thyme

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Don't forget, a big silver X next to your name on the front probably means you won't be seeing any more of these for a while unless you... DO SOMETHING!

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The 1984 Hugo Awards - The Shorter Fiction

In the last issue - Thyme #46 - The "Literary Supplement" - the novels nominated for this year's Hugo Award were discussed, in order to familiarize those unable to obtain copies of the books with what was on the ballot. Several other categories of award were also discussed. Here then, to round up the discussion of this year's awards - especially pertinent because of this year's large number of Australasian voters - is a series of comparative reviews of the shorter works of fiction in line for the Honours:- Best Novella (40,000 - 17,500 words); Best Novelette (17,500 - 7,500 words); and Best Short Story (<7,500 words).

If you haven't voted yet but wish to do so, you'd better be quick about it - votes have to be received by the 31st of July at Box 427, Abbotsford 3067, Vic. Next Wednesday. Use your vote. But now on with the reviews....

The Novellas

reviewed by Dennis Callegari.

It has been said that the novella is the ideal length for an sf story. Well, that's hardly a case of revealed truth: the same has been claimed for the novel and the short story as well. And let's face it: the combination of good idea plus good writing results in a good story, no matter what the length.

But a couple of this year's Hugo nominations lend support to the champions of the novella.

Enough of the preamble. Here is the list of Hugo-nominated novellas for 1984, in their order of merit - in my opinion, anyway....

1) Press Enter

John Varley

2) Summer Solstice

Charles Harness

3) Cyclops

David Brin

4) Valentina

Joseph H.Delaney/Marc Stiegler

5) Elemental

Geoffrey A. Landis

I do not understand why <u>Elemental</u> made it onto the ballot at all. This, as far as I know, is Landis' first published story, and there is no way to disguise the fact that he hasn't yet learned all the basics of his craft. Especially, he lacks the ability to construct a believeable conversation. Take this example: the introduction of romantic interest into the plot...

"My dignity, woman, my dignity has taken a mortal wound. I may never recover."

"Oh, poor baby!" she replied in hock seriousness. "Shall I kiss it and make it better?"

"Hey, that's the best offer I've ad all ay," said Ramsey. He looked up at the girl and grame. "Say, you mind if I ask you a dumb question? What's your runs. I've seen you around, but I don't think I know you."

Painful prose such as this can be a printed by a lot of practice; Landis surely needs that. Someone has done and a great disservice by nominating this story for the Hugo: it is not a good stay. It is not even competent. Landis should forget Elemental altogether, and try gain. It at first you don't succeed....

Valentina is also a disappointment. Not in the same way that Elemental is: Delaney and Stiegler have at least ironed out their prose style. Where Valentina fails to satisfy is in its reluctance to face up to its theme. This is a story supposedly about the accidental creation of the world's first artificial intelligence, a challenging them and one which deserves a good deal of attention. Well, how would a synthetic which think? An accidentally created mind offers even greater story possibilities. Delaney and Stiegler shirk the task: Valentina the AI is just like the rest of us, and the authors waste their time pursuing a very ordinary story about blackmail, greed and lawyers.

Cyclops by David Brin also deal if per pherally, with the idea of artificial intelligence. The setting is no thol caust North America, the story a sequel to Brin's earlier novella, The Powner. In the earlier story, Brin had produced a clever plot twist on the standard forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itinerant survivorof the war, a self-proclaimed of forecast: the hero is an itin

Cyclops takes the plot from there. Gordon Kranz, the 'Postman', wanders backwoods Oregon (these days everywhere is backwood, setting up his half-true post offices and generally trying to survive, when he discovers that a small, technologically advanced society still oxists under the guidance of Cyclops, the only artificial intelligence to survive the war.

I've told the plot'in detail so far because, of all the novellas nominated for this year's Hugos, Cyclops has the best story idea. And, in the development of the story, you can see one reason who the novella can be the correct-length story for a particular idea. The idea in Cyclops is not in itself strong enough to sustain a story of novel length - indeed, the 'Postman' stories, when collected, will be published as a novel - nor does it have the immediate impact required to make Cyclops into a good short story.

Brin's purpose, to show us what this post-holocaust world is like, needs enough room to allow us to discover the way in which people think and act. In short, what is needed is character days of ment and a well-described future society. Brin does it competently but no will tailly - contrast Cyclops with walter M.Miller's Canticle For Leibowitz, or a tample, with which it has a fair bit in common.

Drilliantly well-written, not because the idea left me gasping - Summer Solstice is just fun to read. It begins like a typical fift as adventure tale - the sort of thing Robert Sheckley used to trot out, where brave and foolish things happen to the quietly soothing accompaniment of tackling circuit breakers - and then gets better as it goes along. I mean, how can you not enjoy the prospect of

tagging along while a feathered alien zoologist crashlands his spaceship in Eratosthenes' backyard? Could you'a story full of adventure, prophecy, mythology, romance, history, politics, geometry and the lost tomb of Tutankhamun? If so, then Summer Solstice is not for you; put it third, not second, on your Hugo voting form.

The main criticism I have to make about <u>summer Solstice</u> is that, for the number of plot elements crammed into it, the story is too short. For example, the meeting between Eratosthenes and the alien, Khor...

'Khor spoke through the teleband into the mind of his host. "My name is Khor."

'The Greek showed his surprise. "You understand Greek And you are able to speak into my mind? How is this? Whence came you?"

'Khor pointed to the band around his head, visible in outline under his body veil.

"Ah," said Eratosthenes. "A mental language device."

You would think that an ancient Greek, even a rather bright one like Eratosthenes, might balk at a discovery like that. The fact that he takes it all in his stride is only one instance of Harness' haste (can I say laziness?) when writing the story.

Press Enter is clearly the best vritten of the nominated stories, well enough written so that the basically weak concept of the story (and some of the silliness in the plot) seem unimportant concerns. I mentioned that Cyclops was a story that suited its novella length; Press Enter is a story which has been substantially improved by the fact that Varley has hidden the story's faults behind good characterisation, believeable dialogue and expert narration; something that could not have been done as well in a story of shorter length.

What are the weaknesses in <u>Press Enter</u>? The idea, for one:
mysterious computer man is killed because he knows too much. Not much can be
done about that. However, something could have been done about the determined
oddity of the main characters: can an epileptic, brainwashed Korean war veteran
and a Vietnamege refugee computer expert both fit easily into the same plot
without the story losing some credibility?

But these are comparatively small criticisms; the fact is that Varley has over come these faults.

Press Enter is the best of the novella nominations. It has already won a couple of awards; I cannot see it missing out on the Hugo either.

Dennis Callegari.



The Novelettes

reviewed by Roger Weddall.

Of this year's selection of seven novelettes in contention for the award, only three merit serious attention.

Bioodchild by Octavia Butler is a story set in a future where human beings have been fought against, beaten and eventually domesticated by the Tlic, a many-limbed, oviparous race which needs a host animal for their voung to grow in - much like a contemporary species of Earth wasp. The eggs are injected into the host where they develop and hatch into larval stage. In the case of the Tlic, the human hosts are then doped up and split asunder and the alien young recovered. Larvae transferred to another hese animal, human beings repaired, all is well.

The story is concerned in particular with the acceptance of one young girl of her role as an incubator host for the eggs of an alien she has grown up with and thought of as a friend. The changes the girl goes through in facing the decision to act as willing breeder is told glibly enough but it is a twelve year old girl who is making these decisions, and it would be only fair to say that the real story to be told probably happens maybe three or four years later when the full fury of adolescence, and realisation of how one has been used. strikes back against a coddling, patronising system. As one of the kids observes:

""If it were going to happen to me, I'd want to believe it was more ((than just being used)), too."

""It is more!" I felt like a kid. Stupid argument.

The question of why the Tlic use human beings to nourish the eggs and then transfer the young across to another warm-blooded animal (on which they will feed and fully mature) is crucial, but never resolved. It's at this stage that the reader starts shouting "Plot device!" and with justification; without this twist, Octavia Butler would have had nothing to write about.

The Lucky Strike by Kim Stanley Robinson is the story of the member of the air crew responsible for pushing the button that will drop the bomb on Hiroshima. What makes the story science fiction is the fact that he misses the target on purpose, (temporarily) sparing the lives of thousands of Japanese. What makes the story silly is the piece of wishful thinking that serves as an ending but which should simply have been cut which, after the military execution of the man for disolodience of orders, sees the establishment of The January Society, a popular and influential movement to prevent such acts of nuclear terrorism in the future. Nice idea! Hardly likely. Kim Stanley Robinson can write quite well, but this slight tale is compromised by its ending.

The Man Who Painted The Dragon Griaule, by Lucius Shepard, is also not without its faults, but the beautiful imagery of the story makes it, in my eyes at least, marginally the better of the three.

It is the story of an obsession, the obsession of a mountain climber with an unclimbed mountain. The mountain in this case is the quiescent body of the dragon Griaule, and the mountain climber one Meric Cattany, dilettante and self-styled painter. The setting, somewhere that could be Argentina or Italy. At first it is the intention of Cattany to make a quick peso or two by convincing the people forced to live in the shadow of this monstrous relic to contribute money to a scheme he has devised to kill off Griaule and at the same time handsomely line his own pockets. Having worked this, set up with a nice income, the ruinter is ineluctably drawn in to become part of the phenomenon that is Griaule. No-one who comes to the area where the dragon crouches, immobile, is able to leave, protagonists caught no less than anyone else.

The way that the charisma of the spellbound dragon changes those near it subtle to the point that no-one ever really tries to leave. Cattany, for all his self-serving intentions, becomes completely committed to the painting of the dragon. His scheme, that the dragon will allow itself to be painted in the interests of art, while the leaded paint poisons it, is nothing less than the dragon's very wish.

The Man Who Painted The Dragon Griaule is unneccessarily interrupted by quotations from various purported decements that, supposed to set the events in context, only direct from the atmosphere built up so well throughout the story, but apart from that it's a class effort from the likely winder of this year's. 'Best New Writer' John W. Campbell award.

So much for the 'okay' stuff; what about the rest?

Blued Moon by Connie Willis. Vaguely reminiscent of Vonnegut's Player Piano, but without any of the qualities that made that work successful or even, really, readable. If one were to sattle on one word to describe Blued Moon, that word might be 'contrived'. It is, essentially, a soap opera - boy meets girl - with the occasional touch ofout-of-place slapstick. A clumsy waste of words.

Silicon Muse by Hilbert Schenk is not very well written, but flashes of dark humour sustain the reader's interest in this tale of a computer built to write short stories. As a one-line joke it's enough, but it doesn't really bear up well to critical examination. John Sladek did all this much better in Roderick.

The Weigher is by Eric Vinicoff & Marcia Martin, and while not as mindless as Blued Moon or as erratically written as Silicon Muse, it is simply dull. An intelligent race of felines or canines with little holding them together as a society - daily fights to the death over trivial matters are commonplace they prove surprisingly (nay, impossibly) resistant to any form of social change which might mean that the property owners are safer. They're not more honourbound; they're just bloody.

Described as surprisingly lacking in verve, the story lugs its way from uninspired setting, through tiresome dullard intellectualising, to uninteresting conclusion. Human beings arrive on the planet, and they are a married couple, presumably living in domestic bliss while on their doorstep lurks an alien world. Later on, they are killed. The story ends. Ye gods.

Return To The Fold by Timothy Zahn is, by comparison, superior, but in fact it's just ordinary. A genetically altered person plying the star-routes for commercial purposes wishes to check out the planet he's come to for awhile. Dis be bad idea, say company executives, and the rest of the story concerns their attempt to either return him immediately to his ship, or have him discreetly killed if that fails. In the end, he heads back to outer space (on another playful jount of fifty years) little the wiser, but with the promise that next time he reaches somewhere, he'll probably be able to go surface-side. So much for being a starship captain one day. Ho hum. This is told with great lack of conviction, and is Timothy Zahn's self-celebration of his pure morality. Yeuch.

In summary, with the idea of voting in mind, I would list the stories as follows:

- 1) The Man Who Painted The Dragon Griaule Lucius Shepard
- 2) Bloodchild

Octavia Butler

Kim Stanley Robinson

3) The Lucky Strike 4) Return To The Fold 5) Silicon Muse

Timothy Zahn Hilbert Schenk

6) The Weigher

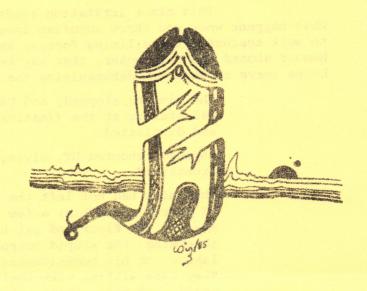
Eric Vinicoff & Marcia Martin

7) Blued Moon

Connie Willis

I hope I've shown here why I consider the three stories placed first, second and third noticeably better than the rest; the Shepard story is, I feel, the best, although there are people around who would rather slit their wrists than read what they consider any form of fantasy... my advice in this case is for you not to read Dragon Griaule just vote for it.

Roger Weddall



The Short Stories reviewed by Roger Weddall

The six stories on this year's ballot range from the dreadful to the excellent - so what is news about that? Well, Lucius Shepard is new as a writer to the field, and Kim Stanley Robinson hasn't been around that much longer, and again, as on the novelette ballot, these two writers dominate.

Salvador, by Lucius Shepard, is one of the superior stories on the list, but whether it belongs on a ballot of science fiction stories is another question; the plot is roughly as follows:

A patrol of American soldiers, fighting against a guerilla campaign in a tropical jungle setting, completely destroy a native village. Soon afterwards, the company sets up camp in an ayahuamaco, the local equivalent of a fairy circle; predictable results follow.

Set in El Salvador, it is essentially yet another thinly camouflaged piece on the subject of American involvement in Vietnam....

'Moody was slightly built, freckled, and red-haired; his eyes had the "thousand-yard stare" that came from too much war. Dantzler had seen winos with such vacant, lustreless stares. Moody's father had been in 'Nam, and Moody said it had been worse than Salvador because there had been no real commitment to win; but he thought Nicaragua and Guatemala might be the worst of all, especially if the Cubans sent in troops as they had threatened.'

This and other references to young war veterans committed to fighting a war without cause, and discussion of the after effects on those there, makes it plain that Shepard is writing with Vietnam in mind, but it being the case that this is so, and it being the case that Shepard is a good enough writer to describe what

he sees with clarity and enthusiasm, one wonders why he bothered to lump in the mysticism and not get on with the business of American youth cracking up under the drug-complicated strain of a war.

What causes Dantzler to accidentally kill most of his comrades would have been better left, and had more impact, as the crazed imaginings of a man close to the edge of insanity, than spirited away with explanations of Latin American mumbo jumbo.

This minor irritation aside, <u>Salvador</u> is a finely crafted story about what happens when you throw suburban innocents into an environment where they have to work against all civilising forces, and kill to survive. The moment of black humour aboard the helicopter, that may help this story to become a Hugo winner, helps serve to show how dehumanising the war has been on all involved:

'The singing stopped, and Dantzler saw that the whole platoon was staring at the ((native)) kid, their expressions slack and dispirited.

""Space!" shouted DT, giving the kid a little shove. "The final frontier!"

'The smile had not left the kid's face when he toppled out the door. DT peered after him; a few seconds later he smacked his hand against the floor and sat back, grinning. Dantzler felt like screaming, the stupid horror of the joke was so at odds with the languar of his homesickness. He looked to the others for reaction. They were sitting with their heads down, fiddling with trigger guards and pack straps, studying their bootlaces, and seeing this, he quickly imitated them.'

Crystal Spheres, by David Brin, is more identifiably science fiction, but no better for that fact. The idea that the Universe is some sort of giant, cosmic hatchery is, to be charitable, an old and tired one, and David Brin brings nothing novel to this telling of it. Each planetary system bearing a wateryworld is enclosed in a 'crystalsphere'... but let the author explain:

'The conclusion was obvious. The deathbarriers ((the spheres)) were destructible, but only from the inside!'

Having broken out of its shell, humanity has found it impossible to break into any others', and it has taken the good people of Earth some seven hundred years to leap to this startling conclusion: thus has David Brin made dullards of us all.

Eventually discovering another system with a broken crystalsphere, uninhabited, a Message is found left for all who follow after. That message, soon deciphered, gives the address of a conveniently located black hole where the entire race have of their own volition gone, following in the tracks of the four races who, earlier in the piece, broke out of their respective shells. There, in a time-distorted corner of space, all await the day when the galaxies will thrive with sentient races who've burst their bubbles. It seems that we are early hatchers.

A question that springs obstinately to mind is why earlier races have found it necessary or desirable to leave the Universe behind with nothing better in mind than doing specifically nothing, while orbiting said black hole. This question is obviously one that David Brin feels unhappy with as he gives the answer twice, in such a way that it is obvious he would hope the curious are dissuaded: when the main character of the story offhandedly mentions the inevitability of the human race also hightailing it for BlackHoleLand, instead of living, loving and just being, the best he can do is this:

'Oh, we could have waited around for a few billion years'... 'But by then we would have changed. We would have become an Elder-Race.'

This is not explained at any stage; one gets the impression that the reader is meant to gape in awe at such a phrase. My reaction was: 'yes, well?'

One lastpoint is DavidBrin's plentifuluse of adjectivenounclusters to hint at how language and people have changed over the centuries. All verycharming, I'm sure, but a strategy that doesn't reallywork.

With stories like this, as the story progresses we are supposed to learn more of, or gain some insight into the, gasp, secrets of the universe. As <u>Crystal Spheres</u> progresses everything makes less and less sense, including the fact that we are spending time reading it.

Yo ho ho... <u>Rory</u>, by Steven Gould, is worse. I don't particularly enjoy running people's efforts down, but this is artless. Forty years ago the 'trapped-in-a-derelict-spaceship-and-we're-running-out-of-air' idea was cliched; what is one to say about a clumsy retelling of this standard? Shake one's head in disbelief and turn to <u>Symphony For A Lost Traveller</u> by Lee Killough, one of the better efforts on the ballot.

The rains of an alien craft, long marooned, is found on one of the asteroids, and the space-age industrialist to have found it is eager to inspire others to take the grand, entrepreneurial leap out of the solar system and into outer space, searching for live aliens etc. etc..

To this end, the services of a composer of what could be called latterday music/video clips are engaged to write a promotional piece. Lee Killough's main character, a charming young airhead by name of Cimela Bediako, becomes caught up in the ridiculous question of whether her artistic integrity has been compromised. Of course it has, but who gives a hoot? Neither Lee Killough nor the reader who is too busy enjoying the omagery of golden-feathered aliens cavorting and swooping about on centre stage - or are they tentacled slugs with diamond faceted eyes? What do those aliens look like? The characterisation is a little lacking, but other than that it's an acceptably enjoyable story.

The Aliens Who Knew, I Mean, Everything, by George Alec Effinger, is unfortunately a disappointment. Great title, shame about the story. James Tiptree Jr. did this sort of story better than anyone; Effinger's prose is average where it should have been sparkling crisp. When the nuhp come to Earth with their quietly persistent, completely inflexible ideas of what constitutes perfection in any sphere of achievement (a.k.a. 'know it alls'), the president of the U.S.A. has some nice, droll lines - he isn't going to be caught flat by these, um, aliens - but the story just lacks punch. Groucho Marx, G.A.Effinger ain't. The story contains the fascinating line that the best piece of music ever composed - now, there's no point in arguing - is the '"score from the motion picture Ben Hur, by Miklos Rozsa."' Sorry, but the story is just second rate...

And so we come to the story I regard as the best of the lot - Ridge Running by Kim Stanley Robinson. Like Salvador, it may appear to be only marginally science fiction, but the elements of it that are, are more certainly an integral part of the story. Similarly, while the humour found in Salvador has been (intentionally) thrown in as a slap in the face to break the tension, in this story it arises more as a natural consequence of what has happened.

Joe has in the recent past been in a serious accident, and had part of his brain badly damaged. Advanced regrowth techniques have enabled those damaged parts of the cortex to be repaired, but many of the memories, the patterns, are gone. Now new pathways have to be forged, new memories laid in place. And the world can seem pretty strange and funny to someone seeing it for the first time: take the scene where Joe, Brian and Pete are trudging through the snow....

'Brian gets his pack on, turns and begins walking up the slope, bending forward to take big, slow strides. Watching him, Joe says to himself, "Humped, splayfoot packbeast, yes. House-backed creature. Giant snow snail. Yo ho for the mountains. Rum de dum. Rum de dum de dum."

Ridge Running is a science fiction story about someone who would have been a mental vegetable for life, before the advent of a significant medical breakthrough that, in our world, people are working on right now.

Joe is capable of holding a conversation, and not all of his memory has gone. When he and Brian and Pete reminisce together, they sound the same as would any group of three old friends. The carefully casual way in which the story is related, with such apparant ease, makes it hard to believe that it hasn't really all happened. The whole story rings with authenticity in a way that is rare in science fiction. Take, for example, the subject of bushwalking....

'Joe's pace is a bit faster than Pete's, and slowly he pulls ahead. He looks left, to the tree-filled valley, but slips a few times and turns his gaze back to the snow in front of him. His breath rasps in his throat. He wipes sweat from an eyebrow. He hums unmusically, then starts a breath-chant, muttering a word for each step: animal, animal, animal, animal, animal. He watches his snowshoes crush patterns onto the points and ridges of the pocked, glaring snow. White light blasts around the sides of his sunglasses. He stops to tighten a binding, looks up when he is done. There is a tree a few score yards ahead - he adjusts his course and walks again.'

To summarize once more, this is the order in which I would rate the nominated stories:

- 1) Ridge Running
- 2) Salvador
- 3) Symphony For A Lost Traveller
- 4) The Aliens Who Knew, I Mean, Everything
- 5) Crystal Spheres
- 6) Rory

Kim Stanley Robinson Lucius Shepard Lee Killough George Alec Effinger David Brin

Steven Gould

Letters of Comment

Okay, we admit it - people do write us letters and we do publish them (sometimes). I could go even further and say we positively encourage such letters. Axe to grind? Nice thing to say? Tell us about it. So much for the shameless pleading; here's this issue's crop:

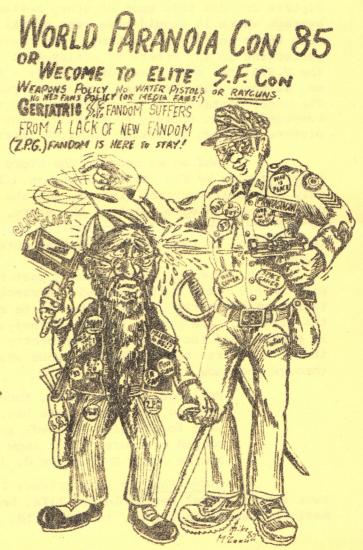
Dear Peter and Roger,

well I shall try to send some Artwork and Cartoons on Fandom as I and Media Fans see S.F.Fandom and as to why you have only 5 Fans in your MASQUERADE at World Con.

My cartoons are my way of doing a loc in a fanzine I am hoping you are not into censorshipe ((sic)) as you did with my last letter on Syncon 84. remember! So what about a Fair go in your zine, show that you are not taking sodes as I think you are...!?

Live Long and keep up with a great looking Fanzine $_{\mathrm{Mike}}$

P.S. If you are into censorshipe! send back my Artwork and I shall try a fanzine that is not I hope I am wrong on this....



((It's a little difficult to know how to reply to a charge like this. Your editors don't consciously indulge in censorship of material, but we have to be a little bit selective as to what we use and what we don't. Mike sent us a huge quantity of artwork which we weren't unappreciative of, but we do admit to having some trouble working out how to fit it in with Thyme's format. There were two basic problems - 1) most of it was full page size. Thyme can't use full page artwork except for use as covers. Otherwise, we like fillos around 1-page/eighthof-a-page size and will use work from almost anyone provided it uses about that much space. We tried - oh, how we tried - to photo-reduce some of the better pieces so that we could use them; alas, the line work became too fine in the reduction process. - 2) (dare I say it) a lot of it wasn't really very good. If you're going to indulge in comment by cartoon, it would be nice if the comment could be a little more pithy and a bit less obscure. A lot of the material received was either critical of Ausssiecon Two or supportive of media-fan issues. is obviously intended to be topical, but we haven't any supporting editorial material to go with the subject matter and make it topical. I realy don't see a cartoon as a substitute for a letter of comment. Cartoons tend to snipe at issues rather than illuminate them. If you're into promoting reasoned discussion (as Thyme is when it's talking about issues at all), you really need something more than just a fillo to base that discussion on.

((Them's our choices, and we make them. Sorry, Mike. If you want us to use your art, please send us some supporting articles (or organise for somebody else to)

((Whew. Well, it didn't take long for people to get around to commenting on last issue's reviews. Start off with the critical one:))

Dear Peter and Roger,

Having just finished Thyme #46 (Literary Supplement). I feel that a review needs to be done on the reviews that are in there.

I completed my formal schooling in 1981 and thought I had then seen the last of exam papers. Apparently I was wrong. Most of the reviews sound like they're attempting top marks in an English Lit. exam and there's a very fussy Professor marking the papers. I know that some of the nominated books are hard to plough through, but I would have expected the reviews to be easier.

Let's face it - the Hugos are awards for popularity and have little to do with literary merit. This was pointed out by George Turner at the beginning of his review of Neuromancer, but was then quickly forgotten in the rest of his review. If we stop pretending that the quality of writing is vital and attempting to analyse the works as if they were Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Hemingway or any of those others that we were forced to disect at school and just say whether we enjoyed them or not, we'd do much better. Most of those voting don't have literary degrees or may not have even done Lit. in Matriculation so let's get back to grass roots.

My other great criticism of the reviews is that I was under the impression that they were intended to give those unable to obtain the works more of an idea of who to vote for. Although I have read most of the novels, I don't believe that those who have not read them would be any the wiser. Perhaps I am wrong in this assessment - if someone who has not read them would be willing to comment, I'll be happy to be corrected. I do not intend to give my opinion of the novels here. I did, in fact, enjoy some of the books - purely as entertainment & not for literary merit, and it's on that basis that I will vote!

Karen Small

((Fair comment I suppose. Popularity seems to have a way of not reflecting literary merit. At the moment I'm still trying to come to grips with the popularity of that film Rambo. But, to be fair, reviewers are only people too.

They try to analyse what they personally like or didn't like about a story, but ultimately reviews are pretty subjective things. [inter-editorial exchange: "we'll have to talk about this one"] I suppose review style is a pretty subjective thing, too.

((Here's a slightly different view:))

Dear Roger/Peter,

I found your "Literally Supplement" an immensely helpful, enjoyable lead up to the Night of the Hugo. It's a real Community Service... thanks for doing it. ((Oh Van, you say the nicest things.... Mr Ikin also peforms his own form of Community Service by editing and producing Science Fiction, a magazine of reviews and criticism of sf,at 3 sques for \$10 or single issues \$4, from Dr V.Ikin, Dept. of English, University of W.A., Nedlands 6009. Recommended.

Van also writes with news of two new editions of Australian works....))

Uni. of Qld. Press is doing a reprint of Kelleher's Ditmar-winning Beast of Heaven (which comes under strong attack from Jenny Blackford and Damien Broderick in the Aussiecon issue of SF). For some strange reason, though, the book will only be reprinted in hardcover, and at a dear or price, I believe. So people may want to want to seek out a first-edition copy while there's still time.

Van Ikin's Australian SF is also being reprinted - in a new paperback edition at \$12.95 (which is also a higher price). The reprint corrects typos occurring in the first edition. The total Aussie print-rup of this book is now just under 5,000 copies, and there is a US edition of 6,000 copies (which is not selling well).

Van Ikin.

((On delivering this next letter, Bruce Gille pie commented that John Baxter mightn't be talking to him for a while if we ablished it.))

. Dear Peter and Burns,

re John Paxter's review of In The Heart Or In The Head

(Thyme #45):

When writing this review, why dissanter not attach a preliminary paragraph saying: 'For years I've really want d to get Turner, really crush him. Now he's written this book, and I'm back in A stralia, and have the chance, so I'll really put the boots into him...'

And, perhaps, tell us why he has such a vast store of malice, which he pours out on George Turner?

Only if Baxter wrote such a prel minary paragraph could we explain the inaccuracies and shonky reviewing to be f und in his review of In The Heart Or In The Head. The book has been sadly misr presented, especially as (which you did not point out in Thyme, editors) the eview appeared first on radio and so, we presume, had a wide audience.

I dare say George Turner can cor ect Baxter on the many inaccuracies of fact which appear in the review. My main oncern is with inaccuracies in reading, a more serious problem. What malicious stretch of the imagination, for instance, leads Baxter to speak about 'Turner's even-handed dislike of almost everyone and everything'? Is this all the reaction Turner gets for taking the trouble to look at his life and art directly only without illusions? Does Baxter demand that authors enclose a pair of rose-co cored glasses with each book - or is he just trying to score points off 'Turner in particular? Stephen Murray-Smith, during the launching of In The Heart. , spoke of Turner's remarkable evocation of an era and place (Melbourne during the 1920s and 1930s). Not soppy writing, of course, but the kind of evocation that can spring only from great affection. And no illusions. 'They lack any sense of place', says Baxter. He can't read!

Most inaccurate is Baxter's description of Turner's style as 'clunking and grating... grinding (its subjects) into the cement'. Quite the opposite is true. Australian literature would be wonderful indeed if even

one percent of our published books had the clear-sighted evocative readability of Turner's prose. Not a waste word in the whole book. Unputdownable. That's not me speaking... that's the comments I hear all the time from all the people who've taken the trouble to read the book.

And a book 'without pictures or conversations'? Well, only a very silly autobiographer claims to remember exact conversations, so Turner's book has no fewer than other autobiographies. But the book teems with the most wonderful images: Turner's harridan mother, Dr Floyd's school, Brian Aldiss painfully trying not to be compared with-Somerset Maugham, the previously undiscovered streets of Glasgow, Larry Niven pompously expounding his theory of junk literature at a Melbourne party, and George Turner's encounters with death. If there is nothing else to recommend In The Heart..., George's stories of his close approach to death and how he felt when nearly there make the book essential reading. Is it possible that Baxter likes writers to speak only of frightfully nice matters? Does he have no stomach for painful truths and relentless insights?

Baxter exposes the inadequacies of his viewpoint in nearly everything he says, but most tellingly when he castigates Turner as a man 'writing novels alone at night in rented rooms, supporting himself by day in a series of menial jobs'. Is this a sin to John Baxter? Now trivial his viewpoint must be. What should Turner have done... support himself by writing silly, empty journalism or flashy picture books or profitable, empty per novels? And how else does any real writer produce real novels, except by sitting in a room (empty for preference, as that's less distracting) with a typewalter and a blank piece of paper? What does Baxter do instead? Dictate his reviews to scads of secretaries while reclining by the pool?

It's hard to comment on Baxter's list three paragraphs, since he hasn't taken the trouble to analyse George Turner's ideas about science fiction which, after all, form more than half of the book. Again he runs down Turner for being 'stoic', which is Turner's most admirable quality. Again Baxter tells us more about his own inadequacies than about Turner's. Yes, Turner could be seen as 'a Stapledonian Jeremiah crying the Ar Talypse'. Surely we need more like him, especially as nearly everybody else in science fiction seems more like a sick clown trying to push back the tide; of disaster with a huge cloud of marshmallow.

I repeat: if Baxter is not convinced by the end of *In The Heart...* that George is a good writer, either he can't lead or he is determined to condemn George on any count possible, imagined or real.

Yours, Bruce R. Gillespie.

((The author (George Turner) also felt moved to comment.))

Dear Roger,

My usual advice to a writer faced with an adverse review is to study the thing with care, because only the ad reviews are likely to be useful to him, and to contradict it only if the reviewer is guilty of factual error. When John Baxter's review of In The Heart Or In The Head was given in the ABC programme, 'Books And Writing', it contained nothing of value to the writer, so I wrote it off as the silliness of an incompetent critic, unlikely to do any harm in an ephemeral talk delivered late at night. However, he has chosen to repeat the performance in print, so some notes seem called for to point out his errors of fact and his seeming inability to follow a plain text.

There is scarcely a single wholly accurate reference in his review, so only the more obvious can be singled out.

He sets the tone of his review with a swinging mis-statement: 'His small circle of friends is ringed by a larger circle of adversaries (earned mostly by his testy reviews of science fiction for the Mellourne Age).' Four points should be made: 1. He offers no evidence for the statement, which is unprofessional

in a reviewer. 2. My 'small circle' of friends is so unmanageably large that I am blessed with the uneasiness of not being able to give them the time and attention they deserve. 3. Only a non-personality would wish to be universally loved, but the 'larger circle of adversaries' exists only in Faxter's mind; to have no adversaries would be to be a non-person, but I preser to choose mine with the same care that I choose my friends. 4. I have yet to learn of any adversary created by the Age reviews.

This attempt to begin the review with mild character derogation, opening the way for saltier attacks later (such as the blunt stupidity of 'his even-handed dislike of almost everyone and everything, not least himself') reflects only a willingness to use what comes to hand without going to the trouble of checking the facts. Creating a fantasy and calling it fact is pretty poor professionalism.

Baxter asks, 'Why write autobiography?' He suggests reasons in order to discard them but has none to offer as an answer. The answer is that I did not write an autobiography but a memoir of those passages in my experience which bear on the relationship between fantasy and reality. For-professional readers seem to have taken the point; Baxter has missed it. Pechaps he missed the verse on the title page, where it is stated fairly explicitly.

'As for recrimination,' he writes, 'there is surprisingly little of that,' implying by default that there is some but that such a man should really have been boiling over with it. There is no recrimination at all; more perceptive critics have noted the fact as crucial to the book, which it is.

Baxter: 'He discards thirty years of working with a casual remark that... they are off the point.' It takes a thumping insensisivity to fail to notice that the remark is not 'casual' but deliberately planted and meaningful. Again, the key is in the epigraph.

Baxter: 'Life has been... devoid of meaning... at the conclusion of every passage he specifically forswears any general significance.' A professional critic should know that such a statement must be apported by evidence; since the statement is not true, there can be no supporting quotation. Baxter is here guilty of a distortion which, if not wilful, at least casts doubt on his ability to understand a text - a serious lack in a man who earns money by his discussion of the work of others. Failures of apprehension are inevitable and in the main forgiveable, but here we have altogether too many miding roughshod over text and meaning.

Baxter: 'Except in some brief recollections of Kalgoorlie, which he repudiates after returning to his early home...' '!epudiates'? The text specifically contradicts this; I wrote, 'The two realities coexist, but it is the childhood memory which dominates... Romance "recollected in tranquility" defies facts.' It is a point that could be missed, one imagines, only by a reader determined on destruction before he opened the book.

He continues the sentence with, '... his life progresses through a landscape of the intellect where fiction is the only reality.' So all the chapters of homelife in Melbourne, the Choir School, World War II, alcoholism, brushes with death and a dozen other matters form only a 'landscape of the intellect'? Again Baxter grossly distorts the central statements of the text. Why, one wonder? Is he in fact word blind?

Baxter: 'The world withing the head ecomes all the space there is... like Reardon's book in Gissing's novel, science fi tion itself becomes a vision of "absolute realism in the sphere of the ignobly dea nt".' The text specifically contradicts this, being more concerned with the ab olute un-reality of science fiction. Perhaps the mention of New Grub Street is designed to shore up an increasingly suspect impression of literacy.

Baxter: 'he would dislike the flashy, technocratic fiction of the pre-war years...' Actually I loved it, like any teenager, and said so in the book. Baxter, as a reader, seems to have seen only what would fit his thesis and made the words fit his will to destroy.

The same comment applies to his statement on my chapter entitled 'Cottage Industry Time?' He says: 'He offers a stoic recipe for the science fiction writer of the future... It's plainly in this character that Turner sees himself, a Stapledonian Jeremiah crying the Apocalypse.' (He seems to have misunderstood Stapledon too. If am not alone on the stricken field.) I see myself in no such character, and it would take a pretty thick head to imagine that I do on the basis of my suggestion that there is a valid area of science fiction that has not been seriously attempted yet.

My book contains an early chapter on Alice In Wonderland, so Baxter, as if to show that he too knows his Lewis Carroll, closes his review with an Alice quotation - a pretty vicious quotation, too, if you observe its application. Unfortunately he has managed to get the quotation wrong, as he has managed to get nearly every reference in his review wrong. Yvonne Rousseau pointed out the error on his own 'Books and Writing' programme, several months ago, and he hasn't bothered to correct it - a fair indication of the appallingly sloppy quality of his professional work as indicated here.

Happily, literacy is not dead; I have been universally more fortunate with other reviewers.

Yours, George Turner.

((Your editors views of the worth of *In The Heart Or In The Head* can be found in *Thyme* #45 also. In fairness, John Baxter's review was originally written for a popular, radio audience, not for print and, bearing thatin mind, it is possible that for radio presentation style is considered paramount rather than content, so hyperbole creeps in and analysis is not so rigorous. Not, as George and Bruce point out, this would mitigate errors of fact and misquotation, but we defend his right to have not enjoyed the book (even if we did).))

Received In The Mail Dept.

It's not every day that a recognisably historic document crosses our desk, but with the arrival of Bruce Gillespie's *The Metaphysical Review* (No.4, July'85) we have just that pleasure. Available for letters of comment, articles, reviews, traded fanzines ((selective, we suspect)), cover artwork, phone calls, postcards, lunches of comment or if you insist subscriptions, at \$5/copy or \$20/5 issues, *The Metaphysical Review* has quickly but without a fuss established itself as the best fanzine in Australia, this issue is 'Don Ashby's story of the Magic Pudding Club', the whole issue taken over with the story of this by now famous, fannish household of the 70s. Definitely worth a look. Mail etc. GPO Box 5195AA. Melbourne 3001, AUS.

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