
brg No. 15, April 1996, is a magazine written and published by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood, Victoria 3066, Australia (phone (03) 9419-4797) for ANZAPA and a Few Select Others.

How does the mighty oak tree grow?

Nova Mob Talk, 6 March 1996

[The 6 March Nova Mob meeting was the first at the residence of Lucy Sussex and Julian Warner. We've moved from the Stewart residence. Note it in your diary. First Wednesday of the month, 8.00 p.m., at 13 Frederick Street, Brunswick (Sydney Road tram stop 25). Dinner at 6 p.m. at Alasya Turkish Restaurant, 555 Sydney Road, Brunswick.

Here's my introductory talk about a few books that I have read recently. I hoped the talk would prompt other people to talk about their recent favourites. This aim succeeded; I hope the other people write about their choices.]

Why do I keep reading books of fiction year after year? I can usually give myself an answer, but it is not always a satisfactorily answer. I keep looking for the true surprise. Yet if this surprise is too surprising, will I recognise it if I hit it?

I say this because recently I've been reading more and more mysteries and crime novels, and much of the pleasure they give is anticipated, not unexpected. On the other hand, some of the more challenging SF novels of the last twenty years, such as Gibson's *Neuromancer*, I find quite unreadable because of their challenging approach to language. They exclude me because authors like Gibson don't use the English language well, although I realise that tearing apart the language is a necessary part of what they are trying to do.

A much more interesting question, however, is why do authors keep writing works of fiction year after year? I say this because I've never been able to write a novel. I've simply never found in my mind an idea or character that would sustain me over such a vast number of words. Presume that a writer can write novels, and does, what keeps him or her going? It can't be the money, because very few novelists make a living wage, let alone a fortune, from writing fiction. It can't be, although it often is, the hope of writing something completely fresh and new. Everyone knows how much publishers welcome anything fresh and new, and most readers seem to want more of what they've read before. Many authors say that writing is an itch that must be scratched.

Okay, so you want to scratch an itch. How does a tiny itch into a great oak tree grow? (So to speak.) That's what always fascinates me. How do writers get from a tiny and often vague point X to a novel, which is a vast collection of Points Y?

THE PRESTIGE

by Christopher Priest

(1995; Touchstone 0-671-71924-6; 404 pp.)

Take Christopher Priest's *The Prestige*, for instance. This is by far the most interesting SF novel I've read for awhile, and much of its allure is the way it makes one ask the question: how the hell did he ever think it up?

The Prestige is Chris Priest's best book since *Inverted World*. *Inverted World* has one of the few original SF ideas since the heyday of SF during the forties and fifties. It has one of those Big Ideas that can be described without saying too much about the novel itself.

What if a city of people were trapped within a world, or even a universe, that, while parallel to ours, operates under a quite different physical structure? What if when you look in the sky the sun appears to be a hyperbolic graph? What if one must keep moving in order not to be destroyed by the physics of this world?

The ideas in *The Prestige* are also vivid, but they cannot be described without referring to the characters and action of the book. Unfortunately there's no way I can explain them completely without ruining your enjoyment of reading the book. I hope I can give away enough to make you want to read the book, but not so much that you won't bother.

The Prestige ties together so many wonderful notions that I keep wondering which of them set Chris Priest off. In an interview in an English magazine he says that he began with the idea of twinness. He and his wife have twins. Presumably these twins, who I haven't met, show some of the uncanny aspects noted in some pairs of twins, who seem to communicate by telepathy.

The main subject of *The Prestige* is magic and magicians. At first sight, this might not seem overwhelmingly interesting. After all, a magician does not do magic; he or she performs tricks. The novel derives its name from the 'prestige', the essential trick itself that is the heart of the magician's act.

In writing about *The Prestige*, Priest says that he did a lot of research, mainly on the net, into the world of magicians, and found that their main characteristic is secrecy. There are very strict rules about keeping the secrets of one's own and others' tricks, or prestiges.

The Prestige begins as Andrew Westley is invited to a country house to receive the manuscript written by his great-grandfather, who had been a famous magician at the

beginning of the century. The person who hands him the manuscript is the great-granddaughter of Rupert Angier, a rival magician. We read two rival manuscripts, that of Alfred Borden, Westley's great-grandfather, and that of Angier. We are invited to guess at the secrets of their magic.

What struck me is the parallel between the battle of the magicians and the real-life battle in which Chris Priest has been involved for the last ten years. During that time Chris, much like Borden, has become so irritated by the practices of another writer, Harlan Ellison, that he has snapped at his heels continually in print. In turn, Ellison has done everything he can, albeit across the Atlantic Ocean, to throw off the terrier. The chance of a reconciliation between them is zero. The chances that Ellison will finally publish *The Last Dangerous Visions*, the bone of contention between them, are equally small.

Given this parallel, Priest shows a remarkable willingness to laugh at himself and the situation that has grown up between the two writers. The parallels don't hold up absolutely. Priest and Ellison do not have equal status in the SF world: Priest is a good writer, for instance, and Ellison is insufferably awful; Ellison is widely read in America, and Priest is not. In the novel, the two magicians achieve roughly an equal status, with one becoming pre-eminent for a time, and then the other, until both disappear from public life in 1904.

The trick of presenting rival journals works well. Borden is a magician who can't bring himself to reveal the secret of his prestige, although he published his monograph specifically as a book about magicians' secrets. The careful reader will guess the secret easily enough. In Borden's narrative, Rupert Angier, the other magician, always seems to be in the wrong. He begins his career by staging seances, indulges in many minor tricks to upset Borden, and seeks out Borden's secrets by sending his mistress to seduce his rival.

When we read Angier's narrative, we find that he is also in the right. He cannot understand why Borden has made him into an enemy. Some of Borden's own tricks backfire so badly that they seem to have a homicidal intention. However, in seeking out Borden's greatest trick, Angier seeks help from Tesla, the electrical scientist of the turn of the century, and so comes into possession of a machine that, of course, reminds us of H. G. Wells's most famous devices. It would be most unfair of me to describe this machine or its effects.

Borden's famous act, which Angier seeks to replicate, sounds simple. The magician steps into a circle at one point at a stage and, after the usual magical brouhaha, appears to step out of a circle some distance away, without having travelled the distance between them. The obvious solution is that there are two Borden, twins, but Angier can find no evidence at all that there ever were twin Borden, or that two identical Borden are currently living. Angier concludes that Borden must have a machine that projects him instantaneously from one place to another, and therefore sets out to find or invent a similar machine. Which, of course, he does, much to the astonishment of Borden, who had never considered such a machine possible.

So, although Borden and Angier are unrelated, they come across as the true 'twins' of the novel, linked, yet always at war.

I hope I've suggested that any one of a multitude of images or ideas might have led to the creation of this novel, but I'm left as amazed as any audience member at the piece of magic that Priest creates out of all this. A ragbag of ideas about creativity, rivalry and history somehow come out as

whole cloth. In the framing story, the great-grandson, Andrew Westley, has always believed that he must have a twin brother, although he had no evidence that such a brother ever existed. When he reaches the Angier traditional home, he comes to feel strongly that his twin brother exists, and can be found somewhere on the property. The finding of the secret of this brother ties together and explains every other element in the novel, and provides one of the most hair-raising last scenes I've read for a very long time. An H. G. Wellsian ending indeed, because like the endings of so many of Wells's best novels, it's basically Gothic horror.

Even if I had the imagination to fit together even two of these ideas, let alone link the whole lot, I doubt whether I could ever have done the research that's needed to finish the task. What happens if all the research is sitting neatly in front of you, but you need to turn it into a real book?

AN ANTHROPOLOGIST ON MARS: SEVEN PARADOXICAL TALES

by Oliver Sacks

1995; Picador 0-330-33717-3; 319 pp.)

As you can see, recently I've recovered a bit of that good old-fashioned Gosh! Wow! Sensawonder. First I read *The Prestige*, then *An Anthropologist on Mars*.

At first sight, it doesn't seem as if Oliver Sacks's books could have anything to do with Chris Priest's. It's not science fiction, but a doctor's casebook. The research is the story. In his working life, Sacks deals with a large number of people with unusual mental disabilities. Surely it's not too difficult to weed out the most interesting cases and present a new book of case histories every few years!

Yes and no. I could imagine somebody in Sacks's line doing just what he does, and having every one of his books end up in the dustier, least read shelves of a medical library. Sacks's researches are interesting, but probably not unique. His reputation is based on his literary rather than medical abilities.

For Sacks, like Chris Priest, is a master of the style that hides style, my favourite kind. Each author relies on slow revelations and quiet disclosures to make the impact of their discoveries all the more astonishing. *The Prestige* I hadn't read until now because Justin Ackroyd hadn't been able to get a copy from the Australian distributor; Oliver Sacks I hadn't read until now because of my undisguised prejudice against best-sellers. Silly me.

About the work of Oliver Sacks I must ask the same question that I asked about the new novel of Chris Priest: how did he get there? A case study lies in a folder; how does it become a book that one can't put down? It's not simply a matter of style. It's also a matter of having something to say that nobody else could have said.

Sacks does not say anything as simplistic as: 'There is no such thing as a disability.' Many of his patients have severe disabilities, and quite a few have disabilities that lead inevitably to death, even while they are patients of Sacks's. Sacks is often overwhelmed by feelings of pity, terror and a kind of comedy. He does not say anything as simplistic as: 'Many disabled people develop other abilities that compensate them for their disability.' Of course, some do, especially blind people who develop what seem to us almost supernatural hearing abilities.

I've just watched on video the Michael Nyman opera based on Sack's earlier piece *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. A prominent musician begins to blank out what he sees when looking at everyday objects, even eventually,

as the title shows, reaching for his wife's head when trying to reach for his hat. It transpires that he has a form of Alzheimer's disease that has affected the right side of his brain, therefore closing down the left function of his mind. He retains extraordinary powers of abstract thinking, being able to conduct a lightning game of chess, for instance, without looking at the board. He keeps his world going by connecting every piece of ordinary business to some tune or other aspect of music. But he has lost all sense of leftness, and has lost much of his sense of the reality of everyday objects.

What makes this a fascinating story, and then a mesmerising opera, is Sacks's attempt to understand what the internal world of such a person must be like. This proves to be the same method he uses for all his patients.

The reviews of Sacks's books make it seem as if he merely trots out a series of oddities among human beings: a literary version of the carnival freak show — here's Ollie and the next gang of weirdos!

We go about thinking we're 'normal', that the human brain works in such-and-such a way, but you've discovered that it doesn't.

In looking at each 'case history', Sacks attempts to see how the other person sees the world. If it is possible for this or that person to see the world in this or that way, how do we account for the way *we* see things?

Take colour, for instance. Light splashes into the eyes, down to the brain, and caramba! there's colour. Right? Not at all. In 'The Case of the Colour-blind Painter', the matter of colour sight is thrown open to question. The painter in Sacks's story lost all colour perception late in life. After two years he could not remember what colour was like. But the way he saw things after the loss became rather different from the way a 'colour-blind person' sees things. His paintings appear in the book, giving us one of the few records we have of a person showing us, from the inside out, what it is like to have a major change in brain function.

How does an autistic person see the world or feel about it? How can we tell? Sacks talks about two different autistic people, one of whom is perhaps the world's most 'success-

ful' (in conventional terms) autistic person. Yet, although Temple Grandin can think about her own condition, she still sees other humans as aliens; she sees herself as an 'anthropologist on Mars'. She can see that a sunset is pretty, but the concept of 'awesome' or 'magnificent' is unknown to her. She can plan systems in minute detail — this is what she does for a living — but if interrupted when planning a system, she must plan it all again from the beginning. Certain feelings about people are unknown to her, and that's what makes Sacks find her the hardest person of all to approach. Sometimes Temple Grandin seems to show affection, but are such demonstrations merely tricks learned in order to survive in our world? There's no way to go into her mind to find out. It's only because of her candour about her attempts to explore her own condition that they do achieve a kind of friendship.

Does Temple Grandin have a different sort of brain; or are the elements of her brain merely arranged differently from ours? Do we all have some elements of autism, or Tourette's syndrome? (Sacks tells the astonishing story of a man who is a great surgeon although he has Tourette's syndrome.) Are all 'disabilities' disasters? What kind of a thing is a 'normal mind'?

Sacks throws all these questions up for grabs. One would like to think that SF writers might grab at them, but one so seldom finds in SF writers an interest in understanding people different from themselves. This, more than anything else, is why I find it hard to read most science fiction books these days.

That's one SF book and one non-fiction book. I haven't even started on mystery and crime novels, my favourite type of reading at the moment. I don't know how *The Prestige* and *An Anthropologist on Mars* work, or how the author proceeded from first ideas to final work. How does the mighty oak grow? Perhaps the authors here can tell me. Or perhaps I'd prefer not to know. To be interesting, a book needs to keep its secrets as well as reveal them.

— Bruce Gillespie, 6 March 1996

Other recent reading

SHADOW OF ASHLAND

by Terence M. Green

(1996; Forge 0-312-85958-9; 221 pp.)

I'll admit from the start that I'm prejudiced towards this book. Terry Green, of Toronto, started writing to my magazines during the 1970s, after he had heard that I'm a fan of the work of Philip K. Dick. (Many of my most enduring pen friendships have been with other Phil Dick fans.) At that time he was only writing reviews. Later he began to publish stories, and he sent me copies of his first two novels and his first collection of short stories. The collection included 'Ashland, Kentucky', which seemed much better than anything he had written before.

A contemporary Canadian family begins to receive letters written by a long-lost son/uncle in the 1930s. The main character sets off for Ashland, Kentucky, the small town from which the most 'recent' letters had been received. His arrival in the town is more or less where the story ended.

When Terry told me that he was expanding the story into

a novel, I hardly greeted the news with cries of joy. Most sf novelists have no idea how to expand short stories into novels, but they keep doing it.

But Terry Green has done the impossible: seen vastly more possibilities in his original idea than could be fitted into a short story, then made the resulting tale, *Shadow of Ashland*, into a convincing novel.

Given that the letters had dropped through time, what did the long-lost uncle think was happening to him when he sent them? What had really befallen him during the 1930s, or had he slipped through time into the 1980s? At first the storyteller meets Ashland people who had known his uncle during the 1930s, then realises they are withholding part of the story. And then . . . Terry Green puts goose bumps on your goose bumps.

Shadow of Ashland invites comparisons with a number of other books, especially Jack Finney's *Time and Again*, but it stands on its own because it has a real hard edge of passion that excises that things-were-better-back-then softness that you find in Finney.

THE END OF THE PIER

by Martha Grimes

(1992; Alfred A. Knopf 0-679-41126-7; 230 pp.)

I've been fascinated by the books of Martha Grimes for some years. Why does an American author write British murder mysteries in a way that so slavishly follows the traditional formula that she comes close to sending it up? And does she have a real feeling for British place, or does she write these novels so that she can live in her private Dorothy Sayers Land?

Even if she succeeds at the British-murder-mystery novel (and I've collected nearly all her mystery books without yet getting past the third in the series), from whence does she draw the power to write *The End of the Pier*, an unwavering mixture of small-town Southern Gothic novel and American serial-killer mystery fiction?

The connecting link between *The End of the Pier* and her other novels is her capacity to put characters on stage and let them live. Maud Chadwick is the town's 'daffy lady', an outsider who survives by working at the local café but has dreams of better things. Her son goes off to college, but fails his courses. The local sheriff, Sam DeGheyn, tries to be her friend, despite her vagueness. And she sits at the end of the lake's pier during summer nights looking out over the water at the parties happening in the rich houses on the other side of the lake. It's all very atmospheric writing, buzzing about all over the place. It's as different as possible from the 'Martha Grimes British mysteries' as you could get, but it has a convincing murder plot and a rattling good finale.

THE SCOLD'S BRIDLE

by Minette Walters

(1994; Allen & Unwin 1-86373-718-9; 327 pp.)

When I mentioned Minette Walters to Carey Handfield, his response hinted that I really should have known about her from book one (*The Ice House*, which I haven't read yet).

Minette Walters is refreshing. I've become slightly jaded with all the mystery writers who not only want to astound you but also want to show you what great artists they are. Some are, I admit, smart writers, but it's still refreshing to find someone who believes passionately in the mystery genre itself.

Minette Walters is robust. She doesn't mind a whacking solid cliché if that's the only way of getting your attention and describing what she's on about. She doesn't mind a bit of action, some jaw-dropping revelations, and the odd punch into the reader's solar plexus. She obviously has such fun constructing and writing unrepentant melodrama. *The Scold's Bridle* seems much better than most other mysteries I've read during the last year or so. (Is Ruth Rendell going off the boil? *Simisola*, in particular, seemed bloodless compared to gutsy Minette.)

Nothing much I can say about the story of *The Scold's Bridle* without revealing in it a silliness that you don't notice while you're reading it.

LITTLE DEATHS: 24 TALES OF HORROR AND SEX

edited by Ellen Datlow

(1994; Millennium 1-85798-014-X; 454 pp.)

I've met Ellen Datlow. She doesn't seem to be a genius. Just your ordinary average American bright cookie who does deals and promotes fabulously successful anthologies.

But it takes some sort of genius to extract from authors the stories that Ellen Datlow receives for her anthologies. I can't even guess what kind of proposal she put to the people who appear in *Little Deaths*. Given the slightest chance, most SF authors will plump for the fattest, most obvious cliché and hit it until they've beaten the pulp out of it. Not so in *Little Deaths*. It's almost as if the only note that Datlow gave these people was 'Be original, you bastards, be original!'

The connection between the horror story and the erotic story is so obvious that there have been umpteen collections of sexy horror stories (or horrible sex stories). But in most of the other collections sex = violence = horror = death. Datlow has persuaded her authors to delete the violence. In most of the *Little Deaths* stories, the connections are tenuous and bent, and so are the stories.

In her Introduction, Datlow claims Stephen Dedman's 'The Lady of Situations', the first story in the book 'is erotic and deeply disturbing yet has no onstage violence'. But Dedman's story, which is memorable, is also the least accessible metaphor in the book. I still don't know what he's on about, except that this is a brilliant extrapolation of an old SF idea: what would it be like to have total eidetic memory? (Oliver Sacks speculates about problems like this, but he doesn't come up with Dedman's solution.)

Lucy Taylor's 'Hungry Skin' is a great story because its central metaphor (a frigid woman's fascination for a sexy statue) works in an intricate way, and because the main character can in no way be described as the innocent sufferer of unwarranted torture. (Which is, after all, what most pot-boiler horror is about: torturing innocent people.) The main character welcomes her fate; we accede in this welcoming process, even while guessing her fate. Lucy Taylor is Someone To Watch.

Nicola Griffith's 'Yaguara' is a homo-erotic tale about two women trying to survive in the Central American jungle, but that doesn't make any the less jungly or erotic. On the other hand, M. John Harrison's hetero tale 'Isabel Avens Returns to Stepney in the Spring' is so twisted and offbeat that you wonder what it's doing here at all. Great story; but what *did* Ellen Datlow say to her authors to garner pieces as diverse as 'Yaguara' and 'Isabel Avens'?

Lucius Shepard's 'The Last Time' seems to include everything that's luscious about the best of the rest of the stories, yet has a mad magic of its own. There have been plenty of stories and novels about sexual obsession, but Shepard finds an image that distills the experience of *sexual* obsession. (Most Western fiction assumes that a person could not worked up about sex itself, and therefore sexual obsession must be about something else.)

Don't buy the American edition in preference to the UK edition. *Locus* reports that several of the best stories, including the Shepard, have been dropped, and only one (a new Simmons) added.

Other books read since August 1995

** = Books highly recommended.

* = Books recommended.

👉 = Not recommended.

* ***Shadow Alley: Nine Crime Stories***

edited by Lucy Sussex (1995; Omnibus; 214 pp.)

Some satisfying stories, especially David McRobbie's 'Squat', but on the whole I was too aware of reading a book meant for Young Adults. The punches are ever so slightly pulled. Even the Garry Disher story 'Where the Bodies Are Buried' seems a bit flat.

👉 ***The Little Lady of the Big House***

Jack London (1933; Cassell; 315 pp.)

During his career Jack London had his moments. This is one of his bad moments. I gave up after 20 pages.

* ***Burning Daylight***

by Jack London (1910; Arco; 304 pp.)

Odd mixture of brilliant writing (descriptions of surviving in London's beloved Alaska), adequate writing (brave adventurer's attempts to adapt to tepid ordinary life after moving from Alaska to California) and Jack-London ghodawful (Heinleinian puffery of his schoolboyish hero).

** ***The Panic Hand***

by Jonathan Carroll (1995; HarperCollins; 240 pp.)

Some brilliant, unsettling Carroll stories ('Uh-Oh City', 'The Sadness of Detail', 'Mr Fiddlehead' and 'A Wheel in the Desert, the Moon on Some Swings') and some limp stories that show that Carroll's forte is the novel. Many of the smaller stories were incorporated into novels.

** ***Orson Welles: The Road to Xanadu***

by Simon Callow (1995; Jonathan Cape; 640 pp.)

When he's not dying spectacularly on screen (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*) Simon Callow is a fine writer of biographies of well-built actors (I've also read his book on Charles Laughton). The strength of Callow's biography of Welles (compared with at least three others) is that he concentrates on Welles before he made *Citizen Kane*. He pieces together a picture of what Welles's stage and radio productions were actually like, and concludes that in gaining a film-maker America lost perhaps its greatest stage producer. Except, of course, that it was Welles who wanted to go to Hollywood, deserting the stage. Warts-and-all biography, but Welles's warts prove more interesting than anybody else's.

** ***She's Fantastical***

edited by Lucy Sussex and Judith Raphael Buckrich (1995; Sybylla; 260 pp.)

Reviewed later under the heading of 'Favourite Short Stories of 1995'. Four-star stories are 'Widow Wilberforce and the Lyrebird' (Nadia Wheatley), 'Angel Thing' (Petrina Smith), 'Possum Lover' (Yvonne Rousseau), 'A Sky Full of Ravens' (Sue Isle), and 'Not With Love' (Philippa C. Maddern). Thanks to the editors for pointing me towards M. Barnard Eldershaw's classic Australian novel *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* by including a short extract from it.

** ***From Potter's Field***

by Patricia Cornwell (1995; Little Brown; 340 pp.)

I've seen quite persnickety reviews of this book, but I didn't notice any of the faults noted by the reviewers. However, this novel doesn't stick in the memory the way the other Cornwell books do. She's substituted a tale of a corny super-criminal for her usual careful accounts of forensic detection. Running out of ideas? Waiting for a movie offer?

** ***Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow***

by M. Barnard Eldershaw (1947; Virago Modern Classics; 456 pp.)

She's Fantastical pointed me towards this novel, which I've had on the shelf ever since Virago published the first complete edition in 1983. Not that it's easy to work out exactly what the original edition was. (Thanks to Yvonne Rousseau for sending me the full story of the variant editions.) The 1942 edition was badly cut by Australian censors; the final, 1947 version by Mary Barnard and Kate Eldershaw had some benefit of hindsight. The book tells the story of a working-class family during the Depression and through the early War, then extrapolates an Australian revolution during the last days of the War. A framing story tells of an attempted revolution in a far-future 'utopia' that eerily prefigures the mindless Menzies years of the late fifties and early sixties. Sombre, careful writing, but with a story of enormous, accumulating power. One of the great Australian novels, it is still pretty much unknown here or elsewhere.

** ***A Confederacy of Dunces***

by John Kennedy Toole (1980; King Penguin; 338 pp.)

I can't believe all the rhubarb that proclaimed this as the first novel by an unknown writer who killed himself because no publisher would accept it. It reads like the work of a highly professional comedy writer, someone who had (at least) worked for movies. Walker Percy introduces the book; surely Walker Percy wrote it. The problem with *A Confederacy of Dunces* is its professionalism; it just doesn't have the quality of naivety that might have endeared me to it. But it's very entertaining.

** ***Artificial Things***

by Karen Joy Fowler (1986; Bantam Spectra; 218 pp.)

I cover this when talking about my favourite short stories for 1995. If (like me) you didn't quite come to terms with *Sarah Canary*, read this collection to find a very good writer discovering her wings, then spreading them and flying. Four-star stories are 'The War of the Roses', 'Recalling Cinderella' and 'The Gate of Ghosts'.

👉 ***Sarah Canary***

by Karen Joy Fowler (1991; Zebra; 381 pp.)

'Well written.' Sorry; that's a putdown. Like me, you might not find any point to the proceedings. If so, give up at the halfway mark, or even before. (There might be some illuminating reviews of this book, but if so, I haven't seen them/it.)

** ***The Time Ships***

by Stephen Baxter (1995; HarperCollins Voyager; 630 pp.)

In deference to H. G Wells, to whose *The Time Machine* this is a sequel, Stephen Baxter might well have made

The Time Ships slightly shorter. But given that this does go on and on, I found myself romping through it with a peculiar leaping speed. The quality of Baxter's prose does not emulate that of Wells, but Baxter has an extraordinary ability to visualise the alternate futures and pasts that he borrows from Wells and others. Reading this book is like leafing through a book of ultra-realist paintings: everything is clear, yet everything feels distorted because of the clarity.

* ***Books, Deaths and Taxes***

edited by **Dinny O'Hearn (1995; Penguin; 170 pp.)**

I've already written about this book in *TMR* 22/23. Not much of an anthology, and a totally inadequate memorial to Dinny O'Hearn's work, it includes an obituary by Andrea Stretton that is worth the price of the book. She captures on paper the essence of the man. Now all we need is a collection of Dinny's best writing.

** ***A Slipping-down Life***

by **Anne Tyler (1969; Hamlyn; 157 pp.)**

Somebody (Terry Morris?) wrote somewhere in the mailings that this is a novel meant for teenagers rather being about them. This was a new idea to me. It certainly seemed the most pessimistic novel I've read, because it's one of the truest. Not spectacularly true; just modestly observed, perfectly observed. A girl wants to Be Someone; she attaches herself to a boy who keeps thinking he's going to be a successful rock performer, but of course he won't be. A slight story, but if I live to a hundred I couldn't write anything as well as any one of Tyler's paragraphs. (If I read only one Tyler novel a year, it's because I'm spinning them out.)

* ***Dark House***

by **Gary Crew (1995; Mammoth/Reed; 264 pp.)**

A very similar collection, in intention and achievement, to Lucy Sussex's *Shadow Alley*. The weak stories stick too closely to the conventions of the horror or young adult genres. Only Arnold Zable's 'Beyond Night' escapes the limitations altogether; it's a major Australian short story. Other four-star stories are David McRobbie's 'Album', Jenny Pausacker's 'The Princess in the Tower', Carmel Bird's 'The Conservatory' and Isobelle Carmody's 'A Splinter of Darkness'.

** ***The Education of Young Donald***

by **Donald Horne (1967; Angus & Robertson; 331 pp.)**

I'd put off reading this book for many years because it is hallowed as a Work of Fine Australian Writing (usually a longhand way of saying 'dull'). It turns out to be a surprising book in every way, quickly moving from conventional autobiography into a fractured, impressionistic prose that makes it different from other Australian books of the 1960s. During the last third of the book Horne forsakes the attempt to tell us what he *did* at university; instead he tries to show what he was *thinking*, and why. He shows a post-War era of Australian intellectual life that very few people have recorded; a world in which the pre-War certainties of Left and Right had disintegrated, and harbingers of the 1960s could be sighted on the horizon. Nothing is more difficult than to recall what one thought at a particular time, or why those thoughts were different from one's current thoughts. Horne succeeds in this task.

** ***Things Happen***

by **Philip Hodgins (1995; Angus & Robertson; 65 pp.)**

This book appeared after the little piece I wrote about Philip Hodgins in *TMR* 22/23. This is Hodgins's last

book of new verse, and it contains some of his finest work (my favourite is 'Midday Horizon'). Look out for a 'Collected Poems', promised for 1997.

* ***Simisola***

by **Ruth Rendell (1994; Hutchinson; 323 pp.)**

This Wexford mystery made me think that Ruth Rendell is running out of steam (until I read *The Brimstone Wedding*; see below). Kingsmarkham is not the sort of place where one expects to find a murdered black girl; in the end it boils down to finding which member of which rich local family might have done it. Apart from a brilliant account of a garden party held at the house of one of the rich families, this is a plod.

** ***Court Room***

by **Quentin Reynolds (1951; Gollancz; 396 pp.)**

If you've visited Café Bohemio in Collingwood, you will remember that it has a library along one wall. Read a book while eating cake and drinking coffee; if you take a book, replace it with another. That's where I found this book, in the original edition. (Of course, if I avoided the cakes and coffee altogether, my waist line would have benefited.) I don't know whether *Court Room* has ever been reprinted, but pick it up if you see it. It's the only account I've seen of what a working criminal lawyer actually does, and why. Samuel Leibowitz lost only one case during his career of the late 1920s through to the 1940s, but his methods were not based on the flashy gimmickry exhibited by defence lawyers on television. In this low-key documentary, Reynolds shows how a defence lawyer builds and presents a case, and why it is essential to American, British and Australian law that the accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty. As a by-product of his main argument, Reynolds also shows the extent to which the poor are discriminated against in our system.

* ***Port Vila Blues***

by **Garry Disher (1995; Allen & Unwin; 228 pp.)**

Garry Disher is Australia's most skilful crime writer, but you get the feeling in parts of this, the fifth of the Wyatt books, that he's going through the motions of maintaining a series. A pity, since I'd like to get know Wyatt when he isn't in dire danger. As the title suggests, Disher sends Wyatt off to Vanuatu, offering some elegant writing about places I've never seen. Unputdownable, but disappointing.

** ***Sandstone***

by **Andrew Taylor (1995; University of Queensland Press; 85 pp.)**

Andrew Taylor is an Australian poet whose work I like nearly as much as I like that of Philip Hodgins. Taylor does not have quite Hodgins' quality of sudden gallows humour, but like Hodgins he uses words with simplicity and ease to give haiku-like compression to unlikely subject matter. The main poem 'Sandstone' gives a series of perceptions based on scenes from Western Australia's dry sandstone coast; sand is crushed rock and shells but it is also porous, continually changing; sandstone is ancient rock but lifelike in the way it changes constantly.

** ***Emerald Blue***

by **Gerald Murnane (1995; McPhee Gribble; 216 pp.)**

Still essential reading, like all of Murnane's books, but I'm worried by the little peculiarities that have crept into Murnane's work during the last few years. The practice, for instance, of substituting four- and five-word descriptions of characters for people's names

makes many of the stories seem bulky and fussy. Compression is at the heart of the good short story; surely the need to reduce a story to the smallest number of words is why most writers use people's names or 'I' and 'you'? One of these stories appears in my Favourite Short Stories list.

☞ ***Moonlight Becomes You: A Crimes for Summer Anthology* edited by Jean Bedford (1995; Allen & Unwin; 153 pp.)** These collections, which began as Stephen Knight's 'Crimes for a Summer Christmas' series, have held up well until now. The quality of the series dips alarmingly with this one. Except for a Garry Disher story called 'Stalking Moon', most of the stories are so slight as to slip out of the memory as soon as they've entered it. I'm sure Knight, now living in England, could edit a better collection of Australian stories than the ones that appear here.

** ***The Brimstone Wedding* by Barbara Vine (1996; Vintage; 312 pp.)** I'd given up hope that 'Barbara Vine' (Ruth Rendell's more interesting self) would produce another novel as compelling as the first three or four, but *The Brimstone*

Wedding is a spectacular return to form. A naïve younger woman attends a sprightly older woman who is dying of cancer in a nursing home. The younger woman's problems seem somehow echoed in the memories of the older woman, but only the events of the novel can persuade the older woman to reveal the strange story of why she has kept a house locked and unlive-in for more than thirty years. A wonderful interweaving of dark stories, with some fine examples of Vine's vivid descriptions of the English countryside during summer and autumn.

* ***The Dark Room* by Minette Walters (1995; Allen & Unwin; 398 pp.)** *The Scold's Bridle* might have been very enjoyable, and so, up to a point, is *The Dark Room*. Beyond that, it's a mess. It has a great beginning idea; a woman wakes up in hospital without memories of the last few weeks; events seem to show that she attempted suicide, but she knows that she is not the sort of person who ever would; two other people are dead. Complicated stuff is worked thoroughly up to a point, then thrown away at the end. This could have been such a good book.

A little shot at redemption: Some mailing comments

Since we're just about to lose Alan Stewart as OBE, I will mention that no other person (except Leigh Edmonds, who started it all) has had as beneficial an influence on this apa as this man. Since Alan has been OBE, not only has the steady decline in memberships halted, but we have even returned to an occasional Waiting List. Many former members returned to the apa, and many others stayed who might have dropped out. Thanks, Alan.

MAILING No. 165, AUGUST 1995

Perry Middlemiss: BLUE No. 3

One of the few recent deaths that I did *not* record in *TMR* No. 22/23 was that of my Uncle Ian. In some ways he was as much of an influence on me as my father was, but I couldn't feel much grief when he died, because his death had seemed inevitable for more than two years. Bit of a miracle that he lasted as long as he did. I have tried to make a worthwhile record of his life's achievements, which were many. I sent it to my Auntie Betty, who said that I had got a lot of details wrong. Which is why the account hasn't yet appeared in one of my fanzines.

So I can appreciate the mixed feelings you and Robyn must have felt when your father-in-law died. How we would all wish that our parents (and we!) could die in the same way as Jennifer Bryce's father did: after a healthy life in which he showed no signs of advancing ill health, he dropped dead on the court during the Sunday morning tennis game!

Leanne Frahm: SUNBIRD No. 1

The trouble with computer terms is that there's no reason at all why they shouldn't be clear. Computer programs are written by computer programmers, not by users of the

program. When I was learning Ventura, the main problem was that the programmers did not think to use on a desktop publisher the terms that would make sense to the users i.e. people who came out of typesetting or the publishing industry. A perfectly comprehensible term such as 'leading' (space between lines) does not appear in Ventura. Neither does 'escape' (space between letters) or 'gutter' (space between columns), and Ventura's use of the term 'margin' proved very confusing until I worked out what it really meant.

'Political correctness' proves a running sore through several mailings, and I doubt if I could sort out the matter. The distorting factor in the debate is the Australian habit of using the rudest possible comment to show the greatest level of affection. There's no greater compliment than to call out 'you bastard!' around the bar among friends who know each other well. Australians have always been politically incorrect whenever they find an opportunity, but only among friends. Few people seem to feel the need to be offensive, and would be surprised to find that anyone had taken offence. On the other hand, the reaction of voters in some northern Australian electorates during the federal election shows a hair-raising level of racism that has been merely hidden by anti-vilification laws.

John Newman: COLLOQUY No. 6

Elaine quit work and decided to freelance, so suddenly we were both working in the same house. Keeps my nose to the grindstone, although I would like more time to myself (mainly to play the occasional CD at what I consider a worthwhile volume). It would be easier if we had a bigger house, or upstairs-and-downstairs.

Lyn McConchie: FAN'ATIC No. 47

I've probably said it before, Lyn, but . . . even if a publisher

does like your book (and therefore the rejection note is sincere) there's no point in buying it unless the same publisher can see a way of selling it. One of the most enlightening nights I've attended during recent years was a meeting of the Victorian Society of Editors during which Nick Hudson talked about running a small publishing house. He pointed out that a best-seller is not, as most people believe, the icing on the cake, but it *is* the cake. It is not the regular seller which pays staff and the electricity bills, but the one book that hurtles out of the warehouse. A publisher cannot keep going without scoring the occasional bestseller (which explains why most small operations, including Norstrilia Press, cease publishing), so even the most literate publisher must constantly look at the sales potential of any book. On the other hand, as Nick Hudson also pointed out, it's very difficult to guess which book will be the bestseller (which, again, is why publishers often accept dud manuscripts).

Jean Weber: JEANZINE No. 106

Surely there's not much software that runs under OS/2? People keep saying darkly that OS/2 is everything that Windows 95 should be, but apart from Mac software, there's only Windows 3.1 software and, annoyingly, now a lot of software that will only run under Windows 95.

I put on Windows 95 in August. Within a month, it had crashed completely. Fortunately Dick Jenssen found a way to resurrect my complete 3.1 system, since I had saved it correctly when I put on W95. But now there is a lot of nifty software that I cannot run until I put on W95. Dick thinks he's found a way to put both W3.1 and W95 on the same machine. We'll see.

You mention Linda Bushyager. I don't have an address for her. She began publishing fanzines again a few years ago, then stopped again. Give her my regards if you're writing to her.

A very small number of people/companies own more than 80 per cent of Australia's resources. I don't give them that right. We should all own all major resources equally, i.e. take all of them out of private hands. At the moment much of Australia's wealth is being siphoned off overseas to foreign companies. Cut the siphon. At the very least I would make it illegal for any Australian company to be owned by any non-resident person or company.

Yes, I don't think anybody who started the Ditmars expected them to be taken too seriously. Dick Jenssen (i.e. Ditmar Jenssen, after whom they are named) is both bemused and amused by all the trouble they've caused; when he called recently he was also bemused by the many shapes they've taken over the years.

David Grigg: FANFARONADE No. 6

You do the old heart good, David, remembering an article I (re)published in 1970. Harry Warner doesn't write to me anymore, although I always send him my magazines; but I might try writing to see if he'll let me reprint 'The Kingdom of the Keys' again. I have quite a few of his FAPA articles somewhere in the house; one of them is the finest fanzine piece I've read, and I meant to publish it when *TMR* began, but I still haven't. (That's probably why Harry Warner doesn't write to me these days.)

I've talked to you recently about foot problems. 1995 was my 'Year of the Foot'. This time last year I was in pain most of the time. Through the winter I wore orthotics in my shoes and underwent the masseur's process of twisting and turning my foot. My foot has gradually improved, although

occasionally it still goes lame. Early this year I began walking for leisure again; a wonderful feeling. A long and expensive (about \$2000) process, but it seems to have paid off.

Thank you very much for your tip for creating macros in Word. I've just tried it; it seems to work. Now I'll have to learn Word Basic. (Is there no end to stuff that I never get around to learning?) Any more wonderful tips you can include in ANZAPA?

Win95: When you install it, create all the backups suggested by the Win95 setup program. (This includes a 20 MB zipped version of Win 3.1 stored somewhere on your hard disc, and a backup diskette containing the fundamental DOS files.) If it crashes, as it did for me, put in the backup diskette, type UNINSTALL, and it should put back your Win 3.1 exactly as you had it before. No, I didn't discover this. Dick Jenssen did. I just went into a purple-faced panic, as I usually do when things go wrong with the computer.

Merv insists on importing books without checking that anybody wants to buy them! He keeps sending me his catalogues, and they contain nothing that would interest me. Surely he learned something from the last days of Space Age. The only way to run a mail order business is the way in which Justin began: by importing only the books that people order.

By the time we bought a Pentium, the manufacturer had corrected its problems. The real problem with early Pentium chips was that they ran far too hot, then melted. This happened to at least one friend of ours. Now each Pentium chip sports a little fan that it wears like a hat.

Janice Murray: THE SEATTLEITE

If your husband works for Microsoft, perhaps *he* can tell me a simple way of installing both Windows 95 and Windows 3.1 on the same machine — or describe a way in which I can make sure that Ventura 4.1 works properly under Windows 95.

You wrote a letter to me about the imminent visit of Lionel Fanthorpe. I meant to write back, but didn't. As far as I know he didn't visit Australia last year; if so, he didn't visit Melbourne.

Sorry to hear about the loss of your mother. I can only repeat the comment I made to Perry; wouldn't it be great if our last years could be free of afflictions such as strokes!

**Eric Lindsay: GEGENSCHIN No. 72
KINGDOM OF THE BLAND No. 95.4**

Thanks for the Thylacon report, and all those pictures making people seem unimaginably old. I won't let your camera near me, since I already look unimaginably old.

You won't be surprised to hear that I haven't read any of the books reviewed in this issue.

Any more copies of that *Secret Guide to Computers* available? I'll send money.

WordPerfect 5.1 offers a shadow outline alternative for any PostScript fonts, and Quark XPress can create shadow outlines from any font. PageMaker can create an italic from any font, even if the italic is not installed on your machine.

Sally Yeoland: LE CHAT PARTI No. 18

I've just read four ANZAPA mailings in a row. The name of the apa should be changed to CATAPA. Unfortunately, cat catastrophes occur more often than cat success stories. But the death of Dylan is both. I've never met any other 21-year-old cat. Yes, he was fragile in his last few years, but he was still sprightly when he was eighteen! A great fannish cat, who led nine well-filled lives. A pleasure to have known him.

The new cats are pretty good, too, but they don't yet have that *savoir-faire*, that indefinable swagger you find in a trufannish cat like Dylan.

Gerald Smith & Womble: THE TIME HAS COME . . .

Apart from the odd fourth-division and fifth-division prizes in lotto, the only things I've ever won in raffles are (a) a football when I was about ten (those who know me will realise what an irony that was; I didn't even know that my mother had entered my name in the raffle), and (b) \$500 worth of CDs from Gaslight Records, courtesy of 3RRR. During the most recent subscriber drive I subscribed to 3RRR for the first time ever. My name, it seems, was put in a barrel. It was drawn out, and I was informed that I could select \$500 worth of CDs. When I arrived at 3RRR, I was handed a box. It contained \$500 worth of CDs, picked by Gaslight Records from their bountiful collection of freebies, review copies, and throwouts. About three of them were worth having. I was able to sell some to Paul Collins's Tragically Hip secondhand shop. I gave away a few.

Worst of all, 'Film Buffs' Forecast', the program that drew me to 3RRR on Saturday morning, closed down a few weeks ago. I still listen to Brian Wise's 'Off the Record'. It's the only program on radio that plays the sort of popular music I like. But 'Big Saturday' (formerly 2-4 p.m.) has also finished, so a band of brilliant radio programs on Saturday has just disappeared. Maybe I will now do some work on Saturday afternoons.

I like what Wagner's trying to do; I just don't like the tunes he gives to his singers. I even like most of the composers, such as Richard Strauss, Bruckner and Mahler, who were strongly influenced by Wagner. But I can't take Wagner.

Yes, I have umpteen floppy disks filled with software that I don't look at. So? I'm waiting for writable CD-ROM so I can put them all on one diskette (as Aly Kayn has done with all her graphics).

Jeanne Mealy: LAND OF 10,000 LOONS

I have a note after your WisCon report: 'But what actually happened at the convention?' I thought you might say more about fans I've met. (I once met Cy Chauvin in an elevator at Torcon in 1973. He was leaving and I was entering. We didn't see each other for the rest of the convention. But we do write to each other every few years.)

I have these wonderful dreams in which I am using the DELETE and UNDELETE buttons on bits of real life. It's wonderful.

Put a picture of Jeff Kennett on the screen. DELETE! No more Scumface.

Put a picture of our ex-cat Monty on the screen. UNDELETE! And there's Monty.

Polly is absolutely gorgeous; you ask her and she'll tell you how gorgeous she is. Brilliant, too. We met her brother and sister the other week (now the owners of Alan and Judy Wilson and their four-year-old son Timothy) and they're gorgeous too. Polly's sister Smaug is black and slender, and brother Myst is round and fluffy and grey-and-white. As for Polly's other sister: Eartha shows up in emergency bulletins every other mailing from LynC and Clive.

Eccentrics has had a lot of publicity in Australia, but I've never seen a copy of the hardback. Fortunately a review copy of the paperback arrived the other day. As Karen Pender-Gunn once said, 'The great thing about fandom is that you can be an eccentric and nobody minds a bit.' How could anybody mind?

Richard Hryckiewicz: ANYTHING BUT AVERAGE No. 10

You say: 'One of these decades, I may finally be able to fully unpack.' We've been here for seventeen years. Everything was unpacked, but many things were packed away in shelves, never to be looked at again. And now I have a vast number of boxes newly filled with books that might never see the light of a shelf. I need an infinite library.

Another listomaniac! Madness spreads throughout the world.

The real challenge after collecting fonts is to work out their correct names. This often takes research. The proper name for my heading font is Kabel (or Cable), but its Truetype name (on the Corel CD-ROM) is Geometric 231. And, of course, 'Arial' is 'Helvetica' is 'Swiss' is 'Switzerland'. I can't knock all the alternatives off the system because, for instance, Arial is a system font for Pagemaker, while Switzerland is a system font for the CorelDraw used by one of the Macmillan artists.

Terry Frost: PLENTIFUL WASTE OF TIME No. 1

I don't know what advice to offer about the continuing saga of your breakup with Susan. It wasn't a good idea to stay in the same house, but I presume it was unavoidable. The only time I've broken up with anyone, I did the breaking up. She talked to me for a few months, but I've only seen her once since then. Now she works in the same office as Julian Warner! Because of that, now I know what happened to her. (Went to Peru and came back with a husband; had twins in her mid forties. Amazing!) I suppose if someone drops you, you're much less willing to drop somebody in the future. Or maybe the dance of love just goes on and on.

But Terry, how do you get *me* back on the Ditmar ballot? As nominations are controlled by the Perth Mafia this year, probably both of us will be dropped. It's all luck and politics.

Weller: BURY MY SOUL AT EXIT 63 No. 27

The orthotics were a great help, but as I said earlier, they probably would not have fixed the problem permanently without a lot of manipulative help from my masseur.

The GP's response to the problem? 'Take Voltarin!' (Which would have solved nothing, and would have ruined my gut in a year or so.) No wonder millions of people are very sceptical about regular doctors.

Noel Kerr: THE EYES AND EARS OF THE WORLD

'Lost on the Bay' was a great story, Noel: about the best ANZAPA piece for 1995. A pity you can't get back into *gengine* publishing; you'd whisk the Ditmar away from Terry, me, or anybody else around.

Nothing much to say about the piece, except that it reminds me of things I did on my bike when I was a teenager: riding down steep hills without decent brakes; swerving across intersections and nearly getting hit; riding miles along the broken sides of main roads; etc. etc.

Jan Wilson: (REALLY) LOVE YOUR PEACHES WANT TO SHAKE YOUR TREE

One of the most frightening things I've seen was the tiger pacing at Melbourne Zoo when last I visited there. Just the look in those eyes. Just a few strands of wire between it and me.

There was a mouse plague in the wheat country during one of the years I was posted to Ararat, but somehow the worst of it never reached the town. I kept expecting to see

mice in the flat, but it didn't happen.

Cath Ortlieb: YOU REALLY KNOW YOU'RE HOME WHEN YOU FIND A WOMBAT IN YOUR BED No. 40

When I read a Cath Ortlieb fanzine these days I duck. What will the next catastrophe be? But not this time. Even worse; here's a tale of religion rampant.

I have a hard time dealing with the sudden outbreak of religion in this apa. Children's communion, yet! All very alien to an old dunker like me. Like John Bangsund, I may be an atheist, but I'm a Church of Christ atheist. If you're from the Churches of Christ, you only get baptised if you do it willingly and when you're 'of a suitable age'.

Most of my memories of religion Church of Christ style are negative, so I don't care what you lot do, if it makes you and your kids happy. (Without meaning to, you touched a nerve there, Cath; I've never had the courage to write a memory piece about Me and Religion.)

Thanks for the story of Bev. Somehow one can get used to the idea of the deaths of one's parents (provided they don't die indecently young), but one can never become reconciled to the deaths of friends of one's own generation. (Okay, this lady was 60, but she sounds like someone who was treated as one of your generation.) You just grit your teeth and wish you could press the UNDELETE button of life.

For Better or Worse. I had visions of the entire population of Melbourne darting around that week desperately trying not to look at each other or burst into sobs each time it hit them that 'Farley's dead!' Great dog, Farley. Lyn Johnston is a miraculous cartoonist. I read somewhere that her own life is much less happy and more interesting than that of her characters. I wonder if she's written an autobiography.

As a I wrote above, my sympathy for Merv ran out some time ago. Yes, it would have been much better if he could have got a full-time job in book-selling after the failure of Space Age Books; but when he couldn't gain such a job, I cannot see why he repeated some of the worst mistakes of his Space Age days. Quite a few people are still buying their books from Merv; but this just seems to encourage him to import further copies of unsellable books!

(What am I babbling about? I have a regular income, and I'm still broke all the time! It's a talent we SF fans have.)

Julian Warner: ¡sPLa! No. 8

At the moment, buying a scanner is as distant a prospect as most other desirable purchases. I owe thousands to Elaine, more thousands to the Tax Department. But one day I too may be able to create 90-megabyte files in 'True Colours'. Wheee! (That's the day I install a 1 terabyte hard disk. I bet they're already on the market somewhere.)

I would like to buy the five-CD *Complete Seekers* set, but negative finances prevent me at the moment. The Seekers were good folk singers before they set off for Blighty, and they emitted the occasional interesting song afterwards. It's just that most of their singles were awful.

Roman Orszanski has set up my Word 6 so that I can receive and send HTML files. There's a slight difficulty; I don't own a modem yet.

LynC: LYNX No. 24

If some doctor told me that I could never drink wine again, I would look pained, but have no trouble following orders. If the same doctor thought of some weird reason why I should stop drinking coffee, I would have to respectfully tell him to pull his head in. I am a caffeine *addict*, whereas in all

other things I am merely an over-(ab)user.

We could solve all our overcrowding problems by building another floor on this house. We don't have the money to do it, so we won't.

What does RAEBOWS mean?

MAILING No. 166: OCTOBER 1995

Leanne Frahm: SUNBIRD 2

I feel thoroughly ashamed at doing so well in the poll after (weep! gnash!) failing to vote. I promise to be a better little ANZAPAn next year.

Congratulations, Jeanne; enjoy the burdens and privileges of high office.

Jean Weber: JEANZINE No. 107

Surely the Web cannot threaten print publishing because, strictly speaking, nothing on the Web exists until it is committed to paper. One flick of the wrist and a whole Web-cyclopedia disappears. Besides, I don't read documents from the screen; I have to print them first.

Michael O'Brien: MODULE No. 114

Thyлаcon lost Elaine and me because it was 'fandom's best-kept secret'. If *PR1* had come out in October 1994 we might have made plans to attend Thyлаcon and fit in a week's holiday in Tasmania. By the time it was clear that Thyлаcon really would come into existence, it was too late to make holiday arrangements. (But you did score the doubtful distinction of being the first convention since 1981 to tempt me to travel interstate.)

Thanks for all the material about Thyлаcon. All the reports on it have been favourable. You gained much more and better press than we ever gain for a Melbourne convention.

Cath Ortlieb: YOU REALLY KNOW YOU'RE HOME WHEN YOU FIND A WOMBAT IN YOUR BED No. 41

I couldn't duck this time. Another Ortlieb catastrophe! I had to skip over the gory details. How do you stand it?

Jeanne Mealy: LAND OF 10,000 LOONS

In a good year, we have an autumn. Summer sinks like a soufflé from March to May; hot hot spells separated by cool spells, with each hot spell slightly cooler than the one before. In such a year, the beginning of May is magical.

Last year, summer changed abruptly in late March into winter. No autumn. This year is certainly shaping up for a good autumn. Summer was cool, which pleases me; all the calm hot weather is happening now.

The closest equivalent to your State Fair is Melbourne's annual Royal Show: lots of agricultural produce as well as lots of show bags, rides, slides, food and drink, etc. I haven't been to it since 1978, because it's too noisy and too hard on the feet. There are rumours of great changes for future Shows, mainly because the Showgrounds are little used for much of the rest of the year.

When American exchange students first visited Australia during the 1950s, they seemed far more articulate than we were. It seemed as if they had been debating in class since the age of four. More importantly, they *valued* the power to talk on one's feet. The traditional Australian attitude is: if you need to talk about it, it's because you haven't done it yet. ('Don't stand there talking! Do it!') This attitude is breaking down, probably because of television, where everyone is required to be bright, breezy, and above all,

articulate. Seems to me that many Australians have substituted a brighter, breezier brand of clichés for the mumbling old Aussie clichés.

Noel Kerr: THE EYES & EARS OF THE WORLD

Sorry to have missed you at Arcon, Noel, but it didn't occur to me that some people would come only for the party — especially as the afternoon nostalgic items were the attractive parts of the program. I don't like parties much, and a group of us had already gone out to dinner, so Elaine and I headed home. Front up to Nova Mob occasionally, Noel. The talks are usually not too painful, and you would catch up with a few people you've known for a long time.

Thanks for the piece on the United Moggs Organisation. Another nice piece of fan writing. I've never been a part of any other fandom, but the Moggs sound similar. My sister Jeanette is the equivalent of a Big Name Fan in the folk music world, which operates very much like fandom. (Same problems, too; a growing percentage of ageing enthusiasts, now surrounded by tribes of kids, with not enough young enthusiasts coming in to take their place.)

I'm not sure why I've never taken up photography. An innate fear of machinery has not stopped me becoming a computer nerd, but I've never picked up a camera. A pity, since I could have illustrated many professional pieces if I had the wherewithal, and I could have kept a continual record of my life in fandom, instead of relying on other people to send me copies of photos.

You say 'Merv still enjoys duping'. So would I, if I could get the supplies. Much cheaper than offset. I think I've already told you that when I wanted to get rid of the duplicator, I had to make a chain of eight phone calls to find anybody in the country who could supply stencils, ink and paper. All duplicating paper is imported now, so is probably as expensive as photocopying paper.

Jane Tisell: TISELLATION

RIP Yep. Yet another fine cat gone. It doesn't matter how often it happens, losing a cat never gets easier. Why can't they outlive us, like parrots?

We were luckier when Solomon contracted diabetes. He allowed Elaine to inject him with insulin every day, and didn't mind when she held the little container under him every morning to catch his pee so she could measure his sugar level. He was getting along okay until the day he was diagnosed with a stomach growth, and died that night. Solomon, who died in 1987, was one of those great, great cats; we still miss him a lot.

Eric Lindsay: KINGDOM OF THE BLAND No. 95.5

Richard H. was telling us about Hot Dog. The inventor was clever, all right: he's created such a demand for the product that he's months behind in meeting orders, processing cheques, etc. As Richard tells it, Hot Dog has given the whole Australian software industry a bad name overseas for unreliability.

'Getting Minou an electrically heated cat mat'? Don't tell our lot. They'll all want one. (Imagine the power bill.)

Margaret Arnott: FAREWELL

You certainly live in the fast lane, Margaret. What a breathtaking change of lifestyle! Best wishes for the future, even if I cannot understand why anybody would willingly get involved in religion.

Michael O'Brien: MODULE No. 115

Pay television seems to have been Keating's one big stuff-up: workers busily pulling up pavements, stringing black cables along streets and putting satellite dishes on roofs, all for the sake of a TV service nobody wanted much in the first place. Bizarre. What we were not allowed to have was a vastly extended free-to-air service. Instead, all the good movies have now moved to pay TV, for which I refuse to pay. Almost nothing interesting is left on free-to-air TV. If the TV set went phut!, the only reason for fixing it would be to watch the occasional video.

I'm jealous. Is Weller offering to do dupes of early *Avengers* episodes? Can she get access to the *first* series of Emma Peel *Avengers*, the black-and-white episodes that have only been shown once in Australia? If so, how much does she want for her trouble?

It's only an accident that I saw the first Emma Peel series of *Avengers*. I didn't live in a house with television until 1980, but during 1966 I was staying with my aunt and uncle every Tuesday and Thursday night. (Late lectures prevented me getting back to Bacchus Marsh on those nights). And on one of those nights these episodes were shown. Absolutely brilliant. But each time *The Avengers* began, my aunt or uncle would say: 'This lady [Diana Rigg] is good, but we *really* enjoyed the episodes with Honor Blackman in them.' I've still never seen any of the Honor Blackman episodes. (The colour Emma Peel series have been repeated several times in the last ten years.)

Alan Stewart: YTTERBIUM No. 36

And people wonder that I don't drive a car? Your episode on the freeway sounds several zillion times worse than my worst episodes stuck in a tram or train. Even when the train to Bacchus Marsh used to sit on a siding at Melton for two hours waiting for the Overland to come through on the other line, I always had a book to read and a comfortable seat.

I think I mentioned in my 'Books of Revelation' article that Sunday School prizes were a wonderful source of new books, especially hardcover Enid Blytons. Pure nepotism; as Sunday School treasurer, my father bought the annual prizes. He knew exactly what *we* wanted.

The only books on your list I've read are *Sarah Canary* (gave up halfway through), *Our Lady of Chernobyl* (title story is brilliant), *The Glamour* (still disturbs me, all these years since I read it; one of those good books that I didn't like much); *The Affirmation* (Chris's best since *Inverted World*; until *The Prestige*, of course); *Strange Fruit*; *Axiomatic*; and *Valis* (the one Phil Dick novel I've never taken to). I haven't seen any of the items on your TV and Video or Film lists.

LynC: LYNX No. 25

If my copy of Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* were not buried at the bottom of a large box, I would find it and quote what he says about *Portnoy's Complaint* (which seems to me pretty ordinary stuff; the sort of novel that puts people off American fiction until they read Anne Tyler or Louise Erdrich). Philip Adams's radio interview with Bloom was quite moving. Bloom sees the American literary academy at war with literature. If Bloom were trying for a job now, he wouldn't be able to teach in an English department, but would have to teach French or Biology or something, and write criticism on the side. Bloom told of seeing Indonesian students perform a Shakespearean play in Indonesian; it struck him all over again that Shakespeare, rather than being an irrelevant 'dead white male' author, remains the great universal author. To choose to read an author be-

cause he or she is a he or she, Caucasian or Asian, gay or straight, rich or poor, is to ignore the fact that a great author is a great author, and that's all that counts.

Okay, so Bloom must have his weaknesses. (But Philip Roth?) He likes making lists, which is the main reason why I bought *The Western Canon*.

On reading your nightly schedule, I was going to make some crack about being glad we didn't have kids. Then why do we never get around to leisure reading before 9.30 in the evening?

I can avoid most Nestlé products, but not Nescafé coffee. It's the only instant coffee I can drink in large quantities, and I do drink large quantities. On the other hand, I can't drink plunger coffee ('real coffee') in large quantities without getting strange reactions.

Elaine fervently wishes I were paranoid about money. My parents (necessarily) were, which might explain why I like nothing more than the sensation of spending money.

I never thought I would see Elaine reading an ANZAPazine — until I told her that the gripping serial story of Eartha is unrolling in your contributions. Eartha's been very unlucky compared to her sisters and brother. What's the latest nail-biting episode? There was nothing in the February mailing.

Aren't cats good at spending money? Over the years TC must have cost \$1500 at least, and Theodore has scored well over \$1500. Let's hope Polly doesn't want to 'do as the big cats do' in this as in everything else.

Sally Yeoland: LE CHAT PARTI No. 19

Nobody else has said 'dementia . . . take[s] away a lot of fears and worries that might have affected them earlier on.' My father did not suffer from Alzheimer's, but the effect on his short-term memory was the same. He seems to have decided that, since he could no longer function in the the same old way, he could give up worrying. When I visited my parents at Rosebud, he would often sit in his chair, perfectly content, finally free of all his worries. This put quite a pressure on my mother, unfortunately, as she had to take on many of the money matters that my father had always taken care of.

When we moved from Johnston Street to here, the little blokes from the movers bounced up the stairs, picked up boxes and boxes full of books, and trotted straight down the stairs again. They didn't slow down, even when carrying boxes full of records. Some people must have a certain body type: 'furniture remover'.

Julian Warner: ¡sPLa! No. 9

'Old men in brown trousers', indeed! What could be more intoxicating than dragging out fanzines from 1972, flying high as a kite from sniffing that old duplicating ink?

ICE magazine reports that bootleg CDs have stopped entering America, except in very small quantities. If European governments change from the 20-year to 50-year copyright law, bootlegs will disappear altogether. Not that it was ever easy buying them; and there were no guarantees of quality. My book *Rolling Stones Complete Recording Sessions* lists vast numbers of Stones tracks as 'bootleg only'. If so, they haven't turned up on CD bootlegs.

I'd like to join a Fan History apa, but don't have the time. You'd be welcome in the Gardening apa. I've just been sent a copy of ALPS, the Music apa. Most of its members seem to be into rock music. I keep hoping I'll come across a Classical Music apa. Not that I'm in a hurry. I have great difficulty keeping up with the two apas I'm in.

I see more clearly why I could never summon up much interest in FAPA while I was there, although FAPA contained/contains many of the best fannish writers. I've never met most of the people in person, and the interests of members were simply too diffuse for me.

I don't know much about the Mormons. John Gardner wrote a novel *Michelsson's Ghosts* in which the Mormons are the villains; a year or so later he died in a motor cycle crash. Halldor Laxness wrote a gently satirical novel about the Mormons' attempts to convert the Icelanders during the nineteenth century; Laxness is still alive, well into his nineties. It's Orson Scott Card who gives Mormons a bad name among SF fans; Card is not a person I would want to be buttonholed by, and I don't read his fiction.

MAILING No. 167: DECEMBER 1995

Alan Stewart: YTTERBIUM No. 37

I've read only two books from your first Top 10 — *Axiomatic* and *The Time Ships* — and none from your second Top 10. I'm becoming less of an SF reader every year. But that's because I seem to read less every year. No wonder I've begun to sell some of my books.

After swimming 25 metres, I puff for a while at the end of the lane, then set off on another epic 25 metres. (Clifton Hill is a half-sized pool.) Three years ago I returned to swimming after the winter lay-off. Did twenty laps and wrecked my shoulder. It took six months for my shoulder to heal completely. By that time, I had rediscovered walking. (So I walked too much, and developed spurs on my foot. Exercise is a health hazard.)

I've read only one book (*The Time Ships*) from your Recent Reading list. From your TV and Video list I've seen *The Wedding Banquet* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

Cath Ortlieb: YOU REALLY KNOW YOU'RE HOME WHEN YOU FIND A WOMBAT IN YOUR BED No. 42

Oh no! Another dramatic episode of the Ortlieb Epic! Pneumonia this time! The horror! (But it makes good copy for ANZAPA contributions.)

What 'good things' happen to you?

Jean Weber: WEBER WOMAN'S WREVENGE No. 48

Just to show that I'm not particularly prejudiced against Alan Stewart's reading tastes, I can report that I've read an equally small number of Tiptree Award nominees. I've read Paul Park's *Coelestis*, which I didn't like much (but I finished it), and Karen Joy Fowler's *Sarah Canary*, which I didn't finish.

Your Books notes: Both of us enjoyed George Turner's *Genetic Soldier* and Sean McMullen's two recent novels, and I've reached page 70, twice, when attempting to read *Permutation City*. *She's Fantastical*. . . see my review elsewhere in this issue. *Alien Shores* leaves a good impression with me, although some of its stories were real duds. I haven't read any of the others.

John Bangsund: THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS NEWSLETTER Dec. 1995

Like most of the other members of the Society of Editors, I never have time to comment on issues of the *Newsletter*. Thanks for placing a particularly rich edition in this mailing.

I should have attended the meeting at which Helen Daniel spoke. I feel slightly guilty that I've not subscribed to *Australian Book Review*. Probably that's why I didn't attend

the meeting: because I might have felt called upon to say nice things to Helen about a magazine I cannot bring myself to read. I look at *ABR* often when I'm in Reading's Book Shop. I find some Australian commentators who are interesting, but usually I put it down again. I missed the one issue I wanted: the August 1995 issue that contained Peter Nicholls' review of Damien Broderick's *Reading by Starlight*. Fortunately, I've finally obtained a copy of both the review and Damien's reply.

Janet Mackenzie's article on 'The Con in Deconstruction' is brilliant. If any editorial intelligence remained at *The Age*, this article would have been picked up and reprinted on one of the feature pages. Such things do not happen these days.

It's pleasant to have summarised in two pages everything that one hates most about po-mo prose, including some aspects that I had not noticed, such as the scorn of 'aids such as sub-headings, numbered lists, bullet points, boxed text, case studies or dialogue'. Since my magazines use liberal quantities of such aids, I can see why few academics read them these days.

'Traffics, Bob Hawkes, politicses, staiscses'. Brilliant. If *ABR* published articles like 'The Con in Deconstruction' I would subscribe to it. As it is, it's only the *Newsletter* that keeps many people paying their annual subscription to the Society of Editors. You may quote that sentence, John.

We already own a copy of *The Australian Editing Handbook*, edited by Elizabeth Flann and Beryl Hill. When people ask us 'How do you get into editing?', we usually suggest that they start by buying this book.

Nice to see 'Muphry's Law' in print again, although I suspect that the Law itself has already become widespread throughout the world without anyone knowing who invented it.

Noel Kerr: THE EYES & EARS OF THE WORLD

I've stayed in a few motels over the last twenty-five years, but have never had an experience as offputting as yours. In 1975 I had to give a talk to a group of SF-interested people in a country town in late May. The organisers of the talk put me up for the night in a motel room that would have been all right if it had not been so upcountry cold. I'm still not sure how I got to sleep at all. The compensation for the whole trip was motoring back to town with one of the people who organised the talk. On a sunny freezing morning we drove into Carlton down Princes Street, surrounded by the colours of late-autumn Carlton trees. Carlton has some of the most beautiful streets in the world; I've never been struck more by their beauty than on that morning.

I agree with your comment to Mike O'Brien: 'Hope to hear from you within the next five to ten years'. His last letter of comment to *SF Commentary* was in 1976.

The point about American mail is that 90 per cent of surface mail is sent from there airmail. Some isn't, of course, which is why occasionally I still receive a fanzine that's taken three months to cross the Pacific.

Leanne Frahm: SUNBIRD No. 3

If you're a font fanatic, you need a CD-ROM player. Some \$20 CD-ROMs contain 2000 or more fonts. What's the text font you use for this issue?

You say that you were 'astonished at the baggage of bitterness towards [Derrick and Christine]' you've 'carried through all these years'. Not half as much as the baggage of bitterness that they and some of the other A85 committee members have carried towards the rest of fandom! I was

astounded that Derrick and Christine attended Arcon, since I thought they would never again have anything to do with the rest of us. Peter and Elizabeth Darling have also had nothing to do with fandom since 1985. Fortunately, David Grigg, caught in the middle in 1985, returned to us. The Dreaded Events of 1985 seem to have made the Australia in '99 Bidding Committee determined to prevent any such divisions wrecking their efforts. (Ha!)

I've met several people recently who've taken cable television for the free first's month's viewing, and not bothered going on with the deal. These are people who, like us, find they have little time to watch television.

The Victoria will not accept bookings from any more science fiction or fantasy conventions. Seems that a few people behaved very badly at a Victoria convention in the late 1980s. Maybe we'll be off the black list by 1999.

LynC: PURR-ZINE No. 3

We might make elaborate plans for renovating, but it wouldn't do us any good. We'll never have the money to do it. We've seen several examples of houses built up, not out. Friends of ours in Richmond had the same problem we have: the foundations will not support a two-storey house. They put pylons on each corner of the house, and the second storey is built on these pylons. The finished job looks just like a very large house; there is no visible sign that it is really one house built on top of another. Judy and Alan Wilson added a second storey; it's given them so much space that they now have three junk rooms!

Thanks for the further Eartha bulletin.

The story of Clive's parents is so horrifying that I found it hard to read. A textbook example of Life in Kennett's Victoria.

Michael O'Brien: MODULE No. 116

So somebody besides me gets into financial trouble simply by ordering too many of the necessities of life — in my case, CDs, software, books, magazines, and all the other little things that make life interesting.

A great Leunig cartoon. Leunig is usually magnificent these days: he's rather become the actual Leader of the anti-Kennett Opposition during the last three years. Now he must rise to the challenge of a Howard Australia. Despair gives strength to his genius. I wish I could say the same about me.

Gerald Smith and Womble: MERRY CHRISTMAS, ANZAPANS

What can I say to Womble and you except: just how do you survive all those disasters? What's with ANZAPA? Should we rename it The Disaster Club? I just hope that Womble's knee has mended cleanly.

I've just heard that a fanzine was sent back to America because, although it had my right street address, it had the wrong postcode. (I wrote this incorrectly on one issue of *TMR* while I was changing from the box number to the street address.)

Jeanne Mealy: LAND OF 10,000 LOONS

We get by without a car only because, despite the depredations of the current Victorian government, the public transport system gets us to most places we want to go. If we wanted to attend interstate conventions, we might have a slight yen for a car. When people invite us to the outer suburbs, it can be a problem getting a taxi home late at night. Melbourne's suburbs have stretched so far to the east

that when we caught a taxi home from Charlie and Nic Taylor's place in Mulgrave on Election Night, it cost \$31 (but that's only about a dollar a mile). The occasional high taxi fare is still much cheaper than the total costs of running a car.

You're the first President to exhort us, let alone issue edicts. Congratulations. Many Presidents just disappear from the sight a year or so after they receive High Office.

Terry Morris: HOLD THAT TIGER!

Ed Wood was superb: one of the very few recent films that I've seen. Without the dramatisation of the relationship between Ed Wood and Bela Lugosi, the film might not have worked.

The only other film from your list I've seen is *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Leaves a good taste in the mind, but I wasn't tempted to put it on my Top Ten Films for 1995.

Thanks for the fine review of Fay Weldon's *Puffballs*.

Weller: BURY MY SOUL AT EXIT 63 No. 28

Your four-day weekend sounds much like many of mine. After days of non-achievement I (a) give up and thoroughly enjoy the last day of the break, or (b) suddenly find the energy that was missing the previous three days and achieve most of the things I put off for most of the long weekend. The trouble with freelancing is that one can rarely take anything that looks like a holiday. I am constantly playing tag with deadlines: how much holiday can I give myself? can I give myself any holiday within the next three months?

I hope you get back here before 1999. If so, we must attempt a conversation somewhere other than a noisy hotel lobby. I don't think we talked for more than a few minutes at the convention where I met you. You're more likely to get here than I am to go there.

Terry Lane, ace ABC broadcaster, claims a special advantage from being an adopted child. He doesn't know who his real parents are, and doesn't want to know. That means he doesn't feel obliged to base decisions on factors such as family or race. Admirable sentiment, although Lane does put some unpleasant twists on the idea. The religion in which I was raised preached that 'All are equal in His sight', so as a child I was shocked when occasionally my parents gave vent to feelings of dislike of people from a particular religion or race. (But I was never shocked by racist stereotypes in books; probably because Biggles, say, was much sillier than Von Stroheim.) Racism still shocks me; I label racists as 'stoopid'. This shows my strongest prejudice, which is against people who are 'deliberately stupid'.

At heart, I suspect, I'm as gung-ho pro-Australian as most Americans are pro-American, which is why I'm bitter about the way politicians from both sides during the last twenty years have stripped us of all our advantages.

Terry Frost: A PLENTIFUL WASTE OF TIME No. 3

You can have the Rollins Band all on your own. I don't think I can subject my system to loud noises any more. The last loud concert I went to was eleven years ago: Neil Young at the Festival Hall. Brilliant playing, great music, but I could feel my heart racing dangerously under the stress of putting up with that volume of sound. Anything for a quiet life, these days.

Mailing 168: FEBRUARY 1996

Alan Stewart: OBO
YTTERBIUM No. 38

A contest for Official Bloody Editorship! How astonishing. Official Editors have been trying to fob off the job ever since I can remember, and now two people want it! I sent in my vote; I hope you received it.

I'll make sure I don't buy any Nigerian bridges. A pity somebody can't do something about Nigeria itself. I saw a report that more than half of the world's greenhouse gases are now being created by Shell, which runs the oilfields of Nigeria. It burns off excess oil in a random way, without any attempt at pollution controls. (This was a tiny item in the newspaper; how is one supposed to do anything about the World Situation, when very little of it is reported in the local press?)

I must walk your map someday. (Are you signing up people for the Alan Stewart Fun Walk?) Sounds like the John Cheever story in which the main character swims home across Connecticut by navigating every swimming pool he comes across. If your path crossed the Yarra, you could prove that you really can walk on water.

Are you trying to sabotage the bid, Alan? Musk Lifesavers! When I was a child I was a dedicated ingester of Lifesavers, but I drew the line at Musk.

I haven't read any of the books on your Recent Reading list. I've seen little on your TV and Video list: *Fritz the Cat* many, many years ago (even then the print was in a dreadful state); several different versions of *Metropolis*, including a silent, four-hour, tinted print; and the ghodawful *2010*. (Foyster, who was at the same screening, said: 'It's not every movie that sets the cinema back 20 years.')

Cath Ortlieb: YOU REALLY KNOW YOU'RE HOME WHEN YOU FIND A WOMBAT IN YOUR BED No. 43

As I've said earlier in the mailing, I may be an atheist, but I'm still a Church of Christ atheist. I still know my doctrine, since it's inscribed by corrosive, permanent acid on the inside of my brain. And C. of C. does not sprinkle (but only dunks) because the tiny child is not of an age to make a deliberate decision to join the church. So Churches of Christ allow only adult baptism (total immersion) after a Confession of Faith. The Baptists follow the same line; in fact, I could never work out what were the real differences between the Baptists and the Churches of Christ.

The startling conclusion of the C. of C./Baptist line is that the child will not go to hell before reaching the age in which she or he can 'make a decision' because until then she or he is essentially innocent! Doesn't sound like any child I've ever known.

There was a big stink a year or so ago in *The Green Guide* about the peculiar things that TV channels were doing to the end credits of films. I suspect that the film companies did not realise it was happening. The presentation of the end credits is part of the contract between the distributor and the TV channel. I suspect that the TV companies were forced to toe the line. There was an abrupt end to the practice of racing through the end credits, squeezing them to one side of the screen, or cutting them altogether.

I'll look out for *See Melbourne by Tram*. Sounds like the sort of book the A. in 99 Committee should be sending overseas by the planeload.

David Grigg: MEGATHERIUMS FOR BREAKFAST No. 10

I was just about to write an article about rediscovering poetry, but you've saved me the trouble. I was going to write an article for *Tirra Lirra* by adding remarks very like yours to the beginning to my tribute to Philip Hodgins that appeared in *TMR* 22/23. If it was the poetry of Philip

Hodgins that led me to read poetry semi-regularly, why had I failed to read poetry since I left university?

My answer to this question would centre on my allegiance to the art of story-telling. Most poems these days do not tell stories; that's why I didn't read poetry. But that ignores the fact that many of my favourite passages in novels are non-narrative, or do not rely for the pleasure they give on the stories they tell.

I suspect my prejudice was (and is) much more primitive: my prejudice against the poet as self-appointed sooth-sayer. I hate the 'poetic voice', that self-important bray that one hears in the voice of anyone who describes him- or herself as 'a poet'. Poets, I felt, were, in the great Australian phrase, up themselves.

Hence my interest in finding the poetry of Philip Hodgins, who knew his own strengths but was not in any sense up himself. Later I discovered a few other poets who shared that basic world-amusement that I find in, say, the best song-writers. I still won't read 'poetic poetry' (mainly that of the nineteenth century) but discovering the work of down-to-earth poets such as Philip Hodgins and Philip Larkin helped me to rediscover the astonishing precision of, say, Shakespeare. Take away the misty blinkers while reading Shakespeare, and the gritty quality of its real poetry can be seen.

Your remarks, and the attached examples, only amplify this thought. When I gather my own scattered thoughts, I'll write the article for *Tirra Lirra* and here.

Thanks very much for the comments, however brief, about *TMR* 24/25. I hope you will find time to write a loc during one of your few spare moments.

I'm glad someone realises that 'all of these e-mail messages and these Web pages are ephemeral'. They don't exist until they are printed out. Who is printing all these millions of pages and storing them in archives?

Eric Lindsay: KINGDOM OF THE BLAND

You're hardly the first person to notice that university SF clubs no longer attract students, but no one seems to know why. Is it really true that no one under 35 reads SF any more? That's the gloomy conclusion one could make from looking at, say, the annual *Locus* survey. But much children's and young adults' fiction is undisguised science fiction. Why are these readers lost by the time they reach university?

Ditto for your remarks about the resurgence of religion at universities. When I was at university, a small number of students belonged to the religious clubs, but nobody ever admitted to such a solecism. Surely religion can become fashionable only when critical thought becomes unfashionable?

Jan Wilson: ANNKA'S STORY

We have hair-raising stories in ANZAPA these days, don't we? Even if Elaine and I had ever wanted to have children, which we didn't, we would have been cured of such a wish by reading 'Annika's Story'.

Not that I'm complaining about the quality of the story-telling, Jan. It's just that the events themselves are a bit hard on the nerves. What some people put themselves through!

Janice Murray: THE SEATTLEITE

Best line in the whole four mailings: '... she wanted to see why Seattle has developed a reputation as a great food city. It was so refreshing since among our people "Trying Something New" usually means a different topping on the pizza.'

I found this one of the very best apa contributions I've

read for ages. Thanks for the various reports, including glimpses of Corflu, Westercon and Ditto.

Good to see a name from the past: Linda Lounsbury. When I was in America in 1973 she took me to see a wonderful national park in New Jersey; it was one of the most pleasant days of the whole trip. A few years later she and Ken Fletcher visited our place during their DUFF trip.

Mike Glicksohn won't exchange fanzines with me (no, I don't know why), but Susan Manchester is in the gardening apa with Elaine. In September 1973 I stayed with Mike in Toronto. It was magnificent autumn weather, one perfect day after another, whereas the weather during Torcon itself had been much too hot.

After Theodore got into a fight in 1989, the other cat's claw cut him right across the eye. We had to cart him off to the only small-animal ophthalmologist in Melbourne. That cost \$500 seven years ago! The story of Moose sounds pretty similar. (Theodore is neutered, but ginger.) Disaster, thy name is Cat.

Jean Weber: JEANZINE Nos. 108 and 108.5

I must ring you in the next few days. Please, I want a copy of Here&Now — or any piece of software that will enable easy communication between IBMs and Macintoshes! Yes, I know Macs can take in files from my machine, but the multiple Macs at Macmillan cannot communicate back to me.

You seemed to have had a slightly better time when undergoing your hysterectomy than Elaine did when having hers. Elaine reacts badly to any kind of anaesthetics.

Jeanne Mealy: LAND OF 10,000 LOONS

You mention Stipple-Apa, which I last heard of years ago. What are the main apas in America these days? Is there a guide to them? I'm interested in specialist apas, but don't have much time to take part in any of them.

The 'favorite Chinese place' of Sally and John is the same Chinese restaurant, the Eastern Inn, at which for many years we used to meet them every Friday night. It's only a ten-minute walk from our place, but at least ten miles from Sally and John's place. Sally and John no longer have a car, and quite often don't have the money for a night out, and, as Sally says, often she's just too tired to get there. A great pity, since for a long time this was a highlight of the week. Every now and then some of the other Friday night Eastern Inn regulars meet there for dinner.

Leanne Frahm: SUNBIRD No. 4

'Has a truly error-free book ever been printed?' No. The closest anybody came to error-free publishing was *Time* magazine during its great days. I read somewhere that every piece of copy was proofread by three different people. Not that even that practice guarantees error-free text, but *Time* came close.

I'm looking forward to your short story collection.

Thanks for the font display, even if few of them have the correct names. (But to find the correct name of any font on a freeware CD-ROM can take days of research.)

Linnette Horne: ILLIGITIMAI NON CARBORUNDUM

Another ANZAPA epic that's almost too painful to read! Nothing seems more cruel than the actions of some members of a family towards other members of the same family. If you're caught in the middle, Linnette, no wonder you've dipped out of the apa during recent years. All we can do is hope that there is some way out of this difficult situation.

LynC: LYNX No. 26

I bought *The Idiot's Guide to CorelDraw* and was unimpressed. It tried to cover both CorelDraw 4 and 5, causing some confusion, and was just plain wrong in places. The hearty style was irritating, especially because the book often did not give the precise instructions I needed. In the end, it was simpler to buy the gigantic *CorelDraw Unleashed*, which included a CD-ROM.

So which of the gigantic third-party books on Word would be useful? (Elaine tells me that the official manuals, enormous as they are, are often confusing.) When last I looked in McGill's, there seemed to be about sixty books on Word, each equally weighty, and each making equally extravagant claims for itself. (Other pieces of software fare differently; I haven't yet found a third-party book about Quark XPress for Windows. I found *Quark XPress Tips & Tricks*, but the accompanying CD-ROM is for Mac.)

Bouchercon . . . Tony Boucher was not only one of the founding editors of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* but also a prominent figure in mystery publishing and fandom. He died in the late 1960s or early 1970s. He sticks best in my memory as the mentor and first publisher of the short stories of Philip K. Dick.

People might well give us ornaments and paintings (although nobody but relatives does so) but they don't appear in the house since we have no walls to hang paintings or mantel shelves on which to put ornaments. The walls are covered by bookshelves.

When I was growing up in the already-mentioned Churches of Christ in the 1960s, nobody realised that there *was* any difference between the Christianity of the Gospels and that of Paul. It's encouraging that you, and presumably a fair number of other Christians, see this distinction. Use the Pauline letters to undertake a psychological profile of Paul and one discovers one of the least likable characters in world history. Yet, like many unsavoury prophets, he could emit some astonishing flights of perception, such as the famous I Corinthians 13. Or did he write it? Or did any of the supposed New Testament authors actually write anything that's claimed for them? We have no reliable way of knowing.

Michael O'Brien: MODULE No. 117

'Will send letters of comment real soon now.' I'll believe that when I see them, Michael.

Yes, there isn't much good listening on radio at the moment. Tony Delroy has his moments, but not many of them. Doug Aiton's 3 p.m. talk guest is usually interesting. So is Margaret Throsby's 10 a.m. guest, but she's much too polite to draw out any unexpected truths. I can't imagine anybody listens to ABC Metropolitan Radio now on Sunday nights. This Frank Crook, the replacement for the Coodabeens, sounds like a badly made robot. The music on ABC-FM is usually dull these days.

I might even be forced to turn off the radio now and again.

Of your TV List I saw *Gore Vidal's Gore Vidal* (great stuff), a few episodes of *Poirot*, *The Wrong Trousers* (we're addicts of Wallace and Gromit), and *Inspectors Morse and Wexford* until they disappeared from the screen.

I haven't read any of the books you've read. I did see *Judex* (not as good as its reputation implies; but weird and memorable), *The Magnificent Ambersons* (for the first time since 1973; Welles's most mellow work), and *The Green Man*

(weird in a wonderfully English manner; an underrated film).

Perry Middlemiss: THE WOLLONGONG PIG-BREEDERS' GAZETTE No. 5

I was impressed by your tale of Mr Worm and Miss Grub. You've met Robin Wade at the Eastern Inn. We were dining with him, Frances, Lucy and Julian, and Aly Kayn, the other night. Robin and Frances are not SF fans, although they read quite a bit of SF, and have now met quite a few fans. As the night proceeded, we found that Robin had worked with Bill Wright at some time in the past, and at his new contract job at Telstra is seated a few metres away from Aly. All stories are possible; disbelieve nothing. As Peter Mathers once said: 'If you can imagine it, it's happening somewhere.'

I remember being appalled at turning 30 (mainly because 1977 was a pretty bad year of my life), but felt undismayed at turning 40. Perhaps I should have been more pessimistic at 40. Nobody expects to change appearance rapidly, especially if one didn't change much between 30 and 40. Now I'll be lucky to hit 50 with any hair left!

Roger Sims: SON OF BHEER IS BEST

Not too bad a first attempt at a DUFF Report. We've already had all the other the DUFF Reports with the colour photos and endless descriptions of every little detail. Why not reprint your report as it is, including some clear black-and-white photos? The result would be very entertaining.

Sally Yeoland: LE CHAT PARTI

You and John do seem to have difficult family get-togethers. My Christmas this year was pleasant. My sister Jeanette was actually on time. She picked me up and we trundled down to my mother's place at Rosebud. (Elaine was heading the other direction for Christmas; somewhere out north or east.) My aunt and uncle arrived for Christmas dinner. This was not, as promised, a light salad, but full-scale dinner, but it worked okay as the weather was very pleasant. In the afternoon we went to Rye back beach and walked along the sand. Returned to my mother's. More food (a light salad this time). Then home with Jeanette. What could be more mellow?

Thanks very much for the *TMR* letter of comment. I've seen a few of the films you mention.

- *Strangers on a Train*, of course; the quintessential Hitchcock.
- It's a long time since I've seen *The Lavender Hill Mob*, but I remember it with some affection.
- I still haven't seen *Schindler's List*, but like you I enjoyed *Once Upon a Time in the West*, *The Wedding Banquet*, *Life of Brian* (which is hardly 'ridiculous'; it's probably the most realistic New Testament epic yet made), and *The Fugitive* (it's good to know that somebody in Hollywood can still make a movie as uncluttered and exciting as this).
- *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* must be one of the most beautiful colour movies ever made; in places I was so busy gaping at the beauty of the thing that I almost forgot to listen to the dialogue.
- David Russell gave me three videos for my birthday, although I had written in *TMR* that I don't collect videos. One of them is *Singin' in the Rain*, the 'Fortieth Anniversary Edition' with the 1940s Technicolor fully restored! Bliss. The last time I saw a TV print, the colour was very muddy. *SitR* is the most compressed movie of all; the scene in which Gene Kelly dances in the rain is my favourite film sequence.

- *Enchanted April* begins well, but slows down a bit towards the end. Worth watching for all that Italian summer scenery, let alone some fine performances.

Richard Hryckiewicz: ANYTHING BUT AVERAGE No. 11

Congrats. on finally pinning down that pesky degree. Also congrats. on gaining the job permanently. *If* there are any permanent jobs left in the public service after the change of government.

Of your Books Read I've also read *She's Fantastical*, *The Time Masters* and *Mirror Sun Rising*. Put any two SF readers together and their reading lists will rarely overlap.

Weller: BURY MY SOUL AT EXIT 63

You might well be the first person to buy a vast bundle of luscious toys and *give them all back again*. As it is, I drool at what's available, nine months later, for the same price we

paid for the computer set-up I'm using at the moment. (If I were buying now, for the same price I would get Windows 95, a 6-speed CD player, a Pentium 120 chip, a 1 gigabyte drive plus 10 CDs of bundled software. Pay a bit more and I would get a modem and a 32 Mb drive.)

You're right about Windows 95. The ditching of a usable manual is a disgrace, because it means one must pay the extra \$80 or so to buy an adequate third-party book.

Elaine has an entire album full of cat photos. People can have their photos taken as well, but only if they jump up and down and beg for the privilege. She won't let me use her photo in *TMR*. I would be allowed to fill an issue with cat photos.

A cat on a leash? If you hadn't said it, I wouldn't have believed it. But then, none of our cats ever has to face 37 inches of snow or, indeed, any snow.

FAVOURITE SHORT STORIES 1995

- 1 'The Gate of Ghosts'
Karen Joy Fowler (*Artificial Things*)
- 2 'The Safe-Deposit Box'
Greg Egan (*Axiomatic*)
- 3 'The Interior of Gaaldine'
Gerald Murnane (*Emerald Blue*)
- 4 'Hungry Skin'
Lucy Taylor (*Little Deaths*)
- 5 'Not With Love'
Philippa C. Maddern (*She's Fantastical!*)
- 6 'Angel Thing'
Petrina Smith (*She's Fantastical!*)
- 7 'Living'
Peter Cowan (*A Window in Mrs X's Place*)
- 8 'Escape'
Peter Cowan (*A Window in Mrs X's Place*)
- 9 'The Last Time'
Lucius Shepard (*Little Deaths*)
- 10 'The Green Road to Quephanda'
Ruth Rendell (*Collected Stories*)
- 11 'Back of Beyond'
Cherry Wilder (*Strange Fruits*)
- 12 'Uh-Oh City'
Jonathan Carroll (*The Panic Hand*)
- 13 'The Beach'
Peter Cowan (*A Window in Mrs X's Place*)
- 14 'Possum Lover'
Yvonne Rousseau (*She's Fantastical!*)
- 15 'The War of the Roses'
Karen Joy Fowler (*Artificial Things*)

The trouble with being in fandom for long enough is that even in Australia sooner or later one meets many of one's favourite and not-so-favourite writers. The embarrassing thing about this list is that I know quite well five of these writers (Egan, Murnane, Maddern, Smith and Rousseau) and have had conversations with another two (Fowler and Wilder). I ask myself: are these my favourite stories because I know the authors, or did I merely choose to read them in the first place because I know the authors? Or am I really as objective as I like to think I am, and the fact that I know the authors has nothing to do with my choices?

That last possibility can't be true. A lot of what I read is on the pile of books to be read merely because I know the authors. I can't escape them, or their books! Imagine the consequences if I had *not* read *She's Fantastical!*, edited by two friends of mine, Lucy Sussex and Judy Buckrich, and containing the latest stories by quite a few of my other friends!

And of course I pounced on my copy of *Axiomatic* as soon as I received it. Greg sent it to me. A pity that I had read most of its best stories before they appeared in the collection. (My Best of the Year is for works read/seen/heard first in the particular year.) But I had not already read 'The Safe-Deposit Box', with its two wonderful ideas: the man who spends each day in a different body, and who finds the person who is creating him anew each day.

Karen Joy Fowler. I probably wouldn't have read *Artificial Things* this particular year if I had not found myself, quite unexpectedly, sitting opposite her at a dinner held in Melbourne in the week after Thylacon. We all knew Kim Stanley Robinson would be at Thylacon, but I didn't get to meet him during his one day in Melbourne. Karen Fowler turned up out of the blue, and was good company. Several people already admired her stories, so I thought I'd rip into *Artificial Things* and *Sarah Canary*. I gave up on the latter after half way, never having glimpsed what the author was on about, but several stories in the collection were brilliant.

'The Gate of Ghosts' is about a little girl who learns to disappear from home, to a space that's simply Elsewhere. At first she does it in such a way that she returns home on the instant, but later it becomes obvious that she is slipping from our world into another. All this relates to her relationship to her parents, and their relationship to each other. Jessica's mother wants to 'rescue' her, pull her back into 'normal' space.

I fell in love with this story because of two paragraphs on Page 146 of the Bantam Spectra edition. Jessica's mother is trying to get her to tell about her 'other place'.

'Jessica pushed the spoon off the table with her elbow. It bounced with a tinny sound on the floor. She slid lower and lower in her seat until her mother disappeared below the horizon of the tabletop. Jessica slipped off the chair entirely and sat by the spoon underneath the table . . . Her

mother slid forward; her knees came closer to Jessica's face and then back again and her mother was sitting on the floor under the table beside her, cross-legged.'

This is my favourite kind of writing, where a metaphor for the whole story is expressed entirely in concrete terms, but still conveys the abstract motion of the story. Here I feel Jessica slipping out of one world into another; her mother then joins her, but she must change perspective entirely. Later in the story, the mother does manage to enter the child's 'other place'. Read the rest of the story for yourself.

What about the authors I have not met? If, for instance, I had met Peter Cowan as well, might I have placed his stories higher on the list? Perhaps. I read them early in 1995, and they've faded a bit in the memory. Possibly I've done them a disservice, especially 'Living', which is a passionate prose poem. All I know about Cowan is that he is in his eighties, is a prominent academic in Western Australia, and published his first stories in the 1940s. His lean, hard-bitten style is much more visionary than the easy-going naturalism ('dun-coloured', as Patrick White called it) of most Australian prose of the 1940s and 1950s.

Gerald Murnane is a unique Australian writer whose prose puzzles most critics (and, recently, me). I met him well before he published his first book, and I still enjoy best his first few books, especially *Tamarisk Row* and *The Plains*. I do not know whether I would have read him if I had never met him. Surely I would have read *Tamarisk Row*, as some important critics praised it highly. I've been struggling to come to grips with his recent stuff, and would not even have read *Emerald Blue*, his latest collection, if I had not known the author. Four of the five stories did not over-excite me, but 'The Interior of Gaaldine' (which, I'm told, is a reference for the Brontë buffs) is a real return to form: an amazing mix of wild ideas served up in the most straitlaced of prose.

Now we get to the important part: *She's Fantastical!*

She's Fantastical! is fabulously fannish in lots of ways. Lucy Sussex and Judy Buckrich had been thinking about an anthology of science fiction and fantasy by Australian women writers. They mentioned the idea to a third person, who was connected to Sybylla, a Melbourne women's publishing co-operative, who offered to publish. No doubt Lucy or Judy will publish sometime the story of the battle with Sybylla to get the book published. It's enough to say that Lucy and Judy have a joint will of iron that would topple streetscapes, but the Sybylla crowd also proved to be tough eggs. Somehow the book became better as the infighting got nastier. (I'm not saying that the Sybylla people are fannish, but the problems of publishing via co-operatives are familiar to anyone connected to semi-professional SF publishing.)

She's Fantastical! emerged as a paperback with end-flaps on the cover; with a striking cover illustration that can also serve as an icon for publicising the book; blue ink throughout; and a combination of type faces that is blinding, but unforgettable. The stories are pretty good, too.

Indeed, the real achievement of Lucy and Judy has been to drag stories out of three people who are well known for the quality of their writing, but who are always too preoccupied to produce any fiction.

Philippa C. Maddern (Pip Maddern) is now steaming up

the academic ranks in the Department of Medieval History at the University of Western Australia. To me, she is the best Australian SF writer, but she never has time to write. Somehow Lucy and Judy applied the Spanish Inquisition, extracting the best story in the book, 'Not With Love'. It's an amazing piece, which reminds me most of the stories of Gene Wolfe; you know, there's the story, and it's all happening, but what *is* actually happening? On an artificial living environment a long way from Earth, rebellion is steaming. But how to get in touch with Earth? What kind of people are these inhabitants? What sex are they? (It's only when you finish the story that you realise that, although this is a story of aroused passions, you are not really sure who is male and who female, or whether it matters.) This is not just clever writing; this is suspense fiction of a high order.

Another of my favourite writers, Petrina Smith, is as reluctant to produce fiction as Pip is. Only the indomitable Sussex/Buckrich team could get Petrina to finish a story. 'Angel Thing' is a great story, which recreates all the fear of the alien that you find in outback Australian small communities. Is the creature an angel or an alien? And who are the aliens, anyway? Another first-class suspense story, with that absolutely clear style that Petrina has developed during the last twenty years.

A few years ago Yvonne Rousseau stopped writing her brilliant reviews and critical articles in order to 'write a novel'. No sign of the novel yet, but again I thought it a major Sussex/Buckrich miracle to have extracted a story from her. 'The Possum Lover' is not perfect, but it certainly sticks in the memory. Yvonne has still not learned, as Pip and Petrina have, to leave out all but the essentials, then leave out most of the essentials as well. (If I knew how to do that, I'd probably also return to writing fiction.) But given that 'The Possum Lover' is at least twice as long as it need be, it's quite a bravura performance, with a delicious ending.

I'm a bit unfair to Paul Collins' *Strange Fruit* collection by picking only one story from it. Cherry Wilder is not and never was Australian (she's from New Zealand), but like innumerable NZ pop groups she spent enough time here during the 1960s and 1970s for her to be branded Australian forever. (She's been German for almost the last twenty years.) Still, Cherry did seem to soak up enormous amount of Australian lore while she was here, and 'Back of Beyond', a tale of supernatural detectives, is about as back-of-beyond as you can get. Isolated, loony station owners; the detectives going loony; burnt-out landscapes; everything's here. Nail-biting conclusion, too.

Both Ruth Rendell's *Collected Stories* and Jonathan Carroll's *The Panic Hand* were a bit disappointing as collections. There are a few other Carroll stories I could have included on, say, a Top 30 Short Stories, and two or three other Rendell stories. But the only reason to keep the Rendell collection is for the 'The Green Road to Quephanda', her only fantasy story, and 'Uh-Oh City' is one of several stories that make *The Panic Hand* worth picking up. (Many of the best short stories have appeared already as sections of Carroll novels.)

— Whole issue finished 20 March 1996