



# **S F COMMENTARY**

*the independent magazine about science fiction*

JANUARY/OCTOBER 1979

Australia \$2  
USA/Canada \$3

## **SFC 55/56**

## **TENTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION**

## **AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION: A NEW BOOM?**

pages 5 to 45



January/October 1979  
68 pages

Australia: \$2.00 (double issue)  
\$5/5 subscription  
USA/Canada: \$3.00 (double issue) newsstand  
\$6/5 subscription  
Elsewhere: Australian equivalent

I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

Editor  
John Berry  
Don Ashby  
Rick Stooker  
Alexander Doniphan Wallace  
George Turner  
Cy Anders  
4, 46

and includes

I MUST BE TALKING TO OUR FRIENDS, TOO  
Elaine Cochrane  
48

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION: A NEW BOOM?

A MEATY BOOK FOR INTELLECTUAL CARNIVORES

Sneja Gunew discusses *Beloved Son*, by George Turner  
5

SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA  
A complete survey by George Turner  
7

ROOMS OF PARADISE: TWO VIEWS  
Bruce Gillespie and Henry Gasko  
9

THE MAN WHO FILLED THE VOID  
Bruce Gillespie discusses *Envisaged Worlds*, *Other Worlds*, and *Alien Worlds*, edited by Paul Collins  
16

BY OUR FRUITS...  
Bruce Gillespie discusses *The View from the Edge*, edited by George Turner  
22

TOO MUCH POWER FOR THE IMPOTENT  
Bruce Gillespie discusses *Moon in the Ground*, by Keith Antill  
25

WHY DID THE SKY WEEP?  
Rob Gerrand, John Foyster, Lee Harding, and Bruce Gillespie discuss *The Weeping Sky*, by Lee Harding  
30

LIGHT IN THE GREYWORLD  
Rob Gerrand discusses *Displaced Person*, by Lee Harding  
36

GENTLE ESCAPISM IN PRETTY PASTEL COLOURS  
Henry Gasko discusses *The Luck of Brin's Five*, by Cherry Wilder  
38

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION: IS THAT ALL THERE IS?  
Andrew Whitmore discusses *Walkers on the Sky*, by David Lake and *Future Sanctuary*, by Lee Harding  
42

Editor and Publisher: Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. (03) 419 4797.  
Subscriptions: Australia: \$5 for 5, or \$10 for 10. USA & Canada: \$6 for 5 or \$12 for 10 from Hank and Lesleigh Luttrell, 525 West Main, Madison, WI 53703, USA. Elsewhere: Equivalent of Australian subscription rate. Please submit in equivalent of Australian currency (ie, get cheques converted to Australian dollars first).  
Registered for posting as a publication—Category 'B'. Final stencil typed 17 September 1979.



I MUST BE  
TALKING TO  
MY FRIENDS

TEN YEARS!

'Why bother with a Tenth Anniversary Edition?' was said to me recently. Why indeed? Because we got here. Touch and go, and all that. Plant a flag halfway up Everest, even if the summit is still a long way off (twenty-one years? twenty-five?).

A Tenth Anniversary Edition is needed to thank everybody who made it possible. Sometimes I think that is almost everybody in science fiction except me. If I mention names, then somebody will be left out and get offended. So I won't unroll the long list of people who have been indispensable to every issue of *SFC*. Some people, however, were there right at the beginning: George Turner, who contributed to the first issue, and is still here; Lee Harding, who collated and produced the first two issues, and who has written a lot of books since then; John Bangsund, whose *Fault It All Is*; Leigh Edmonds, who also helped a lot on the first issue; Stephen Campbell, who drew covers for and collated many of the early issues; John Foyster, whose writings for *ASFR* were an inspiration, and who edited six issues of *SFC*; Barry Gillam, who wrote for many of the early issues, and who edited *SFC* 16; Brian Aldiss and Philip Dick, who wrote to a fan of theirs; ...and ... now I've left out your name, I'll bet.

A Tenth Anniversary Edition is a fit occasion for self-congratulation. But I can never find anyone who agrees

with me on what *SFC* was good at... and I was always surprised when people praised it. I've published *SFC* for ten years because it was enjoyable - I met many new people, and writers kept sending me great articles. I've published less frequently during recent years because rising postage rates have made the whole job less enjoyable. (Rates tripled overnight in 1974.) *SFC* = Instant Poverty these days. But the magazine will continue because producing it is still a lot more enjoyable than anything I do to make a living.

1969 does not seem too far away, when I think about it. Prices were much lower. Melbourne fans were getting used to the heady idea of bidding for a World Convention in 1975. I was stuck up at Ararat. The world's worst teacher. My own life became more and more desolate until the beginning of 1971. To compensate (I suppose), I turned out 18 issues of *SFC* in its first two years. I don't have as much energy as I had in 1969. My enthusiasm was fed by marvellous letters and fanzines from nearly everybody (whatever happened to Barry Gillam? Sandra Miesel? Philip Dick?).

1971 saw my return to Melbourne, to a congenial job in the Education Department's Publications Branch. It also saw the closure of the old Melbourne Science Fiction Club, and the beginning of Space Age Books, proprietor Merv Binns, who is the centre of Melbourne fandom whatever else happens.

(Continued on Page 46)



A MEATY BOOK FOR INTELLECTUAL CARNIVORES

Sneja Gunew  
discusses:

*Beloved Son*

by George Turner

(Faber & Faber; 1978; 375 pp; \$15  
Pocket Books 81696.9; 1979; 371 pp; \$US2.25  
Sphere Books; 1979)

To call *Beloved Son* a thesis novel is to praise it, when you recall that Brian Aldiss derives one major area of s f from the eighteenth-century (Age of Reason) philosophical tale. Because that is where its strengths lie: it is a novel of ideas rather than characters.

The ideas themselves, concerning the possible evolution of a post-holocaust society, are fascinating. The framework is respectably inside that tradition which sees the chief end of s f as being the removal of the reader from a known world of empirical experience in order to return him to that world with a new objective awareness. The leading characters of this story, the first interstellar travellers from Earth, gain their importance from their return rather than their journey outward. The space voyage is important only insofar as it transforms them into the standard 'observer' of any utopian or dystopian tale - their main purpose is not to tell of their own journey but to report on their encounter with an Earth which has suffered a rich change.

About the nature of this change, Turner is highly ambivalent. Like Le Guin in *The Dispossessed*, he too is describing an extremely qualified utopia, if indeed it can be called that at all. Now it is, of course, his right as novelist to insist on these qualifications (he is not duty-bound to give answers to the questions he raises), but it is the way he raises them that bothers me, and this has to do with the (to my mind) weakness of the book - the characterisation.

On the face of it, we get several narrative voices, intended, I presume, to provide several perspectives on the new society, and leave the final estimate to the reader. The trouble is that, in the long run, they all sound alike. Ultimately, the voice is the same, even though it issues from apparently quite different figures, all with very different axes to grind. They range from the old Ombudsman Jackson (Turner has challengingly re-defined this term) to the DP psychiatrist Lindley, to the police-chief-turned-demagogue Campion, and even to the psychotic clone-progenitor Raft.

So the evidence the reader is given does not in fact allow him to judge in any substantial way, because he is too aware of the deceptive nature of the source. As I said, each narrator's credibility is undercut in some way but, at the same time, what they say is *sometimes* to be taken as an objective and dispassionate account of the society they encounter. It is this 'sometimes' that is hard to figure out.

Given all this, the extrapolations Turner comes up with are extremely suggestive ones. Quite credibly, he unseats the old bogeyman, the psychiatrist (the mind engineer), and replaces him with the biologist (the genetic engineer) and a new Dr Frankenstein is engendered. What makes it all the worse (as is the case with Dr F) is the inherent idealism of these people. Turner puts it so much better:

Psychiatric practice taught me  
long ago that the sentimentalist,



\*BRG: The two qualities which George Turner shows most obviously are generosity and modesty. When *SFC* was beginning, George contributed articles to the first issue, and still provides support whenever needed. And...in George's article, which follows this review, you will find no mention of his own novel, *Beloved Son*. Yet, in terms of both critical acclaim and financial success, it has been the most successful book of Australian science fiction yet to appear: **British hardback and paperback; US paperback; translated editions.** George won't mention himself, so I'll get in first and praise him.

What does it take to become so successful? Look at George's career and you will see: nearly thirty years of published fiction, including one Miles Franklin Award; five years of work spent on *Beloved Son* itself; twelve years of critical writing about the science fiction field. A writer's training time is as long as his or her life, and George gives every sign that his career in science fiction has only just taken off.

Some will mutter that this single review is not adequate to praise *Beloved Son*. You will be interested to know that John Bangsund (to whom the book is dedicated) has praised it properly. He might still have copies of *Philosophical Gas* 10, October 1978. In that magazine, John gathers together a large range of critical opinion about the novel, and some personal glimpses of George Turner: the result is 20 pages of illuminating reading. \*

in matters where his selfish emotions are not involved, can be depended on for solid intellectual intransigence and no mercy or care for those outside his personal circle of slop.

Along the same moral axis, it is the sentimentalism of the 'Big Brother' global security force which precipitates the greatest disasters in the new society. In their mistaken protectiveness, they do not allow the young to make mistakes, so they inhibit their learning process, and the society becomes vulnerable to any organised takeover. (It has been conditioned that way by Big Brother.)

Very well handled also is the concept of the society founded on youth. Turner's new earthlings are all young, and the energies of their budding minds are encouraged to develop at their own pace rather than being straitjacketed into an institutionally guided pace (oh utopia!). The concomitant of these attractive points are the less appealing ones of intolerance and a general self-satisfaction bordering on smugness (neither is the sole prerogative of the young, but the tone is recognisably the arrogance writ large of present-day youth cults) of a centipetal society. The deliberate ignoring of the returned space-travellers is

only the first symptom of this inward-looking obsessiveness.

The details are not pursued - there are far too many - but there is an overall richness that constantly engages the speculative mind.

The focus on the clone motif is a little puzzling to me. Is it meant to represent the dangers of a polarised totalitarianism - embodying the concept that you are either totally with me or totally against me to the extent that your physical presence nauseates me? If so, the dangers are hardly alleviated by the closing chapters.

And what is one to make of the rather stereotyped homosexual figures with whom some kind of hope for the future resides?

And the figure of the 'Lady'? I will only say that she reminded me of the psychological casebook grotesques that Fellini intrudes into his films when attention is lagging. In both cases, Freud's over-reductiveness has a lot to answer for.

But these are minor points. Overall, this is a meaty book for intellectual carnivores, and one hopes there will be more from Turner in that particular mode.

Sneja Gunew August 1978  
Deakin University

## SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA

by George Turner

EDITOR: This is a shortened version of an article which George Turner wrote for *Arena*, a very good English fanzine edited by Geoff Rippington, 15 Queens Ave, Canterbury, Kent, England CT2 8AY. The complete article will appear there. George has written the kind of article which I could never have written - a history and survey of everything that is happening in Australian science fiction. I've slotted the reviews/critical articles in the appropriate places. \*

### PART 1

#### THE PROFESSIONAL RECORD

##### *Dim Beginnings*

###### The Germ Growers

Science fiction as we understand it began in Australia, so far as I can discover, with the publication, in 1892, of a novel, The Germ Growers (Hutchinson, London), by Robert Potter.

Potter was, of all unlikelihoods, a canon of St Paul's Anglican Cathedral, Melbourne. The story dealt with - hold your breath for it - germ warfare, mind control, invisibility, 'scientific' explanation of myths, secret enemies, and UFOs. The science was godawful but the themes are still with us; since the 'science' of the modern versions is also usually godawful, what's new?

It made no splash in the literary world, and the remaindered copies were given away as Divinity prizes. (I suspect a moral there, but it eludes me.)

\* \* \*

The next name I can trace, the one who set my childish feet on the road to the bedlam of wonder, is Frank Russell, nom de plume of a newspaper sub-editor who wrote gadget s f for Pals, a boys' weekly modelled on the British Chums and Boys' Own Paper. At the age of about nine I was hooked, for ever.

###### Out of the Silence

Another newspaperman (film critic, in this case), Erle Cox, sprang into prominence in the 1920s with Out of the Silence, a novel of prehistoric supermen revived in the present day. It was vaguely utopian and philosophic, mildly adventurous and stickily sentimental. By today's standards, it is hard to take, but it was a local best-seller, and was reprinted in America as late as 1932.

Cox also wrote a fantasy, The Missing Angel, and a fringe s f novel on the coming world war. (It came.)

###### J M WALSH

###### Vandals of the Void

###### The Vanguard to Neptune

###### The Terror Out of Space

The next name of importance is that of J M Walsh, an expatriate living in London. His Vandals of the Void appeared in Wonder Stories Quarterly for Summer 1931. It was good adventure s f for its day, and was followed by The Vanguard to Neptune and, under the pseudonym of H Haverstock Hill, The Terror Out of Space (Amazing Stories, February-May 1934).

As a successful thriller writer, probably he found that s f did not pay and wrote little more of it.

###### Tomorrow and Tomorrow

In 1947 appeared the most important novel in Australian s f to this day, Tomorrow and

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 8



Tomorrow, by 'M Barnard Eldershaw', the pen name of Marjorie Barnard and Florence Eldershaw, novelists and historians. It was a considerable critical success, and has achieved the status of a minor classic in Australian literature.

Written in the days when style and literacy were demanded and appreciated, Tomorrow and Tomorrow was a study of late-Depression and wartime Sydney from a viewpoint four centuries in the future. Its ideas have been superseded, but it remains a beautiful novel.

#### CARNELL's New Worlds

A few novels, mostly bad, were produced during the 1940s and 1950s, but the real seedtime for local writers came with the appearance of John Carnell's New Worlds.

Here appeared the first stories of Lee Harding, John Baxter, Wynne Whiteford, Frank Bryning, Damien Broderick, David Boutland (as David Rome), and Stephen Cook. David Boutland concentrates now on tv work, and Stephen Cook, a promising young talent, is dead, but the others are still writing and selling.

John Baxter's The God Killers was published in New Worlds, and David Boutland's Squat was published locally as a paperback (Horwitz) - but the writing scene remained, to say the least of it, thin.

We had a past but, in 1965, little present. Nor did things improve quickly.

#### The Modern Scene

##### False Fatherland

A local paperback firm, Horwitz, published Bert Chandler's False Fatherland in 1968, but more provocative were the anthologies published by a major firm, Angus and Robertson:

##### The Pacific Book of Australian Science Fiction The Second Pacific Book of Australian Science Fiction The Zeitgeist Machine

In 1968, John Baxter edited, for A&R, The Pacific Book of Australian Science Fiction, which I recall reviewing (sourly) for the first issue of Bruce Gillespie's S F Commentary. It was a mixture of the work of old hands and new, but nostalgia cannot pretend that it was a good (or even averagely bad) collection.

Baxter edited a Second Pacific Book in

1970, and its standard was immeasurably higher - but still not really good, save for a few 'literary' items from writers of the 'establishment' mainstream.

Both of these volumes were reprinted, so perhaps I am just a hard-to-please, curmudgeonly old bastard.

Then, in 1977, A & R produced a third Australian anthology, The Zeitgeist Machine, edited by Damien Broderick. This one was, whatever the judgment on individual items, an advance on the Baxter collections, but Broderick was working with writers who had by that time learned some sophistication and science fiction expertise.

Damien Broderick is highly individual (as per a slim volume of short stories called Packaging at Its Apostrophe Best) in his approaches to writing, selection, and editing; The Zeitgeist Machine (A & R; 1977; 200 pp; \$3.95), filled mainly by contributions from writers who normally operate outside the s f fringe, is certainly eccentric in content and balance, but rewarding in its freshness of approach of writers owing little to England or America - or s f, either.

Among the s f old guard, Lee Harding, Cherry Wilder, Bert Chandler, and (surprise, surprise!) John Foyster will be familiar to overseas readers, but Dal Stevens, John Romeril, Peter Carey, and Michael Wilding are mainstream writers who brought to the book a touch of professionalism, both in writing and imagination, which is outside the usual conception of the genre.

#### WREN PUBLISHING

##### The Bitter Pill

Another firm, not so long-established or so solidly based as A & R, flirted with s f in the mid-'seventies. The Wren choices were unfortunate.

The Bitter Pill, the company's first essay in s f, must have seemed a safe bet, but was, in fact, one of Bert Chandler's less successful novels. In it, he moved into new areas and found himself uncomfortable (so it seemed in my reading), with politics and lesbianism as plot elements.

\* \* \*

Wren's next book, a thriller left namelessly forgotten, was a disaster only attributable to bad editorial advice and misunderstanding of the nature of s f.

Beyond Tomorrow

wren Publishing's final fling in s f came too late; the firm was in serious difficulty by the time Lee Harding's anthology, Beyond Tomorrow (1976; 320 pp; \$12), appeared.

This was a 'safe' collection, in that it leaned heavily on a dozen proven reprints by such authors as Le Guin, Blish, Zelazny, and other big names. The less safe fillip to the collection was the inclusion of five original stories by Australians Bert Chandler, Cherry Wilder, John Baxter, David Grigg, and Tony Morphet. It turned out that they stood up very well in august company, and the book was a success. NEL published an English edition, minus five stories and most of the editorial material.

HYLAND HOUSE/QUARTET AUSTRALIA

Rooms of Paradise

Lee Harding then became ambitious to try an all-new anthology, wherein Australian and big-name overseas writers should share the book on even terms.

So, having recruited Brian Aldiss, Gene Wolfe, Ian Watson, Michael Bishop, R A Lafferty, and a greatly talented Japanese gentleman, Sakyo Komatsu, he commanded six Australians to match the efforts of this formidable team. They were Kevin McKay, Cherry Wilder, David Lake, Philippa C Maddern, Damien Broderick, and myself.

We heaved our sighs of despair at the power-playing ranks of the opposition and got on with it. And - I think - upheld the standard pretty well in a volume called Rooms of Paradise (Quartet Australia; 1978; 182 pp; \$11).

Australia's prize entry, which has caused much comment, was Kevin McKay's 'Pie Row Joe', a totally original piece in outback dialect, as Australian in conception and treatment as Dame Edna Everage can never be - and the only piece of fiction he had ever written.

On the publishing side, it was the first s f venture of a new firm, Hyland House, based in Melbourne, which is interested in quality s f - and only in quality s f. We just have to hope the work will appear.

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 13

ROOMS OF PARADISE:

TWO VIEWS

Henry Gasko &  
Bruce Gillespie  
discuss:

Rooms of Paradise

edited by Lee Harding

(Quartet Melbourne; 1978; 182 pp; \$10.95  
Forthcoming from St Martin's Press, New York)

1. BRUCE GILLESPIE:

I've reviewed Rooms of Paradise already - for The National Times, 2 December 1978. Some commentators have expressed doubts about both the style and the sincerity of the review. It's easy to clarify the second point: I was quite sincere about everything I said in the review. The style? The review was aimed at what I took to be the 'National Times audience'. Later encounters with the magazine have not altered my estimation of NT's estimation of its own audience.

But when the review appeared, I did say

that I would write 'an S F Commentary-style review' which would be quite different from the one written for The National Times. After eight months, I do not find quite the same need to rewrite Holy Writ.

In November 1978, when I wrote the review, I made quite a point of saying that to publish Rooms of Paradise from Australia could be financial suicide for the publishers ('Quartet Australia', alias Hyland House). I made the point that no editor of modern fiction has attempted to gather the best wri-



ters in the field, and succeeded, while promising nothing but initial publication in Australia. 'Is there an editor in Australia,' I wrote, 'whose reputation is strong enough to attract the best new stories by the world's best writers? Could such a book sell enough copies in Australia to make the venture worthwhile?'

The answer to the first question is no - except in the 'genres'. I suspect that Patricia Wrightson or Ivan Southall could edit a selection of new children's stories from Australia and succeed in the venture. But they have not attempted it; Lee Harding has - in s f. The answer to the second question is also no - the Australian publishers would have done very badly if Rooms of Paradise had not been sold later for publication in America by St Martin's Press (with the same cover, no less; it's by Michael Payne).

Just to get the book onto the shelves was sufficient proof of success for Lee Harding, I would have thought. He has been able to attract new stories by Brian Aldiss, Ian Watson, Michael Bishop, Gene Wolfe, R A Lafferty, and Sakyo Komatsu from overseas; and Kevin McKay, Cherry Wilder, David Lake, Philippa C Maddern, Damien Broderick, and George Turner as Australian writers. There is nobody else in Australia but Harding who could have done it; and not many editors outside Australia who could have produced a volume like Rooms of Paradise.

'Fortunately, quality matches singularity,' I said in my National Times review. Indeed. 'Rooms of Paradise is the most consistently interesting science fiction collection that has appeared for some years.' I still agree with that. Andromeda 1 was better, but that came out more than three years ago. Orbit 20 and Anticipations each has at least one story which is better than anything in Rooms of Paradise ('Seven American Nights', by Gene Wolfe, and 'A Chinese Perspective', by Brian Aldiss). But Rooms of Paradise wins on consistency.

'Can a soul starve? Can it die of thirst?' asks the viewpoint character in Ian Watson's 'The Rooms of Paradise'. In one way or another, most of the stories in this volume ask the same question. In 'The Rooms of Paradise', the main character is buoyed up by the hope that he will achieve immortality. The manufacturers of the reincarnation process promise it to him. In he will go, old; out he will come, reborn in a baby's body, with important memories intact. His rapacious sense of self-congratulation and greed for life dominate the first few pages of the book. All this disappears. He is reborn as a baby - but no people surround him. He is in a vast room, cared for by robot attendants. Day by day, he is moved from room to room, and slowly he sees a pattern by which he is

educated in these rooms. But, no matter how he tries, he cannot escape the sequence of rooms. If he evades his attendant, he starves. Eventually he begins to dream in his sleep. The dreams are of a beach which he saw in his previous life - a beach where the 'reborn' children play. The dreams take up more of his life and his 'real' life in the rooms of paradise becomes a memory. He achieves the paradise he sought by forgetting what reality was like.

In one sense, this story is merely a dramatisation of some ideas common in some Eastern religions. Or it is a Phildickian statement about the paradoxical nature of reality. But it is also a vivid experience for the reader, at first engrossed in an endless mystery, then hoping like hell that the main character will, at the end, remember what reality is really like! The finger points at the reader: what do you trust as reality?; is it, in the end, worth a damn thing?

Nupor, the cloned priest in Brian Aldiss' 'Indifference', becomes only too aware of the poverty of those ideas in which he believes most fervently. Like the main character of 'The Rooms of Paradise', Nupor is the product of a civilisation motivated by supreme self-confidence. Religion propels the energies of a universe of human beings: it only takes time to incorporate everything and every planet in God's body. Bormidoor proves to be difficult. The small group of missionaries diminishes as, one by one, each is killed by the human or natural forces of the planet. Eventually a church rises on a lonely coast - but must be moved when the huge waves inundate the coast. There don't seem to be many people on Bormidoor, but they prove particularly hard to convert. Eventually, Nupor is left by himself, a captive of duty and despair. He is unfortunate enough to see the real point of his religion - in humbly serving God the Indifferent, the servant eventually can feel nothing but indifference either. Wisdom he learns, but Nupor never quite learns the trick of being human.

The power of both these stories is derived from the device of 'seeing from the inside out' - viewpoints connected to the main character, with the action qualifying that viewpoint. All the best stories in this book are based on this device - including the very best in the book, 'Pie Row Joe', by Kevin McKay.

The viewpoint character, Joe, is refreshing because he does not indulge in megalomania. He has real power, but does not know it. He can cause fires by the power of thought. Not only can he cause fires but he loves fires. 'Big long logs, they go grey in colour, with long wavy cracks right down 'em. ...the pale yella flame is breathin' over 'em, and nothin' 'appens. 'N then, grey smoke



starts comin' out the cracks, and they start, real slow, sorta goin' black. 'N then little red glow worms starts creepin' over the surface, just like when a dry leaf starts to catch.' Joe is an artist with fire, admiring and horrified at the way wool burns: 'Kind of comes up in black bubbles, and stinks, and crawls over itself like.'

'Pie Row Joe' is the story of Joe's life and death, told by Joe, and it has a great last line. One comes to love Joe for his self-effacing quality: he has spent his whole life trying to stop himself from hurting people with his ability, and has never thought of using it to make himself rich. When he uses fire in anger, against the person he hates most, his trick traps him. You see, he chose a day of hot north wind, with a change about to burst through....

Except for the great nineteenth-century story-tellers of Australia, most of our writers have used 'ocker' language merely to denigrate the uneducated. Here, Kevin McKay writes the story as if Joe were speaking, and so creates a kind of poetry of love for life. Indeed, Joe loves life so much that he does not realise he has left it. This is so much better than all that rubbishy technological science fiction which comes out each year, all of it, to my mind, showing a hatred of life, a desire for destruction. Rooms of Paradise is worth buying for this story alone.

\* \* \*

There doesn't seem a lot more to say about this book except to mention my other favourite stories:

'Re-deem the Time', by David Lake, is another fine story about the treachery of paradise. The man in the time machine sets off, just like Wells' Time Traveller, into the future, but finds himself in a steadily receding past. No, he did not set the dial incorrectly on the time machine. Yes, the

Third World War did take place - but the few people left on the other side of the holocaust are determined not to repeat our mistakes. Lake's 'solution' has not been suggested before in a science fiction story, as far as I know - yet when you read it, you think: surely that's the only thing we can do! After all, it looks as if the technological magic carpet is going to roll itself up anyway, for lack of fuel. Why not carry out the process rationally?

'Collaborating' has its moments (and Henry Gasko describes that story better than I can), but it does not have the ferocious quality of a similar story, Brian Aldiss' Brothers of the Head, published recently in England. If I had not read Aldiss' story first, I would have liked Michael Bishop's better.

'In a Petri Dish Upstairs' I liked better than Beloved Son, to which it is a sequel... and most of the other stories are enjoyable in different ways.

Science fiction is slowly changing and improving, and Rooms of Paradise shows the most attractive features of that change. To my mind, the main thing to get rid of in science fiction is the 'gosh-wow-gee-whillikers' element of the 1940s and 1950s. It was attractive then, and still sells plenty of copies of books now. But it has nothing to do with the situation we find ourselves in at the end of the 1970s. A more sceptical approach is needed - indeed, it must be taken as an assumption that all our assumptions are faulty, and must be re-examined perpetually. The result of this scepticism is an intellectual excitement which was unknown before the mid-1950s, and can lead to some visionary science fiction. The best stories in Rooms of Paradise have the touch of scepticism, even despair, and the same stories have the brilliance to burst through assumptions and show us unsuspected territories. Let's hope there are plenty more collections of original stories edited by Lee Harding.

## 2. HENRY GASKO:

An idea that has been around the s f intelligentsia for some time is that the future of science fiction lies in more 'literary' stories, tales dealing with symbols, allegories, and experimental styles. These are the stories responsible for the mainstream's increased awareness and acceptance; they will lead science fiction out of the wilderness.

While these stories may lead to greater critical notice from the outside world, a dangerous fallacy has grown up: that an illustration of an idea, usually in an area

such as philosophy or sociology, is intrinsically better than a traditional entertainment story built around the hard-core sciences such as physics or biology.

As the stories in this anthology show, this isn't necessarily so. Both types of stories can be enjoyable and exciting with new ideas; both are more often mechanical and uninspired. Characters who were once two-dimensional All-American hero types are now replaced by puppets who jump and jerk about to illustrate the author's point. A style that



is obscure or self-indulgent is no improvement on the uninspired slogging of most of prose.

In Rooms of Paradise, most of the stories are self-consciously literate, stories with a point to get across, where the author is visible behind each word and every action. To varying degrees, these stories are all failures.

Fortunately, there are a few authors here who have chosen a third alternative: stories which deal with people rather than ideas. These are the best stories in the book. But more about them soon.

\* \* \*

The two showcase stories are Brian Aldiss' 'Indifference' and Ian Watson's title story. Both illustrate the failures of most of the volume. They are well-crafted and professional stories, but with an intellectual puzzle rather than a human emotion at their core.

The better of the two is Aldiss' story about three missionaries of a new religion establishing a church on a cold and dreary world. The central character, Nupor, is a clone who cannot get in touch with others or his own inner self (and, therefore, with the bit of God within him). Aldiss' short sentences and deliberately choppy style depict the character and his relationship with the planet very well. But, as Roger Zelazny says in his introduction, Aldiss 'sets his stage carefully' and 'times his entrances and exits to perfection'. Unfortunately, this is all too obviously true. The understanding the reader could share with Nupor's situation is not developed, and he remains a robot going through the motions programmed by Aldiss.

Ian Watson's story, 'The Rooms of Paradise', looks at the interface between the outside world and our inner reality. A man wakes after his rejuvenation to find himself in a new room each 'day', with no apparent escape from the cycle. Eventually his dreams become the reality that he expected, and the rooms fade to vaguely remembered nightmares. There is nothing new being said here, and Watson takes a very long time to say it.

\* \* \*

Easily the worst story in the book is 'A Passage in Earth', by Damien Broderick. It involves a couple of trendy pseudo-gods, a beautiful sixteen-year-old girl, and the cybernetic spaceship that manufactured her. Talking quasars, an Icelandic poet, and The Secret of the Universe all figure briefly. This story demonstrates the worst excesses of the 'New Wave'. It is glib, pretentious, self-indulgent, and boring. Even damning

criticism is more notice than the story deserves.

R A Lafferty's stories used to explode like firecrackers no matter how gingerly you approached them. In 'A Bequest of Wings', the mixture of homespun prose and outlandish ideas is present again. But the technique is well-worn and familiar. The story is missing the sparkle of the early days. I was left with the feeling that it is time for Lafferty to try something new.

Gene Wolfe's 'Our Neighbour, by David Copperfield', is also a disappointment. The story is a long homage/parody of Dickens that never gets off the ground. It seems like an artist's still-life study: an interesting exercise in style, but not something meant for public exhibition.

Another slight story is 'Re-deem the Time', by David Lake. An eccentric professor goes forward in time, only to find that society has decided to regress, and is moving steadily back towards the Stone Age. The story is written stylishly, and is momentarily amusing. But the central idea falls apart as soon as you give it a second thought, and the story is quickly forgotten.

Much more serious is 'The Savage Mouth', by Sakyo Komatsu. This is a gruesome little tale about a man who arranges a surgical machine in his home and, over a period of forty days, eats himself. Unfortunately, Jorge Luis Borges used the same idea many years ago in a story called 'In the Ruins'. This reduces the impact of the current story considerably.

There are several problems within the story as well. The surgical details and culinary preparations are graphic enough. But breaks in the narrative every few paragraphs never allow the horror to build properly. And there is an out-of-place epilogue, in which a detective explains why the man's true fate must never become public. The author starts the story as an allegorical shocker, but ends it as a social treatise.

Also very interesting is Pip Maddern's 'Ignorant of Magic', about a woman who may (or may not) be a time researcher thrown into a world of illusion by her experiments. The story is commendable for its attempt to get inside the woman's mind as she tries to discover what has happened to her.

But Maddern seems to have the idea that confusion on the narrator's part can only be conveyed by confusion and obscurity in the story's plot and descriptions. The story is open to dozens of interpretations, none of them very clear. This is probably what the author had in mind, but it is not very enlightening to a reader trying to figure out what her private vision of the world is. When Maddern learns to communicate her ideas while retaining their unique flavour, she

will be an author to watch.

'In a Petri Dish Upstairs', by George Turner, is about the interaction, after many years, of Earth's culture with the people of the orbiting space stations. The story has many faults: an expository lump that would choke a horse, a too-neat ending, and a lecturing style that is intent on making its point rather than telling a story. However, the point is a good one. The story is an excellent antidote for the many s f stories where even the aliens, let alone the humans from other planets, all behave like businessmen from Cleveland.

\* \* \*

And so (finally) to the good stuff.

Cherry Wilder's novel, The Luck of Brin's Five (reviewed in this issue of SFC), is set on Torin, a colourful, vaguely medieval world of humanoid marsupials. It describes the crash landing of a man, his adoption by a local family, and his effect on the politics of the day. The main attractions are the gentle, unhurried 'people' of Torin, and Wilder's smooth and richly detailed prose. The effect is reminiscent of Jack Vance at his best.

In 'The Falldown of Man', a troupe of dancers use the tale of the Man as the inspiration for a vastly successful play. There is no suspense here, and very little plot, but it doesn't matter. Again, the prose is excellent, and the depiction of a kinder, more closely knit people leaves the reader with a warm feeling and an eagerness for further stories in the series.

The two best stories are by Michael Bishop and Kevin McKay. The two are completely different, but both involve individuals who tell their own stories, with the author nowhere in sight.

McKay's 'Pie Row Joe' is the life and death of an Australian swagman who has the ability to start fires without matches. He uses it to amuse his mates and keep himself warm and

rarely, to hand out justice as he sees it. The story is told in a strong dialect that is pure Aussie, and each simile and metaphor is perfect for a man who has spent his life in the Outback.

Michael Bishop continues to amaze with the range and depth of his stories. 'Collaborating' is a realistic description of the problems of a man with two heads, each with its own separate personality. James and Robert Self tell how it feels, how people react to them, and the accommodations they have reached with each other. The prose is descriptive but barely noticeable, the interplay between the two is excellent, and the characters and motivations of the two are entirely believable. Especially good is the last line; it is at once revealing, logical, and completely unexpected.

Both of these are mainstream stories with an s f element. The attention is on the people rather than an idea or a gimmick. The style is chosen to suit the material, and the characters are individuals rather than generalisations. This is very difficult to do well, but the results are obviously worth the attempt.

\* \* \*

I've probably made this collection sound worse than it actually is. Three very good stories and a couple of interesting ones is at least average for an original anthology. But the overall feeling is disappointment: that such a list of names didn't produce a greater number of good stories; that only George Turner approaches Lee Harding's directive for stories about 'the impact of the future on the individual'; that of the six local authors, only Kevin McKay's story is recognisably Australian (George Turner's story is set in Melbourne, but change the place names and it could as easily be Montreal or Moscow); and most of all that the collection contains so many intellectual games and so few human beings.

- Henry Gasko December 1978

---

From Page 9.....George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA

WILD & WOOLLEY

It  
The Empathy Experiment

Another firm, Wild and Woolley, has produced a small torrent of expensive paperbacks which reflect the firm's name ideally. Few, alas, have been good books, and their two s f satires - It, by Chris Aulich, and The Empathy Experiment, by D M Foster and D K Lyall (both in 1978) - have been dreary send-ups in that specially dislikable form of New

Wavery which seems, fortunately, on the verge of expiry.

PERGAMON PRESS

Play Little Victims

More successful was Pergamon Press, with its excellently illustrated Play Little Victims (1978), by Kenneth Cook. Film-goers will remember wake in Fright (Outback), based on a Kenneth Cook novel.

Play Little Victims is a savagely funny

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 14



From Page 13.....George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA

satirical fantasy about a world dominated by mice after the demise of Man. I hope this one has reached the British and American market, because it's a bleakly comic charmer.

#### CASSELL AUSTRALIA

Cassell Australia has also dabbled in s f and children's fantasy, but its contribution can be better dealt with when authors Harding and Grigg are discussed in Part 3.

\* \* \*

It is a small enough record for 87 years, but at least a promising one. At least we are neither alone nor ignored.

#### PART 2

#### FROM FANDOM TO PROFESSIONALISM

The professional publishing scene has been largely experimental, with an expectable quota of failures, and this - let's be blunt about it - has been only partly due to lack of knowledge of the field, and mainly to the lack of local writers worth publishing.

More interesting are a group of publishers who have grown directly out of fandom and are concerned with s f only.

Before discussing them, however, it is necessary to look at the fannish upsurge which bred them.

#### Babes 'in Their Wilderness

##### Australian Science Fiction Review S F Commentary

You must know about the fans - well, about some fans - in order to make sense of what finally happened. My personal connection with fandom has always been peripheral, but nobody interested in s f would have missed the appearance, in 1966, of John Bangsund's Australian Science Fiction Review and, in 1969, Bruce Gillespie's S F Commentary. They set standards of writing, both 'fannish' and 'sercon' (if, doubtfully, I have the meanings of these words correctly), for the whole continent, and were soon recognised overseas also (with five Hugo nominations between them).

ASFR is long dead, owing to Bangsund's penchant for producing erratic magazines under

erratic titles at erratic intervals and for writing belles lettres on anything that strikes his fancy, except s f.

SFC still shows a fitful head, whenever Bruce thinks of it and, after 54 issues, the standard is higher than ever.

#### Vision of Tomorrow

One fan of this period tried to do more. The late Ron Graham (died 1979), a retired engineer and s f fan from way, way back (his collection of some 70,000 volumes was willed to the University of Sydney), decided that a new magazine was needed, and so Vision of Tomorrow was born.

The first issue of Vot, under the editorship of Phil Harbottle, was published in England in 1969, and the magazine lasted a year or so. Its content was about 50/50 English and Australian authorship, with many reprints of the stories of John Russell Fearn, for whose work Ron had a great regard.

Vot failed, partly because of distribution problems and partly through inexperience in management and editing, but it was a brave attempt and the magazines are collectors' items in Australia.

#### Enigma

At about the same time, Leith Morton (now a lecturer in Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney, but then a student on the campus) conceived Enigma as the magazine of the Sydney University SF Association, and the first number appeared in 1970. It is published regularly still.

This was possibly the first Australian amateur publication to feature regular s f by club members. Its print run, averaging 450, continues today under the editorship of Van Ikin.

Van suggests that, over the years, Stephen Hinchings and Rick Konnett have shown the kind of talent we may hear more of. Of artwork, of which Enigma features a fair quantity, he says, '...Our major contribution may be in the field of artwork, where we have introduced Dane Ikin, Nick Stathopoulos, Michael Kumashov, and... Mike McGann to the world. In time to come, this might prove to be our most valuable contribution.'

#### Yggdrasil

In 1969, David Grigg (of whom more later) instituted Yggdrasil as the magazine of the newly formed Melbourne University Science

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 15

Fiction Association. It was also David's personal magazine for a year or two.

In 1973, Yggdrasil turned more and more to publishing fiction. (Charles Taylor was the editor that year.) This trend was made official in 1974, with the institution of the club's Shaky Leaf Award for the best item of fiction published during the year.

Francis Payne usually does well in the Shaky Leaf competition, and from MUSFA he springs to mind at once as a writer of considerable promise. Perhaps, now that he has completed his degree... David (who left Melbourne University a long time ago) is, of course, already professional.

\* \* \*

Other fanzines in various centres are publishing amateur fiction and, though it would be idle to pretend that any of this has much more than rehearsal value, the evidence of interest is high and the earnestness of these young writers is heartening.

The two University clubs, however, did most to prepare the ground for what was to come.

What was to come was a one-woman storm in an inkpot, Ursula Le Guin.

### *Le Guin and After*

#### 1975 AUSTRALIAN SF WRITERS' WORKSHOP

The thumbnail historian has little chance of establishing basic causes and reasons, but I must chance my neck far enough to suggest that the detonator that blew the current Australian outburst of writing and publishing was Ursula Le Guin.

Others may say it was simply the matter of Aussiecon, with its array of overseas notables, which provided the stimulus, but my bet remains that among writers (who are a different breed from fans, though fans they may have been in the chrysalis stage), the credit will go to Ursula and her fantastic Workshop.

There were, I think, twenty young and not-so-young hopefuls present for that dynamic week in late July 1975. The workshop lasted for seven days of writing, criticising, discussing, arguing, and learning - often into the small hours of the morning - all conducted at the hysterical pace that kills, with Ursula imperturbable, understanding, firm, and quite professionally in charge.

I visited that workshop, in the hills cut-

side Melbourne, as an observer for one morning only, and Bruce Gillespie handed me a typescript headed 'The Ins and Outs of the Hadhya City State', by someone called Philippa C Maddern. By the bottom of page 2, I knew that here was the kind of talent Australian sf needed - that at least one up-and-coming writer was already born.

The enthusiasm of that workshop, carried through at breakneck - and breakmind - speed beggars description. The outcome was not only a great surge of interest among young people who wanted to write, but also a book

### The Altered I

edited by Lee Harding (Norstrilia Press; 1976; 131 pp; \$3.60) from the work done at the 'shop and including short essays by the workshopers describing their reactions and feelings. It is not like America's Clarion Workshop books of a few years earlier; it was a different experience, alive with the energy of creation. Reading it gives an extraordinarily powerful sense of the electric nature of the Le Guin classes.

Among those present were: Philippa C Maddern, Bruce Gillespie, Edward Mundie, David Grigg, Rob Gerrand, Bruce Barnes, Randal Flynn... You will meet most of them again before this article has finished.

#### THE MONASH WRITERS WORKSHOP 1977

### The View from the Edge

Eighteen months later, in 1977, a second workshop, lasting three weeks, was held in Melbourne's Monash University. Vonda McIntyre and Chris Priest were brought out to coach (or whatever word you choose for that indefinable job of 'being in charge') the first and third weeks, with myself in the middle.

It was a different type of workshop, if only because none of us was Le Guin - and certainly because our three styles had little in common. What we did was different, just as the workshop book, The View from the Edge (Norstrilia Press; 1977; 124 pp; \$3.95), which we eventually evolved, was quite different from The Altered I.

Familiar names were present - Maddern, Mundie, Flynn, Barnes - but among the unfamiliar names (although she was at the 1975 Workshop) was a Sydney lass, Petrina Smith, who raced off in a fever of enthusiasm to organise a third workshop in Sydney, which Terry Carr and I conducted in early 1979.



There was also, between whiles, a long-weekender in the hills above Adelaide, 500 miles in the other direction. That one is still going on in monthly read-and-discuss meetings.

\* \* \*

Now you know roughly what was doing and who was doing it, we can get back to the publishing scene and the writing upsurge which owes so much of its impetus to the presence of Ursula Le Guin.

### *The Rise of In-Group Publishing*

'In-Group', I think, expresses it. I mean the publishing of s f by fans who are not attached to a publishing house but are issuing and distributing original work on a professional basis. Theirs are quite literally private publishing houses which exist within the s f structure. I propose to deal with four of them.

#### VOID PUBLICATIONS

Void

Envisaged Worlds

Other Worlds

Alien Worlds

After the demise of Vision of Tomorrow, it was not to be expected that there would be much enthusiasm for regular magazine publication in a country with a population too small to support such a specialised venture. But there was enthusiasm. Not one magazine appeared, but three.

The first of these, Void, launched its first issue to coincide with Aussiecon, the World Convention held in Melbourne in August,

1975. Its editor, Paul Collins, seems to have managed everything singlehanded except the actual writing and illustrating.

And we all said, 'Paul, it's awful; the stories are bad, the editing is bad, the presentation is bad, and you'll go broke.'

Well, we were half right - all of these things were bad, but they improved with practice and Paul didn't go broke (I suspect it was a narrow squeeze at times). He even managed to persuade the Australia Council Literature Board into giving a little cash to help out with costs. He has published stories by Wynne Whiteford, Bert Chandler, Lee Harding, Van Ikin, Frank Bryning, David Grigg, Rob Gerrand, Jack Wodhams, Bruce Barnes, John Alderson, David Lake, and many others. (The eagle-eyed will have spotted some workshop names there.) He specialised in short stories and paid 2¢ to 4¢ a word.

Void lasted five issues. And collapsed? Not on your nelly! Paul simply shifted gears and went into hardcover publishing.

He had his little stable of dependable authors who could provide the stories he wanted and a readership who liked them - and that, after all's said, is the name of the game, isn't it?

So he published Envisaged Worlds (Void Publications; 1978; 233 pp; \$9.95), a jumbo-sized collection of original Australian s f.

He came out of the experience with a sufficiently whole skin to put together Other Worlds (Void Publications; 248 pp; 1978; \$9.95), this one partly financed by the late Ron Graham.

When I spoke to him to get the material for this section, he was on the point of publishing Alien Worlds (Void Publications; 1979; 252 pp; \$12.95).

\* \* \*

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 20

#### THE MAN WHO FILLED THE VOID

Bruce Gillespie discusses

Envisaged Worlds

Other Worlds

Alien Worlds

Void Publications; 1978; 233 pp; \$9.95    1978; 248 pp; \$9.95    1979; 252 pp; \$12.95

edited by Paul Collins

What can I, a mere fanzine editor, write about the collections of short stories edited and published by Paul Collins? Whatever I

write, I cannot help thinking that they have been a financial success as almost no other venture in Australian science fiction has



been. (George Turner's Beloved Son is the exception to almost any general statements about Australian s f.) It does not matter what I think about Envisaged worlds, Other worlds, and Alien Worlds. A lot of people liked each succeeding collection well enough to buy the next one. Even the Literature Board of the Australia Council supports them! (Yes, you can hear a definite note of jealousy.) By sheer hard work and persistence, Paul has guaranteed better distribution for his books than most regular distributors provide for small publishers. In these books is a spark which gets brighter each year.

But none of these considerations has anything to do with reviewing books. Even while I know that lots of other people liked Envisaged worlds and Other Worlds, I know also that most of the stories in them were awful or unreadable. And I would not have bothered to review them if I had not been so surprised by the improvement of the stories in Alien Worlds.

\* \* \*

Envisaged Worlds had an awkward name, but Michael Payne's cover was arresting. Cynical observers around Melbourne expected it to sink without trace. Most people I talked to said there were no good stories in it. I found two I liked - sort of. They were 'And Eve Was Drawn from the Rib of Adam', with which Van Ikin won a short story prize in 1976. I liked it mainly for its accumulation of suspenseful hints, rather than for its revelation. Nothing really exciting there in the end. Bruce Barnes' 'A Matter of Pushing the Right Buttons' shows some of the qualities which emerged far more clearly in his story in The View from the Edge. To judge from his published fiction so far, Bruce knows what commercial fiction is about - and slick, vivid commercial fiction is what he is trying to write.

And even 'pop. fic.' has its minimum standards. Most of these standards are absent from most of these stories. Still, they were beginners, most of them. After reading Envisaged Worlds, I wondered whether Paul could bring out the best in these beginners.

\* \* \*

What progress could be found in Other Worlds? Very little, I thought. The best story was hardly science fiction at all: a tale by Margaret Flanagan Eicher called 'Death and the King', a magic fable with all the conciseness of form and clarity of perception missing from the other stories. Was Ms Eicher a pen-name for somebody more experienced? If not, I hope Paul can gain more stories from

this interesting writer.

The most experienced writer in Other Worlds was, of course, A Bertram Chandler. I enjoyed 'Grimes Among the Gourmets' a lot, but I never escape the feeling that Bert Chandler can toss off a Grimes story any day of the week just by dipping into the ample store of experiences from his own lifetime. 'Gourmets' gains a lot of fun from Bert's knowledge of food and his acute awareness of cultural differences.

But 'Grimes Among the Gourmets' has no extra dimension to it - that exciting experience felt by the reader when an author has something new and exciting to offer. Several authors in this collection had this quality to offer - but bungled the job of offering it.

Of all the stories in Other Worlds, Jack Wodhams' 'Jade Elm' stays in the mind most clearly. It is a simple enough story, showing existence as seen by a jade elm. Or, more precisely, the antics of people as seen by an interested, but not completely sympathetic observer. 'Jade Elm' becomes a story when the tree feels that at least some people have declared war on it as well as on each other. The elm decides to retaliate as best it can. And Nature has the last laugh.

This should have been a great story, and it is not. 'Jade Elm' should have had the same direct, incontrovertible style as Margaret Flanagan Eicher showed in her story. Instead, Jack Wodhams writes paragraphs like:

Human creatures were very interesting. There were so many who were not sub-consciously aware of me. These seemed unaffected by any ambience I might project... But others were more sensitive, and these could recompense me my benignity, albeit I suppose unwittingly, by revealing to me ever finer shades of human behaviour patterns.

This just won't work. I can accept, for the length of a story, a tree which can think. I cannot accept a tree which thinks using terms such as 'subconscious', 'ambience', and 'human behaviour patterns'. These are treacly, mind-numbing cliches, even in day-to-day conversation among people. A tree which talks this way is just a bore! In other words, Wodhams takes 17 pages to tell a tale which could have been told much better in 5. He's added so many extra words which mean little, and hold up the story.

So what does Paul Collins do when he receives a story like this? Probably he likes the story, would like it changed or shortened, but knows Jack's reputation for being prickly about revising stories for publication, and he runs it anyway. Paul provides the only regular market in Australia - but he cannot afford to pay top rates, so he lacks a means of persuading authors to raise their own standards. So how could follow-



ing collections be an improvement on Other Worlds?

\* \* \*

when the partners of Norstrilia Press hired an IBM Composer and went into the typesetting business, we needed some guarantees of business apart from setting Moon in the Ground for ourselves. Paul gave us the job of setting and laying out Alien Worlds, and we were in business. Or rather, I was in business: for more than two months I laboured away at Alien Worlds, watching a job that I thought would be 80,000 words stretch ever onward until it was more than 120,000 words. It's a long, long book.

As I've said, I did not enjoy Envisaged Worlds or Other Worlds very much. I groaned as I struggled through the first few stories of Alien Worlds. Whatever you do, don't read 'The Stage is Set', by Lynette Godfrey. Very few published stories have ever shown such a complete lack of knowledge of the structure of a story. And Alan Carr's 'The Horizontal Player' is not much better. Its structure is perhaps quite sound, but you cannot discover this under all the hysterical, overblown, meaningless words which are thrown around. A sort of Harlan Ellison style which is worse than Ellison's, if possible. The other story to avoid is Kendall Evans' 'Capsule of Infinity'. I cannot remember much about it, except that it is uninspired.

So there I was typesetting, and they were the first stories set. For awhile I gave up hope of enjoying the rest.

But Wynne Whiteford's 'Transition' was okay. But Wynne always writes readable stories, I said to myself, and I would expect a story of at least that standard.

And what's this? Another of Paul's regulars? (A Bertram Chandler). Four excerpts from a new novel?

At that point, I became interested in Alien Worlds. Also, I would like to read all of Matilda's Stepchildren when it appears from Hale later in the year. To judge from the four excerpts, the novel tells of Grimes' adventures on a planet whose rulers provide rough entertainments for tourists who enjoy sadism and voyeurism. Grimes and his companions are captured and forced to take part in games where - so to speak - both Christians and lions are killed in the end. Chandler shows how well he can write genuinely exciting adventure fiction, a rare achievement even in the s f field, whose bread and butter is escapist adventure. Grimes tries to buck the deadly system, but finds himself in an even worse spot; forced to give a star performance as torturer of his own companions. Another hairbreadth escape here, well told.

The final section reads like an intact short story; again, it is adventure fiction made convincing because Chandler shows how people really act in dangerous situations. (A further recommendation: Don Wollheim rejected Matilda's Stepchildren as too 'pornographic' for his readers. What can be too pornographic for the publisher of John Norman's Gor books?)

It's fortunate for Paul Collins that Bert Chandler's pieces are good, since they take up 35 pages of the middle of the book. The only other very long piece is 'One Clay Foot', by Jack Wodhams: not only the best story in the book, but will probably be the best piece of s f short fiction for 1979.

In the introduction to 'One Clay Foot', Jack Wodhams says, 'This story was inspired, if that is the word, by the film, Star Wars... A culminating pain of this experience was a so-called "space" battle, which engaged "space" craft in typical World War II fighter-plane duelling, complete with sound effects. ...Speculating upon the possibility of a reality in space combat, we rather might assume that opponents at best may be hundreds of kilometres apart, and that their tactics towards mutual destruction should rely heavily upon symbiosis between man, computer, and highly sophisticated weaponry.'

It's simple enough to state that as an aim. I can think of any number of ways by which any number of science fiction writers could have written immensely dull melodramas based on this idea. To write a real story about a space war and make it convincing needs some skill even in the planning - which is perhaps why Star Wars evaded the problem and settled for fighter pilot whizzbangs.

Indeed, it is fascinating to watch the way in which Jack Wodhams tackles his enterprise. He does not shirk the problem of explanations. His story-teller has just joined the squadron and he tells us carefully what his task is. He takes it seriously, and 'practises' simulated battles at a computer terminal. Not that there is any difference between simulated battles and real battles, except that somebody usually dies at the end of a real battle. Out in space, the opposing craft are so far apart that they cannot see each other. Kills and flight paths are plotted on the computer screen: that is the only way of 'seeing' what is going on. There is one effective scene where the main character becomes so involved in his simulated battle that the reader cannot quite tell whether it is 'really' happening or not.

Meticulous electronic records are kept of each manoeuvre of each battle. Most battles take place within the high upper atmosphere of planets which are the pawns in the game, so the records show as complex patterns of trajectories and orbits. If you get through



a battle, you can take time later to view it as an intellectual game. Some fighting men, like the Commander, become so blase that they regard their profession as a series of games - until the end.

I've made this material sound fairly dry, and some readers might not be too interested. Jack Wodhams describes it all in fascinating detail, and meanwhile introduces the real theme of his story. He is not really interested in the question: what would a real space battle be like? He is interested in the question: what kind of experience would be undergone by a fighting man in such a battle? Jack's conclusion is that such an experience might not be too different from fighting in any other sort of battle: that the real enemies could be your own companions.

To say more about the plot would be to anticipate the story's ending. Commander Beeschopf Praze will be remembered as one of the great characters from science fiction, a character so individual as well as awful that we can never quite decide whether he deserves his comeuppance.

'One Clay Foot' is so engrossing that not until finishing the story did I think to ask: who was the enemy, anyway; was it human or not?

\* \* \*

The presence of 'One Clay Foot' would be enough to give distinction to any collection of new short stories. Alien Worlds does not stop there, however.

Cherry Wilder's contribution, 'Odd Man Search', is the beginning of a forthcoming novel, but it is a sufficiently haunting piece on its own. California has disappeared in a haze of radioactive dust. Out in the New Mexican desert, a small number of strange survivors live in a disused laboratory. The main character sees himself as an outsider in the settlement, although it is only late in the story that the others treat him this way because he is a robot, not a human. But it was only because he was a robot that he survived at all. He is also well built for searching in the desert for other possible survivors of the catastrophe. He finds some - and they shanghai him and steal his vehicle. Again, he will survive because his anatomy is metal. However, he has found out enough about himself and other people to give him a feeling of humanity. The story is told from the viewpoint of somebody who does not quite know what is going on (although we do) and reminds me rather of Fritz Leiber's award-winning stories, 'Ship of Shadows' and 'Gonna Roll the Bones'.

At about this point when I was typesetting, I realised that Paul Collins had passed an

important hurdle with Alien Worlds: now well-known Australian writers are sending him stories which they could have sold in US or English markets. So Paul's regulars are improving at the same time as he is attracting such writers as David Lake and Cherry Wilder. There is an air of self-confident professionalism about these stories which was so obviously missing in the first two volumes.

\* \* \*

Paul has always published a few stories by non-Australian writers. Darrell Schweitzer's work has never impressed me before now, but his 'Into the Dark Land' is my second favourite story in Alien Worlds. It begins as a conventional sword-and-sorcery yarn, with the hero trying to save the kingdom and all that. But he can achieve his goal only by riding into the Land of Death itself. Comparisons with Le Guin's The Farthest Shore are inevitable. Darrell chooses quite new images for his death landscape, and I found them original and chilling. The ending of the story is great.

From Canada comes Terry Green (whose reviews appear in SFC and Supersonic Snail). As far as I can remember, my correspondence with Terry began when we found we were both Phil Dick fans. In 'Japanese Tea', Terry has written a rarity: a story which pays tribute to another writer (ie, Dick), but has its own viewpoint. There's no way of recalling the spirit of Phil Dick's fiction without inducing a feeling of real terror as well. Terry chooses the tertiary educational system as a fit stage for a terror story.

\* \* \*

And, as usually happens when talking about anthologies, I'm left with quite a few stories which I liked a lot, but which I can hardly summarise quickly without doing them an injustice. Briefly:

David King, from Western Australia, is still eighteen years old, but his 'Skyworld' shows a consistency of form and originality of main image that many other writers would envy. A story with a good sting-in-the-tail.

Rob Gerrard's 'Scenes from a Marriage' would have been much better if Rob had not adopted a style already worn to threads by Malzberg and Silverberg. This style - present tense, exterior description - places the reader so out of sympathy with the characters that it seems as if Rob is jeering at them. Instead, he's really writing a modest little joke, which should have been more effective.

'Within the Soul Lies Waking' is not the best Van Ikin story I've read, but it is the



most concise. Van still appears to believe that a writer can make a reader feel particular emotions simply by using emotional words. A bit of understatement could have helped this story a lot.

'Who Killed Cock Robin?', by David Lake, is well-written, but a bit dull if you guess the ending. Even if you do, it's a nice romp of an adventure story.

And lots of people I've spoken to enjoy John Clark's 'Chocolate Sundae Heist'. In one way, it's just a joky anecdote. But if you catch the Queensland references, it

becomes irresistible. (John is another veteran of the 1975 Workshop.)

\* \* \*

Writing about this book becomes nearly as long-winded as typesetting it. It's enough to say that Paul Collins (and Rowena Cory, since I'm never quite sure how much she is directly involved in the editing) now has a regular winner on his hands. Let's hope the Worlds series becomes the basis of a real Australian s f industry.

---

From Page 16.....George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA

So it can be done. It's a shoestring effort and probably a brutally demanding one, but local writers are being published and paid, and local artists - notably Michael Payne and Stephen Campbell - are providing the illustrations and jackets.

There is much disagreement about the quality of the stories and some less-than-gentlemanly critical infighting but, while there can be no doubt that in some areas Paul has more enthusiasm than expertise, the thing is being done. He tells me profitable results are beginning to show, so the end is not yet.

PETER KNOX

#### Boggle

As if it were not enough that one starry-eyed innocent should brave the dreaded Australian magazine trade, another stuck his hopeful head out in Sydney. In 1977, Peter Knox flung caution and common sense to the winds and produced the first issue of Boggle. If, like me, you find the title a mite disconcerting, rest assured that there are people who like it and race to the defence at the faintest hint of criticism.

Peter's writers were drawn from much the same list as Paul's, with a few fresh names. He also applied for Literature Board assistance, but did not get it, so his publication has been entirely self-financed. The man just has to be a closet-millionaire, out of his mind, or a Dedicated Fan Doing His Bit For Science Fiction. I think it's the last because, in spite of setbacks and disappointments, he is still producing.

The original plan for four issues a year failed, as such plans do in the most professionally backed and funded organisations; to date, only three issues have appeared, but a fourth is on the way.

Let me quote from Peter's answer to my request for details:

When I took it (No 4) to my usual printer for a quote (on a much larger issue) I was thrown figures like \$1000. After much dealing with Fate, I found myself the proud owner of a secondhand offset printing machine. (Logic: I bought it for \$1000.) The bloody thing was more trouble than it was worth, and it died of natural causes a few months later with the issue still unfinished. Fate stepped in again (the Jester) and I found myself the proud owner of a brand new printing machine and a printing business... I still own the printing machine, the business is defunct, and I'm trying desperately to finish printing Boggle from my laundry at home. I'm a dill, but I believe in this bloody thing! There will be future issues.

The mind Boggles.

Here is a further quotation on Peter's policy and aims which, unless I'm badly off beam, pretty well represents Paul Collins' experience and ideas as well:

Boggle is subtitled 'A Forum for the Development of Australasian Science Fiction Writing', and is here to help the unknowns in the field. I've been in lots of trouble with some of the s f critics for what they term my 'publication at any price' policy, but I firmly believe there is an Australian writing scene to be uncovered. Rough as guts at the moment... but here just the same... I'll be the first to admit that my contributors have a long way to go. Nobody was willing to start a magazine because the standard of writing wasn't up to publication... It may be some time before Boggle can boast world-standard content, but at least it's bought a ticket, and without one there's no hope of winning the lottery (old Australian folk tale).

\* \* \*

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 21



As a critic, I prefer to say nothing of Boggle or Void Publications' anthologies, but please bear in mind that they are selling, that there are people who like the stories, that local writers are finding a market, that experience is improving both the editors and their product - and that we critics may find that, in the long run, we are talking only to other critics, while readership swallows its placebos regardless. One can only wish success to those who operate in the teeth of the gale.

VAN IKIN

Science Fiction: A Review of  
Speculative Literature

The third magazine is a very different kettle of fish. It is not dedicated to publication of fiction - though some appears - but to the discussion of science fiction. Appropriately, it is called Science Fiction: A Review of Speculative Literature, and is published and edited by Van Ikin of the English Department at the University of Sydney, and aims high.

Please don't say, 'Ho hum, another bloody Eng. Lit. academic at our throats, waving his degree and quoting Averrrhocs.' It isn't so; it is not a University publication. The magazine has been wholly financed by Van Ikin with, as he says, 'the help of an occasional advertisement'. Though its bias is literary, its tone is determinedly on the side of common sense and intelligibility. Van's own writing of s f no doubt helps keep his perspectives on line.

Vol 1, No 1 appeared in June, 1977, and publication has been inevitably spasmodic, with No 3 to hand in 1979 and No 4 promised in quick time. Since Van was editing the SUSFA magazine, Enigma, writing a degree thesis, producing fiction and articles, and getting married throughout this period, one may not only forgive, but express some awe at his managing it at all.

The latest issue runs to 154 pages, is priced at \$1.70 (about 95p at present exchange), contains an author-interview, verse by Bob Beale and Roger Zelazny (snared, no doubt, while he was in Australia last year), art work by Van's brother, Dane Ikin, some solid reviewing, an editorial and a letter section, two fiction items (one by opposition editor Peter Knox!), and Terry Dowling's 28,000-word (I kid you not) article on Jack Vance. The article is illustrated with a portfolio of Vanciful creatures by Geoff Pollard. This piece, 'The Art of Xenography',

has been sold to a US publisher for a book of essays on Vance, so the tentacles are reaching out.

Van tells me the next print run will be 1000 copies. Good! He also says there will be at least three more issues in 1979. I don't believe a word of that; I only hope to be proved wrong.

This is a professional product. It took either courage or touching faith to start it in a country whose 'establishment' is not anti-s f, but very wary of it. It deserves success.

NORSTRILIA PRESS

Philip K Dick: Electric Shepherd  
The Altered I  
The View from the Edge  
Moon in the Ground

Now for the finest flower of our professional fandom:

Norstrilia Press is owned and operated by long-time fans Carey Handfield, Rob Gerrand, and Bruce Gillespie, and is named in genuflexion to Cordwainer Smith.

Norstrilia Press arose at least partly through Bruce Gillespie's desire to collate the best articles from SFC for a wider public and, presumably, a historically minded fan-posterity. From the beginning, Carey Handfield has run the actual production and distribution side of the business. Rob Gerrand became a partner in 1977.

The intention seems to have suffered a sea change, though it surfaces occasionally in conversation, but the first publication, Philip K Dick: Electric Shepherd (1975; 106 pp; \$6), was indeed lifted from the pages of SFC. It was decked out with a bibliography, an index, an introduction by Roger Zelazny, and an intriguingly eerie wraparound cover executed by the talented Irene Pagram. The articles included three of Bruce's own reverent salaams to his favourite author (and why not?), together with Stanislaw Lem's ill-tempered and, I think, ill-advised attack on western s f which Bruce appears to have permitted because Philip Dick alone was excepted from universal excoriation.

To prevent the book becoming simply a Dick-is-marvellous festival, Bruce needed a scurpuss to spit in the idol's eye, so I was unerringly selected to write the most unpopular essay in the volume. I always get these icon-busting, villain-in-chief roles and, to tell the truth, I rather enjoy them.

At any rate, Norstrilia Press' first book

was a critical success and fully competent in design and production.

Bruce's plans for immortalising SFC were thrust aside by the eruption of Ursula Le Guin onto the local scene in that same year, by the wild success of her workshop, and by the decision to produce the workshop book, The Altered I. The book was a success with readers and critics, and rights were sold to Berkley Books (USA) for a sum that paid off the company's creditors and left money in hand for the next production.

This was The View from the Edge which, limited so far to Australian distribution only, has not yet paid for itself. Efforts to find distribution outlets in England and America have been unproductive, but the partners are not downhearted. They are already busy with a novel, Moon in the Ground (reviewed in this issue of SFC), by Keith Antill, and my literary antennae are aquiver to reports that it is a high-quality book.

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 28

---

From Norstrilia Press, I expect no less.

I believe there is also another novel in the offing, but everybody is being tight-lipped about it.

\* \* \*

The b's money, if it can get itself backed by s f expertise, has the best chance of making publishing history here, but it is my hope that Norstrilia Press, which has the s f expertise but not yet the money, will whip the prize from under the older-established noses who deserve to lose it because they won't bother to learn the trade.

Rob Gerrand is also compiling and editing an anthology of original Australian s f, Transmutations, which will be published in collaboration with (ie, financed by) another local firm, Outback Press.

\* \* \*

#### BY OUR FRUITS...

Bruce Gillespie  
discusses

*The View From the Edge:*  
*A Workshop of Science Fiction Stories*  
edited by George Turner  
(Norstrilia Press; 1977; 124 pp; \$4)

I suppose that what I fear most in the world (apart from physical dangers, of course) is the act of sitting down in front of a typewriter, with a blank piece of paper in it, and attempting to write a piece of prose fiction.

So constant has been this fear in my life that I've written no more than four or five stories during the last fifteen years - and two of these were written at a writers' workshop.

Why the fear? Why not a similar fear of writing reviews or factual articles, which is one of the many ways I have earned my living during recent years? A simple difference,

really. By the time I get around to writing an article, it has already written itself in my head. All the real decisions about the form and style of the article are decided by the nature of the material being researched. All the hard work is in the research, which is easy, even if endlessly time-consuming.

Comes writing fiction - search your notes: nothing. No material to work with! All the decisions yet to be made.

No, that's not right. There is a huge area of material which is waiting to be 'written up'. It's the inside of one's own mind. The contents of the subconscious, as some would say. But that area is limitless... or is



there, perhaps, nothing there? You reach the brink of the cliff which looks out over the territory of complete uncertainty, one's own mind - and look for a path; any path. No more difficult or frightening task in the world.

And that is why I've tried writing fiction only when I've had some certainty about which path to follow.

\* \* \*

But somehow things are different at a Writers' Workshop. I've been to only one - the 1975 Workshop ('the Le Guin Workshop', as George Turner calls it). It was one of the very greatest weeks in my life - perhaps the greatest. I've written already about that experience (in SFC 44/45), and of course you can read lots more from all the participants in The Altered I. What I remember most now is that amazing experience of conquering, for a week at least, the great fear of writing fiction. There's the simple fact that everybody around is sitting, typing, for hour after hour. You try for an idea, and try for an idea, then give up for awhile, then... the story begins. You have no guarantee that you can go from one sentence to another. Yet the sentences keep following, and you can see the end of the story, and then it is finished. It's one o'clock in the morning and you might have time to

finish the second draft in time to get some sleep before the discussion sessions begin the next morning. And you keep wondering at the ideas floating around you, how everybody is feeding ideas to everybody else without much being said. Telepathy? 'Togetherness'? Or just a process as mysterious as the most mysterious process of all - writing?

\* \* \*

One product of my fear of writing has been my enthusiasm for becoming involved in almost every other process of transferring pieces of fiction from the hand of the writer to the hand of the book-buyer. In 1975, Carey Handfield and I formed Norstrilia Press, and Rob Gerrand joined us in 1977, after already lending us a considerable amount of money to continue operations. The whole process went a stage further at the end of 1978. Norstrilia Press hired an IBM Composer, and I began typesetting our fourth book, Moon in the Ground (more on that later). There have been changes in direction, and I can't say I've approved of all of them. I would have liked to continue the 'Best of SFC' series; but The Altered I just had to be published in the way it has been. (It has been our only financial success so far.)

The oddity among our four books published

so far has been The View from the Edge, based on the 1977 Monash Writers' Workshop. I can discuss the book with some dispassion, since I had nothing to do with it until I received a copy, even though it bears the imprint of the company of which I am a partner. I could see no economic justification for publishing it (and so far it has been a financial disaster), and I would have preferred to get on with something new, rather than attempt to repeat the success of The Altered I.

It is plain when reading The View from the Edge that George Turner had no intention of following the footsteps of anyone, not even Lee Harding and Ursula Le Guin. Given the task of editing a 'second Workshop book', George tried to put into effect some ideas about workshops which were different from those shown in The Altered I.

I don't know whether he succeeded or not. As I've said, I've always felt distanced from The View from the Edge. Carey Handfield handled all the processes of publication, raised the money, and worked with George when needed. The cover is splendid, but not inviting. The print inside is small and perhaps offputting to many people. The book contains no 'big names' except those of the writers-in-residence, Christopher Priest, Vonda McIntyre, and George Turner himself. There must have been many potential buyers who found the book forbidding and put it back on the shelf.

But all these things are beside the point. In his editing of The View from the Edge, George has tried to come to some conclusions about the craft of fiction itself. If the reader sees some of these points while reading the book, then George's aims will have been put into effect, and the book will be a success anyway.

I have heard some people dispute the way in which George has interpolated his comments among the stories which were written during the workshop. First there's a story; then George's comment. Another story; another comment. And three general articles, one each from Priest, McIntyre, and Turner. Some have found it disconcerting to read a story which has been thoroughly enjoyed - only to find that George has pinpointed exactly what is wrong with it. I have the opposite problem: after reading a story like Pip Maddern's 'Ignorant of Magic', which I find quite incomprehensible, even in the revised version in Rooms of Paradise, George shows that he knows just what it is all about. And I scratch my head, go back to the story, and find I still can't make head or tail of it.

But again, this misses the point. George aims to cover a host of problems about writing. Usually these are problems which hit beginner writers most severely. If a beginner never solves these problems, he or she will never



get very far. But if the beginner tries to 'write by the rules', no stories will ever be produced. The only solution is to show what has gone right in each story, and what has gone wrong.

Take a story like D W Walker's 'Rat Stew'. It is a mystery story: the main character has been hired to do research in the microbiology of proteins, but he has not been told the aim of the research. The head of the laboratory controls the researchers by an eccentric form of divide-and-rule, and strange things seem to happen to researchers once they have completed a two-year stint. The only key might be provided by the wife of the laboratory head. And when all is revealed at the end, you scratch your head and say... is that all there is? When I finished reading the story, I could not pinpoint just what had gone wrong. I read George's note at the end of the story, showing me just what was right and wrong about 'Rat Stew'. And I could see that Walker could well become a very good writer indeed.

\* \* \*

The real problem with marketing The View from the Edge is that most of its potential buyers would not give a stuff about learning to write, or divining the ins and outs of each story. They would just like to read a collection of good stories. Since there are few 'big names', there is little to guarantee this experience. A pity, because there are some fine stories here, which do not even need George's notes.

My favourite story is Pip Maddern's 'Silence'. It may be objected that Pip is following a furrow already ploughed by Ursula Le Guin and Vonda McIntyre. (You might call it 'anthropological science fiction'.) Well, so are any number of writers in USA and England, and they are not doing it very well. The essence of writing such a story is to see things from the viewpoint of the alien, which means really taking the imagination for a long, hard hike. In Pip's story, the aliens fear noise more than anything else. (On a clear night, they can even hear radio waves emitted by the stars.) The humans come to their planet in search of plunder - what else? They find a way to steal the 'treasure', but destroy it in doing so. And they fail simply because they have no imagination for perceiving an alien viewpoint. One of the very best s f stories for 1977.

My other favourite is Bruce Barnes' 'The Two Body Problem', which is a detective mystery rather than the kind of mystery raised by Pip Maddern. To tell you much about it is to give away too much. George describes the difficulties in bringing this story into being. It was worth the trouble.

Several people have made much of the fact that Sharon Goodman was only sixteen at the time of the 1977 Monash Workshop. (Which means she is eighteen or nineteen now, about the age when Isaac Asimov began selling stories.) Nothing has been heard of her since that Workshop, and that seems a pity. 'Day Dreamer' is an extraordinary story to come from anybody, and few successful writers are so good at sixteen. A girl has gifts of precognition; Sharon shows what this would actually be like for the girl and the people who are responsible for her. Nothing melodramatic at all; no breakthroughs in human possibilities. Just a lot of puzzled, hurt people. This is a type of science fiction which I admire a lot. It's not like the science fiction of Pip Maddern, most of whose stories have involved startling conceptual leaps. Instead, Sharon asks: What would it really be like if...? This takes imagination of a different kind. Perhaps the best s f combines both kinds in the right proportions.

But now I'm starting to pontificate about the nature of writing and of science fiction. Perhaps George Turner does too much of that as well in this book. But George always has something worthwhile to say.

\* \* \*

Having gone back to The View from the Edge with some scepticism, I leave it with enthusiasm. Not as much as I have for The Altered I - but that will always be the problem of this book: it cannot escape being the second in a series. My enthusiasm is for the Workshop, most of all. They managed to get over the fear of flying that I have still. Best of all, some of them have gone on to further writing (titles of which are mentioned in George's main article in this issue of SFC). Even the people we haven't heard from since, such as Sharon Goodman and Malcolm English, could yet re-emerge.

And the articles by George, Chris, and Vonda help to put a lot of things into perspective. One paragraph, written by Christopher Priest, can be particularly helpful in keeping people like me writing:

...All the best fiction is an expression in one form or another of the unconscious or subconscious mind. When writing fiction one should therefore allow the submind a freer rein than one would allow it in other matters. Everything I said during the workshop was, to some extent, a variation of this.

But the subconscious is only the real total of everything a writer is. So the message is: be everything that you really are. Which is a difficult task.

And that is where I started, so I had better finish.



## TOO MUCH POWER FOR THE IMPOTENT

Bruce Gillespie discusses:

*Moon in the Ground*

by Keith Antill

(Norstrilia Press; 1979; 220 pp; \$11.95)

During the last few months, I have read *Moon in the Ground* at least five times, mainly in the process of typesetting and publishing it. The following is unique, I suspect: a long essay by the publisher of a book explaining why he (and the other partners of Norstrilia Press) believe in the book sufficiently to risk a small fortune on it. A true believer's document? Of course - but also the result of considerable examination of the text of *Moon in the Ground* to find out just how and why it is a fine novel:

*Moon in the Ground* is basically a mystery story. What is Pandora? What does she want? What does she offer humanity - evil or good, or something unknown in previous human experience?

The aboriginal tribes who lived around Alice Springs called it a 'moon baby' or 'moon in the ground', an object with magic powers. At the beginning of the novel, Sam Caporn sees it as a 'huge silver disc set in the bare earth'. American surveyors found it and decided that it had an extraterrestrial origin. The US Government incorporated it into its network of bases near Alice Springs, and Caporn is head of the team studying the object. At the beginning of the novel, it has done nothing and revealed nothing.

'Pandora' is the nickname given to the mysterious object - and it proves to be apt. All attempts to 'arouse' Pandora have failed so far. From his reading of the aboriginal legend and by putting 2 and 2 together to make 5, Caporn tries an experiment which activates Pandora. In doing so, he establishes that intimacy of contact with Pandora which continues to be important throughout the novel.

The strange object will communicate only with beings who are technologically advanced to the point that they can keep artificial lighting directed at it for longer than a natural cycle of day and night. Pandora has decided that these are people worth talking to. But are they?

Consider the scene: 14 Shed at 'Churinga Rift, US weather station, in the middle of nowhere'. In the middle is a large metal object which begins to play colours around it. '...The shaft or cylinder began to rise an inch at a time. The whole surface seemed to glow... as it emerged from the earth, ceasing only when twelve feet of its unknown length stood exposed. The disc top lifted a few inches and it too halted.'

Responsible for making contact with Pandora are the scientists, Sam Caporn, Imre Szep, and Hugo Mottram. A group of technicians stay on watch at all times. Military personnel buzz around the establishment. They include General Briggs, who is in charge of the station, and Captain Mayhew, who is in charge during the many periods when Briggs is away. But watching over them all is the CIA, in the person of Clifford Toglund. And who knows who might be watching him? All are Americans, all strangers in this strangest of lands, Australia. Fear washes around them like an ocean: fear of the Australians, who might find out what is really going on here; fear of the Communist enemy, who might be here in any one of a number of disguises; and, increasingly, fear of Pandora and of each other.

The whole book is deliberately theatrical, with Pandora centre-stage, and various groups of characters moved onstage or offstage. This device gives a remarkable density to the action. The book comes close to obeying the unities of time and place, and the reader must stay and chew his fingernails (or laugh heartily) while watching events unfold. At all times, the reader is at the centre of the stage as well, and is swept along by the current of happenings and emotions in the book.

As readers, we find ourselves as puzzled as the characters to sort out those central questions I mentioned. Who is Pandora? Once 'she' (and the characters so soon begin calling her 'she' that the reader does so too) wakes up, Caporn rigs up a teletype device to feed in signals. But so far Pandora has no vocabulary with which to answer. Caporn carries a dictionary towards the object - which stretches out a proboscoid arm to take the book. At the same time, Caporn feels a powerful emotional reaction, of being 'ingested' or 'drawn in'. He feels also that Pandora projects power, that a link, perhaps telepathic, has been established between him and her. He scuttles away from Pandora, and finds that there is a 'circle of influence' around her.

While Pandora is teaching herself to read, playing out vocabulary on the teletype, both Mottram and Szep sneak in at different times to test the power of the circle of influence. Mottram realises quickly that it can be activated only by offering Pandora a gift. When she receives the gift, she perpetrates very strange effects on the givers.

The base's medico, Dr Bianchi, comes to regard those influenced by Pandora as mad. He even plans to write a paper for a medical journal on 'Bianchi's syndrome'. But he is puzzled that Pandora evokes such different reactions from her various 'victims' - intense love from one, the worship of a religious acolyte from another. For awhile, Caporn thinks he is on the brink of turning into a 'superman'.

Pandora yields little information to her questioners, but this is mainly the fault of the questioners. But they are not at fault because of stupidity or cupidity, but because of basic limitations inherent in being human. Their greatest weaknesses arise from their greatest strengths. Caporn will not test out Pandora fully because he is afraid of showing her how stupid and evil humanity is. (For that reason, he opposes feeding her the Encyclopaedia Britannica.) At the same time, he hopes to gain from Pandora 'citadels of new knowledge with its promise of himself - indeed, of all mankind - raised to superhuman levels'. Mottram is afflicted by the love which Pandora stirs in him, unrequited love. He cannot bring himself to speak directly to her. (As it turns out, direct speech to Pandora is one of the signals for which she waits in vain throughout the novel.) Each character refuses to be true to himself, and so makes little headway in gaining the knowledge which is his real quest.

To the military and the CIA, Pandora is nothing more than a dangerous brain-scrambler. Worse, it makes its 'victims' speak of love and brotherhood; so Toglund fears it is an 'interplanetary Communist' - the worst insult

he can think of. Mayhew and Toglund become involved when Caporn, Mottram, and Szep are 'incapacitated'. They try to question Pandora through the teletype link, but receive answers which make little sense to them. Pandora has been asked what her purpose is. She answers, 'If you do not know, what do you want?' During most of the novel, this statement stops all the characters finding out what they most want to know.

Pandora becomes the main character in the book. Not that she says much, but she has a tart way of making fun of people who ask her silly or over-literal questions. Toglund tests her with, 'What is the name of my maternal grandmother?' Pandora answers, 'Don't you know?' Toglund replies, of course, 'Yes.' So Pandora answers, 'Then why ask me?' It's not that Pandora is trying to baffle people; it's just that they are so good at baffling themselves. Mayhew tries to save the situation, and feeds in, 'All questions asked hereafter will be of unknown things.' So Caporn becomes very annoyed, because this limitation rules out a large number of questions he wanted to ask!

Eventually Washington realises how much of a treasure chest Pandora might be. If she is asked nicely, she reveals some remarkable information. Almost as an afterthought, Toglund asks her for a formula for rocket fuel. The answer comes through and is tested. It's a miracle formula, much more effective than anything known before. The Pentagon sends a whole sheaf of questions for Pandora to answer.

Moon in the Ground works 'on stage'. The centre of every action is the 'circle of influence' of Pandora. Eventually every character must face what effect it has on his life. Each set of questions newly sent from Washington must be fed by hand to Pandora. The three who have been affected so far by her influence - Caporn, Mottram, and Szep - refuse to hand the questions to her. They regard the requests listed as unjustified exploitation of her. Let Toglund and Mayhew do it! But they are both terrified of being influenced by Pandora. They enter the circle only because it is their duty to obey their Government and deliver the questions. The result? Bianchi has two more 'patients', Toglund and Mayhew, who have fallen under the influence of Pandora. 'What a change in those two - talk about buddies! It's all "Cliff" this and "Charlie" that, like they'd never had a cross word in their lives.' Like Szep, they become true believers in the one true Pandora god, as a way of bowing down to authority: 'For (Toglund), it's all "Freedom, the US, and the Democratic way". He believes everything the CIA taught him, like he believes what the commercials say. So with authority



you've got their common link, the point of fusion of their personalities.'

Antill has an enticing way of spinning out his story so that, just when the reader thinks all problems have been solved and there is no more to the action, he pulls the rug from under everybody's feet. The rug is never anything but slippery, though. We see, as the characters do not, that they have failed entirely to explain Pandora's actions. She could be up to anything. And there is furious activity in Washington. We hear news broadcasts occasionally, and they show that the outside world is not doing well at all. Antill has a very nice sense of chaos - of showing how people or even countries who believe themselves impregnable can be wounded by the slightest change in their circumstances. And Pandora's inventions are changing the world greatly.

For some time, the 'Pandora Club', as they call themselves, do not realise what is happening in the outside world. Each of them uses the forcefield as a mind comforter and explorer, spending hours of every day inside the circle of influence. But Pandora does deliver the answers to a second lot of detailed questions. The answers do not even go back to America, but are being tested at other bases at Churinga. As nobody in Australia knows, the entire US weapons research program has long since been shifted out to Australia. (Yes, I rather believe it, too.) But the final result is no help to Australia. The US uses one of Pandora's inventions, an all-protective force-screen, to protect itself from the entire rest of the world. The balance between world powers has disappeared, and now it seems as if the Third World War is only hours away.

And then? I'll leave you to read Moon in the Ground for yourself. It's enough to say that Pandora has the last laugh on humanity, but it's a sour laugh.

\* \* \*

The twists and turns of Antill's story are handled adroitly, and give rise to much comedy of incongruity and undisguised farce. There is a beautiful scene, for instance, where Caporn and Mottram, linked by a temporary telepathic bond under Pandora's influence, go charging around the station, speaking with one voice and frightening the hell out of even the toughest military man. Or there are the technicians, who are regarded as beneath consideration by most of the characters, but who gain great amusement from the antics of their 'superiors' every time they enter the circle of influence. And Caporn, Mottram, Szep, Toglund, and Mayhew become figures of fun only because they take themselves so seriously. If any one of them

had forgotten his own sense of self-importance, even for a moment, he might have solved the riddle of Pandora much earlier in the action.

The configurations of Antill's metaphor are just as interesting, but tend to be obscured by the broad satire. In fact, Antill's description of the relationship between Australia and America are scarcely satire, as can be seen from events during recent years. (Moon in the Ground was written in the late 1960s, but becomes more up-to-date each year.)

But Australia seen as the impotent pawn of a technologically powerful America is much the same metaphor as the relationship between the main characters and Pandora. Antill makes much of the fact that Churinga Rift is populated by career figures who 'believe in' what they are doing. They obey orders without question, do their best to advance American interests, and welcome Pandora's influence as a comforting authority figure. They go to some lengths to surrender individuality - and so fail to find the Answer that they are seeking. Pandora waits for the length of the novel for some human to stand up forthrightly and communicate directly with her. Instead, she is fed the ultimately idiotic question, 'How long are you going to continue to serve us?' To reply, she asks, 'How many are you?' Later, she asks, 'Am I to serve the whole world?' If she is to serve the whole world, she can hardly serve only one part of it, America. But these people do not believe in a whole world. Which, as Antill implies, is the same as not believing in yourself as a human being, but only as the representative of some country or belief.

Sexual frustration has much to do with the situation. Early in the novel, Antill makes much of the separation experienced by these men in the Outback. The Australians in Alice Springs do not welcome their attentions. Although office girls work at the base, they are scarcely noticed by the male inhabitants. Some characters, like Mottram, relish the aloneness and absorption in scientific work which life on the base offers. Little wonder that the strong signals released by Pandora evoke in them a sexual response. Several characters show strong signs of jealousy when they realise that others have received her 'favours' as well. Pandora is 'she' - the only female - from early in the book. And 'she' is the most powerful figure on stage, 'a bitch goddess, making fun of her subjects, playing with them, absorbed with them. When she feels that humans as a whole have rejected her (after she has played some cute tricks on them), she leaves in what looks suspiciously like a huff.

But the ambiguity of the book is made more obvious by the fact that Pandora is the most



obvious male symbol in the book. There's that six-foot-long cylinder erected centre-stage throughout the book! No wonder the reactions of the characters tend toward hysteria dissolving into melancholia and acute introspection. But ambiguity of this sort is the essence of good drama. Goaded by internal forces they do not understand at all, the characters put on a spectacular show of energy for the reader.

I feel almost that Moon in the Ground became more complicated than Antill's original intentions. Beside Pandora, humankind was meant to look frail and suicidal. But she is left at the end as something less than an all-pure judge of the world. Pandora is a machine that has been built to react in a certain way with the people she encounters. Although we see little of her reactions, we

know that she takes the whole episode as 'personally' as does any other character. In the end, she likes being an authority figure who brings goodies to grateful subjects. Humankind is an exasperating set of bastards - but we have not so completely given away our humanity as to fall for Pandora. What we have done is extend our war-making capacity so far that we have little hope of avoiding the next world war. That's carrying potency to its most ridiculous extreme. Somewhere between Pandora and Armageddon lies the balance, but Antill offers little hope that anybody will find it. But all is not lost. We must do it, not some visitor from outer space. Read the last chapter in particular. Will there be any world left for Pandora when she wakes again?

- Bruce Gillespie July 1979

From Page 22..... George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA  
With dozens of people writing, editing, publishing, and going to workshops (another one at Monash University next year with, hopefully, Joe Haldeman as my running mate), the future looks set fair.  
But we must find some novelists; you can't build a solid s f on short stories.

### PART 3

#### THE STATE OF THE ART

Granted all the ferment and flurry among fans and ambitious but tentative new professionals, the real future of s f lies with its writers. The fact to be faced is that we have only two who have made a continuous impression on the world scene, two more who are emerging into prominence, and a handful of talented 'occasionals'. It is this small group I must now present, perhaps more briefly than they deserve.

#### A BERTRAM CHANDLER

'This Means War!'  
Empress of Outer Space  
Into the Alternate Universe

If we had a chapter to elect a Dean of Australian s f, A Bertram ('Bert') Chandler would take the position unopposed. Yes, yes, I know he is English born, allowing you to claim at least a part of the action, but he is an Australian citizen these days, living in Sydney.

His record in s f is solid. His first short story, 'This Means War!', appeared in

Astounding for May 1944, and probably only Bert knows how many there have been since. He has published 33 novels; there are two more in the publishers' hands and another on the typewriter. Many s f writers have produced vastly more in a similar period, but few have been so consistent in quality. I can recall only two novels which seem to me to have fallen below the Chandler standard, and there are few prolific writers of whom as much can be said.

Bert is best known as the creator of Commodore Grimes - or whatever his rank in the latest novel, Matilda's Stepchildren - but he has produced sixteen other novels as well, among the least-known of which is his flirtation with John Russell Fearn's Golden Amazon. Fearn wrote a series of Golden Amazon novels for the Toronto Star of Canada. The paper wished to continue with the popular character after his death, and asked Bert to do another GA story.

Bert, who detested the character, accepted in a 'try-anything-once' spirit, but soon found he couldn't deal with the impossible woman; so he had her brainwashed, and the psychologically reoriented lady reappeared as the Empress Irene in Empress of Outer Space. The Toronto Star felt, perhaps, that some sleight of typewriter had been worked on them and the relationship lapsed. The novel was published as half of an Ace Double, with The Alternate Martians, in 1965.

But Bert has always been happiest with Grimes and the Rim Worlds. (He once did an autobiographical piece for John Bangsund, who published it as 'My Life and Grimes'.) It has long been a friendly joke that Bert writes about ocean-going spaceships or space-going liners; he accepts it philosophically. But

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 29



what would you expect of an old seadog who has only recently retired after spending most of his life on the water, ending as Captain Chandler?

In fact, these 'ocean-going spaceships', designed and staffed and disciplined out of a lifetime's familiarity, are more believable than the products of writers who accept the spaceship as a useful piece of s f hardware and forget that it is a miniature breathing, living world.

Grimes appeared as a minor character in early Kim Worlds novels, which began in 1961, but took star status in Into the Alternate Universe (Ace Double with The Coils of Time, 1964), and has never looked back through seventeen published novels, and two as yet unseen.

Grimes' appeal lies, for me, in the sober normalcy of himself and his friends and foes. The environs may be bizarre, the adventures fantastic, but they are faced by people like ourselves; we are not plagued by red-blooded numbskulls or yawnworthy superheroes.

In his short stories, another side of Bert Chandler is seen, displaying a quirkish humour better suited to the swift anecdote than the complex novel. There is the tale of how Ayers Rock turned out to be an ancient spaceship - and took off. There is my favourite, about the orbiting astronaut who returned to Earth to discover himself the only man in history who had missed the Last Trump. We could do with a collection of these tales.

He is a good man for Australian s f, writing for Void and Boggle though better markets are available, always friendly, available when needed, a writer who knows both his worth and his obligations.

He has been published by Ace, Daw, Mcnarch, Dell, Lancer, and Curtis in America; by Herbert Jenkins, Mayflower, and Robert Hale in England; by Wren and Horwitz in Australia; and by just about every major s f magazine you care to name, as well as such gentlemanly outsiders as Town and Country and John O' London's Weekly. And has been translated into eleven languages, including Japanese.

One last note: This renegade Englishman is the most Australian in theme and atmosphere of any of our writers. The native-born might ponder this, then look again at their own imitations of overseas idols.

LEE HARDING

'Dancing Gerontius'  
World of Shadows  
Future Sanctuary  
The Weeping Sky  
Displaced Person  
Fallen Spaceman  
Children of Atlantis  
The Frozen Sky  
Return to Tomorrow  
Journey into Time  
The Altered I  
Beyond Tomorrow  
Rooms of Paradise

If Bert Chandler is our most prestigious writer, Lee Harding is our most diverse and, within Australia, the most influential. He is a dedicated writer, determined on success, and success is coming to him after a long apprenticeship. He has, like any of us, his limitations, but he has also some distinctive abilities and a willingness to attempt fresh areas.

He began with short stories in Carnell's New Worlds and, later, Vision of Tomorrow. From these early years, one tale, 'Dancing Gerontius', still remains sharply in memory.

His first real break came with publication of his novel, World of Shadows (Robert Hale; 1975; 160 pp; \$7). It made no s f history, but was a promising work.

It was followed by the paperback, Future Sanctuary (Laser Books No 41; 1976; 190 pp; \$1.55).

The Weeping Sky was published by Cassell Australia in 1977 (197 pp; \$5.95) to considerable fan applause.

More interesting is Displaced Person (Hyland House; 1979; 142 pp; \$9), a novel which can be seen as a 55,000-word metaphor for teenage alienation; and a most striking metaphor it is. It is his most stylish work yet, and will be in print (from Quartet, England, and Harper & Row, America, as well) by the time you read this.

Lee is no gadgeteer; he writes of people and surroundings as an indivisible whole, with fantasy and wonder arising out of them rather than being imposed upon them.

He has also been busy in other less usual directions, mostly concerning youth education. A few years ago, Cassell Australia published a series of short paperbacks designed for remedial-reading classes. Lee did four of these: Fallen Spaceman (1973; 99 pp; \$1) (not the same as his If tale of the same title), Children of Atlantis (1976; 104 pp;

\$1.50), The Frozen Sky (1976; 102 pp; \$1.50), and Return to Tomorrow (1976; 112 pp; \$1.50). They were popular, were reprinted and, I believe, sold also in Britain.

These books, written with word-by-word attention to remedial-reading necessities, were, says Harding, the most difficult fiction he has attempted.

Fallen Spaceman is to be published in America by Harper and Row with illustrations by Schoenherr, to my mind the best artist in the s f business.

These brought him to the attention of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, for whom he did a children's radio serial, Journey

Into Time. The gimmick was that classes of backward readers listened to the play with the script in their hands so that they could relate the speeches to the printed word. This was a success with kids and teachers, so another, Legend of New Earth, is in progress.

As an editor, Lee earned his spurs with the Workshop book, The Altered I, in 1976, and continued with the already mentioned Beyond Tomorrow and Rooms of Paradise. The last will be published in America by St Martin's Press.

It is a record of achievement, of which my feeling is that we have so far seen only the prelude.

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 37

---

#### WHY DID THE SKY WEEP?

A debate about  
Lee Harding's  
*The Weeping Sky*  
(Cassell Australia; 1977; 197 pp; \$5.95)

with comments from:

Rob Gerrand  
John Foyster  
Lee Harding  
Bruce Gillespie

Rob Gerrand:

#### 'A MASTERPIECE...'

First, we must state quite clearly that The Weeping Sky is a masterpiece - which, in our science-fictional world of noble but failed experiments, is a rare achievement. It is a novel precisely and surely imagined, well structured and beautifully written.

Clarity is the difficult tool Mr Harding has grasped and mastered: clarity in seeing his characters, clarity in seeing their environment, clarity in developing the lucid plot, and clarity in the writing of it all.

It is such a clear novel that virtually any scene can be recalled, three-dimensionally as it were, to mind, such is the precision of expression, the intensity of impression.

The novel is set in an alternate world's middle ages, in which a Scientist and his apprentice have ventured to examine a new phenomenon, carelessly and superstitiously called miraculous by the local monks: a mysterious, transparent wall across a valley, which 'weeps' water, thus slowly forming a lake.



The impact of this mysterious wall on the lives of those nearby and those who venture to see it is related with Ballardian authority, but with a sense of life lacking in Ballard. Keith Roberts' Pavane may be remembered by readers as a novel of another alternative medieval reconstruction. Where that admirable book irritated, however, because of a fundamental confusion as to what Roberts was really trying to achieve, which led to erratic pacing and a tendency to obscurity, The Weeping Sky glides smoothly on, navigating such shoals because of the surety and strength of its construction. The book is true to itself. The other writer who should be mentioned is James Blish, whose Dr Mirabilis is another attempt at medieval reconstruction.

We mention these three writers, Messrs Ballard, Roberts, and Blish - so different,

perhaps even antipathetic, to each other, yet each a serious artist - because Mr Harding appears to have brought off a successful fusion of various of their qualities: Ballard's visualisation and intensity, but adding a sense of warmth; Roberts' example of a youthful protagonist in an alternative history (Pavane has a similar 'feel' to The Weeping Sky), but with a surer sense of purpose and better balance; and Blish's intellectual rigour, but without the pedagogy.

There is no point in retelling the plot or describing the various characters and their interactions. All of that is handled only too well by Mr Harding. What we shall say is that in The Weeping Sky Mr Harding has aroused in us anew, as if it had never disappeared, a sense of wonder.

Rob Gerrard December 1977

### John Foyster:

#### '...A PUZZLE THAT ISN'T A PUZZLE...'

(\*Explanation: What follows is a review that is not exactly a review, and did not appear in the magazine for which it was meant. It is, in fact, written in the form of a letter to John Bangsund, explaining why John Foyster should not review a book written by Lee Harding, a friend of his. It seems that John Bangsund thought the non-review might offend Lee anyway. At least, he didn't print it. John Foyster rescued the review, and published it in Chunder!, Vol 2, No 9, 7 Nov 78. In the meantime, Lee was writing to Chunder! about his objections to Van Ikin's article about Harding's novels. The two issues get a bit mixed up, so I am reprinting John Foyster's comments first, and then Lee's, even though they were all mixed up together at the time. And if you're not confused by then, you can't say I haven't tried. \*brg\*)

Dear John (Bangsund)

You ask me to review Lee Harding's The Weeping Sky. I'm sure it will not have escaped your notice that I've not previously reviewed any of Lee's stories or novels, and I have always felt that I had the best of

reasons for not writing about Lee or his fiction: I am too close to him, personally.

But I think I shall try, partly because you ask so elegantly, and partly because last night I went to the movies and saw an Ibsen double-bill. Ibsen, I think, cheated by writing so much about people he didn't like or, more generally, people for whom he had no sympathy. That, it seems to me, makes writing too easy. But perhaps if I have that sort of belief I ought to think again about not writing on the fiction of someone as close to me as Lee is.

First I should dispose of one troubling problem - or at least bring it to your attention. The Weeping Sky, as found in a volume of the same name published by Cassell Australia, isn't exactly the novel Lee wrote.

Now Lee and I had a fair discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of copy-editing, with particular reference to The Weeping Sky, and it was our conclusion that copy-editing was a good thing, but that screwing up a book wasn't. The Weeping Sky seems to have been subjected to a good deal of the latter and precious little of the former.

And it gets worse. Let us hypothesise a jacket-copy author looking for a quick summary of the plot in the first few pages. Ah, here we are: 'The wall was a mystery they had come here to unravel' (page 2). Give 'em an inch and they'll take an ell, I always



say - what do you always say?

The other side of what was done to Lee's manuscript has to be described in more general terms. Cassell decided to metricate the novel, so they did - in places. They decided that one character's accent was too broad, so it was translated into standard English - in places. Names were changed (of course), and bits and pieces added and subtracted throughout. All in all, I guess Lee has discovered the meaning of involuntary collaboration. (Parenthetically (he remarked tautologously) I might note that Lee finds this sort of treatment very different from what he is currently receiving from another publisher.)

Well, having tried to make some distinction between the book written by Lee John Harding and that published by Cassell Australia, I now find myself dealing somewhat hesitantly with a chunk of paper of uncertain parentage: but I shall not further make that distinction, and will pretend that LJH is the onlie begetter.

I have complained, over the years, and privately to Lee, that there is a certain sameness in all his fiction, so far as I am concerned. I do not think it is just his worldview, which is rather different from mine, but rather that his machinery for dealing with outside impressions is so different from mine.

I think that I take the world as basically knowable; that there are a few rough edges and dark corners near which one must tread carefully, but in general, though we may not like how the world works, we do know that it works and something about how it works. Lee, it seems to me, takes a different view - that if the world is knowable, we do not know very much about it, and that such knowledge as we have should be guarded carefully and treasured as something rare and beautiful and (though this is a somewhat hackneyed description which I find embarrassing to use) there are some things we are not meant to know.

At least, that's how we seem to differ whenever I finish reading one of Lee's stories, whether it's a short story or a short novel like this one. Perhaps I can begin to explain why I feel this way.

Far too much science fiction, as many observers have noted, is based upon the notion that human beings are extremely simple-minded (and, extending that, that none, or very few, are devious). Newspapers and television and pulp fiction all rely upon this self-perception amongst their various audiences. In science fiction, this approach works itself out largely through idiot plots, since the persons in science fiction are almost non-existent. Serious fiction tries, I like to think, to work with more realistic, more human, humans.

Science fiction, however, is a quite rich

field for exploration and variation. Lee Harding, so far as I can make out, has for almost twenty years mined one little patch: a protagonist, almost always alone, seeks to understand an artefact which is clearly the product of Someone Else. (I do not suggest that Lee hasn't written other kinds of science fiction, but he does seem to have taken a lot of gold out of those particular hills.)

I do not see this as a serious problem: understanding other people may be difficult (but that's not likely to arise in science fiction), but dealing with the products of a civilisation, however loosely defined, doesn't seem to me to warrant serious consideration - I'm sorry that Lee wastes his time on it.

In The Weeping Sky, the protagonist is a sixteen-year-old; the artefact is a weeping lens (rather than a weeping sky). The age of the protagonist is determined by the market for which Lee is writing, of course, but nevertheless it is restricting in terms of the perceptions which may be relayed to the reader. But because such a protagonist is so much easier for the writer to handle, such a choice is common enough in science fiction - particularly, say, with Heinlein.

The other way is to make one's authorial life easy is to create a very simple society, probably highly regulated, and not too different from the popular impressions of past human societies. The Weeping Sky is set in a sort of kitsch-medieval alternate world which, because there really isn't room for development, lacks the charm of, say, Lud-in-the-Mist.

The final handicap with which Lee saddles himself is, as one might almost predict from the context, that ponderousness of language which some mistake for poetry. Here's some sample dialogue:

Donella:

'But how can you know this?... How can you say that such a thing will be true?'

Conrad:

'I cannot say for sure, Donella: I can only surmise there is a high probability that this will occur.'

Conrad then goes into an explanation which presumably is so nauseating that even Lee cannot bring himself to report it. And then:

Donella gazed at him in fascination. It was hard for her to visualize what he was saying; her mind had not been trained to understand such things. Conrad seemed to realize this, for he lowered his voice and said gently, 'Donella, I know how difficult this must be for you: but try to understand. It is my task - my sworn duty - to observe everything strange, to record what I have seen; and, where possible, to make conjecture upon what I have seen. This much I have done.'



Of such stuff are reporters for Truth made! (But we should be grateful that the last sentence of this extract from pages 116-117 was not, 'This much have I done.')

Given that starting point, it seems unlikely that a 'good' novel will result. In some ways, the result is disappointing, but it is also true that The Weeping Sky is surprisingly readable. Lee does have a story (or almost a story) to tell and, while the story is jogging along, it is almost possible to forget its surroundings. Perhaps, like some other science fiction writers, Lee isn't actually telling a story, and by craft manages to give the impression that he is. Since the characters don't influence events, one might assume that the novel is to some extent about character development, yet in fact there's little evidence that the characters do change, aside from the author's earnest assurances that this is the case. Nor does the novel tell us very much about our world (except for giving Lee's views on the fallout shelter problem - see pages 166-168). So what the subject of the novel might be, I can't tell you.

But The Weeping Sky is readable, as I have said. Because he has done it so often before, Lee is able to interest the reader in his puzzle that isn't a puzzle. One does want to know something about the bloody lens (er, you don't really find out, by the way) and, if you are like me, you will keep reading in the hope that something of interest will develop in one of the characters (for me, nothing did - they seem to have been pushed around in response to plot requirements). In my case, of course, I was interested in seeing what Lee would do next, and that perhaps won't be so much fun for other readers. On the other hand, other readers may find the plot more palatable. This is one of the major problems, I guess: that because I've seen it done before, I'm hardly able to be enthusiastic about this umpteenth repetition.

I don't know whether you would enjoy The Weeping Sky - it doesn't seem to fit into your pattern of reading material - but it will tell you something about what Lee is up to nowadays.

Regards, John (Foyster)

Lee Harding  
in reply:

(\*brg\* First some remarks Lee made before he read John Foyster's review, but after he read Varf Ikin's long general article about Lee Harding's work: \*)

I do recall a very funny piece in an early ASFR when you reviewed New Writings in SF 11 and tore my story and Jack Wodhams' to shreds - but you did 'phone me and ask permission first...

As for Van's 'appreciation' - this came as a surprise, and I have already written to Van remarking that I thought it was a little, er, premature. I also share your puzzlement with his review of The Weeping Sky: he didn't seem to have read the book I had written. ...He seemed to grow enamoured of the window-dressing: the idea (read metaphor) meaning all. Not so. My novel was not about the weeping sky, nor about the conflict between science and religion.

What was it about? Search me. I can only beg off with the words of John Rowe Townsend: 'The author doesn't necessarily understand better than the reader what his story is about.' Pity about your review of The Weeping Sky - that I would very much have

liked to see in print... I would not have objected to the letting of a little blood from the touch of your scalpel... (Chunder!, Vol 2, No 9, 7 Nov 78)

(\*brg\* In the same issue, John acceded to Lee's request. Next issue, Lee have his reaction after John sliced with the scalpel... \*)

Thanks for printing your very fine review of The Weeping Sky, and for drawing your readers' attention to the mauling given to my ms by a freelance editor working for Cassell. The interview I did for Van Ikin's Science Fiction was typed in November last year; at that time, I had barely recovered from the excruciating experience of having to correct the diabolical page-proofs of the book, and had not seen the finished product. When I eventually managed to get around to reading it some months later, I was shocked to discover that less than 10 per cent of the corrections had been made - and some new errors had been inserted in the process. When the new Managing Editor at Cassell wrote asking what had happened to the new book I had pro-

mised them, I promptly sent him a copy of The Weeping Sky with 72 major corrections (I didn't have time to bother with the minor ones.) His prompt response was to say that this was 'pretty horrific', and that, before returning my copy, he would transfer my corrections to their file copy...

Anyway, the upshot of all this is that I did manage to get a new - and much better - contract negotiated for my next Cassell book, and this includes the right to okay the copy-edited ms. Nothing so strange about that: my new publisher, Harper & Row, is courteous enough to send me airmail Xeroxes of my copy-edited mss with all queries indicated - even if it is only a misplaced comma... On the other hand, my favourite notation so far has been this: 'We cannot find Albert Park Lake anywhere on our maps. Could you be more specific?'

Your review of The Weeping Sky was fine in a way that so many reviews are not: in writing you, you revealed something of your own nature as well as the book's.

I can understand your reluctance to review

the works of friends. I take this a step further and find myself reluctant to raise my pen to praise or damn a fellow writer. Arnold Schoenberg has said that an artist's major concern is his own work, and that, if he criticises one of his peers, then it will be for the purpose of forwarding his own ideas. I think that, in the sf field, Brian Aldiss and George Turner would spring to mind as the most likely contenders in this regard. Since I am neither old enough nor wise enough to have formulated a Theory About Writing - did I hear someone say not perceptive enough? - I feel no urge to write reviews of anyone else's writing. Not any more.

...However, I wish to pick a nit and disclaim your suggestion that (my writing) suggests 'there are things we are not meant to know'. I would prefer to be absolved of that cliché and instead make a point that - perhaps - there are things we simply cannot know. Perhaps I seek the numinous, or whatever?

(Chunder!, Vol 2, No 10, 28 Nov 78).

Bruce Gillespie:

#### WHY THE SKY WEPT

From the exchange of correspondence between Leo Harding and John Foyster, one astonishing conclusion can be drawn: that neither the reviewer nor the author knew what The Weeping Sky is all about. Is it possible that I am more astute than both commentators? Or did John Foyster fox Leo Harding into forgetting ideas which were surely clear to him when he wrote the book?

Another item has become clear: that The Weeping Sky is not a 'masterpiece', as Rob Gerrard claims. However, it is excellent to the point where I am more on Rob's side than on John's. The truth lies between, and I would like to try to find that truth.

\* \* \*

I have had the advantage of reading 'The Weeping Sky', a novella which Leo Harding wrote in the late 1960s, and was bounced from place to place when nobody much was publishing novellas. As I recall it, 'The Weeping Sky' had the same central image as The Weeping Sky: the ever-widening lens, the flood, the journey into the alternate dimension. The main character was an adult monk, however, and there were no other characters

worth speaking of.

Making the main character into a teenage boy was probably not too difficult. Adding the extra characters at the beginning must have been more difficult. The real change between the two stories has been the change in Leo's style. Leo has always had a tendency to describe, in long and wearying detail, the emotions which are supposed to be inspired in the characters at particular points in the story. He needed to cut all that stuff, and either give up worrying about emotions and concentrate on the action, or tell the story in such a way that we felt the main character's emotions for ourselves. The latter feat is more worthwhile, and Leo comes close to it in many sections of The Weeping Sky. More importantly, he has cut down the narrative so that the story skips along, and we can make up our minds for ourselves on what the story is about.

All of which makes me all the more amazed that Leo can write: 'What was it about? Search me.' I suppose I will have to tell him after all.

\* \* \*



The obvious thing to say is that The Weeping Sky is 'about' the wall, or lens, or 'weeping sky'. At the beginning of the book, it looks like a 'solid sheet of glass, directly over the lake. But as it reached out on either side, the intensity of the light diminished, and eventually faded away into a shimmering mist at the extreme edges of the phenomenon'. At first, the water falling through this lens merely wets the ground. Gradually the volume of water increases, the valley becomes flooded, and the intruding water emits the stench of decay.

The function of the Wall in the story is to mock the people who are forced to put up with its incursion into their lives. The Wall is a neutral form of inconvenience which becomes an active form of destruction.

It is also seen as a source of profit by the Abbot of the nearby monastery and the Duke of the surrounding territory. The Duke orders his men to form an armoured ring around the valley. The soldiers' aim is to stop crowds of pilgrims from testing for themselves the proposition that the waters from the Wall have miraculous properties. A monopoly on miracles is seen by the Duke and the Abbot as a splendid opportunity to improve their political position.

The people in The Weeping Sky do not over-react to the new natural phenomenon. Instead, 'collectively the village took a deep breath, found time to give thanks and praise the Almighty, then got ready to squeeze all they could from the purses of the many visitors streaming through the streets.' And, as I've said before, leaders of Church and State set up their sideshow to milk the pockets of both visitors and locals. No oversimplification of motive or plot here: just people getting on with the arduous job of surviving, no matter what.

But Master Asquith and Conrad le Jeune are two people who call themselves Scientists. In other words, they are the only people in this world interested in looking at natural phenomena from an objective viewpoint. This task places them rather outside their own society - so much so that Conrad, the young protagonist, thinks of himself as being above the petty concerns of those he travels among.

I have a sort of mental diagram in my mind of The Weeping Sky (reinforced by the way Harding sets up effective stage settings for all the action in the book). The Wall is in the middle, growing larger and more dangerous, mocking those gathered around. To one side are the villagers, and the farmers whose lands are being taken away by the growing lake. On the other side are the powerful people, especially the Duke (frightened 'by such close proximity to the rabble...': he knew that they could very easily

rob him of all he possessed if the balance of power ever shifted in their favour...'). In ordinary times, the relationship between these groups would be clear: ruler and ruled, oppressor and oppressed. Now all are equally threatened by the central non-human object.

Outside the tableau stands Conrad. In feigning neutrality, he becomes identified with the Wall itself. He becomes non-human, perhaps; certainly an alien, because of his desire to investigate, rather than accept, natural phenomena.

The strength of The Weeping Sky is that Harding does not give automatic support for Conrad's position. We think for a while that Conrad is a 'goodie', just like the heroes of all those other mock-medieval romances. But then the Wall collapses altogether, and a vast flood covers the countryside. Conrad and friend (Donella) and their enemy, the Abbot, are stuck in a room at the top of a tower which is the one structure likely to survive the flood. Conrad locks the door, but the villagers race up the stairs inside the tower and try to get inside the door. Conrad keeps the door locked: 'The screams on the other side of the door rose to a pitch and then faded away into gasps and struggling cries as the momentum of the water swept in through the door of the lodge and surged up the staircase. The people outside were swept and tossed around like so much straw, then sucked down to the bottom of the stairs.' Exit people; exit any pretension of Conrad to be a 'goody'. He is a human, too, just trying to survive. Where else might his metamorphosis lead him?

The Weeping Sky is about being human. In many ways, it is like the Strugatsky Brothers' Hard to be a God, where the main character wanted to abstract himself from the harsh medieval environment in which he found himself - but instead, was quite caught up in it. But not even Hard to be a God had the splendid apocalyptic denouement which graces the last pages of The Weeping Sky.

The flood leaves behind mud where villages and fertile fields had been. After the Abbot escapes from the tower, Conrad slogs it out across the mud, pursuing him. Both step through the lens, now flood-free. The world they see seems alien: 'a featureless plain stretching into deep and utter darkness.' But even this alien world presents mocking images of humanity. Conrad sees creatures killed by a war which rages in this alternate world: 'Something flopped around close by his head... One of the tiny man-fish creatures was struggling to survive. Its near-human face mocked him. After a while, it ceases struggling and flopped over, its head lolling in the mud. (Conrad and the man-fish) stared at each other for a long

time.'

So man has changed into a creature even more fragile than the people Conrad left behind in his own world. Who has replaced people? - Harding does not show us their faces but shows us the effects of the war they wage among themselves. One effect of this war has been a high-energy device which has opened a way from one alternative world to the other. The new people are much like people anywhere.

In this final confrontation, Conrad is deprived of his implied claims to being 'outside humanity', a student of life rather than part of life itself. The strange time-distorting quality of the alternative world works on Conrad as well as the Abbot. Conrad ages quickly; he 'becomes a man' in a few minutes, both physically and psychologically.

\* \* \*

So that's what The Weeping Sky is about - images of humanity; an adventure in which at least one person finds out what it is to be human. If the characters have little scope to affect the main direction of their lives (as Foyster claims), then that is how things are. What is the best way to act, given that we have little scope for action? And can we prevent ourselves acting badly, anyway, without abstracting ourselves from the human stage altogether? The Weeping Sky has no set answers, like so many fantasy and science fiction books. The situation is presented starkly, and we must allow the questions to affect us.

I hope that Lee Harding agrees with me. If so, he might write some more rich books about what it is to be human.

#### LIGHT IN THE GREYWORLD

Rob Gerrand  
discusses:

##### Displaced Person

by Lee Harding

(Hyland House; 1979; 139 pp; \$8.95)

US edition:

##### Misplaced Persons

(Harper & Row; 1979; 149 pp; \$7.95)

Displaced Person is a simply written, understated novel which yet has considerable power. That it is written by Lee Harding shows he has not stood still since The Weeping Sky. Mr Harding has had the courage to move into the different and difficult field of the apparently straightforward first-person narrative. Although the book has some faults, it is a convincing and disturbing novel - and an extremely readable one.

The novel is basically the recounting, via a small cassette player, of a bizarre event in the life of seventeen-year-old Graeme Drury. One day in the local McDonald's he finds himself ignored and the world locking indistinct and grey. Graeme passes quickly into a shadow world where he is cut off from

his normal life. The book is Graeme's account of what happens from then on.

Stated so baldly, this plot outline shows something about the nature of writing - that some writers can make an engrossing work of an idea, and others nothing. Readers become involved only when the author can make his characters credible, and the difficulties the characters face and the means of overcoming them real to the reader. Of course, the author must believe that something interesting is happening throughout the plot, but again, this becomes apparent when the author reveals what the characters are feeling and thinking and how they respond to each other.

Displaced Person is all the more powerful



for the quiet unmelodramatic way it unfolds. For Graeme Drury is a quiet, unmelodramatic youth. He examines and ponders the unnerving way he is cut off from parents, girlfriend, and, finally, society, as he tries to find some understanding of his situation. Since he is seventeen, his occasional philosophising seems jejune at times - but it is never pretentious, and helps nicely to move the book along.

In his grey world, Graeme meets an old man, Jamie - a drawing verging on caricature - and Marion, a more successful creation. By and large, the interactions between Marion and Jamie don't come off - in fact, they are inconsistent - but the book finds its real strength when Marion and Graeme are alone together. The adolescent mixture of strong attraction and great reserve is finely handled.

However, Mr Harding lets this developing relationship dissolve, more's the pity, as he brings the novel to its odd end, an end that leaves us satisfied that, yes, the book has finished appropriately, but also leaves us feeling unsettled by a sense that some threads have not been drawn together properly. On reflection we suspect this is a deliberate attempt to show us all the more thoroughly the nature of Graeme's experience.

There are nit-pickings the observant reader can make. Would a seventeen-year-old have seen Beauty and the Beast (Cocteau's film, of course) eight or nine times, or Aces High three times? How is it that Graeme can pass through some objects but still stand on the ground? Do his parents miss him, or is he in a time warp? Would Graeme have the control of language Mr Harding evidences?

Perhaps these quibbles are unfair; they are certainly not important, for it would be silly to try to see the novel entirely as straight science fiction, or entirely as a straight novel of schizophrenia or alienation. It is all of these, but different.

Having taken the bit between his teeth, Mr Harding (to mix metaphors) has not found it more than he can chew. We look forward to where he leads next.

Rob Gerrand August 1979

(\*EDITOR'S NOTE:

Forgive yet another intrusion by an even-more-gabby-than-usual Editor, but...

Rob Gerrand does not mention that the great attraction of Displaced Person is its sense of place. A teenage reader of this book in Des Moines or Procatello could travel to St Kilda and almost navigate its streets. To see the unique character of St Kilda captured so well is good; to see it at one remove, through this alien experience, is memorable.

Rob also does not mention that Displaced Person could mean something rather different to the reader unfamiliar with science fiction. A friend, not an s f reader, said, 'But that's just how I felt when I was seventeen: all the world outside was grey and depressing; all I could do was sit about and try to write mournful poetry.' So the book's scenario can work entirely as metaphor. As for me: well, I know my s f cliches fairly well, and nothing in the first half of the book was at all surprising, so I found it rather dull. Once Graeme has disappeared entirely into the greyworld, the book comes alive for me - especially because I like both people he meets there, and find all their interactions convincing.

I still find Graeme, alone, unconvincing. He seems too knowing, just too able to sort out his thoughts and feelings. At the same time, there is an edge of hysteria in his voice which also does not sound convincing. But I cannot avoid the feeling that Lee Harding might have had in mind a particular type of upper-middle-class kid, who is being satirised gently. After all, Graeme is so confident and so capable and so balanced - until the catastrophe - that one almost hopes for something to upset his complacency. Also, since when have seventeen-year-olds hungaround listening to jazz? I don't believe it... surely seventeen-year-olds haven't used jazz for background listening for twenty-five years. \*brg\* )

From Page 30.....George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA  
SOME OTHER WRITERS

CHERRY WILDER

The Luck of Brin's Five  
'The Ark of James Carlyle'  
'The Falldown of Man'

I feel curiously distant from Cherry Wilder, never having met her (she lives with her husband in Germany) as I have most of the others mentioned here. She is by any standard Australia's senior woman s f writer (there are quite a few of them), and has had a signal success with her novel, The Luck of

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 38

From Page 37.....George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA

Brin's Five, to which there is to be a sequel. (Original publication: Atheneum, New York; 1977; 230 pp; \$7.95, with a new edition just appeared from Angus & Robertson.)

Her first published s f story was 'The Ark of James Carlyle' (New Writings), which Lee Harding snapped up for reprint in Beyond Tomorrow.

The most recent I have read is 'The Fall-down of Man', especially written for Lee's Rooms of Paradise collection. Another

story, 'Odd Man Search', turns up in Paul Collins' Alien Worlds.

Cherry Wilder writes with a smooth intimacy which imposes itself on the reader without bludgeoning him with the overblown and wildly outré, and has an acute sense of character which renders her prose lively in essence, even when activity is not her concern. Her writing has also that indefinable quality, 'charm', which I do not know how to assess and discuss.

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 40

---

#### GENTLE ESCAPISM IN PRETTY PASTEL COLOURS

Henry Gasko  
discusses

*The Luck of Brin's Five*

by Cherry Wilder

(Atheneum; 1977; 230 pp; \$7.95  
Angus & Robertson; 1979; 230 pp; \$9.95)

When Bruce asked me to review The Luck of Brin's Five, he mentioned that he hadn't liked it at all, and didn't understand what all the fuss was about (it won the Ditmar for the best Australian s f novel of 1977); he couldn't imagine reading it again in order to do a review. I was quite surprised by this. I'd read it in one sitting about a year ago and, even though none of it stood out in my memory, I did recall leaving the novel with a vaguely warm and satisfied feeling. I told him I'd be happy to review it.

So I sat down a week ago to read the book again, expecting to enjoy it just as much as I did the first time.

But it wasn't the same this time. The unhurried pastoral world that I remembered was now just another unimaginative copy of medieval Europe, with all the dirt and disease and suffering removed; the people who had seemed gentle and loving were now simply one-dimensional; the plot dragged, and so did my interest. Something had gone wrong, but I wasn't sure what it was.

The novel is set on the planet of Torin, where the inhabitants are called Moruians and

are descended from marsupials. Newborn babies are still sheltered for a time in the mother's pouch, but in most other respects the Moruians are quite similar to human beings. Most of them live as farmers, craftsmen, or merchants. The world is ruled by a council of elders who represent the wealthy and powerful clans. There are signs that technological progress is beginning to raise its interesting head, and the council, especially the ruthless governor, Tiath Pentroy, is jealously anxious to contain the 'fire-metal-magic' and the disruption it would cause to their power.

Many of the people still 'follow the ancient threads' and live as part of a family of five. This always includes a 'Luck', someone who was born with or has suffered some disfiguration or misfortune: the 'dwarfs and cripples, the blind, the deaf, the mad and the half-mad' (page 10). Brin's Five is a family of mountain weavers whose Luck is dying. Just as she does die, a silver ship crashes into a nearby lake. The governor's men capture the craft, but Brin's Five rescue Scott Gale, the man who parachutes from the



vessel. This is a good omen, and the family immediately adopts him as its new Luck.

The Five flee their mountain tent the next day as the governor's men close in, and soon arrive in the town of Cullin to consult the local diviner. She sends them on a leisurely barge journey to a farm further down the river. Here they live for several weeks, while Scott Gale learns the language and customs, and rebuilds an old glider which has crashed nearby.

Eventually they discover that the governor's agents are still pursuing them. Instead of doing the sensible thing and staying out of sight, Scott Gale decides to fly his glider in the spring festival farther along the river. This decision is crucial to the action, but makes no sense at all; as the narrator says, 'I do not know how the next plan was made... it seems reckless now.'

Scott Gale wins the flying contest at the spring carnival, and soon half the planet knows of his whereabouts.

Again the family escapes the pursuers, and heads for the capital city of Rintoul. Here the Five are befriended by Guno Deg, one of the members of the inner council. Then, when it appears that all are finally safe, Scott Gale is captured.

After several weeks in prison, he is brought before the great council to be tried. His last defence against imprisonment is his bond with Brin's Five. Just as this is about to be ruled invalid because Scott Gale is a foreigner, someone realises that the great clans themselves claim direct descent from the spirit warriors of the planet's mythology. The council votes in favour of Brin's Five and the day is saved. The story ends with Scott Gale and several members of the family sailing off towards the governor's prison island in search of a sequel.

I've simplified the plot a great deal; despite the fact that it moves slowly, it often becomes very confusing. There are an incredible number of characters, and all have long, similar-sounding names (as in Dr Zhivago, only more so).

There are other annoyances as well.

The clever little idea of humanoid marsupials plays no part in the plot and has no effect on the culture.

The experiments with 'fire-metal-magic' seem too advanced to fit into the culture; on a world with no mines or smelters or foundries, one of the gliders has a steam engine!

The capital city of Rintoul is also overdone and out-of-place in an agrarian society; the family's first sight of it is in the evening: 'A network of pure gold - the towers, the bastions, the spires, the sky-houses of the great city of Rintoul' (pages 176-177).

And, for someone who is supposed to be ruthless, Tiath Pentroy's search for Scott Gale is surprisingly perfunctory and inept. He is like a bogeyman in a fairy-tale - lots of noise and posturing to scare the children, but no real danger to anyone.

\* \* \*

But there is a great deal in the novel that is very good as well.

The slow movement of the plot means that there is no suspense, but it does allow the planet and the people to unfold at an unhurried and effective pace. There is a strong feeling that the world is real and extends beyond the limits of the novel.

The characters are uniformly sympathetic - gentle, loving, and without a grain of deceit - and the reader can (almost) understand why Scott Gale makes no attempt to make contact with the other members of his survey team on the outer islands. Of course, he's every bit as honest and steadfast as the rest of them, and fits right in.

All this makes more sense if the book is accepted as a juvenile rather than an adult novel (although this doesn't excuse its faults). The narrator is Dorn, the twelve-year-old of Brin's Family, who was raised in the mountains, and for whom the trip down the river to the heart of the world is an exciting adventure, full of marvels and wonders.

All this is captured in a beautifully detailed and descriptive prose style that is quite amazing, considering that this is Cherry Wilder's first novel. As an example, the stay at the diviner's farm begins with the following paragraph:

There are plenty of jokes about rough bush weavers moving into a fixed house, and I dare say we could have been models for all of them, at Whiterock. If it wasn't the cold, the cooking hearth, the earth closet or the cupboard locks, then we were complaining about the stuffiness and the way the walls did not give. We adapted pretty quickly and the Ulgan's small white house became dear and familiar to us. But there were nights when spring approached when we couldn't stand it another moment and slept in our bags on the lawn or on the flat roof, under the stars.

In one deceptively simple paragraph, Wilder presents a description of the surroundings, a bridge to the family's stay at the farm, and a further development of the personality and background of the family. (My only complaint about the prose is the occasional preponderance of commas in the first few chapters. This does improve later in the novel.) Allow yourself to sink into the soft cushion of this prose, let the images and possibilities

ties take hold, and the book can be very enjoyable indeed.

\* \* \*

So what went wrong the second time I read The Luck of Brin's Five? I think the answer is quite simple; there's a lot that's very good in the novel, and a lot that's bad. Different aspects stand out, depending on the reader's frame of mind. I was in a bad mood the second time I read the book and, because I'd seen it all before, there wasn't sufficient interest there to suspend my disbelief and sweep me along into this new world again.

The moral is clear: if you're feeling misanthropic, or if you're a die-hard pessimist/

realist like Bruce and can't entertain the notion of simple motives and a happy ending for even a single afternoon, then pick up a Philip K Dick novel instead. But if you feel like a bit of gentle escapism painted in pretty pastel colours, read The Luck of Brin's Five - once.

Henry Gasko December 1978.

(\*brg\* Outraged protest: I didn't like The Luck of Brin's Five because I could not understand it: those endless Names and slow sentences were too much for my simple mind. I read Philip Dick for relaxation - for easy-to-read, zesty, fast-moving adventure... \*)

From Page 38.....George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA

DAVID J LAKE

Walkers on the Sky  
The Right Hand of Dextra  
The Wildings of Westron  
The Gods of Xuma  
'Re-deem the Time'

David Lake is another whom I have not met, probably because, until recently, he was in America researching and writing a thesis on H G Wells.

He sprang fully armed, not from the head of Zeus but from DAW Books, with a novel, Walkers on the Sky (DAW UY1273; 1976; 188 pp; \$1.25), the first of a series of five. The Right Hand of Dextra, The Wildings of Westron, and The Gods of Xuma have been published; there is still one to come.

These novels are complex in conception, though fairly simple in structure, and are basically adventure stories in an s f ambience, though informed with an intellectualism which is not pushed too hard. The writing is less individual, more middle-of-the-road, than might be expected of Lake's academic background.

His short story, 'Re-deem the Time', in Rooms of Paradise, is a neat inversion of the time travel theme, confirming the fertility of his imagination, but I still look forward to something more stylish from this undoubtedly gifted man. (David has new stories in Paul Collins' Alien Worlds and Rob Gerrand's Transmutations.)

DAVID GRIGG

'Deep Freeze'  
'To Speak of Many Things'  
'A Song Before Sunset'  
Halfway House  
Shadows

David Grigg is a quiet Melbourne man with a deep interest in the sciences, who goes quietly about his business without making large waves or being washed over by them.

His first published story was 'Deep Freeze' (Science Fiction Monthly, 1975), and 'To Speak of Many Things' appeared in Galileo. Lee Harding swept up his 'A Song Before Sunset' for Beyond Tomorrow, he contributed three items to The Altered I, and one to Envisaged Worlds, and has another in Rob Gerrand's forthcoming anthology, Transmutations.

David also did two of those difficult little works for the Cassell remedial-reading set, Halfway House (1976; 110 pp; \$1.50) and Shadows (1976; 109 pp; \$1.50).

David has not produced a great deal, but has shown steady improvement; he is one of our probable future stars.

PHILIPPA C MADDERN

'The Ins and Outs of the Hadhya City State'  
'Ignorant of Magic'

Philippa C Maddern, a university tutor, scooped the pool at the Le Guin Workshop with her first story, 'The Ins and Outs of the Hadhya City State', one of her three items which later appeared in The Altered I.

In the next Workshop book, The View from

George Turner: SCIENCE FICTION IN AUSTRALIA.....Continued on Page 41



The Edge, she had four stories, including 'Ignorant of Magic', which she later re-handled for Rooms of Paradise.

(She will appear in Transmutations, and a story of hers was bought by Damon Knight for Orbit 20.)

The prime characteristic of Philippa's work is an ability to express a complex situation in remarkably compact prose which is still perfectly clear and informed with literary grace. While still feeling her way as a stylist, she shows a sureness of technique many older hands might envy. She writes for herself, has no hesitation about saying No to editors who want changes (but makes them quickly and accurately when she sees the need), and has so far rejected my plea that she try her hand at a novel.

'Not ready,' says Philippa. When she is, watch out!

JACK WODHAMS

No Australian listing would be complete without mention of that dedicated writing machine and prickly personality, Queenslander Jack Wodhams, who will treat your opinions with the contempt they may/may not/possibly do deserve and carry on writing his way.

Jack hit a responsive spot in the not-really-tough-hearted Campbell, and the Grand Cham of American s f published him often in Analog for several years. Then came Ben Bova, with a different taste in fiction, and the association lapsed. Jack had then a racy, dialogue-oriented style, a penchant for wild, sometimes absurd but always provocative ideas, and a neat hand at the twist-in-the-tail story. He has also sold to Amazing and Vision of Tomorrow.

Lately he has contributed more seriously angled tales to the Paul Collins books and magazines. He writes everything - stories, novels, poems, plays, telescripts, you name

it. How much is sold I don't know, any more than I can hazard a guess at what he might or might not achieve in the future.

DAMIEN BRODERICK

'A Passage to Earth'

The intellectual of our group is Damien Broderick. His tales are rarely easy, his style is mannered in the extreme, and his interest is in underlying meaning rather than explication. Like many another, he will seek your opinion 'as a matter of interest', and discard it immediately as being of no interest.

This, however irritating to the asked, is not an entirely bad thing in a writer. Damien does not wish to be influenced (which is in general right of him), but certainly retains more than he allows you to know. He does not write a great deal of s f, but his story, 'A Passage to Earth', in Rooms of Paradise, is an excellent sample of his style and orientation.

I am told there is also a novel in the works, so watch the news flashes...

#### Acknowledgements

I am conscious of having failed to comment on a number of new writers who deserve a little notice, if only for encouragement - conscious, too, of having given only passing mention to the artists among Australian fans.

For the factual material transmitted here, I am indebted to Bert Chandler, Lee Harding, Bruce Gillespie, David Grigg, Merv Binns, Paul Stevens, Peter Knox, Paul Collins, Van Ikin, and God only knows how many more.

The mistakes and opinions are my own, I will no doubt hear about both.

George Turner January-May 1979

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION...  
IS THAT ALL THERE IS?

Two discussions by  
Andrew Whitmore

(\*EDITORIAL DISCLAIMER: The following articles mount a thoroughly scurrilous and underhanded attack on the novels of two friends of mine. They are also the most entertaining articles I've published for years. They show that criticism hasn't been really critical for more than a century (Andrew acknowledges Thomas Hazlitt et al as inspiration for these pieces). Also, they imply the question: why should we praise Australian s f books just because they are Australian? (or, why should we pull our punches just because we would like the s f publishing industry in Australia to prosper?). \*)

LAKES, SWIMMING POOLS, AND EMPTY SPACES

A discussion of  
*Walkers on the Sky*

by David J Lake

(DAW Books UY1273; 1976; 188 pp; \$1.25)

Schopenhauer once divided writers into three categories: meteors, planets, and fixed stars. The first are apt to engage our attention for a brief time, but are ephemeral creatures and soon disappear from view. The planets are rather more enduring, but they are diminished by distance and give forth only reflected light. The fixed stars are the great works of literature that exist outside of the bounds of time and place.

Of course, Schopenhauer was a philosopher and, displaying a characteristic elevation of intellect, he ignores those vast areas of non-luminous space that exist between the meteors, planets, and fixed stars, and which lend definition to these radiant bodies. This space is, in fact, occupied by an almost infinite number of writers, all of whom are destined never to engage anyone's attention at all unless, by some stroke of fortune, their particular section of the firmament happens to be examined most diligently and in the minutest detail. Mr Lake is among the least visible of this tenebrous company.

Walkers on the Sky offers the reviewer

something of a challenge. This is in no way at all connected with the plot (and one has to misuse the term cruelly to apply it to anything that occurs between these particular covers); nor with the characters (who are very nearly as invisible within the book as the author is outside it); nor with the writing itself, which is so unremarkable as to suggest that the author's relationship with the English language has been a brief and somewhat ill-considered affair. No, the challenge that one faces is to establish why Mr Lake should consider this particular work to in any way repay the amount of effort required to commit it to paper.

There would seem to be two alternatives: either Mr Lake regards the work as possessing some merit of its own, or else the publishing of the book is an end in itself, regardless of the quality of what is published.

The first would appear to be the more difficult proposition to acknowledge. According to information received by this reviewer, Mr Lake is a graduate of Cambridge, has taught in universities in four countries, and has



written critical material on Milton, Greek tragedy, Jacobean drama, and modern poetry. Now, it is quite possible that he regards Paradise Lost as no more than the continuity for a comic strip, and that, to him, Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles were engaged in nothing more demanding than the production of a kind of ethnic soap opera, something along the lines of Days of Our Lives. If this is the case, one word of confirmation from Mr Lake would be sufficient for this reviewer to express his most heartfelt apologies. One does not cane ignorance. If Mr Lake honestly believes that walkers on the Sky contains literary merit (and that could only be the case if he has no inclination at all of what literary merit might be), then one can do no more than hope that this review might provoke him to look more closely at the works of more highly regarded authors and gain some benefit thereby.

However, if one does presume to credit Mr Lake with some critical acumen, however slight (and the fact that he has taught in universities would suggest that he at least pretends to such accomplishments), then surely walkers on the Sky is totally inexcusable. It is not as if Mr Lake has failed because what he attempts to do is beyond his ability to achieve but, rather, because what he has done was not worth doing in the first place. To use the words of a rather more visible author, he has been content to sit back and emit garbage.

This reviewer lacks the time and, indeed, the inclination also, to give a detailed account of the assorted incidents and goings-on that are accumulated in this book. It may best be resolved into a series of cliches, each one being slightly more pedestrian than that which precedes it. We have the Uncorrupted Northern Barbarian. We have the Corrupt Southern Merchant. We have the Raiders. We have the Evil, Degenerate Empire. We have a Good Prince and a Bad Prince (one does not need to be over-endowed with intelligence to predict which of them takes over the throne). We have Primitive Good People living in a place called the 'Netherworld'. We have the 'Netherworld' invaded by the Evil Empire. We have our Northern Barbarian lead the 'Netherworlders' to (interminable) victories. We have Gods flitting around in rocket-powered armchairs, who are revealed to be Earthmen who have come to this particular planet and set themselves up as Gods while the descendants of the colonists live out their lives in manufactured environments beneath force-field 'skies'.

One could go on and list further details, but such an activity would be so tedious as to risk inducing sleep both in the reviewer and the reader. (There is, of course, no danger that anyone would enjoy the book less

merely because they were already familiar with what happens in it before they commence reading, because nothing that happens matters anyway.)

The book contains nothing more than this. The concept of the 'skies' over the different 'worlds' on the planet, 'Netherworld', 'Middleworld', and 'Celeden', although initially suggestive, is presented in such an unimaginative manner that it might just as well have been left out altogether. It is merely stage scenery, and the reader tires of it even before the author does.

It has been suggested that Walkers on the Sky is intended as a parody of the cliches on which it depends. If this is so, then Mr Lake has studied his subject much too assiduously, as there is nothing at all to distinguish what he has written from those books which it is supposed to be parodying. Satire does not consist of merely reproducing in detail all the inadequacies of that which is to be satirised. What's more, satire must be done with a certain wit and flair, attributes so lacking in Mr Lake's writing the one wonders if he is even aware of their existence. His prose is colourless, and possesses something of the texture of a newspaper that has been left out in the rain. He displays no conviction in what he writes and, indeed, there is little suggest that his imagination is ever engaged at all. One comes away from the book feeling that one's time might have been more profitably spent counting the number of bricks in the wall, or watching assorted insects crawl about on the ceiling. Surely Mr Lake must have known something similar when he finally put an end to the manuscript.

The question remains as to why Mr Lake should seek publication for his book, given that he is well aware of its multitudinal failings. All writers, of course, crave acceptance, but it is usually the acceptance of something. Mr Lake, it seems, looks on publication as something that is to be achieved at all costs, the exact nature of the published material being quite irrelevant.

Science fiction abounds with such individuals. They are the backbone of the industry. They collect their two thousand dollars per book, see their names attached to covers almost as incompetently executed as the prose which they contain, and are comforted by the knowledge that none of the people who read their books will remember their names anyway.

The emergence of Australian science fiction does not lie in the hands of writers such as Mr Lake. Indeed, it is unfortunate that so little Australian science fiction is published, else we might comfortably ignore Mr Lake's presence altogether, as he deserves

to be ignored. We do not often find such writers as Lin Carter being held up as the paragon of American science fiction, and nor should we revere Mr Lake merely because he has sold a large number of novels in an exceedingly short space of time. William Faulkner once divided writers up into two groups: first-rate writers and the rest.

He identified those other than first-rate writers as authors who had sold their souls for a swimming-pool. Mr Lake is not quite so elevated (after all, it is science fiction that we are talking about): he has apparently decided that all his soul is worth is an inflatable toddler's pool and a plastic space helmet.

#### MR HARDING'S MISCONCEPTION

A discussion of

*Future Sanctuary*

by Lee Harding

(Laser Books 41; 1976; 190 pp; \$1.25)

Neither Laser Books nor Mr Lee Harding is especially noted for the quality of their work, and so any conglomeration of their abilities, however much expected it may be (as like invariably calls to like), is apt to produce results that are rather distressing, to say the very least.

The issue of this particular union goes by the undistinguished title of Future Sanctuary - and a most unfortunate offspring it turns out to be.

The cover may fairly be ignored, as it is grossly impolite to comment on a person's deformity, whether it be attributable to the hand of God or that of Mr Freas. Mr Harding would have us excuse the 'Prologue' as well, pleading economic necessity, although it is hardly any more inept in its execution than the remainder of the novel, merely somewhat more asinine.

It is generally conceded that the art of writing consists of more than merely arranging words into sentences which more or less conform to some standard of intelligibility; however, one would imagine that the art of writing consists of at least that. Mr Harding would appear to disagree. Consider the following examples:

The mechanical emissaries of the law waited patiently, their featureless faces devoid of expression. (page 5)

and:

The soft soughing of the emissaries' hydraulic limbs sounded sinister beside him. (page 7)

and:

Beyond this and barely visible through the strangled air... (page 24)

Admittedly, the prose does occasionally rise above this abysmal level, but such an

occurrence is rare indeed, and to produce examples would require a much more assiduous search than this reviewer is prepared to undertake.

Nor is Mr Harding's talent confined merely to descriptive writing - his attempts at dialogue are also rendered with an absolute innocence of taste or judgment:

'Let us leave these melancholy images, Deirdre, and begin anew.'

and:

'But I see you are impatient to be off; please be kind and do not reproach me so with your eyes,'

and:

'Now you must go,' she said softly. 'You need to find a place which moves in harmony with your soul. Perhaps you will find others who will share your dream, and I wish you well on your quest...'

Mr Harding has been known to affirm that he is often aware of his characters waiting, locked within their filing cabinet, for him to come and write about them. From the examples of conversation given above, it would seem that the characters were extremely comfortable within their little abode, as they obviously staunchly refused to have anything at all to do with Mr Harding's novel. True, a number of proper nouns do wander about within the book, like insects in a bottle, giving pitiful impersonations of human beings, but we can hardly be expected to dignify them with the title 'characters' for any other reason but that of practicality (as we are required by convention to call them something).

So far, little has been said about the novel other than that its prose is abysmal, its dialogue taxidermic, and its characters



nonexistent. Enough, one might imagine, to condemn the book to Purgatory at least, bearing its puerile cover and attendant 'Prologue' like a stone on its back, there to await the unlikely salvation of a new, and alternate, edition. However, these matters of technique are the least of the book's faults.

Craftsmanship is important - none would deny that - but talent is even more so. The plain fact is that Mr Harding is not a writer, and it is unlikely that he will ever become one. There have been writers who have rendered their work in prose equal to that of Mr Harding at his worst; other writers have produced dialogue which, by comparison, makes Mr Harding's efforts appear the very paragon of elegance and wit; other writers have given to airy nothing a local habitation and a name, only to have it remain airy nothing. David Lindsay comes to mind. William Hope Hodgson is another. As craftsmen, both these writers are not appreciably superior to Mr Harding; but they are writers.

A writer should bring something to his work. If it isn't a talent for language, then it must be something else: an intensity of imagination; a vehemence of feeling; faith or hope or charity. But something must be there. If the reader of this article com-

plains that he has been told little of what Future Sanctuary is about, then let him take his complaint to Mr Harding rather than lay the blame with this reviewer, who is only too willing to describe what the novel is about - were he convinced that it is about anything at all.

Mr Harding has brought nothing to his work, and any criticism of the novel begins and ends there. He leads the reader to his book and then abandons him. The prose is not only clumsy, but pointless. The dialogue is not only poorly conceived, but meaningless as well. Not only does the reader care nothing about the characters, but Mr Harding obviously doesn't care about them either. Nor does he appear to care about what they do. The novel is as devoid of life as the interior of a killing jar.

If Mr Harding takes exception to some of the views expressed in this article, he may comfort himself with the thought that his book will still be available when the works of writers such as Lindsay and Hodgson are long out of print. Indeed, but for those copies in the possession of long-suffering reviewers, the entire edition should still be available.

Andrew Whitmore July 1977

---

The books discussed  
in SFC's survey of  
Australian Science Fiction

may be obtained from  
SPACE AGE BOOKS  
305 Swanston Street  
Melbourne Victoria 3001

(Overseas readers:  
Please have currency  
converted to Australian  
dollars, and add an  
average \$A1.50 per book  
for postage.)

(I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS)  
Continued from Page 4)

1971 and 1972 were the two best years for *SFC*. Franz Rottensteiner was sending me Stanislaw Lem's articles, and I still think publishing them had a lot to do with *SFC*'s first Hugo nomination and first Ditmar in 1972. (A very heady year.) In 1970, the 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' column began, and it seemed to have its best years in '71 and '72, fed by enthusiastic letters from nearly everybody, and nearly everybody disagreeing with Stanislaw Lem.

*SFC*'s success then also had much to do with the fact that Charlie Brown was my agent, and that new subscriptions rolled in. (That was in the good old days when *Locus* was mimeo and reviewed fanzines.)

Worldcon fever was building up, and Australian fans began to attend world conventions regularly. 1970 had been the real bidding year, however, with more than 100 different general circulation fanzines published in Australia during that year. Robin Johnson became more and more involved, and the bid and the eventual Convention depended more and more on his hard work. I like to think that *SFC*'s issues during the 'bidding years', 1970-73, helped to make sure that Australia held the World Convention.

During 1972 *SFC* began to change direction. *SFC* 28 was an issue into which I put a special effort. Four people - Leigh Edmonds, Harry Warner Jr, Bill Wright, Bruce Gillespie - told of our '1971'. Hardly a word about science fiction in the issue. *SFC*s 30 and 31, at the end of 1972, told, among other things, how I discovered the birds and the bees and the True Meaning Of It All (I wonder what that was?). *SFC* had become, more than before, my autobiography. To varying degrees, it has been that ever since.

1972-73 was the only financial year when I had any money to speak of - so I blew it all by going overseas during the last four months of 1973 and Janu-

ary 1974. Yes, I still mean to write an account of that journey. Promise. 1973 was the year when Australia was bidding at Toronto to hold the Worldcon. Our feeling of triumph was great when we won. The rest of the trip had its ups and downs. I'm glad I went, but I think five months on the road (or in the aircraft) cured me of travelling forever. I tried to produce *SFC*s as I went - but producing *SFC* 39 ruined Dave Gorman's duplicator when I was staying with the Gormans in Indiana; and Ed Cagle promptly gaffiated after we produced the *SFC* 40 that was never posted. (The 'real' *SFC* 40 did not appear until October 1974.)

1974 was my first attempt at freelancing. Not much money around, but I had few expenses, except for the rapidly rising costs of producing a fanzine. Hence production of issues of *SFC* slowed down remarkably, and I have never felt rich enough to return to the lightning schedules of 1970.

1975 was the World Convention, and the 'Le Guin Workshop', mentioned throughout this issue of *SFC*, and a wide variety of other interesting experiences. Perhaps the only entirely successful autobiographical piece I wrote was 'My 1975' for *SFC* 44/45.

1976 turned into a disaster, as every true follower of this magazine will remember. *SFC* copped the worst of the troubles. I borrowed a vast sum to set up *SFC* as an offset, semi-professional magazine, found that nobody much was interested, and was left with a huge debt to repay and not much money to pay it with. (I even had to go back to a regular job.) One of those offset issues is still languishing in the files, waiting for funds.

At the time, it seemed as if Melbourne fandom had benefited enormously from the boost provided by Aussiecon. Perhaps my most vivid memory of August '75 was the sight of Henry's Degraives Tavern entirely filled with Worldcon members tucking into that truly awful food for the sake of fandom and good times. Vale Henry and Gemma! When Degraives Tavern was closed at night for



Wednesday night meetings, a process began which, to my mind, has destroyed Melbourne fandom as I knew it, and has built, perhaps, something more interesting. Failure to agree on the best place for traditional Wednesday night gatherings remains. A pity. More revealing was the night of the *Star Wars* viewing in Melbourne in 1978. More than 50 of the people who were there might have called themselves s f fans but had never been seen before by the rest of us. I know some of the people from the university groups, but even most of the MUSFA people attending that night were new faces to me. The same kind of expansion has taken place throughout Australia. I've met only three or four of the Western Australian fans, for instance, but already WA has as many fans as could be found throughout Australia in 1969. Now there is a huge New Zealand group - but we knew of virtually no New Zealand fans in 1969. The only person who is now trying to keep track of all this activity is John Foyster, in *Chunder!* magazine, and I hope he is succeeding. The only people I know anymore are the *SFC* readers, about 120 of them, scattered throughout Australia and New Zealand. (Overseas readers still make up most of the mailing list.)

1977 was one of those non-years, rather flat and depressing, which turned out to be very important after all. You can read all about my 1978 and 1979 in *SFC* 55½, which went out with *SFC* 54. A return to freelancing in April 1978 was very encouraging, and living with, and marrying, Elaine has been even more encouraging. All that's needed is the money to return *SFC* to its regular schedule. But perhaps *SFC* belongs only to the dim, dark days of 1969? Who knows? (Put another stencil in the typewriter, Gillespie.)

\* \* \*

You will notice that I have managed to write a survey of the last ten years in a magazine called *S F Commentary* without once mentioning science

fiction, 'speculative fiction', or fantasy. That is because not a great deal has happened in the field during the last ten years. If you looked at the lists of Hugo and Nebula winners, you would conclude that nothing had happened during that time. However, I keep an eye on what's happening, and often I find good novels and stories which nobody else notices.

Things have been happening in Australia, as you can see from this issue. Ten years ago, there was little Australian s f to talk about, except for people like Lee Harding and Bert Chandler and Jack Wodhams selling to overseas markets. *Vision of Tomorrow* lasted a year, and it was published in England anyway. Now there are a few firms willing to take a chance on Australian sf, and there has been Norstrilia Press and Void Publications, whose efforts are described elsewhere in this issue.

Overseas, much has been happening in the science fiction industry, whose aims are quite different from those recommended in *SFC* from time to time. I read science fiction because I am looking for the new, the unexpected, the remarkable, both in subject matter and in ways of looking at familiar subject matter. On the other hand, to judge from reading the works of those to whom the science fiction industry gives its greatest rewards, that industry seems to be designed for those who want, most of all, something to read which is just like what they read before. This is the only way I can explain the rise of... But I had better not name names. The kind of new author I'm thinking of usually has a few stories published in *Analog*, a novel out from DAW, Del Rey, etc, and is suddenly overwhelmed with advances of \$10,000 or so for the next in what has already become an assembly-line of books. The voters for such awards as the Hugo and the Nebula usually back the judgment of the controllers of the publishing industry.

No, I do not deny hardworking writers the right to financial success for the first time in s f's history. But what

(Continued on Page 51)

Elaine Cochrane:

I MUST BE TALKING TO OUR FRIENDS, TOO

Well, here I am, twenty six, going on twenty-seven, and never contributed before to a fanzine. Hardly even read one, although that need not be a disqualification from writing for *SFC*.

But why start? Mainly to get fanzines out of my system, I think. With Bruce, who manages to put more panic into any situation than I would have thought possible, certainly more than I think necessary, fanzine production takes on the air of a vast and complicated enterprise, something like climbing Everest or crossing Antarctica. I can't say that I'm writing this because it's there, since it isn't there until I do it, but I do feel some sort of challenge.

My last literary effort was my Honours thesis, and that is something I still have to atone for. It was an unmitigated disaster - chemical, scholastic, typographical (I typed it), and literary. I shudder at the sentences left unfinished, the diagrams unlabelled, the conclusions unwarranted. As I've written all I ever will about C13 nmr longitudinal relaxation times of formaldehyde cross-linked amino acids, I feel I am at last ready to branch out.

What to write about? Not s f. This may be my first fanzine contribution, but I'm not that naive.

I've been to only four conventions and they don't seem to be anything to rave about.

Films I rarely see, and on politics I prefer to remain silent.

What else? I like cooking, but I'm not as good as the chef at our favourite restaurant (Two Up, 83 Johnston Street, Collingwood; 419 6086). I'll give you the recipe for lemon pudding later.

Sport I avoid.

Books I like to look at and buy, but they take so long to read. I have read probably no more than a fifth of the books in our house.

Art I like to look at also, but my knowledge is limited to 'I like what I see'.

Cats I like, but Charlie Taylor will be annoyed if I tell cat stories. Can't say I blame him. Someone else's cats are never as interesting as one's own.

Music? I play the piano, sort of, not as well as any of a dozen fans I could name, and I own a violin, from which I can extract horrible noises but not music. Of our rather large record collection there are very few pieces I could claim to know well, and quite a few records as yet unplayed. My favourite composers are Beethoven (rarely played because I can't reach the top shelf), Haydn, Vivaldi, Mozart. I also like early Stones, and the 1812 when played with suitably loud cannon. Francis Payne has a version, Maurice Abravanel with the Utah Symphony, that sounds like a full-scale naval barrage. Magnificent.

I love doing embroidery but, because the execution is so much slower than the inspiration, I tend to have two dozen projects going at once, all destined to remain unfinished for years.

I enjoy gardening when it has progressed to the stage of planting or pruning, but I am tiring of digging rubble out of our yard before starting the garden.

Work I despise, detest, loathe, hate, abhor.

Books. Someone I know used to buy anything that had, or had had, covers around printed pages and was suitably cheap. Anything at 5 cents he would buy; 10 cents required careful thought. As a result he had an enormous library of crud, with a few gems that made me drool. I am a little more selective; I buy books that one day, maybe, I just might want to read. I read reasonably quickly, but I buy books even



faster, so the number I buy remains at roughly three times the number I read for any one year. In 1978 I bought 336 books and read 126. 126 doesn't sound too bad, but I was working as a bus conductor and ploughed through masses of crud to keep me awake on night shift. It had to be crud so I didn't mind being interrupted by my driver stopping to pick up passengers. One problem with reading on the buses was that many passengers took it upon themselves to comment on what the illiterate (of course) conductor was reading. This year's total, til the end of June, is 71 books bought and only 33 read.

Bruce and I have just finished counting our book collection, and the figures are even worse than I thought. Just counting reading books (not science texts or pretty picture books) we have 3390 on the shelves. (Not counting s f magazines or fanzines, either.) I've read 489, just one seventh, and Bruce has read 963, or about one three-and-a-halfth. Not good. At last year's level of 100 books a year, which I certainly won't reach this year, I have 29 years of reading on the shelves. That includes things like *Remembrance of Things Past*, *The Man Without Qualities*, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and such many-volumed monstrosities which really count as one long book. Bruce has read most of them. I haven't.

So why am I typing this instead of reading? Well, after a bout of tonsillitis, made far more severe by an acute allergy to my workplace, I've just about reached saturation point. I just can't read like I used to. At school, I'd take out a book from the library before school, read it in class (I wasn't often caught - the punishment was banishment from the library for a specified period), return it at lunchtime, read the next during the afternoon classes, return it after school, get one to read on the way home. That was a mile walk across some rather nasty streets, so I didn't finish many books on the way home. My mother had ideas like I

should be out in the fresh air, or helping around the house or doing my piano practice, or even doing homework, so it took me all night to finish a lot of things. I am exaggerating a bit, of course. The most I ever borrowed in one year was 80 books, but it was about that stage that I discovered Large Books. *The Count of Monte Cristo* and the Sherlock Holmes stories, and even *Lord of the Rings* (O my dark, infamous past!) took much longer than one half day. But I have got lazy since then.

What do I like to read? Preferably in English, although I can read straight-forward French, virtually anything qualifies for at least a casual glance. I don't recall ever having read a Western (*Roughing It* doesn't count), and I haven't read a historical romance since I lost access to Rosemary Sutcliffe's children's books, unless you count Par Lagerqvist's stories about 9th-century Palestine. That doesn't mean I won't read them; it just means I haven't read them. I enjoy reading historical non-fiction, especially contemporary accounts: Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks*, Galbert of Bruges' *Murder of Charles the Good*, but not Suetonius' *Twelve Caesars*. They were dull! Even Tiberius wasn't especially titillating. I tend to avoid crime/detective books, although I have enjoyed the Saint stuff and loved *Don't Point That Thing At Me* by Bonfiglioli, and I like spy books. Don't ask me the distinction; it's as artificial as any classification. Love stories are harder to explain. I won't read a Mills and Boon romance, but what is the real difference between them and, say, *Death in Venice* or *Madame Bovary*? I certainly don't complain about the bad writing; I don't know if it's bad because I've never read any, and anyway, I read s f. One problem I have in the Philistine world Out There is convincing non-s f readers (who generally are pretty much non-readers) that there is as great a range of types of s f as there are of Love Stories or Crime Stories. I won't say there is quite the range of qual-



ity. I've read abysmal s f as I have of most other types of book, but I have yet to read an s f book that does for me what *The Recognitions* or *Portrait of a Lady* did. But then, I have read very few books of any kind that are in that class.

Which brings me to my Best Books of 1978. I don't list short stories, because it never occurs to me to do so until I've forgotten which I liked in the collection I read three months ago. So here are the novels:

- 1 *The Recognitions* (Gaddis)
- 2 *The Last of the Just* (Schwarz-Bart)
- 3 *Portrait of a Lady* (James)
- 4 *The Makioka Sisters* (Tanazaki)
- 5 *Year of the Quiet Sun* (Tucker)
- 6 *A Spectre is Haunting Texas* (Leiber)

As you can see, s f does get in there. There are quite a few others for Honourable Mention, but do not qualify for numerical listing. Here they are, in no order at all:

*Young Torless* (Musil), *The Rector's Daughter* (Mayor), *Great Expectations* (Dickens), *The Mouse and His Child* (Hoban), *Jane Eyre* (Bronte), *Madame Bovary* (Flaubert), *Journal of the Plague Year* (Defoe) (a fictional reconstruction with many inaccuracies; not a real journal, as he was born after the Plague), *The Miracle of the Rose* (Genet), *Beloved Son* (Turner).

As I only see fit to mention 14 out of the 123, you can imagine what the rest were like.

Why read so much anyway? Laziness, pure and simple. It's so much easier to read than think. I don't like thinking, but I don't like having my brain totally unoccupied. This has been my main problem in finding work. Given that there are more Chemistry graduates than chemical jobs, and that I am by no means a brilliant chemist, I have had to find work in areas that ask for no qualifications or skills at all. That's the trouble. You spend years getting a piece of paper, and everyone you knew who went to work instead acquired skills and good jobs and is sitting pretty. At the end of your course you are too old to be taken for an

apprenticeship (I would like to be a gardener) or on-the-job training. No one likes to pay adult rates for someone who's wasting time learning. I've been a school lab assistant for one term (Physics assistant and for junior Science), a bus conductor, and a public servant. At uni I worked in the High Energy Physics Research Laboratories. That sounds grand, but all I did was press buttons on a machine. It was, however, the most interesting of these jobs, with the possible exception of working for the MMTB. I have just handed in my resignation in from the Public Service and, to quote Tom Collins, I'm UNEMPLOYED AT LAST! Not for the first time, but this time I have a little money saved, a permanent roof over my head, if we can keep up the payments and, if Bruce is not mistaken and I do have sufficient grasp of the English language to copy-edit, I won't have to go job hunting again. I could claim that, being a married woman, I don't have to work, that it's his duty to support me, but that wouldn't go down too well. Besides, he's got a fanzine to support already, and that takes priority. Once I even offered to help him support it if he ever had serious trouble. The truth is, though, I may be lazy but I'm not a good sponge. Idleness drives me crazy.

So here I am. No useful skills, no fanzines or other masterpieces to my credit and shame, bone lazy, only good for charming stray cats. Nothing to talk about at all.

Here's the recipe for lemon pudding:

1 oz butter	6 oz sugar
4 oz plain flour	grated rind, and
2 separated eggs	juice, of 1
	lemon
	1 cup cold milk

Cream butter and sugar, add the flour and lemon, then egg yolks. Mix thoroughly, add milk, then stiffly beaten egg whites. Pour into a greased pie dish, stand it in a pan of warm water and bake in a moderate oven for 50 minutes.

As you can see, I don't cook metric yet, outside the laboratory.

- Elaine Cochrane June 1979



they are writing, quite often, has little to do with what I call science fiction.

The rise of women's s f seems, on the surface, to be an exception to this process. What seems like a fairly selective audience of women has begun buying and reading women authors, and in some cases this has bucked the general trend towards more and more of the same imperialist, militarist macho bullshit which is published as s f. However, publishing execs seem to have given the greatest rewards to women authors whom they see as Ursula Le Guin imitators. Instead of brisk looks at women in the future, women's s f has tended more and more to be a kind of highflown fantasy which has little to do with what Ursula Le Guin is really writing, but sounds a lot like her to the people who pick the books. And this 'fantasy' often sounds as imperialistic, militaristic, and macho as equivalent books by male writers.

But to get back to science fiction that is actually worth reading... and you come slap bang against the Ursula Le Guin Phenomenon. Obviously, Ursula has had quite an effect on my life during the last decade. She has supported *SFC* since it began. I have written already about the experience of being a member of a Workshop at which she was the Writer in Residence. But even her personal influence pales beside the influence her best books (especially *The Farthest Shore*) and short stories (especially 'The Stars Below') have had on my life. (And now Susan Wood has done us all a favour by collecting Ursula Le Guin's essays about fantasy and science fiction into an indispensable book, *The Language of the Night*, which I will review properly as soon as possible.)

The only trouble with Ursula Le Guin is that little of her wisdom or skill has been emulated by other s f writers. Pip Maddern knows what Ursula is on about ('Silence' in *The*

*View from the Edge*), but Pip is a person determined to go her own way, and I shouldn't think anybody's influence will stick for long. Again, Vonda McIntyre's friendship and association with Ursula Le Guin is fairly well known, but Vonda seems to have found her own voice in *Dreamsnake*, and she works slowly anyway. I have some quibbles about *Dreamsnake*, but I suspect that one of the reasons for its success is that it is so much better than other books written by people who imagine they are emulating Ursula Le Guin.

My other favourites in s f during the last decade have little to do with the vast river of sludge that pours over the shelves of Space Age Books. Thomas Disch and Brian Aldiss and Wilson Tucker are novelists who happen to write science fiction, and for this reason most of their books seem to be incomprehensible to the readers who keep the s f industry in business. Disch's *334* and *On Wings of Song* are two of the few unqualified successes during the last decade. Aldiss' *Frankenstein Unbound* and *The Malacia Tapestry* and *Barefoot in the Head* have given me much pleasure, and *Frankenstein Unbound* in particular repays considerable rereading. And Tucker's *Year of the Quiet Sun* is, I suspect, the best novel of the decade, I've praised it already (*SFC* 24, reprinted in the Tucker Issue, 43) and have read it at least four times.

Stanislaw Lem is somebody who was unknown to us in 1969. Now I would place *Solaris* and *The Cyberiad* as two of my all-time favourite s f books. Franz Rottensteiner, my irascible Austrian friend who has had as much to do with *SFC*'s success as anybody else, pushed Lem's name into the lime-light, where it nearly collapsed immediately for lack of good translators. Only the amazing work of Michael Kandel has made Lem one of the best known European writers in America today.

Nobody much in the s f world yet recognises the greatest two books of s f that I have yet discovered - *Cosmicomics* and *T Zero*, by Italo



Calvino. Obviously somebody somewhere knows of Calvino, since these books are reprinted constantly - but nobody in our field has yet written about his work with the kind of poetry and authority which the task demands. (Hence I have still not ventured into Calvino.) Only the occasional discovery of books like these justifies continued interest in the s f field. (Also serendipitous was my finding Kobo Abe's *Inter Ice Age Four* which appeared in, I think, 1969 in English. 'Serendipity', in both cases, was the recommendation of Dick Jennsen.)

SFC owes much to the writings of Philip Dick, but the 1970s have not educated many new books from him. Perhaps he has been struck dumb by all the noisy attention which critics have been giving him. All my favourite Dick books date from pre-1969, but *A Scanner Darkly* gave signs that he has not lost the old flair. The great Dick find of the 1970s was the first publication of his 1959 masterpiece, *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, which shows how fine a novelist Dick would be if he was not constrained by economics to write science fiction most of the time.

I've left lots of books out of consideration - Priest's *Fugue for a Darkening Island* and *The Inverted World*, for instance - but nearly all the books I've liked have been published in spite of trends in the s f field, not because of them. There was of course the temporary New Wave, which made possible the publication of such books as *Barefoot in the Head* and Joanna Russ' *And Chaos Died* for perhaps the only time in s f's history. With the New Wave ebbing fast, nearly all originality in the field has disappeared as well. The philistines have won... long live Goliath! The rest of us just have to read a lot more and in more widely scattered sources to find anything of interest.

There has been a continual list of achievements in the short fiction field - but again, you would never know it by looking at the Hugo and Nebula lists. Ninety-five per cent

of the good stories of the decade have appeared in original fiction anthologies, but most of the award nominees have come from the magazines. Stories which I recommend over the past decade are:

- 'The Castle on the Crag', by P G Wyal (*Fantastic*, Feb 69)
- 'The Time Machine', by Langdon Jones (*Orbit* 5)
- 'The Asian Shore', by Thomas Disch (*Orbit* 6)
- 'The Custodian', by Lee Harding (*Vision of Tomorrow*, May 70)
- 'The Electric Ant', by Philip Dick (*F&SF*, Oct 69)
- 'The View from this Window', by Joanna Russ (*Quark*/ 1)
- 'Bodies', by Thomas Disch (*Quark*/ 4)
- 'The Encounter', by Kate Wilhelm (*Orbit* 8)
- 'The God House', by Keith Roberts (*New Worlds* 1)
- 'Continued on Next Rock', by R A Lafferty (*Orbit* 7)
- 'Heads Africa Tails America', by Josephine Saxton (*Orbit* 9)
- 'Things Lost', by Thomas Disch (*Again Dangerous Visions*)
- 'In Hot Pursuit of Happiness', by Stanislaw Lem (*View from Another Shore*)
- 'The Making of Ashenden', by Stanley Elkin (*Searches and Seizures*)
- 'The Last Day of July', by Gardner Dozois (*New Dimensions* 3)
- 'The Direction of the Road', by Ursula Le Guin (*New Dimensions* 3)
- 'The Night Wind', by Edgar Pangborn (*Universe* 5)
- 'Mr Hamadryad', by R A Lafferty (*Stellar* 1)
- 'The Stars Below', by Ursula K Le Guin (*Orbit* 14)
- 'Tin Soldier', by Joan Vinge (*Orbit* 14)
- 'Riding the Torch', by Norman Spinrad (*Threads of Time*)
- 'The Kozmic Kid, or The Search for the Inestimable Silver Ball', by Richard Snead (*Fantastic*, Jul 74)
- 'Running Down', by M J Harrison (*New Worlds* 8)



'The New Atlantis', by Ursula Le Guin (*The New Atlantis*)  
 'Under the Hollywood Sign', by Tom Reamy (*Orbit 17*)  
 'Settling the World', by M J Harrison (*New Improved Sun*)  
 'Solid Geometry', by Ian MacEwan (*Fantastic Feb 75*)  
 'The Ins and Outs of the Hadhya City State', by Philippa Maddern (*The Altered I*)  
 'The Disguise', by Kim Stanley Robinson (*Orbit 19*)  
 'A Chinese Perspective', by Brian Aldiss (*Anticipations*)  
 'Pie Row Joe', by Kevin McKay (*Rooms of Paradise*)  
 'One Clay Foot', by Jack Wodhams (*Alien Worlds*)

If you read that lot, you would conclude that science fiction has had a magnificent decade. But you wouldn't know about most of these stories unless I told you about them.

Obviously, I've missed out a lot, including all the stories in *Cosmicomics*, *T Zero*, *The Cyberiad*, and *The Star Diaries*, because I've included those books for consideration at one time or another for my 'Best Novels' lists. Also, I'm several years behind in reading science fiction, and recommendations are only sketchy so far for stories published in 1977, 1978, and 1979. The hero of this list is, as you can see, Damon Knight. He's paid the price for publishing good stories, of course: *Orbit* has not been available in paperback since *Orbit 13*, and *Orbit 20* was the last in the series (unless some enterprising publisher will help Damon keep up the good work). The *New Worlds* anthologies were often good as well, especially for publishing the occasional Keith Roberts and M J Harrison stories. *NW* has died in its paperback form. In fact, almost nothing is left but Silverberg's anthologies and Terry Carr's *Universe*.

\* \* \*

In 1969, you could read *Speculation*, *Science Fiction Review*, *S F Commentary*,

and a few others if you wanted articles about science fiction. At that time I thought it unsatisfactory that such magazines were expected to produce fine material on an amateur basis. Already I had the delusion that someday somebody might call me to a position on high where I could be paid for doing what I like doing best - writing about science fiction.

The professional magazines about science fiction have now arrived (notably, *Foundation* in 1972 and *Science Fiction Studies* in 1973; *Algol*, *Science Fiction Review*, and some others now pay for articles) and I am still being paid to do almost every other task except writing about science fiction. I suspect I'm lucky I did not become enmeshed in the academic machine of writing about science fiction: so far, the results have been very disappointing. In my innocence, I thought that a professional critical magazine would be critical. (I hoped always for a *Scrutiny* of science fiction but lacked the gall to call my magazine *S F Scrutiny*.) Instead, magazines like *Extrapolation* and *SFS* have spent years providing the icons of the s f religious establishment. The motto seems to be: Defend the Faith! In the academic magazines, it takes the form of making the implicit claim that every book that can be pursued through sixty footnotes is necessarily a Classic of Science Fiction; and, because of that, is necessarily a Classic of World Literature. In the philistine giants, such as *SFR* and *Algol/Starship*, it takes the form of considering that everything except science fiction is beneath consideration ('only mainstream'), and that any book which is defended with sufficient energy is necessarily a Great Work.

So I've not been too impressed with the vast army of Defenders of the Faith, ranging from other magazines with circulations as small as *SFC*'s to the many books which now call themselves 'The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction'. Most of these



activities have nothing to do with criticism as I understand the term. Most of these books and magazines do not even offer accurate or attractively written book reviews. Most of the people who inhabit all these journals and encyclopaedias and guidebooks cannot even write an interesting or delightful sentence in the English language! Not that I'm holding up my own prose as an example of anything but the hurried jottings of an Editor who enjoys writing for his own magazine. But a fair number of pithy, energetic, and well-written pages have been published here. Among the professional journals, only *Foundation* still has a number of good writers (but I wish Malcolm Edwards would write the entire contents of his own magazine himself), and that magazine is the exception to most of my sweeping statements. Among the s f 'critics' who do not write well or critically, only a few professional novelists such as Aldiss or Le Guin stand out by contributing fine articles to such magazines as *Science Fiction Studies*.

So, I say with no trace of modesty, *SFC* is still needed. I'm not here just to have fun. I still believe in the principles which led me to publish *SFC* in the first place. I still believe that a critic should be 'damned critical', as Henry James put it. I still believe that a critic's function is to judge how a particular work measures up to the standards which the critic thinks are important. I still believe that a good novel or short story is one where the author respects language and can use it attractively and creatively. I do not believe that a badly written book is justified because it has been written about a 'worthwhile' topic. And... if you've been reading *SFC* for long enough, you would know better than I do what I believe in. Usually *SFC* reviewers just try to warn readers away from shoddy goods on the s f bookshelf (the whole bookshelf, to judge from the review copies I see) and point out the few good books which

get published.

The good reviewing is still being done in the amateur magazines, not the academic journals and professional fanzines. I can think of *Vector* and *Arena* in England, *Khatru* in USA, *Sphere* in Adelaide, and some new English-language journals from Europe.

\* \* \*

The other day it was great to receive in the mail copies of Don Miller's latest fanzines. I did not know until then that Don has been seriously ill for the last year or so, which is why he had not published for some time. Don was one of the first people to trade fanzines with *SFC*, and he has managed to last the decade. Quite a few of my main encouragers from 1969 still make contact from time to time. Dick Geis is still collecting Hugos at a ludicrous rate. The current *Science Fiction Review* reads much as it did in 1969 - but how many people remember the four issues of *Richard E Geis* in 1971 and 1972, which helped to start a whole range of personal, highly confidential magazines? (One of my current favourites is Don Thompson's *Don-O-Saur*.) Linda Bushyager was Linda Eyster in 1969, and she was responsible for *Granfalloon*. All of Linda's fanzines have disappeared for the time being, since she is now writing and selling novels. (When I visited the B shyagers in 1973, Linda had not even thought about writing novels.) 'Fannish' fanzines have come and mainly gone during the decade; my favourite would be the current best fannish fanzine, Terry Hughes' *Mota*. Peter Roberts' *Egg* has also been great when it has appeared; meantime I'll be content with *Checkpoint*. I managed to get a few copies of *Warhoon* from Richard Bergeron before he disappeared, and it is truly unfortunate that he has never been able to return to regular production. (The promise of a Walt Willis Issue - not the Issue itself but the Promise - is also ten years old this year.) As different as



possible from *Warhoon* has been *Locus*, which printed subscribers' changes of address in 1969, and now sports colour covers and typesetting.

As George Turner mentions elsewhere in this issue, 'the John Bangsund fanzine' has managed to appear fairly regularly, despite many changes of name. John Foyster also likes changing the names and aims of his fanzines. His efforts for the Worldcon bid, and publication of *Norstrilian News*, are probably his best-remembered publishing achievements, but there have also been *Boys' Own Fanzine* (with Leigh Edmonds) and *Chunder!* Foyster has also organised some of Australia's most successful conventions, spoken at many conventions, written articles and reviews, and pushed people like me back onto the Trufannish Path when they show signs of straying. Leigh Edmonds was a very different person in 1969 than he is now, but the jolly tone of his fanzines has changed little. Leigh's greatest achievement was founding ANZAPA. I wrote in *SFC* 54 about our celebration of ANZAPA's Tenth Anniversary in October 1978. Leigh is also famous for well-loved fanzines such as *Rataplan*, *Fanew Sletter*, and *Boys' Own Fanzine* (with John Foyster).

I could mention names for the rest of this issue. Merv Binns has become a regular fanzine editor (*Australian Science Fiction News*) as well as bookshop proprietor. Paul Stevens can still put out a funny magazine when he gets around to it. Harry Warner Jr still writes to lots of fanzines, if not to every one he receives. Ethel Lindsay is still reviewing fanzines and still publishes one of my favourite fanzines, *Scottishe*. Franz Rottensteiner is still there somewhere in Austria, still sends me *Quarber Merkur* from time to time, and I still cannot read it because it is always in German. But one day I will find a translator for my German fanzines... (The most consistent addresses in my subscription book are those for Walde-mar Kummig and Hans Joachim Alpers, both still publishing fanzines very similar to those they were doing in 1969.)

The people who have had the longest continuous subscriptions to *SFC* are Bert Chandler, Paul Anderson, and Derek Kew (Kevin Dillon's sub lapsed for awhile.) Dave Piper has kept in touch over all this time, and so did Ron Graham until his unfortunate death a few months ago. Joanne Burger has stayed in contact over all these years (and she even published a genzine for a few years), and so has Gian Paolo Coasato (who sent me *New Worlds* in a plain envelope when a few issues were banned from Australia in 1970). Stuart Leslie still writes to me from time to time...

Science fiction fandom might be a little world, often constricting, but it's the biggest, richest little world I know of.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile, what has been happening in the real world since 1969?

If you're talking about important events, then I will have to concede that the Rolling Stones really are finally, irrevocably on the skids. Even *Some Girls* sounds just a bit fake to me, and Ron Wood cannot hack it as a Stones guitarist. (He can't hack it as a Ron Wood guitarist, either, as you would notice from listening to his latest record.) Ron Wood makes Mick Taylor sound like a genius, and both of them make Brian Jones sound like the nearest thing to God that rock 'n' roll has produced. Brian Jones died a decade ago, and I'm amazed that the Stones have produced so much good stuff after the event (especially *It's Only Rock'n'Roll*, which even other Stones fans tend to ignore). Still, two dud albums in a row and a very boring live album just show that even the best rock 'n' roll band in the world can get awful tired after 15 years or so on the road. But it's the Stones' records I will wear out, not anybody else's.

In fact, the whole record scene has gone downhill since 1969. Way back then, for instance, I thought that Creedence Clearwater Revival was just a good band. Recently I bought a few



of the early albums, and Fogarty and Co. sound stunning beside everything being released now. For awhile, I thought Led Zeppelin and Rod Stewart would revive rock 'n' roll between them. But Led Zeppelin has gone slow and somehow distracted, and what has happened to Rod Stewart is so unbelievably awful that I won't mention him anymore. (Still, *A Nod's As Good As a Wink to a Blind Horse* and *Every Picture Tells a Story* are two of my Top 10 albums; Stewart was very good in 1972.) David Bowie made crackling albums early in his career. I've discovered Lou Reed only recently; when I think of it, he's probably the only pop musician who hasn't sold out in some way or another during the 1970s. It helps to be irredeemably sardonic during the seventies.

I've gained more and more enjoyment from that marginal area on the edge of folk, country, and rock which is filled by very fine musicians, most of whom played with the Byrds during the 1960s. (I've discovered the Byrds only recently, and Elaine and I actually saw McGuinn, Hillman, and Clark play the Dallas Brooks in 1973; oh joy!) Gene Clark is a favourite of mine; Gram Parsons made some good albums; and I found a brisk album by Gene Parsons. The two best musos of the seventies - Ry Cooder and Loudon Wainwright III - come from this indefinable area of music which I think of as 'good-time music'. Cooder and Wainwright are funny and always sound as if they are having fun. Beats the Seventies Blues every time.

The two best records since 1970 are *Blood on the Tracks* and *Desire* by Bob Dylan, but his last few albums have been dreary. Still, Dylan has staged more revivals than most musicians have made records, and he will probably still be around at the end of the eighties, if any of us is.

The disaster area in rock music has been the general field of electronic sludge, ranging from the German bands (would you rather be rolled on by an elephant or listen to an hour of Tangerine Dream?) to the production values

of disco. (I found a really good disco track the other day - but it was recorded in 1971 by Stevie Wonder. He and Isaac Hayes invented the disco music way back then, and the rest since then has been good promotion.)

Punk? New Wave? I get the feeling that most of the New Wave bands don't care too much about anything, let alone making good rock music. But people like Nick Lowe and Dave Edmunds are worth listening to. And Australia's own Jo Jo Zep and the Falcons make the best live albums I've heard for awhile.

The general pop scene could do with a decrease in production values. Perhaps producers should demand that rock groups return to recording albums in less than 24 hours on a two-track recorder, each song at a single take. We might get some good music again.

\* \* \*

Sorry I got carried away there. Listening to records and, worse, buying them, takes up far more of my time and money than anything connected with science fiction.

\* \* \*

It is difficult to say what has been happening in literature during the last ten years. If you had read *The New York Review of Books* and *The Times Literary Supplement* during all that time, you would have some idea what was happening. However, I have had access to those magazines only intermittently. Usually I rely on recommendations from my friends. In particular, Gerald Murnane has put me onto some of the best books I have ever read, especially Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* (freely available, through Picador, again at last), Canetti's *Auto Da Fe* (also recently re-released by Picador), and Gunter Grass' *The Tin Drum*.

But those books were written long before 1969. Most of the books I've enjoyed most during the last ten years were written early this century



or before: Henry James, Henry Handel Richardson, Hermann Hesse, Thomas Mann, etc. It is difficult to recall peaks of excitement rising above the flat plain of recent literary endeavour.

However, it is worth noting that the book which has been 'discovered' most often by people I know (often independently from one another) is Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Why are there no books being written in English like this? In turn, discovering Marquez often leads to a discovery of the whole rich world of South American literature: Fuentes, Llosa, Asturias, Borges, Arenas, and many more. So the last decade has been one of translation and discovery of South American books, often written well before 1969.

Fiction from Britain itself seems dead on its feet, but a few good novelists are still working in USA. Stanley Elkin's books are almost unobtainable in Australia, but if you can ever find *The Dick Gibson Show*, buy it. It shows that our language, even in Elkin's feisty version, can still be used with zest, creativity, and piercing accuracy. (His books are funny, too.) William Gaddis is somebody whose reputation I discovered in a very roundabout way. His great novel, *The Recognitions*, was recently reprinted, and a new book, *JR*, is still waiting to be read.

One of the best American novels of the decade, Gene Wolfe's *Peace*, I discovered only because the author was famous already to science fiction readers. Someday someone else will discover that book.

While general literature has been going stale, all the excitement has been going on in children's literature. If you want the finest books from England during the last decade, look at Penguin's Puffin or Peacock lists - Mayne, Garfield, etc. Russell Hoban's books cross over all the genre categories: I've enjoyed *The Mouse and His Child*, *The Lion of Boaz-Jachin and Jachin-Boaz*, and *Turtle Diary*. And Alan Garner must

be the finest writer currently working in Britain.

Which brings us to Australian literature. Deservedly, the best-known Australian writer (apart from Colleen Whatsername, the *Thorn Birds* lady) is Patrick White. But second and third would surely be Patricia Wrightson and Ivan Southall, whose books are for children. Apart from them, very little. Gerald Murnane's *Tamarisk Row* was my favourite Australian book in the decade, but a worthy successor from him has not appeared. Joseph Johnson's *Womb to Let* and Peter Mathers' *The Wort Papers* were funny and zany back in 1973 - but whatever happened to Johnson and Mathers? Even the Miles Franklin Award, formerly a guarantee of quality, has been given only to pot-boilers and predictable winners (*Poor Fellow My Country*) during recent years. George Turner's *Transit of Cassidy* is the only recent Australian novel to be worth much, and that barely scored a review in the press! Australian literature is in a bad way. Many reasons are given - foreign ownership of our publishers, Literature Board grants, etc - but I would have thought an uninterested public, tepid or ignorant reviewers, and inadequate payment for the writer's efforts would stop almost anybody trying to produce a good Australian novel or short story these days.

All in all, the best way to gain a good read these days is (a) try a translation of a South American, European, Japanese, African (etc) book; (b) read a children's book; (c) buy a book by one of the science fiction or fantasy authors recommended in *SFC*.

If the worst comes to the worst, read non-fiction, as everybody else is doing.

\* \* \*

During 1969 to 1979, the newspapers have been filled with the usual news of wars and rumours of wars, and the usual descriptions of famine, plague, earthquake, fire, and pestilence of every kind. The Vietnam War seemed to



have ended when America lost, but the Vietnamese people still have their troubles. It's just gone ten years since the first walk on the Moon (which I saw on television while staying at the home of a science fiction writer, Lee Harding, which was gosh-wow to me at the time), but the Saturn flypast (and, a few years ago, the landing on Mars) are much more awe-inspiring. I wonder whether we will ever get into space after all, except to fight wars? American fans seem far more concerned about these things than I am - but I still cannot help being thrilled at seeing boyhood dreams coming true over the years.

Almost every aspect of scientific and technological 'progress' has taken on an ambiguous value. Australia is undergoing the pain of discovering that many of its workers will be made redundant by 'inevitable' developments in micro-miniaturisation of equipment. But acceptance of 'inevitable' penalties to workers in Australia is just symptomatic of attitudes since the dismissal of the Whitlam Government here in 1975. I suspect that the 1960s lasted longer here than anywhere else. I was in New York the week that the sixties finished for the rest of the world: the week of the last Arab-Israeli conflict, when oil supplies were turned off for the first time. That was 1973 - but the heady days of the Whitlam Government were just starting here, and did not really finish until the middle of 1975. During that three years a process took place by which most Australian workers became paid properly for the first time ever, and capital declared an investment strike which pushed unemployment levels up to politically disastrous levels by 1975. Mad Mal came in. With much less economic nous than anybody would have believed possible, since then he has been doing his best not only to make things as bad as possible for as many workers as possible, but he has virtually sanctioned endlessly rising levels of unemployment, and found reasonable

excuses for doing so. It's the swallowing of the excuses by the electorate that has made life in Australia look increasingly bleak after the bright prospects of 1972. As John Hindle said on 3LO recently: 'The eighties will be marvellous! They must be, after the seventies.'

The most accurate barometer of what has happened in Australia since 1970 has been the rising and falling fortunes of *Nation Review* (also called *Sunday Review* and *The Review* at various times). Its new owner, Geoff Gold, has been having problems keeping it afloat, and various people have already essayed obituaries. Hepworth, Adams, Becket, and Bill Green have all had their say recently, and have somehow come to the conclusion that the Australian readers don't want to know about an 'alternative weekly' anymore. Perhaps - but, in economic terms, they never did. Some of us have always read *Nation Review*, because it is the only alternative. Its initial effervescence was caused by the knowledge its writers had that at last they could contribute to a paper where they could say what they wanted. It's the only time the dead hand of proprietors on Australian newspapers has been lifted. Those early writers talked about everything previously unknown in our daily press - sex, Women's Lib, capitalist ripoffs, of course, but also good book and film reviews. The main thrust of the paper was to get rid of the Macmahon LCP Government, and *NR*'s circulation was highest when this was accomplished and the Whitlam Government began. One commentator was berating the paper for supporting Whitlam from then on, quite forgetting that Whitlam and his ministers were canned as often in *NR* as anywhere else. But the paper was different from the rest of the press because it gave a continuing insight into the nefarious doings of the Liberals and the increasing number of extreme right-wing groups. Also, Mungo McCallum, as political correspondent, was the first journalist, and perhaps the last, to give much



idea of what was really happening in Canberra.

But still I forget to say that *Nation Review's* contributors were funny and ratbaggy and often foul-mouthed and believed nothing was sacred. The disappearance of such a paper means that Australia returns to being the same dull place it was in 1969. For awhile in 1974 and 1975 it looked as if this would never happen.

\* \* \*

Since it looks as if *Nation Review* will not be around much longer to talk about things worth talking about, it looks as if I will need to do it from time to time. Topics nuclear were raised in *SFC* 53. John Berry was co-editing *Egoboo* (with Ted White) back in 1969, and he is one of the many letter-writers who have provided the real backbone of *SFC*:

JOHN BERRY

1203 18th Ave E, Seattle, Washington  
98112, USA

*SFC* 53 arrived in yesterday's mail, with the usual time-warp delay of several months between publication and perusal. I'm delighted to see a new issue, and secretly glad that you've returned to mimeo and a more personal magazine, although not glad at the reasons. (I would suggest that you continue to publish *SFC* and try for more subscriptions, which I think are out there potentially, while not having to feel desperate about it with this less ambitious format. There are indeed people who want some 'straight talk about science fiction', who are 'interested in applying acumen and independent, disinterested intelligence to the science fiction field'. (And who know how to use the word 'disinterested' - thank you for that!) It's just that by the nature of the question those people are fewer, and less public, than the larger audience for superficial s f writing. Your problem is not at all in what you write, or publish; it's in reaching more of those people than you already do.

I'm glad to hear that your life goes well. I wish you good luck and good sense. (You need both, I think, if not constantly then at least periodically.) I hope that you will someday achieve your goal of editing *SFC* for a living; that's a goal I can appreciate fully, since it's almost exactly what I attempted with Pacific North West Review

of *Books* and couldn't make work. Your talk now of making a living at freelance editing inspires me to make a stab at finding freelance jobs here. I'm not sure how many there are in Seattle. At present I make a very modest living as a part-time photo-typesetter, and occasionally sell freelance writing.

A skim over your *Favourite Things* elicited a smile of recognition at your listing of Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* and *Red Shift*. They would fall into my 1978 favourites, since I was introduced to Garner's writing (by Susan Wood) last year and quickly gobbled up all there was. I'm not sure that *Red Shift* is in fact the better book of the two, though more refined, certainly. I did, however, just recommend it to a local short story writer who is a friend of mine; she is moving, in her recent writing, in the direction of compression, leaving nonessentials out, conducting the business of the story in dialogue, and I think she may find much of interest in *Red Shift*. It may serve as a warning, actually, of what happens when you refine a style too far; or it may provide her with good examples.

I have read your two pieces on Australian politics, 'Australia: Fear and Loathing Forever?' and 'A World Mythed Up?' (Do you always title things with question marks?) I'm impressed with the lucidity of your writing; I'm naturally happy with your expression of ideas and feelings that are close to mine. The only thing that bothers me is the partisan tone; not that you take stands, but that you seem to do so with an alternating cynical/romantic fervour. I don't think I'm a romantic, which is probably why I have never been able to maintain a convincing cynicism; the two are sides of one coin. I continue to be fascinated by impassioned accounts of the political struggles in Australia - your accounts and John Bangsund's, largely, though I recall an excellent essay by Bill Wright in *ANZAPA* a couple of years ago - and I find the description you give of 3ZZ Access Radio quite amazing: amazing that a public access radio station could generate such wide support. We have such a station in Seattle, KRAB, which various people I know work at as volunteers or employees; it occupies a needed spot in the media matrix of the region, but it is perpetually in need of money and operates always on a shoestring. There is no government support, of course; KRAB does not look for grants, and it is entirely supported by its listeners in the form of voluntary subscriptions. Like 3ZZ, and listener-sponsored stations in other US cities, KRAB features a lot of ethnic shows, news and music and features for the city's various ethnic communities, as well as a lot of free-form craziness. Unlike Melbourne, I



gather, Seattle has a wealth of commercial radio stations, enough so that I believe that the Puget Sound region as a whole has no available frequencies left for new stations to broadcast on. There is one Public Broadcasting Service station (government sponsored), noted chiefly for its classical music and some nationally distributed PBS shows like 'All Things Considered'. If we had a powerful enough antenna we could pick up the CBC from Vancouver or Victoria without its fading in and out, and that would add another perspective to local radio. In Vancouver there is also a public access station, CFRO Co-op Radio, which is perhaps even more a struggling enterprise than KRAB; the situation in Canada, of course, is different from that in the US, since Canada has a government-sponsored 'public' network in the CBC. Co-op Radio, I think, arose in reaction to the centralisation of the CBC in Toronto, the increasing trivialisation of its programming (that is a completely second-hand opinion, but it's a widespread complaint), and the lack of local input and locally generated shows; and in response to a natural anarchic impulse to 'do it ourselves'. But in neither city is there anything on the scale you describe for 3ZZ; the concept of Commonwealth Electoral Officers being asked to conduct the elections for the station's Greek Language Committee - only one group served by the station! - is phenomenal.

If I can dig up copies, I may send you some guides from KRAB and CFRO - by sea mail, of course. Pass them on to Don Ashby if you don't want to keep them.

I wasn't intending to go on so long about public access radio. What I did mean to talk about was your consideration of uranium mining in the Northern Territory and its impact on nuclear use in the rest of the world. I have been actively involved - well, occasionally active - in local efforts to halt construction of the Trident nuclear submarine base, which is planned for Bangor, Washington, right across the Sound ('the most beautiful ground zero in the world'). There are separate, cooperating groups opposing the construction of nuclear reactors on the shores and tributaries of Puget Sound and the ocean, and trying to shut down the one that is presently operating on the Columbia River near Portland, Oregon. All the arguments you cite contribute to my support for the anti-nuclear movement, as does the understanding that nuclear reactors can only reinforce the centralised, energy-intensive economy that we are possessed by now. Even if it weren't dangerous, nuclear power as a method of fuelling the economy and social structure works against everything I most

passionately want: a decentralised, stable-state, cooperative society with a healthy sense of self-respect and of respect for the world outside our skins (or our egos) and a sense of our place within it. I don't like utopian literature, but I maintain what could be called a utopia in my mind as a model of what I am aiming at and working toward. I oppose nuclear power because it is possibly the most pervasive force being unleashed on us all at this historical point; social changes and the rise and fall of empires are temporary compared to the effects that nuclear wastes can have on a world that was never asked if it wanted them. But my most telling argument, I suppose, is very simple. Look at who controls nuclear plants and disposes of nuclear wastes. Do you trust them to run your telephone system or your post office? Would you then trust them with your life?

That much cynicism, I find, comes easily.

I'm glad to see an intelligent essay on nuclear power in a fanzine, and I think that your final points are important to the s f community in particular. The proliferation of old s f cliches in movies, television, and mass market paperbacks in the past couple of years demonstrates just how right those critics were who insisted that science fiction is creating a new mythology for western civilisation. But the myths that are spreading are the most simple-minded: the worship of technology and the extension of the frontier that American s f, at least, has revelled in for decades; if s f is giving us a handle with which to grasp our technological world, it is a clumsy handle, one most suited to holding things as they are, capable only of large, lumbering movements against the inertia of what the handle attaches to. We need to create more of the finer, subtler myths that s f has started to make in recent years; and we need to bring to bear on the s f myths that are spawned all the intelligence we have and all our breadth of knowledge and understanding. Writers' conclusions may be at loggerheads with each other, but we must not let them get away with unquestioned assumptions, partial understanding, or a narrow view of reality.

That is the responsibility of the fans and critics of science fiction, and it's a responsibility that you're exercising. And that, I guess, is why I was so glad to see SFC in the mailbox yesterday.

(6 January 1979)



It's a help when somebody says clearly what I was trying to say in a stumbling way. My secret utopia, like that imagined by most people who think about such things, tends to be shaped in answer to what is actually happening around me. My imagined utopia now would be without atomic power of any sort; I doubt if that would have been true if I had written for this sort of fanzine in the 1950s. All the evidence has come up against nuclear power, for 'peaceful' purposes or warlike, but bumbling politicians like Doug Anthony can only see the dollar notes fluttering in front of their faces. My imagined utopia would certainly be without cars. No chain fast food stores, either, or freeways. Not as many people. What I see, perhaps, is a society rather like that of Australia in the 1950s, but without the stultifying bigotry, censorship, and puritanism which is the quality I remember most from the 1950s.

Thanks for the information about your access radio stations. We still have 3RRR on the FM band, opened up only in recent years. 3MBS is a public subscription classical music station run by a rather strange old chap who makes sure that no details of programs are given over the air so that all listeners will feel constrained to take out a subscription and receive the program notes. When you do this, however, you find no details of operas or oratorios. This information can be obtained for 'only' another \$10 a year. (I've heard that the Sydney MBS station is much better.) But the government-run station offering ethnic programs, 3EA, is reported to be not even a pale imitation of 3ZZ. There seems to be an implacable determination among members of our current government to 'keep the uppity ethnics in their place'.

I hope you keep surviving okay, John, and that a few bits of our utopias might come true, instead of the only-too-ghastly realities and possibilities, such as those implied by nuclear submarine bases across the bay.

DON ASHBY

22 Maugie St, Abbotsford, Victoria 3067

((Re SFC 54)) I agree with you wholeheartedly with your comments on Unicon 4. Even I, under the encumbrance of an extremely broken foot and an on-the-rocks love affair, found the bits I attended (inbetween making those much-maligned sandwiches and protecting Tonia from the unwelcome attention of extremely drunk male fans) most enjoyable. The Ditmar debacle was just what the whole idiotic institution deserved. At least the business session was exciting for a change. The fan politicians and closet demagogues have since proved that fandom can run precision-engineered conventions in which the usual blah is chewed over in the traditional manner, so your remarks will hopefully not send irate fans rushing to their typers foaming at the mouth as such an admission as you have made might have done six months ago.

I will not regale you with cat stories, even though Ersatz just threw up all over the washing machine. I can come and do that around your place anytime. I mean, of course, regale you with cat stories. I wouldn't dream of throwing up all over your washing machine. It isn't British.

Philip Stephensen-Payne is, I gather, not a complete idiot. He could do much to dissuade others from thinking this by not sounding off half-cocked about matters he apparently isn't equipped to discuss. It is beyond my comprehension why someone would spill so much ink trying to defend Robert Silverberg. A luminary in the field of primitive s f he may be, but his attempts to produce stylistically competent, or even literary, memorable s f have been almost pathetic. It seems to me that perhaps one of the greatest traps an ardent s f fan can fall into is ending up with an utterly destroyed perspective. Science fiction is an extremely small pond, though getting larger, and to attempt to draw up conditions for literary excellence from within it is futile. Most s f is extremely ephemeral and deserving of little more attention than to be read when you are waiting for a train or are too tired to read something better. Every now and then a writer comes along within the field who is good. These writers are generally people who have something specific to say about the human condition and find s f the best mode of saying it. These people, like Dick, Delany, Le Guin, Aldiss (with reservations), Wolfe, Russ, Calvino, etc, etc, are not exactly s f writers (though, sadly, they are often packaged as such) but are writers who write s f. George Turner is one of these. To intimate that George is in some way jealous or aspiring to the 'lofty'



pinnacle of achievement enjoyed by Silverberg is so idiotic that only ignorance of the writings of George makes it possible to be forgiven. In style and characterisation, not to mention actually having something coherent and worthwhile to say, George is so far ahead of Silverberg that it is laughable. Mr Stephensen-Payne's slip was left glaring when he listed his Non-SF Novels by SF Writers. Ninety per cent of them were hacks writing worse (if possible) outside the genre than they did in it. On reflection, make that 50 per cent - but most of the others mentioned aren't exactly literary works of the memorable kind.

Mr Stephensen-Payne's credibility is eroded even more seriously when he reaches the part of his letter concerning the Niven-Pournelle collaborations. To mention them in the same breath (or paragraph) as Dick is a bit like pairing up Enid Blyton with Alan Garner. The Goat in Mod's Eye was so full of holes you could have driven more than a city through any one of them, and the characterisation almost aspired to the heights of E E 'Doc' Smith. Inferno was so light it took me about an hour to read and sent me screaming back to Dante to reassure myself that it wasn't as flimsy as the dynamic duo made it seem. Inferno was a piece of cynical money-making literary effrontery second only to using Carmina Burana in a coffee commercial.

I really enjoyed the Aldiss and Zelazny speeches, as I missed them at the convention (the call of the sandwiches). Aldiss has a hard-nosed attitude to his writing and the field in general that is refreshingly different from the inconsequential posturing of writers with less ability and more ego. Zelazny showed himself to be a craftsman very much aware of his responsibility to the English language and the sensibilities of his readers.

I spend more of my time than I can afford going to schools and talking to children about s f, and the material present in the two speeches has given my (by now rather flagging) spiel a big boost.

Thanks for a very enjoyable issue and let's have them thinner and more often.

(20 July 1979)

If SFC appears more often, it will certainly be thinner. The only two economical sizes for it are either a triple issue of 150 pages or a single issue of 16 pages. More of the latter, I hope, and fast.

Thanks for sending a real SFC knockdown-argument type of letter, Don. Gets the adrenalin flowing and the typewriter keys clicking.

RICK STOOKER

403 Henry Street, Alton, Illinois  
62002, USA

Thanks for SFC 53. I had to write to answer your question about Richard Snead, author of 'The Kozmic Kid' (Fantastic, July 1974), because few others in the s f community know anything about him and, of those, I suspect that only Terry Hughes and Ted White are on your mailing list, and they may not respond.

According to Ted, Snead was about eighteen when he wrote 'The Kozmic Kid', and had been taking acid frequently ever since he was thirteen. He comes from, I believe, either North or South Carolina. He had a pronounced southern accent when I met him briefly at Torcon and right after Discon. In 1974 he was trying to expand 'The Kozmic Kid' into a novel; but I don't know whatever happened to it. Robin White told me in the summer of 75 that Richard had moved back to his home town, and that's the last I've heard of him.

Snead seems to have been one of those one-shot literary phenomena who write thinly disguised autobiographical first novels which reveal great promise and are highly remarkable documents because the authors led highly remarkable lives, but who never produce good second works because they cannot jump out of their own experience long enough to write from the viewpoint of characters who are not themselves under other names.

However, I'd be happy if, in the future, he proves me wrong.

My worry is that even if he does write, or is writing more brilliant s f stories, nobody will buy them now that Ted White has left Amazing/Fantastic. SFWA criticised Ted to their hearts' content, but he was there when members found they had written a story too offbeat or 'experimental' for the mainstream s f editors to touch.

...It saddened me to see you praise Star Wars so much. But perhaps the current hysteria over it is not so prevalent in Australia, and you haven't been forced into reaction against it as I have. (18 January 1979)

I still have a lot of affection for Snead's story. For one thing, the author seemed boiling with ideas, sights, and sounds needing eruption into exciting language. I don't think he quite 'got' the right language sometimes, but he was trying. Also, 'The Kozmic Kid' provided a jolt of encouragement to me when I read it in 1977. I had come to think



of life as a slippery-slide down which one slid inevitably until - whoosh! - off the end and into the dark. Snead's mad life-players had a different idea - life is like a pinball game, with the little silver ball trying to keep bouncing sideways and upward as long as possible, sliding off at the end only after every other trick had been tried.

I don't think I praised *Star Wars* as anything but what it was - a good, fast movie, rather funny if you take it as a parody of the old Republic serials. These days, I remember *Close Encounters* with a lot more affection (as it is witty, as well as funny), but neither film has much to do with my idea of a science fiction film.

ALEXANDER DONIPHAN WALLACE

306 E Gatehouse Drive, Apt H, Metairie,  
Louisiana 70001, USA

Very much thanks for SFC 53, illuminating and enjoyable, replete with goodies about sf&f and varia. Your devotion to the genre is notable.

John McPharlin's essay on Brian "Aldiss" *The Malacia Tapestry* is both entertaining and instructive, an admirably humanistic piece. One enjoys the novel from having read the critique, and conversely. Of 3 pp, in excess of 1.5 pp are devoted to the mores, topography, history, and religions of Malacia, and about 0.5 pp are about the literary historiography of the novel. This distribution of emphasis leaves little space to the structure and characters, possibly by design and intent. But one gathers the idea that the characterisation is deficient, which I take to be so, and that the plotting is loose, which it is not.

The whyness of this state of affairs, or so it appears to me, is worthy of comment. Our 'hero', Perian de Chirolo, is a picaro, a beguiling and engaging rogue, an artful dodger, a prankster, convinced that every woman should lie on her back and spread her legs for him. The picaresque story is well-embedded in our literature - the Robin Hood legends, the Munchausen tales, the Retief stories (Keith Laumer), the Fafhrd and Grey Mouser sequence (Fritz Leiber), and so on. But the First Law of Humour, that there can be no long jokes, implies that the picaresque novel cannot exist - and Aldiss has spread it over 300 pages, much too many. We can have Retief stories but not a Retief novel.

Perry is somewhat of a stinker, a decidedly selfish little beast, and our commonplace morality will not allow him to win in the end; he must be punished, and the best we can do is to allow him to end as he began. As McPharlin points out, this makes the novel cyclic, as with Cugel in Jack Vance's Eyes of the Overworld.

As to structure, the play-within-a-play device is helpful, but not enough to make the story into a true novel. Aldiss achieves length, but at the expense of breadth. Almost, Malacia is the 'hero' of the story, as McPharlin's review indicates. Moreover, Aldiss adheres to the canonical unities of place, time, and action. But this is still not enough. The novel fails because one cannot avoid the First Law of Humour.  
(21 January 1979)

Since I (and, I suspect, John McPharlin and Brian Aldiss) have never heard of your First Law of Humour, then I fail to acknowledge its appropriateness to *The Malacia Tapestry*. Also, the tone of melancholy, or even tragedy, predominates over any mood of humour. The book seems to me a pattern of metaphors about the relationship between perception and action, ie, about life itself. Perian does not see himself in the figure in the play, but neither does Malacia perceive the perilousness of its own position, where it pays for external security with the currency of internal decay and squalor. To want change is treason there; to achieve it is death; to survive is to become blind; to achieve a vision is to risk everything else in one's life. *The Malacia Tapestry* is a book rich with the perilousness of life, and so is quite different from all the picaresque cycles you mention, where the hero is never really affected by each individual adventure. Perian has changed somewhat by the end of *The Malacia Tapestry*.

Anyway, I am probably forestalling or detracting from answers from either John McPharlin or Brian Aldiss, so I move onto a letter from:

ANDREW WEINER

124 Winchester St, Toronto, Ontario  
M4X 1B4, Canada

SFC 53 seemed rather perfunctory. About the only thing which really engaged me was Damien Broderick's letter on Silverberg, which seemed to say more about what is good and bad about his writing than your entire special issue. I would also tend to side with Stableford against Turner's position, which seems to me to be a kind of literary macho. Sooner or later, every writer has to come to terms with the market one way or another, and not necessarily in an all-or-nothing way. (Stableford may be guilty of plenty of hackwork, but he also wrote The Realms of Tartarus, which may be the best s f novel I've read in years.)

I think the reason behind the general flatness of SFC 53 can be found partly in your Top Ten lists. It's obvious that you don't like most science fiction very much. Neither do I, but I don't try to publish a magazine about it. If you're continuing with SFC just to meet obligations to subscribers, I for one would be happy to discharge you from that obligation - or perhaps you could go to an all-letter format, letters always being one of SFC's strongest points.

I disagree with you, incidentally, about Gateway. Pohl is guilty of much the same slickness as Silverberg, but I think he is working his way out of it. Gateway is a considerable achievement, and if he keeps this up he may finally get to be as good as Kornbluth.

I'm surprised that A Scanner Darkly even made your runners-up list. I thought it was a great disappointment. In fact, about the only writer I have any faith in these days is Disch. (30 January 1979)

SFC 53 probably was a bit flat, but mainly because of the physical and financial difficulties of producing it. The same can be said of 54, which was typed up as a quickie fill-in issue for November just before this issue would appear in January.

The beginning of this column would have made it clear, I hope, why I keep on with the magazine. I still know what s f should be and could be. It's worth continuing to publish the magazine with such an idea in mind.

Since you mention my Top Ten lists in SFC 53 (for 1977), here are a few of my:

FAVOURITE THINGS 1978

FAVOURITE NOVELS 1978

- 1 *The Tragic Muse*  
by Henry James  
(Original publication date: 1890.  
Edition read: Dell LX133.  
575 pages.)
- 2 *Capricornia*  
Xavier Herbert  
(1938. Lloyd O'Neil. 510 pp.)
- 3 *The Malacia Tapestry*  
Brian W Aldiss  
(1976. Jonathan Cape. 313 pp.)
- 4 *Transit of Cassidy*  
George Turner  
(1978. Nelson. 259 pp.)
- 5 *On the Road*  
Jack Kerouac  
(1955. Signet D1619. 254 pp.)
- 6 *Confessions of Zeno*  
Italo Svevo  
(1923. Secker & Warburg. 448 pp.)
- 7 *Confessions of a Crap Artist*  
Philip K Dick  
(1975. Enthwhistle. 171 pp.)
- 8 *Roadside Picnic*  
Arkadi and Boris Strugatski  
(1977. Gollancz. 145 pp.)
- 9 *Such Is Life*  
Tom Collins  
(1903. Lloyd O'Neil. 371 pp.)
- 10 *I Am A Cat*  
Natsumi Soseki  
(Peter Owen. 431 pp.)
- 11 *Don't Point That Thing At Me.*  
Kyril Bonfiglioli  
(1972. Penguin 14 004075. 172 pp.)
- 12 *I Am Jonathan Scrivener*  
Claude Houghton  
(1930. Cedric Chivers. 315 pp.)

I will try not to rave on too much about these books, especially as my favourite two books for the year are not on the list. One was *Portrait of a Lady*, by Henry James. The other was Ann Charters' biography, *Kerouac*. The first was not on the list because I had read it before (it made it high on the Top Ten for 1966). Definitely the best Henry James novel, with every theme blended and orchestrated in a way not seen in his other books.



In some ways, Ann Charters' biography of Kerouac makes more interesting reading than anything published by Kerouac himself. Kerouac is written the way biographies should be written: just one stage of immediacy away from being a novel; without trace of pedantry or unwarranted over-interpretation. Since Kerouac's life is remarkably interesting, his biography, now re-released in Picador, is just the thing to read when sick of second-rate fiction. (The moral of the book is that, no matter what else he did or was done to him, Kerouac kept on writing. I keep making resolutions to take heed of this moral.)

To the Top Twelve itself:

*The Tragic Muse* is not as imposing as *Portrait*, but it impressed me a lot, if only for those lovely, long, perfect sentences. :: *Capricornia* is the other Great Australian Novel, apart from the Greatest Australian Novel, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*. The Northern Territory is given the same kind of epic, violent, dangerous glow that Marquez gives to Macondo. Anyone who thinks Australians are not racist can find here not only a record of the intrinsic racism of being a white Australian but also an analysis of the way such racism blights the lives of all afflicted by it. (The most important character in *Capricornia* is a half-caste aborigine.) It is also often funny and always unputdownable :: I've written about *The Malacia Tapes* already when replying to Dr Wallace. I should have added that the book includes some of Aldiss' most magical prose as well as some of his gutsiest action. A juicy book. :: And I talked about *Transit of Cassidy* in my column last issue. An honest mystery story which invites the reader to stay with the story to find out what the main character is really like. :: *On the Road* is probably the best example of American romanticism, the kind that stared with the Western and is most obvious these days in Jack Nicholson movies. Propelled onwards by native craziness, alcohol, and a love of travelling,

the main characters circle the world-in-itself which is America, and find at the end that they must face themselves after all. Kerouac's gushing prose is refreshing. :: *Confessions of Zeno* has something of that analytical, irritating quality of Proust, and gets under the skin in the same way as does *Remembrance*. But at the end it erupts into wild farce, and subsides into a prophetic last paragraph which takes the breath away because of the way its insight reaches forward from 1923 to now. :: I promise myself to review *Confessions of a Crap Artist* as soon as possible. A must for Dick fans, but also for anybody who wants to read a good novel about the life we are supposed to be living now. (It was written in 1959, but it seems more about 1979 than most books published recently.) :: *Roadside Picnic* was going to be reviewed by John McPharlin, but he's probably given up in disgust at SFC's schedule. The sort of really exciting sf adventure which I do not find very often. Not slick. :: *Such Is Life* is the sort of book which is often touted as very much better than it really is. It is basically a collection of shaggy-dog stories set in the bush in northern Victoria. The main character is usually down-and-out, and so are the people he meets, thanks to the way the squatters have carved up the land and made it almost impossible for small farmers and drovers to operate. The refreshingly democratic bite of the book and the effectiveness of some of the tales must blind people, I suspect, to the irritating archness of the humour and the awkwardness of its conception. This is not, I suspect, a very good book, but it is one which I and all its readers remember with some affection. :: *I Am A Cat*. Indescribable. People look very funny to a cat. Especially Japanese people to a Japanese cat. :: *Don't Point That Thing at Me* has a main character whose method of operation is so underhand, murderous, and generally nasty that he makes the Saint seem like a saint. Fortunately, his line of humorous



patter makes this the funniest book for some years. (For details of Bonfiglioli's knowledge of crime in the art world, see Brian Aldiss' talk in *SFC* 54.) :: I suspect that Claude Houghton's fervently held views about Human Destiny were rather nutty, especially if you read all of his seriously intended mystery stories which appeared during the 1930s and 1940s. Owen Webster first mentioned Houghton to me some years ago, and now here is an English firm, Cedric Chivers, reprinting the best known of Houghton's books, *I Am Jonathan Scrivener*. A really intriguing mystery story, although I am not altogether happy about its ending.

#### FAVOURITE NON-FICTION 1978

(A non-ordered list only.)

- Upstate*, by Edmund Wilson  
(1971. Farrar Straus Giroux. 386 pp.)  
*The Futurians*, by Damon Knight  
(1977. John Day. 276 pp.)  
*The Triple Thinkers*, by Edmund Wilson  
(1938/1952. Pelican A550. 303 pp.)  
*Kerouac*, by Ann Charters  
(1974. Picador 330 25390. 387 pp.)  
*The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, by Graeme Davison  
(1978. Melbourne University Press. 304 pp.)

#### FAVOURITE FILMS 1978

- 1 *Casablanca*  
directed by Michael Curtiz
- 2 *Network*  
Sidney Lumet (scr: Paddy Chayefsky)
- 3 *The Man Who Fell to Earth*  
Nicolas Roeg
- 4 *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*  
John Huston
- 5 *Newsfront*  
Philip Noyce
- 6 *The Getting of Wisdom*  
Bruce Beresford
- 7 *Arsenic and Old Lace*  
Frank Capra
- 8 *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*  
Steven Spielberg

Any films Elaine and I saw during 1978 were caught on the hop, when nothing else much was going on. Tell the truth, Elaine doesn't much like watching movies; what could have been a difficulty in our relationship has been solved simply by missing films, but not missing them very much.

By comparison with films of the 1970s, *Casablanca* is so brilliant that I could see it over and over again. But, believe it or not, I had never seen it before January 1978. (No television in the house.) Not only great acting, lighting, photography, direction, etc, but an intricately complete script which picked up all the elements in the film and let them work together. :: Script-writing is the great asset of *Network*, too. Many critics panned the film for being too wordy, which I would have agreed with if the script hadn't been so well-conceived and if the acting and direction had not been so intense. The Peter Finch character is supposed to be mad, of course, but it turns out that all the characters are off their heads in one way or another. It's this frenetic quality which gives the film so much pace and excitement.

The other films are pretty much runners-up to those two. *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is the first film of Roeg's since *Walkabout* that I have really liked. The alien shots were great, and the atmosphere of alienation from Earth was convincing. David Bowie has a most remarkable, angular face, which dominates the screen in a way almost unrelated to Bowie's acting talents. :: I was fortunate to see a new print of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, as the black-and-white photography is some of the best I have seen. The acting is adequate, and the cumulative effect of B Traven's fable carries the story through its slow bits. :: *Newsfront* inspires a lot of affection for anybody who knows how Australia dragged itself out of the Fearful Fifties. Lots of good humour, as well as nostalgia. Good acting. And the original newsreel footage cannot be missed. :: Beresford's *The Getting of*



*Wisdom* is no more than a screen adaptation of Richardson's classic, but to say that the film succeeds is sufficient recommendation. Not as bitter as the original tale, and is given more humour by the lively actors. ∴ The 1970s style of comedy seems to have passed Frank Capra by, but *Arsenic and Old Lace* is made convincing by the energy and conviction which is given to this ludicrous farce (with Raymond Massey pretending to be Boris Karloff, and Peter Lorre). ∴ I've already discussed *Close Encounters* once in this issue. If you don't take it as a comedy about obsession, especially regression to childhood obsessions and fantasies, then I don't see how you can take it. There was a recent article about Spielberg in *Sight and Sound* which said better than I can what should be said in favour of the film.

#### SHORT STORIES 1978

As you know, I keep two lists of short stories. One is the list of s f short fiction for any one particular year. I've read the original fiction anthologies up to halfway through 1977, but the s f magazines only up to the middle of 1975! If I have the courage to keep on with the magazines, I will release 1975's list real soon now. If not, I will continue with lists of the best s f from the original fiction anthologies alone.

But I also keep a list of short stories of any kind read in any particular year. In 1978, there were only three contenders for the Top Ten:

- 1 'A Chinese Perspective', by Brian Aldiss (*Anticipations*)
- 2 'Second Variety', by Philip K Dick (*The Best of Philip K Dick*)
- 3 'Pie Row Joe', by Kevin McKay (*Rooms of Paradise*)

I will include reviews of the first two when I get around to reviewing Chris Priest's admirable anthology, *Anticipations*, and the most recent

'Best of' Philip Dick, published by Del Rey. 'Pie Row Joe' is reviewed in the 'Australian SF' section of this issue of *SFC*.

\* \* \*

I should mention in this Tenth Anniversary Edition that finally I found a copy of *I Must Be Talking to My Friends*. (You didn't think I invented this column's title myself, did you?) It is a recording by the great Irish actor, Michael Macleanmoir, in which he reads selections from Irish literature to show the struggle of that people through the ages. I heard it for the first time in the mid 1960s broadcast by the ABC, and again in 1969. If you want to hear it, you will probably need to do what I did and find a copy of the record. (I discovered it in Discurio, Melbourne. It's on Argo.)

Some final words. Firstly,

#### GEORGE TURNER

87 Westbury Street, Balaclava,  
Victoria 3183

I have just read *SFC 54* and am suitably grateful for your intervention against Philip Stephensen-Payne's angry tirade. Your defence of my stand is one I could not, in conventional decency, have advanced for myself and I would have had little choice but to allow the letter to pass unanswered.

As it is, I now feel able to point out that in cooler days ahead Philip will probably reconsider some of the quotations he has lifted out of context (who was it said, 'A quotation out of context is a pretext?') and see that his interpretations are too extreme to be just.

The article itself I stand by. I felt when I sent it to you for publication that it might rouse a pretty uncomfortable storm of protest from pro-Silverberg fans, but Philip's is in fact the only seriously denigratory response I have seen.

I'm looking forward to your reviews next issue - or do I mean the next but one or even the one between that one and some other?  
(19 July 1979)

Gulp. All of those, George. (Copies of *SFC 51*, The Silverberg Issue, are still available.)



CY ANDERS

2845 W Walnut, Johnson City, Tennessee  
37601, USA

In July of 1977 I found a thick dog-eared magazine lying unattended on a table at the local comics emporium. A quick thumbing disclosed the fact that it contained quite a few reviews and lists of books. How much was it? The proprietor didn't even know how it got there, so: 'You can have it for a quarter.' Probably the best buy I've made in my life!

The magazine was SFC 41/42, and I was suddenly confronted with the fact that there were others familiar with such supposedly secret books as Canetti's Auto Da Fe. Not only familiar with, but writing about them and recommending them! In-depth reviews of speculative fiction and what books to choose: 334 and The Dispossessed. I could go on for pages, but the whole point is this: SFC 41/42 is (was?) the best issue of any periodical I've ever read. One of my main aims in writing this letter is to say, 'Thank you, Bruce', and thanks as well to George Turner, Gerald Murnane, and everyone else who contributed to the writing and production of this marvellous magazine. I've read most of the articles, reviews, and letters five or six times and found even the incomprehensible parts (such as your review of Gerald's book) (incomprehensible because I haven't read the book) to be well written and entertaining. As a direct consequence of reading your magazine I was led to the work of Priest, Roberts, Watson, Coney, Abe, Lem, and many others. (Those that were not mentioned in SFC were mentioned elsewhere as being similar to or having elements in common with the work of authors I was checking out at the time.) (18 March 1979)

Thanks, Cy, for the Encouraging Letter of the Year. All the effort does seem worthwhile after all when I get letters like these (not to mention the large cheque that Cy sent for back copies - although I could not supply a replacement copy for 41/42, which he lost).

OOPS...

I keep remembering bits that I should have included some pages ago. For instance, I did not talk about the Nova Mob. It began as a group to discuss science fiction once a month, and the first meeting was held at the flat of Tony and Myfanwy Thomas in 1970. It

roared on for awhile, then died from lack of interest. John Foyster and Carey Handfield and Peter Darling put most of the work into reviving the group in 1974, and it did very well until about the middle of last year. When no new people were turning up and even regulars disappeared, we gave up. It was good, and sometimes very good, while it lasted.

Also forgot to say that Tony Thomas was one of SFC's first subscribers, and he has kept up his sub ever since.

Various fan households must be mentioned to tell the true story of Melbourne fandom since 1969. Unfortunately, I do not have space here to tell those stories. Don Ashby keeps promising to finish the story of the Magic Pudding Club. John Bangsund or Leigh Edmonds or Paul Stevens could tell you much about various Bangsund residences before he left for Canberra. And quite a few people could tell the story of 275 Rathdowne Street, or the flat John Breden shared for awhile, or...

I forgot to give my Grand Sweeping Survey of the last ten years in Film or Serious Music. In film, it's been a sharp, glossy downturn from the high-point of the sixties. Production values up; artistic values down; Melbourne audiences flock to see Marx Brothers movies, W C Fields movies, Humphrey Bogart movies. In Serious Music... well, probably we won't know what happened from 1969 until 1979 until, say, 2009-2019. In the composition of new music, that is. For record buffs, there have been exciting new recordings of old music: the Dorati complete Haydn symphonies, the Haitink Mahler symphonies, Boskovsky Mozart, Mariner everything-else. For range of choice, the present-day record shelf seems to offer everything to the classical buff, but one is not conscious of any large-scale movement.

Sign-off time. Again, thanks for your enthusiastic support for ten years, or part thereof. I have no idea what the next ten minutes will bring, let alone the next ten years. Stay around and see the funny man behind the typewriter. He moves, clicks, and produces SFC sometimes.\*

\*Last stencil typed 17 September 1979\*