate the folly of all human vanity, since their fates are equal to the fates of every other human being: they die...

(30 December 1975)*

* All of which is by-the-way to the real reason why I published Terry's letter first. I was most pleased by the letter because Terry pinned down what I've been trying to do in these columns; what "I Must Be Talking to My Friends" is all about. It's not just the fact that, as SFC reader, that you get the feeling that you are "meeting and talking with another person", but that, in turn, as editor, I can get to know other people through letters. The difficulty is that I'm never quite sure what I've said to you. But, in SFC 44/45, I certainly must have said something. I've never received before any letter quite like this one from: *

* MICHAEL O'BRIEN
158 Liverpool St, Hobart, Tasmania 7000

I want to hear what it's like to be you.
- B R Gillespie, SFC 44/45

Really? Well, ok, but you asked for it. Here's Mike O'Brien with all the polite pretense stripped off.

"Why Do You Publish Fanzines?" they asked John Bangsund.
"Because I'm lonely," he replied, and a hush fell at the Con.

I'm lonely too. When I went to kindergarten for the first time, I had little experience in dealing with other children since I lived in a hotel in the centre of the business district. It didn't matter so much there, but when I graduated to Grade 1 at an all-male Great Public School in the British style, I found that I was less than perfectly equipped to fit in.

This slight difference was exaggerated by the various in-group gangs from which I was excluded and the natural tendency for schoolboys to label quickly anybody not exactly like themselves as "different". I had a pretty rotten childhood at times; bullies found me easy meat and some days were filled with terror as I raced round and round the school while pursued, my cries for help presumably mistaken for childish high spirits.

After a few years, somehow I developed an automatic defence against this, in the form

of a cold Berserker-like rage that would come over me. After a certain point had been reached in dealings with other kids, I would snarl and lunge at them ferociously. "Obie's off again," spectators would comment as I leapt at some classmate who had tried to stand over me, and who suddenly found himself pursued by this inoffensive-looking bespectacled tot.

I was always a great reader; this was both a consolation and a curse, as Maugham notes in Of Human Bondage. It soothed me to be able to retreat into other worlds and places through fiction and non-fiction, but this also made me even more of an outsider among the mainly extroverted children in my class.

I was going on seventeen when I discovered fandom, or rather, when fandom discovered me through John Bangsund looking for a Hobart agent for ASFR. It proved a valuable social outlet. At that time, as now I had no friends. I had acquaintances with whom I passed the time of day, people I knew, but no friends I could visit or really communicate with, I was oriented completely towards solitude and self-amusement in the form of books, magazines, films, television, theatre. Even today, the only people whom I count as friends are fans - people I've met through fandom or who I've never even seen face-to-face.

My family life has its ups and downs. Perhaps my sister is wise in spending so much time away from home; she has a job outside our hotel business and many friends whe's met through schoo, Uni, church, etc. We get on quite well and often stand together on our mutual side of the generation gap against the opinions or prejudices of our parents.

Actually, there are two generation gaps in our family, the one between my mother and myself, which is fairly small and the one that yawns between my father and myself. My father was 50 years old when I was born, and we find it difficult to communicate, except on a superficial day-to-day level. Not only is his social conditioning fixed in the era of World War I, but he actively dislikes emotional moments. I was terribly hurt at some of the things he said to me as a teenager til I learned to make allowances for him being not a perfect being but just a very fallible middle-aged man.

Do you know I have never told my father I love him? His reaction if I came right out and told him is completely unknowable. He has this olde-world Male Drive to be always the dominant person in a relationship; when in his cups, one of his perennial curses is a tendency toward paranoia, when he begins accusing everybody of "trying to get over the top of him". My half-sister said to me once when we were discussing his tantrums, "If life is feeling dull, just try going up to Dad and saying, 'No, I think you're wrong there'!"

Part of this flawed relationship is sexual in nature. My father has this deep-rooted fixation about homosexuals; until recently, the very word "queer" raised his hackles and he still calls anybody he really dislikes "that queen". But I am not gay at all, and have never had the slightest inclination in that direction. However, for some reason, I am cursed with a Look about me. Obese, bespectacled, softly spoken, bookish... they all spell out F-A-G to some people. People of a certain low-brow ilk often take one look at me and begin nudging and snickering among themselves. "There's one." "Look at that Big Poof." "Hey, I'll bet you like Paul Whiteman in The Box on tv, don'tcha?" This sort of thing reduces me to quivering rage inside and stoical indifference on the surface. Why me? Why me, of all people, to look queer when so many homosexuals pass for "normal"? Some grand cosmic jest on the part of the gods.

This sort of natural lower-class suspicion permeates my relations with my father. Now I am not a virgin; I have been to bed with girls. But my lack of normal, day-to-day friendships means that I have never had a steady girlfriend in the way that most people have and take for granted. This does not help my image.

A few months ago I got fed up with it all and said to my father in the course of a rather cool discussion in a deserted bar-room, "Look Dad, I know you think I'm a queer, but I'm not." There was a stunned silence, and after a moment he said with a guilty evasiveness, "I've never said that." No, I thought to myself, but you've assumed it, haven't you? Probably half-feared it, without even putting it into words, even in his own subconscious.

Relations between us go up and down. Sometimes I have been driven to teeth-grinding furies, vowing that somehow I will leave home, find another job, and show him I don't have to hang about his stupid hotel the rest of my life. Other times - like now - we get on quite well together; today, for the first time in my 26 years, he said to me about a business matter, "Use your own discretion." We progress slowly, but we do progress.

However, there are still some things I cannot do. I can't invite people home because of my father's prejudices, and this means that I tend to lose contact even with the few fans I know in Hobart locally. Lately, I have even been afraid to go out to a film or play because, when I return home, invariably something has gone wrong. So it's easier to stay at home and vegetate or read or watch tv (or

all three), becoming more and more a recluse, unfit for human society.

This is the reason I have not had a day off since the Worldcon six months ago. I had hoped to go to the New Year convention in Adelaide, but my father was put into such a state by the rush at Christmas that I could not bear to think of leaving the place to chaos for the four or five days I'd be away. So I didn't go.

But this Easter, I'm coming to the Melbourne University Con. I'm not passing up a chance to get away from the Royal Hotel for the first time in 1976, even if there wasn't a convention on. I could always go to movies or drift around the shops; anything to get away from these four walls, which I sometimes feel are like a great concrete womb - comfy enough, but you don't want to stay inside it perpetually.

So I envy you a little for your bold (to me) striking out. Your own flat, your world trip, your work, Kristin... all so alien to my own way of life. Life? You call this "living"?

Speaking of depression: did you ever get those deep bouts of despair when everything seems useless and life is an almost intolerable burden? ((*brg* Yes; through most of 1974.*)) I looked it up under Melancholia in the medical dictionary, but it didn't help much. Sometimes I used to get these spells and just lie in my room staring up at the ceiling. They were the only periods in my life when I could understand how people could contemplate (a) suicide, and (b) the "mood-changing" psychedelics.

Fortunately, I no longer get these terrible spells of depression. Though, at times, I am reduced to gritting my teeth and clenching my fists, I seem to be slightly better adjusted these days, for no reason in particular. (God, that sounds awfully like those people in movies who say they're feeling fine, just before they snuff it!)

So here I am at present. Not much better off that I was ten years ago - a little older, a little more experienced, but basically the same introverted loner who stopped having birthday parties in adolescence because there was nobody he wanted to invite.

(1 April 1976)*

* Mike has been publishing fanzines for ten years and he's never said anything like <u>that</u> in them before. Which means that I was rather astonished to receive it at all, and felt honoured. Many thoughts rise immediately to my mind when reading the letter. My first response was to wrote to Mike that he should "get out". It was his life that was going down the drain, not somebody else's. But I can see from this letter why he doesn't. My second response was - rather egocentrically, I admit - to be a bit tickled that anybody should envy <u>me</u> for anything that had happened to me. It's not so long ago that I wrote to John Bangsund a letter that reads much like Mike's. And I've always envied so many people - in general, the pretty and the glib - the bloke who can charm a girl by looking at her; the pretty girl who has never allowed a worried thought to circulate around her skull because such a thought has never been needed; the "happy couples" I know (quite a few of whom have broken up since I met them first). Now... well, why should somebody envy me? Mainly because, at various points in my life, I've refused to put up with the intolerable, and have simply dropped out of some awful situation or other. This doesn't guarantee me results, of course, but on a few occasions it's given me the strokes of luck I've needed. There's no reason why I shouldn't still be leading a life very like that of Mike but, so far, I keep bouncing. So I hope that Mike can begin bouncing.

I've been thinking about other parts of Mike's letter. My first response is a flip, "Well, if you were queer, Mike, you'd be in fashion now." But that made me realise that the issue of homosexuality has nothing to do with the sort of extreme social abuse which has been thrown at Mike from time to time. Mike's real offence against Australian society (as mine has been through life) is in not being aggressive. One of the results of being non-aggressive in Australian society, as I know very well, is being considered out of the sexual race. Why is it suddenly fashionable to be camp these days? Because the popular image of camp is bitchy, flamboyant, nasty - in short, aggressive. Which is the way most heterosexual relationships in Australian society seem to be initiated. Why is non-aggressiveness, of all things, so irritating to, as Mike puts it, the "low-brow ilk"? Presumably it's just a challenge to the very narrow value systems which guide most Australians' lives. Because, in its way, non-aggressiveness is a sneaky, puzzling aggression in itself. All in all, it's a great pity that this phantom taunt has so bedevilled Mike; he's just an unwitting sacrifice on the altar of a peculiar kind of Australian boofheadedness.

Perhaps I've detached myself too much when talking about this letter. But if I talked about all the resonances it rings in my head, I would be writing for many more pages. The real turning-points for me were, firstly, way back in 1968, when I realised that there was in the world a group of people called science fiction fans who had something of the same world-view as I had, and who might somehow understand me and like me; and, secondly, in 1972, the realisation that it was actually possible that a woman, a most remarkable person, could actually like me. You can build a life on two touchstones of faith; I hope that Mike finds his building-blocks soon.

* There must have been some magic mind-substance

poured over the pages of SFC 44/45 when it went into the mail. Or maybe I have the Enchanted Duplicator, after all. At any rate, here's a letter from another person who almost never talks about his real self... *

* ERIC LINDSAY
6 Hillcrest Avenue, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776

For me (the editorial) will probably remain the most interesting part of the issue, since it speaks directly to me, and not to a distant and unimportant part of me we might call "the critical reader".

It still seems to me better that you should have found that happiness is not provided by someone else after a period of happiness, than to seek without finding it all your life. And you have ahead of you the chance of finding happiness in other things you do. Perhaps. For myself, I realised long ago that I didn't (and never will) need anyone else, and indeed avoid even the appearance or pretence of need or involvement because of my conviction that happiness through others is an illusion, just as happiness through possessions is an illusion. Still, I could wish to be able to set that sort of thing down as you do, even if I also think it is probably a mistake to do so, at least as widely as you do. I should go on about that section of SFC at length, since it is far more important than the reviews. Perhaps I will later. On the other hand, usually I end up thinking about what sort of an impression it will make on others, and decide to say nothing, or at least only complimentary things about me.

During the evening, over tea, I was reading in New Scientist of an experiment with noise of 80 dB, caused by a lawnmower. The experimenter, moving from car to door in a street, dropped a pile of books. When it was quiet, 25 per cent of passers-by helped him pick them up. When noisy, only 10 per cent did so. When the experimenter wore a plaster caste, 80 per cent helped in the non-noisy situation, and only 15 per cent in the noisy. In short, noises encourage anti-social activities and discourage humanistic ones. Not unexpected, really.

I am lucky here, in that, at least during the day, there is relatively little noise. But even that is too much, so I am still thinking of isolated land somewhere else, for what would I really miss here? I rarely go to films; don't have tv to miss; the local library is a waste of time; I never see the neighbours at all. In short, one place would be as good as another for those external factors, since I don't often visit Sydney to see friends.

Your report on Syncon, then, brings back all sorts of memories, although I was amused by your locating me only 30 miles from Sydney. It is more like 50 miles, in fact. There is really little that one can say about memoirs, except that I did enjoy reading them.

(13 March 1976)*

* The first piece of this letter is more of a personal statement than ever I thought I would see Eric make anywhere. Eric has much the attitude I had before 1972, although he is much more practical in making it a workable way of life. And, in effect, my life goes in much the same direction. Except when I feel depressed, I really do get along with my own company rather well. It's pleasant to know that. But it's a prison, like any other, to be committed to living that way all the time for the rest of one's life. Here's a letter which says this better than I can: *

* DAVE PIPER
7 Cranley Drive, Ruislip, Middlesex HA4 6B2, UK

Listen, I wasn't really surprised to read the news (in SFC 44/45) about you and Kristin. The lack of surprise, though, didn't lessen the sense of sadness and loss that I felt.

I guess you had to reach the conclusions you apparently have reached the hard way but, from what you say/imply here, it's not a good thing that your finding it out involved another person and caused that person distress. For that reason, you both have my sympathy... which I realise is not a lot of good, but...(?)

Look, if it's any help at all, I'm not, and never have been, convinced that two people (of whatever sex and for whatever reason) living together as exemplified in, say, a marriage is necessarily the natural, ideal, or desirable situation. The success or otherwise of the arrangement depends just so much on the ability, and willingness, of the partners to... to... (sod it! can't seem to formulate this very well) give a lot and take less. Play down their own egos, I guess I mean. And that's only one (albeit the main one, as far as I'm concerned) necessary ingredient...which makes a reasonably happy arrangement (which, luckily for me I think, Cath and I seem to have) a minor miracle in itself.

I dunno if this is going to come over as too flip and glib (and you might have realised that this is, in all respects, just about the hardest letter of comment I've ever attempted to write! - if I cock it up, please excuse) on the subject of "deep relationships". I'm not altogether convinced that everybody needs another one. Everybody, including you and me and John Smith, have a never-ending deep relationship from the moment we're born... it's your own relationship to yourself. The success, or need, or whatever, for another relationship throughout one's life depends

vastly on just how much the individual wants or needs to play down that one. Some people, and possibly you are one such, seem incapable (or, what is more important, are capable, but don't just want to) of playing down to the extent required to develop other "deep" relationships. As you say, and in many respects it is a "somber" thought, perhaps you're one of those people who don't, and never did, need such.

I guess that coming to terms with that - well, perhaps not exactly coming to terms, but appreciating the fact - is a necessary part of making a life for yourself which can be relatively happy and content. I suppose it's all relative, really.

And that's that! My next letter will be the usual load of verbal diarrhoea and, hopefully, more enjoyable. For me to write and you to read. (29 April 1976)*

SUSAN WOOD
2236 Allison Road, Vancouver, British Columbia V6T 1T6, Canada

Hey! Wow! Far north! *chuckle* *grin* - wave, wave - hi! *hug*

The Bruce R Gillespie we all knew was hiding in there someplace has finally emerged! (Visions of Bruce, slowly fanning large butterfly wings, nervously contemplating air currents, and staring bemusedly at the world through multi-faceted eyes.)

All of which is to say thank you for SFC, numbers whatever. It's the usual highly schizophrenic yoking together of serious-discussion-about-s f, and personal journal of personality-in-growth (no wonder your readers are confused!), and welcome for that reason, but doubly welcome for the balance and sense of humour and sense of proportion and general nice-blokeness its editor reveals. Now don't go and insert a grotching, self-deprecating *brg* comment, even mentally. ((*brg* Not even a little grotch?*)) You have a duty to your adult self. And it still is a fine and wondrous thing to see you smiling. (I can see it still over 12,000 miles.)

Hi.

I think what moved me most in the issue was your account of Owen Webster's life, and your own reactions to it. One of the things which I've followed with concern through the last fifteen or so issues of the "new" S F Commentary, the one with Bruce in it, has been your process of learning about the humanness of other people. That is - other people suffer, too. And some of them get over it, and some of them are less lucky and get broken. And you, Bruce, seem to have done the former, fortunately for us all and, in the process, learned that no one is "perfect" or lives an ideal or enviable life; we just live the best lives we can. The end of envy is the end of self-pity, perhaps. More empty philosophising, and not a word of comment on the very fine, meaty, thought-provoking contents, Susan? Too right. I've had seven months of heavy lit-crit complicated by strep throat, and can't write an intelligent literary comment on anything that hasn't been turned in for credit in English 440. Apologies. Read and enjoyed and marvelled at the issue, of course; still, what I respond to, again, is the hearts and not the minds (which duality is false).

The passage about Kristin was also moving. I could feel what you were feeling, but could also feel you coming to terms with it. I dunno - I never really believed that suffering was either necessary or noble which, I guess, is what I've been trying to say all these years. (The sense of humour which describes the earlier *brg* and his emotional first flights is more of a distancing device and mask than a real coming-to-terms, I think, but then, that's what I do, so maybe I'm projecting.) Now, if you'd only find a way of inventing 240-hour days so you could be a human Bruce and a reclusive editor of monthly S F Commentarys too...

(24 March 1976)*

* In reply to Dave and Susan: I don't want to reply in too many words, since that will set off the whole discussion again. The idea of writing "My 1975" was to provide an epilogue to the whole endless serial story of "My Tedious life" which had been running in SFC. Anyway, something more escaped from that piece than I intended, and now I have on hand such contributions as those from Susan and Dave.

Dave, you've probably solved the whole secret of my universe. But granted that now I have the combatants, BRG and *brg*, safe and sound in their corners after being locked in mortal combat, I still like to look out beyond the ring. But that's for the future. Life is, fortunately still risky enough for me to hope that the matter hasn't been settled yet.

Susan: I like to think that the metamorphosis, if there ever was one, was in 1972 rather than in SFC 44/45. But you've been the same way yourself, and it's valuable to see how you view the total process. Yes, each other person seems to have a prison, and I regret mainly that I cannot do more to help. A lot of people, you especially have done a lot to help me.

Micheline, who's been a valued friend for some years, and I discussed all these topics one night about a year ago. Miche has always wanted to write; she feels much about the difficulties of writing as I feel about the difficulties of communicating with people. I said that it took me ten years to learn to write; it was a process

which I began consciously in 1964 and will take the rest of my life to complete. "A ten-year project?" said Miche, "Well, why don't you begin a ten-year project of becoming good at human relationships, and put just as much effort into that?" Probably I began such a process in 1972; there's only six years left before you can begin checking progress, if any.

Even more to the point: Kristin seems to have had a great time during the past six months or so. She's gained a place in a paid teaching-and-teacher-training scheme, and has had the use of an entire house for a low rent. We don't see each other very often, but this has a lot to do with the fact that we live in separate areas of Melbourne and don't really share many of the same interests. But we can be good friends when we do meet, which is something. Good fortune go with her.

* There comes a time in this column when, sooner or later, we must return to the topic of science fiction. And who better to change the turn of discussion altogether than the person who has done most, during the last few years, to keep Australia's fanzine-publishing and letter-of-comment-writing reputation alive?: *

* LEIGH EDMONDS
PO Box 76, Carlton, Victoria 3053 (new address)

You really don't expect me to read all of SFC 44/45, do you?

Probably one of the reasons why I never comment on SFC is because you answer all your own questions - the ones that I notice, anyhow. When I come up with a new and original thought, I find that you've already beaten me to the punch. My "new and original" thought out of this issue was that your review of Hard to be a God gave a pretty definitive account of your world view and then, somewhere in the letter column, you went and said more or less the same thing. So I give up.

Dave Piper's remarks about never having a blank page or whatever was set off nicely by the following page being printed upside down. But I read it all the same. And on it Lesleigh got onto one of the interesting subjects in the issue. The other one is politics (and what and when they are).

In his letter, Gus O'Donnell said it was his point of view "that all writing should be criticised". I would modify this only by putting it, "All writing may be criticised." I do not see much value in literary criticism except that it is as worthy a sport as Scrabble or ice hockey. When I read through SFC, it is primarily to see the boys out on the field performing. I generally don't get inspired to buy books after reading reviews, since your reviewers don't like the kind of books I do. The jostling of the packs around The Dispossessed at the moment is particularly interesting. And the only comparison I can come up with for the note from Bob Tucker about Lem is that, so far, it has been a long, hard, and fairly even struggle - a subtle spin bowler and brilliantly defensive batsman (Turner and Lem respectively) battling it out for hours and hours. Bring on the fast bowler (no subtlety, but plenty of pace) and the poor batsman is bowled middle stump.. Thunderous applause!

Where was I? Never mind. I do agree with Gus on his way of defining politics and the last line of Angus Taylor's letter puts it precisely. Your reply that all problems are "personal, not political" had me tossed for awhile until it occurred to me that, in things like that Hard to be a God review, you stated very clearly that you regard just about everything as something to be internalised - made personal. You confuse the issue by throwing in the "problems" bit, which would seem to say that if you don't have any problems all you are is happy. Being less lugubrious than you, maybe I don't internalise things so much and can, instead, see actions, problems, packets of Cornflakes, etc, as political. Everything we do in contact with anybody else affects them. This "affect" effect is, in most cases, a direct way of altering that other person's thoughts and actions. Individually, the effect might be small but then, the roots of the Liberal landslide last December are equally so small and go back a long way. And, even though what happens in Canberra affects me to some extent, it is talking to the people here at work about football or the price of cars which flavours my political philosophy far more than anything Frazer or Whitlam might say.

While Valma was away over Christmas, I read four books, and I haven't read anything but New Scientist, New Behaviour, Scale Models, and Air International since. Busy, you know.

The four books were Ice and Iron, Tales of Known Space, Sherlock Homes and the War of the Worlds, and something so memorable that I can't remember a thing about it right now. Sherlock Holmes and the War of the Worlds was pretty dull, but I did read it in one sitting, which must mean something. The nicest scene was when some bombastic scientist has to keep Watson away from Holmes for a bit so that Holmes and his landlady could do it.

Tales of Known Space was disappointing, mainly because I'd read it all before in different places. Niven is not a particularly good writer but, like any fan, I'll read anything he commits to paper because, apart from most of the stuff in Analog, it's the only science

fiction going. In the ANZAPA before last, David Grigg raised the question, "Why is there no poetry in science fiction." In the latest mailing somebody waved The Dispossessed at him. Since David and I have boozed at Degraves Tavern and have talked over this subject, I'd hazard a guess that what David meant in the first place was, "Why is there no poetry in science fiction." And it's a fair question too. The possibilities of space and science are marvellous and yet, in a story like the evergreen "Neutron Star", all we really get is a bit of the old cardboard character and some physics made easy to understand for us laypersons. But there was no feeling for the awesomeness of a neutron star. Why not? Well, maybe it's because Niven can't do it, but surely somebody should be able to.

Ice and Iron was by far the best of the four, and all the more fascinating because the personality that comes under the microscope in the main character is - as we've discussed - Tucker Tuckerised in all but name.

And how about bringing out smaller issues more often? ((*brg* Because current postage rates would make that more expensive. For much the same reason I can afford to publish only a few issues each year.*))

PS: Valma hasn't read SFC yet, but she will sympathise with you about neighbours. Because we had new ones, and she is going to College as well, we're moving to Carlton to get away from the noise. (18 Febraury 1976)

Rob Gerrand is a very nice fellow, but he should be put up against a wall and shot for crimes against A E Van Vogt. The reviews, or whatever, that he wrote for the "Weapon Shops" books are nice reading but, after rereading the first of the two, I would be tempted to say that we read different books but with the same title.

Of course that is not the case. Rob takes the bits of the book that he thinks are nice and blows them up out of all proportion to the rest (and the majority) of the book. Of course it is a little difficult to say exactly what the main thrust of the book is, if there is one, but it is certainly not the bit that Rob picks out. The only two connections between the rest of the novel and it are that Fara is the father of Cayle and that Cayle does borrow the moeny which gets his father into trouble. When Fara stands up for himself, this is the end of his bit of the book and it has no connection at all with what happens in the rest.

Now I really can't see the point of picking out a side issue in the book and using it to justify the rest of the book. As if the rest needs to be justified anyhow.

On the whole, I enjoyed The Weapon Makers the more of the two. Rob is off the mark in his estimation of it, and we get enough glimpses of Robert Hedrock in it to build up a far better character than we do of anybody in the first book. It is a pity that Rob chose to sneer at the episode in which Hedrock trampled buildings, since it is as good an indication of that man's character as anything about Fara in the first book. We can't say that Van Vogt is a good writer, but he is as good as any of the others who come from the same period, and his characterisation is maybe just as badly written, but still better worked out than most you will come across. ((*brg* That's what's called having it both ways at once.*))

And what is to say that decent characterisation in a book makes it a book worthy of comment and the lack of it makes the book unworthy of consideration? Surely the science fiction writers of that period had more important things on their mind. ((*brg* More important?*)) Some of the best books I've read have been without any decent character and I don't see why this obsession with such a minor part of the cosmos of possible writing forms should be so obsessive in fine magazines like S F Commentary these days. You may now cut my head off. But I read science fiction for the science fiction, not for the finely crafted characterisation.

(One thing I would like your reviewers to do is to give away the shock endings and other bits that generally they don't give because they don't want to spoil the books for us readers. Since I'm not likely to read most of the books, what the hell.) (March 1976)*

* In a recent, regrettably dnq letter, Damien Broderick was tut-tutting because SFC bothered to feature anything about Van Vogt at all. He will be struck down with dismay after this current addition to the literature of Van-Vogtiana.

I've answered most of your comments, already, in my Guest of Honour Speech for Unicon at Easter. Unfortunately, I'm not publishing that speech, but John Bangsund is. Perhaps I can summarise what I said. When trying to analyse what we enjoy when reading science fiction, I said that (1) we enjoy what is happening - the series of events; the plot. However, that means little without (2) those series of events happening to somebody - the characters. In science fiction, it also helps if (3) the series of events which happen to the characters are enjoyable because they spring up from some new idea or changed way of looking at the universe.

Unfortunately, science fiction is burdened by its name. Given a bit of time and patience, probably I could make out a case that there has never been more than a tiny bit of science in science fic-

tion. S f should be called almost anything else - speculative fiction is accurate; "alchemical fiction" is one that John Foyster suggested years ago; "engineering fiction" for most of the stuff of the 1960s. What would science fiction be like? It would be about science. And what is science? It's ideas about the universe; it is not gadgets, or cosmic geography, or slitting people's throats in free fall. Science is the laws and observations of people like Planck and Einstein and Heisenberg. And where are these ideas in s f? Almost non-existent. Why? Because they are too difficult to understand for most s f writers, let alone the readers. And how do you make fiction out of something like Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty? You write something like Ursula Le Guin's short story, "Schrodinger's Cat" which, to most of its readers, probably did not make much sense. In other words, as even the most cursory look at New Scientist will show, most good science these days borders on mysticism. But you can't put mysticism in science fiction! - that's New Wave fiction, and people like Leigh Edmonds wouldn't like it.

At any rate, you can't "put" science into science fiction at all. You need to write a piece of fiction + science. And you can't write a piece of fiction without it happening to somebody, and the more interesting the "somebody" who has these scientific ideas, the more interesting the story will be. Of course, lots of s f writers are making some attempt to do these things, but they are not up to it. Why is there no poetry in science fiction? Because the authors don't even have enough understanding of science to show the poetry that is there in the ideas all the time. You can't have poetry without metaphor, as also I said at Easter. And you cannot have metaphor - patterns of thought and existence - unless the people in the stories are given life. Again, s f writers try so hard, but they fail most of the time. If you want to praise the failures and second-raters, Leigh, that's your business. But I have strong scruples against accepting anything less than the best in anything, which is why I keep asking for something better.

Politics?: *

* ANGUS TAYLOR
14 Edburton Avenue, Brighton, Sussex BN1 6EJ, England

Australia seems to have elected a caveman, from what one reads. Is this your doing, Bruce? (29 December 1975)*

* We have, but it wasn't my doing. Fortunately, he seems to be an incompetent caveman, so far. If he really gets going with all his bizarre schemes for destroying everything worthwhile in Australia... Well, let's hope that the Fanarchist Party is in fine shape for the next elections.

* I've given up trying to include more than a small number of the letters I wanted to put into this issue of SFC. Therefore, what better way to conclude than with: *

* JOAN DICK
(again)

I arrived back in Albury last Friday night. I had the best intentions in the world of re-reading S F Commentary and writing to you over the weekend, but I might as well have planned to spend the weekend on the dark side of the moon. Two men alone in a house for five days can find the most amazing ways and means of making a mess. Even the dog managed to get into the act. There went my good intentions for the weekend.

For a few hours this week I managed to visit the planet Dune. Frank Herbert's Children of Dune has that effect on me. I can really get lost in the story. The people really live - I can hardly wait to see what happens to Jessica, and just what do the twins have in mind?

But I am also doing factual reading. "The Possibility of Life Elsewhere" is the subject matter for our next Astronomical Society meeting. Mainly because of the Viking landings on Mars later in the year, Analog supplies a lot of factual articles that come in handy here. Also, the latest issue of Analog I have (February 1976) has a short story set on Mars. I am pleased to find that the background material used is based quite well on what is known so far of the Martian surface. I have also been looking up "first contact" stories. As the s f expert (?) in our group, I am asked, "What do the writers think of life elsewhere?"

Are you aware that you always have a great writer in every issue? That's George Turner. An excellent writer - one whose thoughts I value on any subject. Who is George? What? Why? When? Where? Please let us know more about George Turner. That is - if George agrees. Perhaps he is a shy shrinking violet.

* Perhaps. It's very easy to meet George, if you ever manage to meet more people when in Melbourne, Joan. The nearest thing to a biography of George Turner that I have published appeared in SFC 41/42. There's a one-column autobiography in a recent issue of Algol (that is, an issue from within the last two years). But George doesn't say too much about himself. He's in his 50s, has, seemingly, been everywhere and done everything, and is now settling down to a life of writing (mainly criticism), listening to music, reading, and enjoying life. And he is a great writer - although this is one of the few issues into which I couldn't fit him. And he's generous with his greatness; he's done more than most people to keep SFC going. *

Ah, those Ghastlies. But they did chase you

out into the big wide world. ((*brg* Which is the point of what I was trying to say in that section. Every cloud... etc.*))

On the basis of Owen Webster's article, I have re-read most of John Wyndham's stories. I found, to my surprise and delight, that I have never before read The Midwich Cuckoos. Perhaps I have read so many reviews of the book and the film that I thought that I had read it. And I had read The Chrysalids under another name. I still consider this as his best novel. It deals with people and a situation that, dreadful as it seems, could conceivably occur.

So - you find incomprehensible my statement that I read s f for escapism. Bruce, escapism is an essential part of my day-to-day life. My future consists - so far this year - of an unending list of 21st-birthday parties, wedding parties, and Christmas parties. My friends and I all married at the same time. We all had children around the same time. Hence they are all turning 21, getting married, and producing more children all around the same time. And that time is now. I am up to my ears in knitting for daughters and, now, granddaughters. The present trend for ponchos will see me producing at least four of those objects before winter sets in. My days consist of working, ironing, and the mind-bending problem of what to cook next. I had thought to make a small escape from all this mundane routine, but illness of an elderly family member has put paid to those plans. My dog - who I love - takes up much of my day. His latest caper was to acquire some fleas. Bath is a dirty word to him, as water was meant only for drinking. So a bath was essential to get rid of unwanted fleas acquired from an unwanted girlfriend. He is quite a small dog, but it took two full-grown men and me to bath the wretch. My biggest deal today is to water the front garden to make the ground soft enough to be dug up to plant cauliflowers.

Now, with such an exciting prospect stretching before me for heaven only knows when, can you possibly doubt that I immerse myself into s f as much as possible? Otherwise I would go way round the bend and never come back. These brief visits to Melbourne and some of the cultural interests down there are a welcome break into a saner, more regulated, and happier world.

I'd better go and move the hose and do some more knitting. (18 March 1976)*

* It's worth putting out this whole issue just to publish those last few paragraphs. I manage to escape all those mind-bending tasks, so it's only fitting that Joan and I should have different ways of "escapism".

So many more letters itching to slurp out of the folder and spread all over the duplicated page! Keep waiting for "The S F Commentary 47/48 Lettercolumn, Part 2". Seeyuz. (16 May 1976)

EDITOR

(TOMORROW FOR NON-BELIEVERS - cond from p 20)

taxation, and passing necessary laws. Some math teacher with imagination can help classes to work out a monetary system reviewing or teaching decimals at the same time. Bank structure and function, credit, international money exchange and trade problems could all involve maths and might even open a channel for revival of what is too often considered a total bore by my classes.

There is also scope for an almost infinite variety of projects in this unit. Easy ones, such as clothes of the future, can add enjoyment for a slower student, while the range can reach to plotting the path of a ship from Earth to Ganymede for a more able student.

The actual teaching of this unit will require much more than I'm giving here. The materials to use, however, cannot be given until I meet the students who will use them. I have found very little value in work devised without specific students in mind, so I prefer to work out details after I know my classes.

One thing though that I know in advance is that a teacher without enthusiasm is like a class without laughter. It may look human, but the soul is missing. I badly need the enthusiasm that teaching this project could give me, and my students can never have enough of laughter.

** ** **

This article did not just begin a few weeks ago. It really began six months ago when summer was a dream of freedom, not a clammy pressure cooker. My reading began then, my thinking started to take shape, and decisions were forming slowly. The chance to put this into concrete form will be helpful when the battles for the books and the campaigns for cooperation begin.

What the success will be, I cannot say, but I am certain that the youngsters involved will not suffer in polite silence. If a project dealing with the future is successful, then a way will be opened to break free of so many of the stultifying conventions among which my school blindly insists on working. I would welcome that - warmly.

And last, maybe I'll be lucky enough to see again a nearly non-reader like Danny find in a book the something he could barely articulate, but needed more desperately than food.

BOOKS REFERRED TO IN THIS ARTICLE

By Robert A Heinlein:

Between Planets (New York, Ace Books, 1951)

Citizen of the Galaxy (New York, Ace Books, 1957)

Farmer in the Sky (New York, Dell Books, 1950)

Red Planet (New York, Ace Books, 1949)

The Rolling Stones (New York, Ace Books, 1952)

The Star Beast (New York, Ace Books, 1954)

- Reba Estra July 1975