SF Commentary 111

December 2022 **84 pages**

JOHN BANGSUND :: JENNIFER BRYCE :: DENNIS CALLEGARI :: HENRY GASKO :: BRUCE GILLESPIE :: MIKE GLYER :: DAVID GRIGG :: EDWINA HARVEY :: JOHN HERTZ :: DENNY LIEN :: DENNY MARSHALL :: ROBERT LICHTMAN :: MICHAEL MOORCOCK :: DAVID NICKLE :: COLIN STEELE :: JONATHAN STRAHAN :: TONY THOMAS :: SALLY YEOLAND

Denny Marshall: 'Planet Eating Worm Dragon.'

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FRONT COVER: Denny Marshall: 'Planet Eating Worm Dragon'.
BACK COVER: Denny Marshall: 'Attack from the Space Fabric Rip.'

PHOTOGRAPHS: Cath Ortlieb (pp. 4, 14); **Chris Couch** (p. 5); **Bruce Gillespie** (p. 8); **Alison Scott** (p. 10); **Carla Bleeker** (p. 12); **Peter Halasz** (p. 15); **Patricia Peters** (p. 16); **Yolande Oakley** (p. 18); **Taral Wayne** (p.21); **Sally Yeoland** (p. 29); **Henry Gasko** (p. 66); **Yvonne Rousseau** (p. 74); **Helena Binns** (p. 83).

ILLUSTRATION: Dennis Callegari (p. 62).

I must be talking to my friends

Gillespie retires at last! ... SFC print crisis!

My *Coral Reefs* index for CSIRO Publishing was my final iudex before retirement. Congratulations are not in order. Elaine has wanted to retire for awhile, and believes she can survive financially. I've spent my entire working life wanting to retire, but I need that money rolling into my account. I started accessing my superannuation fund when I turned 65, ten years ago, but it ran dry in October last year. My old age pension went up a few hundred dollars per fortnight, so I'm still non-bankrupt.

The clincher, though, has been a change of ASIC rules. These changes make it difficult for a small company (Gillespie & Cochrane Pty Ltd) to keep operating, so we closed the company on 30 June. I would still like to be able to compile three or four indexes a year, but it seems unlikely I'll ever be offered more work.

My retirement threatens *SF Commentary*. I've been able to send out quite a few print copies to Australian readers until now, but now I can no longer afford to send out any physical copies. It seems almost an insult to readers to offer only PDF files instead of print copies, as you might not send letters of comment unless you can leaf through the pages of actual copies. But I'll keep publishing *SFC*. What else would I do? Please look for it on efanzines.com. I'll also stick to publishing **brg in ANZAPA (now nearly 30 members strong), but I can't afford to send out any print copies of **brg** either.**

Imminent retirement also reduces my ability to buy the latest CDs by my favourite performers. We keep being told that CDs are on their way out, but that doesn't seem to be happening for my favourite performers.

Elaine and I will not be able to afford to travel, but I've lost all desire to do so since the first Covid lockdown of March 2020. I'm just glad that fandom enabled me to attend Corflu in 2005.

The Real Official Carey Handfield Fan Club

In February I suffered from a couple of strange bowel traffic jams that made me worried enough to visit my GP. She recommended a CT scan (my first). This revealed nothing except that I have an extra fiddly bit on my bowel, which was last untangled in 1961 when I was 14. There was a shadow of something unclassifiable lurking in the small intestine. The obvious diagnostic solution was a colonoscopy. I should have a colonoscopy every five years anyway, because my father died early from bowel cancer.

Australia's Medicare system has many glitches, mainly because of the Federal Government's failure to finance it adequately. If my GP had sent a recommendation to a public hospital to undertake the colonoscopy, I might have scored an appointnent in a year or two. Instead, I paid for the procedure myself (because neither Elaine nor I can afford private health insurance). I travelled to the Ivanhoe Endoscopy Centre, made the apointment, whereupon they offered me a vast list of instructions for the week preceding the procedure. I would have to undertake a PCR Covid test five days before; eat nothing but 'white foods' for three days before; nothing but liquids during the 24 hours before; drink Plenvu (an awful bowel-cleansing gloop) during the 12 hours before; and consume nothing at all during the three hours before.

We don't have a car. How would I get the PCR test in the first place? Carey Handfield, who now lives not far from us, offered to drive me up to the testing site on the Diamond Creek Road. Early on a Sunday morning we trundled up the road. Nothing. We had obviously gone too far. Carey did a U turn, and soon we saw the notice for the testing site.

Carey Handfield and one of his fans (Marc Ortlieb). The photo was taken by Cath Ortlieb at Aussiecon 3, 1999.

The test was negative. Elaine managed to buy enough goods so that we could isolate from Sunday to the following Friday. She even bought the makings for oven-baked white bread, which was delicious.

The colonoscopy sheet instructed me not to travel to or from the colonoscopy by public transport. If it had not been for Carey, I would not have been able to do the test. He picked me up at 8.30 on the morning of Saturday, 11 March, and picked me up about 11 a.m. the same morning. The procedure itself went smoothly, and the result was negative.

What's the point of this story? On the night of Friday, 4 March, Carey had been out with friends in town and had fallen onto the footpath. He had broken four ribs. On the morning of 6 March he drove me to the Covid testing site without telling me anything about his broken ribs. And again, on Friday 11 March, he drove me to Ivanhoe and picked me up later, when the cracked-ribs pain must have been really kicking in. I did not find out until Carey let something slip on Facebook a few days later!

Yes, I know the members of the Real Official Carey Handfield Fan Club will nod wisely and say to me, 'That's Carey being Carey'. But this kind of practical friendship has become very rare these days. Carey has been consistent over the years, from his setting up of Norstrilia Press, to his treasureship of various committees and conventions. My favourite Carey Handfield Day, though, was when we traipsed all over the Dandenongs to find a venue for th 1975 Le Guin Writers' Workshop, ending our quest when we visited Booth Lodge, a haven in the hills.

Happy

A couple of weeks ago, I felt happy for a few days.

I had read two ANZAPA mailings in six days, and I had seen on Facebook the following news in the days after ChiCon, this year's world convention held in Chicago:

Mark Linneman's Big Heart Award

Mark Linneman won this year's Big Heart Award. Nobody more deserving could have won it. You might remember that Mark was a Melburnian for ten years, from the beginning of 1981 until the end of 1990, while he held the job of Law Librarian at Melbourne University. He became an enthusiastic member of Melbourne fandom, and was on the Committee of Aussiecon 2, 1985.

He became a best friend to Elaine and me, in part because we were as enthusiastic as he was in discovering restaurants around inner Melbourne and drinking good wines at their tables. Mark also took us on a trip to Yarra Valley wineries in the early 1980s and a weekend trip around the northern Victorian wineries in 1987. I don't know what's happened to the great big red wines of that area. I don't see the names Brown Brothers, Stanton and Killeen, All Saints, or Osicka's much any more. We drove around the wonderful countryside south of the Murray River and stayed at Beechworth overnight.

All this ended when Mark felt he needed to take a job back in the USA to further his career. There he suffered professional difficulties for some years before landing the job of State Law Librarian for California in Sacramento (the state capital). He stayed at that job until he retired, and still lives in Sacramento. Mark was on the committee of Aussiecon 3 in 1999, after which we returned to a dinner Abla's of Carlton, our favourite restaurant. For many years he has been on the Site Selection committee for each world convention.

We saw him most recently during and after Aussiecon 4 in 2010. We returned to Abla's, and

Lesleigh Luttrell celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the first DUFF trip. (Photo: Chris Couch.)

that's the last time I helped him (or anybody) empty several bottles of fine red. He's been able to ring us regularly since then, and we had hoped he could visit Australia after the 2020 Worldcon in New Zealand. It didn't happen. I can't see either Elaine or I ever travelling overseas again, and for health reasons Mark certainly cannot do so. He's met everybody in fandom, and been to many conventions over the years. No wonder he won the Big Heart Award.

DUFF's Fiftieth Anniversary

Fan funds provided a highlight of Chicon, or so I'm told. Not only did the auction raise over $4600 for the various Fan Funds, but the convention celebrated the 50th anniversary of **DUFF (Down Under Fan Fund)**. Its success led to the establishment of such funds as GUFF and FFANZ. **Lesleigh Luttrell** was the first DUFF winner, visiting Sydney (for Syncon 2) and Melbourne in August 1972. At that time she co-edited the great *Starling* fanzine in Columbia, Missouri, but her Australian trip was part of the process of moving with her husband Hank from college in Columbia to postgrad work in Madison. She has been out of fandom for some time, but she and Jerry Kaufman set up the DUFF Anniversary Celebration at ChiCon, her first convention in many years. It's a pity that **Leigh Edmonds**, who with **John Foyster** established DUFF, could not be there.

Lesleigh was the Offical Editor of APA-45 while I was a member, and a member of ANZAPA for several years in the early 1970s.

Claire and Mark's Glasgow Worldcon GoHship

Our very own **Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer**, stars of fanzines, conventions, and ANZAPA, have been chosen as Fan Guests of Honour of the world convention to be held in Glasgow in 2024. Not that I have any prospect of attending, but if I had the cash and opportunity, their GoHships would be sufficient reason to attend.

The official announcement reads, in part: 'Glasgow has been confirmed as the location for the 82nd Worldcon. Our Guests of Honour range from writers to artists and beyond: Chris Baker (Fangorn), Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, Ken MacLeod, Nnedi Okorafor, and Terri Windling. … Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer have been pillars of the science fiction and fantasy fan community for years. Their exemplary work in organising and running fan conventions, as well as in fan-writing, fanzines, and fan-history, has enriched the lives of countless lovers of the genre.' Claire is a Hugo Award winner, and both Claire and Mark are FAAN Achievement Award winners. They have visited Australia, on my count, seven times.

Melbourne SF Club's 70th anniversary

As LynC likes to tell us in *Ethel the Aardvark*, the MSFC's club magazine, the Melbourne Science Fiction Club is now the second oldest SF club in the world. It hardly seems any time since its Sixtieth Anniversary, at which various Lifetime Members (including me) were guests. Ten years later, in a new location, the numbers at the July 2020 meeting were lower (25). Some of us have left for the Great Convention in the Sky, and some of the Lifetime Members, such as Race Mathews, Dick Jenssen, and Jack Dann, could not get there. Geoff Allshorn had driven us in from Greensborough, but we arrived late, and missed the Business Meeting. When we arrived, the Birthday Cake was being cut, and most of the goodies that

people had donated had been consumed. Then the party pies and sausage rolls appeared fom the oven, and disappeared almost immediately. I had brought some packets of Tim Tams, and they also disappeared immediately. It was your typical MSFC gathering, plus Golden Oldies such as me who find it difficult to attend monthly meetings these days. I caught up with Alan Stewart for the first time in a year, and also with Peter Ryan, LynC, Eva, and other people last seen before the March 2020 lockdown. A very enjoyable night, thanks to the organisers, such as Alison, LynC, and Jocko. I trust that we will all be around for the 80th Anniversary party.

Knees! don't take to me about knees!

In the couple of years, many ANZAPA members have suffered from falls. Others, having told us to stop having falls, have also fallen. Falls seems to go with the age range of many of us.

The disaster area has moved from Falls to Knees. In the pages of ANZAPA (which currently averages 500 pages per mailing every second month), I have winced my way through vivid descriptions of knee replacement surgery or looming surgery. But I realise the pain they have been enduring has been much greater than any I have ever suffered.

I was feeling cheerful that week. Bad move, Gillespie.

I heard that our Greensborough Railway Station would be out of commission for a couple of weeks. Since I was feeling sprightly, I took the train two stations (seven minutes) up the line to Eltham. I hadn't visited Eltham for about four years. There's not much need to visit Eltham, because we can find all our essentials in the Greensborough Shopping Plaza. Eltham does not have a Plaza as such, but instead several distinct shopping areas. It has the Eltham Book Shop, which has a reputation beyond its actual performance. It is one of the few bookshops left in the northern suburbs now that Andrew's has closed in Ivanhoe. It's a small shop, selling a tiny percentage of the up-market books that I would usually find at Readings in Carlton. I didn't buy anything, but at least I had put my nose in the place for the first time in years. Eltham has gained a few more cafes than Greensborough. We have only one, Urban Grooves, that is open from 8 a.m. to late at night, but Eltham is now peppered with all-hours cafes. I tried one of them. The coffee was okay and the vanilla slice better than okay.

I wandered back to the station, and was feeling so good that I more or less skipped across the street instead of walking. Skipping is not something one should do at the age of 75. There was a slight dip in the asphalt of the street. I failed to see that the gradient changed abruptly. I went over slightly on my left foot, but seemed not to have sprained anything. I was wrong.

The slight meniscis injury I had caused myself might never have given me any trouble if I had not still felt even cheerier two days later. I walked a walk that I haven't walked for four years: the Plenty River path from Greensborough to Were Street, Montmorency. I go down, down, into the valley, walk along the riverside path for about a kilometre, almost forgetting that I am walking the border between two suburbs. I cross a footbridge and begin the long walk upwards: first through a park to Para Road, and then a long slope up Rattray Street to the Were Street shopping strip that is the centre of Montmorency. I was feeling rather tired when I reached Were Street, had a coffee at one of the few cafes that were still open in the late afternoon, then realised that the railway line had already closed. I had to walk back home instead of taking the train. I became very exhausted. On the way I witnessed the beginnings of the station replacement: a surrealistic giant big thingy, which I suppose is the new station centre, hovering above the valley like the building site for the starship *Enterprise*.

Only then did my knee began to show itself very unpleased. It became angrier and angrier next day. I hoped to visit my usual physio, Adam, in Greensborough, but the following week was a short week (the Queen's Funeral observance on the Friday, followed by the Grand Final Friday holiday). I visited a bloke called Paul, who prescribed a rote set of Things to Do, but they didn't work well. When I finally was able to see Adam, he bandaged the knee properly, but that was nearly two weeks after I had done the damage. I had been surviving on painkillers, applications of a cold pack, and generous lashings of the anti-inflammatory Voltaren gel. Adam offered a few other possibilities for treatment, but did say the injury would take a minimum of four or five weeks to heal.

For several weeks the only activities that kept my mind off the pain were watching episodes of *Foyle's War* (I have the complete set; I have

watched them before, but they seem much more entertaining now), and writing notes for ANZAPA and *SFC*. Good old fanzines — the ideal painkiller drug.

Two months later (4 November), my knee is finally healing well. The physical pain lasted only two or three weeks. The main pain has been the cost of an MRI scan, not covered by Medicare.

Worlds lost

Before he died I heard Gore Vidal say on Phillip Adams' little wireless program (*Late Night Live*, ABC RN) something like this: 'When I go, I will no longer exist. You will no longer exist. Neither you nor I will ever have existed.' Gore's little joke on us all, no doubt, but true enough.

We are each of us a world, and when we leave the planet our particular world will disappear. That's what makes us all equal. No matter what seems to separate us according to political, social, or religious categories, we are all absolutely equal: each a self-contained world that can never see things as others see it, can never communicate what we see except through writing or speaking, but each a self-awareness, each of us infinitely more complex than the most complex computer, each of us with the right and hope to live as long as possible.

Our generation of fans is leaving us, each a vast world of experience and knowledge, none of which can ever be replaced. Some of their individual worlds still exist in what they wrote and published, but almost nothing remains of their talk. They are the people I've grown up with over the last 53 years, the people who've published the fanzines, organised the conventions, run the apas and clubs and fan funds … in short, the people who have Taken the Trouble, the people who care more about other people than themselves.

Some of them have have very greatly improved my own internal world:

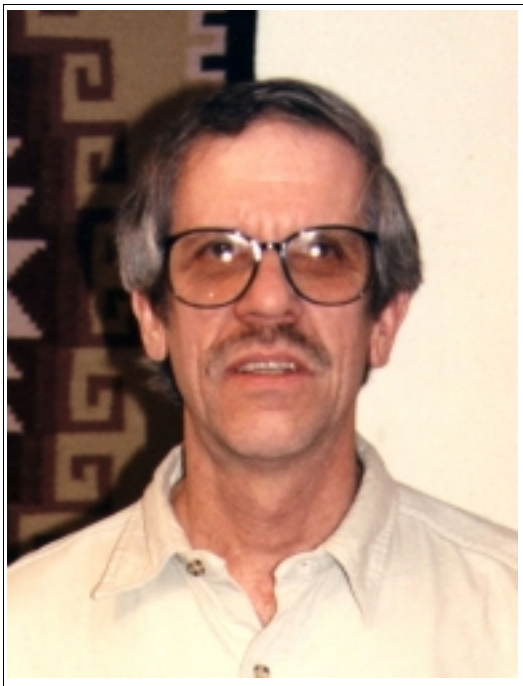
Robert Lichtman (1942–2022)

Robert Lichtman left us on 6 July 2022. Robert, who lived around the San Francisco area, rejoined fandom more than 10 years after I had begun publishing *SFC*. At first he revived his fanzine *Psi-Phi*, his fanzine from the 1950s and 1960s, but in 1983 began publishing his annual fanzine, *Trap Door*. It is generally recognised by those who received it as the best fanzine of the last 40 years. Not that many people ever received it, as it was distributed strictly 'by whim', and issues have appeared as PDFs only in recent years.

Robert would have remained just another excellent overseas fanzine trader if he had not also begun to send me the fanzines he produced for two apas (amateur publishing associations), *Door Knob* for SAPS (Spectator Amateur Publishing Society) and *King Biscuit Time* for FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Publishing Association). He was one of five or six remaining members of SAPS by the time he died, and the main organiser of FAPA until fairly recently. In his small fanzines he revealed his deepest thoughts, whereas in *Trap Door* his editorials were more guarded. In his apazines he left his deepest thoughts. He also asked that we not 'spread around' many of his autobiographical thoughts, although in them I discovered his finest writing.

Robert asked me to send him every issue of every fanzine I produced, including **brg** (for ANZAPA) and the Official Bloody Organ for ANZAPA while I was still Official Bloody Editor. One of the most galling effects of Covid restrictions in the last two years is that I have been no longer able to send US fans print copies of my fanzines, merely PDF files, although Robert was still able to send to me print copies of *King Biscuit Time* and *Door Knob*.

I did not meet Robert until 2005. You might remember the Bring Bruce Bayside Fund of 2004. Marty Cantor proposed the fund. Bill Wright in Melbourne, and Arnie and Joyce Katz in Las Vegas, organised and raised the funds so that I could travel to the West Coast of the USA for a month, a guest of two conventions (Corflu and Potlatch) in San Francisco, and side trips to Seattle, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles. Not long before the convention, Joyce broke both ankles, so



Robert Lichtman, 2005, San Fancisco. (Photo: Bruce Gillespie.)

(l. to r.) Billy Pettit, Robert Lichtman, and Peter Weston, at Robert's place in Glen Ellen, California before he moved back to the San Francisco area, 2005. (Photo: Bruce Gillespie.)

neither she nor Arnie could travel from Las Vegas to San Francisco for Corflu. Robert Lichtman volunteered to take over the organisation of my trip, and he did a magnificent job. He was a wonderful person to talk to. During the week between Corflu and Potlatch, he played host to Billy Pettit (our driver), Peter Weston (the great English fan, who died a few years ago), and me. He showed us his magnificent fanzine collection, and even allowed me to touch a copy of the first issue of *Void*. Robert was trembling with tension as he did so.

He also introduced me to his wife **Carol Carr** when she attended one day of Corflu. She was one of the most vivacious and attractive people I've ever met. No wonder fans have been speaking of her in awe and wonder since 1961, when she joined fandom.

Robert also let me know that he had been suffering from long-term double myeloma. Obviously his medical team was very skilful, as Robert survived on medications for quite a few years. As he became weaker during 2021, Carol became his carer. Recently, she died suddenly (see my tribute to her in *SF Commentary* 108 and John Hertz's tribute in his column in this issue). Robert has been greatly helped by his sons and grandchildren since he lost Carol, but two months ago the family notified fandom that Robert was very ill. We were not surprised, but still greatly saddened, when he left us on 6 July.

Mike Glyer has provided a fine obituary for Robert in his online fanzine *File 770*.

Robert Lichtman's last letter to me

ROBERT LICHTMAN

brg* When I visited the San Francisco Bay Area, Robert was still living away from Carol, in Glen Ellen, until he could retire from his government job in Santa Rosa. She lived in Oakland, and he would spend all weekends, holidays, and vacations with her there. Robert's letter, below, included many thoughts about Carol and their last two years together, but I am obeying his wish to keep most of his paragraphs private.

I think about Carol a lot, and especially when something happens that would make her either happy or sad (or a little of both). For instance, she would be most pleased that we've had a break in our drought with several days of decent rain behind us and several more due to begin arriving tonight. But since this is only late October and our fire season can now run through November, she wouldn't be entirely sanguine — especially if rain stops appearing in the forecast. Since we live in the part of the Oakland hills that burned in a firestorm in 1991 (30th anniversary of that on the 21st), she would still worry. So do I, but not as much.

My days are filled, variously, with keeping up with fanac (mostly lists), grocery and medical

trips, and weekly visits from one or both of my sons who live the closest.

On the first page of **brg** 117 you lament that you can't print file copies of your zines because your printer's duplexing function 'has become unreliable'. My HP 2600 color laser printer doesn't have a duplexing feature, so when I want to print something double-sided I have to go through a few steps to achieve that. First I tell it to print all the odd-numbered pages. Once that's done, I put them back in the paper tray (checking to make sure there are no blank pages). Not knowing what printer you have, I won't go into details about which side is up and which direction the pages should be facing. Once that's worked out, I tell the printer to print the even-numbered pages, cross my fingers that only one sheet at a time will be fed (almost always reliable), and....voila!

Over the years I've had holiday cards from David Russell, usually accompanied by colour postcards of Australian scenery, which is an acceptable trade for *Trap Door*. I'm no longer publishing it, though, and wonder if he'll continue to send the cards.

About the spottiness of whether or not mail from Australia gets delivered in the US, my best guess would be that individual mail processors at certain post offices don't know about the rule change and let the mail go through, while others — no doubt thinking how efficient they are (the bastards!) — send it back.

(24 October 2021)

Maureen Kincaid Speller (1959–2022)

I can think of nothing more painful an experience than losing a partner, especially a partner who dies 'in the midst of life' when much success lies before her. Recently we said farewell to Judith Hanna. Now we are very deeply shocked at hearing of the death from cancer of **Maureen Kincaid Speller** on 18 September. Paul Kincaid, her husband, had told us on Facebook that she was very seriously ill, but none of us expected to hear of her death so soon after her diagnosis. Since Maureen was 18 years younger than I am, Paul and the rest of us would have expected her to have had a long and successful career, both within the SF and mundane worlds. Paul's eloquent Eulogy from Maureen's funeral service can be found at https://tfdlabyrinth.wordpress.com. He tells of many aspects of Maureen's life and work of which I was unaware.

Maureen's achievements in fandom, and in SF criticism, are so numerous that it took the BSFA's committee and other correspondents several thousand words to describe them (at https://www. bsfa.co.uk). I must admit I knew little about her until in 1995 Yvonne Rousseau, local fan and fine writer, invited me to join a British apa called Acnestis, which was edited and organised by Maureen. This proved to be a collection of erudite and delightful correspondents, including K. V. Bailey, Maureen and Paul, Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, and many others I might never have heard of.

In 1999, Paul stood for and won GUFF, the fan fund that brings fans from Britain and Europe to Australia, or takes them the other way. Paul was a guest of Aussiecon 3, held in Melbourne in August. Maureen accompanied Paul, along with many other members of Acnestis. It was wonderful to meet them for the first time, as well as Claire and Mark, Paul and Elizabeth Billinger, Andy Butler, and others. On the last night of Aussiecon 3, Maureen and Paul and I sat down to a delightful dinner, where we hatched the idea for an international fanzine to be edited by the three of us. Called *Steam Engine Time* (in honour of big ideas whose time had come), it would concentrate on longer articles about SF topics rather than short reviews. Paul edited the first three issues in Britain in 2000 and 2001. He seemed then unable to post out the paper copies of the third edition, so he and Maureen pulled out of the arrangement, without explanation. Acnestis lasted until 2005, each mailing more stimulating than before. And then Maureen closed it down, again without explanation. And that's the last I heard from her.

A biography of Maureen could be the length of a book. A shorter version appeared in *File 770*, 19 September 2022. Thanks to Mike Glyer for allowing me to reprint the following:

Maureen Kincaid Speller (1959–2022)

(*File 770*, 19 September 2022)

Influential sff critic and reviewer Maureen Kincaid Speller died September 18 of cancer. She was the Senior Reviews Editor at *Strange Horizons*, and

Maurren Kincaid Speller. (Photo: Alison Scott.)

Editorial Consultant for *Foundation: the International Review of Science Fiction*.

Active in fandom since about 1980, she wrote over the course of time as Maureen Porter, Maureen Speller, and Maureen Kincaid Speller; she was the partner of Paul Kincaid from 1986 until her death (they married in 1993).

A leader in the British Science Fiction Association, she edited its publication *Matrix* in the late eighties, served as Magazine Reviews Editor of *Vector* in the nineties, and wrote innumerable reviews and essays for each of them. The organisation mourns her loss, saying 'Her diligence, wisdom and vision were instrumental in the BSFA's continuance for several years'.

Speller was a four-time Hugo nominee, once for Best Fan Writer (1999) and three for her work on *Strange Horizons* (2016, 2019, 2021). She won a 1998 Nova Award, given for achievement in British fanzines, as Best Fan Writer.

In addition to the BSFA publications she worked on, Speller created her own fanzines, including *Snufkin's Bum*, and *Steam Engine Time*, co-edited with Paul Kincaid and Bruce Gillespie.

Elected the 1998 Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund delegate, she traveled to Bucconeer, the 1998 Worldcon in Baltimore, and fannish centers including Madison, Seattle, Minneapolis, and Portland. Geri Sullivan reminded friends today that Speller was 'the TAFF delegate for whom TAFF-on-a-stick (a fannish outing to the Minnesota State Fair) was first invented'.

She often served as an awards judge — four years for the Arthur C. Clarke Award (1989, 1990, 1993, 1994); the Otherwise Award (2004); and the Rotsler Award (2004-2006). She also contributed reviews to the Clarke Award 'Shadow' Juries of 2017 and 2018.

Outside of fandom, she was active in the Liberal Democrats party, running for local office at least once, in 2005 (the Conservative candidate won).

A great deal can be learned about the nuances of sff criticism by reading her work, partly because it was so insightful, and partly because she expressed her thoughts so clearly and concisely. One memorable example is 'You're Never Alone with a Critic: Shadowing the Clarke Award, 2018', which says in part: 'Here's the thing — a critic's job is not to provide plot synopses, nor is it to tell you whether or not you'll like a novel. It is definitely not a critic's job to act as an unpaid publicity agent. A critic's job is to look at the fiction itself, and to have a view about it. Critics write about all sorts of things. They think about where a text sits in relation to other works of sf, they explore themes, tease out aesthetic similarities and differences; they consider what a novel says about the world at large, and, yes, they make judgement based on their experience as informed readers.'

Christine Ashby (1951–2022)

***brg* I remember Christine McGowan (until she married Derrick Ashby) best as a participant in convention panels during the 1970s and as a very articulate fanzine publisher and ANZAPA member. She was very active in the organisation of the first Aussiecon, 1975, held at the Southern Cross Hotel in Melbourne, the first world convention to be held in Australia. Much of the last-minute organisation of the convention took place at the slanshack house that called itself the Magic Pudding Club (see Perry Middlemiss's *Alien Review 3*). Since Derrick was**

living at the Magic Pudding Club, and Christine was doing much of the organising from there, it seemed only natural that they should get together. In 1976, she was the Australian DUFF delegate, attending MidAmeriCon, that year's Worldcon. Her trip report, *The Flight of the Kangaroo*, was published a decade later (https://fanac.org/fan_funds/kanga/cover.html).

Christine maintained her involvement in Melbourne fandom, and was the Treasurer for Australia's second world convention, Aussiecon 2, 1985, also held at the Southern Cross Hotel in Melbourne. Christine and Derrick remained active in ANZAPA, but dropped out somewhen in the 1990s. Since the beginning of 2020, Derrick has returned as a valued contributor to ANZAPA, but Christine's problems escalated. Despite knowing about the health difficulties that afflicted both Christine and Derrick during late 2021 and early 2022, I found it a shock to hear that she had left us.*

David Grigg, with his wife Sue, were friends with Christine and Derrick Ashby for many years

I was greatly saddened to hear from Derrick of Christine's death. It has been clear from his recent contributions to ANZAPA that her health was failing and she was finding life very difficult.

Christine was one of the first fans of about my own age I met when I joined fandom. She'd been at university with my friend Carey Handfield. I was always impressed by her sharp wit, fierce intelligence, and pleasant company, and I greatly valued her friendship over the years.

Christine performed splendidly as Treasurer of both Aussiecon and Aussiecon Two, and I have to say that she and Derrick were the real workhorses of organising the latter convention, of which I was merely Chairman. Without their hard work, that Worldcon would just never have happened.

Christine was also very active in other areas, and it was through her recommendation that I joined the board of the Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Association of Victoria ('Paraquads'), of which she was Chair for a while.

She and Derrick have also been valued members of ANZAPA through the years.

Denny Lien, Minneapolis fan, remembers Christine Ashby

I met Christine (and Derrick) on one of my Australian trips (I don't recall if it was 1975 or 1981) and have always felt guilty about causing her a couple of bad days on her American DUFF journey. She needed a host for her planned Minneapolis stay, and as she would be getting here before I got back I couldn't do it, so pre-convention I asked for volunteers at a MinnSTF meeting. A couple whom I only vaguely knew and who were not club regulars volunteered, and since they lived in a modern highrise apartment building with elevators etc. (important as she was 'physically challenged', as today's weasel wording has it, or 'a cripple', as Christine cheerfully referred to herself). I thought that would be fine.

But when I did get back to Minneapolis and stopped there to visit her, accompanied by Carey Handfield, who was staying with me, I was horrified to (a) see that the apartment was something of a cluttered pigsty and (b) be told by Christine as Carey as we whisked her off for a meal '*Get ...me... out ... of ... here ...*' Which of course we'd both immediately intended to do anyway. I forget just what excuse we came up with for the fringefans who'd 'hosted' her (and apparently basically ignored her) or which much more suitable MinnSTF host we found for Christine on short notice, but we did indeed get her out from the

Christine at Sue and David's wedding in 1979.

'hosts', with much apology and grovelling on my part. And of course she accepted my apologies and all fandom was not plunged into war.

Erik Harding (1965–2022)

Erik Harding. (Photo: Carla Bleeker.)

I've known **Erik Harding**, son of Lee Harding and Carla Bleeker, almost as long as I've known anybody in fandom. He was only three when I met him at the home of his parents, Lee and Carla, in the hillside suburb of The Basin in early 1968. He was a very cheerful child then, and from all I've heard, stayed cheerful for most of his life. I met him again only a few times during his childhood until Lee and Carla split up, and later Carla and the family moved to Perth. I kept hearing that Rik (as he was known there) had joined Perth fandom when he was a teenager, but I know little about Perth fandom from then on because of the lack of a news fanzine from Western Australia. I had heard from Lee and others that Rik became a foundation member of Swancon, the annual Perth convention that's been held for over 40 years He was good at playing Bluebottle during fannish presentations of The Goons, and Julian Warner mentioned that he was a member of the fan band the Ratettes, along with Ian Nichols and Julian. Rik helped organise conventions, but seems never to have been drawn into fanzine publishing.

I very much enjoyed meeting Rik five years ago when he travelled to Melbourne for the Great Fannish Birthday Party, which Jean Weber and Eric Harding organised with the help of Carey Handfield at the Mail Exchange Hotel. It celebrated major birthdays for Jean, Eric, Robin Johnson, Lee Harding, me, and one or two others. Rik went back to Perth after the event, and we did not meet again.

Lee had told some of us that Erik was suffering from cancer, but nobody expected his death soon after. Best wishes to Carla and the family — and special thanks to Belinda for her news from Perth, especially as now Lee has been able to move from Melbourne to Perth.

Edwin 'Ted' Scribner (1943–2022)

Farewell, Ted Scribner: A tribute by Edwina Harvey

I'm sad to announce the passing of my good friend and colleague, **Edwin A. (Ted) Scribner**.

Ted and I 'met' on the Eidolist, and I know at least one fan thought we were the same person. At a time when SF fans were discovering the joys of communicating via email lists, we pursued the old-fashioned form of communication: Ted, his lovely wife Ros, and I met face to face for brunches at Cronulla Beach. They introduced me to the joys of drinking Ricadonna, and I don't think I'll ever see another couple as in love with each other as Ros and Ted were.

Ros was never into SF conventions, but would enthusiastically accompany Ted to them (includ-

ing the first Conflux in Canberra and the 1999 Worldcon in Melbourne) then go off and do her own thing.

Ted particularly liked the works of Larry Niven, and Ros persuaded Eric Lindsey to sell her a Niven title Ted was keen to have.

When Marc Ortlieb retired from editing and publishing *The Australian Science Fiction Bullsheet*, Ted and I combined forces to bring the newsletter out of retirement. (It took two people to do in a month what Marc did in a fortnight!) We ran the *Bullsheet* from 2002 until 2010, winning three Ditmar Awards for our efforts. (When I phoned Ted to tell him of our third win at 8.30 p.m., his response was 'That's nice. I'm going back to bed.')

Ted also regularly attended Sydney Futurians meetings.

When I queried Ted why he didn't answer my emails, I received a card from Ros explaining that he'd been diagnosed with early-onset dementia, and wasn't intentionally ignoring his friends.

Ted was eventually admitted into Newmarch House, where I saw him twice, the last time for his 75th birthday party. Newmarch House later recorded a high number of deaths when Covid broke out, but Ted survived.

Ted's funeral was held Tuesday 12 April Vale, Ted, from one good friend to another. Fly free among the stars.

Ted's funeral on Tuesday 12 April at St Stephen's Anglican Church, Penrith, had a historical significance, because Ted's Great great-greatgrandfather (I hope I've got the correct number of 'greats') was a founding member of that church.

Through the recollections from Ted's daughter and two of his cousins a few new things came to light, and my memory was jogged on a couple of other things about Ted. I didn't know about the family connection to the church. I hadn't realised that part of Ted's work monitoring water quality for the NSW Dept. of Fisheries often involved field

Ted Scribner (from the family's funeral obituary).

trips around parts of rural NSW. Ted's innate curiosity for the 'how' and 'why' things worked went back to his earliest days, and his favourite treats both as a child and as an adult were barley sugar, eucalyptus and honey lollies, and chocolate.

The first time I visited Ted at Newmarch House, it was music day, and I was surprised to see Ted playing along on a flute. I learned at his funeral that he'd taught himself the flute as a boy. I was reminded of Ted's love of photography, and his hobbies of making beer and mead. I think I got to sample some of Ted's mead in the early years of our friendship, but he'd stopped making it regularly because by then honey was becoming expensive. I was also reminded that Ted wrote SF poetry and at least one short SF story.

In a sweet gesture (pun intended), at the end of the service, as mourners gathered outside the church, we were all offered a small organza pouch containing a honey and eucalyptus lolly, a barley sugar, and a chocolate with a thank-you message from Ted's wife and daughter.

David Cummer (1956–2022)

brg* I know almost nothing about David Cummer. He was a member of ANZAPA for a few years, although he lived in Minnesota. He was an enthusiastic writer and supporter of Australian fandom. I can't remember if he ever was able to travel to Australia; he certainly wanted to. If he did, we didn't meet, and that's a pity. Other members of ANZAPA have met him when travelling in USA.

David Charles Cummer (18 May 1956–8 March 2022): The family's obituary

David was our family's 'Rocket man', always interested in both science fiction as well as actual space science and space exploration.

His unexpected death on March 8th has left a huge hole in our lives and the lives of his many friends who loved him without hesitation. He loved his two nephews Charles and Jeffrey Cole, along with the many 'adopted' nieces and nephews he met during his life with the same lack of hesitation.

David did not suffer fools lightly, and he supported many causes from the LGBT community to the Deaf community to overcoming the injustices he saw.

He was funny and irreverent, yet he still had a sense of grace to him.

With his passing we all have lost a brother, a friend, an uncle, and the world will be dimmer without his laugh.

A Memorial Tree was planted for David.

Jeremy G. Byrne (1964–2021)

brg* I know little about Jeremy, except that he was a member of the editorial team of *Eidolon*, which began in 1991 in Western Australia. I have every issue, plus the anthologies he edited with Jonathan Strahan. My most vivid memory of Jeremy is that, of the Western Australian contingent who were highly visible at Aussiecon 3 in 1999 in Melbourne, Jeremy was the only one who came over and made friends and congratulated me on being the convention's Fan Guest of Honour. Along with many other Melburnians, I was disappointed that I met Jeremy only once after he moved to Melbourne. Jeremy is one of those people in the SF community I value highly, but who rarely connected with me in person. A pity.

Jeremy G. Byrne (1964–2021): A tribute by Jonathan Strahan

Editor and publisher **Jeremy G. Byrne**, 57, died 25 November 2021 in Melbourne, Australia after a long illness.

Byrne co-founded Eidolon Publications in 1990 and co-edited all 30 issues of *Eidolon: The Journal of Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy* until its closure in 2000. He was an integral part of publishing Terry Dowling's *The Mars You Have in Me*, Storm Constantine's *The Thorn Boy*, Robin Pen's *The Secret Life of Rubbersuit Monsters*, and Howard Waldrop's *Going Home Again*. Byrne was also part of MP Books, which published *Antique Futures: The Best of Terry Dowling* in 1999. Byrne co-edited three anthologies with Jonathan Strahan, two volumes of *The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy* in 1997 and 1998, and *Eidolon 1* in 2006.

Active in fandom, he was on the committee of the 1997 Australian national science fiction convention, The Festival of the Imagination, edited *Piffle and Other Trivia* for the University of Western Australia science fiction club, and was closely involved with WASFF and the Ditmar Awards for some years. Byrne also co-owned and ran Interzone Night Club and many other ventures. He famously accepted Greg Egan's 1999 Hugo Award for 'Oceanic' in Melbourne, which led to the persistent, if inaccurate, rumour that he was Egan.

As an author Byrne, published story 'Tizzy's Tail' (1990) and a number of essays for *Eidolon*, including 'Big Blue Was Watching You' (1990), 'Now is the Time' (1991), 'Now is the Time (Again)' (1991), 'Editorial' (Spring 1991), 'From the Lands Beyond the Hill' (1992), 'Directions' (1992, with Jonathan Strahan), 'Awards, Holidays and Gender Issues' (1993), 'Ch-ch-ch-changes' (1999), and

Jeremy Byrne, accepting Greg Egan's Hugo Award at Aussiecon 3, 1999. (Photo: Cath Ortlieb.)

'Editorial: Not Just Another Decade' (2000). His co-interview with author Greg Egan was also published in *Eidolon* (1994, with Jonathan Strahan).

Jeremy George Byrne was born 4 November 1964 in Subiaco, Western Australia and attended the University of Western Australia, where he studied medicine and computer science.

Lorna Toolis (1952–August 2021)

brg* I've never met Lorna Toolis, but she was a great friend to me and *SF Commentary* for many years. As curator of Toronto's Spaced Out Library (based on Judith Merril's collection), later the Merril Collection, she subscribed to the magazine while library funds allowed, and then exchanged various publications so the library could stay on *SFC*'s list of recipients. It is a great pity that she was never able to travel to Australia.

Lorna Toolis: a tribute by David Nickle

I am coming to realise my good luck to have lived so many years in orbit of **Lorna Toolis**. She died on Wednesday afternoon (11 August 2021).

Lorna was the long-serving head of the Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy — a world-class collection of science fiction and fantasy materials at the Toronto Public Library. The birth of that collection preceded Lorna, but by only a few years; when she started, it was still known as the Spaced Out Library, seeded by a donation of science fiction writer and editor Judith Merril's personal collection of books in 1970.

In the late 1980s, when I first met Lorna, the Spaced Out Library was on the second floor of the Boys and Girls House at Beverly and College Streets. Not climate controlled. Not accessible. As ad hoc a library as its name might suggest.

I'd come in as a journalist, ostensibly working with another writer on an article about the Canadian science fiction community for a local alternative paper — but really, dipping my toe into a world that I very much wanted to enter.

Lorna helped me do both. First, she gave me a who's-who rundown of sources I might speak to, suggested I hit Ad Astra, the local science fiction convention to find those sources in one place.

Those sources included Judith Merril herself, who after a very professional interview, told me

Lorna Toolis. (Photo: Peter Halasz.)

very candidly about a writer's workshop that might be looking for members — and introduced me to one of the founding members, Michael Skeet, Lorna's husband.

I and my collaborator Shlomo Schwartzberg wrote our article, and I think it was pretty good. After a bit of to-and-fro-ing, I took my seat at the Cecil Street Community Centre, where the workshop met in those days, and became a not-quite-founding-member of the Cecil Street Irregulars workshop. I learned to write. I started to publish. I found a community, like I'd never had before, in that corner of the local SF scene. In the course of all that, I entered orbit. Lorna's orbit.

I've written elsewhere that Lorna was one of my dearest friends; that I would not be who I am without her.

Langdon Jones (1942–2021)

brg* I have never met Langdon Jones. Even in 1974, the only time I've visited England, I had the impression that he had dropped out of the *New Worlds* group, of which he was a notable member during the late 1960s. His stories were highlights of *New Worlds* when I resumed buying it in 1967, and his collection *The Eye of the Lens* is one of my most valued books.

Langdon Jones: A tribute by Michael Moorcock

One of my closest, longest and best friendships was with **Lang Jones**, a talented composer, editor, and writer, one of the most modest people I have ever known, with the sweetest nature of almost any human being I've met. He was Assistant Editor of *New Worlds*. He restored *Titus Alone* by Mervyn Peake to the edition you probably read, and wrote the music for *The Rhyme of the Flying Bomb*. You can hear his lively piano on *The Entropy Tango*. His own collection of stories, *The Eye of the Lens*, remains his only published fiction. I last saw him about two years ago, at the wonderful wedding of his daughter Isobel to Jason Nickolds, for whom he was extremely happy, and he said he had stopped writing and composing and had never felt better. He leaves a son, Damon, as well as his daughter. One of the few people of whom it's possible to write: Loved by all.

Frank Denton (1930–2022)

Frank Denton was one of those fans who published small, friendly fanzines for many years. I doubt that I ever sent Frank a letter of comment, or he one to me, but we both enjoyed each other's fanzines. As *File 770* puts it: 'A Seattle-area fan, [Frank] was best known for publishing the fanzines *Ash-Wing*, from 1968 to 1978 and *The Rogue Raven*, from 1975 to 1997, although he also worked on many others. Denton also participated in several amateur press associations including TAPS, The Cult, Minneapa, N'APA, Slanapa, and APANAGE.'

I would have liked to have met Frank when I visited Seattle in 2005. I had forgotten that he lived in the Seattle area, and nobody reminded me to get in touch while I was there. *File 770* tells me that 'for 30 years [Frank w]as a teacher, library director, and media director of a community college ... He enjoyed mountain climbing, sports car rallying, was pipe major of a bagpipe band, played guitar and sang during the folk revival. Frank was a kind man who was a popular figure in West Coast fandom. Frank is survived by his wife, Anna Jo.'

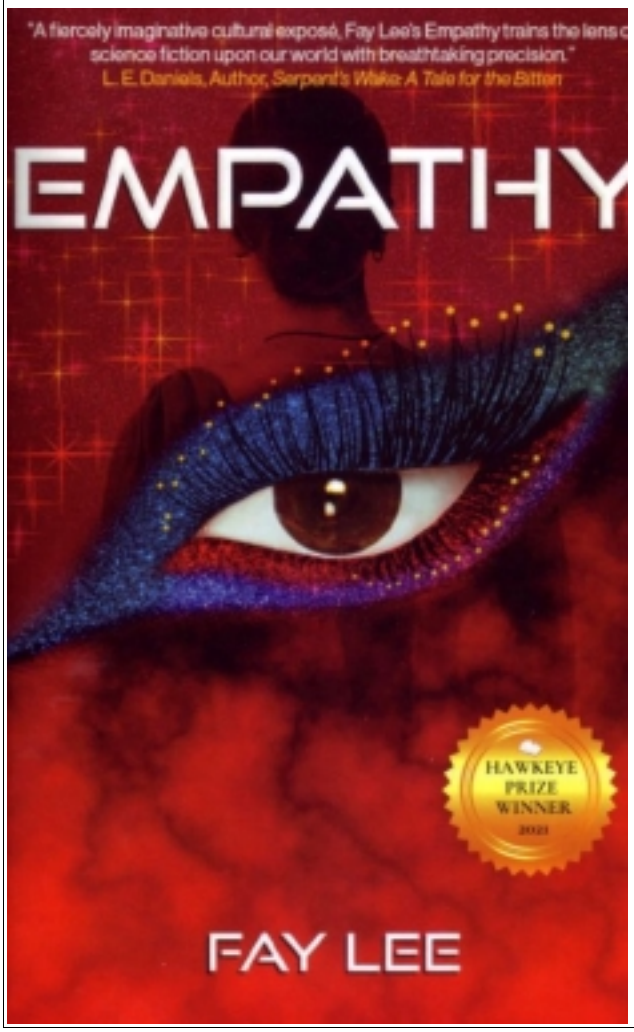
— **Bruce Gillespie**, 25 July 2022

Frank Denton. (Photo: Patricia Peters.)

In the mail

All my life I've haunted the mailbox at the front of whichever house I've been living in, waiting for the mail. In the early 1960s, Australians received two mail drops a day. By the late 1960s this schedule dropped to one mail a day, including Saturdays. Then Saturday mails disappeared. And now the mailman (who is still a mailman around our suburb) passes us by, day after many a day. Sometimes a week goes by without any mail for me; not even a credit card statement. *Sigh* So — thanks to those people who send me hand- written letters (hi, Stephen! hi, David!) and packets containing paper publications (hi, John!).

EMPATHY
by Fay Lee
(2022; Hawkeye Publishing; 212 pp.; $25; contact www.hawkeyepublishing.com.au)

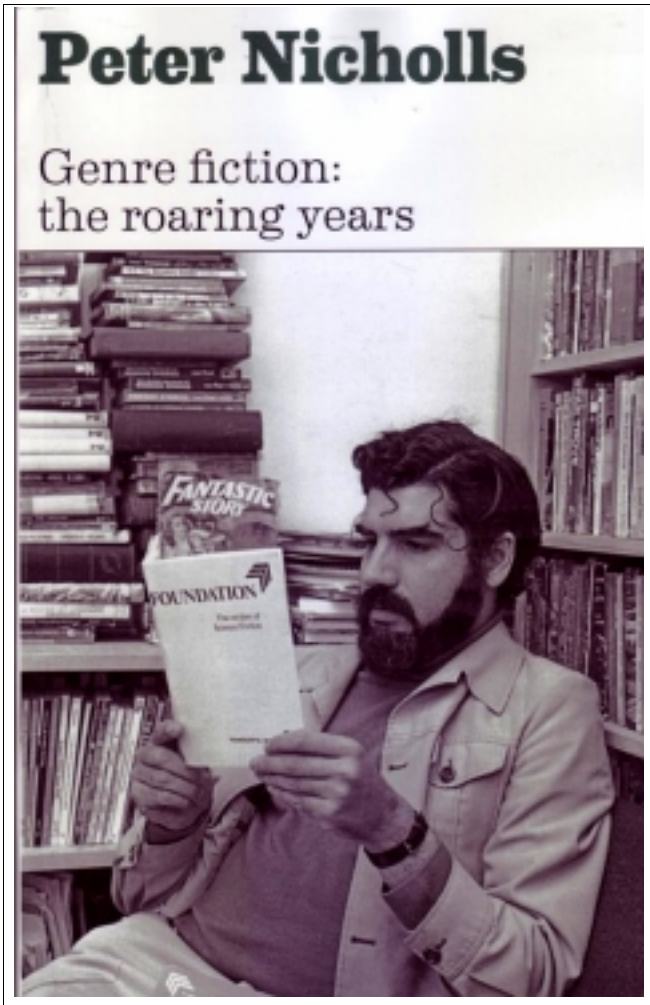


Empathy by **Fay Lee** is one of those books, published by a very small publisher, that you would expect to have been taken up by a major publisher. But authors have become understandly impatient about making submissions to the thirty-seventh publisher in a row. They have something to say, they feel confident that they have said it rather well, so they 'go small press'. The difficulty is having their work noticed. On the other hand I receive few print review copies from publishers, so I'm very glad to take a look at *Empathy*.

Empathy's main subject is sex, or rather, the future of the sex industry. The novel's viewpoint character lives in Paradise, a vast city that suspends itself above the surrounding countryside, and makes the lands below its parasites. It also provides very sophisticated sexual experiences to both its own rich citizens and clients from the lands below. The women who supply these services are doubly enslaved. They provide not only sexual jollies for their cliants, but they are covered in a bionically engineered second skin that hyper-stimulates the experience for the client — but gives nothing back to the 'nymphs', the super-beautiful superstars of this sex trade. The nymphs themselves are slaves in constant danger. The viewpoint character begins the novel having lost many days of her memories. Her quest is to recover those memories and solve a great mystery about Paradise itself. *Empathy* is a highly readable mystery as well as skilful counterpoint to current social assumptions about the sex trade.

GENRE FICTION: THE ROARING YEARS: A COLLECTION OF COMMENTARIES AND REVIEWS
by Peter Nicholls (2022; Ansible Editions 978-1-4716-1610-5; 414 pp.; $40; contact ae.ansible.uk)

This book is as welcome as it is overdue. **Peter Nicholls** has been Australia's most successful SF export overseas, making his name not only as a leading figure in setting up the Science Fiction Foundation as an academic institution in London and editing early editions of *Foundation* magazine, but also in becoming the editor (and writer of much of the contents) of the first edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1979). He was also co-editor of the two later editions (1993 and 2011



and online updates). He has also written and edited other books about science fiction (especially *Science Fiction at Large*), and written extensively in SF journals. But many of his best writing has been unavailable for anything up to 45 years. Hence my pleasure in being able to hold in my hands this collection of many of his best essays, self selected before his recent death.

I enjoy Peter's essays because, as Neil Gaiman writes on the back cover blurb, he is 'able to speak as easily and fluently to an audience inside the genre as to the world at large and to academia'. SF has had its distinctive critics, but many speak with either too academic a tone or with too much of a them-and-us cringeing tone. Peter loved good writing, but he also loved all aspects of science fiction and fantasy. He could see the good within much writing dismissed outside the field, but also hold it up for scrutiny. His own academic bent, at Melbourne, then Sydney Universities, was Leavisite, like mine: the text tells the story, so the critic should concentrate on the text, not the author's biography.

The essays I enjoyed most when they were published are two that I reprinted in my own magazines, with Peter's permission. 'Teaching Children the Value of Death' was his title for an article in *Foundation* in the 1970s about Ursula Le Guin's *The Farthest Shore*. Since that is my favourite fantasy novel, I value highly Peter's exploration.

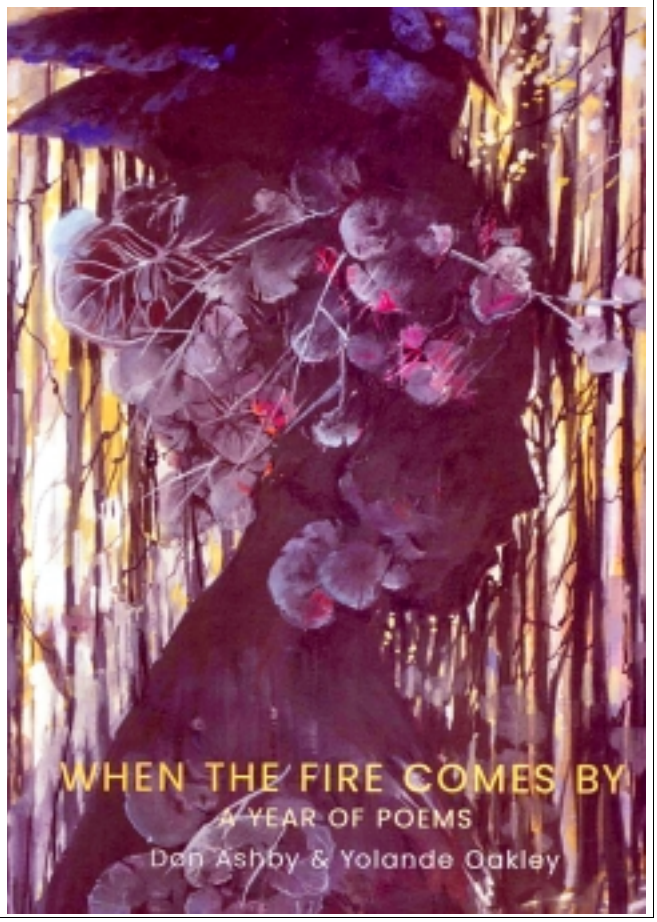
The other essay, from the 1990s, is 'The Books We Really Read', in which Peter explores all those books that we read not merely because we feel we ought to, but because we really love them. Originally in *New York Review of Books*, this essay was reprinted in my *Metaphysical Review* in 1997, where it drew an enormous letter response. I'm trying to work out a way of republishing that correspondence, including letters that had not yet been published when *TMR* folded in 1998.

I haven't had time to read all of *Genre Fiction: The Roaring Years* yet, but I urge everybody to get in touch with Dave Langford, the publisher, to make sure of your copy.

WHEN THE FIRE COMES BY: A YEAR OF POEMS

by Don Ashby and Yolande Oakley (self-published; 2022, 80 pp., $60. Contact: goblinhag@gmail.com)

Justin Ackroyd was the mailman this time. He had visited **Don Ashby**, who lives in Mallacoota, at the extreme eastern end of the state of Victoria, during his trip to the Conflux convention in Canberra. And Don had given Justin a book to give Elaine



and me — the most startling book of the year. Don has become a TV star this year by appearing in the four-part documentary about the bushfire immolation of the town of Mallacoota in late 2019. Don and his family lost their house and all their possessions, including a lifetime's memorabilia of work in theatre, art and fandom. Don and his family have, like the other citizens of the town, been involved in a vigorous attempt to resurrect buildings and community. In the process, he has somehow found time to write a set of poems about the ways in which the bushfire and its aftermath affected him. At the same time, local artist **Yolande Oakley** prepared a set of paintings that are startlingly beautiful. It seems that in Mallacoota lives one of Australia's greatest visual artists. The resulting book, ***When the Fire Comes By***, provides poems you can re-read and contemplate, plus a set of magnificent paintings, each of which you would like to have on your wall. This might be a 'thin volume', but it has a large layout, and would every cost every penny that has been invested in its production.

LOST IN TIME
by A. G. Riddle
(Head of Zeus/An Ad Astra Book 978-1-80454-1177-7; 2022; 450 pp.; $29.99 tpb)

I would never have heard of **A. G. Riddle** if Bloomsbury, the local distributor of this book, had not sent it to me as a review copy. Print-copy review copies from major publishers are rare these days.

A. G. Riddle has sold five million copies of his books and lives in South Carolina, all without me suspecting that he exists. I trust that his future novels will be as entertaining as ***Lost in Time***. This is one of those delicious rat-a-tat tales that begins with a mystery about the motivations of its main character, plunges into the twisted motives of a future company that specialises in time travel, and includes a locked-room puzzle murder the answer to which unlocks the answers to all the other mysteries. Add adventures in prehistoric times and in our near future and some stimulating speculations about the possibilities of time travel.

I claim little for Riddle's prose style, but at least it never gets in the way of his lively yarn. Sam Anderson, a partner in the powerful Absolom Sciences Inc., takes the blame for a murder he did not commit. The punishment in this future world is to be hurtled back in time to a prehistoric era from which he can never return. Adeline, his daughter, suddenly orphaned, becomes the main character, determined to retrieve her father, solve

the murder mystery, and bust open information about the corporation's actual time travel ambitions. No dull stuff or padding here.

CHARM, STRANGENESS, MASS AND SPIN
by Stephen Dedman (Norstrilia Press 978-0-6453696-2-5; 358 pp.; $29.99)

Stephen Dedman from Western Australia was making a name for himself, both here and overseas, about the time I met him at Aussiecon 3 in 1999. He has now published six novels, including *The Art of Arrow Cutting*, which I enjoyed about 20 years ago, two short-story collections, and two books of non-fiction. However, I haven't seen much about his work in recent years, and I had wondered if he had stopped writing.

Wonder no more. Rob Gerrand, having revived the Norstrilia Press imprint after nearly 30 years, has issued as his second book ***Charm, Strangeness, Mass and Spin***, a large collection of Stephen Dedman's short fiction. These stories have been collected from a wide variety of international and Australian sources. Readers will notice the enormous spread of genres within which Dedman works; as well as his extraordinary ability to create an alternative society or world in a couple

of pages as a prelude to the action of the story. Most authors who plunge readers into alien societies or places provide nowhere enough information to allow readers to participate fully in the action. Dedman has 'whereness awareness', that special quality missing in most SF or fantasy stories.

Charm, Strangeness, Mass and Spin has already received reviews in the Australian press, most notably from Cameron Woodhead in *The Saturday Age*'s *Spectrum*, 17 September 2022. He sums up better than I can the impact of reading this book: 'It's full of uninhibited excursions into genre writing, and although style plays second fiddle to its obsessive imaginative drive, the prose is neat and can be devoured without distraction. The range of tales is vast, from alternate history featuring an encounter between Fritz Lang and Adolf Hitler to a ghoulish homage to the stories of Edgar Allan Poe; from Lee Harvey Oswald saving a life in his later years to a clever reworking of Arthurian legend. And that doesn't even begin to cover the welter of genre tropes Dedman draws into his orbit.'

My favourite stories not only place the reader straight into an alien or unexpected environment but also develop major themes in a restricted number of pages. Try 'Dead of Winter' first; it's a masterpiece of compression and mood. My other favourites are 'Transit', 'The Pretender', 'A Sort of Walking Miracle', and 'From Whom All Blessings Flow'. The less impressive stories suffer only because of the word-length limitations that many magazines place upon their contributors.

NOWHERE FAN 6
edited by Christina Lake (March 2022; 32 pp.; available for 'the usual'. Contact christina.l@virgin.net)

Christina Lake is is one of those 'natural writers' we are privileged to find within SF fandom and rarely elsewhere. I assume Christina, who lives in Cornwall, scribbles away on social media like the rest of us, but I read much of her best writing in bimonthly mailings of ANZAPA (Australia and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) or in ***Nowhere Fan***. She also published an excellent anthology of her best writing awhile ago.

This issue features an excellent travel article, 'Elephants, Impalas and Zebras: An African Road Trip'. Christina and her partner Doug Bell 'early in the New Year of 2020 … set out from Cornwall to Botswana, via London, Amsterdam, and Johannesburg, arriving in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, just as it started to rain.' Christina and Doug are more resilient and adventurous than I am, so their adventures make very good reading.

I must admit that, because of its subject matter, I preferred Christina's breezy account of attending Corflu and Novacon conventions in November last year. Christina is one of those people who can talk to anybody anywhere, and they want to talk (and have a drink) with her, so these convention reports are accounts of personal meetings rather than program items. I wish I had the ebullience to enjoy conventions these days. Christina also reviews books entertainingly, and the letter column is as entertaining as you would expect, since everybody wants to natter with Christina, don't they? (She is also adept at layout and illustrations.)

INCA 20
edited by Rob Jackson (August 2022; 42 pp.; available as a PDF from efanzines.com; or email Rob at robjackson60@gmail.com)

It's always a wonderful surprise to receive a print copy of **Rob Jackson**'s ***Inca*** from Chichester, England. Rob has an excellent sense of layout, and he prints the whole issue in colour on his home printer. *Inca* 20 is the most interesting issue for some time. If at the start you can survive a spray of Nic Farey ('An Apology from the Management'), you are well equipped to enjoy Sandra Bond's 'A Poet and Tragedian Visits Novacon', a

Cover illo by Taral Wayne.

McGonagall-eye viewpoint poem that I've also seen on Facebook; or plunge into Taral Wayne's 'Morty', a piece of genuine fan fiction (i.e. fiction about fans and fandom), which will evoke uncomfortable memories for we mournful desperate-and-dateless slobs who entered fandom in the fond hope of finding fair madidens, despite the fact that there were few of them, and we seemed to love SF and fantasy books more than people. Taral has taken on the job of raising the flag for fan fiction while the rest of us have let it fall by the wayside.

I'm not sure how John Nielsen Hall makes entertaining a tale of a weekend snowed into a house without power, but he does. 'My Weekend Away' is one of the best fanzine articles of 2022. Not to be outshone in his own fanzine, Rob matches him with a tale of his old car being trapped by snow ('The Illustrated Hotel Previa') and the journey and wedding that followed.

Steve Jeffery writes the Letter of Comment of the Year in this issue of *Inca*. 'I digress,' he writes, after digressing for awhile. 'Even my digressions have digressions. This is … one of the pleasures of letter writing as a preferred form of fanac: a form of improvisation of taking a common thread and seeing just where it leads before you run out of steam.' Steve has barely begun improvising at this point in his letter, let alone running out of steam. The result is a dazzling combination of Dr Johnson and Avram Davidson: deep learning combined with shaggy-dog story, on the subject of Nicholson Baker's obsession with the word 'lumber'. No, I don't know how Steve does it. I have a copy of Nicholson Baker's *The Size of Thought* (1996). I've read it, but have no recall of reading Baker's long article. All I can do is enjoy Steve Jeffery's dazzlement of digressions.

Mark Plummer's letter is also excellent; Hazel Ashworth West takes us to the most recent British Corflu; and there are many others. Truly, fanzine publishing is for the pleasure of the editor and the contributors.

VANAMONDE Nos. 1434, 1435–7, 1382–3, 1492–1514, received since June 2022 written by John Hertz (Enquire: 236 S. Coronado St., No. 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057, USA)

More batches of issues of ***Vanamonde***, ranging from about two years ago up to the most recent, from **John Hertz**, who writes two pages every week for APA-L, and prints extra copies for other friends. I find it hard to thank him immediately, because he doesn't own up to a home email address. You can find reprints of some of his *Vanamonde* pieces in John's new column here in *SFC*, including his own tribute to Robert Lichtman.

The mini-reviews

WHERE SHALL WE RUN TO?: A MEMOIR
by Alan Garner (2018; 4th Estate; 194 pp.)

TREACLE WALKER
by Alan Garner (2021; 4th Estate; 152 pp.)

I found out about both these books only well after they had been published, and feared that I would never put my hands on either. My friends at Readings came good with copies of both of them six months after I had placed the order. **Alan Garner**, my favourite British writer, now in his eighties, weighs in with two seemingly light books written in his usual very concentrated prose. ***Treacle Walker***, a novel that is seemingly about children but is written for adults, has just been long-listed for the 2022 Booker Award. I didn't like it as much as Garner's other recent novels, but like all Garner books, it deserves re-reading.

Much more penetrating is his childhood memoir ***Where Shall We Run To?***, which brings to life those wonderful moments of discovery during childhood that energise the rest of one's life.

A MASTER OF DJINN
by P. Djeli Clark (Orbit; 2021; 392 pp.)

The book doesn't work. It's twice as long as it should be. It shows little of the sparkle of **Djeli Clark**'s novella *The Haunting of Tram Car 015*, which shares this alternative world, Cairo early in the twentieth century. I gave up reading it half way.

SPACE OPERA
by Jack Vance
(Spatterlight Press Signature Editions No. 32; 1965/2005; 148 pp.)

It's been many years since I've read a **Jack Vance** novel or short story. Dick Jenssen gave me his spare copy of this new edition of ***Space Opera***, the 1965 tale of a space-faring opera company whose dictatorial director aims to demonstrate the superiority of terrestrial opera to the inhabitants of all the planets in the known universe. A variety of interstellar audiences react rather differently than anticipated. This book made me into a Jack Vance fan again. Vance's prose style is a bit stately and over-detailed, but his wonderful sentences and delicious humour drew me in. Vance's knowledge of opera is faultless.

LIGHT FROM A LONE STAR
by Jack Vance
(NESFA Press; 1985; 127 pp.)

Light from a Lone Star is one of a long series of small hardback books that were published by NESFA Press each year to celebrate the works of the Guest of Honour at Noreascon in Boston. Tony Lewis and the people at NESFA sent several of them to me as review copies, but I confess I've only now read this 1985 **Jack Vance** collection. 'The Men Return' (1957) is, I'm led to believe by Dick Jenssen, his most celebrated story. It's a nice little adventure tale about what happens when causation disappears. Other stories in the volume that

I would call classics are 'Hard-Luck Diggings' (1948), 'First Star I See Tonight' (1954), and 'The Potters of Firsk' (1950).

SAMUEL JOHNSON: A BIOGRAPHY by John Wain (Viking; 1974; 388 pp.)

I bought this biography of **Samuel Johnson** in 1982 after Tom Disch recommended it to me in a letter of comment to *SFC*. And it's remained on the shelf ever since. I'm not sure why I pulled it off the shelf right now, but I'm glad I did. **John Wain**'s style is a bit over-fussy, even for a book published in 1974, but he makes vivid his tale of Johnson's lifelong sufferings and triumphs in the 1700s. Johnson's levels of achievement (including his great *English Dictionary* and the first fully annotated edition of Shakespeare) were so far beyond those of anybody now living that I wonder why we bothered with the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, let alone the twenty-first. Wain makes plain that he would prefer to read Johnson than most authors of later centuries, which leads to some unintentionally amusing grumpy asides. Somewhere during house moves I've mislaid my Modern Library edition of Johnson's literary works that I bought in 1967 for my English Literature course, so I can't catch up with most of the books and poems that Wain writes about.

LYING BESIDE YOU by Michael Robotham (Hachette Australia; 2022; 390 pp.)

I swallow (or wallow in) each of **Michael Robotham**'s thrillers with great pleasure, but a month after reading ***Lying Beside You*** I can't for the life of me remember anything about the central plot. I leave that to David Grigg's review in a recent *Through the Biblioscope*. What I remember is the pleasure of being in the company of psychologist/detective Cyrus Haven and his 'ward' Evie Cormac, the girl who still carries inside her secrets that are so dark that Robotham has kept them hidden during three novels already. The other memorable character is Haven's brother Elias, who murdered all of his family except Cyrus during their childhoods, and has now been released from psychiatric care into his brother's stewardship. This is the sort of novel that David or Perry can review much more successfully than I can, because they can remember the plot!

MY TONGUE IS MY OWN: A LIFE OF GWEN HARWOOD by Ann-Marie Priest (La Trobe University Press/Black Inc; 2022; 471 pp.)

This will be hard to beat as my Book of the Year for 2022. You might remember that I listed **Gwen Harwood**'s *Blessed City* as my second-favourite book read during 2021. That book contains many of the letters Gwen Harwood wrote to her best friend Tony Riddell during World War II when she was living in Sydney. They were letters of a young person in love with life, full of good cheer and brilliant observations. Riddell introduced her to his friend, a dashing young officer, Bill Harwood. That's where *Blessed City* ends.

I found a copy of her *Collected Poems*, but had not had time to read more than a few poems when Ann-Marie Priest's biography appeared. It shows that Harwood's ebullience, sense of fun, and love of the adventurous life continued throughout her career. However, she married the wrong man. Bill Harwood comes across as rather a dry stick of an academic, who disapproved of Gwen's literary activities. She felt trapped by motherhood and duty, although occasionally she did manage to escape from Hobart to academic gatherings. Despite many setbacks, she slowly built a reputation as one of Australia's leading poets of the mid twentieth century. She also had a tendency to fall in love with the wrong people, but remained steadfast in refusing to leave her husband. Priest tells

Harwood's long story succinctly. She is most entertaining as she unravels the intricate status feuds that arise among poets. You would think that poets, being ill paid and unappreciated by Australian society, would band together in support of the ideal of artistic endeavour. Not on your nelly. Instead they can be much more querulous and competitive than members of another ill-paid, unappreciated group, science fiction fans.

LOVE AND SUMMER
by William Trevor (Viking; 2009; 212 pp.)

I pulled this off the shelf because I felt like a delicious snack after some heavier literary meals. I have enjoyed all the **William Trevor** stories I've read, but I had not read any of his novels. ***Love and Summer*** is only 200 pages long, and it could have been shortened to novella length. It is a slight story about an older woman, married to a much older uninteresting husband, living in an Irish country village in the early part of the twentieth century, who falls in love with a wandering younger man who happens to lodge in the village for several weeks. He is not a bounder and a cad, merely attractive to the woman as only the driftless can be. Despite telling a familiar story, Trevor hits the reader hard with his evocation of sudden love-at-first-sight and its inevitable consequences.

EVERSION
by Alastair Reynolds
(Gollancz; 2022; 306 pp.)

I met over dinner the husband of a friend of Elaine's. We seemed to have nothing in common, but he began telling me about his favourite writer, **Alastair Reynolds**. I lent him a couple of books of Reynolds' shorter fiction. I haven't liked any of Reynolds' 500-page blockbusters, but my new friend's interest led me to investigate his lastest novel, ***Eversion***, which is only 306 pages long. Almost everything about the novel is uncharacteristic of Reynolds, with its beginnings in the early nineteenth century, and its slow unfolding of a puzzling scenario set in a wide range of historical periods. Reynolds dips his lid to Philip K. Dick, but he converts what should have been a suspenseful and exciting ride into a rather dull trot. I suspect that Reynolds fans won't like it.

POIROT AND ME
by David Suchet, with Geoffrey Wansell
(Headline; 2013; 310 pp.; £20.00)

A few months ago, I spent more than a month re-watching every episode of *Poirot* that starred **David Suchet**. Suchet was employed originally by producer Brian Eastman and the heirs of Agatha Christie for a series of one-hour episodes that mainly featured adpatations of Christie's short stories. Only a few of the novels were filmed, as double episodes. The photography and set design in these episodes were British TV best, but the series was renewed only year by year, as David Suchet relates in ***Poirot and Me***. After what seemed like final cancellation, new producers (money providers) rehired Suchet and allowed him free rein. He resolved to finish filming *every* Poirot story and novel that Agatha Christie had ever written in a series of full-length TV movies. He also resolved to reinterpret Poirot according to Christie's vision. You can find his interpretations at their most effective in episodes that have already been made into feature movies, such as two other versions of *Murder on the Orient Express*. Suchet builds tension into the narrative by describing how his animation of Poirot changed and developed his own character and outlook.

THE DEMON PRINCES
by Jack Vance
(Science Fiction Book Club; 1981; 965 pp.)

Thanks very much to Alan Stewart for lending me this large volume, which includes the five Kirth Gersen novels written by **Jack Vance**: ***The Star King*** (1964), ***The Killing Machine*** (1964), ***The Palace of Love*** (1967), ***The Face*** (1979), and ***The Book of Dreams*** (1981). I remember enjoying the first novels when they appeared in *Galaxy* magazine in the 1960s, but I retained only the vaguest memory of what was so enjoyable about them. Each one of them has much the same plot: Kirth Gersen has a list of five mysterious powerful figures, called the Demon Princes. For reasons that never become clear the five of them cooperated in an operation that killed all of Gersen's family when he was child. Now he seeks revenge on the five, one by one. The trouble is that each of them is rather good at disguise, so the mainspring of each story is to identify a particular Demon Prince and despatch him. The books should be very boring, but they are not, because the plot beccomes merely a device for propelling Gersen around the universe to visit a vast array of meticulously described planets, tribes, and subsidiary characters. Gersen is a trickster who need to invent roundabout ways of tracking down his intended victims, so each books features a fair amount of humour as well as action. And even that action would be boring if it were not for Vance's love of the English language and his great ability to manipulate wonderful sentences. Not quite

prose poetry, but not far off.

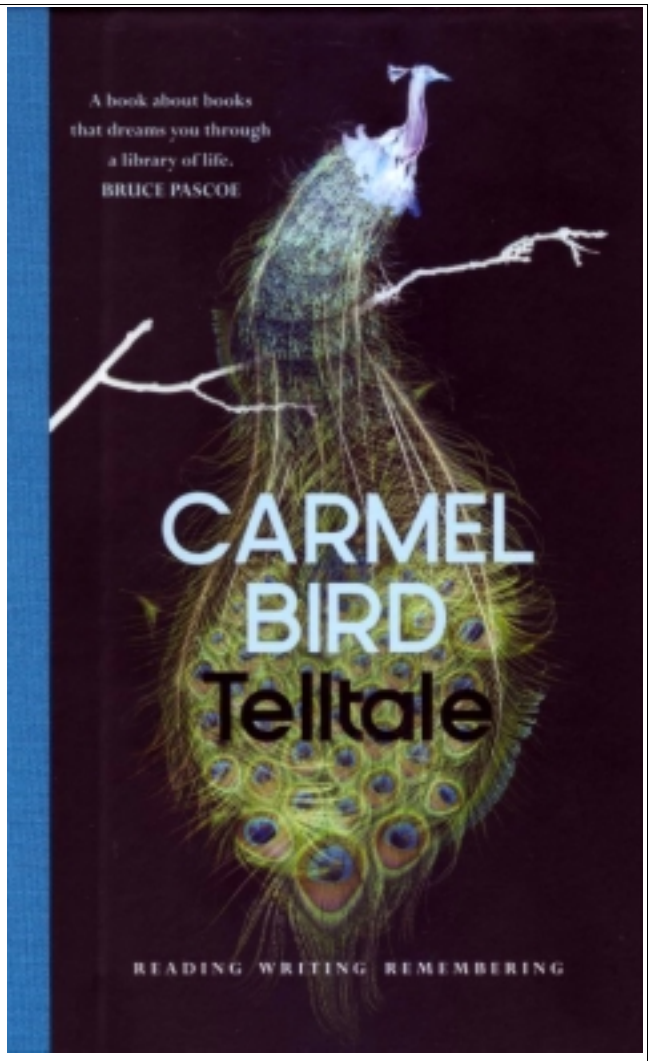
The only trouble with this book is that will need to give it back to Alan. If anybody owns this volume, or the five books separately, and wants to sell them to me, please let me know.

BEL CANTO
by Ann Patchett
(4th Estate; 2001; 318 pp., $22.99)

I found an article on the Internet that I don't seem to have saved, listing ten major novels that feature music as a major theme. Richard Powers' *The Time of Our Singing*, one of the greatest novels of the last 50 years, is on the list. So is Bradford Morrow's *The Prague Sonata*, which I'm reading at the moment. I ordered that from Readings, along with another novel on the list, **Ann Patchett**'s ***Bel Canto***. But *Bel Canto* is an odd fish, although it is Patchett's best-known novel (and has been filmed), along with *Taft* (not read yet) and *The Magician's Assistant* (very much enjoyed some years ago).

There's no denying the books whereness awareness. On the first two pages the lights go out at a party of prestigious people of a South American country; when the lights return, they have all been captured by a group of political activists. And they stay captured for most of the novel. The party has been arranged by the Japanese ambassador for the President of the country. The armed band have jumped the party for one reason only — to capture the President and disappear into the night with him. But the President has stayed home that night in order to watch his favourite TV show, and has sent his deputy instead. The terrorists don't want the deputy, so now they are stuck inside a large house with a party full of unwanted hostages. Readers other than me might accept the situation as set out by Patchett, but there is an air of unreality that lays over the actions of both the captors and the hostages. They expect to be all murdered any moment, but that solution is resolved when one of the guests, a very famous soprano, begins to sing to cheer up the hostages. The captors appreciate the magical quality of the soprano's talent, which is the main musical motif to the novel's structure. The captors feel they cannot let anyone go, or the authoritarian regime of the country will kill them all. On the other hand, the party guests have to be organised somehow.

It's enough to say that this situation is interesting in itself, but does not lend itself to much development until the end of the novel. Various characters intermingle, fall in love, and otherwise alter the dynamic of the household, but reading



the novel makes one feel there it is afflicted by an awful lot of padding. 318 pages could well have been 150 pages. *Bel Canto* is memorable, but it's a disappointing read because of a failure of craft rather than style.

TELLTALE: READING WRITING REMEMBERING
by Carmel Bird
(Transit Lounge; 2022; 274 pp.; $32.99)

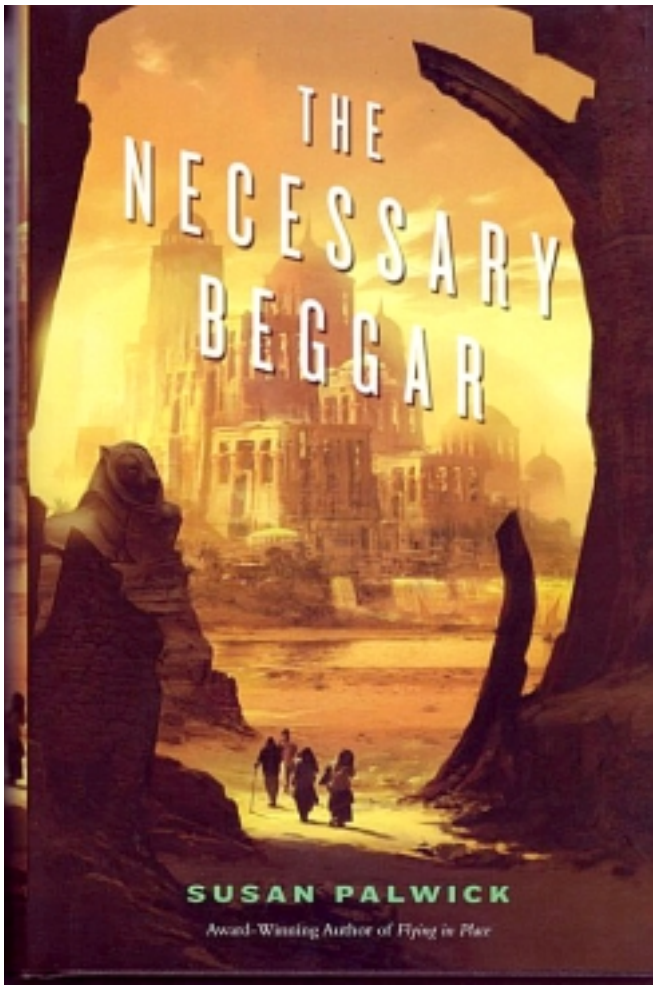
Carmel Bird has long been one of Australia's finest prose stylists. The looking-glass clarity of her style often hides unexpected depths. She can be a very funny writer, usually without drawing attention to her humour. Most of her books are works of fiction, but in ***Telltale*** she makes an ambitious attempt to account for the construction of her childhood experience through her growing awareness of literature and landscape. She goes to her own shelves, and considers only the books she has in the house.Exhibiting a bravura display of the essayist's craft she weaves recurring images from her early Tasmanian experience into images and themes from the books she read as a child, as

well as her discoveries about the savagery of Tasmania's early colonial history. Tasmania, then called Van Diemen's Land, was a sort of forgotten-world hell hole until the middle of the nineteenth century because it was mainly a repository for many convicts who had been transported from Britain. A paradise for its native inhabitants until the British arrived, Tasmania became a torture chamber when troops were commanded to kill as many of the Indigenous people as possible and exile those remaining to Flinders Island off the coast. Carmel Bird incorporates into her essay the astonishing beauty of Tasmania, an awareness of its painful past, and a revelation of how her own consciousness came into being.

THE NECESSARY BEGGAR
by Susan Palwick
(Tor; 2005; 316 pp.; $US24.95)

Early in 2022 I took from the shelf a novel that had been sitting there for many years, **Susan Palwick**'s *Flying in Place*. I enjoyed reading it so much that immediately I read the other Palwick book I owned: *The Fate of Mice*, her short story collection that includes 'Gestella', a classic fantasy story. I asked Justin Ackroyd to look out for other titles of hers, whereupon he gave me —for free! — *Mending the Moon*, a long novel about intertwined lives, and ***The Necessary Beggar***, one of the greatest fantasy novels I've read. Or is it a fantasy? It begins with a fantasy premise. In the country called Lémabantunk, capital punishment is replaced by banishment — a one-way journey through a long tunnel to another dimension. The people of Lémabantunk, situated on some other earth in some other dimension, live within a system of beliefs not found on our earth. Members of families are bound indissolubly, so that when Zamatryna's brother is convicted of homicide, all his family must follow him into banishment. They find themselves stranded in a USA resembling today's, but with racial and social tensions even more strained. Without visible means of support, they are rounded up into a refugees' camp, and try to live in very poor conditions.

So is the fate of Zamatryna's family merely a metaphor for that of the many Muslim refugees who have been ill treated in recent American history? Not quite, because this family's background religious/social outlook is anything but Muslim. The new visitors have a mystical non-religious belief system — but they need to become accustomed to American assumptions in order to survive. They are befriended by a conservative Christian couple, who try to convert them, but they cannot make sense of many Christian



assumptions. Again, this looks like simple social stereotyping, whereas the novel is based on the lives of individual characters, each of whom must adjust to the unthinkable and act surprisingly. Palwick's writing is clear and direct, yet incorporates all the subtleties of her story. I can't say I've seen it mentioned anywhere before, but *The Necessary Beggar* should be on any list of great fantasy novels.

I'LL BE YOUR MIRROR: THE COLLECTED LYRICS
by Lou Reed
(Faber; 2019; 652 pp.; 25 pounds)

I couldn't resist buying this huge hardback volume when it was offered by Readings Sale Table for $20. I started leafing through it. Wherever I opened the page, I found an interesting poem or a few striking lines or verses. These poems are the lyrics of **Lou Reed**'s many albums over 60 years, including all the songs he wrote when he was in the Velvet Underground. I expected them to a bit poppy and a bit empty, and some of them are. But Lou was the first rap performer, who half-spoke-half-sung his lyrics. Often his tunes were basic-to-boring, without minimising the power of the lyrics.

Most of these lyrics (except for the poppy stuff) stand on their own. What most of us would remember are Lou Reed's jagged descriptions of New York street life, especially 'Walk on the Wild Side', which was played on Melbourne radio only because the station censors of the mid 1970s had no idea what they were listening to.

I'd always thought of Lou as a street journalist rather than an in-depth verbal explorer, but many of these lyrics prove me wrong. Lou's characters defy existence, it's true, but often they just want to find a philosophical fulcrum in the middle of confusion. One of his verses is: 'It must be nice to disappear/To have a vanishing act/To always be moving forward and/Never looking back'. In 'Pale Blue Eyes': 'If I could make the world as pure and strange as what I see/I'd put you in the mirror I put in front of me.' Most of his songs feature people in desperate situations, both physically and emotionally, but Lou applauds all of them. The only people he derides are people from the suburbs who play it safe.

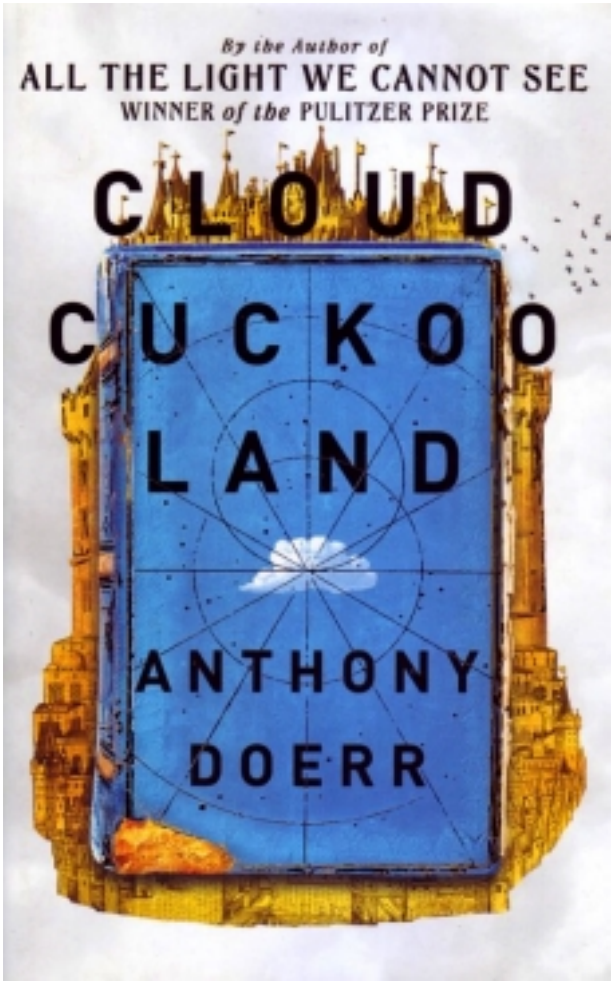
While reading the book I came to realise that I don't have copies of two Lou's most important albums (for their lyrics), *Growing Up in Public* (a concept album) and *Set the Twilight Reeling*. I know I had the LP of the former at one stage, but know not where it's gone. I seem not to have bought the latter. I hate having incomplete collections! Fortunately I do have Lou's greatest trilogy of CDs: *New York*, *Songs for Drella* (a tribute to Andy Warhol), and *Magic and Loss* (a tribute to Doc Pomus).

THE EXTINCTION TRIALS
by A. G. Riddle
(Head of Zeus; 2021; 441 pp.; $29.99)

I bought ***The Extinction Trials*** because it was the novel that **A. G. Riddle** published before *Lost in Time*, which I liked very much. There's an unfortunate gap between the two novels. *The Extinction Trials* is based in an original SF idea, one that I hadn't seen before, but the revelation comes at the end of 440 pages of endless gallivanting adventures, the superstructure of which is never explained. The idea would have made a nice little 20-page story. I'm still not quite sure how I kept my interest in order to finish the book.

CLOUD CUCKOO LAND
by Anthony Doerr
4th Estate; 2021; 626 pp.; $39.99)

Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, was all over



Melbourne bookshops for more than a year. I picked it up a few times. Nothing in Doerr's prose style struck me as startling, so I put it down again. I didn't even consider buying Doerr's latest novel, ***Cloud Cuckoo Land***, until David Grigg began writing about it in his PDF fanzine *Through the Biblioscope* (especially issue No. 5). After this year's Hugos had been awarded, David complained justifiably that it's absurd that neither Richard Powers' *Bewilderment* nor Anthony Doerr's *Cloud Cuckoo Land* had been top contenders for Best Novel. Even on the *Locus* Awards Best Novels list Doerr's novel came in at only No. 16. But I must admit I was still reluctant to buy *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, even after reading David's review.

This was a long shot for me, but I bought the hardback, began reading, and kept wondering for nearly 300 of its 626 pages whether I had made a mistake. Nothing to grumble about its prose style, but nothing to enthuse about, either. The narrative kept flicking from one character to another, some of them situated in the fifteenth century, some in the early twentieth century, some in recent history, and one character in the far future. All of them are connected in some way by an ancient Greek document, *Cloud Cuckoo Land*, by Antonius Diagenes. It is not clear whether this is

an actual historical document or a fiction of Dierr's.

The novel gradually gathers momentum for 300 pages, but I would not condemn any reader who gave up before then, despite the power of the passages describing two characters involved in the preparations for the sacking of Constantinople. My tiny brain began putting together all the fragments of this epic only at about page 300. The main theme of the book proves to be the power of literature, and the fragility of the papers it's been written on — the fact that most of the great books of most eras have been lost or destroyed, often deliberately. For instance, we have only a small percentage of the plays of Euripides and Sophocles, only phrases of Lesbia's poetry, and only a few bars of ancient Greek and Roman music. Humanity is supposed to be an intelligent species, but has spent most of its history destroying intelligence wherever it raises its head. The book comes to life when the fragments of the text of the manuscript of *Cloud Cuckoo Land* that have survived from Ancient Greek times have become the obsession of characters in our own time, and can still be read from a computer in a spaceship carrying Earth's survivors to a far star, all the stories resonate. The revelations and insights in the last 200 pages are remarkable. Be patient with this novel and it will reward you.

THE MAGIC PUDDING: THE ADVENTURES OF BUNYIP BLUEGUM by Norman Lindsay (text and illustrations) Angus & Robertson; 1918/2008; 224 pp; $50)

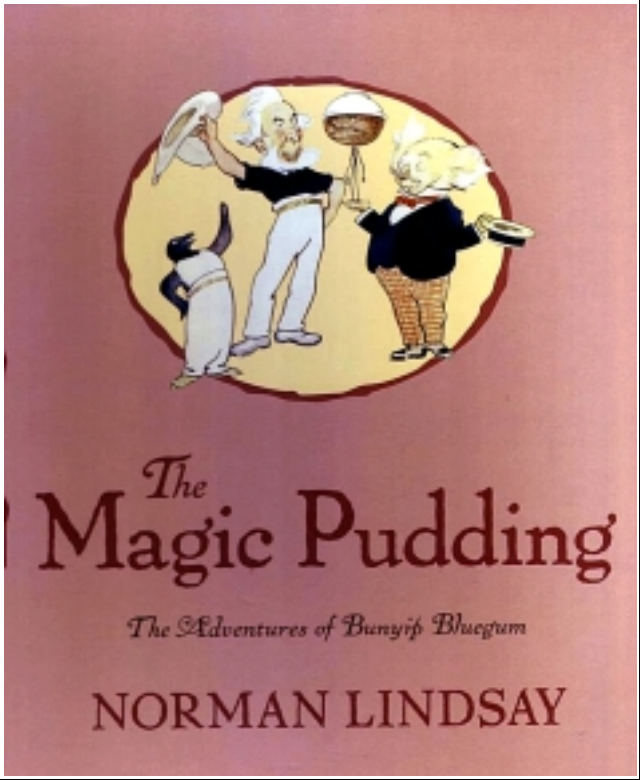
I read this just after reading Don Ashby/Yolande Oakley's *When the Fire Comes By* (reviewed above). What's the connection? In the mid 1970s Don Ashby and various friends lived in a slanshack called the Magic Pudding Club. (A slanshack is a household of miscelleneous young SF fans, often in transit from leaving home to before marriage). It was the scene of much of the nuts-and-bolts organisation of Aussiecon, held in August 1975. I've never asked Don whether he had read ***The Magic Pudding Club*** in England while he and his brother Derrick were growing up. I assume so.

The odd thing is that I was never offered it to read while I was growing up. I had still not read it until a few weeks ago. Recently the most recent edition, a magnificent piece of bookcraft, was on the Readings Sale Table at $16. I thought I had better catch up after sixty-something years.

The Magic Pudding Club proves to be a welcome surprise. All I knew about it is that it is a children's book about the Magic Puddin', a grumpy little steak-and-kidney puddin', from which people can cut pieces to eat forever, and various attempts by the Puddin' Thieves to steal it. I had always thought the text would be in the rather bland easy-reading style that bedevils even the best children's and YA books. Instead, Norman Lindsay, one of Australia's most famous painters, invented in 1918 a vigorous Australian vernacular which probably could otherwise be found only in C. J. Dennis's poetry, also from the first 20 years of the 1900s. Lindsay's characters lapse into jolly verse at the drop of a hat. The main subject of the book is the Australian everyday language, which was treated with scorn and avoided by most writers for children until the 1960s, but which proves vibrant and blazing in the hands of Lindsay. The plot is pedestrian: the Puddin' Thieves trick the Puddin' Owners into handing over their prize Puddin', and the Owners find ways to retrieve it. The fun of the book is being in the company of these characters.

(Why was it not in our local library? Why was withheld from our eyes while we were growing up? Probably because we were taught at school not to drop our 'g's in 'ing's — but almost all the 'g's in all the 'ing's in this book are dropped.)

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 5 November 2022



Two by John Bangund
archived by Sally Yeoland

Requiescat, Donovan, 1974–86

SALLY YEOLAND writes:
March and April will always be full of memories of John Bangsund. 29 March was our wedding anniversary from 1974, and 21 April 2022 would have been John's 83rd birthday. One of John's favourite pieces came up in his Facebook memories recently, so here it is.

Donovan and John Bangsund, Mile End, South Australia, 1976. (Photo: Sally Yeoland.)

Dick Bergeron invited me to write a column for the revived *Warhoon*, one of the greater honours I have had in my years in fandom, and the first instalment appeared in no. 29. I called it 'Cheesehenge'. It was reprinted in Patrick Nielsen Hayden's *Fanthology 1981*. The second instalment wasn't to Dick's liking. That's background. The second column I wrote for Dick started much like the following, but I adapted it in 1986 as a memorial to our cat Donovan.

'Spears are OK,' I remarked to Donovan, the ginger one that everyone forgets — he has never quite got over Dylan being the only Australian cat mentioned by name in the fiftieth anniversary issue of *Amazing Stories* — 'you get used to spears after a while.' He agreed. Donovan always agrees with me. Also, Donovan never sleeps on the typewriter. He's a good bloke. Every night when he comes in for supper he tells me what has been happening in that exciting world beneath and beyond the house that only cats know, and he always ends by saying something like 'Rrrrow', which I think means 'OK? You got it?', and I say 'Rrrrow' with a slightly different inflexion, which I hope means 'OK, I got it', and this can go on for some time, until he is satisfied that I have grasped the finer details of what he has told me. And that reminded me today, when *Warhoon* 29 arrived, to mention those spears to him. 'You get used to them,' I said, 'after a while, the barbs, the shafts, the slings and arrows and things.' 'Rupf,' he said.

I am not sure how to tell him about the hinged gorgonzola that Dick Bergeron has used to introduce my column. Cheese, Donovan understands — loves the stuff — but the hinge is a concept that eludes him entirely. When we moved into this house I carefully explained the operation of the screen door to Dylan and Donovan, and Dylan

mastered it within weeks — food this side, freedom that side, just push or pull, jump quickly, and the hinge does the rest. In Donovan's world only wicked or futile things are done quickly and noisily, so he waits patiently for a human to operate the hinge. Dylan is a jumping, skittering, noisy sort of cat who appears from nowhere at great speed and knocks things over. He talks to himself a lot. Donovan quietly drools when you stroke him; Dylan sticks his bum in your face. (I hasten to say that this is a feline honour, an act of submission, but it must be said that it embarrasses visitors, especially dinner guests.)

Dylan is the one that people remember. He gets Christmas cards. He is mentioned in fanzines, even in *Amazing Stories*. I know of people who have never been mentioned in any issue of any SF magazine, not even in a fanzine. Dylan is a legend. Fortunately, he doesn't know that.

Cheesehenge was constructed by a Welsh editor of biochemistry texts, my friend Paul Stapleton, one day when there was a party at his place. He just decided that there must be a more interesting way of serving a plate of cheese, so he made a little model of Stonehenge. He built it, I named it, he laughed, and I decided instantly to publish a fanzine called *Cheesehenge*. I had not quite got around to doing that when Dick asked me to write a column for him. So now you know.

Dylan's mother was named Poxy. She lived with our neighbours in Canberra, Rob and Cathy, who had a way with words. His father is unknown. His uncle, as far as he knew, was Rob and Cathy's German short-haired pointer, Kruger. Kruger apparently believed that cats were just a different kind of humans and therefore was polite and friendly with them.

Donovan was born near Bungendore, a small township in country New South Wales not all that far from Canberra, about the end of August 1974. Sally and I were given Dylan in September; I wanted to call him Wombat, but was overruled. Sally named Dylan after Bob Dylan; I named him after Dylan Thomas; and years later we learnt that Bob Dylan named himself after Dylan Thomas, so that was OK. A few days later we found ourselves possessed of a second kitten, a puny little ginger bloke with most of his whiskers and almost half his tongue missing, and I insisted he be named Donovan.

Dylan was always everyone's cat, still is: you pat him, he's yours. But top cat, no. After a few months of being regularly beaten up by Dylan, Donovan asserted his dominance, his right to be top cat in our house — and even now his ghost haunts Dylan. There are places where Dylan won't go, things that Dylan won't do, because they are Donovan's territory, Donovan's prerogative.

Everything that can go wrong with a cat happened to Donovan. Not that he ever complained. He would just come in, talk a bit, maybe pick a fight with Dylan, and settle down for the night. For the first few years he would choose a different place to settle down in each night, but as he got older he would settle in the same place for maybe eight or ten nights in a row. More often than not, he would choose some spot that Dylan liked, belt him up a bit, and stay there until the novelty wore off.

About June last year we knew he was getting old fast. Then, in August, we were forced to leave both cats with the vet while we were in Tasmania, and Dylan annoyed everyone with his songs of abandonment, while Donovan curled up in a ball of silence. Home again, we realised that Donovan's experience at the vet's had driven him around the final bend. He had always been the outside cat. Dylan's poofy job was being nice to visitors; Donovan protected the house and grounds. Suddenly he was afraid to go outside. He spent most of his days asleep inside, and when let out — our brave Donovan, who for years had terrorised any other cat that came within half a mile of his territory — he cowered under an old bathtub that someone had left behind in our back yard.

There was a day at Bridgewater, in the Adelaide hills, not long after we moved there from Canberra, when Donovan seemed to have taken on all the cats of the district in the ravine next to our house. We thought we had lost him then: the fights went on all day; we'd never heard such fiercely belligerent sounds; but Donovan limped in victorious. And beat up Dylan, just for the hell of it, before he retired.

Early this year Donovan became whatever the feline equivalent of senile is. He sprayed and shat more or less at random. Sally and I tried not to admit to each other what we knew must be done, but after a few days we put it in words, and cuddled our dear old friend one last time, and took him to his final appointment with the vet at Pascoe Vale. PTS, the vets call it — put to sleep. And that's how it was, all it was, that day in February. One lethal injection — Donovan was so used to injections, and so tough-skinned (he had blunted vets' needles at times), that all he was worried about was the strange people, the strange smells, the unaccustomed table and floor and walls, too much to take in all at once — and he was gone. In death he was superb, so relaxed, so at peace with everyone and everything, so big, so handsome. I stroked him, ran my hand through his magnificent golden

coat, and somehow found the way through my tears to the vet's back door, and Sally drove us home.

Miss him? Of course. That's not the hard part. We *expect* him, still. Dylan's in, *where is ...?* And as I have suggested, Dylan is utterly disorientated. He won't eat where they both ate, refuses utterly to use the same kitty-litter box. He is so used to being dominated by Donovan that he doesn't know what to do now, most of the time. Our permission is not enough: he is missing Donovan's instructions. The oddest thing of all is that he is turning brown. I thought I was imagining it, a trick of the light, but it's true. As if grieving for Donovan, Dylan is gradually turning brown. I am told that this happens to black cats as they grow old, but why now?

(Written 1986,
retyped and revised 22 March 2013.)

John's Facebook response to a comment on whether Donovan would be yelled at for collapsing on the diningroom table.

No, Dylan was the one who was forever being chided. Donovan was a much quieter sort of cat, and he'd had such a hard life that we were always pleased to see him so relaxed. His purpose in life was to guard the perimeters of the house, and he got into some fearful fights doing that. Before he retired each night he used to tell me everything that had happened in his world during the day. I would make little noises that I hoped meant something like 'Go on, eh! Really! That was brave of you!' and he would correct me until he was sure I had understood what he had said, and then he would go and belt Dylan and steal the spot where Dylan had chosen to spend the night. Donovan and I had a special relationship. So did Dylan and I, but it was much more ordinary and did not involve conversation.

Flann, Brian and Myles

JOHN BANGSUND writes:
17 April 1977: If there is one thing that an editor resents more than anything else, it is having his own work edited. He knows that being the best editor in the world (which he readily admits he is not) does not necessarily make him a good writer, but this knowledge does not lessen the resentment.

Back in December 1976 a bloke in Melbourne named Jules Lewicki, editor of a magazine called *Bottom Line,* wrote to me and said that Lee Harding had given him my name 'as a person who would perhaps be interested in writing a review of Flann O'Brien's works'. I was interested, certainly, but not sure of my competence to do something like this. Jules stressed that he wanted just a general article about the writer and his work, rather than a profound piece of criticism, and I was thankful for that at least, since there are seven books by 'Flann O'Brien' in print, and each one of them is worthy of 2500–3000 words. I told Jules I would do it, but not before March. On the 1st of March he rang me and asked how it was coming along, and rang me again each week thereafter until I posted off the article just before Easter.

I was not happy with what I had written. After half a dozen false starts I had managed to do about 3000 words roughly along the line he wanted, but I didn't enjoy re-reading the article, not the way I enjoy re-reading some of my fanzine writing. The best things about it seemed to be the personal touch here and there, a few gentle jokes, and the Keats & Chapman anecdote that I had supplied with it.

Jules wasn't happy with it either. I rang him two days ago to make sure he had received it. It was written in *Nation Review* style, he said, too personal and self-indulgent. That's the way I write, I said. It's okay if the personality is interesting, he said. I was too dejected by this stage to bother saying anything rude to him; besides, I need the money. The Keats & Chapman story will have to go, he said, because you haven't explained what it's about. So, with that out, and all the personal bits out, I reckon Jules is left with about 400 words. I look forward, in a rather dismal way, to seeing what appears under my name in his magazine. Meanwhile, here is the article I wrote.

It's a bit hard, trying to write a sober, scholarly article about Flann O'Brien, when you know next to nothing about the man and all you have by way of recommendation for the job is an endless capacity for delight in his work. But I'll have a bash at it.

When I first started reading Flann O'Brien, at a time when it was neither popular nor profitable ... No, that'll never do.
Yer Average Aussie Reader: What will never do?
Meself: Plagiarising the man before I'm barely started.

Scrub that. I'm starting again, scholarly-like.

According to Dr Brian Cleeve's *Dictionary of Irish Writers* (Mercier Press, Cork, 1967), Flann O'Brien was 'widely revered as The Sage of Santry'. Born in Strabane, County Tyrone, in 1912, O'Brien is well known for his novels *At swim two birds* and *The Dalkey Archives*. Hang on: I'm not sure I like this scholarship. 'adventures of Yeats and Chapman' *Yeats* and Chapman? Good grief. Hm, turning now to James Joyce, Dr Cleeve mentions his famous novel *Finnegan's Wake* ... Whatever Dr Cleeve got his doctorate for, it wasn't proofreading. Anyone want to buy a copy of Cleeve's *Dictionary of Irish Writers*, cheap? No? *Thunk!* — another $1.70 down the drain.

Flann O'Brien, or Brian O'Nolan (as we shall call him here), was born in Strabane, County Tyrone, in 1911. Briain 0 Nuallain (pronounced 'Brian O'Nolan', roughly) wrote fiction as 'Flann O'Brien', and his column in the *Irish Times* appeared under the name 'Myles na gCopaleen' (or 'Gopaleen'). Benedict Kiely called him 'the three-headed man', and no wonder.

'After a brilliant career at University College, Dublin', says the blurb in the Penguin edition of *At Swim-Two-Birds,* 'he did linguistic research in Germany and then joined the Irish civil service.' The latter (wrote Bangsund, making it up as he went along, having run out of Facts) O'Nolan hated, as only one who is forced to dispense Irish civility all day and write immortal novels all night can hate it. But down at the Scotch House, a popular pub in Dublin much patronised by up-and-coming immortal Irish novelists, O'Nolan was making a name for himself — and getting into trouble with the publican for it, mainly because he was making his name with a penknife on the bar. The night the publican threw him out and told him to stay out, for good, he had carved the name FLYNN O'BROGAN, and he just knew he was getting close. Picking himself up from the gutter, he stood for a moment in deep thought, up to his ankles; then, whipping a piece of chalk from his pocket, he wrote in large letters on the pavement — FLANN O'BRIEN! Then he went home, whistling a jaunty *cantarachd* (filthy Irish filksong), and composed six short stories in impeccable Irish before supper.

I can't keep this up. No, I mean, I could keep it up, but I'm supposed to be writing a sober, scholarly article of a factual and preferably uplifting nature, and I'd better get back to it. If I keep on running short of Facts, well, after all, what are Facts but lies agreed upon? (One free copy Cleeve's dictionary to the first reader that spots the misquotation.)

In 1939 O'Nolan's first novel was published, and in the same year he started writing his 'Cruiskeen Lawn' column for the *Irish Times.* The novel was *At Swim-Two-Birds,* one of the funniest books ever written, possibly the most brilliant first novel ever published. The critics, most of them, were ecstatic about it. 'I wouldn't say I was exactly ecstatic about it' said one, whose name means nothing to us today; 'A book in a thousand' said Graham Greene; 'The literary debut of the century' said the Spectator; 'That's a real writer, with true comic spirit' said James Joyce; 'Just the book to give your sister if she's a loud, dirty, boozy girl' said Dylan Thomas; 'Irish pornography at its impenetrable worst,' said the *Grong Grong Chronicle,* 'and not even illustrated.'

I confessed once to A. D. Hope that the novel I would most like to have written was *At Swim-Two-Birds. 'Ah,'* he said, 'the throwaway Irish novel.' I have never been game to ask him exactly what he meant by that, but I suspect the worst. Alec is a delightful bloke, but he's an academic, too, and *At Swim-Two-Birds* is not an academic's novel, not by an extended calcinated writing-instrument.
Yer Average Aussie Reader: By a what?
Meself: A long chalk. Sorry.

At Swim-Two-Birds is not an easy novel to get in to, and even when you're in it, not an easy novel to grasp. I have read it at least six times, and each time it has amazed and delighted me, opened up new vistas of imagination, thought and language, and generally made me feel like a writer's bootlace. You probably know the feeling. *At Swim-Two-Birds* gives me inexhaustible joy because it so brilliantly combines a delightful story (however digressive), an introduction to the main elements of Irish mythology (however oblique) and an insight, never more profoundly nor hilariously presented, into the Irish sense of humour (than which only the Russian could conceivably be more human). It's the kind of book Gogol might have written if he'd been born a century later, in Ireland. It's the kind of book Spike Milligan might have written, if he'd

had James Joyce's intellect and upbringing. In fact, Spike Milligan did write a book something like this: his *Puckoon* (a very funny book) is a kind of dole-bludger's *At Swim-Two-Birds.*

Was Brian O'Nolan ultimately responsible for the Goon Shows? There have been times when I have thought so. There are times, when I am watching *Monty Python* or *Fawlty Towers,* for example, when I think that the best kind of contemporary British humour is really Irish humour, traceable, through the Goon Shows, back to writers like O'Nolan, James Stephens, Oliver St John Gogarty and so on, and beyond them, to — well, how far can you go? You can go back to Duns Scotus, if you like. The great Irish scholar was once asked by a heathen king 'What is the difference between a Duns and a dunce?' 'The width of this table, milord,' he said, and got away with it, too.

During 1940–41 O'Nolan wrote at least two novels, one of them *The Third Policeman* (published 1967), another *An Beal Bocht* (first published in English in 1973, as *The Poor Mouth*). No matter how you look at it, ***The Poor Mouth*** is a vastly depressing novel. Sure, there are great helpings of humour, wit and side-splitting hilarity, but the overwhelming impression is of rain and spuds and futility, the Irishman's lot. Exaggerated, perhaps, especially to the Australian mind (despite the fact that this is precisely how many of our forbears felt about the country they had come from), but true, up to a point. There is fantasy here, too, as fantastic as anything ever imagined by the science-fiction writers, but this is true of all O'Nolan's novels.

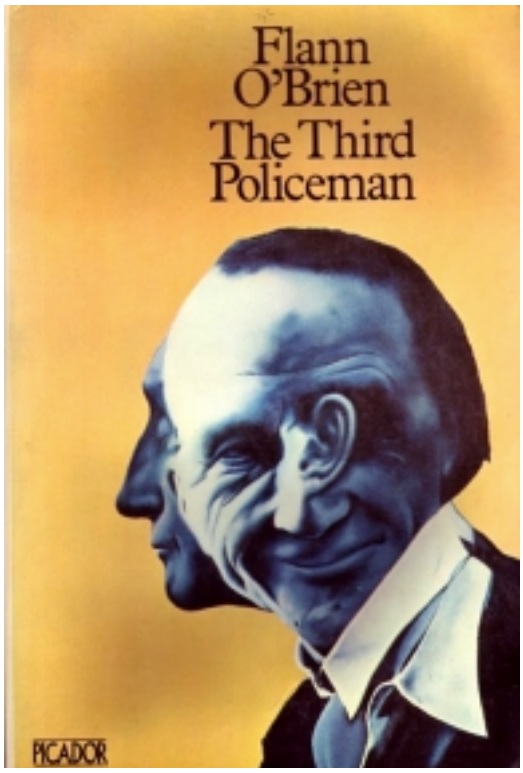
Until a biography of Brian O'Nolan is published (or until I read it: for all I know, there may be such a book in print right now), I will have no idea when his novels were written. It surprises me not a little that *The Third Policeman* was written so long ago, and this makes me wonder about the others. But from here on I'll go by publication dates.

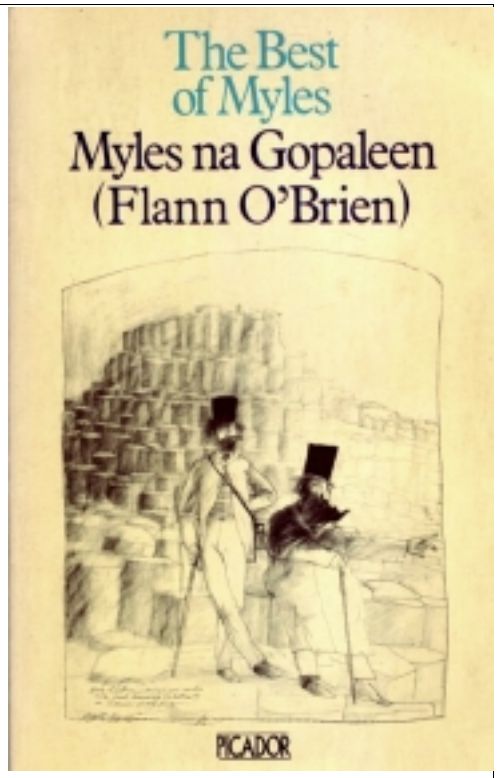
In 1961 ***The Hard Life*** was published, and it is, I admit, a novel only for the confirmed 'Flann O'Brien' addict. It is good, of course, the kind of novel that would immediately secure for any Australian writer something of a reputation, but it is not up to standard O'Nolan set elsewhere. The story has to do with one Collopy, who has dedicated himself to the noble objective of providing Dublin with rest-rooms for ladies. If for no other reason, you should read this book for the scene where Collopy meets the Pope, who finds himself being asked to exert his influence on the Corporation of Dublin for this purpose. But there are other reasons for reading it, as you will discover when you get round to it. My only strong recommendation about this book is that you should read O'Nolan's other novels before it, except *The Poor Mouth*, which you should read last of all.

The Dalkey Archive was published in 1964. The main characters in fantastic story are James Joyce (a devout writer of religious tracts, who is furious about the bastard who has published those obscene novels under his name), St Augustine (him, yes: the Bishop of Hippo, long believed dead), a mad scientist named de Selby, and a policeman obsessed by bicycles. In many important respects, some so profound that I haven't noticed them yet, the novel harks back to or foreshadows *The Third Policeman*, in which de Selby and the policeman make their first or next appearance.

De Selby (I quote here, broadly, from an article written by another great Irish writer, Walt Willis[*]) is a kind of humourless Charles Fort, who believes that time is an illusion caused by the presence of oxygen in the atmosphere. On the theological side, de Selby believes that God lost his primeval battle with Lucifer, and he proposes to remedy the present deplorable state of affairs by annihilating time — and with it, the world that Lucifer has mischievously created. The book deals mainly with the efforts of the hero to prevent this catastrophe. In this he is aided by Sergeant Fottrell of the Dublin Police. The good sergeant has a bicycle, but he never rides it, for the sufficient reason provided by what he calls the Mollycule Theory. And what is that? Well, when a hammer repeatedly strikes on an anvil, you know, mollycules from the anvil will enter the hammer, and vice versa. And when human beings ride bicycles, especially on the bumpy roads of Ireland, the same process will occur. At this very moment, the sergeant assures us, many unfortunate people in Ireland have become more than half bicycle. If you can't imagine what might conceivably happen to a man who is half-bicycle, or a bicycle that is half-man, you must read this book. But the bikes and the mollycules are merely the beginning of the fun in this absurdly funny (and quite profound) book.

The Third Policeman, I am given to understand by learned young friends of mine who had barely learnt to read when it was published, is O'Nolan's magnum opus. And yes, it probably is, if you don't know about Myles, and if your concept of The Novel doesn't include such sports as *At Swim-Two-Birds* — and if that's the case, you probably don't like *Lavengro* or *Tristram Shandy* either. But *The Third Policeman,* I am forced to admit, is the one book by 'Flann O'Brien' that you must read, whether or not you read any of the others. Since you probably have read it, and since





otherwise I'm not sure why I'm writing this, I will say nothing about the book at all.

'Flann O'Brien's' *Stories and* Plays appeared in 1973. They include an unfinished novel, *Slattery's Sago Saga* (which is just so good that you could cry at the injustice of O'Nolan's *dying so* young), a handful of little stories and plays, all delightful, and an essay on James Joyce, an essay as unlike your conventional essay, and as fine an exposition of what Joyce was all about, as you're ever likely to encounter.

If Brian O'Nolan had written nothing else but his five novels (five and a half, if you count *Slattery's Sago Saga),* in fact, if he had never written anything but *At Swim-Two-Birds* or *The Third Policeman,* he would rightly be regarded as one of the finest writers of our time. But he wrote so much else!

From 1939 O'Nolan kept up his 'Cruiskeen Lawn' column, daily, for the *Irish Times* until his untimely death in April 1966. 'Myles na gCopaleen' must be one of the very few newspaper columnists who has kept on writing brilliant stuff, day in, day out, for twenty-seven years.

I can't attempt to describe 'Myles's' column. (Since people like James Thurber, S. J. Perelman and Claud Cockburn have tried, and failed, despite their admiration for it, I don't feel too bad.) O'Nolan put into it everything he was interested in — and that was:

KEATS AND CHAPMAN were discussing poetry.

'I have often wondered' said Keats 'what exactly is meant by the expression "poetic justice".'

'I always imagined it to be a singularly appropriate punishment meted out to some wrongdoer,' said Chapman. 'And such a thing, with respect, seems to happen more frequently in poetic creations than in real life. On the other hand, it may have its origin in some historical occurrence.'

'Such as?' said Keats.

'I am thinking,' said Chapman, 'if you will forgive me, of some possible connexion between the bard and the barred, the court and the caught, the, ah ...'

'I am finding it difficult to forgive you,' said Keats.

'So sorry,' said Chapman. 'But you can perhaps imagine some learned judge, in some far-off time, handing down his decisions in verse ...'

'I cannot,' said Keats.

(John Bangsund, *Stunned Mullet*, June 1977, for FAPA and ANZAPA)

(Archived by Sally Yeoland in her ANZAPA fanzine *Les Chattes Parties*, based on The John Bangsund Archive scanned and assembled by Perry Middlemiss and Irwin Hirsh for https://fanac.org)

Colin Steele's Bookworld

brg* COLIN STEELE's review column has been published in *SFC* since 1979. More recently his reviews have covered a wider subject area beyond SF and fantasy. A number of the reviews have previously appeared in the *Canberra Times* and *Biblionews*, the quarterly magazine of the Book Collectors' Society of Australia, although a number are published for the first time in *SFC*. Colin is the former University Librarian of the Australian National University, where he is now an Emeritus Fellow.

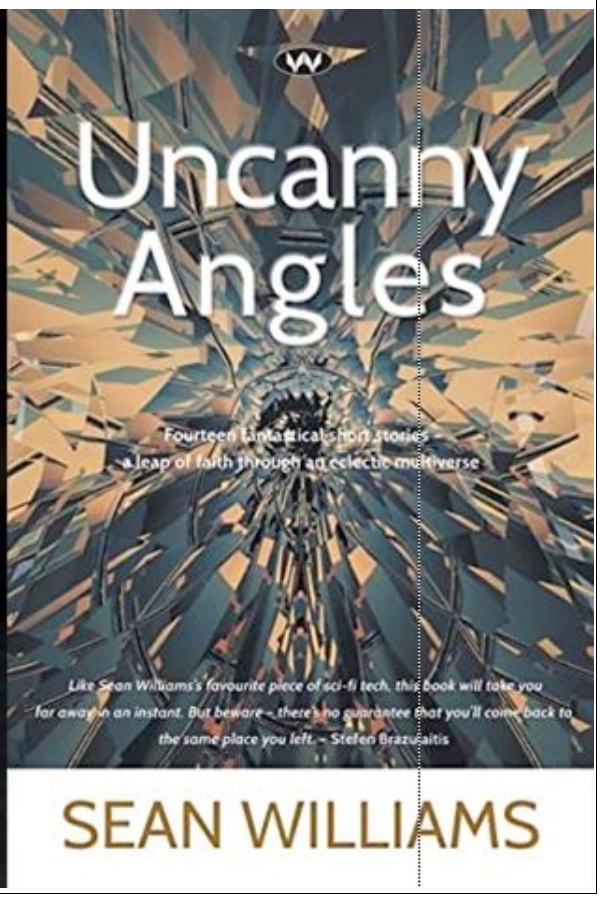
Are books and reading having a revival? During Covid, books, both in print and e-book form, saw a resurgence. Globally, Audiobook sales have risen significantly, while digital offerings like BookTok have dramatically impacted print book sales, including back titles. Independent bookstores, targeted to local audiences, have also increased in Britain and America despite the dominance of Amazon.

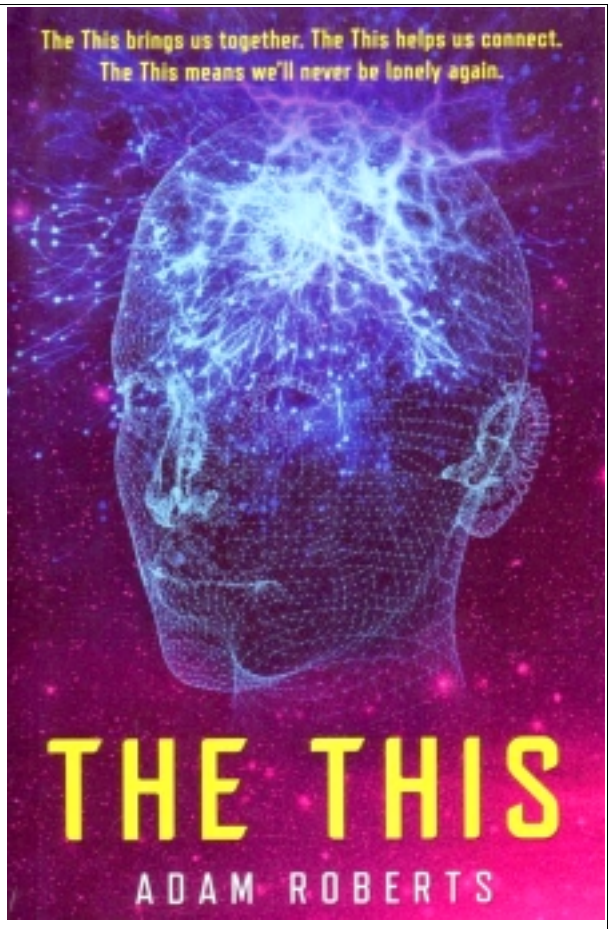
Print still comprises 76 per cent of book sales in the United States, but the rising global cost of paper will undoubtedly have an impact on the cost of books in the near future. This may well drive more people to e-books and audiobooks, but for the many who love the physical magic of books, they will undoubtedly retain them in rooms of their own.

AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

UNCANNY ANGLES
by Sean Williams
(Wakefield Press; $29.95)

Adelaide-based author **Sean Williams** has published over 50 novels and 120 short stories, mostly in the SF genre. Williams has said of the 14 short





stories in ***Uncanny Angles***, each of which has a background preface, 'The one thing these stories have in common, apart from their determination to exist, is a desire to take something familiar and twist it to reveal a different face. Be it a dragon, a guitar, a boy's club, or one's true and only love, my intention is always to leave the reader seeing these things differently. From a new and uncanny angle.'

Williams' Australia Antarctic Arts Fellowship in 2017 provided him with the context for 'The Second Coming of the Martians', set after the failed Martian invasion in H. G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*. 'The Cuckoo', which spins off Williams' science doctorate, follows a prankster's impact in 2075 on matter- transportation, resulting in a cult of chaos. In 'The N-Body Solution', Williams extends the concept of matter transmitters to a Loop stretching across the universe, in which his two main characters, on a planet, Cyernus, with the oldest known Loop junction, attempt to uncover the maze-like secrets of an ancient alien disk.

BLITZ
by Daniel O'Malley
(HarperCollins, $32.99)

Canberra author **Daniel O'Malley** achieved instant publishing success with his debut novel *The Rook* (2012), which was subsequently made into a TV series. The second novel in the 'Rook' series was *Stiletto* (2016), and now comes the third, ***Blitz***. All the novels feature a secret organisation, the Checquy, that has long battled supernatural forces in Britain.

O'Malley tells me that 'The Checquy books have all been about keeping the world safe from secret horrors, and never interfering in the affairs of normal people. But does that mean standing aside and letting horrible things happen? What do you do if World War II is happening, if bombs are landing on your country and you can make a difference, but are forbidden to so? How do you decide what is right?'

O'Malley follows two linked timelines, one set in 1940 during the Blitz in Britain, and the other in contemporary Britain. In 1940, a female member of the Checquy takes it upon herself to attack a German bomber over London. Her action unleashes deadly consequences from the surviving German airman.

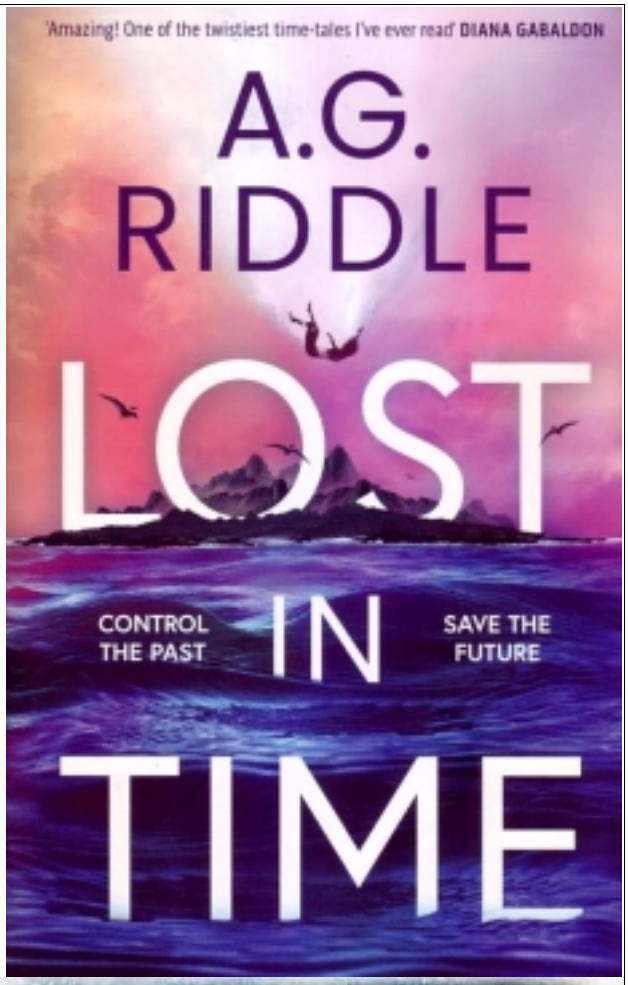
In the present day, Lyn, a librarian with supernatural powers dramatically emerging, is taken from her family into the Checquy Academy. When a number of underworld figures are killed seemingly from her powers, Lyn must go on the run to

prove her innocence, a task that is increasingly linked back to 1940. Blitz. At nearly 700 pages, this novel could have been pared back, as both plot lines meander at times, but fans of the series will not be worried.

INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FICTION

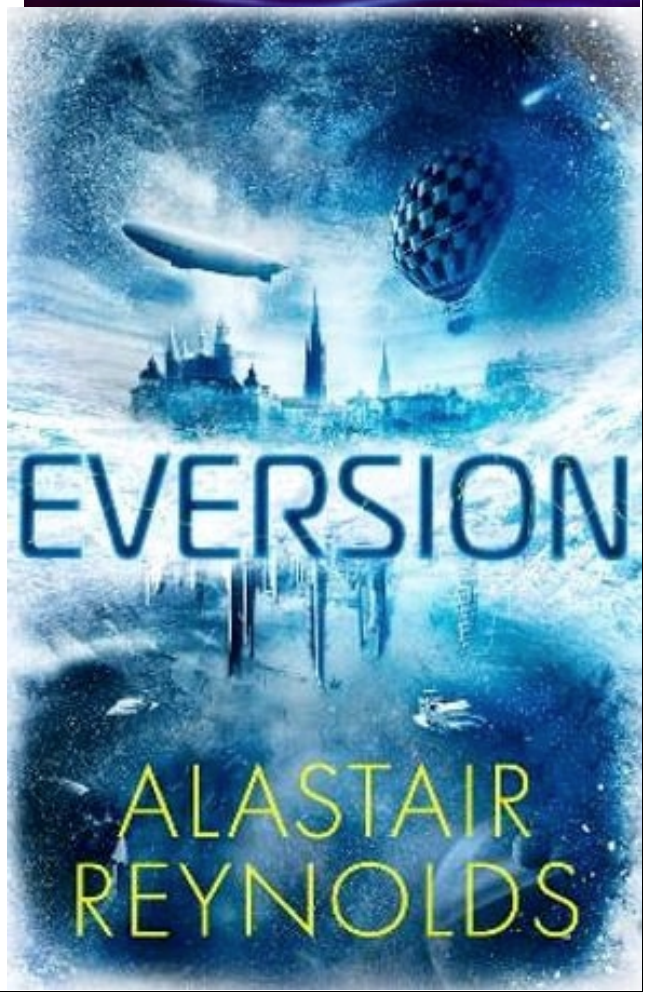
THE THIS
by Adam Roberts
(Gollancz; $45)

Adam Roberts, Professor of English at London University, ensures the literary influences in ***The This*** are evident, notably George Orwell and the philosopher Hegel. Roberts has written, 'The novel I wrote is an SF novelisation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*'. Roberts, in a narrative set across different time periods, imagines the impact of a neural implant app that allows for 'hands-free Twitter'. Unfortunately this neural accessory increasingly absorbs individuals into a growing communal hive mind, 'The This' — think here the *Star Trek* Borg. The hive collective control of the individual accelerates in a future in which Roberts combines time travel, interplanetary conflict, and first contact themes.



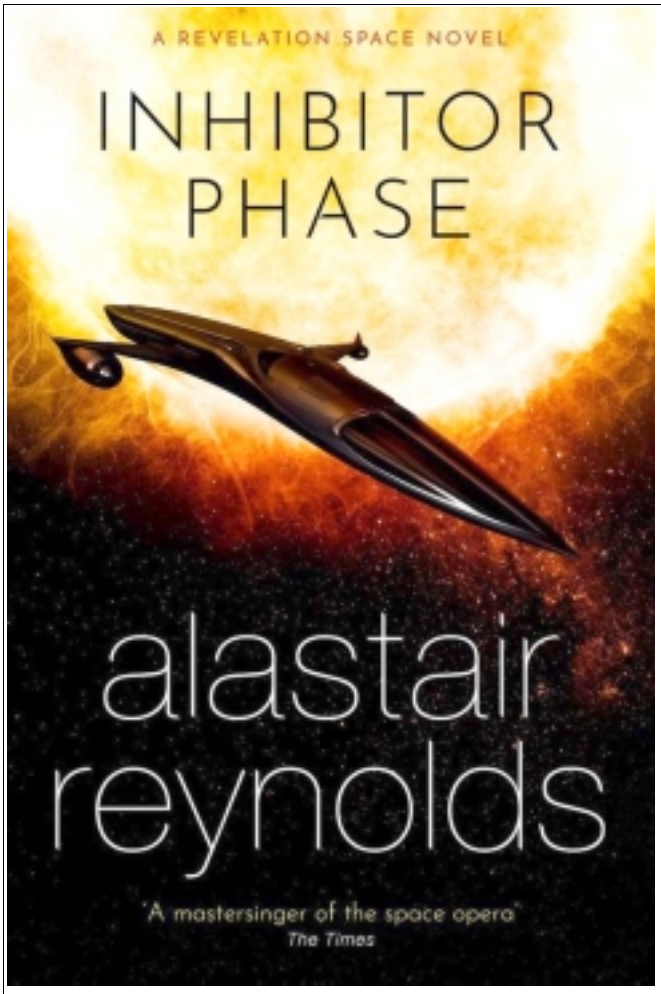
LOST IN TIME
by A. G. Riddle
(Head of Zeus, $29.99)

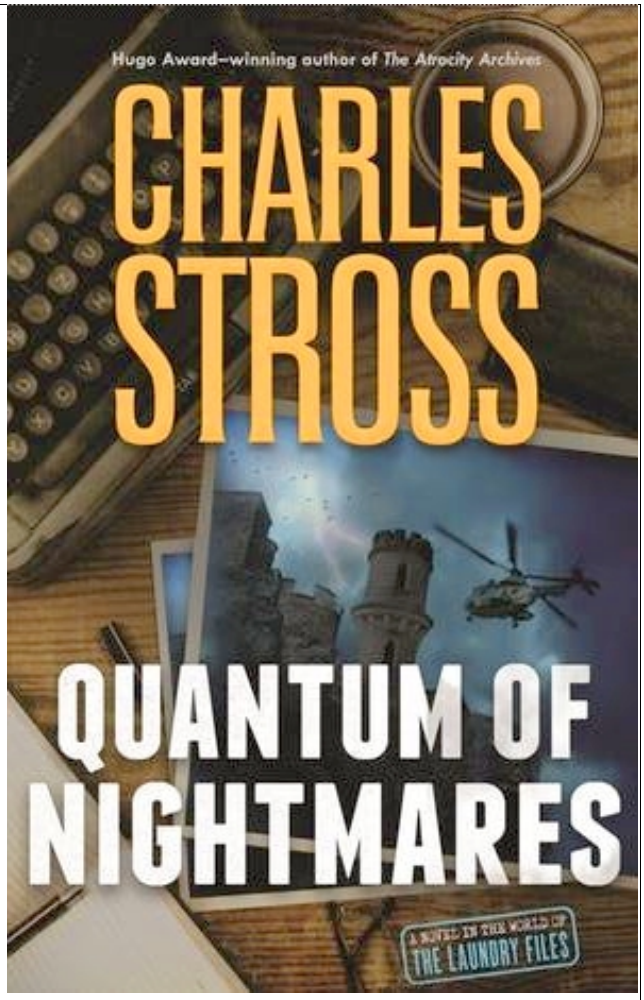
Time travel is at the core of best-selling American author **A. G. Riddle**'s ***Lost in Time***. Sam Anderson, with his science research colleagues, has invented a time-travel device known as Absolom, which has significantly reduced crime, as those convicted of major crimes are transported back to the prehistoric era, apparently without any 'butterfly' impact on the future. Sam finds his life overturned when he is wrongfully convicted of the murder of his lover and colleague, Nora. In a fast-moving narrative, which shakes the framework of time paradox, Sam's 19-year-old daughter Adeline determines to find the real murderer, involving herself in numerous time loops in order to not only clear his name but rescue her father from the past.



EVERSION
by Alastair Reynolds
(Gollancz, $32.99)

Multiple times and locations are a feature of ***Eversion*** by **Alastair Reynolds**, in which Reynolds





uses his astrophysics doctorate to provide the topological background for what is initially a spin-off from the novels of Jules Verne. The main character, Dr Silas Coade, is a ship's surgeon on a ship sailing off the coast of Norway in the early nineteenth century in search of an alien artifact, 'the Edifice'. But when disaster strikes and Simon is killed, he, the crew and their rapidly changing transports, are catapulted forward in time, including to the Antarctic and outer space, in search of the possibly sentient Edifice. Ultimately, Reynolds is, with differing literary styles for his various time periods, exploring the nature of AI and thus what it is to be human.

INHIBITOR PHASE
by Alastair Reynolds
(Gollancz; $32.99)

Alastair Reynolds' characterisation in *Eversion* is deeper than in his award-winning 'Revelation Space' series but, in those books, Reynolds' characters are lesser players within a vast hard science, space opera, framework. ***Inhibitor Phase*** is the fourth in the series, following *Revelation Space*, *Redemption Ark*, and *Absolution Gap*. By the late twenty-eighth century, humanity only survives in a few isolated pockets hiding from the 'The Inhibitors', powerful ancient machines determined to wipe out technological civilisations wherever they find them. In a complex narrative framework, both at the personal and galactic level, Reynolds follows humanity trying to survive in a universe that 'doesn't give a damn about what's fair and right'. *Inhibitor Space* can be read as a stand-alone, but it would be preferable for new readers to start the series at the beginning to gain full appreciation of the time and plot lines.

QUANTUM OF NIGHTMARES
by Charles Stross
(Orbit; $45)

Charles Stross's ***Quantum of Nightmares*** is the eleventh in another long-running and popular series (the 'Laundry Files' series), which blends satire of politics, corporations, and bureaucracy with espionage plot lines and Lovecraftian horror. In *Quantum of Nightmares*, the New Management government, not worried by having an ancient powerful God as its prime minister, has taken England back to some late eighteenth-century settings, including making public executions the norm for minor offences. Stross's normal dark

humour could be termed gallows humour in this instance. The complex plot line, with an eclectic cast of characters, is underpinned by reflections on economic inequalities and social welfare issues, in which the vulnerable and unemployed literally become food for thought.

INTERNATIONAL FANTASY

AMONGST OUR WEAPONS
by Ben Aaronovitch
(Orion; $32.99)

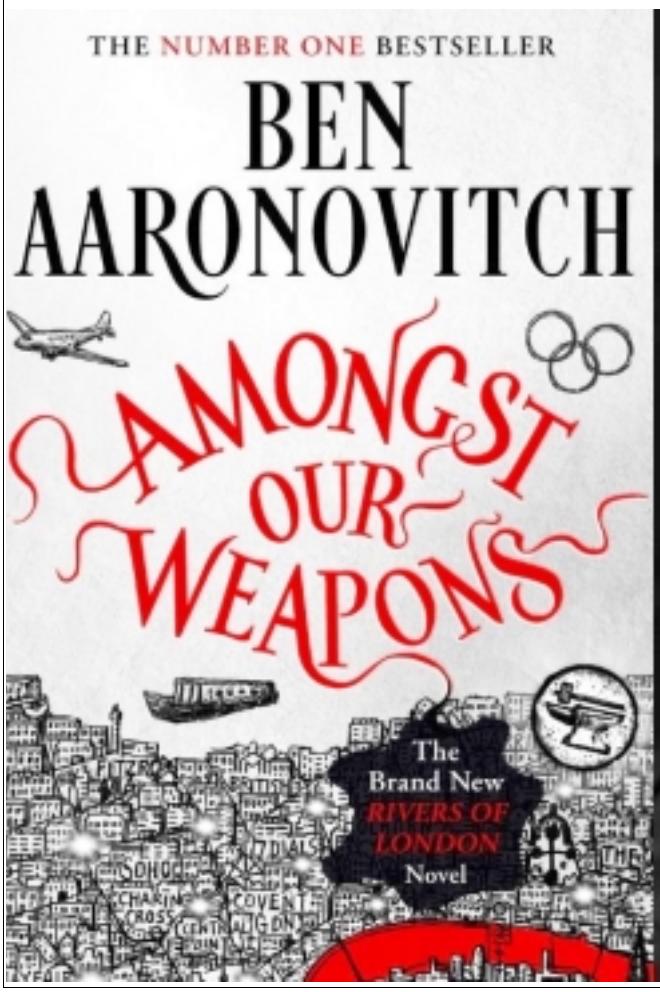
Amongst Our Weapons is the ninth novel in **Ben Aaronovitch**'s bestselling series, 'Rivers of London', which is now being adapted for television. Aaronovitch's books have been translated into 14 languages and have sold more than five million copies worldwide.

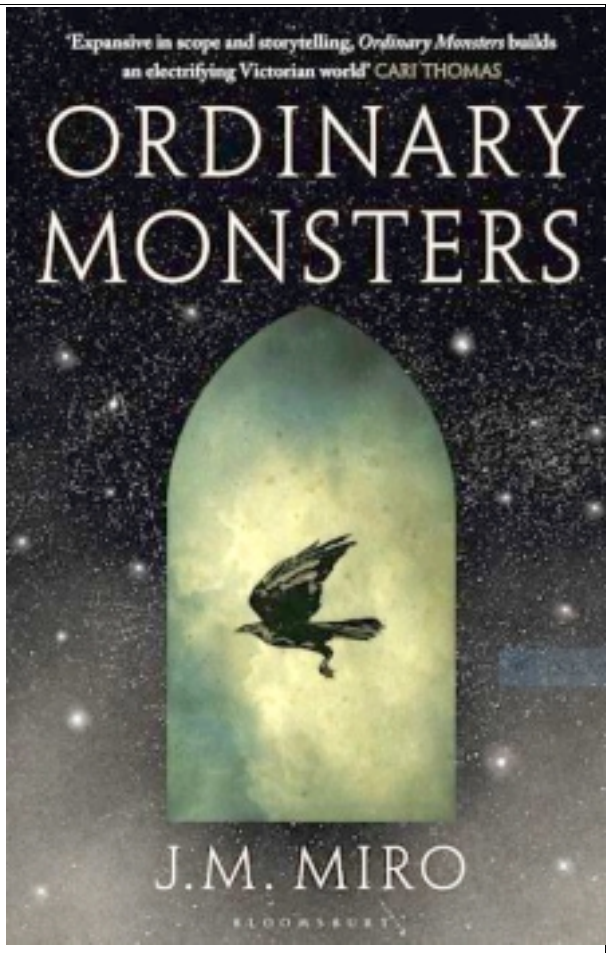
Aaronovitch has said, 'Rivers of London was never conceived as a series with a beginning, a middle and an end. Instead I was aiming much more at the classic detective mode as seen in Ed McBain's 87th Precinct series, Ian Rankin's Rebus books or, more classically, Agatha Christie's Poirot. But unless you reset your detective after every mystery there is going to be character and setting change and growth with each instalment … things have moved on since PC Peter Grant tried to take a witness statement from a ghost one cold January night in Covent Garden'.

The series, part urban fantasy, part police procedural, features mixed-race DC Peter Grant working in the Folly, a London police unit working on supernatural crimes. *Amongst Our Weapons*, which has already topped the *London Times* best-seller list, begins with a mysterious death, accompanied by a lightning flash, in the London Silver Vaults. The victim has a hole in his chest where his heart should have been.

The ability of Peter and his colleagues, Sahra Guleed and DCI Thomas Nightingale, to solve the murder involving a ring with mystical or alchemical symbols is hampered by the witnesses losing their memory. Peter's well-being is also affected by the fact that Peter's wife Beverly, a river goddess in her own right, is about to give birth to twins.

When a second murder victim turns up, Peter finds a ring link back to a small religious group at Manchester University in the 1990s that is under threat from what Peter terms as 'the Angel of Death'. It soon becomes clear that the magical





powers of the Folly in general, and of Peter in particular, are going to find it difficult to comprehend, and thus confront, the deadly magic of the angel.

As usual, Aaronovitch provides supernatural historical background relevant to the plot line. Apart from the regular insights into the history of London, Aaronovitch provides links to occult societies in World War II, as well as Cromwell's England and the Spanish, with the familiar *Monty Python* cross reference. Aaronovitch has commented, 'I only allow myself two Monty Python references per book'. The second is the chapter headings.

Amongst Our Weapons will clearly appeal to the legions of Aaronovitch fans, but those unfamiliar with the series will find a playful mix of the supernatural and the historical within in an intriguing murder mystery.

FAIRY TALE
by Stephen King
(Hodder, $32.99)

In ***Fairy Tale***, **Stephen King** proves that his fictional creativity has not diminished with age. King takes fairy-tale favourites, including Jack and the Beanstalk, and mixes them with a dash of H. P. Lovecraft, L. Frank Baum, and Ray Bradbury to create a fascinating portal fantasy. Seventeen-year-old Charlie, who lost his mother at an early age and has an alcoholic father, befriends the elderly and reclusive Mr Bowditch and his German Shepherd dog, Radar.

Steps in Bowditch's backyard lead to the kingdom of Empis, where the royal family has been usurped by the evil despot, the 'Flight Killer', who has disfigured the population through the 'the gray', a physical representation of his oppression. Charlie must save them, including the disfigured, mouthless Princess Leah (a nod here to *Star Wars*, of which Charlie reflects is 'just another fairy tale, albeit one with excellent special effects?').

Charlie must face many dangers, including a gladiatorial contest, in order to save the kingdom. Charlie reflects, 'Did I want to be the prince in this dark fairy tale? I did not. What I wanted was to get my dog and go home', but Charlie knows he has to do his best. King delivers a heartwarming and inventive fantasy.

ORDINARY MONSTERS
by M. M. Miro
(Bloomsbury, $29.99)

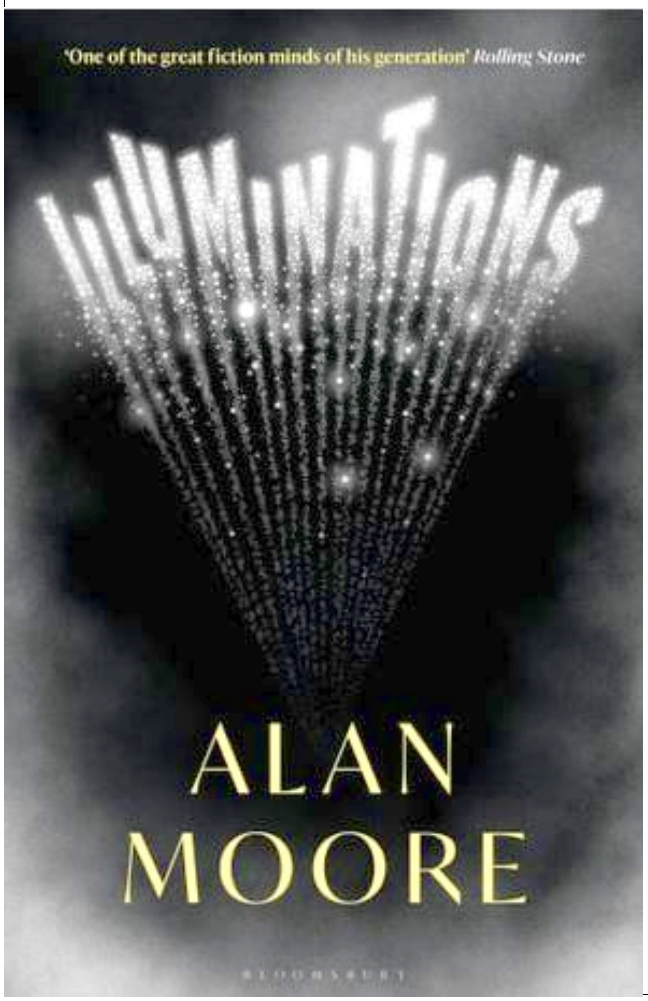
J. M. Miro, the pseudonym of Canadian author

and poet Steven Price, follows a familiar fantasy path in ***Ordinary Monsters***, the first in a trilogy, but a path with some decidedly original twists. Set in an alternative late Victorian Britain, it follows the fate of young orphans, 'talents' with magical abilities, who seek refuge and training at a mysterious educational institute near Edinburgh, whose mission is also to be 'a bulwark against the dead world'.

Each of the children has a different skill, ranging from invisibility to healing powers, but all have their own inner demons to confront, apart from the external threat of the evil Jacob Marber, who is more dust and smoke than flesh. Miro cleverly invokes the trauma of each individual talent, and the ambiguous nature of good and evil, in an impressive world-building novel with a cliffhanger ending.

ILLUMINATIONS
by Alan Moore
(Bloomsbury. $32.99)

Alan Moore, now 68, is one of the most influential figures in comic book history, with creations such as *Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta*, and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. In ***Illuminations***, Moore brings together eight stories and a 'monumental novella, 'What We Can Know About Thunderman', a satirical hard-hitting history of the comic book industry, which he says 'exploded from him like a lanced boil'.



A number of the stories reflect what Moore calls 'the haunted resonance of the English landscape'. In the title story, 'Illuminations', a man takes a nostalgic holiday in a caravan park in a seaside resort that his family frequented in his youth but finds that past and present merge.

Moore says that 'Location, Location, Location' 'had been on my mind since hearing about the Panaceans in Bedford', a reference to the Panacea Society, a millennarian religious group, who believed that Bedford in England was the original site of the Garden of Eden.

Moore reflects: 'It was just such a ridiculous story. But what if it was true? What if it actually happened? What if the Panaceans were right?'. So, in 'Location, Location, Location', God is dead and his son 'Jez' is living in a terraced house, while The Book of Revelations plays out in Blakean fashion in and above Bedford. *Illuminations* proves that Moore can still soar above the conventional.

BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

TERRY PRATCHETT: A LIFE WITH FOOTNOTES.
THE OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY
by Rob Wilkins
(Doubleday; $35)

Terry Pratchett, a.k.a. Sir Terence David John Pratchett OBE (1948–2015), now has an official biographer in **Rob Wilkins**, the custodian of Pratchett's literary estate, who worked with Pratchett for 20 years, 15 as his personal assistant.

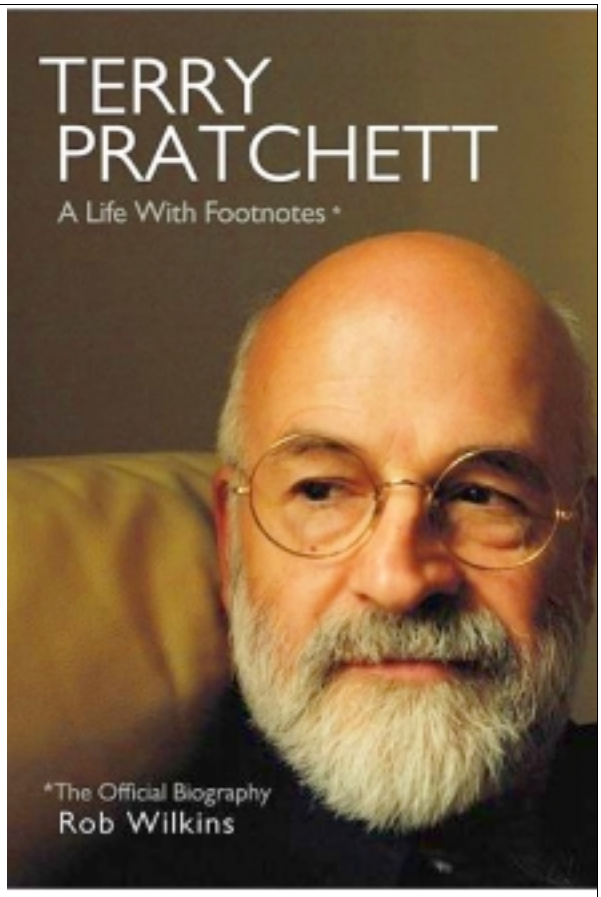
Pratchett, who progressed, in Wilkins words, 'from a kid from a Council house to a knighthood and a mansion near Salisbury by the sheer power of his imagination alone', is one of the most popular British authors of all time, with 100 million books sold in 37 languages. Forty-one of Pratchett's 50 books were set on his famous Discworld, 'world and mirror of worlds', a platform that allowed him to satirise society through inventive plots, laced with memorable, especially female, characters.

Pratchett in later life suffered from what he called 'The Embuggerance', a rare form of Alzheimer's. Wilkins became almost a carer, 'an emergency pop-up Pratchett', in Pratchett's

daughter Rhianna's words. When Pratchett lost the ability to type, Wilkins helped edit his AI dictation and spoke for Pratchett at events, including the numerous honorary doctorates that Pratchett was awarded. Pratchett ended up with 10 honorary doctorates, including ones from Trinity College Dublin and the University of South Australia. Pratchett took pleasure, on occasion, in calling himself, Dr Dr Dr Dr Dr Dr Dr Dr Dr Dr Pratchett.

Pratchett always intended to write an autobiography, but only left behind 'rough hewn, disjointed' segments that ended in 1979, before his publishing career really took off. Wilkins, while noting they were an invaluable source, observes that Pratchett was not always 'an entirely reliable documenter of his own life'.

Wilkins is a faithful and comprehensive documenter of Pratchett's life in 430 pages, but ones which never really reveal the inner Pratchett. The reader instead is given a lot of what Pratchett called the business of being 'a nauthor'. So, instead of an analysis of Pratchett's creative processes, or the social and political beliefs that underpinned the novels, we get instead extensive detail of publishing deals, book sales, book tours (very important in the Pratchett pantheon), the numerous film, TV, and audio adaptations and the ever-expanding Discworld merchandise.

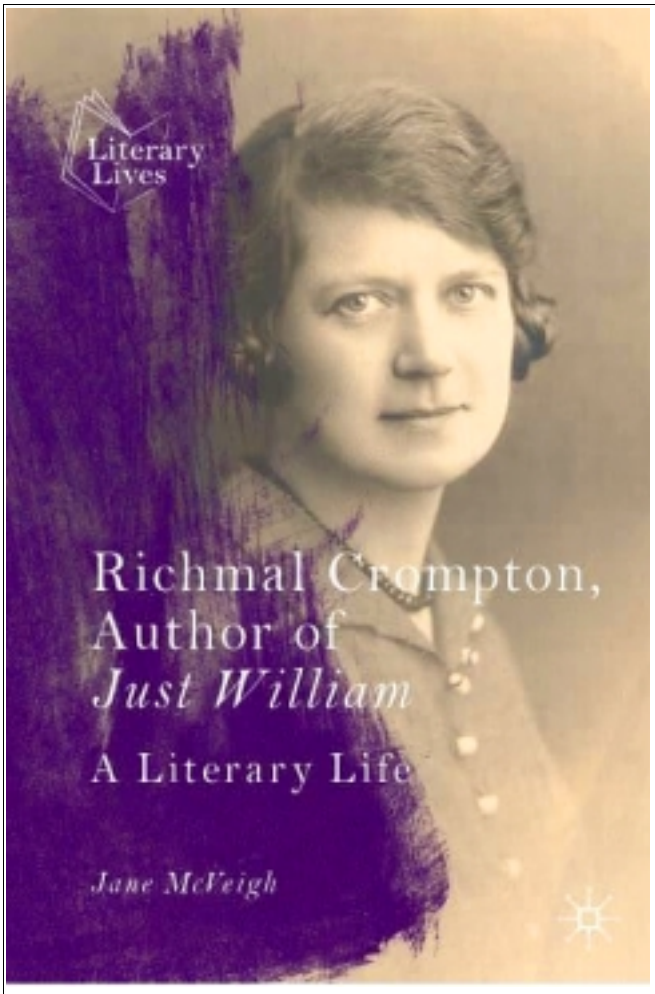


I interviewed Pratchett six times for the *Canberra Times*, with the last time in Sydney near the end of his life, when he was accompanied by Wilkins, but he always kept his family life private. In a biography, however, we need more than the bland occasional descriptions of family life.

Pratchett, aged 20, married his first girlfriend, art student Lyn Purves, in 1968, and their only child Rhianna was born in 1976. In the early 1970s, Pratchett said that he and Lyn were 'hippies with a wage', although it wasn't a large wage, from Pratchett's provincial journalism. They cultivated a large vegetable garden and allotment, with goats, chickens, goats, bees, and lots of home brewing.

Rhianna, who became an author and videogame creator, recalls her father being more of a 'big brother', while her mother 'was the disciplinarian'. Wilkins quotes Rhianna reflecting, at the age of nine or ten, that her father was always very busy, but there is no extrapolation of this comment, nor are there details of Rhianna's life as a teenager. Similarly, Lyn almost disappears from the book after the 1970s, yet she surely played a crucial part in assisting and facilitating Pratchett's success.

Pratchett's family life couldn't have been perpetually idyllic, given Pratchett's rigorous work



schedule and renowned temper. Wilkins recalled being summoned on more than one Boxing Day to Pratchett's house, so that Pratchett could escape what he called 'all this family shit' for 'a little light work'. Pratchett's great friend Neil Gaiman, the co-author of *Good Omens*, recognised that Pratchett was not simply the 'jolly old elf' of PR creation.

Wilkins experienced Pratchett's 'anger in all the 57 varieties' but he doesn't document many of them. Mark Barrows, in *The Magic of Terry Pratchett* (White Owl, 2020), a solid biography, but written by someone who never met Pratchett, quotes Wilkins, stating in 2017, that he had an argument every day with Pratchett, 'every day I quit, every day Terry sacked me'. Yet the relationship undoubtedly worked.

Pratchett may have become a workaholic because of the influence of his mother, 'the formidable and dominant' Eileen, who was no admirer of his fiction. Wilkins notes she perhaps only became a proud mother when Pratchett was knighted in 2009, although recording that Eileen was disappointed that she personally wasn't presented to the Queen!

Pratchett fans will revel in the detail of ***Terry Pratchett: A Life With Footnotes***, but it neither uncovers the inner Pratchett nor explores the creative foundations of his undoubted literary genius. Wilkins is at his best, and most original, in his moving and sensitive account of Pratchett confronting the increasing physical, and mental impact of dementia in the years from 2008 to his death.

Terry Pratchett wrote in *Reaper Man* (1991), 'no one is finally dead until the ripples they cause in the world die'. The ripples from Pratchett's books will live long and certainly continue to prosper long into the twenty-first century.

RICHMAL CROMPTON: AUTHOR OF JUST WILLIAM: A LITERARY LIFE
by Jane McVeigh
(Palgrave Macmillan; $64.25)

Philip Pullman, Ann Fine, and Kate Atkinson are just some of the contemporary authors who have acknowledged the influence on their writing of Richmal Crompton (1890–1969), who has been termed the J. K. Rowling of her day.

Many readers today will not be familiar with her name, although more may be aware of her 38 'Just William' novels, which have had numerous film, TV, and audio adaptations. The first film appeared in 1940, the first radio series in 1946, while Dennis Waterman played William in the first TV series in 1962. Terry Pratchett, who has said that he learned irony from Crompton's books, and Neil Gaiman originally titled their 1990 *Good Omens* book *William the Antichrist*, after Gaiman had the idea of crossing the *Just William* books with *The Omen*.

So who was **Richmal Crompton**? **Jane McVeigh**, Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Roehampton, UK, host of the Rachel Crompton archive, has written an informative and comprehensive biography of Crompton, to coin-

cide with the hundredth anniversary of the publication of the first two William novels, *Just William* and *More William*, in 1922, now collector's items worth thousands of dollars.

Crompton, a vicar's daughter, was a suffragette at University, and taught classics in an all-girls school until the age of 32, when a severe case of polio forced her to abandon teaching. Fortunately, the success of the William books provided financial security and a full-time writing career that resulted in 41 novels and 10 short-story collections, in addition to the 'William' books. Crompton, who never married, produced on average two books a year.

Crompton's 'William' novels, which were written initially as much for adults as children, follow the adventures, in a English home counties village setting, of a an 11-year-old dishevelled free spirit, William Brown, the leader of the 'Outlaws', Ginger, Henry, Douglas, and the scruffy dog Jumble. In William, Ben Aaronovitch has argued that Richmal Crompton 'created one of the great characters of English literature ... William is almost always on the side of the tramp, the underdog and the rebel in the face of wealth and authority'.

While William himself remained at the age of 11 throughout the books, the chronological settings changed. Initially, in the 1920s and 1930s novels, the Brown family household functioned within a solid middle-class environment, with maids, a cook, stables, and a summer house. But by the early 1950s only the maid remains, and television and a wider world intrude. The novels, however, still resonate today, even if some of the social settings and attitude have dated.

McVeigh writes that in her detailed account of Crompton's life and writings she wanted to rescue, 'the voice of an undervalued woman writer about whom patriarchal myths have been told'. Crompton's non-'William' novels often cover the darker undercurrents of village life, focusing on issues of domestic violence, family tensions, and the frustrations of young women trapped within conventional mores, compared to the generally uplifting 'William' books.

Crompton's non-'William' books were often bestsellers when published, but were overshadowed by the success of the 'William' books. Nonetheless, it is through the 'William' books that Crompton will always be remembered. Crompton once referred to William 'as my Frankenstein monster. I've tried to get rid of him, but he's quite impossible to get rid of'. She grudgingly conceded 'there is something rather appealing about him', and wondered if the character of William appealed because he had characteristics 'common to all human beings. Love of adventure? Inventiveness? Burning curiosity? Courage? The stuff of heroes'.

Martin Jarvis, the voice of the acclaimed *Just William* audiobooks, has referenced Crompton's mastery of nuance, her 'incredible psychology and understanding ... the picture she paints of just about every form of adult from that time is incredibly accurate'. Crompton's children are all well defined, such as the lisping Violet Elizabeth Bott, the daughter of the nouveau riche, social-climbing Botts, who always wants to be involved in the Outlaws adventures. She regularly threatens William: if she can't be included she will, 'thcream and thcream till I'm thick'.

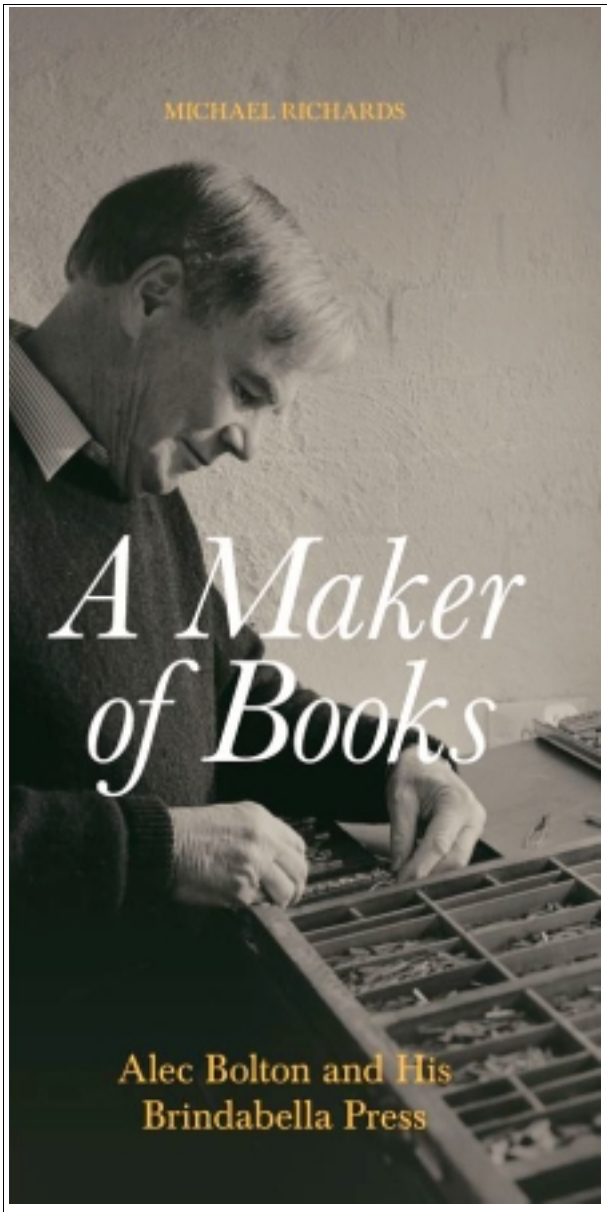
McVeigh argues that the literary merit of the 'William' books 'lies in language, style and tone of the narrative that speak to both adults and children, although some, but not all, children may miss Crompton's wry eye reflecting on the absurdities of the adult world'.

William's wishes, expressed in 'The Outlaws Report' in *William and the Brains Trust* (1945), still resonate for children today, except for the size of the pocket money. They demand: '1. As much hollidays as term; 2. No afternoon school; 3. Six pence a week pocket munny and not to be took off; 4. No Latin. No French. No Arithmetick; 5. As much ice creem and banarnas and creem buns as we like free; 6. No punnishments and stay up as late as we like'.

A MAKER OF BOOKS: ALEC BOLTON AND HIS BRINDABELLA PRESS by Michael Richards (National Library of Australia; 460 pp.; $49.99)

The National Library of Australia (NLA hereafter) has publicised **Michael Richards**' book ***A Maker of Books*** as its 'flagship title for the celebration' of 50 years of NLA publishing. Richards worked at the NLA between 1986 and 1998, and, as Director of Exhibitions, curated the Library's major exhibition for the Australian Bicentennial.

Richards terms his book a 'biblio-biography', viewing the life of **Alec Bolton** (1926–1996) through the lens of the books that Bolton produced, notably his Canberra Brindabella Press publications. Bolton's career in publishing began in 1950 when he began working as an editorial trainee with Angus and Robertson in Sydney, where he met **Rosemary Dobson**, then a reader at the firm. They married on 12 June 1951, with Dobson later becoming one of Australia's most renowned poets. In 1966, Bolton was appointed head of the Angus and Robertson London office,



which allowed him to study letterpress printing at the London College of Printing as an evening student.

Bolton became the inaugural Director of Publications at the NLA in October 1971. Over the next 16 years, he oversaw the production of the *Australian National Bibliography* and commissioned many outstanding books, such as *The Bligh Notebook*, *Cazneaux*, *The Hunter Sketchbook*, and *The Flower Paintings of Ellis Rowan*.

In 1972, Bolton established the Brindabella Press in a studio at his home in Deakin, ACT. Printing was a weekend activity, initially an informal concern, 'a press run by someone who prints to please himself'. The first publication was 150 unnumbered copies of Rosemary Dobson's *Three Poems on Water-Springs*.

Bolton retired from the NLA in 1987 to concentrate on the Brindabella Press publications. Richard believes that 'the later works of the Brindabella press are among the finest of twentieth-century Australian private press books' and 'became his personal statement of defiance against declining standards of printing'.

Alec Bolton was now 'engaged in the never-ending quest to make the perfect book, in which every element of type, design, paper, binding and text come together to produce a harmony that the reader cannot tire of'. Asked to sum up his principles of design, he nominated 'simplicity, a minimum of ornament, restraint, a search for joy and esprit'.

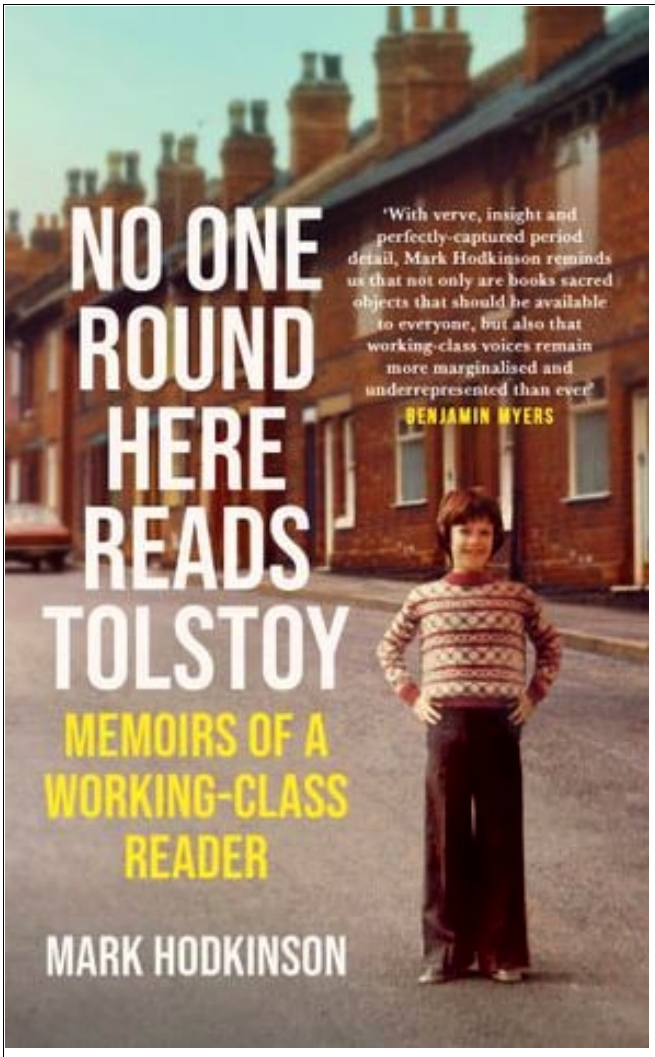
Bolton once said: 'Printing is like religion. We live in sin, but with the hope of perfection before us.' Marie-Louise Ayres, NLA Director-General, notes in her Foreword that Bolton 'linked the traditions and sensibilities of his training as a commercial publisher with the literary and ascetic ambitions of the private press movement, publishing fine editions of some of Australia 's leading poets, as well as bringing younger and overlooked writers to attention'.

The roll call of Brindabella authors is impressive. They included Les Murray, Judith Wright, James McAuley, Barbara Hanrahan, David Campbell, Alec Hope, Philip Hodgins, and Philip Mead, their books incorporating wood engravings by notable Australian printmakers, such as Rosalind Atkins, Mike Hudson, Victoria Clutterbuck, and Helen Ogilvie. Outstanding designers included Arthur Stokes and Adrian Young, while binders for the hand-bound books included Brian Hawke, Robin Tait, and many by Helen Wadlington. Bolton, the 'gentleman printer', skilfully brought together the talents of many skilled artists in creative collaborations.

Alec Bolton and Rosemary Dobson knew just about everyone in Australian literary circles. Rosemary's poems featured in several Brindabella press publications, whose signed print runs rarely exceeded 300 copies. They are now extremely collectible, as indeed are the other works that he produced, such as those for the Friends of the ANU Library, which included the 1987 Brindabella publication, *Rainforest* by Judith Wright.

Richards' book is not a traditional biography .The primary focus is on Bolton's work with the Brindabella Press publications, but, nonetheless, there is much more to be gleaned on institutional and cultural settings and Bolton's relationships with his colleagues in the creative process.

There are numerous Canberra insights. This reviewer, for example, was unaware of how Bolton, with Anthony Ketley, Head of the Canberra Public Library Service, helped establish the Canberra Lifeline Book Fair, building on the concept that



Russell Oldmeadow, the Director of Canberra Life Line, had proposed to the then National Librarian, Allan Fleming. Bolton, *inter alia*, persuaded many of Australia's leading poets to donate manuscripts for auction to the first Book Fair in June 1973. It's a happy juxtaposition that the half-yearly Lifeline Book Fair opened on 9 September, the same day as Richards' book was launched at the NLA.

Michael Richards, himself a notable amateur letterpress printer, concludes that 'Bolton built a bridge between the book-oriented culture of the early twentieth century and those of us who, in these challenging times, continue in the perhaps quixotic belief that the book can be one of the great triumphs of the human spirit and that we should not surrender automatically to ceaseless demands of modernity and technological change'.

Marie-Louise Ayres reflects that 'Alec's work celebrates the primacy of the book as a means of scholarly, cultural and poetic communication'. Michael Richards, in a beautifully produced NLA publication, provides emphatic confirmation of that statement.

NO ONE ROUND HERE READS TOLSTOY: MEMOIRS OF A WORKING-CLASS READER by Mark Hodkinson (Canongate, $32.99)

In ***No One Round Here Reads Tolstoy: Memoirs of a Working-Class Reader***, **Mark Hodkinson** recalls an English working-class community in the 1970s where books were rare. His family had only one book in his Rochdale house, *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain*, which was kept on the top of a bedroom wardrobe. Hodkinson was told never to crease the pages and never slam it shut. Hodkinson says by the age of 10 'the book had given me a profound but narrow field of expertise'.

Now an author, *London Times* journalist, and a publisher, Hodkinson still lives in Rochdale, but now surrounded by thousands of books. Hodkinson once worried about having so many books, which he termed his 'metaphorical friends'. Hodkinson's lifetime memoir of his involvement with books began at a time when British public libraries were major educational and entertainment sources and allowed working-class readers, on another level, to be 'spirited away from reality'.

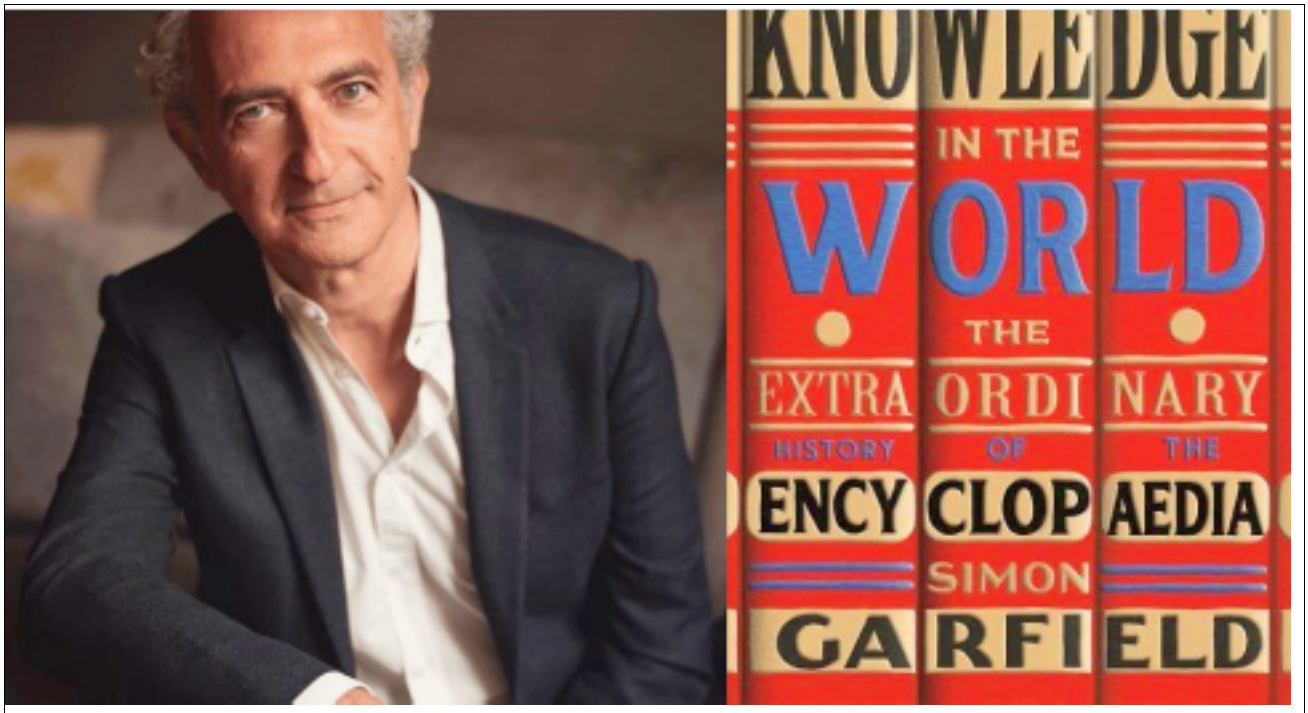
The young Hodkinson, reading *L'Etranger* by Albert Camus, escapes to Algiers as an outsider. Hodkinson didn't have a room of his own except his bedroom, where he spread the books out like a blanket. He notes that Virginia Woolf's plea for a room of her own 'was an entreaty on behalf of womankind but also resonant to the poor'.

BOOKS ABOUT BOOKS AND LITERATURE

ALL THE KNOWLEDGE IN THE WORLD: THE EXTRAORDINARY HISTORY OF THE ENCYCLOPAEDIA by Simon Garfield (Weidenfeld & Nicolson; $32.99)

Secondhand booksellers fear people entering their shop with encyclopaedias for sale. The internet, with its vast array of reference sources, especially *Wikipedia*, has completely devastated the market for print encyclopaedias. Yet, for most of the twentieth century, encyclopaedias were a licence to print money, with travelling encyclopedia salesmen, purporting to bring wisdom to a household, a regular feature in many countries, especially America.

Observer journalist and author **Simon Garfield** recounts in his introduction his experiences in buying encyclopaedias on the internet, including



a complete set of the 1997 *Britannica* for 1p from 'Cambridgebaglady'. The catch was that the volumes have to be personally collected from Looe in Cornwall, which leads Garfield to think how wonderful it would be to spend a penny in a town called Looe.

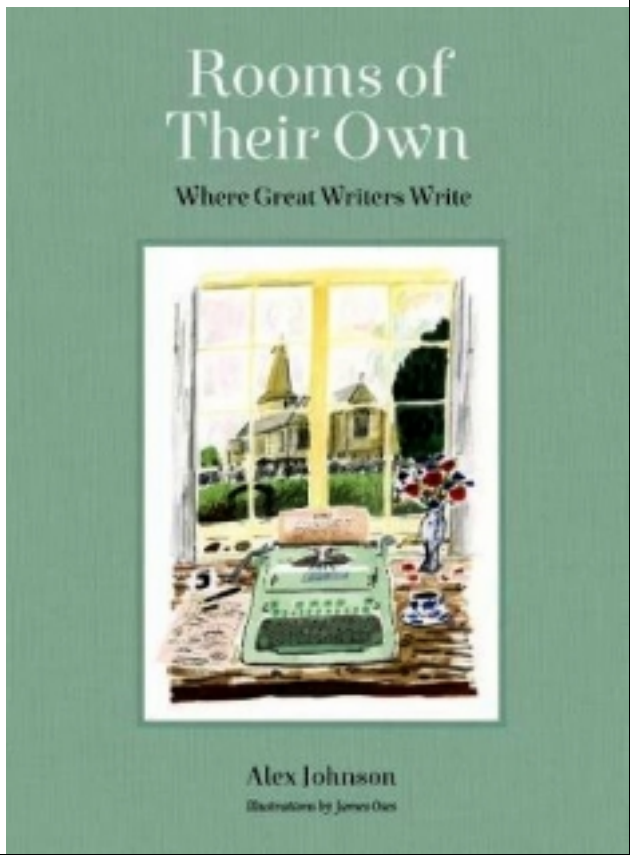
The Encyclopædia Britannica, first published in 1768 in Edinburgh by 'A Society of Gentlemen in Scotland', is the oldest English-language general encyclopaedia. Simon Garfield quotes Ford Madox Ford, writing in September 1929, that he used the volumes of the *Britannica* 'as a trouser press', and any 'house that was without it was to be pitied'.

Garfield has not written a comprehensive encyclopaedia of encyclopaedias, rather a survey of selected encyclopedias that he deems the 'most significant or interesting, or indicative of a turning point in how we view the world … within the framework of western knowledge building'. He sees his book as much 'about the value of considered learning as it is about encyclopedias themselves'.

Garfield's textual approach is A–Z, like an encyclopaedia. His eclectic subject headings, such as 'Information Overload', 'Little Women', and 'Sexuality: a Diversion', allow him to range widely over the history of encyclopedias, covering how topics like sexuality, race, politics, and technology have been treated, noting the many errors and prejudice within them. The early encyclopedias certainly had a gender bias. The first *Encyclopædia Britannica* defined 'woman' as 'the female of man. See Homo'.

Garfield is a fan of *Wikipedia*, which, despite its critics, today has more than 500 million page views per day, 1 billion unique visitors each month, and a total of more than 54 million articles in around 270 languages. *Britannica* itself, after many twists and turns in the digital era, now has a varied and colourful website delivering a wide variety of offerings.

Garfield concludes his entertaining and informative book with the view that, despite the commercial demise of the print encyclopedias, 'A fine encyclopaedia will stand you in good stead like an



old wristwatch: its timing may be out, and sometimes it may not work at all, but its mechanics will always intrigue'.

ROOMS OF THEIR OWN: WHERE GREAT WRITERS WRITE by Alex Johnson (Francis Lincoln, $39.99)

Alex Johnson's ***Rooms of Their Own: Where Great Writers Write*** covers offices, attics, billiard rooms, bedrooms, and garden sheds, occupied by writers such as Sylvia Plath, Stephen King, Hilary Mantel, Roald Dahl, Maya Angelou, and Marcel Proust. Johnson notes that James Baldwin and J. K. Rowling wrote their first novels in a café.

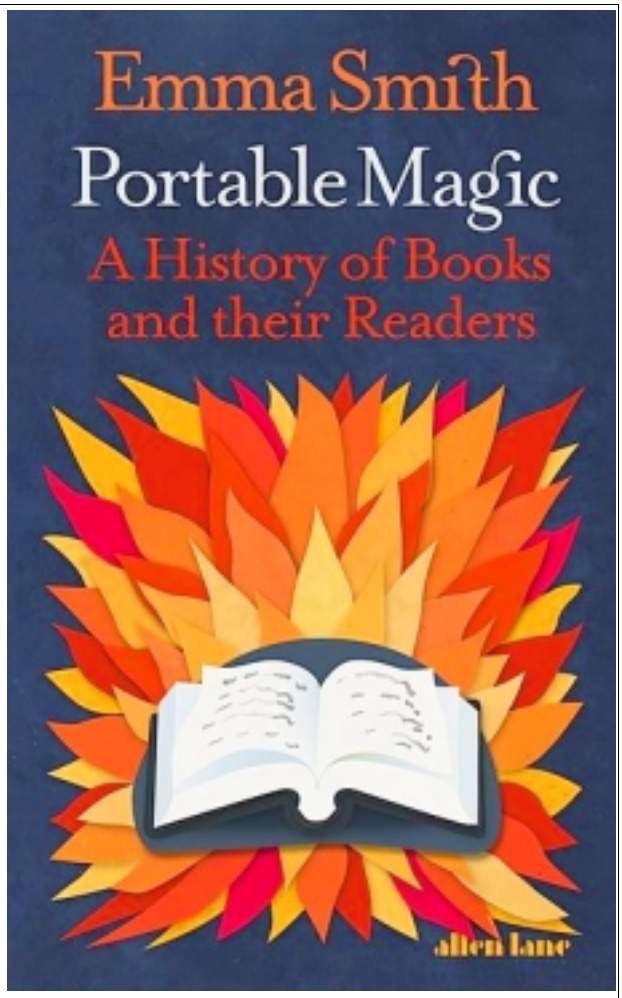
Johnson covers writers from those requiring complete silence to those who benefit from background music and ample alcohol. While Johnson confirms that there is no best place, time or technique for the creative process, his description of individual authors and their diverse settings certainly resonate. Each author entry is supplemented by watercolour illustrations by artist James Oses of the writing areas and furnishings.

PORTABLE MAGIC: A HISTORY OF BOOKS AND THEIR READERS by Emma Smith (Allen Lane; $45)

In ***Portable Magic: A History of Books and their Readers***, Oxford University Professor **Emma Smith** reflects Stephen King's comment that books are 'a uniquely portable magic'. She demonstrates through historical examples how books can be instruments of harm as well as good as they have shaped social, cultural, and political issues. Smith takes the reader, in 16 diverse chapters, from the Gutenberg print revolution to the Kindle, charting an 'alternative, sometimes sideways, history of the book in human hands'.

WRITING IN THE DARK: BLOOMSBURY, THE BLITZ AND HORIZON MAGAZINE by Will Loxley (Weidenfeld & Nicolson $34.99)

Emma Smith reflects that books 'comfort and educate'. Comfort and education are certainly evidenced in **Will Loxley**'s ***Writing in the Dark: Bloomsbury, The Blitz and Horizon Magazine***, which focuses on British 'new writing' of the Second World War. Loxley bookends his narrative with the famous, or infamous, flight from England to the United States in 1939 by W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, and George Orwell's death



in January 1950.

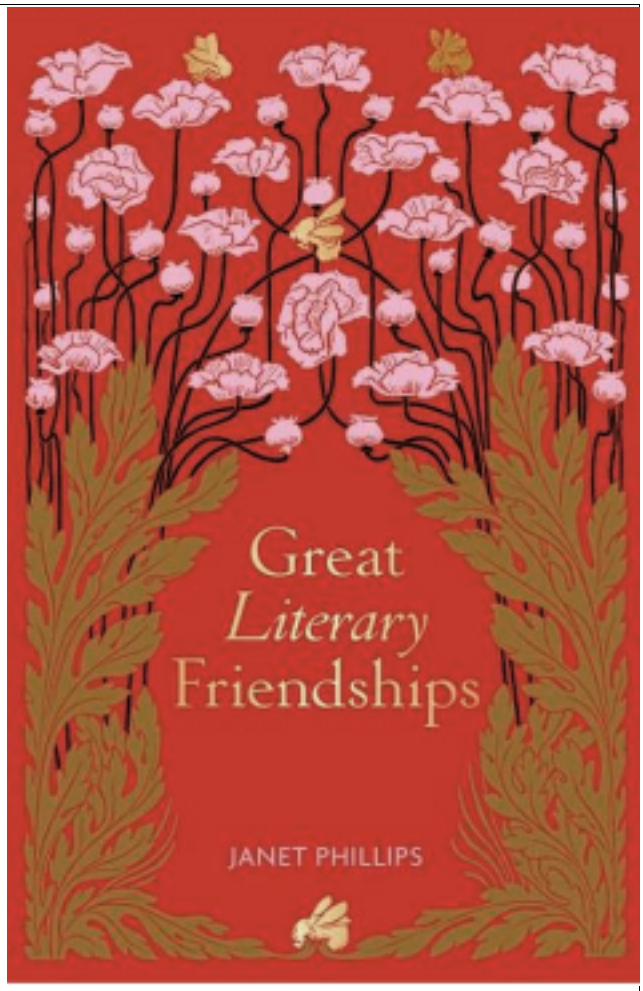
Loxley follows the writers that emerge through Cyril Connolly's literary monthly *Horizon* and John Lehmann's *New Writing*, As ever in literary circles, the established literati were not impressed. Virginia Woolf commented on *Horizon*'s first issue as 'small, trivial, dull', yet it sold out its 80,000 copies. Future issues of *Horizon* included T. S. Eliot, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Aldous Huxley and, notably, Arthur Koestler's early public revelation in 1943 of the Nazi mass killings of the Jews. It also published some of the best poetry of the war, notably by Stephen Spender, Dylan Thomas, and Lawrence Binyon.

Loxley provides pen pictures of the main players, including a prickly George Orwell and a drunken Dylan Thomas, and reveals how reading brought comfort to many against the backdrop of curfews, blackouts 'darkness as thick as hell', and the bombing of London.

24 GREAT LITERARY FRIENDSHIPS by Janet Phillips (Bodleian Library, $47.50)

Loxley often highlights literary tensions, while

Janet Phillips emphasises ***24 Great Literary Friendships*** (Bodleian Library; $47.50). Here are Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Sancho Panza; Harry, Hermione, and Ron from *Harry Potter*; Elana and Lina from Elana Ferrante's Neapolitan novels; Frodo and Sam from *The Lord of the Rings*; and George and Lennie from Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Phillips provides short summaries of the books and publication history before highlighting the friendships of the characters and how they played out in the context of each plot line. Phillips notes how many friendships blossomed during lockdown through 'the solace of books'.



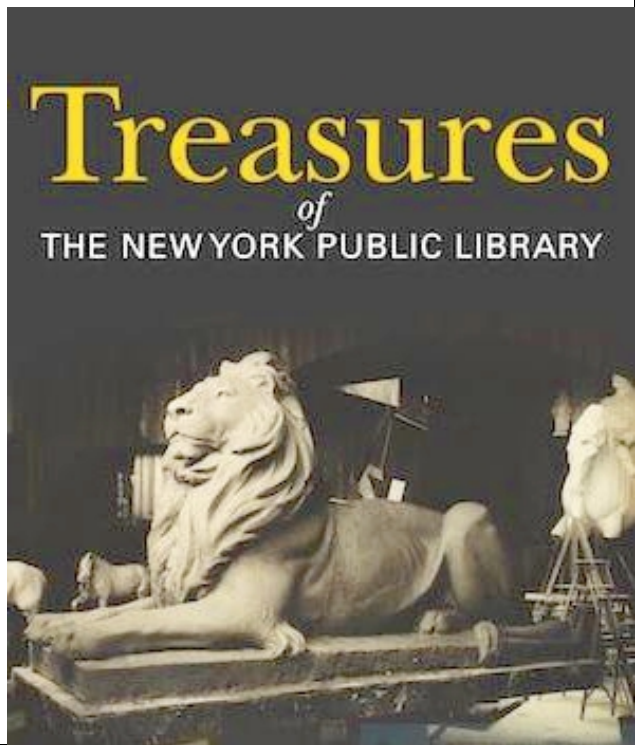
TREASURES OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY (St Martin's Press; 2021; 338 pp.; US$50)

The **New York Public Library** (NYPL hereafter), with 92 locations and 56 million items, is the largest library system in the United States and the fourth largest in the world. To honour the NYPL's 125th anniversary, the Library opened its first ever permanent exhibition, The Polonsky Exhibition of The New York Public Library's Treasures, in 2021, on the first floor of its famous 42nd Street Building.

The exhibition, scheduled to be on view for the next 75 years, funded 'by a generous gift' from philanthropist Dr Leonard Polonsky, features 250 rare items, some of which will be rotated, from the library's collections. The treasures are organised into nine themes: 'Beginnings', 'Performance', 'Explorations', 'Fortitude The Written Word', 'The Visual World', 'Childhood', 'Belief', and 'New York City'.

Treasures, a lavish volume with numerous colour illustrations, is the official companion to the exhibition. Declan Kiely, Director of NYPL Exhibitions, has stated that 'it became clear to us that the word treasure is a dangerously elitist word and frankly rather outmoded ... I'm not so much interested in what treasures are, but how things got to the library, and why we preserve them and provide access to them. For me, it's an essential part of cultural heritage and memory'.

Each featured treasure comes with a colour illustration and accompanying documentation. The treasures are certainly diverse. On the one hand, we have the Declaration of Independence written in Thomas Jefferson's hand; Charles Dickens' desk; George Washington's handwritten farewell address; the only existing letter from Christopher Columbus to King Ferdinand regarding his discovery; a Sumerian cuneiform tablet ca. 2300 BC; manuscript material from authors such as Maya Angelou, T. S. Eliot, Jack Kerouac, Vladimir Nabokov, and Mary Shelley; a lock of Beethoven's hair circa 1827; and the manuscript of Jane Austen's poem 'Winchester Races', written just three days before her death in 1817.



On the less conventional side, there is Malcolm X's briefcase; the original Winnie-The-Pooh dolls; a Haitian Vodou vèvè flag; a placard from a protest after Martin Luther King's Jr's assassination; a 1909 photographic plate of one of the dirtiest and most unsanitary rooms ever found in New York; dress shoes worn by Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini; the 1964 typescript of Timothy Leary's *The Psychedelic Experience*; an umbrella given to P. L. Travers, author of *Mary Poppins*; and Virginia Woolf's walking stick.

Her husband Leonard Woolf wrote a letter, which is in the exhibition, to her lover Vita Sackville-West just days after Woolf committed suicide by drowning in the River Ouse. Declan Kiely has commented: 'Leonard talks about finding that walking stick in the river, and that is the first indication that something's wrong. He correctly realizes that this is not an accident, that she's killed herself. I think seeing the letter and the cane together like that is both chilling and thrilling, because it completely recreates that moment in history.'

Many of the treasures can be seen online at https://www.nypl.org/events/exhibitions/galleries/beginnings/item/3239. Those who can visit NYPL will, however, relish seeing Albrecht Dürer's monumental 'Triumphal Arch' woodcut (1517). Kiely says: 'I wanted the exhibition to raise awareness that the library does have great artworks. And when I show people Dürer's "Triumphal Arch", I remind them that we now are exposed in one minute of our lives to more man-made images than a person living at that time, in the 16th or 15th century, would have seen in their entire lifetime. You have to put yourself for a second in the time frame and the mindset and the visual experience of their reality'.

CULTURE AND LITERATURE

THE WEEK: A HISTORY OF THE UNNATURAL RHYTHMS THAT MADE US WHO WE ARE by David M Henkin (Yale University Press; $41.95)

'That was the week that was. It's over, let it go ' were the opening words of the 1960s British satirical TV program *TW3*. In ***The Week: A History of the Unnatural Rhythms that Made Us Who We Are***, **David Henkin**, Professor of American History at the University of California Berkeley, doesn't let the week go, taking us back to the origins of the week and the rhythms that it has imposed on our lives.

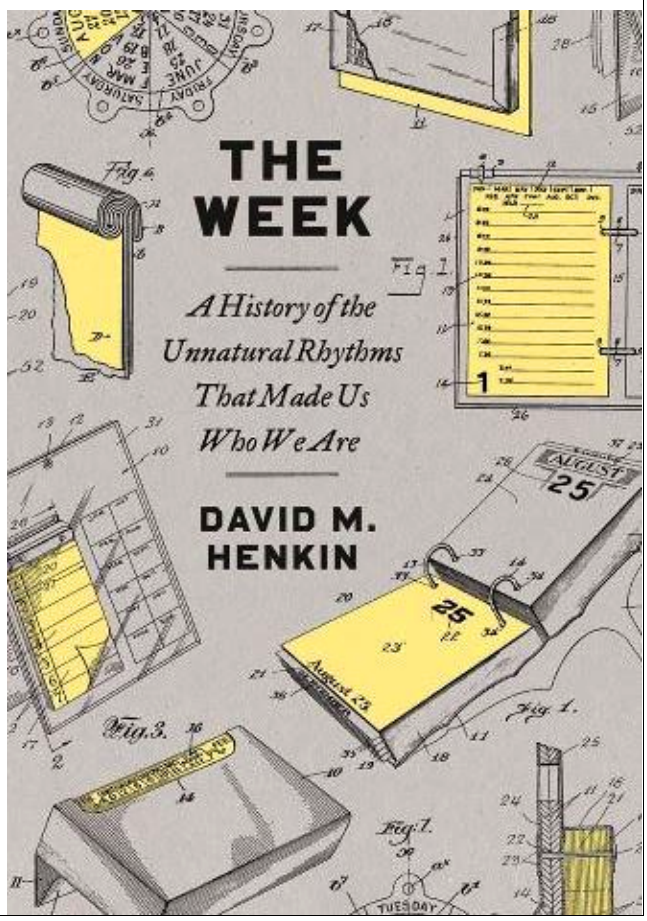
Henkin says 'no Christian, Muslim, or Jew who's attached to the idea that you can count seven-day weeks all the way back to creation is going to think that you can just move it around'. For the Jews, the Biblical account of the Creation, is one in which God laboured for six days and rested on the seventh.

The seven-day week stems from the calendar of the Babylonians, which in turn is based on an earlier Sumerian calendar. The Romans had a month divided into variants of the week, but Emperor Constantine in 321 CE established the seven-day week in the Roman calendar, with Sunday as the first day of the week.

The zealots of the French Revolution tried to make the week increase to 10 days, the 'décade', but this attempt failed, as did the Russian Revolutionary government's attempt in 1929 to remove the weekend.

Henkin, who calls the week 'an artificial construction of the modern world', documents that the weekly rhythm of society was reaffirmed through the growing global commercialisation of the first half of the nineteenth century. Diaries/appointment books, pioneered by Letts of London, became a physical symbol of the week.

But what has happened to the working week, given the impact of 247 online operations, blurring the distinction between workdays and the weekend for business and entertainment? Covid, with

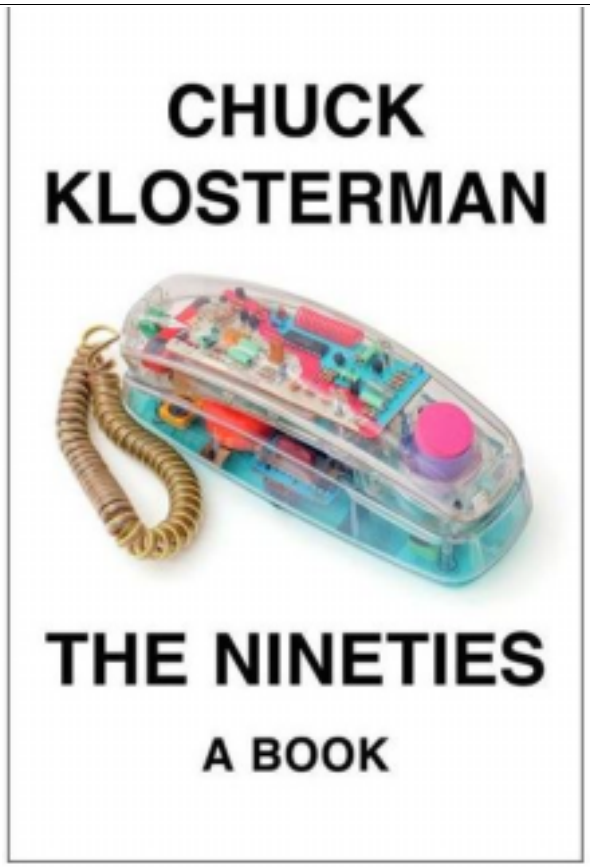


large number of people working from home, has also had an impact on the traditional weekly work schedule.

Henkin has commented: 'When I began this project, I had the sense that maybe I was documenting the modern experience of the week just as it was about to unravel. But by the end of it, I was less sure about the unraveling. I do think there's been some attenuation of the week's power. What happened earlier in the pandemic is a great example: People were disoriented because they didn't know what day of the week it was, and that experience was a telling symbol of the unmooring of time'.

The Beatles may have wished for eight days a week in their classic song, but seven days a week seems likely to remain, even if days increasingly morph together and the physical place of work becomes uncoupled from ordinary experience.

THE NINETIES: A BOOK
by Chuck Klosterman
(Penguin; $44.95)



Chuck Klosterman, author of several best-selling books on American popular culture, now covers ***The Nineties***, although from an almost totally American perspective.

Klosterman, who acknowledges that 'there is always a disconnect between the world we seem to remember and the world that actually was', notes that 'part of the complexity of living through history is the process of explaining things about the past that you never explained to yourself.' Klosterman is Gen X, those born between 1966 and 1981, which he believes to be 'the least significant of the canonical demographics', but which 'remains the least annoying'.

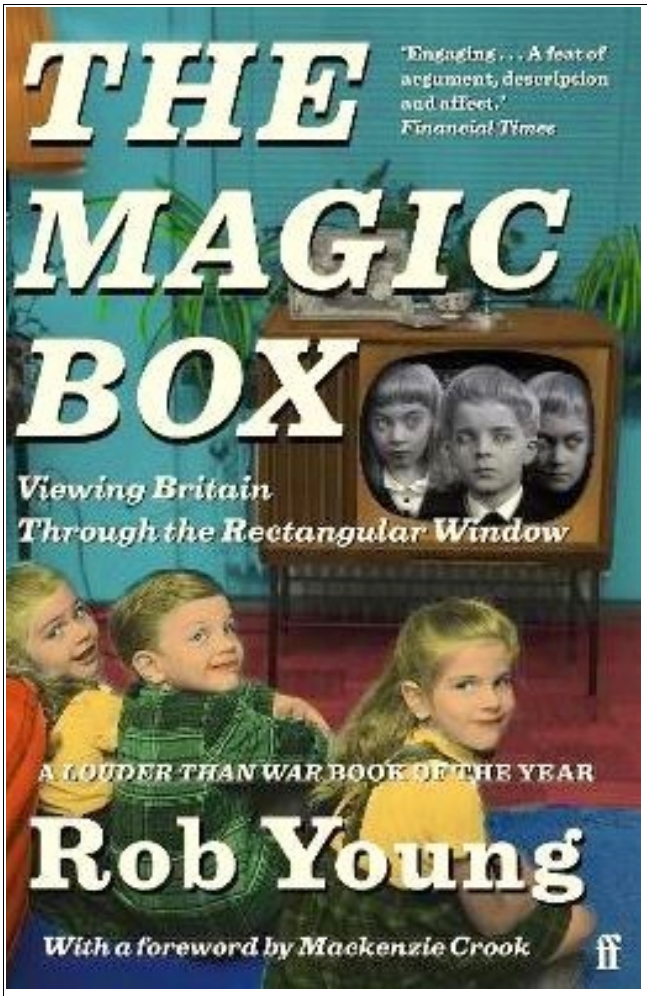
The nineties, which Klosterman believes ended on 11 September 2001, might well be the last decade to be able to be defined, like the 1930s Great Depression and the swinging 60s. Klosterman has deliberately subtitled *The Nineties* '*A Book*', which highlights that the nineties represented the last of the physical analogue world before the Internet transformed everything into digital. Here we are in a world of landline phones, print newspapers, VHS stores, cassette tapes, compact discs, and the prominence of TV in defining reality.

Facebook didn't start until 2004, Twitter until 2006, and Instagram didn't launch until 2010. Klosterman writes in the 1990s, 'No stories were viral. No celebrity was trending. The world was still big. The country was still vast. You could just be a little person, with your own little life and your own little thoughts. You didn't have to have an opinion, and nobody cared if you did or did not.'

Even in his largely restricted American context, Klosterman has a lot to get through. His approach is entertaining, eccentric, eclectic. episodic not chronological, with the decade often seen through musical and cultural prisms. Comments on political and social issues are often juxtaposed with analyses of music, for example, of Billy Ray Cyrus and Kurt Cobain.

Not for Klosterman, Francis Fukuyama's 'End of History'. The implosion of the Soviet Union receives little commentary compared to analyses of the impact of TV shows like *Seinfeld* and movies like *The Matrix*. *The Blair Witch Project* is mentioned but not Tony Blair. Image takes precedence over power. American politics covered include Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill, Bill Clinton, the Oklahoma City bombing, Ross Perot, and Ralph Nader.

The Nineties is not a decade-long history in the style of Frank Bongiorno's *The Eighties*; rather it's a wide-ranging. unconventional interpretation of the calm before the storm. 'It was a good time that happened long ago, although not nearly as long ago as it seems … It was the end to an age when we controlled technology more than technology controlled us.'



THE MAGIC BOX: VIEWING BRITAIN THROUGH THE RECTANGULAR WINDOW
by Rob Young
(Faber; $39.99)

Rob Young's ***The Magic Box*** takes readers on a journey into the psyche of Britain, through an expansive, and often eclectic, exploration of British television from the late 1950s to the late 1980s. Young sees this period as a golden age of television and film.

Young grew up in the 1970s when watching television was a completely different experience. Families watched television programs through the 'magic box' in the family living room. It was a one-off viewing experience as programs were usually only broadcast once. No recording, fast forwarding or rewinding, or streaming.

Young writes: 'You had to tune your circadian rhythm to the broadcasters' scheduling.' What was delivered is what you viewed. The viewing numbers were huge. In the 1970s, 26 million people watched a *Morecambe and Wise Christmas Special*.

While Young is aware of the seductiveness of personal nostalgia, he documents the loss of 'immersive' interaction by families, now often all viewing on separate screens. In a series of themed, sub-divided, chapters spread over 500 pages, with numerous black-and-white illustrations, Young analyses many thousands of hours of television to find his cultural portals into television history.

His chapter 'An English Dystopiary' covers the underlying societal fears, especially 'covert systems of power and control', during the 1950s, reflected in Nigel Kneale with his 'Quatermass' trilogy and Kneale's classic 1954 adaptation of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

In later chapters, Young covers the television depiction of the threat of right-wing coups, reflecting Harold Wilson's fears in the 1960s and 1970s, sexual permissiveness, social inequality, Thatcherism, the decline of Empire, and the Americanisation of British culture.

While Young covers such TV classics as *Brideshead Revisited*, *Doctor Who*, *Bagpuss*, and the annual M R James Christmas ghost stories, many popular series are missing from analysis, such as *Dad's Army* and *The Sweeney*.

Young, who writes 'it's a only small step from the homely to the unheimlich [uncanny]', is not so much interested in comfortable television as the quirky and unsettling. He highlights the fractures and issues in society and those programs 'imagining alternative Englands'.

Young, perhaps surprisingly, sees the time travel serie *Sapphire & Steel* (1979-1982), starring David McCallum and Joanna Lumley, 'envoys from a cosmic nanny state', as one 'one of British television's most tantalising enigmas'. He cites one analyst who has depicted the series 'as a kind of metaphor for the new era of Thatcherism'.

Young's wide-ranging survey delivers many 'spells woven against forgetting'. In this context of national memory, he questions the British Conservative Government's recent attacks on the BBC, which have an impact on 'a vital backbone of British cultural life'.

— **Colin Steele**, June–October 2022

JENNIFER BRYCE retired from a job in educational research to focus on writing. In 2019 her debut novel was published. She has had short fiction published in an anthology, in magazines and read on Vision Australia Radio. A life-time of playing the oboe influences her writing. She blogs at jenniferbryce.net.

Jenny wrote her survey of 2021's best books in January 2022, but as you can see, *SFC* 111 is rather late. (Isn't SFC always late?) Her article was meant to accompany my own Favourites of 2021, but I keep pushing my articles out of one issue and into the next.

Jennifer Bryce

Best ten books of 2021

In 2021, the 31 books I read for pleasure were, in this order :

Helen Garner: *One Day I'll Remember This*, Diaries 1987–1995

Sofie Laguna: *The Eye of the Sheep*

The Decameron Project, 29 new stories from the Pandemic, selected by the editors of the *New York Times Magazine*

Sophie Cunningham (ed.): *Fire, Flood Plague*

Michelle Baloch: *Her Kind of Luck*

Donna Leon: *The Temptation of Forgiveness*

Tracy Chevalier: *Remarkable Creatures*

Sally Rooney: *Conversations with Friends*

Sally Rooney: *Normal People*

Thomas Hardy: *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

Jessie Tu: *A Lonely Girl is a Dangerous Thing*

Jane Austen: *Persuasion*

Martin Amis: *Inside Story*

Ursula Vaughan Williams: *RVW: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams*

Amanda Lohrey: *The Labyrinth*

Michael Robotham: *The Secrets She Keeps*

Francis Spufford: *Light Perpetual*

Kazuo Ishiguro: *Klara and the Sun*

Mary Lawson: *A Town Called Solace*

Francis Spufford: *The Child That Books Built*

Patricia Lockwood: *no one is talking about this*

Rachel Cusk: *Second Place*

Anuk Arudpragasam: *A Passage North*

Nadifa Mohamed: *The Fortune Men*

Damon Galgut: *The Promise*

Jennifer Mills: *Dyschronia*

Sally Hepworth: *The Good Sister*

Robert Douglas-Fairhurst: *The Turning Point: A Year That Changed Dickens and the World*

Helen Garner: *How to End a Story*

Maggie Shipstead: *Great Circle*

Jennifer Mills: *The Airways*

And now, for the ten best:

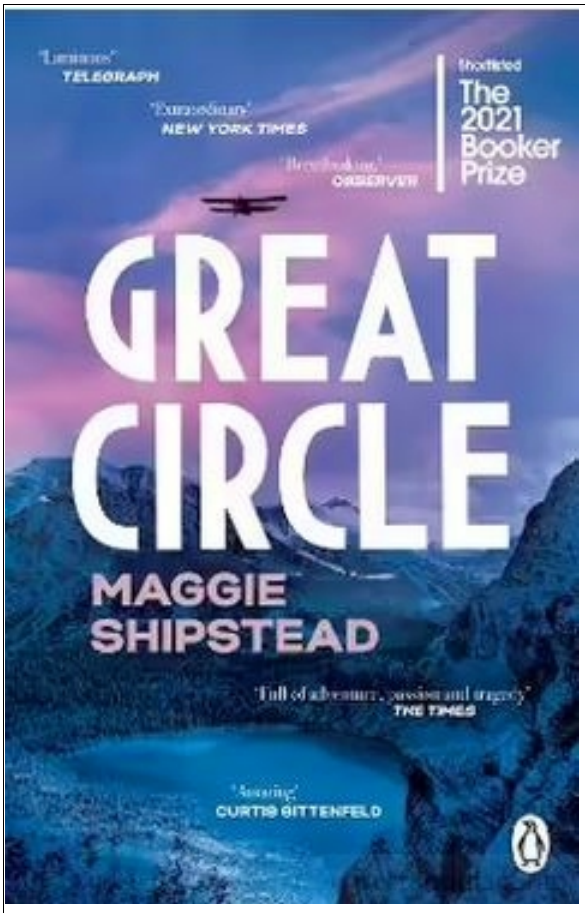
1 Maggie Shipstead: GREAT CIRCLE

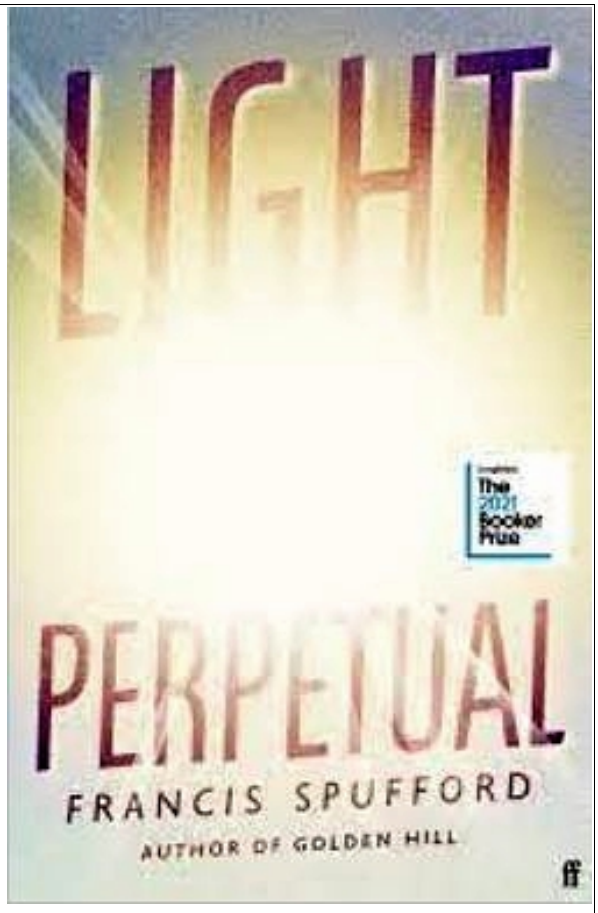
As a prologue to this Booker short-listed novel, **Maggie Shipstead** quotes from Rilke's *The Book of Hours*:

> I live my life in widening circles
> that reach out across the world.
> I may not complete this last one
> but I give myself to it …

It encapsulates the story of fictitious Marian Graves, obsessed with flying ever since she was a young girl in the 1920s. As I read *Great Circle*, I had to keep reminding myself that it is a novel — the character Marian Graves is so determined, her eccentricity is believable.

Early in the novel we learn that in 2014 a film is being made of Marian's story. The world knows that Marian and her navigator Eddie disappeared somewhere over the Ross ice shelf, heading to-





wards New Zealand to complete Marian's dream to fly around the world longitudinally — passing over both the North and South Poles. Hadley Baxter plays Marian in the 2014 movie. Both she and Marian have similar stories — they didn't know their parents. Other reviewers have said that Shipstead deftly weaves the two stories of Marian and Hadley. I found the Hadley story a bit of an intrusion and was impatient to get back to the story of Marian. Nevertheless, it is important that near the beginning of the book Hadley is rehearsing the scene where Marian's plane plunges into icy Antarctic waters. We assume, like the rest of the world, that she drowned in 1950. But at the end of the book we learn that there was, in fact, another story.

I was with Marian all the way — understanding her love of being alone up in the clouds and willing her to achieve her ambition to circumnavigate the world. All of these things were so much more challenging for a young woman at that time. Brilliant writing by Maggie Shipstead made this nearly 600-page book indeed a page-turner for me.

2 Francis Spufford, LIGHT PERPETUAL

This book was long-listed for the Booker Prize (see my comments and Tony Thomas's in *SFC* 108). The first five pages were dauntingly difficult to read: a dense description in slow motion of the one ten-thousandth of a second of a bomb explosion. The explosion really happened in a Woolworths store in south-east London one Saturday in November 1944, caused by a German V2 rocket. Children were there with their mothers who were buying scarce saucepans. The description is punctilious: the way that the children are standing when the rocket hits, what happens to the wares and to the building. Then it's as though the camera goes back to real time. There is 'a ringing stillness'. Everyone is dead. And the opening section ends, 'Come dust'.

On his way to work at Goldsmiths College, **Francis Spufford** walks past a monument to the people killed in that 1944 explosion. Fifteen of the 168 victims were children under the age of eleven and this book is an acknowledgement of the children's lost chance to experience the rest of the twentieth century. The children in Spufford's book are fictitious, as is the Borough of Bexford where they live.

The idea of writing 'what if a particular person had lived' is not new. I think in particular of Kate Atkinson's *A God in Ruins*. A main difference with *Light Perpetual* is that we trace the 'what if' trajectories of five children and, rather like the *Seven Up* series, we visit each child after five and then every 15 years from 1944. In 1949 all five children are in a singing lesson. They have a very good music

teacher and music seems to shape their lives, albeit in very different ways. Jo and Val are twins. The other children aren't related.

The stories of these children are bound together by a kind of counterpoint that originates in the 1949 Bexford music class and, compared to the first section of this book, the regular glimpses into the lives of Jo, Val, Vern, Alec, and Ben are seductive and compelling. Spufford has a way of succinctly letting you see the very essence of a character — you get inside their heads, sometimes through their performance of mundane activities such as washing dishes. Ben, who has always been a bit frail and 'different', suffers from schizophrenia. We go through a most poignant and illuminating description of a schizophrenic episode that happens when he is at work as a bus conductor. By 2009, he is on the brink of death, but in a good place with caring people around him. He looks out of his nursing home window and in what seems an ethereal experience, 'Ben sees the light, and the light is very good.'

The reader turns the page to 'infinity', and again we read the words, 'Come, dust'. I am left with thoughts of Wordsworth: 'apparelled in celestial light' and 'trailing clouds of glory' and a painting of golden clouds by James Gleeson. What a beautiful tribute to those children who never became adults.

3 Sally Rooney: NORMAL PEOPLE

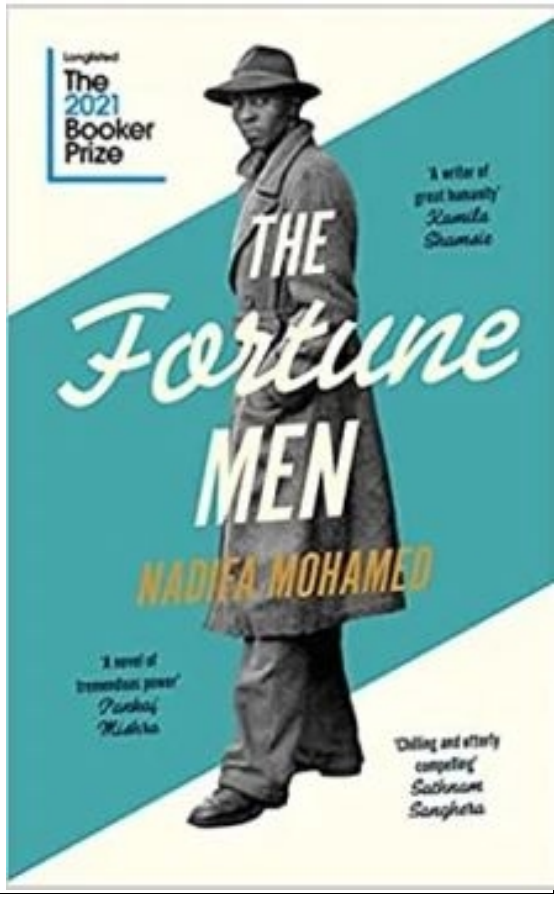
I could have placed both of the **Sally Rooney** books I read on my best ten list. Sally is not yet 30 and has written a page-turner, not just for her generation, but the likes of me. She writes about the details of people's lives so that we really get to know them. For variety I've chosen just one of her books. This is a special love story set in the present day. The time span is January 2011, when Marianne and Connell are still at school to 2015 when they've won prestigious scholarships to Trinity College Dublin. Over the pages roles change — Marianne is well-to-do, Connell's mother (who had Connell out of wedlock when she was young) works as a cleaner for Marianne's family. Yet to start with, Connell seems the stronger personality — Marianne has always been unpopular at school, but doesn't care. At university they have relationships with other people, but there is always a bond of something more than friendship that draws Marianne and Connell together. At the end of the book, when Connell is offered a creative writing scholarship in the US, Marianne, out of love, we feel, says he must go.

4 Sofie Laguna:
THE EYE OF THE SHEEP

This book won the Miles Franklin Award in 2015. The title refers to Jimmy counting sheep when he cannot sleep — a practice introduced by his big soft loving mother. Jimmy has 'special needs' — in fact, he seems to be on the autism spectrum, although the label is never used. This sad book helps us to get inside the mind of a child like Jimmy. His reasoning is abnormally complex for a primary-school-aged child — he likes to read manuals for machines but if he's asked to do more than one thing or gets upset or excited he becomes manic, racing around in circles. The family falls apart — maybe it would have anyway, with the father's drinking. As Anne Susskind says in her review in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, this book 'goes towards explaining what a library of textbooks could not'.

5 Nadifa Mohamed:
THE FORTUNE MEN

This was short-listed for the Booker Prize. It is based on the actual story of the last man to be hanged in Cardiff Prison, in 1952. He was Mahmood Mattan — a Somali seaman who had married a local Welsh girl and they'd had three boys. She had kicked him out of the marital home



for his constant debt. On land he didn't have a steady job, he was occasionally lucky with horse-racing. Because of his situation he was a petty thief, but he was not a murderer. And the love between Mahmood and his wife was strong despite her frustration at lack of money, and he was a doting father.

Prejudice against coloured people in the Tiger Bay area of Cardiff was strong in 1952. When a shopkeeper, Violet Volacki is murdered, evidence is fabricated and Mahmood is arrested and brought to trial. He knows he is innocent and for a long time he assumes that the truth will save him. In prison he reflects a lot on his past life, treasuring memories of his mother and he comes to see that his life is 'as fragile as a twig underfoot' and he sees that he could become 'the devil they always took him for'. But for most of the time he has a flawed confidence in the truth.

The best writing is the descriptions of Mahmood's time in gaol — all written from his viewpoint. The book drags a little with descriptions at the beginning and, given that Mahmood was not the killer, and the book is about him, it is probably not necessary to go in so much detail into the life and family of the murdered woman. Nevertheless, at the end one is confronted with the brutality and finality of capital punishment — particularly in this case where Mahmood was wrongly convicted largely because of the colour of his skin.

6 Jane Austen: PERSUASION

After reading Jessie Tu's *A Lonely Girl is a Dangerous Thing,* I felt that I needed to escape the twenty-first century, and I realised that I'd never read ***Persuasion***, which has been described as a 'Cinderella' story. An unfortunate twenty-something has been 'persuaded' to break off her engagement because the young man is not thought by her family to be worthy of her. Many years later, when he has improved his circumstances through participation in the Napoleonic Wars, they see each other again — the spark is still there — and they will be united. What fascinated me was **Jane Austen**'s use of 'free indirect discourse', where a character's voice is mediated by the voice of the author. Most of the book is conversation — inner dialogue of Anne, the protagonist, or this means of discourse, where Anne thinks (to herself and the reader), but the author subtly points out where these thoughts are going. I was taken right into what may well have been the thoughts of an early nineteenth-century 'mature' woman, given that Anne was in her second 'bloom'.

7 Mary Lawson:
A TOWN CALLED SOLACE

Another Booker Prize 2021 long-listed book. Clara, Mrs Elisabeth Orchard, and Liam have each suffered tragedy. We learn very quickly about that of Clara; her rebellious sister Rose has run away following a row with their mother. Seven-year-old Clara attends school, but at home she spends every waking moment looking out of the window, willing Rose to return. Her only outlet is feeding Moses, a cat she's looking after for their neighbour, Mrs Orchard, who is in hospital.

Gradually we learn the story of Mrs Orchard. She and her husband have no living children — she suffered numerous miscarriages and understandably but very inadvisably became attached to Liam, the neighbours' son who had four sisters. She was ultimately driven to abduct him. Liam loved being with Mrs Orchard but of course was

kept well away from her after the abduction — for which she had to spend a year incarcerated.

Everything ties together. Mrs Orchard dies and leaves Liam her house, which is next door to Clara's house — she feeds Mrs Orchard's cat, Moses. Liam has kept in touch with Mrs Orchard. At the time of the story, his marriage has (perhaps inevitably) broken up. He has travelled to Solace to take possession of Mrs Orchard's house. His initial intention is to leave by winter, but he's drifting and at the end of the book it seems likely he will stay on in Solace.

The book is very simply written — at first I thought it might be a YA novel. There is vivid description of small town life and a poignant description of realising you are about to die: Mrs Orchard 'communes' (though she isn't religious) with her late husband, addressing him as 'you'. It was a quick and easy read but left poignant feelings of loss and love.

8 Robert Douglas-Fairhurst:
THE TURNING POINT: A YEAR THAT CHANGED DICKENS AND THE WORLD

Robert Douglas-Fairhurst is Professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Magdalen College. He is a scholar of Dickens and has published other books about him. Douglas-Fairhurst has said of his writing: 'What you don't want to be as a biographer or as a historian, I think, is an omniscient narrator, who knows far more about the world than the people in it knew about it themselves. What you want to do is to recapture that sense of possibility and uncertainty and surprise which was felt at the time.' One way Douglas-Fairhurst has done this is by thinking of the year in terms of blocks of time — perhaps more as people living in London at that time might have seen it — so the book is organised into seasons, the seasons of 1851. As I read the book, I was transported to a foggy, muddy London, where modern amenities such as flushing toilets (for the wealthy) were transforming the city into something resembling a London familiar to me.

1851 appears to have been a turning point for Britain as well as for Dickens: the year of the Great Exhibition at the specially built spectacular Crystal Palace in Hyde Park. Dickens turned 40 in early 1852 and in 1851 he experienced the death of his eighth child and his father. No longer young, he was aware that his marriage was quietly disintegrating.

The book ends with Dickens embarking on writing *Bleak House*. This novel was particularly pertinent for the 'turning point' of 1851, because here Dickens expanded his view towards a realisation that human life is also social life. Individual characters, no matter how compellingly odd or disarmingly sweet, are always part of a dense nexus of human relationships and their consequences. This, I am told, became a characteristic of his writing from *Bleak House* onwards.

9 Helen Garner:
HOW TO END A STORY

I have been envious of **Helen Garner**, so famous that she can publish volumes of her diaries. I have read the first two volumes with interest, being almost her contemporary, but although it is described as the final volume of Garner's diaries (1995 to 1998), *How to End a Story* is different. This is the story of the falling apart and ultimate ending of Garner's marriage to Murray Bail — referred to as 'V'. It's a kind of memorial to that marriage — how each saw the other. Helen at one point says that she'd hate to be married to herself. It seemed to me that at the crux of it, people are very important to Helen, but not to Bail, who would rather be a hermit — or that's how Helen sees it.

10 Tracy Chevalier:
REMARKABLE CREATURES

I read this book after seeing the movie *Ammonite*, which introduced me to Mary Anning — a famous fossil hunter at Lyme Regis in the early nineteenth century. The book graphically depicts what life was like then for poor people who had little choice but to eke out a living from selling 'curies'. Mary, however, has a special gift for this and although she may have had no school education — she learned to read at Sunday School — she develops an extraordinary knowledge of geology and palaeontology to the extent that learned men seek her expertise. Extraordinary, given that this is in a time when women were almost completely overlooked, and Mary was of the very lower classes. The book also gives a vivid account of life in Lyme Regis at this time — the whisperings and jealousies. Mary values her friendship with Elizabeth Philpot — another fossil hunter who is of a higher class — there are misunderstandings and adolescent jealousies. The sections of the book are narrated alternately by Mary and Elizabeth. Although Mary never wrote a scholarly paper, she is acknowledged in some, and some of her pieces are on display in places such as the Natural History Museum, London.

— **Jennift Bryce**, *January 2022*

Tony Thomas

The Booker Award 2022

The Booker Prize Long List was announced 27 July 2022
The Booker Prize Short List was announced 6 September 2022
The winner was announced on 17 October 2022.

Initial reading

SMALL THINGS LIKE THESE
by Claire Keegan (Faber 2021; edition read: hc 12th ed.) (finished 29 July 2022)

Small Things Like These is a small gem of a novella recounting the horrors of the Magdalen laundries, a story which we now know a lot about of course. Forty-year-old Bill Furlong is a small business coal and timber vendor in 1985, with wife and five daughters, able to make ends meet but with few luxuries, while around him a few show obvious signs of wealth, especially the Catholic Church, while most are poorer, just scraping a living, or emigrating or giving in to drink. Bill was brought in a well-off Protestant household, when his mother was taken in pregnant by Mrs Wilson, and lived and worked there till she died. She never told him who his father was. Bill, who is a sort of innocent, has an education, then works in the timber yard as a teenager, and after working his way up buys it with the gift of a few thousand pounds from Mrs Wilson, who has since died.

Bill regularly delivers coal to the Magdalen convent, and only begins to suspect things are not what they seem when he comes across some barefoot, badly dressed girls scrubbing a floor. But it's only when he makes an unexpected delivery on a Sunday before Christmas that he discovers a distressed girl locked in the coal house, recently given birth, surrounded by her own excrement. While the Mother Superior takes pains to treat the girl well as she has Bill to tea, Bill's doubts are growing. It appears that his female customers, neighbours, even his wife know, or at least suspect what it really going on behind the convent walls. It's Christmas, and Bill makes a decision which might change his life (and that of the girl's) for good. Beautifully written, full of authentic Oirish detail, and, wonder of wonders, concise.

Rating: *****

CASE STUDY
Graeme Macrae Burnet
(Saraband; hc 2021) (Text pb 2021)
(finished 31 July 2022)

Graeme Macrae Burnet was shortlisted for the Booker in 2016 for *His Bloody Project*, a bloody 'true' crime novel that I admired at the time (4 and a half stars), though which I didn't think would win, and so it proved. ***Case Study*** is written in the same matter-of-fact, even compelling prose, which somehow doesn't serve this novel quite as well, as it is essentially a comic story, among other things playing games with all sorts of 1960s 'icons', such as R. D. Laing, Colin Wilson, Dirk Bogarde, John Osborne, Paul McCartney, and Kierkegaard. These are all real people who interact with or are quoted by the supposed editor of this set of documents assembled as a novel, 'GMB', or with his protagonist, the imagined quack psychologist A. Collins Braithwaite, author of *Kill Your Self and Untherapy*. I say 'imagined', but Burnet takes pains to make his character so believable that some readers have been fooled enough to ask Google: 'Was Collins Braithwaite a real person?' And this appears to be Burnet's method in all his novels that I've read: introducing one or several more-or-less unreliable narrators, with no clue as to whether they really existed or not, so that, as well as complicating the plots, this subverts the usual idea of the novel as something that may approach 'truth'.

So what happens in this hall-of-mirrors novel? GMB is sent out of the blue a set of diaries just discovered and written by his unknown correspondent's cousin in the 1960s. They deal especially with the cousin's interaction with Collins Braithwaite, which GMB is known to have been interested in researching. The novel then

comprises the five 'lightly edited' diaries, interspersed with GMB's detailed biography of Braithwaite, from early life to the end, gleaned, we are told, from published accounts and archives of his papers and books. The diaries are written by an unnamed 25-year-old woman, who believes that Braithwaite was responsible for her sister Veronica's suicide, and assumes a new name, Rebecca Smyth ('with a y') to become a client of Braithwaite's and investigate. These are the liveliest part of the novel: the narrator of the diaries is at once amazingly literate and highly perceptive about her family, her uninteresting job, her encounters with boys and men, and especially her sessions with Braithwaite, but at the same time her lack of understanding makes nearly all of these episodes comic. She is both sexually repressed, still being a virgin, yet at the same time comically indulges in masturbatory pleasures in many different contexts. Acting as Rebecca leads her to develop a traditional 'split personality', but the novel ends without us finding out how this affected the rest of her life. At the same time the story of Braithwaite develops both in his interactions with Rebecca, and with GMB's biographical descriptions, and there is a great deal of discussion about Laing's 'divided self' and Braithwaite's contrary position: 'Only by inventing and reinventing ourselves — by "being several" — can we escape the tyranny of the fixed immutable Self.' The whole novel can be read as a commentary on what is the Self; some of it quite serious and thought provoking. I don't think, though, it is 'a novel of mind-bending brilliance', as Hannah Kent proclaims on the back cover. Rather, good fun, some more-or-less serious discussion of important ideas à la Colin Wilson, an inventive construction, and a couple of terrific characters. I'll certainly look forward to more of Graeme Macrae Burnet, or even GMB.

Rating: **** 1/2

Brief notices

The following is a roundup and brief notices of books read in August/early September, but not written up until the night before the short list is announced.

TREACLE WALKER
by Alan Garner
(4th Estate; hc; 2021)

A beautifully written fairy story — but set in a real enough world — about a boy whose lazy eye allows him to see at least some of the faery world. And what he does about it, after encountering the rag-and-bone-man Treacle, whose cart (of course) contains much more faery stuff. Nicely done, pleasantly short, but perhaps in the end, slight, though slight for Garner is still pretty good.

Rating: **** 1/2

NIGHTCRAWLING
by Leila Mottley
(Bloomsbury; 2021; hc)

(Jenny Bryce is reading this at the moment, so all done from memory.)

A first novel (I think) about a very hard-done-by black teenager — dad gone, mother in prison for drowning/letting drown her sister, brother won't earn anything to keep them going, so she ends up selling herself to a number of rather nasty, but remarkably non-violent men, some of them police. Ticks all the PC categories: black, bad men, better sisterhood, drugs, cross-gender, written in a semi-black argot familiar from TV or film but often difficult to understand fully. Most of this, I guess, is far from personal experience, and, despite it running off the shelves at bookshops I go to, seems a bit unconvincing in the end. But anyway ...

Rating: ****

THE TREES
by Percival Everett
(Graywolf Press; pb; 2021)

Another black novel by a black professor who has written dozens of previous novels. Bravely attempts something probably impossible to bring off — a comedy about lynching. Mostly a comedy anyway — it almost has to turn into something a bit more serious because we can't forget that the subject is far from funny. Full of semi-noble black policemen and FBI agents, dumb stereotyped good old boys, a plot that starts like a police procedural and veers into magic realism (a genre I can't deal with), a bit like *Catch-22* without even its level of wit. In chapters so short that all we get is incident and character-free characters. But it was a brave idea.

Rating: *** 1/2

MAPS OF OUR SPECTACULAR BODIES
by Maddie Mortimer
(Picador; hc; 2022)

Only half read so far, and contains a large number of features that would normally make me dislike

it a lot: a million short sections (well, several hundred anyway — can't call them chapters) from a few lines to a few pages, typically less than a page; not right aligned anywhere, and quite large sections of the prose set as poetry, mostly more annoying than enhancing the thought; a few genuine bits of poetry interspersed; VERY non-linear; and lots of playing with type-faces, and setting out things visually:

L i k e this see or perhaps don't see.

So I started hating it, but then was beguiled by the story of three generations of the women of the family that forms the central motif, as it's revealed slowly, jumping between generations and time frames, back and forth, back and forth. And interspersed with this, the astounding idea of the voice or voices of the cancer which is eating away at one of the women at least. Some very good writing occurs in the family story, and to some extent the slow reveal works. And maybe it wouldn't have in a more conventional format. I'll see how it comes out in a few days. In the meantime ...

Rating: **** 1/2 stars

My short list

So with only 5 and a half of 13 of the Long List read, my shortlist so far might contain:

Claire Keegan: ***Small Things Like These*** *****

Graeme Macrae Burnet: ***Case Stud***y **** 1/2

Alan Garner: ***Treacle Walker*** **** 1/2

Maddie Mortimer: ***Maps of Our Spectacular Bodies*** **** 1/2

Rather too many, as I can only fit in two more from the next seven. We'll see tomorrow which of these made it.

(12:45 a.m.; 7 September 2022)

The Short List

8:29 a.m. 7 September 2022: The Short List is out!

NoViolet Bulawayo: ***Glory***

Claire Keegan: ***Small Things Like These***

Alan Garner: ***Treacle Walker***

Shehan Karunatilaka: ***The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida***

Elizabeth Strout: ***Oh William!***

Percival Everett: ***The Trees***

And two of my short list picks made it, Keegan and Garner! And one that I didn't think was so good, Everett's *The Trees*, though I can see why the judges might have been taken by the brave idea of a comedy about lynching. But it didn't tell me anything I can't see daily on the TV: some blacks are good and noble; some white Americans are appalling; most of us fall somewhere in the middle; and moving into magic realism at the end seems (to me) a copout.

So, three more on the shortlist to read in the next 42 days (plus four more on the Long List) as well as watching the rest of the US Open and fitting in concerts, a weekend in Port Fairy for the Spring Music Festival, hearing A. C. Grayling's talk, Evan Jones' Memorial Service, compiling and presenting *Contemporary Visions* every Tuesday on Radio 3MBS, Melbourne Shakespeare Society, and reading *Richard III* — should be a breeze!

The rest of my Bookers reading

10 September 2022:

At last I finished ***Maps of Our Spectacular Bodies***. The last half gets more and more fragmented, more like a poem than a novel, with some startling imagery occasionally, but also very repetitive and immensely drawn out. The voice of the cancer (as I supposed) turns out, according to the author's after note, to be the voice of Lia, whom the cancer is killing, but in its journeys through all of her organs describing in great detail exactly how the cancer operates biologically, this seems to be a strain. Heartfelt and passionate, but doesn't add up to a novel, I think. Didn't make my short list.

Revised ranking of: *** 1/2

OH WILLIAM!
by Elizabeth Strout
(Viking; hc (UK); 2021; 1st edition)
(Short List)

Sequel to *My Name Is Mary Barton*, on the Booker short list in 2016 and read by me then, but of which I have no memory. Gave it 3 and a half stars. Here, the beguiling first-person voice of the narrator is almost lovable (many find her so) but not quite. The author has set many of her books in the same milieu, Maine and New York, with continuing characters and mentions of others who are the centre of other books, like the Burgesses. She certainly seems entranced by Mary Barton, who with William features in another book just about to come out, *Lucy by the Sea*. This reads a bit like

a superior romance novel, is all about love and how we can never know others even if we've spent years together, and how things we didn't know about keep popping up (some might have been anticipated, like William's affairs, with a slightly more steady gaze). Hilary Mantel, quoted in the blurb, has it absolutely right: 'A superbly gifted storyteller and a craftswoman in a league of her own' — except perhaps for the last qualification.

Strout's world is almost exclusively of the fairly well-off white upper-middle class — much like, say, that of Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters* — with the rest of America largely absent, and there's a sort of inarticulateness about how these people talk to each other. Although 'love' is a word frequently appearing, this is somehow treated as if it has nothing to do with sex, which is entirely absent. And therefore, also, passion, too, to a large extent. Very readable, and I can see why many like Strout, but as I also found about the prequel, in the end eminently forgettable.

Rating: ****

GLORY
by NoViolet Bulawayo
(Chatto & Windus; hc; 1st edition; 2022)
(Short List)

I started reading this after it made the Short List; couldn't see why. The author steals the central idea of *Animal Farm* (with acknowledgement) and applies it without much relevance to Zimbabwean politics under Mugabe. All the characters are therefore animals or birds, but the author fails to realise these in a way we could possibly visualise them — so donkeys and horses sit on chairs and reach under them, birds' claws turn into hands whenever the author forgets (or doesn't care). So we get large doses of Zimbabwean politics of the most dictatorial sort, filtered through this ill-conceived metaphor, and supplemented by cute writing tricks, and with nearly all of the nasty bits of the regime off-stage. And of course, one of my pet hates: I suppose this would be called magic realism. I became extremely bored, and only read 160 pages of the many hundred.

Rating: **

The Booker Prize winner!

Announceed 17 October 2022:

THE SEVEN MOONS OF MAALI ALMEIDA
by Shehan Karunatilaka
(Sort Of Books; 2022)

I started this after the Short List came out, and gave up halfway through the first moon, about 60 pages in. Yet another novel dealing with a country's awful politics (Sri Lanka this time) by using a fantastic metaphor. The main character is a ghost whom we meet just after death, engaging in what the author imagines is snappy dialogue with those monitoring entry into the afterlife. This sets the tone. Anything can happen after this, and does, with much more supposedly snappy dialogue. The author was quoted after his win as hoping that readers would see the novel as a fantasy rather than a commentary on Sri Lankan politics. If fantasy for him means anything can happen, no rules, why bother to keep reading? He needs to read a few good fantasies — Tolkien, Le Guin — and notice that the rules of the imagined world are the only thing that makes for any drama, giving characters obstacles that are difficult to overcome. Here, at least in the first 60 pages, I couldn't see any evidence this was the case. And therefore I couldn't care what happened either.

No rating, as I couldn't continue reading long enough.

The rest of the long list

I haven't attempted to read the rest of the long list, four books, which include **Karen Joy Fowler**'s ***Booth***. This starts off engagingly enough, but I put it down months ago and haven't picked it up again. However, some of these four, including *Booth*, look more worth reading than some of the Short List.

A very bad year for the Bookers, in summary, with only two books on the short list which deserved to be there, in my opinion, and perhaps one other (that I read) which might have made it.

— **Tony Thomas**, 23 October 2022

DENNIS CALLEGARI was a member of the Melbourne University Science Fiction Association (MUSFA), who were at the time students who befriended me in the 1970s. Without MUSFA, I might not have met Elaine. For many years Dennis was a tech writer, and eventually was able to retire on the proceeds of competing on a TV quiz show. Since the 1990s Dennis and I and others have been talking about books, films, and music over the table at the Friday night group, made up mainly of former MUSFA members. Covid lockdowns have stopped these meetings, which have been replaced by Zoom meetings. Since neither Dennis nor I Zoom, it's only recently we've been able to catch up socially. Meanwhile, we've still been nattering and arguing about books by email.

The Dennis Callegari column

Winter Solstice 2022

In 1988, the author John M. Ford wrote the prose poem 'Winter Solstice, Camelot Station' as his annual Christmas card.

It imagines the scene at the Camelot Railway Station as the various knights of the Round Table arrive for Yuletide celebrations. King Arthur's seneschal, Sir Kay, acts as station-master while various trains bring knights — Gawaine, King Pellinore, Galahad, Percivale, and all the rest — home for the holidays. (Sir Mordred, of course, arrives in his own private carriage.) King Arthur and Sir Lancelot make a low-key entrance, and nobody notices.

You can find the text of the poem at http://thegreenbelt.blogspot.com/2006/12/winter-solstice-camelot-station.html

The image is my take on the scene. The photo it is based on was taken by the photographer Peter Olsen, but I have added a few extras. Left to right: Sam Neill as Merlin; Heath Ledger as Galahad; Franco Nero as Lancelot; Richard Harris as King Arthur; Keira Knightley as Queen Guinevere; Joel Edgerton as Sir Gawaine, having a chat to the Green Knight.

Also pictured but much reduced: Sir Palomides has just got off a train. King Pellinore is there with his Questing Beast in a crate. And at the windows of the railway hotel, the Lady of Shallot and Morgana le Fay (Helen Mirren) look out over the scene.

What I've been reading

I haven't been keeping you updated on what I've been reading since the middle of 2021. Here's a partial list:

Biographies of musicians

TELL ME WHY: THE STORY OF MY LIFE AND MY MUSIC (Archie Roach)

Archie Roach's autobiography is a compelling read. I knew the guy could write songs, but his talents translate equally well (if not better) into book length. Each chapter is prefaced by song lyrics (simultaneously released as an album), but the body of the book is really about his life, to which his music appears almost incidental.

Stolen from his birth parents as a toddler but raised in a loving adoptive family, Archie's search for his birth family led him to leave home and school. Homelessness and coincidence led him to re-connect with his birth family, to meet and marry Ruby Hunter, and to begin an unexpected career as a singer-songwriter. Highly recommended.

What I like about autobiographies of song writers are the *personas* — genuine or otherwise — that they adopt when they write them. Is Keith Richards really a lovable gypsy rogue? Is Bruce Springsteen really a working-class troubadour? Is Neil Young really unstuck in time?

Biographies written about them by others, not so much.

NINE PARTS WATER, ONE PART SAND: KIM SALMON AND THE FORMULA FOR GRUNGE (Douglas Galbraith)

This was written about the Australian musician Kim Salmon by his friend and fan Douglas Galbraith — after Salmon showed no sign of wanting to do it himself. Salmon's story should have been fascinating. He was a driving force behind The Scientists — a band with international influence — the Beasts of Bourbon and The Surrealists. But written from the outside, it's full of facts without context. (On this, see also my comment about *Numbers Don't Lie* below.)

General non-fiction

NUMBERS DON'T LIE : 71 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE WORLD (Vaclav Smil)

The only reason I read this book was the fact that Bill Gates said it was a book we should all read. Never use Bill Gates as a referee; the book is chock full of facts, some interesting, some not, but my overwhelming reaction was 'facts don't make a story'. Nor was I overly impressed by Vaclav Smil's prediction that COVID-19 wouldn't be such a big deal …

A FATAL THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM: MURDER IN ANCIENT ROME (Emma Southon)

The blurb for this book starts with an anecdote about Tiberius Caesar, private eye. (How could I resist?) It's not your standard history book, but I enjoyed it. Emma Southon's idiosyncratic style may irritate some people, but her history is well structured and backed up by solid research. Oh, and don't call the ancient Romans civilised. They were organised, sure, but not civilised.

TALES FROM THE LIFE OF BRUCE WANNELL: ADVENTURER, LINGUIST, ORIENTALIST

I had never heard of this guy, but he apparently

did (among other things) a lot of the translations for William Dalrymple's books about Indian history. This recent book (produced during the British lockdown) is simply the reminiscences of Wannells's friends after his death from cancer. Some are better written than others, but the thought that kept going through my mind was that this was what Melbourne fan Roger Weddall's life might have been like if he had followed the same calling. The guy was obviously the life of every party, could organise ridiculously complex events at the drop of a hat, and was maddeningly unable to recognise things like deadlines and obligations!

Science fiction and fantasy

It all seems to have been science fiction or crime fiction for me the last few months.

MAMMOTH (Chris Flynn)

I read this after seeing some positive reviews. It's told from the point of view of a fossilised mammoth and — supposedly — covers an overview of human existence over the last 13,000 years.

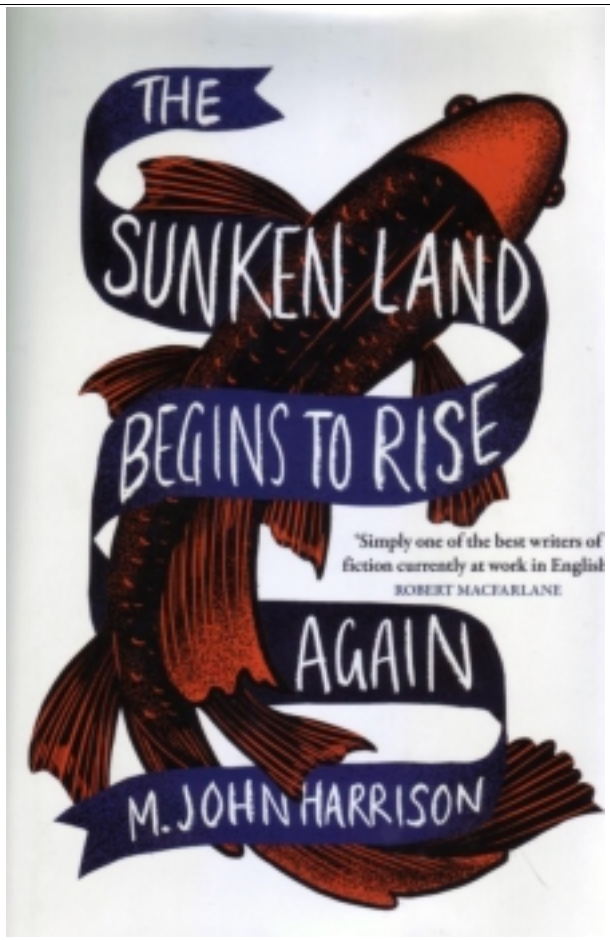
I was disappointed. The first problem was the central conceit, which did nothing for me except remind me of the comedy movie series 'Night at the Museum'. The second problem was the personalities of the other fossils that the hero talks to, which include a T. Rex that speaks in a bad attempt at modern 'hipness'. The third problem was the supposed 13,000-year span of the narrative — fully half the book is about an obscure Irish uprising in the 19th century. Interesting, no doubt, if your name is 'Flynn', but not much otherwise.

THE SUNKEN LAND BEGINS TO RISE AGAIN (M. John Harrison)

Again, this one came to me carrying a lot of hype, but justified the hype better than the unfortunate *Mammoth*.

The book is described as SF or Fantasy, but it is really a horror story. Admittedly, the horror is less 'Don't look behind you!' and more 'Is this what life in modern Britain looks like?' combined with 'Water really is kinda creepy, huh?' Curiously the obsession with water is a big thing in Japanese horror too. Did Harrison use that deliberately?

A synopsis of the story probably wouldn't do the book justice, but the main characters, Lee Shaw ('lee shore'?) and Victoria, separately see two



different aspects of the central water-based theme. He sees the human reaction to it; she is much closer to the horror itself.

The most unsettling thing I found about the story was how abruptly it ended. It is structured in sections: one from the viewpoint of Shaw; the next from that of Victoria; then back to Shaw, and etc. Literally I turned the last printed page from Shaw's point of view and — to my surprise — found myself facing a dozen empty pages.

On reflection, any further development of the story would simply be covering old ground. If I'd been writing it, my final section would have been from Victoria's point of view, but that probably means that Harrison knows how to structure novels better than I do.

INSIDE MAN (K. J. Parker)

Inside Man returns to the alternative universe of *The Devil You Know* and *Prosper's Demon* for another episode in the continuing war of wits between humans and the demons trying to corrupt them ... though sometimes it's not easy to tell who's corrupting whom. This instalment is a tale from a demon's point of view that doesn't quite reach the standard of its prequels.

FUGITIVE TELEMETRY (Martha Wells)

Fugitive Telemetry continues the story of Murderbot, the soap opera-loving security unit who once again has to save those annoying humans from themselves. Clearly, I still enjoy this series because I read it in one sitting — but how long can the formula keep working?

PROJECT HAIL MARY (Andy Weir)

It was your recommendation, Bruce, that set me reading Andy Weir's *Project Hail Mary*. It's definitely a return to the problem-solving hard SF from years ago, fizzing with ideas and well worth reading. I *do* have a couple of reservations about it, though. The original premise of a bug that can infect stars *and* enable interstellar travel at the same time was one that took a while to get used to. For me, the most interesting part of the story was the process of two alien species learning to communicate with each other. Not quite as convincing was the fact that, once communications were established, the two species were so much alike intellectually ...

Crime fiction

THE KNIFE SLIPPED (A. A. Fair)

I have read a few crime novels too. One that I read out of curiosity was *The Knife Slipped* by Erle Stanley Gardner (writing as 'A.A. Fair'). I still can't fathom why Gardner was so popular, once upon a time.

THE THURSDAY MURDER CLUB (Richard Osman)

Enjoyable semi-cosy mystery that has already been optioned by Steven Spielberg, apparently.

THE MAN WHO DIED TWICE (Richard Osman)

More to my liking was *The Man Who Died Twice*, the second of Richard Osman's 'Thursday Murder Club' mysteries set in a retirement home. Just as much fun as the earlier book, but I'm not sure if Steven Spielberg will option this one too.

LOW ACTION (Andrew Cartmel)

The latest in the amusing but increasingly formulaic 'Vinyl Detective' mysteries.

A LINE TO KILL (Anthony Horowitz)

The prolific Anthony Horowitz returned with *A Line To Kill*, the third of his 'Hawthorne' series, in which Anthony Horowitz himself appears as Daniel Hawthorne's reluctant Dr Watson. Easy to read, but somehow less than engaging.

DVDs

On the subject of old *films noirs* (from our last conversation), I finally managed to get a DVD copy of ***Murder, My Sweet.*** I'm not sure how Dick Powell managed to survive getting knocked unconscious so many times. :: I also saw ***The Blue Dahlia***, the best part of which was the on-screen chemistry between Veronica Lake and Alan Ladd.

YouTube

NERO WOLFE

I've just discovered that all the episodes of the ***Nero Wolfe*** TV series, with Timothy Hutton and Maury Chaykin, can now be found on Youtube!

I stumbled across the series because I also stumbled across the earlier 1959 TV pilot for a *Nero Wolfe* series that never got produced. The 1959 pilot had William Shatner (!) as Archie Goodwin and Kurt Kasznar as Wolfe. (I didn't watch much of that one, but both the main actors seemed to be OK in their roles.)

The Hutton/Chaykin series is in 480 definition, which is a little less than standard TV definition, but it will have to do until something better comes along. To find it on Youtube, do the following: For Season 1 episodes, enter 'Nero Wolfe s01e01' and so on; to view Season 2 episodes, enter 'Nero Wolfe s02e01' and etc. To view the pilot episode, 'The Golden Spiders', enter 'Nero Wolfe s00e01'.

The credits for most episodes are silent, and audio only begins when the action does.

— **Dennis Callegari,** 2021

(The second half of this 'column' can be found as Dennis's letter of comment, pages 84–5 of *SF Commentary* 110.)

The Henry Gasko column

Henry Gasko's self-portrait: 'Cycling: Mt Disappointment'.
Henry writes: 'Photo taken on 14 February 2009, exactly one week after the Black Saturday bushfires of that year. I wanted to see the destruction of the nearby bushland for myself. This is on a back trail from Clonbinane up to Mt Disappointment.'

HENRY GASKO was born in a displaced persons camp in Yugoslavia after World War II. He was raised on a vegetable farm in Canada, and emigrated to Australia more than 40 years ago. He has recently retired from a career in data analysis and medical research. Henry has had stories published in the anthologies *Dreamworks*, *Alternate Apocalypse*, *On Time*, Australia's *Aurealis* magazine, and in the *SciPhi Journal*. He is a two-time semi-finalist in The Writers of the Future and he won first prize in Positive Writer's 'Why I Write' essay contest. He also won the 2018 Sapiens Plurum short story competition, and came third in the 2020 competition. When he is not writing, he enjoys cycling, kayaking, swimming, and playing bridge.

The Writing of 'The Flight of the Brolga

Introduction

In September of 2020 my story 'The Flight of the Brolga' finally found a home. It was published in *Dreamforge* 7, December 2020.

The story is about a young ecologist and rock climber, Dean Maitland, and his attempts to find meaning in life after suffering a catastrophic accident. The story begins with Dean's fall from an empty sky to his death in the Kakadu wilderness of Northern Australia, wearing a wing-suit; the subsequent plot describes how this curious and tragic event came to pass.

It had made the rounds of my friends, including Bruce Gillespie, who all said they loved it. After that, it started kicking around the slush piles of numerous magazines, and even made it to the semi-final list of The Writers of the Future, a prestigious contest for new writers of science fiction. Again, the editors all had words of praise but somehow it was not quite right for their particular magazine at that particular time.

This article describes the genesis and development of the story and how it finally found a home in Scot Noel's *Dreamforge*. As such it will necessarily contain details about the plot of that story — i.e. spoilers. If you wish to read the story first you can find it here: https://dreamforge.mywebportal.app/dreamforge/stories/show/the-flight-of-the-brolga-henry-gasko

Story genesis

Like many of my stories, this one was born while kayaking. Many of my ideas come when I am doing something physical and rhythmic, such as cycling or running, swimming or kayaking. A lot of people find those kinds of activities boring but I enjoy the almost trance-like state that they induce — like meditation but without the years of effort required to master that. Kayaking on flat water is especially conducive since it does not even have the worry of traffic and road conditions, or avoiding head on collisions with other lap swimmers in the same lane.

A group of us were on Corio Bay, which is an off-shoot of Port Phillip Bay near Melbourne in Australia. The day had been calm when we set out from Geelong and headed to the far side of the bay for lunch. But on the way back, the winds picked up and we were suddenly aware of how far we had come that morning. And my wife and I were both in river kayaks, with broad cross-sections and minimal draft — only one step up from taking to the water in a bath tub.

Our strongest paddler, Peter, had come better prepared and was in his sea kayak, and he had a tow rope. After some discussion he attached it to my wife's kayak and we continued our journey to the far shore, with myself in the rear of the group, pushing into the wind. So there was nothing to do but turn off my brain, lest it complain about the situation we had found ourselves in. I put my body into auto-pilot mode and simply paddled.

My mind turned to the water around us: not open ocean but a sizeable body of water. And below the choppy surface I imagined I could sense an entire ecology, with creatures oblivious to us struggling on the surface. I saw a similar self-contained ecology on the distant shore. And then I looked up and thought 'Why not?' And that is the beginning of what I would come to think of as my 'aero-ecology' — a full and self-contained world in the sky, unknown to humans.

I immediately liked the idea, and started embellishing it. I knew there were numerous instances of spiders found thousands of metres in the air, using a thin filament for buoyancy. And what could they be doing up there if not hunting for even smaller prey; wherever there is food, nature will find a way to harvest it by some predator.

So I had an idea, a concept, an image. But it was a long way from being a story. It might make an interesting article in some speculative science magazine, if there were such a genre. I know a lot of science fiction has often been little more than science speculation dressed up with a minimal characters and plot. Personally I think that an entire genre of speculative scientific articles, without the encumbrance of character and plot, would be very interesting. But for now there is not much of a market for that sort of article.

Development

That was as far as I went that day. But a story needs people, and on subsequent exercise excursions I started to think about how to get someone up into my aero-ecology. I dismissed the obvious

methods such as balloons and planes — not much fun there. But I remembered a terrific music video clip that I had seen and loved — a group called Rudimental, with Emeli Sandé singing vocals on a song called 'Free'. You may have seen it — it has had almost 60 million views. If not, I urge to have a look: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KDPW_g2AhAU.

The video is about wing-suit flying and features Jokke Sommer, who is described as an 'extreme athlete', and it is spine-tingling. I watched it again and knew that this was now the basis of the story. But there were certain issues, such as the fact that the longest wing-suit flight by a human was less than ten minutes — not enough for the story I was imagining.

So the next step was to construct a character who could do everything that Jokke Sommer did in the video, but do it for days on end — a man who can live permanently in my aero-ecology, just as humans have learned to live in almost every environment on the planet.

The elements of the story developed quickly after that. I had toyed with the idea of setting the story around Corio Bay. But I realised that would never work: the area is heavily populated. Surely someone would notice a complete ecology a few thousand metres up. And the weather around Melbourne is not exactly conducive to permanent living in the sky.

But I remembered a trip to Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory some years ago. It is extremely remote; there might even be areas not yet explored. And it had that ring of exotic otherness — the Jules Verne element — which is quite difficult to find anywhere these days. And someone had told me that the winds in the Territory during winter, when a large high pressure area settles over central Australia, are some of the most consistent on the planet. Perfect, I thought. Never mind the cyclones in the summer — I would cross that bridge later.

And finally the characters

Now, with the locale settled, it was relatively easy to construct the characters. The main character would be an 'extreme athlete' who was perfectly at home in the outdoors in the Northern Territory. But he would be able to fly, not just for ten minutes, but for days at a time. To make that at least a semi-realistic possibility, he would have to lose a lot of body mass — specifically his legs, which are less important in wing-suit flying than arms (not that I have ever flown, and probably never will now that I am 70 years old. But I am a writer — when all else fails, I use my imagination.)

Putting that together with the Kakadu locale, I soon had my main character: an ecologist and a rock climber, comfortable in the outdoors, with superb upper body strength and a reason to be out in the wilderness. There are no mountains in the Northern Territory but there plenty of escarpments, and rock climbers are among the fittest athletes in the world. And an ecologist would have reason to be out in the bush, and a catastrophic car accident in the wet season would be more than plausible.

Notice that I say 'construct', since that is the way that my mind works. Hopefully the final result is anything but obviously 'constructed', and yes, I wish I could write a whole and organic character without having to work at 'constructing' that person. But my mind does not work that way, and I venture that most writers would have to do the same.

The structure of the story

That settled the first part of the story: the speculative element, the setting, the main character and his problem. The next question was the structure of the story. I personally find that 'I did something wonderful' stories told in the first person are extremely grating. So this would be told from an external point of view — the 'Doctor Watson' method.

Yes, it is a cliché, but only because it works so well and has therefore been used so often. Doctor Watson is the ideal vehicle to narrate the external action of the Sherlock Holmes stories while still leaving the reader guessing about the internal workings of the great detective's mind and therefore the true nature of what is taking place. And Watson and Holmes are a perfect fictional complement, with sufficient contrast to highlight the strengths and short-comings of each man: Holmes is brilliant but moody and unstable, while Watson is not exactly stupid but stolid and reliable without ever rising to great heights — the perfect everyman.

So I needed my own everyman, someone to relate the story to the reader: a fellow ecologist and climber, but one who responds to the shared tragedy of the car accident, not with the unquenchable thirst for life that Dean exhibits, but with a subdued acceptance of the fate that has befallen the two men. Dean was never going to accept his fate without fighting back but Trevor Siddons might.

I also knew that I needed a bit of a 'kicker' near

the end — something unexpected but obvious in retrospect. I decided that there would be another person already up there; someone already flying would make it much more believable that Dean could also live in the air. Of course it would have to be someone who was also uniquely adapted to permanent life in the air and who had an equally good reason for doing so. And as quickly as the thoughts came to me, Meilin was born.

Of titles, and first and last sentences

The title is the first thing that any reader will see when picking up your story and if that person, whether it is a slush pile reader or an editor or the final paying customer, does not like it, all is lost. Titles often don't make themselves obvious until well into the writing of a story, and sometimes even after a story is written they still prove elusive. But every story needs a title, and it better be a good one.

I have never been a fan of long titles that sound poetic but have little to do with the actual story. For this story, something related to flying seemed the obvious choice. So the first component of the title: 'Flight'. It implies movement, action, something out of the ordinary since very people fly regularly. But who or what is flying?

Many writing books advise never to use a person's name or a made-up word in the title: the reader won't know what you are talking about and therefore won't care. (Never mind obvious counter-examples from *Romeo and Juliet* to *The Hobbit*.) In this case, at the about the half-way point of the story, I introduced the brolgas, the large cranes of the Australian tropics, and I decided that would be a possible choice. The word would be unfamiliar to most people, but it is a real word and it might peak the reader's curiosity. And it was directly relevant both as an event in the story and thematically.

The next most important element of a story is the first sentence, or at least the first paragraph. It should grab the reader and never let go. This sentence came to me as I started to write: 'You may have heard that they found Dean Maitland's body.' And I was very proud of it. It introduces the main character and implies that he is dead. The reader does not know who this Dean person is but at least there is a mystery. And the rest of the paragraph gives a lot of quick background — he fell out of a clear blue sky, still wearing his wing-suit. Hopefully that is enough of a tease to keep anyone reading for a bit longer.

This sentence also makes it clear that this story has a 'frame', a device that surrounds the main action. By giving away the ultimate fate of the main character in the first sentence, it sets the reader's expectations: this will not be a 'what happened' story, but rather a 'why did it happen' story, a slow burn as mysteries are uncovered. Hopefully those mysteries are enough to hide that fact that nothing really 'dramatic,' in the sense of rapid action, happens for most of the story.

The final draft

This was at least three months after the original idea. But there was no hurry. I am firm believer in Stephen King's dictum (contrary to almost any other writing advice that I have read) to *never* carry a notepad. If an idea is any good, it will stick with you and keep rising to the top of your consciousness. If it does not, if it fades away and disappears, maybe it wasn't an idea worth spending time pursuing.

I started writing. This was going to be a 'gentle' story with no huge conflicts, internal or external, to propel it. So I decided the best way to retain a reader's interest through what was going to be a long slow burn of revelations would be to start with the ending — something incongruous and intriguing that would (hopefully) carry the reader through the slow bits.

After that it flowed easily; I knew what had to happen to get the characters to that ending and it was just a matter of taking from my mind's theatre onto the page. The only difficulty was relating some facts that my narrator could not know at the time, and the concept of extracts from Dean's journal was born. It is a bit of cheat, and jars my mathematician's sense of the purity of a single point of view throughout, but it seems to work and be accepted by most readers.

How do you spell 'verisimilitude'?

This might be a good time to talk about believability, or verisimilitude, as the lit courses like to call it. In science fiction (as opposed to fantasy or magical realism) the author generally only gets one or two speculative elements. And I believe that for true *science* fiction, the other aspects must be hyper-believable so that the reader will accept the speculative additions.

With that in mind, I wrote lengthy descriptions of various elements of the story:
(a) The car accident that precipitated the whole thing (over 2000 words).
(b) The details of the aero-ecology (over 3000 words).

(c) The rehabilitation of the characters (1000 words).

The punch line to this is that, even though every editor said they 'loved the story', none wanted to take it. 'Too long,' they said. And though they didn't say it, they probably meant 'Too many boring bits.'

And they were right. In my mind, this was still a story about the ecology up in the sky. That was the genesis of the story and to me it was the most interesting part. But to a reader, that was almost incidental; the aero-ecology might have been the *genesis* of the story but its *core* was how the way my two main characters faced the massive challenge that life had thrown at them. And for that, those long sections that I thought added verisimilitude were no longer necessary.

Of course any writer, especially a relative beginner, rarely sees things that way. But Scot Noel (bless his heart) was the only editor to suggest that I try editing it, the only one who was willing to spend time working with a new and unproven writer on a story that might never make it. And he asked that I cut it not just a little but a *lot*!

I was getting desperate to see this story, which I *knew* was pretty good, into print. And so I took the version I sent to *Dreamforge*, at over 13,000 words, and I started cutting.

And yes, it hurt. It really *hurt*. But if this precious child of mine was ever going to see the full light of day, I knew it had to be done. The final version is about 8500 words — still a large investment in both money and 'real estate' for a magazine to make in a new author. But Scot Noel did publish it and I am forever grateful.

Before leaving the question of believability, there is one other point I would like to make, and the best way to approach it might be to ask: What kind of toilet paper does Mr. Spock use? Does he need toilet paper at all, or is he somehow differently configured? We know a lot about Mr. Spock's personality, his background and how he reacts in a crisis. But neither Gene Roddenberry nor any of the subsequent writers ever gave us this detail about him, even though it presumably comes up every day in Spock's fictional life.

The reason I mention this is because it bears directly on the question of believability. I spent a lot of time contemplating just how much verisimilitude is too much. In particular I wondered if I should go into the full details about Dean's life in the air. Or would the whimsical nature of the story carry the reader past the need to know those mundane details.

I did leave in explanations about Dean's life regarding food and water and sleep. I cut most of the others. But I couldn't resist leaving in the front and rear flaps that Dean fashions into his suit for you-know-what kind of activity. Is that necessary? Does it add to the believability of the story? Or does it suddenly jerk the reader out of the whimsical haze that envelops the rest of the story with a dose of unneeded reality? You tell me.

But where's the conflict?

I think it is important to mention the place of conflict in this story. Every text about writing will tell you that you need conflict, and I tried to practise that for a long time. But it rarely worked. There are some great stories that have true conflict between two humans, or a human and a society or even a human and nature. But my experience is that there are vastly more stories where the conflict is laboured and artificial — something put there as a kind of literary Click-Bait for the editor and publisher, who think the readers need it.

Instead, in this story I deliberately chose not to have conflict in the normal sense of the word. My main characters are confronted with an awful life accident. But this is not something that can be fought. Instead they must decide how to accommodate themselves to it and make the best of their new situation. Some might call this 'conflict', but to me it is simply learning to live with what life has thrown at you, and to determine what you can and cannot do with that fate.

To me, this ability to differentiate between what you can and cannot change, to determine what is possible and not possible in any situation, is the true beginnings of maturity. Our society relentlessly pushes the idea that anyone can do anything — it is the staple of most fiction and the huge self-help market. There are vast amounts of money to be made in telling people what they want to hear. But should that be the limit of an author's ambition: to merely tell people the stories they want to hear.

It is wonderful to follow dreams that are truly yours and not borrowed or imposed by family or society, and fiction can reflect that. And it is often possible to accomplish much more than we first imagine. But there is a fine line between persistence and futility, and there are tragedies to be written about mistaken judgments made on either side of that line. So this is a story, not about conflict and overcoming impossible odds, but about accepting the situation and making the best of it.

Most of all, it is a story about contrast: life

before and after the accident, life on the ground and in the air, and most of all the contrast between the main characters' responses to the challenge that confronts them.

The story does not even contain the internal conflict that many writing manuals would say is absolutely necessary. I could have made Dean conflicted about whether to stay on the ground like his friend Trevor or take to the air permanently. I could have had him ruminate at length about it, to anguish over it and suffer. But that would have been a lie. Dean was a free spirit — once he had learned to fly, he was *never* going to simply accept his fate and stay on the ground. So why pretend that he might.

After all, why walk when you can fly?

Quantum love

by Henry Gasko

I have always been intrigued at the possibilities of depicting the sort of love that spans eons and galaxies. Not easy in a short piece, but one day I was thinking about quantum entanglement and I realised it was the perfect metaphor for that kind of love. In fact, I am surprised that (as far as I am aware) no one has done it before.

A frown upon your face, my love;
Why so deep perplexed?
I've loved thee in all my former lives,
I shall love thee in my next.

Uncertainty rules our fate it's said,
But the quantum holds no fear.
In each divergent multiverse
I always will be near.

Though space and time may distance us,
Black holes pull us apart,
Like elementary particles
We share a tangled heart.

The only 'roos are dead ones

by Henry Gasko

My mother came one last time,
Over the callous waves
To see me, and her grandchild,
'Before I meet my grave.'

She saw her grandson playing,
And seeing him, she smiled.
But in her darker moments,
She only sat and sighed.

'Your father, on our last trip,
He loved the kangaroos.
I hope we see a few this time.'
I said 'I hope so too.'

We drove around the hillsides
And then back home again,
But the only 'roos were dead ones
By the side of Taylor's Lane.

'No 'roos in the paddocks?'
(She'd learned the word before)
'Just new houses on the hills,
And condos near the shore?'

I said, 'There's been a drought,
The worst we've ever seen;
So the only 'roos are dead ones
Beneath the dead gum trees.'

'You know,' she said, 'I did have hopes
You'd come back home again.
Now those hopes are dying
Like that 'roo on Taylor's Lane.'

'I'm sorry, Mum, my life's here now.
I did what I thought I must.'
She only stared at the dead 'roo
Encased in road-side dust.

The viscera and the eyes go first,
Then the tiny fat-filled brain.
Now there's just a hollowed corpse
By the side of Taylor's Lane.

JOHN HERTZ, according to the *Fancyclopedia 3*, 'is a Los Angeles fan and member of LASFS. He is noted for his fan writing, panel moderating, masquerade judging, art show tours and Regency dancing, to say nothing of his propeller beanie (exchanged for a top hat when he dons dancing attire). He received the Big Heart Award at the 2003 Worldcon and was the DUFF delegate to Aussiecon 4 in 2010. He was sent to the 2007 Worldcon by a one-time travel fund, HANA (Hertz Across to Nippon Alliance). He is a Rotsler Award judge and a perpetrator of the Prime Time Party. He writes frequently for fanzines, and has pubbed his personalzine, *Vanamonde*, weekly since 1993.'

The John Hertz column

The Worldcon I saw

DisCon III: the 79th World Science Fiction Convention, 15–19 December 2021

A substantially similar form of this D3 report appeared in *Vanamonde* 1493–99.

DisCon III was held at Washington, District of Columbia, USA. In these pandemic times the con committee took a Dec 2020 poll *Would you rather we held DC3 on the 25–29* Aug *21 dates we'd planned, when it would have to be only 'virtual'* [i.e. taking part by electronic media] *like the 2020 Worldcon, or in December, when we think we could manage in-person attendance?* Two-thirds said *December,* and so it was: in the event, a hybrid of in-person and virtual. In-person attendance about 2400; the con also sold about 950 virtual-only memberships (we sell memberships, not admission permits, wanting participants, not spectators), but didn't keep track of how many of them participated in the various hybrid offerings. Art Show sales about US$32,000 by 33 artists.

On the 14th, changing airplanes at O'Hare International Airport (Chicago, Illinois), I saw the exhibit honouring Lt. Cdr. Edward H. 'Butch' O'Hare (1914–1943), the United States Navy's first Top Gun, who on 20 February 1942 single-handedly attacked a formation of nine enemy bombers approaching his aircraft carrier, shooting down five, and becoming the first naval aviator to win the Medal of Honor. On 26 November 1943 he led the Navy's first night-time fighter attack launched from a carrier; his Grumman F6F Hellcat was shot down and never found. On 19 September 1949 the Orchard Depot Airport (lest you wonder why its International Air Transport Assn location-identifier is ORD) was renamed in his honour. His exhibit includes a F4F-3 Wildcat restored and dressed in the livery of his plane. In July 2021 the airport also set up an exhibit honouring Bessie Colman (1892–1926), the first black woman and first American Indian to hold a pilot's licence; I was in time to see that too.

For the convention I stayed at the Churchill Hotel, 1914 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington 20009, built in 1902, renovated and modernised inside. It was only half a mile (1 km) from the Shoreham where D3 was held; with a daytime air temperature of 60°F (16°C) it was a tempting walk, but I kept finding myself sharing rides in people's cars, taxicabs, vans — at a con you might well want a car for moving around, a van for Art Show or Dealers' Room or party-hosting things. I was pleased to see the Churchill's restaurant was named the Chartwell (for the historic house in Kent of Sir Winston Churchill 1874–1965). I suggested the hotel might arrange to get reproductions of some Churchill paintings (I like but didn't mention his 1920 self-portrait, see https://artuk.org/discoverlar/artworks/self-potrait-218781; I recommend M. Soames [his daughter Mary], *Winston Churchill: His Life as a Painter, 1990*).

Tuesday night at a restaurant-bar a few blocks away — I did get some walking in — people at the next table saw what I was reading and a discussion of SF ensued. They had read Niven and Le Guin and like that, no ignoramuses (an awkward word to make plural, since the Latin is a plural

[*ignorainus,* 'we do not know', in older law practice a return by a grand jury upon finding evidence insufficient}. But they were surprised to learn the Worldcon was less than a mile away and this weekend, aiee.

At the Shoreham, after Registration, I hastened to the Art Show so I could put up the Rotsler Award exhibit. This again looked swell, having been made with the help of graphics wizard Elizabeth Klein-Lebbink. It had just been at Loscon XLVII (see Kenn Bates' photos at https://file770.com/rotsler-award-exhibit-at-loscon-47/ 5 December 2021. I was working next to Sara Felix, the President of ASFA (the Association of Science Fiction & Fantasy Artists) putting up her exhibit; she's been active as both a pro and fan, and indeed on Saturday night at the Hugo Awards ceremony would be given Best Fan Artist.

I never could learn from the con committee whether I was wanted to lead Classics of SF discussions — one story, one discussion — as I've done at cons, including Worldcons, for decades. They didn't happen at D3, led by me or others. Over the months I'd written, telephoned; anybody I reached said I should go to somebody else; some just didn't answer. I did get assigned to a panel 'What Makes a Classic?', Wednesday at 5:30 p.m., with Chris Barkley, Shaun Duke (moderator), Ellen Kushner, Brad Lyau. Four dozen people came. I thought it would be undiplomatic to say the Classics talks I'd led had been thrashing this out since — oh, maybe LACon II the 42nd Worldcon. Anyway, Kushner said 'Has to be old enough'. Lyau quite rightly asked, 'What about works not in English?' Duke asked 'What's the role of people?' i.e. readers, listeners. Barkley said: 'There can be classics by acclamation, or personal.' Kushner said, 'We get the fairy tales we deserve.' She and Barkley read Shakespeare aloud. *The Tempest* is ours, being fantasy; Horatio's 'Look, my lord, it comes' *(Hamlet* Act I scene iv) shows the Ghost isn't Hamlet's imagination. From the audience, 'Can an artist try to make a classic?' Kushner said, 'Lasting influence after the original audience is dead.' From the audience, 'We're intolerant of the past.' I ventured my working definition, 'A classic is a work that survives its own time. After the currents which might have sustained it have changed, it remains, and is seen to be worthwhile for itself.' This impressed Kushner, gosh.

Thursday morning in my hotel lobby I met Len Van de Graaff, of Baltimore, Maryland, grandson of Robert J. Van de Graaff (1901–1967), the physicist famous for inventing that high-voltage low-current electrostatic generator. And so it continues.

I was Chief Hall-Costume Judge. Hall costumes are what some people wear at our cons for strolling the halls; the late great Marjii Ellers called them *daily wear for alternative worlds.* Decades ago, as the Masquerade evolved from a dress-up party to an on-stage costume competition, we worked out the difference between stage costumes and hall costumes. Stage costumes are meant to be seen at a distance. Hall costumes are meant to be met: in a corridor, in the Dealers' Room, in the con hotel restaurant, when a down escalator passes an up escalator. A stage costume only has to survive the few minutes while the costumer is on stage during the Masquerade, and can be big. A hall costume has to be wearable for a while, hours usually; it has to allow the costumer to sit, stand, and like that; it has to allow both its wearers' and others' vision, hearing, and ordinary movement. Stage and hall costumes are different media, like, say, oil painting and pencil drawing. We give stage costumes recognition with a theatre audience that can applaud and a panel of judges seeing all entries and then giving awards. We give hall costumes recognition with a gang of prowling judges armed with rosettes they pin or otherwise attach to good work in the moment. Hall costume judges are usually recruited by the Chief Hall Costume Judge during the con. I'm often the ChHC Judge and I have lots of stories. Once when the hall-costume awards hadn't been made I set up a factory — this happened to be at Renovation the 69th Worldcon, in the Fanzine Lounge, which happened to be an open space in the Convention Centre — and got folks to stay an hour or two as we made them by hand. Another time in the audience of a panel discussion someone else said, 'Too bad there doesn't seem to be any hall costume judging at this con' (which in fact wasn't true, but unlike Masq judging it isn't spectacular and had merely escaped that person's notice), so I rose from my seat, walked up to one of the panelists who happened to be wearing a good hall costume, pinned a rosette onto him, and went back and sat down. At D3 my judges were Dave Howell, Sandy Manning, Judith Newton, Filthy Pierre, and Amy Thomson.

We've long had Art Shows; Bjo Trimble invented them for the 18th World Science Fiction Convention. They're partly a sales gallery, partly a museum, with fanart, pro art, a Print Shop (no equivalent — yet — for three-dimensionals e.g. woodwork, sculpture, pots, jewellery). Another thing I often do at our cons is arrange Art Show tours. Talking about art is itself an art. I used to call them *docent tours,* but although *docent* is the

John Hertz (r.), Regency dancing, WorldCon 1996. (Photo: Yvonne Rousseau.)

right word I found that people didn't know it, wouldn't look it up, and only fell asleep over it, so I dropped it. Bill Rotsler gave swell Art Show tours. Some years ago a con asked me to give one. When I said 'Who, me?' I was answered, 'Well, someone told us you'd be good at it.' When I said 'I think you'd better tell me who that was' I was answered 'Kelly Freas'. So I said **gulp** and 'Okay, if Kelly thinks I can do it I'd better do it'. I went to him and said 'What were you thinking,' and he said, which I've never forgotten, 'You seem to be able to say what you see.' I realised this was why I'd often been made a Masquerade judge, gosh. I'm big on discussion, which to me doesn't mean *You're wrong, you worthless nitwit* but hearing people tell how things look from their point of view. I try to take tours others lead. If a tour leader said *A very professionally done picture* I might respond, 'But we can't see that: it's a conclusion. Can you help us by pointing out what you see which leads you there?'

Art Show tours have to be coördinated between the Art Show and Programming, *inter alia* so tour leaders aren't cross-scheduled with, say, sitting on a panel discussion at the same hour. At DisCon III the Art Show Director was Andrea Senchy, whom I've always found competent and easy to work with. I never could get into good communication with D3 Programming, which must have resulted in the Pocket Program listing

Thursday 4 p.m. ART SHOW GALLERY CRAWL. Join the Art Show staff for a group stroll through the Art Show to view and discuss the works on display. *Art, Interactive.* John Hertz (moderator), Suzanne Palmer, Ardamus, Natalie Naudus.

although (i) experience favours having one leader or maybe two on a tour, partly by way of keeping the tour size manageable; (ii) a tour leader needn't and usually shouldn't be Art Show staff, most of whom have their hands much too full without this; (iii) there should be, and I always try to arrange, several Art Show tours, not just one, during a con; (iv) no one had ever mentioned this item to me. *Interactive,* yes, certainly.

Meanwhile, i.e. before the con, I was indeed trying to arrange tours. Some people . who've given good ones weren't going to attend — Bob Eggleton, Rick Sternbach, Michael Whelan. Ctein found he couldn't attend (or even exhibit, alas); Dave Howell took his place with Teresa Nielsen Hayden, who with Ctein has given good team-tours. TNH had thought of exhibiting her pots, but couldn't manage. Jane Frank gave a tour; her perspective as a collector and dealer interesting as ever. I gave one. Speaking of people who couldn't attend, although Artist Guest of Honor John Harris found himself there, or maybe I should say not there, he exhibited generously. His cover for Greg Benford's *Shadows of Eternity* had just appeared in October. The Art Show Reception was on Friday afternoon. There was a band. It played a waltz. I found a partner and we danced around.

Space was scanty at the Shoreham. DisCon III had originally planned on the Wardman Park Marriott Hotel (site of the Sheraton Park, which had hosted Discon II and many Disclaves [local SF con], demolished after Disclave XXIII [25–28 May 79), the Shoreham for overflow. But the Wardman Park closed in the summer of 2020. That threw D3 to the Shoreham, and we had to make the best of it.

The Shoreham, hosting the Beatles in 1964 and every inaugural ball of United States Presidents for 70 years, becoming an Omni in 1983 and a Historic Hotel of America in 2005, was ample for many gatherings; but few of them are like our Worldcons in the US or abroad, with our Art Show, Dealers' Room, Exhibit Hall, Hugo Awards, Masquerade, panel discussions large and small and open (everyone welcome) and closed (invitation-only), parties at all hours — speaking of which, we also put extraordinary traffic into hotel elevators. The D3 attendance of 2400 — half the size of the 73rd Worldcon at Spokane, a third of the 75th Worldcon at Helsinki — if not exactly a silver lining in the cloud of COVID-19,' was in this sense a blessing. Even so, the Dealers' Room and Exhibit Hall had to be combined in what had been an underground garage; no place could be found for a Fanzine Lounge, nor the Christine Valada Portrait Project, nor, less crucially but sad for some, Regency Dancing (see 'The English Regency and Me', http://www.jphan.org/mimosa/m29/hertz/htm; yes, I know it was really a British Regency). The hotel staff too was affected, so, for example, no room service.

We did manage an Information Desk in the lobby, and an auction for the travelling-fan funds, principally TAFF (Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, sending delegates between North America and Europe–Republic of Ireland–the United Kingdom since 1953), DUFF (Down Under Fan Fund, across the Pacific Ocean between North America and Australia–New Zealand since 1972), and GUFF (alternately the Going Under Fan Fund and the Get-Up-and-Over Fan Fund, completing the triangle since '78). Particular thanks to auctioneers James Bacon, Jerry Kaufman; tally clerks Spike, Suzle; runners Laurie Mann, Mia McCarty, Sharon Sbarsky, Kristin Siebert.

Another thing I often do at Worldcons is lend a hand with WOOF — the Worldcon Order Of Fan-editors, founded by Bruce Pelz in 1976, an apa [amateur press, or publishing, association, https://fancyclopedia.org/APA isn't too bad; also https://fancyciopedia.org/WOOF) continuing at each Worldcon. Roger Hill has kindly applauded my efforts; Guy Lillian in his exuberance has called me the chief organiser; I'm more like Viscount Melbourne (1779–1848), who when told he was a pillar of the Church said *I don't see how I could be a pillar. I must be a buttress. I support it from outside.* For D3 the OE [Official Editor, in some apas called the Apa Manager] was Rich Lynch, cover by Tim Kirk.

With no Friday or Monday holiday in the US on the D3 weekend, the Masquerade had to be Friday night so Hugo Awards Night could be Saturday — awkward for Masquerade entrants but we made the best of it. I'm often a judge or Master of Ceremonies. I was a judge at D3. Chris Garcia was to have been MC — which reminded me that in his first stint, upon my asking *Want some advice?* he blithely replied *How hard can it be?* then during the event while acquitting himself well sweated buckets — but couldn't attend, so his place was taken by veteran costumer Kevin Roche. My fellow judges were Jill Eastlake and Mary Robinette Kowal — the con chair, gosh. Workmanship judges were Miri Baker and Leslie Johnston (who'd just received the Int'l Costumers' Guild President's Award in November). Masq Director was Dr Karen (Karen Purcell).

In our Masquerade, wonders appear. At first we thought entries had to be things no one had seen. Typically they were characters in a story. At LACon II the magnificent 'Night on Bald Mountain' (from Disney's Fantasia, 1940) showed us we needed Original and Re-Creation divisions. Later we realised we needed both the Masquerade Judges who see what the audience sees, and Workmanship Judges backstage, who judge for workmanship anything the entrants offer, i.e. it's optional, can be 'only this gauntlet' or omitted: a superb entry may have been thrown together with staples or a glue-gun, which perhaps should be considered workmanship but, as my father used to say, *Not within the normal meaning of that term.*

Masquerade photography is an art. Ideally there should be (1) run-time photos; (2) posed photos; (3) video of the whole show. Run-time photos have rarely been managed; *No flash photography* during the show is inviolable. I'm still trying to learn if a video was made at D3.

Pictures are worth many words. See us judges at https://icgallery.org/items/show/53078, the entries at http://www.icggallery.org/worldcon-2020s, the awards at https://discon3.org.wp-content/uploads/12021/12/Newsletter-Issue-6-Sat-AM.pdf; Novice, Journeyman (and some add Craftsman), and Master Classes are based on experience, but anyone may 'challenge up'. There are no set awards: there may not prove to be e.g. a Most Beautiful or Most Dramatic: judges have to decide them. Catherine Anastasia Nelson's '*La Calavera*', based on John Picacio's *Loteria* card, was so great that Chris Barkley ran from the audience to find JP, luckily succeeding in time for us to include JP in presenting '*La Calavera*' with Best in Show.

Saturday night, white tie for the Hugo Awards. We're such reverse-snobs in science-fiction fandom that I have to keep explaining no such evil

wicked mean and nasty formal clothes are required; it being, however, an Occidental man's most ceremonial costume, I relish wearing it for Hugo Night, our greatest event. Susan de Guardiola was among the ushers. She'd been a fine Mistress of Ceremonies for the Masquerade at two Worldcons, LoneStarCon II (55th Worldcon) and Noreascon IV (62nd), and Toastmistress at Lunacon XLVI (New York con, hosted by local club the Lunarians; 21–23 Mar 03), recently teaching advanced historical-dance workshops in the US, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine — that last two now suspended. She said, 'You taught me to dance.'

I couldn't be disappointed by the Hugos; I already had been by the ballot. Absence of two novels I thought outstanding, Powers' *Forced Perspectives* and Niven and Benford's *Glorious* (reviews reprinted here), was almost trivial compared to the still wretched state of the fan categories. I don't mind people's nominating what they think best; I grieve over people's not nominating what they think best. Reaching the Best Fanzine ballot needed 39 nominations: *Outworlds 71/Afterworlds* had 21, *Portable Storage* had 12; not even that for *Banana Wings*, *SF Commentary*, *The White Notebooks*. Best Fan Writer needed 42: Claire Brialey had 8; not even that for Sandra Bond, Fred Lerner, triple-threat Ulrika O'Brien (fan artist, fan writer, fanzine). Best Fan Artist needed 10 (!): Ditmar had 6, Steve Stiles and Tara1 Wayne each had 4; not even that for Ray Nelson, Marc Schirmeister, Alison Scott. People for whom these names were worthy were silent.

What to do for Ben Yalow, the Fan Guest of Honor? He'd attended eight hundred cons, working on a third of them. He'd been first-rate as cons' hotel liaison — as a side note, once when I noticed the Hospitality Suite was in Room 770 and asked him 'Was that deliberate?' he said 'Of course it was' [alluding to the party in Room 770 of the St Charles Hotel at the 9th Worldcon, which upstaged the convention; the title of Mike Glyer's *File 770* alludes to it likewise]. He'd regularly and productively attended World SF Society business meetings — alas, too few have done both. Dave McCarty bought a supply of the Bantam Books *Robert's Rules of Order* illustrated by Will Eisner. Each copy got a sticker inside commemorating an important BY con. The rule was that BY could not refuse a copy; he could only return another, autographed. I got back one with 'Chicon V, the 49th Worldcon, Ben Yalow's 21st'.

The Site Selection result stirred many. I could only wish they had been stirred earlier. Chengdu won by 2006 to 807. Anyone who wanted the 2023 Worldcon to be held at a site other than Chengdu, or managed by a more experienced *con* committee, and like that, only had to vote for Winnipeg. Looking things over, I figured 4908 people could have voted for Winnipeg but didn't. I found some Chengdu representatives and quoted Confucius, 'When you know something, to know that you know it; when you do not know something, to know that you do not know it: that is knowledge' (*Analects* 2:17). They seemed to recognise it, even in English. I discussed its application too.

Epistolary footnote

Chris Barkley's photo of we DisCon III Masquerade judges is here: https://file770.com/barkley-discon-iii-the-third-day/#jp-carousel-89782

The judges were Jill Eastlake, me, Mary Robinette Kowal (centre to viewer's right in the photo). The Workmanship Judges were Miri Barker, Leslie Johnston (viewer's left, and second from left, in the photo).

Masquerade judges often dress up; Eastlake and I, Baker and Johnston, did. This is in no way required; Kowal did not.

Two particular points of applause for Kowal. She took the chair of the con after many difficulties had beset it; it's rare for a pro to chair a Worldcon, all the more achievement in these circumstances. It's rare for a Worldcon chair to serve as a Masquerade judge, adding a time-consuming and fiendishly difficult task to a greater responsibility which is far more so; she was a good judge, too (not only have I often been a Worldcon Masquerade judge, I've been the Judge in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury* and sung those very words).

Photos: Richard Man (rhymes with 'Don' and 'Ron') was there; he's one of our best photographers. You'll want his email address, which I don't have. I'll see if I can put him in touch with you.

(Letter received 28 September 2022)

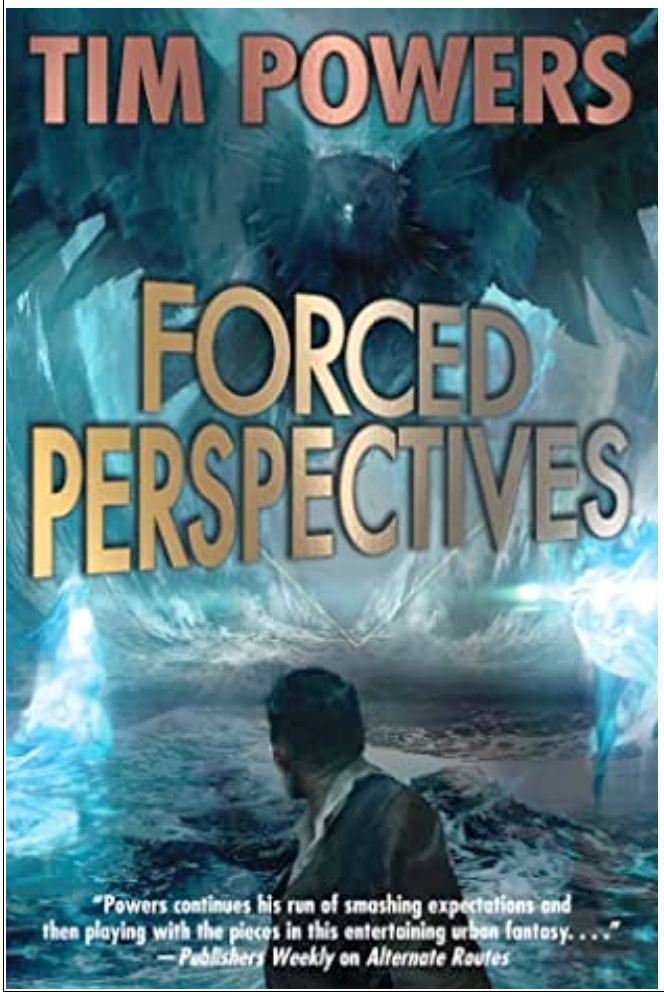
Two celebrations

At the height of his —

From ***Vanamonde* No. 1433 (reprinted at File770.com 9 Feb 21), No. 1444 (repr. *File 770* 30 Apr), No. 1446.**

Tim Powers is at his best in ***Forced Perspectives***. He managed to bring us this book in March 2020, four years after *Alternate Routes*, a short time for him. He writes well — that's one of my understatements, folks — but not, as he's told us, fast. I didn't re-read *Alternate Routes* first. I don't think you'll have to. He is, as we expect, imaginative, poetic, rooted in the world we know and branching away, realistic and strange.

C. S. Lewis advised what I call the One-Strange Rule: either an ordinary person in extraordinary circumstances, or an extraordinary person in ordinary circumstances. Rules get exceptions — does that have exceptions? never mind for now — but, or *and*, Powers does both.



I've advised *The greater the reality, the better the fantasy*. I didn't have to advise Powers; he's masterly at it. As I said of another Powers book, and Samuel Johnson said of Shakespeare (it may take a genius to write about a genius; I'm doing my best), we've never met these people, and if as Powers says himself he is writing fantasy, we can't meet them; but we believe that if we did, they'd be as he portrays. Such is the art of fiction.

Some years ago Bob Dylan sang 'Nothing is revealed'. That was his art; not Powers'. If we see a man walking on stilts, with springs under his shoes — another Powers book — or a car painted all over with clown faces, we'll learn why.

When one of Shakespeare's characters says 'I can call spirits from the vasty deep', he's answered 'Why, so can I, or so can any man; but will they come when you do call for them?' Of *course* that's iambic pentameter. Powers has different fish to fry. His recipe isn't particularly to sow doubt about the claim (nor is it always Shakespeare's). In a Powers story they may well arrive. His recipe is *Then what?*

Another part of realism is *Where did that come from?* In a Powers story if a man has to swim a long distance under water, or shoot a handgun suddenly and well under great stress, we know how he can do that, and what it cost. I'm reminded of a different careful fantasy author who made a modern man wield a centuries-earlier sword. The man was strong enough; nor did the foes he happened to be against call on him for much skill. He beat them. But he blistered his hand.

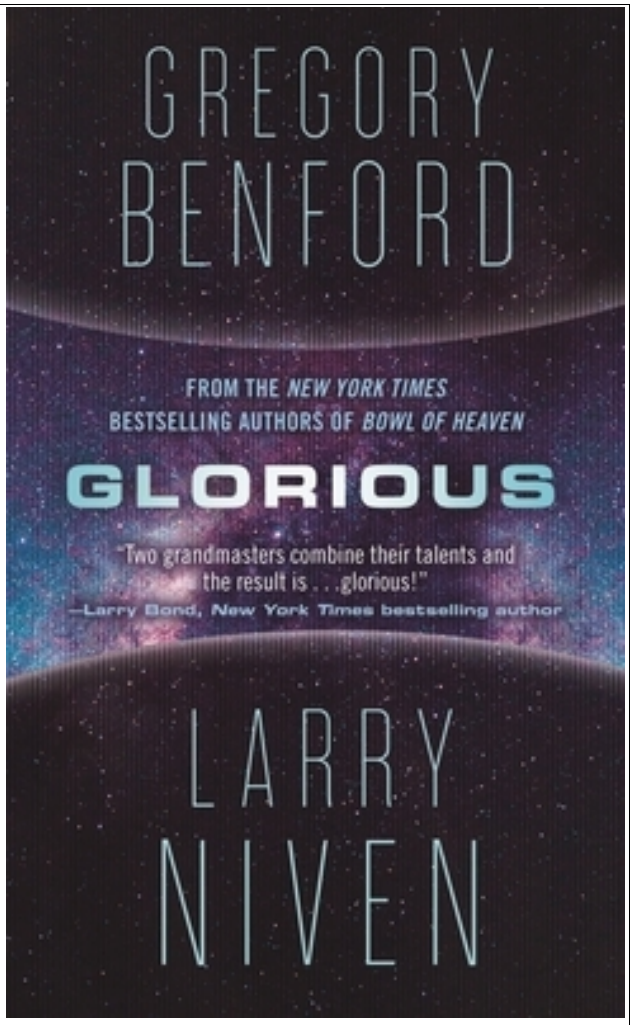
Not for nothing does SF have visitor stories, growing-up stories, investigation stories. Readers must somehow learn things the imagined world takes for granted. *Forced Perspectives* is an investigation story. The two protagonists, Sebastian Vickery and Ingrid Castine, try to learn what's going on. They've seen some of this before. They thought they were out of it. They weren't.

Powers often writes what some call secret histories. Who, really, was Kim Philby (1912–1988; another Powers book)? How, really, did the sets for Cecil B. DeMille's *Ten Commandments* (1923) get buried afterward in the sand and sea (this book)? Powers imagines the answer and tells us the true — according to his fantasy — story.

Another part of his realism — or, more technically, verisimilitude, the appearance of truth — is that he doesn't invent everything. For this book he didn't invent the notion of an egregore. He didn't invent the Egyptian gods (or forces of nature? or demons?) *Ba* and *Nu*. You can look them up and see they're what his characters say. Of course those sources you found might not have known — or told you — the real truth, aha.

There's comedy in a Powers story. That's hard to do, maybe harder in fantasy than in science fiction, which is already hard. I'm not going to fall into the pit of trying to tell you what comedy is. I'll suggest it has something to do with our recognising *That couldn't be true*. If I said to you *What do you think, I can work magic??* you'd smile. But in fantasy the character who said that might be able to. Anyway, two of my favorite moments in this book are 'Isn't either' (ch. 7) and 'You have behaved in a regrettably high-handed manner all along' (ch. 17). Also you might recognise 'Tension apprehension and dissension have begun' (ch. 15). I liked them. Maybe you will.

Once when Powers was being interviewed at an SF convention someone asked 'Do you actually believe in this stuff?' He said, 'No. But my characters do.' As Gordon Bennett wrote, and Frank Sinatra sang, 'This is all I ask, this is all I need.'



Another well-titled book

In one of Forry Ackerman's more inspired puns, he called us the Imagi-Nation.

We make things up.

Of course all art does. Maybe all life does.

I knew people with a bookshop that had two names, 'Bookfellows' and 'Mystery and Imagination'. I told them I liked 'Bookfellows' better because all books were mystery and imagination.

SF is particularly hard. If it's just like what we already know, it's only mainstream. If it's too unlike what we know, how are we going to engage with it?

I've mentioned C. S. Lewis' advice I call the One Strange rule: ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances, or extraordinary people in ordinary circumstances.

Ambitious SF authors may try both.

Glorious, the **Greg Benford–Larry Niven** novel appearing in 2020, is one of the more ambitious SF stories. It's third in a series. I didn't re-read the first two before reading it. I don't think you'll have to.

It's an interstellar-travel book. To manage that, some authors make up a way to go faster than light. So far as present-day science knows, it can't be done. (I've heard of the Alcubierre drive; even if it's possible we can't build it now.) There's no faster-than-light drive in *Glorious*. There are no generation ships. There's suspended animation — 'cold sleep'. The authors don't suppose that will be easy or simple. There's a lot of high-power computing machinery — artificial intelligence.

I don't know if AI, cold sleep, or FTL will prove achievable. A century or a millennium from now any might have been demonstrated to be fantasy. Meanwhile a story treating any well is science fiction.

Some of *Glorious* might contradict some people's religious faith. That faith might be right and *Glorious* wrong. But faith — I have some — isn't science. It isn't less valid — or so I believe — just different. Science is based on things that can be detected and measured in certain ways. Faith doesn't have those limitations — so it has other limitations. I happen to believe some of *Glorious* is wrong. But I don't read books to be agreed with.

Colonists in *Glorious* think they're high-tech. They've left Earth, and found what looks like a

suitable place far enough away. It would be only a short hop in an E. E. Smith book, or a Larry Niven 'Known Space' book, but this isn't one of those.

Colonists try to prepare for surprises. History shows and SF tells they're surprised anyway.

People in *Glorious* get downloaded — if I were writing a few decades ago I'd have had to explain that — into bodies and even machines. That's almost trivial — I did say *almost* — compared to what these colonists have to face.

They also have to find how to perceive what they're facing.

We've had stories like *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* with protagonists on the high-tech side. *Oh, look at those benighted creatures over there*. In *Glorious* the sucker is on another tentacle.

There's some reason to believe the *Glorious* protagonists are being played for suckers.

Benford is known for imagining physics. Niven is known for imagining aliens. Plenty of both in *Glorious*. There's poetic writing too. It isn't quite like either of them. This is a collaboration.

The landing team arrives. We're a quarter of the way into the book.

> The long meadow before them lay quiet and placid. No greeting party.
>
> No sign of any reception at all.
>
> Not what any of them had planned. … a forest that seemed a writhing mass of wide, hollow limbs. Every living thing seemed endowed with light, airy mechanics. Translucent spiked leaves wove in an easy breeze, and diaphanous flowers of a shiny blue and golden yellow … Beth knew that this plain was underpinned by struts, and so was clinging to a silvery tether trellis [p. 119].

Things will get more beautiful and more strange.

In another ambitious feature of this book, it has illustrations. The graphic artists are Don Davis and Brenda Cox Giguere. That hasn't been an ordinary part of novels for adults in quite a while. The pictures are monochrome. They aren't captioned. Like the words, they result from and invite imagination. I thought this had better not go without saying. Getting there took me a while.

Much farther along an alien being says:

> 'You have encountered our transmitter, which distorts space-time. You correctly deduce that we use this channel to speak with distant minds that carry out large, powerful experiments.'
>
> 'Look,' Viviane said, 'we came here to communicate and colonize, if you will be so kind. Not about physics and such, at least not right away.'
>
> Redwing whispered to her… 'Let Twisto go on. It wants something from us [p. 354].'

If the space — land-space — or something — isn't unoccupied, and if the people ('Science fiction is about people. Some of the people are aliens') are higher-tech than our protagonists, how can colonisation be possible — if they will be so kind? Must our protagonists, or anyone, be careless, arrogant, or worse?

There's glory for you.

Five departures

Carol Carr (1938–2021)

From ***Vanamonde* No. 1473, 15 November 2021**.

> The stars wait for us.
> When we find our way to them
> What shall we give? get?

Carol Carr (1938–2021), author editor fanziner wit, wife of Terry Carr one of our sharper minds, then of Robert Lichtman, another, as she too was, left our stage on 1 September 2021.

She was Carol Newmark, a good name for her, when at age 13 she took a 20-volume set of Dickens home on the bus from a used book shop, one grocery bag at a time. She met fandom, and married Carr, in 1961. He died in 1987. She married Lichtman in 2000. He survives her.

Karen Haber, one of her best friends, said she had a mordant understanding of human nature (*Locus*, October 2021, p. 57). As an editor she 'teased meaning out of morass. The right word mattered — a lot. She had the sharp focus, love of wordplay and whimsy, attention to detail, and graceful phrasing that characterize superb writing.'

A *Collected Writings* was published in 2014,

with an introduction by Haber. It has stories from *Orbit* and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction,* things from *Lighthouse* (a Terry Carr fanzine; TC was active as both fan and pro, winning a Best Fanzine Hugo, a Best Fanwriter Hugo, and two Best Pro Editor Hugos) and *Trap Door* (a Robert Lichtman fanzine), and appreciations of Richard Lupoff, Avram Davidson, and Philip K. Dick.

> Looking at his letters, almost thirty years later, I see uncanny similarities between Avram's prose and Phil Dick's — their off-the-wall humor, temperament, and eccentric brilliance.
>
> What can I possibly say about Avram that he didn't say better himself, if only he could read his handwriting ... Here is a typical closing:

I cannot write mom right now, as my every move is being watched by secret agents from Birobidjan, who are also spreading rumors that I am paranoid. When merely being noid is bad enough.

> See what I mean about Phil Dick? [*Writings*, pp. 70–71]
>
> *R.I.P.*

Robert Lichtman (1942-2022): Remembering a Man of Light

From ***Vanamonde* 1508**; reprinted in ***File 770*, 26 October 2022**

Robert Lichtman (1942-2022) left for After-Fandom on the day I came home from Westercon LXXIV. May his memory be for a blessing.

He missed his 80th birthday by two months. He hadn't been to many Westercons recently, either, although he was Fan Guest of Honor at Westercon LV — whose ringmaster, Bruce Pelz, had died two months earlier. He was at Westercon XXXIV; so was Pete Stampfel, who'd played with the Fugs and the Holy Modal Rounders (and later married Betsy Wollheim); people kept telling Lichtman how much they liked the Fugs or the Rounders, so he cut his hair.

Now that he can take no more part in affairs of this world, I can offend his modesty — ow! what was that?? — by telling you his name meant *illuminator*.

He was a shining star of fanwriting. His letters of comment won eight FAAn (Fannish Activity Achievement) Awards. His loved and acclaimed — not always the same, alas — fanzine *Trap Door* won five. In the 2020 FAAn Awards he won Lifetime Achievement.

He wrote one of the National Fantasy Fan Federation's seven fandbooks (fan + handbook; pointers from veterans for newcomers), *The Amateur Press Associations in Science-Fiction Fandom*. He edited a collection *Ah! Sweet Laney!* (F. T. Laney, famous for *Ah! Sweet Idiocy!*); another, of Walt Willis' 'Fanorama' columns from *Nebula*; a fanthology *Some of the Best from 'Quandry'* (Lee Hoffman's loved and acclaimed fanzine); and *Fanthology '92*, *Fanthology '93*, *Fanthology 1994*. He got Jack Speer's 1939 history *Up to Now* onto efanzines.com.

He was Secretary-Treasurer of FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Press Associationn, our oldest, founded 1937) from 1986 until his death, no small achievement; if I hadn't just called him a shining star, enough to make him a pillar. David Bratman said, 'As sometime Vice President of FAPA, and as emergency editor after Official Editor Seth Goldberg died in 1997, I found Robert Lichtman as Secretary-Treasurer an absolute rock of reliability."

His SAPSzine (Spectator Amateur Press Society, acronym deliberate; our second oldest) was *Door Knob*. His FAPAzine was *King Biscuit Time*. He had others there and elsewhere.

He was elected the 1989 TAFF (Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund) delegate.

He found us in 1958 through Bob Bloch's fanzine review column in *Imagination*. By then he was living in Southern California. That year he published his first fanzine, called (what else?) *PSI-PHI*, co-edited with Arv Underman. He joined the LASFS (LA Science Fantasy Society, oldest SF club in the world; pronounced as if rhyming with a Spanglish 'más fuss'), to which, wherever he is now, he still belongs, since Death will not release you. Later he moved to the San Francisco Bay area; to the Farm, a 1700-acre commune in Tennessee; to San Francisco Bay again; he married twice, by his first wife four sons, Carol Carr, his second as he was hers.

I don't know the fate of his fanzine collection. I hope it was directed soundly. The tragedy of Harry Warner's arrangements I learned of too late. Bruce Pelz disposed of his collection while he was alive. Jay Kay Klein's photographs I believe are safe.

Although the moment seems much longer ago — time flies when you're having fun — and of course time flies like an arrow — fruit flies like a banana — *Pogo* fans know about timing gnats (see *I Go Pogo* no. 20, 1960) — *Trap Door* 23 has my

reminiscence 'I Thought I Had a Pumpkin Bomb'. Not counting that, it's a good issue. Earlier *TD* reprinted (*Trap Door* 18) from *Vanamonde* 232 my appreciation of Bill Rotsler, another giant, with Basho's poem 'A cicada shell / it sang itself / entirely away'.

Notes:
Westercon, the West Coast Science Fantasy Conference, on the North American continent west of the 104th W. Meridian or in Hawaii.

- Originally faan was a pejorative form of fan; the extra a, or more of them e.g. faaan, denoted excess; enough of this lingered in 1975, when Moshe Feder and Arnie Katz started the F Awards, that the name showed a self-depreciation thought suitable; the Awards were given 1975–1980, then 1994 to date; since their revival they have been associated with the annual fanziners' con Corflu (corflu = mimeograph correction fluid, once indispensable).
- 'Release', a decades-old LASFS catch-phrase.
- Worldcon, the World Science Fiction Convention.

Roger Sims (1930–2022)

From ***Vanamonde* No. 1486, 14 February 2022**.

> Twos can come from ones.
> Giving at the right moment
> Teaches truth to us
> How we find we can go on!
> Reaching, resting, hand in hand.

Roger Sims, one of our great fans, left us last month, after a long run (1930–2022). His wife, partner, best friend, and Valentine, Pat, survives him. She and he married 16 August 1964, a date refulgent with powers of two. They had met at Midwestcon. If spectra had ends, Midwestcon would be at the opposite end from the Worldcon. It too is famous in song and story.

He ran into fandom one day in 1949 at Detroit, Michigan. Ten years later he and Fred Prophet, the Prophet of SF, co-chaired Detention, the 17th World Science Fiction Convention. Howard DeVore had said there would be a Detroit Worldcon only over his dead body. The con began with a bang and a body dragged across the stage.

Since 1975 the North America Science Fiction Convention has been held when the Worldcon is overseas. Detcon, the 1 lth NASFiC, named Roger Sims and Fred Prophet its Con Chairs *Emeriti,* recognising their service to the previous Worldcon-scale event in Detroit.

Meanwhile Pat and Roger moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. They became the heart and hub of its fandom. They, Sue and Steve Francis, Carol and Mike Resnick (MR vigorous as both fan and pro), and a host of others were and are, some now we suppose from After-Fandom, active in the hospitable Cincinnati Fantasy Group, Midwestcons, and like that. As some went to Florida there was an attempt to make *CFG* stand for *Cincinnati Florida Group,* but that trick never worked. Roger starred in the 1983 video *FAANS,* which the electronic may now see at https://youtu.be/YI_6LT8cn9E. *Faan,* which once meant a person more fannish than thou, the more a's the worse (we had *faaan,* even *faaaan),* has for decades been affectionate, self-deprecatory, or both.

Roger was Fan Guest of Honor at Nolacon II, the 46th Worldcon. At Nolacon I the 9th Worldcon, the most famous fannish party of all time — as Joe Siclari has said, and he should know — had been in Roger's room of the St. Charles Hotel, where he, unlike several others taking part, was registered. Everybody seemed to be there, and at one time or another probably was, running well into the next day. It was in Room 770, thus famous in song and story. Roger tried to explain, in the Nolacon II Program Book, that there really had been two parties. He also said there really had been only 284 empty glasses left on the trays outside the door — admitting that was only from the first party.

Pat and Roger after Magicon the 50th Worldcon went to Kenya on a month-long safari with the Resnicks. Mike said that sitting 20 yards from a herd of elephants at a water hole in Samburu made him feel better about not winning his Hugo.

Pat and Roger were elected the 1995 Down Under Fan Fund (DUFF) delegates, attending Thylacon I the 34th Australian natcon (national convention; there's no United States natcon, perhaps because the Worldcon has so often been here).

Roger co-chaired Corflu IV (with Bill Bowers; fanziners' con; *corflu* = mimeograph correction fluid, once indispensable), Ditto X and XVII (with Pat; fanziners' con; Ditto, a brand of spirit-duplicator, technology often thought inferior to mimeography, though with its own virtues), and FanHistoriCon IX (with Pat). He gave many fanzines to the FANAC.org Fan History Project *(fanac* = fan activity; the non-profit corporation producing Magicon was the Florida Ass'n for Nucleation And Conventions, which went on to produce the

electronic archive and omnium-gatherum which can be seen at https://fanac.org). Affable, quiet, witty, a combination not always seen in fandom, he was a friend to many, including me.

Speaking of fanhistory, he had articles in *Mimosa* 5–6, 10–12, 15–16, 20; the electronic may consult http://www.jophan.org/mimosa/ author _list. html#sims. There's a Pope in one. I particularly recommend 'The Awful Truth about Roger Sims' in *M*5, and 'The Definitive Story of Numbered Fandoms' in *M*6. Perhaps influenced by Stapledon's *Last and First Men* (1930), Jack Speer once said First Fandom comprised those active at least as early as 1936; later, many said 'as early as the 1st Worldcon'; later, and of later fandoms, many said more. A First Fandom club, formed in 1959, has since 1963 placed yearly in a Hall of Fame persons who have made significant contributions to SF throughout their lifetime; in 2020, Roger Sims.

R.I.P.

Bernard Haitink (1929–2021)

From ***Vanamonde* No.1479, 27 December 2021**.

Bernard Haitink (1929–2021), said *The New York Times* (26 Oct 21), may have been the wisest classical-music conductor. David Allen wrote there that Haitink gave orchestras integrity, gravity, and warmth; he was able to make music emerge as if it was entirely uninterpreted — without its becoming anonymous; his conducting was personal, even as it felt impersonal. He 'was not obviously an heir to the literalism of Arturo Toscanini, and certainly not to the uncanny subjectivity of Wilhelm Furtwangler ... in the French repertoire in which he excelled ... careful seriousness of purpose drew a clarity, a beguiling transparency ... the influence of the historically informed performance movement was plain, but subtly so ... cleareyed, sensitive Mozart operas ... a Brahms cycle that unfolds with unforced, unforgettable patience.' Clemens Hellberg, a violinist in the Vienna Philharmonic, said 'He is a servant of the masterpiece.' Bruckner's Symphony No. 7 (1885), recorded live with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic in Haitink's 2019 farewell concert, is Challenge Classics CC 72895. His memoir, from that year, is *Dirgieren ist ein Rätsel; Dirigieren (*all nouns are capitalised in German) is 'conducting', and people have been rendering *Rätsel* as 'mystery'; it's also 'riddle'. He said 'Think with the heart. Feel with the brain.'

Mabel Mercer (1900–1984): Things that will always be true

From ***Vandemonde* 1448**:

One thing I didn't know about **Mabel Mercer** — no, strike that. Nobody knew anything about Mabel Mercer (1900–1984). She kept her personal life to herself.

She may have been the greatest cabaret singer. On the back cover of **Margaret Cheney**'s centenary book ***Midnight at Mabel's*** (2000) Frank Sinatra says, 'Everything I know about phrasing, I learned from Mabel Mercer.'

I was at her Los Angeles concert on 21 March 1978. She was in the Chandler Pavilion of the Music Center down town. It was a strange venue for her, a theater of 3200 seats. Hardly the physical intimacy of cabaret. Usually she would appear about midnight; her second set could end at 4 a.m. She might go to someone's table and sing there. She might recite a poem.

But many people wanted to hear her.

By this time her voice was physically almost gone. That didn't matter. I knew it wouldn't. So did the rest of the audience. Come to think of it, that was something we did know. She sat in a chair and sang. She delivered, or told, or gave the songs.

Don Smith's remark another time will tell you. In 1985 he launched the Mabel Mercer Foundation. While she was still with us he said, 'When you sing these songs, you make it seem as though you know the things that will always be true.'

Anyway, it's a good book. And Chapter 20 says she liked science fiction.

— John Hertz, 2021

The spirit of fandom — John Hertz at Aussiecon 4

John Hertz, wearing his fannish beanie cap, at Aussiecon 4, 2010, where he was DUFF delegate. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

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