

THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW

No. 11/12/13

November 1987

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE:

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LEE HARDING	TOM WHALEN
TERRY HUGHES	ANDREW WHITMORE

plus THE EDITOR and many more



I MUST BE
TALKING TO
MY FRIENDS

Page 3 says this is the November 1987 issue. It seems more like the November 1986 issue of... whatever it is. I call it a fanzine, but some will call it an encyclopedia. It's so long since The Metaphysical Review appeared that everyone has forgotten its name, and keeps calling it SF Commentary. Nearly all of this issue (of whatever-it-is) was written by November 1986, and most of it was on diskette by March. You know the problem: when I have the time to publish, I don't have the money (March 1987); when I have the money, I don't have the time (the rest of this year).

That's not a very original way to start, is it? Surely I could have written a hard-hitting essay on fannish ideology? (A Joseph Nicholas suggestion.) An in-depth survey on what's wrong with science fiction today? A fun-filled memoir of Eastercon '87? *Yawn*?

Back to the first paragraph...

Whatever virtues this issue might have, coherence is not one of them. Neither is up-to-dateness. Try as I might, I have not been able to extract a Big Theme from this stack of letters and articles. The oldest item is the long Russell Blackford article, which he finished in January 1986. I'm ashamed to face most of the other authors as well.

* * *

1987:

THAT WAS THE YEAR I HOPE WILL FINISH PRETTY SOON

I haven't much to say about 1987, except that many of the memorable bits are painful memories, and most of the unmemorable bits were connected with earning money. Elaine and I withstood the year quite well, but we had to find some way of coping with the death of Elaine's mother, the loss of A Prairie Home Companion, and the threatened loss of Solomon, our favourite cat. (Just in time he was diagnosed as having diabetes, and is now maniacally fit on about 10 units of insulin per day.) 1987 also saw the loss of Fred Astaire, John Huston, Ron Smith, James Tiptree Jr (Alice Sheldon), Terry Carr, Richard Wilson, Ted Cogswell, and others who died much too early.

I asked Elaine to write about her mother, but that's not something she feels she can do at this time. I've known Mrs Lois Cochrane only since 1977, and I'm ashamed to say that initially I misjudged her. My first impressions were of a traditional, and slightly old-fashioned, Australian Mother. Australian Mothers, according to my little category file, have strong and inflexible opinions on everything and are mainly devoted to neat gardens and houses. Elaine was quite shocked when she realized what I had thought of her mother. 'You should see the house at Glenroy!' she said. Eventually I did inspect the Cochrane residence. I discovered that Elaine's mother liked jungly gardens, cats (at one stage she had nine), and collecting things. The house was filled with a lifetime's accumulation of things, all of which were going to come in useful sometime.

Mrs Cochrane proved to be untraditional in lots of ways. Elaine was surprised to find, in early 1978, that not only had her parents guessed that she and I might start living together but that they already liked the idea. I've always been grateful for that. (Elaine and I are also grateful for the enormous help we received from the Cochranes when we were buying a house. It's a debt we can never repay.) Elaine's mother was always interested in new ideas, and was a staunch Labor supporter (although I suspect the latter-day antics of Messrs Hawke

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THE METAPHYSICAL REVIEW

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If X marks the box, you won't receive the next issue. SUBSCRIPTIONS are \$25 for 6 issues in Australia; US\$25 for 6 issues airmail; 15 pounds stg. for 6 airmail. Financial donations are also welcome at the moment, although this magazine is still available for The Usual.

(From Page 2)

and Keating tested her loyalty). She tried to investigate the world of science fiction, mainly because I was interested in the subject. Bad luck, George Turner; the science fiction parts of In the Heart or in the Head don't mean an awful lot to a non-sf person. But Mrs Cochrane finished George's book, and said nice things about the last chapter. She said less approving things about the play version of Damien Broderick's Transmitters -- but then, hearing swear words spoken on ABC radio was more than even she could stomach.

One day Elaine and I were wandering through the Botanic Gardens. Since I know nothing about plants, I asked Elaine the names of unusual specimens. Elaine had to confess that she didn't know the common names of most of them. Her mother knew them all -- but only the Latin names.

Elaine's mother died on 5 September, after being in intensive care at the Royal Melbourne Hospital for nearly three weeks. An operation for bowel obstruction had been successful, but she was not able to recover afterwards. For a bit over a week she seemed to improve, but sank rapidly after yet another operation. Although the death certificate does not say so, she actually died of rheumatoid arthritis; arthritis had led to the collapsing spine which caused her prolapse; the hysterectomy led to the adhesions which obstructed her bowel. And, as rheumatoid arthritis suppresses lymphatic production, her immune system could not respond adequately to fight the post-operative infection.

My main reaction was of disbelief. Grief sets in later. Mrs Cochrane had become an important part of my life, and suddenly she wasn't there. Mr Cochrane is left in a large house with seven cats and two dogs, and Elaine has been left without her best friend.

The funeral was as doleful as all other funerals, but made memorable because more than 90 people, mainly from the Glenroy area, attended. Particular thanks to John Bangsund and Yvonne Rousseau, who were able to be there. We thought we were being unemotional and brave until the funeral procession left the undertaker's chapel. Mrs Cochrane had been a voluntary worker at the local primary school -- she had listened to children reading. When we passed the school, all the pupils were lined up outside, and they seemed as distressed as we were.

I didn't want to be too doleful in starting this issue, especially as there are lots of light moments within. But when faced with the deaths of a former Famous Fan Editor and Good Person (Ron Smith), two former subscribers (Richard Wilson and James Tiptree Jr) and a former faithful reader (Terry Carr), I feel deprived.

Ron Smith had been the editor of Inside magazine when he lived in America. After he came to Australia in the early 1960s he became a publisher and, later, the proprietor of several bookshops which became social centres for their readers. Ron died after a very long illness.

Terry Carr leaves such an enormous gap in the field that he must leave many people -- friends, editors, and publishers -- wondering what to do without him. Along with Ted White he seemed to be one of the few people who had a finger on the pulse of fandom. In the professional field, he, Dave Hartwell, Robert Silverberg, and a very few others have tried to keep up standards in science fiction, although they've had a hard time in recent years. Until his death at the age of 50, Terry seemed to be winning, as he was maintaining the Ace SF Specials, the Best SF of the Year and the Universe series. And now? After Terry, the deluge (Volume 3 of a six-part series).

* * *

Let me get really maudlin now. Some losses seem unbelievable. Some leave one in mourning. But the loss of weekly doses of A Prairie Home Companion is both galling and appalling, more like suffering the withdrawal of a favourite drug than the loss of a loved one. How could Garrison Keillor do this to us? How could ABC-FM do this to us? I can understand Keillor wanting to change his lifestyle after 20 years of radio broadcasting, but I cannot forgive ABC-FM for failing to run programs from the 11 years of PHC that were taped before it was heard in Australia. If I lived in America, I could still hear reruns of PHC on the Public Broadcasting network. Here? Nothing. Outrage!

I've paid tribute to Garrison Keillor when answering Joseph Nicholas's letter in this issue. For the moment, I'd like to thank Denny Lien, who sent me the June issue of Minnesota Monthly, which includes a 124-page 'Farewell to A Prairie Home Companion' supplement. This tells everything about Keillor and PHC except reliable ways to get it back on the air again. The issue has pictures of Margaret Moos, Butch Thompson, and Peter Ostroushko, wonderful tales about the early days of PHC, tributes from many of the people who've appeared on the show, and 'Hello, Love: A Prairie Home Companion Sampler'. I presume copies of the supplement are still available for US\$5 from 'Farewell', PO Box 70870, Dept. 243, St Paul, MN 55170, USA.

Special thanks also to the people who sent me, out of the blue, copies of Lake Wobegon Days (Ralph Ashbrook, Brian Earl Brown) and Happy to Be Here (Terry Hughes, Joyce Scrivner). Don't worry; the spare copies have been put to good use. (Penguin finally got around to distributing the Faber editions of both Keillor books in Australia, but didn't make much of a fist of publicizing them.)

Some other thank yous, while I think of them, to:

- * Mark Linneman, who made it possible for us to see parts of Victoria we would never have visited otherwise (northern and central Victoria), and is a much-appreciated all-round good friend and restaurant companion.
- * Terry Hughes, for sending me CDs as well as books, and (so far) refusing to take payment.
- * Don Keller, who sent me two very much appreciated records (including the Davis/LSO version of Berlioz's Symphonie Fantastique).
- * Paul Heskett, who sent Tyler's Celestial Navigation.
- * Doug Barbour, who sent me an original copy of Engh's Arslan, the best sf novel of the 1970s (I'm since found out that Arbor House has reprinted it, but didn't send me a review copy).
- * Grant Stone, who unearthed my 1986 Ditmar Award from some dank Western Australian vault and sent it to me.
- * Syd Bounds, who sent a copy of LAM (initials for London Australia Magazine), published for Australians living in London. I wish something like this had been available when I was visiting London.

* * *

Now that we've got to the nice-and-cuddly part of this editorial, let me mention, not too obviously of course, that in February 1987 I turned 40 years old. Please don't send commiserations; I'm nearly 41 now. Elaine and I were going to hold a party to hoist me over the hill, but decided against it. For a start, I don't like parties. For another start, I don't like parties in February, when the temperatures are high and the humidity even higher. We made a list of people with whom we hoped to dine at King Wah restaurant. When we got to about 30 people, and they all accepted, we realized that we had left off the list at least another 40 people. *Sigh* If those other 40 people have stopped talking to us, we deserve it... but haven't noticed yet. The people we did invite were generally (a) about my age or even older than I am; and (b) people I've known for 15 years or longer. This ancient-folks' evening went very well, until I made the mistake of trying to make a thank-you speech. I was sure I had composed a wonderful little piece that would succinctly sum up the wonderful qualities of the birthday guests. Instead I said: 'It occurred to me today to wonder...', hesitated, garbled something or other, and sat down. John Bangsund thought the first sentence summed it all up perfectly. I thought it was one of Great Gillespie Embarrassing Moments. Thanks for the presents, by the way; I really enjoyed spending all those vouchers on CDs.

* * *

Did anyone mention CDs? as one King Charles's head might have said to another. How did we take so long to get to this subject? Confession time, now. I have spent a fortune on CDs this year. I shouldn't have, and I know I might have emptied the Metaphysical Review piggy

bank permanently. But you should see what's coming out now! At last EMI is starting to release some of its vast back catalogue, including some Beecham, Baker, and Barbirolli recordings. Brash's has sales from time to time, when it knocks down the prices of classical CDs by half. Every now and again Mark Linneman drives us out to JB Hi Fi, East Keilor, where prices are much lower than in Melbourne. Meanwhile, the people at Readings Records in Carlton dangled the American CD catalogue in front of me, and immediately I ordered 10 pop CDs that are unavailable in Australia. Neil Young's and Joni Mitchell's back catalogues are finally being released. Edsel Records (UK) has even released two Byrds albums on CD. Best purchases so far this year include Richard and Linda Thompson's Pour Down Like Silver, Solti's version of Berlioz's La Damnation de Faust and the great Davis version of Berlioz's L'Enfance du Christ. What next? Maybe even Romeo et Juliette and Benvenuto Cellini? And yes, I yielded to temptation, and bought Les Troyens on CD when Brash's dropped the price from \$120 to \$71. (Which might give Americans some idea of how crippling CD prices are here.)

Since I'm talking of my favourite subject, let's start the letter column:

FRANK DENTON

14654-8th Avenue SW, Seattle, Washington 98166, USA

I've been particularly interested in your writing about music and records. The CD is, I'm afraid, the most dastardly invention in the music world in modern times. It can threaten marriages. I've collected records all my life, and I thought that the advent of the LP was wonderful. The CD is even worse. I've bought more classical music in the last year than in all the years of my collecting. I'm trying new composers, and finding new recordings of never-before-recorded works of composers who have been favourites for a long time. Leos Janacek is an almost unknown composer who suddenly has a number of works available. There are some recordings of Respighi works that have been recorded before. I think it's wonderful. So keep writing about music and records all you like. I enjoy it greatly.

(20 December 1986)

CDs need not threaten your marriage, only your sources of credit. Even Elaine can become excited about CDs. During the recent Brash's and Discurio sale, when CDs were marked down to \$20 each (from \$28), she spent a small fortune on the little devils. She discovered a very late eighteenth-century composer named Jommelli, and a Hungarian operatist named Erkel. And Sinopoli's version of Rigoletto was extra-cheap because it lacked cover information. (Someone must have nicked the original box without realizing there were no discs inside. Maybe somebody just likes collecting pretty CD boxes.)

LEE HARDING

PO Box 198, Fern Tree Gully, Victoria 3156

I stand in awe of anyone who can spend more than \$2000 in eight months on CDs. I haven't walked into a record shop for more than a decade. I used to tape a lot of music from FM, but where we live the reception is so poor I gave that up several years ago.

What I manage to do occasionally is fossick around in bargain basement bins in big department stores -- Myer's in Melbourne and Grace Brothers in Sydney, to name two -- where I pick up the odd bargain cassette for \$4.99. In this modest price range the Decca Viva! label is exceptional value; I recently purchased a collection of Erik Satie pieces conducted by Bernard Herrmann, and the Schumann Symphonies 3 and 4, conducted by Georg Solti with the Vienna Philharmonic -- excellent performances and sixties-quality sound.

Reading between the lines, it would appear you're as thoroughly seduced by the new recording technology as Bangsund and I were in the sixties, when stereo records first became available. The sleepless nights we endured then, plagued by the horrors of acoustic feedback and taunted by the inability of our new cartridge to track at less than one gram...

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ANDREW WHITMORE usually works as a secondary teacher deep in the Western District of Victoria, but has taken a year off to write fiction. Andrew keeps submitting wonderful novels to the Norstrilia Press triad, two of whom keep rejecting them. Despite this, Andrew has won a William Atheling Award (for his first long essay on D. G. Compton) and a Ditmar Award (for 'Above Atlas His Shoulders', Dreamworks, Norstrilia Press, 1982).

THE CALL OF
THE UNKNOWN ENQUIRER:

the ANDREW WHITMORE letter

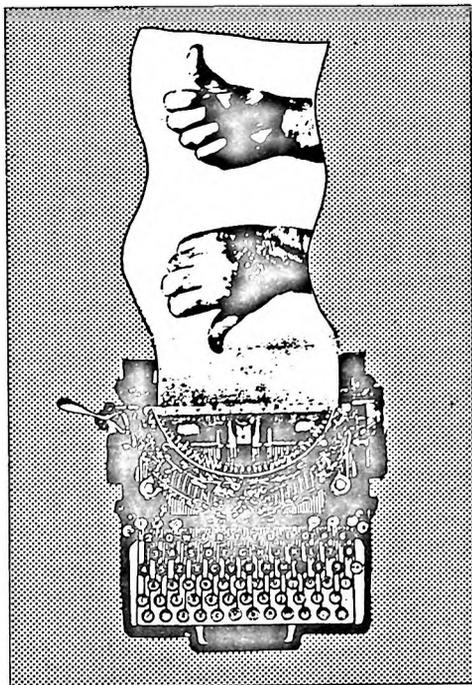
(PO Box 11, Hawkesdale, Victoria 3287
27 May 1986)

Oh my god! No! No! Not the Big Red X!
Anything but that! What can I have done to
deserve such a heinous fate?

The answer, of course, is all too obvious. Apart from bumping into you a few times at Aussiecon II (when you always seemed to be pretty busy), I haven't really been in touch for a while, although I hadn't realized it had been so long. The main reason I couldn't get in touch over the Christmas holidays is that Mary, Lauren, and I were getting ready to travel overseas. We left 7 January and

arrived back two days ago. I'll merely say that our trip, which took in Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, and England (with a brief stopover in LA on the way home), was the most marvellous experience of my life (Mary's too) and, though it cost us an arm and a leg (leaving us, to stretch the anatomical metaphors, up to our eyebrows in debt), it was well worth every cent. Strangely enough, the two most alien places we visited were at the beginning and very end of our trip -- Cairo and LA. Both, in very different ways, were as far removed from life in Australia as one can possibly imagine.

I don't think I've ever actually complimented you on any of your magazines -- mainly, I think, because I always imagined that you must know full well how good they are and don't need me or anyone else to tell you. [But] I'm sure that if you didn't expend all your creative energy on such productions, you'd find it far easier to write fiction. I know that the amount of fiction I can produce is inversely proportional to the amount of other sorts of writing that I am doing at any particular time. For example, if I have a lot of work to do on the school magazine, or am writing letters to people, or making up some lengthy interactive assignment for school, I find it hard to do any fiction at all, even though I still have the same amount of time in which to do so. The question, of course, is whether you would prefer to write, or produce something like The Metaphysical Review. I, for one, would be saddened to live in a world without Bruce Gillespie fanzines.



I would take issue with your statement that veterans of the 1975 Workshop have all lapsed into ignominious silence. I, for one, certainly haven't been idle, although, for all the good it's done me, I might just as well have spent the time repeatedly hitting myself on the head with a brick. Since the workshop I've written seven novels, all of which I've sent to Cherry Weiner (whom I laughingly refer to as my agent). She submitted four of them to various American publishers, to no great effect, and rejected the other three as 'uncommercial' (including the last two that I sent her -- which seems to suggest that I am getting worse rather than better). I've also sent novels independently to Faber & Faber, Avon, Macmillan, Hutchinson, Hyland House and Norstrilia Press. If, as Lee Harding suggests, 'Persistence, persistence, persistence...' is the key to success, then I just wonder how long one must actually persist before concluding that there must be some other, deeper malaise at work. Occasionally, of course, something comes along to boost my spirits and spur me on to greater efforts. The sale of my story to Dreamworks prompted a surge of energy that saw me completing a novel in about six weeks, when previously I'd been unable to finish anything at all. Winning the Ditmar had a similar effect, and coming back from our trip (coupled with Aussiecon II) has rekindled my enthusiasm once more. Sooner or later, I'm going to crack it, if it's the last thing I do.

Speaking of Lee Harding. I assumed you saw his comments in Locus about Australian sf. I wish I knew what he meant about 'cojones'. What, precisely, are the symptoms of gross cojone-deficiency in one's prose? Where may one look for paragons of cojone-intensive sf? In Lee's own work, perhaps? It seems a strange thing to say in a forum like Locus. Perhaps Lee is running out of enemies and is trying to engender a few more round the place.

I am pleased to see that you sympathized with the 'unknown questioner during the Wolfe Question and Answer panel at Aussiecon'. The truth may now be revealed: the 'unknown questioner' was my own humble self. I'm not sure that I got my question across clearly enough (which is why I submitted it twice in different forms) but, in any case, Gene seemed disinclined to answer it directly on either occasion. I realize that he has a perfect right to imagine any distant future that he pleases, but what concerns me is that he appears to have opted for the same autocratic form of government that is to be found in virtually any other 'far future' that you care to examine. Silverberg's Lord Valentine, Vance's Connatic, Asimov's Hari Seldon -- not to mention the plethora of one-man-against-the-universe-type heroes one encounters in untold numbers of novels -- all seem to suggest that the 'common man' is incapable of guiding his own destiny, and that the 'masses' require someone to tell them what to do for society to function effectively. No wonder people like Thatcher and Reagan are in power. What my questions tried to get at was the way in which Wolfe creates a certain historical background in an effort to legitimize the iniquitous social set-up of the Commonwealth. That is, he makes the Ascians so bad, so thoroughly, inhumanly evil, leagued with supernatural monsters whose aims are nothing less than the extinction of the entire human species, that tyranny seems a small price to pay for their destruction. Reagan does something disconcertingly similar in his portrayal of the Soviet Union as an 'evil empire', or his justification for supporting the Contras in Nicaragua. This may seem a small quibble, perhaps the symptom of ideology intruding unnecessarily into criticism, but I do find it disturbing that so many sf writers, in portraying the future, retreat into the past, recreating various feudal societies rather than seeking to envisage a way of life as different from our own as Western civilization is from medieval times. I suspect that many sf writers share a similar background (a point that struck me while reading Hell's Cartographers years ago). Isolated in childhood, their lives revolving around books and fantasy, often intellectually superior to those around them and resenting the fact that this counted for little among their fellows, they might easily come to conceive that they know better than 'ordinary' people, and that, given the chance, they might resolve all the world's ills if only everyone else would just follow their instructions. It seems odd that America, the alleged home of democracy, should have created a literature that is characterized by a marked distrust of democratic principles. Apart from Delany and Le Guin, how many authors have imagined a future in which people are actually trusted to guide their own destiny?

I would have liked to raise these points on the Gene Wolfe panel, in which I'd originally

been asked to participate. However, since school didn't finish until Friday, I couldn't get to the convention for that panel. Instead, I was on a panel called 'Writing and Selling SF in Australia' which, given my credentials, was about as appropriate as having a polar bear lecture on the dangers of skin cancer. As a result, I said not a word for the entire duration of the panel. This, incidentally, was the panel where Ken Methold accused Australian sf of being too in-groupish and written by academics and dilettantes. I was really in no position to argue, since whatever I said was bound to sound like special pleading, but basically I agree with what Ursula said back at Aussiecon I -- either you do the best you can, or you sit back and emit garbage. The rest is up to the whims of the marketplace.

For all that I admire Ursula as a person and a writer, I found myself agreeing with much that Franz Rottensteiner said, especially when he described much of her work as 'ethically and morally commendable, but essentially shallow'. I think this perfectly sums up my reaction to her recent fiction -- particularly The Eye of the Heron and some of the other stories Rottensteiner mentions. I sometimes think that Ursula is simply too nice to write a truly great book -- it takes a bastard like Faulkner or a neurotic like Kafka or Lowry to look squarely into the heart of the human condition and set it down unwaveringly on the page.

I must agree that sf is currently in a pretty bad state. Like you, I survey the shelves of specialty sf shops in dismay, desperately searching for something readable among the dross. Even Barrington Bayley has begun to fail me recently, although I remain staunchly loyal. Both of his recent books seem to lack the boisterous imagination that has so appealed to me in works like The Grand Wheel, Collision with Chronos, The Garments of Caen, etc. Still, I was pleased to see that The Zen Gun won the Japanese 'Hugo' for best foreign novel. It's not his best, but still immeasurably superior to the junk the Americans produce.

I must now admit that I did a very silly thing while overseas. I found a copy of Delany's Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand in an Italian bookshop [*brg* Not Gian Paolo Cossato's in Venice?]* and, grievously deceived by rave reviews that I'd read in various magazines, actually thought that he might finally have come good again. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Although not quite as dreadful as Dahlgren, Triton or those horrendous Neveronya books, Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand is certainly grindingly tedious. Delany may have coined the term 'expository lump', but in this novel he claims proprietorial rights in full. The book is full of page upon page of dreary, turgid exposition, often all but unintelligible. I wish I had it here to quote some particularly bizarre examples, but it's still tucked in with a whole mass of books I posted home from England -- although god knows why I bothered keeping it.

I did, however, read some enjoyable books on the trip. The best of them was Ancient Evenings by Norman Mailer. As a piece of 'world building' it far excels anything that sf has managed to produce. Ancient Egypt is a far more alien place than any planet conceived by sf writers, and Mailer absorbs the reader in his world totally. I enjoyed it immensely.

Less spectacular are Gore Vidal's historical novels, especially Creation and Julian. They're rather light reading, I suppose, but I enjoyed his ironic, magisterial style and, of course, travelling in Greece and Italy has rekindled my archaeological interests, which have been largely dormant since university.

Another interesting book was Chaim Potok's history of the Jews, Wanderings. I particularly enjoyed its extensive coverage of early Jewish history (the Age of the Patriarchs, etc.), which are usually ignored in standard works of Jewish history, since it is assumed that the reader knows the Old Testament backwards.

Lately, I also thoroughly enjoyed Dark Quartet, a biographical novel about the Brontes. As you know, I revere Wuthering Heights, and walking on Haworth Moor in the rain and drizzle up to Top Withins (the reputed archetype for Wuthering Heights) was one of the highlights of our trip. Anything that served to heighten this feeling of intimacy with the Brontes was obviously bound to appeal.

I find that I've forgotten most of the traditional formalities, like enquiring after your health. We're all healthy enough, if you excuse jet lag and near-terminal depression at returning to school and finding that nothing whatsoever has changed. I'm not even sure that the kids realized I'd been away.

One last point. I was saddened to hear that most of the stories submitted for the Aussiecon contest that were written on word processors were pretty dreadful. I've just bought myself one: if we extrapolate from your observations, I may well have just driven the last nail into my coffin. Still, if Piers Anthony and Jack Chalker can sell their stuff, then perhaps being 'bloody awful' is the secret of success that has eluded me all these years.

brg During a long and dispiriting recent phone conversation, Damien Broderick made uniformly uncomplimentary remarks about my most recent piece of fiction. I could hardly complain, since I had asked Damien how I might improve the piece. Given that he thought it unimprovable, I asked, 'Given that I'd like to write fiction, how do you think I should go about it?' To which he replied (and I paraphrase): 'Write three or four hours a day every day for about ten years, and you might start to write well.'

Which is, of course, the kind of advice I've had from other people, including Gerald Murnane. Two things occurred to me: (1) Even if I began to write fiction very well -- perhaps even if I were already writing half-way well -- would Damien Broderick like anything I wrote, given that we have opposite ideas about the nature of fiction?; and (2) Do I want to spend all that time learning to write fiction, when I could be publishing fanzines instead?

The second question decided the answer. Let's face it: the real reason why I want to write fiction is to justify my existence in the world. If you produce fanzines, you are the lowest of the low. Fanzines cost money. Writing fiction earns money. For good upright moral reasons I should be writing fiction. For the good of my soul I should write fiction.

But when I sit down to write fiction I feel an appalling sense of failure, a knowledge that I have no self-confidence in this field. However, the first time I ever sat down to type up a fanzine, I had absolute self-confidence. I knew that, no matter how bad the current results and no matter how many people disliked the result, this is what I should be doing, and this is what I do best. That feeling stays the same.

But how does one raise the money to publish fanzines? This question haunts every day of my life. My current solution -- earning money from a job that is unsatisfying and energy-consuming -- is no solution.

But take your case, Andrew. No doubt every time you sit down at the word processor to get stuck into more fiction, you know this will be greatest thing you ever did. No matter how many times it is rejected; no matter who dislikes it. And I agree with you. The other two members of Norstrilia Press don't. There's no accounting for tastes.

I'm glad you revealed yourself as the Unknown Enquirer during the Wolfe Question and Answer Panel. Now we know the unknown questions, maybe somebody will provide the unsuspected answers. *

The search for this article by John Bangsund proved nearly as absorbing as the article itself when I found it. I remembered that 'One Flash and You're Ash, Buster' was somewhere in the first few mailings of ANZAPA (Australia and New Zealand Amateur Press Association), but I hadn't realized that it was in the very first mailing -- 10 October 1968, when it was still called APA-A, and its Official Editor was Leigh Edmonds, who has only recently dropped out after nearly eighteen years of continuous membership. The members then were John Foyster, John Bangsund, Peter Darling, Ron Clarke, Gary Woodman, Bruce Gillespie, Paul Stevens, John Ryan, Gary Mason, and Leigh Edmonds. John Bangsund and I are the only two who are still members (although we have both dropped out at one time or another), Gary Woodman has disappeared altogether, John Ryan died a few years ago, and most of the rest are semi-gaffiated or removed to other kinds of fandom. (Bernie Bernhouse, also now gaffiated, was a member in October 1968 but did not have a contribution in the first mailing.)

One of the reasons why most Australian sf fans have joined ANZAPA at one time or another, and why many have stayed members for long periods of time, is that in this manner they get to read the works of John Bangsund. As you can see from the following, John acted as recorder of Melbourne fannish happenings during the 1960s and early 1970s. Among the people who appear most often in his pieces from that time are Diane, John's first wife, and Paul Stevens, who is now married and living in Western Australia and who was then one of the leading members of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, especially its Fantasy Film Group. Also mentioned in the following article is the Astor Theatre which, after lying derelict for some years, has been redecorated and is now one of the main repertory cinemas in Melbourne.

ONE FLASH AND
YOU'RE ASH, BUSTER

by John Bangsund

(Reprinted with permission from The New Millennial Harbinger, No. 1, October 1968)

Paul Stevens tracked down a bloke who owns an almost complete run of the old Universal serial Flash Gordon. For various reasons I will not identify him; let's call him (hm, what's something original?) Mr X.

With Paul I visited Mr X to see if there was any chance of screening the film for the MSFC's Fantasy Film Group. There was indeed. Mr X stated his price and terms, all of them eminently reasonable. They included the condition that he be allowed, if not to show the film himself (since he is a qualified professional projectionist), at least to sit in the projection booth with his precious film.

(I pause, lest there be any misapprehension, to point out that Paul is the Film Group Secretary and I his typist, chauffeur, and witness, when available.)

Paul had already discussed with the owner of the Astor Theatre, St Kilda, the possibility of hiring the place for Film Group screenings, and had reached an agreement with him. I shall refer to him as Mr Thanatos; not to protect the innocent, but because I can't remember his Hellenic-type name. (Mr Poneros? No, I'm guessing.) Paul had also discussed the matter with Mr Thanatos's projectionist, a septuagenarian named (no covering up here; he can fend for himself) Wally Waterford, and failed miserably to come to any agreement with him on certain points. Mr Waterford, you see, hates horror films, and finds it difficult to discern the difference between science fiction and horror. Paul at one point rather tactlessly mentioned that he would love to screen Frankenstein sometime -- and was nearly ejected bodily from the

theatre. Now you know, and I know, that Frankenstein is a science fiction story, a quite important and eminently respectable literary work that has supplied the basic plot for a myriad other stories since, and that it is worthy of study no matter in what form it is presented. But try explaining that to a seventy-two-year-old average Australian illiterate to whom the word Frankenstein means horror-monsters-JDs-wrecking-theatres-at-midnight-shows.

At first we were under the impression that we would be watching sixteen episodes of a serial, but Mr X advised us that he had spliced the episodes, cutting out the introductory sections, so that they made one continuous film of just over two hours' running time. Paul was relieved to hear this, and only hoped that too many people wouldn't turn up at 7.30, the advertised time.

At various times on the day of the screening I had the feeling that something would go wrong. We would have an attendance of fourteen and Paul would have to flog his sf collection to pay the bills; or four hundred, mostly local larrikins, and they'd wreck the joint. Or that somewhere in the film there'd be a monster and Wally W. would stop the film and order everyone out. You know the sort of bad feeling you get when you've taken a risk on something, and you're terribly confident of it working out, but as the time draws near... like that.

On behalf of the Club, Paul had taken a risk -- a big one. Club finances for years have been minimal -- at the best of times we've been hard put to it to find even the modest rent for the cobwebbed firetrap we are pleased to call the Clubroom -- and part of the problem has been the Film Group. More often than not the Group's 16-mm screenings at the Club have lost money -- and who can be blamed for staying away from our primitive shows, with their dusty, draughty, cigarette-smoke-laden auditorium, rickety old seats and fuggy sound system? Deciding whether or not to attend a show at the Club has been almost as difficult as deciding whether to watch a film on commercial television.

So all honour to Paul for taking the risk of arranging a full-scale 35-mm show in a proper theatre.

By 7.30, after a last-minute panic when we realized that a programme-cum-propaganda sheet hadn't been prepared and tore about typing stencils, running them off and thanking the fannish ghods that we hadn't hired a theatre on the other side of town, it looked as though Paul's gamble was about to pay off. There were about sixty people in the Astor's foyer within a few minutes of our arrival, and half an hour later more than double that number.

Mervyn Binns was signing people up as Film Group members almost as fast as he could write, and I was folding the propaganda sheets and wondering where the hell all these people were coming from, when there was a bit of a commotion and I observed that Paul had turned a deep shade of blue. Diane came over to me. 'Bloody projectionist,' she said. 'He's locked the film in a box and gone home!'

Well, I'm not too sure whether that bit actually happened or whether Mr Waterford just threatened to go home, but the fact is that for the next half an hour all seemed lost. Mr Waterford had half a dozen stories, and none of them seemed terribly reasonable. He wasn't allowed to have anyone in the box with him -- it was against the law -- and even if we had arranged for Mr X to be in the box (which he claimed we hadn't) it was still illegal. The film was of the old nitrate type -- he couldn't use it unless there was a fireman on duty in the theatre. Mr X wouldn't let him run through the film before showing it, obviously proving (to Mr W.'s satisfaction, anyway) that it must be in a dangerous condition.

The arguments drifted down to us from upstairs. We appealed to Mr Thanatos to honour his (verbal, worse luck) contract with us and proceed with the show. He just shrugged. He had hired the theatre to us for the night; we were in the theatre; he could do nothing more.

Eventually Paul had to tell the audience that the show could not proceed 'due to technical

difficulties', but that if everyone was willing to go to another theatre, Mr X was willing to show us the film. Everyone was willing. It takes more than a lunatic projectionist to upset a dedicated film fan. So, as Mr X busied himself in a phone booth across the road trying to find us another theatre, the crowd milled around in the foyer. Some discussed incendiary techniques, some pondered methods of killing theatre managers and projectionists which would look like accidents afterwards, others -- about thirty of us -- debated the logic of the situation with Mr Waterford who (with incredible foolhardiness, if he really believed we would destroy the theatre at the first sight of a monster) descended to the foyer. 'I've been a paratrooper, luv', said some character we'd never seen before to Diane, 'and me mate's a commando. Who do you want us to do in? Just say the word.' Diane was tempted, but wisely refrained from saying the word.

Then a delightfully absurd thing happened. Mr X returned and mounted the staircase to address us. Mr Waterford followed him, and they stood, on either side of the banister, like a couple of rival politicians on the hustings, each telling us in the most dignified terms why the other was, if not a dangerous lunatic, at least a nasty spoilsport. We learnt for the first time that in examining a cartoon that was to be shown before the main feature, Mr Waterford had managed to break the film in four places. Naturally, Mr X would not trust him with his priceless film. 'Priceless my foot!' said Mr Waterford. 'You can imagine what condition the film is in if he won't even let me look at it!' And so on and so forth, with all of us cheering and booing alternately, just like a matinee crowd.

Finally we all piled into cars and headed off for Toorak, where Mr X had found for us an obliging friend with a private theatre. Which seated forty-eight people. Somehow we packed in, about a hundred of us. On the way in, so they tell me (Diane and I were among the last to arrive), one chap stopped everyone with a melodramatic gesture and said, 'Okay, I'm the projectionist here, and if there's anyone in the theatre I'm not showing the film!'

(We found out later that this man's name is Fred Smoot. He enjoyed himself hugely and swore he would be using the night's incidents for a sketch in his show at the Chevron. We have no way of telling whether he did, nor to what effect. Sf fans don't patronize night clubs to any large extent. I mean, you're either the kind of person who goes to night clubs or the kind of person who pays 70c for Analog. It's hard to be both.)

Flash Gordon was fun. We knew it would be. The film was in superb condition. But... well, it was all a bit of an anti-climax after the entertainment we'd already had that night.

The most important result of Paul's magnificent gamble is, of course, that the Melbourne Fantasy Film Group now lives. Not only does the Club look like having a financial backer, but the Group itself could become quite a significant thing in its own right. We have booked the Plaza Theatre at Newport for our next show on 17th October, and we hope that in time Newport, Vic., will become as synonymous with fantasy films as Newport, R.I., is with jazz.

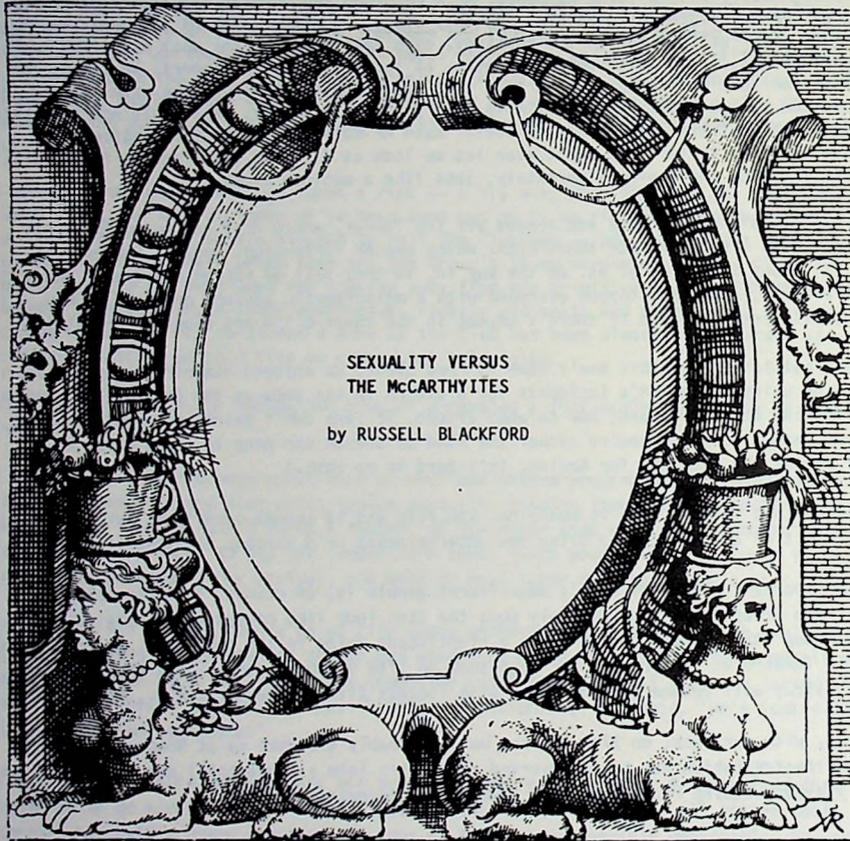
Naturally, with our luck, on 17th October we'll probably all turn up at Newport and find that the theatre (which has been converted downstairs into a dance hall) has been hired out for an Italian wedding reception, or a Seventh Day Adventist ball, or...

-- John Bangsund, October 1968

brg So it has been a long time since 1968. Analog no longer costs 70 cents per copy, people have stopped being afraid of horror movies, and the videocassette player and the repertory cinema have made the Fantasy Film Group redundant. The old Melbourne Science Fiction Club no longer exists; we had to leave it in 1971 (because, interestingly enough, the Fire Department twigged that we were showing nitrate films there), and the 'cobwebbed firetrap' burned down a few years later.

I wasn't there on that night at the Astor in 1968. I'm so glad. I always get upset when things like that go wrong. But I did enjoy reading about it. Thanks, John. *

RUSSELL BLACKFORD is one-half of Ebony Books (Jenny Blackford is the other half), writer of fiction (The Tempting of the Witch King and Ditmar nominee 'Glass Reptile Breakout'), editor (Urban Fantasies with David King), and prolific essayist (long articles about Delany -- in Australian Science Fiction Review, September 1986 -- and Harding -- in a future issue of Science Fiction). He speaks at conventions and meetings of the Nova Mob, and is preparing, with Van Ikin, Australian Science Fiction: A Critical History. Russell also finds time to earn an income -- he represents the Australian Public Service Board in proceedings before the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission.



Discussed:

I

Pleasure and Danger:
Exploring Female Sexuality

edited by Carole S. Vance
(Routledge & Kegan Paul; \$A14.95)

Let's forget about science fiction for a few pages and concentrate upon a book that really matters. There is an explicit link with the world of science fiction here, but it's a pretty narrow one, and maybe not many people have yet noticed it. I'll pick that up later.

I'm really writing about Pleasure and Danger because it's important, involving, and

essential reading -- not because it has anything to do with sf.

Pleasure and Danger constitutes the proceedings of a 1982 conference held at Barnard College in New York City, entitled 'Towards a Politics of Sexuality'. This was the ninth in an annual series of conferences under the title 'The Scholar and the Feminist'. The story of the conference and the enormous hostility it generated in certain feminist circles is recounted vigorously in Carole S. Vance's 'Epilogue' to the book. Anti-pornography feminists denounced the organizers, protested against the conference, and distributed leaflets to attendees criticizing both conference and organizers in sensationalist terms. Barnard College seized copies of the conference handbook, and the sponsor, the Rubinstein Foundation, cancelled funding for the 1983 conference. Participants found themselves blacklisted by sister feminists, and subjected to intensive attacks on their reputations and careers. The epilogue carries descriptions of anti-conference protesters wearing T-shirts crying, 'For a Feminist Sexuality' (whatever that is, you might say) and, on the back, 'Against S/M'; the leaflets distributed to attendees evidently contained lurid allegations about the sexual practices of individual organizers.

You may wonder how an academic conference, even on so obviously trendy (and possibly spicy) a topic, could generate such a circus of antipathy. The trouble with this particular conference -- and the beauty of it -- was that it sought to explore the polarities of sexual danger for women as well as, and herein lay the controversy, sexual pleasure for women. The latter notion was itself disturbing to a breed of feminist, and especially so when pondered by a group of feminist radicals who were clearly viewed as polymorphously perverse denigrators of all that was just, true, and politically correct. Women Against Pornography charged that organizers had 'shut out a major part of the feminist movement and thrown their support to the very sexual institutions and values that oppress all women' -- fighting words. Again, Vance writes that the conference's diversity of thought and experience was reduced by its enemies 'to pornography, S/M and butch/femme -- the antipornographer's counterpart to the New Right's unholy trinity of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll'.

A petition organized by supporters of the conference attacked 'these and all such attempts to inhibit feminist dialogue on sexuality', adding:

Feminist discussion about sexuality cannot be carried on if one segment of the feminist movement uses McCarthyite tactics to silence other voices. We reaffirm the importance and complexity of the questions feminists are now beginning to ask about sexuality and endorse the Barnard conference for its effort to explore new territory. In an age of reaction, we believe it is important for feminists to resist the impulse to censor ourselves as strongly as we resist the efforts of others to censor us.

Among the signatures to this document were at least two that will be familiar to every reader of The Metaphysical Review: those of Joanna Russ and Samuel R. Delany. Hence some narrow but explicit connections with the variegated sf community.

But what were these science-fictional luminaries supporting in signing the petition? That's hard to say, because I don't know which ideas presented at the conference may have been attractive to individual signatories, except those whose papers appear in Pleasure and Danger. But it is possible to see a broad underlying philosophy through the collected papers. The dominant theme is tackled in Vance's opening paper to the book: 'Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality'. Vance juxtaposes different strands of thinking about sex by feminist activists and theorists -- the strand that emphasizes the dangers to women arising from sexuality ('violence, brutality, and coercion, in the form of rape, forcible incest, and exploitation, as well as everyday cruelty and humiliation'), and the strand that emphasizes the 'positive possibilities' of liberated sexuality. Vance's thesis, which runs right through this big, generous, passionate, important book, is that recent feminist thought, at least until very recently, has been unbalanced in over-emphasizing the dangers of sexuality for women and downplaying, unflatteringly codifying, even anathematizing, its pleasures. Accordingly, such canonical literary and cinematic texts of 1970s' and early 1980s' feminism as Brownmiller's Against Our Will, the film Not a Love Story, and the anti-pornography collection Take Back the Night, fare poorly.

In her mighty fifty-page thunderclap of a paper, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', Gayle Rubin savages Not a Love Story in the following (largely justified) terms:

The use of S/M imagery in anti-porn discourse is inflammatory. It implies that the way to make the world safe for women is to get rid of sadomasochism. The use of S/M images in the movie Not a Love Story was on a moral par with the use of depictions of black men raping white women, or of drooling old Jews pawing young Aryan girls, to incite racist or anti-Semitic frenzy.

Interestingly enough, that genuinely radical feminist, Kate Millett, who appeared in Not a Love Story and made some of the most restrained and judicious comments on pornography in that often unrestrained film, is back in Pleasure and Danger with a tough, sensible, and far-reaching paper on the sexuality of children.

Other topics explored in the book include sex manuals (which are criticized from the radical sexual left for a change, and with considerable wit), relating to erotic cinema, the political and existential implications of bodily image, the romantic discourse of teenage girls (in a sensitive yet rigorous study by writer-philosopher Sharon Thompson), and parallels between nineteenth- and twentieth-century concepts of sexual purity in feminist thought.

In addition to formal papers, Pleasure and Danger contains poetry, photography (not what you're thinking), and personal reflections. There's something for everyone to disagree with and an embarrassment of scholarly and theoretical riches. But, for me, the real heart of the book is in three lengthy theoretical essays. Between them they map out a whole theory of the politics of sexuality and, especially, a sexually leftist critique of what has unfortunately been feminist orthodoxy (until it was largely upset by, among other things, this book). All three papers were written with precision and discipline combined with passion, humour, and vision. I have in mind the opening paper by Carole S. Vance, mentioned above, a paper by Alice Echols called 'The Taming of the Id: Feminist Sexual Politics, 1968-83', and Gayle Rubin's aforementioned paper. In an effort to convey the flavour and argument of the book, which so infuriated conservative feminists when it was originally presented at the conference, I want to try to do justice to each of these three in turn.

II

Vance's paper begins by contrasting different feminists' emphases on pleasure or danger for women in sexuality. Vance notes that, amid the social flux arising from the increased sexual autonomy won by second-wave feminism, 'many women have come to feel more visible and sexually vulnerable', a vulnerability that has been exploited by the Right in its programme to 'reinstate traditional sexual arrangements and the formerly inexorable link between reproduction and sexuality'. She sums this up: 'In this the Right offers a comprehensive plan for sexual practice which resonates in part with women's apprehension about immorality and sexual danger.'

Contrary to the sexual holiness of the Right and to the sense of constriction and prescription implicit in late seventies feminism, Vance sees the ideology of sexual danger as problematic (without denying the genuine dangers that do arise for women from sexuality): 'The subtle connection between how patriarchy interferes with female desire and how women experience their own passion as dangerous is emerging as a critical issue to be explored.' Vance sees sexuality, including female sexuality, as ambiguous, rich, diverse; she denies that there is an intrinsic specifically female sexual nature, and argues that 'sexual constriction, invisibility, timidity, and uncuriosity' in women are 'the signs of thoroughgoing damage' -- psychic damage inflicted by our prevailing gender system.

More philosophically, Vance applies something called social construction theory to sexuality. Social construction theory is a methodology that insists that the meanings, values, codifications placed on experience in a social context and the ways experiences are

dealt with and activities or institutions are built up around them are all products of economic, social, and political structures. They are not determined in any direct, simple, or uniform way by human 'nature' or biology. Since this is a methodology and not just a concept, devotees of social construction theory attempt to show how and why sexuality, for example, might be 'conceptualized, defined, labeled, and described' in different ways 'from time to time and from culture to culture'. If this were just an affirmation of cultural relativity, it would be attractive enough; as a methodology with a more or less empirical basis, great potential for rigour, and enough modesty to avoid the wildly paradoxical ambitions of, say, logical positivism, it is very satisfying. (How it might fit in with the basic sociobiological imperative to preserve the genes I leave to fandom's double inheritance theorists.) Social construction theory is a very science-fictional sort of idea, because what's the underlying philosophy of sf if not the recognition of change permeating the very thought habits of cultures, even if arising from something as supposedly superficial or remote from culture as a new technology or a new scientific paradigm? This philosophy is more than implicit in Delany's work, and it's neat to see that Delany was involved in the conference that led to the book.

As seen by Vance, the task set by social construction theory in her field is 'to describe and analyze how cultural connections are made between female bodies and what comes to be understood as "women" and "female sexuality".' Cultural assumptions or popularizations of what women are like, or what the nature of the sexuality is or should be, are to be dissected, challenged, to have scrutinized their contradictions and discontinuities, to have revealed their multifarious origins and mysterious directions. Vance sets about elaborating on some of the questions to be dealt with in such an analysis: what social formations have organized the 'meaning' and shape of sexuality in our culture, and how? What multiple sources of information, and what gaps in the information, are there about how sexuality is constructed in our culture and its subcultures? What biases, motivations, implicit assumptions are built into our available information? How is information on sexuality transmitted across and between generations?

From this perspective, Vance concludes:

Sexuality may be thought about, experienced, and acted on differently according to age, class, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation and preference, religion, and region. Confrontation with the complex intersection of social identities leads us away from simple dichotomies (black/white, lesbian/heterosexual, working-class/middle-class) toward recognizing the multiple intersection of categories and the resulting complexity of women's lived experience.

Though the paper is less polemical than some that follow, Vance is clearly exploding the idea of a monolithic and biologically programmed 'female sexuality' -- passive, nurturant, romantic, process-orientated, and monogamous -- replacing it with a startling pluralism. She attacks dogmatic feminists for setting up a false and divisive ideology based on strict boundaries between 'the good and the bad, believers and unbelievers', insists that feminism is 'sexually radical' and must speak to the issue of oppression: 'not only the oppression of male violence, brutality, and coercion which it has already spoken about eloquently and effectively, but also the repression of female desire that comes from ignorance, invisibility, and fear.' Ultimately, Vance enjoins that feminists move, positively, 'toward pleasure, agency, self-definition' and not just, negatively, 'away from danger and oppression': 'To persist amid frustrations and obstacles, feminism must reach deeply into women's pleasure and draw on this energy.'

The central idea of Vance's essay is the social construction of sexuality, an idea that is used as the basis for a pluralistic account of female sexuality. Central to Alice Echols's 'The Taming of the Id' is a simpler concept, but one which I had never seen developed before, certainly not by a radical feminist writer: that of cultural feminism. Echols begins by pronouncing that recent feminists have developed 'a more highly prescriptive understanding of sexuality' than their predecessors -- 'one which in some crucial ways is antithetical to early feminist sexual politics'. She goes on immediately to distinguish

clearly two easily recognizable kinds of feminist thinking about gender distinctions in regard to sexuality:

Early radical feminists believed that women's oppression derived from the very construction of gender and sought its elimination as a meaningful social category. Today's feminists, by contrast, claim that our oppression stems from the repression of female values and treat gender differences as though they reflect deep truths about the intractability of maleness and femaleness.

Echols puts the polarity in a way that reflects the difference between a social constructivist approach and an essentialist approach to the meaning of gender roles and values associated with them.

She quickly identifies examples of the essentialist approach to gender distinctions: the idea that sexual inhibition in women is a sign of superiority; the idea that women are somehow closer to nature than men. Then comes the crunch: a strain of feminism fundamentally divergent from the radical impulse of second-wave feminism has gained hegemony within the movement -- 'I will refer to this more recent strain of feminism as cultural feminism, because it equates women's liberation with the nurturance of a female counter culture which it is hoped will supersede the dominant culture.'

Echols spends some time looking at examples of cultural feminist thought, noting that cultural feminism has reached its apotheosis in the anti-pornography movement, with its idealization of an assumed female sexuality and demonization of an assumed male one. Some cultural feminists have equivocated as to whether the devastating male/female polarity, which they see as biologically based or the result of history and socialization, but the preference has been to adopt biological theories that are distinctly unflattering to men. Indeed, though Echols does not make the point, such theories would be denounced by left-wing thinkers, and indeed by most of us, as unspeakably evil if the terms 'man' and 'woman' were replaced by the terms 'black' and 'white'. Within the ambit of cultural feminist thought, we have Brownmiller's familiar 'all men are rapists' line (which Brownmiller herself has recanted, but which remains popular) and some sfnal-sounding examples that Echols cites, such as Sally Gearheart's 'the proportion of men must be reduced to and maintained at approximately 10% of the human race'.

By contrast with radical feminism, cultural feminism is disinclined to adopt a politically leftist orientation; in regard to the supposedly 'feminist' issues that it espouses it is prepared to encourage coalitions of widely varying political persuasions. Cultural feminism has in some instances attacked sex itself as reactionary or antithetical to the interests of women, and has attempted to reconstruct the concept of lesbianism as 'woman-bonding' -- desexualizing sexual choice to make it acceptable to a wider social audience. Most obviously, cultural feminism has placed great stress on the dangers inherent for women in sexuality, to the virtual exclusion of any recognition of sexual pleasure. It has viewed pornography as the central concern of feminism, rather than grounding radical aspirations in a critique of the family, the political economy, and other fundamental social institutions. More recently, Echols tells us (though I can't say that I've noticed this happening in Australia), cultural feminism has joined its attack on pornography with a critique of sexual fantasy, which is said to be dangerous because it replaces the reality of another person with an illusion, and has been referred to by at least one cultural feminist as a 'phallogocentric need'.

But most fundamentally, cultural feminism sees male and female sexuality as 'polar opposites':

Male sexuality is driven, irresponsible, genitally orientated, and potentially lethal.
Female sexuality is muted, diffuse, interpersonally orientated, and benign.

Men who show some of the qualities considered female are supposed to have sinister motives, while women who show some of the qualities considered to be male are supposed to be

betraying their sex. It is denied that heterosexuality can be freely chosen by women or genuinely pleasurable to them. Echols adds that 'heterosexual cultural feminists seem to accept this understanding of their sexuality, although to do so would appear to involve guilt and self-deprecation, if not self-flagellation'. Importantly, cultural feminists in the States have taken unsympathetic stances towards transsexuals, gay males (and their sexual values), and other sexual minorities. Pornography is indicted by them for breaking down traditional respect for women, and the sexual revolution is considered to have subverted female sexual values.

At the heart of Echols's denunciation of cultural feminism is her sense that it has abandoned the radical feminist critiques of values and institutions that have constrained women sexually, existentially, politically: religion, patriarchy, the family, the State, sexual laws and mores. The anti-pornography movement has sought to establish parameters for female sexuality to avoid the taint of 'male-identified' sexual style, and has diminished the possibilities of sexual variety, expression, and pleasure for women while insisting with great eagerness but ultimate monotony on the ubiquity of sexual danger. Echols poses to her assumed female audience the following problem and question:

In acknowledging women's right to sexual pleasure while ignoring the risks associated with sexual exploration for women, the sexual revolution has heightened women's sense of sexual vulnerability. But do we really want to return to the old sexual order whereby women were accorded male protection in exchange for sexual circumspection?

The answer expected is obvious, and Echols provides it in language close to that in Vance's paper described earlier:

We need to develop a feminist understanding of sexuality which is not predicated upon denial and repression, but which acknowledges the complexities and ambiguities of sexuality. Above all, we should admit that we know far too little about sexuality to embark on a crusade to circumscribe it. Rather than foreclose on sexuality we should identify what conditions will best afford women sexual autonomy, safety, and pleasure, and work towards their realization.

I hesitate to attempt to do justice to Gayle Rubin's paper, which towers over everything else in the book, and over pretty well everything I've ever read about sexuality and its politics. Rubin takes social construction theory and the concept of cultural feminism for granted in launching forth on a major critique of 'erotic injustice and sexual oppression', particularly as perpetrated by both the Right and by cultural feminists. In doing so, she condemns six 'axioms' that have supported sexual persecution:

- 1 Sexual essentialism: the idea that sexual behaviour is ahistorical and biologically ordained in its forms and details.
- 2 Sex negativity: the idea that sex itself is inherently dangerous, destructive, sinful.
- 3 The fallacy of misplaced scale: sexual acts, especially supposed sexual evils, are to be given a quasi-cosmic significance.
- 4 The hierarchical order of sexual acts: sexual acts are defined on a hierarchy of status; some acts are of contested status, and this raises the question of where to draw the line.
- 5 The domino theory of sexual peril: if anything is permitted to cross the line of what is acceptable, 'the barrier against scary sex will crumble and something unspeakable will skitter across'.
- 6 The lack of benign sexual variation: 'One of the most tenacious ideas about sex is that there is one best way to do it, and that everyone should do it that way.'

Rubin's discussions of the hierarchical order and the domino theory are particularly witty, enlivening, and sane -- and jazzed up with some nice diagrams (again, not what you think). She makes it plain that, in her view, 'A democratic morality should judge sexual acts by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and the quantity and quality of the pleasures they provide' rather than on assumptions about the goodness or badness of particular kinds of acts. Most tellingly, she laments that only acts given high value are considered to have any moral complexity, while those given low value are depicted as 'a uniformly bad experience'.

From here, Rubin analyses sexual repression as practised by various groups, including cultural feminists. But the paper goes beyond a feminist analysis of female sexuality or a radical feminist analysis of cultural feminism, to develop a mighty statement of the need to rethink the old axioms -- which were the products of history rather than timeless truths. Even if you disagree with Rubin's approach as I've outlined it, her paper deserves to be the major philosophical text from which the next generation of thinkers starts considering the subject -- and you should look it up.

III

Northrop Frye begins his Anatomy of Criticism with a 'Polemical Introduction', but wisely rounds it off with a 'Tentative Conclusion'. Having spent a fair number of pages in enthusiastic description of Pleasure and Danger, I now offer an evasive commentary, evasive because I don't at this stage wish to get bogged down in a philosophical quagmire analysing all the ideas I've relayed.

I do make it plain, however, that I accept the fundamental insights of Vance, Echols, and Rubin as described and interpreted above. Their approach strikes me as liberating, enabling a stance from which to criticize unhealthy tendencies, not only in the perennial thought of the Right but also in feminist thought -- to which I for one would expect to be able to have recourse for enlightenment, but which has often been disappointing in its treatment of sexuality. At one point in her paper Vance bemoans the fact that 'so much of the literature on female sexuality has been written by men, suggesting the need for critical reading'. Too true! One could hope that women themselves, once allowed, might be able to tell us something a bit more credible and yet profound about their sexuality than men have been able to guess at. I would naturally hope that women would also have fresh insights into sexuality and human relationships in general, since theirs is a perspective which has largely been ignored or submerged through the centuries. And, indeed, feminism at its best has offered just this. Two things have been disappointing:

- 1 Cultural feminist analysis of female sexuality has tended to define it in the banal terms with which we've always been familiar.
- 2 Cultural feminist analysis of male sexuality has reduced it, in Echols's words, to 'its most alienated and violent expressions'.

Feminism is a movement that seeks liberation for half the people of the world, for patriarchy has gained global hegemony in historical times. As such, feminism is of staggering importance and imperatively requires our support. That so much recent feminist analysis of sexuality has failed is a prodigious loss to us all, and that newly radical feminist analyses are rising from the grey ashes of cultural feminism is cause for hallelujahs. Take notice of the names of people like Carole S. Vance, Alice Echols, Gayle Rubin, Faye Ginsberg, Sharon Thompson: they're writers and thinkers for the future. I've presented their ideas somewhat uncritically: however you respond to them, those ideas deserved to be set out and injected into the thought of people reading this zine who, in most cases, would not be familiar with them. I expect the audience of The Metaphysical Review to be able to think smartly, which means radically, about this stuff if anyone can (and I won't be amused if I'm told it's all too academic and hard: if we can't think precisely and probingly about the stuff of life, let's go back to Donald Duck).

Among other things, I have not addressed possible criticisms of the ideas presented above. For example, social construction theory, unless handled very carefully, could have its own paradoxes (if, for example, someone wished to press the point that all theories, including social construction theory, are social constructions). I'm also concerned that Vance and Rubin seem to rely heavily on that wily but, some would say, irresponsible Frenchman, Michel Foucault, though I don't find their essays to be burdened with Gallic excesses.

More importantly, it might be charged that even the papers presenting the most elaborate and destructive dissections of cultural feminism fail to tackle head on the more reasoned arguments for thinking that there may be biological tendencies underlying at least some of the observed differences in male and female sexual styles or for advocating some of the social measures seen as necessary by cultural feminists. For example, the question of innate differences has been discussed with considerable reason and charm by Beatrice Faust (not a stereotypical cultural feminist), who is critical of the sexual revolution for seeking to assimilate women's sexuality to the provenance of male sexual privilege -- but admits that the biologically based distinctions she argues for are only tendencies, and further, that her own sexual style rather conforms to the 'male' paradigm. Again, some anti-pornography feminists have avoided the tacky revivalist approach of Not a Love Story and actually presented reasoned arguments for their case, the most impressive I've seen being Helen E. Longino, whose essay, 'Pornography, Oppression, and Freedom: A Closer Look', stands out as a model of lucidity in Take Back the Night. With any luck, these arguments will be given both their due and their just reply by the new radical feminists, and those aspects with merit will be absorbed into what should now be recognized as the mainstream of feminist thought.

I don't expect any of my readers of either sex to trust a man writing about all of this, but, since feminism concerns itself very closely these days with the sexuality of men, men have an automatic responsibility to make some modest contribution to the debate (even if only in self-defence!). Cultural feminism is presumably still strong enough, and strong enough in fandom specifically, for my comments so far to bring some fierce rejoinders. Naturally I welcome them, but what I would welcome at the end of the debate is a sense that an incremental addition has been made to what Gayle Rubin calls the attempt to 'prevent more barbarism and encourage erotic creativity'. Four years after the conference that hatched Pleasure and Danger, after the message has been taken to heart by many feminists, at least in the States, but when society as a whole has nurtured some repressive elements and impulses that are more vicious and sensationalist than ever -- thanks to the AIDS scare -- I can only cry Amen!

-- Russell Blackford,
January 1986

OF HIS CONCERTINA BROW

I came across a chart in Life magazine yesterday which was designed to help me decide whether I am a Highbrow, a Lowbrow, a Upper Middlebrow or a Lower Middlebrow. After some pondering I think I must be a Concertina Brow, for like such Lowbrow things as beer and parlour sculpture, and I also like such apparently Highbrow things as red wine, art, ballet and pre-Bach music. But then I am a great fellow for the theatre, which is rated as only Upper Middlebrow. I even like front-yard sculpture, which is supposed to be Lower Middlebrow, though I also admire the fat naked female statues of Maillol, which are Upper Middlebrow. In short, my brow heaves up and down alarmingly, like a concertina, and I have a few tastes which do not fit into any of these categories, like my affection for corduroy trousers, and my fondness for bananas dipped in hot coffee. I am inclined to think that it must be very dull to have one's brow stuck at a particular point; I am glad my brow is able to expand and contract.

-- Robertson Davies,
The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks, p. 229



YVONNE ROUSSEAU, having written a book about Joan Lindsay's Picnic at Hanging Rock (The Murders at Hanging Rock, Scribe, 1980; Macmillan, 1988), has now written a commentary to the until-now-withheld last chapter of the book. The last chapter, in a book that included Yvonne's commentary, was published on St Valentine's Day, 1987, by Angus & Robertson.

Both of the following reviews are reprinted from Thyme magazine (the Peace piece from No. 49, pp. 16-18, and the Compass Rose review from No. 52, pp. 9-10). The first review celebrated Wolfe's Guest-of-Honourship at Aussiecon II, August 1985, and the second review was prompted by the book's nomination for the Ditmar Award.

FLICKERINGS AT
THE CORNERS OF THE EYES

by YVONNE ROUSSEAU

brg In Shadows 2, edited by Charles L. Grant, Gene Wolfe wrote: 'Many of the most effective horror stories are those that deal with matters offstage, those flickerings at the corners of one's eyes that never quite come into focus until the story is done. It is not a trick of putting together the pieces of a puzzle; it is the recognition that the author has made you uneasy for a reason you cannot figure out. You wait. You wonder. And then, finally, the true horror hits you...' And so to Peace... *

Yvonne Rousseau discusses:

Peace
by Gene Wolfe

(New York: Harper & Row; 1975
(London: Chatto & Windus; 1984; 264 pp.;
hardback \$A26.95; paperback \$A8.95)

Gene Wolfe's novel is called Peace -- a word that is never used in the book itself. Slowly, if at all, the reader becomes aware that this 'peace' is the place referred to on tombstones: 'Rest in Peace'.

The narrator is dead. On his grave is planted an American native elm tree. Late

in the book, he remembers a neighbour getting his permission to plant such a tree when he is dead; and the novel opens with the words: 'The elm tree planted by Eleanor Bold, the judge's daughter, fell last night.' Its fall brings an impression 'that the whole house was melting... going soft and running down into the lawn'.

The narrator thinks of the house as a building in which, having suffered from a stroke, he moves questingly from room to room. However, elsewhere in his experience, a book of necromancy describes a moving spark behind a dead man's empty eye-sockets: the spark is 'the soul of the dead man, seeking now in all the chambers under the vault of the skull its old resting places'. The narrator also describes how crumbling walls can be bound together by the roots of living things. With the elm tree fallen, the walls of the skull begin to break apart.

There are hints about the mechanism of consciousness after death. One character speculates that 'all mankind, living and dead, has a common unconscious'. He also stresses that all entities are composed of 'the same electrical particles'. The narrator holds that 'whatever exists can be transformed but not destroyed', and that 'existence is not limited to bits of metal and rays of light': 'memories exist'. He sees no reason for his memories to be 'less actual, less real, than a physical entity now demolished and irrecoverable'.

The narrator doesn't wish to know that he is dead. But in the manner of a dream, giving cryptic messages, his awareness returns again and again to stories of unquiet graves and other Gothic horrors, such as men being turned into stone. He tells his story as if he were alive, in a house designed with 'museum' rooms -- duplicating places from his past that he wants to keep remembering. He even reports going outside with his axe. But disbelief is unavoidable at some point. Readers are unlikely to believe his account of using a reconstruction of a doctor's surgery to intrude into the visit to a doctor that he made when he was four years old. In this episode, he consults the doctor about the stroke he has had when he is about sixty and the doctor has long been dead. The doctor in turn questions the four-year-old about the future.

The reader's problem is to decide where disbelief should begin, and how far it should extend. Is the narrator's unconscious mind correct about his being dead? A similar problem is found in Wolfe's earlier work The Fifth Head of Cerberus, which is about the shapeshifting aboriginals of another planet. A shapeshifter who takes on human shape will mimic a human personality so thoroughly that he misremembers -- deceiving himself about his true origins. Peace contains a good deal about the deceptiveness of memory, and of evidence from the past: the evidence of origins. The forgery of ancient documents is elaborately defended. Inaccurate memories are praised, because they approach nearer to a 'fundamentally artistic' ideal. And this is more than frivolity or cynicism. In Wolfe's later work, The Book of the New Sun, the protagonist claims that 'of all good things in the world, the only ones humanity can claim for itself are stories and music'. A story, then, will reveal more of the essential truth about human beings than would a mere accurate record of events.

Exemplary myths about the past are one form of evidence about the human psyche. Peace is about a small American midwestern town, where the country's aboriginal myths are simply not known. Instead, the book's mythic stories originate mostly from an Irishwoman, Kate Boyne, who arrived in Boston as a child, at the time of the potato blight in Ireland. In one story, she tells of Saint Brandon reaching the Earthly Paradise, when his boat fetches up in Boston harbour. Oddly, the potato blight that made Kate's family emigrate is repeated in the American midwest. Mixed farming on small properties has been replaced by the unhealthy monocropping of potatoes to supply the drink company that the narrator controls. The American small farmer's way of life has become extinct, like the earlier Amerindian way of life.

In the narrator's imagination, ghosts from the small-farming community haunt Indianapolis thousands of years in the future, when the city is reduced to a mound. He believes that 'America is the land of magic, and... we, we now past Americans, were once the magical people of it, waiting now to stand to some unguessable generation of the future as the nameless pre-Mycenaean tribes did to the Greeks'.

These unguessable future generations are described in Wolfe's later science fiction, The Book of the New Sun. Anthropologists there have obviously had the difficulties that Peace keeps imagining for them. One ancient fable that survives until the time of the New Sun is a mixture of the Mowgli story from Kipling's Jungle Book and of the Romulus-and-Remus legend. But it has been sanitized, in the way that present-day anthropologists believe that primitive myths always get sanitized by later generations.

In Peace, the reader-anthropologist is confronted with a more immediate question of sanitization. The narrator regards himself as representative of his time: 'a very ordinary man. The most ordinary.' But he is unmistakably responsible for one death, and readers may suspect him of another three. Did he accidentally run over and kill his Aunt Olivia? Did he panic, and leave another worker to die in the freezer room? Did he shoot a librarian who planned to shoot him? His attitude -- if so -- is expressed in his remark to a forger: 'All of us do real harm, and most of us don't have your class.' He considers his actions ordinary. But the narrator is called Weer, and his author is Wolfe. Beneath the seemingly limpid surface of Wolfe's books -- behind the perfect evocations of touch; of place and of weather -- there are elements (like Weer and Wolfe) that keep linking themselves disconcertingly. To read Wolfe is like tuning your awareness to your unconscious patterns of thought. As a result, Peace will seep into your dreams; and what it does there won't be easy to isolate.

(Author's note: The above review was broadcast on the ABC's 'Books and Writing' programme on 21 August 1985. Before writing it, I told Damien Broderick of my 'discovery' that Peace's narrator was dead. Damien then embarked on an inspired re-reading, and it was he who pointed out to me the 'Weer-Wolfe' connection. At Aussiecon II, Gene Wolfe agreed that the narrator was dead, and a werewolf -- and added that the elm's death was taking place about two centuries after Weer's death.)

-- Yvonne Rousseau, August 1985

LE GUIN'S
MEANINGFUL MAP

by YVONNE ROUSSEAU

Yvonne Rousseau discusses:

The Compass Rose:
Short Stories

by Ursula K. Le Guin

(New York: Harper & Row; 1982;
275 pp.; US\$14.95)
(London: Gollancz; 1983;
275 pp.; 7 pounds 95)
(New York: Bantam; July 1983;
272 pp.; US\$3.50)
(London: Granada; 1985;
286 pp.; \$A5.95)

The Compass Rose consists of twenty stories, the earliest published having appeared in 1974, while the two latest make their first appearance here. They are not in chronological order, as the stories in The Wind's Twelve Quarters were. Instead, they are placed to create a new whole -- something more than a collection.

The stories are grouped according to compass directions (which can be shown in a drawing that resembles a rose). The European Rose of the Winds has the four wind directions (NSEW); but the Rose of the New World -- which is to say, of many Amerindians' belief -- has two more directions: Above (the zenith) and Below

(the nadir). The self -- the here and now -- is the centre or corolla of this rose, from which the other six directions radiate; they -- 'and thus the Universe' -- may be sacramentally contained in that centre.

The compass rose defines the directions on a map -- perhaps a map of the writer's mind; but Le Guin points out that 'one's mind is never simply one's own'. As she suggests in The Language of the Night, we human beings may have 'the same general tendencies and configurations in our psyche', and thus 'a vast common ground on which we can meet'. We know, however, that Le Guin lives in Portland, Oregon. Although American history and cultural traditions are widely known throughout the world, might Le Guin not orientate her psyche differently from people who live (as Australians do) in the Southern and Eastern hemispheres of Earth?

From the viewpoint of the United States in general, Portland in Oregon is located in the North (cold) and the West (frontier country). But if Portland is viewed as the centre, the Pacific Ocean lies West; while Eastward the land stretches on until Boston Bay, with the colonizing countries of England and Europe across the Atlantic, in the East (a source of usurping invaders from the Amerindian viewpoint, but of ancestors for the American majority). Overlaying these associations is the Earthwide vision that Swinburne has captured:

the faint east quickens, the wan west shivers
Round the feet of the day and the feet of the night.

In the West of Le Guin's compass lie stories of death and encroaching darkness; and in 'Malheur County' the 'unhopeful and impatient' ageing heroine is from the Oregon county named in the title: 'the frontier without hope, the end of pushing on'. Thus, the West symbolizes both the frontier of the pioneers' America and the frontier of night (equated with death; and with the relinquishment of light in one's life). In 'Gwilan's Harp' and 'The Water is Wide', utter grief is given the power of passing, in some sense, beyond that frontier.

The East is where a new light dawns, but (correspondingly) it is the direction from which the threat to an established culture comes -- as it came for the Amerindians. The four stories of the East are about vulnerability to power, barbarian or otherwise.

In 'The Diary of the Rose', Dr Rosa Sobel, a psychoscopist -- honest, naive, and over-impressionable -- becomes a winter rose, 'all thorns', in the process of receiving a political education and finding herself helpless to save Flores Sorde from having his mind and personality deliberately destroyed by electroshock treatments. In this story, technology has made mindscanning possible in television-like images from a person's 'Con and Uncon dimensions' alike -- although Rosa says that 'Nobody knows if there are any limits to the psyche. Except to the limits of the Universe.' Nevertheless, Flores (and his fate) have to teach her that 'you can't be reasonable about pure evil. There are faces reason cannot see.'

Also in the East, the shipwrecked Second Officer of a ship from the Terran Interstellar Fleet ('The First Report of the Shipwrecked Foreigner to the Kadanh of Derb'), in a courtly speech full of subtle threat, tells the Kadanh of Derb about Earth by describing Venice -- whose 'first lesson' is mortality, and where warnings are offered from black gondolas 'more elegant even than the boat that brought me here'. Another story, 'The White Donkey', is set in India -- culturally regarded as 'the East'; red, as in the Eastern sky of a new day, is the colour of the Goddess and of bridges, like the unfortunate virgin with no voice in her fate, from whom the White Unicorn withdraws into the darkness. The final story of the East owes its title to the legendary phoenix of Arabia, with the power of being reborn from its own ashes, like the sun; in a Loyalist-Partisan wrangle, the Phoenix theatre being bombed and a library being burned are only minor aspects of the general cultural vulnerability.

Associations intermingle in these stories of East and West: relative longitude, light and darkness, the history of colonization, life and death, legendary creatures. They are not narrowly regional.

Between East and West, Le Guin places her Zenith stories. In all four, creativity is expressed -- successfully and joyously in the first two stories; failing in the third story because the observing human is alien and uncomprehending; in the fourth story, flawed by the world-imagining deficiencies of an acne-plagued adolescent.

The Nadir stories are about receiving rather than creating communication -- although 'The New Atlantis' comes as a message in a bottle. There is darkness, passivity, submersion. 'Schrödinger's Cat' suggests that a larger box is needed, to enclose the human observers in this familiar thought experiment. "The Author of the Acacia Seeds" and Other Extracts from the "Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics" not only suggests that ants (unlike humans) would view 'down' (the Nadir) as the desirable direction, but also postulates that plants have an art that is passive, not designed to communicate; and that rocks may be words spoken 'in the immense solitude, the immenser community, of space'. Placing this story at Nadir gives it a significance that might be absent if the story were read in isolation.

One's latitudinal location on the globe could be relevant to stories assigned to North and South. Le Guin's North stories are about traumatic change, involving death or madness; two have female narrators who are each defective -- one morally, the other mentally. The cold we expect of the North in the Northern Hemisphere is not asserted, even in 'Two Delays on the Northern Line', which is set in a region familiar to readers of *Orsinian Tales* and *Malafrena*. My only confident conclusion about Le Guin's North is that it is nothing like Tennyson's. For him,

bright and fickle is the South,
And dark and true and tender is the North.

The South for Le Guin is a place of seeing things differently. 'The Wife's Story' is another view of werewolves -- compelling, and not one that Angela Carter has treated. Loss of time is viewed scientifically in the second story, and 'Sur' tells the secret of the first expedition to reach the South Pole -- an expedition that comes, naturally, from South America, the land of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and of Jorge Luis Borges. There are fascinating images, such as Shackleton's footprints remaining 'like rows of cobblers' lasts' where the uncompacted snow around them had dissipated. No man such as Amundsen is to know of this South American expedition because then he 'might know what a fool he had been, and break his heart'. Rosa del Sur -- 'Rose of the South' -- is born during the expedition, but dies before adulthood.

Le Guin writes gripping stories, which make readers know themselves vulnerable to loss -- when they cannot help caring about characters that they are powerless to save. Features recur on the map as a whole: bereavement; the relativity of concepts; the precarious nature of 'reality'; aphorisms that identify estrangement of one sex from another, rather than complementarity. The Compass Rose justifies Delany's view that 'science fiction is a way of casting language shadow over coherent areas of imaginative space that would otherwise be largely inaccessible'. An excellent example is the Zenith story, 'Intracom'; but the Rose's ability to shape a meaningful psychic map is also a revelation, which may bring to life many private roses, their petals unfurling in readers' minds.

-- Yvonne Rousseau, March 1986

OF BILIOPHILY

Real bibliophiles do not put their books on shelves for people to look at or handle. They have no desire to show off their darlings, or to amaze people with their possessions. They keep their prized books hidden away in a secret spot to which they resort stealthily, like a Caliph visiting his harem, or a church elder sneaking into a bar. To be a book-collector is to combine the worst characteristics of a dope-fiend with those of a miser.

-- Robertson Davies,
The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks, p. 285

LUCY SUSSEX earns her living as a researcher with the Department of English, University of Melbourne, but seems to spend all her spare time writing fiction, reviews, criticism, and anything else that fits. Two stories of hers, 'Montage' (Urban Fantasies) and 'The Lipton Village Society' (Strange Attractors), have been nominated for the Ditmar Award last year.

FALLING OFF THE FENCE:

REVIEWING WILLIAM GIBSON'S
'NEUROMANCER' AND 'COUNT ZERO'

by LUCY SUSSEX

Lucy Sussex discusses:

Count Zero

by William Gibson
(London: Gollancz, 1986)

Neuromancer

by William Gibson
(New York: Ace, 1984)
(London: Gollancz, 1984)

Other works discussed are listed
at the end of the article.

treading on people's toes. However it is possible, while aloft the boundary line, to sway back and forth without overbalancing, and this shall be done in the course of this review. William Gibson has his merits; he also has his demerits.

For someone of a mild and inoffensive appearance (to judge from the photographs), William Gibson arouses strong passions: at a recent Nebula Awards banquet he ran the gamut from receiving the award to being punched in the stomach. In Australia, argument about the worth of Gibson contributed to the recent Broderick-Turner contretemps in The Notional, while the equally formidable Doctors Tolley and Blackford have also expressed strong opinions for and against this writer.

Given such a combative atmosphere, the reviewer must state her position, which is... the fence -- an eminently suitable place to avoid

Gibson as poet

'Gibson's prose is one of the delights of this book... Gibson's comparisons are vivid, precise, and fitted to the high-tech jungle he describes... A kind of high-tech short-attention-span poetry develops...' (Russell Blackford, 'Mirrors of the Future City', Science Fiction 19, p. 18).

Damien Broderick also used the term poetry; Turner and Tolley thought Gibson a poor wordsmith. In the exchanges between Broderick and Turner (preserved for a puzzled posterity in The Notional), semantics was an issue. For some time now, surreal combinations of words have been used in poetry, in avant-garde prose and, indeed, by Damien Broderick: 'Gibson's sleazy hypertechnic future is absolutely lived-in, sped-up in, brought-down in, angel-glided through...' ('High Flying and High Tech', The Notional 3, p. 9). When used by Gibson, these tricks were deemed by Turner to be 'loaded copouts that mean the writer can't be bothered visualising properly' ('Awards, Winners, and Values', Thyme 46, p. 11).

At the risk of seeming out to get Turner (a foolhardy enterprise), a comparison will be made between his reaction to one copout of Gibson's he cited and a highly similar example used by

the excellent Pip Maddern: 'kaleidoscopic angles' (from Neuromancer) and 'kaleidoscopic precision' ('Ignorant of Magic', in The View from the Edge, p. 62). Turner wrote in his afterword to 'Ignorant of Magic':

Look closely at that phrase, 'kaleidoscopic precision'. Workshopers objected to it in an earlier version of the story, and they were right; that version lacked the atmosphere to sustain impressionist language. In this version I felt I understood it but was uncertain of it as an act of communication, so queried Pip about changing it. Kaleidoscopic visions are fragmented, I said, not precise. Pip refused outright. (There comes a point where editors sigh and retreat.) She also explained what she intended of the words and I agreed that the phrase should stand. Her explanation? No, no, you do the work. I refer you to the secondary meaning of impressionism: 'details so treated as to be apprehended simultaneously and not successively with changes of focus' (Concise Oxford Dictionary).

(The View from the Edge, p. 70)

To be fair to Turner, it should be stated that he probably felt Neuromancer could not sustain impressionist language, or, as he terms it in The Notional 8, 'surrealism' (Letter, p. 19). Turner, it would appear, is a tessellator, someone who selects the exact word from the multitude in the English language to fit his mosaic, while Gibson and Broderick play 'thimble and pea with words', in Turner's slightly impressionistic phrase (Letter, p. 19). The reviewer does not care to argue which semantic approach is superior: they should coexist.

Michael Tolley simply stated, in his 'The Bill Gibson Show' (Aphelion 1, p. 51), that Gibson writes sloppily, and proved it with the example of Linda's eyes. After being described as grey, they are unfortunately compared to those of an animal 'pinned in the headlights of an oncoming vehicle' (Neuromancer, p. 8). Ace editor Terry Carr should have noticed this error. Tolley then heaped coals on the simile: 'her upper lip like the line children draw to represent a bird in flight' (also on page 8). In Aphelion, Tolley wrote: 'all upper lips are like that' ('The Bill Gibson Show', p. 51), which is a curious comment -- unless there is a South Australian variant of the ideogram, any book of portrait photography proves him wrong. However, arguing over details like this ultimately descends to the 'tis, tisn't, tis' level, and the reviewer wishes to stay atop the fence.

Gibson can not only be careless, he can also be pretentious, and again in the description of women: 'The faces he woke with in the world's hotels were like God's own hood ornaments' (Count Zero, p. 11). The politest thing one can say about this simile is that it is rum, which is probably what Gibson was imbibing at the time of its composition. Yet, for a short sharp introduction to an otherworld, Neuromancer's opening sentence is unrivalled: 'The sky above the port [of Ninsei] was the colour of television, tuned to a dead channel.' The reader knows at once that this society is divorced from nature. Michael Tolley thought the hook line despicable, but even he had to admit that it was clever (p. 51).

Gibson as thief

We hoped he wouldn't mind us asking, but some of the cyberspace scenes in Neuromancer had reminded Joseph of bits from the film Tron, and some of the street scenes set in Japan reminded us of bits of Ridley Scott's Bladerunner: did either of these films have any influence on the writing of Neuromancer?... 'No, no, I'm delighted you asked! I've been waiting for a shot at this... If you go back and pull out the July 1982 issue of Omni, which contains my story 'Burning Chrome', you'll also find a lovely pictorial spread on Tron which ran, I think, somewhat in advance of the release of the film. My reaction at the time, was 'Oh, shit...' I still haven't managed to see the film. With Bladerunner, I was about a third of the way through the first draft of the novel when I went to see the film. It looked so much like the inside of my head that I fled the theatre after about thirty minutes and I have never seen the rest of it.'

(Interview with Gibson conducted by Joseph Nicholas and Judith Hanna,
Interzone 13, pp. 17-18)

In response to the above, one can only say hmm: if any book resembled a combination of Iron and Bladerunner, it would be Neuromancer. The explanation may well be synchronicity, although Gibson was writing about voodoo in Count Zero suspiciously quickly after the publication of Lucius Shepard's Green Eyes. And even the favourable reviews of Neuromancer noticed its debt to Alfred Bester in particular: '1980s version of The Demolished Man' ('Mirrors', p. 18).

In defence of Gibson, though, it must be stated that he has not claimed to be original, in fact cheerfully disclaims it: 'I see myself as a kind of literary collage-artist, and sf as a marketing framework that allows me to gleefully ransack the whole fat supermarket of 20th century cultural symbols' (the Interzone interview, p. 17). One should also remember that the recent Sydney Biennale was largely concerned with the question of whether art needed to be original any longer.

Gibson as futurist

Of the four critics surveyed in this discussion, George Turner said little about the extrapolation of Neuromancer; therefore in this section Leigh Edmonds will be co-opted in his place. The Notional's co-boss observed that the background of Neuromancer 'is only sketched in enough to give the novel a racy excitement... and Gibson never takes the time to walk us through a bit of history or politics... But, of course, he has better things to do' ('The Demolished Man Walks Again', The Notional 5, p. 15). In other words, there are no expository lumps: this is a future apprehended at the street level rather than in the university lecture theatre.

Granted that the society of Neuromancer is imperfectly seen (I did not say imperfectly visualized), is it much of an extrapolation? Tolley thought it 'the form of a future' (p. 50) and not substantial. Blackford recognized Neuromancer as a 'futuristic distortion, of our own global society' (p. 21). Damien Broderick was the most committed of the critics: 'If you want to feel in your bones what the future might be...' ('High Flying', p. 9). Oddly enough, Gibson himself would disagree with him: 'I think we'd be phenomenally lucky to emerge from this century into a world like Neuromancer, where people can still hustle, get rich, get laid, have a few laughs, afford a new pair of jeans if they feel like it. I love the Sprawl as an image... but... I don't think that that kind of conurbation is even remotely possible' (Interzone interview, p. 17).

The absent George Turner laughs loudly at this point. If we evade the nuclear holocaust, the future seems quite likely to be that of his 'The Fittest', which he takes great pleasure in informing the striplings at the Nova Mob he will not live to see. As Gibson disowns his own future, he would appear to be, in Lorenz Lorez's useful phrase, 'the archivist of a lost future'. And yet the future of Neuromancer is vividly, wonderfully alive.

Gibson as amoralist

'Sheckley appears to have no moral, religious, or political convictions clamouring for expression; no teacher lives to play enemy to the artist...' (Brian Aldiss, Billion Year Spree, p. 283).



What Aldiss says about Sheckley could very well apply to Gibson. Blackford noted Neuromancer's 'avoidance of moralization' (p. 18), and in fact the opinions of Gibson are noticeably absent from his work. In these respects, Gibson is quite unlike George Turner.

Blackford referred to Neuromancer's 'hard amoral world' (p. 18), but the other side of the fence apparently found it immoral. 'Case is a kind of human blah... the sort of hero you hope will be shot out of hand,' said Tolley (p. 50). Turner was more specific: 'Neuromancer would be a simple goodies and baddies thriller if there were any goodies, but there are only the rotten and the less rotten... The women are killers, lesbian or harlot-sexy and cold-blooded' ('Awards', p. 11). Hmm -- one wonders what the word lesbian is doing in that company of pejoratives.

A comparison between the use of a motif in Gibson's and Lucius Shepard's work may be useful here. It has already been mentioned that both Green Eyes and Count Zero concern voodoo. Shepard presents the cult with the kind of admiring horror that can be described as: 'Ooh this is evil! Isn't it naughty! Let's wallow in it!' Count Zero avoids mentioning zombies, the most notorious aspect of voodoo (a new explanation for them is the McGuffin of Green Eyes). In Gibson's novel, the voodoo gods and their oungans are powerful, unknowable, and depicted again without a moral stand. One of the few mentions of good versus evil is the oungan's self-description: 'Dudes who serve with both hands... means they work both ends. White and black, got me?' (p. 92). The reviewer takes a leaf out of Gibson's book (vandalism!) in forbearing to take a moral stance on his lack of moral stance.

A further serious charge against Neuromancer is raised by Turner, who noted the book 'could present a thoughtful exposition of the possibilities and implications of artificial intelligence, or it could use AI as a gimmick for a thriller' ('Awards', p. 11). Was Turner implying that Gibson had shirked his artistic responsibility in writing a book in a popular, entertaining form? Interestingly, an example of Turner's first option exists: the 'Golem XIV' section of Stanislaw Lem's Imaginary Magnitude. I reviewed the tale for this journal and found it thoughtful and scholarly -- it was relatively easy to put down. The same could not be said for Neuromancer: Leigh Edmonds claimed it 'reached out and grabbed my attention, keeping it engaged to the very last' ('Demolished Man', p. 14). Tolley scoffed: 'What a long attention span this Edmonds must have' (p. 50). Clearly, a book that monopolizes the attention in this way -- unless the reader is Michael Tolley [*brg* and Bruce Gillespie] -- must be admitted to have some power.

We shall leave this discussion of Neuromancer and climb down from the fence metaphor to consider Count Zero, Gibson's 'sort of sequel' (his words) to the award-winner. How best to describe this work? It has the same setting as Neuromancer, is similarly a thriller, but there is a considerable difference, regrettably in quality, between the two. Count Zero is a second novel.

George Turner claimed that Neuromancer stopped 'right where the real story should begin: Now that the AI has what it wanted, what now?' ('Awards', p. 11). Count Zero, which occurs seven or eight years (p. 144) after the first novel, is not Turner's continuation. Gibson evades the problems of an omnipotent computer by causing the Neuromancer-Wintermute amalgam to fragment. One of these shards is the Boxmaker, an artist described with a poignancy quite absent from Neuromancer; the others are, er, voodoo gods. Curious though this idea might seem, in practice it produces the vividest writing of the book. Part of the success may be due to the Western unfamiliarity with the voodoo pantheon. Imagine how silly it would be if Thor and Wotan were booming from the cyberspace.

These patches of interesting prose do not compensate, though, for Count Zero's lack of a McGuffin. In Neuromancer, the brilliant concept of virus computer programs to some extent carried the book: even the critics could not fault it. Count Zero is just a thriller, and there are enough similarities between it and Neuromancer to be irritating.

Some minor characters from the first novel reappear, and again unlikely down-on-their-lucks are chosen by the powerful for mysterious missions. Marly (Molly?) is an even odder choice

than Case in Neuromancer; she is a lovesick former art dealer sent in search of the Boxmaker. The other main characters are the eponymous Count Zero, a novice hacker saved from death by the voodoo Vyej Mirak (Virgin Mary) and Turner (just a coincidence!). The latter's crust is earned by poaching eggheads from one multinational to another, which is an insight into the setting not present in Neuromancer. Clearly, corporations control the world in this fantasy of capitalism rampant. The novel flicks from one character to another, like a remote-control TV device changing channels, until ultimately their interconnectedness is revealed. All are involved with the fragments of the AI.

Saving touches of cynicism are scattered throughout the book, like this description of the future art market:

Picard... was speaking with a broker in New York, arranging the purchase of a certain number of 'points' of the work of a particular artist. A 'point' might be defined in any number of ways, depending on the medium involved, but it was certain that Picard would never see the works he was purchasing... the originals were very likely crated away in some vault, where no one saw them at all. Days or years later, Picard might pick up that same phone and order the broker to sell. (p. 121)

Other similarly wry details include the Vyej Mirak becoming hostess of a TV talk show. The sinister possibilities of this idea will presumably be explored in another 'sort of sequel'.

Despite these moments, however, Count Zero is basically disappointing. It has all the faults of Neuromancer -- weak characters and weaker ending, for example -- and few of the merits of that book. Perhaps Gibson should do as George Turner suggested, and abandon the thriller for something more thoughtful. Certain passages in Count Zero -- namely the description of the Boxmaker and the death of the Hughes-like Virek at the hands of Loa Samedi -- indicate that Gibson could, if he allows himself enough time, make a good job of it.

Whatever form his novels may take in the future, one hopes that Gibson will still be vital and fun.

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-- Lucy Sussex, April 1986

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CLASSICS OR CLUNKERS?:
C. S. LEWIS'S 'NARNIA' BOOKS

by ELAINE COCHRANE

Elaine Cochrane discusses:

For many years, the 'Narnia' books were in Penguin Puffin editions. Now they've been reissued by Collins's Armada Lion imprint which, for some peculiar reason, has reversed the order of the first two books in the series.

Here is the order of the Lion releases, although Elaine discusses the books in their correct order:

The Magician's Nephew
(Fontana Lion C1667; \$A4.50)

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe
(Fontana Lion C1663; \$A4.50)

The Horse and his Boy
(Fontana Lion C1666; \$A4.50)

Prince Caspian
(Fontana Lion C1664; \$A4.50)

The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'
(Fontana Lion C1665; \$A4.50)

The Silver Chair
(Fontana Lion C1668; \$A4.50)

The Last Battle
(Fontana Lion C1669; \$A4.50)

brings on spring; the witch decides to kill Edmund (at last! but surely now she should keep him on side?), and Edmund is rescued. The witch demands Edmund back; under the rules she is entitled to all traitors. Aslan offers himself instead, is killed, and resurrected. Under the rules, which the witch does not know (and apparently neither did Aslan until afterwards, but he does not say so), a willing, guiltless sacrifice undoes death. They all go off to the witch's castle, where Aslan releases her prisoners; there is an almighty battle during which Aslan kills the astonished witch; and the four children sit on their thrones.

The seven 'Narnia' books of C. S. Lewis have the reputation of being classics of children's fantasy. Recently I read the series for the first time. I found the books racist and sexist; few of the individual titles work as novels; between the titles there are gross inconsistencies in the nature of the fantasy world of Narnia; and, in most, the solution to everything is violence on a massive scale. Why, then, the reputation?

* *

In The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, a witch has imposed perpetual winter on Narnia (but never Christmas). There is a prophecy that her reign will end when four humans -- two male, two female -- sit on the four thrones of Cair Paravel.

A boy, Edmund, steps through the magic wardrobe and meets the witch: once she realizes he is human, she bribes him with magic Turkish delight to go fetch his brother and two sisters. (Why? Surely she'd be better off killing him, or giving him such a fright that he would never go near a wardrobe again?)

All four children go through the wardrobe into Narnia. There they meet two beavers, friends of a faun that the youngest child, Lucy, had met when she visited Narnia before Edmund. The beavers tell the children that Aslan the lion is coming to save them all, and they arrange to meet with him. Edmund goes to tell the witch; the others go to meet Aslan. Aslan's presence

After many years the children accidentally go back through the wardrobe, find themselves children again, and realize that no time has passed in our world. At the end of the book, the prophecy is irrelevant: the witch was killed before the children sat on the thrones. The children are irrelevant: the witch's power begins to fade as soon as Aslan appears, and it is Aslan who releases her prisoners and kills her. The children merely get in the way and delay things by causing Aslan to be killed and resurrected. True, the boys do take part in the final battle; the girls, although they have weapons, are not to use them: 'battles are ugly when women fight'. Aren't they anyway?

* *

The second book, Prince Caspian, works much better. Some pirates and their kidnapped native women entered an island cave and found themselves in an uninhabited country bordering Narnia. Their descendants eventually conquered Narnia, and the talking animals and trees were enslaved. Prince Caspian, the rightful heir to the throne, believes that's not right, but as he is the rightful heir he is in danger. He decides to fight for his throne, and calls the four children back to help him. There is an almighty battle, Aslan wakes up the trees, who all wade in, and Prince Caspian is crowned king. Aslan? What's he doing there? Good question.

* *

There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it. His parents called him Eustace Clarence, and masters called him Scrubb. I can't tell you how his friends spoke to him, for he had none. He didn't call his Father and Mother 'Father' and 'Mother', but Harold and Alberta. They were very up-to-date and advanced people. They were vegetarians, non-smokers and teetotalers and wore a special kind of underclothes.

Although The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader' ostensibly takes place so that Caspian from the previous book can find some missing countrymen and find Aslan's country, the whole purpose really seems to be to turn the promising young Eustace into a good, boring child. This takes place in the presence of two of the children from the previous books.

* *

In The Silver Chair, Eustace and a girl named Jill Pole are victims of bullies at their school. (It must be a bad school: it is co-educational, doesn't believe in corporal punishment, and has a female Head.) Aslan calls them to rescue Rilian, son of the aged Caspian (time travels at a different speed in Narnia), who has been captured by a wicked witch. They are given some clues to help them, which they manage to miss, but all comes right in the end. Aslan reappears, says 'well done', and frightens the bullies. A quite satisfactory quest novel.

* *

Remember that in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe even the witch wasn't sure what humans were like? By the end of that book, the four children are adults, and as kings and queens have established diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries. The Horse and His Boy takes place during their reign, yet these neighbouring countries are well populated by humans. In particular, Calormen is inhabited by dark-skinned people who wear turbans and eat rice with sultanas and nuts, instead of being blond and eating buttered toast and ham and eggs. Naturally they are baddies.

Susan, one of the children (queens), goes to Calormen to see if she really does want to marry the crown prince. Of course, once she sees him on his home territory, she doesn't want to. He is offended. Meanwhile, a boy and a Narnian stallion, both slaves, decide to run away together to Narnia. They join a Calormene noblewoman and a Narnian mare, also running away. They arrive in time to warn Narnia's friendly neighbouring country, Archenland, of the

revenge-seeking Calormene's invasion, and to let the boy discover that he is the long-lost crown prince of Archenland. Aslan (wot, him again?) makes sure that it is the boy who saves the day, and he turns the Calormene prince into a donkey. This, in a land where talking animals have equal rights, makes him a laughing stock. Maybe some animals are more equal than others?

A shoddy book that relies on information from the earlier titles, but gets it wrong.

* *

The Magician's Nephew is Diggory Kirke. (Did he deserve it? Only Clive Staples Lewis would know.) His uncle, the magician, has made rings out of dust from another world. Being wicked and a coward, he uses the rings to send Diggory, and Polly from next door, into that other world. They find themselves at a sort of cosmic crossroads, enter another world chosen at random, accidentally wake up a dormant witch, and take her home with them. The witch's spells don't work in London, but she's a pretty impressive and troublesome lady, so they use their rings in an attempt to send her back where she came from. Both children, wicked Uncle Andrew, the witch, and a cabby and his horse all end up in a Nothing world. The cabby, being a good boy, sings a hymn. Aslan appears, sings a hymn, and Narnia springs into being. Aslan tells off the children for bringing an Evil (the witch) into his paradise.

Diggory and Polly, riding the cab horse (now converted into a flying horse), are sent to fetch an apple from the tree in the centre of the garden... Unfortunately for the reader, Diggory doesn't eat it; instead, he brings it back to Aslan, who has him plant it to shelter Narnia from the Evil. Diggory is then given an apple to take home to cure his dying mother. He plants the core in his London backyard; when that tree blows down in a storm many years later, he uses the wood to make a wardrobe... (Do you now understand about the pirate cave?)

* *

Everyone dies in The Last Battle. Paradise is just like Narnia, except England is there.

* *

If the series is this bad, why is it so popular?

The first requirement for popularity, of course, is for a lot of people to have read the series. The books are aimed at the nine-to-twelve age group, which in the past was undersupplied with reading matter. The author was an English academic and aggressively Anglican; his theme is (in part) the triumph of Good over Evil; he was Safe, and therefore good material for school libraries and gifts. These factors -- adult approval and dearth of competition -- meant there was a high probability that the budding sf and fantasy reader of some years ago would have read the books at an impressionable age.

The second requirement is for the reader, now adult, to remember having enjoyed the books as a child. Now, adult memories of childhood are notoriously selective. True, I have yet to meet anyone who remembers enjoying The Last Battle: its religious symbolism is at once heavyhanded and all but incomprehensible; it is a novel in which everything goes wrong for the Goodies, and does not go right in the end. What child would accept that being killed and going to heaven is a happier ending than trouncing the Baddies? And what Australian child would be reassured by finding England in heaven? The reputation of the series rests on the first six books.

Of these, two, Prince Caspian and The Silver Chair, work well as novels. In them religion, in the form of Aslan, plays a relatively small part. In The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader', the child can enjoy persecuting the kid who is different -- he asks for it -- and children, being conservative little beasts, do persecute other children who are different. The Assumption of the Mouse into Heaven, body and soul, will be selectively dismissed from memory. The average child does not notice racism and sexism unless directly affronted by

them, although the racism in The Horse and His Boy is so blatant that one hopes it makes at least some children uncomfortable. 'Girls are useless' is so much a part of our culture that I, probably like most girls, used to shrug it off when I found it in books, and just identified with the (male) hero like any boy would. When Jill Pole tells the bewitched Prince Rilian in The Silver Chair 'Where I come from, they don't think much of men who are bossed about by their wives', what child would object that her attitude could be a sign of something wrong in our world? The child reader will not notice these things, so of course the adult cannot remember them.

If these arguments explain why children do not reject these books, they do not account for their popularity. There are several contributing factors. First, and most obvious, is the absence of adult characters, other than as background furniture. Next, at least in the better books, and despite the inconsistencies, Narnia is a different and vividly realized world. Take, for example, one of the perils encountered in The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader':

'Nevertheless you will fly from here,' he gasped. 'This is the Island where Dreams come true.'

'That's the island I've been looking for this long time,' said one of the sailors. 'I reckoned I'd find I was married to Nancy if we landed here.'

'And I'd find Tom alive again,' said another.

'Fools!' said the man, stamping his foot in rage. 'That is the sort of talk that brought me here, and I'd better have been drowned or never born. Do you hear what I say? This is where dreams -- dreams, do you understand -- come to life, come real. Not daydreams: dreams.'

There was about half a minute's silence and then, with a clatter of armour, the whole crew were tumbling down the main hatch as quick as they could and flinging themselves on the oars to row as they had never rowed before; and Drinian was swinging round the tiller, and the boatswain was giving out the quickest stroke that had ever been heard at sea. For it had taken everyone just that half-minute to remember certain dreams they had had -- dreams that make you afraid of going to sleep again -- and to realize what it would mean to land in a country where dreams come true.

Most important, however, is that all the books, apart from from The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, which talks down to the reader, keep you reading. The people who remember the series, of course, are those who got past this first book. All the other other titles, no matter how disappointing overall, do have the necessary 'what will happen next?' quality.

Many children's books have these qualities, and no great reputation. But the Narnia books form a series. Few children take much notice of titles and authors, even of books they enjoy. With a series, however, each title read reinforces the memory, and it is the series, not the individual books, which is recalled.

Does it all matter? I believe it does. Anyone choosing books for children should not rely on her own childhood memories, but should consider what the books are actually saying. For the children's sake, reread before buying. If the message is distasteful, why pass it on? This is not a plea for ideologically pure writing. I read shelves of junk when I was a child and enjoyed it (and still do), and almost always loathed adult-approved books. I do suggest, however, that childhood memories alone are an inadequate guide to choosing books for the next generation of readers.

-- Elaine Cochrane, January 1986

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'THE MOST ENCHANTING OBLIVION':
ROBERT WALSER'S SELF-EFFACEMENT

by TOM WHALEN

Tom Whalen discusses:

Selected Stories

by Robert Walser;
translated by
Christopher Middleton and others
(Farrar Straus Giroux; 1982;
194 pp.; US\$16.50)
(Vintage; 1983;
194 pp.; US\$5.95)

Jakob von Gunten

by Robert Walser;
translated by Christopher Middleton
(Vintage; 1983;
154 pp.; US\$5.95)

Das Gesamtwerk

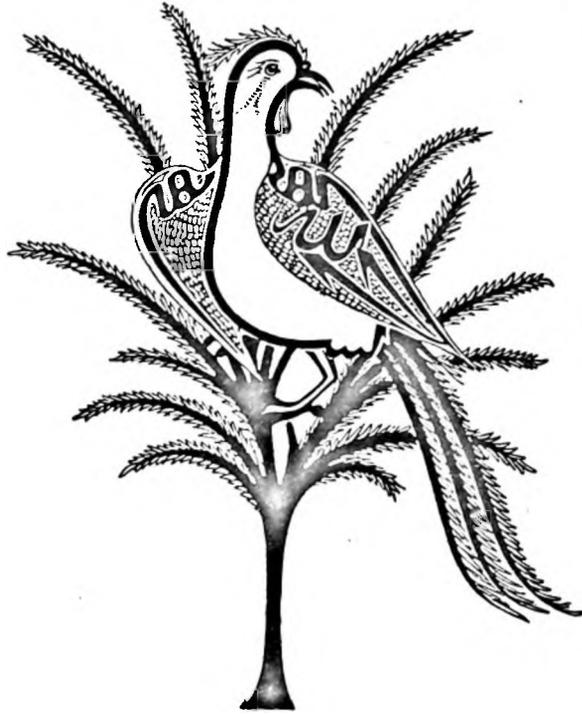
by Robert Walser;
(Suhrkamp Verlag; 1978;
12 volumes; 5267 pp.)

Once upon a time there was a Swiss-German author named Robert Otto Walser who came up to Hugo von Hofmannsthal at a Berlin literary party and asked, 'Couldn't you forget for a bit that you're famous?' Robert Walser never had to confront himself with such a question, but the issue was an important one to him, as it is, finally, to all artists: the writer creates to communicate, but to communicate he must be known, but if he is known, will that not close or narrow the channels of his creativity? Might he not then begin to dissimulate? Might he not destroy the delicate bridge that connects the truth of his self to the world, and become merely a pontificator of dead ideas?

Walser began his publishing career in 1898 at the age of twenty, filled, no doubt, with great hope and naivete. But the three novels he published in 1907, 1908, and 1909 (Geschwister Tanner, Der Gehulfe, Jakob von Gunten) did not sell well, and the twelve other books he published between 1904 and 1925, consisting

mostly of his short prose, also earned him little money, even though they were praised by such contemporaries as Hesse, Morgenstern, Brod, Musil, Benjamin, and at that time the much less known Franz Kafka. Increasingly he had to rely on his own will to create, with the full knowledge that his writing would likely never see publication. In a letter dated 4 October 1927, to Max Brod, who was trying to get a publisher interested in a book of Walser's poetry, Walser wrote: 'And then I find the idea of publishing a book fine and interesting as long as it hasn't happened. Every book that has been printed is after all a grave for its author, isn't it?'

But he kept writing -- prodigiously. Between 1925, when his last book published during his active writing career appeared, Die Rose, and 1933, when he was committed to a sanitarium in eastern Switzerland, Walser wrote at least one novel (Der Rauber) and 478 prose pieces, which constitute four volumes (more than 1700 pages) of the twelve-volume Das Gesamtwerk. This difficult, self-reflexive, most gentle of twentieth-century writers wrote himself into oblivion, and oblivion of a self-imposed kind was the matrix from which he did so.



'I am, to put it frankly, a Chinese: that is to say, a person who deems everything small and modest to be beautiful and pleasing, and to whom all that is big and exacting is fearsome and horrid,' writes the narrator of 'The Job Application' (Selected Stories, p. 27). This delight in the minimal offers a healthy antidote to Promethean desires and excessive egotism; it is the most generative element of Walser's creativity. It accounts for his fondness for paradox and contradiction and the 'jazzy oscillations' of his style, as Walser's primary translator, Christopher Middleton, describes it. The schoolboy scamp Jakob, who narrates Jakob von Gunten, tells us:

Not being allowed to cry, for example, well, that makes crying larger. Doing without love, yes, that means loving. If I oughtn't to love, I love ten times as much. Everything that's forbidden lives a hundred times over; thus, if something is supposed to be dead, its life is all the livelier. As in small things, so in big ones. Nicely put, in everyday words, but in everyday things the true truths are found.

(Jakob von Gunten, p. 105)

Despite all his chatter, Jakob believes life is meant to be experienced, not thought about:

I have perhaps the most thoughts, that's quite possible, but at root I despise my capacity for thinking. I value only experiences, and these, as a rule, are quite independent of all thinking and comparing. Thus I value the way in which I open a door. There is more hidden life in opening a door than in asking a question.

(Jakob von Gunten, p. 92)

But 'true truths' are more likely to be found in such quotidian occurrences as the opening of doors than they are in any grand analytical endeavours.

The activity most suited to Walser's minimalist perspective, other than writing, is the parallel one of walking, the context of which offers a freedom of movement and thought that gives to Walser's prose its improvisatory, aleatory feel. He produced numerous prose pieces with an ambulatory subject and structure -- 'A Little Ramble', 'The End of the World', 'The Street', 'The Violet', 'Energetic', and 'The Lover and the Unknown Girl', to name a few.

In his 1925 'Sunday Walk', the Walser-like protagonist 'thought it was just as good to be a human being and to go walking as it was to sit at a desk and successfully sell books' (Das Gesamtwerk, Vol. iii, p. 338; all translations from Das Gesamtwerk are by Tom Whalen and Susan Bernofsky). In 'The Alphabet', the narrator saunters through the same, encountering A., who 'rides like an Amazon down an avenue' ('A. reitet als Amazone durch eine Allee.'), B., who is a mountain (Berg), and so on.

But when he reaches the first person pronoun, I., he writes: 'I. I leap over since this is I myself' ('I. überspringe ich, denn das bin ich selbst.'), and apparently leaps over J. as well, for the next letter he encounters is K., a waitress (eine Kellnerin), who serves coffee (Kaffee) (Das Gesamtwerk, Vol. vii, p. 333).

Often in the later stories the external walk is abandoned in favour of an internal one -- the landscape has changed, the prose turned more self-reflexive, the field more obviously one of artifice and language.

The most direct statement on the appeal that walking had to Walser and what it meant to him is found in the long speech he gives in the 1917 novella, 'The Walk', after the tax collector has remarked that the narrator is always seen out walking.

'Walk', was my answer, 'I definitely must, to invigorate myself and to maintain contact with the living world without perceiving which I could not write the half of one more single word, or produce the tiniest poem in verse or prose. Without walking I would be dead, and my profession, which I love passionately, would be destroyed... Walking is for me not only healthy and lovely, it is also of service and useful. A walk advances me professionally and provides me at the same time also with amusement and joy; it refreshes and comforts and delights me, it is a pleasure for me, and simultaneously, it has the peculiarity that it allures me and spurs me on to further creation, since it offers me as material numerous small and large objectivities upon which I later work at home, diligently and industriously... With the utmost love and attention the man who walks must study and observe every smallest living thing, be it a child, a dog, a fly, a butterfly, a sparrow, a worm, a flower, a man, a house, a tree, a hedge, a snail, a mouse, a cloud, a hill, a leaf, or no more than a poor discarded scrap of paper on which, perhaps, a dear good child at school has written his first clumsy letters. The highest and the lowest, the most serious and the most hilarious things are to him equally beloved, beautiful, and valuable. He must bring with him no sort of sentimentally sensitive self-love or quickness to take offence. Unselfish and unegoistic, he must let his careful eye wander and stroll where it will; only he must be continuously able in the contemplation and observation of things to efface himself, his private complaints, needs, wants, and sacrifices. If he does not, then he walks only half attentive, with only half his spirit, and that is worth nothing... He must be able to bow down and sink into the deepest and smallest everyday thing, and it is probable that he can. Faithful, devoted self-effacement and self-surrender among objects, and zealous love for all phenomena and things, make him happy in this, however, just as every performance of duty makes that man happy and rich in his inmost being who is aware of his duty. Spirit, devotion, and faithfulness bless him and raise him high up above his own inconspicuous walking self, which has only too often a name and evil reputation for vagabondage and vagrancy... In a word, by thinking, pondering, drilling, digging, speculating, writing, investigating, researching, and walking, I earn my daily bread with as much sweat on my brow as anybody. Although I may cut a most carefree figure, I am highly serious and conscientious, and though I seem to be no more than delicate and dreamy, I am a solid technician!

(Selected Stories, pp. 85-8)

I quote the speech extensively (though hardly in its entirety) because of its relevance to the themes of minimalism and loss of self, and to call attention to Walser's emphasis on emotional extremes, the high and the low, and the relationship of his art to his life.

Walser's walker is a servant to nature, to society, and to his art. In Jakob von Gunten, Jakob, who attends the Benjamenta Institute, a school for butlers, tells us: 'Such people as I am, to some extent intelligent, should let the good impulses which they possess blossom and exhaust themselves in the service of others. Me, I shall be something very lowly and small' (Jakob von Gunten, p. 53). To be in service to others is a means by which the individual can lose his self; a means, then, paradoxically, to freedom. The young child in Walser's 'fairy tale', 'The End of the World', who has 'neither father and mother, nor brother and sister, who belonged to no one and, in addition, had no home, hit upon the notion of walking continuously until it came to the end of the world.' She is in service to 'the one notion, the one idea, namely the idea of seeking the end of the world and walking until it had been found' (Das Gesamtwerk, Vol. II, p. 246). She walks for sixteen years. Finally she comes upon a farmhouse which, unbeknownst to her, is called 'The End of the World'. When she is told by the farmwife that she has reached her goal, she

collapsed from weariness, good heavens! but was quickly picked up and laid in a bed by good human hands. When the child came round again, it was lying to its astonishment in the prettiest little bed and living with dear good people. 'May I remain here?' it asked, 'I will serve you well.' The people replied: 'Why shouldn't you be allowed to do that? We like you. Stay here with us, and serve well. We could certainly make use of an industrious maidservant, and if you are worthy, we will have you as our daughter.' The child did not have to be told twice. It diligently began to work and heartily to serve, and as a result, everyone was soon fond of it, and henceforth the child walked on no longer, for it was as if at home.

(Das Gesamtwerk, Vol. II, pp. 247-8)

Jakob is quite certain what serving will bring him as he grows older. 'One learns very little here,' Jakob von Gunten begins: 'there is a shortage of teachers and none of us boys of the Benjamenta Institute will come to anything, that is to say, we shall all be something very small and subordinate later in life' (Jakob von Gunten, p. 23). What are Jakob's antics, jokes, contradictions, sillinesses, but attacks on the deadening restrictions of institutions and on the stolidity of self-importance? He aspires toward selflessness. 'But one thing I do know for certain: in later life I shall be a charming, utterly spherical zero' (Jakob von Gunten, p. 24). Within the confines of Benjamenta's Boys' School, Jakob represents the dynamic force of creativity. Only by becoming nothing, a zero, a cipher ('Since I have been at the Benjamenta Institute I have already contrived to become a mystery to myself.' [Jakob von Gunten, p. 23]), can one be free to perceive 'the true truths' and create. 'Every poet likes dust', Walser wrote in his mock-questionnaire, 'Poets', 'for it is in the dust, and in the most enchanting oblivion, that, as we all know, precisely the greatest poets like to lie...' (Selected Stories, p. 117).

By losing himself in that 'most enchanting oblivion', Walser was freed to do some rather curious things with language. With the self on the wane or no longer there, language comes to the foreground. In a piece entitled 'My Efforts', Walser looked back at his work and said: 'In fact I was experimenting in the linguistic field, in the hope that there is present in language an unknown vivacity which it is a pleasure to awaken' (Das Gesamtwerk, Vol. XII, pp. 431-2). Words themselves, as Gaston Bachelard also maintained, are living entities, and in order for the artist to contact their life source, he must abandon his self and enter the dream of language. Walser's 'form of arabesque discourse', Middleton observed in his essay on Walser, 'The Picture of Nobody', 'can explore dimensions of verbal comedy which are inaccessible to any prose of a representational nature. Often what is said may be out of all proportion to what it is said about, but in such a way that the statement creates its own proportions, its own world of imaginative forms.'

Two passages, by way of illustration, from the late work:

The parson of the village where what is here told occurred was out of doors elucidating

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for his young protegés the planetary system. A writer was working in a lamplit room at his rapidly waxing work when, vexed by visions, the girl rose up from her bed intending to rush into the pond, which she did with almost laughable alacrity.

('A Village Tale', Selected Stories, p. 167)

In the Biedermeier period, thus during the time when, let's say, a Lenau brought to the shaping stage his ineffably delicate and beautiful verses, at his ease, and slowly, as he raised them up out of the silent depths of not yet having been written down, there lived, unless my presence of mind forsakes me entirely, a housemaid, of whom and in whose hearing, albeit she was in her way an excellent person perhaps, more young than old, and more nearly beautiful than fundamentally hideous, some were apt to say she was a beast.

('A Biedermeier Story', Selected Stories, p. 182)

Was Walser simply 'a child, though a quite clever one to be sure' (Selected Stories, p. 165), that is, a kind of primitive, as he said Thomas Mann considered him? Certainly no more than were many other artists at that time who cultivated childish qualities in their work, notably his fellow Bernese, Paul Klee, and in music the Papa of Les Six, Erik Satie. But a primitive writer could not approach Walser's complexity. His naive-ironic art offers us a way to see the world in a fuller, though not necessarily brighter, light.

Beneath the lightness and ludic sense, a current of psychic distress flows as disturbing as that of Kafka. Where are we? the reader asks. How did we get here? What brought about these radical shifts of perspective, of emotion and tone?

My most exalted is so beautiful and I worship her with such a holy respect that I attach myself to another and therewith must seize the opportunity to recover from the strain of sleepless nights, to relate to the successor how dear the past one was, to tell her, 'I love you just as much.'

(Selected Stories, p. 137)

There is a demonic side of Walser and self-effacement that cannot be overlooked. The creative waves that come in when the self is abdicated are not necessarily benevolent ones. In a 1925 letter to Therese Breitbach, a young girl with whom he exchanged letters but never met, Walser wrote:

Today I went swimming in deliciously cold water, soft and delicate sunshine, in the river which runs shimmering around our town like a serpent. Needless to say, nobody knows about the girl whom I made fun of, partly in prose, and whom I worshipped, on the other hand, partly in poems. I have lived in rooms where all night I could not close my eyes for fear. Now it's like this: I no longer know for sure if I love her. Indeed, my dear Fraulein, one can keep one's feelings very much alive, or let them grow cold, neglect them.

(Selected Stories, p. 166)

In 1929, after a period of intense isolation and poverty, during which he suffered from hallucinations and nightmares and made several suicide attempts, he voluntarily committed himself to Waldau Sanatorium outside Berne. The diagnosis was schizophrenia, though his symptoms were more those of a depressive. In 1933 he was transferred, against his wishes, to a mental hospital in Herisau, eastern Switzerland -- after which he never wrote again. (When asked why he had stopped writing, he said, 'I am not here to write, but to be mad.') On Christmas Day, 1956, four months before his seventy-ninth birthday, Walser went on his usual solitary walk across the hills near the sanatorium. He was found that afternoon by some children and their dog, lying on his back, hand on heart, on a snow-covered field of the Rosenberg.

It is quite possible that Walser's thirty-five years of sending us messages from 'the most enchanting oblivion' caused the artistic silence of his final years, but his self-effacement was also what was most responsible for his producing a body of work and style as original as any written in this century.

-- Tom Whalen, December 1985

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COUNTER-EARTH AND
COUNTER HUMANITY:
A Consideration of
the Gor Series by John Norman

by MARTIN BRIDGSTOCK

Introduction

At the time of writing, there are twenty-one books in John Norman's Gor series . They appear to sell very well (Elliot, 1982; 21), yet Norman appears to be separate from most other sf and fantasy writers. A Brisbane sf dealer reports that buyers of Norman's books tend not to buy other sf.

Norman's books are essentially fantasy, but with some sf trappings. However, their appeal is differently grounded. I want to investigate that appeal. It may shed light not only on the Gor books, but upon the appeal of sf generally.

Gor

The Gor novels are told in the first person, and are set on a planet on the far side of the sun from Earth. The priest-kings of Gor, a mysterious race of giant insects, restrict human military technology on the planet, so that the standard weapons are swords and bows. In other ways, the planet has advanced technology, with cableless electric light and portable translating machines. Gor is mainly a planet of medieval-style walled cities, though there are powerful nomad societies as well.

In many books the hero is Tarl Cabot, an Englishman who taught in an American university before being transported to Gor. He becomes a Gorean warrior, and completely accepts Gorean culture.

The first three Gor books (Tarnsman of Gor, Outlaw of Gor, and Priest-Kings of Gor) differ somewhat from the others. There is some evidence (Hurst, 1985; 54) that they were intended to be the complete series. The distinctive elements are less clear in these works.

The Gor series as fantasy

Norman Spinrad (1981; 7) has summarized a commercial formula for fantasy novels. It runs like this:

a single heroic lead, male or female but more likely male [who] is propelled by special destiny on a picaresque quest across a danger- and wonder-ridden landscape through many thrilling physical adventures.

The hero is characterized by:

courage, single-valued moral innocence, physical prowess, and a secret identity as the darling of destiny.

The Gor books correspond well to Spinrad's formula. However, they cannot be described as good examples of it. For a commercial fantasy book to be successful, it seems reasonable to assume that it must use the elements in Spinrad's formula in exciting or appealing ways. The landscape must be deeply and excitingly dangerous, the physical adventures thrilling and well recounted, the hero unusually sympathetic, and so on. By none of these criteria can the Gor books be classed as good. The dialogue is usually poor, and on occasion (such as the opening of Fighting Slave of Gor) stilted almost beyond belief. The action writing is also poor, and indeed sometimes it is hard to tell what is going on. It seems safe to say that, if Norman's books had no appeal beyond the standard formula, they would not be bestsellers. They would be undistinguished, and largely unnoticed, examples of the genre.

The one distinguishing feature of the Gor books is their treatment of the relationship between the sexes. The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (Nicholls, 1979; 431) summarizes this as 'bondage and sado-masochism'. This is too simple. Norman's books set forth a consistent thesis, diametrically opposed to current ideas. In this sense, Gor is indeed a 'counter-earth'.

The philosophy appears in virtually all the books, but is clearly spelled out in Nomads of Gor. Cabot, over the protests of a former New York secretary, makes these pronouncements:

throughout the mammals it seems that there is one whose nature it is to possess and one whose nature it is to be possessed. Goreans recognise... that this truth is hard for women to understand, that they will reject it, that they will fear it and fight it... That is why... upon this barbaric world the woman who cannot surrender herself is upon occasion simply conquered.

In the stories this means that for women on Gor (imported Earth women included), freedom is an unnatural state. Repeatedly, arrogant women are stripped, chained, whipped, branded, and forced to confess their status of abject slavery. There seems to be 'subcultural' variations. Among the nomads, for example, recalcitrant women may be immersed in a bag of bosh dung for the night, while in the city of Ar they may be forced to act, and eat, like dumb beasts (Nomads of Gor and Mercenaries of Gor respectively).

Slavery is presented as being positively merciful. The true nature of the human female is enabled to surface, and the slaves are eventually happy to serve their male masters, being 'wild and free and sexual [with] helpless appetites' (Nomads of Gor).

Although the enslaved women end by confessing their dependence upon men, the reverse is not true. Men treat their female slaves as commodities (Peek, 1984). They may be lent for sexual purposes to other males, sent out to earn money by prostitution, or sold. The idea of returning the love of a slave is treated with incredulity .

'I love you, master,' she wept, 'I love you.'
... I supposed one could be fond of a slave.

(Beasts of Gor)

Of course, this is a rapist's charter. It justifies any man in imposing his will upon any woman. After all, he knows what she really wants while she, probably, does not! The philosophy also implies that no woman is capable of wielding power or taking serious responsibility. This is illustrated in the books. As early as the second book (Outlaw of Gor), the female ruler of a city condemns Tarl Cabot to death -- because he refused to abduct her. She had been secretly dreaming of being abducted. The Lady Florence (Fighting Slave of Gor) is a scheming baggage who treats her slaves badly and carries out vicious intrigues against female rivals.

It is therefore too simple to summarize the Gor books as 'bondage and sado-masochism'. The

beatings, chainings, and enslavings are part of a consistent philosophy. The end product of the enslaving process is a stereotyped female slave. The following is an amalgam of speeches made by slaves in virtually all the Gor books. Former New York secretaries, Gorean aristocrats, and long-time slave girls all talk the same. Their speech runs something like this:

'Master, Master,' they quack, 'I am a well-whipped slave. I hope that you will not beat me, but I am happy that you are able to. I desire only to serve you, Master, and to be your slave.'

I call this process 'quacking' because that is roughly how far it resembles normal human speech. The ultimate fate of a woman on Gor is to become the quacking slave. However, this state is not in itself of interest. Once the haughty, proud, tormented women have been reduced to quacking slaves, usually they leave the narrative rather quickly, or at best remain as peripheral characters.

The end result of the Gor philosophy is the quacking female, deprived of any individual personality. However, this end state is not by itself interesting. It is the process of destruction upon which the books focus, and which seems to fascinate many readers. The Gor books iterate that any woman can be reduced to slavery and destroyed as an individual. The books are poor fantasy, mild porn laced with bondage and badly described sadism. Their central thrust, though, is the relentless destruction of the female personality .

Gor as a counter-Earth

In order to portray this 'counter-Earth', Norman has to construct a world that is strange in many respects. First, the female population of Gor seems oddly composed. Virtually all the women are nubile. One wonders where the little girls are, and the middle-aged and elderly women.

Second, to make the disintegration of the women convincing, Norman has to deprive them of anything but pride and misguided ideas about their own station. These, of course, are soon beaten out of them. Other means of resistance are kept out of the picture. For instance, female slaves do not band together against their captors; they laugh at each other's misfortunes. One sees little, too, of the manipulation of men by cleverer women, although this possibility is mentioned in Tarnsman of Gor. Finally, the embarrassing topic of motherhood is kept, for the most part out of the picture. There are some exceptions, but generally speaking the women are creatures of straw, isolated and with nothing but pride and stupidity to resist destruction.

Hurst makes more points along the same lines (Hurst, 1985). To sustain the central philosophy of his counter-Earth, Norman has had to portray a world that is wildly unconvincing by any rational standards. The props in the Gor series are shoddy. They are poor fantasy. And yet people -- many people -- keep on and on buying the books. Why?

The appeal of the Gor books

Why do people read fiction? I have yet to encounter a satisfactory explanation. Perhaps the most interesting attempt is that of Gerhart Wiebe (1971). According to Wiebe, the messages received can be put into three categories. One category -- directive messages -- can be put on one side as far as the Gor series is concerned. Directive messages 'call for learning, for changed behavior, new differentiations, refined perceptions. Such responses require the expenditure of intellectual effort on the part of the neophyte' (Wiebe, 1971; 161). I doubt if anyone has learned much from the Gor books, or found them requiring much intellectual effort!

The other types of message -- maintenance and restorative -- are of more interest. According to Wiebe, maintenance messages reinforce and strengthen pre-existing attitudes. They do not teach or improve understanding, except that they may 'review, elaborate, extend...

experience at approximately his achieved level of sophistication'. Maintenance messages are restful and unchallenging. They are also somewhat pleasurable; most of us enjoy having our basic assumptions confirmed!

Restorative messages are also pleasurable. They involve reversing 'deference lines, so that the acted upon becomes the actor' (Wiebe, 1971; 167). Often, via fantasy or metaphor, restorative messages enable the oppressed or frustrated to strike back at those above them. They release small amounts of aggression, and enable the consumer to take a respite from the stressful world.

Now, do these ideas of Wiebe -- maintenance and restorative messages -- apply at all to fantasy, and to the Gor books in particular? I think they do. Delany has summarized the appeal of standard sword-and-sorcery stories in these terms:

Sword and sorcery begins as a specifically male escape from the coming responsibility of marriage, family and a permanent home, i.e. wife, children, job. Its purpose, the people who publish and sell it say, is to provide the adolescent male audience with a bigger stronger man to identify with, who rescues the woman, beats up the villain, and who is loved briefly and allowed to leave without hassle.

(Delany, 1977; 219)

Delany's analysis (and, of course, the publishers') corresponds to Wiebe's restorative function. Fantasy provides the young male with a rest, a reversal of the 'lines of deference'. Consider a male in early adolescence. He will still be at school, being 'processed' by an organization, and subject to older people of both sexes. At home, he is still dependent upon family income, and subject to parents. If he has a part-time job, it is likely to be of the poorly paid, menial type and once again subject to elders. Fantasy, clearly, involves an escape from all this; the values and activities in the standard fantasy story are completely at odds with those of normal life.

Being fantasy, the Gor books clearly perform this restorative function. However, what about their additional feature, the way they treat women? I believe that, for a section of the fantasy reading public, Norman's books also fulfil the maintenance function. They embellish and sustain pre-existing attitudes for some people. I suspect that the Gor series appeals to a suppressed rage against and fear of females that some (perhaps many) males experience. The series provides steady reassurance that women are ultimately subservient and inferior, and have slavery and humiliation as an ultimate fate. Such reassurance, for some people, is both pleasurable and a rest from the stressful world of real people.

This explains why the Gor books are such a success, despite their poor writing and plotting. It also explains why the subjugation elements become more and more obsessive as the series proceeds. The attraction of the Gor books has nothing to do with literary quality, and little to do with a 'good read'; it has to do with a steady diet of reassurance, mild titillation, and escapism. Superficially the Gor novels resemble fantasy, but at their heart is a different, and more malign, appeal.

So much for the male readers of Norman. Now for a surprise. Norman claims that his work is widely popular among females as well:

Certainly, many women are avid fans of the Gorean series. Indeed, I think one of the contributions not likely to be acknowledged, which the Gorean books have made commercially to the science-fiction field, is that they have helped open it up to female interest.

(Elliot, 1982; 240)

What might female readers find in Norman's writing? Perhaps some of the appeal may resemble that found by males. There is fantastic adventure, soft porn, and bondage. Indeed, the latter may exert more appeal for women; the titillation provided by Norman can hardly compete with outright erotica, but women are still, apparently, less likely to buy this than men.

But what of the endless degradation and depersonalization of women? How can any female readers find this attractive? There is evidence that being dominated in a sexual context appeals to many women -- but to some men too! (The 'governess' literature is hilarious.) It is also possible that women find a 'horror' element in the subjugation process; they can feel secure, and slightly contemptuous, as the depersonalization process proceeds. It might also be that Norman's philosophy is being received in a restorative sense; the male subjugator is identified with; as Wiebe has put it, 'the acted upon becomes the actor', and some degree of aggression and frustration is acted out through the book.

Personal comments

It is difficult to find out why human beings behave as they do. When one is discussing sensitive areas of ego and sexuality, one can be reasonably sure that the truth is even harder to ascertain. The ideas here are tentative attempts to understand what is happening with the Gor series, and it is quite possible that they are totally wrong.

My main conclusion is that, although the Gor books have some features in common with simple fantasy, the heart of their appeal is quite different. For the male, at least, they appeal to a suppressed fear and rage of women, and provide some degree of reassurance. As literature, or even an enjoyable hour's reading, they are almost worthless. The first three books can just bear re-reading; in the others, the obsessive elements are so strong that the books are ruined as stories.

It is also worth noting how far the Gor philosophy is removed from current issues. The controversy over feminism continues, but Norman's position is totally beyond the spectrum of debate. On the one hand, many feminists argue that men and women are closely similar in character, apart from obvious biological differences; the rest is socially conditioned. On the other hand, critics such as Goldberg (1979) have argued that there are intrinsic differences between the sexes, and that women will never occupy more than a minority of positions of authority. Compare this to Norman's position. For Norman, women (all women) are so different from men that not only can they have no authority but they are all, without exception, happier as abject slaves. Norman is virtually beyond the realm of rational discourse.

As I slogged through most of the Gor series, my reaction changed from exasperation to boredom. It would have been delightful to find a female character who stepped out of the mould, who tasted the full delights of slavery, and then announced, 'Thanks, but no thanks. I'd rather be free.' She never appears, of course, and eventually I stopped looking. And, I confess, my children played a part. Loud whoops of 'Read any more John Norman books, Daddy?' can be very demoralizing, especially in public places. To spare myself further embarrassment I have decided to pack away my (metaphorical) dirty raincoat and quit Gor forever. After all, it's a dreary place.

Footnotes

- 1 According to the Encyclopedia (Nicholls, 1979), there are twenty-one Gor books to date, published in the following years. I have read the asterisked ones. All titles listed here are followed by 'of Gor': *Tarnsman (1966), *Outlaw (1967), *Priest Kings (1968), *Nomads (1969), *Assassin (1970), Raiders (1971), Captive (1972), Hunters (1974), Marauders (1975), Tribesman (1975), *Slave Girl (1977), *Fighting Slave (1980), *Guardsmen (1981), *Rogue (1981), Savages (1982), Blood Brothers (1982), Beasts (1983), Explorers (1983), *Kajira (1983), Players (1984), *Mercenaries (1985). In 1975 Norman also published Imaginative Sex and Time Slave, and in 1979 Ghost Dance. I have no desire to read more. Grotesquely, in 1979 an author with the name John Norman published a book entitled Organs of Britain!
- 2 This parodies a theme that often appears in romances. In these, the hero and heroine come into conflict. The heroine is more and more disturbed by her dependence upon the hero, and finally confesses her love. The hero then reveals that he is equally in love with her. Fade to sunset. All of this happens in the Gor books, except for the last stage.

- 3 In my first draft of this paper, I argued that Norman's books were not strictly sadism, as the actual torture is subject to the depersonalization process, and the illustration of the philosophy. However, Cathy Kerrigan pointed out that de Sade expounds a similar philosophy in some of his books. I suspect there is a difference: de Sade's philosophy was thought up to justify his sexual leanings. By contrast, the sadism in the Gor books is a means to an end, the expounding of the philosophy. The dialogue at the beginning of Fighting Slave of Gor suggests that a major target is the feminist movement.
- 4 There is a scene with a starving peasant woman and her child in Mercenaries of Gor. She is treated quite sympathetically, but soon drops out of the story.
- 5 I think Wiebe is too dogmatic here. Learning can be a pleasurable process -- witness all the people studying part time for no other reason! I suspect also that part of the pleasure of reading books by writers such as Arthur Hailey or Frederick Forsyth is that learning takes place: one learns interesting things about banks, hotels, or arms smuggling while following the story.
- 6 A whole bevy of movies -- mostly dreadful -- address these problems directly. Examples are Porky's, Better Off Dead, and Ferris Bueller's Day Off. A key question then arises: why do some people find relief in fantasy, and others in messages that directly address the problems?
- 7 Can one have good literature devoted to this type of appeal? In some senses, yes. There is nothing to prevent a Gor book being well written, well plotted, and with clear, vivid descriptions of surroundings and societies (however odd the latter may be). One could also envision very cleverly written works that accounted for recognizably human behaviour in terms of the Gor philosophy. However, given their obsessive and repetitive themes, the Gor novels are not like this. Insofar as they are obsessive, repetitive, and unrealistic, they cannot be considered good writing.
- 8 I suppose it is reasonably well known by now that John Norman is the pen-name of John Lange, an academic at the Queens College of the City University of New York. His area is philosophy, in which he has published a number of works.

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-- Martin Bridgstock,
Griffith University,
March 1987

HITLER

Was trying to explain about Hitler to some children today; he was, I said, a very bad man. "Was he the kind that wanted his custard before he'd eaten up all his meat and vegetables?" one of them asked. I said that his sins had been even more scarlet than that, but was unable to abridge the iniquities of the Third Reich to nursery terms, for fear of putting ideas into their heads.

-- Robertson Davies,
The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks, p. 60

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SOCIAL AND MORAL ENTROPY
IN J. G. BALLARD'S 'HIGH-RISE'

by GUIDO EEKHAUT

Guido Eekhaut discusses:

High-Rise

by J. G. Ballard
(London: Triad/Panther, 1985;
original publication 1975)

The science of thermodynamics gave us a term -- often misused -- which is of special importance when reading the work of J. G. Ballard. This term is entropy. First used by the German physicist Rudolf Clausius in 1868, the term originally stood for the quantity by which the amount of measured energy that is no longer available for further work in a closed

thermodynamic system after initial work has been performed. Thermodynamics is based on two laws, the first stating that energy is neither created nor destroyed but can only be transferred from one state to another (for example, from heat to work), and the second stating that during this conversion a kind of 'punishment' is inflicted upon the system under the guise of lost energy.

The problem with entropy, however, is that the term seems to have received a number of distinguishable meanings in diverse scientific disciplines, each of them using entropy in a different sense. Entropy is also the 'heat death of the universe', where all difference between energy levels in the universe will have disappeared as a result of the above-mentioned entropic process. In that way, the name given to the process is now given to the result.

Since with the disappearance of differences in energy levels the information about these levels is also lost, entropy has been put on a par with chaos. As such, the term was incorporated in communications theory (Claude Shannon), where entropy is seen as the amount of uncertainty about the content and meaning of messages. The term is also used in economic theory, textual theory, statistical physics, etc., and in each discipline we are further distanced from the original meaning. Originally indicating an equalizing of levels, the term 'entropy' has become most frequently used, in literature as well, as a tendency towards chaos, and chaos itself.

Science fiction is rich in entropic topics; it is a subject matter that fits very well the objectives of some branches of the genre where writers extrapolate, or in which they research those aspects of the human psyche not currently used in the mainstream (the characters and their environments in the works of Philip Dick being a good example): reactions against super-urbanization; people becoming automata (in the figurative sense; again see Dick's work); and decay in all its forms.

As a specific example of the use of entropic images I have taken a book by J. G. Ballard,

High-Rise (1975). The first paragraph immediately sets off with an image of 'distancing' -- that is, an image which puts the reader at a 'historic' distance from the events by means of elements that make clear this is neither here nor now, so that the book may not be mistaken for naturalistic/mimetic fiction: 'Later, as he sat on his balcony eating the dog' (p. 7). This image evokes entropy in its social sense. One is inclined to read this sentence wrongly, but there is no escape from its implication: Dr Robert Laing, one of the main characters, is eating a dog on the balcony of his apartment. Meanwhile he reflects on the 'unusual events that had taken place within this huge apartment building during the previous three months' (p. 7). In this way, the other main character is introduced: a forty-storey-high building with a thousand apartments, supermarket, school, restaurant, and pools.

After his divorce, Laing has moved to the building to find quiet, rest, and anonymity. To us it seems shortsighted to look for these things in a building this size, but we are far from imagining what Ballard has in store for us. The fact is there: Laing hopes to become invisible, unnoticed in the mass of humans. He hopes for what sociologists see as the disease of the modern urban community: the dehumanizing of interpersonal relations, the tendency of people to become objects. And this is one of the themes of the book: that the individual is not an object, not a piece of scenery, and that he will resist bureaucratic plans to classify him in social classes of status and earnings, as happens in the High Rise (where the richest people occupy the highest floors).

This first image -- Dr Laing (in many ways a man of the middle, since he is living on the twenty-fifth floor) eating roasted dog -- is already proof that entropy, in the form of social chaos, has struck. The first signs were already noticeable three months earlier, with an incident that concerned Laing alone, but would become typical of the first stage of decaying human relations. From the thirty-first floor, where a party has been going on, a bottle is thrown down -- by accident or on purpose -- and hits Laing's balcony, suggesting to him that 'people in high-rises tended not to care about tenants more than two floors below them'.

From the start the high-rise is a world set apart and isolated (and planned as such, with its own shops, energy, and water supply), but it is also a mirror image of the world outside even if it seems to deny that: 'For all the proximity of the City two miles away to the west along the river, the office buildings of central London belonged to a different world, in time as well as space.' At first the high-rise seems to provide an alternative to the hated urban setting, with its crowded streets, traffic jams, subways, and lack of parking space. Most of the tenants work near by: at the airport, in a hospital (like Laing), in tv studios. The community should have been a utopian one, a symbol for a future, ultra-urban society, and it is not by coincidence that its inhabitants leave it seldom, in fact only to go to work. All their needs and wishes are cared for by the high-rise.

Nevertheless there is turmoil under the seemingly calm utopic ocean: 'never far below the froth of professional gossip was a hard mantle of personal rivalry. At times he felt that they were all waiting for someone to make a serious mistake' (p. 12). Not only is insomnia often complained of by the inhabitants (and, as Ballard explains, a preparation for the eruption of chaos later, when nobody will get any sleep at all) but Laing becomes aware of his own nonchalance when he throws the remains of the broken bottle from his balcony and only later realizes he might have injured somebody.

The announcement of the coming chaos is not sudden, but the realization of it is (in Laing's phrase): 'he now had to accept something he been trying to repress -- that the previous six months had been a period of continuous bickering among his neighbours, of trivial disputes over the faulty elevators and air-conditioning, inexplicable electric failures, noise, competition for parking space and, in short, that host of minor defects which the architects were supposed specifically to have designed out of these over-priced apartments' (pp. 17-18). Furthermore, Ballard presents the high-rise (and its near-replicas that occupy part of an enormous terrain) as a topographical entropy of the landscape: 'The five apartment buildings on the eastern perimeter of the mile-square project together formed a massive palisade that by dusk had already plunged the suburban streets behind them in darkness'

(p. 19). In earlier novels Ballard described diverse entropic processes -- of natural causes (The Drowned World, The Crystal World) or of human causes (The Drought) -- but here the artificial destruction of the landscape is a powerful image of threatening entropy, as the towers take away all light from their environment. The tone of the book is already given.

Designed as a balanced human ecological system, the high-rise seems not to behave fully as planned when, after an electrical failure, riots break out and the feelings bottled up by civilization are let loose. The thin varnish of civilization proves very thin indeed, and is quickly eroded by the inhuman proportions of the building. A clear example of the disturbance of order is the carcass of a dog, found in the pool, probably drowned out of resentment. The dog is a symbol of class differences and a source of anger:

Something convinced him that the dog's drowning had been a provocative act, intended to invite further retaliation in its turn. The presence of the fifty or so dogs in the high-rise had long been a source of irritation. Almost all of them were owned by residents on the top ten floors -- just as, conversely, most of the fifty children lived in the lower ten. (p. 23)

The competition between floors, which results in the riots, is a competition between social classes, between groups of inhabitants (childless versus parents, dog possessors versus dogless). Later we notice that, as chaos and decay multiply, the groups involved in the conflict become smaller but more dangerous and fanatical. This decrease in the size of the groups goes hand in hand with a proportional decrease in the area of the corresponding territories, another aspect of increasing entropy. Laing becomes involved in this competition when he goes to the highest floor for a game of squash with Anthony Royal, one of the designers of the high-rise, and is threatened, non-violently but emphatically, by the other inhabitants of the floor.

After the first riots a period of waiting follows. People stay at home from work and keep their children away from school. A new provocation follows. Encouraged by their parents, children escalate a party into an orgy of alcoholism and destruction of cars -- a series of loud parties that seem motivated by aimlessness. Nobody seems inclined to sleep. The competition between floors and groups of floors increases swiftly, lifts are being taken over, and a psychologist predicts accurately: 'We'll soon be refusing to speak to anyone outside our own enclave' (p. 31). Here Ballard shows clearly the new territorial feeling of the tenants, that impulse inherited from their primitive past that pushes them, to varying degrees, to suspect everyone from 'outside', a suspicion that can only turn into hate. Ballard condenses this theme, proper to sf, to some very everyday premises: disturbance, noise, jealousy, quarrels. For him, these problems of 'the other' are not to be solved in outer space; it is enough to show human relations in a situation close to our own.

Each morning Laing finds it difficult to leave the building and go to work. He feels something is missing once he has left the high-rise, something he cannot find in the clinic. When he leaves 'Laing looked back at the high-rise, aware that he was leaving part of his mind behind him' (p. 35). This feeling is shared with other inhabitants, and is reason enough for some of them to stay at home for good. Strangely, Laing even meets signs of decay within the clinic:

He let himself into the dissecting rooms of the anatomy department and walked down the lines of glass-topped tables, staring at the partially dissected cadavers. The steady amputation of limbs and thorax, head and abdomen by teams of students, which would reduce each cadaver by term's end to a clutch of bones and a burial tag, exactly matched the erosion of the world around the high-rise. (p. 35)

Ballard seems to point out the entropy in the high-rise is something every inhabitant carries around with him, something that is, in other words, inherent in them as inhabitants of the building. We are not sure if Ballard is aware of this conclusion, because elsewhere he makes clear that entropy is a factor of the dehumanization of the environment in which the inhabitants must live. But maybe they are 'infected' by the entropy of the building. Maybe they are changed since entering it. Indeed, Ballard says:

A new social type was being created by the apartment building, a cool, unemotional personality impervious to the psychological pressures of high-rise life, with minimal needs for privacy, who thrived like an advanced species of machine in the neutral atmosphere. This was the sort of resident who was content to do nothing but sit in his over-priced apartment, watch television with the sound turned down, and wait for his neighbours to make a mistake. (pp. 35-6)

This is the new man, who learns to live amid entropy, with his swiftly changing acquaintances, breaches in his privacy, and limited involvement with other people -- a new sort of man who has cast off part of his humanity to arrive at this point. But entropy is as much cause as result: 'For the first time it removed the need to repress every kind of anti-social behaviour, and left them free to explore any deviant or wayward impulses' (p. 36). Small wonder that Laing is impelled to return to 'the high-rise after work.

Another important character is Wilder, a tv director, who wants to begin climbing to the higher floors. This is very clearly a climb up the social ladder (he lives on one of the lowest floors). But his plan fails because of the enmity of the inhabitants of the upper floors. In Wilder's view, the high-rise is purely a class society, and he does not intend to stay below. At one point, Ballard makes him realize that for the inhabitants of the lower floors the 'real opponent was not the hierarchy of residents in the heights far above them, but the image of the building in their own minds, the multiplying layers of concrete that anchored them to the floor' (p. 58). Reason enough for Wilder to insist on a second attempt, a fight against his own limitations as well as those of the building.

However, Ballard denies this initial conclusion in a further context. The inhabitants are closing themselves off from the outside world, destroying all possible means of contact (except mute TV pictures) and stubbornly considering their problems as an internal matter only. When one of them falls out of a window and is killed, nobody thinks of calling the police. The entropic process has been accepted from the start, as a result of hierarchical differences. It is seen as necessary, and finally even welcomed as the great equalizer: 'Royal suspected that his neighbours unconsciously hoped that everything would decline even further' (p. 76). The reason for this is that out of chaos (and in the moment of chaos itself) a new world emerges, a world more exciting than the old one, more thrilling and animal-like than the polished and boring modern society. Acceptable or not, the entropic process manifests itself more and more pointedly: 'The tampering with the electricity system had affected the air-conditioning. Dust was spurting from the vents in the walls' (p. 57). Dust is an extreme form of entropy (also found in Philip Dick's work), and the dust will finally cover all furniture and also the cars around the high-rise, those useless cars nobody needs any more. Ballard concludes:

the residents enjoyed this breakdown of its services, and the growing confrontation between themselves. All this brought them together, and ended the frigid isolation of the previous months. (p. 60)

Yet their acceptance of chaos has something of desperation, insofar as they are eager to see its symptoms as a last chance of preserving their senses:

As [Royal] stumbled over the black plastic bags he wondered why they had never heaved them over the side. Presumably they held this rubbish to themselves less from fear of attracting the attention of the outside world than from a need to cling to their own... (p. 137)

A third character we have met already: Anthony Royal, co-designer of the high-rise and inhabitant of a rooftop apartment. He too is aware of the escalating entropy. In his eyes the building is a living entity close to death, and his first impulse is to leave it. But the high-rise is not dead yet and, like the other inhabitants, Royal will not be able to leave it. He is worried personally by the vandalism inasmuch that his injuries from an accident months earlier are hurting him again, like stigmata, but he is also intrigued by the new social (dis)order that is emerging. The high-rise is now fully isolated from the

outside world, a perfectly closed system in the thermodynamic sense, where entropy has free play. Not even the highest floors are spared; even they get their portion of decay:

Along corridors strewn with uncollected garbage, past blocked disposal chutes and vandalized elevators, moved men in well-tailored dinner-jackets. Elegant women lifted long skirts to step over the debris of broken bottles. The scents of expensive after-shave lotions mingled with the aroma of kitchen wastes. (p. 92)

But the continuing decay is not only a question of dirt and dust. It can also be seen in the way people look, despite the chic of the highest classes. Hygienic precautions are not taken seriously, there is no interest in regular food or water, a bath is unthinkable. Getting drunk as quickly as possible is the only rule. Social order breaks down: people move at random to other floors, change partners, and degrade into a primitive tribal system that consolidates floors and barricades their boundaries. Civilized conventions have been lost. Entropy is twofold: on the one hand, the degradation of the material environment (accumulation of human dirt, destruction, lack of hygiene); and on the other hand, the decay of morality (the dentist Steele strangles a kitten he has found in a flat while Laing watches in fascination).

But the entropy of morality is a decay of morale as well. Wilder's wife, who cannot follow her husband's social and topographical climb and cannot comprehend it (even if she ends up on the top floor, a servant of Royal) retreats into herself more and more and tries to maintain a normal living pattern although her apartment has been wrecked. Steele descends still further into decay:

Dressing up corpses and setting them in grotesque tableaux was a favourite pastime of the dentist's. His imagination, repressed by all the years of reconstructing his patients' mouths, came alive particularly when he was playing with the dead. The previous day Laing had blundered into an apartment and found him painting a bizarre cosmetic mask on the face of a dead account-executive, dressing the body like an overblown drag-queen in a voluminous silk nightdress. (p. 150)

Laing falls under his influence for some time, and follows him on his violent trips. Apart from that, he has some kind of perverse relationship with his sister:

Laing enjoyed her wheedling criticism of him, as he tried to satisfy her pointless whims. All this was a game, but he relished the role of over-dutiful servant dedicated to a waspish mistress, a devoted menial whose chief satisfaction was a total lack of appreciation and the endless recitation of his faults. (p. 148)

Wilder and Laing do not understand the extent to which their behaviour has been degraded, especially in the way they threaten their next of kin and fellow tenants. The old civilized self has been displaced by some freer self, but that freedom entails cruelty and a wish to dominate. The more profound the entropy, the more primitive these obsessions become. Even the clans, born out of necessity, are subject to entropic decay; they split into smaller enclaves made up merely of a few adjoining flats, and later divide into small roaming groups and individuals 'who built man-traps in empty apartments or preyed on the unwary in deserted elevator lobbies' (p. 133). Under the pressure of decay, even the most primitive of tribal groups cannot hold together. 'Strangely enough, Royal reflected, they would soon be back where they had begun, each tenant isolated within his own apartment' (p. 134).

Royal's servants and women leave him, and he becomes obsessed by final victory over the whole building. He sees himself going downstairs with his dogs and the birds that have gathered on the roof, opening all the apartments like cages in a zoo. But the reality is different: confronted by the other tenants of the upper floor he, once their leader, is made to look a fool. Silence finally descends on the building:

The residents of the high-rise remained where they were, hiding behind the barricades in their apartments, conserving what was left of their sanity and preparing themselves

for the night. By now what violence there was had become totally stylized, spasms of cold and random aggression. (p. 146)

Here Ballard makes a transition from one form of entropy to another -- from the notion of chaos to that of the most fundamental form in a thermodynamic sense: one of levelling. The high-rise will now slowly die of its own 'heat death', but will remain habitable for those who have survived all past ordeals. The past, the information about the past itself, is being lost:

He gazed up at the derelict washing-machine and refrigerator, now only used as garbage-bins. He found it hard to remember what their original function had been. To some extent they had taken on a new significance, a role that he had yet to understand. (pp. 146-7)

This too is an aspect of entropy, contrary to the natural procedure by which, with the advance of history, more and more information and knowledge is gathered. But Ballard contradicts the conclusion that entropy is, here, a complete phenomenon. It is responsible for decay, true; but it also creates a new order out of chaos, another sort of order:

Even the run-down nature of the high-rise was a model of the world into which the future was carrying them, a landscape beyond technology where everything was either derelict or, more ambiguously, recombined in unexpected but more meaningful ways. (p. 147)

Here the information has been preserved, but on a higher level than the individual. It has acquired another dimension by which it could possibly be unrecognizable to the tenants.

In High-Rise the only way to survive chaos is to descend to a more primitive level of random violence and passionless domination (although even that gives no certainty). Wilder becomes, during his climb upwards, a primitive man soiled with blood and paint, clinging to his camera as if it were a symbolic weapon. Laing barricades himself with two women in a flat and wants to seal out the rest of the building. Royal wants to join the birds on the roof, and the view of human intruders there distresses him. Wilder reaches the roof in ecstasy, shoots -- as in a child's game -- Royal, and meets a group of women on the roof garden. He feels like a child again, with all his wishes granted, and does not notice the knives they are holding to slaughter him, at the moment when he forgets the hard lesson he should have learned during his climb. Royal, who once thought he could dominate the building, ends up as a grotesque ruler over an empty pool full of bones and corpses. Laing is the only one left, and in an adjoining high-rise he sees the lights go out...

-- Guido Eekhaut, 1985

CAT STORY

I recall one Saturday afternoon when we heard a terrible commotion and howling coming from outside. When we investigated we found one of the neighbour's dogs, on a leash, struggling to cross the street to avoid passing our house. Kate, our cat, was just sitting on the porch looking totally unconcerned.

-- Gerald Smith, The Dilettant's Journal 7,
ANZAPA mailing 111, August 1986

HENRY FIELDING

Given a sign of life in any object, Fielding drew near to watch it, and to enjoy what he saw.

-- Richard Church,
The Growth of the English Novel, p. 75

Irene and I don't get to restaurants very often, either. When we do, it's usually yum cha at West Lake or an evening meal at the Rice Bowl.

PS: What I probably said, long ago, was 'fiction' is life with all the dull bits taken out'. But I didn't say it first. Henry James did.

(25 June 1986)

I should lead a more worthy life, in which I never go near record shops and never have debts, and in which Elaine and I never suggest to each other that we feeling like going out to a restaurant tonight... Come to think of it, the size of my debt just about equals the amount Elaine and I have spent on CDs over the last two years.

Polygram (DG, Decca and Philips) is about to release the CD version of the Viva! label and others like it. But a 'cheap' CD on such a label will still cost \$20, which is the price all CDs were when they were first released.

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Some recommendations from among CDs bought recently:

- * Karajan's superb rendition of Wagner's Parsifal is absolutely engrossing. Listen to the Prelude (taken rather slowly) and savour the sound and the immaculate silences. Not far away is the Solti 'Ring' cycle that you mention in passing. I have heard the LP pressing, but I realize now that it gave only an impression of what the master tapes held.
- * Shlomo Mintz's rendition of the Bach Violin Sonatas and Partitas is stunning. Listen to the 'Ciaccona' from 'Partita No. 2' wherein the struggling and failing, aspiring and despairing, indomitable human soul is portrayed. The last time I played this was immediately after an episode of A Prairie Home Companion, and the juxtaposition seems appropriate.
- * John Eliot Gardiner conducting Bach's Mass in B Minor: sorry, but yes, I prefer my music usually on contemporary instruments. Bach did not write the Goldberg Variations for a piano but for the timbre of a harpsichord. Whilst piano performances -- such as Glenn Gould's -- can be enlightening, my money would be directed to a harpsichord version. Talking of which, Trevor Pinnock delights in the Goldberg Variations.
- * Emil Gilels playing the piano sonatas of Beethoven, especially the Hammerklavier.
- * The Beethoven sonatas for piano and cello, with the magnificent combination of Rostropovich and Richter.
- * Karl Bohm's coupling of Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 and Symphony No. 9; I also have Ashkenazy's Sixth, but the Bohm seems to convey the lilt of this symphony even more charmingly and magically.
- * The Hogwood performance of Handel's Messiah.
- * The Gothic Voices performing sequences and hymns of Abbess Hildegard of Bingen on Hyperion.
- * Abbado's set of Mendelssohn symphonies -- the Second complete on one disc!
- * The Hogwood performance of Maunder's edition of Mozart's Requiem.
- * Neeme Jarvi's cycle of Sibelius symphonies on Bis, and Karajan's Fifth (even coupled as it is with a lacklustre Seventh).
- * The set of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau lieder recitals recently released by DG, including Schubert, Schumann, Wolf, Beethoven, Brahms, and Mahler.

Looking through that list, I realize that the transition to CD (I no longer buy LPs) has been beneficial: I think more carefully about my purchases because of the large price tag, and therefore am more likely to buy at least a good performance, if not an

outstanding one. It is also good to see that CD is no longer restricted simply to the classical potboilers, thanks largely to the efforts of the independent companies, such as Bis, Hyperion, Nimbus, and Harmonia Mundi.

We've only ever had one specialist classical store in Perth, and this is now largely given over to CDs, with a diminishing range of LPs. I await the day when we'll be able to get works such as the Solti 'Ring' complete on one disc, with a holographic replay of suitable vision.

(21 June 1986)

Some of those set racing the blood of the lusting CD buyer, and some I disagree with. For instance, recently I heard Jarvi's (to me) dull version of Sibelius's Symphony No. 5. I pulled out Lorin Maazel's set of the Sibelius symphonies, recorded in the late 1960s, and released as a set by Decca in 1972. What a feast for the ear that was, despite the surface noise on the records. So I played Maazel's version of Symphony No. 7, and that was even better. Listening to LPs still has its compensations, if only because the record companies have not yet reissued on CD so many of the really great performances.

Versions I don't much like include Gardiner's B Minor Mass. And Brendel seems much better than anybody else (except Schnabel during the 1930s) at Beethoven's piano music. Anyway, you've now seen my Favourite Records list for 1986, and no doubt will find a few of them disagreeable.

PHILIP BIRD

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Here are a few more details about my recommendations (printed in TMR 7/8).

Brahms:

- * The Clarinet Trio was by the Prague Trio on Supraphon.
- * The Viola (or Clarinet) Sonatas, Op. 120, were by Yehudi Menuhin (viola) and Louis Kentner (piano) on French HMV.
- * The Piano Trios are by Rubinstein, Szeryng, and Fournier on RCA.
- * Violin Sonatas 2 and 3 are by Zuckerman and Barenboim on DG.

I don't know which of these is on CD, but I suspect that the Violin Sonatas, at least, would be.

I was heartened to read of your dissatisfaction with Brahms interpretations. Too often I've felt frustrated listening to a Brahms work, feeling that it was treated too reverentially, that the conductor did not release the latent emotion. I look forward to hearing one of his symphonies really grabbed by the scruff of the neck and plunged into. That's why I was delighted by a performance of the two Cello Sonatas by an unknown (to me) duo on CBS: Friedrich and Eckart Sellheim. They really experience the music, rather than merely preserving it graciously for posterity.

Schumann:

- * Violin Sonatas, Op. 105 and 121: Catherine Courtois (violin) and Catherine Collard (piano) -- wonderfully moving works, a lot more direct than his symphonies. On French HMV; maybe a CD.

Prokofiev:

- * Violin Sonata in F Major, Violin Sonata in D Major: Lydia Mardkovitch (violin) and Gerhard Oppitz (piano), on Chandos.

You'll have noticed, I suppose, my concentration on sonatas for violin and piano. Somehow this literature speaks more personally for the composer than else. Other gems I've heard include the Grieg, Faure and Vaughan Williams works in this style. The more of Faure I hear, the more I like it.

of Faure I hear, the more I like it.

A qualification about my comment on Glenn Gould. I feel that he played around with the dynamics (speeds, shadings, etc.) to suit himself, whereas Bach's music treated according to the dynamics of baroque style speaks for itself, and is sufficiently uplifting. Back in 1970 my piano teacher put me on to Rosalyn Tureck's playing. She is closest to the mark, as she is a real student of Bach and his times.

A final special recommendation: Christopher Hogwood's Academy of Ancient Music, on L'Oiseau-Lyre, playing three quartets and a fantasy for flute, viola, cello and fortepiano. Perfection in music-making.

Books: This year I've been catching up on fantasy. I loved Lord of the Rings, and found Jack Vance's Lyonesse very satisfying. But best of all was William Morris's Waters of the Wondrous Isles. The medieval style is a slog initially, but eventually I was caught by the rhythm of it. Birdalone is one of the most mature characters I've met in a work of this type.

Other enjoyable tomes this year include Mythago Wood, Knut Hamsun's Love and Hunger, and a factual work, Robert S. Richardson's The Star Lovers, a collection of biographies of men of science, put together in a way that illustrates the progress of astronomy and cosmology.

(4 September 1986)

Thanks for the recommendations. Onward to a CD-led bankruptcy.

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I enjoyed the lists in TMR 7/8, as I always do. Glad to see Richard and Linda Thompson top of your popular records list. I don't buy too many records nowadays, but I did fork out for Richard Thompson's solo Across a Crowded Room, which is in many ways an extraordinary album, even for him. I saw him do a solo acoustic version of 'Love in a Faithless Country' which was utterly chilling, but the album version is weird by any standards. And 'She Twists the Knife Again' is probably the most vitriolic song since 'Positively 4th Street'. Yet 'When the Spell is Broken' is vintage Thompson -- mournful, chugging and melodic.

Books? Editing Paperback Inferno doesn't give me the chance to think about really memorable books. Far too often I find myself reading high-quality garbage or magnetically interesting trash. However... Diana Wynne Jones's Fire and Hemlock is an outstanding retelling of the 'Tam Lin' legend in a modern setting while, to continue the faint Fairport Convention theme that has slipped into this letter, the autobiography of John 'Babbacombe' Lee, The Man They Couldn't Hang, which inspired the album Fairport made when Richard Thompson left the band, has recently been reissued, and it's a gripping read. (Partly because, as the introduction suggests, Lee was probably guilty, but if he wasn't, there may well have been some strange conspiracies and relationships going on.)

The last memorable book I read was The Penguin Book of Caribbean Poetry, which has opened my eyes to a wonderfully rich literature. We had a 'Caribbean Week' on TV recently, and one of the highlights for me was the club poet Michael Smith reading Shelley, which shed a new light on both reggae/club poets and Shelley.

The only current possibility is the new Ray Bradbury, Death is a Lonely Business. Despite all the guff about what a literary writer Bradbury is, I find lines like 'Every time it is a damp dreary November in my soul I know it is high time to go from the sea again, and let someone cut my hair' (page 58) just bring me out in a fit of giggles.

I was thinking about the comment you made to Casey Arnott's letter on the purpose of criticism, where you put your finger on an important point, namely the problem of presenting a questioning of the assumptions made by a writer's audience to that audience. Though I'm not sure about your citing Edmund Wilson's Tolkien piece as something that 'hardly made a mark on Tolkien devotees'. Certainly when I read it, I found it extremely useful in (1) opening my eyes to some of the demerits of Lord of the Rings (which I'd devoured uncritically and ecstatically two or three years before, when I was fourteen); and (2) causing me to articulate just why, despite the fact that I agreed with much of what the man said, I still found much to admire in Tolkien. But perhaps I'm not a 'Tolkien devotee' in quite the way you mean...

I'm not able to write at any greater length now. I have a M.Phil. thesis on my desk which I am submitting in the next few weeks. It's the culmination of five years' work, of finding time to study and write after a full-time job, and I'm feeling exactly like the novelist who tears out his heart into a novel and, after it is complete, discovers it would be better to light fires with! (Well... parts of it are actually quite good...) As you can see, I'm feeling very unsure about the whole thing, and this is currently affecting the way I see a whole lot of other aspects of life.

(6 July 1987)

I do like these 'dark night of the soul' letters, especially as all I can raise these days is the occasional twilight shadow of melancholy. Five years on one project! I could never do that. Let's hope bits of your thesis are suitable for fanzine articles.

Elaine and I saw Richard Thompson in concert. Elaine's reaction was: 'I didn't know you could do things like that with a guitar.' Thompson is a brilliant musician... but his lyrics could be described as just a little bit misogynistic. Also he doesn't have quite the self-mocking sardonic quality of a Dylan or Jagger. I don't much like Thompson's latest album, Daring Adventures, and I feel chilled by many of his recent songs.

JOHN BROSINAN

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Bruce, I think your taste is improving. The Bruce Gillespie of yesteryear wouldn't have included movies like The Blues Brothers, The Rocky Horror Picture Show, and The Terminator in his list of his favourite movies. But I must disagree with you on The Duellists. Very pretty, yes, but apart from being horribly miscast it was also incredibly dull. It was nothing but a slight anecdote padded out to interminable length, and I found it almost as boring as Chariots of Fire.

The lack of American tourists [in 1986] is apparently having a serious effect on the British economy, and everyone from Thatcher to the Archbishop of Canterbury is desperately going on about what a marvellously safe city London is. (It's true that Libyan terrorists are notable by their absence, but it's still possible to be mugged by the locals.) But as far as I can see, the streets seem just as clogged with American tourists this summer as in any year. Personally, I think the more tourists who stay away from London the better. The city is just not suitable for large numbers of visitors, nor does it treat them very well, ripping them off in hotels and restaurants, etc. (and British hospitality to visitors is only equalled in offensiveness by the French version).

I long ago came up with a solution to the tourist problem. It was to be a theme park called 'LONDONWORLD' built somewhere in the empty dockland area. Londonworld would contain replicas of all of London's most famous landmarks, like Buckingham Palace, Tower of London, etc., but all very close together. So instead of clogging up the streets of the real London with tourist buses, all the tourists could wander round this replica city (which could be populated with unemployed people from the north of England pretending to be cockneys, stockbrokers, etc.). I think most tourists would find Londonworld much more satisfying than the real London because it would resemble the

London they'd be familiar with from movies -- you know what I mean, where you see someone walk out of Trafalgar Square and straight into the Kings Road...

Still on the subject of bombs: I must say that my old mate George Turner seems a bit out of touch with state-of-the-art nuclear weapons. He says in his letter: '...we might consider the obvious directions of weapon design for eliminating populations without destroying their cities and artefacts... One of the more uncomfortable possibilities is the development of "radiation bombs" with little explosive impact...' Great idea, George -- it's called a Neutron Bomb, and it's been around for awhile. In fact, a few years ago it inspired one of Barry Humphries's more amusing quips. It was the time when Terence Stamp was playing the lead role in a very unsuccessful London stage production of Dracula and Humphries said of him: 'Terence is like a human Neutron Bomb -- he can remove all trace of humanity from a theatre without damaging the building.'

(8 July 1986)

Soon we'll need an Australialand as well, with kangaroos hopping, wombats grunting, and bushrangers ranging. Ballarat, with its Sovereign Hill settlement, and such towns as Maldon have already become mini-Australialands. Now all we need is a composite Australian city -- with a Melbourne tram, a Sydney Opera House, a Perth millionaire, etc. -- so that we need never meet a tourist.

Nearly all the items on my Favourites Films lists of recent years would never have appeared on my lists during the 1960s and early 1970s. For one thing, I didn't have any kind of TV set. For another, I still preferred movies with subtitles to movies that spoke English (or American). People such as John Flaus (local all-purpose film buff, teacher, and broadcaster) and Barry Gillam (one-time SF Commentary contributor) showed me what to look for in Hollywood movies. Even before that, Lee Harding showed me what to look for in Hollywood musicals. Now middle-1960s and early-1970s films look more awkward and outdated than even the most ancient silent movie.

JOHN D. OWEN

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You are correct in your assumption that Ridley Scott's The Duellists is exquisite in colour. I've seen it several times, once in the cinema and once on colour TV. The sets and photography are superb, as if Scott had hired Rembrandt as artistic director. The scenes in the vault, where Carradine and Keitel are duelling with sabres, are brilliant. Dark, saturated colours, with a contrasting wash of sunlight from the side, the flash of steel from the swords, the sparks as they fence, especially when a sword catches on the walls or low ceiling, the darkening of the clothing with sweat and blood: it really has to be the most exciting sword fight ever filmed.

We seem to have been very fortunate to have a great number of good 'TV movies' made by British companies in the past few years, of which Blade on the Feather is only one. The reason has been the influence of our newest national TV channel, Channel 4, which has been encouraging, and paying for, British TV drama of a high quality. Now BBC and the commercial companies are following suit. In the past year we've had Dr Fischer of Geneva (the Graham Greene story, with splendid performances by James Mason, Alan Bates, and Greta Scacchi); Monsignor Quixote (that man Greene again, this time with Alec Guinness as a priest on the run); Shadowlands (a play about C. S. Lewis's marriage, with Joss Ackland and Claire Bloom); The Ivory Tower (a John Fowles story, with Laurence Olivier, Toyah Willcox, and Greta Scacchi); The Insurance Man (about Franz Kafka's early career as a social security bureaucrat, with Daniel Day Lewis as Kafka); and The McGuffin (a corkscrew of a thriller, with Charles Dance as the central figure in a plot to out-Hitchcock Hitchcock).

Of that list, only The Ivory Tower and Monsieur Quixote has been shown on television here yet. People in the film and television industry here are jealous of the money being spent by Channel 4, but I'm not sure that local directors, given the same set-up, would want to stick

to adaptations of literary texts. From your list, I would hardly expect another Powell, Hitchcock, or Welles to emerge from Channel 4.

On to yer 'proper' films. Tied at the top of the list are two comparatively recent films: The Killing Fields, which might end up as Goldcrest's finest (if not final) hour, and which moved me to tears (a rarity indeed -- last time I cried at a movie it was at Bambi, when I was very young). Then there's Witness, directed by your own Peter Weir, with Harrison Ford in a role where he can act for once.

Others, in no particular order or age: Who Dares Wins; The Wicker Man, with Edward Woodward, Christopher Lee, and Britt Ekland; Danton, by Wajda; The Man Who Could Work Miracles, Korda's version of Wells's fantasy story; The Man with the White Suit, one of Ealing Studio's best efforts, with a young Alec Guinness; Beverly Hills Cop, with Eddie Murphy; Educating Rita (Michael Caine and Julie Walters), which is a personal favourite, as it is loosely (and inaccurately) based on the very institution I work for -- the Open University; The Hit, with Terence Stamp and John Hurt; Fahrenheit 451, Truffaut's version of Bradbury's story.

I have steadfastly resisted the lure of the compact disc, on the grounds that the discs themselves are far too expensive (average eleven to twelve pounds range). I'm not convinced that I would actually hear the difference anyway. The hi fi is set to filter out scratches and surface noise when playing my records.

Like you, I discovered the 'country punk' movement about eighteen months ago, and rushed about and bought records by the Long Ryders, Green on Red, Los Lobos, the Blasters, Lone Justice (not one of my favourites), as well as Jason and the Scorchers (especially Lost and Found), the Beat Farmers (a collision between the Blasters and Johnny Cash), and the Del-Lords (more urban rock-punk). Best of all is REM, whose Murmurs album I had listened to on tape for about a year before I realized I was listening to something splendid. Their Fables of the Reconstruction is well worth getting.

I bought REM's first album, and that sounded merely like tepid punk. The reviews seem to show that REM's later stuff is more listenable.

These 'revivalist' bands, drawing as they do as much from Byrds, Neil Young, and other pre-punk performers as from the energy of punk, resurrected my interest in rock music. I'd faded out, buying only new records by particular favourites who are still recording, such as Van Morrison and John Martyn, and getting my kicks searching out jazz and blues albums. This past eighteen months, though, I've been buying records like crazy, both new and backtracks (such as the whole of Creedence Clearwater Revival). My real favourite for the year is the first solo album by Sting, The Dream of the Blue Turtles. Now it's been challenged by his Bring on the Night, a double live album that re-records the previous album, minus a few tracks, plus a few new versions of old Police material. But I'm amazed by the vibrancy of the live versions.

I note your advocacy of the Thompsons' Pour Down Like Silver, which is a superb album. I tend to prefer I Want to See the Bright Lights Tonight, mainly for its clever and unusual use of brass band sounds. Of the Thompson solo albums, Hand of Darkness is my favourite because its lyrics are slightly more humorous than those on Across a Crowded Room, which ought to carry a public health warning ('Do not play if you are a manic-depressive with suicidal tendencies').

U2 is a band I've heard a lot over the past few years, but I didn't really pick up on them until Live Aid, when they were one of the best of the Wembley performers. That convinced me to look out for their material, and their The Unforgettable Fire has given a lot of pleasure.

Another favourite of mine wasn't bought by me at all, but by my wife, who is a long-time fan of the Animals. We came across a solo Eric Burdon album called The Road, which was

apparently recorded in Germany in the early 1980s, and which shows that ol' Leatherlungs hasn't lost any of his vocal power or his love for the blues. Some old blues classics, a number of brand new songs, some covers, and a sharp, competent band.

I agree. I know I recommended The Road in one of my columns, either for TMR or Rataplan. No other Burdon solo albums since then. :: I can't say much except that I agree with you where I've seen or heard the same things. This can't be right: a reader I agree with!

Here's another:

KEN OZANNE

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Shock, horror! I found myself agreeing with you on one of your favourite books read during 1985. I read Warhoon 28 when it appeared, and I was so enthusiastic that I wrote my longest ever letter of comment -- about 5-6000 words. That occupied three aerogrammes of miniscule printing. Bergeron never printed much of it (he considered it too gushing and uncritical). I discovered only last year that he had passed the letter on to Willis. I met Walt at Yorcon in Leeds last year and he knew who I was!

In retrospect, I would probably change almost no words of what I wrote then. I regard Warhoon 28 as not merely the finest issue of a fanzine ever to appear, but also as one of the literary events of the century. How you could place it only second is beyond me. And, doubtless, second to something that I wouldn't consider reading at all.

Actually, you have me worried. You make Good News from Lake Wobegon sound like something I would enjoy, despite your known usefulness as a negative critic. And this issue you seem to harp on those few literary tastes that we have in common -- John Bangsund, Ursula Le Guin, ASFR, etc.

I have no doubt whatsoever that Metaphysical Review is SF Commentary in the very most transparent of plastic disguises. It still consists of a lot of Bruce Gillespie, with the best of the rest being things that never would have been written at all without you as catalyst.

(19 June 1986)

At the recent (Easter 1987) convention in Melbourne, Jack Herman cited Warhoon 28 as the most basic work of the Basic Non-Fiction SF Library. Best written, anyway. Richard Bergeron (Box 5889, Old San Juan, Puerto Rico 00905) still has copies for sale of Warhoon 28, and it still costs US\$25. :: And I think you would enjoy Anne Tyler's Searching for Caleb, which beat Warhoon 28 for top spot in My Favourite Books of 1985.

Here's somebody whose tastes are a bit different from mine:

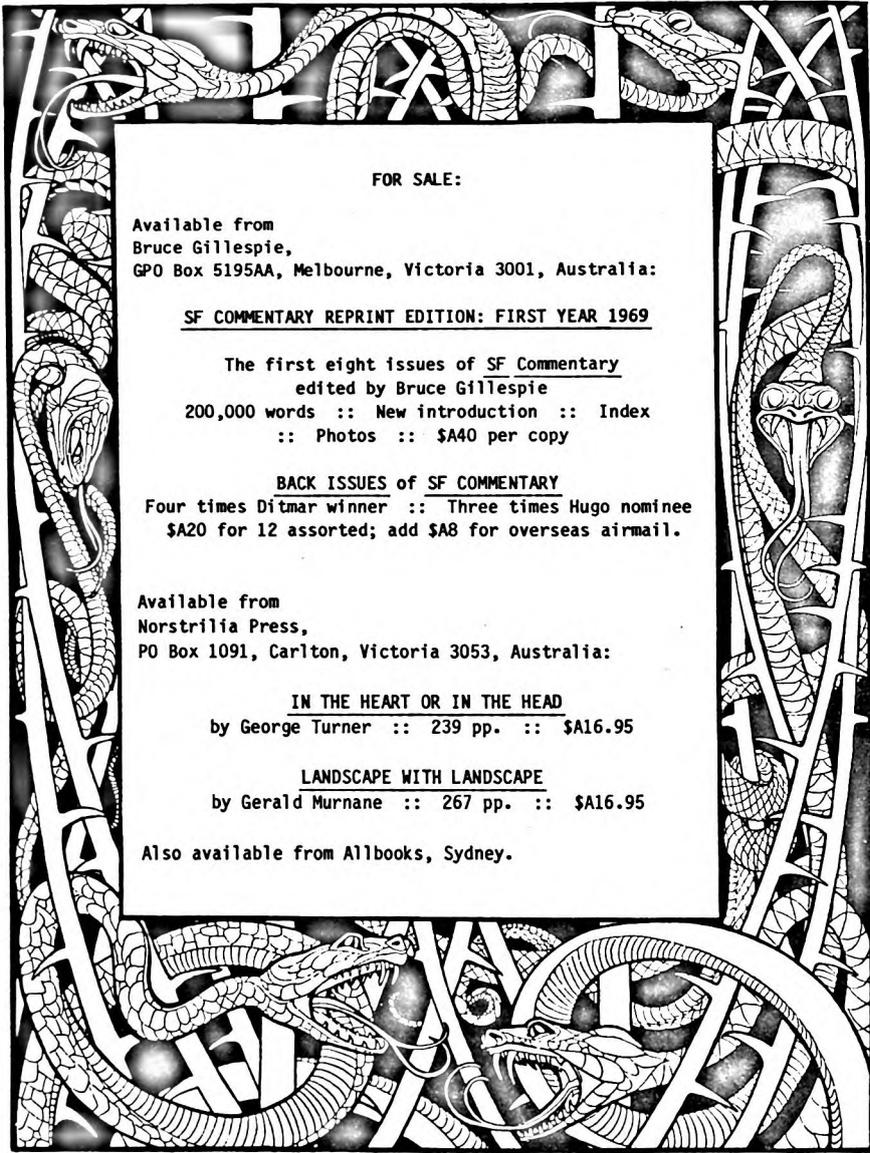
NICK SHEARS

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Every time I go into London I make a point of going round at least one or two of the enormous record stores. HMV used to describe itself as the largest record store in Europe. Then Virgin built their Megastore at the other end of Oxford Street, and not only was it bigger, but it was much better laid out, the air conditioning worked, the layout made it possible to find things, and it was only five minutes from Forbidden Planet. Now the American Tower Records company has opened up a shop at Piccadilly Circus which they call the Greatest Record Store in the World, although it has all the faults that drove people from HMV to Virgin. And, full circle, HMV is now building a new store that is supposed to be the biggest in the world. Ho hum.

Hell, you're not interested in all that. I was getting around to say that, although I shall not buy a CD player until the real cost of CDs themselves drops, I shall happily look for what you're after.

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I'm glad you haven't found them, or I might have had trouble paying for them this year. Anything on CD that's released in Britain seems to be released here. America seems to get many releases that never appear in either Britain or Australia -- but the cost is not less, as I found out when Terry Hughes bought me some CDs I could only get from USA. Add airmail postage to the exchange rate, and I find that Australians pay about the same, in real terms, for CDs as do people anywhere else.

We're in agreement on Loudon Wainwright III, who has always had a steady following over here, more so than in the States, I believe. I just missed seeing him at the Cambridge Folk Festival last month, but he's bound to be back within the year.

Have only read Gene Wolfe out of all those in your list of books of 1985, though you have driven me to seek out Searching for Caleb. Mind you, I don't know how compatible our tastes are, since you mention Henry James, who provided some of the real low spots on my reading lists at university, and I vowed never to open one of his books again.

It's unfair to judge a movie when you've only seen it on television. Would you judge a book accurately if you couldn't read a third of it because of the shape of the page? The Duellists is likely to have been a lot nearer the top of your list had you been able to really appreciate it -- one of the best-looking films I've ever seen. The Rocky Horror Picture Show gains a lot as well from being on a large screen and having decent sound.

Each year I try to make a note of the best film, book, play, concert, etc. of the year. (Ignoring date of publication or release -- the year I experienced it is what counts.) Here's the movie list for the last few years. Some of my favourites of all time don't make it, because I first saw them in a year when something else was the best.

- 1973: Catch-22
- 1974: O Lucky Man!
- 1975: Phantom of the Paradise
- 1976: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
- 1977: The Man Who Fell to Earth
- 1981: The Elephant Man
- 1982: Blade Runner
- 1983: Local Hero
- 1985: Back to the Future

Three years missing in the middle there. Must dig out the notes for that period. Once upon a time I used to list every film I saw, with dates of release, director's name, and so on. I stopped doing that when I stopped keeping a diary, and really regret both discontinuations.

Hell, this is fun. Here's the book list:

- 1973: Jonathan Livingston Seagull
- 1974: Keep the Aspidistra Flying
- 1975: King Lear
- 1976: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man
- 1977: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
- 1978: The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, Unbeliever (I hear you squirm, Bruce.)
- 1979: Dying Inside (Possibly my favourite sf novel of all time.)
- 1980: The Stand
- 1981: The Shadow of the Torturer
- 1982: Roderick
- 1983: The White Hotel
- 1984: Christine
- 1985: Easy Travel to Other Planets, by Ted Mooney (as reviewed in Entropion 3).
(11 August 1986)

I first 'met' Nick Shears when he lived in South Africa, and he was contributing to ANZAPA during the early 1970s. Then he disappeared, turned up in England, and has in the last year or so produced an entertaining fanzine, Entropion.

Yes, making lists is fun. So here, to fulfil a promise to Roger Weddall, are my:

TOP 10 FAVOURITE NOVELS 1965-85

1965 is the first year's list that I'm not entirely ashamed of now. (I was eighteen years old in 1965.)

1965: 1. A Passage to India (E. M. Forster). 2. Anna Karenin (Leo Tolstoy). 3. Lavengro (George Borrow). 4. L'Assommoir (Emile Zola). 5. Ninety-Three (Victor Hugo). 6. Boon Island (Kenneth Roberts). 7. We the Living (Ayn Rand). 8. Do I Wake or Dream? (Frank Herbert). 9. Père Goriot (Honore de Balzac). 10. Prophet of Dune (Frank Herbert).

Well, some of those placings are pretty unbelievable now. Herbert before Balzac? Tolstoy before Zola? (Do I Wake or Dream? was the magazine version of Destination: Void, and The Prophet of Dune was the magazine serialization of the second half of Dune. I've never read all of Dune.)

1966: 1. All the King's Men (Robert Penn Warren). 2. Nostramo (Joseph Conrad). 3. The Brothers Karamazov (Fyodor Dostoyevsky). 4. Portrait of a Lady (Henry James). 5. Lucky Jim (Kingsley Amis). 6. Middlemarch (George Eliot). 7. The Moon is a Harsh Mistress (Robert Heinlein). 8. A Canticle for Leibowitz (Walter Miller Jr). 9. The Trial (Franz Kafka). 10. The Power and the Glory (Graham Greene).

Not quite so unbelievable -- but what's Lucky Jim doing so high on the list, and why is Heinlein there at all? If I rearranged these now, Portrait of a Lady would be top.

1967: 1. Candide (Voltaire). 2. Gulliver's Travels (Jonathan Swift). 3. Another Country (James Baldwin). 4. The Magic Mountain (Thomas Mann). 5. The Sleepwalkers (Arthur Koestler). 6. The Tree of Man (Patrick White). 7. The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch (Philip K. Dick). 8. Vile Bodies (Evelyn Waugh). 9. Scoop (Evelyn Waugh). 10. The Wrong Box (Robert Louis Stevenson and Lloyd Osborne).

These days, I would put Nos. 6, 7, and 8 as Nos. 1, 2, and 3, and move the others down.

1968: 1. Hothouse (Brian W. Aldiss). 2. The Comedians (Graham Greene). 3. The Zap Gun (Philip K. Dick). 4. Time Out of Joint (Philip K. Dick). 5. Brave New World (Aldous Huxley). 6. A Difficult Young Man (Martin Boyd). 7. Inside Outside (Philip Jose Farmer). 8. The Centaur (John Updike). 9. Camp Concentration (Thomas M. Disch). 10. Rabbit (Sinclair Lewis).

The first, and still the only, year to have a science fiction book as No. 1. If I rearranged the list now, Brave New World would probably rise to No. 2.

1969: 1. Swann's Way (Marcel Proust). 2. Jean Santeuil (Marcel Proust). 3. To the Finland Station (Edmund Wilson). 4. The Turn of the Screw (Henry James). 5. Now Wait for Last Year (Philip K. Dick). 6. Ubik (Philip K. Dick). 7. The Male Response (Brian W. Aldiss). 8. The Wanderer (Fritz Leiber). 9. Bug Jack Barron (Norman Spinrad). 10. Non Stop (Brian W. Aldiss).

1970: 1. Magister Ludi (Hermann Hesse). 2. Voss (Patrick White). 3. Nineteen Eighty Four

(George Orwell). 4. The Guermantes' Way (Marcel Proust). 5. Within a Budding Grove (Marcel Proust). 6. Cosmicomics (Italo Calvino). 7. Solaris (Stanislaw Lem). 8. So ('Adam Pilgrim'/Owen Webster). 9. Greybeard (Brian W. Aldiss). 10. The Black Corridor (Michael Moorcock).

1971: 1. The Man Without Qualities (Robert Musil). 2. The Recognitions (William Gaddis). 3. Auto Da Fe (Elias Canetti). 4. Time Regained (Marcel Proust). 5. The Captive (Marcel Proust). 6. Cities of the Plain (Marcel Proust). 7. Joseph and His Brothers (Thomas Mann). 8. Inter Ice Age 4 (Kobo Abe). 9. The Year of the Quiet Sun (Wilson Tucker). 10. The Sweet Cheat Gone (Marcel Proust).

This was my best year's reading ever. The Man Without Qualities is still my favourite novel, with The Recognitions and Auto Da Fe in the Top 10. In bits, Remembrance of Things Past took three years to read, with more than half read in 1971. Even so, The Year of the Quiet Sun would now be No. 5 if I changed the order to suit my memories of these books.

1972: 1. The Man Who Loved Children (Christina Stead). 2. The Tin Drum (Gunter Grass). 3. Slaughterhouse-Five (Kurt Vonnegut). 4. 334 (Thomas M. Disch). 5. A Wizard of Earthsea (Ursula K. Le Guin). 6. The Fabulous Riverboat (Philip Jose Farmer). 7. The Lathe of Heaven (Ursula K. Le Guin). 8. To Your Scattered Bodies Go (Philip Jose Farmer). 9. A Maze of Death (Philip K. Dick). 10. The Story of My Heart (Richard Jefferies).

1973: 1. Steppenwolf (Hermann Hesse). 2. Journey to the East (Hermann Hesse). 3. Speak, Memory (Vladimir Nabokov). 4. The Bailbondsmen (Stanley Elkin). 5. The Dick Gibson Show (Stanley Elkin). 6. Mysteries (Knut Hamsun). 7. The Scarlet Letter (Nathaniel Hawthorne). 8. Cat's Cradle (Kurt Vonnegut). 9. Frankenstein Unbound (Brian W. Aldiss). 10. Womb to Let (Joseph Johnson).

1974: 1. The Farthest Shore (Ursula K. Le Guin). 2. One Hundred Years of Solitude (Gabriel Garcia Marquez). 3. Tamarisk Row (Gerald Murnane). 4. The Castle (Franz Kafka). 5. America (Franz Kafka). 6. The Cyberiad (Stanislaw Lem). 7. The Island of Dr Moreau (H. G. Wells). 8. The Eighty-Minute Hour (Brian W. Aldiss). 9. The Inverted World (Christopher Priest). 10. Rendezvous with Rama (Arthur C. Clarke).

1975: 1. Peace (Gene Wolfe). 2. The Three-Cornered World (Natsume Soseki). 3. A Bad Man (Stanley Elkin). 4. Tender is the Night (F. Scott Fitzgerald). 5. Ulysses (James Joyce). 6. The Little Prince (Antoine de Saint-Exupery). 7. Galactic Pot Healer (Philip K. Dick). 8. Ice and Iron (Wilson Tucker). 9. Hello Summer Goodbye (Michael G. Coney). 10. The Lord of the Rings (J. R. R. Tolkien).

1976: 1. The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney (Henry Handel Richardson). 2. Doctor Faustus (Thomas Mann). 3. Doctor Mirabilis (James Blish). 4. Memoirs of a Survivor (Doris Lessing). 5. The Beautiful and the Damned (F. Scott Fitzgerald). 6. The Wayfarer (Natsume Soseki). 7. A Fringe of Leaves (Patrick White). 8. Bring the Jubilee (Ward Moore). 9. Wolf Solent (Cowper Powys). 10. The Winter Sparrows (Mary Rose Liverani).

1977: 1. World Light (Halldor Laxness). 2. A Fan's Notes (Frederick Exley). 3. The Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man (Thomas Mann). 4. Owls Do Cry (Janet Frame). 5. Clara Reeve ('Leonie Hargrave'/Thomas M. Disch). 6. Intensive Care (Janet Frame). 7. The Autumn of the Patriarch (Gabriel Garcia Marquez). 8. Cider With Rosie (Laurie Lee). 9. The Owl Service (Alan Garner). 10. Red Shift (Alan Garner).

1978: 1. The Tragic Muse (Henry James). 2. Capricornia (Xavier Herbert). 3. The Malacia Tapestry (Brian W. Aldiss). 4. Transit of Cassidy (George Turner). 5. On the Road (Jack Kerouac). 6. Confessions of Zeno (Italo Svevo). 7. Confessions of a Crap Artist (Philip K. Dick). 8. Roadside Picnic (Arkady and Boris Strugatsky). 9. Such is Life (Tom Collins). 10. I Am a Cat (Natsume Soseki).

- 1979: 1. The German Lesson (Stiegfried Lenz). 2. An Exemplary Life (Stiegfried Lenz). 3. Lark Rise to Candleford (Flora Thompson). 4. The Jersey Shore (William Mayne). 5. A Woman of the Future (David Ireland). 6. On Wings of Song (Thomas M. Disch). 7. Pages from a Cold Island (Frederick Exley). 8. Juniper Time (Kate Wilhelm). 9. The Brightfount Diaries (Brian W. Aldiss). 10. Cat and Mouse (Gunter Grass).
- 1980: 1. The Debacle (Emile Zola). 2. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (James Agee and Walker Evans). 3. Limbo (Bernard Wolfe). 4. George (Emlyn Williams). 5. The Franchiser (Stanley Elkin). 6. A Young Man of Talent (George Turner). 7. Birthstone (D. M. Thomas). 8. The Manticore (Robertson Davies). 9. The Mutual Friend (Frederick Busch). 10. A Stranger and Afraid (George Turner).
- 1981: 1. The Fish Can Sing (Halldor Laxness). 2. Look Homeward Angel (Thomas Wolfe). 3. Boswell (Stanley Elkin). 4. Lanark (Alisdair Gray). 5. No Fond Return of Love (Barbara Pym). 6. Explosion in a Cathedral (Alejo Carpentier). 7. Arslan (M. J. Engh). 8. The Singing Sands (Josephine Tey). 9. Finnley Wren (Philip Wylie). 10. Diplomatic Conclusions (Roger Peyrefitte).
- 1982: 1. The Plains (Gerald Murnane). 2. The Naive and Sentimental Lover (John Le Carre). 3. Couples (John Updike). 4. Judgment of Deltchev (Eric Ambler). 5. Journey into Fear (Eric Ambler). 6. Brat Farrar (Josephine Tey). 7. Moonlite (D. M. Foster). 8. The Mask of Dimitrios (Eric Ambler). 9. Miss Pym Disposes (Josephine Tey). 10. Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy (John Le Carre).
- 1983: 1. Riders in the Chariot (Patrick White). 2. The Lost Steps (Alejo Carpentier). 3. The Woman Warrior (Maxine Hong Kingston). 4. Rabbit Run (John Updike). 5. His Master's Voice (Stanislaw Lem). 6. Living in the Maniototo (Janet Frame). 7. Grimus (Salman Rushdie). 8. Midnight's Children (Salman Rushdie). 9. Ada or Ardor (Vladimir Nabokov). 10. Saint Francis (Nikos Kazantzakis).
- 1984: 1. Mickelsson's Ghosts (John Gardner). 2. Paradise Reclaimed (Halldor Laxness). 3. What Maisie Knew (Henry James). 4. Time and Again (Jack Finney). 5. Morgan's Passing (Anne Tyler). 6. The Cupboard under the Stairs (George Turner). 7. Some Tame Gazelle (Barbara Pym). 8. The Aunt's Story (Patrick White). 9. Transmitters (Damien Broderick). 10. Household Words (Joan Silber).
- 1985: 1. Searching for Caleb (Anne Tyler). 2. Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant (Anne Tyler). 3. An American Tragedy (Theodore Dreiser). 4. Lake Wobegon Days (Garrison Keillor). 5. Legs (William Kennedy). 6. Such Pleasure (Martin Boyd). 7. Playing Beatie Bow (Ruth Park). 8. A Bigamist's Daughter (Alice McDermott). 9. The Talented Mr. Ripley (Patricia Highsmith). 10. The Claw of the Conciliator (Gene Wolfe).

And 1986's list, with James Hanley's The Secret Journey at the top, was printed last issue.

You make the conclusions from all this. Some authors recur, of course, but nobody gets No. 1 twice, during 21 years of lists, except Halldor Laxness, from Iceland, and Hermann Hesse, a German. Only four women (Ursula Le Guin, Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead, and Anne Tyler) made No. 1 -- *gulp* -- but one of my favourite woman writers, Janet Frame, a New Zealander, had no No. 1.

The competition varies greatly from year to year. This is most obvious when Gerald Murnane's Tamarisk Row made only No. 3 in 1974, but The Plains, which I don't like as much, made No. 1 eight years later. Voss would have been No. 1 in almost any other year. These days I would put The Tree of Man top in its year.

The Ultimate Top 10? That's a hard one. There are four novels that have a greater emotional impact on me than any others, but they are not necessarily the best I've read. In other words, my reasons for choosing them would take a chapter for each in my autobiography. They are Ayn Rand's Atlas Shrugged (No. 1 in 1963, and which I couldn't read now), Owen Webster's

So, Ursula Le Guin's The Farthest Shore, and Henry Handel Richardson's The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney. They are important for reasons that go much deeper than any literary evaluation could uncover.

A more literary Top 10? Not in rank order:

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland/Alice Through the Looking Glass (Lewis Carroll)
(listened to or read throughout my life)
Les Miserables (Victor Hugo) (read in 1959 or 1960)
Wuthering Heights (Emily Bronte) (read in 1960)
Madame Bovary (Gustave Flaubert) (read in 1964)
Portrait of a Lady (Henry James)
Voss (Patrick White)
The Man Without Qualities (Robert Musil)
The Recognitions (William Gaddis)
Auto Da Fe (Elias Canetti)
Tamarisk Row (Gerald Murnane)
The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney (Henry Handel Richardson)

Um. That's a Top 12. I can't reduce the list to ten. It'll be interesting to see how that changes when I reassess it in twenty years' time.

Thanks, Nick, and Roger (indirectly) for prompting that.

SIMON BROWN

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The only good fantasy I've read in the last six months is Robert Holdstock's Mythago Wood, which I enjoyed, and recommend.

The most impressive piece of science fiction (and here I'm stretching the definition) I've come across lately was on television: Edge of Darkness, serialized on the ABC over six weeks. This is one of the best television shows of any genre I've ever seen, and is light years ahead of the usually abominable mini-series which Australian and American producers keep churning out with all the glee of demented sausage-makers. Edge of Darkness excels in its writing, acting and production values, and for sheer suspense it would be hard to equal.

If the preceding superlatives haven't stopped you from reading on, I might also point out that much of the music was written and performed by Eric Clapton and Michael Kamen. I hope the ABC screens the series again. [*brg* It did.*]

During my recent trip overseas I would lash out now and then with my dwindling funds and buy a novel. Renault was always good fun, especially when I was shuttling between Athens and the islands. It's a curious feeling sailing across the Aegean reading about Theseus sailing across the Aegean.

Another good buy was Gibson's Neuromancer. I was getting quite wrapped up in the story, and was only 40 or so pages from the end, when the book, along with passport, camera gear, travellers' cheques, and so on, was stolen from me. This occurred in Dublin. If you had asked me before I left Australia in which city I would least expect trouble, I think Dublin would have been my choice. I've since learned that Dublin is considered by Europeans to be more dangerous than any other city in that part of the world, with the exception of Marseilles. Apparently Dublin's a major distribution point for the trans-Atlantic trade in coke and skag. My brother and I were both victims of the theft, and had we caught the people guilty of the offence we'd have torn them limb from limb. It was quite disturbing to discover how easily you can be made to feel violent towards other people. The thieves would probably have been only thirteen or fourteen years old,

working in a gang of between three and five members. God, they were efficient.

(4 August 1986)

FRANK BERTRAND

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Some favourite non-fiction book read during the past year or two:

- * James Turner: Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America
- * R. J. Hopper: The Early Greeks
- * Irving Howe: A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Autobiography
- * Robert E. Conot: Justice at Nuremberg
- * Nat Hentoff: The First Freedom: The Tumultuous History of Free Speech in America
- * Barbara W. Tuchman: The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam
- * Robert Scholes: Fabulation and Metafiction
- * Kathryn Hume: Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature
- * Leslie Fiedler: What Was Literature? Class Culture and Mass Society
- * Sterling Seagrave: The Soong Dynasty

Of these, the most sobering and disturbing were Conot's, Hentoff's, and Tuchman's. Those by Scholes, Hume, and Fiedler helped to dispel a bit of the thick fog surrounding sf's origins and sf criticism.

They might dispel some fog around your way, but around our way we can't buy them. I've seen Tuchman's book, of course, but Fiedler's does not seem to have been imported by any Australian bookshop. As for Scholes and Hume (and Suvin, etc.), they are just the sort of book that nobody imports now that Space Age Books has disappeared. Locus does not seem to review scholarly books about sf, Foundation reviews only a small number of them (but it could well run a checklist of sf scholarship), and I'm not, I must admit, a member of the SFRA. Therefore I don't know about such books, and therefore don't order them.

That's not quite true. The reason why I haven't been a member of the SFRA and haven't ordered the scholarly books about sf that I've known about is that I haven't had the money. Even now, I'd be reluctant to start ordering: my book bill would dwarf my CD bill.

Of course, I could revive the SF Commentary name and maybe a few publishers would send me review copies. Nope, that wouldn't work; they'd just start sending me UFO books again.

As for fiction, I find myself reading less and less, whether so-called 'bestsellers', sf, or mysteries. But there were a few that were a bit different:

- * Janwillem van der Wetering: The Mind-Murders
- * Janwillem van der Wetering: The Rattle-Rat
- * Jarrod Comstock: These Lawless Worlds #1: The Love Machine
- * Stanislaw Lem: His Master's Voice
- * Justin Leiber: Beyond Rejection
- * K. W. Jeter: Dr Adder

The music scene is far more lively and stimulating than fiction these days. Some favourite albums heard this past year:

- * AC/DC: Who Made Who
- * Pink Floyd: The Final Cut
- * David Gilmour: About Face
- * Tina Turner: Private Dancer
- * Richard Strauss: Alpine Symphony
- * Modest Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition (classical guitar version by Kazuhito Yamashita)
- * Liona Boyd: Liona Live in Tokyo
- * Tangerine Dream: Logos
- * Tomita: Canon of the Three Stars

Had the good fortune to see Tangerine Dream in concert in Boston this past summer: an outstanding performance and light show. Also saw the Beach Boys (twenty-fifth anniversary tour) and Dokken/Loverboy concerts. So western culture isn't quite dead yet.
(24 November 1986)

I have great trouble convincing George Turner that rock music has anything to do with western culture. Come to think of it, I don't try to convince him at all. I just say that I like rock 'n' roll because I need an adequate outlet for my wild, crazy, and dissolute personality.

RICHARD BRANDT

4740 North Mesa, Apt. 111, El Paso, Texas 79912, USA

TMR 10 inspired me to contribute a list of my Favourite Books of 1986: Afraid I can't conjure up the publishers' data or date of publication for all of them on the spur of the moment. This is just a goddamn loc; I'm not going to research it. In no particular order:

- * Graham Chapman: A Liar's Autobiography
- * Albert Camus: Notebooks: 1933-1942, 1942-1948 (2 vols.)
- * Albert Camus: The Plague
- * Graham Greene: The Heart of the Matter
- * William Gibson: Count Zero
- * Gene Wolfe: Soldier of the Mist
- * Carlos Fuentes: The Old Gringo
- * John Javna: Cult TV: The Shows America Can't Live Without
- * Michael Weldon: The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film
- * Kurt Vonnegut: Mother Night

Random comments:

- * The Plague pushes all the same buttons as a really good sf book.
- * The Old Gringo is of interest for its subject matter -- Ambrose Bierce in Mexico -- and its views on US-Mexico relations, plus some nifty historical titbits about Villa and the like.
- * The Javna book was a Christmas gift from my sister.
- * Psychotronic is a guide to demented late-night types of movies. Aside from his hilarious critical style -- on Night Must Fall: 'Once you've seen Montgomery as the charming, smiling cockney killer in this, he starts to seem demented in all his films' -- he has some moments of serious critical judgement and social outrage, such as noting that Mario Bava's elegant horror flicks were 'treated like cancer by inner-city theaters in the Sixties', while grotesque bucket-of-guts slasher films are now being released by major studios.
- * Mother Night is a powerful attack on the notion that we have some secret self that we hold apart and sacred from all the things we actually say and do in our day-to-day existence. A mother of a book.

I thought Dorothea Dreams was a beautiful meditation on art, death, and responsibility, even if a description of the plot makes it sound like The Desperate Hours with a ghost. It just didn't strike me as a contender for my favourite of the year.

I have a tape of Peeping Tom, and isn't it an asskicker?

Thanks for recommending the Johnny Cash albums, one of which I'd spotted at the library but was hesitating over taking home to do illegal things on my stereo with. I've only recently begun acquiring albums to any great extent. My favourite track lately is 'til tuesday's 'Voices Carry', which has an intensely personal meaning for yours truly.

Favourite albums acquired lately:

- * Peter Gabriel: So
- * David and David: Boomtown
- Marvin Gaye: Anthology

- * Timbuk-3: Greetings from Timbuk-3
- # Stephane Grappelli: Stephanova
- The Pretenders: Learning to Crawl
- 'til tuesday: Voices Carry
- Jackson Browne: The Pretender
- *+ Bruce Hornsby and the Range: That's the Way It Is
- *+ Georgia Satellites
- Sting: Dream of the Blue Turtles
- Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers: Southern Accents
- * - 1986 release (I think)
- + = I won it from a radio station
- # = Got it from the library.

I guess I'd place Emmylou Harris's 13 on my also-rans list, too, because I love everything she does with her voice, but it's not up there with my all-time favourite Emmylou albums -- some of which rank on my alltime favourite list, period.

You may or may not be able to guess that my acquisition of a record runs a bit behind its appearance on the market, barring special circumstances. Look for me to acquire soon the Eagles' Desperado, Dire Straits' Love Over Gold, Anita Baker's Rapture, The Babys' Anthology, U2's War, ZZ Top's Eliminator, The Judds' Rockin' with the Rhythm, Steve Winwood's Back in the High Life (hesitantly), Eric Clapton's August, Genesis's Invisible Touch (which a friend wants a tape of) and, of course, Johnny Cash's Rainbow. These record clubs and their \$1.99 sales are murder. (By the way, Georgia Satellites are good country rockers in sort of a Jerry Lee Lewis-ish way. Perhaps they would be your cup of tea.) (1 June 1987)

Georgia Satellites certainly would be my cup of tea (coffee, in my case). The record wasn't released here until well into 1987, and then I waited for the CD. Does damaging things to the speakers, but good fun to play very loud. I'm annoyed that Desperado is the only Eagles album not to be released on CD. Don't bother about Back in the High Life or August. Borrow both of them and tape the two good tracks on each. :: Your lists -- books and records -- overlap mine fairly well, and I'll look out for some items I don't know. I read The Plague and The Heart of the Matter for Matric. (Year 12) English Literature, and didn't like Camus much then. The Plague is one of those many books I gobbled up -- and regurgitated onto an exam paper -- during my malformative years and now must go back to. The Old Gringo has just appeared here in Picador paperback. :: I'm now told that the version of Peeping Tom that I saw on TV has lost lots of footage from the original.

DAVID LANGFORD

94 London Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 5AU, England

Well, you know how it is: there are the hot-shit fanzines that are without a doubt Where It's All Happening, and there are the null fanzines that shrivel like candy floss as you try to devour them, and then there are a few meaty ones that don't loudly call attention to themselves but sit around (usually under an old bushel) quietly demanding to be re-read. After reading again through TMR 7/8, which seems to have been in the pile of stuff at my bedside for most of a year, I feel I should flatteringly point out that you're definitely publishing a closely encounterable fanzine of the third kind. Thanks.

(Pause to consider and abandon a fast-food theory of sf success. A book that hits immediately and hard with that deep-down tang of literary monosodium glutamate tends to get awards and all that. The books I find require re-reading from time to time could be classed as more filling through less spectacular: Little, Big didn't exactly get showered with awards, did it? Fast-food analogy eventually abandoned on grounds of dismaying triteness and unsafe implication that re-reading anything at all constitutes the dog returning to its vomit. Oops.)

Judith Hanna's explanation, that hardened con-goers demand high-quality events to stay

away from, is but the first step into the tortuous metaphysics of the convention critique. The most irritating symptom of such logomachy is the way in which fans tend to argue not from their own viewpoints but from that of some shadowy 'silent majority'. On one side you hear, 'Grottycon was great for me because I always enjoy cons, but the programming would really have put off a new fan.' On the other: 'Of course the tiny minority of old-time fans were bitching as usual, but the newcomers really enjoyed it...' For some reason the opening 'I'm a new fan and I thought...' is extremely rare.

I was tempted to go back and compare all your sf reviews to all mine, but managed to stifle the impulse: the differences seem to be mainly of emphasis, and I find Gillespie's Good Stuff pretty reliable. (Thanks for Garrison Keillor, who now seems to be doing well over here too.) 'What reviews?' you may well ask: this is a mite embarrassing, but for nearly five years I've been contributing a monthly column to an sf/fantasy role-playing games mag. Luckily (he said quickly before B. Gillespie can cast the effusions of this leper into the incinerator) my brief is to provide the Intellectual Interest by coverage of books and never games. When I've finished this note, it'll be time to write the fifty-second column, in which I'll have to think of something to say about Iain Banks's fourth novel: extraordinary newish author, three books of witty/horrific/surreal events (The Wasp Factory, Walking on Glass, The Bridge) with sf elements growing stronger from book to book, and suddenly now he's done Consider Phlebas, a dead-centre genre novel of high-energy space opera. From afar one hears the creak and rustle of hitherto indulgent literary critics getting set for dramatic reassessment... Although my review columns are inevitably a bit bitty, I keep being tempted to publish them in a small collected edition, since in several evenings of madness I tried out some new indexing software by preparing an index of columns 1 to 50, and one can hardly waste efforts on that scale. You may hear more of this.

(Astonishing discoveries from the reviewing slushpile? Well, have a look at Robert Irwin, whose small-press fantasy The Arabian Nightmare will soon be getting a big hardback reissue from Penguin/Viking, and whose The Limits of Vision must be the first kitchen-sink fantasy to explore the metaphysical ramifications of household dirt. Another breakthrough for Literature! Good stuff, too.)

(No, I don't quite know what my audience of fourteen-year-old Dungeons and Dragons players -- the median reader, according to a survey -- makes of my plugging such offbeat works. But nobody's sacked me yet.) (13 April 1987)

A Dave Langford letter of comment! And in the same issue as letters by... almost everybody.

Iain Banks -- in hardback, at least -- is published by Macmillan in England, but I've never seen one of his books round the Macmillan office when I go in there. I wonder if I can get a discount... or even review copies?

Dave, if you feel like placing some of those reviews with your nearest friendly fanzine, don't hesitate to write 'GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne' on the envelope. According to the policy statement I set out in TMR 1, Banks was going to be the sort of author to be discussed in the magazine's pages. The policy is still intact; it's just the articles that are missing. (There are exceptions; Tom Whalen's article in this issue discusses Robert Walser, an author who was unknown to me.)

ROBERT DAY

'Ashgrove', Didgley Lane, Fillongley, Coventry CV7 8DQ, England

[Re James Morrow's The Continent of Lies.] I made a mistake: I read Morrow's first novel, The Wine of Violence, first. Oh dear. Fifties-style spaceship makes emergency landing on unknown sister planet of protagonist's homeworld. Nasty natives kill most of the crew and eat their brains. Hero and nasty companion escape to Civilization: a walled city surrounded by a moat of blood. Once inside, hero lives a Californian-style pleasant life (jacuzzis, long drinks, and glamorous women) whilst nasty companion, who has

political views somewhere to the right of Genghis Khan, hunts down one of the brain-eating natives who has got into the city (because the city's inhabitants aren't into violence) and rapes a few women. Hero meanwhile finds out that the city-dwellers take off their brain-pans once every month, stick an electrode directly into their brains, and translate all their violent thoughts into the red stuff from the moat.

Not much else happens. Oh dear.

And when I read The Continent of Lies, I found more of the same. Certainly, the plotting was better: but the society still looked like California, with cephapples taking the place of heroin and cocaine. But then I spotted the dedications in the books, and I realized that James Morrow is a fan. The cephapples -- especially in the light of the cephapple conventions -- become sf itself. Mr Morrow wrote, if my memory serves me correctly, with the aid of some sort of academic grant as a writer-in-residence. (I could be wrong about this.) I'd like to think that his next novel might be better; but I suspect that he has written about what he knows best, and that appears to be sf fandom. If that be so, then The Continent of Lies might turn out to be his best book -- not necessarily a good prospect. True, there are memorable bits in it; I just couldn't get on with Mr Morrow's style.

I thought Morrow's style at the beginning of The Continent of Lies would stop me dead as well. But after about 50 pages I found myself reading on, faster and faster, and enjoying the book more and more. Elaine liked the early satirical bits -- see next issue for her comments -- but I liked the Yggdrasil tree best (in the central section), and some of the what-is-reality high jinks at the end of the book are dazzling, paying quite adequate homage to Philip Dick. In Morrow's latest, This Is the Way the World Ends, he improves his style greatly, but I can't say that I understand fully what is happening in the book. I've asked Elaine to read it so she can work it out. (Elaine is somewhat cleverer than I am.)

Hornby introduced 00-gauge trains before the war, around 1937-8. Production was suspended during the war years, but resumed after the war. Hornby introduced two-rail electrification in 1958, in response to the threat from Tri-ang, who introduced its range with two-rail electrification from the start, in 1949. Hornby wasn't taken over by Lines Brothers (owners of Tri-ang) until 1963-4. Of course, the collapse of Lines Brothers and subsequent upheavals in the world toy and hobby market mean that nowadays the Tri-ang marque is called 'Hornby', though many of the old Hornby products are available in versions manufactured by G. & R. Wrenn Ltd.

(19 October 1986)

At last we're talking about model trains! It's been a long wait...

WILLIAM M. DANNER
RDI, Kennerdell, Pennsylvania 16374, USA

I don't think I ever saw before any mention that you are an incipient model railroader.

Let's get this straight before we go on: I'm not an incipient model railroader, although I can become very excited in the presence of a model railway layout. Bill, I have none of the practical skills that would enable me to take part in such a hobby. In fandom, however, John Bangsund and others helped me to gain just enough practical skills for me to take up fanzine-publishing as a hobby. Just as long as I don't have to fix the duplicator. End of necessary interruption.

I've been one for 49 years now, for it was in 1937 that a bunch of others and I formed the Pgh HO Model Railroad Club (still going, but for some reason called The Model Railroad Historical Society). I dropped out of it in the late 1940s and went in for O gauge, and when I moved here found an O-gauge club with a huge layout. Over the years until 1982 I built four locos and acquired others, both brass and plastic, and built close to a hundred cars, both from bits and from scratch. Most of this stuff, with a few

fortunate exceptions, was at the club layout in the spring of '82 when a bad flood put the entire layout completely under water for six days. Some cars and a large building were destroyed, some cars more or less damaged, and some came out needing nothing but removal of surface mud and oiling of the trucks (and some with plastic trucks didn't even need that) to be nicely weathered cars. Most of the ones with no damage, oddly enough, were scratch-built flats assembled with white glue, so if you've ever had any doubts about the claims for that stuff as regards waterproofness, you can ditch them. Everything salvageable is now here except for a couple of open-end old-time coaches, which are at the club until I can salvage them. They were salvaged, that is (and one had to have a whole new side), but I lent them to the club for a special purpose last year. I got into the club twice last year, and so far not at all this year. I built a lot of special shelves along one wall, and most of what I have left are displayed there. There are still a few cars to be restored, and I've built a few new ones, and a pilot beam still has to be made to replace one lost from the Pennsy F-3. This is an import from Samhonga of Hong Kong or some such place. It's a nice model, but the soldering was very sketchy. It's quite remarkable how little damage was done to the locos; a few tiny bits of touch-up were needed, but I didn't have to replace any of the lettering.

(19 August 1986)

I think what the system you had when a child was what we call 0-gauge tinplate. 'Tinplate' is a somewhat derogatory term here (for non-tinplaters, I hasten to add), but the sort made in England by Hornby, Basset-Lowe, and others was a cut or two above the US kinds. It's too bad you didn't keep all the stuff, for there are collectors who pay real money for old tinplate. I'm no authority, but I imagine that clockwork locos, being now scarcer than electric ones, might be all the more valuable. I wish I'd kept the Lionel 'standard'-gauge stuff I had when I was a kid.

Until recently the whole layout is still in a tin trunk at my parents' place. The pieces of rolling stock and the accessories are okay, but the trunk has rusted and fallen apart. Nobody has looked at the whole layout properly for years. The clockwork engines would need some work done on them, since the springs had broken or rusted even when I was a kid. Anybody who wants to make an offer should write to me.

I imagine the Hornby electric models you mention are in British 00 gauge. This is the same gauge as H0 elsewhere, but to 4mm/ft scale instead of 3.5 mm. Here 00 gauge is three-quarters of an inch instead of the 16.5 mm of H0. The larger scale in Britain was originally developed because there were no motors small enough for the 3.5 mm scale of English prototypes, which were built to a smaller loading gauge than those of any other country. Now, of course, models are being made with a gauge of a little over a quarter of an inch (Z gauge).

I'm pretty sure Hornby is still going. Ten years ago or so it introduced an elaborate system of electronic control of H0 systems that had some success.

Backyard layouts are found wherever the weather permits, and your system certainly qualified as a layout. One representing the whole of the US is perhaps the most ambitious one I ever heard of, and it's obvious that you didn't have enough track. But of course every layout representing some actual line must be what the modellers call 'selectively compressed' to get it into the space available. To do justice to your project you'd have had to compress it with a hydraulic press.

As readers of the most recent issue of Sikander would know, our back lawn at 50 Houghton Road, Oakleigh, had a depression down the middle. That was the Mississippi River valley. The lawn itself was rectangular, but had a bite out of one end. That was the Gulf of Mexico. If we laid out the rails one way, we started from New York or Washington and could just get to Seattle or Los Angeles. If we abandoned that idea, we could get one branch line to St Louis or Memphis, and another to Florida. The bridge that Dad built didn't quite get our train over the Mississippi River; carriages tended to fall off. Crashing trains was a major interest of the game. We didn't have much in the way of accessories: a couple of stations, a

turntable, and a couple of railway-gates crossings better suited to English country lanes than to America. Much of the fun of the whole proceedings, I suspect, was stretching out on the lawn and poring over a double-page map of the USA, and marvelling at those wonderful names (Natchez, Connecticut, Rapid City), trying to imagine what those places were actually like.

Though I can't recall ever reading anything by Murnane, it's too bad the part of his novel with the model railway didn't get published. I wonder if you've ever read any of the works of Norman L. Knight, who died in 1972. I corresponded with him sporadically from the mid-1940s until he died, and he once sent me a painstakingly corrected copy of a pulp magazine containing his novelette 'Once in a Blue Moon', in which a weird creature on another planet has a large-scale (big enough to ride on) model layout of US prototypes. It's a fascinating story; I read it several times and always found it as fascinating as I did the first time. Far as I know, nothing of Norman's was ever anthologized, though many less deserving things were. He wrote other novelettes and short stories, too, and I read some of them in magazines lent me by Virginia Blish, but none of the others had quite the appeal of 'Once in a Blue Moon'.

(25 October 1986)

Since you mention Gerald Murnane (who has seen copies of *Stefantasy*, and rather enjoyed them). I'll interrupt your letter, Bill, and let Gerald have his say:

GERALD MURNANE

22 Falcon Street, Macleod, Victoria 3085

Thanks so much for the letter and the magazines. My favourite sentence in all three, before I forget to tell you, is: 'How could anybody willingly dismantle a railway line?' But then, railway lines -- and especially dream railway lines -- are one of my favourite subjects. As the years pass and our ways tend to diverge somewhat, I begin to suspect that the most enduring bond between Gillespie and Murnane is not, after all, what we thought we had discovered in 1970 when we shared a windowless office in the Publications Branch; is not our love of reading but our love of railways and especially model railways. I still find myself longing to have in my hands again a book I was loaned for a few days in 1954 -- a book with a diagram and a half-dozen black and white photos and a page of print describing each of fifty celebrated model railway systems in the USA. The systems ranged from a layout screwed onto a tabletop-sized board which could be folded against the wall to which it was hinged (The owner lived in a small apartment in Miami, but he had refused to do without the railway system that he had once owned in some more commodious house. He had designed and built an almost-microscopic system -- scaled of course -- of loops and sidings and tiny engines and rolling stock and scenery which would normally have filled a whole backyard but which now was confined to a tabletop.) to a leisurely system whose layout extended over a half-acre or so of the owner's huge allotment somewhere in New England, wound into his garage and out again, climbed a gentle hill past his fishponds -- that sort of thing.

Something else that I see more clearly as the years pass is that the prose of your personal writing (not necessarily your prose fiction) has always been an influence on me. At first, writing Tamarisk Row and the book that was shortened to A Lifetime on Clouds, I was trying to write as I thought my subject matter demanded. Over the years, though, I have tried to relax my prose. And one of the styles I have wanted to equal (not imitate, of course) is the relaxed, wandering-and-returning style of BRG talking to his friends.

Think how the course of Australian literature would have been changed if you'd been sent nothing but fanzines by John Bangsund, Walt Willis, and Terry Hughes.

It seems that for you, Bruce, Tamarisk Row has yet to be equalled. I'm not going to say you're wrong... Now a peevish note creeps in. Some nameless reader of Landscape with Landscape has remarked to you that the narrator (I could ask, which of the six is meant)

is an incompetent who couldn't be expected... This may have been remarked indulgently, and with no suggestion that an incompetent character has no right to appear in fiction. But it is in my nature to suspect the worst of any ambiguous remark. I suspect, therefore, that I am told by an irritated reader that I should not write about incompetent characters. Who then should I write about? Competent characters, I suppose. People who can tie up their shoelaces and think positively and manage their roll-over investments... ah, shit! The reader who doesn't like incompetent characters had better turn to the Readers Digest. Ask that reader, by the way, what he/she thinks of Hamlet. Now, there was an incompetent ditherer.

I am cheerful again. I am going to go on with my next book of fiction, which has not one but two incompetent fools in it. At the rate I've added to the text in the past year, it will be finished in 1993. But I am giving up writing letters like this one after today, giving up talking about writing... I can't give up watching TV, since the last thing I saw was the replay of last year's Melbourne Cup, and before that the replay of the Cup before that. I haven't listened to a radio programme (race broadcasts not counted) since Punter to Punter began to bore my son two years ago. I haven't played a record or a tape for at least two years. I do still play my fiddle every few days, and I whistle now that I never have a pipe between my teeth. And I still read -- about fifty books a year on the train between Macleod and Tooronga. Trouble is, the new trains are so warm I fall asleep a lot. Yet this has made easy my task (self-imposed) of giving each book I read one to five ticks. I just note which station I fall asleep at. Five ticks to the book that keeps me awake all the way. Four ticks to the book that keeps me awake until Clifton Hill.

(28 June 1986)

Of course the person who made the remark about Landscape with Landscape made it off the cuff during an uproaring dinner more than two years ago, and probably would not recall doing so. 'Competence' is one of those words banded about in science fiction circles, and is usually used to describe characters who win at the end. In fact, almost no competent characters are ever described in science fiction stories, which specialize in devil-may-care heroes who couldn't possibly lose, as the author won't let them. 'Incompetent' characters are therefore people who are allowed by their authors to die or lose out at the end of stories. Fans of the works of Robert Heinlein keep saying that his characters are 'competent', but that's only because Heinlein spins fairy-tales in which the characters who share his attitudes sail through every adventure and end up unharmed. (There are only two exceptions that I can think of: Michael Valentine Smith in Stranger in a Strange Land, who dies only to end up in a kind of cutesy-pie heaven, and The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress's computer consciousness, whose death/disappearance tends to hit the reader only because it is so unexpected in a Heinlein book.) Almost no sf shows a character who is really competent -- that is, shown doing manual, technical, or intellectual work, or getting on with ordinary life, despite all the usual difficulties.

So if the word 'incompetent' stings, Gerald, it's only because you've been hit by one of those peculiar concepts that lurk around sf criticism -- concepts that don't arise outside the field, since they have nothing to do with the quality or otherwise of fiction.

Having said that, I must say that the narrator/s of Landscape with Landscape puzzle me, and I find it hard to like some sections of the book, although I admire it all. There is the central paradox, for instance, that although most of the narrators have failed to write the pieces they dream of, they obviously have written them, since the texts are before our eyes. Do we therefore disbelieve much else that the same narrators tell us about their experience? If so, which of their propositions? Since their worlds are stiflingly self-enclosed, it is difficult to glimpse that other viewpoint (presumably the author's) that would illuminate the ironies in the text before us. For instance, Tamarisk Row's Clement Killeaton is in many ways the one sane, reflective voice in an unreflective community. Clement speaks for my childhood, for that sense of outrage at being powerless in an all-powerful adults' world. Tamarisk Row is the only book that truly remembers childhood, which is why I still find it startling. The narrators of Landscape with Landscape, however, are committed to being

powerless in a plastic world -- that is, a comfortable world in which they might affect events if they chose to do so -- and I can't quite see why. The exception is the narrator of 'The Battle of Acosta Nu', which reads as the case study of a certifiably insane man. Clement Killeaton's reflections lead him to see far more than do the people around him. The narrators in Landscape come to their conclusions by excluding much that is interesting, delightful, and necessary in the world. Are all these narrators insane? If not, what is the source of their deep grievance against their world, their choosing to be incompetent, so to speak? Are the stories in Landscape funny stories or horror stories? They are certainly disturbing, but perhaps not entirely in the ways intended.

Gerald seems to have forgotten already his resolution not to talk about writing. An interesting interview appears in Yacker 2 (Picador), and Gerald writes amusingly about his own attitude to writing, under the guise of reviewing a Murray Bail novel, in Australian Book Review, July 1987.

Now a return to:

WILLIAM M. DANNER
(address already given)

Your writing is generally so good that it is disturbing to run across an occasional solecism such as, [TMR 8] on page 26, '...younger than me'. A few lines on, you have it right: '...younger than I am'.

Similar use of the 'ee' ending -- I should say 'misuse' -- is so common that I suppose you can't be blamed for 'attendees' on page 8. I am sick to death of hearing TV news announcers talking about 'escapees', who have escaped from durance vile somewhere. According to this misuse of the words, an employee is one who hires other people, a payee is one who pays out money, and so forth. What's wrong with escaper and attender (or attendant, though this has a slightly different connotation, of course)? The 'er' ending is for one who does something; the 'ee' ending is for one who has something done to him.

Just below Mats Linder's letter: '...to hear from someone how you appear to them...' Yes, I know this misuse is almost universal, but it still makes my hair stand on end every time I run across it in otherwise literate writing. I'm afraid that 'them' with all its variations will become the universal pronoun to take the place of all others. The pore ole Englisch langwidge is being systematically destroyed anyway, so what the hell?

You might not believe this, Bill, but I earn my living by picking up exactly the type of errors that you mention in my writing. *Gulp* Of course, that would be the issue that Yvonne Rousseau did not proofread. Even so, if I'd been proofreading my own writing, instead of writing it, I would have picked up the mistakes. Elaine is proofreading this issue (but accepts no responsibility for it).

Your dreams were interesting ones, certainly, but I've never been able to see that any of them mean anything at all. I've had some weirdies in my time, and for a while some fifty or more years ago I used to write them down in a blank book every morning. In that period I had a coherent dream that progressed logically to a regular cliff-hanger of an ending, and it occurred three times in exactly the same sequence. I tried to make a short story of it but don't remember what became of it. I've not had many nightmares, but once, after moving here in 1957, I had one in which I was standing atop some high peak with my arms stretched over my head and I had the certain knowledge that if I lowered them everything would at once come to an end. I started to lower them, and just before they were at my sides I woke with cold chills up and down my spine. For a long time afterward all I had to do was recall that dream to have the cold chills again.

So what? It was just a dream... As I get older (I hit 80 in July) I find that either I

have fewer dreams or don't remember them so readily or for so long. Years ago I used to have, fairly often, a dream that it was the first day of a new semester (it wasn't clear whether it was High School or Carnegie Tech) and for some reason did not have my schedule and hadn't the slightest idea of where or what my first class was, and went wandering around the halls looking in doors to see if I might recognize one that way. I suppose some of the dream analyzers would make something of that, but it has been a long, long time now since it bothered me. It never happened in reality.

(19 August 1986)

A dream is only a dream, huh?

THOMAS M. DISCH
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What a good idea the dream issue is, though I'm not surprised that fanish types would flee from the concept in alarm. It is a little like inviting people who are shy of even going swimming to come visiting a nudist colony. And that you should comport yourself with such matter-of-fact grace in telling your dream (and Lo, I had been wearing only my singlet the while!) is only likely to add to the anxieties of someone who hasn't taken the plunge. The plunge, that is, of telling home truths about oneself without quite knowing what they are. Poets, generally, are aware that this is part of what is required of them, but a large part of sf fandom is able to enjoy 'turds in the water' (to use your imagery) precisely because they deny the symbolic/aesthetic meaning of what they're reading -- for example, the psychopathology of the Syme/Gens fantasies of La Lichtenberg. No, no, such fans insist, this is just plain old-fashioned story-telling, no deep meanings here.

Being neither a Jungian nor a Freudian myself, and having no overall schema for interpreting dreams, I try to interpret them as I would a poem or figurative painting. So, while I can admire the neatness of Brian Aldiss's interpretation, I find it rather formalist, as though all dreams had to be reduced to the lowest common denominator of a few archetypes, wombs and tombs, birth, death, and incest. Looking (as against doing) may well characterize incest, as Brian says that Freud says, but it characterizes a lot of other phenomena as well: football on tv (get that, all you Freudians), visits to art museums -- and symphony concerts.

Did none of your interpreters question the equation between the symphony orchestra and the pool that comes to replace it? That seems the 'key' to any useful interpretation -- that, and your regression to earlier stages of childhood as your approach nearer to the pool. To the source, might it not be, of the music you have such interestingly mixed feelings about? You are horrified and embarrassed by the 'American' high school girls singing their foI-de-rol, but they have actually anticipated the orchestra. And art can be embarrassing in the materials it exploits for its purposes. In this case: girlishness, Americanness, mischief, notably high spirits, and such a sense of solidarity (they rush forward, clinging to each other) that you are left by yourself in the back rows. Then as you come to accept the feelings they've expressed (through the orchestra's mediation), you are confronted with the possibility of entering the pool -- that is, of becoming an artist yourself. Art is not now the orchestra, or gaggle of singing girls, from whose closed circle you are excluded, but a personal possibility. The question remains: are there turds in the water? Or: what are the sources, in our psyches, of creative energy? Here, I suppose, some Freudian knowhow might show how a regression to earlier anal stages of development is necessary for full self-integration. My favourite 'interpretation' of creativity along Freudian (and Melanie-Kleinian) lines, and one I strongly recommend to you, is Anton Ehrensweig's The Hidden Order of Art. Anyhow, I think it's a lovely dream, and very well told. The hard part about narrating a dream is to convey the feelings that attach to various images, since the images alone can be confounding.

As to the second dream, I have much less confidence that I know what it's about.

Clearly, David Grigg functions as your double, and all the correspondences that Yvonne Rousseau point out are on target, but to say that you've been vouchsafed a vision of the 'Great Goddess' and leave it at that begs the issue of what the Great Goddess is to you and you to her that you should dream of her. (Allusion to Hamlet there, please note.) I have a fairly extensive sense of your relation to the great swimming pool of art, since your magazines are about that; but as to your relation with the Great Goddess, there you would have to hire yourself a Jungian and spend a decade drawing blueprints of yourself, and then you might get back an interesting 'interpretation'. But actually it doesn't sound like you should have to. Both dreams are so upbeat that you should consider them Certificates of Good Mental Health and leave it at that.

I can't resist the following anecdote. It was sometime in 1969 and I'd returned to psychotherapy (everyone in NYC went to therapy of one kind or another in those days), after a mild dose of unrequited love. I'd gone to perhaps five or six sessions and was just beginning to enjoy it, when my therapist -- a man of wonderfully sound and subtle insight -- declared that not only was I of sound mind but that I was preternaturally well integrated. Not an exact quote, and of course the question would always remain: did he really mean it or was he just saying goodbye in a diplomatic way? But it did the trick as well as Dumbo's feather: since then I've never doubted my essential Mental Health, nor felt any further need for therapy. After all, as a writer, I can tell my dreams to the world at large, and be paid for it to boot.

(21 August 1986)

After an incident in 1976 rather similar to yours (except that this was an encounter-group situation, not one-to-one therapy) I came to the same conclusion about my Certificate of Mental Health. (In the encounter group I met people who really had problems, and realized that I had none, so I quit the group after two sessions.) That's not the problem, as you can see from my reply to Andrew Whitmore's long letter. I just want to know the best way of spending the rest of my life. Do I, in fact, have much say in the matter? Should I drift along for however many years I have left? Should I expend huge amounts of energy into breaking free from my current patterns of thought? Or will Life bounce me on a new course anyway, as happened regularly during my twenties? When I write down my dreams, I am looking for the Big Answers, you know.

Thanks for the comments about the orchestra and the swimming pool. Nobody else -- including me -- made that vital connection, although it is one of two or three central happenings in that dream.

If 'David Grigg' in the second dream is my alter ego, then so must be 'Roger Weddall' and the female figures. However, I've always seen the character of the real-life Roger as being quite opposite from mine; he's easy-going, sociable, friendly to a fault, et cetera. It's a real challenge -- perhaps the challenge offered by the dream -- to find in myself any Roger-like characteristics.

* * *

If I don't print all the letters that came in response to TMR 9, it's because they've been displaced by the following masterpiece, a stretch of writing that I could never have anticipated when I published that issue. Being a fanzine editor can be a very gratifying experience:

ROBERT JAMES MAPSON
(address already given)

I find The Metaphysical Review 9 fascinating. Dreams, religion, myth, psychology, and philosophy are an abiding interest of mine. As far as I'm concerned there are no distinctions between them; they represent the same numinous aspect of the human mind approached from different directions. The goal, the mystery at the centre of the temenos, is the same in each case. As I did not receive your original Dream Issue, I'll

have to enter your competition rather belatedly with these interpretations. (Your comments on psychology -- specifically the Freudian use of couch and unseen analyst -- remind me of the joke from Punch: A patient lies on a couch, staring blankly at the ceiling, his hands clasped as if in prayer. He is saying, 'Of course, you probably hear this sort of thing every day...' We, as impartial observers, can see the psychiatrist is not behind the patient, but in the next room, a lavatory, throwing up.)

I began to read some of the interpretations printed by you, but then hastily stopped this, as I wanted my own interpretations to be unsoftened, and furthermore decided to read only the first dream before interpreting the second. As Jung has pointed out, interpreting isolated dreams such as this is, if not dangerous, often pointless, as I know little of the psychic make up of the person they originate from. I know you are a fan, and that you belong to the literary element of fandom (this is neither a compliment nor a complaint, but only an observation), but this is not necessarily what influenced you in the dream, and is still only a very broad classification. Nevertheless, I shall attempt some comments.

You also mention that, even after faithfully writing down your dreams (like the Sunday churchgoer? -- outward form without inner conviction?), you have yet to find The Really Big Answer to The Immense Question. This is perhaps because there is no sudden revelation, except for the neurotically disposed with the aid of an analyst. The 'normal' psychic person must continually reinvent the wheel (also known as the mandala), and continually progress little by little.

On to the dreams:

The Dreamer is at a school, originally a secondary school, but later this regresses to a primary school. He is a child again. A school is a place where one is taught things, educated, on how to handle oneself in life. It is also, to a large extent, a shelter from the realities of life: working, relationships, tax, bills, finding the next meal, etc. The dreamer is teenaged; that is, adolescent (and all that implies). The psyche is saying that it is not fully developed (are all of us like this? one wonders in passing) and has returned to the 'school' in order to learn how to cope with life. At first it tries a secondary level, but this is still too advanced, and the psyche must in fact return to the primary level, to the very basics of realization and learning. Later in the dream other such regressions to lower levels become evident.

To confirm this, the Dreamer is not being lectured, but is receiving a practical demonstration on how to cope with life. He is watching an orchestra. Now, in an orchestra numerous individuals (thoughts?) all operate independently, yet all combine to produce a perfect harmony, whether in homophony (unison), counterpoint (where two or more arguments are presented simultaneously), or polyphony (where each individual seems to be pursuing his or her own path, but the final product is still an aesthetic whole).

The Dreamer states that everyone around him is female. No number is given, but Yvonne Rousseau automatically assumes these to be the Dreamer's anima. A trite assumption that any female in a male's dream is an anima. How many animas does this man have? Five hundred? From what sort of vast and incurable psychosis is he suffering? (It was at this point that I stopped reading the supplied interpretations.) I would want to know what connotations the Dreamer gives these females, but perhaps they are (fallen?) angels (angelos = messenger), aspects of the collective unconscious, of the shadow. There also seems to be a compartmentalization: all the girls are on one (higher) level, and all the boys on a lower level. The mind recognizes the higher powers of the feminine aspects, but then totally isolates the feminine from the masculine, rather than uniting them. Later, the Dreamer is isolated from the group as well:

If he hearkens to the voice, he is at once set apart and isolated, as he has resolved to obey the law that commands him from within. 'His own law!' everybody will cry. But he knows better: it is the law, the vocation for which he is destined.

(Jung, The Development of Personality, para. 304)

The Dreamer is not prepared to trust this side of his personality: when the girls start to sing he thinks it some banal song that will only interfere with the carefully coordinated movements of the orchestra, and just at the culminating moment as well. In fact, he retreats from them, by allowing them to leave him: they are in one half, he in the other. A psychic disequilibrium results. He is an 'outraged, isolated onlooker', not able or prepared to understand his intuitions, but not prepared, or able, to control them ('To call out very loudly... would have meant... embarrassment for me'). While he is thus agitated, the orchestra begins its last tune: precisely the same banal song the girls had been singing. The final tune is the climax of the concert: the culmination of the thought; the apotheosis of existence -- it is merely a banal tune, but it is the one the Dreamer has known all along but refused to acknowledge. Perhaps the unconscious is trying to tell him that life is not full of brilliance, or that the answers are particularly complex, but often quite obvious and simple.

The first of the Dreamer's interruptions: No, no, no, you miss the point of the tune, but I've only just got it. I thought everybody in an Australian school must have had to sing 'The Happy Wanderer', which is why I didn't explain it well enough. It is a song that is usually sung only by a choir, and not by a soloist, because the song is in two parts, a tune and a high descant. A group of girls who can sing high and belt out a song can do wonderful things with the descant; the boys in the class, as I remember clearly, are left to rumble along with the tune. (All of them are pretending to sing but instead make low rumbling noises.) Sung heartily, 'The Happy Wanderer' gives its main enjoyment to the singers rather than the hearers. So the song at the beginning of the dream celebrates togetherness. By implication the rest of the dream must be about separation and identity. And there's the song's title -- 'The Happy Wanderer'. Surely that's a possible title for the whole dream -- but at the end the Dreamer is not merely happy, but is ecstatic.

Sorry about that. That dream is so loaded with emotional weight that it's still surprising me, the Dreamer, six years after dreaming it.

Now the Dreamer is reconciled with his feminine, they are no longer 'threatening', because he realizes they are on his side after all. The Dreamer experiences a 'reunion/school spirit', or an approach to the God constellation in the psyche, the Self, the einigter Geist, wholeness.

Originally, however, the Dreamer could not accept this; hence the original separation. Therefore he is forced to climb down a level, to the tier of the masculine forces. He feels 'much more part of the school' now, and the orchestra, the magnificent display of all the myriad thoughts of the mind in harmony, has disappeared. In its place is a pool -- a kind of school pool; that is, something to learn from. A pool is also a pool of ideas. To the dreamer it is attractive, but he is warned that it is actually sewage, and full of turds. The dreamer is disconcerted. He is searching for the School Spirit (now in capitals) that had been lost in the past. The Dreamer does not believe the boys. To him the pool appears 'crystalline, invigorating' and lures him on. The pool is quite obviously the deepest layers of the unconscious, the collective unconscious, the level of primal, nonsentient being. It is indeed attractive, as it is the basis of all our psychic beings, but it also includes 'turds': dark thoughts, dark desires that we would rather not wish to acknowledge. If we plunge into its waters we are liable to drown (that is, become permanently immersed in its unconscious being; suffer from a psychosis), and if we look too closely we may find the revolting turds. These turds exist, but to come upon them suddenly can be disconcerting in the extreme.

You, like some of the other commentators, have got pretty excited about those turds. The point of the dream is that they are not there, and never have been, but are mentioned by the gang of schoolboys in an attempt to stop the Dreamer from going into the pool.

Let me pause here to relate a dream of my own. I am diving into some offshore waters, where a boat sank recently. Broken and dislodged parts of it occasionally drift upwards without warning, out of the dark depths, and at odd intervals. I must be careful

because if I am struck by one of these fragments I could be seriously injured. (The waters are the collective/deep unconscious, the diving my own investigation of my psychic foundations, the fragments the equivalents of your turds.) The scene changes. Someone shows me how well trained is a snake that he owns. It is quite large, similar to a python or an anaconda. (It may be a phallic symbol, but the context of the rest of the dream implies not. It is a phallic symbol only insofar as a phallic symbol represents all libido.) He drapes it about his neck, like a scarf, but I realize that he is not actually in control. In fact he is desperately struggling with it, and so I leave him in disgust at his charlatanism. Later his limp corpse is dropped out of the snake's tree. (Again, the snake is the unconscious, unacknowledged impulses, and I should not fool myself into believing that they are easy to control. The tree is a shamanistic image, which I had climbed metaphorically in my search for God/knowledge/enlightenment/understanding.) Again a scene change: the snake, now a semi-human bipedal lizard, like a scaly dwarf, but with a lizard's head, runs at me attacking. I realize that last time this happened I panicked and all was lost. (Actually I had never had this dream before, but the thought probably refers to the previous scene, where 'I' lost.). This time I am ready. As he charges I sidestep, grab his head as he rushes by, twist it and break his neck, thus banishing him. (That is, with foreknowledge the unconscious is still dangerous, but can be overcome.)

Um. Are you sure there isn't a lot more in that dream than your own explanations?

Still further, the dreamer climbs down into a labyrinth. He is descending the psychic ages of his mind, just as Jung describes in Memories, Dreams, Reflections on page 182, where he tells of his House of the Ages. But the Dreamer becomes lost: 'it is no simple matter to find the pool.' He has descended too far. He is no longer an observer, but rather a captive: 'Suddenly I was ascending upwards from some underground chamber to the pool.'

The Dreamer now discovers the source of the pool. He is recognized by the boys, and the School Spirit, another source (of 'mystic togetherness' or individuation) was 'up there', or at least in the vicinity, rather than just a nebulous idea. The Dreamer is only a primary schoolboy now, though. He is either still mentally an undeveloped child, or the psyche is telling him that we are all children in the matter of the mind.

Rashly, the Dreamer begins to paddle in the pool of the unconscious. He is still not prepared to trust his fellows, and the pool overwhelms him. He is swallowed up by the Great Whale, just as Jonah, into the maws of unconsciousness, yet he finds this a 'cold, concrete, pure sufficiency'.

In effect, the Dreamer is unindividuated, and would far rather sink back into primeval unconsciousness than tackle the long road of awareness and development.

Again I stress that this is my interpretation of someone else's dream, and that I, too, stumble about in the labyrinthine catacombs without a torch by attempting to relate the meaning of it to someone who is far better qualified to tell me how wrong I am in my assumptions.

* *

But on to Dream Number 2:

Again, a disclaimer. Wherever I mention an actual person, I must point out that I have never actually met that person, and I refer only to the psychic image that has been designated by that name.

Right at the beginning, the Dreamer leaves home, the place of residence and normality, to go to University; he is attempting to seek out tertiary schooling instead of secondary or primary, as in the first dream.

Instead of arriving at university, however, he arrives at a hotel on campus. It is simply another residence, but this time a transitory one. The Dreamer is trying to leave behind the situation of his day-to-day life and to obtain an Archimedean fulcrum point from which to lever his psychic world up to understanding, but can only go as far as to trade the normal residence or state of mind for one only partially removed from it. He is not prepared to let go fully of all he thinks is important -- which is probably wise, considering his affinity, seen in Dream Number 1, for the unconscious.

To confirm this, a friend (since he cannot remember whom, it is probably himself) comes to discuss a matter of some delicacy. The Dreamer feels anxious about this; either it is his stated search for Big Answers, or perhaps a problem that had been worrying him at the time. The Dreamer's things (thoughts) are left 'higgledy-piddledy all over the room', necessitating the arrival of cleaners, or a psychic cleaning out of aspects the Dreamer has been ignoring. The Dreamer is not yet ready to do this himself as, though he attempts the task, his friend (himself) tells him to leave. While walking away from the hotel room, the Dreamer at least realizes that he will have to return there, ostensibly to collect his things, but also because it is the room of thoughts upon which he bases his daily life.

He now finds himself in a library. Again, like the school and the university, this is a repository of knowledge and understanding, and perhaps represents the Dreamer's memories.

He is, in fact, handed a book by 'David Grigg', who is proud of his achievement of having written it, and having his presence, presumably, acknowledged by the Dreamer. As becomes clearer later, the unconscious here is asking for recognition and giving the Dreamer its knowledge in the most acceptable form to the Dreamer: as a book. It is interesting that the Dreamer feels jealous that he cannot achieve certain effects of the book in his magazine. The magazine is his conscious undertaking, or his waking life, the book his (collective) unconscious understanding.

Just as in Jung's House of the Ages, this book also presents a journey down the past ages of the collective unconscious. The Dreamer, in the twentieth century, discovers pictures from the 1800s in the book and, further on, illustrations from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The Dreamer attempts to return the book, but the unconscious (symbolized by 'David Grigg') confirms that the book is the Dreamer's. Of course! If he knew the truth, he would realize that he was the author.

The Dreamer states he will have to pay for the book later, as all his things are back at the hotel (yet he confirms a feeling of 'freedom' at being away from the hotel, at his newfound exterior viewpoint of himself), but 'David' explains that there is no payment: the book is a means of contact between himself and other people; between the unconscious and the conscious as a mean of transmission of ideas.

A secondary episode occurs here at the 'door [threshold] of Lee and Irene's', where 'David' seems reluctant to use his book as a means of meeting old friends. I don't understand this passage. Perhaps the real Bruce feels a certain reluctance at imposing upon the real Lee and Irene? Perhaps he is only being told that the book helps the dream-'David' to meet the dream-Bruce only, and is not applicable to other people.

Things do get difficult here. Real-life David Grigg, who has written some fine stories but currently does not seem to be writing fiction, is the real-life brother-in-law of Lee Harding, who is of course a well-known author. They'll probably never forgive me for letting them sneak into my dream. What's the contrast here for the Dreamer? Between potential author and actual author? I presume so since, like me, real-life David finds he can hardly make a living from writing, but can make a decent living from one of his other talents.

I wish my dreams didn't keep co-opting people from everyday life and juggling them around in the most unlikely ways.

The Dreamer now finds the title of the book. We have gone even further back in time along the paths of the back brain. The title is not simply fifteenth century, or even old, but 'ancient': The Catch. Words or phrases fully remembered from dreams are significant, because it happens so infrequently. We remember saying or being told something, but not the actual act of speaking, the precise words.

Let us investigate the word. Collins English Dictionary gives thirty-four separate meanings! Basically, the more important ones are: to catch something (ball, or sickness); the prize or capture; a hook or fastening; a cricket term involving the dismissal of a batsman; an eligible matrimonial prospect; a break in the voice; a concealed, unexpected, or unforeseen drawback; a form of round or canon; another name for bell sheep. The word originates from words meaning to pursue and to snatch, from capere, to seize.

This is obviously an important book: it is a book of ancient mysteries, the Dreamer's Eleusinian mysteries revealed. Confirmation is that the book's author's name has been obliterated from the cover, or was never there originally, being simply a 'thick piece of black adhesive' or a blank. This unknown author is of course the deus absconditus, just as the Bible, another important book from the unconscious, was authored by him also, by YHWH, which another cipher like the black adhesive. David has by now left the room, so the Dreamer is unable to ask him directly about this obliteration of his name, because it would lead to David revealing his name. He is the God that Herodotus was not allowed to name.

And of the contents of the book? If only the Dreamer had sat down and actually read it! It is what he had been pursuing, and can now catch or seize: unconscious understanding which he now has in his hand, and so he can now manipulate it, to make use of it. But the book is not called The Knowledge, but The Catch, because there is a catch to gaining this knowledge: the Dreamer is liable to sink into the unconscious, or to misinterpret it. He is being simultaneously warned and enlightened. He has seized the knowledge he is seeking, but he must be careful that it does not seize him in turn.

Without David, and unconsciously knowing what he is holding, the book becomes 'very large, awkward'. The Dreamer appears to be having trouble until a 'slight, attractive girl' helps him by pointing out various items. She is in charge of that section of the library, and helped David to produce the book. She is described as possessing 'quiet confidence... equal to every situation'. This, I would point out, is an anima figure. Yvonne Rousseau seems to have read somewhere that Jung interpreted a female figure in a specific dream as an anima, and she has assumed that all female figures are animas, but this is patently not so. The anima (in its benevolent aspect, and not that of the old witch/devouring harpy) is often a child ('slight') and carries a numinous air ('equal to every situation': witness the birds in fairy tales who help the hero to gain the treasure and/or princess).

Without the help of the anima, the unconscious (dream-David) would have been unable to produce the Book. ('The anima of a man has a strongly historical character. As a personification of the unconscious she goes back into prehistory, and embodies the contents of the past': Jung: Memories Dreams Reflections, p. 317, my emphasis.) The Book was always present in the unconscious, but without the anima it could not have been dredged up from the muddy depths to be presented to the Dreamer. She now proceeds to guide the Dreamer through the Book. It is interesting to note that the Dreamer now accepts his feminine side, passively at least.

But the Dreamer is in danger of becoming immersed in this study, just as he felt the bliss of oblivion by drowning in the waters of unconsciousness. Therefore Roger Weddall appears, and invites the Dreamer to join a group, to come out of his introspection (but

the Dreamer carries his knowledge with him; he still has the Book), and in fact to 'come to(o)'. The Dreamer expresses concern at taking the Book out of the library, out of the source of knowledge, an act which appears to him illegal -- that is, transgressing the laws he has previously been required to uphold -- but his anima accompanies him and, in effect, where the guardian of the library goes, there goes the library.

The trio travel by tram to the city and come upon a shop run by a friend of the librarian anima (indeed!). The figure changes sex and is 'slighter and thinner' than the anima, 'mischievous and lively': a wonderful description of Hermes-Aphrodite, Mercurius, the trickster, the psychopomp. The Dreamer has to keep reminding himself that Mercurius is running the shop. Apparently he disbelieves this. Given the chance, the trickster will attack the self as well as bringing the secret of fire to man; the disbelief of the Dreamer is well justified.

It is worthwhile to note that we now have a classic Jungian quartet: Dreamer, Roger Weddall, anima, and hermaphrodite. This is an approach to wholeness. The simple gathering of fans at the convention earlier in the dream now becomes a 'remarkable air of festivity'.

The Dreamer still has the Book with him, which he thinks is similar to David's book. (As I mentioned earlier, it is the same Book). But passive possession of the Book is not enough. The message contained in it must be brought to life. Not merely an academic understanding, but an actual *imitatio Christi* is required. Hence an 'animator' is employed on a picture of a young girl of the eighteenth or nineteenth century. (This is a closely related century and therefore not as dangerous as the earlier ages; what would have happened if a primeval image had been animated? Probably it would have subsumed the Dreamer and gained control.) The animated picture indicates to the Dreamer 'all its possibilities', and time becomes fluid, the girl being both young and old at the same instant (just as Mercurius is Hermes and Aphrodite in the same instant). A sense of wholeness through the union of opposites is here being alluded to: the heiros gamos. When the two are joined the whole is greater than either:

Contraries are Positives
A Negation is not a Contrary

as William Blake wrote in Milton (Plate 30).

The picture has a 'disturbing quality' because the Dreamer is being shown not only the possibilities in the picture but also those available to him personally. Therefore the 'spirits' of the party are not dampened. The Dreamer now feels ready to go back to his hotel room and 'pick up [his] things', creating or restoring an order in himself.

In order for the Dreamer not to have an inflated ego, to consider that he is, rather than potentially is, Mercurius, he now finds himself in a state of undress. This perhaps also indicates some anxiety at the mission that has been entrusted to him, of individuation.

The Dreamer experiences melancholy that he is alone, 'wandering down an empty street', because each psyche's path of individuation is individual, by definition; to reach our destination we travel alone.

The trams in this city are difficult to catch. A woman (the Dreamer's feminine aspect) fails to catch one, because the Dreamer is still not wholly with her, but an observer of her actions. However, when the Dreamer attempts to catch one he succeeds by running as fast as possible. It is also worth saying that the final scene of the dream involves attempts to catch these means of transformation. The Dreamer half succeeds in the catch, but his feminine aspect is presumably still waiting to catch his tram.

* *

What are these dreams telling us? The Dreamer is obviously (as seen in his own editorial and the fact that he published 'The Dream Issue', not merely as seen in the dreams themselves) interested intellectually in Jungian dream analysis, but he has been warned in Dream 1 that if he proceeds without caution, and too far, he will, rather than achieve his objective of enlightenment, be obliterated. In Dream 2, he makes better progress, not travelling so deep into the unconscious (only to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries) and being shown what he must strive towards: a reconciliation or union. As just mentioned, catching the tram is both a sign of good hope and of failure; when he returns to his hotel to reorder his things, he will need the woman with him as well. He believes in the message given to him, but is unable to implement its strictures yet.

Let me add one final disclaimer: the above interpretations are my interpretations of someone else's symbols: they do not necessarily apply to the actual Dreamer, but they have perhaps helped me to clarify my own definition of my own symbols and my application of them.

The Dreamer must continue on his long search:

Tropic corridor
Tropic treasure
What got us this far
To this mild Quator
We need someone or something new
Something else to get us through.

(Jim Morrison)

* * *

You callous swine, you've slipped in a third dream at the end! As its themes are relevant to the first two dreams, I feel obliged to continue my interpretive efforts a third time.

The Dreamer is on a walking tour with his father (but how old is the Dreamer?) in the Dandenong Ranges 'as they used to be'. He is under his own power (walking) and not relying on any outside means of transportation, but still required a guiding principle on his tour (his father). And what is he touring? The heights, the upper regions of the past.

Not quite true. Once you enter them, the Dandenong Ranges are low hills and gentle valleys, an area for easy hikes, civilized rather than untamed. The highest point in the Ranges, Mount Dandenong, is only about 2000 feet high. 'As they used to be' is before they were invaded by humans other than day tourists; nowadays the area is disappearing under suburban houses.

Up here he becomes upon an opening to the unconscious waters, a small bush swimming pool. As it is specifically described as a swimming pool, and not as merely similar to one, it is evidently there for swimming in. In these heights, however, the unconscious is not so evident. The pool is only small and, moreover, shallow. Later events prove that shallowness (in more than one sense of the word) can be a deceptive trap. There is a wire fence around the pool. As Urusual Le Guin points out in The Dispossessed, a wall, or fence, not only shuts out something, but also shuts in something. The world of higher consciousness and the opening to the unconscious are carefully delineated, but a small opening is provided. In the light of day the pool is safe for locals, but by nightfall one can become entrapped there.

Allowing oneself access to the waters of unconsciousness is described as refreshing and invigorating, but the Dreamer is here careful to immerse only his body. His head, the site of thought and reason, remains outside the waters of the pool. In effect, this physical position mirrors the existence of the pool within the Ranges.

The guiding principle, the Father, knows that a means of travel back to the city (the centre) must be employed before nightfall and entrapment, but the Dreamer fails to heed this warning, and he is locked in.

It is only in the final sentence that the Dreamer expresses confusion at when his father disappeared. Now he reappears: a local man from a little hut comes out to tell the Dreamer what to do. He is a spirit of the place, hence a local (described later as 'a kindly type of older gent'), a dwarf or guardian of the unconscious (therefore, what better place for his hut than next to the pool?).

The Dreamer is advised to climb over the deceptively simple fence, which the local kids could easily have surmounted. The Dreamer finds this impossible. He has higher ideas of his capabilities than he actually possesses or, to put it another way, he thinks the unconscious is easier to escape from than it is.

Or turn the image around completely. I have never been able to scale fences -- this is the central part of the dream. So here physical limits are more important than they are to most people.

On the other hand -- and this is something I've just thought of -- swimming is one of the few types of exercise I've ever enjoyed (although I've never been any good at it), but in the dream I do not swim at all, but loll around. Which ties up, I suppose, with being able to go through the fence without exertion. I'm pretty good at not exerting myself, so maybe the dream promises a great future for me.

A local boy is then sent to a local person's house to get a key to the pool enclosure. The lad returns with six others. There are therefore now eight people outside the enclosure, a double quaternary, while one is inside.

Suddenly, after talking to the old man 'desultorily' the Dreamer discovers, to mixed feelings, that he is outside the enclosure, without making any effort at all. While attempting to become familiar with the guardian of the unconscious he is better able to handle himself in the location of the pool, and this is the way it should be approached, through the auspices and understanding of the old man, not by a foolhardy immersion by oneself. The Dreamer seems to have crossed over without any effort. All that has changed is his understanding. Where he stands makes no difference if he has the help of the psychopomp. Both sides of the fence are the same, both parts of the same psyche.

The Dreamer is now to be transported to the nearest railway station (train = tram) which is a stopping point for the meeting and movement of ideas. It is up to the Dreamer which train he catches, what destination he travels to, or even if he chooses to catch a train.

I think the Dreamer is attempting too hard to fathom the unconsciousness, like the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's The Descent into the Maelstrom. Note how that story commences, like the third dream, with a juxtaposition of the heights, the fatherly or knowledgeable guide, and the terrible depths:

We had now reached the summit of the loftiest crag. For some minutes the old man seemed much too exhausted to speak.

The old man had foolishly stayed out too late, like the Dreamer, and had a close encounter with the swirling wrath of the unconscious, and is now 'broken up body and soul... frightened at a shadow'.

Given care, and the proper guide(s), the Dreamer may attempt the task. Perhaps he should wait for the messages from the unconscious to come to him, as the anima explaining to him the Book, rather than diving to dredge them up from the depths.

(15-17 August 1986)

I thanked Robert by letter, and sent him details of a further three dreams. His comments on them were as illuminating as the letter I've printed. I don't know what else to say; I hope I haven't failed the author of such a letter by taking a year to publish it.

The year's interval since the 'Dream Issue' has given me a bit of distance from the whole subject of dreams. I haven't had a highly detailed and emotionally charged dream for quite some time, but occasionally I still receive strong images that relate far more to the details of everyday life than do the Big Dreams of a few years ago.

RICHARD BRANDT

(address already given)

[Your third dream in TMR 9] signifies some kind of Rite of Passage -- into, if not adulthood, then maturity. I find it significant that you were 'led' to this place by your father -- but after emerging from the waters, you find he has abandoned you. You feel lost and deserted, but more important, left to your own devices. Your feeling of isolation is reinforced by the 'locked gate', the fence you cannot cross, and the fact that there are other people in your dream -- but all on the other side of the barrier. Almost as soon as you miss your father, another figure appears to offer you advice. But he advises you to attempt something you feel incapable of achieving -- and you feel embarrassed that 'everyone else' can do it. He sends for help, and here come not one boy, but a whole passel of them (well, six anyway) -- representing all those kids who were able to climb over the wire fence. They were probably good at sports, had lots of friends, and weren't stigmatized at school, either. But when they arrive, what do you find has happened? You are on the other side of the fence after all -- but don't remember having clambered over it.

Interpretations? You can achieve your goals in life, without having to go about them the way 'everybody else' does (crawling over the fence). Although you feel 'set apart' from others, you can achieve your own ends -- who is to say they are not the same ends -- by continuing to follow your own offbeat course. You need not feel isolated from others, or a failure on their terms, because you choose to seek different objectives and to pursue them in a different way.

I had a dream just last night, I did. I found myself walking into the hotel where our soon-to-be-held convention was opening, and was gratified at the huge crowd waiting at registration. Once inside, however, I was startled to find my ex-wife and her fiance sitting at the registration table. I waved hi to them, and while he nodded back, she was either absorbed in some reading or refusing to acknowledge my presence at all. After a while, I noticed the con itself seemed to be falling into the disastrous pattern of our previous affair. The walls between the function rooms had been dismantled, for some obscure reason, so folks were sitting at gaming tables at the back of the room, and some incredibly vast distance away, authors were trying to conduct a panel before a vanishingly small audience. (Really -- the crowd seemed to grow smaller the more closely I looked at it.) Finally, back at registration, an attendee was complaining irately that she'd lost her badge and had been forced to pay for another full membership, right on the spot, even though she hadn't been at registration, and now she was complaining because she'd paid twice already and still had no badge, and finally broke into tears and prostrated herself over a table. Luckily, soon after this I woke up.

(20 November 1986)

It's said that most common recurrent subject of nightmares among most people in the community is that of examinations: either turning up late for one, or arriving without being prepared, etc. Among fans the most common recurrent dream subject must be disastrous sf conventions. This could be because attending some conventions can be more nightmarish than one's worst nightmares.

I've had quite a few dreams broadly similar to the two you printed: various combinations of schooldays, old friends, embarrassing situations, and swimming pools. However, I swimmer, and school swimming lessons were cold, miserable torture for me. In fact (I may be wrong, but so far as I can judge) I never seem to have dreams that require much sophisticated analysis at all. Normally, elements from real life appear unmodified (give or take a little surrealistic distortion), and any symbolism is very transparent stuff indeed; usually decipherable even as I am dreaming.

An example:

I was doing volunteer work feeding old/demented people with Sister Carol (a nun I know), feeding them rice and green string beans. Carol says butter is our best friend and greatest helper; we carry a pack of it, and use it to moisten each forkful of rice we feed the old people. The job frightens me, and I almost refuse to take it. It seems too daunting, but it turns out to be tolerable. Carol promises worse patients tomorrow.

Having finished for the day, I go home via Osborne Library (the local library when I was growing up in Perth), where a slide show/music practice is being held. There is a girl there playing some music that I wrote. I become angry with a teenager who is competing with me for her affection, but he turns into a dog so that I can't punch him (he couldn't punch back as a dog).

Then I'm waiting in the foyer of the Valhalla Cinema to see Nicholas Roeg's Eureka after seeing another film; there is a one-and-a-half-hour wait for the second film. I wander off to the Perth Institute of Film and Television to buy socks, and find myself on the set of Bliss II, which based on both a novel by Peter Carey and a short story by someone else, written simultaneously in England and Australia, without collusion. At first I can see only the cast, then the crew of the film become visible only as reflections in windows, etc., and then someone starts making a film about the making of Bliss II, and as soon as that happens the crew become directly visible. I almost miss the start of Eureka.

Everything in this dream had an obvious link with real-life events of the previous week. For example, a few days before the dream Carol had been discussing the soup kitchen that she runs. The volunteer work that I do with her in real life involves helping her set up and run computer programs; to do something involving personal contact with people (such as working in a soup kitchen or the dream-task of feeding) would be daunting to me.

Being angry with someone competing for a girl's affection... that was a totally literal transcription from a party I went to the previous weekend (he didn't turn into a dog, though; he just became, intentionally, too drunk to be responsible for his actions).

The third part is the only one with a really interesting idea to it... at first only the film's cast is visible (as is the case, hopefully, when watching the actual film), then the crew can be glimpsed in reflections (in rare stuff-ups that might be literally true, but more likely their presence is betrayed by intrusive techniques), and then, in a 'The Making of...' documentary, the crew are fully visible.

What I'm getting at is that you are probably by far the best person to interpret your own dreams; you know the complete context, not only the facts about your life in a biographical sense, which you have to some extent communicated with other people, but also precisely what was worrying and/or interesting you at the time of the dream.

But in concentrating on the details of your own life that correspond to the details of the dream, you seem to have missed obvious things about the shape of the dream itself:

especially the fact you have to wait for 'eureka', are temporarily turned aside by 'bliss', (bliss too), but return to 'eureka'. If dreams give the shape of your mind at the time, and not merely the shape of the week's events, this one shows a pretty basic conflict there. Wasn't Eureka a film about seeking and finding treasure? (I haven't seen the film.) What treasure were you on the point of discovering that week? Was it connected with the work you were doing with Sister Carol? Were you nearly deflected by secondhand bliss from your real path towards discovery? Was the bloke who turned into a dog really doing you a good turn?

In other words, dreams can sometimes give the dreamer a good kick in the backside, but the dreamer might be the last person to see where the kick came from, or the direction in which it was meant to send him or her. I suspect most of my dreams are messages of this kind, messages I cannot read, no matter how hard I try.

All this crap about swimming pools representing vaginas... does anybody really take that seriously? Like theories of literary criticism, theories of dream interpretation can easily be lathered up into vast, inflated, pompous structures. But if the writer of a piece of fiction does not subscribe to a certain contrived literary theory, then that theory is unlikely to say something useful about his/her work, and if a dreamer does not think in terms of the set of symbols popular with a certain school of dream analysts, then that dreamer is unlikely to dream dreams amenable to dissection by those analysts.

In other words: if I had dreamed your two dreams, I would have done so because of concerns very close to those of the dream protagonist. Literally close, with no need for any symbol hunting or decipherment. Presumably, if Brian Aldiss had dreamed those dreams, his particular analysis would have been pertinent... if that's the way he thinks about dreams, then it is reasonable to expect that this is the way he dreams about his thoughts. Where exactly you lie on the continuum, only you can judge. (Surely the fact that, although you often intellectually admired the rigour and consistency of some of your correspondents' analyses, you nevertheless felt obliged to comment that they simply didn't ring true to you, demonstrates that, ultimately, you must make the final interpretation, and at best other people's comments can only illuminate choices that might not have immediately occurred to you.)

(24 August 1986)

As I've commented to Robert Mapson, my dreams have changed a lot since the ones I wrote down in 1981 and 1982, so that they have become shorter and more pertinent to everyday events. Maybe you're right: read Jung, dream Jungian dreams; read Freud, dream Freudian dreams; read lots of science fiction, and you don't need to dream at all. Or maybe you dream about science fiction:

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

Lo how the dream tree is sighing and shaking
Pretty dreams fall down on thee...

(Buffy Ste Marie)

It seemed an appropriate quote for your 'Dream Issue'; unfortunately, the rest of the song is a lover's lament. I was playing it this afternoon, and then picked up TMR to comment on.

I won't try to psychoanalyse your dreams; I don't take much stock in psych, probably because of the inane jargon that floats around in popular conversation in bad tv shows and lately even in science fiction stories. I never regarded stf as the stuff of dreams, either. Fantasy, yes. Science fiction, no.

However, I'll give you one of mine. I'm in a well-known town for some reason, and have some time to kill, so I walk around idly, looking for anything interesting, and run across this tiny, crowded newsstand. I go in; I always go in newsstands, if I have the

time and sometimes if I don't. And it has all these fascinating science fiction magazines; old ones that I never expected to see and new ones that I never heard of before, and I come out with an armload.

This was the original dream. In the various repeats, I'm walking around and suddenly realize that this is the town where the marvellous little newsstand is and I go look for it. Sometimes I can't find it, sometimes I find the building and the newsstand is no longer there, and once or twice I find it again and it's still loaded with treasures.

It's not always the same town, but it's always a town that I've been in and the city layout is the same, no matter what the layout of the real town might be. Usually it's some town close to my boyhood home in northern Indiana, but on this occasion I'm visiting relatives in southern Indiana and the town is down there. And it's always, in the dream, been some time since I've been in that town, so I've forgotten about the newsstand in the interim, and only just happen to think of it. I'm always by myself in the dream, though in some cases I've taken someone else to the town and I'm just waiting around for them to finish their business; there's always a good logical reason for me to be wandering around by myself. I suppose I've had a half-dozen sequels to the original dream.

The dream is a recent one, for me; obviously couldn't have happened before I discovered science fiction at the age of twenty. Most of my repeated dreams came when I was a child, and taking strong asthma medicine -- one of the milder ones was a mixture of stramonium and belladonna, which was ignited and the smoke inhaled. (No wonder I had a lot of dreams back then.) These days I seldom have any dreams that I remember the next morning -- not over three or four times a year, and usually when I've been taking asthma medicine.

Which is probably why I don't put much faith in Jung; my memorable dreams are obviously the result of a disordered mentality brought on by drugs. The newsstand one is totally logical, though. I do visit newsstands when I'm in a strange town -- a heritage from the 1950s, when new magazines were showing up almost every week, and I would find them sometimes in odd places. (The first issue of Galaxy and the first issue I ever saw of Other Worlds were both picked up on a trip to Michigan, sightseeing.) Frankly, I think the whole thing is based on a memory of my early days as a sf reader, and the times I failed to find the newsstand are because I know in my subconscious as well as my conscious that those days are gone forever.

Of course, my conscious mind does play a large part in my dreams; quite often I go through a dream sequence, decide that it's silly, and go through it again, with changes. I wonder if anyone else edits their dreams?

(25 August 1986)

In an article in a recent issue of Time, dream researchers estimated that 5 per cent of people had the ability to edit their dreams while dreaming them. I don't have this ability.

I'm surprised that I don't have your recurrent dream. One of the greatest pleasures of my life was scouring newsagents and book stores for sf magazines after I discovered magazine sf in 1960. Your dream seems to be the perfect wish-fulfilment dream for any fan who grew up while the magazines were still the centre of sf publishing.

It's the dreams I don't have that, more than anything, made me interested in the peculiarities of the dreaming mind. I don't dream about former girlfriends. I never dream about some of the places I've lived, such as Syndal and Melton or 10 Johnston Street, Collingwood, although I still dream about my first home at Oakleigh. I no longer have a recurrent dream about returning to live in 72 Carlton Street -- but I had that dream constantly until I wrote a story about the place. Maybe, Buck, you should write a mystery novel that begins with exactly the scene you've described, although that would only deprive you of the pleasure of dreaming it.

MAE STRELKOV

4501 Palma Sola, Jujuy, Argentina

Do you know what you are, if some Cosmic Figure were to view you? A rock, a stable rock, over which the torrents of other people's emotions and imaginations cascade -- a constantly flowing river and waterfall. Above this swoop birds of prey with sharp eyes fixed on the silver fishes (bright dollars) also in that stream. You are apart, yet are the necessary rock that creates the presence of the waterfall. It has never been transformed into a stream at the depths of a canyon because you are not eroded that easily. People like you keep us stable. And more: because you have never had those flying dreams, it shows how firmly fixed on the Rock of Mother Earth you are, too. Be glad.

Those with flying dreams (I include myself) are the little birds at the edge of the drenching torrent, perched on some precarious bough, out to catch a dragonfly or two. Fanzines seek to channel humanity's torrential undercurrents and the whirlwinds and whirlpools also we create.

You've an injured salmon in the pool below the falls. It seeks refuge under that 'rock' that is yours, where you cast a deep shadow and allow the little ones also to find rest. They swim in circles unable to escape, momentarily. The beautiful, bright salmon who got hurt trying to leap the falls is, of course, David Lake, whose books (from DAW) we have enjoyed. The wound is not to death, but it has marked him.

I am reminded of that great fish in the little pool in Little, Big. (Yes, I got to read it, thanks to Ned Brooks.) It is puzzled. It cannot understand. It knows there's a 'they', but cannot comprehend 'their' purposes. So it calls the unknown 'them' instead of God. A poor, misused name! To cure True Believers of their 'First Person of the Trinity' images (long-bearded and dour), it would do them good to borrow a view from India of a Creator with innumerable arms and other limbs, all containing symbols of action, and heads innumerable also. Then, refocusing, we restore the image to fit our own (one-headed, two-armed, and so on) -- but we should never trust any man-created model for too long, for He/She/It/They is always 'more', as the 'message of Creation' announces. Will it end? No guarantee, David Lake. Don't trust too blindly twentieth-century science! Will we end? Also no guarantee.

(19 February 1986)

Some people say I have rocks in my head. Others say I'm as stolid as a rock. And, as Paul Simon wrote, 'I Am a Rock'. I hope that I'm long-lasting, especially in the fanzine-publishing game, but I don't see myself as earthy. I'm not at all a practical person.

PERRY MIDDLEMISS

GPO Box 2708X, Melbourne, Vic. 3001

Far be it from me to comment on your dreams, Bruce. I have enough trouble just trying to work out how my own work. In fact, I have long since decided that unless the meaning of my remembered dream stands up and punches me in the face I have no intention of trying to figure out the deep-rooted implications. For example, what can you make of a barely remembered dream fragment that runs like a scene from Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Red-Headed League', which has, as its cast of characters, all the people I have known with red hair? The only other memory of the dream is of me sitting before a very large desk being interviewed by one of the League and feeling very nervous and apprehensive. If an interpretation leads to me being accused of being a colourist, then I don't want to know about it.

The one dream I do have very strong memories of comes from five years ago. It occurred a short time before I moved from Adelaide to Canberra. The dream ran like a personalized version of the Frank Capra film Lost Horizon (forget the 1973 version; it was garbage). The plot of the two films was the same, however, and, I am sure you will recall,

concerned a group of travellers lost in the high mountains of Tibet or the Himalayas. They are found by a rescue party that takes them to a 'magical valley'. There the sun always shines, while the surrounding mountains are covered in snow and blasted by blizzards. Everything is just bonzer until a few of the travellers start getting an unquenchable desire for a Big Mac or somesuch and decide to leave. The leader of the group, in the meantime, has come to the conclusion that the valley is just great and wants to stay. However, loyalty and democracy being what they are, this idea gets the flick and he leaves the valley with others -- only to return weeks or months later after all the conspicuous consumers in his group have gone the way of all such hedonists.

I am sure you remember it. If not, you probably will never want to see it now that I have inflicted such a tedious plot synopsis on you.

My fantasy version ran along much the same lines. In the dream I was already there having a good time when I, with all the others in my group, were informed that the valley contained a very large amount of radioactive material in the soil and water, and that if we stayed too long in the place we would surely die. Nobody knew how long this would take, but we knew it was inevitable. All my companions decided to leave while I stayed; what the hell, I thought, when you're on a good thing stick to it.

And that's it. Not much, eh? I know what it means, though. I was trying to tell myself at the time that no matter how bad things became after I moved to Canberra there was no going back, and I might as well make the most of it. In a way it's a pity that I didn't take the warning that the dream gave me. My longterm relationship of the time broke up eighteen months after I got to Canberra, and life gradually went downhill from then on. That is, until I decided to get out and move to Melbourne last year. So I guess the moral of the story is: if you think your dreams are trying to tell you something, you bloody well better listen.

A final note on your question of whether you should go for an 80-page or a 120-page issue next time: take whatever's cheapest and gives you the most enjoyment putting out. You know the old Bette Midler line: 'Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke!'

(16 September 1986)

I hate to admit this to another film buff, but I've never seen the Frank Capra Lost Horizon. But I see the point of your comments: pay attention to the dreams that obviously point somewhere, and keep the others to write in fanzines. Recently I haven't been able to remember dreams when I wake up, so you're saved from the recent crop.

The trouble with Bette Midler's line is that I was the one who couldn't take the joke. I got all upset, but that was a long time ago. The trouble is that in turn I upset one of my most valued correspondents:

SKEL

25 Bowland Close, Offerton, Stockport, Cheshire SK2 5NW, England

(26 June 1986):

You say I add my own je ne sais quoi. I thought what it was, was friendliness. I thought I was sitting chatting to a friend, who had been sitting talking to me. Quite frankly I found your response hurtful. Very. Actually this surprised me, because intellectually I would have said that we simply haven't had the contact to make me consider you a close enough friend that such remarks could hurt (close is relative here, you understand). And yet I was hurt. For you to lump that letter of mine in with the others, for you to call it 'bitchy'... well, words fail me (although I'll do my best).

Then again, I don't think I will. Suffice it to say that all I complained about was my own inability to appreciate such pieces, not your right to publish them or Yvonne's right to write them, or others' right to enjoy them. I just felt bad because you were shelling out so much money airmailing me material that normally I would not read.

(17 July 1986):

Many days have passed and letters been squeezed from this typewriter ribbon. I decided to step back from it. Time heals all wounds. I was pigged off with you, but am not any more. I forgive you. There, you may kiss my halo.

However, next time you get up on the wrong side of the bed and want to stomp me, please do so for my real sins, which are doubtless manifold, rather than for imagined ones just because you like to keep things neat and all in the same box.

And don't come on with twaddle like '...if you remove all the sentences that she uses specifically to counter Franz's arguments, you still have most of her article left...' Yes, and if you took out from the Holy Bible all of the sentences that mentioned the word 'God', you'd still have a pretty thick book. So fucking what? Look, the entire article is structured specifically as a rebuttal of Franz's arguments. Ignoring the footnotes, there were 35 pages -- on only 11 of which was the character string 'Rottensteiner' not present. Yes, there was a lot of material in there that, had she written a different article, would have been in a different article. So what? She didn't and it wasn't.

You also say 'Who reads all of any magazine anyway?' The answer is that your friends do when you spend getting on for four dollars mailing it to them. Call it guilt, call it a sense of (self-imposed) obligation, call it what you will. Which was what I was going on about in my original letter. Material that I would normally skip I feel obligated to read because a friend of mine, a hard-up friend of mine, has spent enormous sums mailing it to me. Look, if Readers Digest put that much postage on something that came through my letterbox, I'd still stick it in the bin, but when my mate Bruce does it you better believe I'm going to read every word. Fandom is many things, but it is not impersonal. Besides, what's the hardship in reading your zines? Even if the subject matter does intimidate me at first in places, I invariably enjoy it when I stir the sinews. Maybe not as much as other bits, but you've never sold me an absolute clunker yet. Honest Bruce's, fanzines without the clock turned back.

Yes, you can rely on a Bruce Gillespie fanzine. Everyone has a mental image of a Bruce Gillespie fanzine, and apparently it isn't quite the image that you have. Whose fault is this? You isolate your 'fannish' side into the editorial/letter-column, but when you get formal, in the more structured parts of your fanzines, it is generally with serious discussion of sf. To this extent people 'know' that this is the sort of stuff you are interested in publishing. Is it any wonder therefore that this is the sort of material that people send you? Of course it isn't. Your complaints along these lines imply that all an editor does is sit by his mailbox like a spider sits by her web, taking whatever drops in. You don't just have to set traps, you know; you could go hunting. If you just sit back, all you are going to get is the sort of material that you have a reputation for publishing. You have conditioned your audience. Take my last loc, for instance. I may have dressed it up with a bit of preliminary waffle or friendly chat (what some people have been known to refer to as 'je ne sais quoi'), but when I got down to it what I talked about was what I thought you were interested in, in as serious a manner as possible (what some people have been known to refer to as 'bitchiness').

So, there are probably reasons why you don't get unsolicited material from W, X, Y, and Z. Well, I can't speak for W, X, and Y, but Z was me (last as usual), and I can speak for me. Ok, so the articles from 'Skel' don't arrive in your mailbox out of a clear blue sky. Do you honestly expect them to? I am ready to be educated. Tell me, which article that I've ever written would have fitted into any fanzine that you have ever published, and if so, which zine? You are a gourmet fanzine and I write hamburger. (I have no delusions in this regard.) I produce Take-Away. Your audience expects the equivalent of fine French cuisine and they are not going to be receptive to King-Prawn-with-Murshrooms-and-Special-Fried-Rice-to-go. Look, I'm not knocking the stuff I write as such -- it has its place, it's just that I don't see that place as being in TMR. People go to TMR; they expect what they are used to getting there. The same people expect

different things from different sources. Me, I eat more donner kebabs than fine cuisine, but if I went out to a swish restaurant I would be pissed off if I found a donner kebab on my plate. There is a time and a place for everything, and I honestly do not think that TMR is the place for any of the sort of material I have yet written.

Look, if you think you can convince me otherwise, then please try. Anyway, I am beginning to feel insulted again. I cannot speak for John Foyster, Irwin Hirsh, or Joseph Nicholas... but you know there are actually, unbelievably as you make it sound, fan editors who write to me actually requesting that I contribute to their fanzines. Amazing, isn't it? And yet oddly it is precisely these fan editors that I write for. I do not have the relevant degree in ESP required for me to write for those editors who simply sit back and wonder why I don't write for them.

Look, Bruce, if you want to change the direction of TMR to include more varied types of material, then you are going to have to make positive steps to do so. You may think you have a better mousetrap, but it is only catching one sort of mouse. The world is not going to beat a path to your door unless you give them some sort of encouragement.

Anyway, I guess enough is enough. It is 11.45 and I have a drainpipe to climb (highly esoteric allusion which could only be understood if Irwin Hirsh prints that portion of me loc to his fanzine.) Enough is enough. (26 July 1986)

You're right, of course. I hope you met Irwin and Wendy Hirsh during their English journey. It was Irwin who showed me the truth of what you are talking about. I offered him an article from an apazine. No, he said, rewrite it this way. I didn't know how to obey Irwin's instructions, and put off the project for a year. But eventually I rewrote my article about trains, and it turned out much better than I could have expected.

So why haven't I written asking you for articles, Skel? Because I'm an old fan and tired, and this issue has taken a year longer to publish than it was supposed to. It would be quite foolish to ask anyone for material until I know for sure that I can publish future issues. And even then... perhaps the readers are right. Perhaps I never can move the magazine in a fannish direction. However, I like everything you write, Skel, and it would be honour to publish anything you send me.

I'm still worried that you felt insulted by my comments in No. 7/8. Just shows. Never write anything in fanzines unless blessed by the finest good feelings towards all creatures.

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER

Marchettigasse 9/17, A-1060, Wien, Austria

Frankly, I must side with those of your readers who thought Yvonne Rousseau's piece too long. The overwhelming impression that anybody makes who replies to a short review with a piece about ten times as long must be one of great partisanship and enthusiasm for a writer. What's the use of it? Yvonne Rousseau must like Mrs Le Guin very much. Of course she stands head and shoulders above the current crop of sf writers, but nevertheless I think in the world at large she is just a popular and readable, but not very great, writer. I suppose that Yvonne Rousseau must be very young; when I was a young man, I felt perhaps also tempted to reply to any criticism of Lem (from which one could compile a long list of idiocies), but these days I am not even irritated by absolutely asinine writings, such as the review by Tom Disch of Microworlds (Times Literary Supplement) that you mentioned, and take them just as proof of the fury and envy of writers whom Lem has not counted among the exceptions from the hopeless case. The books that these writers recommend as samples of 'literary' sf! To me it is absolute illiteracy to assume that Lem would be able to read more than a few pages of a work such as 'The Book of the New Sun'.

I should perhaps say that I am hardly able to read any sf at all: you read all those

enthusiastic reviews about the literacy of current sf, its sophistication and so on; and then you get brave little toasters and worse, if it is not sword and sorcery anyway.

Lem has two novels coming up in 1987. Fiasco, his latest effort, a big book, has some parallels to The Invincible, a sort of allegory on the SDI programme located in another solar system. This is a book that would be a great success if written by (or carrying the byline of) somebody like Gregory Benford (whom I mostly find very dull reading) or Larry Niven, but which nevertheless should be a success, perhaps a great one, although it is of course a very Lemian book. Later there is Eden, an early novel (from 1959), also about the exploration of another planet and the problems of contact.

(29 June 1986)

Yvonne was amused at being thought 'very young', as she is older than I am (but looks somewhat younger). :: And Ursula has finally received the recognition for Always Coming Home that has never quite been given to her other novels. I'm told on Very Good Authority that she came within a whisker of winning the National Book Award for Fiction. In fandom, of course, Always Coming Home has been virtually ignored. (I must confess that I was put off by the size and sheer elaboration of the Always Coming Home package, which includes a cassette of music. Because of Yvonne's review in a recent issue of Australian Science Fiction Review, I will read the book very soon now.)

I was also puzzled by Tom Disch's outraged review of Microworlds, especially as I thought he would be one of the few sf writers to understand what Lem is getting at. Disch says (TLS, 27 December 1985, page 1478 -- thanks, George, for sending me the cutting), '[Lem] comes across follow his own example in adulating Stanislaw Lem.' Not so. I think Lem has been made angry from time to time by the failure of sf writers to set themselves the goals which Lem regards as essential to writing science fiction. It is very easy to make fun of the works of most English-language sf writers. Lem does so often enough -- but he is more deeply concerned about their deeply trivial aspirations. As David I. Masson once wrote (in Foundation 10): 'Sf is a Giant -- with its head in the clouds, its bottom on the ground, and its feet in a cesspool. Its nose is pointing to the future, but its eyes are mostly squinting down to its navel.'

In the same review, Tom Disch approves of David Pringle's Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels, which I've been unable to buy so far. 'As an indication of Pringle's (and my own taste', writes Disch, 'here are some of the titles from just the last twelve years that receive his highest encomia: Ballard's Crash and High-Rise, Le Guin's The Dispossessed, Russ's The Female Man, Crowley's Engine Summer, Benford's Timescape, and Wolfe's The Book of the New Sun.' George Turner, who sent me the cutting of Disch's review, comments: 'I must admit to some disappointment in his championing of three dreary books he quotes from Pringle's selection.'

The trouble is that we all seem forever doomed to argue in terms of the 'sf field'. Rotten writers go on forever, because of their 'importance' to the 'field'. Good writers are ignored because they don't fit into somebody-or-other's definition of a 'good sf novel'. Even Lem gets trapped in this way. I can never quite decide whether he wants his works judged as the best examples of a vastly improved sf field, or whether he wants them accepted just as 'good fiction'. If the latter, he has already succeeded in America where, I expect, he is the one sf author read by many people who never read sf. If the former, then Lem is never going to succeed, because the sf field has become so polluted in recent years that it allows virtually nothing good to remain alive in it. And Disch should know that, and sympathize with Lem's concerns, as Disch is one of the quality authors most threatened by current trends.

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

22 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, London SW1V 2ER, England

Thanks for The Metaphysical Review 7/8 -- another huge thick issue, as intelligent and as intellectual as its predecessor but still far too much to read in one sitting. Or

even two sittings. 'Who reads all of any magazine anyway?' you ask on page 62, responding to complaints about issue 5/6; and while it's true that no one is likely to read all of a magazine, the position is rather different where a fanzine is concerned. The context in which it is read and the manner in which it is read are wholly different from those of a mainstream publication like New Socialist or South where, unless one is personally acquainted with the author of a particular article, one entirely lacks the supporting web of personal relationships and interlocking references that sustain and give added meaning to fanzines. One is thus driven to want to read all of a fanzine, because a fanzine is in many senses the printed equivalent of a convention or a pub meeting, an irreducible part of the same social fabric; and one feels cheated or disappointed when portions of a particular issue prove for some reason dull or indigestible.

Thus the bones of a theory, which I daresay I could elaborate on at greater length if you were so interested. (Shock horror! Bruce Gillespie offered chunk of fannish ideology for his next issue! Well, why not?) In the meantime, though, I can tell you that I did eventually get through all of issue 7/8, despite finding -- as I did with issue 5/6, which I didn't finish -- parts of it not altogether congruent to my taste. Such as your discussion of Garrison Keillor and his A Prairie Home Companion, in which you at one point seem to imply that he's a proto-fan who never quite discovered science fiction so became something else instead ('Why is Keillor's style of humour so accessible to sf fans?'), citing qualities of shyness and a repressive upbringing supposedly shared by those who do become fans. Well, bollocks to that. This may be true for you, and it may be true for a number of other people, but the idea that it's true for sf fans in general is simply absurd. Spotty adolescents who masturbated over the brass brassieres on the cover of Planet Stories and dreamed of one day saving the world singlehanded might fit this pattern, but those of us who came through the sixties and seventies are altogether too naturally self-confident and assertive to have had much if any truck with that sort of nonsense. And as for the fans now coming up in the eighties -- Christ, I can't imagine teenage computer hackers, unemployed punk anarchists and rock video editors finding much to entertain them in the sort of down-home mid-West humour you describe. Can you?

Well, yes.

The next paragraph was incorrect when Joseph wrote it, but I'll have to include it so that the following correspondence will make sense.

I should perhaps stress that this isn't to decry Keillor as such -- A Prairie Home Companion is not broadcast and Lake Wobegon Days has not been published in the UK, probably because they'd make little if any sense to the average British listener and reader. Thus I know nothing more about him than you relate; and from a position of such ignorance I would not attempt any actual criticism of him, his programme or his sense of humour. Just your half-baked attempt to claim it as especially suited to sf fans.

(20 July 1986)

After reading this I did my lolly, as one tends to do after reading letters from Joseph Nicholas, and wrote a letter of which I remember nothing except saying that: (1) surely anyone who kept up with books would know that Lake Wobegon Days had, in July 1986, already been at the top of the British bestseller lists for some weeks; and (b) that Keillor's humour most closely resembled that of Willis and Tucker, which is one of the points I thought I had made clearly in my article in TMR 7/8. Joseph Nicholas replied:

'I'm astonished', you say, 'that you did not realise that [Lake Wobegon Days] has not only been released in Britain... but shot straight to the top of the bestseller charts there.' But why should you be astonished by my unawareness of this fact? If you've been paying attention to what I've been saying about fiction in my previous letters to you, you'll have worked out by now that if I can't be bothered to keep up with what's being published then I'm hardly likely to pay any attention to the bestseller charts. At least

you should have done -- but instead you fall back in astonishment, thus demonstrating that you haven't. At this I in turn express astonishment.

Your statement appears predicated on the assumption that since you follow the bestseller charts everyone else should too; a straightforward projection onto others of your own concerns without pausing to consider why other people should share them.

I don't think everyone should too; I seem to have made a mistake in believing that anyone intimately concerned with books can't help running across a bestseller chart at least once every month or so in some magazine or book or other. The American and English bestseller lists are published here in Weekly Book Newsletter, and occasionally quoted in newspapers. I used to buy the New York Times Book Review every week when Readings Bookshop imported it; that also had the American list. The Age runs the Australian bestseller lists every month, but I have some good reasons for doubting that list's accuracy.

And why I am interested in bestseller lists? Because I'm interested in what Real People Out There are reading, even if I have no intention of following their example. And because, as you would realize by now, I can't resist lists.

This same 'projection' is evident throughout the rest of the paragraph in question. You state, for example, that 'Keillor's humour is like fannish humour because he seems to have a mind rather like that of the best fannish writers, such as Walt Willis and Bob Tucker', which implies that we're all agreed not only on what constitutes fannish humour, but also that we all think Walt Willis and Bob Tucker are amongst the best fannish writers. This is nonsense. Tastes change, the world moves on, and in the cold grey light of the eighties what looked shit-hot in the fifties and sixties instead emerges as laboured, tedious, and utterly without depth or substance. The best fannish writers, and the best fannish humourists, are those who are writing now, not those who built themselves reputations in the distant past and have since done nothing but rest on them. You should look again, for example, at the work of people like Christina Lake, Simon Ounsley, and Jimmy Robertson -- people whose technique, whose style, whose range of expression and experience is streets ahead of the routines pursued by Willis and (especially) Tucker.

I've read Warhoon 28, a sizeable chunk of Willis's writings, and would be surprised to find any fan writing of the last thirty years that is better than the best of those pieces. Not that I'd know about the people you mention, since (as far as I can recall) they don't send me their fanzines. Of those British humorous fan writers whose works I've read, only Christine Atkinson and Malcolm Edwards seem to aspire to greatness. Haven't seen much of their stuff recently.

What are the qualities that are shared by Garrison Keillor and the great fan writers (Willis, Tucker, Warner, Bangsund, Shaw, Terry Hughes, John D. Berry, etc.)? 'Quiet subversiveness' is, I think, the best way of putting it. 'Being funny without seeming to try being funny'. 'Kindliness' -- that's important. Not too much kindness in 1970s and 1980s British fan writing. 'Wisdom.' The one quality you can't fake. The great fan writers see life entire; fandom is very important but it is only part of the great tide of human existence. Garrison Keillor is the wisest person I've ever heard speak (although some of his glamour is lost on the printed page). Willis, Tucker, Warner, Bangsund, Shaw, Hughes, Berry, and other favourites of mine have all had their moments. Good writing is good writing is good writing... who cares which decade it comes from?

Only at the end of the paragraph does a smidgin of doubt creep in, but even then it's a doubt about how many other people share your concerns rather than a doubt about whether they do in the first place. 'I'd be disappointed', you say, '...if fans have become the relentlessly extrovert types that you describe at the end of your letter'; and add: 'Who would I have to talk to?' Well, times change, the world moves on, and even in the flat brown light of the seventies fans weren't quite the introverts you seem to believe. Nor (to contradict what I said previously) even in the warm red light of the sixties. Or the

steel blue light of the fifties. Or the forties. Or... In fact (compounding and elaborating the contradiction), all this stuff about fans being naturally bookish types with glasses and acne who wrote ten locs a day and hid in the attic when, coff coff, girls came to visit is and always was strictly fiction. Fans are and always have been naturally gregarious, articulate, socially active types, and attempts by certain individuals to construct an alternative image for them only a half-hearted justification of their own fumbling inadequacies. The wonder is that the gregarious, articulate, socially active types have allowed and still do allow them to get away with it -- but that's probably because they're too busy being gregarious, articulate, and socially active to have time to waste refuting their drivel. Or: you're in a minority here, Bruce, and retreating into your typewriter won't help you.

(7 August 1986)

I don't mind being in a minority. I know I'm doing something wrong if ever I find I'm in the majority on any issue. But I do seem to have read a lot of autobiographies of sf fans and writers over the years, and most of them tell stories of being shy people before they discovered fandom. Then they decide to be relentlessly extrovert exhibitionists, if only to find out what it's like to be noticed.

Here's somebody who knows what Garrison Keillor is all about:

BUCK COULSON

(address already given)

I think you may be making Lake Wobegon Days more autobiographical than Keillor intended it. You should read his Happy to Be Here, where Garrison Keillor parodies various popular plots and writing styles, with pieces that originally appeared in The New Yorker. I quote from 'Jack Schmidt, Arts Administrator', which is my favourite:

'Sweetheart, I lied quietly, hoping she couldn't hear my heavy breathing, 'don't worry about it. Old Jack has been around the block once or twice. I'll straighten it out.'

I'd also quote from his fake sports column, but you're not used to US sportswriters. Suffice to say it's a lovely parody. Keillor can handle any sort of writing style; the hometown boy's reminiscences may be partly autobiographical, but they're mostly part of his act, and I wouldn't bet on his family's religious preferences or his shyness. Not too many shy people that I know make a living by getting up on stage and talking for minutes at a time. Reviewers agree that his radio stories of Lake Wobegon aren't written down ahead of time; he makes them up as he goes along. Which is the really amazing thing to me. I could get up and perform from a script, but I couldn't tell a longwinded funny story without notes. Which is not to say that Keillor doesn't know people very well; he does, and his comments are very apt. Incidentally, that sort of life isn't extinct; I worked with people like that. The current generation may be the last, but I doubt it. My son went to school with one girl who had never been outside the county in her life. (The county is about 15 miles by 12 miles.) Cities were a total mystery to her.

(1 July 1986)

Somewhere in the the June issue of Minnesota Monthly (mentioned early in this issue) Keillor admits that he wrote the Lake Wobegon stories ahead of the program, but because he delivered them without notes, often they took on a life of their own and took far more time than had been allowed them. The most famous recent example was the story he told during the second Alaska program in 1986; the story went for half an hour, and Keillor found he was still trying to finish it in the car park after the show. One of the PHC performers says that it takes her a year to write and rehearse a whole new comedy act; she was awestruck when she realized that Keillor wrote and rehearsed two hours of comedy every week for 13 years.

RALPH ASHBROOK

303 Tregaron Road, Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania 19004, USA

Your review of The Sirens of Titan reminded me of a comment by Philip K. Dick I heard on a PKD Society tape. He talked about loving early Vonnegut, but was angry at Breakfast of Champions. 'It was all right to say "Things are hopeless". I've said that often myself. But what Vonnegut said that I can't forgive is "Things are hopeless. So what?" That's a betrayal of the writer's craft.' I think that is funny. But not out of disrespect. I like seeing the distinction. I always thought 'It's hopeless' meant 'so what?'

Not at all. 'It's hopeless' means: there's nothing in the world out there that could give me hope. 'So what?' means: I despair, no matter what information I receive about the world out there. Take me, for example. (There's nobody else in the room, so you'll have to put up with me.) I can't see how the world can escape nuclear annihilation -- i.e. 'It's hopeless'. But I don't say 'So what?' Instead I find that every moment of life is all the more precious because everything could disappear in the next instant after this one. (My interpretation of Vonnegut would be rather different, however. I don't think for a moment that Vonnegut despairs.)

I am confused about my recent reaction to movies. I can't watch well-meaning 'films' such as Gandhi, A Passage to India, Kiss of the Spider Woman, or Amadeus (which I loved as a play, by the way). The ones that I remember the most fondly (or watch over again the most on VCR) are whispy: The Sure Thing, The Breakfast Club, Desperately Seeking Susan, Baby It's You, Sixteen Candles. The sleaziest of these -- the Madonna movie -- is drenched in innocence, maybe in spite of itself, maybe consciously. They are all about misplaced people. They are all about being in love with the wrong person (which I suspect is an element of love).

Which brings me to Garrison Keillor. His 'Letter from Tom' on the 'Spring' News from Lake Wobegon tape has the same quality. It is as if the soul resides in relationships, not the body. The struggle to love is more earth-shattering than anything important. Love doesn't take itself too seriously. It sweats. It grunts. It comes. It misses. This is a very loose translation of I Corinthians 13, mind you.

(1 July 1987)

What do I say to that? Thanks for the best two paragraphs in this issue, Ralph.

Can Garrison Keillor survive a happy marriage? Is he too old to pitch any more?

(1 October 1986)

As we now know, the answer to both questions is: yes.

My sending Lake Wobegon Days was part of the rush I got from your Shy Persons' Issue -- and the realization that, as with sf, Keillor is a shared experience. There was a Prairie Home Companion tv special that the kids and I watched. While the show was very ordinary (no special Lake Wobegon secrets for the expanded audience), it was startling to see. But overall we like the added element of radio. Cable tv costs about \$25 a month and gives subscribers recent, uncut movies, lots of sports, some nightclub acts, and Prairie Home Companion. Stranger still, it is on the Disney Channel, which is mostly for kids, and features old Disney movies.

I treat the VCR like you do your compact disc player -- pour money I don't have into it, record shows to see later, record movies to keep, rent recent movies. Blank tapes are about \$5 and hold six hours. It is beyond my comprehension that I can save movies forever for less than \$2 each. I won't argue with the universe on this point.

I'm glad you found a familiar note in my dream interpretation. My prize, of course, is whatever of your life you continue to share with us.

(28 October 1986)

There are some things in my life you might not want to share. For instance, I've just written an article about one of my obsessions -- the records of Roy Orbison. Over the years I've found that Roy Orbison is not an obsession shared by many people (but I'll run the article in TMR anyway). Other obsessions/touchstones/King Charles's heads include the Rolling Stones, Philip K. Dick, Berlioz, Musil and, for the time being, Garrison Keillor.

Don't tempt me with words about VCRs. I live beyond my means at the moment; with access to a VCR, I'd become a pitiful bankrupt.

Here's the person who started all this talk about Keillor:

TERRY HUGHES

6205 Wilson Boulevard, Apt. 102, Falls Church, Virginia 22044, USA

The myth you wove in The Metaphysical Review 7/8 about how I brought culture (read: Lake Wobegon Days) into the wilderness (read: Australia) is less than totally accurate, as is the case with all the best myths. I'm sure John Bangsund has already corrected your erroneous impressions, but just in case he has been too busy or too polite to do so, I will tell you the whole truth.

I must confess that I did not bring a copy of Lake Wobegon Days with me to Aussiecon specifically to give to John and thereby cause John Bangsund and Sally Yeoland to become faithful listeners to A Prairie Home Companion. In fact it never occurred to me that such a typically midwestern American radio show would even be broadcast in Australia. I am only an occasional listener to A Prairie Home Companion myself since here it is broadcast Saturday evening (just like in Australia) and that is not the time of the week when I am most likely to be found stretched out in front of a radio. When I do listen to the show, I do enjoy it (Keillor even did a routine one week about considering moving the show from Minneapolis/St Paul, Minnesota to Columbia, Missouri, which thrilled me no end) and I had read and enjoyed his first collection, Happy to Be Here, which dealt with things other than Lake Wobegon. So I picked up a copy of the just-released Lake Wobegon Days for myself to read as I was soaring over the world's largest body of water on my way to Aussiecon II. It was at the convention that John Bangsund casually dropped the name A Prairie Home Companion in a conversation and thereby alerted me to the fact that not only was the show broadcast in Melbourne but also he and Sally were avid listeners to it. So when he invited me to a dinner party they were giving, I brought not only some wine but also Lake Wobegon Days because I figured that if he was a fan of the show he would really like Keillor's writing as well. (I hadn't actually read all the book yet myself, but I knew I could get another copy once I got back to the States, which I did.) As it turned out, A Prairie Home Companion was broadcast the night of the Bangsund/Yeoland dinner party, but I missed it because I was in the kitchen talking with Sally as she was preparing the meal while Art Widner and John were listening to the show, which they only mentioned after it had ended. So I missed my chance to listen to A Prairie Home Companion in Australia, and now I'll never know if you dubbed in Aussie voices over the midwestern accents so that the radio public could understand what was being said (sort of the reverse of what we do to some Australian movies that are released over here, like the first 'Mad Max' film) or not. I'm happy I missed it, however, since I can listen to the radio anytime, but that was my only chance to really talk with Sally. By the time you and Elaine arrived Garrison Keillor was no longer the topic of conversation, so that may be why you got a distorted impression of how things came about. I am responsible for introducing Lake Wobegon Days to John Bangsund and thereby to Australian fandom, but he was already well aware of Lake Wobegon through A Prairie Home Companion. Once again John Bangsund was at the forefront of Australian awareness.

(24 July 1986)

I hate to say that my legend is more accurate than your legend -- but John Bangsund still agrees with my version: that he had not heard A Prairie Home Companion before that night we all met during August 1985. It was only two months later that we received the Good News in a roundabout way from John and Sally.

I hope we all get together around a dinner table some time in the future -- with John D. Berry, and Art Widner, and Yvonne (who had to miss out last time), and one or two other American and English fans I could name.

* * *

Here are a few letters that I can't fit neatly into categories, but I would like to run anyway. First, here's:

THE MIKE SHOEMAKER LETTER

MIKE SHOEMAKER

2123 North Early Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22302, USA

In Dreams and False Alarms #2, your comment that 'Australians know all about American high schools, after seeing innumerable films about them' brought forth a burst of laughter from me. Then I caught myself and thought, 'He's probably joking.' And when I looked again and found that you were serious, I felt an amused sadness, such as one might feel watching children playing innocently in a garbage dump.

I was joking, Mike, really I was. People don't notice when I'm joking. *Sigh* Don't Australians know everything about USA from watching American movies, except what it's like to live in USA?

This is another example of that bizarre foreign misconception that US culture is monolithic. The truth is that the US is more diverse culturally (except perhaps in language -- but even that is changing) than any country in the world. Hence, there is no such thing as 'American high schools' characterized by a single ethos. I assume the 'innumerable films' you mention are serious films -- The Blackboard Jungle, Up the Down Staircase, American Graffiti, etc. -- and not the trashy teen-exploitation films (including the brainless Porky's of a few years ago), which, if they bear any relationship to reality, usually depict the southern California ethos and nothing else. The trouble is that the view from Hollywood is incredibly narrow, even when it's accurate (which it rarely is).

There are at least three major types of high schools: city schools, suburban schools, and rural schools; and they really are worlds apart in their spirit. Back in 1969, our track team went down to Stonewall Jackson High, in Manassas (semi-rural then, now rather suburban), for a scrimmage meet, and it was like stepping into another era. While waiting for our events, some of us went into the gym, watched their B-ball team shoot baskets, talked to them, wandered the halls, etc. It was fascinating, for they were completely 'out of it', stuck in the 1950s, naive; but also more open, friendly. Even today, there are still a few one-room schoolhouses in Appalachia and the Northern Plains. But even the modern rural schools remain quite different in spirit from anything Hollywood depicts. Furthermore, within any one type of school, there has never been any uniformity of culture and spirit (other than the jolly, rote, 'school spirit', aka 'us against them'). There were the 'athletes', the cheerleaders, the 'Beers', the 'Heads', the 'grade-grubbers', the 'Wiz-kids', and more; each a microcosm. Today, with our immigration explosion, it's even more diverse.

As for the school spirit in athletics, this has almost never been depicted accurately on film. It was (and I believe is) nothing like the rah-rah, party-time attitude always depicted in films and TV (although such an attitude may be true for southern California for all I know). Instead, it was all taken very seriously by most students, and especially by the athletes. It had, and has, the solemnity that only adolescents can

bring to trivialities. But it also forged tremendous feelings of comradeship, feelings that are almost ineffable. So far as I know, only one thing on film has ever approached the truth: the TV series of a few years ago, The White Shadow, about an inner-city high school basketball team with a white coach. I probably would have played on the B-ball team if I had not gotten hooked on track, so I had a lot of friends, mostly black, on our team. It is uncanny how similar the characters on The White Shadow were to guys I knew on our team.

Comics were a big part of my childhood, too. I had a huge collection, partly 'inherited' from a cousin, partly acquired secondhand from neighbourhood yard sales, etc. All gone today, except for a small stack of some favourites that I kept largely out of nostalgia. I, too, once had that marvellous Uncle Scrooge about 'The Seven Cities of Cibola'. You will be sick to learn that those Uncle Scrooges are worth some absurd amounts today -- several hundred dollars, I believe. Oh, wait, I see you still have them. Good lord! Take the money and run!

They're not worth much in Australia, but might be in America. They are the Australian reprints of the American versions, not the American originals.

I might have told you about my repetitive dream when I was very young, but since one of your topics is dreams, I'll recount it again... I would be hanging from the very high Key Bridge, which links Virginia with Georgetown, slowly slip, and fall. A terrible nightmare that repeated many times. Finally, one night I experienced an episode of lucid dreaming -- knowing that one is dreaming while one is dreaming -- and I said, 'Hey, this is just a dream', and deliberately let go, hit the water, and woke up. Never had the dream again. I'm reminded of the passage in Lord Jim, where Stein says something like: 'One must submit to the destructive element, submerge oneself in it, and let it buoy you up.'

My most memorable dream from childhood was of the experience of hanging by my hands from a pylon that was stretched from the shore to the island of Manhattan. The stretch of water between the two was very wide, and all I could see of Manhattan was a line of skyscrapers on the horizon. The very long pylon hung some way above the water, and I was desperately afraid of falling. At the same time, I did keep going, hand over hand, but did not reach Manhattan before I woke up. Anyone who has read my fiction will recognize a similar image in 'The Wide Waters Waiting' (in Transmutations), but it wasn't for some years that I made the connection between the image there and the image from my childhood dream. Maybe I should have let go that pylon in that dream so long ago and my life would have turned out quite differently.

There is also a dream motif that has popped up in many contexts in my dreams. I would be running from some danger (after the obligatory paralysis episode), stumble, push off the ground with my hands, stumble some more, proceed more and more by a whole series of stumbles, discovering gradually that I could move quite quickly and easily in this manner -- that is, by using all four limbs -- and often ending with a full sense of power and fleetness rather like a dog or wolf. I'm quite certain that the cultural influence of the werewolf theme has nothing to do with this, because the experience is too visceral, fundamental, powerful and archetypal. In fact, my researches on weird phenomena show that this dream is archetypal and has been known for centuries. Indeed, it was regarded as an indication that one was a werewolf. The dream is easy to understand as a type of power-dream, where power is achieved through a reversion to the animalistic, but it is hard to account for its source except on the basis of Spencer's theory of race memory, which has never appealed to me for other reasons.

I should mention that I rarely remember my dreams anymore; haven't for nearly a decade now.

TMR 3: I don't know about articles on Shostakovich and Mahler, but I could send you old college papers (all As) of music analysis, such as 'An Analysis of Act I of Harry Partch's Delusion of the Fury', or 'Guillaume Dufay and His Music'. But I seriously

doubt that anyone would want to read: 'a higher pitched hand-drum always plays the last eight-note of each measure in the top line of the schematic, thus creating a strong feeling of motion over the bar line', or 'Dufay uses passing tones most often when adding ornamental notes to his Gregorian-chant cantus firmus'. That's real analysis, I'm afraid.

I give your readers more credit than you do. I'm sure they know many other fields (especially computers). As for myself, there's music, distance running, board and card games, the outdoors, scientific anomalies and supernatural phenomena, and the American Civil War. The trouble is that there is no common ground in these topics, and trying to write a pop article on such topics is an agony that can be assuaged only by payment. Does anyone really want to hear about the 'King-lead Mystery', one of the great unsolved problems of two-handed pinochle? Or learn my full-proof method of point calculation in three-handed pinochle (sorry -- it's a trade secret)? Or hear about the importance of Missouri in our Civil War, one of the most important and neglected aspects of the war?

If you could (a) explain enough of a specialized field to give it some sense to the non-specialized reader and (b) show why the subject matters very much to you, these topics might work. Not that the subject matter is so important. What I'm looking for is well-written personal writing -- that is, writing about what matters to the writer. Harry Warner Jr is probably the best exponent of this sort of writing. It could include the more usual 'fannish' writing, but fannish fanzines tend to stick to one type of subject matter -- fans. The rest of the world is also interesting.

That's the ideal. What's actually happened is that most TMR contributors have sent me articles about science fiction, just as they did to SF Commentary. They're good articles; sometimes even brilliant. What I need now are the kinds of articles that contributors might not have sent to SFC (and the space in which to print them).

The authentic-versus-modern debate about performances strikes me as silly. It's a matter of taste, for the only rule in music, as Scarlatti said, is not to offend the ear. Besides, if people want authentic performances, aren't we obliged then to recreate the stinks, and bad acoustics, and bad lighting of a typical eighteenth-century performance? Scarlatti, by the way, is a good example of someone who, I think, is vastly better played on a piano than on a harpsichord.

The letter from John Millard reminds me of an oddity that I have: a first edition of Donn Byrne's Messer Marco Polo, with an inside autograph 'Russell Owen, Antarctica, February 25/29' -- that is, Owen had this book with him in Antarctica when he was on the joint expedition with Byrd! Owen was a famous oceanographer, and made the first ecological study of the Antarctic Ocean.

Since you're interested in American fiction, why do you limit yourself to the last two years? Have you exhausted Melville yet? What about Redburn, which is tremendous and much neglected? And then there are my other favourites: Crane, London, and the incomparable Cabell, who was one of the finest stylists who ever worked in the English language.

I'm still catching up. Any year now for Crane, London, and Cabell, and for going back to Melville. I've never seen a copy of Redburn. I'm not changing my prejudice, though. The best writing in the English language today is being published in USA and Canada, and I've been able to read a few of the best.

I envy your seeing The Trouble With Harry, practically the only Hitchcock I've never seen. A lot of familiar titles on your list, but I'm surprised you've never seen them before: things like Stage Door and The Women, and especially Bad Day at Black Rock, which I thought everyone had seen. Although Wyler is one of my favourite directors, I've never cared for The Letter at all -- dull, dull, dull. Bunny Lake Is Missing was indeed a surprise. As you know by now, I quoted your word 'creepy', which is exactly right, when I commented on it in The Shadow Line. A very disturbing movie; almost everyone in

it is essentially insane! I hope The Man Who Knew Too Much wasn't too faded; that is one of the most lushly beautiful colour movies ever made.

(9 October 1986)

You're going to get a shock, then, unless the prints sent to Australia of the newly revived Hitchcocks were themselves more faded than the American release prints. I haven't seen films like The Women until recent years because, as I've explained several times, I started to see pre-1960s films only when we were given a black-and-white TV set only five or six years ago. Before that, I'd never lived in a household with a TV set in it.

THE HARRY WARNER Jr LETTER

HARRY WARNER, Jr
423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland 21740, USA

I continue to suffer from increasing inability to cope properly with the big fanzines, particularly those that concentrate on science fiction... [However] I can claim without the least adulteration of fibbing in my blanket statement: I did read every page of Yvonne Rousseau's reply to Franz Rottensteiner [in TMR 5/6], without skipping the paragraphs that looked least promising. The only copout was my failure to read the footnotes. After this latter-day Performance, I felt that Franz remained mainly intact from the impact of such a massive barrage of scholarship and polite invective. I think Yvonne's essay would have been much improved if she hadn't launched that Mephistophelean adjective and then returned to it so regularly, and I'm sure that if this had been an attorney's argument in a court case, the judge would have chided her repeatedly when the attorney for the other side complained she was going too far afield. I found Franz's piece a well-balanced estimate of what's good about Ursula Le Guin's fiction and its limitations. A reply to his essay that tried to refute some of his criticisms of Le Guin would have convinced me more than this attempt to deny all the allegations of the things that separate her fine fiction from the quality of the world's great literature.

Greg Egan might be amused to know that a member of SAPS recently wrote a little essay praising Laurie Anderson, much in the manner of Greg's contribution, but the SAPS member wrote it under the assumption that Laurie is a man. It's hardly surprising in this era of squeaky-voiced males in popcult whose faces look as if they'd never suffered five o'clock shadow. I've seen a few snippets of Laurie's productions on television and I liked them provisionally, but I do wish she would allow one scene to remain on the screen for longer than two or three seconds; if I ever get a four-head VCR, I'm going to ruin her love for quick cutting by playing her stuff one frame at a time so I can look at each cut at leisure. It would also be nice if she would comb her hair.

George Turner's complaint about Neuromancer for emphasizing 'the surefire selling values of the pop literature of the moment' embodies one big reason why I'm not reading much science fiction written in the 1980s. I'm sick unto death of friendly and intelligent dolphins, computers in the far future that look and work exactly like today's computers, female lead characters who never have any trouble reaching something on the top shelf or keeping up with the men while being chased by beams, and bedhopping characters who never think about jealousy unless the author has run out of another gimmick to fill up another 10,000 words.

On the other hand, I admire Jenny Blackford for her impartial-sounding review of The Clan of the Cave Bear. I hate to think what would happen in the loc column if a male wrote so frankly about the limitations of the author of a book so strong for feminist notions.

I doubt if there is just one cause of dreams, any more than there is just one reason why extremely old people lose the ability to think (like me). A tumour, Alzheimer's disease, the effects of alcohol, and various other problems trouble the mind in old age; why shouldn't there be an equal wealth of reasons why it behaves so irrationally while its possessor is sleeping? Many of my dreams are clearly derived from my greatest fears, particularly the dreams that find me once again working for the local newspaper. But others seem to be explicable only on the grounds of wish fulfilment, like a regularly recurring dream in which I find myself in the same secondhand book store that is physically different from any I've ever visited and where I find literary treasures I've long wanted. Last night I dreamed myself engaged in conversation with Bob Dylan, who was beautifully groomed, speaking sonorous prose in a cultured voice with a faint British accent, and in my dream I was telling him how much I admired his ability to create and sustain the image he manufactured for his appearances on stage. I've never owned a Dylan record, have no interest in his music or his politics, know about him little except what I've read in fanzines, and there's no reason why he should be in my dream at all, much less in that particular manifestation.

Your May issue [No. 7/8] gave me to pause when I saw the cover. It seems somehow disjointed for Garrison Keillor to be so widely known in Australia when I've had next to no experience of him. There is no PBS radio station close enough to Hagerstown to be heard clearly on FM radios without some kind of antenna, and it has just been too much trouble to rig up a wire so I can hear A Prairie Home Companion regularly. He has had two television appearances so far in this country, but I was otherwise engaged on both occasions and didn't think about turning on the VCR. But I'm glad his humor and philosophy are capable of going beyond national boundaries, and I'm even happier that a new, important personality has emerged from radio in the United States. I can't think of such a thing happening for the past couple of decades. Some big names in television got their start on radio, but they were virtually unknown until they began to appear regularly on the tube.

Of course, most of your chronicle about pop-music listening in 1985 was over my head. But I could connect cleanly and directly with what you had to say about classical records, despite an undertone of envy. The same problem I mentioned about Keillor's program makes it hard for me to hear much serious music on the radio, and the television situation is degenerating rapidly: the public television network has cut back by perhaps 75 per cent on its use of classical music. So has one cable network, Arts & Entertainment, and I've been expecting something to happen to the only remaining dependable source, a pay cable channel, Bravo, which seems to have very poor distribution on cable systems. One mostly irrelevant matter about your music dissertation bothered me, though: your references to having worn out lps that you've replaced with compact discs. I don't know your listening habits, and if you played an lp twice daily every day for two or three years its deterioration is inevitable. But if you listened to a new lp once a day the first couple of weeks you owned it, then two or three times a week for the next few months, then occasionally after that, the pattern that many music enthusiasts maintain, your lps shouldn't have suffered so badly.

When the oil crisis hit in 1973, one of the first casualties was the lp record. I don't know the technical details, but I gather (from what I read in Rolling Stone at the time, naturally) that the substance used in records is based on much less expensive petrochemicals than it was before 1973. Whatever the reason (and some reader must know the exact details), records pick up dust and lint much more readily than they once did, and the playing grooves deteriorate very fast. I find that many records now have faults when first played, and some are hissy and enfeebled after only a few playings. I sigh when I compare them with the records I bought in the late 1960s and early 1970s; for example, my Barbirolli version of Bruckner's Symphony No. 7 still plays very well, and my very first lp record, Roy Orbison's Lonely and Blue (pressed in Britain in 1960) still plays well, with only a small amount of surface noise, although it is undoubtedly the most-played record in the collection. A CBS executive, interviewed on ABC-FM, was amazed that sales of classical CDs was four times that achieved by classical lps in Australia. No wonder; discriminating music fans who had avoided Australian-made CBS lps for years leapt on the company's CDs.

You're correct to feel envious of Australians because they have the nationwide ABC-FM network. It was put together all of a piece in 1975, instead of being invented bit by bit, and standards have never been allowed to drop. Unfortunately for many people who are still out of range of FM transmitters, classical music has been almost dropped from the programs of the ABC AM network.

I felt Up To Date and Sophisticated when I found I'd seen one recent film on your list, The Purple Rose of Cairo, in addition to most of the older movies you saw for the first time last year. Some of the older ones, in fact, I saw on their original release in a theatre, if you want a timebinding thought to crogggle over. Just last night I videotaped The Lady Vanishes, after a long series of indecisions on previous television showings about whether I really wanted it on a VCR cassette. I read somewhere, incidentally, that the two cricket fans on that train are being modernized to serve as the leads in a new television comedy series.

It was a surprise to find you apparently saying Australia has no mail delivery on Saturdays at all. Such things still happen in the United States. A few years ago the Saturday mail was under fire, with suggestions of dropping it to conserve funds, but I haven't heard such heresies lately. Apparently daily newspapers still have quite a few subscribers by mail, so they were particularly opposed to the notion. Twice-daily mail deliveries lasted in the United States until I was in my twenties or thereabouts. Just before Christmas, the mailman came three or four times a day to keep up with the Christmas card deluge.

Australia still had two postal deliveries per working day until the early 1960s. As I remember it, the Saturday delivery finished abruptly when the Postmaster-General's Department was split in two, and both sections -- Australia Post and Telecom -- were required to make profits. At the same time the basic letter rate rose from 10 cents to 18 cents. For long-suffering fanzine editors (or whingeing, angry fanzine editors like me) that was the beginning of a sharp rise in prices and an equally sharp decline in service.

I forgot one item when I was commenting on the previous issue: David Lake's stomach-cancer worries. Quite a few years ago my doctor grew suspicious about me and sent me to the hospital for a series of tests for cancer. When he told me to do this, I had just one overwhelming reaction. I felt sorry for myself for all the nights I had spent writing locs instead of watching movies on television. That particular episode didn't have disastrous results for me, and as you can guess, I didn't learn my lesson but went on writing locs instead of watching movies.

(5 August 1986)

If I had done the same all these years, I would be a much better person and a well-liked fan. (I say this with guilty memory that recently I spent half the afternoon watching The Seven Per Cent Solution instead of writing letters to anyone.)

THE PATRICK MCGUIRE LETTER

PATRICK MCGUIRE

Alpenstrasse 2, 8100 Garmisch-Partenkirchen, West Germany

TMR 7/8 arrived the day before yesterday. I finished it the same night and resolved that (especially since I hadn't loced or even yet finished the previous issue) I would sit down the next day and rap out a loc. The next day, however, was beautiful: clearly too nice to spend inside at a typer. (It rains a lot in Garmisch.) Today is almost as nice, but I decided to compromise by taking along a notebook along as I set out to commune with nature. A number of German towns have a hiking trail called a Philosophenweg (Philosophers' Path), along which one is supposed to walk while thinking profound

thoughts. This loc is written at numerous benches along the Philosophenweg in the foothills of the Alps between Partenkirchen and Farchart. This may not be quite as exotic as reading Ringworld in Beijing (though I did reread it in Moscow, back when) but it is the best I can do at the moment.

I cannot get A Prairie Home Companion here in Germany; it's one of the few American programs I miss, though I was never a real fanatic. Back in Maryland, about 25 per cent of my coworkers were PHC fans, though none were into sf. The audiences may overlap, but are distinct.

Are down-home virtues really so out of favour in Australia? No smalltown Lake Wobegons there?

Yes, plenty. But they are much smaller and more isolated than the traditional American midwestern 'small town'. And 90 per cent of Australians live in five state capitals and about a dozen other large urban centres.

I'll bet half of even Lake Wobegon would be more 'with it' than Keillor presents, but traditionalists are much more visible in US society than they seem to be in Australia. I don't really have my finger on the pulse of German society, but my impression is that here in Bavaria there is not necessarily a pervasive religiosity, but an impulse toward enforced conformism, that would make Keillor very understandable.

I suspect that the various churches are much more important as social centres in Victorian country towns than they are in the suburbs -- but not as important as the churches in Lake Wobegon were supposed to be. Besides, I was comparing my suburban experience -- and the fundamental Australian experience is suburban, not urban or rural -- with Keillor's experiences as shown in Lake Wobegon Days.

It seems that Australian sf is in a vicious circle: The Australian sf community is necessarily small and spread out, while the larger North American and British ones are a long way off. Therefore (1) it's harder to get established commercially (although not so much harder to sell sf once you do get established -- for example, Chandler and Wodhams), so there is a tendency to satisfy yourself first and go 'literary'; (2) as there is a smaller sf community, writers tend to merge more with the 'mainstream' community, all of whom (one gathers from Australian fanzines) feel like persecuted intellectuals in a highly non-intellectual culture and therefore have a strong sense of fellow feeling; and (3) looking for someone to blame for their alienation, writers find a convenient scapegoat in the US, which shows up as the villain in a lot of Australian sf. All these factors make it harder to sell Australian sf in the first place, so it drifts further into an amateur 'literary' activity. Perhaps cheaper communications will one day reverse the trend -- data-linked submissions direct from word processor, reduced charges for telecommunications with other fans, and maybe even further reduced costs and speeded-up times for travel to North America and Europe.

Nope -- all that's needed is for Britain and America to stop treating Australia as yet another colony. Both countries expect to dump millions of dollars' worth of books on our ever-receptive market, but are often not willing to buy Australian-produced manuscripts, and are never willing to distribute Australian-produced books. Hence the market here is small for hardback fiction of any sort. Add to that a contempt within (British-owned) publishers for Australian-written popular fiction and an almost complete ignorance or hatred of science fiction. Add, moreover, Australian sf readers' dislike of Australian sf. And mailing expenses and delays. Etcetera, etcetera. Of course Australian writers do occasionally break into the US or English markets. But it would be nice to have a market here. The only real fiction market in Australia is children's and adolescents' fiction; this is also the only Australian market that welcomes science fiction and fantasy.

On the other hand (to get back to your letter), some literary novels do very well here, and some upmarket writers can survive on a combination of literary grants, prizes and writer-in-

residence scholarships. Most such writers would feel exclusively tied to the Australian literary world, although some of them, such as Peter Carey, have done very well overseas.

But if you insist on writing sf and fantasy in Australia, you can't seal deals in smoke-filled rooms at sf conventions. We have the conventions, but smoking's now banned, and there are no publishers offering million-dollar multi-book deals.

I enjoyed Yvonne Rousseau's con report. One thing that struck me particularly was her description of the 'wandering nature of the enormous crowd'. As my own association with fandom attenuates, I find cons are rather anonymous affairs, and when somebody of my generation does sweep past me, he or she often just sweeps off in the crowd again. Part of the problem, of course, is that since I'm one of Keillor's shy people, I don't strike up new acquaintances quickly. For instance, the pub arrangement at the Brighton Eurocon was particularly daunting. At American room parties (or the American-style parties at the Brighton Worldcon) anybody at an open party can expect to be addressed by anybody. I was more reluctant to approach people at one of the British-style bars set up in the Metropole for the Eurocon.

I pass over your numerous lists in silence. However, you mention films: Compared with American tv, Austrian and German tv (Garmisch gets both) are much more serious and scholarly about films, even when the films don't merit the attention. The announcers (invariably female and on-camera, unlike US practices) give little introductions to the directors involved, and the films tend to run in series. No commercials, of course. I have a multistandard set-up, and I'm getting quite a collection of mostly US films dubbed into German! This is supposed to help me learn the language. Although I use English or Russian most of the time at school, my German is gradually showing some improvement.

I don't much care for the tone of a piano, and I think that it lost the excuse for its existence when it became possible to amplify the harpsichord. At the other extreme of amplification, however, is the classical guitar. Every stray thump and rattle is lovingly preserved on record.

You asked what had happened to all the Le Guin fans of yore. I haven't disappeared, but I've cooled off a tad because (1) Le Guin's production is way down (which, justifiably or not, cools off enthusiasm); (2) Le Guin has increasingly sacrificed (not intentionally, I'm sure) story or other artistic values for preaching; and (3) I don't hold with about half of what she preaches -- although, as with Lake Wobegon values, one can't safely react against everything she says, either. Point (3) is non-trivial, and now that I am better able to read the 'message', my current view probably influences my view of her earlier work. (I feel the same about classic-period Heinlein. Go back over his old work; once you know where to look, you can see the cracks that will grow into chasms, and this 'foreknowledge' can dampen the pleasure taken from what was an excellent story.)

(3 July 1986)

THE BRIAN ALDISS LETTER

BRIAN W. ALDISS

Woodlands, Foxcombe Road, Boars Hill, Oxford OX1 5DL, England

Just back from a family holiday in Europe, to find I have won the prize in the interpretation of your two dreams. Wonderful! I am quite content with that honour alone, and certainly would not like any old Piers Anthony novels, or Heinlein or Asimov, either, come to that. There's a famous early work on the exploration of Australia by two guys, which I once had and valued but lent... I'd love a copy of that (even in an old

World Classics edition); but since I fail to recollect the guys' names [note on envelope: 'Hume and someone?'], I don't rate my chances highly, and would prefer to read of you mucking about with your character, as we fans of yours have been doing for -- how long is it now? You're valuable, Bruce; they should have you stuffed when you pass over.

Most days I feel that I'm stuffed already -- but that's how you're supposed to feel when you've turned 40.

Elaine and I have been trying to guess your prize request. Did you mean a general book about Australian exploration, as written by two historians? Or did you mean an account by two explorers of their own expedition? (From the cryptic note on the envelope, that sounds like Hume and Hovell.) Whatever the answer, we found a horrifying lack of material on Australian explorers, for whom I have a new respect since researching material about them for the Macmillan Australian Children's Encyclopedia. Elaine has found a book based on the journals of Hamilton Hume and William Hovell, who were the first to cross the Victorian hinterland (and during the journey named Mount Buffalo, our favourite place). I hope you enjoy it. Still, if I can find a handy account of the wanderings of Charles Sturt, I'll send that as well. He was the explorer who believed most strongly that Australia must have an inland sea, and spent several years deep in the middle of the desert looking for it. Sturt was the most interesting explorer, but the more famous Burke and Wills were the silliest.

It's rotten luck that you lot live in Australia. It makes Europe so far away. England is just right: you have to cross a body of cool vaporous water to reach the dream land, full of enchanted names, from Calais, to Amiens, Arras, Dijon, Laon, Geneva, Chamonix, and Aosta... I mention only the names of towns we visited, crossing Picardy and Burgundy and so on. To me, Europe is a dense, chaotic, haunted land, beautiful, tantalizing. We spent most time in the Geneva area, where Margaret and I hunted for the shades of Byron, Shelley, and Mary. Byron is commemorated. There's a plaque with an inscription in English on the walls of the Villa Diodati, saying he composed the Third Canto of 'Don Juan' there (which he gave to Mary Shelley to make a fair copy of, incidentally). Shelley and his little missus have disappeared from view, and little the Tourist Board cares. There are statues to Voltaire and Rousseau. But this is Frankenstein's city. Cologne, where the Villa Diodati still stands, is now a prosperous outer suburb, full of heavy bourgeois architecture guarded by railings and dogs, very stuffy. Mt Saleve, up which the monster shinned so nimbly, is a newer suburb. Chaps hang-glide from its cliffs. As for Plainpalais, that's now just a bit of green park in the middle of the city; in Mary's time it was outside the city walls. There was a flea market on the day we went through and drank black coffee at the Cafe Boccaccio. All that past is like a dream (which Mary turned into her tragic dream). Somehow I was moved by hard, commercial Geneva, and commenced three stories with Genevan settings -- none finished as yet -- and may never be, now that we're back and confronted with the Real World, i.e. work. You notice how work never features in dreams, does it? Dreams are freedom. Sometimes past and future feel like that, too. (We also visited the Mer de Glace... Migod, the Ice Age...).

You almost give me the courage to go traipsing around Europe, but not quite. Elaine is the member of our family who wants to travel there.

Australia might seem a long way from Europe, but Europe seems just a step from Australia. Today I read that, out of an Australian population of 17 million, 1.45 million people travelled overseas last year. Most of them still go to Britain and Europe, but travel to America increased by 8 per cent, and travel to Thailand -- suddenly a symbol of paradise to travelling Australians, now that everybody but us has been to Bali -- increased by 24 per cent. Roger Weddall probably told you the story of how Torbjorn, the friend he travelled with during his first trip to Europe, was able to convince Americans in Europe that young Australians must do compulsory overseas travel instead of compulsory military service. About 40 Australians went to Conspiracy, and saw Britain and Europe as well. Thanks for the travel pointers, if we ever get there.

In reality, the only travelling we're likely to do is our biennial visit to the Mount Buffalo plateau, all of 300 kilometres from here. The vast granite rocks have more interesting shapes than the products of any human architecture, and there are very few people there.

A word to one of your correspondents, Lucy Sussex. It was not Mary Shelley who ate raw meat at night to produce nightmares, but her mother's lover, Henri Fuseli the artist. One of Mary's predecessors, Mrs Radcliffe, ate heavy meals last thing, with the same end in view. Perhaps you have misremembered a passage in Billion Year Spree. Never mind, the lusty new Trillion Year Spree will be out in October, when memories can be refreshed.

(23 September 1986)

To which we have an instant reply:

LUCY SUSSEX

42 Wolseley Parade, Kensington, Victoria 3031

I suppose you will publish the Aldiss letter, drat you, in which I am proved to be wrong about Mary Shelley. The trouble is that after Franz Rottensteiner's correction of my review in TMR 3, and now Aldiss, I begin to look extremely inaccurate. This is not a good reputation for a Reference Librarian.

There is nothing I can do with the Shelley mistake but flagellate myself, but I would like to take the opportunity now to reply to Rottensteiner. My impression that the Golem sections of Imaginary Magnitude were extracts from the Polish Golem XIV rather than the book in entirety was gained from the title page verso of Magnitude. This stated that "Lecture XLIII -- About Itself" and "Afterword"... first appeared in Golem XIV'. As these chapters comprised only 70 pages of Magnitude, there was some justification, coupled with the misleading extract quoted above, for thinking they were not all of Golem XIV.

I made the same mistake as you did about Imaginary Magnitude as you did; although I suspected that the text on the imprint page was just a clever-clever ploy, I didn't really know it was until Franz sent his letter.

That over, allow me to recommend to the Garrison Keillor fans Edmund Gosse's Father and Son which, although published in 1907, recounts a fundamentalist upbringing in almost the same tones as Keillor -- gentle irony. Consider this extract:

All these matters drew my thoughts to the subject of idolatry, which was severely censured at the missionary meeting. I cross-examined my father very closely as to the nature of this sin and pinned him down to the categorical statement that idolatry consisted in praying to anyone or anything but God himself. Wood and stone, in the words of the hymn, were peculiarly liable to be bowed down to by the heathen in their blindness. I pressed my Father further on this subject, and he assured me that God would be very angry, and would signify His anger, if anyone, in a Christian country, bowed down to wood and stone... I determined, however, to test the matter for myself, and one morning, when both my parents were safely out of the house, I prepared for the great act of heresy. I was in the morning-room on the ground-floor, where, with much labour, I hoisted a small chair on to the table... My heart was now beating as if it would leap out of my side, but I pursued my experiment. I knelt down on the carpet in front of the table and looking up I said my daily prayer in a loud voice, only substituting the address 'O Chair!' for the habitual one.

Having carried this act of idolatry safely through, I waited to see what would happen. It was a fine day, and I gazed up at the slip of white sky above the houses opposite, and expected something to appear in it. God would certainly exhibit his anger in some terrible form, and would chastise my impious and wilful action. I was very much alarmed, but still more excited... But nothing happened... I had committed

idolatry, flagrantly and deliberately, and God did not care.

(Father and Son, p. 38-9)

I am further informed that this autobiography was nearly published in French under the punnish title Père et gosse -- 'gosse' being French for a youngster.

(26 October 1986)

THE DAVID LAKE LETTER

DAVID J. LAKE

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I presume you've read Brian Aldiss's 'Helliconia' trilogy (or tried to?), and the review of it in Foundation #35, pp. 70-3, by Peter Caracciolo. Peter C. calls it a 'masterpiece', and compares it to Lucretius and James Joyce.

I first gave up reading about 90 pages into the first volume. Then I made another effort, and at last I have finished reading all three volumes. I checked with a friend and colleague, John Strugnell. He managed to get through the first volume, but then decided that he didn't want any more of that.

I was dismayed by our two reactions, as I have liked some of Aldiss's previous work, especially The Malacia Tapestry. I guess I could accept Tapestry because the title itself warned me not to expect much from the plot. The plot wasn't the point; the point was the creation of a fantasy para-Venice. The Tiepolo illustrations were exactly right for that (un)novel.

But in Helliconia Aldiss has tried almost the same ploy -- and for me it doesn't work. There are plenty of events -- mostly pulp-type violence, battles, rapes -- but they seem to have no significance. They make no difference to the fate of that world. Especially in the middle volume, Helliconia Summer, the violent goings-on seemed to have no connection whatever with the fact that the planet was nearing perihelion to the hot star Freyr.

I kept reading on, at least in the desperate hope that Freyr would go supernova and at least blow up the whole boring planet (it must go supernova within a few million years -- big blue-white stars always do). But no: the story just petered out when the observation station Avernus went dead and the TV transmissions back to Earth consequently failed.

I wonder how seriously Aldiss himself takes this work. Is it tongue-in-cheek? The title is certainly a Joycean pun -- it pretends to be a work of inspiration (Helicon) -- but I think it's a Hell of a Con. It's a soapie (like Dallas or Rosa de Lejos) which announces that it's a soapie: just as the centuries-long adventures of the people with ugly names are beamed back to Earth to amuse a bored and decadent civilization, so we, the sf fans, are presented with the same endless adventures (and the implication may be that this is the sort of pap we deserve). I'm sure that Aldiss has judged his market correctly: the average fan will doubtless love it, just as they seem to love any other series so long as it's long and has lots of battles and rapes.

I also don't like the style. At times Aldiss seems to be trying to rip off Gene Wolfe ('The Book of the New Sun') by throwing in the odd extra-learned word, such as 'stramineous'. Also, his names are hideous (and therefore I don't care what far-fetched puns they may conceal). Even his map is implausible and ugly, with too many round islands. (Slartibartfast would object, as I do. There is an aesthetic of imaginary

maps.) Also, his afterlife of gossies and fessups is quite preposterous. Mystical rubbish of this sort doesn't fit into science fiction.

So -- you see, I hardly like anything about Helliconia. Peter C. is probably right in his learned screed about all the book's subtleties and symbolisms. If he is, for me that only makes it worse. It seems like pretentious camp. (I don't like the later James Joyce, either. I prefer Dubliners and Portrait to Ulysses, and I have never got past page 1 of Finnegans Wake.)

I'll admit to one thing -- Aldiss has got me annoyed by something else. See his letter in Van Ikin's Science Fiction #20, page 41, where he says 'Riddle Walker strikes me as strickly [sic] for pseuds'. In that case, I'm a pseud, and I guess so are most of us on the sf scene in Australia. Riddle Walker nearly blew my mind when I first read it -- it was better than pot, nearly better than sex. I used to wake up laughing in the middle of the night, shouting 'Arga Warga!' or whatever. And I've re-read it several times, and each time it's better. You see what Aldiss has done? He has arrogantly or ignorantly assumed that his judgement is the only 'right' one on Hoban's book. But it's not. It only means he doesn't like it -- as I don't like Helliconia.

Other news: I've been up in a balloon (hot air variety: very suitable for an sf writer!). It was marvellous. When the burner is off, you glide with no sense of motion, since you are going with the wind. It's very like a flying dream, and I guessed it would be, which is why I went up. Now I can die in peace.

(21 May 1986)

Gillespie fanzines try to keep up a reputation for being equally unfair to everybody. First TMR had Damien Broderick in favour of the 'Helliconia' books, and now we have David Lake against. Anybody for duels at dawn?

WE ALSO HEARD FROM:

Please don't get upset if your letter is not mentioned here. My filing system is, to say the least, imperfect.

Please don't get upset if your letter has been relegated to this section. I'm sorry, but the credit limit on my Bankcard won't extend to a 200-page issue. ('I Must Be Talking to My Friends' seems to have gone well over 60 pages already, and could reach 120 pages if I let it.)

Please don't get upset if you think I've failed to thank you for books, magazines, CDs, or records you've sent me. I've mentioned you in the early part of this column.

So, anxiously looking at the bulging file of letters-not-yet-published, I say: We Also Heard From...

GABRIEL McCANN (39 Cox Avenue, Bondi Beach, NSW 2026), who is the Australian organizer of the Philip K Dick Society. He's been a great help in supplying information about Phil Dick books and making sure Australian members of the society receive the PKDS Newsletter. Membership of the society is still \$12 per annum. Gabriel recommends A Matter of Life and Death, a Michael Powell film I haven't seen yet.

RICHARD BERGERON, who had seen my mention of Ted White's Guest of Honour speech from Aussiecon. (A few paragraphs are quoted in TMR 5/6). I photocopied the only copy I could find, and sent it to Dick, who replied to the whole speech in detail. But I had not run the whole speech; Eve Harvey had run it in Wallbanger. I asked her if she wanted to print Dick's reply. No, she didn't. Meanwhile, No. 7/8 had been published, and this issue was getting more and more delayed. The only other place in which to publish most of Ted's speech was

Thyme. Its immediate past editors, Roger Weddall and Peter Burns, were willing to run Dick's reply, but prefaced it with a few scattershot comments which, in turn, annoyed Dick. I wonder how the current editors of Thyme, LynC and Clive Newell, are making out? (Subscribe to Thyme: \$10 from PO Box 4024, University of Melbourne, Vic. 3052.)

JUDITH HANNA, who sent a wonderful letter about What She Has Been Doing Recently. I would have published the letter if it had not been dated 17 May 1986, and therefore might now be out of date. I presume that Judith is still working for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in London, and that life is still as hectic as ever (especially as she and Joseph Nicholas have just dropped out of ANZAPA, pleading pressure of work). On a later postcard (24 April 1987), she wrote: 'Also all in favour of swimming. Mind you, I thought everyone but masochists took a breather between lengths.'

DIANE FOX wrote a very long letter on TMR 5/6 in which she commented on everything, and therefore did not concentrate on anything in particular. Recently she wrote to say that she has suffered from writer's block during the last year or so. She broke through it so that she could write the review that appears next issue.

JOSEPH NICHOLAS has sent several letters apart from the two I've run (above, somewhere). He also sent a postcard pointing out, quite correctly, that I wallow in luxury compared with a Third World peasant, but that I'm likely to go broke if expenditure continues to outstrip income. Too true.

MICHAEL HAILSTONE will be cheesed off because I haven't run his marathon letters, but... and here I feel stupid... often I can't see what he's getting at, or he seems choked up with wrath about matters that seem straightforward to me. In person, Michael comes over as shy but easy to talk to. His fanzine, The Matalan Rave, has lasted quite well. It's available from PO Box 258, Manuka, ACT 2603. It keeps improving, despite the determined efforts at sabotage by Michael's typewriter.

A few comments from Michael's letters: 'On one Prairie Home Companion program Garrison Keillor was talking about his visit to Australia, and therein dropped the name of Adrian Rawlins, someone I know.' 'Your comment from The Blues Brothers has one word wrong: the woman actually ses: "We have both kinds of music here: country and western."

Michael and I exchanged letters about my editorial policy (which, despite the evidence of this issue, is to talk less about science fiction and more about other interesting things, such as music): 'I'm very fond of classical music; it's probably my greatest love. Unlike you, I've had musical training. I could write stuff that wouldn't make sense to you, such as: "Beethoven's genius lay partly in his ability to make even the simplest and perhaps even banal passages full of great meaning and feeling. Take the end of the exposition in the first movement of his Triple Concerto, where the full orchestra swings back and forth between the chords of A minor and E seventh, a very conventional and unoriginal cadence, yet somehow Beethoven does something that makes it sound stirring..." I understand music well enough that I could write stuff like that, if I wanted to, yet I'm no connoisseur.' No, I don't know about E sevenths and chords of A minor, but yes, what you're pointing out does make sense to me, and I would be interested in any articles about music that you wanted to send.

From a later Hailstone letter: 'Did I grow up in the same decade as you? Did Garrison Keillor? Amongst my most humiliating memories is that of team-picking at primary school. I was always chosen last, often with the team-picker saying: "And I suppose I'll have to have Hailstone." When playing softball, I was always an outfielder on the bowling side, and I used to get so bored just standing out there that I'd lapse into daydreams. I'd wake to reality just in time to see the ball rolling towards me and miss it, whereupon I'd receive heaps of abuse from my teammates. When we played cricket, I never took part but played insted down in the nearby stormwater drain. One day in the playground a teacher accosted me about this, pointing out the danger of a flash flood (which was hardly likely in fine wether).' Everything to do with sport at school bored and humiliated me. The trick is to turn such unpromising experiences into good stories.

JOE AQUILINA, who has recently joined the TMR mailing list, wrote: 'The best thing in TMR 5/6 was Yvonne Rousseau's long essay "The Right Hand of Light". I disagreed with much of what Mr Rottensteiner said in his essay, but could never respond as well as Yvonne has. I look forward to other essays from Yvonne Rousseau.' There are two in this issue, Joe. Essays by Yvonne have recently appeared in Australian Science Fiction Review (Second Series), available for \$10 a year from Ebony Books, GPO Box 1294L, Melbourne, Victoria 3001.

IRWIN HIRSH wrote several times, mainly in connection with the article that eventually he purloined from me for Sikander 15. Irwin has become a hot-shot Oz fan writer in recent years, especially under the pressure of producing material for Larrikin, but Irwin says of his own writing: 'There is a good reason why Irwin Hirsh hasn't sent you an article: I'm a slow writer. Leigh Edmonds describes my editorial column in Sikander 12 as "styleless", and he is probably correct. But you have no idea how hard it is reaching even that level. I'm not a great writer, and I just have to be as careful as I can to meet even the requirements of "styleless" writing. If I were a faster or better writer, possibly I would've sent you an article or three, on films, or Why I Hate Music Videos, or What I Did On My Summer Holidays, whatever.' I thought the aim of a good writer was to produce a 'styleless' style -- that is, one which has startling clarity and puts up no unnecessary impediments in the way of the reader. The reason I don't like my own style is that Gillespie mannerisms creep into my writing, no matter how much I weed them out.

DOUG BARBOUR sent, as I've mentioned already, a copy of Engh's Arslan. He also shot through Australia, and rang me from the airport. When he returned to Canada, he wrote: 'The concept "winter" seems simply ludicrous in Noosa Heads -- lying naked in the sun at 28°C and swimming in an ocean warmer than any lake or ocean I've ever swum in before -- and the locals say, well, it's cool, you know, this time of year!' With luck another academic junket might bring Doug back to Melbourne in 1988.

ARTHUR HLAVATY: 'Garrison Keillor reminds me very much of a certain sort of fan writer. He goes on and on with mundane detail about the world around him. It's well phrased, but one wonders why is he telling us all this. But then, just as one is ready to toss the book aside as the work of an ordinary smalltown bore, he comes up with something brilliant and perceptive like the "95 Theses". I'm tempted to wish upon him some sort of selective amnesia.' But... but... excuse the spluttering... don't the concepts of 'humour' and 'irony' come to mind when you're reading Keillor? Or, and this is possible, does the reader add these qualities because he or she has heard Keillor on the radio? After all, he is the most mesmerizing speaker I've heard. I'm not saying that Lake Wobegon Days lacks faults; certainly it lacks a shape that could fully contain the material. But surely a sound basis of all good writing is close, even obsessional, attention to detail?

SYD BOUNDS sent lots of letters, but since he never writes a great deal about any particular topic, I'll just choose a few remarks: 'The BBC is broadcasting a 26-part history of jazz, with digital recording from Vintage Productions of Sydney. You listen to a two-hour radio program? I've never even heard of Garrison Keillor! I listen regularly to Alistair Cook's "Letter from America", but that's only 15 minutes. Maybe you should hint to the radio people that you can do a "Letter from Australia"?' Tom Disch started doing a 'Letter from New York' for the ABC's 'Radio Helicon' program. Then Richard Connolly left the program, to be replaced by John Tranter, who seems to have forgotten about Disch.

About crises: 'As you know, I quit work before I got my pension, and my scanty savings evaporated. The TV people paid up, so I thought: great. Now my rent is going up, so it's back to square one financially. I'll survive somehow.'

Syd is not particularly interested in the subject of dreams, but he has found that 'the trick of going to bed with some story problem to solve on your mind and waking up with an answer, does work. What really is the "unconscious"?' The short answer is: the part of your brain that does all the hard work. Conscious thoughts and actions make up a fairly small part of one's daily performance.

Of TMR 10, Syd writes: 'How nice to receive a thin copy of TMR. I was even able to make time to read it. I had far more time for reading and writing when I had a fulltime job. If you want to do something (anything) do it now, because you won't have time once you're retired. TMR 10 is a bit more like the old Gillespie; you appear need difficulties to get you going... "Something worthwhile to do with your life?" What could be more worthwhile than "I Must Be Talking to My Friends"? Nothing, Syd, except being paid for writing 'I Must Be Talking to My Friends'.

'I remember seeing Peeping Tom when it first came out. It didn't cause much stir then (apart from the prudes looking down their noses at it). And now it's a Gillespie No. 1 down there in kangaroo-land. Well, well! Have you ever seen a kangaroo? Or thrown a boomerang? In England, we have tales of wild wallabies roaming around -- real Fortean stuff.' I've seen kangaroos at the zoo. I've never seen a boomerang thrown, let alone tried to throw one myself. And the suburbs, which is where Australians live, are covered by main roads, freeways, cars, housing, shops -- just like anywhere else. The worst suburban affliction during the 1970s and 1980s has been the upspringing of weird buildings bearing signs such as 'Kentucky Fried Chicken', 'McDonald's', and 'Wendy's'.

DON KELLER sent, as I've already acknowledged, some much-appreciated records. I still haven't been able to find for him a copy of Don Banks's Horn Trio. Indeed, I can't find any records of worthwhile Australian contemporary music in Australian record stores .

TERRY GREEN sent me, on 2 July 1986, information about everything he was doing then. They included a novel, Barking Dogs, which was scheduled to appear last year, and a short story collection from Pottersfield Press. I don't know whether these things have happened. Maybe they have, and much else besides.

DAVE PIPER wrote last year from Seattle, in the middle of the first Piper trip to America: 'After 40-odd years of dreaming of it, I'm actually here -- "here" being at the moment the dining room of the Dentons' house in Seattle...' You must have got home okay, since several people mention seeing you at Conspiracy.

GEORGE HAY wrote last year when he was in the middle of organizing the Arthur C. Clarke Science Fiction Award. The first award has since been given (to a Canadian, Margaret Atwood, for The Handmaid's Tale), which gives extra meaning to George's comment: 'Notice that the award is for "the best sf novel published in Britain". This means that if the native sons and daughters of Albion don't come up to scratch, the prize could go to the best American, Australian, or whatever novel republished in Britain in the year concerned.' I hope that George Turner's publisher keeps this in mind when the next Clarke Award is given.

ANDREW WEINER keeps sending me notes about records by the Byrds or ex-members of the Byrds. Yes, I bought Gene Clark's Firebyrd, and agree that the only interesting track is his new version of 'Mr Tambourine Man'. So Rebellious a Lover (Gene Clark and Carla Olson) is a more satisfying record. Andrew didn't mention that his first novel was published recently (as an 'Isaac Asimov Presents'), but I haven't seen a copy yet. He did mention: 'I've only heard three of your Top 15 Albums... but your Number 1, the Thompsons' Pour Down Like Silver, is probably the record I've played most over the past year, after very belatedly acquiring it last summer in England.' It's now on CD, Andrew.

DEREK KEW is the only person who regularly (every few years) arranges a Luncheon-of-Comment with me. (Lucy Sussex, Jenny Blackford, Yvonne Rousseau, Roger Weddall, and Mark Linneman are among the people who have arranged irregular luncheons-of-comment during the last few years.) In his most recent letter he says: 'I would like to say how much I miss the Space Age Bookshop. I hope you are right about Merv rising from the ashes.' Merv is selling books from home (write for a catalogue to PO Box 491, Elsternwick, Vic. 3185), but that's not the same as being able to buy books in Space Age. 'I like long articles, so I don't agree with the criticisms expressed in TMR 7/8. Anyway, you seemed to stomp on most of them when you replied.' With my weight, I can do a lot of heavy stomping. It's been a year since the last lunch, so I suppose it's my turn to ring.

JOYCE SCRIVNER reminds me that I used the name Metaphysical Review in the early 1970s, because she found some old copies in her fanzine collection. TMR was then my all-purpose apa magazine, featuring only non-sf material. The current incarnation was supposed to continue the tradition, but hasn't. Joyce (3212-C Portland Ave. S, Minneapolis, MN 55407) has a vast fanzine collection which, as of 3 November 1986, she was selling. Among the many items you might like are lots of Bangsund fanzines, stuff by John D. Berry, Granfalloons from Linda Bushyager, some Malcolm Edwards fanzines I've never received (*sigh*), lots of Geiszines, some very early David Grigg fanzines, etc., etc. Joyce might have some choice items left.

Other comments from Joyce, who sent me Happy to Be Here: 'In TMR 4, the story of the Magic Pudding Club is great. Somehow after reading Susan Wood's article about Aussiecon I, I had a vision of the Magic Pudding as being a bar rather than a slum shack.' Often it was both.

LEIGH EDMONDS and I swapped comments about reviewing for the Notional, but its schedule slipped for awhile. Leigh seems to be doing pretty well at his own book reviewing in the new two-page format, and he and Valma are currently staying with Eric Lindsay and Jean Weber, c/o 6 Hillcrest Avenue, Faulconbridge, NSW 2776, before moving to Western Australia. The Notional is \$12 for 10 issues.

JERRY DAVIS had lots of comments about lots of things: 'The best American book of this, last, or many a year, is And Ladies of the Club by Helen Hoover Stanmyer. This book is all you need to understand Middle America... People never agree on what's good reading. Recently a hippie turned college professor and writer (I forget her name) said that E. M. Forster is her inspiration. Some still say this of Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, or G. K. Chesterton. Science fiction has Catholic writers, a Mormon writer, a Quaker writer, atheist writers, etc. On his weekly two-hour radio show, Harlan Ellison said that the best American Catholic writer is not Irish, Italian, or Polish, but a Southerner of old American-English extraction -- that is, Walker Percy...'

The following comments from Jerry Davis (who lives in Simi, California, and claims to be nearly as old as Heinlein) did not go in the rest of the letter column because, for the life of me, I can't work out what they respond to. But if a letter like this turns up, I have to print it somewhere: 'In the big aerospace layoff of 1968 through 1970, engineers, scientists, and support people were being dropped like flies after being lured to this land of milk and honey. The helicopter pad was on a grassy knoll. My friend said that an executive would land soon and tell us where we stood. I said that it wouldn't work that way. The briefcased executive would come flying in soon, but only as a messenger. He would have no more idea of our working future than we did. And he didn't. What I said was true. Now I try to tell my grandsons that at the plant where they work as automobile assemblers and robot maintainers the local executives and union leaders cannot make them any valid promises because these people have no more idea of what is going to happen than they do, and that their next work might be with McDonald's or Domino Pizza.'

BRIAN EARL BROWN sent me a photograph of himself, a copy of Lake Wobegon Days, and a later postcard saying that he couldn't afford to publish the next issue of Sticky Quarters. This is a terrible situation. Dear readers, if you won't send me subscriptions because you know I'm a dissolute spendthrift, at least send some money to Brian, who is a sterling struggler, and has been publishing one of the more interesting fanzines (11675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, MI 48224). Brian also commented on TMR 7/8: 'I am one of those people who generally read everything in a fanzine [but] TMR 7/8 is too damn thick to hold in one's mind as a whole thing.' Then you're going to have trouble with this new issue, Brian; it's already too damn thick for me to hold in my mind, and I'm supposed to be the editor. I think I'll give it to Solomon to chew; the bits that Solomon doesn't destroy I will collect into a Collage Issue. I'm glad you reprinted John Bangsund's fine article on E. B. White and Garrison Keillor. I applaud (roundly and with a standing ovation) your plan to reprint more of John's articles... In John's essay, thoughts of E. B. White lead to Garrison Keillor, and for you thoughts of Keillor lead to thoughts of Walt Willis who, I believe, greatly admires E. B. White... The only book recommendation I have is Catherine Macleod's The Curse of the Giant Hogweed, a blend of P. G. Wodehouse, mystery fiction and Narnia -- a good send-up, lots of

laughs, and even a real mystery to solve... Mats Linder's comments about 'oral galvanism' (mercury poisoning from dental fillings) interested me as I seem to have many of the symptoms: hair falling out, difficulty in -- uh -- concentration, and failing memory. I thought I was just getting old. Now I wonder... could it be me teeth?'

PETER SIMPSON sent an aboc -- autobiography-of-comment. He's been a subscriber forever, but disappears from time to time. Now I know why: 'I've been married for 5 years now. I met Sara when I was in England in 1979. She was working (as a librarian, same as me) at the place where I got a job. In fact, I married my boss. Last year we bought this house, which is a fairly ordinary three-bedroom semi-detached about 50 years old, but it is distinguished by being bigger [than the usual British semi-detached] and overlooks a school playing field. I now work for the British Medical Association in the press department. It's not very exciting, but I can stand it. We got out to the theatre and cinema quite a lot: just about the only reason anyone could have for wanting to live in London... I'm a member of the Philip K. Dick Society, and buy all his posthumously published works. I read Puttering About in a Small Land, which I quite enjoyed, but it didn't make the same impression on me that Confessions of a Crap Artist did years ago. Have you ever read Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh? I was absolutely fascinated by it, and when I found a biography of Butler for three quid I read that too. What a life!' I've had The Way of All Flesh for 15 years, and I still haven't read it. Also I'm behind on even the small number of Dick posthumous novels I've been able to buy. Haven't seen any sign of Puttering About in a Small Land.

JERRY KAUFMAN sent me a nice letter last year, but the fact remains that I never get the copies of Mainstream he sends me. Who's the foul person somewhere in the postal system who nicks my copies? I did get a copy of Aldiss's ...And the Lurid Giare of the Comet, published by Serconia Press, with which Jerry is closely involved. A very enjoyable book, which I was supposed to review for Van Ikin's Science Fiction six months ago. But then, Van isn't overwhelmed with funds for magazine publishing, so I've been lazy about my review column. Jerry's recommended reading list (as of 16 August 1986): 'Re/Search on J. G. Ballard. Fire Watch by Connie Willis (big surprise to me). Metroland by Julian Barnes (at least the first 60 pages... I left the book in someone's car). Only Apparently Real by Paul Williams on Phil Dick (mostly interview transcriptions). Recommended Viewing: Home of the Brave: Laurie Anderson in concert. Burroughs: a documentary on Wm. B. that I rented right after seeing Home of the Brave.' The Laurie Anderson film just turned up at the local Valhalla Cinema. I promised myself I would see it, but haven't yet. I liked Fire Watch a lot, but haven't been able to get hold of her latest novel.

LUCY HUNTZINGER was this year's DUFF candidate. I'd hoped to have a good talk to her sometime, but it never happened. *Sigh* If Lucy hadn't always been talking to someone else, and if I hadn't been struck dumb in awe at this Famous American Fan Personality, we might have talked about the following: 'I am especially pleased with TMR 10. I have vivid and memorable dreams (that is, I remember them without writing them down) frequently if not every night. I haven't seen much discussion of dreams in fanzines, and yet they're so very personal and interesting. I talk about mine a lot, and remember some from years and years ago. I feel like most of the literature on dreams and dream interpretation tends to be too "new age" for me, but I have not read traditional psychoanalytic literature on them. And of course I get burned out on doing research if I think my leg is being pulled. Sometimes living this close to Marin County is a drag. Still, I think dreams are not just a sorting process of the day's impressions but a workspace for ideas and creativity also. That's why I think dreams can be prescient; sometimes the subconscious is quicker to spot trends than the conscious, rational mind. I pay attention to the particularly vivid ones because they often help me see a new angle or provide extra perspective on a problem. Sometimes, of course, they seem significant but I can't begin to attach any interpretation that makes sense to me. I just chalk those up to Art. I would have found it hard to interpret your dreams without knowing you, yet those who did know you well didn't do the best job. Of them all I thought Ralph Ashbrook's was the most coherent, although Brian Aldiss's was apparently the more traditional.'

LARRY DUNNING sent me a long letter about dreams, but in answer told me a dream that he later discussed in his own fanzine. Which is why I didn't run what was otherwise an interesting letter.

PATRICK NIELSEN HAYDEN (and, I should think, TERESA NIELSEN HAYDEN, although I didn't hear directly from her) was very helpful during a very strange period of fannish time when Australians felt cut off from the greater world. We heard that Ted White had been put in jail only after it happened. People who had met Ted at the 1986 World Convention or before knew that he'd been arrested, and could possibly be incarcerated for a long time. In the end, Ted served about three months, and wrote there a series of remarkably interesting letters. They were photocopied and distributed by various friends of Ted. Patrick and Teresa arranged that I should receive Ted's Letters from Prison. Patrick also sent a very long letter telling me the circumstances leading up to Ted's jail term. Patrick would not want it quoted, although almost all the important details have appeared in fanzines during the last year or so. Thanks to the Nielsen Haydens, and to Ted, for making the best of a very difficult time. During his time in jail, Ted met the lady who became his wife early this year.

DAVID RUSSELL wrote in September last year: 'Thanks for turning me on to A Prairie Home Companion; my Saturdays are now spent waiting for it to come on.' Now you must be cursing me, David, for introducing you to the show; perhaps you still spend Saturdays waiting for PHC to come on. Thanks for the article from the July 1986 Esquire: Garrison Kellor on 'Lust'. 'Should a person who writes an article on lust in a men's magazine as widely distributed as Esquire is still be considered a shy person?... The "Shy Person of the Year Award" doesn't strike me as an award that you can win more than once -- unless, of course, you refuse to accept it when offered it a second time. This would force the judges to give it to you for, after all, if you didn't want it again it was because you were too shy.'

JACK HERMAN has this bracing comment on fanzine ideology: 'Your answer [to the quartet of critics in TMR 7/8] appears to be saying that the editor's job is to sit at home and wait for articles and hope they are interesting. If you are not out hustling in the marketplace, as the latest jargon of the real world has it, it is no wonder that you are not getting the sort of article that is appearing in Tigger, Sikander, Space Wastrel and, god help us, Wahf-ful. We are all showing that it is possible to have articles that don't concentrate solely on sf as subject matter. And while Larrikin demonstrates the 'thin and frequent' idea that Foyster was pushing, the other zines tend to be pudgier and less regular. If you have an idea of what you want TMR to do, solicit articles that reflect it. Anything else that turns up will be serendipity. Foyster's comparing fanzines to public transport is a little farfetched, but let's go with it for a moment. Public transport needs to appeal to a massive cross-section of society. It must try to please as many as possible all the time. On the other hand, fanzines are an elitist undertaking, incestuous and self-involving. We, as faneds, are not trying to please everyone, but the small coterie of regular readers and traders. Some can be satisfied by small and fast zines, others by big irregulars. To me, The Mentor shows the problem of trying to produce a regular medium-to-large zine -- it is frequently, nay almost always, mediocre or worse. Me, I prefer to wait until I have the articles I want (and sufficient money) to produce (and mail) WF. That means it comes out irregularly, and varies between 30 and 40 pages.' Well, of course I agree with you, but I like depending on serendipity. Often I don't know what potential contributors have in them until they write it; I don't know what they feel passionately about until they tell me. I suppose I don't want articles that are merely written to fill space in a fanzine; I would like TMR to be the magazine where you send your best stuff about your own favourite subjects, exactly those subjects you couldn't approach in other fanzines because, say, they were not fashionable, or cool, or whatever.

Maybe all I'm trying to say is that I wanted the TMR train to take a different track from the SF Commentary train, but it keeps switching points and heading straight back to the old line. So be it... until I can switch the points again.

ANDY SAWYER did me the kind a favour I cannot repay: he sent me the Times obituary of James Hanley. I didn't know Hanley was dead, since a new novel of his appeared not long ago. Hanley was, as I suspected, a giant of a literary man. He had been everywhere and written much, but the power of his writing has not been recognized by many, probably he was a writer who identified himself unashamedly with the working class during his whole life.

CASEY ARNOTT sent me an article she had written about dreams. She says more in 12 pages than any of those dream-help-yourself books say in 200. I'm ashamed to say that her article does not fit in this issue; yet another example of my bad management of huge amounts of typescript. Casey also sent an apazine in which she tells the epic story of her cats; parts of it were almost too painful to read. She is a very personal and warming writer, and took time out from studying to comment on particular issues of TMR.

Casey wrote the following comments almost a year before I heard of k. d. lang and the reclines: 'If you like country punk you ought to hear our k. d. lang. [Casey comes from Vancouver.] She's a young woman with little hair, lots of voice, and a style unto herself. Never have I heard or seen "Johnny Get Angry" performed with such... the word that comes to mind is dementia. She is a fan of Patsy Cline's (hence the name of her band), and does a lot of her tunes, as well as standards and her own tunes. Come to Canada and see her live. She won gymnastic awards at high school, and reels and cavorts around the stage like a dancing epileptic. She sings "Stop the World" or some such tragic song dressed in a shabby white wedding dress, veil, and matching cowboy boots. The only regret I have about her growing fame is that I no longer can afford to see her.' We get to see her, though, on music video shows, and I've bought Angel With a Lariat (Sire). Great stuff, although I suspect the band is much better on stage than on this record.

Casey again: 'I was interested to read Yvonne Rousseau's bit on Aussiecon II, as my own impressions are hazy and somewhat disappointed. I had forgotten what it's like to be at a con with no one to hang out with. Most of the programming has faded from memory, although I do remember one or two panels of interest, one or two I'd sooner die than repeat -- and Fred Pohl and Hal Clement were great. Sorry I didn't get to see more of you, Gillespie. I should have parked myself at your table instead of chasing the elusive program book.' This bit came as something of a surprise to me, since Casey seemed to be always so busy that of course I didn't see her much. And I never do figure that somebody might be more of a shy person than I am, if possible. It wasn't much help that I had Official Duties, such as holding up a Norstrilia Press table waiting for book-buyers. 'You know, Bruce, it makes me sad to read the way you talk about yourself, as a failure and all that. There are ways to let go of that despair, anger, fear, and such that we pack into our bodies and minds at early ages and have been struggling against and acting out ever since. How gratifying it would be to read "I've just realized what a hot-shit writer I am, and have confessed at last that I'm a fabulous human being. Even the cats can't stay away.'" But it wouldn't be true, would it, Casey? (Sorry, I couldn't resist that Gillespieism. I suppose I'm reasonably content with life as it is, especially as chiropractic help has relieved my back problems over the last year or so. But the rock against which I keep stubbing my psychic toe remains the fact that I can't earn my living doing what I like doing. That's irritating, no matter how often other people point out that very few people in the world earn their living in an interesting way. That's part of the Universal System I'd like to beat.)

IAN PENHALL keeps in touch with the magazine, but is too busy to write letters of comment. Ian has taken over editing an Apex Club newsletter, and when last heard from was enjoying this the way I enjoyed publishing fanzines when I started eighteen years ago. (And I still like publishing fanzines, except when I have to pay the bills.)

PAUL HESKETT (who sent me Anne Tyler's Celestial Navigation) was one of the most fascinating people I met at Aussiecon II -- in fact, one of the few people I had time to hold a conversation with. At that stage he had something to do with the 'Writers of the Future' project, but he doesn't mention it in the following letter: 'Within a few days of my return to England, Angie and I began work in pub management. We quit that in May 1986 and got a flat in Sidcup, about 15 miles from London. We commute to work like hundreds of thousands of others; I am currently working as a word-processor operator with various temporary agencies. It pays the rent and the bills. Currently, we are beginning to consider and explore the possibilities of emigrating to Australia. I was there for only five and a half days, just enough for the convention and an all-too-brief visit to friends of ours near the Gold Coast, but I think that I could live in Australia quite easily. In fact, both of us miss the sunshine after living in Sri Lanka, in 82-83, when I was working for Arthur C. Clarke.' I have to admire a bloke who can name-drop a comment like that without explaining it.

ALAN SANDERCOCK is a South Australian who has been living overseas for more than a decade now. He and his wife, Sue Trowbridge, live in Decatur, Georgia, and he sends newsy letters from time to time: 'Here I am trying to get some typing done and being constantly frustrated by the cries of our child (Maria), who seems to know the worst time to make a nuisance of herself. Actually Maria is a pretty good baby for beginners in the baby business like us in that she really doesn't cause a lot of trouble, but on the other hand it is very easy to end up with no time to do things like writing letters to people who send fanzines. And I don't want to do this since eventually the fanzine deliveries dry up and then all I have to read are the bills, sale ads, and other junk mail that finds its way into our letterbox... Sue, Maria and I were actually in Australia this August. We spent most of the month in Adelaide... and just over a week in Sydney.' But why not call in on Melbourne, Alan, where all the fans are? When did I last see you? 1973 at the latest. :: Alan writes that he and Sue have just discovered the novels of Anne Tyler, and recommend The Accidental Tourist and Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant.

SPAN was away overseas for awhile. When he came back he couldn't find issues of TMR I had sent to the only address he had given me. As a result he wrote a letter of comment that repeated most of what he'd written in the letter I had already published. Which is why I'm not running his later letter. In a more recent letter, Span took a great deal of trouble to write about the dreams in TMR 9, but repeated other people's comments without meaning to. But I must quote the following paragraph: 'I recall a dream that was very similar to your third dream. Some friends sent me up a very tall tree to retrieve a package for them, a tree whose trunk was swathed in barbed wire. I made it all right, tossed down the package, and would have descended but felt the accomplishment was too soon achieved. Looking around, I saw that the tree overlooked a placid little rectangular swimming pool with a cyclone wire fence around it, so I jumped down and landed safely inside the fence beside the pool, at the end of which were a couple of magnificent statues of Egyptian gods. I wanted to go into the pool, but should I? Well, I was only wearing shorts, so why not? I splashed about quite happily until a stern young woman rushed through the (unlocked) gate to the compound and began telling me off: I wasn't supposed to be here; what was I playing at? Bullshit, I thought; I'm enjoying this. I tossed a few impertinent comments at her for her uptight sternness and, taking my time, got out of the pool, took another look at the gods, and left the compound. A Freudian might like to see this as a simple indication of sexual irresponsibility, but it seems that Freudians like seeing that kind of thing. I like seeing gods, I suppose. Anyway, it was a lot of fun.' I won't attempt an interpretation of this one; maybe the whole point was that it was all a lot of fun.

DAVID MUSSARED subscribed. Thanks very much.

JEAN WEBER sent a report on the joint fortieth birthday party (for Eric Lindsay and me) that was held in Sydney. I couldn't attend, of course. 'We started at 4 p.m. and finished about 1.30 a.m., well past the time I've usually got tired of the noise, or the conversation, and gone to bed. It probably helped that a second group of attendees showed up about 8 p.m., injecting some new blood into the group.' Of TMR 5/6, Jean says: 'I did appreciate George Turner's comments on Neuromancer... I had been very disappointed in the book, and George does a fine job of explaining why I was disappointed.' Jean sent a much later letter discussing the problems I've had in typing stencils with a daisywheel printer. I didn't solve those problems, despite her help, so TMR has gone offset.

RUSSELL PARKER sent a nice letter, most of which has 'dnq' written beside it.

JEANNE MEALY lives in Minneapolis, but didn't listen to A Prairie Home Companion 'though I went to it a few times and enjoyed it somewhat. I also enjoyed John Bangsund's article on interconnections... I guess Keillor's style grates on me a bit, so I don't seek it out -- but occasionally I like it. Feel free to ask questions about Minnesota. Though I'm not originally from here, I've picked up a few things since 1978 -- and if I really don't know, I'll make up something good.' I could say the same about Melbourne. (Jeanne is now a co-editor of the long-running fanzine Rune; her address is 4157 Lyndale Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55408, USA.)

LYNC announced yet another loss for 1987: 'It is with regret that I announce to you the death of MUSFA... As a solid supporter of Yggdrasil over the years, I thought you'd like to receive a copy of what will probably be the last issue ever.' MUSFA is/was the Melbourne University Science Fiction Association, which has been a source of active fans in Melbourne since the early 1970s. In 1970 MUSFA was started by David Grigg, who also began Yggdrasil. The old MUSFAns are still around, still active, but finally they all left Melbourne University. No new members from freshers, therefore no club. If it hadn't been for MUSFA, the mid-1970s would have been rather dull for me. If it hadn't been for MUSFA, I wouldn't have got to know Elaine. (I choose my words carefully here. I met Elaine because Charles Taylor invited me around to meet Elaine and Frank, with whom he was sharing a house. Elaine has forgotten that first meeting.)

JAY BLAND has been writing plays, and occasionally having them broadcast and performed. 'I've written a stage play about the events leading up to the Crucifixion -- a philosophical repudiation of Waiting for Godot and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead... The State Theatre Company of SA gave a public reading of it in August 1986... and now, after a rewrite, they're seriously thinking about the possibility of considering it for production -- but not before September 1988. So I keep myself occupied doing New Testament Greek at Flinders this year. Next year I may do Latin. I hope you've adjusted to being 40; it certainly beats being 20. And I wouldn't worry too much about doing "something worthwhile"; 40 is the age at which one should begin to retire from the affairs of the world and look towards the deeper matters of the soul.' But I'm still waiting to be noticed by the world, Jay; I can't retire from the world until I've been in it.

LUCY SUSSEX wrote again: 'Recently I read Alain-Fournier's Le Grand Meaulnes because of an article on it by John Fowles, in Harper's of all things! Le Grand Meaulnes I class with Miles Franklin's My Brilliant Career and Olive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm, all three being first novels by young authors. The three are all very original, and highly revealing of the authors' psychosexuality. In My Brilliant Career there is an anti-sexual subtext, African Farm contains quite gratuitous sadism, and Le Grand Meaulnes is, as you know, concerned with the phenomenon of amor de londenha ('love from afar'), a term originated by the troubadours.' No wonder I liked the novel, since for the first 25 years of my life I fell in love constantly, but never did anything but worship from afar.

MARTIN BRIDGSTOCK is someone I met a few years ago, but did not encounter properly until he sent the article that I'm running this issue. For some years Martin has been a prominent member of a group of Queensland scientists who are trying to fight the plague of Creationism that is fouling schools and universities. Martin promises an article on the subject (just as soon as I publish his first contribution, no doubt.)

PERRY CHAPDELAINE sends advertising pamphlets and notices from time to time. He is publishing his own books (including Volume I of The John W. Campbell Letters, and a number of books about miracle cures for rheumatoid arthritis) and, as I did for some years, typesetting at home in order to keep house and family together. Perry's address is Rt. 4, Box 137, Franklin, TN 37064, USA.

SARAH PRINCE got a new job in May 'and I have spent more on books and CDs already than I'll ever earn there'.

ELLEN BUTLAND sent a first draft of her report on Capcon (this year's Australian national convention in Canberra). Since I can't remember meeting her, she can't have made it from New Zealand to the Melbourne Eastercon the week before.

ROBERT DAY again: 'Nice to see Powell and Pressburger heading your list of Favourite Films for 1986. A friend of mine had no hesitation at putting A Matter of Life and Death at the head of her list of "all-time favourites". A World War II airman is grievously injured and finds himself in limbo whilst a heavenly tribunal sits to decide if he should live or die. The lead role is taken by a disgustingly young David Niven, and the style is wide-screen fx movie, which is pretty good considering these things hadn't been invented when that film was made. Also nice to see Twilight's Last Gleaming on your list.'

TOM WHALEN: 'Your Top 25 Favourite Books for 1986... Hanley, yes. Larkin has been one of my two or three favourite poets for years. Good for you for reading Austen and James. (I like Mansfield Park and The Ambassadors the most by those two)... I had a productive leave in Europe: wrote one novel, one novella, 12 stories, and an essay on Wim Wenders's Alice in the Cities. And I have 10 stories (the usual amount) forthcoming in literary magazines.' Don't make me more exhausted than I usually feel, Tom. Thanks for sending your own Top Twenty lists (June 1986-June 1987): They were:

Fiction: The Mystery of the Sardine (Stefan Themerson); General Piesc, or The Case of the Forgotten Mission (Themerson); The Handyman (Penelope Mortimer); Nothing (Henry Green); Doting (Green); The Assault (Harry Mulish); The Corpse Dream of N. Petkov (Thomas McGonigle); Across (Peter Handke); Ubik: The Screenplay (Philip K. Dick); Sentimental Education (Gustave Flaubert); Blood Meridian, or The Evening Redness in the West (Cormac McCarthy); A Life (Wright Morris); The Blind Men and the Elephant (Russell M. Griffin); They Shoot Horses, Don't They? (Horace McCoy); The Paper Men (William Golding); A Perfect Spy (John Le Carre); Gloria Mundi (Eleanor Clark); Who Was Changed and Who Was Dead (Barbara Comyns); Ilywhacker (Peter Carey); Savage Night (Jim Thompson); The Enchanter (Vladimir Nabokov).

Films: Vampyr (Dreyer); Alice in the Cities (Wenders); Alphaville (Godard); Menage (Blier); The Fly (Cronenberg); Two English Girls (Truffaut); The Blind Director (Kluge); Wild Strawberries (Bergman); Beyond Therapy (Altman); High and Low (Kurosawa); The Osterman Weekend (Peckinpah); Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000 (Tanner); Blue Velvet (Lynch); My Darling Clementine (Ford); The Elephant Man (Lynch); Texas Chainsaw Massacre II (Hooper); Heart of Glass (Herzog); Family Plot (Hitchcock); The Hitcher (Harman); Re-Animator (Gordon); Swimming to Cambodia (Demme); Chaos (Taviani Brothers); Finders Keepers (Lester); Psycho III (Perkins); Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here (Polansky); Ivan's Childhood (Tarkovsky).

Where I've read or seen those, I'll agree with you, Tom: I've read the Flaubert and Griffin on the Books list (and haven't heard of most of them), and seen the Godard, Bergman, Ford, and Hitchcock on the Films list.

And last (maybe?) but not least (how could anything be least in this magazine of infinite possibilities?), is a recent letter from:

GUIDO EEKHAUT (Berkenhoflaan 13, 3030 Leuven [Heverlee], Belgium), who wishes to migrate to Australia, with his wife and two children -- aged four and seven -- and would like as much information as possible from TMR about jobs, salaries, prices, places to live, etc. I suggested to Guido that he apply immediately to the Australian embassy, since he might have to wait forever for the right to migrate, and to apply for jobs. I said that of course the only place to live was Melbourne, and as evidence sent an average copy of the Saturday morning Age. If that doesn't frighten him off, nothing will. (More effectively, I could send him a copy of the Age Green Guide, showing the putrid tv programs offered here in a full week.)

Before finishing the issue, here's something I promised in No. 10. I wrote it for my FAPAzine, but has had to wait until it's a year late to appear in TMR:

Footnote to The Metaphysical Review 10:

FAVOURITE SHORT STORIES 1986

- 1 'Dance of the Happy Shades' by Alice Munro (Dance of the Happy Shades)
- 2 'I, Maureen' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 3 'Deep End' by J. G. Ballard (The Terminal Beach)

- 4 'A Trip to the Coast' by Alice Munro (Dance of the Happy Shades)
- 5 'The Terminal Beach' by J. G. Ballard (The Terminal Beach)
- 6 'A Letter from the Clearys' by Connie Willis (Fire Watch)
- 7 'My North Dakota Railroad Days' by Garrison Keillor (Happy to be Here)
- 8 'The Girl Who Loved Horses' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 9 'Sharon' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 10 'The Finder' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 11 'Boys and Girls' by Alice Munro (Dance of the Happy Shades)
- 12 'The Tip-Top Club' by Garrison Keillor (Happy to be Here)
- 13 'Images' by Alice Munro (Dance of the Happy Shades)
- 14 'The Overloaded Man' by J. G. Ballard (The Voices of Time)
- 15 'The Day Before' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 16 'Judith Kane' by Elizabeth Spencer (The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer)
- 17 'Old Bessie' by Brian W. Aldiss (The Pale Shadow of Science)
- 18 'All My Darling Daughters' by Connie Willis (Fire Watch)
- 19 'Walker Brothers Cowboy' by Alice Munro (Dance of the Happy Shades)
- 20 'Time Zones' by Damien Broderick (Introducing Damien Broderick)

This list is quite different from the others; it took six months until I had the courage to sort the items into order. Courage? To make up yet another Gillespie list? Am I mad?

Let me start another way. The trouble with writers of non-sf short stories is the way they bamboozle readers by making sure that the title of a story never tells you anything about its contents. Take Alice Munro's 'A Trip to the Coast', for instance. I couldn't remember what that was about, although my recommendations list showed that I liked it a lot. I had to read it again. I would have been spared the effort if the author had called it 'Grandmother and the Hypnotist'. That would not give away the surprise ending of the story, but it does remind you of the story if you've read it already. When I looked at my list, I realized I could remember almost none of the stories by looking at their titles. I had to spend a whole weekend re-reading The Stories of Elizabeth Spencer, Alice Munro's Dance of the Happy Shades, and bits of three Ballard collections, making extensive notes, and suffering bloodied eyeballs before deciding on the Top 20. And all this when I should have posted this magazine months ago!

I didn't mind re-reading the stories, of course. It's just that I have about ten other things to do, and all of them at the same time. Lunatic thoughts raced through my head as I skim-read the books. The most lunatic of them was to abandon this mini-article and instead write a gigantic article about the State of the Short Story. I was saved from madness by the clock and the calendar.

I should not have bothered with a numbered list, but a true lister lists on. At least as many great stories are left off as are included, and after the Top 3, the rest are more or less equal. A good year for short stories, although I didn't read as many story volumes as in most years. Elizabeth Spencer and Alice Munro are the two stars. Spencer writes mainly about Tennessee, Mississippi, and other southern parts of the USA. Munro writes about the backblocks about Ontario, where everything has the same air of faded, poverty-stained gentility as Spencer finds in southern towns.

Even as I say this, I can hear in the distance the sf fan who complains about 'New Yorker-style stories', the sort of fan who snorts in derision at any fiction that deals with ordinary people. Such a person has probably never read any fiction about 'ordinary people'; sf stories, after all, mainly deal with subnormal people (usually described as 'superhumans').

My first response is usually to say that it doesn't matter what a story is about; it's only the style that counts. But I don't believe it -- not unless the style is so exciting that you forget about everything else. There are no 'ordinary people', no 'average guys'. There are lots of people who think of themselves this way, but each has his or her own story. Nothing is typical of anything. There are only individuals.

My second response is that writers like Spencer and Munro do a lot more than write about the stories of 'ordinary' individuals. They can shine a torch through a life so that suddenly it becomes extraordinary. I'm not sure how they do it. Neither has a particularly distinctive style -- in fact, sentence by sentence you could mistake the style of one for the style of the other. It's all a matter of intensity.

Take 'The Dance of the Happy Shades', yet another story which I could not remember by its name until I read it again. ('Miss Marsalles's Music Party' would have been less euphonious, but more accurate.) The kind of reader who does not like fiction about ordinary people or places would stop reading immediately. That person would be the loser. Not even an Edgar Allan Poe horror story would make you more uncomfortable than moments in this piece. Every year since forever, Miss Marsalles has held a recital for her piano students. Each year the number of students decreases and every few years she moves to a smaller house. She insists on giving the yearly recital of her students as a party which becomes more awful each year. The story takes place on a hot summer afternoon. Miss Marsalles's few remaining students and their mothers crowd into the tiny parlour of a tiny house. Flies crawl over the dried sandwiches; the soft drinks are already warm. Mediocre students play their boring pieces. Everybody is about to escape when a new group arrives -- Miss Marsalles's class from a school from mentally retarded kids. They also crowd into the tiny room; for the moment all we feel is the acute embarrassment of the story-teller. But one of the mentally retarded girls sits at the piano and plays magnificently. Miss Marsalles's life's work is justified although 'people who believe in miracles do not make much fuss when they actually encounter one'. Munro's point is fairly clear: miracles among people happen where you least expect them, and the writer is the person best able to recognize them.

(End of sermon. I still have my notes for a longer article.) (And what about the Ballads? you cry. I discuss them in the next issue of TMR. Some Ballads, such as 'The Cage of Sand', are not listed because I read them years ago.) Seeyuz soon.

Thanks to the people who sent Christmas cards last year... and Elaine, who is proof-reading this stuff at least once. Last page typed 29 November 1987

KITTEN

My kitten Tigger... has a luxurious, Bohemian, unpuritanical nature. It eats six meals a day, plays furiously with a toy mouse and a piece of rope, and suddenly falls into a deep sleep whenever the fit takes it. It never feels the necessity to do anything to justify its existence; it does not want to be a Good Citizen; it has never heard of Service. It knows that it is beautiful and delightful, and it considers that a sufficient contribution to the general good. And in return for its beauty and charm it expects fish, meat, and vegetables, a comfortable bed, a chair by the grate fire, and endless petting.

-- Robertson Davies,
The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks, p. 81

OF FEIGNED INDUSTRY

I spent a busy day today, but got little done. This is because I am at last becoming perfect in the art of seeming busy, even when very little is going on in my head or under my hands. This is an art which every man learns, if he does not intend to work himself to death. By shifting papers about my desk, writing my initials on things, talking to my colleagues about things which they already know, fumbling in books of reference, making notes about things which are already decided, and staring out the window while tapping my teeth with a pencil, I can successfully counterfeit a man doing a heavy day's work. Nobody who watched me would ever be able to guess what I was doing, and the secret of this is that I am not doing anything, or creating anything, and my brain is having a nice rest. I am, in short, an executive.

-- Robertson Davies,
The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks, p. 245

THE GILLESPIE REPORT

I've left myself only two pages for short reviews in this column, so I'll skip them altogether. Instead, here is a short guide to one of the major new enterprises in recent British/Australian science fiction publishing: the Gollancz Classic SF line and the Gollancz SF Paperback line.

In the past Gollancz has concentrated on its famous 'yellow jackets': hardback sf titles that sold mainly to libraries and to those people who could afford hardbacks. I presume that severe cutbacks to government allocations to libraries, both in Britain and here, have forced Gollancz away from sf hardback publishing. Both new lines concentrate on reprinting Gollancz's vast back list, bringing back into print many good books that have been out of print for some time. New writers, it seems, still appear first in hardback.

Gollancz Classic SF

The Gollancz Classic SF titles are trade paperback size, with attractive cover art on a white ground. Sturdy binding, designed to be bought by libraries as well as browsers. The titles which I have received for review are:

- No. 1 575-03819-5 Kurt Vonnegut: The Sirens of Titan (original publication date 1959; this new edition published 1986; 224 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
- No. 2 575-03821-7 Theodore Sturgeon: More Than Human (1953/1986; 233 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
- No. 3 575-03820-9 Robert Silverberg: A Time of Changes (1971/1986; 221 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
- No. 4 575-03818-7 Samuel R. Delany: Nova (1968/1986; 224 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
- No. 5 575-03849-7 Arthur C. Clarke: The City and the Stars (1968/1986; 255 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
- No. 6 575-03850-0 Robert A. Heinlein: The Door Into Summer (1956/1986; 190 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
- No. 7 575-03852-7 Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth: Wolfbane (1959/1986; 189 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
- No. 8 575-03851-9 John Sladek: The Reproductive System (1968/1986; 192 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
- No. 9 575 03978-7 Arthur C. Clarke: A Fall of Moondust (1961/1986; £2.95/\$6.95)
- No. 10 575-03980-9 Bob Shaw: A Wreath of Stars (1976/1986; 190 pp.; £2.95/6.95)
- No. 11 575-03979-5 Algis Budrys: Rogue Moon (1960/1987; 173 pp.; £2.95/\$7.95)
- No. 12 575-03981-7 Frederik Pohl: Man Plus (1976/1987; 215 pp.; £3.50/\$9.95)
- No. 13 575-03993-0 Christopher Priest: Inverted World (1974/1987; 251 pp.; £3.50/\$9.95)
- No. 14 575-04061-0 Daniel Keyes: Flowers for Algernon (1959/1987; 216 pp.; £3.50/\$9.95)
- No. 15 575-04122-6 Robert Sheckley: Journey Beyond Tomorrow (1962/1987; 189 pp.; £3.50/\$9.95)
- No. 16 575-04144-7 Harlan Ellison (ed.): Dangerous Visions (1967/1987; 544 pp.; £6.95/\$19.95)
- No. 17 575-04123-4 Samuel R. Delany: Babel-17 (1966/1987; 193 pp.; £3.95/\$11.95)
- No. 18 575-04127-7 Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth: Gladiator-at-Law (1955/1987; 192 pp.; £3.95/\$11.95)
- No. 19 575-04121-8 Ward Moore: Bring the Jubilee (1952/1987; 194 pp.; £3.95/\$11.95)
- No. 20 575-04134-X John Crowley: Beasts (1976/1987; 184 pp.; £3.95/\$11.95)

Malcolm Edwards, Gollancz's sf editor, has much the same notion of 'science fiction classic' as mine, but I wouldn't have chosen some of these titles. The least 'classic' of these books include Silverberg's A Time of Changes and Pohl's Man Plus. Why not Gateway? Edwards might say: because we don't have the rights anymore. Perhaps that's why Phil Dick doesn't appear anywhere on this list. Some of these books I haven't read (including both Delany titles and both Pohl/Kornbluth titles, believe it or not). Bring the Jubilee,

Inverted World (rescued from Faber), and The Sirens of Titan would be contenders for my Top 10 SF Novels Of All Time list.

Gollancz Science Fiction Paperbacks

The books in this series are regular paperback size, with front cover paintings on a black background and spine. Outstanding packaging compared with other British paperback lines.

- 575-03987-6 Bob Shaw: Night Walk (1967/1987; 188 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-03988-4 Arthur C. Clarke: The Other Side of the Sky (new introduction; 1958/1987; 245 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
575-03989-2 Robert Silverberg: To Live Again (1975/1987; 231 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
575-03990-6 Robert Silverberg: The Masks of Time (1968/1987; 252 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
575-03996-5 Andre Norton: Web of the Witch World (1964/1987; 192 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-03998-1 Andre Norton: Three Against the Witch World (1965/1987; 191 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-03999-X Andre Norton: Year of the Unicorn (1965/1987; 221 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-04007-6 Andre Norton: Star Gate (1958/1987; 192 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-04008-4 Greg Bear: Hegira (1979/1987; 222 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
575-04009-2 C. J. Cherryh: Angel with the Sword (1985/1987; 302 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
575-04010-6 Robert Holdstock: Eye among the Blind (1976/1987; 219 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-04011-4 Robert Holdstock: Earthwind (1977/1987; 245 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
575-04022-X Hal Clement: Mission of Gravity (1953/1987; 203 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-04032-7 Jack Vance: The Faceless Man (1971/1987; 206 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-04038-6 Robert Silverberg: Up the Line (1969/1987; 250 pp.; £2.95/\$6.95)
575-04044-0 C. J. Cherryh: The Dreamstone (1983/1987; 192 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-04052-1 Jack Vance: The Asutra (1973/1987; 187 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-04053-X Jack Vance: The Brave Free Men (1972/1987; 224 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-04096-3 Bob Shaw: Medusa's Children (1977/1987; 184 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-04124-2 Andre Norton: Star Man's Son (1952/1987; 220 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95)
575-04125-0 Cordwainer Smith: Quest of the Three Worlds (1966/1987; 184 pp.; £2.50/\$5.95).

Needless to say, the best of these is the most recently received: Cordwainer Smith's Quest of the Three Worlds. (Gollancz's advance publicity promises some more Smith soon.) Clement's Mission of Gravity should have gone on the Classics list. It all depends on the criteria being used to place a book in either the Classics or the Gollancz SF paperbacks. Of the titles on this list I've read, those I can recommend include Vance's 'Durdane' trilogy (The Faceless Man, The Brave Free Men and The Asutra) and Silverberg's Up the Line. Andre Norton is one of the most unreadable authors I've ever tried to read, but I bet sales of her books will be more than those for all the others put together. I must get around to reading the two early Holdstock novels, Eye among the Blind and Earthwind.

I was hoping to fit into this column short reviews of a host of other books. The column, like much else, has been pushed into TMR 14. I've found quite a few books to praise, believe it or not, but still find it difficult to read those mainstays of the field at the moment, the Big Boring Books. Yes, I did read Little, Big at last. To argue against this book would take some trouble and effort, and I'm not sure life can last so long. In the end, it's just another very long book that doesn't for one moment make you want to turn the next page. I would have thought this was the most important criterion for any work of popular fiction: unputdownability. SF writers have, by and large, lost the ability to make you want to keep reading their books. It's all a duty.

Which is why I'm looking forward to catching up with the Gollancz reprint titles (listed above) that I haven't read yet. Most of them come from an era when sf writers at least tried to seduce their readers. Some of them come from my 'Golden Age of SF', the early 1950s. If you want to know what sf is all about, buy the titles in these series. (But not the Nortons, unless you're masochistic.)

Bruce Gillespie, March 1988