THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW

No. 15/16/17 148 pages August 1[illegible]

Writing in Australia:

GEORGE TURNER
YVONNE ROUSSEAU
LUCY SUSSEX

This issue also features:

IAN GUNN

LEE HOFFMAN

JOHN BANGSUND

DOUG BARBOUR

BRUCE GILLESPIE

AVEDON CAROL

ALLAN BRAY

CY CHAUVIN

ROB GERRAND

ROBERT JAMES MAPSON

DAVE PIPER

RALPH ASHBROOK

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

DAVID LAKE

SKEL

JOHN D. BERRY

and many, many others

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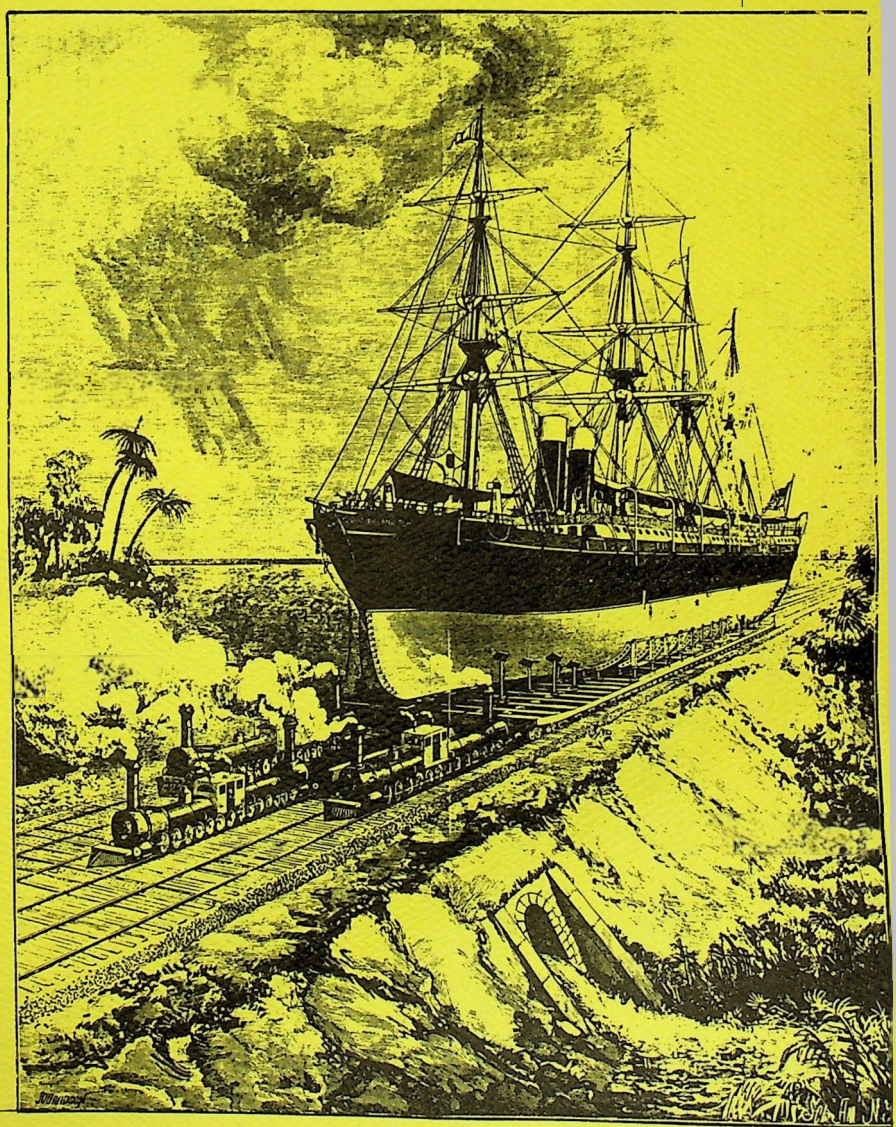

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Dedicated to William M. Danner, for reasons obvious to those who have seen *Stefantasy*.

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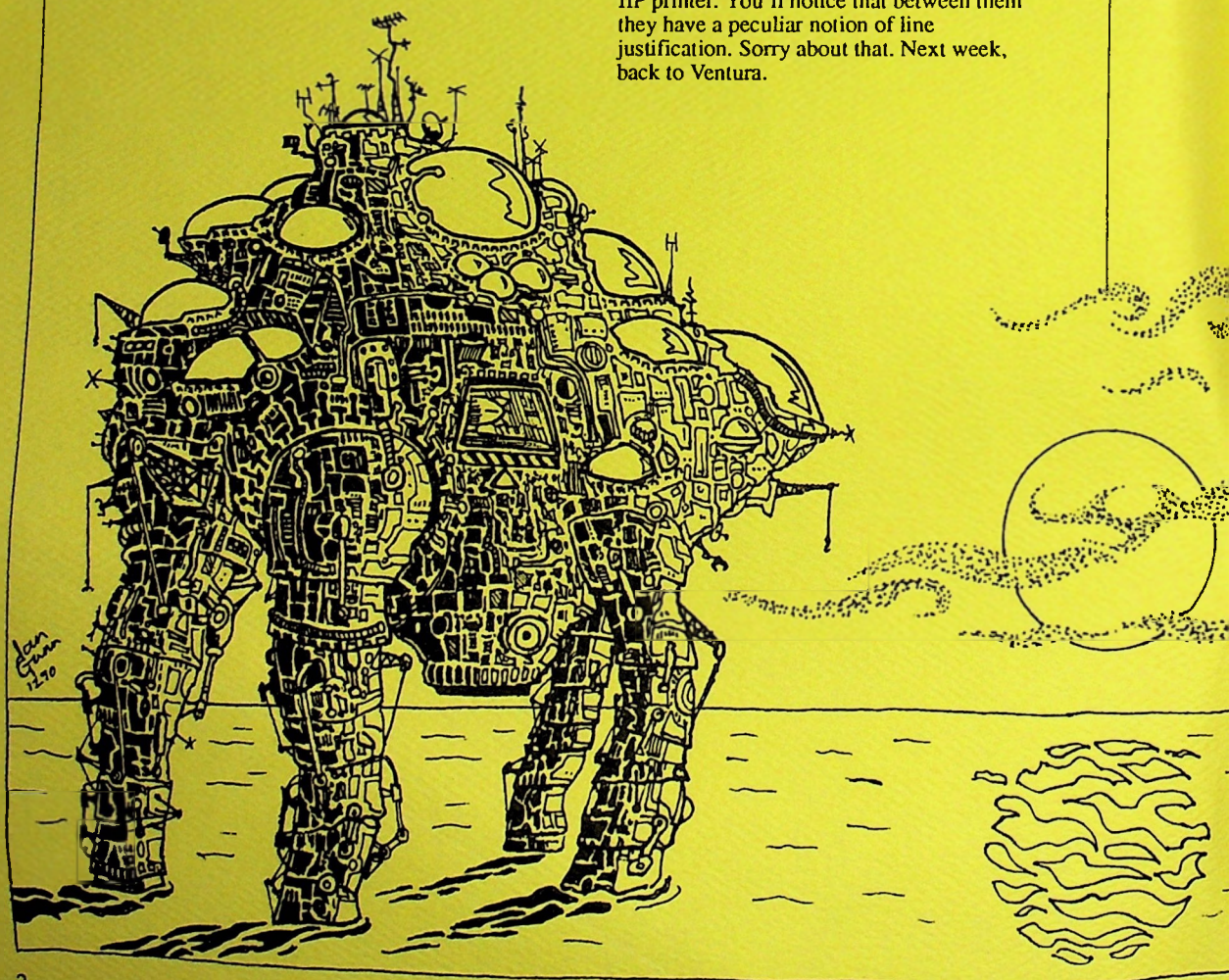
ART
Most of the art was taken from officially out-of-copyright illustrations in various Dover Press publications. Thanks to Elaine for her help in researching this material.

Other art: Ian Gunn, pp. 2, 72.
William Danner, for items from old *Scientific Americans*, pp. 74, 91, 93, 97.
Lucy Gutteridge, for photo, p. 33.
Ellikon Press, for processing of photographs.

TECHNICAL STUFF
Thanks to Charles Taylor, who processed *SFC* No. 69/70 in Ventura, and has tried to teach it to me. I'm still getting used to this new computer, which explains why I haven't learned Ventura yet. And *that's* why I used Wordstar 6.0 with the new Hewlett Packard IIP printer. You'll notice that between them they have a peculiar notion of line justification. Sorry about that. Next week, back to Ventura.



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I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS

The usual excuses

Much of this issue of *The Metaphysical Review* could have been published three years ago. This helps to explain why the articles seem slightly dated — for example, both George's and Yvonne's articles describe events that took place in 1988.

I offer the usual excuse — when I have the time to publish, I do not have the money; by the time I have the money, I run out of time. Every now and again I would grab a week or two to return to this issue. Each time I would nearly catch up with the letter column. But each time I had to return to the work that actually pays for this magazine. Six months later, the letter file would have fattened exponentially.

To me, the letter column hasn't dated, although *you* might have forgotten that indiscreet letter you sent me in 1987. I was still receiving letters about No. 11/12/13 (October 1987) up to a month ago, and letters on the Music Issue (No. 14) up to a week ago. Every ingredient folds into the mix — I hope you like the cake.

Boring policy statement

Not that I've been away. I did publish an issue of *Dreams and False Alarms* two years ago. It went to everybody on the *TMR* mailing list. And three issues of the revived *SF Commentary* have been published.

In the most recent *SF Commentary*, I ventured a Policy Statement: that *SFC* would contain nothing but reviews and articles about science fiction and fantasy; and *TMR* would include everything else. Difficult policy statement, impossible to maintain rigorously. For example, this issue of *TMR* is mainly letters responding to an issue (No. 11/12/13) that mainly concerned sf and fantasy. Let the two magazines go at their own chosen speed.

Sequels

A few subjects dominated 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' in *TMR* 11/12/13 and *Dreams and False Alarms* 5. Most of them appear again in this issue, but for the sake of those who have been waiting:

* Our house did not fall down after the wreckers pulled down the house next door. You will be glad to hear this. There is a wide crack in the plaster of one wall, but that crack has been there since the drought of 1982. It's great not having noisy neighbours who hold all-night parties.
* We don't hear Garrison Keillor any more. PBS put up the price of repeat episodes of *A Prairie Home Companion* from $300 per episode to $1000 per episode. The ABC cried poor. Even so, the ABC surely could have run the the annual reunion episodes of *PHC*. And I would like to hear some episodes of Keillor's new program. Meanwhile I must be content with the tapes I made of the Lake Wobegon stories, tapes on sale at the ABC Shop, and one marvellous CD (*Lake Wobegon Loyalty Days: A Recital for Mixed Baritone and Orchestra* by Garrison Keillor and the Minnesota Orchestra conducted by Philip Brunelle). Thanks to Denny Lien, David Russell, Joyce Scrivner and Robert Mapson, among others, for sending me news from the land of Lake Wobegon.
* Adam Clayton's book *Only the Lonely* answers many of the question I asked about Roy Orbison in my article in *TMR* 14. I couldn't help being astonished by the extent to which my background and personality are like those of Roy Orbison. His church background was much like mine. He wasn't good-looking. He was shy. He wasn't

attractive to girls. He stayed reclusive all his life. He put on weight easily. The main difference between us is that Roy Orbison could sing, and had an unshakable belief in his own abilities. This carried him through many years of obscurity before he became successful, although hardly prepared him for the shock of the deaths of his wife and children. There are very few of my heroes I would like to have met, but I certainly would like to have met Roy Orbison.

As I mention elsewhere in this issue, Orbison's death in December 1989 and the success of his *Mystery Girl* album unlocked the vaults. The most wonderful moment of the last two years occurred when Steve Smith of Readings Records delivered into my trembling hands the re-issue on CD of the first three Orbison albums, *Lonely and Blue*, *Crying* and *In Dreams*, all from Columbia. Those particular albums were not issued in Australia, but all the tracks have been released recently on cheapo CBS CDs of Orbison hits.

* In various fanzines I've talked about the ups and downs of my favourite radio show, *Film Buffs' Forecast* on 3RRR, Melbourne's college station. John Flaus and Paul Harris had been going for some years when they were thrown off the station for six months in 1988. They returned; all was forgiven. Everything was back to usual; John talked, Paul interrupted, John talked, Paul told jokes, John talked. Wonderful stuff. Early this year, the unexpected happened. John abdicated. He went to live up the country somewhere. Paul Harris has become an accomplished broadcaster during recent years, and he has been left to support the show by himself. He needs an opponent as irrepressible as John Flaus. I miss his voice a lot. I miss the endless film education I get from listening to Flaus (Paul knows as much about the cinema, but he is not in as much of a hurry to tell you everything *right now*). I hope John Flaus returns to radio soon.

Writing in Australia

It's not often that I commission articles, but I did ask George Turner to describe the process of judging a literary competition, and I did ask Yvonne and Lucy for their articles. Irwin Hirsh regardless, that's probably the last time I will commission articles; I've been unfair to the authors. Fortunately, George's article has also been published elsewhere (a shortened version in *Meanjin*).

Why articles on Australian writing and writers? The easy answer is: it's the only literature we have. Not that that's of much concern to most overseas readers, but you might be interested in the termites' nest in which Australian sf and fantasy writers must work. Until recently, there has been little genre publishing, but suddenly mystery writing has become the main campus industry. I'll try to cover that development in a future issue.

Who is the best Australian writer? For the last thirty years, there has been only one possible answer: Patrick White. But he died recently, and there is no heir apparent. Patrick White has been the last of the nineteenth-century epic writers, but his possible successors, such as Kate Grenville, Amy Witting and Gerald Murnane, are all miniaturists. Australia is, as the tv program title says, a 'big country', but we don't seem to have any authors that match up to the country. (Peter Carey is the author picked by the critics and prize-givers to be White's heir apparent, but I can't find much to like in the bits of *Illywhacker* and *Oscar and Lucinda* I've looked at. Thomas Keneally might qualify, but these days reviewers revile his increasingly turgid prose style.)

To me, the only truly epic Australian novel of recent years has been George Turner's *The Sea and Summer (Drowning Towers)*, but it was published overseas and received woeful distribution in Australia. Another major writer, still an unknown in his own country, is Sumner Locke Elliott, who has lived and published in America since 1948.

Although we have had a dearth of Great Writers during the last fifteen years, the combined financial support of governments, educational institutions, and even publishers, has led to an enormous growth in Australian writing. Only seventeen novels were published throughout Australia during 1972. I'm not sure if anyone keeps count today, but the combined total of books of fiction, poetry, and literary criticism published each year must be 500 or more. Is much of it of any lasting value? You might glimpse an answer from the articles that appear here.

I'd be interested in comments on the literary scene in *your* country. How do British writers get on, for instance, when print runs there for hardback novels are little more than they are here (2000 copies if you're lucky)? I understand that neither Britain, Canada nor USA has anything like the superstructure of author support that is found in Australia. How does anybody in the writing game survive?

Or is that the wrong question? Perhaps you could ask us: how does any Australian writer survive without the backbone of genre/ popular fiction? *

JOHN BROSNAN
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HA2 0DA, England

So you're in your forties now too — heh, heh. Actually, you're *older* than me. By a whole eight months. I turned forty in October of '87. Despite my protestations to the contrary Rob Holdstock and his girlfriend Sarah insisted on holding a party for me at their place for the fortieth and very enjoyable it turned out to be. I ended up literally under their kitchen table, absolutely paralytic but still capable of

carrying on a sound and rational conversation (well, it seemed sound and rational to me) at two in the morning. It seemed the best way to start the short slide down to the big Five Oh (if I last that long).

I got a little confused on first reading your comments to Patrick McGuire; when you said 'Add to that a contempt within (British-owned) publishers for Australian-written popular fiction and an almost complete ignorance or hatred of science fiction' I assumed you were talking about the British publishing scene, but on second thoughts I guess you're referring to the Australian domestic publishing scene. Even so, I'm still puzzled. Who is it exactly there who has this ignorance and hatred of science fiction? The British publishers? Their Australian employees? And if there's a contempt for Australian popular fiction among the British publishers, how come it ever got to be popular in the first place? Like, who actually distributes it? And *what* is it? Sorry if these questions sound stupid but I'm somewhat out of touch with the Australian publishing scene (well, I never was in touch with it).

* The easy questions first. Just shows what happens when I try to express ten disparate but intimately connected thoughts in one sentence. The '(British-owned)' phrase is snide, I realize. All the big publishers here are owned by overseas companies, usually British. Their employees, who choose Australian books for the Australian market are, as you point out, Australian. Some of them read, like and understand science fiction. They won't label any Australian fiction they publish as 'Science Fiction'. A friend whose book of science fiction stories has recently been bought by a British-owned local publisher recalls a conversation in which the editorial and marketing people were searching for any label for her work but science fiction. 'Fabulist'? 'Experimental'? No matter; anything had to be better than 'Science Fiction'. Australian science fiction will not sell to Australian science fiction readers. We at Norstrilia Press found this, which is why we are recommending would-be contributors to the NP slush pile to send their manuscripts to American publishers. Certainly all the local publishers *believe* this. But meanwhile the same foreign-owned companies act as distributors for vast numbers of British science fiction paperbacks.

See the section on Australian fiction in this issue of *TMR*.

The usual melancholy Gillespie diary entry

I dreamt last night that I consulted a doctor back in Oakleigh, the Melbourne suburb where I spent the first eleven years of my life. I went to the doctor because I was suffering from a minor eye complaint. The doctor was busy; he had another patient waiting on the other side of the room. The doctor was in his thirties, cheerful, bustling, cracking minor jokes. He turned to me and looked into my eye. He seemed to stand much too close to me. I backed away. 'Mate', he said to me, 'I can't do this any other way. I'm suffering from a rare form of cancer that has affected my eyes. I can only examine you by looking at close range.' He said this deadpan, and made no further comments. I felt uncomfortable; here was I worried about a minor eye complaint, and this doctor was about to die from some rare eye cancer! The doctor put me at my ease; he kept up the line of offhand comments and jokes.

The dream sounds like a commentary from the unconscious on much that I've been thinking about recently, including the paragraphs below.

Since the beginning of the year I've been reminded of how fortunate I am. I received Don Thompson's last fanzine about a month after he had died. Posted in November, the last *Don-o-saur* was meant as a farewell to friends after Don discovered he was suffering from a melanoma that had spread throughout his body. But his death followed the publication of his fanzine so closely that his friends did not have time to write him a return farewell before he died.

Just as disturbing are the fanzines Bill Bowers has been sending since the beginning of the year. In the most recent issues of *Xenolith*, he has told a marriage-breakup story so scary that it rivals so-called horror stories. I doubt whether Bill has any copies of his fanzines left, but if you count yourself one of his many friends and haven't heard from him recently, you might want to write to him at PO Box 58174, Cincinnati, Ohio 45258-0174.

And on the wider scale, the rest of the world hasn't been having a good time, either. Bangladesh is yet again blown away and flooded. The Gulf War seems to have benefited nobody very much, as its only results are the burning off of fifty years of the world's oil supply, the slaughter of 100,000 Iraqis and the scattering of a million and a half Kurds. The head of Sadam Hussein on a plate would surely have been quite enough killing for one year.

As usual, nothing much happened in Australia except the rapid unemployment of 100,000 people, while — *right now and at this moment* — Elaine and I are both still earning incomes.

But....

But. . . . It all started in the first week of May 1990. TC went missing. TC is not the oldest cat, but he is top cat. He is not prone to wander. Yet he vanished. No sign of him at all. Night after night, Elaine called around the streets. We letter-boxed the district, and phoned all the vets and animal shelters. Nothing. Five days

later, I had given him up for dead. Elaine never gives up.

John Gauci, the owner of the office building next door, said he might have heard a miaow abut 3 a.m. one night, but he could find nothing. On the fifth night, Elaine called in the lane at the back of the house. It was a Sunday night, about as quiet as it ever gets near our house. She thought she could hear a faint cat call. She just kept calling, until suddenly we could clearly hear the cry of the TC. There he was, at the window of the kitchen of the building next door. He had been in there the whole five days, but had been too timid to make himself known to the people who worked there. We still don't know why we hadn't heard him before.

I rang John the owner of next door, and he kindly came over from Glen Iris at 11 on a Sunday night to let out our cat. Elaine coaxed TC down to the front door. He had survived by stealing food from the resident cat, LJ. Still, he was rather glad to return home.

Reunification! Rejoicing! Yes, but the strain of those five days told on Elaine. And things did not get better.

You'll remember that Elaine's mother died in 1987. Elaine's father, John Cochrane, suffered much more from grief and loneliness than we realized. He was not a man to talk about concepts like grief and loneliness. Usually a cheerful and resilient man, he told (and retold) stories about the old days, and he came into his own whenever we needed advice about household repairs. But he had no words to tell about his own real problems.

For this reason, we did not realize how badly his health was failing. Or rather, Elaine and her sisters had a pretty good idea of the real situation, but they could not get through to their father. His own doctor kept saying that he did not have serious diabetes, and ignored the obvious signs of declining heart functions. ('We all get a bit breathless as we get old,' was one of his last lines to John.)

John had spent his life quietly helping people, both within and without the family. Because he was lonely in a big house, he took in boarders, often people who had little money. Two of these boarders were friendlier than the others, and were John's companions during the last year of his life. We did not see him often, and were not invited to Glenroy.

Therefore we not too surprised, but not too concerned when one of John's new friends called one night in early July last year and said that they had taken him to a new doctor. At last! we thought. The new doctor had put him straight into hospital. His diabetes was much more serious than anybody had suspected.

Elaine spent much of the next fortnight visiting her father, as the hospital tried to steady his blood-sugar levels. Meanwhile, he allowed the other couple, who had moved out of his house, back in. John was very dispirited. At first he wanted to go back to Glenroy, but he agreed to go from the hospital to the home of Elaine's sister Margaret. On the night of 31 July 1990, after only a week out of hospital, he fell in the passage, and within a few moments was dead of a heart attack.

From then on, Elaine and her sisters Margaret and Valerie did not really have time to grieve. Within a few years, their father had taken care of the funeral and financial arrangements for their uncle, mother, and grandmother. Now suddenly it was their task. There were immediate problems with the death certificate, the first of many difficulties.

The funeral was a melancholy affair. John was well known throughout Glenroy, and many people attending had not even been aware that he was ill. John Bangsund and Sally Yeoland came to the funeral, and so did our friends Maureen Brewster and Richard Felix. Many thanks.

The funeral was just the beginning of six months of exhausting nightmare for Elaine. She was executor of the will. She had to dig through all her father's financial and other papers. She had to find homes for the seven cats and two dogs who were still at the family home in Glenroy. Under Victorian law, she could not order out the two 'boarders', although they were demanding money and not paying rent. She had to give them sixty days' notice to quit. One or other of the sisters had to be at Glenroy every weekend to check on the house and its contents and begin the process of sorting through the vast accumulation of forty years' collectibles, selling the furniture, and selling the house.

There were compensations. A wide variety of people were generous in their help. Jenny Bryce and Graeme Foyster evaluated the contents of the house. People at Elaine's work bought many of the best pieces. Slowly but surely, good people took custody of the cats. A bloke from over the back badly wanted to buy the house. If he hadn't, Elaine and her sisters would have had great trouble selling it during the sudden depression that set in during October.

By the beginning of December, Elaine had been working seven days a week since early July. By then, the boarders had left, most of the junk was cleared from the house, the house was sold and cleaned out, and some of the financial details cleared up. Only then did we feel free to take off a few days to visit our favourite place, the Mount Buffalo plateau. A holiday at the Mount Buffalo Chalet never fails us. While Melbourne was suffering its first (and worst) heat wave of the summer, we walked endlessly in light warm winds.

Elaine's workload, including endless letters back and forth to the lawyer about the estate, lasted until February. Since then there have been other things gone wrong. On 13 May, our little black cat Sophie disappeared for eight days. Yes, she reappeared, quite safe, still tubby and smelling slightly of machine oil. The only casualty was, yet again, our peace of mind.

This hasn't been a year of *my* melancholy,

but of Elaine's. I've watched most of this from the sidelines. Indeed, I've been the main beneficiary, since we could not have bought this computer and PostScript printer without help from John Cochrane's estate. But as Elaine said recently, 'Surely there has to be a let-up sometime.'

Maybe. Since I turned forty, both of Elaine's parents and her grandmother have died, and so has my father and two of my uncles. I can no longer see paths forward and up, but only paths down. If this is as good as it gets — well, it's better than being part of the less fortunate 99.999 per cent of the world's population. And I suppose Australia will pull through, despite the depression our accursed Treasurer said we had to have. In the best of all possible worlds, I'll still be able to publish fanzines tinged with melancholia. I just keep hoping that Elaine has a good year coming up.

DAVE PIPER
7 Cranley Drive, Ruislip, Middlesex
HA4 6BZ, England

You have my sympathy over Elaine's Mum's death and the death of your father, for what's it's worth. There isn't anything to say to ease the pain, in my experience, and it doesn't seem to get much better as the years go by. I miss my Dad and Mum seemingly as much now as when they died. What always hits me like a brick is it's so *final*.

That cover, though [to *Good Night, Sweet Prince*] — it's just *amazing*, Bruce. That photo could have been of me and my Dad in 1949, for crissakes! The suits, the pose, the general ambience is so British; so Wormwood Scrubs; so Bracewell Road W10 in 1949 as to border on the supernatural. Weird.

(2 December 1989)

* Much of the history of Australia is the history of the attempt to transpose Britain to an alien south land. When he was out here last, Chris Priest noticed that certain streets in the suburb of Ivanhoe look much the same as streets in any well-off London suburb. Both my father and my Uncle Fred loved growing roses; our family was as enthusiastic about the 1954 royal visit as any other family. Now the outer suburbs of Melbourne have been shaped to look like the outer suburbs of Houston or St Louis. And people point camcorders at each other, not box cameras. *

GERALD MURNANE
22 Falcon Street, Macleod, Vic. 3085

[Re. *TMR* 11/12/13:] Please accept our sympathy on account of Elaine's mother. I still haven't read all the parts that I intend to read in *The Metaphysical Review*, but one part that I have read includes your describing the funeral. When I read about the schoolchildren standing by the road I remembered something that happened during my father's funeral, which took place nearly twenty-eight years ago. A very old man was about to cross the street near the church just as the leading cars were approaching. He was no one that I knew. He probably did not know whose funeral was passing. But the old man took off his hat and held it over his heart and stood at attention while the long procession of cars went by. That was the first moment when I felt the full weight of my father's death.

(15 May 1988)

* Thanks very much for the above letter, and the one below, which at first I thought was meant to be an entirely private communication (it was co-signed by Catherine Murnane).

Memories of life are so elliptical that I remember Gavin and Martin best when they were five years old and played like puppies on the lawn at the State Savings Bank residence at Plenty Road, East Preston! And then there was the day in 1980 or early 1981 when they played handball in the lane behind our place here at Keele Street, and our black cat Julius was so frightened by the presence of *children* in his territory that he raced off and was never seen again. The boys Gerald describes here are strangers, although we meet Giles occasionally.

But when I looked at it again, I realized that this letter was written specifically in response to *Dreams and False Alarms* 5 and an ANZAPA magazine: *

Thanks for the letter and the two publications.

This letter is being typed (with one finger) by Gerald Murnane on behalf of both of us. While he types, Gerald is looking back over the printed pages of the two publications.

Perhaps we should tell you in a few sentences about our household at present. Giles just a few days ago completed all the theory and prac. work needed to qualify him as a fitter and turner. He still has to serve another eighteen months as an apprentice before he qualifies as a tradesman, and he intends to do during that time the theoretical and practical work needed to qualify him as the higher sort of tradesman: *toolmaker*. (A toolmaker, you may be interested to know, does not make tools; he (or, improbably, she) makes the metal moulds that are used for producing plastic objects such as the lids of your favourite yoghurt containers. (If Giles could read this paragraph, he would correct it with many flourishes and obscene words; he maintains that I do not understand anything of what he does.)) Giles left school a few years ago during a rather confused period in his life. He some-

(Continued on Page 54)

* I know little about **LEE HOFFMAN** beyond what is contained in this letter, and the tributes to her in *Warhoon 28* (in Walt Willis's story of his travels in America in the early 1950s), her own fanzine *Science Fiction Five-Yearly*, and other references in fanzines. While still a teenager, she published famous fanzines in the early fifties, only to turn up at her first convention to reveal, in Bob Tucker's famous phrase, that 'He is a *girl*.' Or so the legend goes. It is a great privilege to receive a letter from Lee, especially this letter. *

• ***FEATURE LETTER***

Lee Hoffman: *Farewell to my father*

LEE HOFFMAN
401 Sunrise Trail NW, Port Charlotte,
Florida 33952, USA

My father was in his late eighties when he came down with a serious infection from undiagnosed diabetes, and had to have an operation on his foot. At the time he lost control of his bladder. He came home in a wheelchair, with a catheter. He kept expecting his condition to improve, but it didn't. Finally he went into the hospital hoping a prostate operation would solve the bladder problem. There they dis-covered the cancer. He went through the operation well enough, but because of his age they put him into the intensive care unit for observation the first night.

During the night, he stopped breathing. They rammed a respirator hose down his throat and pulled him through, but his mind was never the same after that. Among other things, he lost a lot of memories. He'd been born in 1898, and had a wealth of stories of his life and times, but most of them were gone.

It was less than a year after his operation that my mother died suddenly and I took over as sole care-giver for my father. My mother's death hit him very hard. He lost interest in most of the things he had cared about. He was still in the wheelchair. He did not have a colostomy bag, but he still had to have the catheter. His main pleasure in life became being taken for a car ride, or being pushed through a store. Weather permitting, we went out every afternoon.

During the first year of my caring for him, he declined slowly. His sight and hearing became poorer and poorer. Then the day after the second Christmas since my mother died, he complained of feeling very weak and showed classic signs of depression. At the time I blamed it on the fact that he received so little attention; none of the grandkids came to visit and no one here stopped by or invited us out. Added to this, the car wasn't working right, and the weather wasn't good, so I couldn't get him out for his regular rides.

A couple of days after Christmas, he asked me how many more days in the year. I told him, and he said he would not live past the end of the year. I thought when New Year came, and he found he had lived, he'd pull out of the depression. New Year's Day I baked him a ham and he seemed better, but didn't eat as heartily as usual.

As soon as Home Health Care was open again after the holidays, I got them to send a nurse to check him out. The nurse said his vital signs were all good, and it appeared to be the not-uncommon Holiday Depression.

January 5th was his ninetieth birthday — the day his family should have been there to make a big fuss over him — but I was the only surviving family member within several hundred miles. However, a couple of his old friends invited him over, and that pleased him. He perked up appreciably and enjoyed the visit with them, though it did tire him. For a few days he was better, but then slipped back into the depression.

I was able to get him out occasionally, but the car was giving trouble and we kept getting chilly rainy afternoons that kept us in a lot. He got into just lying in bed, not interested in TV or anything. When I took him to his GP he perked up again, and the doctor didn't think there was anything wrong, except holiday depression. Desperate to get him help of some kind, I took him to a psychiatrist.

He told the psychiatrist that he felt sad. He

felt nobody paid any attention to him. When the psychiatrist asked if he wanted to go to sleep and never wake up, he said no, he liked waking up. The pshciatrist prescribed an anti-depressant. He continued in his depressed behaviour for two more days, then it was like he woke up. He was interested in things and relatively active. For several days he continued alert, but then began sliding back into the apathetic state.

Our next visit, the psychiatrist sort of brushed us aside, simply renewing my father's medication. From there we went to the GP, who said Dad's blood sugar was good, and said that he needed more exercise and more activity to arouse his interest. I kept trying to get him to get more exercise, and kept taking him out afternoons whenever the weather permitted, though that was not often enough.

On a Wednesday, I took him out grocery shopping, but in the store he was droopy and not alert. I thought he was tired from the outing. When I got him back into the car, he couldn't sit up straight but was leaning over against the window. I asked if he felt sick or just tired. He said just tired.

The next day the aide who bathed him found he was running some temperature. I was afraid he'd caught cold and started giving him Bufferin for the fever. He didn't want breakfast, so I beat up an egg in milk with some sweetener for him. He was happy to get that, and drank two glasses. At lunch time, he said he'd get up for a regular meal. He did, but didn't eat as much as usual. He didn't feel like getting up for supper, and didn't want any solid food, so I gave him a cup of chicken broth. He ate a couple of crackers with it, and he did take more sweetened milk, and some juice.

Friday, he didn't want solid food or to get up at all. At one point during the day, when I went to empty his Foley bag, I found some blood in his urine, but when I checked again later, the urine was clear and looked good. I talked to someone at Home Health Care, who said that I was doing was right and suggested I left the GP know about his condition. I couldn't get the GP so I left a message.

Saturday the aide who came to bathe him found discharge around his catheter and suggested I get the nurse to check him for possible urinary infection. The nurse came later that afternoon, and found him somewhat perked up, and his temperature close to normal. The discharge was gone, evidently wiped off against the bedclothes, and she said it was probably normal, and that his vitals were good, and there were no indications of urinary infection. She warned me that he could get pneumonia from just lying in bed, so Sunday morning I literally dragged him up into the wheelchair. He was very weak and couldn't help much. When I got him to the table, all he'd take was a glass of egg and milk, and a piece of raisin bread.

Until Sunday, he'd welcomed the cool drinks, putting down plenty of fluid. Sunday he was much less responsive and it was harder to get him to take anything. I chopped up some apples and coooked them with a little cinnamon and sweetener. He ate some of that.

Monday, he was not very responsive, and his underarm temp was 99°F. When I asked if he wanted a 'milk shake' he nodded, but when I took it to him, he seemed unable to cope with the straw. He managed to suck some, but mostly lay with his mouth open, as if oblivious. I got a little of the drink down him, but not enough.

I called the GP's office to let them know about Dad being sick, and especially that I was having difficulty getting nourishment into him. I was worrying a lot about that. They contacted the Home Health Care agency to have a nurse sent to check him and take urine and sputum specimens for testing.

I crushed his medication in some of the cooked apples and spoon-fed him that, then got more of the milk drink into him, and later more apples. Around two o'clcock his temp was down about half a degree. He had perked up some and responded when I asked if he wanted some juice. He managed to suck down a full glass of juice without any problems. I thought the medication had taken effect, and he would be pulling out of it.

When the nurse arrived around three o'clock, he was asleep. He more or less woke when we tried to communicate with him, and he tried to co-operate, but was obviously very groggy and weak and barely comprehending. Except for the slight fever his vitals seemed good, but she detected a little crackling in the right lung.

Since he was so weak and grogged out and having such difficulty responding, she asked if I wanted to take care of him myself or would rather he go to the hospital. I was worried about his getting proper nourishment, so I said I'd rather he had professional care. She called her office and I think they checked with the GP. It was agreed for him to go the Emergency Room for a full examination, with lab tests.

He was so weak it was obvious that even the two of us could not get him into the car, so the office suggested she contact an ambulance transport company. But when she described his condition, they refused to take him. So we called the Emergency Medical Service.

As the paramedics checked him, one asked me if he had a Living Will (instructions not to use extraordinary means to maintain life functions). That startled me. I knew he had one in the safe, but I got nervous enough to have trouble getting the safe open. Meanwhile, he was too weak for the meds to get him into the wheelchair, so they carried him from his bed to the stretcher on a backboard.

Carrying the appropriate documents, I followed the ambulance to the ER. It was around four o'clcock when we get there. The ER was crowded, and another ambulance arrived not long after. It took about three hours before anyone got back to me. Finally, the ER doctor came out and said he'd like to bomb the lab (for taking so long with the tests). He told me that my father looked a lot worse than when he'd seen him six months ago. (I was very impressed that he remembered.) He said my Dad appeared in far worse condition than his tests indicated and he'd made a deal with the GP to have Dad kept overnight for further testing, and possible admission the next day.

The ER doctor had to hurry off, and it was a while longer before someone else got back to me. I asked if I could see my Dad. She took me back to him. He appeared really hazed out. Moments later an attendant came to take him up to a room and I was allowed to go up with him.

While arrangements were made to get him from the gurney into the bed, I held his hand, and asked if he wanted me to take his watch home. He nodded. Then he tried to tell me he wanted something. I couldn't make out what he as asking for, but thought it might be 'water'. I asked if he was thirsty, and he nodded. I said I'd get someone to get him some as soon as he was settled in. He clung to my hand. Then they came and moved him into the bed, and the GP arrived.

While I was talking with the GP, Dad fell asleep. The GP said they would give him a couple of units of blood and some antibiotics, and more tests. Then he asked if Dad had a Living Will. He went down to the nurses' information and I gave them all the information about him I could. They told me I'd be called about him the next day.

The next day I kept waiting for the phone to ring. It didn't. Around four o'clock I called the GP's office and was told he'd get back to me. By six, I couldn't take the waiting any longer. I went on over to the hospital, got my visitor's pass, and went up to the room.

I figured the blood would have strengthened him. I was expecting him to be more alert and complaining that it had taken me so long to come. When I went into the room, he was lying with his head turned to the right, his mouth open, and eyes nearly shut, much the way he'd lie at home when he was grogged out. There was an IV in his right arm so I went around the bed and took his left hand. It felt normal, but there was no response. I spoke to him and stroked his hair, but still got no response. Looking at his chest, I couldn't see any movement. I couldn't hear any sounds of breathing, I tried to find his pulse and couldn't.

I hurried out of the room to locate a nurse. One came out of the next room. I asked her if she could tell whether my father was still breathing. She went in, checked him, said he wasn't, and asked if he was coded. I answered that he had a Living Will, and they'd copied it downstairs.

She led me from the room and sent some people down to him. I said I wanted to be there, but she asked me to stay at the nurses' station.

A nurse asked me some questions for a form. The head nurse told me she didn't want me to see them take him out and suggested I go on home. I was about to leave when the GP returned their call, saying he would be there soon. I decided to wait for him.

He came in and we talked. He explained that my father'd had a series of mini-strokes and then the one that took him.

Evidently, over this whole period his brain had been shutting down, a bit at a time, but nobody had recognized the fact. That's what gets me. Despite all my calls and attempts to get help, no one had recognized what was happening. If I'd had any idea what it really was instead of simply 'holiday depression' I'm sure I'd have treated him differently. I certainly would not have dragged him out of bed to the table that last day when he was so weak and reluctant.

Life was not fair to my father. He'd been born into a lower-middle-class working family and had worked hard from childhood, struggling through the Great Depression, eventually building up a successful business of

(Continued on Page 23)

Easter 1990, Easter 1965

by John Bangsund

It is Good Friday as I write, and Sally's birthday, 13 April 1990. Later today Sally and I and my mother intend to make a kind of pilgrimage to Springvale Crematorium, about an hour's drive south-east across Melbourne.

My father, Leif Bangsund, died on Good Friday 1965, 16 April. On 21 April, my twenty-sixth birthday, he was cremated at Fawkner Crematorium, north-west of Melbourne. That day is as clear in my mind as yesterday. A bright, cold day. Someone, my Aunt Hilda, I think, brought my grandfather Sigurd to the funeral. He stood about, gracious, beaming, totally unaware of what was going on. The Freemasons took over the ceremony when the minister of the Northcote Church of Christ had said his piece. It was as though my father had been mislaid, somehow forgotten, the man we'd all known and loved now just an exemplary member of organizations.

This aspect of my father's death continued. A few years ago I wrote the most powerful, distressing and rewarding couple of pages I have ever written: a letter to the Department of Veterans' Affairs in support of my mother's claim to a War Widow's pension. It took about three weeks to write. Under new legislation introduced by the federal government my mother's claim was reviewed and recognized, and this had an unexpected consequence. The government has established permanent memorials to former service personnel who are deemed to have died from service-related injury or illness, but there is only one memorial in each Australian capital city. So the only tangible public commemoration of my father is a plaque on a wall at Springvale. On this twenty-fifth Good Friday after his death we will go and look for his official plaque.

Friends of mine, not least among them Bruce Gillespie, for years have asked me why I have never written about my father. The short answer is that I haven't got round to it. The longer answer is that I do not have Bruce's urge to produce something like his *Good Night, Sweet Prince* — that extraordinary tribute to his father, so moving, so much about Bruce as about his father.

My father was not a bank manager. He probably could have been if he'd set his mind to it, but he didn't. He was, like me, something of a wanderer, and an innocent, forever putting faith before common sense and experience. At Mr Gillespie's funeral I met a friend of my father's, Reg Hillbrick. Reg is old now, hard of hearing, but a bright, interesting, neat, well-preserved kind of man. I could happily spend hours talking to him. During the Depression of

This is another in the series of 'The Best of **JOHN BANGSUND**'. Indirectly, it is also a 'Feature Letter of Comment'. John wrote the first draft of this piece, he says, because he wanted to. He included it in an issue of *Philosophical Gas* that was printed but not distributed.

the 1930s Reg's father had employed my father on his farm, and Reg recalled the passionate discussions he had enjoyed with my father about religion and other subjects. Reg and I entered theological college in the same year, 1957. Some years later he told my mother that I was regarded then as the brightest student the college had ever had. We did not broach such matters at Mr Gillespie's funeral, but his fondness for me and my father was obvious, and heart-warming.

On that morning twenty-five years ago my father had started painting my sister's bedroom. I greeted him perfunctorily on my way to the shower. The night before I had called him from Essendon airport — my girlfriend's flight from Sydney was delayed, I would be late home; he sounded tired. I had started dressing when my mother called me. I rushed into the room. My father was dying, and trying to say something, but it trickled out unintelligible with his last breath. I held him — I recall, absurdly, that it didn't seem right, me in my singlet and underpants, cradling my father in his dying moments — as he fought that dying of the light, struggling to say some-thing he wanted us to know before he went.

I said to Jack Brideson, the undertaker, 'Was he asking me to try mouth-to-mouth respiration?' I felt so guilty about that. Jack, so wise, so experienced, said no, and that if by some chance I had succeeded in prolonging my father's life, that life would be no better than a vegetable's. My father had died, it seemed to me, slowly and in anguish, and there was nothing I could do about it. That, too, is partly why it is taking me so long to write about my father.

One night a few years later I had a strange, compelling dream. My father sat at the end of my bed, and talked about Heaven. Yes, it was quite true: there certainly was a Heaven, and he had gone there as promised, and there he would spend eternity. But he looked sad as he said these things, and finally, on the verge of tears, he said that it wasn't what he had expected, that he was very unhappy. I reached out to comfort him, and I was awake and he had gone. I wept for my father, for his unhappiness, and mine.

17 April: On the way to Springvale we passed the old College of the Bible at Glen Iris: the Mulgrave Freeway literally passes its front door. Then we went to see the new college, the Churches of Christ Theological College at Mulgrave. It looks like a large toy building: there is nothing to give it scale. There isn't even a sign saying what it is.

On the way home Sally drove past the house we had lived in in Kew and the hospital in Fairfield where I was born, and within a couple of streets of the flats where my grandmother Holyoak spent her last years and the house that Lone and Sigurd Bangsund had lived in. Altogether, the day's journey turned out to be a sort of unintended biographical tour.

The memorial at Springvale is a dignified, even tranquil place. There are neat lawns, some rock pools and native trees, and many walls bearing plaques. The plaques seem to be in no particular order: men and women, officers and other ranks from the three services, mingle here as they probably never did in life. My father's plaque is on wall 73, row F. I had a sense of relief, looking at it, a feeling that it was OK to let go now.

— John Bangsund

WRITING IN AUSTRALIA

GEORGE TURNER's most recent publications include *A Pursuit of Miracles* (a book of short stories) and *Brain Child* (his latest novel from Morrow). He has completed another novel. Since 1987 he has been collecting prizes and kudos for *The Sea and Summer* (*Drowning Towers* in USA).

George wrote this article for me at the end of 1988. Fortunately for George and those people unaccustomed to the peculiar *TMR* schedule, a slightly shortened version of this article appeared in *Meanjin* 1/1989. George's story, and the conclusions he draws from it, still seem pertinent in 1991.

LITERARY COMPETITIONS

Parentheses: Matters of judgment

by George Turner

Having been for thirty years content to lurk on the fringes of literary Australia, and so avoid most of the enthusiasms (usually mild), intensities (sternly intellectual) and austere reproofs of my elders, youngers and all too often my betters, I was surprised to be called on to make one of the three judges of the Fiction section of the 1988 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards. Vanity knowing no bounds, I accepted. In retrospect, it was a mistake.

Some forty books had been entered, so the smooth voice on the phone assured me, and the judges would meet for a preliminary discussion. . . .

Meet we did, all twenty-one of us for the seven different awards, and in the printed 'Guidelines for Judges' I read, with sinking unbelief: 'It is emphasised that the Premier and his Committee intend these prizes as specifically for literary merit. *There are no difficulties in interpreting this term for the judges of poetry and fiction.*' (My italics.)

Are there not? What is literary merit? I know what the term means to me while you, Hypothetical Reader, know what it means to you, just as, no doubt, the Premier knows what it means to him* — are all three meanings the same? I considered my two fellow judges and wondered. Stephen Knight is an academic and Helen Daniel has academic training, while I was the lonely tradesman with, for background, only thirty years on the literary treadmill. If you imagine that this practical experience qualifies you automatically as critic and judge of fine literature, please imagine otherwise, beginning now; it teaches you some expertise in the detection of poseurs and intellectual phoneys but little more. I had read Helen's critical work *Liars*, and wondered just how I might go about disagreeing with some of her certainties, and I had read enough of Stephen's reviewing to know that our literary tastes were markedly different. So — what would they think of my definition of literary merit? If, that is, I could produce a coherent statement of it. The immediate future darkened.

In a spirit of either-fears-his-fate-too-much I plucked up courage to ask chairman Barrett Reid what the committee meant by 'literary merit'. In nasty mood, I asked how much literary merit, in the sense of fine writing, would count when lavished on a thin and unimportant theme. I don't recall a word of the answer, only the feeling that I had asked an unanswerable question and was getting an evasively questionable answer. What it amounted to, I think, was that we three judges would settle the matter between us. This was the stuff of diplomacy, which holds empires in balance.

(*Parenthesis 1: Literary Merit.*

Why should the committee not provide some more concrete idea of what is required of the judges? On the following day I rang the (alas) late Stephen Murray-Smith and was heartened by his opinion that significant content was a basic requirement of literary merit. This set me

* 'Him' in 1988 (John Cain); now our Premier's a 'her' (Joan Kirner).

wondering about the meaning of literary awards in general. They are thought of, vaguely, as going to the 'best' book of its year or subject or genre — but what does 'best' mean? Best written, in an academic sense? Most effectively written (remembering that effective writing may have little in common with 'good' writing)? Most relevant to current community concerns and perceptions? Best researched in period detail or accurate representation of demotic or specialized speech (both apt to operate far from literary propriety)? Most realistic? Most transcendent of mere realism? (Current literary fads come into their own here.) Most original in conception or execution?

Few works of fiction will meet all of these requirements, and individual preferences will determine where the reader places his laurel. The question is: which matters most? The answer, answering nothing, is: that which most satisfies each individual reader. It is a recipe for warfare between judges. (We were specifically asked to avoid the unpleasantnesses attendant on the judging of the 1987 awards.)** Such warfare can break out in the secret sessions. A's 'marvellous underlying subtlety' is B's 'tantalizing hints of subtext' and C's 'pretentious obscurantism' or 'literate blarney' — and who knows which is correct? Public opinion, the popular vote, may favour A with a vocal minority opting for C while reviewers play safe with B. In twenty or thirty years' time — something of an acid test, this — academic opinion may have come down in favour of A, and in a further twenty (verdict of posterity) the dreary volume may have vanished from the canon, leaving today's plaudits hollow echoes in the corridors of time.

Worse, the book brushed aside in seventh place in the 'also commended' list may achieve semi-classic status even before we cultural arbiters are safely dead and so unaware of the brute thumbing its nose at our myopia.

With so many awards now available, surely some consideration could be given to the various characteristics of fiction. Some division of categories might lead public attention to a broader spectrum of available work.

So: what is literary merit? I don't know and I'm not sure that I really want to know; it sounds like a term restrictive of creative values. Not knowing, am I a fit judge? If not, who is?)

At home our forty books awaited us, plus another sixteen that had crept in under cover of the mailing list. Fifty-six in all — with about sixty reading days before we three must meet to declare our preferences — some small and some forbiddingly large, to be swallowed whole in an unconscionably short time and evaluated against each other's claims. A short list was to be arrived at in in time for a final wrangling and judgment — 'numbered, numbered, weighed and divided'.

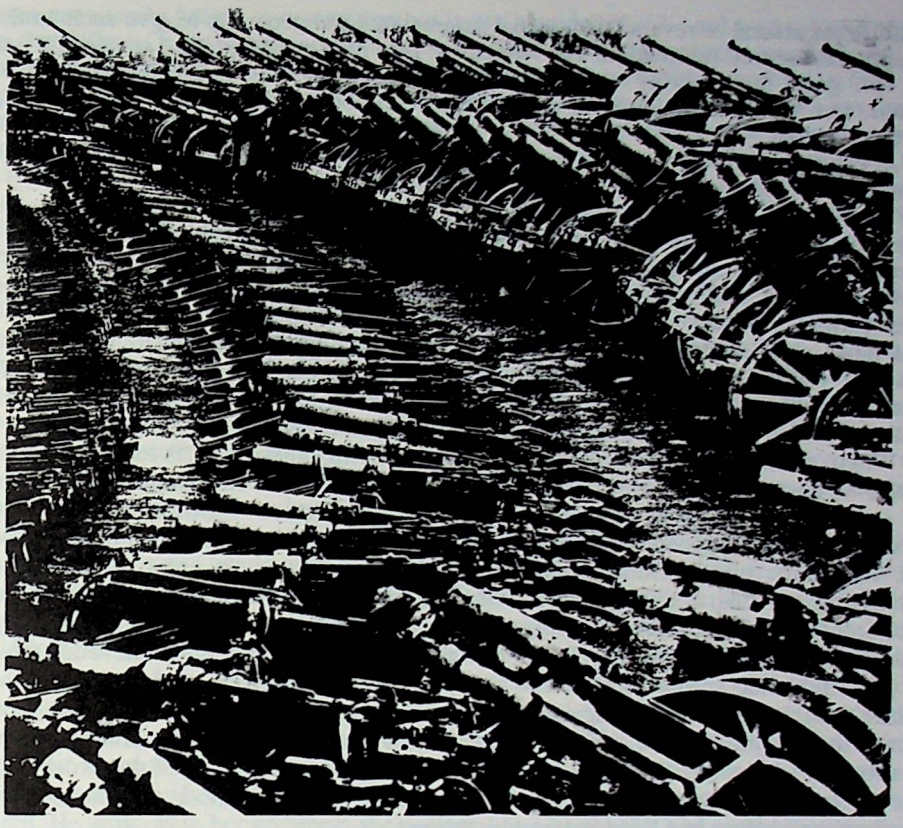
No time for thinking, only for judging; no room for remembering that the winner's joy dances on the loser's buried hopes. No room for emotion because that way indecision lies.

So — a coldblooded attempt to manage at least one book a day while dealing with time-consuming private emergencies that had waited on just this crux to demand attention. Some sort of method was needed; mine was more desperate than intelligent. I sorted out the half dozen titles that had attracted great critical benediction, to be read first and slowly since these surely must (if newspaper and periodic reviews be allowed credibility as professional estimates) jostle each other for short-list positions. In my mind was the awareness that if my choices clashed with those of Helen and Stephen I had better be loaded with ammunition for defence of my case.

Next I made a pile of the books by authors with whose work I was familiar and who might easily produce the exceptional novel or story collection to lift them from the ruck. Last came the ruck itself, about half the total, offering little to the casual leafing-through but still capable of casting up the unexpected pearl. Indeed there were two that did so, turning the grind of perseverance into a treasure hunt.

This dedicated reading tended to reduce fifty-six books to a blur, not quite undifferentiated but certainly not as clearly defined as they should have been. I made notes, whole pads of notes that turned out useful as comments although, when I consulted them a month later I

** Like most such 'unpleasantnesses', this one seems to have been forgotten by all except those involved.



could recall little of the spirit of pleasure or boredom or appreciation in which they were written.

It was as well that I had chosen the most promising titles to read first; when I came to the lesser-known works I found myself actively resenting the necessity of reading books which as a buyer I would never have chosen for myself. Yet they had to be perused as closely as any other; the volume that could be laid aside after struggling through a couple of incompetent chapters was a rarity. In fact I came upon only four which, on grounds of technical shortcoming, could be left unfinished; all the others had to be read with student care, if only because I would have felt a damned fool if the other two judges agreed in lauding some work whose patent virtues my unwillingness had missed. That crisis did not occur, but my force-fed literary indigestion became a warning to gluttons.

(*Parenthesis 2: Indigestion.*
Is there any good reason why all this reading should be crammed into so short a time? Why should not publishers submit their entries as soon as the work is published, allowing the judges — who could be chosen earlier in the year than May — time to read the with the lesiurely respect deserved as much by a lesser work as a greater? The publishers know, or in professional competence should know, when they have a submissible product, and should be able to enter it on the day of publication. The books could then reach the judges at reasonably spaced inervals rather than served *en masse* as a test of absorptive critical stamina against a too-close deadline.

The judges would have time to confer when a promising work appeared, agree on its merits or disagree with each other's judgments, have time to reconsider or even re-read, to

solidify or amend or reverse their initial summations and generally to give each work a more deeply considered rumination. The alternative is to read quickly, take a stance and stay with it. Not good and possibly not fair to the books. I wonder how many literary-award judges could, ten years later, look back on their short lists and say, 'I wouldn't change the position of one of them'?

A proper judgment cannot be squeezed out of breathless readers in a fifty-six-book marathon run against the clock.)

We finished our chore by the end of July and met to present our short litst for each other's scrutiny. Each of us was, I think, determined that the meeting should pass without critical bloodshed, but that would depend on Stephen who, nominated as convener, would divert over-furious loyalties and soothe ruffled feathers. It did not take long to discover in him an old hand at boardroom diplomacy, one who did not allow the feathers to ruffle in the first place. I found a part of my mind observing and analysing his performance and allocating marks for expertise while applauding his technique for firmly pushing his own preferences without actually disagreeing with Helen or myself. Smooth, very smooth.

When at last we faced the moment of truth by laying down our lists for comparison there were, of course, three incompatible truths. We had agreed to a selection of nine books, listed in order of preference, to be whittled down to an agreed three — winner and two runners up. The inevitable happened: We produced three different winners and a total of six books to fill the first three places. Some wrangling, however gentle, was in order, and some low-key wrangling we had, mainly between Helen and myself. The watching part of my mind noted that Stephen contented himself with an occasional direction-seeking remark favouring neither side. Experienced, cunning Stephen — the right man in the job at our dishevelled table.

My immediate problem was Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*, a book which I had after much thought come down against but which featured in both Helen's and Stephen's first three, though not in mine. I had come to a profound disagreement with much of the critical praise loaded upon it. There could be no doubt about the expertness of the writing or about the book's major status in its year, but a reaction had set in about two-thirds of the way through the reading and had hardened by the end.

(*Parenthesis 3: The fiction of Peter Carey.*

My experience of Carey begin with *The Fat Man in History* in 1974, and I have read everything he has published since. In 1974 — aged fifty-eight, physically ill, feeling myself a written-out failure in my chosen art — these downbeat, dour, demi-scientifictional metaphors for waste, confusion, despair and the damnedness of reality fitted my mood very well. They were fine stories. Many of them still are; they have not aged.

Then I had a couple of major operations, began to look freshly at the world, started to write again in desultory fashion after a ten-year break and suddenly found myself embarked on a new, late-autumn career. So in 1981 I came to Carey's *Bliss* with a fresh perspective and found what seemed a lightening of the Carey attitude to the world. True, the portrait of Harry Joy in his perceived hell had its savageries, but the bitter disillusion of the short stories was subsumed in something close to a smile for the man's twitching in the web of life. And there was a happy ending, a Joyful ending for Harry after his revealing death in life. I liked *Bliss* very well. Not until 1985 did it strike me that Harry's joy had a price — withdrawal from the whole competitive, family-bound, success-oriented, decadent world of display and deceit. Harry's world was, after all, still the world of the short stories. Harry was forgiven and saved but the world was not; it was a disastrous place, fit only for leaving.

1985 was the year of *Illywhacker*; I took great pleasure in Carey's account of the lies we live by. I thought he recognized the cultural necessity of the social lies, most of which are means of bridging the gaps of understanding between individuals (too long an argument to develop here) until the final chapter brought my appreciation to a jarring halt; the portrait of human exotica in cages, stared at by other human brutes, was intolerable. Could he really mean that the edifice of cultural lies, without which the world could not exist save in barbarism, had to be paid for in terms of individual debasement?

Perhaps I was mistaken. . . .

Came 1987 and *Oscar and Lucinda*, and I was not mistaken. Here was a novel of

innocence not merely falling to destruction but being hounded to it — not by the logic of life but by the author. Oscar is damned from birth, we must believe, by people who cherish his spiritual welfare without thought for his practical needs in an unspiritual world; Lucinda has the advantage of great determination but no idea how to use it, lacking as she does any useful upbringing. Both are basically nice people; both have aspirations; neither has any conception of how the world works. The novel sets out to show how small the venal world can grind two decent innocents who don't know how to defend themselves against commonplace, everyday nastiness. And there is plenty of that in a crowded book with only one other basically honest character (the Dean). I was reminded of David Foster's Finbar in *Moonlite*, but Carey hounded his couple with a relentlessness far from Foster's good humour.

For some 300 pages I wondered whether the author would allow them a chance of an unspoiled life at the end or whether he would carry his thesis — that innocence has no chance in a corrupt world — to its bitter end. He did neither. He killed Oscar and ruined Lucinda — and did both by falsifying the thesis. I perceived that once the pair were brought together in love the chances were that they would find some manner of bearable resolution, of beating the odds against them; if the novelist had played fair they might have done so, but fair play was not in Carey's mind. He wanted innocent blood in order to show us what we and our world are really like, and what followed was not cruelty from the world but persecution by a novelist manipulating his plot rather than allow the poor brutes to escape him.

Lucinda and Oscar are in love but the frail device that keeps them apart is pure Barbara Cartland; such innocents would no more have disguised their feelings than flown unassisted. Their combined purity is sublimated in the building of an amazingly beautiful (and structurally unlikely) glass church which is to be transported a considerable way to a distant parish. (Remember that this is the mid-nineteenth century.) This explosion of love and beauty, much lauded by reviewers, is as cynical an exercise as cruelty could desire. Carey actually points out twice in the text how useless the thing is, calculated to fry any worshipper using it under the Queensland sun (a nice juxtaposition here of heaven and hell), but nobody seems to have heard the author snarling in his sleeve. Lucinda, to supply Oscar with funds for the work, wagers her whole fortune with him against his success in transporting and erecting the church. He wins, as in her goodness she designed that he should, and so she is ruined.

Meanwhile, a new character has had to be introduced to twist the screw tighter. (A new character at the crux of final resolution of the thesis is not honest dealing; it is plain manipulation, akin to solving a murder mystery by discovering, in the last chapter, the existence of a passing tramp.) A woman appears and takes Oscar's virginity in a moment of physical and spiritual weakness (a doubtful scene, this) and the poor dupe thinks he has to marry her and will her all his possessions, i.e. Lucinda's money. Then the precious church justifies the author's string-pulling by killing Oscar in a crash of falling glass, and Carey's revenge on innnocence is complete.

The thesis remains unproved. The bitter, brutal world did not destroy Oscar and Lucinda; Carey did. The novel fails to make its point and therefore it did not appear among the first three on my list. By reason of sheer virtuosity and superior style it had to be recognized, but in my rating I penalized it for cheating on the theme.)

I indicated my line of thought and its basis. Helen disagreed, politely. I had not expected otherwise; she could not reasonably be expected to jettison in a few seconds all that she had written in the Carey chapter of *Liars*. I did not press the point. I had registered my stand and that was enough; we were engaged in discussion, not combat. Stephen offered no opinion. Sensible Stephen. Point made; why lean on it? Smooth convener.

Helen thought well of Murray Bail's *Holden's Performance*; I had enjoyed its comedy in a mildly puzzled fashion, appreciating the workmanship but distanced from its content. I objected that Holden did *not* perform, that he was a torpid lump who viewed, failed to understand and floated by his own inertia from one unapprehended vision to the next. Of course, Helen affirmed, this is Bail's view of Australia, seen through the eye of innocence.

Bail's view of *his* Australia, never mine.

All those representative freaks, engaged in anything but living, merely parading for genial disparagement! I felt exposed for an anachronism, anchored in the past, unable to comprehend the younger view.

(*Parenthesis 4: On the outside looking in.*
I am a full generation older than Murray Bail, raised in a different world. My world came to a violent end in 1939, and when I returned to take up life again in 1945 a new world had been born. Helen and Stephen had been born into that new world and conditioned by it; it was part of their normality. *Holden's Performance* showed me, with a shock close to fear, that a connection between myself and the contemporary world had snapped, perhaps had never existed. The returning soldier had fitted in, he thought, learned the new rules of the new social games, taken new technology in his stride, accepted a little wrily the new permissiveness (feeling, at age thirty, already a mite too old to take much advantage from it), baulked only at the new popular music, which his ears refused to hear. He had thought himself pretty much at one with his world.

Now, here was Helen telling me that Bail's was an authentic view of Australia — this Bail portrayal of universal silliness, double dealing, mental inertia and selfishness! I was well aware of having withdrawn from much of Australia that did not chime with my vision of its people, but had thought that my grasp on its literature was firm. Now I knew that it was not. I was unable to recognize what true children of the time absorbed without challenge. I recognized talent, I recognized technical proficiency, but was unable to recognize the truth or untruth of the product. I was, bluntly, out of date. I could no more recognize Bail's Australia than Helen and Stephen could recognize — except as museum visitors to the Fossil Room — Nicholas Hasluck's Fremantle of the 1920s (*Truant State*) which for me lived and breathed. Or was I right to think *Holden's Performance* superficial and distorted? And how could I tell? Either way, I was the odd man out.

My own writing also, I was now forced to realize, had been governed by the generation gap. After World War II, writing in a country town where the pre-war world was still recognizable, I ground out my six contemporary novels — and stopped dead with nothing more to say about the immediate scene. For ten years I produced nothing until, at the prodding of a friend, I wrote a trio of science fiction novels in which the present world did not appear.

Later, at the age of sixty-eight, I promised myself one more 'straight' novel, one last study of contemporary Australians . . . and, roughing out the scenario, found that I could not do it. The Australia in my mind's eye had gone away and I was unable to look at the substitute through the eyes of today's young, or even today's middle-aged. I did not know . . . I *do* not know what they see or how they think. Perhaps my total inability to come to terms with rock music says it all.

I know now why so many of our older novelists set so much of their work in the past. I shall have to revise my judgments of contemporary fiction, being an outsider in a strange land.)

It was time for me to shut up; indeed, I had been doing most of what arguing there had been and achieving nothing by it. Stephen had his plan for reconciling all our differences, a neat piece of mathematical gamesmanship which I shall not reveal here for fear of arousing dire argument; it was not a perfect system but I cannot think of a better one. It involved listing and counting and eliminating and recounting and, lo, at the end three titles emerged which none of us cared to query. The Premier's Award short list was complete and the winner decided.

1 *Holden's Performance*
2 *Oscar and Lucinda*
3 *Bloodfather.*

(*Parenthesis 5: Query.*
Were these three really the 'best' of fifty-six? Best in whose opinion rather than ours? And by what standard? And is there a standard by which 'best' can be measured?

Time may or may not tell, and time is a merciless judge. My present bet, which I am unlikely to live to collect, is that one of the three will be current reading in thirty years' time and the other two will not. And, I think, several of the unmentioned also-rans will still be

earning Public Lending Right money when their presumed betters are forgotten.
Judgment is a shuddersome business.)

I resented giving the Premier's Award to *Holden's Performance* but I had agreed to the method of resolving the deadlock and could not in honesty begin whingeing now.

My preference was for David Ireland's *Bloodfather*, which for me stood head and shoulders above all the rest as the truest and deepest presentation of youth I have discovered in a lifetime of reading. Twain's young Huckleberry Finn is observed rather than understood, Murnane's relations of his growing self are fine but in the end too personal to catch the spirit of youth itself, and Louisa Alcott's family is an ode to love rather than reality; the famous works and the praised works all miss the feeling of growing and finding out, while Ireland's vision of youth seen through its own eyes is superior to anything I have found elsewhere. To read it is not to appreciate but to remember that this is how it was.

Here is a little boy telling of his early life with only the words and concepts available to a little boy, broadening his vision, his vocabulary and his perception as he gains years and experience, in mid-teens beginning to understand the ambience in which he lives, only to be oh, so secretly unbalanced by the onset of puberty and doubly unbalanced by the complex feeling that the drawings with which he has expressed his private puzzlements and satisfactions are the truth of himself, signposts to a destiny he is not yet ready to apprehend — the joy, despondency, satisfaction and frustration of total absorption in art.

Bloodfather is the first volume of a trilogy whose continuation I await with impatience. It is a voyage of rediscovery. It has won no prizes that I know of and has been given only cursory critical attention, but it justified the entire two months of frenetic reading. I hope it will still be with us in fifty years' time. It is unique. I regret that nobody else seems to agree with me. Perhaps its time is yet to come.

And so the $15,000 prize went to a novel which, while good of its kind, seemed to me inferior to at least four or five other entries.

This, I suspect, happens more often than we know, almost inevitably so. Personal taste counts for a great deal more *pro* and *contra* in criticism and reviewing than their practitioners will be willing to admit. We all like to think ourselves capable of impartiality, though in fact nobody is so; we seek out the plus values that shore up our delight and find excuse for the minuses we don't wish to recognize, believing that the good outweighs the bad. When three people with different backgrounds, different training and different tastes burrow into a pile of books with no clear idea of what they are looking for (nor should they have any idea), what are the chances that they will all surface waving the same volume? And what are the chances that, if their choices are questioned they will not defend them rather than reconsider in the short space of a single meeting? Pretty small, I think.

What, then, can be done to ensure a proper selection?

Nothing can be done. All selections other than the haphazardly insane are proper. Nobody can select the best novel of the year because there is no standard for judging the best; there is only a consensus which is unlikely to be reached.

I submit that what really matters, with regard to quality, is that a book continues to communicate with readers across years and centuries, simply because it says those things that apply now and tomorrow as well as yesterday. This does not mean that the *Satyricon* of Petronius is therefore a better novel than *Notre Dame de Paris* (though for my money it is infinitely better), only that it has timelessness and is therefore worth continuing attention. Is *War and Peace* a better novel than *David Copperfield* or *Moby Dick* or *Ulysses*? Who can define 'better'?

So prizes continue to be won by unlikely contenders, and this is not altogether a bad thing. Judgment by professional critics and writers means at least that the purely market oriented and the incompetent will be weeded out and that whatever wins will have some values. If six different novels win six similar awards in the same year we can at least be sure that each has something to commend it — and the money goes round and round instead of falling into one pocket as it would if absolute standards could be applied.

The results can be interesting. For instance:

Peter Carey's *Oscar and Lucinda*, critically lauded best-seller and winner of Britain's super-prestigious Booker Prize, has at the time of writing not garnered a single award in

Australia — and God knows there are enough awards going begging round the States. I was uncharitably pleased to note that one of the Booker arbiters went on record as agreeing with my judgment of authorial contrivance, but the others outvoted him.

Thea Astley's *It's Raining in Mango* (a competent but not outstanding novel with little fresh to say) won the Steele Rudd Award ($10,000) but did not appear among our Premier's Award finalist. I placed it about ninth on my list.

Glenda Adams's *Dancing on Coral* won the NSW Premier's Award in 1987 but came nowhere in our Victorian listings. It's a nice, harmless novel about emotional rites of passage in which I saw little to distinguish it. Plainly some judges in NSW saw a great deal. Who was wrong? Both or neither? What is 'wrong'?

Frank Moorhouse's excellent but, to my mind, flawed *Forty-Seventeen* has just won a goodish prize to the accompaniment of fulsome judgmental praise. None of our three saw it as a front runner. My list placed it sixth, which is no mean spot among fifty-six.

And a personal note: My own novel, *The Sea and Summer*, has won no awards in Australia and, aside from fine reviews from Van Ikin and Bruce Gillespie (which are really in-family appreciations) has received little attention from critics. Overseas it has won the Arthur C. Clarke Award ($2000), has been placed second (for $3000) in the Commonwealth Writers' Prizes, second in the John W. Campbell Memorial Award, and was nominated for a Nebula Award. It is a source of satisfaction to me that a science fiction novel has received recognition in a mainstream event.

Do these considerations mean anything? Only, I suspect, that different judges have different values and different tastes.

So, what then is the point of all these awards?

There are two major points. The first is that worthwhile books are brought to the attention of a public who might otherwise never hear of them. Australia is one of the world's greatest *per capita* book-buying countries, but it can buy only so many with a limited population and any guide to the outstanding, by whatever criterion, serves a useful purpose.

The second point is that they help to sell books. A survey has discovered that the average Australian freelance writer earns about $2.80 an hour — $112 for a forty-hour week, less than the age pension. Anything that improves the writer's lot, even if it has some of the lucky-dip aspects of a ticket in Tatts, helps to keep him/her writing.

These awards give heart to the writers, though I've yet to meet anyone, including the readers and the publishers who live on the writers' output, who gives a damn whether the scribblers eat or starve.

An end note:
The state of Australian fiction

Before I began this rumination, Bruce Gillespie asked me for an overview of the state of Australian fiction in 1988, based on my reading of the Premier's Award entries.

In a phrase or two: prolific, technically masterful (on the whole), not very adventurous save for a handful of stout souls, and in general, satisfactory.

My personal view — and please remember that I offer no more than that — is that only two outstanding novels appeared in the surveyed year: *Bloodfather*, already discussed, and Eric Wilmot's *Pemulwuy*.

Pemulwuy is not a great work of literary art, but it is a contribution to the understanding of Australian history in popular terms. It deals with a little-known, carefully hidden small war waged by the Aborigines of the Sydney Cove area against the Rum Corps in the early days of settlement. It is an eye-opener, worth attention simply because of its subject matter. Here is a case where content takes precedence over literary propriety. It is a book that should be widely read; with artistry it would be a better novel, but there are values other than artistry.

Of the fifty-six books submitted, it would not matter to your experience of life if you failed to read some fifty of them, but *Pemulwuy* is one that adds something to public knowledge.

Among others worth reading: Georgia Savage's *The Estuary*, though a little spoiled by a contrived ending; Nancy Phelan's *Home Is the Sailor*, a fine study of little-appreciated aspects of old age; Nicholas Hasluck's *Truant State*, about West Australian corruption in the

1920s, the 'secession' years; Finola Moorhead's *Remember the Tarantella*, feminist but not offensively so and interesting for stylistic experiment; Louis Nowra's *Palu*, concerning the state of the educated New Guinea woman, stranded between tribal culture and modern aspirations.

On a more popular plane, Australia has always been short of thriller writers; Upfield's Napoleon Bonaparte was offered in altogether too gentlemanly and sometimes stuffy prose, and I am probably alone in finding Peter Corris unoriginal and uninteresting. However, two fine examples of genre work are Bob Brissenden's *Poor Boy* (a trifle donnish in spots) and Jennifer Rowe's *Grim Pickings*, which is an essay in the Agatha Christie type of country-house murder and transfers astonishingly well to an Australian setting. Rowe is a better writer than Christie ever aspired to being.

There were seventeen volumes of short stories, of which only two hit any sort of mark with me: *Stories from the Warm Zone* by Jessica Anderson and *The Wild Dogs* by Peter Strzynecki. Both manage variety of subject and treatment while projecting a very personal voice. Most of the other collections were too variable in quality, though each contained at least a couple of good stories. My general impression of them is of having read a year's issues of Bruce Pascoe's *Australian Short Stories* — OK in the moment of reading but leaving few imprints on the memory.

Among the fifty-six books I recall only four absolute disasters. They shall remain nameless because I don't understand how any publisher in his right mind could have entered them. Still, a 7 per cent rating of duds is not too bad.

Of the rest, my impression is of competence expended on minor or well-worked-over themes, a lack of basic imaginative originality. Too few Australian writers have courage to tackle the big, eternal themes and so they condemn themselves to transcience. A big failure is more interesting than a stream of competent little reworkings of social interaction, however expertly observed. Too many writers are concerned with 'style' instead of precision and far too many insert 'subtleties' like currants in a bun, in search of critical praise. I think that our reviewers, all bursting with the latest in critical theory, are telling young writers what is expected of them and too many writers are trying to live up to the reviewers at the expense of their personal voices. They would do well to forget structuralism and all its posts and neos. Criticism is what happens *after* the book is written; I can't remember any good novel written to illustrate a critical theory.

It was, I suppose, a reasonably good year. Two really outstanding novels in almost any year, plus a double handful of good-but-not-quite-superior volumes is very heartening. The indications are that the general standard of Australian fiction is as high as in any other anglophone milieu and one can only watch and wait.

We had an explosion of genius, mostly female, in the first half of the century; perhaps we are just treading literary water while the next outbreak builds up pressure.

— George Turner, October 1988

(LEE HOFFMAN
Continued from Page 11)

his own. He'd retired comfortably, and then had his 'golden years' undercut by inflation. He'd spent the last years of his life deprived of his favourite pastimes — driving, eating, puttering in the yard and around the house — and instead confined to a wheelchair, feeling help-less and useless. He saw too many of his friends die before him. He'd lost the memories of good times that are a comfort in old age. He lost his only son to cancer, and lost the wife who'd become a part of him over the years. I sometimes think it would have been better for him if they'd never shoved him onto the respirator when he stopped breathing in the ICU.

It is too common a story these days.

(13 November 1989)

* But he had *you*, Lee. In the end, there was no one else.

What can I say but thanks for this letter? I could say lots about the way the medical profession treats older people, but no one would thank me for saying it. *

The following article appears four years late. Many apologies to both the author and the readers. **YVONNE ROUSSEAU**, intrepid correspondent, has moved to Adelaide since the event discussed, the 1988 Writers' Week at the Adelaide Arts Festival. During 1991, Yvonne and other members of The Co-operative have been winding up *Australian Science Fiction Review*, Second Series. It is not clear how Yvonne will fill the newly available stretches of free time.

'I never laugh so much as when I am in Australia'

A report on Adelaide Writers' Week 1988 by Yvonne Rousseau

Dear Aunt Agatha,

Despite having a cold, I somewhat inconsiderately went to several events in Writers' Week (at the 1988 Adelaide Arts Festival) — but was thoughtful enough to keep away from the book launchings.

On Monday the 7th of March, I attended the panel on Reviewing — where Nissim Ezekiel of India was the most entertaining speaker. He told us that in India the only people who would turn up for a panel such as this would be reviewers (no, he admitted, this was not quite true — there would be some others who would come in rather late in the meeting: they would be the parents of the reviewers). In India one is proud to be the parent of a reviewer; reviewers are respected, because in India it is widely known — it is *widely known* — that reviewers are respected in Great Britain. If it ever happened that reviewers ceased to be respected in Great Britain, then in India . . .

Nissim Ezekiel confided to us that he was not used to the way audiences laugh at what he says, in Australia (thus reminding me of what Angela Carter told a journalist in September last year: 'I never laugh so much as when I am in Australia.') If you make people laugh in India, Ezekiel said, it means you are not serious; people will say to you afterwards that it was very entertaining, but it was not useful. So he had not yet learned what to expect, in this unfamiliar set of relationships; for example, he had expected that his introducer would tell the audience (as she did) that he had published over 500 book reviews; but 'I did not think that she would say that *I* had told her that.' (In fact, Nissim Ezekiel is also a notable poet and editor of a literary magazine.)

Ezekiel said that reviews in India are different; they deal in principles and aesthetics rather than in direct assessment of a particular work. Similarly, when Gerhard Köpf of Germany spoke later, although inaudibility and Germanic sentence-structure made what he said difficult to decipher — people in the Writers' Week tent became restive as he spoke, recollecting that it was 33 degrees Celsius today, and fanning themselves with their programs a good deal — and although he admitted that he was not himself a reviewer and knew nothing about Australian reviews, there was a definite suggestion in what he said that the German approach also might be quite different from the American, Australian, British and French general approach. Although he proclaimed an urgent need for criticism that

illuminated the historicity of literary positions, the manner of his complaint suggested that there was already a greater tendency in Germany to write of general principles in a review. But he complained that reviewers no longer make clear to the amateur reader what the spectrum of available methods of criticism contains, and where the particular critic belongs in that spectrum.

Earlier, as the first speaker of this panel, Victoria Glendinning, from the UK, had said that she disagreed with Coleridge's notion that reviewers and critics were interchangeable. She felt that a reviewer was a journalist, and that a journalist's first duty was to be read.

Next, Edmund White of America had explained differences between French and American reviewing; these had much to do with propinquity. He said that in France reviewers all live in Paris within a few blocks of one another, and they all review one another's books, and are very nice to each other — filling their reviews with eulogistic remarks. In America, on the other hand, most reviewers are in academic posts spread out all over the country. Writers and reviewers there feel no need to be nice to one another — except for a special subgroup: the American poets, who know one another because they travel the same reading circuits, and who tend to write nicely about one another. If I understood Edmund White correctly, an American academic completes a first review after a month of strenuous work, and is then given tenure and never has to do anything again, ever.

In both America and France, reviews emphasize political analysis. Among the French publications that carry reviews, there is now one with no political affiliation; formerly, there were none. In America, there is also, among writers, speculation about other kinds of politics. Because most of the literary magazines are in New York, whereas most American writers live scattered around the country, the writers imagine New York conspiracies which explain what gets reviewed, and who gets reviewed badly and who is in favour. Edmund White countered with the opinion that reviewers much prefer to write a favourable review if they possibly can, because a favourably reviewed book is News.

Susan McKernan of Canberra boasted that none of her friends were writers — they were all readers — and her speech ended with 'There must continue to be passionate readers!' She held that there was no place any longer for the Romantic writer who believed that artists were of higher sensibility (etcetera) than the rest of humanity — and she attacked book editors by contrasting the actual reviews received by three recent highly acclaimed Australian books (Rodney Hall's, David Ireland's and Thomas Keneally's) with what she believed the book-publishers' editors ought to have made those authors go away and do to their manuscripts, instead of publishing them as they were. (Later in the panel, Kerryn Goldsworthy commented on the recent fashion for reviewers to take book editors to task whenever a reviewer didn't like something in a book, and to say that the book had been badly edited. Goldsworthy deprecated this fashion, saying that good editing is invisible, and that the reviewer has no way of knowing what was done by the editor before the book appeared in its published form.)

About friendship, Nissim Ezekiel (who spoke after Susan McKernan), said that these days he reviewed only writers who were not friends, and in whom he had no kind of vested interest. With the works of friends, he had found that if he were genuinely fond of them, he had a tendency to be overly kind, whereas if he only *wished* he were really fond of them, he would be extremely 'objective', on the grounds that one must compensate for the bias that friendship imports. . . .

Ezekiel disagreed with the view generally held by the world: that, in contrast to poetry, a review is something you can just dash off. He always reads a book for review at least twice — the first time, as a Simple Reader; the second time, taking notes. He said that dashed-off reviews, in particular, reveal unresolved problems concerning the reviewer's relationship with the review's audience — what level one is aiming at; whether evidence from the book should be cited, or whether the reader should accept an opinion on the basis of the reviewer's authority: whether it is to be merely a matter of taste. In Ezekiel's opinion, a book review should be able to move from level to another — from the elementary to the slightly less elementary, and so to the slightly more advanced, and then higher — so that even a top-ranking academic ought not to find it too elementary. He thinks that the journalistic approach to book reviewing is as bad as the purely academic one.

Kerryn Goldsworthy of Melbourne spoke next, and revealed that she had been asked to

speak specifically on the role and responsibility of the book reviewer. For this purpose, she told a fairy tale, in which Ernest, a left-wing feminist, has to decide how to review the latest work of Elizabeth Malouf, which espouses, in beautifully written sentences, the most sexist and reactionary views. In the course of this tale, the clichés of contrasting hack reviewers are devastatingly epitomized; the end is that Ernest lives happily ever after because, after that review (which doesn't include a plot summary), no one ever asks him to do a review again (they complain that he's 'academic' — which is true). This tale revealed the conditions in which reviews are commissioned, written and published in Australia; and Goldsworthy went on to explain that the most influential reviews in Australia are the ones in the review pages of newspapers, and that newspaper editors judge these, as they do the rest of the paper, by news criteria. Thus, the editors of the literary pages are encouraged to take the journalistic approach and solicit snappy, punchy reviews.

In discussion later, an audience member who characterized himself as a simple reader asked a 'Dorothy Dixer', mentioning that he had noticed of late an increase in syndicated reviews originating overseas, combined with a marked decrease in the number of pages devoted to book reviews in Australian newspapers; were Australian reviewers at all concerned about this, if he was not alone or mistaken in noticing this trend? Kerryn Goldsworthy assured him that they are concerned, and described Judith Brett's *contretemps* with the *Times on Sunday* — which assured her, when she was its literary editor, that the superior kind of reader who bought that newspaper would not be interested in Australian reviews.

Gerhard Köpf, as I have mentioned, is not a reviewer, and therefore had not the same interest in the problems of newspaper reviewers. His speech — the last for the panel — was framed in a somewhat poststructuralist mode; he gave us long lists of what a reviewer was not, and said that the critic has no longer any role to play, and also (and I could not tell whether he meant here to allude to the way Susan McKernan had aligned herself with 'readers') that 'the Reader is a fiction; anyone who speaks in the name of the reader is a charlatan.' (This statement was made more piquant by his pronouncing 'charlatan' in the French manner.) He said that these days the text was ignored — concentration was on media-showcasing. And he ended by explaining fully his contempt for literary critics of the present: he said that he told his students, 'Please read — or you must become a critic.'

During the post-panel discussion that followed, Edmund White referred again to the journalistic approach — which he does not care for. He said that beauty *is* difficult and elitist, and that 'literature is finally a coterie art'. Although he was all for the razzmatazz involved in actually *selling* a book, 'the book itself should remain pure and beautiful and difficult'. (When I mentioned this remark to John Baxter, later, he laughed and said that it was only gays who ever said this kind of thing; the heterosexuals always got together and began discussing the best place to unload their review copies.)

Next day, the Editorial panel was chaired by Liz Calder of the UK, who is now Bloomsbury's publishing director. I noted secretly to myself, however — when the subject of Doris Lessing writing as Jane Somers was raised later — that she used to be a senior editor at Jonathan Cape where, in 1981, she rejected the pseudonymous Lessing within the week; in strong contrast to Bob Gottlieb in America who wrote back to Lessing's agent, 'Who do you think you're kidding?' since he recognized Somers at once as Lessing.

Jane Arms of Australia was the first editor on the panel, and told anecdotes of her work with authors — one at least of which must have made the author cringe, if he had been in the audience. One of her successful editings was done with a crazed American neurosurgeon (after six months she had succeeded in getting 180,000 words cut from the manuscript; the published book did extremely well). At their first meeting, when he was praising his book and explaining that 'they' were about to make him a genius, she asked him shrewdly why he had chosen Melbourne as the place for publication. His reply was that 'Melbourne is the intellectual capital of the Third World' — and how could she argue with that?

Tony Lacey of the UK, who's now with Viking, addressed the question of whether Americans do more editing than the British. In her introduction, Liz Calder had mentioned the prevailing idea that Americans do too much editing, the British don't do any, and the

Australians — well, she wouldn't like to repeat what's said about the Australians. Lacey thought that Americans do edit more, and that this is partly economics and partly temperament. Because of the larger market in the United States, an editor has more incentive — there's more pay-off for getting something right. In addition, an American editor typically gets fewer books per year to deal with than a British editor does.

Lacey mentioned a new development in the UK: a fashion for buying (if not reading) the latest hardcover — for snobbish reasons. On the other hand, he strongly contested the observation (made by somebody on the Promotions panel the previous day) that, for class reasons, publishers in Britain took no interest in sales.

Ed Barber, of Norton in New York, spoke next. He pointed out that Norton is unusual in being practically an employee-owned company, with eight editors among its eleven directors: Barbara Ward, who is one of its authors, had dubbed it a 'cottage commune'. Barber thinks it is baloney that (as so many editors believe) writers are juvenile, unstable, insecure types, looking for the ratification that an editor can give them. He believes, instead, that it is the writers who make the editors look good and give them the ratification that (as juvenile, unstable, insecure types) they are looking for. He mentioned his work on a book of anecdotes by the physicist Richard Feynman, who died a fortnight before this panel was held. The anecdotes were tape-recorded, and every sentence needed changing; it was two years' work, I think Barber said — but the result made Barber, the editor, look good. (Looking too good, however, had its disadvantages — it meant that a bigger publishing house would snatch your author and get the proceeds from his next book: the bestseller.)

At present in America, editing by cheque book is the rule. Agents make multiple submissions accompanied by a computer-generated letter mentioning that the auction for the manuscript will close at such-and-such a date (usually about three weeks away). When you're making a decision for a company like Norton, where it's your own money you'll be spending, you find that it concentrates your mind wonderfully.

By comparison with American cheque-book editing, the Australian publishing situation was still quite civilized, but (said Ed Barber) 'You have been warned.'

Jacqueline Kent of Australia was next, introduced as writer and editor both — and gave the opinion that experience of writing makes one a better editor, but experience of editing doesn't make one a better writer. She suggested that there was a trend in Australia for publishing houses to give more time and attention to editing, because of a new breed of women publishers who had worked as editors themselves.

The last speaker was Philippa Harrison, managing director of Macmillan in London, who agreed with Tony Lacey that the Promotions-panel person yesterday was quite wrong to say that 'salesman' was a dirty word in British publishing circles; she knew of nobody in British publishing who thought like that.

Harrison mentioned Lessing's pseudonymous book — hence my thoughts about Liz Calder's response to it. (Although she did not explain these things to us, Philippa Harrison as senior editor for Michael Joseph at the time, and responded enthusastically to the book, accepting it for publication and commenting that it reminded her of 'the young Doris Lessing'.) Harrison's explanation for the hoax was that Lessing-writing-as-Lessing was never edited, so she wrote as Jane Somers in order to have the experience of being edited. . . .

In Harrison's view, the three qualities required of an Editor were Judgment, Winning the Trust of the Author, and Stability. Regarding the last of these, she said that we all knew how many publishing houses had changed owners in the UK over the last year; as a result, editors tended to move on because they didn't feel that they knew what the new owners would want of them. This meant that the author, sticking with the publishing house, had to deal with a different editor, and could build up a stable relationship only with an agent — and an agent was powerless to influence the way the author was treated within the publishing house.

By contrast with the audience for these Reviewing and Editing panels, the listeners to Roberta Sykes's reading on Wednesday morning were almost exclusively female. Two days later, in the session entitled 'Homecountry Australia', the person introducing Sykes said that in his experience it is very rare for a Ph.D. to be beautiful, witty and dangerous — but that Roberta Sykes was all of these at once. In her Wednesday reading, she introduced her poems

with snippets of information — such as that black deaths in custody in Australia are forty times higher than they are in South Africa; or that as recently as twenty-five years ago Aboriginal children were taken away from their parents to be brought up 'white'. When (as adults) they do succeed in finding a parent, it is always the mother that they find — hence Sykes's poem, 'Miscegenation', with the repeated refrain, 'Excuse me, sir', which changes its meaning by the end of the poem to something like 'Excuse me for what I am, for being conceived; I didn't do it on purpose'. The poem's seemingly naive speaker apologizes also for having no 'real reason' for asking whether this 'Sir' is her Dad (that is, the speaker isn't asking for money).

Another of Sykes's poems was 'Racism: Many Faces', in which a woman complains that Sykes's poems (which the woman admired before she met her) don't mention that Sykes is black, and also wonders why Sykes troubles to write feminist poetry. In the last line of the poem, Sykes wonders in return: 'Do They think we spend our whole life being Black — for Them?' This poem made it more than a little uncomfortable when, at question time, a woman from the audience asked why Sykes had decided to change her image from Bobbi Sykes in blue jeans to Doctor Roberta Sykes in — (Sykes was wearing a very elegant black trouser-suit); what was the reasoning behind this? Sykes was prepared to answer this merely by flabbergasted facial expression, but on prompting said that it was hard to answer because it was such a convoluted question. She thought: perhaps she was supposed to go on wearing blue jeans until she reached the top of her life expectancy (as a female Aboriginal) of forty-seven? She then said that the questioner reminded her of a policeman. The policeman said: 'Why do you call yourself Doctor?' — and she said: 'I never call myself.'

The question of the doctorate led Sykes to explain (prompted by the chairperson) that a third Aboriginal woman is at present engaged in getting a doctorate at Harvard. Sykes had felt that there was a big difference between being the first female Aboriginal to get a doctorate at Harvard, and being the only one; if she were the only one, she felt, that would be her fault. She agreed with some embarrassment to having a hat passed around the audience for a the third candidate's assistance; in her speech on Friday she said that she was pleased that over $700 had been collected — but how she wished that such a collection for black education was not necessary.

Later on Wednesday came the panel 'Tracing the Women's Tradition', which was chaired by Susan Mitchell (author of *Tall Poppies* and *Matriarchs*), who partly resembles a strict but fair hockey mistress, generically speaking. She pointed out that it was not, as generally supposed, the founder of the Adelaide Arts Festival — John Bishop — who started Writers' Week. No! it was Margaret Bishop (née Harvey), who lived in Adelaide from 1948, who was a member of the Lyceum Club, and who died in 1966. In future, we are to remember this, and honour Margaret Bishop, when we come to Writers' Week.

Two of the speakers on this panel mentioned that they were lesbians — and seemed somewhat embarrassed about doing so. Before mentioning it, Sandra Shotlander — an Australian playwright who is also successful in America — said deeply, when she produced a large handkerchief, 'You can see there's something funny about *me*', because it was a man's handkerchief; but no, it wasn't really, it was a liberated woman's handkerchief. (She said.)

The first speaker was Valerie Miner, from America — among whose many books are *Murder in the English Department, Tales I Tell My Mother,* and (as co-editor) *Competition: A Feminist Taboo?*. She said that having a feminist audience had made a profound contribution to her novels; when she started as a journalist in her youth, 'as a woman, being a cipher was the expected role'. She described her working-class background, and said that feminism allowed her to find a new voice as a lesbian. Then she became a bit embarrassed and said that now the audience would say, 'See — all these feminists are lesbians'; but she recovered and said, 'Despite what Sandra says, not enough feminists are lesbians; but many are.' Lesbianism was not irrelevant; it was 'a social, cultural and philosophical way of being in the world'.

Miner believes that fiction can empower a reader by raising a range of potentialities and imparting the momentum for the reader to engage with them. Questions she had for us were whether there was an international feminist culture and, if so, why its expression was so

disproportionately Anglophone. And why were there no black representatives on this Adelaide Festival panel, and why was female illiteracy still so common in the world?

Diane Bell of Australia described how she had written about Aboriginal women's possession of sacred relics and rituals and domains that were closed to men — explaining the difficulties of writing when much of one's information has to be restricted to women's eyes, and only to certain categories of women at that. She also described how, having defined the tradition, she found herself being called on to defend it — to be a witness in Land Rights cases, for example.

Janine Burke (one of whose books is *Australian Women Artists 1840-1940*) began her talk by commenting with indignation on that morning's Adelaide *Advertiser*'s report that 17 per cent of women and 22 per cent of men condone domestic violence against women. She also said that domestic interiors (with still lives and humble treasures) — not landscape — were the traditional subject matter of Australian women's art.

Sandra Shotlander told us that 'woman-conscious theatre' is a worldwide movement — the voice of the Nag across the centuries — and (she said) 'If you don't listen — we're used to it. But if you're not interested in listening to us, it's a pity, because we've stopped listening to you.'

Shotlander displayed something of a penchant for virgin goddesses (in her third play, the Virgin Mary takes over Parliament); and she also spoke of her Jewish background and how, when she writes, she senses a reactionary critic on her right shoulder, a feminist critic on her left shoulder, and her mother sitting on top of her head and saying this-play-is-not-going-to-make-any-money. (Her task was punctuated by frequent audience laughter.) As a playwright, Shotlander was not prepared to say that she 'just happens' to be a woman; such a trivialization seems absurd to her.

The final speaker on this panel was the Swiss, Anne Cunea, who was notable for looking, while the others spoke, very pretty and very discontented. She said that she feared that she was the black duck in this Swan Lake: she was not a feminist. She grew up in an Italian village where she was told 'The greatest virtue of woman is her silence' — this, she said, is the woman's tradition. Then she was Jewish in Nazi Europe, she was an orphan in a world of parents, she was cheap labour (an Italian immigrant) in affluent Switzerland — and in all these roles she was told that her greatest virtue (the greatest virtue of the group she was in) was silence. So, finding that she is articulate, she lends her voice to all the discriminated-against groups and does not think of herself first as a woman, but as a woman and all these other things. Anyway, *she* is a woman: why should she be a feminist? Her brothers should be feminists! In her plays, she wants to make brothers and racists understand what it is to be oppressed. (As she talked of a play she wrote about being an orphan, a baby in the audience began to cry desolately — not very loud — and was taken out.)

Cunea read from her play 'Ophelia from the Backstreets', telling us first that Shakespeare's Hamlet is a horrible chatterbox, trampling all over the feelings of Gertrude and Ophelia and never even looking at them. The Ophelia of Cunea's play is a cleaning woman in a theatre who secretly observes a rehearsal of *Hamlet* and tries to explain what she feels, and how it relates to her own life, to a male itinerant worker called Hamlet (Cunea said that many Italians are called the Italian version of 'Hamlet'). One memorable passage is where Ophelia describes how the director explains that men talk and talk and talk and never stop; women say nothing — and then, all of a sudden — they go mad! Cunea said the overall message of her plays is human decency: 'Respect one another.'

Anne Cunea's piece was followed by discussion, in which Valerie Miner took up the question of labels such as 'feminist'; she said that, as an American, she doesn't like labels: 'How would *you* like to be called an American?' But she said that, in addition to other things, we are social agents, and being a feminist — expressing solidarity with other women — was one of the ways of being a responsible agent in society.

The next day, when the Biography panellists had finished their speeches, Anne Cunea took the audience floor to tell how she had written three biographies of people who were still alive; from the platform, Victoria Glendinning deployed her beautiful British manners to say that she could never bring herself to write the biography of someone who was still alive —

not even if she were offered a free week in Australia every year for the rest of her life. As far as she was concerned, a biography of a living person is journalism.

This Biography panel's first speaker was Francesca Duranti, who is not a biographer, but has written *The House on Moon Lake*, a novel about a biographer (here the one invented character so captures everyone's imagination that she is eventually agreed to have been the true author of the biography — while the biographer, who made her up because there was insufficient detail about his subject's final years, is dismissed). Duranti apologized for her poor English, and at one stage was not sure that the word that came to mind would be understood: 'paradoxical?' But, yes, of course the word would do, she said: 'Greek words are always understood by everyone.'

Speaking second, Victoria Glendinning quoted among other opinions George Eliot's that biography is 'a disease of English literature'. Glendinning said that Europeans are not nearly so keen on biographies as English-speakers are.

Discussing the theory that facts only hamper a biographer, Glendinning likened facts to the bottom of a bucket. Certainly it is a hindrance and a restriction to free flow, but you cannot do without it. Meanwhile, she thought it impossible to avoid lies and silences when writing a biography — and whether to tell certain things would depend on the moment when you were writing. Reading a biography of Hugh Walpole in the 1970s, she was disgusted that the biographer had not been explicit about his subject's love for policemen; re-reading the same biography in the 1980s, she applauded the biographer for his subtlety. These days, she said, we all know the things you can do and needn't do; there was no need to write down everything.

Glendinning said that, with any biography, the reader knows how it is going to end; the subject will die. But finding a narrative line is difficult for the biographer, because life is multifocused; the facts collected resemble the dot-to-dot puzzles one fills in as a child, but they are not numbered and it is therefore possible to get the picture completely wrong.

Brian Matthews of Australia was next, with a talk cast in the form of an anecdote about a writer of fiction and a writer of biography who met under a tree and asked one another about their professions. In turn, they described how they would write an account of their meeting. For his description, the biographer first had to set the scene in Australia in March 1988; he referred, among other things, to the second arrival of the First Fleet, which involved 'ruinous expense and similarly nondescript passengers'. In both descriptions, however, 'the writers sit in uneasy silence broken only by the obscure subtextual murmurings of the surrounding forest'. In his attempts to justify his procedure, the biographer read aloud to the fiction writer several passages from a biography he had written. At last, however, a book reviewer accosted them, and began to write witty one-liners about them in his notebook; the fiction writer and the biographer set upon him, beat him to death, and tore up his notebook.

It now became completely clear that the speaker at the Adelaide Festival was the biographer in question, but — as he told the writer of fiction — 'cowardly and gratuitous attacks on reviewers of books' would not be sufficient, at this gathering, to deflect attention from his own shortcomings. His own biography (*Louisa*) had taken eight years to write, and therefore contained most of what he wanted to say about biography anyway. Therefore (he told the fiction writer) he intended to read from it precisely what he had read aloud to the fiction writer. He was told in reply that the whole thing would be a complete failure; what would he do, when the audience was howling and catcalling and execrating? He said that he would lift his head (he lifted his head) and say, with what dignity he could muster, 'Thank you'. ('Thank you.')

Drusilla Modjeska, Australian author of *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945*, was the next speaker — at present writing a biography of her mother. She pointed out that 'the retreat of a Steppenwolf is not on, if you're a mother'; she discussed the refusal of memory to be static — how subject it was to its 'own tricky logic'; she explained the challenge it was to write a biography that was 'ordinary' — not one of the class of portraits in London's National Portrait Gallery, which she used to visit as a child; and she discussed the gaps in one's information about other people's lives. The biographer needs to live with these gaps and not merely be aware that they exist.

The final speaker was UK biographer Andrew Motion, who wrote *The Lamberts* and is

now at work as Philip Larkin's authorized biographer. Discussing the need to have sympathies in common, he said that Richard Ellmann's otherwise excellent biography of Oscar Wilde failed at a point because Ellmann was not, like Wilde, 'famously gay'. Motion disagreed with Glendinning about how much ought to be told; the biographer had to determine the relationship between the life of events and the life that was going on inside his subject's head. In Philip Larkin's case, one needed to know exactly what was going on in the subject's private life. Moreover, the biographer had to ask people questions that one would normally ask only if one had known someone a very long time, and perhaps not even then; private details were necessary.

In the discussion that followed, Victoria Glendinning mentioned the paradox that biographers have to rely on scraps of paper for their evidence, whereas any writer (including the biographer) knows that the inspiration for a piece of writing comes from everyday events that no one else ever can or will know about — things that are unrecorded. To complicate things further, the documents that biographers rely upon are becoming increasingly scarce; people don't write letters any more, and American universities aren't buying up so much, either. With the Death of Documents, she said, it would be quite exciting to see what would replace them. (She deplored the photocopier, which meant that one no longer travelled to the place where the document was and, concentrating one's mind, took notes; one simply sent

away for a copy of the whole thing and published it undigested.) Among the things that Glendinning thinks unnecessary in a biography are details of ordinary physical decay. And when people recount astonishing confidences to her, she shows them her typescript later and asks again whether they are sure they want the information published.

Friday the 11th, the last day of Writers' Week, had a panel called 'Homecountry Australia: Home on *Whose* Range?' The speakers were Carmel Bird, Manning Clark, Jack Davis, George Papaellinis and Roberta Sykes — and a recurrent theme was that Australians would have to cease repressing the truth about their history.

Carmel Bird said that the repression of the truth about convicts and Tasmanian Aboriginals left Tasmanians with a haunted subconscious. In Hobart houses, with a basement designed as a prison for convicts and a ground floor with shutters for protection against bushrangers, the sleeper in the attic was haunted by hosts surging up from below.

Manning Clark said that until we treat that theme of tragic grandeur — the encounter between the strangers and the original inhabitants — the country can't be home for all of us. As in *Macbeth*, the banquet can't begin until the bloodstained ghost has been dealt with.

Jack Davis, an Aboriginal playwright celebrating his seventy-first birthday that very day, agreed that an unconscious battle was being fought with 40,000 years of former occupation.

George Papaellinis, having mentioned how the Bicentennial Authority rejected his plan for a re-enactment of the first landing in 1947 of the *Patris* (complete with welcomers yelling, 'Go back to Greece, ya wogs!'), said that Bruce Chatwin's *The Songlines* was silly and offensive, and that Tom Keneally was wrong to tink that political exiles in Australia ought to trace back their home countries' cultural myths. He said that Australia regarded itself as a great orphanage (and fawned on the British Royal Family which had exiled and orphaned Australians in the first place), and that he himself was no orphan: Matraville was his place of origin. And why did Australians keep leaving for Nicaragua? Why did they avoid dealing with the realities of problems at home?

The final speaker was Roberta Sykes, who also emphasized the importance of recognizing our history, if an acceptable relationship between black and white in this country were to be created. This was her home country — she couldn't protect it, and she was ashamed of that; but at least it could never say that she didn't try. She said that she was a black woman where blacks had virtually no value and women were undervalued; she described how, the first time someone tried to murder her, he protested afterwards in court: 'But she's just a black — a nigger!' Sykes said that the knowledge that one's life was totally worthless to others because of one's race created a despair that must constantly be struggled against; that for every positive experience, like Wednesday's collection for black education, there were a dozen negative experiences.

Earlier, Manning Clark had identified himself as belonging to the tribe of Anglo-Celts, and said that this tribe had lost its faith in the Enlightenment, along with its religious beliefs, just at the time of Federation, when a magnificent Declaration of Independence might otherwise have been made — instead, a very dry and inexpressive statement had been issued. And Carmel Bird had described how, as a Tasmanian, she had thought of her island as a misplaced bit of the British Isles, and the world as a place where you were absolutely free to look for a better site for Tasmania (the fact that some other place, such as Australia, might already occupy the perfect site was something that didn't register). Australia — which Tasmanians called 'the Mainland' — did not feature in this geography.

Carmel Bird now lives in Melbourne, and told the audience about walking along her street one day and confessing, after some conversation with a woman who was gardening, that she had come from Tasmania. The woman informed her that she had already noticed this — having come from Tasmania herself some fifty years ago. 'We're a different race,' she told her, and: 'You can never shake it off.'

I remain
Your Obedient Niece

Yvonne Rousseau
(April 1988)

It's not clear whether this is 'Feature Letter' or an 'Article In Reply to a Previous Issue'. It's also not clear to what extent the editor should reply (through gritted teeth) immediately. (I did anyway.)

LUCY SUSSEX's career has taken off since she wrote this article. Her recently published books include *The Peace Garden*, *My Lady Tongue and Other Tales*, and *The Fortunes of Mary Fortune*. Several other manuscripts are, as they say, in negotiation.

GRAPHOMANIA

So you want to be a paperback writer

by Lucy Sussex

LUCY GUTTERIDGE

Andrew Whitmore aspires to be an author, Bruce Gillespie aspires to be an author, and so it seems, to judge from the huge list of FAW members, the enrolments in writing classes, the overheard pickup lines at Writers' Weeks, 'Tell me dear, what have you written?', does half the population of known space. In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Milan Kundera gives this phenomenon a name: graphomania.

> Graphomania (an obsession with writing books) takes on the proportions of a mass epidemic whenever a society develops to the point where it can provide three basic conditions:
>
> 1. a high enough degree of general well-being to enable people to devote their energies to useless activities;
> 2. an advanced state of social atomization and the resultant general feeling of the isolation of the individual;
> 3. a radical absence of significant social change in the internal development of the nation. (p. 92)

I have quoted Kundera at length before, in a somewhat unkind review of *Starkindler*, an amateur magazine for infant sf and fantasy writers. In retrospect, I should have been encouraging, handing out one lolly to each story like a teacher judging a kindergarten art contest. Unfortunately, the exquisitely evil *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* had immediately preceded *Starkindler* on the bedside table. Kundera followed by a sub-professional magazine was a cordon bleu vinaigrette with a first attempt at lamingtons for a dessert. And, to continue the metaphor, Kundera is scathing about the reasons why people become cooks:

> The proliferation of mass graphomania among politicians, cab drivers, women on the delivery table, mistresses, murderers, criminals, prostitutes, police chiefs, doctors, and patients proves to me that every individual without exception bears a potential writer within himself and that all mankind has every right to rush out into the streets with a cry of 'We are all writers'.
>
> The reason is that everyone has trouble accepting the fact he will disappear unheard of and unnoticed in an indifferent universe, and everyone wants to make himself into a universe of words before it's too late. (p. 106)

In other and less elegant words than cynical old Milan, it's all ego. Compare and contrast the behaviour of the graphomaniacs in the following sequences:

Scene One: A fan gathering. As each person comes through the door, they are met by Joe Neo, who has just made his first sale to *Utterly Appalling Stories*. 'See this beautiful string of beads? That's what they paid me.' Nobody has the heart to say, 'Well congrats, kid, but don't give up the day job', even when Joe persists in raising the subject at thirty-second intervals thereafter.

Scene Two: A dinner party, two of the guests being Eleanor Established, a big-name writer, and Stacey Starting-Out, who has just placed her first novel. Conversation is brittle, with any hesitant remarks by Stacey instantly contradicted by Eleanor.

Stacey: 'I haven't read the new Tim Winton . . .'

Eleanor: 'Winton! The upstart puppy!'

It occurs to Stacey that her miniskirt and long fringe give her the appearance of a teenager. Does Eleanor think her that abhorrent creature, the young prodigy? Casually she drops into the conversation the magic words: 'My book should be published on my thirty-fifth birthday.' Eleanor thaws considerably, patronizing Stacey for the rest of the meal, with the occasional flash of hostility: 'My dear, I must warn you that your publishing company thinks of its authors as worms. . . .'

A confession here: I am a graphomaniac, as is Bruce, Andrew, the composite characters in the preceding sketches, Kundera himself, and many of my acquaintances. The Whitmore–Gillespie experience, as described in *The Metaphysical Review* No. 11/12/13, is close to mine, in that I also attended workshops (and have conducted some myself, at which the story that Bruce mentioned was submitted). Like Bruce, I have had Damien Broderick lacerate a story of mine from a safe distance. At least in my case I had the consolation of thinking, whenever Damien executed a particularly stunning rapier cut: 'Yah boo sucks, Broderick, it's already been sold.'

Which brings me to Whitmore and his patent resilient ego. Had I written seven novels and had them all rejected, I think I would have taken to drugs and done something socially useful, like sericulture. As it happens, I have been lucky, or yucky, depending upon your point of view. My first attempts at poetry and the short story were both accepted by the first editors to which they were submitted. The first novel I wrote was accepted after a long and tortuous process, highly illustrative of how your baby becomes somebody else's product.

Mid-1986: My first (there have only been two) fan letter, from Ms X at Old & Tried publishing. 'I did like your story in *Strange Detractors*, and if you have any manuscripts suitable for children in your bottom drawer, do send them to me.'

As it happened, I was then engaged with a novella about a thoroughly miserable love affair, which was followed by a novella about a lesbian feminist utopia. I work slowly (on the whole), and it took some time to banish such adult concerns from my mind and consider the problem of writing for children.

End of 1986: Unemployed. I dusted off an old workshop spoof on sword and sorcery (the princess ends by marrying the robot). After excision of the long words and dirty bits, I submitted it to Old & Tried as a proposed picture book.

Beginning of 1987: Ms X rejected the manuscript. I submitted it to two other publishers, with the ditto response. When I re-read the story, it seemed all too obviously an adult tale sanitized for kiddie consumption. If you are going to write a children's book, I resolved, you must conceive it from the first page with the child in mind.

February 1987: Still unemployed. Then I was struck by a thunderbolt of an idea and wrote a children's novel in eleven days. I revised it, made a neat final draft, and mailed it to Ms X.

March: Letter from Ms X: 'Thank you for submitting the manuscript. I have just got a new job as children's editor at Caffey & Geoffrey's, and therefore cannot make a decision on the text. My assistant editors will be in touch with you soon.'

April-May: Not a whisper.

June: In a black mood, I wrote to Old & Tried demanding the return of the MS. It came back, with a covering letter from Ms Y, the newly appointed children's editor: 'This looks interesting. I would like to read your novel again.' So I sent it back to her in the next post.

July: A large and strangely familiar parcel arrived from Old & Tried. With trembling hands I opened it, to find the MS and a letter from Ms Y: 'I regret having to return your novel, but we have just been taken over by Grabitall and therefore are not buying any books at the moment. I wish you luck.'

August: While considering whether to submit the MS again to Ms X at Caffrey & Geoffrey's, I bumped into Z, an old acquaintance of seven years back.

LJS: 'Hi, what are you doing these days?'

Z: 'I'm children's editor at Ivory Tower Press.'*

LJS: 'How *interesting*. Let's have lunch sometime.'

Z: 'Okay. Give me a ring.'

Several days later, I phoned Z: 'Umn, I have an ulterior motive.'

Z (suppressing ladylike groan): 'Okay, send it in.'

September: I rang Z again. 'I'm just off to the Petropavlovsk Book Fair. I'll read it when I get back.'

October: A call from Z, at 10 p.m. at night, sounding very surprised. 'Hey, I like this!'

That wasn't the end of the affair, but I'll spare the gruesome details of budgeting, contracts sent to the wrong address, etc., and just note that a book that took eleven days to write will be published nearly two years after. Publishing, like the mills of god, grinds exceedingly slow. The above shenanigans, incidentally, are as nowt beside the manoeuvrings involved in getting the Mary Fortune collection into print. Mary Fortune was an early Australian author, a graphomaniac to her buttoned boots, who suffered the fate dreaded by all writers — she was completely forgotten after her death. Only recently has she been rediscovered by feminists.

Returning to Kundera, it is interesting to note that he does not exempt himself from his general condemnation, nor indeed one of the greatest of writers:

> Tamina feels that the eyes of a single outsider are enough to destroy the worth of her personal diaries, while Goethe thinks that if a single individual *fails* to set eyes on his lines, that individual calls his — Goethe's — entire existence into question. The difference between Tamina and Goethe is the difference between human being and writer. (p. 105)

Elsewhere he writes that the crucial determinant for graphomania is the need for publication:

> A woman who writes her lover four letters a day is not a graphomaniac, she is simply a woman in love. But my friend who xeroxes his love letters so he can publish them someday — my friend is a graphomaniac. Graphomania is not a desire to write letters, diaries, or family chronicles (to write for oneself or one's immediate family); it is a desire to write books (to have a public of unknown readers). (pp. 91–2)

The above would seem to indicate that the only way to write and not be a graphomaniac is to be a 'mute inglorious Milton', leaving instructions that your works must kindle your funeral pyre. Of course, that purist approach eschews glory, or as the fans say, egoboo. In his response to Whitmore, Bruce writes of justifying his existence by writing, which reads like an existential whine until he qualifies it by the mention of money: 'Fanzines *cost* money. Writing fiction *earns* money. For good upright moral reasons . . . for the good of my soul I should write fiction'. Dear me, the Protestant work ethic rides again.

I suspect that graphomaniacs do not have the inner strength to write purely for themselves, and crave the approval of others that publication gives. Or, as Kundera puts it, they want to shout others down:

> They did not come to warn or scold or threaten her. They are not at all concerned with

* I knew of Z's position before, but had avoided contacting her, on the grounds that nepotism is tacky. Desperation got the better of me in this instance.

> her. They came, each one of them, to tell her about themselves. About how they ate, how they slept, how they ran up to the fence, and what they saw on the other side. About how they had spent their important childhood in the village of Rourou. About how their important orgasm had lasted six hours. About how they saw a woman on the other side of the fence and she was wearing a knitted shawl over her head. About how they swam, fell ill, and then recovered. About how they had been young, ridden bicycles, and eaten a sack of grass that day. There they are, standing face to face with Tamina, telling her their stories, all at the same time, belligerently, pressingly, aggressively, because there is nothing more important than what they want to tell her. (p. 104)

My stance is: egoboo is good, even when it takes the form of invitations to lunch because the inviters want a job in publishing, or backhanded compliments like 'I didn't think much of you until I read your story' (these are authentic incidents), but writing is better. Basically, I get a buzz out of chasing words down a page. It is what I do with them afterwards that Kundera tells us is suspect:

> The invention of printing originally promoted mutual understanding. In the era of graphomania the writing of books has the opposite effect: everyone surrounds himself with his own writings as with a wall of mirrors cutting off all voices from without. (p. 92)

> Once the writer in every individual comes to life (and that time is not far off), we are in for an age of universal deafness and lack of understanding. (p. 106)

Note:
Kundera's argument is complex, and in thus excerpting it I may have done him an injustice. Readers are urged to seek out *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* for themselves. Besides the extracts already quoted it contains gems like: 'He's a second-rate, third-rate, tenth-rate writer, and everyone knows it. Banaka is so much the victim of his own reputation that, believe me, he himself has nothing but scorn for people who read his books' (p. 87).

—Lucy Sussex, 1988

* brg: Not being able to resist the temptation to make some sort of reply, I point out that neither you, Lucy, nor Kundera point out the main reason why people want to become writers: because they want to emulate the only people who gave them any pleasure during childhood.

It has long been my belief that the only occupations worth following are those of writer, composer/musician, film-maker, artist, scientist or teacher. Since I have no talents at music, art, film, science or teaching, and have never discovered a way of making a living at writing (because I'm no good at writing fiction; because nobody wants to *pay* writers), I'm forced back to boring publishing (secondary textbooks) for a living, and interesting publishing (fanzines) for a hobby. But like most graphomaniacs, I would simply like to earn a living from an honorable profession. *

I don't know exactly what **DOUG BARBOUR** has been publishing recently, but I suspect it would be either poetry or criticism. It's good to see these non-sf reviews appearing in the mail from Doug; I hope they inspire more.

RECENT FICTION

A century's shards

by Doug Barbour

The twentieth century has become, we now see, something of a vision out of a mad artist's collage of science fiction dreams and nightmares. Attempting to obey Bruce's injunction to make *The Metaphysical Review* a place where something other than the simple discussion of sf occurs, I offer here a composite review of three recent novels, two American, one British, each of which attempts to confront aspects of what it has meant to live in this most interesting and troublesome century.

THE NEW CONFESSIONS
by William Boyd
(Penguin; 1988)

William Boyd has already made something of a reputation with his first three novels, *A Good Man in Africa*, *An Ice-cream War*, and *Stars and Bars*, all described as serious comedies. *The New Confessions*, his most ambitious work yet, can also be described that way, but it is, as well, a large historical novel, a sly fictional exploration of the genre of autobiography, a study of the flaws and failings of the Romantic artist in our time, and a complex study in character.

The New Confessions purports to be the memoirs of a forgotten cinematic genius, one John James Todd, born in Scotland in 1899, and writing his life for perusal in 1972. Like the famous Romantic philosopher whose *Confessions* changed his life when he read them in prison camp during World War I, Todd is a man of emotion and impulse: the life of reason is impossible for him. Also like Rousseau, he purports to be absolutely honest in his autobiographical narrative.

Todd's birth causes the death of his mother, so not only does he miss out on maternal love but he also never gets much affection from his doctor father. Instead, he imbibes the wild oral tales of the Celts from his wet nurse and housekeeper, which provide his first apprehension of the beauties of the fantastic. A poor scholar, he ends up at one of those odd schools for misfits that have achieved an eccentric reality for so many of us who read British fiction. There he befriends a young mathematical genius with whom he will remain friends for life, before running away to declare his adolescent love to an aunt. That futile gesture ending in farcical embarrassment, he makes the mistake of joining a Universities and Public Schools Brigade and ends up in the trenches of World War I which, as he admits, is the last place he would have chosen to be had he thought about it at all. But then forethought is not his strength.

Boyd's genius in this novel is to have created a garrulous, self-centred, yet fascinating old man as his tale-teller, and though Todd's focus is always far too narrow, he has been in many of the places where the twentieth century was happening most fully. He spends World War I first on the front lines, then in a film unit (his first discovery of the art that would be his), then in a German prisoner-of-war camp. In every case, his experience is out of the ordinary, eccentric in the extreme as befits the personality he so casually yet carefully presents to us.

Similarly, his marriage and early work in the cinema in England after the war, his later successes in Berlin, his tumultuous affair with the star of his greatest work (a silent film in three parts, based on Rousseau's *Confessions*, which failed at the box office because of the advent of sound, and which bears a more than passing similarity to Abel Gance's *Napoleon*), the divorce that followed plus the loss of his great love, the descent into near-nonentity in Hollywood, his life as a war correspondent for a Mexican newspaper chain, his trials during the McCarthy era — all tie his life to some of the most important political events of our era,

yet Todd can only perceive them in the most eccentric fashion, which provides a strange yet comic focus on some of the central happenings of the era.

Like Rousseau, Todd is a supreme egotist; this means that he reports incidents with extraordinary acuity but not with extreme accuracy. It also means that he lives through some of the most important public events of this century hardly aware of their larger social impact but only of their effect upon his personal life — as in his perversely narrow though thoroughly lively memories of Berlin during the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, where he can recall only the life of the studios and the antics of his fellow artistes. In this perhaps he only reflects the mass of the people, but it seems provocatively wasteful to create a character who has lived through so much history only to ignore most of it in his telling.

Yet such ignorance is clearly deliberate on Boyd's part: though Todd has been there, he has missed the public impact of what was going on. Yet his reportage from the margins is full of powerful images, especially if he has been able to imagine the situations he finds himself in as part of a film. Thus his memories of the front, like those of post-World War II Berlin, are searing in their intense awareness of destruction and loss. And, when he notices them, his descriptions of the people involved are powerfully evocative.

Similarly, his descriptions of the making of and the images of his own films are delicate, rich and subtle. Todd, as Boyd presents him, is the man he says he is: a person who might well have been a superb director, a man who has always acted on impulse even when it was foolish to do so, and, apparently a narrator of extreme honesty. For, like Rousseau, he insists he is telling everything, showing his own behaviour in full, warts and all. Certainly, the warts are there — there are moments when we cringe at his behaviour. But as well there are long hiatuses, major blanks in the film of his own life. Are they simply periods when nothing happened, or is he hiding something — even from himself?

It's a tribute to Boyd's characterization of his narrator that I can ask such a question. With all his faults, Todd interests us enough that we read on, wanting to know more about him and the people to whom he introduces us. His version of the century does finally take its place beside the more 'official' ones, not least because the people he shows us are themselves so intriguing.

The New Confessions is an entertaining and illuminating example of the contemporary serious British novel as it attempts to take on the whole world.

THE MESSIAH OF STOCKHOLM
by Cynthia Ozick
(Random House; 1987)

THE EXILE OF CÉLINE
by Tom Clark
(Random House; 1987)

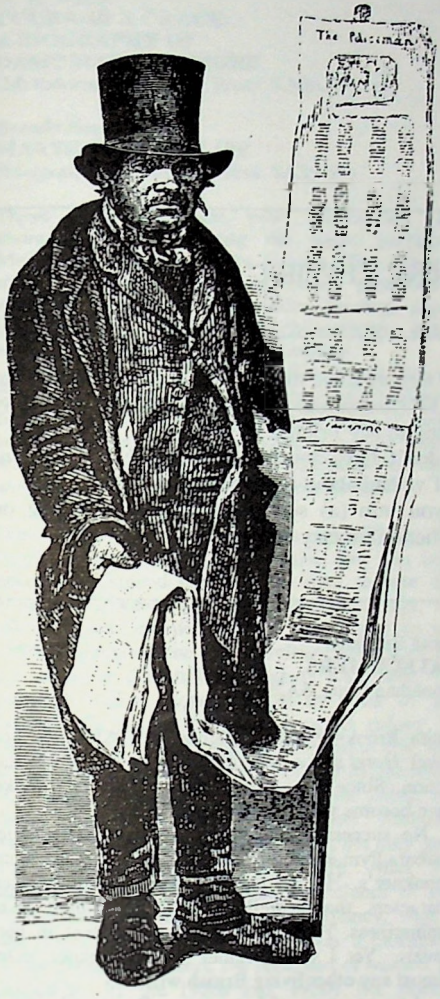
If a new British novel looks out to the world which was once a part of empire, the writers of a later empire often tend to look backward. Despite the United States' determined turning away from Europe in its cultural beginnings, its artists have always turned back to the old culture for certain kinds of inspiration. Two recent novels point, in their very different ways, to Europe's continuing fascination for American writers.

In *The Exile of Céline*, poet and biographer Tom Clark turns his gaze upon one of the most controversial figures of twentieth-century writing. Louis Ferdinand Céline, author of *Journey to the End of the Night* and *Death on the Instalment Plan*, dedicated doctor, and vociferous anti-Semite, finds himself near the end of World War II accused of being a Nazi sympathizer and even a traitor. With his young dancer wife Lucette, he is trying to escape north through war-torn Germany to Denmark, where he has stored a hoard of gold against disaster.

Clark's novel, written with a savage clarity of vision, follows Céline into his seven-year exile from France, allowing the doctor-novelist a chance to protest his innocence of the specific charges brought against him by the French Resistance, yet showing the bitter strength of his nihilistic vision of humanity. Céline would have gotten on well with Swift, I think, for he hated mankind though he certainly treated Tom, Dick and Harry with at least medical compassion.

As he and his wife move through a haunted and apocalyptic Germany, then as he sits in prison cells and infirmaries awaiting what he feels is his inevitable return to France and execution, Céline relives his life and opinions. He doesn't change much, but his general hatred of all humanity, and especially of the Aryans in whom he had once invested such hope only to see them utterly destroy themselves and their world, reveals a mad idealist, not a traitor.

Clark has written biographies of other writers, and *The Exile of Céline* is fictional biography at its best. In many darkly lit scenes of phantasmagoric perception, Clark captures the full horror of the destruction of the war. As well, he creates a series of blackly comic encounters between Céline and such people as



the kindly Danish lawyer who tries to help him but cannot understand his bleak view of the world, and the Jewish-American literary scholar who comes to interview him while he is living on the lawyer's country place in the north of Denmark. Throughout, Clark's cool, analytic tone places everything at the right distance to keep the reader on a moral edge, thoughtfully refusing to be drawn in by anyone's explanations or excuses, yet involved in the narrative rush of his story of exile and guilt.

The Exile of Céline could so easily have become just a slick thriller, but Clark refuses this easy path. It is the fascination of a mind that hates so much yet never quite gives up on hope and compassion that appears to have drawn him to Céline, and in his novel he has engaged that mind near the end of its tether, creating in the effort a fiction of real power.

Cynthia Ozick, recognized as one of the finest American writers to emerge in the 1970s, is interested in another kind of exile, one which perhaps all thoughtful people inhabit today. In *The Messiah of Stockholm*, she has written a novella both compelling in its moral intensity and wonderfully comic in its delineation of character. *The Messiah of Stockholm* may not be her most profound work, but it deals with serious problems of illusion and reality, of how one establishes one's psychic roots in a world in which everyone is somewhat out of place.

Ozick's novella concerns Lars Andemening, an orphan who has invented a past rich in both symbolic and literary mystique. Lars believes he is the son of Bruno Schulz, a Polish writer who published two books before he was killed by the Nazis. Now in his forties, and a deeply serious, even solemn, but not too popular book reviewer in Stockholm, Lars tells his tale to a German emigré bookseller who begins to feed his desire to discover everything about his 'father' by sending him to a Polish emigré for Polish lessons and finding him letters and other writings by Schulz. Eventually a woman about Lars's age arrives in Stockholm claiming to be Bruno Schulz's daughter and carrying what she claims is *her* father's famous missing manuscript, *The Messiah*.

How Lars deals with this double-barrelled assault on his whole way of life is the core of this richly evocative story. In pursuit of his dream he has allowed his marriage to fall apart, and he has retreated into a very small world of middle-European literary dreams. Now he must decide on the illusoriness of both his own claims and the manuscript's claims to truth.

Ozick's style is delightfully angled away from straightforward narration; she is interested in the tics and foibles of her characters, in the way they perceive personal interactions from within a particular and often peculiar bias. The novella is a series of scenes in which both major and minor characters display their all-too-human quirks, without any banal psychologizing from the author. As Lars and the other characters move towards an acceptance of the ordinary that, though 'right', is something of a loss, Ozick makes us care for them and for the very real moral dilemmas in which they are caught. This is a fine addition to her work.

— Doug Barbour

WASABE!*

a column by Bruce Gillespie

BOOK REVIEWS FROM 'THE MELBOURNE REPORT'

The following reviews have appeared in *The Melbourne Report* since the end of 1988. I've left out reviews that have been substantially duplicated here or in *SF Commentary*, but I have included reviews of books that are mentioned in passing in 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'.

I apologize in advance for most of these reviews. I don't have much space in *The Melbourne Report*, and often I include only a portion of the thoughts I've had about any particular book.

My motives for including these reviews is to spark you into (a) sending letters disagreeing or agreeing with me; (b) sending me reviews of non-science fiction/fantasy books.

Anita Brookner:
LATECOMERS
(Jonathan Cape, $A29.95)

Anita Brookner became famous in 1985 when her novel *Hotel du Lac* won Britain's Booker Prize for fiction. Since then *Hotel du Lac* and all her books have become very popular.

No success story, other than that of the late Barbara Pym, could be more unexpected than Anita Brookner's. Her writing style is whisper-quiet. Her characters, though well heeled, insist on their own ordinariness. Plots are almost non-existent in her novels. Yet I would rather read Brookner than almost any other living British writer.

Any summary of *Latecomers*, Brookner's latest novel, can hardly make it sound interesting. As boys, Hartmann and Fibich flee Germany for Britain just before World War II. They go to school together, set up business together, and live in the same apartment building after their marriages. Their business prospers, their children grow. Nothing seems to disturb the comfortable surface of their lives.

These self-contained lives are only made interesting by Brookner's magical ability to fashion the English sentence. Her sentences are lithe, witty, always filled with surprising details. She places us right inside these people while keeping a respectful distance from them. She does not presume to tell us more about them than they know themselves, but she shows the way they achieve self-knowledge. This is art that hides art; immaculately literate but not self-consciously literary.

Latecomers does have a plot. Near the end of the novel Fibich returns to East Berlin to try to find some trace of the world that rejected him forty-five years before. He cannot find it. At first he is baffled, but later accepts, for the first time, the reality of his own life. *Latecomers* is full of such secrets.

* It gets up your nose.

W. H. Wilde:
COURAGE A GRACE:
A BIOGRAPHY OF
DAME MARY GILMORE
(Melbourne University Press, $A45.95)

Brenda Niall:
MARTIN BOYD: A LIFE
(Melbourne University Press, $A39.95)

These two important new biographies are distinguished by sharing the same publisher, Melbourne University Press. Each is a fine example of bookcraft — and each is entirely produced in Australia. In each book the editing, binding, paper, typesetting, as well as the photographs, notes, bibliography, and index, are exemplary.

In other ways *Courage a Grace* and *Martin Boyd* are very different from each other. *Courage a Grace* is a stodgy, unrelenting book that is saved entirely by Dame Mary Gilmore, its subject matter. *Martin Boyd* is a lithe, witty, literate book, in many ways as well written as Boyd's own novels.

Dame Mary Gilmore was born in 1865 in the Goulburn area of New South Wales. She was born poor, and stayed poor all her life, despite the honours that were awarded her. At an early age, she showed great independence of mind, and by the 1890s depression she was a tireless campaigner for the cause of the striking workers and, later, the political Labor Movement. At the turn of the century she joined the New Australia colony in Paraguay, the 'communalistic' settlement that was supposed to eliminate all the injustices its members left behind in Australia. The settlement failed, but there Mary met Will Gilmore, her husband. Returned to Australia, Mary bore Bill, her only son, but chafed at being a farmer's wife. After the success of her early poems and her column in *The Worker*, she travelled by herself to Sydney, where she stayed the rest of her life. She was a champion of the rights of workers, the poor, and of women in particular. In the 1920s and 1930s her poetry became as popular as that of Lawson or Paterson. She died at the age of ninety-seven.

I must admit that I had very little idea of why Dame Mary Gilmore was famous before I read this book. Initially her poetry made her a popular figure in Australian life. Today it seems absurdly mid-Victorian and melodramatic. Wilde's biography shows that she should be best known as a pioneer of the women's movement in Australia. Energy was the keynote of Mary Gilmore's life. She rarely seemed to sleep. She wrote much of the time; the rest of the time she addressed meetings. When depressed, she made jam. Her enormous sympathy and confidence reached out to every person she met. She supported the work of new writers.

Dame Mary Gilmore bursts the bounds of *this* book. W. H. Wilde takes a dull, methodical approach to his subject, trudging through a biography instead of catching the life of his subject. But Mary keeps pushing aside her biographer, reminding us of a very remarkable, independent person.

Martin Boyd, on the other hand, was a snob, a prude, and more attracted to Britain to Australia. Even his Australia — comfortable, gentlemanly, artistically eccentric — was quite a different country from Mary Gilmore's. Boyd had no sympathy for workers' movements; indeed, he spent most of his life avoiding the need to work. However, he was the finest prose stylist Australia has yet produced, and the contradictions of his life provided enough material for more than a dozen fine novels.

In *Martin Boyd: A Life*, Brenda Niall is able to take the reader inside a world that has largely vanished from Australia: that of the old gentry, who lived on their private incomes and scorned 'earned income'. Boyd was born in 1893, the third son of an amateur painter, Arthur Merric Boyd, and Minnie Boyd, *née* à Beckett. The young Martin's maternal family, the à Becketts, provided the money that kept the whole family in comfort, but even this money began to run dry in the 1920s. The Boyds, of course, became the most famous artistic family in Australia. Martin Boyd didn't fit anywhere. He liked England better than Australia, but was disgusted by the attitudes of the British ruling class during World War I. Martin himself narrowly missed death in the trenches and in the air. After the war he retired to an English village for ten years and taught himself to write. This took great courage, as he was forty-four years old by the time he finished his 'apprenticeship'. For subject matter, he explored the rich material supplied by his own family. His writing career culminated in the 'Langton Quartet' (*The Cardboard Crown*, *A Difficult Young Man*, *Outbreak of Love* and *Where Blackbirds Sing*), which finally brought him some recognition in Australia. His earlier *Lucinda Brayford*, which was successful in Britain, was not noticed here. Boyd was poor at the end of his life, his talent still largely unknown. He could hardly have realized the popularity his works would achieve within a few years of his death.

Brenda Niall is a biographer with a novelist's ability to highlight the more paradoxical aspects of her subject. In bringing him to life, she brings re-creates his whole dazzling circle of family and friends. Like *Courage a Grace*, *Martin Boyd: A Life* is an invaluable guide to a remarkable Australia that's now lost.

Germaine Greer:
DADDY, WE HARDLY KNEW YOU
(Hamish Hamilton, $A29.95)

What if all those dull, unobservant, unimaginative Australian writers who win literary prizes suddenly took off their blinkers and began to write like angels? What if they replaced the milk in their veins with fire in their bellies? The result might resemble *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You*, the most exciting Australian book of 1989.

But Germaine Greer's latest book was not written or published in Australia. And the reviews in our major newspapers and magazines have ranged from stupid to uncomprehending. The Australian reception given to *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You* must again make Greer feel like a stranger in her own land.

A good book should obey the command 'Astonish me!' Germaine Greer's new book, the

quest for the origins of her father, keeps astonishing the reader to the very last page. It is a great book of detection and historical research — and much more.

Greer is unclear in telling us what began this project. I suspect that Hamish Hamilton gave her an advance payment to write the first volume of an autobiography. She already knew a lot about her mother's background. She needed to research the origins of her father before she could tell her own story. But Reg Greer, her father, did not exist. Germaine Greer found no trace of him before 1929. While looking for him, she trudged four states, spent thousands of dollars, and encountered much of the worst of Australia as well as its best. (Her account of trying to extract information from slow-moving bureaucrats and librarians is hilarious.)

Reg Greer had never existed. Everything he had told his family about his origins was a lie. The account he gave of himself when he joined the army in 1941 was false, except for the name of his grandmother. This clue enabled Germaine Greer to unravel the puzzle. I won't tell you more, because that would be like telling the last page of a detective novel.

This would all be fascinating enough in the hands of an ordinary writer. In Germaine Greer's hands, her father's story becomes the story of Australia itself. Australians believe they live in a democratic, egalitarian society, yet Reg Greer's life betrays this belief. He reinvented himself in order to survive. He destroyed his past in order to gain a future.

Reg Greer knew the nasty reality of Australian history and chose to forget it. His daughter sees the same reality and assimilates it. In *Daddy, We Hardly Knew You* Germaine Greer reveals, as nobody else has done before, a tragic meaning to our story. This is the one essential book you should read this year.

Charmian Clift:
IMAGES IN ASPIC
(Collins Imprint, $A12.95)

In Australia, the art of the personal essay has been almost lost. Philip Adams tries to write them occasionally, and so does Max Harris. Neither ever rises to level achieved by Charmain Clift in the 1960s. Never less than serious, she always seemed light-hearted. To argue an opinion, she offered aphorism and vivid illustration instead of bluster. If she mocked other people, she put herself in their places.

Charmain Clift died in 1969. *Images in Aspic* is a collection of thirty-six newspaper columms that she wrote after she returned to Australia from Greece in 1964. Nothing in the collection hints that she wrote mainly for the money, and under difficult circumstances. She handcrafts every sentence, picking every word with delicacy. Today's newspaper editors would have no idea what to do with writing of this quality except spike it.

Take Yanni Tsakrios, whose story is told in a piece called 'An Exile's Return'. Why is he returning to Greece, although he made good in Australia? 'Where is the life here? The *life!* . . . These people are dead. Where is the little *taverna*, drink some wine, eat some fish, sing some songs . . . Everybody asleep nine o'clock. No singing, no dancing, no nothing . . . it isn't really living, you see. Not living at all.' In the years since, no one has better expressed the intense loneliness felt by migrants in suburban Australia in the 1960s. Has anything improved since?

My other favourite piece is called 'On Saving Sevenpence'. Clift weaves an elaborate anti-argument here. She seems to be saying that buying goods at an Australian supermarket is much simpler and more satisfactory than bartering for goods in an Eastern Bazaar. Then she looks closely at the 'pre-haggled' specials at her local supermarket. She realizes that the sensible buyer spends as much effort finding a real bargain in Australia as any traveller does in the east.

These essays are taut, entertaining and observant. Buy *Images in Aspic* for yourself, and another copy to give to your least favourite newspaper columnist.

Alex Skovron:
THE REARRANGEMENT
(Melbourne University Press, $A24.95)

Geoff Page:
FOOTWORK
(Angus & Robertson, $A12.99)

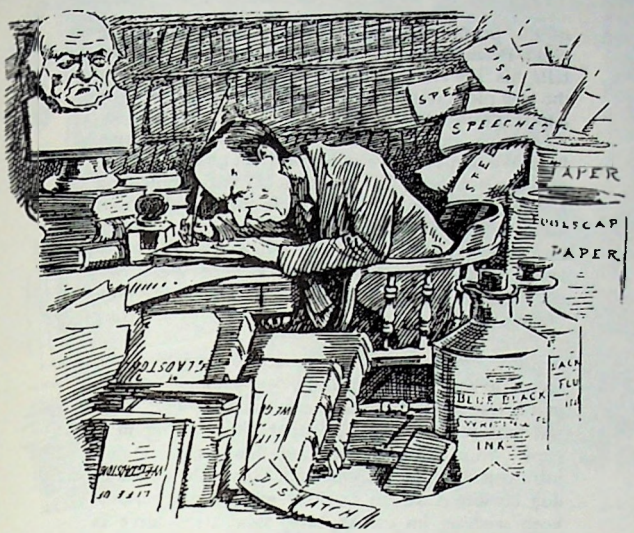
Australian poets of the last forty years have been consistently more interesting than the fiction writers. Our poets have developed a mercurial language based on skills of compression and wit that elude all but a few of our prose writers.

How then do we account for the skills of Alex Skovron, whose whose first collection of poems, *The Rearrangement*, appeared recently? Skovron forswears the easy amusement of the ironic lyric. Instead, he chooses an approach that is serious, even solemn. For him, words are more like minefields than succulent fruit; poetry is a spartan, life-and-death business.

Alex Skovron's approach can be disconcerting. For instance, I find little that means much to *me* in 'The Concise History of the Moon', the first poem in *The Rearrangement*. It bristles with images that do not yield their meaning easily. Ferocious images — a 'navy black' sky, a 'spiteful motorcyclist' who 'lacerates the night', 'the ghost train of Treblinka', and 'the slide of the logical ocean' — crowd in upon each other. The key to the cipher eludes me.

Much more approachable is the title poem, 'The Rearrangement'. The poet stands in his study, deciding how best he will complete the annual Rearrangment of his 'twelve hundred volumes'. This contemplative lyric is a wonderfully rueful ride through the mind of someone who is both a poet and a philosopher, and — how can I best put it? — a rearranger.

For Skovron's central quest is: how can I best rearrange the bits of the world so that they make sense *and* yield up truth? Are these quests complementary or contradictory? In 'The Rearrangement', the poet stands still while the books (and the world) changes pattern around him: 'I close the books, dissolve within the dark. Only a



pulse vigils the universe of paper, cardboard, ink'. As his task becomes more difficult, the world presses in upon his sanctuary, driving away comfort.

In 'Lines from the Horizon', the poet does not wait for the world to crowd in on him. As a boy he ventures out into a foreign country — Sydney, Australia — after arriving with his family from Poland. But the more he becomes accustomed to his new home, the more his native Poland recreates itself in his mind. 'In Park Kosciuszko — no, / not your Snowy Mountains upstart size of all Poland / but a tract of the native genus in white Katowice'. The boy discovers one world, as he and his bike hurtle uncontrolled down a slope in Sydney past park perimeters, or as he learns the rules of the schoolyard. Meanwhile another world presses in on him — the Poland he left behind in 1953 ('Next door they were burying Stalin . . . and Adolf Hitler lay / unburied').

Except for funny poems such as 'Tale without a Moral', Alex Skovron's work might prove a bit humourless for most people. Persevere; riches can be found under the surface. Skovron shows a mastery of form and purpose which already makes him an unmistakably authoritative voice among Australian poets.

Geoff Page has already earned his spurs. If you count translations and marginal items, *Footwork* is Page's ninth book of poetry. Here you find intoxicating self-confidence. The reader can only applaud the bracing bravado of a poem like 'Gravity's End', where the whole tragedy of the death of the galaxy and oneself fit into 17 lines of poetry ('Another galaxy / collapses. / Gently now / the shock arrives').

Similar compression works breathtakingly in 'The Balance', as Page evokes the essence of Australian patriotism ('skyline to skyline, / planes of ploughed earth / and a tinge of new wheat'), the 'balance / of earth and sky' that impel Australians to defend the country against possible invaders.

Geoff Page is so damned brilliant, so at home with a wide variety of subject matter and poetic forms, that I began to wonder how he chooses his themes. Not for him Skovron's dogged working away at a small number of grand themes; Page can conjure up a Grand Theme at the drop of an adjective. Only on a second reading do we realize how deeply he is concerned about death, family history and the countryside — one theme, really.

The best of this group of poems is 'My Mother's God', a poem that itself makes *Footwork* worth buying. It is, as they say, agonizingly funny. 'His mother's God . . . is most clear in a scrubbed wooden table'. This familiar God 'has written the best of the protestant proverbs'; 'He's also observed at weddings and funerals / by strict invitation, not knowing quite / which side to sit on.'

Yet this is not merely satire; the poet is making fun neither of his mother nor the more severe forms of Protestant theology. Instead, his poem aches with love for the mother who can believe these things, and regret for the fact that he cannot. 'It is not easy, she'd confess, / to be my mother's God'. Nor, I guess, his mother's son.

Ian Hamilton:
IN SEARCH OF J. D. SALINGER
(Heinemann Minerva, $A11.95)

In Search of J. D. Salinger is the story of a doomed fan. Ian Hamilton, child of the 1950s, was struck down by the wonders of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. 'I remember that for many months after reading *The Catcher* at the age of seventeen, I went around being Holden Caulfield.' In the 1980s, Hamilton wanted to write the biography of his hero. His hero wanted nothing of it.

You've probably already read about the difficulties Ian Hamilton had in finishing his biography. Salinger, long famous for his solitude, did everything possible to deny Hamilton access to sources: letters, diaries, friends and acquaintances. When Hamilton found an entirely unexpected source of letters, Salinger took him to court. The resulting decision, which preserved Salinger's copyright even in this matter, has made the future practice of biography excruciatingly difficult.

Hamilton persevered, often wondering why he was bothering. Salinger was no longer his hero. As Hamilton dug, he could find out nothing pleasant about the man. Salinger had begun cutting himself off from the world in his teenage years. After he achieved enormous success, he could no longer bear to share his creations with the world. Paranoia ruled.

Worse for Hamilton, he began to sympathize with Salinger's desire for isolation. Why should any person be *forced* to face the interrogation of a biography? Shamefaced, Hamilton cannot answer this question. The sheer difficulty of the job kept him going. The result is a book about writing a book, rather than a book about Salinger. Some secrets are revealed, but in the end Hamilton shows that the best part of Salinger can be found in his work, which is largely autobiographical.

In Search of J. D. Salinger hasn't stopped people writing biographies, but maybe it has stopped some people from reading them when they should have been reading the author's works.

Paul Auster:
THE NEW YORK TRILOGY:
(CITY OF GLASS
GHOSTS
THE LOCKED ROOM)
(Faber & Faber, $A11.99)

Paul Auster:
IN THE COUNTRY OF LAST THINGS
(Faber & Faber, $A29.99)

Paul Auster is Flavour of the Year in New York, an author People Talk About, somebody You Should Have Read. That's what I'm told by People In the Know. How very strange.

During the period of the greatest increase in material prosperity in history — Europe, America and Australia from 1945 to 1973 — the main literary climate was of hand-wringing *angst* and existentialism. We are all separate, said scribes as diverse as Sartre and Salinger; we cannot communicate; how dreadful. When people are most comfortable, they are most alienated. (None of this had anything to do with non-literary people, who were too busy buying TV sets.)

At the end of the 1980s comes Paul Auster. Yes, he says, we are alienated, we cannot communicate. How wonderful this is! At last people can become completely solitary! Look at the hoboes and bag ladies of modern New York. Once you drop out of society in New York, you do not exist at all. Nobody sees you, even while they look at you.

This is the central theme of *The New York Trilogy*, three interlocking short novels (*City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, and *The Locked Room*). In each of these novels, the main character is hired to carry out a mysterious task of detection. This task takes him away from his friends and acquaintances. At some time during the investigation, he realizes that his quarry not only knows what is happening, but is in fact spying on the spy. Eventually, the main character is so separated from society that he becomes a hobo, or, in *City of Glass*, disappears entirely.

There are precedents for Paul Auster's work. Lee Harding won an Australian Children's Award with *Displaced Person*, a teenager's novel about a panic-stricken boy who finds himself becoming invisible, slipping from our world into a grey world, separate from our own. In Christopher Priest's *The Glamour*, the main character is afflicted by 'the glamour', an effect that makes him invisible to all but a few people. Priest's position is much closer to Auster's than Harding's; he seems to relish this invisibility.

Take the process a step further, and you reach the position of Auster or, indeed, Australia's Gerald Murnane, whose characters also revel in solipsism.

Why should such Auster's work strike a chord in the USA, a country where everybody wants to communicate? Because Paul Auster communicates very well. He is a better writer than any Australian except Patrick White. His strong, clear, muscular sentences hide layer on layer of ambiguity. He tells you nothing that is difficult to understand, yet the whole picture is appalling.

In *City of Glass*, the best of his novels, the main character seems to be part of a detective novel. One of the people who hires him is an autistic man-child, Peter Stillman. The chapter in which Stillman tells his life story, in peculiar jagged sentences, is the best piece of prose I've read for years. Auster is a total master of his craft.

Having said that, I feel that Auster's enterprise fails. We don't believe in his dropout characters, as we don't believe in Murnane's self-deprecating aesthetes, precisely because their authors tell about them with such passion. The books propel us back into society, although the author purports to throw it away. Perhaps it's the conflict between these two impulses that makes *The New York Trilogy* unputdownable.

In the Country of Last Things is, as Americans say, more 'up beat' than the trilogy — which is why it is much less interesting. On the surface, *Country* is a standard science fiction novel about surviving in a New York from which all law and social infrastructure have disappeared. This is the dog-eat-dog society Australia's conservative social pundits keep wishing on us. Anybody who stays alive is lucky or very skilful at scavenging. Everybody is a hobo or bag lady; in this sense *Country* is the furthest extension of the ideas put forward in the trilogy. The difference is that *Country*'s female hero does not give in to the forces of anonymity. She survives, finds a lover, survives his apparent death, and and eventually becomes part of a household striving to ameliorate the forces of decay.

There is nothing new in *In the Country of Last Things*. Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor*, for example, says much more, more interestingly, on the same theme. But always one is captivated by Auster's iron-hard, totally readable style. There are no aphorisms or brilliant bits, so I can't hand over any precise quotations to back up my claim. But Auster wastes no word; every sentence helps to create a world in the reader's mind. Read him, especially if you're searching for the secret of how to write well.

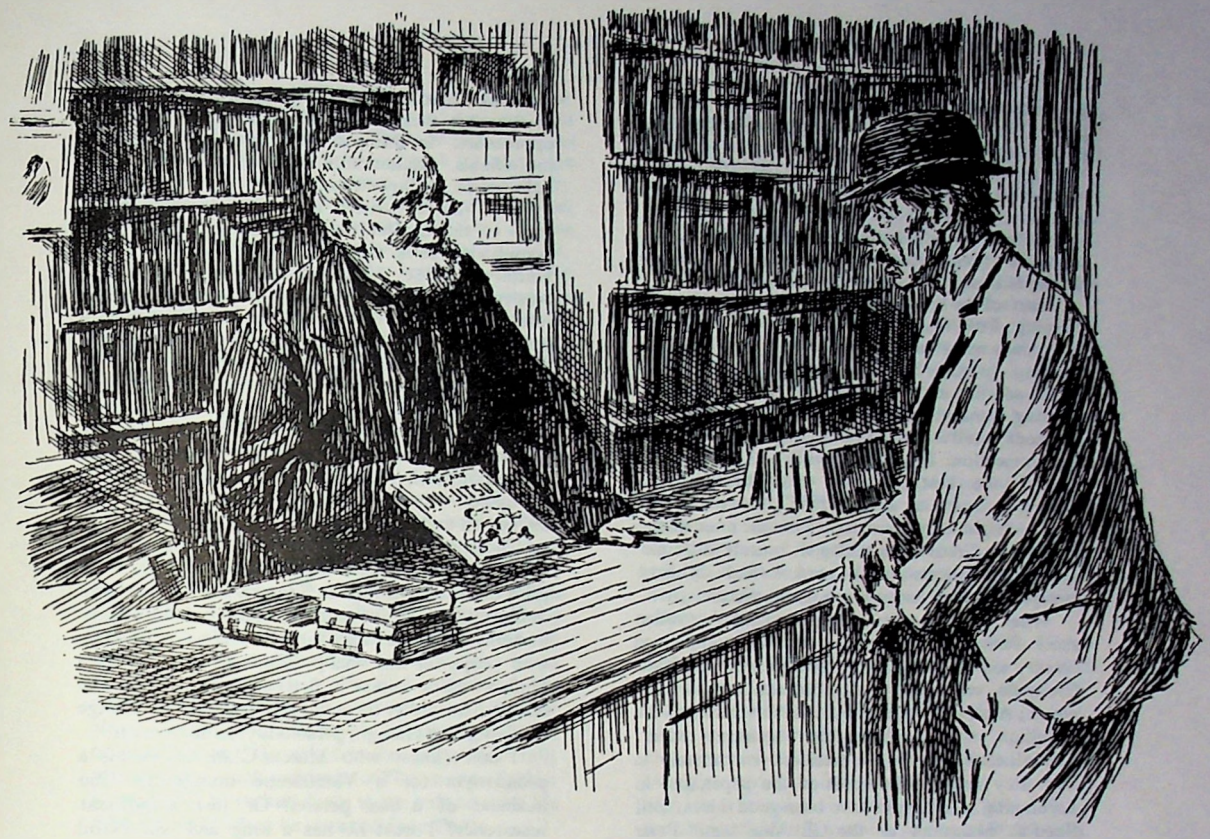
100 critics compiled by Helen Daniel:
THE GOOD READING GUIDE
(McPhee Gribble, $A16.95)

Helen Daniel (ed.):
EXPRESSWAY
(Penguin, $A12.99)

Helen Daniel is a rare creature on the Australian intellectual scene — a literary commentator and editor who doesn't have to feed from the hands she must bite from time to time. She has the qualifications to join the establishment — literary academia — but instead earns a living by running a secondhand book and furniture store. This gives her the freedom to take an independent overview of the Australian literary scene, an overview unavailable to most Australian writers.

Helen Daniel's sense of independence has led her to organize two original and interesting recent projects, *The Good Reading Guide* and *Expressway*.

A confession first. I'm involved in *The Good Reading Guide*. But then, who isn't? Once Helen Daniel had enlisted 100 critics to supply the 100-word reviews in this book, there was hardly



anybody left to write an unbiased review of the *Guide* itself.

Our brief was to cover, if possible, all the Australian novels and books of short fiction published in the last twenty years. First we nominated lists of books that should appear in the *Guide*, then wrote on those that interested us most. I suspect that, like most other writers, I chose authors other critics might have ignored. After Helen Daniel assembled the book, her ace editor Jackie Yowell had two attempts before she found the right publisher.

The result has hardly the unctuous authority of *The Good Food Guide*, but is vastly more useful and interesting than any previous guides to recent Australian literature. 650 titles by 290 authors are covered. Many more titles are mentioned, even if not reviewed. Helen Daniel has been astonishingly thorough in garnering short biographies of these authors. A useful series of book guides, plus an index, can be found at the end.

Could *The Good Reading Guide* have been better? Yes, if it had been written by one person, someone with the style of Gore Vidal and the reading stamina of I. F. Stone. Since perhaps not even Helen Daniel herself fits the bill, the current volume is a useful compromise.

Speaking for myself, I would have liked more space than 100 words for each entry — but if you compare my entry on Gerald Murnane's *Tamarisk Row* and Imre Salusinszky's, you will find that Dr Salusinszky can say much more in *his* 100 words than I am able to say with mine. Sigh.

Helen Daniel's *Expressway* is an equally original notion. If it works less successfully than the *Guide*, that's hardly the editor's fault.

Take a painting. Not any painting, but an Australian painting that always stops you in your tracks whenever it appears in a book or magazine. Ask a wide variety of authors to write stories inspired by Jeffrey Smart's *Cahill Expressway, 1962*.

Twenty-nine authors responded to Helen Daniel's invitation, and the result is much more various and interesting than I had expected. The best stories make brief contact with the painting; the worst are very literal in interpreting it. *Expressway* is a slice through the meat of current Australian fiction, both best and worst.

In Jeffrey Smart's painting, a bald, tubby, sixtyish man in a blue suit stands on the right, on the side of a road leading into a tunnel. He has lost an arm (a fact noticed by only one of the story-writers). Much of the picture is dominated by the road entry into the tunnel. To the left, a road reaches up to the overpass. On the extreme left, work proceeds on a building site. Seen from a distance is a monument; a statued figure gestures grandly into the distance. There are no human beings in the painting other than the tubby little man in the blue suit.

To my surprise, nobody saw the picture as an image of Australian literature itself (well constructed, sterile, still dominated by old males, despite the fact that a horde of new writers are about to stampede out of the tunnel) and they concentrated on the tubby little bloke instead of that wonderfully evocative statue-and-monument at the top of the picture. Many writers speculated on what

the little man had been doing at an earlier time or place (Elizabeth Jolley's 'The Widow's House', a rich little ghost story, and Glenda Adams' brilliant 'Our Town', which evokes not only the little man as he was as a boy, but the entire Cahill Expressway area as it was forty years ago). Others tell of nasty negotiations in which the little man is about to be involved (Peter Corris's 'Tie-breaker', Janette Turner Hospital's 'Eggshell Expressway').

Most of the best stories in this book bypass the painting. I can find no connection between Gerald Murnane's nasty but effective 'Finger-web' and the painting. In Louis Nowra's 'The Father', the story-teller admits at the beginning that the Smart painting reminds him of his father, and then proceeds to tell a moving family saga that bypasses the connection. In Kate Grenville's 'Look on My Works', the best story in the collection, her 'traveller from an antique land', the maker of bricks, might at one time have been the man in the picture, but Grenville is telling an entirely different story, of delicate brush strokes and brilliant metaphors, so we forget all about the picture.

What does *Expressway* tell us about Australian short fiction in 1989? It is, as I've complained before, too short. (But some writers, such as Kate Grenville, can make a vignette seem as rich as a novel.) Australia has neglected the novelette and the novella, malnourishing the serious reader. Australian writers are too careless — not merely in how they arrange the words on the paper, but in developing what might have been good ideas. Bill Reed's 'Messman on the CE Altar' and Peter Mathers' 'Merchant' are nearly incomprehensible; surely such authors could have taken the trouble to tell their stories instead of losing them in a mess of exuberant prose?

Australian writing is too miniature, too enclosed, too self-referential. There is little courage, bravado, or lunacy. But there are writers like Kate Grenville, Glenda Adams, Brian Matthews (whose 'The Ordinary Human Being Museum' might have been a bore, but emerges as a delicious fable), and others I've mentioned who can turn a book like *Expressway* into an entertaining and surprising anthology.

But I'd like to see what this lot would make of *Blue Poles*.

Marcus Clark:
EXIT VISA
(William Heinemann Australia, $A17.95)

Although cursed by an unattractive cover and little publicity, *Exit Visa* is worth buying. It is one of the most assured and satisfying Australian novels to appear for some years.

Exit Visa is an epic work of fiction that tells most Australians what they don't know about the Vietnam War, the emigration of the 'boat people', and the difficulties that South-east Asian people face in Australia today. Clark analyses an entire era of world history. He shows how people are formed or malformed by their circumstances. The two main influences in the real world (not lotus-land Australia) are hunger and thirst. Hounded by disaster, some people become greedy, cruel or even berserk, while others become almost superhumanly altruistic. Ideologies crumble under such pressures or become weapons in the hands of individual oppressors. In the end, there are only suffering individuals, remarkable people who can find redemption if allowed to do so.

Exit Visa is written in the unadorned, cryptic style of the thriller, but maintains a high level of complexity. It is told in a series of first-person narratives. Six Vietnamese people and one Australian sound as if they are talking very rapidly into a tape-recorder while in imminent danger of losing their lives. This device works, as throughout the novel most of the characters usually *are* in imminent danger of losing their lives. Through their experiences the reader lives through the Vietnam War and the beginnings of the Communist government in South Vietnam, a perilous boat expedition from Vietnam to Australia in 1978, and a disrupted existence in Brisbane during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The most interesting character is Phong Van Giang. At first he seems a pallid character. After he joins the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea, he discovers in himself a thirst for random violence. Increasingly berserk, he lurches into Vietnam, becomes a pirate who preys on the boat people, and turns up as a knife-wielding rapist in Brisbane at the end of the novel. The author convincingly presents each stage of Phong Van Giang's personality disintegration.

I don't know who 'Marcus Clark' is. Is this a pseudonym for a Vietnamese immigrant? The husband of a boat person? Or just a brilliant researcher? I trust he has a long and successful career as a novelist.

Ric Throssell:
MY FATHER'S HOUSE
(William Heinemann Australia, $A39.95)

Ric Throssell's life has been dominated by the fact when he was young his father, Hugo ('Jim') Throssell, committed suicide. During the depths of the Depression, this seemed only way he could solve his own and his family's money problems.

Jim Throssell committed suicide at Greenmount, the property he bought during the prosperous 1920s. When he took up the property, he financed it by acting as an estate agent for surrounding properties. As the Depression approached, nobody bought the blocks of land for which Jim Throssell held the mortgages. Buried in debt, he tried farming on a family property in the wheat belt, prospecting for gold and, most miserably of all, attempting to promote Greenmount as a dude ranch. All these ventures failed. In an empty house, Jim Throssell shot himself.

The family was broken up at the time. Ric's very famous radical mother, Katharine Susannah Prichard, was visiting Russia. Ric was boarded elsewhere in the district. The family's beloved property, Greenmount, in the foothills near Perth, was bankrupt and becoming derelict. When Jim Throssell, VC winner and businessman, died, his wife could claim a war pension. Ric Throssell was cast adrift, both from the countryside and his father.

In an odd way, Ric Throssell never quite came back to life after the loss of his idyllic childhood home. At least he never comes back into focus. The

rest of his life would be dominated by his father. Until the Freedom of Information Act made it possible to investigate ASIO files, he did not know that Australia's secret police dogged his footsteps and held back his entire career. This was guilt by association. Ric's mother, Katharine Susannah Prichard, was an enthusiastic member of the Communist Party. Jim Throssell supported his wife, and therefore also came under suspicion from the police, who in turn kept a file on Ric from the age of ten! When Ric joined the Department of Foreign Affairs during World War II, he expected to lead a brilliant career as a diplomat. He was refused promotion year after year, and nobody would tell him why. Only in the 1980s did he discover that ASIO had vetoed those promotions.

My Father's Son is an odd story, because Ric Throssell suppresses many of his strongest feelings. He comes very near to leaving himself out of his own autobiography! Protected by his parents from most of their own difficulties, he led a privileged life, but it was a much less illustrious life than it should have been. Always the ghost of his father was there. But because Throssell cannot bring himself to express his fiercest feelings about the injustice at the centre of his adult life, he backs away from much we would find interesting. His second wife is barely mentioned; we know little about his children. His travels become a series of names. It's as if the only time he really lived fully was on those back paddocks of Greenmount, when in the 1920s he rushed down to the train to meet his father at night when he returned from Perth.

Garry Disher (ed.):
PERSONAL BEST
(Collins Imprint, $16.95)

Every other publication has reviewed this book, and who am I to add any original observations? Here again are a few reasons why you should buy *Personal Best*.

I could say, as others have, that this is a great idea for a book, and somebody should have done it before now. But it's Garry Disher, one of Australia's more interesting literary figures, who asked thirty of Australia's best-known writers to choose their best story and write an introduction to it. Hence the title: *Personal Best*.

I could say, as others have, that the idea works in unexpected ways. Many authors confess that they have not chosen their *best* story but their *favourite* story. In several cases, this is the author's first. Hence Kate Grenville, an author for whom I have contracted a severe case of hero worship during the last year or so, contributes 'Junction'. This is a very disappointing piece that happens to be the first story Kate Grenville wrote. Another disappointing author's favourite (not best) is Elizabeth Jolley's 'Wednesdays and Fridays'.

I could say, as others have, that sometimes the introductions are longer than the stories, and at least as interesting. Gerald Murnane provides an exhaustive introduction to 'Precious Bane'. After reading this blow-by-blow description of the hatching, you almost find it unnecessary to read the story itself. Except that 'Precious Bane' is, as I already knew, quite different from anything the author tells us about it. I had read 'Precious Bane' when it first appeared, and did not understand it, although I enjoyed the fictional portrait of the old man who used to be manager of Grant's Bookshop in Commercial Road, Prahran. Coming back to 'Precious Bane' after several years, I was armed with a knowledge of everything Murnane has published since. Suddenly I could see what the story was all about, how all those shimmering metaphors, seemingly disconnected, link into a path that leads straight to a startling and original conclusion.

I could say, as others could not, that almost all of these stories are new to me. In the last twenty years I've ignored most up-and-coming Australian writers, even Peter Carey. For me, *Personal Best* is startling. For the first time in years, Australian fiction as an entity seems to have some life in it for me.

For example: Jessica Anderson's 'The Appearance of Things'. What seems at first a precious memory of a long-ago era turns into a spiky drama of family tensions. Nostalgia gives way to a minefield of bitter memories; the past is a dangerous territory, and only the brave and innocent should risk returning there.

Anderson is a rival for Canada's Alice Munro and the USA's Elizabeth Spencer. I didn't think I would ever make such an admission about any Australian writer. Astonishingly, so is Joan London. I had also never read her before. 'Sister Ships' has made me seek out her books. 'Sister Ships' is about two girls trying to face life and meet interesting men on a tour ship. The story-teller is the dork of the ship and doesn't know it. At one level this is a brilliantly observed tale of how people can get up each other's noses. Only at the end comes the kind of necessary painful revelation rarely granted to awkward people.

My other favourites in *Personal Best* are Peter Carey's 'American Dreams' (now I had better read all of Carey's books — fast, soon), James McQueen's 'The Brush Bronzewing', Helen Garner's 'Little Helen's Sunday Afternoon', Garry Disher's 'Amateur Hour', Peter Goldsworthy's 'The List of All Possible Answers' (families should gather around the kitchen table to read this aloud), Robert Drewe's 'The Bodysurfers', and Tim Winton's 'My Father's Axe'. Most of the other stories are recommended.

Mal Morgan (ed.):
LA MAMA POETICA
(Melbourne University Press, $A19.95)

Elizabeth Riddell:
FROM THE MIDNIGHT COURTYARD
(Angus & Robertson, $A12.95)

Without ever having written poetry, I've always admired poets. They devote vast amounts of time and energy and lung power (if they are performance poets) to an activity that will bring them no money, rare reviews and even rarer applause.

But to judge from these three books, poetry is still the livewire activity in Australia's literary scene. Take a look at *La Mama Poetrica*, which spills over with fresh ideas and fine writers who are new to me. Edited by Mal Morgan, this 250-page collection gives an overview of the poetry readings

that have taken place at Melbourne's La Mama Theatre during the last two decades. Famous older writers, such as R. A. Simpson and Walter Adamson, jostle for a place alongside vigorous new writers.

In *La Mama Poetica* nobody is disappointing, and there are enough points of brilliance to keep the reader eyetracking through this imposing book.

Jennifer Strauss pinpoints the true horror of the deaths of friends in 'Tending the Graves': 'It is absolute absence. / They are so engrossed by death they refuse even to haunt us.'

Death is also the theme of the collection's best poem, Walter Adamson's 'Five Minutes', which tells of his father's last five minutes ('You aren't really dying, are you? We looked at each other. / His eyes opened a little wider, his pupils filled with an / ocean of vision.')

Of the poems inspired by observations of nature, the best is Adrian Rawlins's 'This Morning the Pelican', with its magical description of a pelican taking off from the water, all the more miraculous because at first the pelican appears only 'bulky / like an old water-logged galleon / with grey tattered sails').

And there is a invigorating selection of poems here that seem very much designed for reading aloud — poems like Kerry Scuffins's 'Moving Out', which would make a great song lyric for some aspiring rock composer. Buy the book and read some aloud for yourself.

Elizabeth Riddell will be eighty years old this year, and *From the Midnight Courtyard* is only her fourth collection of poetry. Yet she has a reputation as one of our major poets, for reasons that become obvious when dipping into her latest collection. Every poem is culled from the lifetime's lode, every word carefully selected.

As she approaches the end of her life, Elizabeth Riddell has increasingly turned to thoughts of its disappearance. In 'The Time of Life' she writes: 'I owned my body once but now my body owns me'. Of a lifetime's friend's last 'Telephone Call': 'The voice is almost gone to somewhere else . . . / Goodbye she says, goodbye, she'll ring next week. But does not ring next week.'

Despite the tone of desperation in some of the poems, the collection is not bleak. Like all great poets, Riddell asks how best we can lead our lives. Maybe we have only a little time left, so what should we look for in life? 'Rock stays the same and waves and sand / and paint on your canvas or your board, / so there is security. . . . / Look for no more.' This wonderful poem 'Security' reads like Riddell's final statement of faith. Perhaps it will prove her epitaph, or merely a pointer towards some fifth collection of poems.

Michael Holroyd:
BERNARD SHAW:
VOL. 1: 1856–1898
THE SEARCH FOR LOVE
by Michael Holroyd
(Penguin; $16.95)

Since its first publication, the main claim to fame for this first volume of Michael Holroyd's biography of Bernard Shaw has been the amount paid for it by the Penguin Group: $1.2 million. But that's for twenty years' hard work.

Is the money worth it? Every review I've seen so far has sidestepped this issue. The assumption seems to be that $1.2 million guarantees quality, and therefore this must be a great biography. The truth is that no one will know whether or not Holroyd's biography is great until he finishes it. Some, like me, are disappointed already by Volume 1.

George Bernard Shaw was, by 1990s standards, a very peculiar man who lived in a very strange world. A workaholic who made today's famous workaholics seem like beachcombers; a man fascinating to women who rejected almost all the women who loved him; a socialist who had little empathy for the lower classes and mixed mainly with theatrical people, socialites, and other socialists — George Bernard Shaw turns out to be one of the most unlikable men I've ever read about. And I'm not sure that Michael Holroyd likes him any better than I do.

There is much that is impenetrable about Bernard Shaw. At least, Holroyd doesn't succeed in penetrating it. True, Shaw had a rocky upbringing, afflicted by a weak father and a mother who rejected him and took off for London from Ireland in pursuit of Vandeleur Lee, an ex-boarder and family friend who was later the model for Svengali, the famous character from George du Maurier's novel *Trilby*. But not every unpromising upbringing has produced a man quite like Shaw, who early in life rejected most physical comforts, evaded physical sex until the age of thirty, and who spent eight years in the British Museum teaching himself everything about everything. This is not just eccentricity; this is a superhuman and inexplicable prodigality of admirable and inhuman traits. Perhaps it needs another superman to unravel George Bernard Shaw.

Holroyd's prose is never less than lucid and

delightful, yet I found this book a hard slog. That's entirely because of the subject matter. Bernard Shaw must be a prime candidate for the most irritating Famous Person of all time. There is no explaining him, and I feel that eventually Holroyd gives up. Given the chance to portray a person he understands, such as Shaw's father, or Vandeleur Lee, or Charlotte Payne-Townshend, the woman Shaw marries at the end of Volume 1, Holroyd shows what a fine writer he can be. Look at the wonderful portrait of the Payne-Townshend family on pages 433 and 434. These paragraphs have a dash and sparkle that rarely invade Holroyd's portrait of Shaw himself.

Shaw's treatment of women was bizarre. Time and again he went out of his way to charm a woman to the point of infatuation, only to reject the relationship when it might have given him real joy or caused him inconvenience. Some women he courted merely as a help his theatrical career, but others genuinely fascinated him. They became rapidly less fascinating when they wanted to take him to bed. Holroyd describes these endless shenanigans, but cannot explain them.

Shaw's attraction to socialism is equally unexplained, and Holroyd doesn't even try. As an outsider in London, Shaw's desire to conquer London society is understandable. What is not clear is his spectacular rejection of that society, his equally spectacular organization of the Fabians and exploration of socialist ideas, and his startling emergence right at the top of London society. He certainly did not seek the company of the down-and-out, as George Orwell did forty years later.

In the end, Shaw repels us because he was a man who absorbed vast amounts of information about vast numbers of ideas, and turned himself into an idea — GBS. There is no understanding such a person. He is a type of person who has almost disappeared from Western society, perhaps to our loss. Certainly we have few people who would be willing to spend twenty years in preparation for a life's work, as if he knew he had fifty years ahead of him.

If Holroyd never penetrates the skin of Bernard Shaw, that's hardly to his discredit. But I'm puzzled by Holroyd's inability to discuss Shaw's plays. Unfamiliar with them, I gained little information or critical insight from this biography. Again, I suspect Holroyd doesn't like them much, even as he probably doesn't like Shaw much. When Holroyd is enthusiastic, as in his discussion of Shaw's music criticism, he becomes a fine writer.

I wonder how many people will read Volumes 2 and 3 of this long biography. It all seems too much work devoted to a writer who will always elude understanding. Or is Holroyd not the man for the job?

Isabel Allende:
EVA LUNA
(Penguin; $12.99)

If you want a typical South American Magic Realist novel, you could not go past *Eva Luna* by Isabel Allende.

That is not a putdown. *Eva Luna* is a wonderfully readable novel that I can recommend ahead of almost any European, American, British or Australian novel of recent years. But it *is* typical of South American Magic Realist fiction. It includes a main character of uncertain, possibly magical origins. It is set in a South American country (seemingly Venezuela) ruled by a series of nasty dictators or democrats who behave like dictators. The main male character is a boy who becomes a rebel, performing seemingly impossible feats during his endless battle against a series of oppressive governments. Eva Luna's life is a pilgrimage from one strange locality to another, from one surprising household to another. The minor characters are all larger than life. The jungle steams up through everything.

Eva Luna is readable because the typical quality of the South American Magic Realist novel is surprise. These novels emerge from surprising countries. A South American novelist such as Isabel Allende finds herself as both a serious chronicler — of dreadful deeds and ferocious cruelty — and a quick-witted magician. Jupiter and Mercury in one. She dazzles us, but never lets us forget the reality in which these people live.

We have not seen novels like these since the great British, French and Russian novels of the nineteenth century. You can't fake Magic Realism, although plenty of modern American, European and Australian writers are desperately trying to do so. Such terrible and amazing adventures can only be lived through. And all experience is somewhere in *Eva Luna*.

Liam Davison:
THE VELODROME
(Allen & Unwin; $12.99)

Unrecognized by everyone but me, 1989's best Australian book of fiction was a short-story collection by Liam Davison called *The Shipwreck Party*. Now here I have for review *The Velodrome*, a novel that was written before *The Shipwreck Party* and was shortlisted for the Australian/Vogel Award in 1987.

The Velodrome shares most of the attractive qualities of the stories in *The Shipwreck Party*: a clear, tantalizing prose style, a hallucinogenic sense of place and time, and a collection of lonely characters adrift in strange landscapes. If *The Velodrome* had been reduced to 50 pages and included in the short-story collection, it might have been part of Davison's best work.

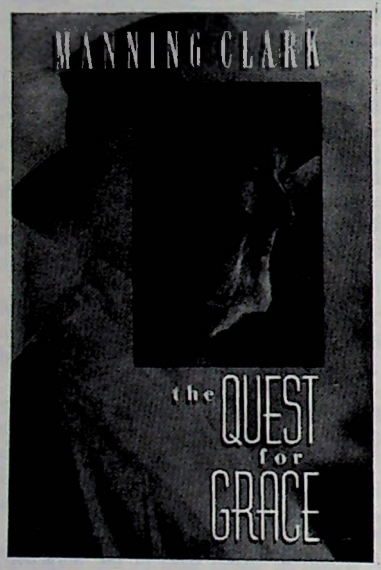
As it stands, *The Velodrome* is a remarkable first novel that is a bit too long for its assumptions. It's the story of Leon and his bike-obsessed family. His father is killed during a bike pile-up on the nearby velodrome at exactly the moment when Leon is invited under the velodrome to learn the secrets of sex from Jody. The coincidence of the two events makes Leon think he somehow killed his father. Eric, crippled in the same pile-up, marries Leon's mother, much to the annoyance of another bike fanatic, Sam Ballard, who has always had his eye on Leon's mother. Jody, Eric's daughter, now becomes Leon's 'sister' and therefore out of reach.

This odd domestic set-up would have no interest without Davison's style and his strong visual sense, which combine to isolate the characters like

motionless chessmen on a vast chessboard. Metaphorically they circle around the velodrome, still obsessed by tales of biking prowess. Actually they circle around each other without understanding. In the second part of the novel, they join together on an epic trip north to Queensland. Sam Ballard insists on cycling parts of the journey, tagging behind the car. The car gets sicker and sicker. The trip ends prematurely.

As Davison becomes more and more assured as a novelist, he will probably deflate the importance of his slightly oppressive images and give more autonomous life to his characters and situations. He has already done this in the best of the stories from *The Shipwreck Party*.

The Velodrome is a beginner's novel, but it is much more interesting than most other recent Australian fiction. Liam Davison is certainly the Australian author to watch for during the next few years.



Manning Clark:
THE PUZZLES OF CHILDHOOD
(Viking: $29.99)

Manning Clark:
THE QUEST FOR GRACE
(Viking; $29.99)

I was one of many thousands of Australians who looked forward to the publication of Manning Clark's autobiography. Here at last would be the life story of Australia's most famous writer of history (the six-volume *A History of Australia*) and one of Australia's most famous oracular voices. Here would be the true story of a legendary figure.

Perhaps we expected too much. Perhaps we should have remembered that few autobiographies answer the questions we wanted to ask of writers. But I was not prepared for the extent of disappointment I felt on reading *The Puzzles of Childhood*, the first volume of Manning Clark's autobiography. And although *The Quest for Grace*, the second volume, is more interesting, it is still a coy cover-up rather than a great revelation.

Clark's direct statements about himself and his family are baffling, clothed in vestments of high-sounding phrases that obviously mean much to the author but little to the reader. Over and over he repeats his mother's phrase '"There are things in my life, Mann dear, I hope you'll never know anything about"', says 'I do now', but never tells us what he learned. Clark wraps a cloak of impenetrable mystery about the time his father disappeared between appointments at Kempsey, NSW, and Cowes, Phillip Island. What went wrong between his mother and father? By the end of volume 2, we still do not know. We do not know whether Clark ever found out, or whether he was kidding us all along.

These two volumes are full of paradoxes — the puzzles of Manning Clark. About his parents, he begins with a direct enough statement: 'My mother was a fine flower of patrician and genteel Sydney: my father was a child of the London dockyard and the respectable working-class areas of St Peters'. But soon he enunciates giant florid statements about his father, an Anglican minister: 'I think he liked to believe . . . that God is more forgiving than men, certainly more forgiving than women, indeed, that God ought to forgive everyone.' Of his mother: 'She did not understand those who had malice, envy, jealousy or spite in their hearts.' How does he know these things?

'When we talk about other people we often talk about ourselves,' writes Clark in *The Quest for Grace*. This is the key to the autobiography. Like so many other autobiographers, Clark will go to any lengths to avoid telling us about about himself. But in making guesses about his mother and father, he provides a self-portrait. 'A magnificent showman, so magnificently alive'. We have nothing but Clark's word that such a phrase applies to his father — but it certainly applies to the public Manning Clark. 'No confession to God can calm the uproar in his heart, or put an end to the self-lacerations.' How did Clark know this about his father? He probably didn't; he is probably describing himself. According to Clark, although his father was in many ways a fine clergyman 'He was not capable of loving those who did him great evil.' Like father, like son, to judge from these volumes.

Once we realize that Clark is always talking to us indirectly, we can make understand something of what he is trying to tell us. Time and again we are baffled. Why does Clark repeat through both books Dostoevsky's phrase from *The Brothers Karamazov*: 'I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it has all been for'? Why does Clark think that life's experience, the world, history — whatever 'it' is — has been *for* anything? Without Clark's detailed exposition of the meanings he might give to particular phrases, we can make little connection with our own experience.

Clark is very much his father's son. The mantle of the clergyman has descended on his shoulders. Clark, I suspect, does not even realize how much he is trapped somewhere up in the air, suffocated by an endless range of pompous phrases. The effect is

most unfortunate. Clark's life, we are led to believe, has been a perpetual upward pilgrimage towards Higher Things. The title of the second volume should be *Grace — and How I Achieved It*. The stink of sanctity gets up the reader's nose.

What saves the Clark autobiography? Most reviewers have stressed how readable it is. You can't help liking the old buzzard, even though you know he's spinning you a line. Again, the answer is that Clark comes to life when he talks about other people. He can detect life in the most casually observed acquaintance — people remembered from his edenic days living on Phillip Island, or people such as C. J. Dennis and Olaf Jorgensen who lived at Belgrave in the 1920s. No reader will forget the melancholy story of doomed Mary Sambell, who sat with Clark's father while he fished on the rocks of Phillip Island.

By *The Quest for Grace*, this recall of interesting people looks suspiciously like name-dropping. After the age of twenty, Clark seems to have met nobody but Famous People or People About to Become Famous. But many of these people flicker into life — garrulous Zelman Cowen (for whom Clark seemed to have great affection), Geoffrey Blainey, the quiet genius, the drunken poet James McAuley, and endless others.

What joins together all the paradoxes of Manning Clark? The need for revenge — and the love of a good story.

Perched between two classes — the respectable lower middle class, and the gentry — Clark has acquired a much stronger sense of class than do most Australians. As a scholarship boy, he wanted revenge for the wrongs done to him while attending Melbourne Grammar School. This truly dreadful experience — of systematic bullying and indoctrination by the senior boys of the Long Dorm — casts malignant shadows backwards and forwards through the book. It explains to Clark why his mother's snobbish family would never mention and rarely talk to his father's family. It provides a paradigm of the type of people who have always ruled Australia, or indeed the world ('It does not matter which group or which society — capitalist, communist or fascist — they are the self-appointed standards men'). It explains why such people worshipped all things British, and understood nothing about Australia. It explains why little about Australia was taught in private or government Australian schools before the 1950s. In turn, an awareness of the class dynamic in Australian society propels Clark towards his own 'good story' — the long struggle to rid himself of Eurocentricity, discover the Australia that the bourgeois did not want to know about, and write this country's story.

Love of story-telling is essential to Clark's strengths and weaknesses. He wants to tell a really epic story in which Manning is Moses delivering the tablets from the mountain. Left to look at the tablets, we scratch our heads and say: 'Is that all there is?'

But there is another Manning Clark, not prophet but amused observer, the novelist who never became a novelist, the chronicler of times and places that would otherwise be lost to us. For this Manning Clark we can be grateful. We can even look forward to Volume 3 of his autobiography.

(**Late note:** Unfortunately, we can't. Manning Clark died at the age of seventy-six on 28 May 1991. The third volume was not finished before Clark's death.)

Edward Greenfield, Robert Layton and Ivan March:
THE PENGUIN GUIDE TO COMPACT DISCS
(Penguin; $40)

The Penguin Guide is one of those essential books to keep about the house, like Leonard Maltin's guide to films and videos. Replacing each year's edition has become a bit expensive ($40 for a paperback!), but necessary. For years it reflected the slightly stuffy values of its authors (critics for *The Gramophone* magazine). But Ivan March and his staff were among the first music-lovers to welcome the introduction of the compact disc. With what many people must see as indecent haste, they have thrown out listings for both LPs and cassettes. Now you can find nothing but information about CDs.

In a sense, *The Penguin Guide*'s critics had to wait until the British record industry caught up with them and became aware of the possibilities of the CD. In 1987 and 1988, EMI suddenly released many of the best performances of the previous eighty years. Polygram and EMI managed to re-release most of Karajan's best records before he died. Multiple packs of remastered rarities have become commonplace. With such a wealth of material around, *The Penguin Guide to Compact Discs* is an essential guide for the perplexed.

Most of the fun of owning this book is comparing your opinions with those of Greenfield, Layton and March. Their prejudice against some of the newer and more interesting European conductors (especially Sinopoli and Harnoncourt) continues. They still tend to support the duller of the 'authentic instruments' performances.

But I find that the *Guide* supports my view that the boxed set of Karajan's 1961–62 performances of the Beethoven symphonies is by far the best available. The authors even agree with me that Karajan's version of the Sixth Symphony is the only weak spot on the set. I note with dismay that the boxed sets of Karajan's 1948 and 1954 performances have already been deleted, less than a year after release. If you see a CD you like, buy it.

The writers of *The Penguin Guide* do not agree with me that the 1962 Klemperer version of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* is the greatest record ever made (they prefer the much duller 1966 Karajan version), but I'm gratified that they give a rosette (their extra-special award) to Mariss Janson's new versions of the Tchaikovsky symphonies.

Don't believe what the *Guide* says about the Karajan version of Haydn's *The Seasons* or the Beecham version of Brahms's Second Symphony. These are two of the greatest records ever made, both finally on CD, and neither valued highly by *The Guide*.

Nitpicking could go on forever. *The Penguin Guide*'s awards of rosettes remains as controversial as ever, and the whole volume desperately needs an index. I would really like to know how many Beecham records have been transferred to CD; I

would like to track down Alfred Brendel's and Glenn Gould's records of solo piano music. Perhaps what's needed is another 1339-page volume — *The Index to the Penguin Guide to Compact Discs*. Would it also cost $40?

Gerald Murnane:
VELVET WATERS
(McPhee Gribble; $29.99)

Gerald Murnane:
THE PLAINS
(McPhee Gribble; $14.99)

'Gerald Murnane is the most original writer our country has so far produced,' writes the critic Imre Salusinszky. Few people familiar with Australian writing would disagree with him. Originality, however, is not a prized or sought-after quality in Australia. Among my own friends I have trouble finding anyone who actually *likes* Murnane's writing. I must admit that even I was a bit apprehensive about facing up to the eleven stories in *Velvet Waters*, Murnane's latest book.

I didn't expect to *enjoy* this book as much as I did. I felt so familiar with the grim, contemplative colour of this writer's mind that I expected no surprises from this book. Instead, the greatest surprises were among the stories I thought I knew well.

Take 'Land Deal', a story I read first ten years ago. The narrator is one of the tribespeople who received gifts from John Batman and handed over 600,000 acres of land. Murnane is the only fiction writer who has reflected on the improbability of this land deal, and the meaning that the tribesmen might well have have given to it. Gerald Murnane takes his idea for a walk, leading down an unexpected path that provides an entire interpretation of Australian history in five-and-a-half pages. This story must have some claim to be the best short story ever published in Australia.

'Land Deal' was a story that barely penetrated the thick rind of my mind when I read it first in 1980. Re-reading was essential. Likewise, in 1985 I made little of a Murnane story 'Precious Bane'. Re-acquaintance has made it into one of my favourites. Murnane links images of an old man staring out of a bookshop window, monks in cells, and the construction of the brain, and produces from them an all-encompassing theory about our relationship to the future. Not bad in twelve pages.

The argument in 'Precious Bane' goes something like this. Why is the future important to our present thinking? Because we believe we will be there. How could we be there after we have died? We can be there only if something of us remains behind in books. This is an argument that we might expect in the pages of the more esoteric European and South American writers, but is still somehow not what Australian readers expect of Australian writers. Most of our fiction exists to record the earnest deeds of vigorous unthinking men and women. Murnane's fiction exists to record the innermost thoughts of its characters — indeed, thoughts that can exist nowhere else but in books.

Perhaps the most intense expression of this impulse is in 'Stone Quarry'. This tells of a writers' workshop that restricts its participants to an absolute vow of non-communication. If a writer at the workshop makes contact with another writer, he or she is dismissed immediately. The narrator, who agrees with the methods of the workshop, cannot repress his desire to impress his existence on some other writer. Deprived of means, his imagination fills the space between people, just as a writer fills spaces on pages.

Murnane's stories are defiantly cerebral and unapologetically paranoid. In no way do they allow readers to feel comfortable, which is probably why many people don't like them. More cerebral than any story in *Velvet Waters*, yet more approachable, is *The Plains*, Murnane's 1982 short novel that has just been re-released by McPhee Gribble.

I cannot claim any objectivity in mentioning *The Plains*. Not only am I a member of Norstrilia Press, the publishing company that originally published it, but I typed the first manuscript and typeset the first edition. Under such circumstances, one can become quite fond of a book.

At one level, *The Plains* is a much simpler text than anything in *Velvet Waters*. An unnamed narrator 'leaves Australia' and enters the land of the plains, where all our conventional expectations about 'Australia' are overturned. This is a territory where large landowners devote all their free time to the arts, philosophy, and an elaborate sport based on colours. The only people patronized by the landowners are contemplatives, people such as the narrator. Armed with ideas for a film script, he inhabits the libraries of the landowners, becoming part of a world in which it becomes unthinkable to make the film he imagines. The reasons he gives for his inaction are arcane but often amusing. When we finish reading the text, we find ourselves thinking like a plainsman, and rather impatient with the mundane world that recaptures us.

Velvet Waters and *The Plains* are works of quiet remorselessness, products of an alien god with a cruel and sometimes inscrutable sense of humour. They are meant for readers who believe that the life of the mind is the only 'real life'. And they are meant for readers who don't merely read, but re-read.

Ronald Morley:
GREYBEARD
(Fremantle Arts Centre Press; $14.99)

Greybeard is one of the most entertaining Australian books of the last few years. It is also a unique study in criminology. There have been plenty of books, especially from America, in which a criminal tells of his (usually his) life and crimes. But such books never make us feel that such events could happen to us. Until *Greybeard* came along.

Ronald Morley was a fifty-year-old husband, father and businessman with an unblemished record. In the early 1980s his Perth business went bankrupt. With $50,000 or so, he might have saved his business. Morley found himself working out how to carry out a bank robbery. And finally, to his astonishment, he realized that he had planned and carried out his first successful bank robbery.

Morley's story resembles that of a compulsive gambler. That first big win makes you think you can keep winning. What seemed like an impossible adventure becomes routine, then necessary. Your whole life is destroyed, but the compulsion remains.

Morley fooled the police by wearing a cheap disguise — a grey beard. It seemed as if he could never be caught. His family had no idea that he was leading a second life. There was only one problem — the banks became too smart for bank robbers. They set up security devices that ensured that each robbery netted less than the one before. Morley could never quite achieve the Big One, the robbery that would give him the rest of the $50,000. He kept going until he was caught.

Morley is no great wordsmith, but he tells his story with gusto. It was good fun robbing banks and getting away with it! Morley doesn't disguise this obvious point. But at the same time he does not whinge about being caught. Of course he was going to get caught.

There is something of the scientist in Morley. The second half of *Greybeard* is a remarkably even-handed account of the failures and strengths of the Western Australian prison system. His account of life in jail could easily have been less interesting than the early sections of the book, but they are not. No whingeing, no excuses, just a refreshing eye for the truth.

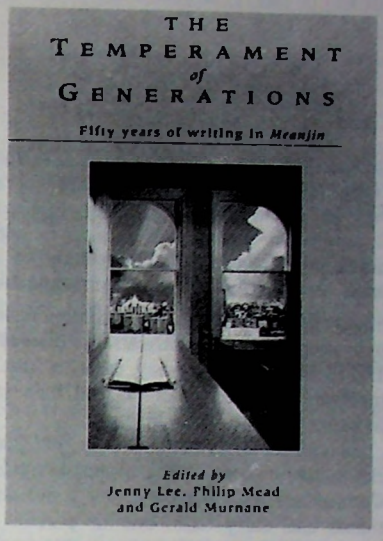
Morley reserves his anger for only one target — the banks. The same banks that handed out millions of dollars to Perth millionaires but refused a small businessman a vital line of credit in the early 1980s. The same banks that still blame anybody but themselves for the recession. The same banks that create their own bank robbers. Readers who also dislike banks will enjoy *Greybeard* very much.

Jenny Lee,
Phillip Mead and Gerald Murnane (eds.):
THE TEMPERAMENT OF GENERATIONS
(Melbourne University Press; $29.95)

Meanjin is one of those 'little magazines' that are hard to find at book stores and impossible to find at newsagents. Also known as 'literary magazines', they are a necessity to a small band of subscribers, and not much noticed by the rest of the Australian population. Yet their importance to Australian life is immeasurable.

Always an acorn, *Meanjin* is forever sprouting great oak trees. Signs of these can be found *The Temperament of Generations*, an anthology of 'Fifty Years of Writing in *Meanjin*'. Jenny Lee, the current editor of the magazine, has joined with Phillip Mead (the poetry editor) and Gerald Murnane (the fiction adviser) to give an account of the history of the magazine and, incidentally, a history of our country.

During the last fifty years *Meanjin* has been vilified by prime ministers and other parliamentarians, condemned by community leaders, shunned by various groups of poets and writers, and generally regarded as leftist and trouble-making. It coined the phrase 'The Cultural Cringe' and staged the Melbourne-versus-Sydney debate 'St Petersburg versus Tinseltown'. It has started the careers of many of Australia's best



writers. It's been doing a great job.

In the early 1950s Clem Christesen, the magazine's founding editor, had already paid 7000 pounds of his own money to keep the magazine going. The magazine's finances never improved much, although *Meanjin* officially came under the umbrella of the University of Melbourne in 1947. Various people, especially people on the right, made moves to take control of the magazine, but Christesen remained editor until Jim Davidson took over in 1974. By that time, *Meanjin* had become so important a magazine that later editors (Davidson, Judith Brett and Jenny Lee) have been able to apply their own talents while drawing strength from the magazine's traditions.

I discovered all this by reading Jenny Lee's succinct explanations that link the extracts from the magazine. The correspondence is also enlightening. Combined with the articles, fiction and poetry, they make *The Temperament of Generations* into a vivid account of our society since World War II.

How frightening was Menzies' McCarthyism of the 1950s? Read this book to find out. What really happened to ordinary Australians as they struggled to set up their new suburban culture during the 1940s and 1950s? Read Gwen Kelly's article 'Portrait of a New Community' to find out. What was the Ern Malley Hoax really about? Read Brian Elliott's illuminating summary. How were Patrick White's novels received when they were first published? Read Marjorie Barnard's very fine essay 'The Four Novels of Patrick White'.

And what is Australian literature really all about? Surely there can be no more penetrating account than H. P. Heseltine's 'The Literary Heritage', a 1962 essay that makes nonsense of most of what has been written since.

In other words, *A Temperament of Generations* is a rich book, much richer than any reader can discover on first reading. I'm not very excited by the later poetry or much of the fiction, but perhaps examples of both were chosen to represent their period rather than the talents of the authors. This hardly matters; the ferment of the times can be tasted even in items that are not enjoyable in themselves.

My only regret is that the editors were forced to produce such a short book. Only 394 pages? We need to know much more of the temperament of those past generations. Perhaps an enterprising publisher can have a go at *Temperament, Vol. 2*.

— Bruce Gillespie, 1988–91

(I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS
Continued from Page 8)

times says nowadays that he would like to go back to school after he has completed his tradesman's qualifications. He is interested in the engineering qualifications offered by TAFE colleges. Anyway, he's a qualified tradesman at the age of 20 and he's saving money each week from his pay.

Gavin, the elder twin, is in his first year of a BA in criminology at Phillip Institute (Coburg Campus). He's doing very well in his assignments and early tests, but his parents are a little puzzled as to what he intends to do with his degree when he's finished.

Martin is a musician. His life, pleasant to relate, is all worked out; he will give himself up to music. What a life! Right now he's somewhere over in the eastern suburbs playing in an orchestra that is actually paying him. During the week he's a student for the B. Ed. (Secondary) as a teacher of music. At the age of twenty-two he'll be qualified to teach music in secondary schools. I'm sure he'll live a long and fruitful life as a player/teacher of violin; he'll probably even do what his father was never brave enough to do — travel overseas.

No doubt you have both been told before today that children make a difference to your life. We have given up countless hours during the past twenty years in order to 'bring up' our three sons. Now, when each of us is past the age of fifty, we find ourselves working two or three hours each day on behalf of the three adults who still depend on us. Consider that, if you please. Two or three hours each day is about twenty hours each week. About twenty hours each week is about two days each week. About two days each week is about three and a half months each year. Imagine what a writer or some such person could do with an annual holiday of three and a half months. Imagine such a person being granted by some fairy-godmother-government department fourteen weeks each year for his/her creative writing or whatever. Well,

(20 May 1989)

Well, as I started to say last month, well. . . .

Well, Bruce rang me at some point of time while I was waiting for the time to complete my letter. He told me that his father had died that day.

I can't even remember whether or not I met your father, Bruce. I seem to remember a hot afternoon in the early seventies when I visited you for some reason in your spacious bank house on the corner of Plenty Road and — was it? — Wood Street. I seem to remember a tall, thin man in a white shirt: a man with thinning hair. My only clear image of your father is a wholly imagined image, but a cheerful image and probably an image that agrees with some of your own memories. I see in my mind sometimes a tall and dignified man bending over a Hornby train set in the backyard of a house in Haughton Road, Oakleigh. I sense that the man bending over the train-set is a kindly man. I envy the son of that man. My own father was a kindly man but in all my childhood he never stopped to look at what I was doing or what either of my brothers was doing. My brothers and I shared a Hornby train set from 1952 until I left home at the end of 1959, but I don't believe my father was aware of this. He lived in a dream world of racing.

(18 June 1989)

* My father was a kindly man, but also a worried man. We worried him. His bank responsibilities worried him, especially after he became a manager. His church duties worried him. Was he worried to death, as I can't help thinking? *

I've just read the parts that interested me of *TMR* 14 and, of course, the whole of *Good Night, Sweet Prince*.

I've often told you how much I admire your way of writing about yourself in 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' and similar bits of writing. I think it was way back in the early 1970s when I first noticed that I enjoyed your sort of plain writing more than I enjoyed many of the books of fiction that I read.

While I was reading just now 'Waiting for Roy Orbison', I noticed how nearly you had come to writing a convincing piece of short fiction — I mean, a publishable piece of literary fiction of the sort that gets published in anthologies and collections by authors much less readable than you.

I thought this especially while I read the paragraphs about the hosing of the lawn in Syndal and the first three paragraphs on page 5.

I'm not trying to encourage you to begin writing fiction, but if ever you think again about fiction, believe me that you're much closer to writing it than you believe.

I could never say where the border lies between autobiography and fiction in some of my own books of fiction. I'm on record somewhere as saying that autobiography is a branch of fiction. I'll bet that you invented or imagined a few details in the Orbison piece. Just invent a few more details and you could pass the whole thing off as fiction.

I call *fiction* any piece of writing that

suggests the meaning of a particularly human experience.

Thanks for the piece about your father. It contains the material for several pieces of fiction.

(13 November 1989)

* I think I know what you mean, but so far I have not found a way of jumping the chasm to that particular kind of fiction from the kind of pieces I like writing about my own experience. It is perhaps a fiction of mine that I write fanzine pieces entirely derived from memories. If once I abandoned that secure handrail, and deliberately invented details, I feel that I would fall into a chasm. I might again write the kind of ill-shaped monsters that are my published pieces of fiction. I see great fiction — great *stories*, that is, since it is the art of story-telling I value most — as creations that derive from the author's experience, but at some stage acquire independent life and rise clear above the author's life. Gerald, you have at times spoken of finding one's 'true voice'. I have mine already. I've had it all my life. It's inescapable. I hate it. My entire writing enterprise is devoted to ridding myself of all the unfortunate aspects of that voice, and finding one that's much more interesting. The autobiographical pieces in my magazines say what I want to say, and as such are satisfactory. But there must be a way of writing stories that go far beyond anything that derives from mere *me*. *

BUCK COULSON
2677W-500N, Hartford City, Indiana 47348, USA

Re *Good Night, Sweet Prince*: From what I remember of your appearance, you must look a lot like your father.

* I would, except that I'm at least 20 kg (40 lb) heavier than my father at the same age. *

The short-term loss of memory I can sympathize with, since my father had it to the point that after he was in the nursing home he never recognized me, but thought I was my uncle, his younger half-brother. In Dad's mind, he was actually living in 1912 or thereabouts, and it's an extremely difficult thing to deal with when one is trying to hold a conversation with the afflicted. (I was always glad that I had listened to Dad's stories when I was younger, and could sort of keep up with what he was saying.) I gather your father was never quite that bad, but I'm sure it was disconcerting. Especially if it was mostly repeated questions, it would be difficult to deal with, without showing exasperation. (Ask Juanita; she has to repeat things to me because I'm getting a bit deaf.)

You must have missed a lot by not knowing your grandfather. He seems to have been a man of firm opinions and little interest in what people thought of him, and the world can do with more of that kind. (Or possibly I'm just prejudiced in favour of people like me.) Good marks for him, for marrying a servant in the face of family opposition.

(22 February 1990)

* My grandfather wouldn't let people take photographs of him. My mother let me have a copy of a photo my father took of Robin (aged a few months) and me (about two) sitting in a wheelbarrow. My grandfather is in the background, his head averted. Obviously he did not know the photo was being taken, but it gives some idea of what he was like in old age.

My father *knew* that he was not remembering what people said to him in conversation. To avoid embarrassing them, he kept silent when in large groups. He never lost his basic personality, which makes me think he suffered from something other than Alzheimer's disease. The trouble is that I'm almost certain to suffer from the same condition. Perhaps I've suffered from it all my life! I've no ability to remember poetry verbatim, and I find I forget any facts that I don't bother to write down. *

Our Christmas was very cold; down to 0°F that night. Coldest weather we've had so far this winter. Bruce came over the weekend before Christmas, with Emily Vazquez and Lee Swartsmiller, and we exchanged gifts, played Scrabble (remember Scrabble?) and mostly talked. Bad weather kept us penned up for a few days, but we got down to see John and Sandra Miesel on New Year's Day. Peter had gone back to university, but Marie and Ann, both doing postgraduate work, were still home. Another gift exchange. I expect we'll have a Christmas exchange with the DeWeeses when we go up to Wisconsin for Wiscon in March; it's nice to be able to spread the Christmas cheer over several weeks.

Bruce and Emily will be making us grandparents sometime this summer, barring accidents. Have no idea if they'll get married, except for a suspicion that they will. Coulsons take their time about serious duties like procreation; one doesn't want to rush into these things. Dad was thirty-two when I was born, I was twenty-nine when Bruce was born, and Bruce is now thirty-three. For that matter, my great-grandfather was twenty-nine when his first child was born, but granddad got a early start; he was about twenty-two at the birth of his first child. I can recommend this idea of taking one's time about serious matters; look how well all of us turned out.

I don't know if the Indiana floods got onto

the international news; probably not, with everyone's attention focused on the middle eastern desert. Too bad we couldn't have sent some of our water over there. Closest the flood came to us personally as about six miles, where a road was closed due to high water. All we got was a little water in the basement, and we get that frequently. All in all, though, over half of Indiana's counties were placed on the disaster list, and there were thousands homeless, at least briefly.

(15 January 1991)

* Buck, I suppose the whole reason why I keep publishing is to receive, every now and again, a few paragraphs like yours about your Christmas. To think about Christmas in Indiana reminds me of the wonderful sleigh-ride sequence in *The Magnificent Ambersons*. Most of our Christmases are spent hoping for the next cool change, or fearing the next hot spell.

When I began to receive *Yandro* from Juanita and Buck Coulson, Bruce was eleven years old. When I visited the Miesels in 1973, Marie was known as 'Chirp', the most elegant seven-year-old I've ever met, and Ann was known as 'Mite'. In turn, the three of us babysat Peter, watching *Sesame Street*. I don't known how the Miesels slipped off my mailing list; give them my best wishes when you see them. *

A. LANGLEY SEARLES
48 Highland Circle, Bronxville,
New York 10708, USA

Perhaps *Good Night, Sweet Prince* seemed the more real because he was of my generation. I was born a bit less than a year after he was, and recall all too well the years of the Great Depression. Like he, I was offered a full-tuition scholarship, and was fortunately able to accept it; by living with relatives and working on the side I was able to complete my four years of undergraduate education, and thus get a good start in life.

Besides science fiction, I also had two identical interests, classical music and gardening. Although I lived in New York City for over fifty years, for over forty of these I managed to have a garden around the house where I lived, and grew both flowers and vegetables. At this address, where I've lived since 1984, I've been able to continue this hobby.

Finally, your memoir made me cast my mind back to my relationship with my own father, who died at the age of sixty-eight in 1958. Oddly, he lived longer than most people expected. I was told he had been sickly in his youth, and didn't learn until fairly late in life that he'd been afflicted with rheumatic fever, which was why he'd had a bad heart for years. I was estranged from him, because he divorced my mother, for some time, but we got together again some years before he died, and I enjoyed the renewal of relations. I am left with one regret, however: that I didn't ask him more questions about himself and his family when I had the chance. It's the old story — you become interested in history late in life, and so often then there's no one left to ask about it.

(15 January 1991)

* Several of my aunts and uncles, on both sides of the family, retain vivid memories of their entire lives, but they don't seem willing to write them down. The only exception is my mother's sister, my Auntie Daisy, who has traced the Triplett family (my mother's maiden name) back to the seventeenth century. (The 'Triplotts' were Huguenots who finally settled in Cornwall after they emigrated from France.) *

JERRY DAVIS
2881 Rock Street, Simi, California 93065,
USA

The elderly in my community have money and energy to go on world tours and cruises, and they volunteer for everything from making trails in the wilderness (or the urban mountain areas) to masterminding programs for the poor, to political action against nukes (or maybe for nukes). These old people refuse to hang up their jock straps or G-strings in order to make way for the forty and fifty-year-olds. They still want it all. They give advice to the young — this, from people who were alive for most of the twentieth century, and as such are at least partially responsible for the most deadly century of them all. No rocking chairs for them, and this place is becoming a mecca for them only. because it is part of the Sun Belt. Yet Jay Bland [*TMR* 11/12/13, page 119] is right. If you haven't made it by forty, forget it. Hang 'em up.

(10 October 1988)

* Yet at the 1990 Easter convention held in Melbourne, I launched George Turner's book of short stories by commenting that he published his first novel at the age of forty-three, his first reviews and criticism at the age of fifty, his first sf novel at sixty, and his first short story at sixty-two. Makes you wonder what Mozart might have produced at the age of forty-three. *

Your father was about my age. He was a monument to stability, like people of his generation, especially in the midwest and the south. In fact, the Church of Christ was founded in the Border South in Kentucky, I

believe, spun off from the Christian Church over the issue of instrumental music. I attended the Church of Christ in Tennessee and in Santa Monica, California. It is especially strong in southern California, brought here by the dustbowl refugees in the 1930s.

My family is mostly Welsh-Irish. Even my cousins in Australia have the same background, although they are Catholics, a large extended family who live mostly in Queensland.

I've never been work stable, though I know plenty who are. I admired my dad, a West Virginia hillbilly who, wounded in France in World War I, always worked and supported his family. My heroes are those men who went into the shop, mine or office, day after day, week after week, month after month, with two weeks off in summer in a rented cottage at the lake, working at a job they liked, or tolerated, or detested, but they did it. Some drank booze on weekends; some drank fruit of the vine at church, Sunday school, Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, and hung tough in there. That's guts, that's courage.

I've observed a couple of newer generations. If they are an improvement, I can't see it. They seem more glib, or articulate, but they have had the TV on twenty-four hours a day. So instead of saying 'I learned everything I needed to know in Sunday school' now you can learn all you need to know in life by watching TV from the age of two.

(27 November 1989)

* I'm of the generation that might have watched TV from the age of nine onwards (TV arrived in Australia in 1956), but in fact attended Sunday school until my mid-teens, and did not live in a house with a television set until 1980. More than anything, I learned from radio, books and magazines. No wonder I'm a misfit. *

PATRICK McGUIRE
7541-D Weather Worn Way, Columbia, Maryland 21046, USA

I was saddened to hear of your father's death. My own father died of cancer in a not dissimilar fashion about six years ago, so I know something about what you've been through. There were even a few biographical similarities between your father and mine, who also spent World War II in the US equivalent of the Pay Corps.

The day before your mailing came, I was organizing files, and I came across issues of Susan Wood's *Aspidistra*, plus a note from her. She suddenly dropped dead at age thirty-one, as you may recall. You or I could be checking out long before we get to the respective ages of our fathers.

* Not a week goes by when I don't think for at least a minute or two in that week how much I would like to receive a letter from Susan Wood. If it is difficult for me still to believe that my father is dead, how much more difficult is to believe that I could go on, and Susan no longer exist? Almost nothing in life makes sense, except the fact that I am here at this moment typing these words. *

You said you entered fandom in 1968. That was also the year I started, though only with the local university sf club (resurrected by Jerry Lapidus, now completely gafiated). You obviously took to the whole business with more commitment than I, rising to international celebrity in a few years, but on looking over old letters and such, I was surprised to see how much, at least in the way of letterhacking, I was doing within a year or two. I was looking at carbons of letters I wrote in 1969, and, as I've just passed the notorious fortieth birthday, it was more than a little daunting to realize that when as much time again passes, I'll be *sixty*. Assuming I get there, of course.

I didn't do a thorough search of my files — I was mainly trying to organize them, and to see if I could offhand find a carbon of my first letter to Alexei Panshin (in reaction to *Heinlein in Dimension*), since I'd alluded to it when writing him recently in reaction to *The World Beyond the Hill*. I didn't find the first one, but I found other curious stuff, including a series of letters in Spanish to Hector Pessina in Argentina. After the first second of panic, I discovered that, yes, I could still read them, though I haven't done anything serious with Spanish for years, but that I hadn't had anything very profound to say. Elsewhere in the letters, I had once 'proven' that *Clouds of Witness* is a science fiction story, principally because it depicts a trans-Atlantic airplane trip with a passenger before one had taken place. I hand't realized how well I'd argued my case: I convinced myself all over again.

(14 November 1989)

DAVID LAKE
7 8th Avenue, St Lucia, Queensland 4067

Don't worry if you find you can't write 'good fiction'. The best in this kind are but shadows. Shakespeare didn't even bother to publish his plays, or indeed anything but a couple of semi-porno early poems which he wrote to get money off lordly patrons. I suspect he had a very reasonable scale of values. When he'd

made enough money, he gave up writing to retire to Stratford as a comfortable gentleman, aged forty-eight. (A very good age to retire, for most writers.)

(17 July 1988)

Thank you for *The Metaphysical Review* 14. I am sorry to hear of the death of your father, especially the way it was. The Lord obviously doesn't look after his sincere worshippers; and I want to say a bit more, obliquely, arising out of that.

Most of your Music Issue is on music I know little or nothing about. I can see a certain virtue in jazz, blues and the Beatles, but I am not at all into pop music. My taste began when I was eighteen with Tchaikovsky, rapidly found the root of Romanticism in Beethoven, and then as I got older I settled on Mozart and Vivaldi, with bits of Purcell and earlier stuff back to the Middle Ages in Europe. I also like Indian music very much. Now that I am old I like slow movements best. For me the choral section of the Ninth still works, but I think largely as a political manifesto: I am still a Romantic liberal.

But heavens! So Stalin liked Mozart's 23rd Piano Concerto. . . . The man can't have been all bad. The slow movement of the 23rd is my own very secret special manifesto. I first heard it when I was nineteen years old, a conscript in the British Army in Tripoli, Libya, January 1949 or soon after, on an old 78 in a soldiers' club of some kind. Now I have several recordings, but still like to hear it on the radio. I usually drop whatever I'm doing and follow on the score — 99 bars of pure heaven in F sharp minor. It's the answer to Life, the Universe, and Everything . . . at least, I don't know a better.

Which brings me back to the Lord. I think it's a mark of wisdom to notice when an experiment is disconfirming an initial theory, by simply not providing expected data. If the theory is a very elaborate one — like Christianity — the disconfirming process will take time, perhaps lots of time. I had a rigorous instruction in Christianity, the Catholic kind, from Jesuits in a college in India, when I was in my teens. I broke with the church when I was twenty-seven, because by then the negative data was piling up. First, much of the Bible struck me as immoral and genocidal, and secondly, the Church's teachings simply did not fit the facts of life — sex and other things. In those days you were either a Catholic or you weren't. So I decided I couldn't be. Christianity was disconfirmed in my experience.

It took me much longer to junk God altogether. For decades I believed in an Aldous-Huxley sort of God, one approachable by the mystics of all regions. I also believed in Jungian psychology, synchronicity, omens, and much else. It was only in the last five years that I saw that all that had to go too. I had reached the point of cutting God's throat with Occam's razor: all the phenomena could be explained without that hypothesis. To put it simply, God does not give a damn for anyone. He may exist, but he does not interfere in the universe. So it is scientifically immoral to postulate a God.

Once you see this, you see that all God-believers are kidding themselves. It is so comforting to believe in a loving Father *uberm Sternenzelt*, but it is only a wish-fulfilment. You can't achieve God by even the most advanced technique of meditation. All I found that way was nothingness and boredom; and those who get mystic visions merely get hallucinations. None of that can be evidence.

This has been painful for me, for I am temperamentally inclined to mysticism. And I find the concept of 'God' rhetorically useful — rather as William Blake did (but Blake really believed we are all 'God'). Mozart's 23rd to me is a valid proof of that sort of God. But one must not claim any more, because the facts are not there to back up any such claims. It's like ESP: lots of dirty data, alleged miracles, but the more you study the facts, the more dubious the miracles look. Neither ESP nor theology are advancing sciences . . . so surely there were no real data there in the first place.

I also think the Hebrew prophets, often acclaimed as sublime poets, were the beginning of a deadly element in world history: *righteous indignation*. This always leads to bloodshed, sometimes on a genocidal scale. The guillotine and the killing fields of Cambodia are all there in seed form in Isaiah. I think the Sadducees have had an unfair press: there's much to be said for running a society reasonably, with a good working economy and no religious enthusiasm. 'The word of the Lord came to me. . . .' Oh yeah? Who says?

PS: My recent conversion to unbelief has made it pretty well impossible for me to write fantasy, as I was doing up to 1984. My two fantasy novels belonged to my mystical period. All over now.

(23 October 1989)

* I can't see any necessary connection between religion and writing fantasy. Like sf novels, fantasy novels are thought experiments

(Continued on Page 62)

AVEDON CAROL is a famous American fan who emigrated to Britain some years ago. Both before and after the move she has published some classy fanzines, but I haven't seen anything from her for awhile. Avedon has been nominated for Best Fan Writer in the Hugo Awards this year.

• ***FEATURE LETTER***

Avedon Carol: The pleasure of women

AVEDON CAROL
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1AB, England

Thanks much for *TMR* 11/12/13, which arrived this morning. It's . . . big. You went broke on this, right? You went broke just mailing this one copy, I think.

Russell Blackford's discussion of *Pleasure and Danger* was refereshing, especially after a hard month of having to explain that being a radical feminist does not necessarily imply separatism, repeating over and over, 'Individual men are not my enemy.' And having to put up with Michael Moorcock's recent efforts to introduce a Dworkin-type anti-porn bill here in the UK. God, it makes me tired.

My only quibble: I realize that, in part because this kind of discussion *has* been suppressed, making it very difficult for many of us to say our piece, Vance's book probably *is* the first place Russell Blackford has learned of anyone saying these things — but that doesn't mean they haven't been said before. I've been saying them for years, along with a few other people, usually causing a great deal of fireworks while we all get accused of Nazism, collaboration with the enemy, and of course getting all of our ideas from men.

The situation has become intolerable. Imagine the insult for women who felt so liberated in the early days of this wave of feminism, after years or decades of silent suffering in sexual relationships that were boring and tedious, thinking there was something wrong with us because we didn't enjoy these experiences — then finding that there were indeed sexual experiences we enjoyed, and being told by our supposedly feminist sisters that we didn't *really* enjoy those, either.

Decades of being told we should only have 'vaginal orgasms', or that we should *all* be straight, or that we should be fulfilled by staying home and doing housework, did not brainwash us sufficiently into having a great time in bed with tediously dull sexual relationships — which is one good reason why there is a feminist movement in the first place. We *knew* we were having a lousy time, even if we didn't always have the nerve to admit it. Sure, a lot of us ended up feeling for a long time that it was something inherently awful in heterosex that made it so boring and oppressive — we knew we hadn't been quite truthful in conveying the impression that we enjoyed it, and we figured every other woman must be lying, too. And some women didn't even bother lying — on the Right, there are plenty of women who make it clear that they do experience sex as a horrible filthy thing which they tolerate only because it is their duty in marriage and for procreation.

Rotten sex is something that, to read the literature, you would assume to be impossible, as sex is generally described (even by your parents when they are trying to convince you not to do it) as something that ranges from cheap thrills to Wonderful, but never *less* than cheap thrills, never something that is no thrill at all. But the simple fact is that literally millions of women have gone through their lives having numerous sexual experiences that can only be described as ranging from unpleasant to painful and humiliating, with not one single pleasurable sexual experience.

Having reached the first plateau of realizing that, despite the euphoric tones in which sex is generally described, sex isn't always wonderful, it should be simple enough next step to recognize that obviously some poeple are doing something different in order to enjoy it. Unfortunately, most those women who have rotten sex generally come to the conclusion that it is sexual activity itself, rather than the assumptions under which those activities are undertaken, that creates the problem. Lesbians who have had rotten sexual experiences with men but good sexual experiences with women

come to the mistaken conclusion that this is because sex with women is innately good while sex with men is innately bad — thoroughly failing to realize that their own desire (or lack thereof) for the kind of sexual relationships they were in was and is the crucial factor in whether or not they enjoyed the resulting sex. That's why we have so much feminist sexual theory that states baldly that no woman can really enjoy fucking and that all heterosexual experiences must be unpleasant, oppressive, and indistinguishable from rape.

Some of us, however, were able to integrate our new understanding of sexism into a method of bypassing these rotten sexual experiences in favour of situations that offered new and more attractive possibilities — attractive in that they genuinely *turned us on*. To be told that we don't *really* enjoy these things, that we only *think* we do because we are accepting the brainwashing of male society, is rather a poor joke — do they honestly believe that after all that went before we can't tell the difference? We've already been through the whole business of suffering in silence and taking it, remember? We *know* the difference.

To be told to discard our newfound sexuality and be offered in return the tepid, sterile, over-romanticized pseudo-sexuality of 'politically correct' neo-puritans who claim to be feminist is fundamentally no different than being told to abandon feminism altogether and return to the kitchen and the nursery.

If there is one thing women have heard plenty of in the last few hundred (or few thousand?) years, it is that other people know better than we do what kind of sexuality will be satisfying to us. The last thing we have ever been permitted to consult in the matter has been our own feelings of attraction and desire — whether the people doing the proscribing and prescribing were priests, our parents, psychologists, or feminists. It is still everybody's business but our own to decide why we go to bed with someone and what we should do there with them. Because a woman is still just a sexual property of everyone but herself.

It makes no difference whether it is Andrea Dworkin or John Norman telling me what I should *really* be doing in order to find my natural sexual fulfilment. It still sounds like the same old shit to me.

However, this very phenomenon may in some part explain why women read the Gor books. After all, in a life where everyone claims to know more than you do what you really need in bed, it becaomes a rather attractive fantasy that somewhere you will find someone who is *right*. The idea that the source of that advice, the advice itself, and the means by which that advice is delivered should be repellent is hardly inconsistent with what we've already been taught to expect. Aren't women always being told that what we want is something entirely other than what our experience tells us we want? Aren't we constantly being told we should want things that in fact repel us? Isn't the lesson that women cannot possibly know for themselves what they want so deeply ingrained that even avowed feminists feel free to tell other women the same thing?

Given that people tend to think of our sexuality in dualistic terms — that is, that all women want one particular form of sexuality, and that all men want an opposite-but-complementary form of sexuality (traditionally, male dominance and female submission), and given that fulfilment for one requires cooperation from one's partner, S&M fantasy as presented by John Norman would seem to have a certain logic (although, since in fact men are at least as likely to be sexually submissive as women are, a role-reversed world would be equally logical).

Martin Bridgstock quite rightly points out that John Norman departs dramatically from most S&M pornography in crucial areas. One is the lack of reciprocity — ordinarily, S&M dominants are as lovingly obsessed with their 'slaves' as the submissives are with their masters (and mistresses). In contrast to Norman there is Sharon Green (Dave Hartwell swears this is a real person), who also writes fantasy books about entire S&M planets that are largely male dominant, although in one series the protagonist is a woman warrior who has grown up in and now leads a society in which women dominate and men are mere sexual toys — however, she gets kidnapped and finds herself enslaved, escaping, enslaved, escaping again, etc., in a larger world where in fact most of the tribes and cities are male dominant, for another four or five books. In another series, we have the classic earth woman who has found herself captive to this dominant male on an S&M male-dominant planet — well, the point is, these guys always seem to be in love with their captives almost instantly.

Sharon Green is also a little more like the rest of S&M porn, in that she portrays both male and female dominance and male and

female submission. Norman's insistence that sexual submissiveness is natural for *women* — that is, for all women, and not at all for men — is not unique to him, although it is not all that common to actual S&M pornography. Given the antics of Women Against Pornography, it is ironic that S&M porn is actually less likely to promote this false stereotype than is most non-pornographic literature, including neo-puritan 'feminist' literature. God knows Freud has a lot to answer for, here.

But this idea of the lover who really loves you and wants only what's really best for you and will make you happy — and actually knows how to supply it — is certainly not an uncommon fantasy, or even one that is hard to fathom. I think a certain amount of confusion comes from the stereotypical idea that the female role is passive. If this is so, then obviously a woman who wishes to play a submissive role in sexual fantasy is just acting out a more extreme version of the traditional female role, right?

Well, I suppose you could come to that conclusion, but I have a real problem with the idea that having to anticipate, arrange, and manipulate (often subtly and almost invisibly) the comfort and pleasure of everyone around you is a nice, passive, restful activity. The whole range of feminine skills — the things expected from any single female — usually define eight or ten separate and distinct career paths in the commercial world, including management (made all the more complicated by the fact that some of these expectations are inconsistent with each other). After a hard day of anticipating, planning, buying, arranging, and doing all the things that go into being attractive, nurturant, comforting, and a household management specialist, the idea of being tied up and taken care of sounds like a refreshing departure from all that hard-driving activity.

Bridgstock notes that 'the embarrassing topic of motherhood is kept, for the most part, out of the picture', and I believe there are several reasons for this, both in the Gor series and in virtually all S&M fantasy. In the case of Gor, the most obvious reason is the simple inconsistency of actually being a mother (pregnant, covered with stretch marks, nursing a child, obsessed with the care of the children) with being a full-time sexual slave. In other words, motherhood is not terribly attractive or useful from the point of view of a man who expects a woman to spend all of her time adoring and catering to *him*. Moreover, as stated earlier, the role of the mother is a very active one, and such a demanding adult male poses more of a threat and a hindrance to the children and to that role than anything else — his attentions are unlikely to be welcomed.

But as I say, children are not a part of more traditional S&M fantasy, either. Some of the

same reasons noted above hold here, but more importantly — and this is true for both men and for women — a significant number of people who read S&M literature (or look at the pictures) imagine themselves in the submissive/slave role, and are not particularly interested in having the requirements of mothering intrude into their fantasy. (Sharon Green's protagonists, although sometimes playing a dominant role temporarily, are most often in the submissive position.)

For the slave/submissive/bottom role, the essential element is being the focus of attention; for the mother role, the essential element is to focus the attention on someone else (the child). Not incidentally, an interesting subcategory of S&M is infantilism, in which the submissive partner is treated more precisely like a baby — made to wear diapers and other (oversized) baby clothes, kept in a crib, etc. (Some people make a lot of money catering to the equipment/clothing needs of this market.) Additionally, it might be worth noting that many elements of infantilism can be found in more ordinary S&M fantasies — she may be wearing adult lacy underwear and sitting in grown-up furniture, but you find a lot of similarities like being spoon-fed, dressed, and groomed — and of course, taken over the knee and spanked. Generally, the apparent 'slave/master' relationship is only superficial — such terms, like 'sadist' and 'masochist', which have other conversational uses, and 'passive', 'submissive', and 'dominant', which imply that the will of only one person is being met, merely obscure the issue. Not 'master/slave' at all — but 'mother/child'.

At least from the so-called submissive's point of view. It's easy to understand why someone would want to have someone else pay attention to them, do things for them, make them feel good. It is less easy to understand why anyone would want the work and responsibility of playing the dominant/master/top role. But of course, we know that people *do* enjoy playing a nurturant role from time to time, and the advantage of nurturing a responsive adult instead of a baby is that adults have a choice, as well as the ability to demonstrate their appreciation and pleasure in more concrete ways. People often enjoy knowing they are giving pleasure to a lover, and some people get a great deal of their own pleasure from seeing that their lovers are very aroused by them — and very satisfied. Some people actually feel that this is *more* important than any direct physical satisfaction for themselves.

But then, the idea of having a lover who seems willing to do anything you want must have a powerful lure — not so much for the feeling of exercising power, but for the feeling of simply being so attractive and important to someone else that they will go all out to please you. Most of this junk in S&M is just symbolic, patently unreal, and people who are into it insist that the so-called dominant is anything *but* dominant, and that it is really the submissive who sets and controls the 'scene' — but it is a game in which, depending on your perspective, each partner leads.

All of it, of course, can be achieved without any S&M role-playing. In real life, though, we run into a number of problems, such as the fact that our prescribed roles don't always allow us the latitude for it. Even if one is conscious of the unnaturalness of those roles, it's hard to jump into bed and casually break free of a lifetime's conditioning. The plain fact is that people still aren't all that good at figuring out how to have a good time in bed together. Those retrograde elements in the feminist movement who have worked so hard at de-sexualizing our very sexuality have certainly done nothing to ameliorate this situation.

(11 June 1988)

(I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS
Continued from Page 58)

about the world as we find it. Surely your 'conversion' would merely yield a more complex and interesting type of fantasy novel?

*

SYD BOUNDS
27 Borough Road, Kingston on Thames,
Surrey KT2 6BD, England

I hope your house is still standing. Borough Road is being taken over by the yuppies and done up in trendy style; prices around £100,000. Wish I owned mine! Kingston is a mess; they're building a new main road right through the centre and chaos looks like lasting for ever.

I'm still reasonably fit and surviving by tutoring with a bit of writing thrown in.

I enjoyed 'Trains in the Distance' and suggest the reason you couldn't sell it is because you have two different themes here. You might sell an article on nostalgia (your memories of the model set); or a fact piece on Melbourne's rail system. It was a mistake (from a commercial magazine viewpoint) to

squeeze both into one article.

(20 May 1989)

* They go together inextricably in my mind, which is why the article takes the form it does. I dare say you are right. I realized just now (7 a.m., 27 April 1990) that they both could be subsumed in a much greater article, accompanied by photographs, of nostalgia for and information about the Melbourne suburban railway system. *

Good Night, Sweet Prince is one of the best pieces you've written. I can be sure of this because it made me sit and think about my own father for a few minutes. He died early, in his forties. The last of my aunts died recently, so an era passes. And Bill Temple, too, died in 1989.

'There seem to be no great chances after you turn forty.' This made me laugh. Life changes all the time. Since I 'retired' I've been tutoring would-be writers, and find I'm enjoying it. I still do a bit of writing and have this year restarted drawing and painting at a local evening class. I don't seem to get much time for reading.

(19 November 1989)

GREG EGAN
GPO Box J685, Perth, WA 6001

I finally decided not to return to Uni, but to spend a year trying to write instead, reasoning that if I don't get a whole lot more written and published soon, everything's going to keep happening at the same snail's pace (that is, six short stories in print in five years).

(9 March 1988)

Andrew Whitmore's letter in *TMR* 11/12/13 was sobering. Publishers will apparently print anything sufficiently dull and predictable by name writers. I've just finished reading *The Coming of the Quantum Cats* by Frederik Pohl, the most tedious, hackneyed parallel-worlds novel imaginable, all based around a voodoo mish-mash of undigested quantum physics (which in fact supports none of the book's essential premises). There's one parallel USA in which Moslem law applies, another in which Nancy is President instead of Ron, and so on *ad fucking nauseam*. I've only read a single short story of Andrew's, 'Above Atlas His Shoulders', but if his novels aren't ten thousand times better than this hamster shit by Pohl, I'll eat photocopies of all of them.

The trick, I'm beginning to think, is to get famous by some non-literary activity. For example, Michael Jackson, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Joan Collins have all written best-sellers. If their stature seems unattainable, think a little smaller: get kidnapped by UFOs. Stage a coup in Fiji. I'm personally very much into serious murders; I'm trying to arrange a scale of fees, say, two corpses for a sale to *Analog*, three for *Omni*, twenty for a novel to Bantam or Tor.

I don't quite know what to think about your agony over whether or not you should be writing fiction. If you expect it to support your fanzines in the style to which they have become accustomed, and that's the only reason, forget it. But if you feel compelled to keep trying, despite misery and self-doubt (not to mention 'uniformly uncomplimentary remarks' from Damien Broderick), then presumably you *will* keep trying, and I wish you success.

* I can think of no ideas that would carry me further than page one of a short story, but I keep thinking of great ideas for fanzine articles. *

As a scantily published writer myself, the only miniscule piece of practical advice I can offer is, when you finally have a story which you think is brilliant, don't send it to a US magazine that will either never let you know its fate or send you a No Frills rejection; send it somewhere like *Interzone* whose editors, if they don't buy it, will at least take the trouble to make some intelligent comments as to the reasons why; as well as getting some possibly useful criticism, the difference in effect on morale is enormous.

Lucy Sussex mentions Michael Tolley's complaint about Linda's eyes in *Neuromancer*, which gives me an opportunity to recommend, to anyone who'll listen, a book called *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes. It's a novel about a Flaubert aficionado, his travels, his research, his speculations, and there's one marvellous chapter, called 'Emma Bovary's Eyes', in which Barnes turns the tables brilliantly on every smart-arse nit-picking caught-you-out critic who ever gleefully rushed into print with some petty discovery of this kind.

(8 July 1988)

* Since Greg wrote this letter, he has started selling stories regularly overseas, starting with the British *Interzone* magazine and spreading to all sorts of magazines I never see. *

IAN PENHALL
PO Box 689, Woden, ACT 2606

I spent most of a year editing an Apex newsletter: fortnightly, but only a fraction of the size of your efforts, and I know how much

time I put into doing it: combining it with a full-time job was quite an effort.

We had much the same logistical difficulties as you describe in *TMR* 11/12/13: specifically, the best reproduction technology available within our budget was someone else's old, slow, and unreliable photocopier — together with collating, stapling, etc. subsequently by (yours truly's) hand and after word-processing on this Commodore 64 and Star NX10 printer I'm now using. (Don't laugh: as well as plenty of games the C64 has some home and [very] small business software available at or very close to professional user level; it's also cheaper than the IBM clones, Apple MacIntosh, and other such competitors.) Subsequently the club did manage to buy a second-hand photocopier — no faster and not a lot more reliable, but at least more convenient because all the copying can now be done at the editor's home. Adequate for the volumes involved (up to 30 pages an issue and 50–60 copies a time); probably not for your requirements.

But doing that job (newsletter editor) did give me an insight into something that puzzled me for a long time — *why* people publish fanzines. The satisfaction it gave me was tremendous. I suspect it was the exercise of creativity in putting it together, the sense of achievement in seeing it finished and distributed once a fortnight, and the good reactions from readers that combined to make it a very busy year but an extremely rewarding one.

(28 May 1988)

JAMES ALLEN
PO Box 41, West Brunswick, Victoria 3055

I hope you like *Get Stuffed*. *SF Commentary* was the first zine (indeed the first fannish item) I ever read. Phillip Institute's library had a subscription (probably when it was Coburg State College) and it still has a pamphlet box full of issues. I used to work there in Serials, and I read them in my tea and lunch breaks. I was blown away. This was the sort of publishing I had never seen before. *SF Commentary* has been both a signpost down a divergent road and the first steps on that road for me. I saw what could be done with limited resources. I was also fascinated by the 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' column. Here was personal explanation. I love analysis, explication, so this really got me. It was more than an editorial yet not a diary.

The concept was in my mind at early *Get Stuffed* meetings, which led to the 'I Must Be Talking About Myself' column. True, it is a bit of a satire, meant affectionately and also exaggerated. It starts on a subject and goes where the writer wants. It's not disciplined and can be really bad writing, but I'm assured it is fun to do. It is also first draft. Hopefully it is *funny*.

Funny is what *Get Stuffed* aims to be. The only serious thing is our stated aim of winning a Ditmar.

(10 December 1988)

* And you succeeded. In my report on the 1990 Easter convention in John Foyster's *Doxy* I mentioned the insidious New Wave of Melbourne fandom. We boring old farts don't mind being called Boring Old Farts because the New Wavers (publishers of Ditmar-winning *Get Stuffed*) *are* funny. I was a bit taken aback by the first 'I Must Be Talking About Myself' because it was all too accurate. What the hell, I thought, give the buggers something to laugh at. And then I began to meet some of the New Wavers, who had been fairly invisible to the rest of Australian fandom until two years ago. Now James, plus Ian Gunn and Phil Wlodarczyk, have joined ANZAPA, the bastion of Boring Old Fartiness. With any luck there will be some New Wave art in this issue of *TMR*. *

CY CHAUVIN
14248 Wilfred, Detroit, Michigan 48213, USA

[At Conspiracy, the 1987 World Convention, Brighton, England] I had the pleasure of seeing Irwin Hirsh again after eight years, and meeting Wendy for the first time. She reminded me greatly of a friend of mine at home.

You were a favourite topic of conversation at times. Wendy apparently was dying to ring you up and ask about your cats, but Irwin wouldn't let her — afraid it might give things away. She was tickled when you rang up Irwin and she could ask. I admit I was surprised when she said you had nine!

* Everything gets mixed up in the telling. We had five cats in 1987; now we have seven. *

I also got a chance to talk to Dave Piper: quite a nice guy, and someone I never expected to meet at Brighton. He told a BRG story or two.

Also I met your rivals at *ASFR*, all wearing black leather, and looking fierce, ready to rub out authors that don't meet critical standards, no doubt. Is this 'Nova Mob' a motorcycle gang?

* Good one, Cy. The Nova Mob is Melbourne's monthly sf discussion group. Now

(Continued on Page 70)

I first met **ALLAN BRAY** sometime during the 1970s. He was (still is) a cheerful person from South Australia, somewhat prone (as you can tell from the following) to whirlwind activity. Allan is one of the few 1970s' South Australian fans to stay in that fair State.

• ***FEATURE LETTER***

Allan Bray: Eleven ginger cats!

ALLAN BRAY
5 Green Avenue, Seaton, South Australia 5023

Lesley and I were both lucky enough to gain entry to Flinders University via the Special Entry Scheme. It's a long process, but a bloody sight easier than trying to matriculate. One first fills out a long form specifying all one's choices for study. You sit a scholastic aptitude test. It's not an intelligence test in the normal sense of the term; it tests one's ability to reason from data. Then you write an essay on one of about fifteen choices under exam conditions, then write a statement about why you want to study tertiarily *now*, and sweat for awhile.

Following all this, we were offered places at Flinders to do a BA. Because we're both working, we can do only one subject a year, so we decided to do English 1, 2 and 3 straight through and, assuming no failures, achieve a completed major. Special entry is only a provisional matric. until a single normal year is completed. You can't afford to fail. Because we both thought we could pass English three years running, it seemed the safest thing to do.

We started last year, and both got B (credit), so it looks as if the strategy is working.

It was murder the first year. We had three lectures and a tutorial. We got study leave, but Les didn't get as much as me by two hours. On Tuesday and Wednesday we would go to work at nine, leave at ten, and drive the 26.7 miles to Flinders for a lecture at eleven, leave at twelve and arrive back at one. On Thursday the same, but advanced by an hour. On Thursday night, we left at four thirty for dinner and a tute at six. It's seventeen miles each way to work. Adding it up, I worked out that our mileage each week was one extra week's travel to and from work plus one trip one way. Let's put it this way: I got quite pissed off with driving.

This year it's a lot better: nine to twelve Tuesdays and Thursdays. We can go straight from home, and then be back at work in time for lunch. Because Les had to make up flexi-time because of the difference in study leave, we were at work until six most nights to make up her time.

I don't know whether or not you heard, but because Marc Ortlieb could not be guest of honour at the recent AUSFA con, it meant they had to ask me (he! he!) and I got to 'ave me moment of glory didn'I! I was quite surprised.

Critical Mass (the Adelaide version of the Nova Mob) is going quite well on the first Wednesday of the month. It's held in the South Australian Writers' Centre, which is on the top floor of the building where the Left Bank is.

At home, we had a go at breeding. I don't think I mentioned that Les had a couple of miscarriages. There was no great drama, except that the first one was somewhat painful. Our joint attitude to kids was: if one or two roll up, all's well and good and we'll do the best we can. But as Les was turning forty, there was a deadline. We are not prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to have a family and, to be truthful, I can't stand kids. I'd be a very nervous bad-tempered father. So we are now confirmed DINKs.

Except, of course, for the thirteen cats.

This started with Mother Cat who was a part-wild tabby that we sort of acquired. She's dead now, but her legacy is still here.

We have Winkin and Nod (Blink disappeared), Cheech and Chong, Sooty and Bandit (son of Bandit Senior (not ours)). Also Adolf and Heinrich (born the day Germany was re-unified; we had Eva but she was run over), Rustus (because he's very ginger), and lastly Athos, Porthos, Aramis and D'Artagnan. All male except Sooty and Winkin. Sooty has now been done, Winkin is next; then we start

on the males. I'm a sucker for kittens, but enough is enough.

All the cats are ginger except for Sooty (self-explanatory) and Bandit, who is a classic black-and-white, seemingly masked. He has a different sort of personality to the others, more placid. The gingers have vaguely Siamese personalities, climb up your clothes, the front-wire door, and everything else.

The Four Musketeers are the latest. They are the liveliest, the tamest and the noisiest.

* We have one ginger cat, Theodore. Asked for a definition of hell on earth, I might say 'Eleven ginger cats'. You have our profound sympathy.

But we agree with you about kids. Neither of us wanted kids, so Elaine did her best to make sure it could never happen. I wish all the people in the world who really don't want kids would really make sure they don't. *

I now have eleven computers. Some of them are old Tandy or Dick Smith Z80-powered stuff. I keep them mainly to play with, and also because they are impossible to sell. I've got lots of software for the Commodores, so I keep them in regular use. This letter is being typed on a Bondwell 14 because it runs the daisy-wheel printer along with WordStar and SpellStar. The IBM clone is not in use. The latest and best acquisition, the Macintosh Classic, is not being used here because I don't have a printer for it yet. I want a cut sheet feeder and one of the new, cheap Inkjet printers that Apple has just brought out. Also I need a four-meg upgrade and a hard drive. Les also has a Mac 512 upgraded to 1 meg, an external floppy drive and an Imagewriter, but she uses tractor feed paper, and I'm too fussy for that. We both have work stations.

I hope you are well. I've been a little weird lately. Back in June, when I woke up one Sunday morning and turned over in bed, the whole room decided to rotate rapidly for some time. When it stopped I said, ''Ave you done?' It said, 'Yes', so I turned over again and it did it again. I said, 'You lied', and got up. It was OK when I stood up or sat down, but if I moved my head sharply or bent over, *whee!*

I went to the quack. He said, 'You're 260 over 114; take the white pills and the pink pills and see me regularly.' Then he upped the dosage on the white pills and said 'Lose

weight'. So I lost a couple of stone, and I need to lose one more, but I'm stuck. Anyway, life's too short to work yourself to death in fandom, and there's no call to give up completely. I haven't.

* You have my admiration for being able to lose a couple of stone. I should lose at least that. I decided to swim every day, but I lost virtually nothing. When I slackened the swimming regime, I stayed the same weight. On the other hand — for reasons that must be genetic, not behavioural — I still get a normal blood-pressure reading of 120/80. *

The library is now floor to ceiling on all four walls. When the Black Hole closed, I bought its remaining secondhand stock and I'm busy (except when I'm busy doing something else) sorting out the duplicates for sale. Soon the back wall of the sun room will be floor-to-ceiling book shelves as well. Part of the expansion is needed because we bought lots of lit. crit. books and other references for the university course.

Les is a gardener (fortunately, because I'm not), and has put in vegies and shrubs. She also got in a tree lopper to get the bloody giant tree in the back yard under control. I bought a secondhand mulcher, which chews stuff up like mad. I've also been given a power hedge-trimmer for my birthday. In the meantime the cats poo in all directions and we smell like Animal Farm.

* We've filled the entire house with shelves for books, records and CDs. Elaine thinks she's found a spare bit of wall for new wall-to-wall shelves. Great. Then I'll feel free to buy *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (thirty volumes) and *The Australian Encyclopedia* (ten volumes). As it is, our 1962 *Enyclopedia Britannica* is banished to the kitchen.

Elaine has command of the garden, because I refuse to have anything to do with it. Besides, it's a small garden, and we have no lawn. The cats can have most of it for their jungle. *

That's it. I should go and read five Shakespeare plays and some Byron and *Frankenstein*. I have an essay due 6 May and a Comparative Literature essay before the end of semester, plus a couple of essays in Early Nineteenth Century Literature and I would like to do a couple more tutes to get my average up, since I'm lousy at exams.

(7 April 1991)

* So am I, Allan, which is why I have nothing but admiration for people who do a degree after the age of forty. Best of luck to you both; I wish I had the tiniest fraction of your energy and enthusiasm. *

I once spoke to **CY CHAUVIN** for five minutes in a lift (sorry . . . elevator) at Torcon in 1973, so I don't know a lot about one of my most faithful correspondents. One of these days we might get to talk for a few hours in a restaurant at some Australian convention. Meanwhile, here's Cy, and he has the . . .

• ***FEATURE LETTER***

Cy Chauvin: Neighbourhood blues

Re *Dreams and False Alarms* 5: Your horror story about the house next door has my full sympathy and understanding, since I have been going through a similar ordeal with the house next door to my own.

The story begins in early September 1988 after I arrive back from New Orleans, and notice that no lights are ever on next door, not even the porch light, which they often left on all night. Like you and Elaine did, I first reacted with relief: now I can finally have the old refrigerator, which has sat in their back yard for two years, hauled away.

But strange things soon begin, with an old girlfriend of the neighbours breaking in, and the police come and haul her away. The odd thing is that most of the furniture and other belongings are left in the house, even an old car on the driveway (that has also sat there two years). One day the old neighbours come by

and haul some things away in a truck, but I don't get out to ask them anything before they leave. I look out the window and wish there were some way I could get rid of that house. I never realized at the time how much I would have to go through to get that wish granted, of course.

One day I come home and all the aluminium siding has been stripped off the back wall, and one of the back windows broken! I am stunned. I have occasionally seen abandoned homes with the aluminium siding removed, but didn't understand why. Two days later, at night, I hear a funny tinkling noise and look out my bedroom window and see two men removing the aluminium storm windows from the house. I yell at them and then call the police. No one responds to my call. After fifteen minutes I call again. No response. Worried, I go to sleep.

Two days later I see a man hauling out some clothes and old furniture parts. I feel rather sorry for him — why would anyone steal anything like this unless he needed it? — but I feel more worried about my own house, so I call the police. I nail up a heavy mesh grating over one back window, and I look at another in the hardware store, but for some reason decide not to buy it. I also had to go that night to my parents' house and stay overnight, so I could drive them early in the morning to the Geyhound bus station for a trip to visit my brother in Traverse City. I have a horrible feeling something is going to happen.

My neighbour behind me (across the alleyway) calls me up at work and tells me some men have stolen the aluminium downspouts off the back of her garage. When I get home, I am greeted outside by Molly, my cat, who should be inside! And of course the very window I left ungrated is the one lifted up, the glass not even broken, the pane lifted whole out of the frame (which is wooden, and very old and soft). Of course the stereo is gone and my typewriter and even the vacuum cleaner and a package of fish sticks (?). I suppose the TV was left because I left it unplugged. I suppose the thieves thought it was broken, or even (*gasp*) black and white. No market for that.

This is not the end, however. Every few days or so, someone comes by and steals more siding off the house. I call the police every time, but except for the time the police catch a tramp sleeping in the house, they never come in time. I talk to the woman behind me (her husband is a policeman; she has lived here thirty-three years, and in the neighbourhood all her life), and we decide to circulate a petition to close the alleyway, since this seems to us to be an 'avenue of crime' which no one sees. One neighbour tells me aluminium is now 55 cents a pound, which is why it is stolen. Circulating the petition gives me a chance to meet many of the neighbours I've not seen before, and of course poor and black people still fear crime as much as anyone.

The final horror happened one week after Hallowe'en: the house burned. I was awoken by firemen, and although the houses share no side wall like your house did, there is probably only 12 feet between the two. I suspect that the blaze was caused by the tramp who wandered back into the house and lit a fire to keep warm (since I saw a light earlier that evening in the house), but perhaps it was set by aluminium-siding thieves, to make the house totally worthless, so no one would bother them while they took the siding. I don't know.

I subsequently went down and made my first-ever appearance before the city council and asked for early removal of the house. The City Department was going to recommend against removal (because it had been boarded up by the owner), and so the council was glad to hear my case. I was called later by a council member aide, and told that the council hoped to demolish the house in June, so I may have an extra garden this summer. It will be small compensation for all the anguish. And I forgot to mention the water leaking from the house next door into my basement, or the weird fellow with a tow truck who I decided later probably stole junk cars. . . .

(25 May 1989)

* And Charles Grant and Stephen King earn money by *inventing* horror stories?

I actually found it quite difficult to read your story, Cy, because it sends waves of horror wiffling up and down my spine. The worst of our situation is that the people who lived across the road until recently were burgled five times. Eventually they had very little to burgle, but (a) they were away from home at particular hours of the day; (b) when both their cars are missing, everybody could be seen to be away; and (c) there was unseen access from a back lane. We don't have a car, and one of us is usually home. But even so, there is always a high possibility of burglary in our inner-suburban area. *

ROB GERRAND, one-time noted fannish *bon vivant*, relates a story about the fabled Fantasy Film Group meals at the Madelaine Restaurant, Collins Street, in the early 1970s. This was a jolly and largely unrecorded era in Melbourne fandom. The Madelaine itself was a basement restaurant furnished with the world's most uncomfortable metal chairs and tables. At one of the Madelaine dinners (at which old films were shown), John Flaus first met Paul Harris, and that friendship eventually led to *Film Buffs' Forecast* on radio station 3RRR-FM. Also, it might not be a coincidence that Lee Harding and Irene Pagram named their daughter Madelaine.

• ***FEATURE LETTER***

Rob Gerrand: Remember the Madelaine!

ROB GERRAND
863 Hampton Street, Brighton, Vic. 3186

I've just finished relocating my study, and going through my papers I found something I wrote about one of those evenings in 1972:

Last night Trevor Ashton and I went to the Madelaine Cafe with Stephen Pascoe (art student-teacher at Brighton Tech.) and Stephen's friend Dominic (another art student-teacher at Tech. Teachers' College), A Yugoslav — Croat, in fact.

The Madelaine was the venue for the Fantasy Film Society's screening of Douglas Fairbanks Snr in *The Three Musketeers*, Buster Crabbe in *Flash Gordon*, Part 1, and Olsen and Johnson in *Crazy House*, a forties funny film better termed *Shit House*. We ate and drank before and during the films — a good set-up.

Dominic is an extraordinary fellow. He has long bushy hair and beard, a diffident manner and a staggering naivete. He is innocent.

Trevor is relating the story of the origin of the name 'strudel for apple strudel: 'Kaiser Wilhelm I had a mistress Wilhelmina Strudel — Fraulein Strudel — '

'Gee, is that really true?' asks Dominic, mouth open in wonder.

'Yes,' we all nod, disbelieving Dominic's gullibility.

'Anyhow,' continues Trevor, 'One day, the Kaiser said to Wilhelmina: "Ah! Tasting you is like eating wild apples!" — I leave it to you to work out what he was referring to — but he said: "Ah, yes! Wild apples!"'

'Wow. Really great,' says Dominic. 'To use words like that. Wow. They said at College you had a way with words, with speaking. It's great hearing the way you talk.'

'I speak Biblical English.'

'Wow. Hey, how did you know all that, about Strudel?'

'Well, when I was in Albania — '

'Hey, man, you were in Albania? Go on!'

'Yes, Albania. In Albania I came across a cave in which there were some scrolls.'

'Coffee scrolls?' I say.

'No, not coffee scrolls. The Dead Sea scrolls,' says Trevor.

'Oh, Trevor,' Dominic says. 'You've caught me. Were you in Albania?'

'No, no — ' Trevor is overly contrite — 'no, no not really. I just enjoy telling lies. Rob and I do it often, tell each other lies.'

At this point our waitress, a slim girl with short blond hair, returns with, as she terms it, 'the four strogs' (we had each ordered a beef stroganoff).

'Have you seen *A Clockwork Orange*?' we ask our waitress.

'No, great. I really want to. I've heard a lot about it.'

'You're not scared of the violence?'

'Oh, I'm a one for a bit of sadism,' she grins at us.

'Have you seen *Joe*? It had more impact — the violence — on me than *A Clockwork Orange*,' I say.

'Yeah. Great film.'

After she leaves, Trevor asks Dom whether he knows how stroganoff received its name.

'Hey, do you know that, Trevor? Gosh!'

'Wasn't it named after Count Stroganoff?' I ask. 'You know, during the French invasion of Russia. An enclave of Russians, led by the Count, were trapped in the snow, frezing and without food. The men were kind enough to let the Count make the noble sacrifice. They

stewed him. In the circumstances, it was an exquisite and delicious dish. On the strength of it the men were able to reach security and wamrht, and bear the glad news of the Count's heroic role and of their culinary discovery. It's been a favourite ever since, though some people — the more squeamish, I believe — substitute in the recipe and use, um, beef.'

'No, Rob, Trevor says. 'It wasn't Count Stroganoff. It was in fact Count Strogan.'

'No!' breathes Dom. He has sat marvelling at the story and feeling for poor old Count Stroganoff.

'Yes, it was Vladimir Ilyich Lenin himself who had Count Strogan . . . disposed of. After the Revolution. In their enthusiasm, the Count was dumped into a pot of stew. A large pot.

'When Vladimir Ilyich returned a couple of days later, the stew was reheated for lunch, and brought out on steaming platters. But Trotsky reports Lenin as saying, "Take it away! Take it away! This Strogan's off!" Hence the name.'

'They had, as it were, his guts for garters.'

Dom has had enough.

'Trevor, you've got to be sincere, man.'

'What is sincerity?" I say. 'Who knows when they are sincere? Many people think they are, and try to be sincere. But because they don't know themselves, deep down, they often are, really, insincere. So some other people, realizing this, make a practice of insincerity: always saying something ridiculous or patently false. Sometimes things are untrue, too. Being uncertain of what they really mean, they always say what they don't mean. That way, they think, there's never any confusion, and no deception.'

Dom's eyes light up, and he laughs. 'Gosh, is that so?'

'Yeah.'

'Terrific! — Trevor, are you like that?'

'Well, I suppose so. I enjoy telling lies,' he says. (Truthfully?)

'I mean,' I say, 'if people like Billy McMahon are sincere, how can I afford to be, myself?'

'Do you know what?' Trevor asks Dom. Stephen throughout all this rubbish has been sitting back, smiling and laughing to himself.

'What?' says Stephen and Dom together.

'Our waitress. Poor girl, she's had a terrible life. I spoke to her when I was going to the toilet. She told me her tragic story. Yes, a tragic story.'

'No!' says Dom, meaning yes.

'Yes. Ah, tragedy.' Trevor pauses. Dom is hooked again. 'You see, she used to be a nun, at . . . at Our Lady of Charity.'

'Our Lady of Charity. Hey! There is an Our Lady of Charity, down in Balaclava — '

'Yes, yes, yes. Anyhow, she was a nun. She was praying one day, rubbing the neck of the flask of sacramental wine, when out popped — poof! — a genie!'

'Oh, shit, Trevor. Jesus, caught again. Hey, are you knocking my religion?'

'No, no. No, the last thing I'd want to do. In fact, the exact opposite is the case. Anyway, as she told me, the genie granted her one wish. She sat there thinking. Finally she said, hands uplifted: "Oh give me a man, a man, a mansion in the sky!"'

— Rob Gerrand

(I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS
Continued from Page 64)

that Russell and Jenny Blackford, and Janeen Webb, have stopped attending, it's become very demure. *

Carey Handfield was also a very nice fellow, also met for the first time. He told me about your fears of crossing the Arrat River.

* I couldn't work this one out for a while. Oh! Crossing the *Yarra* River, not the 'Arrat'. But I don't have a 'fear' of crossing it — I just travel as little as possible. *

Your ears must have been burning that weekend, Bruce. Wendy was amazed when she learned that I had met you only for five minutes in 1973, but that's what made writing the article [in *Sikander* 14] . . . I was going to say 'easier', but it took seven years to complete.

(1 October 1987)

* As far as I know, Cy's most recent project has been editing for Advent Books *The Tale That Wags the God*, James Blish's last collection of essays. *

SIMON BROWN
18 Forrest Crescent, Camden, NSW 2570

I resigned from the Public Service early in 1988, and am now writing full time. Up to now, my expenditure far outweighs my income, but I hope to reverse the flow of funds by the end of the year. (I had better, or I won't be eating.) I am trying to survive by writing articles for nature, travel, and heritage magazines, and have discovered I will earn

more from half a dozen transparencies than from 3000 words of text. It is not just that one picture is worth a 1000 words, but that we live in an age when people would rather not read if they can avoid it.

Since going to Europe at the end of 1985 I've caught the travel bug. At the end of 1986 I visited Vanuatu and New Caledonia on a two-week diving trip. Most of the diving involved travel-brochure stuff — beautiful coral reefs spread out like huge tapestries under azure seas — spectacular but expected.

The diving off Vanuatu's largest island, Espiritu Santo, was something else. My partner and I made five dives down to the world's largest accessible wreck — the *President Coolidge*, a 22,000-ton ocean liner turned troop ship that sank in World War II with the loss of only two lives.

Our first dive set the tone that the others would follow. I was having problems equalizing the pressure in my ears, and wasn't paying as much attention to my surroundings as I should have been. When I finally felt comfortable I checked my depth gauge, which was reading about 22 metres, and looked up. Looming above was the bow of the wreck, a dim grey outline partly obscured by the turbid water. It looked like an airbrush painting done by someone like Giger, and the muscles in my back tightened involuntarily. My partner and our dive-guide had been waiting patiently for me to arrive, and we set off along what had been the ship's main viewing deck. The guide showed us a revolver encrusted in shells and algae, and a mess kit with all its components intact. In this and subsequent dives we saw things like a hold full of jeeps and a barber's chair, an anti-aircraft gun and ship's stairways descending into a gloomy and very still interior. It was all very eerie, like a huge set for a horror movie.

By the way, did you know that Espiritu Santo was the original 'Australia'? It was first sighted by a European in 1606. The Spanish explorer, de Quiros, thought he discovered *Terra Australis* and named it La Australie del Espiritu Santo.

(6 June 1988)

KEN LAKE
115 Markhouse Avenue, London E17 8AY, England

Dreams and False Alarms 5: Ah, the sexual shortcomings of life in yesteryear. At any gathering of young men of intelligence (for the rest didn't have meetings — they were out getting their end away unselfconsciously and setting a standard that we found it impossible even to contemplate) there was one initial topic of discussion: 'Are you getting your fair share?' To which the only answers were either 'No' or a lie.

I finally got married at the age of twenty-six because I felt I ought to, and because my (first) wife wanted to get away from her parents. The result was far more disastrous than the thirteen separate and successive affaires I had before that (the first not till I was twenty-two) because the marriage went on for fourteen years, where the affaires wore themselves out in months, as they should have done. The reason the marriage lasted was basically three kids, added to poverty and fear of change; for ten of those years Sue threatened constantly to leave me 'as soon as the children are old enough'; I blew it by finding Jan, and leaving Sue before she could do it to me. For this she made both of us suffer financially for the next decade.

I'd have done better to forget marriage, continue with my oh-it's-not-too-hard-when-you-get-the-knack-and-the-circle-of-friends-of-the-right-type sequence of totally 'faithful' affaires, but of course you never know that till you've made the big mistake. But yes, I know what you mean by 'I was always unattractive to young ladies'. It's just not true. It's just that they have perceptions of how to be approached and treated and I (and you?) didn't know the pattern of behaviour that unlocked things for us. Remember, this was in the fifties, long before The Pill and The Sexual Revolution and Flower Power and all that liberating stuff: I had the gross misfortune to miss out on all that because I married Sue and remained faithful to her for fourteen appalling years.

At least you have had twenty-plus years of active fandom. I came to sf reading around 1941 (Wells, etc.) and 1944 (British reprint editions of *Astoundings*, etc.) but my natural diffidence kept me from fandom till just five years ago, and even then it took me two years to get Jan to participate. Of course I knew *about* it — names like Vin¢ Clarke were as familiar to me as Arthur C. — though I did join the British Interplanetary Society in 1945 and so came to know Arthur C. and P. E. Cleator and so on (but not for long, as we left London and I lost touch; a pity, though I do recall attending a talk by Olaf Stapledon and being amazingly and embarrassingly so bored that I fell asleep on a canvas-backed chair and fell out of it).

(23 May 1989)

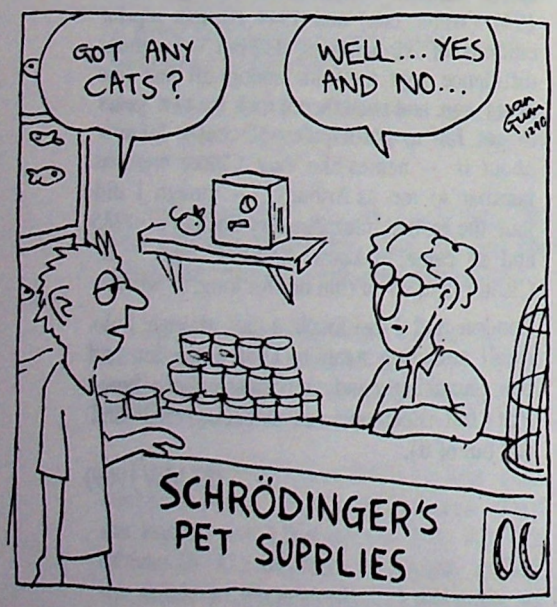
MAE STRELKOV
4501 Palma Sola, Jujuy, Argentina

Particularly interesting to us are the stories of your cats, for lately we have been so involved with our own cat tribes. There are the outdoor cats longing to live indoors, and the indoor cats longing to be outdoor cats. The white indoor cats are a delicate strain; we give pills to them; they are females. Even so, we're never without kittens, because we've three mother cats that roam in the wilds by night, but have their kittens indoors. Two of these mothers are pure white, but lately are producing more and more black, grey and striped kittens. It's easiest to give away the white ones that occasionally still appear. The jungle-clad mountains around us are full of wild life, and sometimes our outdoor cats vanish. Or they catch some illness and die. We find it very heartbreaking.

They are all such unique, loving and intelligent individuals, I go on missing those that die. It's quite crazy to care so much, but felines do get right into one's heart.

We have got into pig-rearing. The problem right now is the mother pig, which has enchanting piglets. She's developed a strong personality. (All our animals do; the horses too.) She has arguments with Vadim over where she wants to be, and if I come out to help she charges straight at me. I scratch this monstrous, ferocious-looking tank behind her ears and she grunts with pleasure and love, then returns to her digging up the land in search of her favourite roots. We will soon be overrun with pigs, every one too lovable to eat.

And there are the chickens! Individualistic personalities, too.



We have a big lawn by now in front, and we're developing terraces all around. The flowers grow to enormous heights. Weeds to do on all our perimeters as the jungle reaches back in. But we love it here. Our youngest two are active in social affairs. Sylvia teaches at the Palma Sola High School. Tony teaches karate. He married a young, dynamic lawyer.

(11 June 1989)

* Pity help us if ever we visited you, Mae. I would never be able to drag Elaine away from your place. Immediately she would be surrounded by the cats and pushed over by the pig. Our own tribe now includes a Ditmar-nominated cat, Apple Blossom. (Asked to choose their own Ditmar categories in 1991, Australian fans chose all the old boring ones, but added Best Fannish Cat. The competition was hot, with Roger Weddall's cat Typo winning.) Apple Blossom is the oldest of our cats. She may be tottery, but still feisty. TC is a few years younger, still a sook, still tubby. I have pictures of tiny Oscar on my shoulder, but now he's overweight, fluffy, sooky, and timid. He still thinks he's a six-week-old kitten. Next is Theodore, caramel-orange, flouncing a fluffy tail, vain, fond of a punch-up, and Oscar's Very Good Friend. (Oscar seems to spend entire days perched on the shed roof looking out for Theodore, last seen heading thataway.) The other two good friends are Monty (short for Monty Zoomer, star of a Brian Aldiss novel) and Sophie; one tabby, one black; who move at high speed most of the time. Last one aboard is Dick, who has had his name changed to Muffin. Refugee from Elaine's father's house, he has lost most of his ears because of skin cancer. Tubby, he looks like a white and grey muffin, but turns out to have the aspirations of an army sergeant. Very loudly he tells us and the other cats what to do. Too bad we ignore him most of the time.

I had not heard from **JENNIFER BRYCE** for some time when in 1989 I received a brief note giving her new address in Golden Square, Bendigo, and offering corrections to a Macmillan-published Australian Studies textbook that I had edited. Jenny teaching Australian Studies? At Wedderburn High School? My letter-of-astonishment produced the following reply: *

JENNIFER BRYCE
353 High Street, Golden Square, Vic. 3555

One of these days I think I should try to write a piece about returning to teaching after nearly twenty years out of the classroom. Thank heavens it's a small country high school! I feel that with my Year 7 Geography class, all that's needed is a video camera and I'd make lots of money by providing scenes for *The Comedy Company*. Year 7 girls are a strange species with which I have yet to come to terms. It's

absolutely impossible for students to be quiet while the teacher talks. (I'm sure this is the influence of television being on constantly at home — the family talks, fights, etc. and the TV is an accompanying drone . . . thus students see teachers as an accompanying drone to their other, more important activities.) So I don't talk, or explain. I just try to provide resources — and I get the kids to do lots and lots of projects. The good ones can find information in the library. The bad ones spend at least a week doing a beautiful heading. 'Endangered Species', 'Tropical Cyclones' — you name it, we've done a project on it.

The other day I was trying to teach 'Nationalism' to a Year 10 class. (Yes, you teach things like that at high school.) A student teacher was observing, and I'd already got in a mess by not realizing that the class set of books I was using had several different editions, and the diagram I wanted students to look at was on a variety of pages. It was 9.30 a.m. when I realized that the students had a genuine reason for staring out the window into the corridor. A man was waving to them. I opened the door to ask him whether he required assistance . . . and he came staggering into the classroom, stinking of drink. 'I jush wanna have a word with a few of the boys.' He was dressed for the races, I thought — in the way of people who want to make an impression but haven't quite managed to — bell-bottomed trousers, pink tie, a hat. I didn't know then that he had arrived in a Mercedes. I was very worried that he would take some of the students away. If this happened, I would be responsible. We performed some strange kind of drama in front of the class, with me trying to entice him out the door. Ultimately I pushed him out into the corridor and decided it was prudent to leave the rioting class, complete with student teacher, and push him down the corridor towards the office. 'Is he your boyfriend, miss?' As you can imagine, it was a little difficult to pick up the threads of the lesson when I returned!

Why on earth am I doing this? Graeme and I are running the business, Mostly Deco, but it seems like a good idea for one of us to have a regular income — probably a similar set-up to yours. School teaching provides an income plus school holidays. I would really like to be a Careers Adviser in schools. (Having had several 'careers' I feel well placed to do this.) I find the area interesting and rewarding, and I think I could survive teaching better without frequent confrontations with seething masses of kids who don't really want to be there (and you don't want them to be there either).

(3 September 1989)

* And you did get the job of Careers Adviser at the school. Maybe such a solution in 1971 might have kept me teaching, but I doubt it.

Anybody who wants to buy 1920s and 1930s furniture and accessories should drop in some weekend at Mostly Deco (address at the head of this letter). *

GUIDO EEKHAUT
Berkenhoflaan 13, B-3030 Leuven (Heverlee), Belgium

TMR 14 and *Good Night, Sweet Prince* added up to the saddest, most personal and at the same time the most gratifying issue of all. Now that your father has (bodily) disappeared, you will start to understand him better, a process that was already begun when you wrote about him. Your father will live on in the memory of those who knew him. In that sense he did not die. Perhaps that is why we are so creatively busy: we want to be remembered after our death.

What have I been doing? I published a new book in June 1989, and just signed a contract for another one (a novella only) to be published in 1990. And finishing a novel that, I hope, could mean some sort of breakthrough. But I'm less and less convinced that success is what a writer needs. You ought to have some success, but becoming an instant star can only corrupt you. And it has corrupted good writers before. So at the moment I enjoy my status as the least-known writer of this small country, and I continue writing. I won an award for one of my radio plays. Belgian Radio (BRT) will have its first daily radio serial and I'm one of the writers, although I haven't sold anything yet.

Reading: I managed to retrace some old loves such as John Hawkes who is, to me, a continuous source of literary themes and innovations. Everything the man has done since the early 1950s remains fresh and contemporary. You can find him in New Directions, and his new books come out from Penguin and other publishers. I've read no sf at all, or nearly nothing, recently. Recent trends in American sf just don't interest me any more. I'll keep up with anything Chip Delany does, including his autobiography.

Music: Time and money permitting, I'm going through a small secondhand record shop here in Leuven to look for music produced between the early 1960s and the late 1970s. My Golden Age, perhaps. People are buying CDs and selling their old records. I step in and buy all these old things.

(18 December 1989)

I was very happy with the way you presented

my Ballard article, and from now on I'll mention its publication in my bibliography.

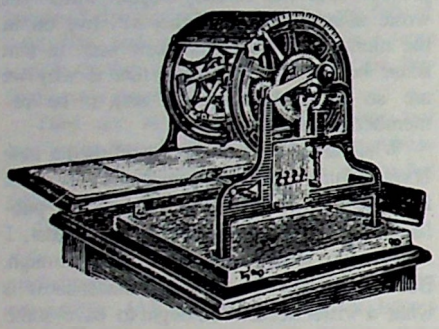
I thought I had written about my plans for emigration, but probably I didn't. These plans were born out of a severe breakdown I had in late 1987, and which lasted well into 1988. I wanted to get out of it all, out of a dead-end job. Perhaps you know that feeling.

* Often. *

Thanks to my wife and some good friends I managed to crawl out of my dark hole and live a normal life again. Although I'm still with the same job (more or less) I find writing an outlet for neuroses and things like that. Not that what I write is dark and terrible, but it gives me the opportunity to vent my feelings within a world of my own.

I haven't been writing any articles on sf subjects, although I'm now a member of the SFRA. Neither will I be going to the Worldcon in Holland, although it's only 400 km from where I live. I'm just not that much interested in fandom any more. I remain interested in sf and fantasy, but only a certain group of writers. Whenever I read [illegible] I find more and more pulp being advertised as the literary masterpieces of the century.

(17 August 1990)



Listomania II:
The self-indulgence section

Accompanying this issue of *TMR* is an article, 'Listomania', that explains the origins of my dreadful list-making affliction. Writing the article reminded me that I haven't published any of my usual lists since the ones that appeared in *Dreams and False Alarms* 5, February 1989. And they were only the 1987 lists!

(Reminder: These are 'favourites', not 'The Best', and they are my favourites read, heard or seen *for the first time* in the year mentioned.)

1988:
Favourite novels

1. *Forgotten Life*
   Brian Aldiss (1988; Gollancz; 288 pp.)
2. *The House of Markku: An Epic of Finland*
   Unto Seppanen (1940; Duckworth; 458 pp.)
3. *Innocent Blood*
   P. D. James (1980; Scribner's; 311 pp.)
4. *Brighton Rock*
   Graham Greene (1938; Penguin; 250 pp.)
5. *Fire and Hemlock*
   Diana Wynne Jones (1984; Berkley; 280 pp.)
6. *The Vampire Tapestry*
   Suzy McKee Charnas (1980; Pocket; 294 pp.)
7. *Lincoln's Dreams*
   Connie Willis (1987; Bantam; 212 pp.)
8. *The Hampdenshire Wonder*
   J. D. Beresford (1911; Eyre & Spottiswoode; 235 pp.)
9. *The Manchurian Candidate*
   Richard Condon (1959; Signet; 351 pp.)
10. *Beyond the Labyrinth*
    Gillian Rubinstein (1988; Hyland House; 170 pp.)
11. *The Falling Woman*
    Pat Murphy (1986; Tor; 287 pp.)

Something of a return to science fiction and fantasy here, after my disaffection of the early 1980s. I decided that since there was so much in the sf world, I could ignore the junk and search out books I liked. It was a bonus when two of my favourites, *Lincoln's Dreams* and *The Falling Woman*, did well in the big sf awards of the year, and *Beyond the Labyrinth* won the Australian Children's Book of Year award.

Forgotten Life should have won the Booker Prize in its year. It's certainly the warmest, richest Aldiss novel for many years; perhaps his best work so far. I've written much about it, without writing a review that does it justice. John Foyster accomplished this feat in an issue of *Australian Science Fiction Review*.

I am surprised that I did not place *The Hampdenshire Wonder* higher on the list. It's probably the only copy in Australia. George Turner lent it to me, and it's obvious that it has had a great influence on George's work. It's one of those quiet books that grows in the memory; a very Wellsian tale of a superchild, it has many wonderful touches that would have been beyond Wells.

The House of Markku is what the subtitle says: 'An Epic of Finland'—in this case, the Finland of late last century and early this century. The style reminds me of the best of South American literature, minus the 'magic realism'.

Innocent Blood made me a P. D. James fan until I had suffered a few of her more conventional mystery novels. *Innocent Blood* is a unique view, through the eyes of someone planning a murder, of suburban life in London. A reminder that British authors almost never tell you what life is like in areas other than the

moors or Highgate.

The Manchurian Candidate is a sizzling story written in awkward, almost unreadable prose. No wonder Frankenheimer's movie is a lot better than the book. (But Condon really does know what good story-telling is all about.)

1988:
Favourite books

1. *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*
   edited by Sally Fitzgerald (1979; Farrar Straus Giroux; 617 pp.)
2. *Forgotten Life*
   As above.
3. *The House of Markku*
   As above.
4. *Innocent Blood*
   As above.
5. *Brighton Rock*
   As above.
6. *Fire and Hemlock*
   As above.
7. *Down the Lake with Half a Chook*
   Philip Hodgins (1988; ABC; 72 pp.)
8. *The Second Oldest Profession: The Spy as Patriot, Bureaucrat, Fantasist and Whore*
   Philip Knightley (1985; Pan; 43[illegible] pp.)
9. *The Collected Poems of Stevie Smith*
   (1975; Penguin; 591 pp.)
10. *The Vampire Tapestry*
    As above.
11. *Lincoln's Dreams*
    As above.
12. *The Hampdenshire Wonder*
    As above.
13. *The Manchurian Candidate*
    As above.
14. *Defending the National Tuckshop*
    Michael Cathcart (1988; McPhee Gribble; 222 pp.)
15. *Beyond the Labyrinth*
    As above.

Flannery O'Connor's personality packed a fair wallop as she sat in Milledgeville writing her stories and flinging out the powerful letters that appear in *The Habit of Being*. There are two main subjects of the letters: her own writing, and the tortured brand of Catholicism that informed it; and the writing of her acolytes, or rather the lack of it. After reading these letters, you're either scalded into writing your masterpiece, or give up writing altogether. Needless to say, I gave up.

Philip Hodgins' poetry gets better with every volume. Like many other people, I hope that his illness is permanently in remission. We need lots more books from poets whose work is truly enjoyable.

You're probably familiar with the Knightley book already: a feast of espionage. Unknown outside Australia, however, would be Michael Cathcart's *Defending the National Tuckshop*. I reviewed it in *Dreams and False Alarms* 5. It tells of the well-documented push by Australia's right wing to organize secret armies on various occasions between 1914 and the 1950s.

1988:
Favourite short stories

1. 'On the Turn'
   Leanne Frahm (first read in *Matilda at the Speed of Light*)
2. 'On for the Long Haul'
   T. Coraghessan Boyle (*Greasy Lake and Other Stories*)
3. 'Fits'
   Alice Munro (*The Progress of Love*)
4. 'Hawaii'
   Garrison Keillor (*Leaving Home*)
5. 'Hansel'
   Garrison Keillor (*Leaving Home*)
6. 'Blessed'
   Garry Disher (*The Difference to Me*)
7. 'The Moon in the Orange Street Skating Rink'
   Alice Munro (*The Progress of Love*)
8. 'The Difference to Me'
   Garry Disher (*The Difference to Me*)
9. 'Homecoming'
   Garrison Keillor (*Leaving Home*)
10. 'Chicken'
    Garrison Keillor (*Leaving Home*)

It's a bit embarrassing now to realize that none of these stories comes from a book that actually made my Top 15 Books. Yet the stories themselves are memorable, with Leanne Frahm's ontological horror story rising way above the rest. 'On the Turn' is one of the great pieces that seems to be a simple mood piece, then turns into a complex mood piece, then turns out to be something else altogether.

I reviewed Boyle's book in *SF Commentary* a few issues back, and we talk a lot about Garrison Keillor in the rest of this issue. Even without the asides, and the chocolaty Keillor voice, the stories listed above work very well.

Alice Munro must be the only author every one of whose books I've read. (Except the latest. Oops.) *The Progress of Love* is not as interesting as her earlier collections, but the two stories listed here, plus 'A Queer Streak' are up to her usual standard.

I reviewed Garry Disher's *The Difference to Me* in *Dreams and False Alarms* 5. He's one of the few Australian writers with a dark streak in his work. I keep looking out for his books.

1988:
Favourite films

1. *Only Angels Have Wings*
   directed by Howard Hawks (1939)
2. *Gregory's Girl*
   Bill Forsyth (1981)
3. *The Great Man's Lady*
   William L. Wellman (1942)
4. *Fedora*
   Billy Wilder (1978)
5. *The Dead*
   John Huston (1987)
6. *The Manchurian Candidate*
   John Frankenheimer (1962)
7. *The Killing*
   Stanley Kubrick (1956)

8. *Housekeeping*
   Bill Forsyth (1987)
9. *Man on a Tightrope*
   Elia Kazan (1953)
10. *I Confess*
    Alfred Hitchcock (1953)
11. *The Philadelphia Story*
    George Cukor (1940)
12. *Caged*
    John Cromwell (1950)
13. *The Suspect*
    Robert Siodmak (1944)
14. *These Three*
    William Wyler (1936)
15. *A Place of One's Own*
    Bernard Knowles (1945)
16. *I See a Dark Stranger*
    Frank Launder (1946)
17. *The League of Gentlemen*
    Basil Dearden (1960)
18. *King Lear*
    Peter Brook (1971)
19. *Richard III*
    Laurence Olivier (1956)
20. *Local Hero*
    Bill Forsyth (1983)

1988 was my attempt to rediscover the real live cinema, the one you sit in, not the one you switch on at 11 p.m. when you can't be bothered reading a book.

The Valhalla, Melbourne's pioneering repertory cinema, moved from Richmond to Westgarth, only twenty minutes' walk away. The Astor, Melbourne's other great repertory cinema, offered increasingly attractive programs. Because of them, I discovered Bill Forsyth's movies long after everybody else did. I became really enthusiastic about this new hobby of cinema-going until winter set in. After that, I relied on Bill Collins as usual.

It's hard to describe Bill Collins to anyone who has never seen him introducing movies on tv. 'Florid' is the word that comes to mind: a big man, big gestures, vast smile, and iridescent suitcoats. A figure of fun for many, especially as he gushes with enthusiasm for every movie he shows. John Flaus and Paul Harris, Melbourne's ultimate film buffs, were granted an interview with Bill a few years ago, and came away impressed. He really is as enthusiastic about 1930s and 1940s films as they are and I am. He really does know all those trivial details about all those great old films. If he shows slightly-less-than-brilliant movies sometimes, it's because they are the only movies whose rights are held by the Ten network.

In short, most of the movies on my list were shown by Bill Collins in one or other of the time slots he used to command on Channel 10. A few others, such as *Fedora*, were shown by Ivan Hutchinson on the Seven network. (Ivan knows as much about film as Bill Collins, but he seems to have little control over selecting the movies he presents.)

I don't have the room to describe each of the movies on my list. Besides, you know my prejudices already. Instead, I'll talk about the selections that go against my own criteria.

Gregory's Girl has undistinguished photography and direction, but the script and acting are so delicious that it seemed my favourite movie of the 1980s. (This doesn't say much. I've seen fewer than twenty movies made in the eighties.) *Gregory's Girl* is one of those few films that continues to surprise you, even when you think you know where it's going. Every move is subversive and absurd.

Also, watching *Gregory's Girl* was the first occasion for many years when I've said at the end: 'It can't stop! It's hardly begun yet.'

I'd say much the same about Bill Forsyth's other films on this list. If I had seen *Local Hero* before I saw *Gregory's Girl*, maybe that would have been my favourite. Whichever film you see second seems less surprising than the other. *Housekeeping* is taken fairly directly from Maralynne Robinson's novel, but Forsyth's direction and Christine Lahti's performance make the film much more interesting than the novel.

Only Angels Have Wings combines all the things I love most about 1940s films — deep-field black-and-white photography, epic adventure, brave people, and a fair amount of devil-may-care cynicism. I liked much of the material about attempting to fly small planes over high mountains in Central America, but I liked much more the integration of the relationship between the three main characters into the adventure story. The ending is a three-hanky job, but of course you would never catch me sobbing during a movie.

The Dead is my other three-hanky film, but this time I was in a cinema, and hoping at the end that nobody looked my way while I was shambling out of the Kino. Some friends scorned the ending, saying that John Huston squibs the job of rendering the last page of James Joyce's story into images. The ending

worked all too well for me. After watching Angelica Huston disintegrate before one's eyes, and hearing her terrible story, suddenly there is the terrible story of Ireland, told over images of snow and graves.

Directed by John Huston when he was close to death, the party scenes have a sense of dramatic life that one finds in few films. I particularly liked the drunken son. Surely Huston could not have realized his visualization of this character looked just like old photographs of Henry Lawson?

Most of the other films on my list are there because they tell good stories.

Fedora has one of those double-surprise endings that don't seem fashionable anymore. With William Holden as the bamboozled investigator, the film makes sly parallels with *Sunset Boulevard*.

The Killing is a crisply told series of grim misadventures of crooks who thought they had the perfect scheme.

The other great heist-attempt movie on the list is Basil Dearden's very English *The League of Gentlemen*. Of course, there is one tiny detail that trips up their scheme, and of course that tiny detail is comic in a very English way.

And *Man on a Tightrope*, with its story of a circus troupe attempting to escape an unnamed middle European communist country in the 1950s, is also a perfect nail-biter. One of Kazan's best films, although few people write about it.

I See a Dark Stranger is a frothy English comedy-mystery. Nobody mentions it much, but in fact it is as good as the similar films made by Powell and Pressburger at the same time.

The most exciting visual and aural experience for the year is not on the list. It's Vincent Ward's New Zealand fantasy *The Navigator*. Perhaps it's not on the list because it works too hard, is too earnest. But the idea of fourteenth-century villagers tunnelling their way through rock and time to twentieth-century New Zealand is irresistible, and the ending is remarkable. If I reorder my 1988 list in a few years' time, I suspect *The Navigator* will stand much higher on the list.

1988:
Favourite records

Classical

Here I emphasize that these are records *bought* for the first time. From 1987 on, I was able to replace nearly all my favourite classical records with CDs.

Sometimes the results have been unfortunate. The digital remastering of some of EMI's older records has given them an uncomfortable hiss that they did not have on record. The set of Casals playing the Bach Cello Sonatas is a particularly uncomfortable example.

In most cases, it's wonderful to have my favourite pieces in a format that does not pick up pops and crackles after each playing. Klemperer's 1962 versions of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and *Fidelio* were released at last. So was Karajan's 1952 version of *The Magic Flute*, Beecham's 1960 version of Brahms' Symphony No. 2 (for sentimental reasons, my very favourite record), the Jean-François Paillard Orchestra/Alfred Jarry version of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, Colin Davis's version of Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique* with the London Philharmonic, and many others.

1. Haydn: *The Seasons*
   Herbert von Karajan cond. Berlin Philharmonic, Choir of the Berlin Opera
   (EMI) (original release 1973) (2 CDs)
2. Mozart: *The Magic Flute/The Impresario*
   Karl Böhm cond. Berlin Philharmonic/RIAS Choir/Staatskapelle Dresden
   (DG) (1964/1974) (3 CDs)
3. Shostakovich: String Quartets
   Borodin String Quartet
   EMI/Melodiya (1979–85) (6 CDs)
4. Britten: *The Complete Music for String Quartet*
   Endellion String Quartet
   EMI (1986) (3 CDs)
5. Berlioz: *Symphonie Fantastique/'Le corsaire'/'Royal Hunt and Storm'*
   Sir Thomas Beecham cond. French National Radio Orchestra/Royal Philharmonic
   EMI (1959) (1 CD)
6. Berlioz: *Roméo et Juliette*
   Sir Colin Davis cond. London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus/John Alldis Choir
   Philips (1968) (2 CDs)
7. Berlioz: *Benvenuto Celllini*
   Sir Colin Davis cond. BBC Symphony Orchestra/Chorus of Royal Opera House
   Philips (1972) (3 CDs)
8. Beethoven: Complete String Quartets
   Alban Berg Quartet
   EMI (1979–84) (10 CDs)
9. Rossini/Handt: *Messa da Gloria*
   Herbert Handt cond. BBC Singers and English Chamber Orchestra
   Philips (1973) (1 LP)
10. Haydn: *Paukenmesse (Mass in Time of War)*
    Leonard Bernstein cond. Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus
    Philips (1984) (1 CD)
11. Mozart: Violin Concertos Nos. 4 and 5
    Oscar Shumsky: violin
    Yan Pascal Tortelier cond. Scottish Chamber Orchestra
    Nimbus (1983) (1 CD)
12. Beethoven: Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2
    Alfred Brendel: piano
    James Levine cond. Chicago Symphony Orchestra
    Philips (1983) (1 CD)

I wrote down 92 items as competing for the Top Ten. And they were just the very best of the CDs I bought in 1988. No wonder I was still broke in 1989.

In 1987 and 1988 the major companies dumped on the market all the best items from

their back catalogue. Since then they have realized their mistake, and have begun rationing the vaults.

For me, the highlight of the year was the release of the complete Colin Davis Berlioz cycle. Some of them I did not buy, but many of them were important items that had been out of print for a some years. *Roméo and Juliette* is a strange work in which all the dramatic action is 'told' by the orchestra, with a few sections for singers merely as connecting links in the story. *Benvenuto Cellini* is a rollicking comedy with a magnificently unrolled dramatic scene at the end. Highly listenable, even if you don't follow the libretto, but even the libretto is entertaining.

Is the Karajan version of Haydn's *The Seasons* the best record ever made? Or is it the 1962 Klemperer version of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*? I can never quite decide. Karajan might even win, because he and the mighty forces under his command have made a masterpiece out of an oratorio that can sound rather ordinary in the wrong hands. He has made more than was really there. Klemperer, on the other hand, merely (merely!) realizes the potential of what was already in Beethoven's pages. Buy both.

Another version of *The Magic Flute*? Why not? The 1952 Karajan version might be the best, but the Böhm version is one of the most exciting versions of the stereo hi-fi era. If Elaine would let me, I would buy *every* version of *The Magic Flute*.

As you can see, 1988 was the year of releasing the 'Complete' this and that. When I buy this or that 'complete' set, often I find myself baffled. I suspect there are still CDs unplayed in the 'Complete Shostakovich Quartets' set. This hardly matters. It will probably take the rest of my life to come to terms with this craggy, introspective music. Perhaps I should aim to get to know one Shostakovich quartet per year, and hope I last until 2007.

Britten's *Complete Music for String Quartet* is much easier to understand. He wrote only three quartets. The other 'minor' pieces occupy the first CD of the set. This is also dense, introspective music, but it is the product of a confident soul living in green England.

Most people — people with impeccable taste — would have placed the Alban Berg's set of the complete Beethoven string quartets at the top of this little hit parade. Judged as a performance, yes. But I never quite know what to make of the Beethoven quartets. They always baffle me, even the early ones. I can never maintain my concentration on a Beethoven quartet. I respect them, but don't yet like them. Worse, this is the *only* Beethoven music I cannot come to terms with. I guess I'll just have to keep playing the Alban Berg Quartet's performances.

Until the Colin Davis/LSO version of Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique* appeared, I had to be content with substitutes. Beecham's dazzling version is a pretty good substitute; perhaps even a valid alternative approach. Beecham's brass sound in the last movement has not been equalled.

One morning when I should have been working for the Company, I heard the first movement of a choral/orchestral mass. Not just any mass, but a piece of music so sparkling an unusual that it put into the shade most of my favourites. Yet I was sure I had never heard it before. An hour later I was hoping desperately the music would end so that I could go to the toilet — but I was not going to miss a note. The record turned out to be 'Rossini's *Messa da Gloria*'. Why was it not as famous as Rossini's own *Stabat Mater* or the Verdi Requiem? Because (a) it was then, and still is, only released on LP; (b) it was actually constructed by conductor Herbert Handt from Rossini's sketches, and therefore is not counted as a genuine Rossini piece. A great pity. Handt must be very proud of his work; I just hope his version (still the only recorded version) makes it to CD soon.

The other three on the list are glowing new versions of familiar music, and are highly recommended.

Popular music

1. *Crossroads*
   Eric Clapton (Polydor) (4 CDs)
2. *The Singing Detective*
   Various (BBC) (1 CD)
3. *For the Lonely: 18 Greatest Hits*
   Roy Orbison (Rhino) (1 CD)
4. *This Note's for You*
   Neil Young (Reprise) (1 CD)
5. *Hold on to Me*
   Black Sorrows (CBS) (1 CD)
6. *Little Criminals*
   Randy Newman (Warner Bros.) (1 CD)
7. *Open All Night*
   Georgia Satellites (Elektra) (1 CD)
8. *Little Love Affairs*
   Nanci Griffith (MCA) (1 CD)
9. *One Fair Summer Evening*
   Nanci Griffith (MCA) (1 CD)
10. *Land of Dreams*
    Randy Newman (Warner Bros.) (1 CD)
11. *5-4-3-2-1*
    RobEG (Festival) (1 LP)
12. *Melissa Etheridge*
    Melissa Etheridge (Island) (1 CD)

13. *Berlin*
Tony Bennett (Columbia) (1 CD)
14. *Vol. 1*
Travelin' Wilburys (Wilbury) (1 CD)
15. *My Baby Just Cares for Me*
Nina Simone (Charly) (1 CD)
16. *The Walking*
Jane Siberry (Reprise) (1 CD)
17. *The Speckless Sky*
Jane Siberry (Open Air) (1 CD)
18. *Spillane*
John Zorn (Elektra/Nonesuch) (1 LP)
19. *When in Rome*
Penguin Cafe Orchestra EG) (1 CD)
20. *Luxury Liner*
Emmylou Harris (Warner Bros.) (1 CD)

One day I was buying some records at Readings in Carlton (a common experience) when the woman at the counter sounded surprised at the odd mixture of CDs I was buying. Perhaps I was buying some of them for a friend? No, I'm just odd; sorry about that.

I like guitar music (RobEG's early 1960s Australian Hawaiian guitar singles collected on *5-4-3-2-1*; Neil Young's classic rock guitar on *This Note's for You*, Dan Baird's on *Open All Night*, and Waddy Wachtel's on *Melissa Etheridge*; and Eric Clapton, the greatest modern blues guitarist (*Crossroads*)).

I like country-tinged melodious melancholy voices (Roy Orbison; Joe Camilleri; Neil Young; Nanci Griffith; all the Travelin' Wilburys; Jane Siberry; Emmylou Harris).

But I also like great jazz voices (Tony Bennett; Nina Simone), crooners from the 1930s (all the vocalists in *The Singing Detective*), and even experimental jazz (John Zorn, with some help from Albert Collins and the Kronos Quartet).

I wrote down 74 contenders for the Top 10. Many of them came as review copies for my column in *The Melbourne Report*, but most of them were bought. More bankruptcy. 1988 was a year of unexpected discoveries. I would never have known about Jane Siberry's strange mix of experimental and melodious music if I hadn't received *The Walking* as a review copy. Now I'm trying to get hold of all her records.

I can't remember how I discovered Nanci Griffith. I suspect it was by hearing her on 3RRR's 'High in the Saddle' program, which I don't hear very often. Now I'm trying to complete my collection. This is difficult, since *Little Love Affairs*, her first successful record, was also her seventh released. She has an achingly high breathy voice that makes overgrown men like me want to swim oceans to meet the singer. Ah, Nanci!

In 1987, Bob Dylan sold a million copies of his three-CD retrospective *Biograph* set. Record executives looked at the amazing financial statistics of such a coup, and proceeded to box everything in sight. Eric Clapton's *Crossroads* is by far the most successful boxed set of the current crop. Every track is placed in chronological order. The notes list the complete recording details for each track. And there are many songs that have never been heard before (including everything remaining of the uncompleted second Derek and the Dominoes studio recording). Many of the *pop* tracks on this set are redundant, but when Eric sings the blues . . .

An appreciation of the soundtrack of *The Singing Detective* is coloured by the experience of seeing the tv show, but it's a very good selection of 1930s pop music anyway. Brilliantly remastered for CD, the tracks include 'The Teddy Bear's Picnic', the only song whose lyrics I've ever been able to learn, and a version of 'Dem Bones' so clear that it sounds suspiciously like a re-recording from the 1950s.

For awhile it seemed as if the remastered tracks on *For the Lonely* would be the only selection of Roy Orbison's Monument recordings. That was until he died at the end of the 1989, of course. Rhino Records has some brilliant technical people working for them, and somehow they make these tracks sound as if they were recorded in the digital era.

In the annals of pop music, Neil Young will always be remembered as the man who missed the 1980s. People who made the mistake of buying *Trans* and *Everybody's Rockin'* assumed that Neil had gone all sorta funny in the head. They stopped buying his records until 1990's *Ragged Glory*. They missed out on many of Neil Young's best albums. Nobody would play them. Geffen, Neil's new record company, wouldn't promote them. When Neil returned to Reprise in 1988, the radio stations still wouldn't play him, and his old public remained aloof. A pity. *This Note's for You* is a passionate mixture of brassy blues, guitar rock, and some of the loneliest ballads ever recorded.

I can only apologize that there are only two Australian albums in the list. But the list only barely represents the music I heard during 1988. The best Australian group is the Black Sorrows, and *Hold on to Me* was the Australian equivalent of a double million-seller for them. No wonder. To the LP's twelve tracks they added six more tracks for the CD. In eighteen songs they cover almost every type of American-flavoured blues and country rock, using the best musicians in the country. Joe Camilleri, lead singer, co-songwriter and the group's sax player, has waited twenty years for this triumph. Let's hope everybody overseas notices him next.

1989:
Favourite novels

1. *Lolita*
Vladimir Nabokov (1955; Weidenfeld & Nicolson; 319 pp.)
2. *Very Old Money*
Stanley Ellin (1985; Andre Deutsch; 312 pp.)
3. *Visions*
Kevin Brophy (1989; Angus & Robertson; 177 pp.)
4. *Murder Must Advertise*
Dorothy L. Sayers (1933; NEL; 288 pp.)

5. *Lavondyss: Journey to an Unknown Region*
   Robert Holdstock (1988; Gollancz; 367 pp.)
6. *The Beggar Maid: Stories of Flo and Rose*
   Alice Munro (1979; King Penguin; 210 pp.)
7. *City of Glass*
   Paul Auster (1985; Faber & Faber)
8. *Last Notes from Home*
   Frederick Exley (1988; Random House; 397 pp.)

Not a great year for novels. Reading review copies for both *The Melbourne Report* and the *Melbourne Times* was a debilitating process. I read a lot of very ordinary books, and had little opportunity to pick from the shelves some older books that I might have enjoyed more.

But I read *Lolita* precisely because I did rebel against the review-copy regime. *Lolita*'s spine had been mocking me for years. Elaine told me many years ago that it is one of the Great Novels. I must take her advice more often.

In *Lolita*, Nabokov achieves that most difficult of literary stunts: inhabiting the mind of an obsessed figure while delivering an outsider's judgment of that figure. Humbert's obsession with twelve-year-old girls is brought to life; but Nabokov also shows the extreme limitation of that obsession. Humbert's joy in the presence of Lolita becomes our joy; but we also realize how totally unaware she is of his feelings. We also realize, as Kubrick apparently did not (when making the film), that Quilty, Humbert's arch-enemy, looks exactly like Humbert. After all, it would have been within Peter Sellers' abilities to play both Humbert and Quilty.

I've reviewed *Very Old Money* in *SF Commentary*, and *Visions* in *Dreams and False Alarms*.

Very Old Money is the last, and most accomplished novel by Stanley Ellin; much more than a mystery novel, it can also be thought of as an alien-worlds novel about a very rich, well-camouflaged New York family.

Visions is the most interesting Australian novel for some years. Like *Lolita*, it plunges into an obsessive mind, but Brophy's emotional colour is more purple than Nabokov's, and his control of his experiment not quite so dazzling.

I'm not sure now why I liked *Murder Must Advertise* better than some of the other novels on the list. I suppose I enjoyed this Lord Peter Wimsey novel because it tells much about Sayers' own interests and obsessions. As a mystery it's ordinary, but it's an unusual look at the advertising world in London during the 1920s.

I've attempted to review *Lavondyss* several times, and failed. All you can do is plunge into the forest it explores, and trust that you will last the distance. In this world, myths come true; but the people who are our myths stem from grubby, grunty primitive people, not from the pallid water-colour of all those other rotten fantasy books. Rob Holdstock has a most original imagination; I look forward to everything he writes.

The Beggar Maid is not Alice Munro's best book, but it stands re-reading very well. You feel that each Munro book must be autobiographical, but in each book she tells a different story. She has created her own unfolding versions of back-country Ontario; I enjoy returning to them.

I might have room to reprint in this issue my awkward review of *City of Glass*. Ralph Ashbrook talks about Auster's books in the letters section. Auster is America's Gerald Murnane; nowhere near as interesting, but just as baffling in his viewpoint.

I don't think I would have taken *Last Notes from Home* seriously if I had not read Exley's other novels, *A Fan's Notes* and *Pages from a Cold Island*. It's a novel about a raunchy, vulgar bloke who only seems to know other raunchy, vulgar people. The 'Exley' we meet is also a braggart, and by the end of the novel we realize that in a world of liars, he is the most blatant liar of all. Which means that under all this busy, funny detail lies some awareness of life that neither Exley the author nor 'Exley' the character will admit to. Not a likable book, but brilliant.

1989:
Favourite books

1. *Daddy We Hardly Knew You*
   Germaine Greer (1989; Hamish Hamilton; 312 pp.)
2. *Lolita*
   As above.
3. *The Rediscovery of Man*
   Cordwainer Smith (1973; Gollancz; 377 pp.)
4. *Very Old Money*
   As above.
5. *Quest of the Three Worlds*
   Cordwainer Smith (1966; Ace; 174 pp.)
6. *The Instrumentality of Mankind*
   Cordwainer Smith (1979/1988; Gollancz; 238 pp.)
7. *The Shipwreck Company*
   Liam Davison (1989; University of Queensland Press; 125 pp.)
8. *Home Before Dark*
   Susan Cheever (1984; Houghton Mifflin; 243 pp.)
9. *Martin Boyd: A Life*
   Brenda Niall (1988; Melbourne University Press; 268 pp.)
10. *Visions*
    As above.

1989 might not have been a good year for novels, but it was certainly a good year for books. 1989 was the year I re-read Cordwainer Smith. Purrr! But I've already written about him. Most people who received *ASFR* should have seen my 1989 essay on Smith; *TMR* readers would have seen short reviews in 69/70.

I reviewed *Daddy We Hardly Knew You* in *The Melbourne Report*. Maybe I'll have room to reprint that review here. *Daddy We Hardly Knew You* is the best Australian novel for years — but it's not a novel. With passion, grace and

fire (the qualities most conspicuously missing in Australian fiction), Germaine Greer tells of the search for the origins of her father. The result is a mystery story with as many surprise endings as *Witness for the Prosecution*. It makes all the mystery novels I've read seem tame. Most vivid moments include Germaine caught in a dust storm in north-western Queensland, and Germaine motoring across the more mournful parts of the strange island of Tasmania. She provides a remarkable description of the defence of Crete by the Allies during World War II, an episode almost entirely unknown to people who were not there at the time. It's difficult to over-praise this book.

On the surface, the stories in Liam Davison's *The Shipwreck Party* seem exactly the sort of Australian short stories about which I whinge all the time. They are cool, ironical, detached, ambiguous. Everything is seen at a distance. But they are not *realistic* stories. They are genuine fables. With intense economy, they tell inner truths, not outer trivialities. Davison achieves a magical, luminescent quality that I find in very little Australian fiction. He looks right past the surfaces of things. This is only the first collection by Davison; what will his next be like?

Scott Donaldson produced a large biography of John Cheever in 1989, but he says little more in 416 pages than Susan Cheever, the author's daughter, does in the 243 pages of *Home Before Dark*. She is an elegant and sympathetic writer, and one day I hope to track down her first novel, which has appeared overseas. And I must return to the John Cheever stories.

Equally elegant is Brenda Niall's biography *Martin Boyd: A Life*. Martin Boyd is usually counted as second only to Patrick White among mid-twentieth century Australian writers, but his work was barely known outside Britain and Europe until the early 1960s. Boyd wore his cloak of brilliance lightly, his style similar to but slightly less acid than that of Evelyn Waugh. Boyd came from a bunyip aristocratic background, and never had to work. (Not that he ever would, even when he was very poor.) Blessed with free time, he spent ten years teaching himself to write, then sat down for the rest of his life to write, telling in fictional form the tortuous history of his own family. Niall's style matches Boyd's, which means that she does not Tell All, but enough to understand something of the melancholy wit to be found in Boyd's novels.

1989:
Favourite short stories

1. 'Look on My Works'
   Kate Grenville (*Expressway*)
2. 'Who Do You Think You Are?'
   Alice Munro (*The Beggar Maid*)
3. 'The Appearance of Things'
   Jessica Anderson (*Personal Best*)
4. 'American Dreams'
   Peter Carey (*Personal Best*)
5. 'Sister Ships'
   Joan London (*Personal Best*)
6. 'The Failure of the Bay Tree'
   Marion Halligan (*The Hanged Man in the Garden*)
7. 'The Observatory'
   Liam Davison (*The Shipwreck Party*)
8. 'Lessons in Genealogy'
   Liam Davison (*The Shipwreck Party*)
9. 'The Swimmer'
   Liam Davison (*The Shipwreck Party*)
10. 'The Ordinary Human Being Museum'
    Brian Matthews (*Expressway*)
11. 'The Brush Bronzewing'
    James McQueen (*Personal Best*)
12. 'Encore'
    Brian Matthews (*Quickening and Other Stories*)
13. 'The Bodysurfers'
    Robert Drewe (*Personal Best*)
14. 'Spelling'
    Alice Munro (*The Beggar Maid*)
15. 'The Beggar Maid'
    Alice Munro (*The Beggar Maid*)

1989: a very good year for short stories, in Australian literature as well as on my list. The year was dominated by *Expressway*, edited by Helen Daniel (a number of writers used as a stimulus for their stories a painting called *Cahill Expressway* by Jeffrey Smart) and *Personal Best*, edited by Garry Disher (some of Australia's best-known writers choose their favourite story from among their own, and tell why they chose it).

I'm not sure why *Personal Best* is not on my Top Ten Books for the year. Disher's collection introduced me to many authors I had not read before, including Jessica Anderson and Joan London.

It also includes a Gerald Murnane story, 'Precious Bane', which meant little to me when I first read it. Revived in *Personal Best*, its pattern suddenly became apparent to me. Great stuff, but it does not qualify as one of my 'favourite short stories read for the first time during 1989'.

Kate Grenville's 'Look on My Works' is by far the most original and disturbing story in the collection. It has the weight of a great fantasy story, but can hardly be pinned down under a category. Its incantatory rhetoric and delicious sense of unknown perspectives lifts it above all those Australian short stories.

Only slightly less impressive, Jessica Anderson and Joan London dip into lost pasts, and bring them to life.

In 'The Appearance of Things', Anderson tells of a well-off early twentieth-century Australian family in which the sisters are growing up and destroying the bond that had been taken for granted through childhood.

Joan London's 'Sister Ships' is told from the viewpoint of a naive young woman travelling to Europe on a cruise ship. Her 'friend' is determined to capture every man on the ship and destroy any happiness that might occur to the story-teller. There is nothing stodgy in the telling, despite the unlikely material.

'American Dreams' is an early story by Peter Carey. I must read those early collections of his. This is pretty much a straight fantasy story, set in Bacchus Marsh of all places! (Carey came from the Marsh, and I lived there for some years; the town in the story is unnamed, but easily recognized.) The story has echoes of Ray Bradbury as well as Robert Sheckley.

The Hanged Man in the Garden, Marion Halligan's collection of stories, demonstrates most of the things I dislike most in Australian fiction. She appears to believe that the careful observation of superficial details of life, including buildings, clothes and people, rendered in consecutive order, can be called a 'story'. But even she provides a couple of exceptions. 'The Failure of the Bay Tree' is a deft urban horror story about a modern witch, all the more chilling for being set in boring Canberra suburbia.

Brian Matthews is a pillar of Australian literary academia, but his mind turns toward fantasy given half a chance. 'The Ordinary Human Being Museum' reminds me of J. G. Ballard, and could easily fit within the pages of *Interzone*. 'Encore' uses an idea that seems obvious when you get to the end, but I've never seen it used before. It could easily have appeared in *F&SF*.

And 'The Bodysurfers' (or perhaps a novel-length version of the same idea) was turned into a film for television. The short-story version is a vivid mixture of angst and dream images developed from the central image of an Australian surf beach.

1989:
Favourite films

1. *A Canterbury Tale*
   Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (1942)
2. *The Red Shoes*
   Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (1948)
3. *Holiday*
   George Cukor (1938)
4. *The Stars in My Crown*
   Jacques Tourneur (1950)
5. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*
   Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (1942)
6. *Andrei Rublev* (complete version)
   Andrei Tarkovsky (1966)
7. *Lawrence of Arabia* (complete version)
   David Lean (1962)
8. *Tales of Hoffmann*
   Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (1951)
9. *Freud: The Secret Passion*
   John Huston (1962)
10. *Behind Locked Doors*
    Bud Boetticher (1948)
11. *Meet John Doe*
    Frank Capra (1941)
12. *Algiers*
    John Cromwell (1938)
13. *Cuba*
    Richard Lester (1979)
14. *Amadeus*
    Milos Forman (1984)
15. *High Sierra*
    Raoul Walsh (1941)
16. *Ginger and Fred*
    Frederico Fellini (1985)
17. *The Woman in Question*
    Anthony Asquith (1952)
18. *The Sting*
    George Roy Hill (1973)
19. *True Grit*
    Henry Hathaway (1969)
20. *The Amazing Mr Clitterhouse*
    Anatole Litvak (1938)

This is the most competitive films list I've put together. *Andrei Rublev* at No. 6? When some of the best minds in cinema call it the greatest film ever made? But surely, so is *A Canterbury Tale*? And *Lawrence of Arabia*, finally restored to a state of grace?

1989 was the year of remastered, restruck revivals (although some of the films restored and shown overseas, such as *Ben Hur*, have not reached here). It was the year in which I caught up with many of the Powell and Pressburger films I had merely heard about. And it was the year in which Bill Collins was allowed to choose and present a film on late Friday night tv, plus three films on Saturday night tv, as well as two on Sunday afternoon. (I didn't catch any of the Sunday-afternoon films.) A year of film bliss.

The result is that the Top Eight films are nearly equal in my estimation, and those numbered from 9 to 20 could easily be interchanged. For different reasons, they are all Number One films. (Now I'm starting to sound like Bill Collins.)

When I was very young, I was only allowed to see Disney films or British films. (Nothing nasty and *American* in our household, thank you!) (Except Disney, for some reason.) A 'British film' was an ideal rather than a fact. In a British film, every line of dialogue is amusing and cynical rather than outright funny. All the people are quaint and amusing: jolly people you would rather like to invite to tea. A 'British film' has lots of wonderful scenery, much nicer than Australian scenery.

Seen in that light, *A Canterbury Tale* threatens to become the ultimate 'British film'— for the first hour or so. Four different groups of frightfully nice people meet each other in an English village outside Canterbury just after the Battle of Britain. The military officers are stationed there temporarily; other characters seem to be just passing through. All are in limbo, waiting for orders. A wonderful idyll of English summer life is undermined by the threat of a rapist in the village. There seems no pattern to the events.

Only gradually do we realize that each character is a modern Canterbury pilgrim. As each character reaches Canterbury, the meaning of his or her pilgrimage becomes plain to the character and to us. In one of the greatest scenes in cinema, the character played by

Sheila Sims walks around Canterbury looking for a house she knew from before the war. All she sees are flattened city blocks. Where each house or shop once stood, a sign indicates the former occupant. She is baffled. One of the citizens says (and I paraphrase): 'Look at it this way, love. Now the buildings are knocked down, you can see the cathedral.' And sure enough, the camera pans up and shows the cathedral, suddenly become the visible focus of the city.

In that one piece of dialogue, Powell and Pressburger show why World War II is still regarded with so much affection by the British. It was the only event this century to sweep away the old in Britain and allow some building anew.

Better is to come. The character played by Dennis Price had been a musician before he became an army officer during the war. He sneaks into the cathedral. The directors allow their camera to follow his vision, show the entire sweep of the roof as seen from the floor! Be still, my beating heart! And then the same character achieves the end of his pilgrimage when he is allowed to play the organ in Canterbury cathedral. This final scene puts Powell and Pressburger into the Eisenstein class.

I was very lucky when I went to see *The Red Shoes*. I get the impression that a badly faded print has been doing the rounds for some years (*The Orange Shoes*, as Paul Harris put it), but the print I saw at the Astor one rainy Sunday afternoon was a fully restored print. I remember best the directors' radiant use of colour and their meticulous depiction of theatre life in the early 1950s. The story line — that the ballerina must choose between marriage and the theatre, and cannot combine the two — seems silly now. Not so silly is the film's ability to bring the cinematic energy of a Hollywood hoofer film to the world of ballet.

I had seen *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* in a badly cut black-and-white print on television some years ago. During a short-lived Powell and Pressburger revival season, the people at the Astor Theatre imported a restored print of the film, and showed it around the country. (But why not new prints of *Gone to Earth* and *Black Narcissus* as well?) *Colonel Blimp* is almost a catalogue of Great Scenes from British Cinema; greatest of all is Anton Walbrook's monologue to the camera in which he tells why he has become a refugee from Germany during the 1930s. This is propaganda elevated to great drama.

My life's ambition is to see Powell and Pressburger's (and Beecham's) *Tales of Hoffmann* in a restored print. Despite the fact that the colour had almost completed 'pinked out' in the print I saw, enough remains to show that it has perhaps the most ambitious colour design in any film. The singing is good, too, although the soundtrack on the print I saw was wearing badly. Robert Helpmann dominates pro-ceedings as the villain in each of tales; his singing voice is dubbed by Owen Branigan.

Enough about the films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. It's a pity they fell in love with Technicolour, since their black-and-white films have not faded as disastrously as their films in colour. But perhaps the very rich Powell fans, such as Martin Scorsese, who have already paid for some restorations, will finish the rest and exhibit them in Australia.

Only a few directors understood the possibilities of 70-mm film. One was Stanley Kubrick (*2001: A Space Odyssey*). The other two were Andrei Tarkovsky (I've seen *Solaris* and *Andrei Rublev*) and David Lean.

To watch a restored print of *Lawrence of Arabia* six rows from the front is to inhabit the Arabian desert for four hours or so. The desert is the main character of the film, dwarfing all the human characters. It's not clear why Lean was never able to repeat the achievement of *Lawrence;* for example, all I remember from *Dr Zhivago* are giant close-ups of Omar Sharif and Julie Christie, rather than any good photography of ice and snow.

Andrei Rublev's combination of fine-etched black-and-white photography and the gigantic screen is even more effective than Lean's epic. I saw a cut version of the film at the 1973 New York Film Festival (thanks to Barry Gillam) (whatever happened to Barry Gillam?), and it didn't make a lot of sense. With the other bits of the jigsaw restored, *Andrei Rublev* becomes a film I can barely absorb, but which I could watch many times. Many of the best moments occur in the episode showing the casting of the giant bell. The film's highlight is the aerial shot showing the entire process of making the bell.

I can cite plenty of candidates for the most beautiful shot in cinema. One of them comes from *Holiday*, as Katherine Hepburn sweeps down that stately staircase. Everything in this film is affectionate and delightful, from Cary Grant, Katherine Hepburn and Edward Everett

Horton performing cartwheels in the upstairs nursery, to Lew Ayres staging one of the great drunk scenes of cinema, to Henry Daniell attempting to comprehend that any person would prefer peace of mind to seeking wealth. I saw this film again recently at the Astor; the crowd applauded.

As fans of the first *Cat People* know, Jacques Tourneur was one of the subtlest directors ever to work in Hollywood. *The Stars in My Crown* is his masterpiece of back-country Americana, creating an entire way of life with quiet, intense performances by Joe McCrea, Ellen Drew and the young Dean Stockwell, and some of the best black-and-white photography I've seen. This films seems to have been forgotten by everybody except Bill Collins, who showed it one Saturday night.

I don't have room or time to write in detail about the other films on my list, although each of them would merit an essay in itself.

From *Freud: The Secret Passion* I remember best the shadowed face of Montgomery Clift as Freud. (According to John Huston, the director, Clift was already close to dead when he made the film, and behaved like a zombie. On screen, Clift's performance is made great.)

In *Behind Locked Doors*, I remember the squeezed-in passion of its characters, warders and patients, trapped in a mental asylum. The film is effective because it was made as a B-movie; no sentimentality anywhere.

Cuba is a forgotten film. In any other year, it would be high on my Top Ten. It's Richard Lester's best film other than *The Knack*. (Whatever happened to *The Knack*? It's never on tv; never in the cinema. Does any print still exist?) I don't know why he made it, since he must have realized it would never sell in America. He takes us through Battista's last day in Cuba, showing exactly why the corruption and incompetence of the old régime had made the Castro revolution inevitable. The comic misadventures of the non-Cuban characters provide the focus for showing the day the revolution succeeded. Lester never shows Battista, Castro or any of the revolutionaries. Most memorable scene: tanks from the opposing sides thundering around in the cane fields, quite unable to see each other or decide who is winning.

Amadeus, *The Sting* and *True Grit* are films that have become so famous that I've avoided them until now.

Amadeus is very rich fare, as long as one doesn't accept it as a life of Mozart. None of the reviewers had said that much of it is very funny. I remember best the whole long sequence of Mozart's writing the *Requiem*; and Jeffrey Jones, as the Austrian emperor, who upstages the other actors.

The Sting and *True Grit* are absorbing Good Yarns, of a type almost disappeared from American cinema. Each is wonderfully designed and photographed in colour. Kim Darby's performance is the highlight of *True Grit*.

The Woman in Question is an almost unknown film by a very underrated British director, Anthony Asquith. It's the best example I've seen of the multi-version story. A woman in a provinical English town is murdered; before the crime can be solved, the detective must find out what she was like. Everybody has an entirely different view of her.

1989:
Favourite records

Classical

1. Shostakovich: Complete Symphonies
   Gennadi Rozhdestvensky cond. USSR Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra
   (Olympia) (1983–86) (11 CDs)
2. Humperdinck: *Hansel and Gretel*
   Kurt Eichhorn cond. Munich Radio Symphony Orchestra and Tolz Boys Choir
   (Eurodisc) (1971) (2 CDs)
3. Beethoven: *Fidelio*
   Herbert von Karajan cond. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir of the German Opera
   (EMI) (1970) (2 CDs)
4. Shostakovich: Symphony No. 5
   Mariss Jansons cond. Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra
   (EMI) (1987) (1 CD)
5. Vaughan Williams: *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis/Fantasia on Greensleeves/The Lark Ascending/Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'*
   Neville Marriner cond. Academy of St Martin-in-the-Field
   (Argo) (1972) (1 CD)
6. Russo: *Street Music: A Blues Concerto*/Gershwin: *An American in Paris*/Bernstein: *Symphonic Dances from 'West Side Story'*
   Corky Siegel: harmonica and piano
   Seiji Ozawa cond. San Francisco Symphony Orchestra
   (DG) (1973/1977) (1 CD)
7. *Glenn Gould in Stockholm, 1958*
   Glenn Gould: piano
   Georg Ludwig Jochum cond. Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra
   (BIS) (1958) (2 CDs)
8. Bach: *Goldberg Variations*
   Glenn Gould: piano
   (CBS) (1954) (1 CD)
9. Johann and Josef Strauss: *Waltzes and Polkas*
   Herbert von Karajan cond. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra
   (DG) (1967/1971) (1 CD)
10. Bruckner: Symphony No. 7
    Otto Klemperer cond. Philharmonia Orchestra
    (EMI) (1962) (1 CD)

1989 was a bit less expensive than 1988 — in the classical record shops, anyway. There were not quite as many releases of massive sets, although Deutsche Grammophon were so chuffed by the success of their flood of Karajan releases (to celebrate his eightieth birthday)

that they began repackaging everything else in sight.

1989 finally saw the release on CD of the greatest boxed set of them all: Karajan's 1962 recordings of Beethoven's symphonies. My old box of records — my second classical purchase, way back in 1968 — could be replaced at last. For a few months in 1989, you could buy boxed sets of each of Karajan's Beethoven cycles: from each of 1948, 1954, 1962, 1977 and 1982. (I was tempted to buy the 1948 and 1954 sets; I still haven't heard them.)

Among the records I 'bought for the first time' in 1989 were great versions of old favourites, as listed above.

Russians play Russian music best. I already had many of the Svetlanov versions of the Shostakovich symphonies on record, and even battered copies of some of the classic non-Russian versions (the late 1950s version of the Fifth by Rowicki and the Warsaw Symphony; and the famous Mitropoulos Tenth from the early 1950s, a version that might have appeared on CD by now).

But I've never had a complete set of the Shostakovich symphonies, and certainly no set of performances setting as high a standard as Rozhdestvensky's. The fidelity of the performances varies greatly, ranging from a muddy Twelfth to a super-digital version of the Fourteenth that sends the furry beasties belting out of the living room. The USSR Ministry of Culture Orchestra does not merely play with passion; it plays with a suppressed fury that a non-Russian never quite comes to terms with. (You can't just go into a record shop to find this set; these CDs took five months to arrive after I ordered them from Discurio.)

In my pantheon of conductors, Karajan, Klemperer, Walter and Beecham stand at the top. Now that Karajan is as dead as the other three, people keep looking for successors. Neeme Jarvi seems to make one record every working day, but I find many of them bland. (His records with Swedish orchestras are his best.) Abbado, Muti and the rest seemed to have all the life bludgeoned out of them by the digital tape recorder. So far, there is only one possible successor to Karajan: Mariss Jansons. And his version of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 is actually more detailed and passionate than Rozhdestvensky's. I hope that Jansons will complete a Shostakovich cycle, but so far his choice of subjects has been eclectic. (His Prokofiev Fifth narrowly missed out on my 1988 list.)

Many years ago, I had borrowed from Elaine's uncle's collection the vinyl records of Eichhorn's version of *Hansel and Gretel*. Although the conventional wisdom is that Karajan's 1954 version is the touchstone version, I found I liked Eichhorn's better. Also, Eichhorn's makes use of the finest recording techniques, while EMI has made a sloppy job of transferring the old Karajan version to CD.

There is a moment in Eichhorn's version that won me completely: as the children's father enters, he sings a simple wordless refrain. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau makes this refrain a ray of light that illuminates the whole opera. I had never been a Fischer-Dieskau fan before I heard that little refrain. In recent years, his voice has suffered the Frank Sinatra effect—retaining its intelligence and style, but losing much of its natural melody. In 1971, Fischer-Dieskau was at his best, and so are the rest of the cast.

Both Karajan's and Klemperer's 1962 versions of *Fidelio* were released on CD at the same time. On vinyl, Klemperer's has long been one of my favourite records. Karajan's version, new to me, proved to be quite different, but just as stirring as Klemperer's. Klemperer could persuade a whole company to bellow at the tops of their voices, yet sound oddly intimate. Karajan's version, on the other hand, has little intimacy, but has every bit of Beethoven's nobility. If these two versions of one opera can be so different from each other, it's no wonder that maddened spendthrifts collect every version of the great operas.

I realize that Boult has recorded all the 'minor' pieces by Ralph Vaughan Williams, but Marriner and the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Field also make a luscious feast of them on their invaluable English CD of Vaughan Williams favourites. 'Minor' VW seems to me his best.

A few years ago, John Bangsund and Sally Yeoland astonished us over dinner by playing for us a piece that we assumed had been taped by ABC-FM, and could not possibly be available on CD. On this tape, we heard the wail of blues harmonica, a sad and heart-wrenching tune. When least expected, an entire orchestra broke in, carrying the blues tune without any sense of fake popularizing. Later, a blues piano joined the orchestra. A genuine blues concerto: still the only one that's worked convincingly. Much later we discovered that William Russo's *Street Music: A Blues Concerto* is indeed available on CD; that Corky Siegel is both the harmonica player and pianist; and that the project was the idea of Seiji Ozawa, who commissioned Russo and Siegel to put together the piece for the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. The catalogue number is 419-625-2. Don't miss it.

Even before I read the biography of Glenn Gould, I was attracted to his powerful musical personality. When Elaine bought *Glenn Gould in Stockholm, 1958*, we merely realized how much we enjoyed listening to it. We did not know then that this double-CD set represents Gould at his performing peak, not long before he retired from the concert stage. We did not realize then that the Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 2 was Gould's favourite piano concerto. We just knew that we were listening to something special. We did not know that Gould made himself a specialist in the piano works of Berg, Schoenberg and Webern. We merely enjoyed Berg's Piano Sonata No. 1, which finishes this recital. I wonder whether anybody else has released Gould concerts on CD?

Gould's landmark record is, of course, his

first: the 1954 version of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Not only is this a much more feisty version than the one he completed shortly before his death, but it is better recorded. This is for people who enjoy Bach, but also for people who don't think they can stand him.

It was Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* that made me a classical music fan (with a little help from me friends, of course). I can even tell you the exact moment that turned me on to nineteenth-century orchestral music. The bone disappears, and in its place is the space station. Gillespie jaw drops. *The Blue Danube* begins the Waltz of the Spaceships. And there is that moment when the glockenspiel announces the main tune of the waltz. All I need to do to recreate that moment in my life is replay my CD of Karajan's versions of Strauss's *Waltzes and Polkas*. Only *that* version of *The Blue Danube*, of course, since no other version contains that tiny filigree of glockenspiel at just that moment.

Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic perform miracles with the other Strauss warhorses on this CD. Indispensable for appreciators of great orchestral playing.

The same should be said about Klemperer and the Philharmonia. Bruckner can be turgid stuff, but not in these hands. I must buy Klemperer's other Bruckner records sometime.

Popular records

1. *The Singles Collection: The London Years*
   Rolling Stones (Abkco) (3 CDs)
2. *Chuck Berry*
   Chuck Berry (Chess) (3 CDs)
3. *Blue Bayou*
   Roy Orbison (CBS) (1 CD)
4. *New York*
   Lou Reed (RCA) (1 CD)
5. *Oh Mercy*
   Bob Dylan (CBS) (1 CD)
6. *Bluebird*
   Emmylou Harris (Warner Bros.) (1 CD)
7. *Journeyman*
   Eric Clapton (Warner Bros.) (1 CD)
8. *Story Teller*
   Rod Stewart (Warner Bros.) (4 CDs)
9. *Eldorado*
   Neil Young (Reprise) (1 EP)
10. *Live at the Ritz*
    Ron Wood and Bo Diddley (JVC) (1 CD)
11. *Freedom*
    Neil Young (Reprise) (1 CD)
12. *So Tough*
    Johnny O'Keefe (Festival) (8 CDs)
13. *Good Old Boys*
    Randy Newman (Reprise) (1 CD)
14. *Cry Like a Rainstorm, Howl Like the Wind*
    Linda Ronstadt (Warner Bros.) (1 CD)
15. *Jane's Addiction*
    Jane's Addiction (Triple X) (1 LP)
16. *Tin Machine*
    Tin Machine (EMI) (1 CD)
17. *Beau Woes*
    Christine Lavin (Philo) (1 CD)
18. *Only the Lonely*
    Frank Sinatra (Capitol) (1 CD)
19. *In the Wee Small Hours*
    Frank Sinatra (Capitol) (1 CD)
20. *A Black and White Evening*
    Roy Orbison (Virgin) (1 CD)

I came up with a list of thirty-two records that should have been Top Record of the Year. How to separate one from the other?

The Rolling Stones' *Singles Collections* wins because I like the Stones' music better than anybody else's. Also — at last — somebody has remastered the singles correctly so that they regain their original percussive power. Until now the only way to hear the drums clearly on 'We Love You' was to wreck your stylus by playing your little 45 rpm single from 1966. Suddenly, here is the original sound in glorious mono. The same goes for the *thwack* from the beginning of 'Honky Tonk Women'. Until now, it hasn't *thwacked* on LP or CD. Now, there it is, just as it sounded in 1969. In the CD age, miracles do happen.

Chuck Berry, the three-CD set from Chess Records, also provides miracles. Many of the early Berry singles were recorded on 78 rpm, and many of the others sounded as if etched by a stone stylus. Now all the rough edges have been removed, and you can hear a wide selection of Chuck Berry songs, some for the first time.

Blue Bayou, from German CBS, is the best single-CD selection of Roy Orbison's hits. Like the Rhino collection mentioned above (in the Popular Records list for 1988), it represents the finest in digitized remastering technology. The hiss from the old tapes has been removed; the rough edges from the original singles have gone. More miracles. Similar technology has been applied to a wide variety of Orbison repackaged CDs since he died; other worthwhile (and very cheap) purchases include *Best-Loved Standards*, *Our Love Song*, *The Big O*, *Rare Orbison* and *Rare Orbison II*.

Each of the following records should also have been Number One Record of 1989:

- *New York* — for Lou Reed's laconicism stretched to become high passion; for stinging lyrics telling the true story of the underbelly of Reagan's America; for reducing his band back to essentials: two guitars and drums.
- *Oh Mercy* — for showing that Bob Dylan can still write brilliant songs and perform a record that is both low-key and intense; for demonstrating the production skills of Daniel Lanois, who will Go Far.
- *Bluebird* — for presenting Emmylou Harris's best record in some years: hand-picked songs, high harmonies, and a very good band.
- *Journeyman* — for Eric Clapton's best record in sixteen years; for his return to the blues after a wilderness walk through schlock pop; for inviting Robert Cray into his team.
- *Story Teller* — for offering a rich collection from Rod Stewart's great years (late 1960s until 1974); and, on the fourth CD, showing how far Rod returned to form during the 1980s (although you could never tell from listening to the radio).
- *Eldorado* and *Freedom* — for showing that

Neil Young is today by far the greatest rock guitarist, especially when given a long leash by Reprise and allowed to record Very Loud Rock Songs. About half of *Freedom* is filler, but the five tracks on the EP *Eldorado* (available only in Japan and Australia) are as uncompromising and invigorating as anything on *Live Rust*.

• *Live at the Ritz* — for showing that Bo Diddley is as good a blues player as ever; and for showing that Ron Wood still can play the guitar, despite all the evidence to the contrary on Rolling Stones records since 1976. Two people having very good fun on stage; the backing band is good as well.

• *So Tough* — What can I say? In most other years, this would have to be Top Record: eight CDs of all the most important stuff (and much that's trivial) from Johnny O'Keefe, the most important figure in Australian pop music. Why can't Festival provide further packages to document the rest of that era of Australian rock?

• *Good Old Boys* — for providing startling evidence that I should not have ignored Randy Newman all these years. Like *Land of Dreams*, Newman's most recent record, this is a mini-novel about growing up in a foreign land — the American South. It's obvious that Newman loved the South, as well as despising its redneck attitudes. A perfect blend of tender and satirical songs.

• *Cry Like a Rainstorm, Howl Like the Wind* — for showing that we should never write off Linda Ronstadt, no matter what dreadful things she did to those delectable Nelson Riddle song arrangements; for providing Ronstadt's best record since 1976: sweeping arrangements performed on a Hollywood sound stage; a juicy combination of Ronstadt, rock, big choir, big orchestra, and the voice of Aaron Neville. The drumming is good, too.

• *Jane's Addiction* — for turning up the Best New Group That Never Got Better. Jane's Addiction's second and third albums have been loud and forgettable, but this first album (still unavailable on CD) has frenetic versions of 'Sweet Jane' and 'Sympathy for the Devil', plus lots of loony new songs.

• *Tin Machine* — for providing one of the best guitar records of recent years; for providing the best David Bowie record since *The Man Who Sold the World*. The critics and the David Bowie fans hated *Tin Machine*; but usually I hate David Bowie records, so I enjoyed every louder-than-loud guitar note of this one.

• *Beau Woes* — for providing the one CD we inflict on every luckless dinner guest who says 'I've got no preferences; play any record you like'. Christine Lavin is funny and perceptive about yuppy life; also, she's looking for true love. Her 'Ballad of a Ballgame' reminds me of just how much I hated sport at school; 'Biological Time Bomb' makes people squirm or cheer. 'Amoeba Hop' is just funny, like most of the songs.

• *Only the Lonely* and *In the Wee Small Hours* — for providing evidence of just how well one human being can sing, even if he hasn't much of a voice. Sinatra's always been best at ballads, not those dreadful ring-a-ding-ding yelling songs, but he was much better at ballads during the 1950s when Nelson Riddle wrote these exquisite arrangements for him. If you ever get desperately lonely, don't play *Only the Lonely* too late at night.

• And back to Roy Orbison, more or less where I began. *A Black and White Evening* began as a video co-starring Springsteen, Costello, Lang and anybody else who could clamber onto the stage. Transfer the whole lot to CD, and you have Orbison's only live album. Luvverly. I could so easily have named it Best Record of the Year.

1990:
Favourite novels

1. *Toilers of the Sea (Les travailleurs de la mer)*
   Victor Hugo (1866; Collins Classic; 470 pp.)
2. *The Land of Laughs*
   Jonathan Carroll (1980; Legend; 241 pp.)
3. *Puttering About in a Small Land*
   Philip K. Dick (1985; Academy Chicago; 291 pp.)
4. *Four Hundred Billion Stars*
   Paul J. McAuley (1988; Gollancz; 253 pp.)
5. *A Child Across the Sky*
   Jonathan Carroll (1989; Legend; 268 pp.)

1990:
Favourite books

1. *Toilers of the Sea (Les travailleurs de la mer)*
   As above.
2. *Glenn Gould: A Life and Variations*
   Otto Friedrich (1989; Vintage; 441 pp.)
3. *The Order of Things: A life of Joseph Furphy*
   John Barnes (1990; Oxford University Press Australia; 421 pp.)
4. *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick*
   Lawrence Sutin (1989; Harmony; 352 pp.)
5. *Animal Warmth*
   Philip Hodgins (1990; Angus & Robertson; 63 pp.)
6. *The Land of Laughs*
   As above.
7. *Velvet Waters*
   Gerald Murnane (1990; McPhee Gribble; 235 pp.)
8. *Light Years and Dark*
   edited by Michael Bishop (1984; Berkley; 498 pp.)

9. *Mirrors: Redress Novellas*
(1989; Women's Redress Press; 286 pp.)
10. *Puttering About in a Small Land*
As above.
11. *My Lady Tongue and Other Stories*
Lucy Sussex (1990; Heinemann Australia; 280 pp.)
12. *La Mama Poetica*
edited by Mal Morgan (1989; Melbourne University Press; 250 pp.)

1990:
Favourite short stories

1. 'Dinner Party'
Gardner Dozois (*Light Years and Dark*)
2. 'Summer's Lease'
Joe Haldeman (*Light Years and Dark*)
3. 'The Lecturer'
John Kessel (*Light Years and Dark*)
4. 'God and Her Black Sense of Humour'
Lucy Sussex (*My Lady Tongue and Other Stories*)
5. 'Cotters Come No More'
Gerald Murnane (*Velvet Waters*)
6. 'When the Mice Failed to Appear'
Gerald Murnane (*Velvet Waters*)
7. 'Candle House'
Andrea Gawthorne (*Mirrors: Redress Novellas*)
8. 'Over the Edge'
Petrina Smith (*Mirrors: Redress Novellas*)
9. 'Stream System'
Gerald Murnane (*Velvet Waters*)
10. 'Death in Ruby'
Jennifer Rowe (*Dead Witness*)
11. 'The Wanda Lake Murders'
Robert Thurston (*Light Years and Dark*)
12. 'The Woman Who Lost Her Memory'
Rae Sexton (*Mirrors: Redress Novellas*)

The day is short, and night is long, and I seem to have been writing these lists for a week. So I will be lazy and lump together the three literary lists. This is because they are affected by the same problem — dreaded review copies: Compulsory Reading.

When I visited the home of Charlie and Nic Taylor, I saw on the bookshelf a book I had always wanted to read, but had never seen in an uncut English translation: Victor Hugo's *Les travailleurs de la mer (Toilers of the Sea)*. Charlie lent it to me. This is a debt I cannot repay. (And not the only one; Charlie ran out the most recent *SFC* through his Ventura program and laser printer.)

Victor Hugo gave me more enjoyment than all the other listed books and short stories put together. Nineteenth-century French writers had it all over mere twentieth-century writers. Not only could Hugo put the words together so that it was a pleasure to read each sentence, but he knew how to tell a great story of heroism, endurance, romance, sacrifice — you name it, it's here. This book tells the story of a group of people living in the Channel Islands early last century. A rich man loses the boat that is his livelihood; another man offers to find the boat and rescue it in return for the hand of the rich man's daughter. Pretty basic stuff? Not the way Hugo tells it. By the time you finish the book, you have swum every stroke, tied every knot, climbed up every cliff with the hero. You have been with him and triumphed with him. This book's greatest moment sets you floating for days. (I can't tell you to buy it, since it's simply not around. Why doesn't Penguin reprint it in their Penguin Classics series?)

I read *The Land of Laughs* out of duty; I thought I should read some contemporary urban fantasy and review it for *SFC*. The experience was far more enjoyable than I had expected. I'm supposed to be talking about this book at the October Nova Mob meeting, so I won't bother now.

If you've seen a copy of my 1990 Nova Mob talk, 'The Non-SF Novels of Philip K. Dick', you'll have some idea what I thought about *Puttering about in a Small Land*. (Thanks again for the William Atheling Award.) That talk has taken on the status of the five loaves and two fish; I distributed very few copies other than those appearing in ANZAPA and FAPA, but everybody seems to have a copy. I wrote it for Van Ikin's *Science Fiction*. Write to Van (Department of English, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, WA 6009) if you want an official copy.

And I reviewed *Four Hundred Billion Stars* and *My Lady Tongue and Other Stories* in *SF Commentary* 69/70.

The rest of these lists divide neatly between biographies, poetry and short stories.

A biography can only be as interesting as the person being biographed, but it helps also if an interesting person is writing about an interesting person. I would guess that Otto Friedrich is an interesting person. He admires the life and work of Glenn Gould (*Glenn Gould: A Life and Variations*), but has no illusions about him. The book is full of funny stories about Gould, who seems to have had few illusions about himself. He was a genius and an eccentric, and played up both, but knew that genius brought little comfort. Finding it impossible to offer intimate human contact with anybody, occasionally he would offer his friends 'presents', such as playing for them, at three in the morning, the greatest performance ever of some great concerto or sonata. In 1963, Gould could no longer stand public performances, so he retired to his apartment. He is still the only pianist to have made a living solely from his recordings. (But he became *rich* by playing the stock market as maniacally as many people play computer games.) He woke up in the evening, and slept during the day. He took more pills than Philip Dick. Eventually he died of cumulative ill health brought on by his many eccentricities.

Friedrich tells all this with admirable wit and restraint. Gould was delightful company, and totally exasperating. Friedrich shows both sides. He also gives a useful guide to the relative worth of Gould's recordings, and the last 100 pages of the book comprises a

complete listing of Gould's achievements.

Joseph Furphy was not a genius. To all but a small number of admirers, he was a complete failure. John Barnes's *The Order of Things* is a sober, slightly fussy account of the man who wrote *Such Is Life*, the novel that many people now consider the Great Australian Novel. (I don't. That honour goes unequivocally to Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*.) By the time that Furphy died, *Such Is Life*'s sales had slipped to six a year. It received few reviews when it appeared, although the writing of it took twenty years of Furphy's life.

Barnes tells one of those stories that evokes both quiet horror and quiet satisfaction. Furphy failed at *everything* he tried in the practical world. His marriage went sour, and his wife seems not to have talked to him for forty years, but Furphy stuck by her until his death. He lost a block of land because of a legal technicality. He drove a bullock team across the plains of southern New South Wales until a drought killed the bullocks and his livelihood. The most majestic pages in the book tell of this lonely time in Furphy's life, when he took vast numbers of books with him on the road, and used the distance and solitude for self-education.

Returning home broke, Furphy was employed as a labourer in the foundry of his brother, a rich man who had invented the Furphy water wagon. Furphy explored a number of philosophies and religions (the book includes an episode in the history of the Shepparton Church of Christ), became a socialist, began to write for *The Bulletin*, and made contact with a small number of correspondents who remained his only friends. And for twenty years, in a back shed, away from distractions, he wrote the book that became *Such Is Life*. After it was written, it took some years to appear, and was then ignored by most people. The family moved to Western Australia, and Furphy finished his life still labouring.

We now know that Kate Baker, his most fervent admirer, worked for thirty years to establish the current reputation of *Such Is Life*; I hope that Barnes can write her biography as well.

Barnes is one of those few biographers who can make you feel that you have met the person under discussion. *The Order of Things* is an important Australian book.

I used *Divine Invasions* as the basis for my talk 'The Non-Sf Novels of Philip K. Dick'. Now I find that I should read the Gregg Rickman biography as well. Enough to say that *Divine Invasions* is highly entertaining and very useful, especially in the way it shows how events of Dick's life became part of his novels.

Two books of poetry: *Animal Warmth*, Philip Hodgins' third book of poetry, and *La Mama Poetica*, the best of the many poems performed at Carlton's La Mama Theatre during the last twenty years.

I've raved much about Hodgins' work; to me he is the best Australian poet. In the new book, Hodgins escapes the morbid details of his illness, and tells of the cruel yet fascinating quality of Australian rural life.

I hope to run in this issue my *Melbourne Report* review of Mal Morgan's *La Mama Poetica*. Not many famous names in this collection, but a lot of exciting poetry.

For me, 1990 was the Year of the Short Story. (It certainly wasn't the Year of the Novel; on the 'Favourite Novels' list I was struggling for a Top Five.)

The two best single-author collections were Gerald Murnane's (*Velvet Waters*) and Lucy Sussex's (*My Lady Tongue and Other Stories*). Neither are well represented in my 'Favourite short stories' list because I had already read the best stories in each collection.

In the case of *Velvet Waters*, I had read the best stories and failed to appreciate them. Murnane's fiction demands second readings; in this way I felt the full impact of 'Land Deal' and 'Precious Bane'. 'Cotters Come No More', 'When the Mice Failed to Appear', and 'Stream System' are my favourites from among the stories I was reading for the first time.

I had read most of the stories in *My Lady Tongue* already. I still don't much like the title story, although a second reading gave me some clues to it. 'God and Her Black Sense of Humour' would have been as famous as Connie Willis's 'All My Darling Daughters' if it had appeared in a major American source. (I keep telling Lucy to send her stories overseas; she ought to be as famous as Greg Egan by now.)

Alan Stewart lent me *Light Years and Dark*. Justin Ackroyd of Slow Glass Books has never been able to find a copy for me; no other copies have turned up here. It's the best original fiction anthology since the *Orbit 14* and *Orbit 15*, yet Bishop was never able to find a hardback publisher or gain a second printing. The reprint stories include many of my favourites, especially Chris Priest's 'An Infinite Summer'. The new stories include the pieces I list: Gardner Dozois' 'Dinner Party', the ultimate statement about the effect of the Vietnam War on American society; Joe Haldeman's 'Summer's Lease', a perfect little parable about human destiny; and John Kessel's 'The Lecturer', which simply tells of a lecturer who stands in a city square and lectures — forever.

Lucy Sussex lent me *Mirrors: Redress Novellas* because it is packaged so aggressively as a feminist book that I might never have picked it up.

I wanted to read *Mirrors* because it includes a story by Petrina Smith, who was a member of the 1975 Writers Workshop. Petrina's story is a superb piece that tells of a group of people who separately enter a fantasy world in which there is a reversal of their usual relationships with each other. In the fantasy landscape, a ship crosses a desert, and the relationship

between these people unravels.

The other stories in the collection are also novellas. One of the others is genre science fiction, and all of them have the subjective intensity that was so enjoyable in *New Worlds* in the late 1960s. 'Candle House' and 'The Woman Who Lost Her Memory' are rich tales of people pushed together, yet trying to disentangle themselves from fierce relationships. *Mirrors* is a major Australian book that one day might be read and reviewed adequately.

1990:
Favourite films

1. *Wings of Desire (Himmel über Berlin)*
   Wim Wenders (1988)
2. *Grand Hotel*
   Edmund Goulding (1932)
3. *Edge of Darkness*
   Lewis Milestone (1943)
4. *The Private Life of Henry VIII*
   Alexander Korda (1933)
5. *Sunset Boulevard*
   Billy Wilder (1950)
6. *The Spy in Black*
   Michael Powell (1939)
7. *Carbine Williams*
   Richard Thorpe (1952)
8. *Perfect Strangers*
   Alexander Korda (1945)
9. *The Narrow Margin*
   Richard Fleischer (1952)
10. *True Stories*
    David Byrne (1986)
11. *White Heat*
    Raoul Walsh (1949)
12. *Brazil*
    Terry Gilliam (1985)

Jan Epstein, the film reviewer of *The Melbourne Report*, said that *Wings of Desire* is the best film of the last twenty years. I'm inclined to agree with her. I went to the Astor to see it because Jim Schembri said on *Film Buffs' Forecast* that it was the *worst* film he had ever seen. Good on yer, Jim.

Jim Schembri probably didn't like *Wings of Desire* because it was a bit slow. Or because it aches with an love of people and sympathy for their unachievable aspirations. Or something.

Wings of Desire is the story of two 'angels' — immortals who have been trudging the earth since the beginning, observing the antics of humanity but invisible to them and unable to help them. In divided Berlin (the Wall is always somewhere in sight), one of them falls in love with a mortal woman, a circus trapeze artist. He can make contact with her only by becoming mortal. He does this. In a wonderful piece of whimsy, he discovers that throughout history 'angels' have been 'crossing over' from immortality to mortality, and that Peter Falk (playing Peter Falk making a film in Berlin) is one of them.

It's not just the fantasy premise that makes *Wings of Desire* great. It's the sheer accumulation of filmed detail about Berlin and its people. It's the density of observation, the wonderfully packed photographic images. It's the slow realization that the film's real theme is the division of Germany, and Germans' endless ache for the fall of the wall. (Nice to see Wenders so prophetic.)

But I love *Wings of Desire* because it is romantic to the nth degree. Romanticism is a quality that is badly needed at this end of the century.

What can I say about the rest of these films? Not much. I've run out of puff.

But I can say that in any other year *Grand Hotel* would have been Top Film. Filmed in Berlin in 1932, it is the only American film that looks entirely European. It's the original of all those films in which unlikely people trip over each other's story-lines in some exotic location. Garbo, Fairbanks and two Barrymores are in this one, but it works like one of the great German expressionist silent movies. Everything is wildly exaggerated and shot in balletic black-and-white photography. It doesn't matter what *happens* in a film like this; you just want to watch the movement of gorgeous figures across a screen.

Edge of Darkness is not the great tele-series of a few years ago, but the story of the resistance by a Norwegian village to the Nazi takeover during World War II. Milestone's film, with much hand-held camerawork and adventurous use of lighting, looks very modern, especially in this new print that Bill Collins showed.

I had heard much about *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, mainly in Callow's biography of Laughton. The film is much jollier than Callow's description. The dialogue is very funny and often risqué, everybody seems to be having a great time (even the doomed wives seem to be having a great time), and Laughton leaps right out of the frame.

The Astor Theatre imported a new print of *Sunset Boulevard*. Such luxury! From the wonderful device of having a dead man narrate the film, to Gloria Swanson's extravagant costumes, to Erich von Stroheim's clipped admission of a life of quiet desperation, the film tells truths that seem to reach deeper than Hollywood revelations. Not that I cared; the black-and-white photography is so sumptuous that I didn't worry too much about the strange events.

Michael Powell made films both before and after he entered into the 'Archers' partnership with Emeric Pressburger. *The Spy in Black* is his crisp suspense film from 1939. By then, Powell was already a better film-maker than any Briton other than Hitchcock. To high cinematic values he adds a tightly written script that spins out surprises and memorable scenes right to the end.

American film-makers seem to have stopped making movies like *Carbine Williams* — quiet pieces of restrained acting and efficient scripts. James Stewart plays Williams, a mechanical genius who is falsely accused of murder and sent to a Southern jail. In one of his best performances, Wendell Corey plays the

tough jailer who eventually comes to respect his recalcitrant prisoner. When sentenced to solitary confinement, Williams saves himself from insanity by inventing, without benefit of pen and paper, the carbine rifle. It seems unlikely that this has much to do with history, but it makes a good yarn.

Perfect Strangers is an unlikely British film (because it was made a Czech, Alexander Korda) about the effect war had on marriages. Early in the film we are shown a satire of the archetypal cold English marriage. Comes the war and both partners enter the armed forces. They loosen up a lot. The don't see each other for four years. The woman of the pair discovers many freedoms she had never imagined. So does her husband. *Perfect Strangers* is an early feminist film that celebrates personal freedom and, in particular, relishes the way in which World War II destroyed many of the worst aspects of the old Britain.

True Stories shows what happens when David Byrne meets The Strange Inhabitants of a Small Texan Town. 'Meets'? No, like a tourist guide he introduces us to them. The film has the straightfaced comic *chutzpah* of a Talking Heads video; it's not at all clear what Byrne means to say about Texas, but shows us some funny denizens of this strange environment. John Goodman is brilliant as the big guy who finally meets and marries the girl of his dreams.

The Narrow Margin and *White Heat* are the great B movies on my list.

In 1952, Richard Fleischer made his name with *The Narrow Margin*. It's so fast, compact, well written and and well acted that it makes all current Hollywood films look amateurish.

Among my friends, *Brazil* is their Favourite Movie of the 1980s. Well, it's the film that comes up most often in conversations. I'm not sure that I've seen it properly yet. Roger and Geoff showed it to us on video, but people keep telling me how effective it is on the wide screen. The violent approach to action is a bit hard to take some times, but the creation of an alternative Britain and the freshness of imagery and dialogue make this a memorable epic. Like an Orson Welles film (the most obvious comparison), *Brazil* must be seen a few more times before I can make any judgements.

1990:
Favourite records:
Classical
Popular

I'm pooped, finished, wiped off the keyboard. I should be proofreading an Australian history textbook. I haven't yet typeset the main articles for this issue. My Favourite Music lists will have to wait until next issue.

Until then:

- **Favourite classical record** was Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* performed by Nikolaus Harnoncourt directing the Mozart Orchestra, Soloists and Choir of the Zurich Opera House (Teldec) (1985) (2 CDs). Sparkling champagne music (vintage 1779), performed live in 3D sound. Harnoncourt is a genius, or he hires a very good recording engineer.
- **Favourite popular record:** Right at the top of my list will be **The Byrds**, all four CDs of classic performances, remixed, digitally remastered, twenty-four new tracks, including the original Gram Parsons vocals from *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*.

And to show that I don't live permanently in the 1960s, my second-favourite on the list will be *Songs for Drella*, John Cale and Lou Reed's tribute to Andy Warhol. (But aren't they all refugees from the sixties?)

PHONOGRAPH WITH MULTIPLE EARPIECE

LEE HARDING

You'll recall that I recently acquired a CD player. I probably wouldn't have done so if the player hadn't been a superseded model and dirt cheap (like all my audio gear), and if I hadn't discovered JB's Camberwell store — which is situated conveniently on my way to the city. Unlike the branch at Keilor, Camberwell is a hole-in-the-wall operation with a manic commitment reminiscent of the early days of Space Age Books. I've forged a fruitful friendship with Sam, the enthusiastic young guy managing the store. He'll get in just about any classical record I want and charge a lot less than city stores. Their top price for current CDs is only $22.99, sets are a whopping lot cheaper than anywhere else, and Philips and DG mid-price labels sell for $15.99. But generally I hunt through the deletions, which they have in abundance. I've rarely paid more than $17.99 for a CD and certainly couldn't afford top-price discs from other outlets.

(9 May 1988)

* When I met Lee at the end of 1988, he was adding to his CD collection at a remarkable rate. He put me on to a lot of interesting CDs. Then I didn't hear from him again until Easter this year. He's still a CD fan, but I don't think he made himself bankrupt in the way I nearly did in 1988. I agree with Lee about JB Hi Fi. Given that CDs sold in Australia are about twice the price they should be, JB's pricing

policy is a relief. The East Keilor store is even more of a hole in the wall than the Camberwell store, and therefore even more crowded and exciting. The classical section at Camberwell seems small until you realize what's there, including many CDs that appear nowhere else in Melbourne. An addict like me begins to shake and quiver when he enters JB. *

KEN LAKE
(again)

I am *not* yet sold on CDs. I started buying classical LPs back in 1985 (previously I had a thousand-odd traditional jazz/etc. collection, most of which I have now sold to help pay for my classical fixes); by June 1986 I had 400 LPs, by August 500, February 1987, 700, by May, 800, and by November, 1000, and I now have over 1100 LPs. During that period Jan (my wife) bought some cassettes for her Walkman (I hate cassettes), and since CDs started to make their mark, we had to think very seriously about them. And we came to these conclusions:

1 They are ludicrously costly, and we refuse to shell out that sort of money while the only cheap CDs are the cruddy reissue compilations we do *not* want. My collection is almost entirely single-composer LPs so that I can file and record them properly in order, and play what I want easily.
2 The catalogue so far makes it unimpressive as a source for a collection, there being far too many potboilers and composers who do not interest us, and very little that's not already on LP, whether in-catalogue or deleted, and available sooner or later secondhand.
3 We do not want to duplicate what we have and like simply for the sake of going over to CD. We'll run any CD collection in tandem as, to be honest, we *prefer* LPs. That needs more explanation, so here goes.
4 LPs are long-lasting and unbreakable, packaged with notes that can be easily read, well protected by sleeves, slim and easily handled, and fit closely into standard shelving we have had built in vast numbers; when filed, they stay where they are, holding each other up.
5 CDs are packed in flimsy breakable plastic cases that take up an inordinate amount of room, crack and shatter easily, do not hold notes of any size and readability, slip and slide all over the damn place, and for safety have to be fitted into costly racks that waste space by having dead space between each one.
6 Cassettes have to be wound on or back, you can't see the surface, the containers are fiddly and slide around and need wasteful racks; like CDs they cannot be filed in simple shelving and they look a bloody mess all over the place, where the serried ranks of LPs make like furniture.
7 CDs are artificially small because of a unilateral decision by the manufacturers to standardize to the four-inch size. Had they shown enough sense, the players would not have had sunken play areas, so they could have issued six-inch and even twelve-inch CDs in time to take far longer periods of music.
8 Initially the cost of a CD player was enormous; now I gather we may be able to buy an add-on player to fit our current JVC midi radio/cassette/LP player centre, which makes more sense, but obviously we are not going to do this until we find that 'it pays to buy CDs'. For us, that will *not* come until:

(a) CDs are priced at LP levels.
(b) There is enough otherwise unavailable single-composer stuff in the CD catalogue to fill obvious gaps in our collection.

Like most people we have likes and dislikes, and Jan's are not always mine, so we have a three-part collection comprising what Jan likes, what I like, and what we both like:

1 Mid- and late baroque suits us both.
2 Early classical period suits us both, though Jan dislikes Beethoven, and I hate vocal music while Jan is getting into opera.
3 I have a big thing about harpsichords, and we both have about fortepianos, as 'authentic' instruments.
4 We both share a liking for the piano music of Schumann, Chopin and, to some extent, Schubert, but only Jan likes Liszt and later.
5 Jan has a big thing about Mahler (and indeed has nearly fifty recordings of his symphonies and vocal music amounting to 70 LPs, no small achievement in the time), and is looking to complete the Horenstein recordings sometime.

I have been collecting as they appear the complete works of Scarlatti recorded by Gilbert Rowland (a friend) on his own Keyboard label — but having reached LP No. 24, he now tells me he will have to go over to CDs as 'I can't find a manufacturer who will press LPs for me reliably anymore' — which I find appalling!

So what do I discover from the latest issue of *Gramophone* magazine? That Scott Ross has jumped from A to Z in one smooth move and recorded all 550 sonatas on one series, available on Erato/RCA as a boxed set . . . of CDs! Only! This is apparently a limited edition and scarce, and I have asked a major London dealer to get them for me. After

haggling over the price and beating him down just a leetle, I shall be, assuming he gets them, paying him (or rather, Jan will) 200 pounds for the 34 discs — about six pounds per CD that, to me, is sensible. Here we'll be with a 34-CD set that I *can't play*.

(20 June 1988)

PHILLIP BIRD
Flat 1, 25 Hampton Road, Essendon,
Victoria 3040

Like you, I've been hit by the magic of CD! Eighteen months ago I started flogging my 1200 LPs, in a replacement program, switching totally to compact discs. Some I could sell at work for $5 or so at a time, but most went down the drain to the cheapskates at second-hand record stores. It's generally painful having some spotty prat tell me an old favourite 'isn't worth anything'. Some are generous, especially Missing Link.

If it hadn't been for JB Hi Fi, I probably wouldn't have got started. At the East Keilor store in particular, that $10 bin is always worth watching. The first three CDs I bought were from that pile. I think the owner is sometimes unaware of what he's throwing out.

* He's quite aware of what he's doing. In an article in *The Age*, he said that he constantly discounts records below their wholesale price in order to draw people into the store and keep them there. Suckers like you, Lee Harding, and Elaine and me. (See Lee Harding's letter and my reply to it.) *

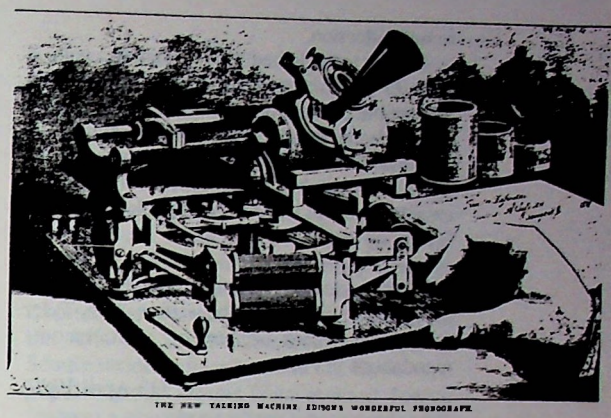
Since CDs are so expensive, any money from LP sales or trade-ins is very quickly absorbed, so the number of CDs hardly matches the lifetime collection of LPs. I certainly discovered which records I had to have, and which were unnecessary in the long run.

Have you had any problems with the varying dynamic range of some brands? Although most appear to match the range available on LP, several, including those from BIS and Chandos have an expanded range of volume. The crescendos can lift the roof.

* They can also destroy speakers. The increased dynamic range from our CD player destroyed our speakers within a few months. The replacement Silcron speakers we bought from John Bangsund and Sally Yeoland don't seem too worried by CD sound. *

The highlights of my CD purchases so far (not in order) are:

* Trouvères (medieval songs) performed by Sequentia (a superb early music group)



THE NEW TALKING MACHINE EDISON'S WONDERFUL PHONOGRAPH

* Mahler: Ninth Symphony (Bruno Walter)
* Mahler: Second Symphony (Simon Rattle)
* Mahler: Fourth Symphony (George Szell)
* Mahler: Sixth Symphony (Von Karajan)
* Messaien: *Turangalila* (Simon Rattle)
* Brahms: Clarinet Quintet and Trio (Allegri Quartet)
* Vaughan Williams: *A Sea Symphony* (Boult)
* Bartok: *Divertimento and Music for Strings, Percussion and Celeste* (Menuhin)
* Prokofiev: Sixth Symphony (Neeme Jarvi)
* J. C. Bach: Sextets and Quintets (Trevor Pinnock, etc.).

* I haven't heard the Walter version of Mahler's Ninth. My favourite is the mighty last live performance given by Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic a few years ago. This was named by one *Gramophone* reviewer as the 'record of the decade'. The string playing of the slow movement has probably destroyed more loud speakers than any other work or recording. Some of my favourite Mahler performances have not yet appeared on CD: Abravanel's Third (I've ordered it, but it hasn't arrived yet), Kletzki's Fourth, Barbirolli's Sixth. Sinopoli's Fifth and Tennstedt's Seventh and Eighth actually make sense of these difficult works, and give the kind of pleasure I don't find in other versions of them. I now have four versions of the Second, and Bruno Walter's 1962 recording still beats the others, both as a performance and as a recording. I've only ever heard one fully satisfactory First: a very old scratchy recording by Arthur (Marcel?) Bernhardt (Bernard?). Obviously part of the collection of an MBS announcer (not from the station's own library), it was played once, and no details given. It is not listed in any reference books we have. *

CD recording started conservatively, but now companies are getting more adventurous. The music of Eduard Tubin, E. J. Moeran, Rubbra, Ives and Samuel Barber now feature

in my collection.

Having established the collection, now I have to watch for sales. $30 each per CD is impossible on a continuing basis. The shadow of the Mastercard debt lurks all the time.

Secondhand CDs are not to be sneezed at. They are much more robust than LPs or cassettes, so that a CD in reasonable condition is as good as new.

Just before closing, I must mention how glad I am to have discovered the writers Ann Tyler and Alice Munro because of your recommendations in *TMR*.

(13 April 1989)

* I'm not sure which gives me the greater warm runny feeling inside — knowing that yet another CD addict, indebted to the eyeballs, has been born; or that *TMR* led to the discovery of the novels of Ann Tyler and Alice Munro. *

DOUG BARBOUR
11655–72nd Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 0B9, Canada

TMR 11/121/13: CDs: I can say how happy I am with all the classic jazz that has been reissued in the format. I am a more or less careful collector, so I don't spend beyond my means, but I have been gathering a lot of great stuff. It is exciting to get alternate takes on some of the great early albums of the 1950s and 1960s, as in Sonny Rollins' *Way Out West*, for example. I've already replaced or added to my collection of Mingus, Miles and Monk, and the incredible three-CD set of the Blanton/Webster Duke Ellington orchestra, 1940–42, demonstrates just how great a composer Ellington was. I've also found a continual source of pleasure in the many albums of Gil Evans, and then there are all the great Blue Note rereleases, plus some great work by artists still making music today.

At the same time, there are some marvellous classical recordings, although I'm more choosey about those. I tend to love chamber music the best, and would heartily recommend such sets as the Beethoven String Quartets by the Smetana Quartet on Denon, Mstislav Rostropovich and Sviatoslav Richter playing Beethoven's Sonatas for Piano and Cello on Philips, the Amadeus Quartet, with additions, doing Brahms's Quintets and Sextets on Deutsche Grammophon, and the Borodin Trio playing his piano trios on Chandos, plus the LaSalle Quartet's huge set of string quartets from the Second Viennese School on DG. Among the many other records, one that I always love listening to is the English String Orchestra playing Vaughan Williams's Works for String Orchestra on Nimbus. But that's the problem: one could just go on and on listing.

(16 May 1989)

* That's what Roger Weddall accuses me of doing as well. I have the complete Beethoven String Quartets played by the Alban Berg Quartet, and one day I hope to get to know them. *

Dreams and False Alarms 5: I was interested in your terse and bitter denunciations of most New Age music. I don't listen to much of it myself, but I enjoy one group that records on Windham Hill: Montreux, or the Darol Anger/Barbara Higbie Quintet, wich plays avant bluegrass, or neojazzbluegrass: whatever you want to call it. For one thing, they swing. For another, they write a lot of great melodies.

I won't go on about the great jazz on CD that I have been tracking down. You seem to have that one blind spot as you build up a huge collection of everything else.

* Stop right there. I don't have blind spots, Doug. Everybody knows that. I merely bankrupt myself buying CDs. Since I can't bankrupt myself any further, I can't afford to buy jazz on CD, let alone folk music or any of the other types of music I listen to. *

We had a recent Jazz City Festival. I was really blown away by the concert by Carla Bley and Steve Swallow: just piano and electric bass, but Bley is such an artful dodger of a composer and arranger, they are so obviously together (if they aren't lovers, they should be on the basis of the erotic energy flowing between them as they play), and she has a wonderfully quirky sense of humour in her compositions.

The real reason why I am writing is the paragraph on Robert B. Parker. First, I agree with John Baxter: read James Crumley as well. In fact, read him first, as he is really special. And if you like hardboiled detective novels, you will enjoy Parker's Spenser novels — or at least the first five or six of them. But be careful. Parker is a classic example of a writer destroyed by success — not that *his* life is ruined, but his writing has been. Now his books are instant bestsellers, but the recent string of hits is simply not in the same ball park with the early books.

Two other American writers who have created interesting detectives and whose work hasn't slid into utter banality yet are Jonathan Valin and Stephen Greenleaf; as well, there are at least two writers who have created interesting female detectives: Sue Grafton, whose Kinsey Millhone is an independent sort

of feminist, and whose books are appearing alphabeticized (i.e. *A Is for Alibi*, etc., up to E in paperback so far). To me even better is Sara Paretsky, whose V. I. (Vic) Warshawski detects in Chicago.

(24 July 1989)

JANICE MURRAY
PO Box 75684, Seattle, Washington 98125, USA

As I was driving home from work last week I noticed the marquee of a nightclub advertising the upcoming concerts of Robin Trower, Leon Russell, Chick Corea and B. B. King.

Last weekend I helped my mother clean out her basement, and spent a lot of time looking through her collection of 78s, remembering the Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman songs I loved as a kid.

Then today the radio informed me of the death of one of my two childhood role models, Sarah Vaughan, at the age of sixty-six. (The other role model was Katherine Hepburn.)

These incidents made me think about how important music is in my life, and also served to remind me to write about *The Metaphysical Review* 14.

I was very pleased to see so many kinds of music represented. I particularly enjoyed the articles on Roy Orbison and Fairport Convention. I tend to think of 'rockabilly' and folk as somewhat distant relatives of my favourite form, jazz.

I wonder how prevalent jazz is in Australia. Are there jazz clubs down under? Do albums by Grover Washington Jr and David Sanborn sell well? What about Anita Baker?

It is probably well known that there are certain geographical pockets of jazz in the States, but I would imagine that Seattle usually isn't uttered in the same breath as Chicago, New Orleans and St Louis. It should be.

I grew up in Seattle long after Ray Charles hit it big and moved away. (I was born in 1956.)

Quincy Jones was still here, establishing Seattle as a fertile training ground while becoming known as one of the best horn players ever. I can't say I'm terribly excited about Mr Jones's latest project, producing rap music albums, but that probably shows how my taste in music has failed to evolve lately. Oh, well . . . after being forced to give up playing the horn for medical reasons Mr Jones has been very successful in producing, including the movie *The Color Purple*, as well as recording.

Jazz music in the 1960s and 1970s pretty much took a back seat to rock and roll nationwide, and Seattle responded with such diverse talent as Merrilee Rush, Jimi Hendrix and Heart, but the new resurgence of jazz has brought to our attention the magnificent talent of Kenny Gorelick (marketed as Kenny G.), traditional scat singer Diane Schurr and blues guitarist Robert Cray.

There are about a dozen local artists of whom I am fond, who will probably never be internationally famous. Joni Metcalf and Overton Berry teach jazz at Cornish School for the Arts. (A very small school; not a lot of Seattle residents have heard of it.). However, a popular group, Deems Tsutakawa and Sensei, features a saxophone player who is every bit as good as Kenny G. (in fact, they played together in high school). If in the future you see the name Dean Mochisuki on a CD or marquee, remember where you saw it first.

My own appreciation of jazz comes from the fact that my mother was a dance instructor when I was young. I was probably the only five-year-old on the block who knew the difference between a rhumba and a samba. Mother was only a little bit behind the times. In the early 1960s her favourite 'progressive' group was the Dave Brubeck Quartet. I remember getting in trouble in the sixth grade because the teacher thought I was being smart-mouthed when I said that the three Bs were Bach, Beethoven and Brubeck. Sounded right to me.

So, if you ever want an article on jazz, blues or other related art forms I hope you will keep me in mind.

(5 April 1990)

* Consider yourself invited. I can see the makings of another Music Issue shuffling over the horizon already.

Australian jazz? There's enough to warrant the publication of Bruce Johnson's *The Oxford Companion to Australian Jazz*, and much else appeared recently. Graeme Bell has been the leader of Australian jazz since the 1940s, but he is known for playing New Orleans-style traditional jazz. Don Burrows established himself as the leader of the more progressive jazz people during the 1950s and 1960s. James Morrison, the Sydney trumpeter, seems to be doing well overseas (his band accompanies B. B. King on his latest concert tour and album), and there are plenty of other well-known names in Australian jazz. But if you actually go into an Australian record store and attempt to buy a CD by an Australian jazz performer — even a CD that you've heard on the radio — you can have great difficulties. The situation seems to be better than it was in the 1960s and 1970s, but not much. *

(Continued on Page 100)

I don't know much more about **ROBERT JAMES MAPSON** than the bits and pieces he has related in his letters over year. Western Australian fans report that he is a shy person who sometimes turns up at fan gatherings; other evidence suggests that he is simply too busy with a wide range of intellectual, environmental and political activities ever to turn up at fan gatherings.

• ***FEATURE LETTER***

Robert James Mapson: Favourites 1987–1990

ROBERT JAMES MAPSON
PO Box 7087, Cloisters Square, Perth,
Western Australia 6000

A recommendation: After all that, and having mentioned above that I no longer feel that existentialist works are necessarily the pinnacle of literary achievement, I now recommend such a book. In your list for 1975 you place Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince. Southern Mail/Night Flight* is available in Penguin, but *Wind, Sand and Stars/Flight to Arras* have recently been republished by Picador. They are amazingly perceptive works. I guess an early aviator, without all those fancy dials and instruments, had nothing else to do than ponder. *Flight to Arras* (behind which Polonius was killed, of course) is a condemnatory work about the nature of war.

Another recommendation: David Langford mentions 'the first kitchen-sink fantasy to explore the metaphysical ramifications of household dust'. Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* contains recurrent images of dust seeping into everything. Part murder mystery, part time-travel novel (à la Garner's *Red Shift*), it is actually an insidious, discomforting tale of horror and witchcraft.

Leaving Home (Faber & Faber) consists of thirty-six Lake Wobegon stories, most from the final year of the series, and highly enjoyable it is. I look forward to further, non-Wobegon books from Keillor, but also fervently hope that one day we'll have a multi-volume edition of *all* the Lake Wobegon stories.

* I found it annoying that the versions of the stories in *Leaving Home* delete the asides that actually made the stories come alive on radio. I have many of the asides as well as the stories because fortunately I taped many of the Lake Wobegon sections when *Prairie Home Companion* was repeated on radio. *

I notice in your book lists *Cosmicomics* by Italo Calvino. Have you read his *Marcovaldo*? [*brg* Not yet.*] If Garrison had been born in Italy and called Keillorini, this is the sort of book he would have written. In parts deeply serious, always funny, always observant, it acts well as a companion to *Lake Wobegon Days*. I am fast coming to the conclusion that the only good book is a funny book. Calvino and Keillor manage to say so much about humanity, without belabouring the point or simply depressing us. I should mention Philip Dick as well — another humorous author. Wit and wryness, rather than depression and existentialism, will save the world.

Take the opening paragraph of the first tale in *Marcovaldo*:

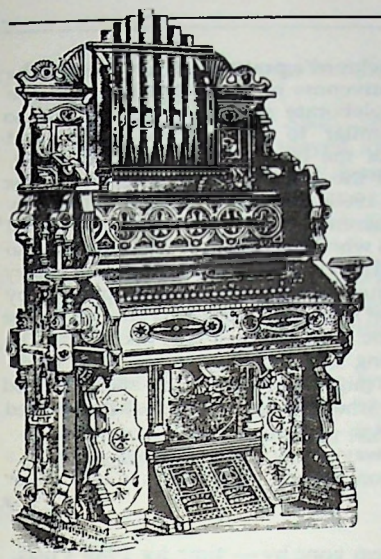
> The wind, coming to the city from far away, brings its unusual gifts, noticed by only a few sensitive souls, such as hay fever victims, who sneeze at the pollen from flowers of other lands.

Or, at the start of another story:

> The city of cats and the city of men exist one inside the other, but they are not the same city. Few cats recall the time when there was no distinction. . . . But for several generations now domestic felines have been prisoners of an uninhabitable city: the streets are uninterruptedly overrun by the mortal traffic of cat-crushing automobiles. . . .

(6 June 1988)

I recently had the misfortune to lose an item from my post box as I opened it, a stray gust of wind catching the said object (which looked like a letter in the brief moment I saw it), and shooting it back into the post office. I notified



a staff member nearby, and was thereafter treated to ten minutes of watching postal staff wandering about in a bemused state, peering under trolleys and, eventually, manhandling a large grey filing cabinet back from the wall to see if my letter had slipped underneath. Amongst the accumulation of dust, three letters were discoverd (none of them mine) including one that looked suspiciously like a cheque or a bill. One wonders about our postal system at times. (And yes, I did get my letter back eventually.)

* No wonder I have some enormous gaps in the Mail Received in 1988. Chris Priest (see later in this issue) definitely sent me lots of mail that didn't reach me then; perhaps other people are wondering why I cut them from the mailing list. *

On to some eclectic, non-all-encompassing lists:

CDs

(This is being typed to the accompaniment of King Crimson's *Red*, played *loud* — whatever happened to the intellectual heavy metal bands?)

Daniel Barenboim's recording on DG of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas 31 and 32 is magnificent, at least in the thirty-second, the one I purchased it for. I heard a fragment of this on the radio, the bit where Beethoven dances about hypnotically with syncopation, and tried to identify the composer. I could only think of names like Joplin, Stravinsky or Schoenberg. It was indeed a shock to discover the actual composer. Imagine if, instead of dying in his fifties, Beethoven had lived to be eight or ninety . . . the New Viennnese School would have been entirely unnecessary!

John Dowland's *Lachrimae*, in the performance by the Consort of Musicke, has recently been reissued on l'Oiseau-Lyre CD. Dowland, the supreme master of courtly melancholy, is one of my favourite composers. This recording, though not preferred by the critics, is nonethleless an intense performance of an intense work.

I've also been catching up on the Tom Waits catalogue on CD, including the double LP *Nighthawks at the Diner*, now available on one mid-priced CD. Tom Waits is the master storyteller, but refrains from simple moralizing about the down-and-outers he sings of.

I bought the DG highlights CD of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, conducted by Karl Böhm. Magnificent stuff, but surely there's sufficient market to release the complete recording of the opera?

Films

I don't see many films at the cinema (two so far in 1989), but can thoroughly recommend *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, directed by Terry Gilliam (he of the rather dodgy *Jabberwocky*, and the far superior *Brazil* and *Time Bandits*). This is a great film, about themes such as fantasy and reality, and the relative importance of either. As a character says at one stage, 'I don't want to die yet; I want to see the end of the story' (but of course we all die before the end of the story). Gilliam must be one of the few directors around with a truly visual imagination; he takes commonplace symbols (the Sea of Tranquillity; a balloon) and creates amazing images, filled with a huge potential of emotive energy. He is also a great artist of terror (remember the bovine-skulled spectres in *Time Bandits*?). There is a scene early in *Munchausen* where the Baron, apparently dead, lies in the shadows and a huge winged figure, either an eagle or a vulture, looms on his chest, performing some action obscured by the shadows, but possibly feeding on his body. When this figure looms up and we recognize it for what it is, the effect in the cinema is overwhelming. I prefer Gilliam's work to that of the other members of the Monty Python team; where they have been basically destructive in their comedy, I see Gilliam as basically constructive.

Books

I've been reading lots of ancient Greek literature lately. One must start somewhere in one's purview of Western literature/civilization, and the Greeks are an appropriate place.

One that isn't is James Gleick's *Chaos*. This is a non-fiction work about the relatively new science of non-linear dynamics, or chaos. Surprisingly enough, it's very readable, doesn't require any higher maths, and affects us all.

Anything by Plato would figure on my list, probably *Phaedrus* and *Protagoras* first.

I picked up on sale Robert Giroux's *The Book Known as Q*, about Shakespeare's sonnets. This was fascinating reading, and includes a facsimile of the first edition of the sonnets (well worth $1.99, I thought).

One book that figures high in my list is Gillian Mears' *Ride a Cock Horse* (Pascoe Publishing). This is the author's first book, and consists of loosely linked short stories about those great imponderables of life, growing up and dreams. I won't say it's an Australian *Lake Wobegon Days* only because the direction it takes is so much more full of pain and despair, but the initial impulses in either case are similar. 'Jason Granger's baby sister was stranger even than Sidney had been. . . . Jason reckoned that the first noises to come out of his little sister's mouth had been a sigh, then a soft *oh dear* and a softer sigh still.' 'His mouth filled with the metallic taste of despair and longing. It was like sucking on a halfpenny that had passed through a hundred hands.' 'He tried to remember his mother as she must have been but her outline was vague and always confined by the doorways of the weeping green weatherboard house.' 'Children are the best story tellers. Only children or old people can imagine the worlds behind cracks on the wall.'

(4 June 1989)

* Without having read Mears, I would say from these fragments that she represents exactly the type of Australian writer most *unlike* Keillor. He avoids pompous, vague phrases like 'metallic taste of despair and longing' or generalizations like 'Children are the best story tellers'. I don't think Australia has any writer as precise, funny and surprising as Keillor.

Robert didn't find much of interest in *TMR* 14, preferring discussion of Dowland, Byrd and Bach to that of the performers and composers covered in that issue. He was distressed by Russell Blackford's praise of Heavy Metal: 'The unimaginativeness of it, the bombast and the need for elaborate special effects are all so terribly similar to the martial music and displays of the Nazis.' You miss the point, Robert. Of the Rolling Stones, their manager said in the 1960s that 'on no account must they appeal to parents'. Now it's the kids who loved the Stones who have become the parents who loathe the Heavy Metal groups. And the Heavy Metal groups are so universally loathed by parents that they are guaranteed success for the next decade or so. Too bad that the *music* is so pussyfooting and safe that it has little to do with the mighty blues bands, such as Led Zeppelin, who are supposed to have started Heavy Metal.

One way you can always start a conversation around our place is to talk about cats: *

Another year gone by — time for 1989's lists:

CDs

* Beethoven: Piano Sonatas Nos. 31 and 32: Daniel Barenboim (DG)
  Mr Barenboim is surpassed by Emil Gilels in No. 31 but gives a magnificent rendition of No. 32 (which Gilels didn't record, alas) in which Herr von Beethoven invents jazz.
* Dowland: *Lachrimae*: Consort of Musicke (l'Oiseau-Lyre)
  Dowland: *First Booke of Songes*: Consort of Musicke (l'Oiseau-Lyre)
  At last the complete edition of Dowland's works has begun to appear on CD.
* Tom Waits: *Raindogs* (Island)
  Ol' Gravelmouth surrounded by exotic beats and instruments. Far too imaginative lyrically and musically ever to be popular.
* Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No. 1: Emil Gilels, with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta (CBS Masterworks)
  Scrappy orchestral playing, and not a brilliant recording, but when Gilels lets rip, who cares?
* *Tibetan Buddhism: Chants of Gyuto* (Elektra/Nonesuch)
  An indication of just how the CD range has expanded. Overtone chanting and gongs — music for meditation.
* Rachmaninov: *Vespers*: Leningrad M. I. Glinka Choir, conducted by Vladislav Chernushenko (Melodiya)
  A Russian mass sung by Russian voices — the sublimity of the Orthodox seen through the eyes of the composer.

* Satie: *Early Piano Works, Vol. 3*: Reinhert de Leeuw (Philips)
Obscure but enjoyable Satie. The critics complained that this is played too slowly, but Satie's music seems to demand these spaces to support itself.
* Borodin: Quartets Nos. 1 and 2: Borodin Quartet (EMI)
Words fail to convey the beauty of this music and the beauty of the playing and the recording (originally made by Melodiya).
* Nico: *Desert Shore* (Reprise)
Quintessential Nico, brooding lyrics and straining harmonium. But only 30 minutes — they could have put another Nico album on the same disc.

Books

* Diana Poulton: *John Dowland*
This is *the* biography of Phil Dick's favourite composer, the Elizabethan melancholic master.
* Milorad Pavic: *Dictionary of the Khazars*
A strange book, basically about the nature of dreams, and published in two different versions.
* Philip Dick: *Confessions of a Crap Artist*
An obvious choice.
* James Gleick: *Chaos*
A marvellously easy-to-read introduction to the new science of Chaos (or non-linear dynamics, as the scientists prefer to term it). My Non-Fiction Book of the Year.
* Antoine de Saint-Exupery: *Wartime Writings*
The piercing intellect and humanity of the man make this collection of notes, letters, lectures and essays of interest to people other than the completist.
* Gillian Mears: *Ride a Cock Horse*
I've already raved about this in an earlier letter. My Australian Book of the Year.
* Italo Calvino: *The Literature Machine*
A collection of essays by the Best Most Recently Dead Writer — see *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* for his idea of categorizing books.
* *The New Penguin Shakespeare*
All right, so this is more like 39 books than one, but I couldn't decide which one to single out.
* David Erdman: *The Illuminated Blake*
Erdman's exhaustive survey of William Blake's illuminated works, and his survey of all those little insects, figures and vines that work their way through Blake's texts.
* Garrison Keillor: *We Are Still Married*
Another obvious choice — Best Book by a Living Writer.

(5 February 1990)

I now have two copies of Keillor's *We Are Still Married*, since for some strange reason the contents of the hardback and the paperback differ. (They are from the same publisher, not US and UK editions.) For those interested, the hardback contains 'The Meaning of Life' and 'The Old Shower Stall'. The paperback omits these, but adds the following: 'How the Savings and Loans Were Saved', 'Country Golf', 'Autograph', 'Viral', 'Snowstorm' and 'London'. Presumably it's a ploy to sell more copies of the book.

(28 March 1991)

* You are probably the first person to notice the switch. I will, of course, buy the paperback as well as the hardback. *

1990 lists

Books (in no particular order)

* Alan Garner: *Fairytales of Gold*
* John Clare: *The Parish*
An unjustly neglected poet, although he seems to be gaining his due attention now. Clare is often labelled a 'bucolic' poet, but he was much more in the visionary, liberationist vein of Blake. *The Parish* is his satirical poem about the characters in a typical English village.
* Keith Bosley (translator): *The Kalevala*
* Philip Dick: *Beyond Lies the Wub*
* Stephen Hawking: *A Brief History of Time*
* Ted Hughes: *Crow*
* Wilhelm and Baynes (translators): *I Ching*
The version referred to Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*
* Marc Rombault: *Paul Delvaux*
An impressive collection of this surrealist's work — he of the naked ladies, clothed gentlemen and skeletons wandering about by night.
* Peter Levi: *The Life and Times of William Shakespeare*
Unashamedly of the school that Will Wobbleweapon did exist, and did write the plays attributed to him; this is a near-perfect example of the biographer's art.

CDs

* Hildegard von Bingen: *Spiritual Songs/Sequentia*
* Jacques Brel: Volumes 1 to 10
  Okay, so I cheated and snuck in nine extra discs. On Barclay, this collection seems to include everything Brel ever recorded.
* Haydn: *The Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross*: Delme String Quartet (Hyperion)
  It's fascinating just how captivating eight consecutive slow movements can be.
* Sibelius: *The Tempest*: Neeme Jarvi conducts Göthenburg Symphony Orchestra (Bis)
* Nielsen: Symphonies 1 and 6: Herbert Blomstedt conducts San Francisco Symphony Orchestra (Decca)
  Nielsen's first and last symphonies, from a full-blooded and accomplished romantic piece to one that includes a witty and satirical theme and variations.
* Einsturzende Neubauten: *Haus der Luge* = Collapsing New Buildings: *House of Lies* (Some Bizarre)
  Industrial left-wing sounds from Germany.
* Bruckner: Symphonies No. 0 and 00: USSR Ministry of Culture Symphony Orchestra conducted by Gennadi Rozhdestvensky (Le Chant du Monde)
  Rough recordings, but they seem to suit Bruckner's early attempts at mastering the symphonic form.
* J. S. Bach: *The Art of Fugue*: Davitt Moroney (Harmonia Mundi)
  What would a listing to Top Ten discs be without at least one performance of Bach? A *Gramophone* Award-winning two-record set.
* Beethoven: *Fidelio*: conducted by Bernard Haitink (Philips)
  Wonderful sound in Beethoven's only opera.

(28 March 1991)

✳ No wonder people have trouble with *my* lists; I haven't heard any of those versions. ✳

(I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS
Continued from Page 95)

PATRICK McGUIRE
(again)

In the northern-hemisphere-summer of 1987, I moved back from Germany. It's been a busy and sometimes stressful time since. I've bought a fairly pleasant two-level condo, the first home I've ever owned, and am slowly getting organized here — slowly enough that it seems incredible I've been moved in as long as I have. I didn't find the transition back to American life quite as bad as many people do, although I'll take Garmisch's climate, clouds included, over that of Maryland any time. I am indeed actually watching at least some of all those videotapes of German and Austrian TV that I brought back with me. I finally broke down and ordered a CD player (hasn't arrived yet), though I wonder if I'll hear much difference on my fairly modest and far-from-new stereo system. Living between Baltimore and Washington, I get fairly decent reception of four FM stations devoted mostly to classical music which makes for a big improvement over one-and-a-half in Garmisch. More often than not, four stations gives you enough chance of finding something listen-to-able that the need to resort to recordings is not large. (Saturday nights sometimes all are given to — *bleah!* — opera.)

(29 May 1989)

✳ You and Mark Linneman — both opera-haters — now live in the same country. No doubt you'll meet at a convention somewhere, and Linneman can tell you just how dreadful the Cochrane–Gillespie taste in music really is.

Patrick also contributed a long discussion about Elaine's article on the 'Narnia' books. A good letter — but he doesn't actually say anything that has not been said by earlier contributors. ✳

DIANE FOX
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At the 1985 Worldcon we noticed that the people from Minotaur Books made an effort to catch the eye of the buyer by setting up their shop to look flamboyant and colourful. The big plaster minotaur was most effective. However, I noticed that Space Age had a much better stock, especially the oddities and hard-to-gets. One of Merv's biggest problems when he was running Space Age might have been inefficiency — I noticed this a lot dealing with Space Age by mail. I notice that these days Merv Binns Books seems to be far more effective in dealing with mail orders than Space Age was.

We don't have a CD player, but we do have a videocassette player. This would eat money, except that not many videotapes are available at a reasonable price ($25 or under) and worth seeing several times. I seldom buy a video unless I've seen the show before, or have

heard enough about it to make it worth buying. At the moment I have trouble supporting my book habit.

Your list of restaurants [in *TMR* 7/8] made me feel hungry. The Blue Mountains area is full of eateries at every level of price and complexity, from impressive-looking restaurants (few of which we've visited so far) to cafés (where we usually eat out) to el cheapo takeaways. There's a pie-and-peas place that is good for a quick snack on Saturday mornings, and a Lebanese-food shop that sell takeaway flat-bread rolls with meat, tabouli, homous and all the trimmings. The worst takeaway food in the Mountains is served at the local K-Mart. It is almost worthy of being recorded in Vogon verse.

You mention seeing the stars when visiting Mt Buffalo Chalet. My first decent look at stars since childhood was at John's parents' place, which is out in the country. The only artificial light (except from the house itself) is from a far-distant highway and from a fairly distant transmitter tower. The ground is flat and the sky looks huge. Moonlit nights are impressive, but moonless nights even more so. I always had thought the name Milky Way was poetic licence. Not so — it's a white glittering stream that seems to flow across the sky. I got some good views of that disappointment, Halley's Comet, at my in-laws' place.

Looking at my list of recently read books, I find that I still prefer non-realism, for want of a better word: sf and fantasy in roughly equal amounts, a few horror books, a few based on mythology, several with mediaeval settings (most of them with legendary characters), and the remainder with elements of 'magic realism': larger-than-life characters or flamboyant events. I also come across great novels with bad prose style (your example was *An American Tragedy*), books that succeed by sheer power and inventiveness. Stephen King's books are examples of this. His style is not really bad; it's just average thriller/horror story. Stephen Donaldson has an awfully overblown style that has been much satirized. H. P. Lovecraft has been accused of having an overdone style, but he was writing for a market that encouraged excess. Have you ever read *A Voyage to Arcturus* by David Lindsay? I found it unputdownable, but everyone who mentions it says the style is awful. William Hope Hodgson's *The Nightland* is famous for its sombre imagery and unforgettable strangeness, and notorious for its imitation of seventeenth-century prose — whereas actual seventeenth-century prose is direct and clear.

* *A Voyage to Arcturus* is one of the worst books I've finished reading. *

I've read a collection of Patricia Highsmith's short stories, which were brilliant. They are mainly about human quirks or vices, but a couple of stories wouldn't have been out of place in *Weird Tales* — but told in a neat, dry ironic style. Both are about snails. Giant, carnivorous ones in one story, and normal-sized but overly prolific ones in another.

We don't get to films much these days. I've been watching TV a lot more. The ABC has recently shown full-length movies, with no advertisements, on Sunday night. The first was *Shadowlands*, about the life of C. S. Lewis. It was very good. The ABC also showed Peter Watkins' *The War Game*, as well as *Amadeus* and *Bliss*. I bought a video of *Bliss*, and recommend it. It's an odd mixture of love story, horror and Monty Pythonish humour. It said a lot more about social corruption than most films I've seen. *The Purple Rose of Cairo* was also on television recently: very good Woody Allen jokes intermingled with downbeat realism. The unexpected downer ending rather rocked me, yet it wasn't surprising. The main character made the wrong choice because she was the sort of person who continually made wrong choices. She was brainwashed into doing what she thought she was *supposed* to do. It's a very subversive film, making an uncomfortable and subtly feminist point about women making self-destructive choices because they have been trained to do so.

Franz Rottensteiner appears in my mind not so much as the scathing critic of Ursula Le Guin as the author of a lavishly illustrated and very unsatisfactory history of sf, about which most people who bought it felt very resentful. They felt they had been ripped off. I no longer have my copy, and usually I hang onto science-fictional reference books. *The Science Fiction Book* concentrated on a few favourites, and treated the rest of the field dismissively. The general tone was a mixture of eccentricity, arrogance and dishonest advertising. The chorus of groans that arose whenever it was shown or mentioned are still fresh in my memory.

Yvonne Rousseau's account of the girl in the cape at Aussiecon II reminds me of how lonely conventions can be — bad if one doesn't known anyone well, and even worse if one does know people but they would rather spend their time with others. It makes you feel paranoid, as if people are deliberately avoiding you — as in fact they might well be.

Recently I bought a semi-punk record by a group called the Pogues. It's called *Rum Sodomy and the Lash*. It doesn't refer to kinky sexual behaviour, but is a sarcastic comment by Winston Churchill on the traditions of the

British Navy. The Pogues play Irish folk punk, a weird combination that works very well — rough-edged sarcastic voices, music with an energetic beat, and lyrics that are a mixture of modern and traditional, with a good deal of satire and outrage.

Of your sf and fantasy books reviewed briefly, I've read *Claw of the Conciliator*, *Sword of the Lictor* and *Citadel of the Autarch* as soon as I received them. After reading *Peace* I realized that the Severian books are not Wolfe's finest, though they are good. *Peace* is a great deal better. *Free Live Free* is like a Thorne Smith book with deeper and darker undertones — modern civilization as having gone down the wrong path.

Your dream issue, *TMR* 9: I suspect that the third negative response to your dream-telling — that 'dreams are not very nice' — was the honest one. Popularizations of Freudian psychology are to blame for this attitude; that is, that all dream imagery is not only sexual but sexual in an indecent way, hinting of perversions or of potential perverse behaviour. Few people who hold such a belief would want to say something they feel could be read as 'I want to have it off with my mother' or worse. It's not lack of imagination here, but a very practical fear of the hostile imaginations of others — the old fear of being 'found out'.

Why the curious passivity in dreams? Because they deal, in most cases, with what has happened. We are not *doing* anything; we are being told a story.

TMR 10: Nineteenth-century French novels seem to have lasted better than those from Britain because the French authors were more forthright and less reticent — in other words, less Victorian. Not only did nineteenth-century English novelists leave things out, but they seemed to find it hard to *think* about taboo matters. When they dealt with non-taboo subjects, they were as good as the French. Dickens, for example, seemed to be entirely at ease with middle-aged female characters, but found it hard to write about attractive teenage girls or young women, the typical 'heroine' types.

(21 August 1987 — 1 December 1987)

GABRIEL McCANN
39 Cox Avenue, Bondi Beach, NSW 2026

One small complaint about *TMR* is that I'd prefer to see more small reviews of a variety of books and fewer long reviews of something like the Gor series. I don't think it's necessary to waste five pages explaining why something like the Gor series is not worth reading. After reading the review of the Narnia books I don't think I'll bother reading them either, but will go back to *The Lord of the Rings*.

* It's good fun demolishing silly books — it's much easier to think of good sarcastic aphorisms than to defend favourite books. Short reviews? Well, I hope you find the current format of *SF Commentary* to your taste. *

The part I liked best about No. 11/12/13 (apart from all the letters) is your twenty-year list of Top Ten Novels. My favourite year would have to be 1975, with *Ulysses*, *The Little Prince*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Galactic Pot Healer* in the one twelve-month period. I tend to agree with most of your Dick favourites, but where is *Martian Time Slip*? And what about the VALIS books? (Even if you don't like *VALIS* and *The Divine Invasion*, I think *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* is one of the best books he wrote.) *A Maze of Death* was the first Dick novel I ever read — in one sitting. The second Dick novel I read was *VALIS*, which probably explains why I like it so much.

(23 May 1988)

* I read *Martian Time-Slip* first as the serial *All We Marsmen* in 1963. Usually I don't reprint my Favourite Novels list for 1963 and 1964 since those lists now seem very peculiar to me. As you can see from *SFC* 69/70 and its accompanying article about Dick's non-sf novels, *Martian Time-Slip* remains one of my favourite Dick novels. *

Of all the posthumous Dick mainstream novels I've read so far, the first and my favourite has been *In Milton Lumky Territory*. After *The Broken Bubble*, only 'Gather Yourselves Together' (1953–54) and 'Voices from the Street' (1952–53) remain to be published. The best chronology for all Dick's 52 novels is an appendix in Paul Williams' *Only Apparently Real* (for example, *The Cosmic Puppets* was written before *Solar Lottery*).

How do you ever find the time to do thirty book reviews, hold down a steady job and produce *TMR*, not to mention all the correspondence that accompanies it? You must be typing or scribbling almost as much as Phil Dick during his last ten years. Now that his fiction is almost exhausted for publication, there's going to be a Collected Letters, not to mention the never-ending Exegesis.

* I'm a lazy person. I fake most of the *SFC* book reviews by talking about books I've

(Continued on Page 110)

DAVE PIPER is, I think, the only original *SF Commentary* subscriber, way back in 1969, still to be receiving my magazines. It's good to know that he can still wrote great classic Dave Piper letters. For many years he did not attend conventions or meet other fans, but in 1973 I visited him anyway. We had a good time yarning and drinking; and I met his and Cath's small daughters. I don't think his daughters or I would recognize each other now.

• ***FEATURE LETTER***

Dave Piper: Amber thoughts from Ruislip

Clare's at college which, secretly, I have a sneaking feeling of pride and pleasure over. I wanted her to go straight from school but she wanted to go to work. Six months of that soon changed her mind and she decided she'd rather go to college. Sara's OK, totally different from Clare (so different in fact that I'm beginning to seriously think about that randy bloody milkman we had 18 years ago!) (or twenty years ago, come to that!) — yep, that's the ages of the those two little tots what you dangled on your knee all those years ago . . . Keerist!, Bruce, next Feb. 28 I'll be 50. *Fifty!* An' I feel . . . no more than 73! Under a new provision of the GSF I could, actually and without prior approval from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, retire on an actuarily reduced pension. A bleeding *pension*, no less. Hang about . . . I'm gonna have to have a lay down and study the un-employed!

Yes, I did meet a lot of Aussie fans at the 1987 world convention. And I enjoyed it. I'm almost getting to be a regular old hand at conventions — two in 49 years. Getting a bit regular, I fear!

I was musing over your lists in *TMR* 11/12/13 — there's a hellofalot I haven't *heard* of, let alone read — and I started wondering how I'd, now, decide on a Top 10. I tried to list those novels that, if stuck on a desert island or transported to Melbourne, would I rather *not* be without. And, to tell the truth, Bruce, there aren't ten novels (or twelve as in your Top Ten) that would make the list at the expense of other books. So I thought it might be of interest to you to list the twelve books, just books, whose absence on my desert island would probably cause me very early (although, given my present dotage, not *that* early, I guess) dementia. In no particular order:

* *Point of Departure*
* *An Indian Summer*
* *What a Way to Run the Tribe*
* *Touch of the Sun*
  (all by the late James Cameron)

* *Catch-22* (Joseph Heller)

* *The Sound of Surprise*
* *Dinosaurs in the Morning*
* *Such Sweet Thunder*
  (all by Whitney Balliett)

* *Earth Abides* (George R. Stewart)

* *The Demolished Man*
* *Tiger! Tiger!*
  (both by Alfred Bester)

* *Fancies and Goodnights* (John Collier)

I'm in trouble now, of course. Can I make it a Baker's Dozen plus One? I'm sure you won't mind. After all, it's only a game, right?

* *A Mirror for Observers* (Edgar Pangborn)
* *The Complete John Bangsund*
  (which I will publish, privately, on vellum in leather and gold just as soon as I win the Pools, despite the fact that the Ol' Bugger doesn't, and hasn't for years, sent me any of his stuff!!!)

So there you go — 7 non-fiction, 4 sf, 1 mainstream novel, 1 collection of fantasy/comic shorts, and 1 unclassifiable. There are a few others that I would like to add, but this list gives a reasonable idea of my particular likes — at least as of now.

The Balliett books (in case you've never heard of him) are collections of pieces from *The New Yorker*, where he's the jazz critic. His writing invariably gives me the feeling that I can *almost* hear the music.

Cameron is, as you might have guessed, my favourite writer, and there is another book by him that I might slip in instead of one of the sf items: *Cameron in the Guardian*. Ten, fifteen, twenty years ago I guess, any list I'd made up on this basis would have been almost totally sf, except for the Heller book, and I suppose it's a measure of my changing taste (or lack of it) and my headlong lurch towards the Senior Citizens' Bus Pass that non-fiction, let alone non-sf fiction, features so prominently now in any Essentials list I might produce.

It's a similar story on the music front. When I was a jazz fan in my early to late teens, for about twenty years all my interest was in rock and roll and John Sebastian, and any list of favourite albums would have been almost totally rock and roll. Now I doubt whether even one would get into the eight for my Desert Island Discs. Such a list would start like this:

* *Grand Encounter* (John Lewis)
* *The Atomic Mr Basie*
* *Jazz Giants '56* (Lester Young *et al.*)
* *Milestones* (Miles Davis)
* *Sidney Bechet Jazz Classics*

an' all like that.

Scheherezade: Symphonic Suite, Op. 35 by Rimsky Korsakov and *Polovtsian Dances from Prince Igor* by Borodin. There you go — that/those is/are the sum total of:

* Classical music wot I *know* I like
* Classical music wot I *have* a version of
* Classical music wot I *remember* I like
* Classical music titles/composers wot I can *almost* type from memory.

The above para is a beautifully succinct (In My Humble Opinion) reason for the total lack of comment from this quarter on 99 per cent of 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends' this time.

It's Friday. I wrapped m'self around 'the good stuff' a little bit earlier than I anticipated (I had one of those days today . . . at least, that's *my* excuse) and have just watched the first game in the European (football) Championships: West Germany v. Italy. Score was one all. On balance, I reckon the Italians were the better team, bit more entertaining and with a bit more flair than the Germans. Still, it wasn't a bad game, which is a fairly unusual thing for the first game in a major championship these days. I mean . . . it was reasonably open and although a draw it wasn't a *boring* draw. The brandy helped, though, I have to admit. Cath and Sara are next door, at Trevor and Jean's, watching a video of a wedding. Nuff sed! I'd sooner be in here, slurping, and waffling away to some geezer over the other side of the world. And listening to Sir Charles Thompson. No, not the Chairman of Aims for Industry or the Confederation of British Industry, but a pianist.

Whilst on the subject of football (which I'm sure you find absolutely fascinating) there's a guy who plays for Holland (who just happen to be in England's group) (and therefore my cheers will be schizophrenic, to say the least) named, at least I *think* that is his name, Ruud Gullitt. And he is something else. Great player. One of my saddest footballing memories is of the '74 Dutch team *not* winning the World Cup — I was cheering as loud as I could — as I reckon they were the most completely entertaining national side since the late 50s/early 60s Brazilian team. Anyway, this Gullitt bloke is, or at least will be, the greatest player currently operating. Course, I could have been a marvellous and successful football player . . . but (shrug) . . . I didn't bother. Bit the same as Brain Surgery . . . I just couldn't be bothered. So it goes.

Mmmm . . . how about a list of my favourite players? Might be of interest to you (?) Might not, of course, but then who's typing this load of old crap, me or thee? Favourite Five:

* Duncan Edwards (Manchester United & England)
* George Best (Man. United and Northern Ireland)
* Peter Osgood (Chelsea and England)
* Dennis Law (Man. United and Scotland)
* Jimmy Greaves (Chelsea and England).

I haven't included any players I haven't seen a *lot* of (mainly non-UK, of course), but Gullitt, Cruyff, Pele, Rivelino and Socrates would probably figure in a Top Ten.

You mentioned *Edge of Darkness* was great. But At This Very Moment the BBC is repeating Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detec-*

tive and *that* (IMHO) is the greatest thing that's been on telly for Gawdknows how many years. I think I understood it, and understand it (although I'm open to suggestions/corrections . . . very 'umble is me, doncha know?) — Potter seems to be saying that everybody is, rather than a linear sorta straight line onward-going entity, a product of his/her real life, fantasy life, memories, and pretend life. Which seems to me a very profound and correct diagnosis of 'The Condition'. More like a mosaic than a postcard. At least I *think* that's what he's saying. And if it is, I agree, and Applaud and Cheer unreservedly.

I've run out of Original Dry Ginger . . . Migawd . . . Disaster has strucken! You may laugh (!) . . . I can't think of anything else, I'm afraid . . . Films is out, as I very seldom visit the cinema (I'm scared of getting propositioned by the usherette, or usher!) and the last film I saw (that I can remember and that I liked) was *Round Midnight*, which I saw at a Sunday morning preview in the company of a bunch of other jazz fans, and which I liked tremendously. Trying, just from memory, to list a Top Ten:

* *We're No Angels* (Bogart, Ustinov, Ray)
* *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*
* *2001: A Space Odyssey*
* *The Wizard of Oz*
* *ET*
  (Everybody, but *everybody*, was smiling or grinning when they came outa the cinema when I saw that . . . Speilberg is a bright boy!)
* The drunk scene in *High Society*
* *The African Queen*
* *Some Like it Hot*
* *Papillon*
* *The Magnificent Seven*

I'd probably substitute at least half of these if:

(a) I could remember
(b) If I could see the keys!

I'm now into Side 3 of a Thompson album and I have no idea how many glasses of amber (the *real* amber) liquid, so please excuse me.

(10 June 1988)

Big news this time is that Clare got her BA with First Class Honours. Talk about being proud parents . . . took about a month for me and Cath to come down. There were only two First Class honours at her university, and indeed (indeed!) only the first First Class since 1986! Course she still hasn't got a job — sign of the times — and is still living here buckshee . . . but she/we have hopes.

Sara's got herself *another* job (that makes two) working in a pub. What the hell the kid does with her money is, a little, beyond me. But. It's her life.

Me and Cath? Oh, we're OK. Our twenty-sixth wedding anniversary was last week. Big spender that I am, I took her to see Victoria Wood (do you get her tv programs over there?) but before that I splurged on a burger!

I'm still spending me money on old jazz records, old sf magazines, new Levis, and a sub to Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club. Yeah, at last I joined an actual club. It's only £2 for members on Monday through Thursdays. So far I've seen Flora Purim, Loose Tubes, Chico Freeman and Steve Williamson.

We had a great summer. Eli Cohen came one day, Frank Denton is still legging it over hill and dale, I (now and again) get *Locus*, and . . . that's about it. I still haven't been made redundant . . . but I have hopes. At least I'm too bloody old to be called up for the Gulf.

(30 September 1990)

THE WORST CANAL CLEARANCE

In 1978 workers were sent to dredge a murky stretch of the Chesterfield–Stockwith canal. Their task was to remove all the rubbish and leave the canal clear. They were soon disturbed during their teabreak by a policeman who said he was investigating a giant whirlpool in the canal. When they got back, however, the whirlpool had gone and so had a one and a half mile stretch of the canal. In its place was a seamless stretch of mud thickly punctuated with old prams, bedsteads and rusting bicycle accessories. In addition to this the workmen found a flotilla of irate holidaymakers stranded on their boats in a brown sludge.

Among the first pieces of junk they hauled out had been the 200-year-old plug that alone ensured the canal's continuing existence. 'We didn't know there was a plug', said one workman explaining that all the records had been lost in a fire during the war. 'Anything can happen on a canal,' a spokesman for the British Waterways Board said afterwards.

— Stephen Pile, *The Book of Heroic Failures*

I don't know anything more about **RALPH ASHBROOK** than does anyone else who has followed his letters in past issues of *SFC* and *TMR*. I've never met him, because no sooner did he subscribe, many years ago, than he went home from Melbourne to Pennsylvania. He sounds like the sort of person I'd like to invite to a Luncheon of Comment.

• ***FEATURE LETTER***

Ralph Ashbrook: The Choose-Your-Own-Adventure letter

RALPH ASHBROOK
303 Tregaron Road, Bala Cynwyd,
Pennsylvania 19004, USA

Just finished reading two books that reminded me of threads you have woven.

The Men Who Mastered Time by David Butler (Heinemann, 1986): I didn't throw it across the room, as I have done with most sf started recently. It is a time-machine story (old, good idea) that is built on 'clues' in the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (new, good idea). Part of it (the clues) worked for me. History spin-offs can be deadly, but this one treated Coleridge as a sort of mythical foundation.

By the way, I have lost the sense of 'one of the best books I have read this year'. I don't know if *The Men Who Mastered Time* is a good book, or even if I liked it. I know it engaged me, and I liked the engagement. But I wouldn't want my sister to marry it.

Bringing us to *The World As I Found It* by Bruce Duffy (USA, 1987). I *couldn't* throw this one across it floor; it weighs about twenty pounds. It is a biographical novel about Wittgenstein, Moore and Russell. There are pages that absolutely sing. It is almost sf (and definitely funny) reading in a novel a character worrying about what we can know, and what language is about, and whether mathematics can sustain itself. Unfortunately the book turns into *The World As I Frowned on It*. It was a desperate time for philosophy, and Wittgenstein was sadder but not wiser. I wonder what would have come of a meeting between him and G. K. Chesterton.

Still don't know where we're going, but very glad to be here.

(January 1988)

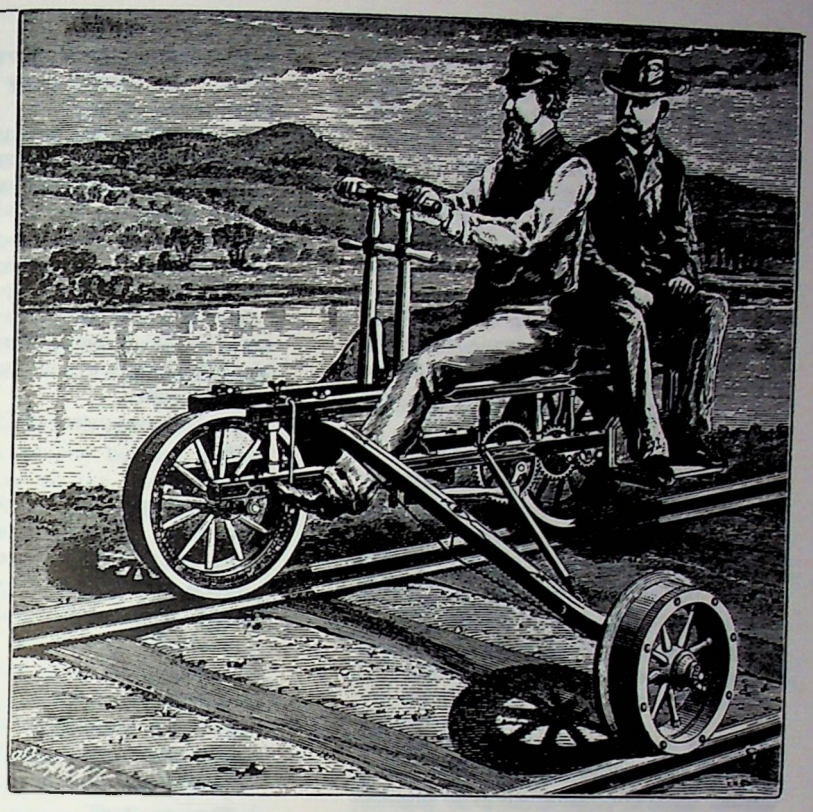
In spite of the Phil Dick connection, I approached *Man Faces Southwest* cautiously, fearing a *Man who Fell to Earth*. Rantes, a young man, thinks he is a visitor from another planet. His doctor is not so sure. I had just seen *Hail Mary*, which I liked because I was constantly remaking it in my head, but which has a miserable feel to it — a distance, a coldness, a mentalness. Godard's brain has enveloped his heart. It was the feel of *Breathless* that made it live.

Man Faces Southwest sparkles as an example of what science fiction should be. The questions it raises are both metaphysical and psychological. Sf has to be about 'people if . . .' or 'people when . . .'. In fact, for one glorious moment the whole nature of 'when' dissolves when the doctor asks, 'Where did you live?' The only word Rantes comments on ('did') was a convention not even intended as part of the question. Rantes answers, 'My past is entirely in you.' He unasks the question! Hot diggety dog!

The doctor's struggle with the possibility that Rantes came from another planet is long, slow and believable. I loved easily accepting the reality or the metaphor of Ranges' otherness and seeing the doctor as the alien — the foreign-thinker who cannot bridge the gulf. Flip flop.

I want to talk about why I think *The Metaphysical Review* is the 1980s' answer to the 1960s' sf novel, and how much I appreciate your pioneering work, which almost by necessity will be unrecognized by a usual forum. But I don't know how to say it. James Harvey writes in the *New York Review of Books* (30 June 1988):

> the unconsciousness of classical Hollywood was one of the conditions of its best work. I doubt that a great movie comedy like Leo McCarey's *The Awful Truth* (1937), for example, or Preston Sturges' *The Lady Eve* (1941) could have had the brilliance and



depth it has if it had aimed at such achievements. It is this refusal of importance and ambition that characterized the Hollywood studio movie, both the best and the worst of them. When they were magical or inspired, they were also casual, offhand, coming out of the commonest reality and transfiguring it.

You see, the fact that you are is the catalyst for these thoughts and many others, unwritten. That is why I read (past tense) from Sturgeon's *The Dreaming Jewels* (the book that startled me awake) through *The Lincoln Hunters* through *Ubik* until about *On Wings of Song*, which by the way I see recast in *Bull Durham* (Kevin Costner, Susan Sarandon). This is the other kind of love story — falling in love with the right person in the wrong place/time. One final remake: *Red River* (1948) — *Tin Men* (1986). As in the Hawks, the love that exists between the male leads (played by De Vito and Dreyfuss) is concealed by the events. Plus you get the Barbara Hershey character who evokes the 1940s. In fact, Dreyfuss and De Vito remind me of all those Spencer Tracy, Cary Grant characters we watched wandering around trying to figure out life. Which is what I do. Maybe we're all actually 1940s characters who just think we have come here from another planet.

(30 June 1988)

TMR 11/12/13 won't let go.

This year I read two novels that put me in mind of my 1950s/1960s sf reading; that is, they bent expectations.

The City of Glass by Paul Auster appears to be a detective novel. The narrator, through chance and choice, assumes someone else's identity. It flows. I care. Even that I consider a miracle in 1988. At the end, the author cheats and the book falls apart, but that process is intended. In a way it bursts apart, which I like; it doesn't fall, as I think *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* does.

Ten Percent of Life by Hiber Conteris (originally written in Spanish) (1985) is the other novel I loved. It also is in the form of a detective novel. The bending comes when Raymond Chandler and Philip Marlowe appear together. Having recently discovered that

Chandler wrote like a slumming angel (as the covers of his recent editions say) I appreciated the nerve. (Forgive an aside. Regardless of the merits of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, the one minute in which Daffy Duck and Donald Duck perform together is wonderful.) This Chandler/Marlowe stuff is risky — retreading retreads — but the 'next Beatles' and the 'next sf novel' will come as a thief in the night, as does your dialogue.

So much for Review. Now on to Metaphysical. While I loved words, I sometimes get disgusted by them. I happened on this quote by Carl Jung (*Essays on a Science of Mythology*, Jung and Kerenyi, 1949):

> Children are educated by what the grown-up *is* and not by what he *says*. The popular faith in words is a veritable disease of the mind, for a superstition of this sort always leads farther and farther away from man's foundations and seduces people into a disastrous identification of the personality with whatever slogan may be in vogue.

God, he must have been in a really grouchy mood to call reason a superstitition and a disease. Of course, using words to discredit words is like fucking for virginity, as the war protesters used to say.

A truly humble person has an awareness that transcends self-satisfaction. Otherwise the only humble people would be those who are too stupid to be proud. Likewise, I think Jung is saying to use words but don't be trapped by them. Now this is sf to me, as well as metaphysics: imagine that thinking is a disease.

Another quote, same book, other co-author:

> Mythology provides a foundation insofar as the teller of myths, by living out his story, finds his way back to primordial times. Suddenly, without any digression or searching on his part, without any studious investigation or effort, he finds himself in the primordiality that is his concern.

This suggests a wonderful picture. Dreamlike. We are all walking over these low hills. Suddenly the ground is gone. I am weaving through a network of tunnels. I am face to face with *my* meaning. I look up and see connections I was never aware of. And then I am back in the real world. I can use what I learned if I choose to and make the effort to. Myth can do this, or a piece of music, a novel, words, the absence of words, an episode of *Family Ties*, a movie about cartoon characters being real . . . Oops. I got carried away there. Don't know what came over me.

I was thinking about your financial situation when I read the Kerenyi quote. Maybe the lack of security/recognition is a necessary part of your meaning. You could not be a mythical hero without it.

(July 1988)

I have tried several times to write this part of my The SF Novel Is Dead/The SF Novel Is Not Dead letter to you, but could not find the right approach.

Paul Auster wrote of Charles Baxter's *First Light*:

> *First Light* is a novel that moves backwards in time, traveling from past to present as though through a tunnel of memory. Things keep falling away from us, words are born and then vanish before our eyes, and gradually we begin to understand that Baxter is telling us our own story, that this is how our own lives are formed within us. Like Chekhov, he is both tough-minded and compassionate, and he never makes his characters more or less than what they are. They are human, and that in itself is a rare achievement for a writer, a thing to be celebrated above and beyond all other achievements in this splendid book.

I tried Baxter's novel and came upon:

> Power is moving from science, the discovery of new information, to data processing, old information used in new ways.

New classical music is not being written. What is left is too theoretical. No listeners.

I am told something similar has happened to jazz. New jazz is too brainy. Listeners want old stuff.

I feel a similar pattern in rock music. There were two full-time new rock album FM stations in Philadelphia from 1968 to about 1980. Both have become 'classic rock' album stations (not oldies singles; that's AM).

Current sf fits this pattern so well it's sad. Or I'm sad, anyway. It even calls itself cyberpunk, and is as lifeless and atonal as new classical and new jazz.

As John Harvey said in my first instalment, knowing what you're doing can ruin it. Sf was so unrespectable that humility and lack of self-

consciousness were possible. Annie Dillard (*Tinker Creek*):

> We have really only one light, one source of all power, and yet we must turn away from it . . . lest our eyes be blasted away.

Please read the above as in brackets. They are the words of an old fart, out of touch with the present. Since the golden age of sf is twelve, all of the magic that I felt in the 1950s and 1960s is currently available to anyone with the right equipment — a teenage body and mind.

By the way, I always thought that the golden age of sf was thirteen, but last week I heard Tom Disch say on the radio (being interviewed as the children's author of *The Brave Little Toaster Goes to Mars*, a role that seemed to give him both genuine and ironic delight) that I was even wrong about that. The golden age is now twelve. So ya see how outta touch I am!

Another possible defence for the above bellyaching is that reading (like listening to classical music and writing letters and smoking) is an anachronistic activity (drinking and love-making, however, are not). Young people today don't actually read. They swim/surf books, so the more superficial a vehicle is, the more it holds them up.

You select!

As you can see, I have embraced the new literature. I have just created a Choose Your Own Adventure letter.

(8 August 1988)

I am mostly not able to read what everyone else calls sf for the time being, but find myself seeing what I am reading as sf (Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time*, John Cowper Powys' *Othello*, Potter's *The Singing Detective*). You, of course, as editor, writer, and guide are a rock. Well, a rock with feelings. Well, a rock with feelings that just keeps walking.

But a rock with feelings is how I see Iago.

Not to get started again, but I just saw Fritz Lang's first American film, *Fury* (1936). The first half is beguilingly peaceful. The second half grabs you by the neck and smashes you against the wall. (Either would have been sufficient, but you know those Germans.)

(23 May 1989)

* I don't know what to reply to Ralph (a) because I've already sent a few letters to him, and (b) I stammer in face of somebody who actually sees what my magazines are all about. 'Choose Your Own Adventure'. Precisely. A rock with feelings? Well, a bit stolid sometimes.

Elaine and I saw *Man Facing Southwest* on Ralph's recommendation. It's naive stuff, but memorable. I picked up the PKD references without realizing I was supposed to. *Hommage* to Phil from Argentina is unexpected.

After I had received Ralph's first letters, I received most of the current Faber releases of Paul Auster novels, and reviewed them for *The Melbourne Report*. That review, my worst effort yet, might appear here. The review reflects my real difficulty in coming to terms with Auster. How can such a vivid and interesting writer go so wrong?

On Ralph's suggestion, I bought *The Men Who Mastered Time* and thoroughly enjoyed it. This is the sf novel John Huston might have filmed if he had not made *The Man Who Would Be King*. (My short review is in *SFC* 67.) I've bought *The World As I Found It*, but haven't read it yet.

I like the comment about the mythical meaning of Gillespie. My personal view of heaven is a room in which I produce fanzines and which I need never leave for mundane destinations. *

In real life I am a computer programming manager in a small bank. I found myself recently in alien surroundings. I spent a week in central Florida helping my brother-in-law build a house. Everything and everyone was foreign to me. I behaved myself. I was initially unobtrusive, then cautiously ironic, then downright outrageous (when the occasion arose). Entertaining, appreciative, helpful, funny.

Then I took my son on a Boy Scout camping trip with dozens of people with interests and enthusiasms foreign to mine. Same behaviour. Same fitting in — with occasional pangs of wanting to curl up with a book, or a Preston Sturges movie or . . . wait! This *was* a Preston Sturges movie. I was a lower-case stranger in a lower-case strange land. Why fight it?

I believe this is a test. When we decide that we can do all the parts, no matter who or when or where, we pass.

* I fail. I can only do the Bruce Gillespie part, and that not very well. I find it very hard work to be entertaining, helpful or funny. *

You seem to be resisting the Bruce Gillespie part. Don't you realize how important it is that you do the Bruce Gillespie part? Don't you realize how important that part is to the

people around you — and in your case 'around you' is quite literal — as in the globe?

And speaking of walking, here is a certain Ronald Duncan on the subject:

Then once upon a dream, a nightmare of
nights ago,
the seas cooled, the clouds of steam
dispersed.
And the sun daggered the horizon again,
and the light,
the light entered its inheritance,
Walking with white feet over the silent
waters.

We come out of a dream. 'Clarity' is an attempt to structure, but always leaves an honest fuzziness at the edges. To use sense as an interesting path, but not the truth, or worse a weapon, is fine. But if we cut ourselves off from our rich messy roots, we will fail ourselves.

This for me is the richness of *Man Facing Southwest* and Sturges' *Sullivan's Travels*. What we have been and done up till now constantly threatens us with its orthodoxy. What other people are and do similarly keeps us from ourselves, but can fuel us.

(20 June 1989)

(I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS
Continued from Page 102)

already read. Many review copies are reprints. I write about one long article a year, plus my reviews for *The Melbourne Report*. What I mainly do is the work I'm actually paid for — secondary textbook editing — and go to restaurants, listen to CDs, and read books. Unproductive, but enjoyable. *

As someone who discovered Dick (in 1984) only after his death, his final three novels were among the first of Dick's novels I read. I can still remember reading *A Maze of Death* (the first Dick novel I read) almost non-stop in one sitting. In just twelve months after that, I'd managed to track down just about all of Dick's novels. The main advantage of death for a novelist seems to be that all your books that have been out of print suddenly reappear in brand new issues.

Apart from PKD, other lunatic obsessions of my life include: Mark Twain, J. R. R. Tolkien, the Marx Brothers, Robert Benchley, P. G. Wodehouse, Monty Python's Flying Circus, Brian de Palma, Pink Floyd (Roger Waters), the Beatles (John Lennon), and Velvet Underground (Lou Reed). I'm not sure what kind of psychological picture this paints of me.

My latest obsession has been Rudy Rucker, or Rudolf von Bitter Rucker. The former name is for sf novels and stories, and the latter for popular mathematical books such as *Infinity and the Mind* and *The Fourth Dimension and How to Get There*. If ever you get any spare reading time, check out his novels *White Light*, *The Secret of Life*, *Software* and *Wetware*. Apart from mathematics, his main literary influences seem to be Kafka, Kerouac and Borges.

Do you have a list of ten worst books ever read/written? (Joyce would place Number One: either *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*.) Near the top of my list would be Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* and Dick's *Vulcan's Hammer* — but to be fair, *The Sirens of Titan* and any number of PKD novels would make my Top Ten best.

(27 June 1988)

* I don't (usually) finish reading bad books, but in the 1960s I took the trouble to read all the stories in all the sf magazines. In that way, I regularly read the world's dullest writer, C. C. MacApp. He was by no means the worst writer in the world, only the dullest. *

BUCK COULSON
(again)

I can't comment on CDs. I don't own one and I don't believe I've ever listened to one. For one thing, I can't afford a player; for another, I'm interested in very little classical and rock music, and in classical, at least, I already have what I want on LPs. I'm less interested in sound purity than I am in content, so I see no reason to discard what I have. In fact, I'm going to the opposite end of the spectrum and starting to record our large collection of 78 rpm records on cassette tape, before the records get broken or the sound gets any worse.

I suppose the most memorable books I've read recently (and there's a contradiction in terms for you, but I *believe* they'll be memorable) were *A Dynasty of Western Outlaws* by Paul I. Wellman (Manly Wade Wellman's brother), *The Crusades* by Henry Treece, *The Monocled Mutineer* by William Allison and John Fairly (now I'm waiting for the BBC mini-series made from it to show up on our tv), *The Life and Times of Little Turtle* by Harvey Carter, *The Social History of the Machine Gun* by John Ellis, and *The First Casualty* by Philip Knightley (a volume on

war correspondents, with the title taken from the phrase 'When war comes, Truth is the first casualty').

Referring to Skel's comment: as a fanzine editor I really did 'sit by his mailbox . . . taking whatever drops in'. Actually, taking about a quarter of it, by the later years. We almost never asked anyone for material; material came in and if we liked it we kept it, and if we didn't, we sent it back. And in the early days, if not enough came in, Gene DeWeese and I wrote it, under our own names and various pseudonyms. (No, we never got one from Skel.) But then, we never particularly wanted to change directions, or were too sure that we were going in a specific direction.

I correctly assumed that you were joking about known American high schools. If you are interested in seeing a movie about an Indiana school like the one I went to, see the movie *Hoosiers*. The school it depicts isn't representative of any other state, but Indiana schools in the 1940s, when I graduated and 1950s when the movie is set, were very much like that. The plot is based on an actual event, though it's based very loosely; a tiny school did win the championship from a big city school in the last seconds, in 1954. The characters are all fictional, but I knew people like them. The rural people haven't changed much today, but the schools have; in the 1960s, a half dozen or so tiny rural schools would be consolidated into one large one, equal in size to the city schools; the state has no more schools as small as the one I went to.

I have *never* heard Garrison Keillor on the radio; only on his two tv shows, an album of two lp records, and his books. He's great, but he's not for everyone, any more than Gary Larson's *The Far Side* cartoons are. You have to have some imagination, for one thing.

(14 June 1988)

ANDREW WEINER
26 Summerhill Gardens, Toronto, Ontario
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Lucy Sussex was quite right about *Count Zero*, although I find her conclusions shaky. I think Gibson would do better with *less* 'thoughtfulness'. It's the attempt to graft mainstream trappings on to the thriller form — all that careful characterization — that slows the book down.

I don't have any more ex-Byrds notes for you. In fact, for the past year I haven't had a functioning stereo (house undergoing a very long renovation) so I haven't been buying records. What I have been doing is playing a lot of old tapes in my car. So here, for what it's worth, is my own venture into the listing stakes: Best Driving Music. (I've numbered them, but really I like them all pretty equally.)

(1) Anything by REM
I have three or four REM albums. They all sound the same (in fact, I still can't tell one from another) but they all sound terrific. Epic drones, one upon another, and lyrics that you apprehend only as fragments. I hear something different nearly every time.

(2) Pet Shop Boys
I don't know the title — a friend gave me the tape — but I think it's their second album. Anthems of the free market for Thatcherite England ('everything's for sale'). Consumable pap, yet more subversive than the Clash.

(3) Bob Dylan: *Biograph*
Some of this is over-familiar, and some of it is just plain awful, but it pulls together the best tracks from some of Dylan's worst albums. Stand-out: 'Senor (Tales of Yankee Power)' from the appalling *Street Legal*.

(4) Bruce Cockburn: *Waiting for a Miracle*
Canadian hard-left Christian folk rock . . . a pretty unlikely combination, but Cockburn mostly pulls it off. Personal favourite: 'The Trouble With Normal' ('it always gets worse').

(5) *History of the Left Banke*
Interesting not only for the hits ('Walk Away Renee', 'Pretty Ballerina') but also the might-have-beens, recorded when the group was falling part, with different line-ups and singers.

(6) *Best of Tim Hardin*
It's the same song over and over, but it's a great song.

(7)(8)
Richard and Linda Thompson:
Pour Down Like Silver
Shoot Out the Lights
You already know all about these.

(9) Leonard Cohen: *Various Positions*
Cohen gets better as he gets older. (I also play the Jennifer Warnes Sings Cohen album a lot: it's kind of watered down, but there's real intelligence behind it.)

(10) Gene Clark and Carla Olsen: *So Rebellious a Lover*
Clark's best work in years.

Some books I can recommend: anything by James Crumley (postmodern private eye stuff . . . truly nasty), Steve Erickson (especially *Days Between Stations*: magic realism that borders on Ballard), Martin Amis (*Money*

is wonderful; the quasi-sf *Einstein's Monsters* is pretty good, too, although at times excessively earnest).

Knowing your own reading tastes, I can't exactly recommend my own *Station Gehenna*: I think you'll find it a bit too genrefied, although you might get a kick out of the Lem *hommage*. Basically, it's *Ten Little Indians Go To Solaris*, with a little Melville thrown in to liven things up.

(16 June 1988)

WILLIAM M. DANNER
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I have a couple of dozen 9 x 12 envelopes stuffed with photo prints I've made over the years. I'm inflicting you with a batch in the hope that you may find some of interest.

* Yes, thanks very much. Many of them feature model trains, and another set includes historically interesting engravings and other illustrations. *

This time I read all of your tome except the book reviews and, of course, I skipped hastily past any references to popular music and conventions, as well as several lengthy dissertations on Garrison Keillor. Here is one of your friends who never listens to his programs if he can help it, and he can. From snippets I've been unable to avoid hearing, I know that he is not for me.

I wonder, though, if you've ever read Stephen Leacock. I have four of his books, bought secondhand many years ago from Walleck's in Pgh., and wish I had more. The four I have are *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (my favourite); *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, *Nonsense Novels*, and *Further Foolishness*. They were published by John Lane from 1912 to 1916. In the first book, Chapter III is 'The Marine Excursions of the Knights of Pythias', which I've read umpteen times. I first learned of Leacock when my freshman English teacher at Carnegie Tech. (now Carnegie-Mellon University) read it to the class, and I've been grateful to him ever since. Twenty or thirty years ago a paperback reprint of some selections from those books appeared, and I have it somewhere; but Leacock has not been as extensively reprinted as he deserves.

* John Bangsund sold us quite a few Leacock books about ten years ago. The experience was so painful for him that we sent him back the books that didn't interest us. We've kept quite a few. I don't know whether John still has the others. *

KEN LAKE
(again)

So omnivorous has been my reading, so fast the number of years and so short my memory, that I have never tried to create 'lists of bests' of anything. But purely as an exercise in self-revelation, I'm going to zip through your lists and pick out solely those books which here and now I can happily say I would enjoy reading again:

Lavengro (strange, bigoted, fun), *Lucky Jim* (honest and amusing), *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (classic, all-embracing), *The Trial* (eerie), *Candide* (great fun), *Gulliver's Travels* (seminal), *Vile Bodies* (delightful), *Scoop* (even better), anything earlier by Philip K. Dick, including your titles, *Camp Concentration* (all-time classic), *Bug Jack Barron* (trail-blazing), *Nineteen Eighty Four* (still frightening), some of your Aldisses, *The Tin Drum* (did you see the movie? marvellous!), *Slaughterhouse-5* (of course), *The Inverted World* (just for fun), the Robertson Davies trilogy; but it's amazing how many of the titles you note just did not leave enough of an impact on me to make me want to re-read them.

To try to add my own favourites would be impossible, but I cannot possibly let the topic drop without wondering how the hell you can list all them thar books without *once* mentioning Tom Sharpe, whose every book I love, though I'd recommend leaving at least six months between each one if starting from scratch.

Just at random, and I mean that, here are but a few of the other books that I'd like to re-read were I not bogged down with all the new stuff and with tiresome things like work and sleep:

Poems of Catullus, *Cantos* of Ezra Pound, *Beowulf* in the original with a crib, *The Canterbury Tales* ditto, *Tristram Shandy*, Beardsley's *Under the Hill*, *The Good Soldier Schweik*, *Three Men in a Boat* and *Three Men on the Bummel*, some Chaim Potok and Isaac Bashevis Singer almost at random, Keith Waterhouse's *Billy Liar* ... and then we're into sf where the mind boggles.

(20 June 1988)

* Ken's first letter of comment runs to ten pages. I don't have room to quote more than this small part of it. Unfortunately, the most interesting parts of his letter, that tell of his ordinary existence and life and times, are heavily marked 'DNQ'. *

Favourite films? It's disillusion time. From my deep-in-movies period (1945 to 1960 roughly)

I have a vast number of favourite memories, almost all of them being avidly destroyed by TV. It works like this: check the listings, set the video, tape this or that movie, make time to enjoy it quietly, and find myself pressing the fast-forward button and quitting in disgust before the end.

In no way, therefore, can I claim anything more than 'these are a few of the films I used to think were great, which viewing again on TV has not destroyed for me yet':

* Section 1: almost anything with Marilyn Monroe except *There's No Business Like Show Business* (1954).
* Section 2: the rest, being so far *Carmen Jones* (1954), *Diary of a Lost Girl* and *Pandora's Box* with Louise Brooks (1929), *The Blue Angel* (1933), *Olympia* by Leni Riefenstahl (1938), *Cast a Giant Shadow* (1966), *A Window on London* (1939), *The Wicked Lady* (1945), *Pitfall* (1953), *A Matter of Life and Death* (1945), *To Have and Have Not* (1944), *Casablanca* (1942), *The Big Sleep* (1946), *Dead Reckoning* (1947), and *La Ronde* (1950). Of those I realize some are in only because they star Lizbeth Scott, or others for similar personal reasons.
* Section 3: A few modern films I've been lucky enough to tape and enjoy vastly, including *Spring Symphony* (1983, the Schumann biopic), *Amadeus* (1984), *Scott Joplin* (1977), *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (1958), *The Cotton Club* (1984), *The Bed Sitting Room* (1969), *Under Milk Wood* (1971), *Catch-22* (1970), *One Way Pendulum* (1964), *Bonnie and Clyde* (1966), *There's a Girl in my Soup* (1970), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *The Tin Drum* (1979) and *Bugsy Malone* (1976).

Have you listened to the amazing Mozart sonatas recorded by Mistsuko Uchida? Not only is she a superb pianist with immaculate timing and touch, she's a living, emoting person who suffers everything she plays. We missed her sonatas season, but bought all the single LPs, and cannot imagine a better set of them. We sat immediately behind her in the front row as she conducted the English Chamber Orchestra from the piano, and played her way in ten concerts through all Mozart's piano concerti, and I also attended many of the rehearsals when she was often at loggerheads with the musicians, as they found it hard to grasp some of her signals from the piano. Now she is working her way through these on LP/CD, having personally promised me that Philips will continue to issue LPs of all of them, with the ECO but conducted by the amazing Jeffrey Tate.

(23 May 1989)

* There follows an amazing letter in which Ken (a) tells me in endless detail why he does not want to receive further issues of *SF Commentary* and (b) comments on *every* issue of *TMR*. I would like to print his letters, I don't have room. :: Re. *TMR* 2: Although an Aldiss fan, he also did not like the Helliconia books (Harry Harrison did it a lot better in the Eden trilogy). :: Re. *TMR* 4, the Magic Pudding Club issue: 'I feel partly embarrassed, partly amused, partly annoyed at the manifest waste of time and energy and life that was invested in such pastimes, while being able to recall my own salad days and the truly incredible way that we were able to see days, weeks and months pass without losing a minute's enjoyment, while now they go faster and we extract less from them at much greater cost to our stores of energy (and money).' :: 'As I think you told me long ago, you don't have any more *TMR* 10, can I beg you to print a squib mentioning that Ken Lake will happily pay postages plus any fair figure requested for a copy of that ish?' Ken's address heads this section.

Ken then delivers an extraordinary tirade against decimalization (I suppose I agree with you, Ken, but not with any passion), set off by I-know-not-what, and belatedly, comments on *TMR*s 7/8 and 9. There's so much here I haven't been able to deal with it. He thinks he won't like Garrison Keillor, but hasn't actually heard him or read his works, and recommends Spaulding Gray. He goes on for four packed pages against dream analysis, knowing full well that I won't agree with a word he says. With luck, Ken will get back to films and music soon. *

WALT WILLIS
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Your parcel made quite an impression here, and I don't mean just that dent in the doormat. I read every word of *TMR* Nos. 7 to 13, and was left with a feeling of awed admiration, mingled with nostalgic regret. It wasn't just the breadth of your interests, it was those *lists*. They reminded me in a strange way of the growth of the Roman Empire, imposing order on an anarchic world. I would have difficulty making a list of the books I read last month, for Ghod's sake, and the same applies to music.

Indeed, for a while in recent years I felt like an inhabitant of some outpost of that same civilization, watching it decay as the legions departed. First, as you'll have read in *Hyphen* 37, I lost the ability to read whole categories of books, and all inclination to write. Then my

stereo system began mysteriously to deteriorate. Or so I thought, until I found that a whole segment of my test record for frequency response had been replaced by utter silence. The triangle was the first instrument to vanish completely from the orchestra, followed by the upper registers of the piccolo and violin. A hearing aid was worst than useless, offering only a thin discordant screech for the full tones I remembered. At that time my favourites were Bruckner, Mahler and Sibelius. Headphones were some help, but I found the presence of a full symphony orchestra inside my head curiously unsettling.

So I have been mournfully immune from the lure of the compact disc. Musically, I survived by switching to baroque and chamber music. For me, Bach is now The Man, though currently my very favourite piece of music is Vivaldi's Piccolo Concerto (RV443), most of which I can still hear with headphones. (One of the things I would most have liked to do was to play the second movement of this in a Greek forest at night. A few years ago we spent a holiday in Corfu, in an apartment deep in a forest: there was a clearing for dances with a permanent PA system, so it was a practicable possibility.)

On the literary front, *TMR* has been unexpectedly reassuring. I had been depressed by the fact that I was unable to finish either *Helliconia Spring* or *Count Zero*, those masterpieces of current sf. It's quite a relief to realize, especially from David Lake's letter, that this inability may not be a symptom of brain damage after all. In fact, altogether *TMR* is remarkably congenial. I feel, for example, that you will readily understand how in some strange way the word processor was able for me to supply the blend of hi-tech and art which I seemed to need in a hobby and which I used to get from hifi.

From a human rather than an intellectual point of view, I was very taken with Skel's letter: it seemed to me one of the most thoughtful and well-written pieces I've seen by him, and it's quite a compliment to you that he wrote you in that way. I see what he means about *TMR* being a gourmet fanzine, but I don't think that what Skel writes is hamburger, as he says. Skel's stuff has always seemed to me to be more like lemon meringue, or cottage pie, the light and frothy surface concealing more solid nourishment. At its best it is gourmet cottage pie. There is a widespread and quite mistaken belief that just because a piece is funny, it cannot be Real Literature. I always think of the last words of Edmund Keane the actor: some tactless watcher by his sickbed commented that dying must be very difficult. Keane roused briefly: 'Dying is easy,' he said. 'Comedy is difficult.'

(30 June 1988)

TMR 14: So much of music is a closed book to me these days, as I tried to explain last time I wrote, that I feel I am getting this issue by false pretences. However, I did find it interesting, in ways strange or nostalgic. The most bizarre mental association is of a recent piece of almost fannish fantasy by a columnist in *The Times*. He advanced the proposition that Roy Orbison and General Jaruselski of Poland were twin brothers, supplying such poignant details of their origins and tragic separation that one almost considered the possibility.

John Bangsund's angry statement about musical appreciation — 'You don't have to understand it. All you need to do is listen to it' — gave me to think. I am not sure that I agree with him, if he means that by attending properly one can fully appreciate any good music. It always seemed to be the case with me that at any time I was fully attuned only to one composer or period or style and that for the time being no others were speaking to me personally.

I suspect that there are subconscious influences on such attitudes. In the case of modern pop I feel an underlying despair which makes me reluctant to venture into the field. My conditioning is of a period when I knew all that was going on in the musical world, both classical and pop. Nowadays there has been such a fantastic proliferation that people become world famous before I have even heard of them. This daunts me. I don't understand how you people keep up with it all. Perhaps you can listen to music while reading books or chopping wood? I can't: I would be like Gerald Ford trying to juggle plates while riding a unicycle.

(19 November 1989)

* I listened to most of the pop music I really know (1959–70) with the transistor radio hidden under the desk and the homework on top of the desk. I was not a brilliant scholar, and improved greatly when seated at a silent desk in the Baillieu Library during my

university days. Now I do a lot of listening to classical music while reading, although there have been times in my life when I turned off the radio when reading. While reading the newspaper each morning, I listen to two sides of an LP or an entire CD. This is known as Freelancer's Privilege, and is the best possible reason for avoiding a nine-to-five job.

*

JOSEPH NICHOLAS
5A Frinton Road, Stamford Hill, London
N15 6NH, England

I tend to have favourite groups rather than favourite records; and while I might like particular songs more than others, these songs tend to be scattered throughout the group's total output. So let's mention the groups. In no particular order, they are:

* The Pogues — punk meets The Chieftains over ten pints; Irish folk music as it should be played: loud, angry and political.
* The Primitives — rediscoverers of the three-minute guitar-based pop song; drive, energy and a wide range of stylistic accomplishments.
* Voice of the Beehive — sixties kitsch revivalists; songs with lyrics that are knowing and allusive, tunes with rhythm and power.
* Jesus and Mary Chain — manic depressive overamplified feedback; devotees of Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground and the only really loud group that Judith says she's ever liked.
* The Church — resembling an Australian Dire Straits; less skilled with the guitar, but cleverer with the words.
* The Divinyls — an Australian band with a lead singer who actually sounds Australian; clever, energetic, very urban.
* Midnight Oil — real political rock; emblazoning their commitments on their foreheads, and making them fit the music rather than vice versa.
* Billy Bragg — the post-punk Bard of Barking, a lone guitarist with a drunkful of songs; angry left-wing politics for Thatcher's Britain.
* Suzanne Vega — the return of the female singer-songwriter, harder edged than hitherto; songs that sometimes resemble the plot of an archetypal Woody Allen film, but a marvellous voice nevertheless.
* Andrew Cronshaw — an electric zither and a repertoire of astonishing range; music as likely to come from Hungary as Ireland, Norway as Wales.
* The Mission — doomy Goths with Led Zeppelin-style riffs; their lyrics sometimes quite meaningless, but their sound wonderfully dank and hollow.
* The Sisters of Mercy — brilliant, hypnotic, overpowering; music that marches from the speakers like conquering legions, lyrics that hint at things both unknown and unknowable, and a voice so deep it resonates like the inside of a tomb.

At that point I'd better stop, because I could go on listing favourites for the rest of the page. I haven't mentioned Rickie Lee Jones, the Bhundu Boys, the Lords of the New Church, Throwing Muses, the Psychedelic Furs, the Style Council, Blue Oyster Cult, Clannad, All About Eve, the Rainmakers, and a host of others; which probably proves only that attempting to select favourites from a collection like mine is probably a pretty futile exercise. Come to that, making up lists — of books, of records, of anything — is itself quite pointless. What purpose do they serve? And who cares what others think is best anyway?

(5/6/7 August 1988)

TOM WHALEN
6109 Magazine, New Orleans, Louisiana
70118, USA

I've sent a copy of my essay [on Robert Walser, *TMR* 11/12/13] to the Walser Archives in Zurich. I was over there writing more criticism on Walser on a grant from Pro Helvetia; was handsomely paid for it too. So I wrote four essays and a fiction called 'Herr Walser on a Stroll Encounters Monsieur Satie Striding' and interviewed the archivists about Walser microscripts, but most of my working time was spent helping a friend put her collection of Walser stories in translation in shape. (Hopkins Press should publish it someday.) And I wrote a few other stories and reread *Moby Dick* and for the first time *The Wings of the Dove* and *Dog Years*, and Goethe and Golding and Iain Banks and a host of others, and got to live in a civilized city and walk about the Alps.

Only to return to this third-world city of New Orleans, which at the time was filled with other-planetary, reptilian Republicans here for their party's convention. The transition back to the States was the hardest it's ever been. So I hid out and wrote more fiction and had an orgy of fiction reading the past few days before work begins and I have to read the work of teenagers.

M31 A Family Romance is an interesting novel by Stephen Wright (author of a Vietnam novel *Meditations in Green* that isn't your usual shootemup). This time he mates Flan-

nery O'Connor to Robert Stone to give us a jazzed-up turn on UFOers; it is very grotesque and very unpleasant and very good.

And Exley's trilogy is completed with *Last Notes from Home*, 397 pages, which I liked better than the previous one. Once again, as in *A Fan's Notes*, he's on the ass of the American Dream and using a little Hawthornian allegory to explore it.

And other books, of course, and a ton of them to read and no time left. Worldcon was in town, but I never made it. I should have for the books, but I've enough waiting to be read as it is. I didn't want to rub shoulders or rayguns with the trekkies or authors at the moment. I have a story due in a nonmainstream sf mag called *New Pathways*, which pleases me more than my usual litmag acceptances do.

(5 September 1988)

* Tom also sent me an article about Wim Wenders' *Alice in the Cities*, a story called 'Fatigue' (*Margin* 6, Summer 1988), another, 'The Visitations', from *Ice River*, 1988, and some reviews, one of them of a two-volume set called *Worst Canadian Stories*, edited by Crad Kilodney, which sounds just like the sort of kick-em-in-the-head fiction volume that is badly needed in Australia.

DAVID RUSSELL (27 January 1989) sent bits and pieces of chatter about Garrison Keillor, including a *Herald* article reprinted from overseas. 'It's mainly about how Garrison is worried (guilt complex) about why he'll wind up in jail; and the terrible things people say about him. By the way, have you heard what people are saying about you?' No, David. I've been worried about this sentence ever since.

Later he replied to the *Dreams and False Alarms* that I sent out in lieu of a *TMR* last year: *

DAVID RUSSELL
196 Russell Street, Dennington, Victoria 3820

In *D&FA* you reviewed *Good Thing He Can't Read My Mind* by Christine Lavin. I've seen her live (he boasted). She had a day free on her capital-cities-only tour and came down to Warrnambool to help raise money for a local FM radio station that's trying to get a licence. So far they have been allowed only test broadcasts. On one of them, they played one of her songs. I missed some of the words of the song, but liked the humour. So later when CREW mentioned she was performing at a local restaurant, Samessa Bistro, I went along.

I enjoyed myself. Christine Lavin sings well (better than she plays guitar). During the break between two of her songs she said, 'Check out the hair, girls.' Since I have long hair and was sitting right in front of her, I took her comment to mean me. It might even have been a compliment. I have a complaint about one of her songs. Apparently two of the characters in the song are travelling at night in a car in Manhattan, where they pick up a hitchhiker they don't know. This jibes with my understanding of New Yorkers' social mores.

During the baton-twirling song, she dropped the baton three times, and seemed crosser each time it happened.

* We now have four Christine Lavin records/CDs. *Beau Woes* is nearly worn out already — and that's a CD. Every time Christine comes to Australia, she talks with Terry Lane on 3LO/2BL. I don't like to sound like *Truth* newspaper — but they have a thing going, I'm sure. Or maybe she says those things to all the boys (including 'Check out the hair, girls'). *

In 'Trains in the Distance', you write: 'Yaco, Texas. You could journey towards a place with a name like that. Tampa, Florida, let's head for there.' When I read this I heard it being spoken very quietly, in my head, by Garrison Keillor. A delightful frisson went through me. Your writing here reminds me of him speaking about Lake Wobegon in that quiet way he had when he wanted you to listen but not to laugh.

(16 May 1989)

* Compliments will get you everywhere, David. *

RICHARD BRANDT
4740 N. Mesa, Apt. 111, El Paso, Texas 79912, USA

Somewhere behind this mound of unlocced fanzines are several shelves of unread books and a public library with several interesting items.

* Only 'several shelves' of unread books? Elaine and I live immured behind unread books. *

A few titles I did manage to take in:

A Cast of Killers, Sidney Kirkpatrick's account of King Vidor's covert investigation into the William Desmond Taylor murder, decades after the fact. Kirkpatrick may be no literary gem, but he's got a hold of a great story here and tells it capably.

Pride of the Bimbos, John Sayles' first novel, about a band of barnstorming baseball players with a midget pitcher, displays such a gift for dialogue and setting that it's easy to see why he took to cinema so readily.

Fool's Run, which is Patricia McKillip's C-word novel, if you can imagine such a thing.

Just recently read William Russell's *Bare-Faced Messiah: The True Story of L. Ron Hubbard*. Vastly entertaining, if a little unsettling. Ron obviously lived in a dream world, where he seemed to have started believing his own fabrications, but his charm was such that he was able to dupe plenty of others. (Kind of irritating, really; sort of like the subject of Tommy Thompson's *Serpentine*, whose women were disgusted with his preening and insensitivity, but were unable to resist his dubious charms.) If you ask me, the book gives short shrift to Ron's latter-day writing revival, but how low Ron must have felt he'd fallen, catering to the same bunch of misfits that gave the initial impetus to his career in Dianetics. What glory is there in trying to buy a Hugo, when you've plotted in your time to win a Nobel Prize?

Recent musical acquisitions: Tom Petty: *Damn the Torpedoes*; ZZ Top: *El Loco* (with the renowned 'Tube Snake Boogie'); *Pretenders*; Bob Dylan: *Infidels*; Dexter Gordon: *American Classic*, Grateful Dead: *American Beauty* and *Workingman's Dead*; Robert Cray Band: *Strong Persuader*; and Steve Winwood: *Arc of the Diver*. This fulfils all of my record club obligations, but leaves me with two freebie coupons to use up: more than likely on the Dead's *In the Dark* and on the first album from Highway 101, a country band with a lead female vocalist who really impressed me with her folksy, bluesy rendition of 'Whiskey, If You Were a Woman'.

(March 1989)

LEIGH EDMONDS
6 Elvira Street, Palmyra, Western Australia 6157

I came very close to writing you a letter the other day about music but restrained the urge because of more pressing deadlines. What sparked it was the remembrance that I had said something about wondering if being on the West Coast would somehow convert me to Beach Boys music. Well, no, it hasn't. But I have, in the last year, found myself becoming very partial to Australian Crawl and James Reyne. While some people might not be able to see much connection between them and the Beach Boys, there does seem to me to be a link: the Beach Boys singing about 'Surfer Girl' and Crawl about 'Daughters of the northern coast ... Sons of beaches' and like things. But while the Beach Boys were just innocent 'fun, fun, fun', Australian Crawl know about tough times and the down side, 'Parties where all the MPs rage' and much less savoury things. Perhaps surfies got streetwise or something like that.

I have also become fairly attracted to bands like U2 (you too, I see), REM and Guns and Roses. The latter reminds me to comment, if I have not already, on the difference between what is on the playlists in different places. In Perth the only FM pop station, 96FM, has a fairly mild-mannered playlist that might progress as far into the rowdy as Keith Richards, but never as far as heavy metal. When I was over in Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney last October, all the stations there were playing the Guns and Roses 'Sweet Love of Mine' (that opening voice seems to me like a glass chainsaw) as though there was nothing else worth listening to. In Perth you would not know the band exists. However, I discovered that on Saturday mornings the station plays the Top 30 LPs in Perth, and despite their best efforts Guns and Roses is in there, so they have to play 'Sweet Love of Mine' once a week whether they like it or not. In fact, 96FM is so bland that I spend very little time listening to it these days, and so have very little knowledge of what is going on out there in the big audio world. I mainly listen to ABC Radio National or ABC-FM, and it is quite interesting to be wandering around in relaxed, sunny and provincial Perth with Sydney or Adelaide-based radio pouring into my ears. Of course, when I remember I listen to parliament too, which means that I keep up a bit with Canberra.

(21 May 1989)

* I listen to hardly any commercial radio these days. When I'm dial-flicking, I rarely hear a track so interesting that it will keep me on a particular station. And the things I heard on radio have little relationship to the tunes listed on the published Top 40 singles charts. Hence, TV video programs must be to current teenagers what radio was to us. One of Elaine's nieces makes a sound tape from the weekly Video Hits program, and uses that as her basis for listening. Probably lots of people use *MTV* on Channel 9 as their only record-buying guide. For awhile Sue Howard was playing the kind of music I like on 3LO (ABC Radio Metropolitan), but now she's been shifted to ABC-FM's 5–7 p.m. spot. Too bad. I enjoyed listeing to Jane Siberry, Edie Brickell, Laurie Anderson, Tanita Tikarum, Julia Fordham and Christine Lavin. *

I was sad to hear about your father's death. The funeral sounds a bit like my grandmother's — more like a send-off than a funeral, which is what Christians believe. I'm sure that being a historian makes a person look at death very oddly. Even with the work I'm doing, which deals with the 1920s and 1930s, everyone involved is now dead. It is all so

inevitable and unavoidable. The forces involved are so small and so subtle, but in the end they subvert every great plan any person ever had.

Re *TMR* 14: Just because singles these days are pre-released from albums does not mean that they don't have a great effect on the public imagination. Of my list, the Beatles, Devo, Jimi Hendrix, Talking Heads and AC/DC all did better tracks on their albums, but as these tracks weren't released as singles I didn't include them. See, it's an exercise in mental discipline, something that, when it comes to music, everyone has noticed that you are sadly deficient in. Not that I blame you. That's why my list of Top Ten singles these days would be different. For example, any new list might well include 'Johnny and Mary' by Robert Palmer, 'Sweet Love of Mine' by Guns and Roses, 'Shake It Up' by James Reyne, and 'Bullet for the Sky' by U2.

But what would I leave out of the ten to make room for the new items — an old favourite like 'Rain' or 'Gloria' or something that is perhaps nostalgia laden, like 'Of Hearts and Dreams and Tombstones'? This is a question I don't have to answer. Seeing the old list is confusing because it is so full of good stuff that I could not really out any of it, if I had not seen the list and you had simply asked for an update.

(20 June 1989)

ROBERT DAY
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Coventry CV7 8DQ, England

Another year passes! Still no progress on my film-music article, though I have great hopes for 1991. The latter part of 1990 has been mainly filled with my house cracking apart — literally! — because of the subsoil drying out during the hottest summer ever in the UK.

[In my new job] I have eight trips to one year, most of them to London. The last three have seen me going to the House of Lords to 'spy' on a committee considering European legislation. My last trip coincided with the second ballot for Tory Party leader. On my way into the House, I was accosted by a media team who mistook me for an MP. 'No', I said, 'I'm just an ordinary member of the public'; then I strode confidently through a door marked 'Closed to the general public'!

(25 December 1990)

Marc Ortlieb's piece on Fairport Convention brings back memories of the twice I saw them, once in college and once on their 'farewell' tour. This was the Fairport we knew and loved of old, Swarb cackling down his guitar pickup.

Music fanzines I've always found most amusing. In most of them we find a group of people, or one person, re-inventing the fannish wheel and expressing much delight in it. Perhaps it's just we who are getting complacent or jaded at the concept of producing our own publications. I dropped out of UK fanzine fandom mainly because people were producing fanzines embroiled in matters of 'what makes a fanzine' and how many nagels can dance on a Gestetner drum.

I wish Leigh Edmonds hadn't resisted the temptation to write about Philip Glass for twenty pages. In my humble opinion, Glass represents the longed-for union between popular and classical music, something that hasn't been seen since the seventeenth or eighteenth century at the latest. Glass started out as a West Coast musician who absorbed many of the influences of the sixties and some of the music of the East that became popular about that time. Now he has virtually single-handedly re-invented opera as a popular art form; indeed, in making music settings of *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (from the Doris Lessing novel) and *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Glass could be regarded as the first big-name sf/fantasy composer since Wagner. Sir Michael Tippett has followed this lead with his new opera, *New Year*, which is based on a BBC TV play about time travellers, *The Flipside of Dominick Hyde*.

(3 November 1989)

ANDY SAWYER
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South Wirral L64 4BT, England

Fairport Convention is of course one of my all-time favourites, ever since I first heard them on the *John Peel Show* one afternoon (this was when the BBC let him loose in the daytime) and heard this really strange rocked-up folk ballad with fiddles and who knows what else going on in the background. This was, of course, 'Tam Lin'. I never actually saw the band with that line-up, but I saw Sandy Denny with her Fotheringay band two or three times until they split, and saw Sandy and Richard Thompson several times solo and together, and Fairport about the time of the *Angel Delight* album. I last saw Richard Thompson a few months ago, in a packed and smoky folk club. Mary hated it; it was too cramped and loud for her. I thought it was great.

Damn sucker for lists that I am, I tried to make my own list of hit singles and failed miserably. As of today's date:

'Another Girl, Another Planet' (The Only Ones)
'Friday on My Mind' (The Easybeats)
'Atomic' (Blondie) (In the best of all possible worlds, this would be re-recorded with Dusty Springfield on lead vocals and the scratchy lead guitar phrase just after the bass solo brought up much louder and clearer in the mix.)
'Losing You' (Dusty Springfield)
'Jumping Jack Flash' (Rolling Stones)
'Cloudbusting' (Kate Bush)
'Gloria' (Them).

A thousand others come crashing in. I'm on much firmer ground with albums:

1 *Astral Weeks* (Van Morrison)
2 *Hounds of Love* (Kate Bush)
3 *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (David Bowie)
4 *Document* (REM)
5 *Shoot Out the Lights* (Richard and Linda Thompson)
6 *The Silent Corner and the Empty Stage* (Peter Hammill)
7 *Carolanne* (Carolanne Pegg)
8 *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* (The Incredible String Band)
9 *Leige and Lief* (Fairport Convention)
10 *The Velvet Underground and Nico* (Velvet Underground)

(1 December 1989)

* Andy, you must have missed out on the 1960s ('the only decade this century worth a damn' in the memorable words of Bob Hudson, who introduces two hours of 1960s music each Saturday night on 3LO). In fact, I bet you started listening to pop music on New Year's Day 1971.

Andy says that, although he can never remember hearing a note of music by Shostakovich, he was so impressed by Robert Day's article that he's going to look for the Great Man's music at the local record library. *

JAMES ALLEN
(again)

My Top Ten Singles will also show my age:

1 'Anarchy in the UK' (Sex Pistols)
2 'Jean Genie' (David Bowie)
3 'Songs from the Wood' (Jethro Tull)
4 'Back on the Chain Gang' (Pretenders)
5 'The End' (Doors) (I think this was released as a single; the album track, over 11 minutes long, is used over the end credits of *Apocalypse Now*)
6 'Looking for an Echo' (OI '55)
7 'Bouree' (Jethro Tull)
8 'Horror Movie' (Skyhooks)
9 'Stairway to Heaven' (Led Zeppelin)
10 'London Calling' (Clash)

* Urgent Editorial Interjection: 'Stairway to Heaven' is probably the most popular song *never* to have been released as a single. *

FRANK C. BERTRAND
174 Profile Avenue, Portsmouth, New Hampshire 03801, USA

You do have a way of publishing material that elicits letters of comment, even from way over here in the 'New World', land of endless condos and shopping malls, fast food and mindless pablum on the glass teat, and now the latest exemplar of western civilization — teenage mutant ninja turtles. Why turtles? Why not gerbils or cockroaches instead?

Having once upon a time taught and played electric guitar professionally — to the point of playing in a rock group while stationed in Vietnam, where the semi-standard way to request a song was by sending a drink up to the stage — music has been and is a solace to me in trying to cope with the increasing insanities of Life. Be it inane sf, the environmental crisis, or something mundane like Fantasy Rot that starts to stress me out, I more and more turn to music, from heavy metal to classical to New Wave to jazz — most anything but c&w and opera, though I do love operatic overtures. Or, for something really *different* I'll listen to the Kronos Quartet on CD: *Winter Was Hard* (1988: Elektra/Nonesuch 79181). My tastes in music, as in most everything else post-Vietnam tour, tend to be eclectic.

If forced, therefore, upon threat of spending a weekend with the *Penthouse* Pet of the Year reading cyberpunk out loud, I would offer this list of Top Ten Singles:

1 'Us and Them' (Pink Floyd)
2 'Unchained Melody' (Righteous Brothers)
3 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' (Procol Harum)
4 'Sweet Jane' (Lou Reed)
5 'Addicted to Love' (Robert Palmer)
6 'Georgia on My Mind' (Ray Charles)
7 'In the Still of the Night' (Five Satins)
8 'Be My Baby' (Ronettes)
9 'You've Got Another Thing Coming' (Judas Priest)
10 'Good Vibrations' (Beach Boys)

* This poses the same problem as I had with Robert Mapson's list — singles that weren't singles. Did Lou Reed, either solo or with the

(Continued on Page 122)

I haven't heard a lot from **JOSEPH NICHOLAS** recently, except through the pages of that sterling fanzine *FTT*. I just hope that the following journals are still being produced.

• **FEATURE LETTER**

Joseph Nicholas: Journals worth reading

I haven't read much fiction since I stopped writing criticism; William Gibson (of course), Bruce Sterling, some of the 'mainstream' novels by Philip K. Dick now finally seeing the light of day, Chris Priest's *The Glamour* (three years after its actual publication), one of the Dozois anthologies . . . oh, and Walter Jon Williams's *Hardwired*, which was wholly derivative in concept but had tremendous narrative drive. But that's about all — these days I read mostly non-fiction, which makes it difficult to provide the sort of list of favourites that you seem to crave. Well, you say, don't I have any favourite non-fiction books? Answer: no, because the non-fiction I read is not timeless essays but context-dependent of-the-moment journalism, which means that if you read the book more than six months after its publication it has ceased to have any meaning. Well, you can read Noam Chomsky's *Turning the Tide: US Intervention in Central America* for its general polemic against what he identifies as 'the fifth freedom' (to rob, to exploit, to suppress any hindrance to US capital), but its fine details (it was written in 1985) have since been overtaken by subsequent events. Ditto Susan George's *How the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger*: great on the theory, now very dated on the practice (it was first published in 1976). The Latin America Bureau has been producing a whole string of books on the history and politics of the nations of Central and South America since 1982 or thereabouts; but as each was published to mark a particular event in those nations they are inevitably dated. Even Martin Walker's *The Waking Giant: The Soviet Union under Gorbachev* (1986) now seems platitudinous and obvious, such is the pace of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

But I read a lot of magazines and periodicals, too; and I thought it might be interesting to see if I could produce an annotated list of my favouties amongst those. Here they are, then, in alphabetical order

END Journal

The bimonthly publication of European Nuclear Disarmament, an organization which is less a popular campaign than a debating forum on the possible shape of a post-nuclear Europe from which the arbitrary bloc divisions imposed following the Second World War have finally been removed. Like most other peace movement publications, it has seized on the essential point that nuclear weapons systems are less discrete items of military hardware than expressions of political and social instability; but unlike most other peace movement publications it has generalized from this truth to elaborate an entire ideology of threat inflation, social repression and globalized hegemonization. Many of the articles it publishes can therefore seem wilfully obscure or over-intellectualized; but when it gets the balance right it can be exhilarating. The importance of John Lennon to Czechoslovak dissidents, the inevitability of compromise by Western social democratic parties, the achievements and the failures of Poland's Solidarnosc, the prospects for further nuclear disarmament in the post-INF environment . . . the range is broad, the ideology flexible, the prospects the magazine points towards virtually revolutionary.

The Guardian

My favourite daily newspaper, and one that has long been noted less for the number of different stories it reports than for the depth of its coverage of the ones it does: and by supplying more background details makes the foreground events much more comprehensible. In this it is rivalled only by *The Independent*, which I read alongside *The Guardian* for about a year from April 1987 to April 1988; but while it might cover a larger number of stories, in the same depth, as *The Guardian*, it is let down badly by its features, which are non-existent, and by its over-reliance on tedious right-wing columnists like (in particular) Peter

Jenkins and William Rees-Mogg. *The Guardian*, by contrast, has whole sections devoted to the media, education, social issues, science and technology, and the arts — and a features policy so catholic and wide-ranging that Tory MPs like Michael Brown and Teddy Taylor can be found on the same page as left-liberal professors like David Selbourne and Peter Townsend, and a Labour MP like Tony Benn can appear in the same forum as the centrist architect of the SDP David Marquand. Besides, it always publishes the letters I send it!

Marxism Today
The 'bible', as some call it, of designer socialism; and the first magazine of the British left to recognize not only that the old class-based nature of politics had broken down to the point of vanishing entirely but also that the nature and methods of politics had been completely reshaped by the Thatcher revolution. In this it was doubtless helped by the position of the British Communist Party itself: so small as to have never quite been part of the British political mainstream, and thus to have been permanently in the position of commenting upon it from without — freeing the party from the traditional assumptions and logics that have dictated (say) the Labour Party's response to Thatcherism. Taking its cue from the writings of Antonio Gramsci, therefore, and allying itself with the so-called 'Eurocommunist' tendency that has helped reshape the Western European left, *Marxism Today* has placed cultural rather than economic politics at the centre of its project, thereby focusing its attention on socially transformative instead of merely oppositionalist issues. And being, in consequence, as catholic and as wide-ranging as *The Guardian*.

Moscow News (English Language Edition)
The indispensible guide to *glasnost* and *perestroika*; and in fact the flag-bearer of both. Where a newspaper like *Pravda* (which now has a monthly English-language edition) will publish lengthy theoretical debates on the nature and purpose of ongoing Soviet reforms, *Moscow News* tends to focus on the reforms that it feels should be introduced — and by taking the risk inherent in floating such (relatively very radical) ideas in the first place helps to create the space in which they can be discussed by the more conservative press commentators. It should of course be remembered that to read it is not necessarily to understand everything that animates the modern Soviet intelligentsia; but it is certainly to gain an insight into their concepts and concerns, and into the guiding tenets of the new foreign and domestic policies of what is undeniably the world's second most important nation.

New Scientist
As the cliché has it, there are more ideas in one issue of this than in a whole shelf of science fiction; but it happens to be true. Supposedly aimed at the intelligent but untrained lay person, *New Scientist* is in fact required reading for everyone who wants to keep up with new scientific and technological developments, and in particular how those developments will affect the world around us. Whereas other science journals simply tend to report, *New Scientist* seeks to place its subjects in their social and political contexts: to make its subjects real by making them relevant. Thus (say) its editorials are as likely to discuss the effects of the government's cuts in funding for the various statutory bodies that co-ordinate research in Britain as the fruits of that research itself. Its excellence is often undermined, however, by its too-partisan stance on nuclear power; the editor seems to have undergone some sort of conversion about four or five years ago, and in consequence often treats all opposition to it with a scorn that verges on the abusive (and which lacks the rationality that he always asserts distinguishes the anti-nuclear case). This aside, however, its coverage is first-class: lucid, impartial and informative.

South
The premier monthly guide to Third World affairs, written by Third World journalists from a Third World perspective, and thus a necessary corrective to the unconscious Western bias of the developed world. Even so, it seems to have changed its orientation somewhat in the past couple of years: where it would formerly highlight politics and culture, these days it seems to pay more attention to business and economics: less analysis of the problems of (say) democracy in Nigeria, and more emphasis on (say) the restructuring of Peru's international debt. The result is to make it seem less radical: five years ago it would have been urging developing country debtors to pull the plug on the global financial system, whereas it now prefers the more panacea-like debt-for-equity swaps. Even so, its insight into what's happening in the Third World, and why the Third World is important, cannot be beaten.

(I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS
Continued from Page 119)

Velvet Underground, ever release 'Sweet Jane' as a single? I doubt it. Ditto for 'Us and Them' by Pink Floyd. Were *any* singles released from *Dark Side of the Moon*? Or were all the tracks on the album played so often that we thought they were? *

Kudos, accolades and first prize to Robert Day for his article 'Now the Great Work Is Ended' on Dmitri Shostakovich. If only similar cogent analysis could be given to sf. Delany, Lem and Aldiss try the hardest, but at times aimlessly wander amidst esoteric verbiage and erudite theories. Which reminds me of a statement from a recent book by Ian MacDonald titled *The New Shostakovich* (Boston: Northeastern University Press): 'Indeed, Western failure to arrive at anything remotely approaching an understanding of Shostakovich's music has less to do with the Machiavellian deviousness of its composer than with the political naivety of Western music critics.'

I also note that little, if anything, was written in *TMR* 14 about music and/or sf. Yes, many no doubt would consider this juxtaposition oxymoronic, as is the publishing label 'SF' itself. Nonetheless, there is some food for thought in such writers as James Blish, Lloyd Biggle Jr (who has a PhD in musicology from the University of Michigan) and, more notably, Philip K. Dick.

One approach for exploration might be music *and* sf, where literary text and musical compositions are inextricably bound, a recent example of this being Tod Machover's opera *Valis*, which premiered at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in December 1987, was 'semi-staged' twice at MIT in Cambridge, Mass. in June 1989, and performed in Tokyo in late January 1990. Here one could also consider musical literary allusion, as exemplified by the several references in various PKD works to Beethoven's 1805 opera *Fidelio* (in his 1976 essay 'Man, Android and Machine' PKD likens his 'idea of springtime' to 'the lifting of the iron doors of the prison and the poor prisoners, in Beethoven's *Fidelio*, let out into the sunlight') or more interestingly, the Gluck in Dick's *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. Is this an allusion to Christoph Willibald Gluck, the Austrian composer of operas, or to the German word for 'fortune'?

A second category is sf *in* music, which exhibits the impact of sf on music — for instance, the 1984 album *In Memoriam P. K. Dick*, which contains eight tracks, all named after PKD novels, by the Portuguese experimental/jazz group Telectu.

Finally, there is *music in sf*, which is perhaps the most rewarding for literary study, in particular musical structures and techniques in sf works. Good candidates here are the PKD stories 'Cantata 140' and 'The Preserving Machine'.

Then again, who cares? Methinks the Russian-born composer Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) was prescient when he wrote in *Poetics of Music* (1948): 'The true enthusiast for music, like the true patron of music, escapes these categories; but both are rare, as all genuine things are rare. The false patron is commonly recruited from the ranks of the snobs, just as the simple Pompiers come from the bourgeois.'

(1 March 1991)

* Little I can add to that. There seem to be no sf authors, except Disch at his best, who can incorporate the succulence and rhythm of music itself into their writing. Not much recent poetry is musical, as can be seen from the many awkward attempts to compose settings for twentieth-century poetry.

G. K. Saunders, the Australian author of children's radio and tv serials during the 1950s and early 1960s, once wrote a radio serial in which people from Earth land on a planet much like ours, but on which nobody had invented music. Saunders' treatment of the subject is tentative (of course the nice Earth people introduce music, and everybody thanks them once they get used to the idea), but I've never heard of any other sf writer using the idea. *

ANDREW WEINER
(again)

I always liked Roy Orbison, especially 'Blue Bayou', but not with the same intensity as you. I think pop nostalgia is largely based on imprinting, like Konrad Lorenz's ducks: it's what we hear first at the critical age that counts most, and what I got imprinted on was Merseybeat and Motown.

* Which was the point of my article: that one's tastes (passions) (perversions) in popular music, literature and film, and the ways in which you arrived at these tastes, tell far more about you than any conventional autobiography could. *

Years later, when I was reviewing for the UK *Creem*, I seized on the Monument *Greatest Hits* package and used it as a stick to beat Carole King, James Taylor and other then-fashionable singer-songwriters, arguing (you may not like this much) that Orbison was the all-time king of schlock-rock, whereas

King *et al* were merely pallid latterday substitutes . . . and that if you were going to be corny and lame and sentimental, it was better to be *honestly* corny and lame and sentimental, like Orbison.

I guess what I was saying was that it was okay to like Roy Orbison, dinosaur though he was; and that schlock-rock, for all its embarrassments, could be authentic, too, no less so (and often more so) than what we then called 'progressive'. Although don't ask me what I meant by 'authentic', or why I even cared.

In any case, I kept on playing the album afterwards. And I got a kick out of his comeback with the Wilburys and 'You're Not Alone Anymore' (*epic* schlock- rock). And I was very sad when he died.

I have mixed feelings about the *Mystery Girl* album, though. At times it sounds less like an Orbison album than an elegant simulation of an Orbison album. But it's better than nothing. (I just saw the Rolling Stones play a less-than-elegant simulation of a Rolling Stones concert . . . most people seemed to like it anyway).

(12 December 1989)

* In the end, I don't play *Mystery Girl* much. It has too many songs that are other people's ideas of what Roy Orbison should sound like. Much better is Orbison's only live album, also posthumous, *A Black and White Night*. With luck, the recent Virgin albums will lead people back to the early Monument material. *

PETER McNAMARA
PO Box 619, North Adelaide, South Australia 5006

Like you, I grew up with Roy Orbison's music, buying the singles the moment they were available, but the LPs only occasionally when my meagre finances permitted. My sister was a devotee of that other great rock figure of the period, Elvis. To my disgust she always managed to find enough money to buy his albums, thus enabling her music to outplay mine on our solitary record player. We argued continually about who was the greater singer, and never did agree.

Now Orbison's music echoes through the house again. But no, I'm not responsible. My nineteen-year-old son spends on Orbison CDs the way my sister spent on Elvis albums. When he began to tell me how great this guy was I could hardly believe it, and I think that he in turn found it hard to believe the time-warp story I fed back to him. All is well with the world; small miracles do occur. I'll pass your article on to him when I've been through it again.

(16 October 1989)

* But it took Orbison's death to allow many of these small miracles to happen. I wonder how many kids have just discovered this great new band The Righteous Brothers, whose 'Unchained Melody' (recorded in 1966) was recently the No. 1 single!

Most of my correspondence with Peter has been about his Aphelion Books, an enterprise that followed the closing of *Aphelion* magazine. In *SF Commentary* 69/70 I reviewed George Turner's short-story collection *A Pursuit of Miracles*, one of the first Aphelion productions.

*

JOHN LITCHEN
PO Box 193, Williamstown, Vic. 3016

Thanks for the eulogy to your father. Though I never met him, I imagine he must have been a pretty good bloke, to judge from the things you've written about him. Please accept my condolences. I can understand what you have been though. My father died on New Year's Day almost two years ago, and the thing I will always regret is not sitting with him enough and talking to him about his life, especially his early life at the beginning of this century. (He was born in 1898.) So much of what he did as a young man is now a mystery. So much of what he learned about life will never be passed on to his children. If only I had made the time to know him better, but then I thought I knew him well.

Your article about Roy Orbison adds to your ongoing biography in a way that is quite fascinating. You should collect all the bits and pieces you have written about yourself over the last few years in one volume and there will be an autobiography that will fascinate a lot of people with its inight into what it was like to grow up in the 1950s and 1960s. You don't need to write a novel, Bruce; it's all there.

(19 October 1989)

* One impulse in me tells me that you are right — especially after I read some mid-1970s *SF*Cs for the first time the other day. On the

other hand, my experience tells me that publishers only take risks on autobiographies of people who are already famous. It seems too laborious to start a career in fiction now merely to become famous enough to sell my autobiography. Far better to publish it in bits here.

I wish I could persuade all my older relatives to write their life-stories. Most of them have led lives that they might consider fairly circumscribed, but they still remember vast amounts of important personal and social information that has never been recorded by newspapers or magazines. *

MALCOLM EDWARDS
c/o Grafton Books, 8 Grafton Street, London W1X 3LA, England

Funny about Roy Orbison. He was one of those people I pretty much took for granted, and I was surprised how saddened I was by his death. Partly, of course, the bitter irony that it came just as he was achieving success again. I remember reading the news on a placard while I was on my way to a big publishers' pre-Christmas party. Usually these are occasions for gossip; that time I seemed to spend most of the evening in conversations about Roy Orbison. I'm surprised you choose 'The Crowd' as his perfect single, because it never made that much of an impression on me. I always thought 'It's Over' was the one.

* I only ever met one other person who liked 'The Crowd' much. Perhaps that's why it was Orbison's least successful record during his most successful years. *

Ah, Fairport Convention. Haven't seen Fairport Convention since 1970. (This could be construed as one-upmanship.) I got over Sandy Denny leaving, but when Richard Thompson went too, that was the last straw. Two of their concerts are lodged in my memory, chiefly on account of Richard Thompson guitar-solos-which-made-time-stand-still. The first would have been at the end of 1968 or beginning of 1969 and featured the band as they were on *What We Did on Our Holidays* — including the dog — and the song was 'A Sailor's Life', not at that time on record. The second would have been early in 1970, just after Sandy Denny left, and that time it was 'Matty Groves'. For some reason I've never been able to understand, I've never followed Thompson's solo career. Strange behaviour on my part towards someone who used to be incontestably my favourite guitarist.

(14 December 1969)

* At a concert in Melbourne in the mid-1980s, Richard Thompson performed solo for about an hour, specializing in supernatural guitar solos and those peculiarly bitter, misogynistic songs that make Elaine dislike his work. Loudon Wainwright III, also solo, was more enjoyable as the first half of the bill. They performed together during the encore, not entirely successfully, but Thompson's recent recording work with Wainwright has been fruitful. *

IRWIN HIRSH
26 Jessamine Avenue, East Prahran, Victoria 3181

Given the time it took you to put together *TMR* 14, the Music Issue, I'm amazed you didn't take the opportunity to improve some of the articles.

For instance, Russell Blackford's article provides an interesting look at two people/groups I wouldn't otherwise bother going to see. (I rather like Cindy Lauper's voice, but it tends not to be matched by the songs she chooses to sing.) I get the strong impression that this was meant to be two instalments in a continuing column, which you decided to run together in one issue. Given that, a bit of editorial glue wouldn't have been astray.

The one article I wouldn't have published is Leigh Edmonds', which struck me as being, even at two pages, too long for its points.

The best things in *TMR* 14 were your article and Robert Day's. Robert's suffers a bit from the use of jargon, but for the most part it is a rich article.

Because your article is the most personal, I think it comes closes to describing why people like listening to music. As a teenager I couldn't stand Roy Orbison. I have a memory of watching something like *The Don Lane Show*, where they had a live cross to Festival Hall for the last song of Orbison's encore and a sweaty, tiny dressing-room interview. For me that epitomized Roy Orbison: no great artist would allow such things. The show is for the paying customer only; and why agree to an interview in such an uncomfortable situation? In my mind I used that segment as evidence that not only was Orbison past it, but he probably never was that great anyway.

Years later I'm listening to his stuff and liking it and mourning his death. And thinking to myself that there is something about his music that would make it hard for a young person to like. So I find it strange that at fourteen you liked Roy Orbison so much.

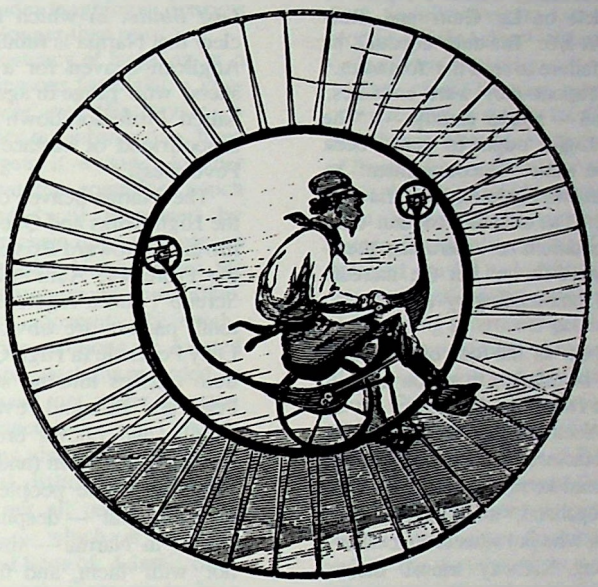
(10 December 1989)

* You're a hard man, Irwin. If you read either

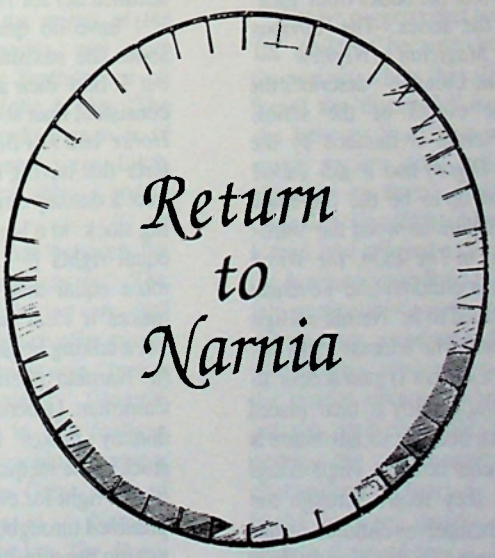
(Continued on Page 134)

When, at my request, Elaine Cochrane wrote her piece about C. S. Lewis's 'Narnia' books for *TMR* 11/12/13, she did not expect that her article would elicit the greatest response for any item in that issue. People didn't like her viewpoint, and said so in carefully argued detail. Here is a selection of the letters received on this subject. (Unfortunately, all this response has not encouraged Elaine, but seems to have stopped her in her tracks.)

• **FEATURE LETTERS**



Yvonne Rousseau,
David Lake,
Robert James Mapson,
and Skel:



YVONNE ROUSSEAU
PO Box 3086, Grenfell Street, Adelaide, South Australia 5000

TMR 11/12/13 was a sheer joy to receive, with all those luxurious letters of comment, not one word of which I had proofread beforehand. Amongst them was Harry Warner's report of reading my article on Le Guin and Rottensteiner in *TMR* 5/6: 'The only copout', he writes, 'was my failure to read the footnotes.' But this was no copout: they were endnotes, not footnotes, and — all too clearly — 'The Right Hand of Light' ought to have been preceded by the same 'Encouragement to Readers' that I put into my book *The Murders at Hanging Rock*: 'The endnotes contain only the sources of quotations or assertions; therefore, there is no need for any but the incredulous to interrupt their reading by referring to them.'

Footnotes appear at the foot of the page, and are meant to be referred to as you read. In an example from *1066 And All That* by W. C. Sellars and R. J. Yeatman, there appears in the text: 'Other benefactors were Sir Isaak Watts who invented steam-kettles, Sir Robert Boyle who had them legalized,* and finally Robert Louis Stevenson, who put wheels on to them, thereby inventing Railway trains, steam-rollers, and other tractarian engines.' The reader is meant to refer to the foot of the page, upon reaching 'legalized,*', and to see '*Boyle's Law: "Watts pots never boyle."'

I was particularly interested by Elaine Cochrane's 'Classics or Clunkers?: C. S. Lewis's "Narnia" Books'. The accompanying *brg* introduction wondered why Fontana Lions had moved two of the books from their original places in the series. The obvious reason is that *The Magician's Nephew* — placed first among the Lions — describes the chronologically first events of the series, where the land of Narnia is founded by the acts of a boy called Digory and a girl called Polly. The boy grows up to be the professor who constructs from Narnian wood the wardrobe through which, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, four children (the Pevensie family, who are destined to be Narnia's High Kings and Queens, and who address Polly as their 'Aunt', although she isn't) gain access to Narnia. *The Horse and his Boy* is then placed third among the Lions, because its adventure is set during the joint reign of these High Kings and Queens (before they return through the wardrobe, and find themselves children again — no time having elapsed, in this world, since they stepped through the back of the wardrobe). In the fourth book, *Prince Caspian*, the Pevensie children return to Narnia, as children, centuries after they reigned there; time in Narnia (as is constantly emphasized) passes independently of time in our world.

The first series first appeared between 1951 and 1956, and ends with the seventh book, *The Last Battle*, in which it is made absolutely clear that Narnia is finally a special path to the Anglican heaven for a select band of Britishers, who range in age from the then white-haired Professor down to Jill Pole, who is a schoolfriend of Eustace Scrubb (cousin of the Pevensies).

The Narnia heaven opens to the parents of the High Kings and Queens as well — they are travelling (toward Bristol) on the same train as the Professor, Aunt Polly, Jill Pole, Eustace Scrubb (whose vegetarian, non-smoking, teetotal parents are obviously ineligible), and Lucy Pevensie (a High Queen of Narnia). The train crashes into the station platform where Peter and Edmund Pevensie (High Kings in Narnia, and Lucy's brothers) are waiting to meet it. All of them (and presumably some unimportant mere people as well) are killed instantly. But — despite having been a High Queen in Narnia — sister Susan Pevensie is not with them, and fails to make it into Heaven. I suppose one can't really care what finally becomes of the wretched girl: 'She's interested in nothing now-a-days except nylons and lipstick and invitations,' Jill Pole tells us. 'She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown up.' Given such an irreclaimable sinner as Susan, is any reader expected to worry about whether Lewis, accordingly, has destined her for Hell when she dies?

I have no quarrel with Elaine's remarks about the sexism and racism of these books, but I find their actual construction far more consistent than she does. In her account of *The Horse and His Boy*, for example, Elaine protests that having the Calormene prince turned into a donkey ought not to make him a laughing stock 'in a land where talking animals have equal rights [. . .]. Maybe some animals are more equal than others?' In fact, the novel makes it clear that the donkey in question is not a talking beast, and also that talking beasts (a Narnian phenomenon) are not found in Calormen (where the Prince's having been a donkey makes him a permanent laughing stock). The inequality of beasts (if it can't talk, it's all right for even a Narnian to eat it) is emphasized throughout the series: for example, a talking beast in *Prince Caspian* contrasts him-

self with 'the poor dumb, witless creatures you'd find in Calormen or Telmar. They're smaller too.' (Moreover, there is a Muscular Christian tendency among Narnians themselves to jeer selectively at differences; at Mice, for example, for being smaller than most but extremely dignified. This tendency, although not endearing, is quite remarkably consistent — and includes laughing at donkeys because their ears are longer than most.)

The alleged inconsistency of laughing at a donkey is one of the reasons for Elaine's conclusion that *The Horse and His Boy* is 'a shoddy book that relies on information from the earlier titles, but gets it wrong.' Another reason is the fact that the countries which neighbour Narnia are 'well populated by humans' during the Pevensie reign whereas, on the children's first arrival in Narnia, 'even the witch wasn't sure what humans were like'. This difficulty is only apparent. The neighbouring lands that Elaine mentions are located south of Narnia, and the witch (as recorded in *The Magician's Nephew*) met many humans (some of them in nineteenth-century London, during a brief, exciting visit). The important factor is a theological distinction: whatever they may look like, not all people in these lands are 'human' — which is to say, 'Daughters of Eve and Sons of Adam'. Such 'humanity' is requisite only if you are to be a legitimate ruler of Narnia; thus, *Prince Caspian* reveals that Telmar (at a time when it had become 'unpeopled') was settled by human pirates and South Sea Islanders, who blundered in through 'one of the chinks or chasms between worlds' ('magical places' which used to be plentiful 'in old times, but they have grown rarer'). Their descendants overran Narnia, long after the reigns of the White Witch and the Pevensies, and were enthroned there. Caspian the Tenth is one of them, and appears in three of the books. (The Witch herself, although she looks human, is of course illegitimate: her parents were Lilith (whom pious Christian men abhor) and a Giant.)

Thus, I think it is not true that 'between the titles there are gross inconsistencies'. The books are in fact plotted with loving care, and their inconsistencies (which are chiefly moral) derive from the nature of Lewis's own 'breezy outdoor Chestertonian Christianity' (Humphrey Carpenter's description, in *The Inklings*, p. 157) which he is openly preaching by means of this series. Aslan — the Great Lion of Narnia — is simply Jesus in a Narnian manifestation, and is described in *The Horse and His Boy* as 'the son of the Emperor-over-sea, the King above all High Kings in Narnia'. Thus, Elaine's mocking impatience with his continual appearances — 'Aslan? What's he doing here? Good question' — 'Aslan (whot, him again?)' — succinctly expresses the rebellion that a presentation of the Christian world-view inspires in many readers. But, at the same time, it misrepresents Lewis's unmistakable plot, in which Aslan — like the Anglican God — is always watching.

The chief Narnian stumbling block for many readers is simply the Christian doctrine; as Rebecca West once expressed it, 'eerie talk of buying favours from the gods by suffering'. What Victoria Glendinning writes of Rebecca West is true for many people: 'It was the savage irrationality of the Crucifixion which defeated her.' Lewis faithfully translates this 'savage irrationality' into Narnian terms — and in doing so arouses general outrage against him for his treatment of Judas–Edmund in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. As Humphrey Carpenter observes in *Secret Gardens* (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1985), the character assassination of Edmund 'seems all too near a kind of spiritual Fascism'.

Ought one, then, to expose children to Narnia's pernicious doctrine of Christianity and to the further offence that is given by Lewis's unashamed prejudices (to which he was always absurdly susceptible)? My own opinion is that it is useless to attempt to shield our children from knowledge of Christianity; and that a little foreknowledge is their best defence against the evangelizing Fundamentalist Christian. The Narnia books (and discussion of them) are a useful source of this foreknowledge.

Elaine suggests that people buy these books for children because, having been children themselves when they first read them, they forget the 'distasteful' message of the books; she believes that 'the average child does not notice racism and sexism unless directly affronted by them'. For my own part, I was often directly affronted by things in books that I read and enjoyed as a child — or example, the frowned-upon Enid Blyton books, where I felt particularly lonely to know that a female author was presenting these girl characters who always sneezed inside their cupboard at the crucial moment, or broke a shoelace, and got too tired and cold, and were generally nothing but a whingeing burden. In addition, contemporary librarians hold that the Blyton books are very ineptly written. And yet — despite their affronts — I have read Blyton's

'Magic Faraway Tree' adventures to my daughter because they are uncommonly susceptible to the process that John Livingston Lowes describes in *The Road to Xanadu*: 'the dull original of our glorified recollection' drops into 'the deep well of unconscious cerebration' and merges 'insensibly, in hues and outline, with other denizens of that mysterious deep, and what we think we have remembered we have actually, in large degree, unconsciously created.' There is a magic — for children — in the Blyton books that an adult librarian can scarcely comprehend.

For me, the Narnia books are another matter, since I first read them when I was twenty. I have not, therefore, the excuse of delusive childhood memories to account for my presenting copies of them to my ten-year-old brother, and for reading and discussing them with my daughter when she was much younger than ten. There is simply a matchless wealth of invention in the Narnia books that makes them — to us — enchanting. The originals of these assembled inventions are easy enough to locate — for example, some island creatures encountered in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* quite likely derive from Pliny the Elder (whom I haven't read) but are certainly found on a fourteenth-century mappemonde of the austral hemisphere, where they are called 'monoculi' and are depicted (in John Livingston Lowes's words) as 'cheerful vagabonds [. . .] who sit in the sun and hold their single foot as a parasol above their head'. The books are crammed with such encounters, and *The Last Battle* is notable for containing the only description of Heaven that I have ever seen which makes it look as if it would be fun. Elaine's objection — 'what Australian child would be reassured by finding England in heaven?' — is invalid; it's made quite plain that whatever you loved in life is restored to you in your own particular Heaven (where, as in Doctor Who's TARDIS, the inside is bigger than the outside), and Elaine and Bruce would find, upon rushing up the waterfall, that every cat they had ever mourned would be awaiting them, along with every street and restaurant they had ever prized, and every fanzine. (Bah! Humbug! — but rather beguiling, all the same.)

* Or all those lost friends who disappear without answering letters or leaving forwarding addresses, or even giving reasons why they no longer value our company. *

As for the books one might buy for children as well as (or — in Elaine's view — instead of) the Narnia books, there are a great number to choose from. In Australia, Patricia Wrightson's books (like *The Nargun and the Stars*) evoke the Australian supernatural, while Robin Klein's *Hating Alison Ashley* and *Games* are excellent school-age stories (whereas her *People Might Hear You* is a powerful direct warning against religious cults, based on an Australian example). In Britain, Joan Aiken offers not only novels about an alternative England where the Stuarts reign in the nineteenth century, and the Hanoverians plot against them (examples are *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* and *Black Hearts in Battersea*) but also (within a remarkable prolific output) stories about little Arabel Jones, and her raven Mortimer: *Arabel and the Escaped Black Mamba* and *Mortimer's Tie* are two of these absurdist extravaganzas. In America, Beverly Cleary's chronicles of family life, from the days of *Ramona the Pest* through to *Dear Mr Henshaw*, are both hilarious and endearing; while Cynthia Voigt's masterpieces — *Homecoming* and *Dicey's Song* — are well worth reading by adults without an ulterior motive. (One of Voigt's earlier novels is set in a fantasy feudal society, and is called *Jackaroo* — which does not mean what an Australian might suppose.) There are certainly enough excellent children's novels being written today to keep anyone busy — but (utterly unregenerate) I still like to read the Narnia books as well.

(27 May 1988)

DAVID LAKE
(again)

Thanks for *The Metaphysical Review* 11/12/13. I'm sorry it begins so sadly. I also lost two personal friends in Queensland over the last year-and-a-bit, both very suddenly, to heart attacks. Some time or other our species will wake up to the fact that death is the main problem of our existence; and perhaps do something about it. I suspect that if/when we discover intelligent species elsewhere in the universe, the definition of the *sapiens* level will be 'knowing that you are going to die'; the superior level will be 'having overcome the death problem' in one way or another. All religions are attempts to overcome the death problem; but we are not superior yet, because religions don't work. Well, they don't work for most people in the Europe-derived cultures today. I suppose there are some fanatics who believe so firmly in Heaven that they face the prospect of death with glee; but they must be

few, even among church-going Christians.

That, of course, is why a fantasy like C. S. Lewis's *The Last Battle* is so unsatisfactory, except for the odd (very odd) fanatic. I agree with Elaine completely on that one. And yet . . . Now I want to indulge in a little literary argument, springing from her very interesting essay on the Narnia series.

One caution first: I wish we could all train ourselves *not* to say: 'This is a good/bad book'. The absolute-truth form here, implied by 'this is', simply doesn't fit the facts. Certainly in my department we are coming to agree that value judgements in literature are basically subjective; there are no agreed canons of excellence. You can now get an Honours degree in English from our outfit without reading any Shakespeare. While I love Shakespeare, I accept that I do so partly on ideological grounds; a fanatic Muslim, Communist, or some brands of Christian would be right to detest him. And so it goes also with Lewis.

When I first read the Narnia series, I was a youngish adult, strongly influenced by Christianity (I think I was just on the point of breaking from it). I liked most of the books, especially *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. In fact, I still like several scenes from those two books, the Wood Between the Worlds, the dying world of Charn, the voyage through the eastern ocean to the edge of a flat world, and the mysterious–romantic flavour of these things. And for me Lewis's style was and is brilliant. But it is many years since I re-read any of the series: the ideology now sticks in my craw. But I think it is worth noting is that my daughter, who was not brought up a Christian, likes the whole series. She didn't seem to notice the ideology: she bought the whole lot, and read and re-read them.

Let us give the man his due. He is not a racist: he lets his young white hero Shasta marry the dusky girl Aravis in *The Horse and his Boy*, which no real racist would do. And the Calormene Emeth is 'saved' and goes to Heaven in *The Last Battle*. For real racism, look at Tolkien. . . . No: what Lewis detests in his Calormenes is not their race but their religion-and-culture. And this is simply the religion-and-culture of Islam. Yes, I know they are supposed to worship a devil-god called Tash; but that is exactly what the medieval Christians thought about Islam: that they worshipped a devil called Mahound. Lewis portrays a slightly worse form of Islam, and makes that a collective villain. This is not racism, it is 'culturism', the attitude that not all religions-and-cultures are equally good. And I feel no resentment against Lewis for this, because I am also a culturist. I hold that not all religions-and-cultures are equally good. And I put Islam very near the bottom of my list of religions; about one notch higher than Aztec human sacrifice. I also detest Communism; but in Afghanistan, I back the Communists against the mullahs. Islam is obscenely anti-feminist: that, surely, is why Queen Susan won't marry the Prince of Calormen, and she is dead right not to. The issue is not a dead one: western women do marry Arabs etc. today; usually with tragic results if she goes to live in his country.

The technical faults that Elaine finds — or example, the plot problems in the first book — simply never occurred to me, and probably never occur to the great mass of young readers. A good example of a widespread process: once you begin to resist a book, you can easily find faults in it.

Let me now turn to another interesting example of the 'good-and-bad' literary problem: Martin Bridgstock on the Gor books. Very good, very interesting: and here again the critic is puzzled as to why 'bad' books succeed. Well, I can only speak for myself. I first read the first book many years ago, and at once I scented the flavour of soft porn. I bought a few more (up to *Assassin of Gor*), but put them on a different shelf from sf: in fact on my pornography shelf, next to de Sade and *The Story of O*. I did not for one moment take Norman's 'philosophy' seriously: if I did, I would react with anger, since I have always been a feminist. No, they are soft sado–maso porn, and since I am a bit maso myself, I enjoyed one or two titles simply as porn. Those were the days when my sexual drive was rather stronger than it is now. Alas, I can no longer read Norman with pleasure.

So I hope that disposes of the valuation question: the books are good as soft porn for those with a liking for soft SM porn. And I know at least one intelligent woman who has enjoyed them in that way. She has more Norman titles than I ever bought.

Norman took one element in E. R. Burroughs and expanded it. There is a clear element of sado-porn in Burroughs, always directed against women: his plots invariably threaten rape to his 'heroine'. Norman doubtless found this the most exciting element in Burroughs, and by magnifying it he has hit a monetarily rewarding streak among the SM people. The badness of his writing is no

problem: that kind of thing actually works better with bad writing.

(28 May 1988)

ROBERT JAMES MAPSON
(again)

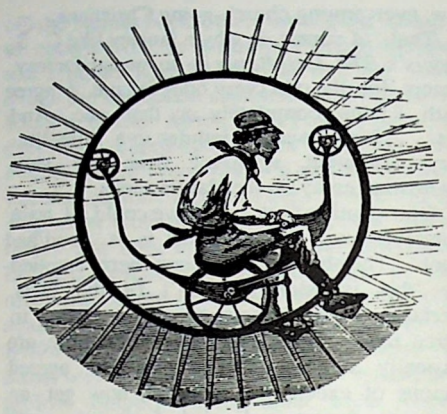
Re. C. S. Lewis and Narnia: Contrary to her statement, Elaine Cochrane *does* seem to be pleading for ideologically sound, neo-Marxist structuralist writings for children. 'If the message is distasteful, why pass it on?' Distasteful to whom? The child, the adult, society, the bookseller? Any imposition of values becomes immediately dictatorial.

I do not consider the Narnia books great literature, but I did enjoy them. I guess I've had a long association with them. My first encounter was at library book readings as a very young child, when the concept of walking through a wardrobe and discovering a magic and magically different world absolutely stunned me (okay, so I was your average introverted child seeking some form of escape — what else could I have become but an sf reader?) *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was the only book I read as a child. Some years later, I heard a radio dramatization of *The Horse and his Boy* on ABC radio's *For the Young at Heart* (whatever happened to that show?). It was only after reading other books by Lewis (including the Screwtape books, his sf trilogy, and some non-fiction works) that eventually I completed reading the Narnia books when I was about nineteen.

* More importantly, whatever happened to children's broadcasting on ABC radio? It has completely disappeared.

We hardly ever listened to *For the Young at Heart* because it was on at the same time as 3GL's religious broadcasts on a Sunday morning. The few programs I heard, such as the wonderful BBC production of *Wind in the Willows* starring Norman Shelley, were memorable. *

Perhaps they do not bear rereading, like Milne or Grahame, but you must remember that C. S. Lewis was born in a time, and was brought up in a milieu, that consciously and covertly condoned the very values that Elaine condemns (which is not to say that they are corect, only that few writers transcend the limitations of their life). C. S. Lewis was consciously Christian, he attended a private school and university, and he deliberately wrote the Narnia books as Christian allegory.



The sources of the Narnia books are literary. Lewis was learned in medieval allegory, in Norse myth and classical legend; besides these he was strongly influenced by George MacDonald and not a little by E. Nesbit. The allegory is the most important element, and it is Christian allegory. . . . The quality of the Narnia books is not consistent. They are at their best when the author is at full stretch.

(John Rowe Townsend, *Written for Children*)

Within a given story any object, person, or place is neither more nor less nor other than what that story effectively shows it to be.

(C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*)

In other words, because Lewis condemns 'progressive, co-educational' schooling, for example, we cannot condemn Lewis's writing simply because we object to this opinion. Children should be taught to question values and beliefs, and to be discriminating, but not through omission.

There has never been a book written, I fancy, in which the assumptions of the author were not present, implicitly or explicitly. Even the most blameless stories of child-life have at their base beliefs about something or the other. There is no such thing as not believing *anything*. One who does not agree with the central premises of the Narnian Chronicles must agree with some others. Will they lead to better ends than those of Lewis's books?

(Walter Hooper, *Past Watchful Dragons*)

The Winnie-the-Pooh books implicitly condone a world of nannies and slave labour; *The Wind in the Willows* unquestioningly accepts a world of the leisured elite. This does not make them 'bad' or 'improper' books; they are far from it. It would be interesting to see how many children's books of today have values and concepts that will be outmoded and unacceptable in fifty years.

(6 June 1988)

SKEL
25 Bowland Close, Offerton, Stockport,
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This letter won't get very far today, for today the England soccer team play their first match in the European Championship finals, and it is being screened live just after lunch. Then, in the evening, there's another live match that will give us the chance to assess the form and merits of the other two teams in England's group. To a confirmed soccer junkie like me, suffering terrible withdrawal symptoms since the end of the domestic season, these are fixes that cannot be missed. Oh, it's true they don't take up much time in themselves, but they do tend to loom on the event horizon, and break up the day's enormous potential into discrete chunks, which are much less than the sum of their parts. The potential of an entire day is great, but there's not much that you can do with a couple of hours here and there, especially with other factors like meals, baths, and housework throwing fences across what little range remains. Not to mention getting things ready for work on Monday (not of course that I'm ever really ready for work on Monday). Be that as it may, the Sunday paper has been read, last night's pots have been washed, the rabbits and guinea pigs have had their needs attended to, and have been freed to roam the uncharted vastness of the skelgarden . . . and there actually seems to be a couple of unaccounted hours looming in which, whisper it but gently, something might be done. Like this letter, or rather a bit of it. On then, before God sees that I'm actually writing a LoC and sends volleys of thunderbolts or visiting relatives (not dissimilar in their effects upon my LoCwriting — or anything else come to that) to spoke my wheels.

Of course, just knowing that I won't get much done today means that I can start this LoC, for I've only so far read a couple of pieces in the Encyclopedia Australis (volume MET to REV). If you had to wait for your LoC until I'd read the whole 120+ pages it wouldn't be a case of me needing a typewriter, but rather you needing a ouija board. But that's not necessary, because I can dive straight in . . . and what I dived into first was Lucy Sussex's reviews of the two William Gibson books.

When I saw this item on the contents page I was chuffed-to-little-bitties. 'Great', I thought, 'I'm going to be able to write about sf for a change.' Now most people on your mailing list will have looked at that piece and thought, '*Neuromancer* — wasn't there a book of that name, years ago? I'm sure I read it and *Count Zero* too. If I could just remember. . . .' Not me, though. Oh no. I finished reading *Count Zero* just yesterday, and I read *Neuromancer* only the week before. *'What an amazing coincidence!'* I thought, before realizing that obviously you'd held back publication of this issue just so's I'd be able to remember the books Lucy was discussing. Such consideration, Bruce, for as you are obviously aware, my memory is not so much bio-soft as bio-squishy, bio-dribble-out-the-ears, bio-run-through-the-fingers, bio-what-the-hell-was-I-talking-about. . . . Not many editors would do this, and I want you to know that I really appreciate the sacrifice you made of your publishing schedule and street credibility just to make me feel *au courant*. I will remember it to my dying day — or 'til tea-time, whichever comes first.

Well, I thought the books are good . . . though not great. The society in which they were set came across for me as well realized, though yes, I guess they were helped in this respect by my having seen *Bladerunner*, but not hindered in the slightest by my not having read anything by Lucius Shepard. Then again, I wouldn't read anything of his on principle. I can imagine only one situation where I could read that name with credibility, and that would be in a newspaper report of the trial where he was found not guilty ('justifiable homicide' ruled the judge) or murdering the parents who'd stuck him with the name 'Lucius'. Let's face it, the last person to be called Lucius was some wally of a Roman poet, whose poems nobody could ever read because they were too busy giggling at the name, or else he was an Emperor whose name so affronted right-thinking Goths and Visigoths everywhere that they rushed in and stomped the piss out of civilization-as-we-knew-it. And who could blame them? I would bring galactic civilization to its knees, destroy the universe even,

rather than go through life with a name like Lucius. And yet I'm expected to believe that there's a guy so proud of that name, he flaunts it? I'm sorry, but my willing suspension of disbelief won't stretch that far. I guess I just came across the name at too late an age.

Kids, of course, will blithely accept just about anything, even an author with a name like 'Lucius'. Which, it seems to me, is part of Elaine Cochrane's problem. She is trying to measure the wrong thing, or rather using the wrong techniques and devices to measure the right thing. Oh yes, in case you haven't noticed, let me wave a flag here. I've moved on, from Lucy's reviews to Elaine's. Now Elaine says that the books are aimed at the nine-to-twelve age range. Well, I used to be in that age range, but I started on Edgar Rice Burroughs' *The Gods of Mars*, and was hooked on sf from there on in. By the time I was twelve, I'd gone through Stockport Central Library's sf, all the Asimov, Clarke, and Heinlein. All the Eric Frank Russell. All the Sturgeon. All the Dick, the Pohl, the Kornbluth, and the Kuttner. All the Vance and the Vonnegut (there wasn't much at the time). All the everything, in fact. I'd even tried, and failed dismally, to get into the first volume of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and henceforth I 'knew' that fantasy was not my meat. So I never tried the Narnia books. I haven't read them and, knowing that they're pitched at nine-to-twelve-year-olds I never will read them. I can't imagine why Elaine thought that particular game to be worth the candle. You can't go back. You can't look at these things and say, 'This is what nine-to-twelve-year-olds *ought* to want.' I'm sorry, but nine-to-twelve-year-olds don't give a shit what you think they ought to want. Elaine tells us many ways in which the books fail, but most of them she freely admits are not faults that would be freely appreciable by the audience at which the books are aimed.

Kids just want a good story, in which the hero or heroine wins. Like holding any audience, you gotta make it interesting, and with the average nine-year-old's level of development, 'interesting' is synonymous with 'Is it exciting, and do the bad guys get stomped in the end?' Style and moral credibility don't run a poor second — they aren't even in the race. Obviously, not having read the books in question I can't even comment on Elaine's judgements of their relative merits or shortcomings, but then I don't think my voice would be relevant there, because of what I've said above. Nor for that matter do I think Elaine's is the relevant voice. The person we really need to hear from on this topic is a nine-to-twelve-year-old, one who's read the books. If I went outside and tackled the first nine-year-old I came across with 'What did you think of *Prince Caspian*?' the answer would almost certainly be, 'Dunno, what channel was it on?'

Bethany, though, has read all the books, and did in fact come across them for the first time when she was in the targeted age group. She has the set and has read them all many times, still rereads them to this day, and even though she is now fourteen she is close enough to the original experience to remember the effect quite clearly. The first of the series she read was *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and it impressed her mightily. At the time she wasn't aware that there were any others in the series, and so it was some considerable time before she came to them. We were talking about books with our good friend Gerald Lawrence, when Bethany happened to mention this 'wipeout' story she'd read about a year previously. As it chanced, Gerald had read the whole series and had fond memories of them. Bethany was so delighted at the discovery that there were another six books in the series that Gerald went out and bought her the set, whereupon we hardly saw her for several days.

So, when I'd finished the article I immediately thought of Bethany, and passed it across to her. When she'd read it I asked 'How do you fancy writing a LoC? You could argue with her.' I thought I was on safe ground here, as Beth is really into arguing at the moment. Her 'An Errand? You Expect Me to Run an Errand?' is a minor classic, and her '101 Reasons Why I Should Not Tidy My Bedroom' is awesome in its refutational inevitability. *Just light the blue touchpaper and stand well clear*, I thought to myself, quietly pleased at discovering a sneaky way to offload my LoCing responsibility onto somebody else. No such luck, because oddly she was disinclined to argue this time around, perhaps appreciating that in this instance she'd be murdered if she climbed into the ring. 'There's no point,' she replied. 'She's already done the arguing herself . . . but she's careful not to take that side too well.' Which gets her points for astuteness as well as self-preservation. Anyway, that's why you're getting this LoC from boring-old-me instead of from a new and exciting talent on the LoC-writing scene.

Which, of course, means no comments on

the books themselves, and so to the final paragraph of Elaine's piece . . . which seems ill-considered. 'This is not a plea for ideologically pure writing,' she writes. But it is precisely that. 'If the message is distasteful, why pass it on?' she also writes. But you are not passing it on. The message is distasteful to us, right, but the message is not even perceived by the reader the books are aimed at. One could of course argue that the message does get through, in the form of subconscious conditioning, but I'd argue with that. After all, such 'messages' have been getting through for centuries, and yet once they're made aware of them, intelligent and compassionate people don't seem to have too much trouble identifying and disregarding them — as witness Elaine's article. Unintelligent folks might remain unaware, but I'd argue that unintelligent people aren't likely to be reading for pleasure in today's passive, all-the-imagination-done-for-you-and-served-up-on-a-plate society.

More alarming to me is the concept that one should pre-screen, with adult sensibilities, a child's reading — that one should do this 'For the children's sake'. Needless to say, I disagree with this. I think kids should be encouraged to read, and in furtherance of this belief I'd quite happily recommend anything I thought the child might find interesting, irrespective of any hidden sub-texts. If the child is comfortable with the written word, then in the fullness of time it will grow up, mature, and be better able to take control of its own destiny. In fact, I would argue that trying to mould the child in one's own image is positively harmful, and this is precisely what one is doing if you use your own sensibilities as a yardstick for the books you recommend (always assuming, of course, that the kid takes any notice of your recommendations).

Elaine seems to be arguing that should recommend stuff to kids on the basis of what you think is good for them, that is, from your viewpoint, satisfying your requirements, rather than from their viewpoint, satisfying their requirements. Elaine seems to have some odd ideas about kids. One of her complaints is that in the Narnia books 'the solution to everything is violence on a massive scale'. But this is precisely the level on which kids operate. Kids have no innate moral sense, and are easily bored. This is why we don't let five-year-olds vote, and why we equate growing older with maturing. I don't have any specific memories in this regard, but some childhood impressions do remain. The children's programs I enjoyed basically involved kids being chased, and kids being threatened. I could empathize with other kids. It was exciting, and provided they won in the end, preferably without the help of stupid, disbelieving grownups, then it was great. I enjoyed some 'adult' entertainment, too, but always the action-adventure stuff. Of course, the people being chased and threatened were adults, and hence harder to empathize with, but then the stakes were higher. They were usually getting shot at. Other adult programs were of little interest. Either people were talking to each other — which was boring — or they were kissing each other — which was soppy and boring.

Kids are lovable, but they are also vicious little bastards. They don't empathize. They are the centre of their universe, and they don't really appreciate others as people as real as themselves. They play violent games. They don't play 'I'll be Constable and paint this haywain. You can be Van Gogh and paint these sunflowers.' It just doesn't happen. Yes, they play house, too. They play with dolls, they play at being grown up, but not with the same fervour, and for different reasons . . . or are they? Basically they play about having power. Kids don't have power, and it's a fucking good job. Could you imagine it? Jerome Bixby could, with his 'It's a *Good* Life'.

Children are amoral. They learn their morality, as they learn everything else. It would be terrible if all they ever learned was to be watered-down versions of their parents. End of rant.

(12 June 1988)

THE LEAST SUCCESSFUL COUP

In 1964 a fascist coup was organized in Rome. Gathering on the outskirts of the city, the right wingers planned a stampede to the centre prior to overthrowing the government. However, the majority were not from Rome itself and so the bulk of the stampede got lost in the back streets.

Five years after the coup, the authorities discovered that it had taken place and set up a commission to investigate it.

— Stephen Pile, *The Book of Heroic Failures*

(I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS
Continued from Page 124)

of the recent biographies of Roy Orbison, you would realize how much he was hit by the deaths of his wife and two children. In the late 1960s he found himself unable to write new songs and burdened by an increasingly uninterested record company. His audience in America disappeared. By 1970 he had stopped making albums, and his singles were released only in Britain, Australia and Europe. The only way he could survive psychologically was to tour incessantly, in some years performing every night of the year. He was still received enthusiastically in Australia — hence the tv segment you saw. It's all the more extraordinary that he was able to make a comeback at the end of his life.

I thought I had shown clearly why fourteen is the perfect age to appreciate a singer like Orbison. Who better summed up those adolescent feelings of isn't-she-beautiful-would-she-ever-talk-to-me-I'll-die-if-she-doesn't-notice-me-but-of-course-she-never-will?

The following letter was actually squeezed out of No. 11/12/13 all those years ago. However, the viewpoint remains interesting, and the book discussed has just been reprinted.

*

DAVID BRATMAN
1354 Crane Street, Menlo Park, California
94025, USA

I really have no excuse for not having read *The Metaphysical Review* 5/6 for nearly two years after receiving, except to say that it immediately moved me to write this letter.

I turned from Franz Rottensteiner's underhanded attack on Le Guin's writing theories to Yvonne Rousseau's rebuttal and defence with a sense of relief which slowly faded under the weight of her flabby verbosity. Well, few of Le Guin's admirers can match the crystalline elegance of her prose, so I let that pass until pp. 27–8, where in a single paragraph Rousseau presents two of the most staggering misjudgements of Le Guin's work I have ever seen.

First, Rousseau denies the plausibility of the character of Owen Griffiths, the protagonist of *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else*. 'I see no reason to believe anything that he recounts about his adolescent sexual feelings,' she says. What she finds so unbelievable she doesn't quite say; perhaps it's Owen's statement that he's more in love with the idea of being in love (cf. pp. 44–5, US paperback, 'I hadn't fallen in love with her . . . I had *decided* that I was in love with her') than he is eager to jump into bed with Natalie. Perhaps Rousseau doesn't believe that a teenage boy could be anything but indscriminately horny. (What else might she be getting at with this bit about 'Adolescence . . . is a time of maximum sexual polarization'?)

Rousseau continues: 'No male I have ever encountered (in person or in the pages of a book) reports having felt at all like Owen Griffiths.' Well, if *TMR* counts as a book, she's encountered one now. Though my personal situation in adolescence was rather different, and nothing quite like the encounter between Owen and Natalie ever happened to me, my basic feelings about love were, and are, almost identical to Owen's. At seventeen, Owen is too young and eager to fall in love for it to happen spontaneously. The same was true for me. Once it did happen (I was twenty), only then could I begin to develop serious sexual feelings for a particular woman. And no, I was not physically retarded or otherwise malfunctional.

Very Far Away from Anywhere Else is the only young adult novel I've read that tells the truth about love as it was for me. Consequently I cherish it dearly, and wish it had been around when I was seventeen; reading it would have been a great comfort and solace. Perhaps my experience is unusual — certainly I, like Owen, felt an unwanted pressure towards early sexual maturity — but, *pace* Rousseau, such experiences do exist.

Then Rousseau goes on to charge that the secondary world in *The Beginning Place* [*Threshold* in the British edition] lacks 'vitality' — the depth that makes Earthsea great. This one had me jumping up and down, saying, 'But — but that's the *point*!' I doubt that I can explain this clearly, but to me *The Beginning Place* is not about the secondary world; it's about the primary world, the dreary city where Hugh and Irene live. Tembreabrezi is a place to which they go to refresh and reorient themselves; it is not a place in which to live. Note that even when Hugh and Irene complete their quest they return to Cleveland (or wherever; the geography doesn't fit, but I think of it as Cleveland) with a new sense of purpose, cured of what ailed them. The experience is equivalent to ours in reading fantasy novels: eventually one must put down the book and get on with life; Hugh and Irene must do the same. They cannot stay, and the reader must not think that they can. So it's critical that the fantasy world be charming but not captivating, that it lack a little vitality. The reader must not long to disappear into it as, say, the Pevensies do into Narnia, or the meaning of the book will be lost. Well, apparently Rousseau lost it anyway.

There is an excellent article, '*The Begin-*

ning Place: Le Guin's Metafantasy' by Brian Attebery, in the annual *Children's Literature*, Vol. 10 (Yale University Press, 1982), which explained to me what I was responding to in the book. I entreat Yvonne Rousseau to read it; if she can't find a copy, I'll be glad to send her a xerox (it's short).

(30 July 1987)

ROB GERRAND
(again)

I was fascinated by the dream correspondence. It brought to mind an exceptionally vivid dream I had many years ago, so vivid that I wrote it down at the time. I have had very few dreams with the emotional intensity or sense of reality that this had. Here is what I wrote twenty years ago:

In those days of the pursuit, the two boys would run up the long corridor, and then hide behind the green bushes. The crowd would rush past, thinning out, and slowly dispersing.

At the beginning of one chase he had bumped into her, and she had laughed softly, and run off to hide.

Now they, the three of them, were amongst the last left in the pursuit. They heard the men behind, closing, when they reached the top, and suddenly the girl was there again, and he took her hand.

'Oh, I remember you,' she said. 'We met at the bottom.' She smiled.

And now, as the slow music started, they danced. At first he was awkward; he did not flow into the movement as she did. He was aware of her gliding beauty and he held back. But then he held her to him, and the music bound them as they danced. They moved to the stairs and up to the corridors with the faces carved in the dark wood walls.

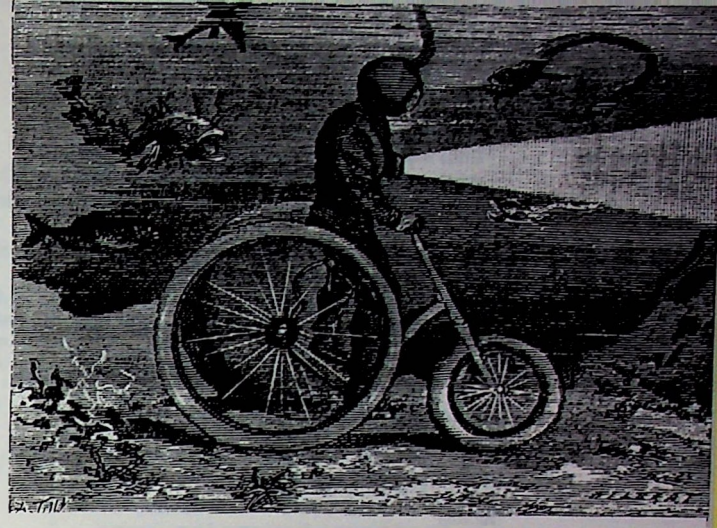
They danced around and around, stopping occasionally to stare at a mask. Then on.

Until finally they burst out on to the path and rich green lawn before the Entrance. She lay down on the grass and he lay down beside her and kissed her.

'They have a sense of smell here,' she said ironically, referring to the area behind the Entrance.

'I know,' he replied. And why did she go there? Was it the gambling?

He would wander through the wooden corridors, looking at the paintings and carvings in the wood. He would inspect them with curiosity, wondering about them.



And then reach the green lawn, and meet her briefly, before she went in through the Entrance. And he had to remain outside.

He would stand there motionless, gazing where she had been, as if she were still there.

One day, he saw the carvings afresh. He walked down, his head pressed against the walls sometimes. The pictures stared back. There was pain and sadness in their eyes. He walked down. The carvings silently stared. His body was weighed with such a tender poignance as each further painting pierced his soul. He felt his eyes wet.

He reached the lawn, and she was there, having never looked more beautiful. She was dressed in white, down to the ankles. She gave him her hand, and his heart beat, he felt constricted, sad, happy, as she led him through the Entrance.

Inside there were many tables, many people. There was food laid out, there was cutlery and crockery. Luscious meats, goulashes. Breads, sweetmeats.

She led him through the quiet, graceful people, and he hardly took his eyes off her. He felt so peculiar: so tender for her.

'Have you seen David?' she asked people. They hadn't.

He reached out his hand and put a finger to her lips. They were soft, moist, and she turned her head slightly to kiss his finger. She smiled gently.

A black shiny car drew up outside, long and sleek, bearing an old man and a young man, obviously a groom. He saw it was David.

'For you?' he asked her, as the white dress, the food, the people, clicked together.

'Yes,' she said simply, and smiled at him with a touch of regret.

Curious for a dream, this one had a stronger sense of narrative than most. I suppose I can remember a handful of others

that, while I was dreaming them, I felt they were real — so that the waking up was like moving from reality to a dream rather than the reverse.

The point about my dream of long ago is that the emotional resonances one can feel are more important than the essentially arbitrary interpretations one can make of them.

(15 May 1988)

* Rob also sent me the story about the Madelaine Restaurant that appears elsewhere in this issue. *

WILLIAM M. DANNER
(again)

I wasn't going to say anything more about dreams, because I've never had any evidence that they mean anything, though some are undoubtedly distorted reflections of past events. One of these recurred frequently after I had quit my job with J&L Steel in Pgh. in 1948. (I liked the work, but the places some of it had to be done were like hell, literally, and the pay wasn't enough to compensate for being called out in the middle of a winter night to fix some instrument that I'd tried unsuccessfully to have replaced.) I dreamed that my former boss had persuaded me to return for six months to break in a new man on the job, so I was back at the old grind again. There was no doubt about the cause of this one. I'd stopped at the Research Department to see some friends, and was told that not long after I left the head of the Hot Strip Mill had called Research and asked that a man be sent to fix one of those old, wornout, and inadequate recorders I'd tried to have replaced. The Research head said that he did not have a man to spare, and added, 'I understand it was you who wouldn't OK those new instruments Danner wanted to get.' Naturally I wasn't unhappy to hear something like that, and it gave me dreams for several years at fairly frequent intervals. Those instru-ments were very complex strip-chart recorders called 'Speedomax', and they were no doubt OK for use in laboratories, but in the mill, where they were likely to have the gasketed doors left open so they got full of scale dust and other crud, they were almost useless. I habitually called them 'Speedomistake', even to the representative of the company that made them. When this man committed suicide, the boys at research said I was to blame for insulting his product. I suppose if I could see them now they would say that my quitting was responsible for the shutdown of the whole J&L operation (for some years now called LTV) in Pgh. and Aliquippa. Though some moderniz-ation had been done after World War II, the Pgh. Works was an antediluvian mess that had just growed like topsy. The Aliquippa Works was something else, but it, too, is almost completely shut down.

The other recurrent dream is a brief and quite meaningless one. I was in school (and again it was unclear whether it was high school or college). I was going down a wide stairway of the usual type — steel with non-skid treads — and decided that walking down wasn't fast enough, so I started sliding down with the soles of my feet just barely touching the treads. I got to the bottom in nothing flat, and nobody seemed to see anything unusual about it. It's hardly necessary to point out that if I'd ever tried anything like that I'd have gone on my ass — or on my head — in nothing flat, and so would anyone else crazy enough to try it. Yet once when I mentioned this dream to my brother, he said that he had sometimes had one very much like it.

(18 June 1988)

GENE WOLFE
PO Box 69, Barrington, Illinois 60011, USA

Buck Coulson described his dream; may I tell you and your readers about a dream-like adventure that actually happened to me in the waking world? I will not make anything up, nor will I omit or improve anything.

I was downtown in a fairly large American city I knew quite well. Walking along a familiar street, I noticed a small shop I had never seen before and went in. It was rather dark, and so narrow I could touch both the walls at the same time; the merchandise was oriental curios: lacquered boxes, ivory carv-ings, and so on. A thin young Chinese who spoke poor English came through a curtain at the back of the shop and tried to interest me in several things. I told him I wanted to look around, and he went back through the curtain.

When he pushed it aside, I glimpsed a young Chinese woman nursing a baby. She was so emaciated that I could see every rib — like a concentration-camp victim. When I saw her I realized, or rather I thought I did, that I was not in the city I recalled; I felt certain I had blacked out, lost days or weeks, and was in Hong Kong or some such place. In a panic, I rushed out of the shop; I was still in the American city I remembered.

For months afterward, I looked for that Chinese shop every time I went downtown. I never found it again. I repeat that this was not a dream — I was wide awake and badly shaken. I've used the situation, considerably altered, in *There Are Doors*. This is what

actually happened, with no embroidery. If anyone can shed light on it, I guarantee I will read and reread that letter.

(5 August 1988)

* In November 1989, Gene sent a much-valued card expressing his sympathy at the death of my father. He also sent a subscription, which has been a help in quite a different way. Thanks. *

BRIAN ALDISS
Woodlands, Foxcombe Rd, Boars Hill, Oxford OX1 5DL, England

Dreams are still much a part of my reality. Early in 1987 I sat down with a few ideas I had for a novel. Suddenly a text came to me that summed up approximately what I wanted to say: 'I think therefore I am. I dream therefore I become.' It seized me. It was like finding a fuse to a keg of gunpowder.

So excited did I feel that I rushed out and went for a walk. There's no one around on Boars Hill; it's like being trapped in a poem by A. A. Milne. But there was someone standing under a tree. It was Maureen Feely — another writer! A coincidence, like seeing two lyre-birds when I was walking in the Dandenongs with Lee Harding. I could tell Maureen and she would understand. Thus, auspiciously, began *Forgotten Life*.

You point out that David Lake doesn't like the Helliconia novels. I read his letter and I see what he means. He takes care to be nasty to me as well as the novels, because that's the way it is these days. You yourself comment on the English reception of *Trillion Year Spree*. How such ungenerous attitudes spread, I don't know; at least *Trillion* was written generously.

However — I don't say this with pride — I have learned not to be particularly wounded by such comments. The last four years, since the family and I came to this house, have been full and immensely rewarding for me. Whatever Helliconia did to others, it aroused my awareness in some way; I bought this place a week after sending in the third volume to Cape. I have been ever since on what — to offer another weapon to my mean-minded enemies — I can only call a spiritual quest. I'll resist the temptation to go on about it. Part of that intense journey is poured into *Forgotten Life*. Anthony Burgess has said of it already that it is the most interesting thing he has read this year. From Burgess, that helps greatly; I can take the yelping of curs. You will not be surprised if I add that during this intense period I have read little sf; which novel would your readers suppose might give a man guidance at such a time?

(8 September 1988)

ROBERT JAMES MAPSON
(again)

Dreams

In *The Master of Go*, Yasunari Kawabata writes: 'Shortly after the Master's retirement match, I was invited with Wu to Shimogamo Springs in South Izu, and learned about dreams of Go. Sometimes, I was told, a player discovers a brilliant play in his sleep. Sometimes he remembers a part of the configuration after he awakens. "I often have a feeling when I'm at the board that I have seen a game before, and I wonder if it might have been in a dream."'

Lewis Carroll on dreams: 'Query: when we are dreaming and, as often happens, have a dim consciousness of the fact and try to wake, do we not say and do things which in waking life would be insane? May we not then sometimes define insanity as an inability to distinguish which is the waking and which the sleeping life? We often dream without the least suspicion of unreality: "sleep hath its own world", and it is often as lifelike as the other' (from Carroll's diary, 9 February 1856).

Which leads me on to Plato's *Theaetetus*.

SOCRATES: What evidence could be brought if we were asked at this very moment whether we are asleep and are dreaming all our thoughts, or whether we are awake and talking to each other in a conscious state?

THEAETETUS: Yes, Socrates, it is difficult to know what might constitute evidence. I mean, the two states correspond as if exact counterparts. And it's not just that the discussion we've been having could equally well have been an illusion in a dream: when one has the experience of dreaming that one is describing a dream, the similarity between the two states is extraordinary.

SOCRATES: So you see that it is not difficult to find an argument, when even the question whether one is awake or asleep is controversial. And we have not yet mentioned the fact that the time we spend asleep is equal to the time we spend awake, and in each state our minds are convinced of the truth of their impressions at the time, with the result that we spend an equal time affirming, with similar conviction, that both the two sets of impressions are real.

THEAETETUS: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: And isn't the same argument relevant to illness and insanity, except that the time isn't equal?

THEAETETUS: Right.
SOCRATES: Well, is the truth determined by length or brevity of time?
THEAETETUS: That would be absurd on many counts.
SOCRATES: And do you have any other means of clearly distinguishing the truth and falsity of impressions?
THEAETETUS: No, I don't think I do.

Which brings us back to the old conundrum: do we dream we are butterflies, or do butterflies dream they are us?

Railways

I enjoyed your article 'Trains in the Distance'. I too had a tinplate clockwork engine and carriages as a child. The engine was a furiously whirring green thing, with grey goods carriages, and I still have the set packed away somewhere.

Westrail, the local State Government rail body, is in the process of electrifying our lines (only three public lines, one east, one west, one south of the city) from the antiquated (many carriages date from the early years of this century; the diesel rail cars emanate from the 1960s and break down frequently) to the new system. The process of doing this seems like a great con job. Railways, by their nature, will never be a profitable institution, but the pictures (artists' impressions, as they're euphemistically termed) of gleaming, speeding rail cars seem a fantasy in this land of chugging carriages (one rail car recently burst into flames!). One station on the line was closed because, it was asserted, it received little patronage. There was a protest, and the station reopened accordingly. The authorities, however, had Learnt Their Lesson. The next station (which admittedly *does* have a fairly low patronage) they closed with only a week's notice, and promptly bulldozed the lot at the end of the week so that further protests would be spitting into the wind.

(4 June 1989)

ROBERT DAY
(again)

We cleared out enough of the garage last year for me to start on my model railway, the first permanent one for some three or four years. I have in mind a medium-sized industrial town terminus layout, and I have the first two sections — some 12 feet or so — built, partially sceneried, and electrified. This last task involved me building a small control switching box that looks like a gadget that's escaped from Greg Morris' workbench in *Mission Impossible*.

One of the advantages of combining railway modelling and sf is that one becomes familiar with the concept of parallel universes. It then becomes possible to create a history and geography of a railway layout that is not based on any actual railway ever built. British railway history gives plenty of opportunities to exercise this little-known branch of sf. Plenty of railway modellers do this without realizing that they are creating science-fiction worlds. My scenario is roughly worked out, but I'll need to refine it further when the layout gets big enough to operate and needs a timetable.

Syd Bounds touches briefly (*TMR* 11/12/13, page 113) on the mysterious wallabies of England. May I explain? Sometime in the 1930s, a very rich man who lived up in the Peak District had a private zoo. His wallabies escaped, and went native. It is said that their descendants have adapted to wet summers and harsh winters and can still be found on some of the wilder moorland

between Staffordshire and Derbyshire. Nothing Fortean about it.

(25 September 1988)

WILLIAM M. DANNER
(again)

[In *Dreams and False Alarms* 5] I enjoyed 'Trains in the Distance'. It made think of Pittsburgh as it used to be when I was growing up. It had a really extensive streetcar system that made it possible to go from almost any part of the city to almost any other for peanuts (in this case, 8 1/3 cents). In its heyday, the Pgh. Railways had 606 miles of track, around 2000 cars, and almost 100 lines that reached all parts of the city and much of the surrounding Allegheny County. From the late 1920s to a few years after the war, the fare was 10 cents cash or three tokens (we called them 'car checks') for a quarter.

As you say it was with Melbourne, so it was in Pgh. Many of the outlying suburbs grew up around trolley lines, so it's a real mess now that most of the lines have been scrapped. Even with that very low fare, transfers, except to a few farflung lines, were free. And it was not always true that taking a trolley was slower than driving. On two different occasions I had rides in the cars that were faster than I could have driven them — once in the mid-1920s and the second time during World War II. On the latter one, it was the last car inbound for the night, and I think the woman operator was late for a date. She kept her foot on the accelerator, and it was mostly a gentle down grade, with few stops and high voltage in the overhead because of the hour. That car really flew. During the war the lines all got very heavy use, and maintenance was at a minimum, and the car rocked so that I thought it would go off any minute. It was the only time in my life that I was actually scared by a trolley ride. But the PCC held to the track like glue and we arrived downtown safe and sound, and I had a wait for the connecting car that usually came almost at once.

Just saw a good movie on tv: *The Sea Wolves* with David Niven, Gregory Peck, and Trevor Howard. Quite a thriller, but the best movies I've seen this year have been foreign ones on the non-commercial stations: *Fanny and Alexander* and *Wild Strawberries* of Bergman, and *The Return of Martin Guerre* (French), all seen without interruption, though the first is 190 minutes. A month or so ago the BBC's *The Singing Detective* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* were run concurrently on Monday nights. I'd seen the latter before, but the other was new to me, and I've never seen anything like it before. Too bad our tv producers make nothing but the worst sort of junk.

(17 May 1989)

Ralph Ashbrook remarks that he can 'save movies forever' on tape. I hope he won't be too badly disappointed. A friend was told by the head of the video department of Chrysler that the average shelf life of a videotape is seven years, and that's probably for professional tape. I've seen tapes on tv that were five years or more old, and the picture was very badly deteriorated and fuzzy, sometimes so much so that faces were not recognizable even in close-ups.

* Bill then told me about CEDs (no, I don't know what those initials stand for): video discs played with a stylus. He sent me a list of about 50 that he owns, including lots I'd like to see. *

I believe the CED discs were never sold outside of North America, and the excuse given for the failure of the system is that it won't record. It's too bad; the picture quality is better than from videocassettes and, according to a correspondent who has both, not so good as from laser discs. I've been kicking myself because I didn't get a machine sooner, for then I might have had discs of *The Philadelphia Story* and *Ninotchka*. Those two were in the first release, but by the time I was buying, MGM had arbitrarily revoked RCA's licence to distribute their movies. I hoped that MGM would re-release them when it started making its own discs, but it never did. Even at list prices, the discs were cheaper than tapes or laser discs; the lowest were $14.95 and the most expensive (for two-disc titles) $39.95. That is what *Gone With the Wind* cost me, and I've never seen it advertised on tape for less than $89.95. After manufacture ceased, of course, there were *sales*. RCA itself had one at the factory in Indianapolis, with prices of $4.95, $8.95, and $11.95 per title, and an outfit in New York called Pendragon Sales had several sales with one price for all — $5 plus 50 cents per disc for shipping. I got several titles from them.

I haven't seen many videocassettes, but some of them were truly horrible for lack of quality. One thing about the CEDs is that they were made from the best available *35 mm* print, and in the event that the colour was faded it was electronically enhanced in the transcription. Defective discs occurred, and RCA's policy on returns was very liberal. On discs purchased from a dealer, they were

(Continued on Page 142)

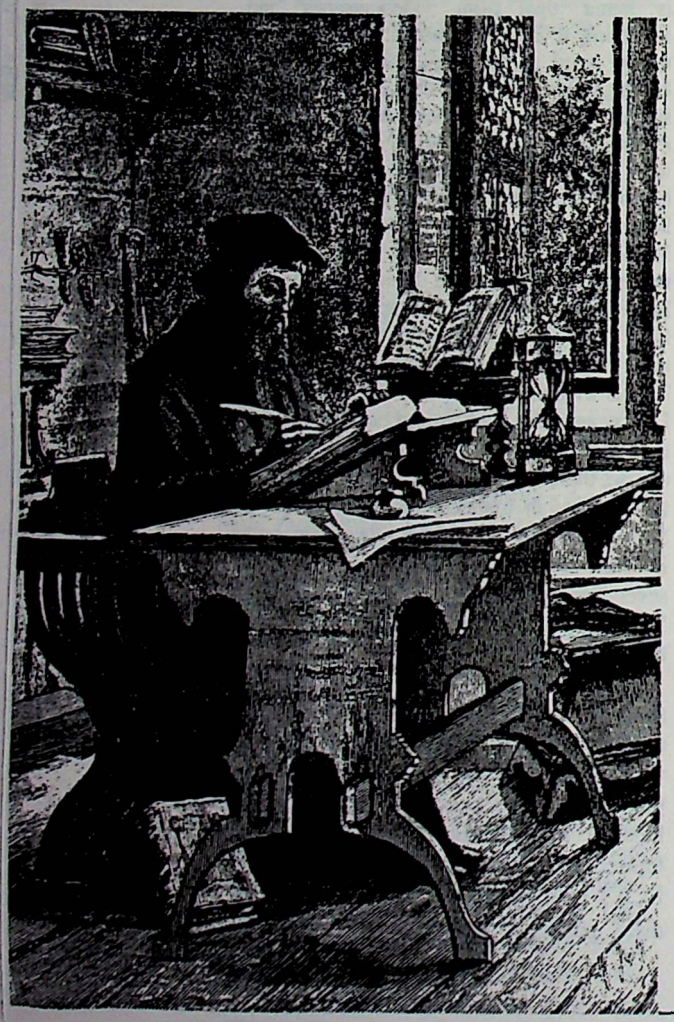
JOHN D. BERRY is one of the elegant gentlemen of fandom. He writes pretty well too. A pity that he lurks over in Seattle, and cannot drop in for dinner, as he and Eileen Gunn did a few years ago when John won DUFF.

• ***FEATURE LETTER***

John D. Berry:
Epistle to an ancient fanzine:
Turner, Blackford, and the art of editing

JOHN D. BERRY
525 Nineteenth Avenue East, Seattle,
Washington 98112, USA

Yesterday I was feeling particularly down — droopy and discouraged and malaised — and an issue of *The Metaphysical Review* cheered me up. I wanted to let you know that. It was No. 3, the May 1985 issue, which I had come across while sorting through the boxes of fanzines for auction for DUFF, and I'd held it out for the next round because of the cover blurb, 'Tolley, Blackford on George Turner's In the Heart or in the Head', over the neatly cropped photo of George. I know I have my own copy of this issue somewhere in the boxes and stacks of fanzines in the basement, but at the time I first got it, I hadn't read *In the Heart or in the Head*; now I have, thanks to you or Carey (I tend to forget which of you gave me which Norstrilia books last year), and I am curious to read other people's responses to it.



So I find myself writing what is in reality a letter of comment five years late.

Michael Tolley's review was slight, but Russell's longish piece dug at some of the things that bothered me in George's book. The book is good, and it's flayingly direct in its examination of its author's life. It's also remarkable for the . . . what word to use? Not 'restraint'; it's not restraint but leanness and a very careful *selectiveness*, a purposeful discrimination, in what details to include and what to omit. (I confess that I wondered, as Tolley did, what the non-fannish reader would make of the thumbnail sketeches of various visiting sf writers, but for me they were delightful.)

But it was the didacticism of that last chapter, the *call* to didacticism, that surprised me and left me unsure of my footing. I would never have expected George Turner to make a case for the subservience of art to purpose. Perhaps this just shows that I don't know George Turner, despite having read his critical articles and reviews (mostly in your fanzines) for much more than a decade. But didacticism? As a virtue? It doesn't take a rarefied taste for

l'art pour l'art to see that art — literature, anyway — that's created with an overtly didactic intent is usually second-rate, stunted, twisted to a shape not its own because its author determined the directions its limbs would grow in before it had even sprouted. Passionate intention to *show* something to people, yes, or to embody in your work the conception you have of the universe and of right and wrong, yes, that too. But didacticism? Literature only worthwhile to the degree to which it teaches? No. This is what socialist realism did, and an eye as penetrating as George's can tell the difference between that and art at any distance.

I was surprised, though, to read that (at least in 1985) there was a general critical disdain for far-future science fiction stories. This was the first I had heard of it. There was a lack of them, that much I knew, if only because I remember David Hartwell mentioning to me around then how much he would like to see more good far-future sf. When I think of this kind of writing, I don't think of the uselessly distant worlds that just serve as setting for any old kind of adventure — the only kind that I would equate with fantasy, as Russell does — but of the worlds that are *meaningfully* distant from our own, where the difference is profound because the author has truly made a leap of the imagination, a leap that lands both author and reader in another spot entirely, from which to look back and see this world that we live in now. When it's done well, this is a bit like travelling to a distant and unfamiliar land; rather than sitting at home in your armchair imagining the distant land, but having no new perspective at all on your own home, you are *in* the alien land, seeing it close up but looking back from a wholly different perspective on the place you came from. Only this kind of writing manages it while you *do* stay in your armchair.

At its best. Only at its best. But perspective and imagination are what it's all about.

Now I wish I knew where my copy of the *next* issue of *The Metaphysical Review* was, so that I could look up the responses to Russell's piece.

It wasn't just the discussion of George's book that lifted my spirits; it was the whole issue, the soup of literate discussion. Reading it over, in no particular order, reminded me that there are people who do think, and who write about what they think in a craftsmanlike way, and that not all of my rants or descriptions or analyses of the world around me are echoing unheard in the empty interior of my head. That's why I wanted to write you and tell you about this.

By the way, I don't agree with what you wrote in 1985 about the job of an editor. 'An editor's first obligation is to "house style",' you said, responding to Patrick McGuire's disgust at the copy-editing his dissertation received when it was published as a book. Having worked on both sides (sometimes simultaneously, although not on the same project) in the sordid world of computer-software manuals for three or four years, I've come to the conclusion that an editor's first allegiance is to the writer. Yes, even in a field like software 'documentation', where the writer is apt to be trained in nothing but the writing of other manuals. If you can improve a poor writer's work, by all means do so, but with the writer's co-operation. When the work is published, after all, whose name is on it? And, if no name is attached, who will get the credit or the blame? That's who should have the final say in how the words are arranged. House style may be useful, but blindly applied rules are never a service to reader. (Lately I've gotten especially incensed about blindly applied rules that are *wrong*, like the way American newspapers seem to regard a compound verb as cousin to the infinitive and consequently something not to be split.) Of course, in any writer-editor relationship the best thing is a perfect balance, and the next-best thing is that the better wordsmith should prevail, amicably. (Well, actually, the *best* thing is that the perfect balance should be achieved through the sort of back-and-forth that rarely happens when writer and editor are at a distance from each other.) But if it comes down to a conflict — the writer is a bozo and an illiterate and won't listen to reason or even take the vaguest suggestion and use it to make an improvement — then it's the writer, the illiterate bozoid writer, who should prevail. Because it's the writer's words we're talking about.

Of course, if the editor is in the position of *acquiring* the writer's work, not just trying to improve it, then the editor can simply refuse to buy it. That's the prerogative of the publisher, and in this case the editor is in the publisher's role. 'Take it or leave it' is the writer's line; the editor as publisher can always leave it. The editor with no power of acquisition should, in this extreme situation, leave well enough alone.

Second thoughts: I'm not right, either. The editor's *first* allegiance is to the *reader*, whose

advocate he or she is when working with the writer. This is certainly true in any field where the purpose of the writing is explanation; in literature it's still true, basically, but it's not so easy to draw distinctions and decide what is in the reader's interests. (The simple version would be to claim that 'plain, straightforward storytelling' is always in the reader's interests, in fiction. This isn't necessarily so, although it's an argument with great popularity in science fiction. I would insist that *clarity* is in the reader's interests, always — but clarity may not be simplicity, if what you're trying to be clear about is itself confused, deep, subtle, ambiguous, or inexpressible.) Anyway, after the given of being the reader's defender, the editor ought to respect the integrity of the writer (or at any rate of the writer's words; the writer may be a shit and a moral crud, for all we know) before that of the publisher or any 'house style'.

Having said all this, I admit that I get fully as frustrated as you do by the stupidities of bad writers, whether I'm editing them or simply reading them in books or magazines or (a hopeless case) newspapers. Why can't people get it *right?* Add in my equal indignation at the incompetence shown on all sides in the handling of type on the page, and you have a recipe for immense frustration with the literate world around me.

See what a five-year-old fanzine can do? I should try to dig out your most recently published stuff and respond to it, too, but that's not the way my epistolic muse is working these days. When it's working at all. I trust you and Elaine are both doing well. I do wish I could drop in again, right away, without having to cross an ocean of deadly airplane seats and airline food and a desert of very large-denomination bills to get there. But I'll be back when I can.

(14 May 1990)

* As you've probably read already in John Bangsund's *Society of Editors Newsletter,* Nick Hudson at a recent meeting of the Society also said that the first duty of the editor is to the reader.

House style has became much less important than it was even six years ago. Even Oxford University Press Australia has abandoned many of the tenets of its formerly rigorous style. Macmillan Australia has handed much of the responsibility for consistent style back to its editors.

Not that basic changes have come suddenly. It's now twenty years since the old Publications Branch of the Education Department plumped for '-or' instead of '-our' word endings, 'program' instead of 'programme', and many other 'Americanisms'. I can't bring myself to use '-or' endings yet. *

(I MUST BE TALKING TO MY FRIENDS
Continued from Page 139)

returned to the dealer, who sent them to the factory and delivered the replacement free.

The sound on these things is amazing. The player has stereo outputs. Connected to my sound system, the sound is like that in a good theatre.

(18 June 1988)

I've found out more about the CED system since I wrote last. For several years I had a spare stylus cartridge, and on 31 January decided to install it. It was easier than I expected, and when I tried it I found the thing working better than when new. Several discs that had glitches at certain points every time sailed though perfectly. The old diamond didn't appear to be worn at 50x, and I cleaned it up and tried it again, and it worked just as it always had. I was so pleased that I ordered another new one. I got around to trying it after a week or so and, while it was better than the original one, it was not nearly so good as the first replacement, which is now in the machine. The system may be so delicately adjusted that no two styluses are quite the same, and that may be one thing that contributed to its demise, though I still think the real reason is that it can't record.

I enclose a copy [*brg* Which, in pencil, is too faint to reproduce here*] of a sketch I made of the cartridge. The gold strap is a spring that furnishes the pressure to keep the stylus in the groove. I drew the stylus across the end of my finger with the force of this spring holding it down, and I couldn't feel a thing. How on earth the system works is a complete mystery to me, but it does work, and well. There are up to 10,000 grooves in a three-inch radius on each side of a disc; the grooves are invisible to the eye, and at 100x there are no visible modulations of any kind. The support at the rear of the arm, which is labelled plastic and rubber, is actually a single piece of moulded rubber, and apparently two tiny ceramic magnets somehow work on associated circuitry in the carriage to convert whatever the stylus picks up into electrical signs of some kind.

(17 May 1989)

MICHAEL HAILSTONE
GPO Box 5144AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001

I share William M. Danner's feelings about the 'ee' ending. Like him, I am irritated by 'attendees'. Yet you use this yourself elsewhere in this issue, and it seems to be standard fannish usage for folk who attend a convention. Is it a mainstream usage too? Just hang on while I check my dictionary.

No, according to both my dictionaries there is no such word.

I was brought up on 'escapee' to mean 'someone who has escaped'. When I was in New Zealand in December 1965, I heard the news of the escape of Ronald Ryan (who was, I believe, the last person to hang in Australia) and Walker from Pentridge Gaol. I was most surprised to hear the New Zealand media refer to Ryan and Walker as 'escapers', and found this most amusing. Henceforth I always thought of them as 'the two escapers'. Now it seems that the New Zealanders were correct (surprising since their use of English otherwise leaves much to be desired).

When I came back to Australia, I told my family of my amusement about 'the two escapers', so that my mother (who was most relieved when said escapers were at last caught) gave me a book for my birthday (I think) titled *The Escapers*. I forget the the name of the author/editor, but it was an anthology of famous escapes.

On the other hand, though, I thoroughly approve of the generic singular use of 'they/them'.

* So does Ursula Le Guin. See *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, her latest book of criticism and commentary. *

I understand it's a usage about 400 years old and is so much neater than saying 'he or she' all the time. There is no linguistic law forbidding the use of a plural pronoun in a singular meaning or vice versa.

(Cup Day, 1 November 1988)

GENE WOLFE
(again)

Mr Charles Grant,
28 Linwood Ave.,
Newton NJ 07860

Dear Mr Grant

I don't know whether you see Bruce Gillespie's *The Metaphysical Review*. But the following appears on p. 22 of the November 1987 number, which I have just received:

> In *Shadows 2*, edited by Charles L. Grant, Gene Wolfe wrote: 'Many of the most effective horror stories are those that deal with matters offstage, those flickerings at the corners of one's eyes that never quite come into focus until the story is done. It is not a trick of putting together the pieces of the puzzle; it is the recognition that the author has made you uneasy for a reason you cannot figure out. You wait. You wonder. And then, finally, the true horror hits you. . . .

That's very true; but I can't remember writing it, and it doesn't seem quite like my style. Can you tell me what's going on here?

(7 June 1988)

* Charles Grant must have been puzzled to receive this letter. And the true horror hit me as I realized what had happened. Years ago I had copied onto a scrap of paper the above passage, written by Charles Grant as a story introduction, as the perfect way to describe Gene Wolfe's short stories, about which I was supposed to talk to the Nova Mob. The little piece of paper was headed: 'Re. Gene Wolfe'. The piece of paper stuck around. When finally I used it in *TMR*, it read in my mind 'by Gene Wolfe'.

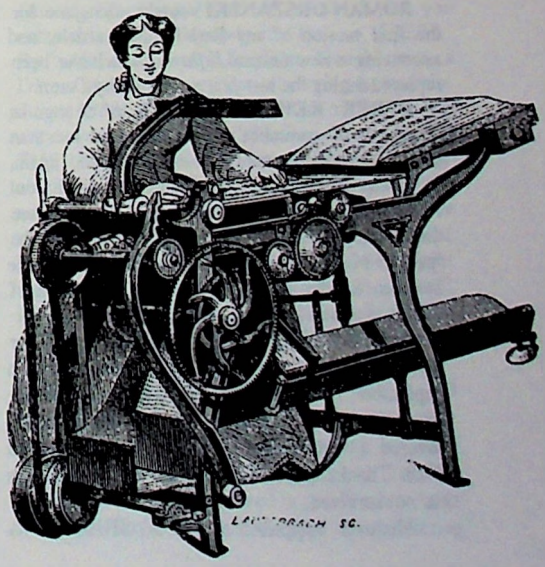
I apologize (have already apologized) to Gene Wolfe, Charles Grant, and Virginia Kidd, who also received a copy of the above letter, for the mistake.

Gene replied to my apology: *

Thanks — however belated — for your explanation.

And for your whole magazine. The letters from Tom Disch and Mae Strelkov are the best things I've hit so far; I haven't read everything.

(5 August 1988)



We also heard from . . .

BEN INDICK and his wife saw 'Jessye Norman in *Les Troyens* at the Met two seasons ago — the whole five-and-three-quarter hours. It was wonderful.'

MICHELLE HALLETT wrote that '1986 was a different year for me: I was finishing my degree and therefore most of the books I read were prescribed by course reading lists. I liked Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra by the River*. . . . I'll look out for some of your music listings, especially *Graceland* and the Beethoven. I have most of his symphonies. I like loud angry music.' Michelle also sent a postcard from her trip to Mexico, saying it was 'very interesting'.

DENNY LIEN keeps sending me very useful stuff about Garrison Keillor, who has become merely a pleasant memory now that none of his broadcasts reach Australia. 'Keillor, as you may have heard, did not stay long in Denmark and is now living with (I think) his family in New York City. . . . There is recently out an unauthorized biography of him, *The Man from Lake Wobegon* by Michael Fedo, which by report is basically favourable but displays warts and all.'

GEORGE HAY (current address un-known) sent news of the establishment of the Arthur C. Clarke Award in Britain, and then news of George Turner's winning of the first award with *The Sea and Summer*.

MAUREEN BREWSTER keeps in touch, and sometimes even sends a letter. We went to see *Fantasia* — the re-released new print — last December. Why is there no *Fantasia* fandom?

MICHAEL TOLLEY: 'My own father shot off to Canada during the war, and divorce followed soon after. I have only two visual memories of being with him. He's now dead, as my brother found out when in the country. Peter hoped to meet him, but I never did, seriously anyway.'

I hear from **JIM HAMILTON** every now and again. For many years he has been editor of the *Victorian Fellowship of Australian Writers Newsletter*, and has from time to time placed little advertisements for my magazine. Ads in the *Newsletter* work — a good way to find new subscribers.

ROMAN ORSZANSKI wrote thanking me for the first version of my Roy Orbison article, and anouncing a new fanzine *Kiflayne*, which has been replaced during the last year and a half by *Doxa!*

DEREK KEW is more likely to arrange a 'luncheon of comment' with Elaine and me than send a letter of comment. But every now and again, he sends a letter. In June 1988, he wrote about Poul Anderson's *Tau Zero*, mentioning the extreme discrepancy between the 'science bits' and the 'people bits'. This was the source of a paper battle between Sandra Miesel and me in a 1971 issue of *SFC*. I must reprint it one day.

COLIN STEELE often sends short notes for the reviews he submits for *SF Commentary*. In September 1988 he sent a copy of an article he wrote for *The Book Magazine*. The article, which covered a wide range of sf matters, recommended *TMR*. Thanks, Colin. Too bad *The Book Magazine* has not survived.

Whatever happened to **NICK SHEARS**? A South African fan, he was active during the early 1970s, then moved to Britain and disappeared, then was very active until about three years ago, and now has disappeared again. Does anybody have his current address?

MARIE MACLEAN, who used to be one of the mainstays of Nova Mob meetings (Nova Mob is still alive and well, Marie), wrote: 'Apart from my recent love affair with Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, I also enjoyed, and think you would too, Rodney Hall's *Just Relations*. It's in the same tradition of bush eccentricity as Peter Carey's *Illywhacker*, and like an Australian *Gormenghast*. Incidentally, how come your list of great reads did not include the Gormenghast trilogy?' I hate to admit to extreme crassness, Marie, but I still have not read *Gormenghast*. Any year now.

MARTIN TUDOR plugged *Critical Wave!*, and wanted an article for an issue of *Empties* that has still not appeared. And Tudor and Green make me grumpy because they won't trade their magazine for mine.

MARTY CANTOR picked up on something written by Andrew Whitmore in *TMR* 11/12/13 — that is, 'The two most alien places we visited were at the beginning and very end of our trip — Cairo and LA.' Marty's reply: 'Robbie and I spent a lot of time walking through downtown Sydney, and it reminded me ever so much of 1950s Los Angeles' downtown. What we saw of Canberra reminded me a lot of some of Los Angeles. At the end of our trip we stayed with the Ortliebs; that part of Melbourne, Burwood, was very much like Los Angeles.'

DAVE LANGFORD has been sending me his book reviews originally written for the English magazines *White Dwarf* and *GM*. Reprinted, they have been the highlights of the last two issues of *SF Commentary*. Of model trains he writes: 'A vast mass of Tri-ang/Hornby kit still inhabits a cardboard box somewhere in the parental attic. You've reminded me that 94 London Road actually offers the realization of an old and silly ambition: the long grimy crawlspaces in the angles of the roof could be filled with a representation of the London Underground, a layout that visitors could admire without actually seeing. Instead, through the partitions would come the amplified rumble of trains moving stop by stop from a simulated Paddington to a model Waterloo, just like the subterranean vibrations of the real thing.'

DANNY RIRDAN stayed in Melbourne during late 1987 and early 1988, then headed off to Los Angeles to become a famous sf writer. For awhile he kept in touch, and sent me a copy of the article 'The Works of William Gibson' that appeared in *Foundation* 43, Summer 1988. Now he seems to have disappeared.

STEVE GREEN is one of a number of correspondents who recommended *A Matter of Life and Death* as the best Powell and Pressburger film. Recently, the State Film Centre showed the only print it could find. It was so worn out that I'm annoyed the Film Centre charged admittance to the experience. Perhaps a restored print will be released some year soon.

JEAN WEBER appreciated Russell Blackford's article about Carole Vance's *Pleasure and Danger* ('even if you did keep it from us for nearly two years!'), and cannot see why anyone would discuss,

let alone buy, John Norman's Gor books. 'I'd like to hear from someone, especially someone female, who enjoys the Gor books and can explain why — without being defensive about it.'

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER wrote about the German scene and his own career, including buying George Turner's *The Sea and Summer* for German publication, the career of Stanislaw Lem ('*Fiasco* was recommended by *The New York Times Book Review* as one of the best books of 1987, but it didn't make the *Locus* list of the 27 best sf books of the year'), and reading: 'Everything, from the commonest trash to quite complicated works of literature, and thank god, very little in sf. I find that most average thrillers or mainstream novels have qualities that put them above most sf and fantasy. The big sellers in the mystery and thriller fields, such as Graham Greene (if one includes him there), John Le Carre, Georges Simenon, and Patricia Highsmith (a bestseller in France and Germany), have quite other qualities than the Asimovs, Heinleins, Clarkes, and Frank Herberts, none of whom is a half-way decent writer.' Franz expresses well my own disaffection with sf over recent years. I never become an addict of thrillers or mystery fiction, but I appreciate the way in which writers of such fiction treat the reader as if she or he were a literate person.

TERRY JEEVES sends bits and pieces of commentary and news. 'Can't share your enthusiasm for CDs [because] I went stone deaf (overnight) in my left ear some twenty years ago (be warned), so modern gimmicks such as stereo and CD are wasted on me. I can't even tell where people are speaking from, and have to go wandering each room if Val speaks to me from one of 'em. Couple this with a total abhorrence of so-called pop music, and I remain perfectly happy with my venerable classical LPs'. Terry has *some* interest in modern gimmicks — computers.

As of July 1988, **JUDITH HANNA** had just taken a job in London with Transport 2000 'an environmental lobby on transport issues — better public transport, provision for pedestrians and cyclists, and less nasty smelly motor traffic.' I haven't heard of a change of job since then.

CASEY ARNOTT from Vancouver sent several warm letters covering a wide range of topics, especially about changes of house, classes and lifestyle.

DICK LYNCH compliments me on the 'Orange Issue' of *TMR* (11/12/13) ('the Beatles had a White Album; you've got an Orange Issue'); and in 1988 applied for a job with, then withdrew his job application from, a small company manufacturing compact discs. 'I suppose I'll always wonder if they would have offered to augment my salary with all the CDs I'd care to take home with me.'

I haven't heard from **TERRY GREEN** since his letter of 26 July 1988, in which he listed his book publications to that time. '*The Woman Who Is the Midnight Wind* appeared from Pottersfield Press, RR2, Porters Lake, Nova Scotia B0J 2SO, Canada, in March 1987. *Barking Dogs*, a novel, appeared from St Martin's Press (NY) in hardcover in March 1988; paperback scheduled for January 1989.' I've bought *Barking Dogs* but haven't read it yet; I haven't heard of any further Terry Green books. Dan Chow in *Locus*, among other critics, liked *Barking Dogs*.

CHRISTINE FORBES had just been to World Expo '88 in Brisbane when she wrote in August 1988. All the greenery was alive, but some had been planted on top of artificial tree trunks.

BRIAN EARL BROWN sent a letter of comment on all the separate bits of *TMR* 11/12/13 — which makes it very hard to pick out any large chunks. His 1987: 'I'm two years away from turning forty, and it makes me feel very strange. I still feel like a kid; then I think about my high school class, some of whom surely married right after graduation, had kids immediately and, if their kids hold true to form, are now becoming grandparents! My classmates.' Brian has rude things to say about the Thoughts of Chairman Nicholas, concluding: 'Joseph Nicholas seems to intensely dislike anything outside his immediate circle of friendships and taste. Willis and Tucker can't be funny writers because they're old, for example. Joseph writes with such self-confidence and assurance, but spends his time passing off personal opinion and prejudice as self-evident universal truths — the very thing he castigates others for doing.' Of John Bangsund's 'One Flash and You're Ash, Buster': 'It's kind of amusing in these post-*Star Wars* days of anyone getting excited by a showing of an old *Flash Gordon* serial — except someday I'm sure I will rent a video of it myself.' On the Gor novels: 'Martin Bridgstock dismisses the possibility that Gor novels are read for instruction ("directive messages"), but that seems the eminently rash statement of a very normal person. God knows I took a lot of what I read in science fiction for advice on acting maturely during my teen and pre-teen years (more Heinlein than Gor). And the part of me that worries about these books worries that kids reading them will assume that this is what women really want.'

DAVID PRINGLE offered to trade *Interzone* for everything I am publishing. That's been an encouraging and enjoyable offer, especially as *Interzone* offers some of the best sf reviewing in the world as well as a high standard of fiction. David also sent me a copy of his *Science Fiction: 100 Best Novels*, which was impossible to buy in Australia.

GEO BONDRE said, on 10 February 1989: 'What a rotter you are! Here I am trying to win a Ditmar with *Marital Rats of Shaolin* 5, and you come out with *The Metaphysical Review* 11/12/13.' By what right does a fan from Slough claim a Ditmar award? Because Geo was living in Australia during 1988. As it happened, neither his fanzine nor mine was nominated in 1989. Geo seemed to like *TMR* 11/12/13: 'Robert James Mapson's letter about your dreams was a masterpiece. Easily the most meaty and marvellous letter of comment I've ever seen. You lucky fellow, you!' Geo also liked Tom Whalen's article on Robert Walser, John Bangsund's 'One Flash and You're Ash, Buster', Elaine Cochrane on Narnia, and Martin Bridgstock on Gor ('now I know all I ever wish without having the trouble of wading though any of the books').

JOYCE SCRIVNER sent me lots of CD catalogues, which showed that not even my favourite record store is quite keeping up with everything that's available in America. Then she disappeared. Later I received a round-robin letter from her, explaining that she had been suffering

from apnea until it was diagnosed and treated. Nasty. Now she has some energy again. Recently she sent me some tapes. Thanks very much, Joyce.

PAUL ANDERSON tells me what it's like to live in a household with young children. It seems that you give up reading. You rely on the video recorder for entertainment. You don't buy a CD player. And you find a store that sells old Disney comics at prices ranging from 5 cents to 70 cents each, and buy lots of them, ostensibly for small daughter. (Paul no doubt knows that the same comics could hardly be bought overseas for less than $20 each.) In response to Elaine's remarks on C. S. Lewis, Paul is the only father who's written to me unabashedly saying he will censor his children's reading: 'Stephanie will not be reading authors like Cormier, who dredges very deep and tries exceptionally hard to have an unrelieved negative view'. My guess is that Stephanie, like most children of sf readers, will eventually read everything she wants to.

In a letter from May 1989, Paul told me that 'the Anderson household is now four: Michael Douglas arrived on 13 April, weighing 8 lb 15 oz.' This time Paul had a three-year-old to take care of: 'On occasion her colour schemes in clothing left a little to be desired. Naturally I got to see a lot of my parents. All told, I think they came down from the hills four times, which was most useful.'

In January 1990, Paul wrote saying that his enjoyment of Roy Orbison's records is pretty much the same as mine. He reminded me of the other ballad-singers of the period: Gene Pitney, not at all dead and still a very successful performer; and Neil Sedaka, whose later career as a cabaret singer made people forget his important place in the history of early 1960s pop music.

DAVE HARTWELL, in answer to what I considered a polite (even simpering) letter, wrote 'Consider yourself traded (magazine-wise, anyway)', and sent one issue of *The New York Review of Science Fiction*. After I sent *SFC* 69/70, he sent five issues. An all-for-all trade would be more satisfactory.

DON KELLER sent me some very valuable records from Seattle in May 1989, and that's the last I heard from him. But did I send him the copy of *SF Commentary Reprint Edition: First Year 1969* that I promised him? I'm biting my fingernails here, Don; please write to me. On another matter altogether: 'Tatiana took exception to Elaine's dismissal of the Narnia books, and wrote part of a reply before getting embroiled in school, and may get a chance to finish it in a month or so. A brief reaction; we just finished reading all seven to our nine-year-old (after many years' gap for both of us), and we enjoyed the books at *least* as much as she did.' I never did get Tatiana's letter.

MAURILIA MEEHAN sent Norstrilia Press a manuscript that we were unable to accept for publication. (Currently we are not reading or accepting manuscripts.) I sent her a *TMR*: 'I especially enjoyed the review of *Pleasure and Danger*, a book I will buy someday, and I will use the recommended reading list at the back to educate myself in sf when I have time.'

SEAN McMULLEN, writing about something else altogether in May 1989, shocked the Cochrane–Gillespie household by adding: 'Trish is in hospital, and has had two operations to have a tumour removed from her right breast. It was found exceptionally early, because of its location, so the prognosis for a full recovery is excellent. Meantime I have been working hard at being a temporary single parent.' The prognosis was correct, and Trish is okay. The child, Catherine, is super-okay, and did her best to commandeer 1990's Melbourne Easter Convention.

TOM DISCH sent an ebullient letter on the eve of leaving New York for a summer cabin. The letter concerns *SF Commentary* more than *TMR*, but in passing Tom mentions that he has just seen the opening night of his play *Ben Hur*: 'Playwrights have more fun, no doubt about it. (But I think they earn nothing, which isn't a very good trade-off, is it?)'

ANNETTE CARTER, who once worked as a book editor at Macmillan, has been living in Sydney for several years. I suspect she's not much interested in sf, but once listened fascinated (or horrified) while Roger and I told her about fandom, and she's a subscriber to *TMR*. She comes back to Melbourne every so often, and we meet for dinner with some other editors who work or once worked for Macmillan.

JACK HERMAN sent me a letter when he returned from his overseas trip with Cath, published a few fanzines, then disappeared. I'm told that he and Cath are trying to establish a convention agency in Sydney. In the most recent letter I've had from him (20 June 1989), Jack sent a list of '200 movies of the sound era that I like a lot'. When I went through them, I found I had seen exactly half his list, but since then I've caught up with a few more (Fleischer's *Compulsion*; Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*). In his list, Jack repeats an error that I've noticed other people making: attributing *Witness for the Prosecution* to Alfred Hitchcock. It's a movie Hitchcock might well have made, but perhaps not as well as Billy Wilder, its actual director.

JEANNE MEALY was the first person to write to me saying that she definitely perferred one of my magazines to another (in her case, *TMR* to *SFC*). Some swing the other way. Jeanne is not a great fan of Garrison Keillor, although she lives in Minneapolis. 'Some of my favourite humorist authors: Jean Shepherd, Pat McManus, John Powers, Bruce Friedman, Dave Barry, James Wilcox, Gerald Nachman. Have you read any of their books? I think you'd like them, and these too: Jean Gonick: *Mostly True Confessions (Looking for Love in the '80s)*; Fannie Flagg: *Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Cafe*; Stephanie Brush: *Men: An Owner's Manual*; Cindy Packard: *Hell's Bells*.' I once read a Bruce Jay Friedman novel, which I liked but didn't keep. I've bought two Wilcox novels, but haven't read them yet. Haven't read the rest. Despite her lack of interest in Garrison Keillor, Jeanne is one of two people who sent me that issue of the *Minneapolis Monthly Magazine* commemorating the end of *A Prairie Home Companion* with a 100-page supplement. Thank you very much.

VIRGINIA KIDD had major surgery in mid-1989, and I haven't heard from her since then. Since I've heard nothing to the contrary, I take it that she has made a good recovery.

KEVIN BROPHY, one of the few really interesting Australian novelists (*Visions*), was

sending me copies of his magazine *Going Down Swinging* in exchange for mine. But I didn't receive the latest issue, and didn't receive a review copy of his latest novel.

PAUL COLLINS moved to Brisbane, but still visits Melbourne occasionally, looking for stock for the secondhand book and record store he has set up. Occasionally he sends me news of people I haven't heard from for awhile, such as Jack Wodhams, Frank Bryning (now in his eighties; he underwent major surgery in 1989), and David Lake. If you want decent prices for your secondhand books, records or CDs, write to Paul at GPO Box 3130, Brisbane, Queensland 4001. The prices offered by such stores in Melbourne are so insulting that I tend to lighten the shelves by giving away excess items to Worthy People.

JOSEPH ADEKANMBI sent a letter from Nigeria asking for copies of my magazines, which I sent. The experience must have been too much of a shock; I've never heard from him again.

DIRK STRASSER sent a subscription back in 1989, and later became known to me and everybody else as one of the publishers of *Aurealis*, the most recent attempt to publish a widely circulated sf magazine in Australia. Since distribution has always been the main problem of such magazines, I would not like to predict yet that it will have greater success than *Aphelion*. But I keep hoping that somebody sometime will break through the dreaded Gordon & Gotch curse. (Gordon & Gotch is a monopoly equivalent of the W. H. Smith chain in Britain. It distributes a magazine for its first three issues. After that, if the magazine does not sell 'enough' copies according to G&G's formula, it is dropped, and therefore loses newsstand circulation throughout Australia. No Australian sf magazine has retained G&G distribution beyond the third issue.) Subscribe to *Aurealis*: $A24 per year. Address: PO Box 532, Mount Waverley, Vic. 3149. Pay 'Chimaera Publications'.

'**CHRISTOPHER AND LEIGH PRIEST** are delighted to announce the birth on 23rd October 1989 of ELIZABETH MILLICENT (3 lb 4 oz) and SIMON WALTER (6 lb 8 oz).' This was the first communication I had had from Chris Priest for some years. He wasn't excited when I wrote telling him this, since he had sent two letters and two copies of *The Last Deadloss Visions* to me during 1988. And they didn't arrive, and have never arrived. But Elizabeth and Simon did, and when I last heard from Chris, he and Leigh were still excited about being parents.

It seems likely that other mail from 1988 may be missing as well, and I have no way of checking up. I might already have cut some people from the mailing list, although they did try to keep in touch.

JEANETTE GILLESPIE (my sister) sent a long letter in late 1989 about her adventures Up North. She took a year's unpaid leave from teaching to travel slowly around Australia, working as she went. In the middle of the year, however, she returned from Queensland to be with my mother during my father's last two weeks of life, and for the month after that. Her trip resumed, she got only to far north Queensland (which is another few thousand miles north of Brisbane). The whole of the region was then struck by an airline pilots' strike for some months. No tourists; no casual work for Jeanette in the tourist areas. Still, Jeanette can have more fun broke than most of the rest of us could have with a lottery win.

ED MESKYS didn't realize that he was on the point of cutting me off the *Niekas* mailing list. Luckily, I noticed. Now we're trading happily again. *Niekas* was already a major fanzine when I joined fandom in 1968; in 1991 it's still one of the best-looking, best-edited magazines. (RFD2, Box 63, Center Harbor, New Hampshire 03226-19, USA).

JANE ROUTLEY was in early 1990 compiling a guide to publications and publishers specializing in science fiction and fantasy writing. I sent her some magazines, but haven't heard from her since.

VAN IKIN has sent several interesting letters, mainly to tell me why *Science Fiction* is running even later than usual. *My* excuses for late fanzines are simple: I'm always lazy and often broke. But Van? He has back problems. And RSI problems, which means he can't sit too long at a keyboard. But he's transferred his material to the university's computer, and now the university allows him only a few hours a week at its computer's keyboard. . . . And when that problem was fixed. . . . 'It's the job, the job. It encroaches at a rate which never fails to confound and defeat me. . . . My tutorials are better because of the extra effort I put in . . . but in The Grand Academic Scheme of Things, lively teaching and doing-the-right-thing-by-your-students counts for almost zilch. . . . I run the Honours program, I supervise the marking of the state Literature exam. . . . It is not my fault that up-front academic workloads are increasing substantially each year and there is just less and less time to do the things which academics can do which are of benefit to the community.' Most Australian readers of *Science Fiction* make allowances for Van's problems.

SCOTT CAMPBELL is a Tasmanian academic who has offered to review books for *SF Commentary*. I enjoyed his first contributions, to be found in the next *SFC*. I'm not sure yet whether I can rope him into *TMR* as well.

IAN GUNN sends me *Stunn Gunn* and illustrated the last issue of *SFC*. With luck he will be contributing to this issue of *TMR*. Occasionally he sends postcards such as: 'Now, look, it's no good whingeing in ANZAPA that you never get invited to New Wave parties, cos now you do.' You guessed it. I didn't go to the New Wave parties to which Ian invited me. I had a good time the one and only time I visited the Melbourne SF Club's Brunswick headquarters; it's my fault that I haven't yet crashed the MSFC social set.

When I last heard from **PATRICK NIELSEN HAYDEN**, he was 'Administrative Editor' of Tor Books. Maybe Tor would be willing to send review copies to *SF Commentary*?

The last I heard from **KEVIN DILLON** (9 December 1989), he was unemployed, but still sent me a subscription. Anybody heard from or of Kevin recently?

JACK CHALKER wrote asking me for details of Norstrilia publications for his *Science-Fantasy Publishers: A Bibliographic History*, and I completely forget to send a reply. Eventually Jack got the information he wanted from Sean McMullen. Thanks, Jack, for asking; thanks, Sean, for helping out. One of these days I will get the time

to answer year-old letters.

DOUGLAS CARIOU (presumably still) is the Editorial Assistant for *Science-Fiction Studies*, and as such was very helpful last year when *SFS* inadvertently knocked me off their traded-publications list. He told me that Dr Darko Suvin (who put me on the traded-publications list for the *first* issue of *SFS*) still teaches at McGill University; but he did not know the whereabouts of ex-Torontan Angus Taylor. Can anyone help me with Angus's address?

SHANKAR RAMAMOORTHY was working in the University of California at Santa Cruz when last year he got in touch with me about *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd* and other publications. I've sent him nearly everything he paid for, but haven't heard from him for over a year.

From **ANDREW WHITMORE** in December 1988: 'I've been doing a Librarianship course at Ballarat CAE. This has kept me fairly busy. I hope to pick up a Librarianship position in 1989, but, whatever happens, I'll be back in a school somewhere. I've certainly enjoyed my two years off, and wouldn't mind twenty or so more. I've also made extensive revisions to the novel I sold to Avon.' That novel, *The Fortress of Eternity*, appeared in Australia very late in 1990. 'Mary is expecting a baby next March [1989], which is pretty exciting as well. We had just about given up hope of having any more children, even though the doctors couldn't find anything wrong with either of us.'

Andrew returned to the library position at Hawkesdale High School that he had last held in 1987. 'If you have to teach, then Hawkesdale is probably one of the least objectionable places to do so, and working in the library is generally less stressful than being in the classroom.'

I hadn't heard from **ROSLYN GROSS** for years, when suddenly she wrote sending a subscription to Whatever I Happen To Be Publishing. After some years of raising young children, she's returning to writing, and has sent some reviews to *SFC*.

'ROCKY' LAWSON, alias **MARK LAWSON**, who is now Leader Writer for *The Australian Financial Review*, wrote from Sydney to send a subscription and tell me that he and Jaeltee Chung have recently married. (We knew, Rocky; we've even had a description of the wedding.) Despite being one of Australia's top journalists, Rocky remains forever of the True Faith: 'As for serious writing — i.e. science fiction — I'm still trying, but I've been sidetracked of late into freelance articles. As this pays a great deal more than sf writing it is difficult to stick with fiction.'

DAVID RUSSELL writes that he tried to buy a copy of *Warhoon 28* from **RICHARD BERGERON**, the editor and publisher, who wrote back to David: 'I no longer have copies for sale, having sold the stock to Joe Siclari, 4834 NW 2 Ave, Boca Raton, Florida 33431. I have forwarded your order to him.' I hope David does better with Siclari than I did in the 1970s when he published the mimeoed version of Harry Warner's *A Wealth of Fable*. I never did receive the copy I ordered, and eventually bought one through Space Age Books.

GEORGE TURNER keeps sending me things. Tapes, occasionally; CDs, sometimes, as George doesn't have a CD player. Most recently, and best: a copy of *Brain Child*, his new novel from Morrow. Thanks very much, George.

JONATHAN STRAHAN and the crew from Western Australia's new *Eidelon* are not willing to trade magazines, which I find irritating. Other people also spend a fortune on their magazines. Why should we then have to trade cheques in the mail? (*Eidelon*'s sub. rate is $A20 for 4 issues; cheques payable to Richard Scriven, PO Box 225, North Perth, Western Australia 6006.)

Long-time correspondent **BERND FISCHER** re-subscribed, but doesn't have time these days to send me his Favourites lists from Germany.

JANEEN WEBB subscribed. Thanks, Janeen. With any luck, after *ASFR* bites the dust, I can persuade you to contribute as well.

Most surprising letter of the bunch arrived only a week ago from **DON ASHBY**, who is usually too busy to write his name. However a rhinoceros fell on him (one of the props in the Victorian State Opera production of *The Magic Flute*). With three broken ribs and back damage, even Don had time to reply to *TMR* 11/12/13 and 14.

The issue is finished, and so is the editor. Now it's time to attempt cutting this vast pile of text into a magazine that anybody can lift. It's not quite clear what the next issue will contain; *less*, I hope. Robert Day has promised another Music article; and I still have on file wonderful articles from Tom Disch and Jennifer Bryce, and my slightly less wonderful record reviews from *The Melbourne Report*. Meanwhile, best wishes . . .

— Bruce Gillespie, 24 June 1991

THE LATE, LATE SHOW

It's nearly a month since those final, final notes above — but events keep overtaking holy writ.

Gene Clark has died, *Time* says at the age of forty-nine, *Rolling Stone* says forty-seven. He still looked thirty-five on his most recent record cover. Either mentions only his few years with the Byrds. Neither mentions that he had one of the great voices of rock music. Each passes over *No Other*, one of the very best albums of the 1970s. Clark never had solo commercial success, but he kept making high-quality records. One of the great experiences of my life was seeing him appear with Roger McGuinn and Chris Hillman at the Dallas Brooks Hall.

Claudio Arrau, Wilhelm Kempff and Rudolf Serkin lived much longer than Gene Clark. Each has died recently, Kempff at ninety-five, Arrau in his middle eighties. Arrau signed a twenty-year recording contract at the age of eighty. At the same time he made what I consider the greatest recording of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto. Recently ABC-TV showed Arrau's Eightieth Birthday Concert. Astonishing stuff.

And even Sumner Locke Elliott, mentioned in this issue, has left us. Farewell, friends.

— (yet again) Bruce Gillespie, 23 July 1991