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No. 27 April 2000



Congratulations, Cath Ortlieb, for achieving what no one else did: taking a photo of two of our most recent ANZAPA recruits, TAFF winner, Maureen Kincaid Speller, and GUFF Winner, Paul Kincaid.

## Watch my beat, please!

Many thanks for making me Official Bloody President for 1999–2000. Or is that Official Bloody Encourager? Chief Whip?

Not that I would hold this position if I hadn't forgotten to vote. This time my forgetting made a difference. If I had voted, Bill Wright would have been OBP for the year. Congratulations, Bill.

*Interstellar Ramjet Scoop* is the most spectacular continuous effort in ANZAPA since those Ian Gunn contributions of the early nineties. (And that's just the Ditmar covers.) If you have any spare cash, you should turn *IRS* into a genzine, Bill. Help put Australia back on the world fanzine map.

Thanks, everybody, for voting for me, although I didn't put in a worthy ANZAPA effort last year. George Turner won it for me! — as he and Stanislaw Lem won those Ditmars and Hugo nominations for me in the 1970s. Sorry for lagging behind in writing Mailing Comments. This issue I've tried to catch up a bit.

Thanks, everybody, for the kind comments on my Fan Guest of Honour speech and Aussiecon 3 Report. In John Foyster's *FNAC*, a Sydney correspondent stomped on me for unkindness to Sydney fandom in general, and G. Stone in particular. I plead Not Guilty. I stomped on them for failing to communicate with Greater Fandom, not for lack of fan activity or good intentions. And I did say that I had

independent evidence that Graham Stone in person was not the curmudgeon he always painted himself in fandom.

Cath, sorry to give you a heart turn when I mentioned Graham Stone during my speech. But the situation would have been the same if you picked any of the other people in my talk who should have received a Chandler Award. In my not particularly humble opinion, the Foundation's sense of fan history is a bit wonkey. My favoured candidates for future Chandler Awards are named in my speech.

I've discovered in recent months that there are lots of small things wrong in my Aussiecon Report, so I will have to produce yet a third version (the ANZAPA version is slightly updated from that in *Acnestis*). Jenny and Russell Blackford, in particular, were miffed that I thought that they had failed to invite Elaine and me to a gathering on the last night of the convention. 'But we told Greg Benford to invite *you!*' said Jenny.

David Russell told me that he sat beside Yvonne Rousseau at the Convention Banquet, so she definitely wasn't with us at the alternative banquet at the Italian Waiters Club. Yvonne couldn't miss the opportunity to hear Dave Langford's speech.

And I wound up in the bar drinking Southern Comforts only *after* attending the ANZAPA Party.

## Where oh where has the little dog been?

Let me tell you all the things I haven't done since Aussiecon 3.

I haven't caught up on ANZAPA mailing comments, and I'm still way behind on reading *Acnestis*. But I have caught up on reading some books (see later in this issue).

I haven't finished keying in the Turner Issue of *SF Commentary*. I had finished 90 per cent of it before Aussiecon 3, but I haven't been able to grab that week or so I need to put it together.

I haven't made any progress on the general issue of *SF Commentary* that has now been mouldering on diskette for more than six years.

I haven't assembled the *Metaphysical Review* that has been sitting on manuscript or computer file since October 1998.

I haven't finished the article on Joanna Russ that has been 99 per cent finished since November 1998.

The only thing I have done is about 30 per cent of the work on the new fanzine that Paul Kincaid, Maureen Kin-

caid Speller and I are publishing before Easter. Paul and Maureen have done most of the work. Paul has also learnt Microsoft Publisher 2000, for which effort I award him a gold star and a blue certificate. MS Publisher drives me crazy, so for this issue at least, I've bowed out of the page design business.

*Steam Engine Time* — that's the new monster's name — has gone its own way. We don't seem to be reprinting brilliant stuff from *Acnestis*, which was my aim. We do seem to be publishing a lot of brilliant other stuff, which will encourage brilliant contributors and letter writers.

I'm way behind on reading mailings, and way behind on everything except endless boring work, work, work. It would be great if I were making a fortune, but instead the next cheque is always all spent before it arrives. While there's hope there's life, as somebody didn't say. But where are the million-dollar cheques with my name on them?, say I.

# LISTS! The Epic

## Lists and John Foyster

To John Foyster, another's little eccentricity can sometimes loom as a major sin. In recent years, he has taken to berating me for spending my few spare hours in making up lists of this and that, forgetting that his own lists of favourite SF in *Australian Science Fiction Review* in 1967 were the first sign to me that other people indulged in this peculiar pleasure.

On page 39 of *ASFR* No. 12, October 1967, he proposed the following lists of 'Foyster's Top Ten':

### Authors:

Cordwainer Smith  
Philip Jose Farmer  
Theodore Sturgeon  
Walter M. Miller Jr.  
Henry Kuttner  
A. E. Van Vogt  
Alfred Bester  
Leigh Brackett  
Kurt Vonnegut  
John W. Campbell

### Short Fiction:

Smith: The Burning of the Brain  
Russell: Metamorphosite  
Farmer: Sail On! Sail On!  
Surgeon: Baby Is Three  
Miller: The Big Hunger  
Ballard: The Voices of Time  
Clarke: The Star  
Shiras: In Hiding  
Matheson: Born of Man and Woman  
Budrys: The Executioner

### Novels:

I can't think of any.

The last line is one of the most striking in *ASFR*'s short history. Could John Foyster think of no SF novels good enough to appear on a Top Ten list? Or was he saying that the term 'SF novel' is an oxymoron?

Let's see if you think that Mr Foyster abandoned the joys of lists in the 1960s, I mention that as recently as 17 April 1981 he sent me a list of Top Books of the Year. His best ten books of 1980, as published on page 62 of *SF Commentary* No. 62/63/64/65/66, June 1981, were:

- 1 Henry James: *The Europeans*
- 2 Doris Lessing: *Stories*
- 3 Oscar Lewis: *Living the Revolution*
- 4 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie: *Montaillou*
- 5 Edmund Wilson: *Upstate*
- 6 Jacques Donzelot: *The Policing of Families*
- 7 E. P. Thompson: *The Making of the English Working Class*
- 8 John Franklin Bardin: *Omnibus*
- 9 V. S. Naipaul: *A House for Mr Biswas*
- 10 Gilbert Sorrentino: *Mulligan Stew*.

As with Thomas Disch's Year's Best, in the same issue of *SFC*, I've used John Foyster's list extensively when buying books.

I've read only Nos. 1 and 5 on Foyster's 1981 list, but for many years I have owned most of the others.

## My first list

Are lists merely useful to the people who read them? No. I construct lists for pleasure, but it's not easy to describe the nature of that pleasure.

Why should I, in 1959, when I was twelve years old, a few months after I received my own radio, not only discover pop music, despite the disapproval of everybody else in my family, but also start writing down the positions in the 3AW Top Sixty as I heard the tunes played each Saturday afternoon? The songs were not played in order. On the first Saturday on which I wrote all the placings, 5 September 1959, here was the 'top ten':

- 1 'Lonely Boy' (Paul Anka)
- 2 'My Heart is an Open Book' (Carl Dobkins Jr)
- 3 'Waterloo' (Stonewall Jackson)
- 6 'Sweet Sugar Lips' (Kalin Twins)
- 9 'Ring-a-Ling-a-Lario' (Jimmie Rodgers)
- 10 'The Battle of New Orleans' (Johnny Horton).

Where were Numbers 4, 5, 7 and 8? To find out, I would have to wait until next week. But by then the positions would have moved, so the pattern might take weeks, even months, to become clear.

Next week, the only Top Ten numbers read out were:

- 6 'I'm Gonna Get Married' (Lloyd Price)
- 7 'Big Hunk o' Love' (Elvis Presley)
- 10 'Only Sixteen' (Sam Cooke).

It's unlikely that anybody but me remembers these songs, unless you have access to Golden Oldies radio station, such as Magic AM in Melbourne. Most items from the 3AW Top 60 in 1959 have disappeared from all human knowledge. You might have heard 'Alvin's Harmonica', by David Seville and the Chipmunks (a TV puppets troupe; the high-pitched cartoon voices were recorded by Seville speeding up and multitracking his own voice), but I have never again heard 'Ragtime Cowboy Joe', by the same group, which was No. 18 in Melbourne on 12 September 1959.

Did these songs actually hold the positions that 3AW claimed for them? Occasionally I looked at the 3DB Top 40 chart, which was published each Friday in *The Sun News Pictorial*. I recognised few of the songs. Was it possible that one or the other station was concocting its chart, or at least taking their statistics from very different record shops?

## I discover higher authorities

Late in 1959 or early in 1960, I discovered Stan Rofe's deejay program on 3KZ. Listening to 'Stan the Man' involved a major change of loyalties, as his program was on at the same time as the *ABC Children's Hour*, which had had my total loyalty for many years. Loyalty be (slowly but surely) hanged! 1959 was the year when I decided to stop being a child. Out went my comics collection. I almost stopped reading children's books. And, slowly but surely, I stopped listening to the Argonauts.

Out went 3AW. At the beginning of the football season in 1960, 3AW began to broadcast both football and racing on Saturday afternoon, interspersing sports results with a few Top 60 songs. It became difficult to work out the weekly chart. Also, I realised that 3AW programmers based their Top 60 pretty much on their own prejudices, rather than weekly record sales.

3KZ was the station where I could hear the records that were actually popular. 3KZ never bothered with a Top 40 chart, but I soon noticed that the 3DB Top 40 usually reflected the songs Stan Rofe had been playing the week before.

### I invent new lists

Listing pop songs became an addiction, and remained my main hobby until 1969, when I was twenty-two. My next list was a weekly tally of the new songs heard on radio. In those days, there was no gang of pop radio stations that decided the three new singles that would be added each week to radio play lists throughout Australia. During the 1960s, more than sixty new singles a week were released. Most would be played at least once on radio. Often, my greatest favourites would be played only once, then disappear forever, or linger at No. 40 until they slipped off the chart.

For my next list (started on 5 December 1959), I chose my Top Four favourites for the week. The heading was 'Hits That Should Be Top':

- 1 'Just Ask Your Heart' (Frankie Avalon)
- 2 'Oh, Carol!' (Neil Sedaka)
- 3 'Woo Hoo' (The Rocketeers)
- 4 'Oh Yeah Uh Huh' (Col Joye).

Frankie Avalon was one of those 'teen idols' that are now seen as the emblem of everything that was wrong with pop music between 1957 and 1963. 'Just Ask Your Heart' became so obscure that I didn't hear it again for nearly forty years (on Magic AM).

The records on hit parades during the fifties and sixties were a mixture of fifties-style ballads, rock and roll-style moanin'-'n'-groanin' love songs, country-and-western, blues, 'novelty' songs (sixties-style humour), and instrumentals.

Oh, for the return of the instrumental! I hadn't heard 'Woo Hoo', a rock 'n' roll instrumental, for more than thirty years until I found it on a Rhino CD called *Rock Instrumental Classics: Vol. 1: The Fifties*. It had the classic rock and roll guitar break (made famous on the Virtues' 'Guitar Boogie Shuffle'), an idiotic chorus singing 'Woo Hoo', and one of the most exciting saxophone breaks in pop history. All in less than two minutes.

Non-Australian readers will never have heard Col Joye's best record, 'Oh Yeah Uh Huh', since it was one of the first Australian rock singles to sell lots of copies. (By Australian standards, 50,000 copies sold is the equivalent of selling a million copies in America.) Until 1962, Col Joye was nearly as popular as Johnny O'Keefe, who in Australia was at least as popular as Elvis Presley.

### Lists are more interesting than Real Life

Leafing through old diaries reminds me clearly why I began to concoct lists. I wrote down my school subjects, which were boring. I wrote down daily events of the weekend. They were boring. Holidays were even more boring. During 1959, my only relief from boredom was illness. I missed more than 60 days of school that year, and often had to travel into town

to visit a medical specialist. On those afternoons, I discovered Melbourne's book shops and record shops.

My diary shows me that at the beginning of 1960 I was reading H. G. Wells' *Food of the Gods*. A week later, I was reading a large hardback of the complete Sherlock Holmes short stories, a Christmas present. Soon I discovered the 'Saint' books, many of them borrowed from the tiny library of the local church. (Nobody at the church had an inkling of the unredeemed unsaintliness of Charteris' Saint.) I spent two weeks reading Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, and by the middle of the year I had read Jack Williamson's *The Humanoids*.

### 1960: My toenails curl with excitement

'Joey's Song', an instrumental by Bill Haley's Comets, was No. 1 on 16 January 1960. It was a hit nowhere else in the world, so was impossible to find on CD until very recently. I had received a copy for Christmas — my very first record. I was about to begin Form 2 (Year 8) at school.

From then on, the lists slowly took over the diary. Daily, I wrote down every song I heard for the first time. I extended my weekly Favourites list to a Top 10. At the beginning of May, I made the breakthrough: I abandoned 3AW, cut out the 3DB Top 40 from *The Sun*, and pasted it in my diary. I did this every week until *The Sun* stopped publishing the list in early 1970. The Top 10 on the first 3DB Top 40 I collected was:

- 1 'Beatnik Fly' (Johnny and the Hurricanes)  
(US instrumental)
- 2 'He'll Have to Go' (Jim Reeves)  
(US C&W ballad)
- 3 'Starlight Starbright' (Lonnie Lee)  
(Australian pop)
- 4 'What In the World's Come Over You?'  
(Jack Scott) (US pop ballad)
- 5 'Cradle of Love' (Johnny Preston)  
(US pop; long-forgotten follow-up to 'Running Bear')
- 6 'Little White Bull' (Tommy Steele)  
(British novelty song)
- 7 'Stuck on You' (Elvis Presley)  
(Elvis's first single after he left the army)
- 8 'Handyman' (Jimmy Jones)  
(US pop ballad; fabulous high-pitched chorus, much copied, never imitated)
- 9 'Village of St Bernadette' (Andy Williams)  
(US syrupy fifties-style religious ballad; Williams' last single for Cadence before moving to Columbia)
- 10 'It's Too Late' (Johnny O'Keefe)  
(Australian power pop version of the Chuck Willis classic; makes the later Derek and the Dominoes version sound like a piece of squashed banana).

Just remembering the amazingly high quality of most of these singles makes my toenails curl with excitement! This was my real world: nothing but music.

The interest was in watching how the fortunes of various records rose and fell from week to week. Usually the obvious 'hits', the songs promoted by the radio stations, shot to the top in four weeks. Occasionally a song would take only three weeks. In 1961, Elvis Presley's 'Wooden Heart' was the first single to enter the Top 40 at No. 1.

Some records succeeded although they were hardly played on radio. Other records dragged themselves reluctantly into the Top 40 at No. 38, pulled themselves up agonisingly to No. 33 or so, then disappeared after four

weeks. Most of my favourite records were not very popular. If I were lucky, I would hear them three or four times before they disappeared.

I didn't collect pictures of pop stars; I thought their beehive or Elvis-cowlick haircuts were daggy. I didn't have the money to attend pop concerts, and wouldn't have done so anyway. Pop concerts sounded dangerous to me.

I wish now that I had attended a Johnny O'Keefe concert. The legend is that if Lee Gordon, his promoter, put him on first, nobody stayed for the four other American acts; if Gordon put him on last, the four other acts, usually from America, were booed off stage until O'Keefe appeared. Even the Everly Brothers were bundled off stage so that Johnny O'Keefe could be unleashed.

### My own hit parade

1961 marks the beginning of the true flowering of my hit parade craze. I began collecting all the hit parades I could find. On Wednesday night, the ABC broadcast its national Top 8. I began to buy *Chuckler's Weekly*, for many years a children's magazine, which was forced to run items of interest to teenagers to keep its circulation. It included the Sydney Top 40. Most of the entries were so different from those in Melbourne that it took a bit of research to find out what they were. For instance, Edith Piaf's 'Milord', a huge hit in Europe and also in Sydney, was ignored here until a Melbourne singer, Gaynor Bunning, recorded it in English and sold quite a few copies.

What should I do with all these hit parades? Make a pattern of patterns! Combine them into my own chart!

This I did for the first time on Saturday, 4 February 1961. I called it the 'Australian Cashbox', after the American *Cashbox* magazine chart, a gospel tome to Stan Rofe, and from which he played the 'red bullets' (fastest-rising records) every Monday afternoon on 3KZ. My very own chart began as a Top Ten:

- 1 'Wonderland by Night' (Bert Kaempfert Orchestra)  
(German instrumental; wonderful trumpet solo; the third or fourth record I owned)
- 2 'Sway' (Bobby Rydell)  
(US pop ballad version of the old forties song)
- 3 'Are You Lonesome Tonight' (Elvis Presley)  
(Elvis in super-maudlin mood)
- 4 'Milord' (Gaynor Bunning in Melbourne; Edith Piaf elsewhere in Australia)  
(see above)
- 5 'North to Alaska' (Johnny Horton)  
(US C&W ballad)
- 6 'Goodness Gracious Me' (Sophia Loren and Peter Sellers)  
(British novelty)
- 7 'Last Date' (Floyd Cramer)  
(US piano instrumental; I received this for my birthday in 1961)
- 8 'Doll House' (Donny Brooks)  
(US upbeat pop ballad)
- 9 'Peter Gunn' (Duane Eddy)  
(US instrumental; with its mighty sax solo, one of the last raunchy rock and roll records)
- 10 'Fools Rush In' (Brook Benton)  
(US pop ballad with infectious samba backbeat)

There is pre-Beatles sixties pop in all its glory: three instrumentals; a couple of ballads that look back to the fifties; a comedy piece; at least one tune that looks back to the rock

and roll era. No Australian single, except for Gaynor Bunning's cover version of 'Milord'. (Australian pop didn't become an industry until 1965, although in the early sixties there were often Australian-made records on the Top 40.)

The excitement of each week was the adding up of the final tally after collecting as many hit parades as possible. This process occupied more and more hours during my weekends, when I should have been doing homework, especially after my friend David moved to Sydney and began to send me all the Sydney charts.

Apart from David (whom, I realised later, probably only took part in this madness because of friendship), nobody in the world seemed interested in this peculiar hobby. That was an important part of its charm. It would have destroyed the enjoyment if I had known that in Sydney, right then, Glenn A. Baker had an even larger collection of hit parades than mine, and would later make a career from recycling the information he gathered; and that in America, Joel Whitburn was gathering the statistics that would later allow him to become the official chart archivist for *Billboard* magazine.

My madness knew no end. I began to make up charts that biased the whole towards my own favourites.

By the end of 1962 I was producing a Top 100 every week. When David returned from Sydney, my supply of some charts dried up, so I reduced my own Australian Cashbox to a Top 40.

I used the weekly chart as part of the contents of my first 'fanzine', although I had never heard the term. During 1961, Ron Sheldon and I produced a magazine fortnightly. Ron's father supplied the Fordigraph and the stencils, and my father lent me his old Underwood typewriter. Magazine sales among the other kids (26 issues produced in one year!) paid for the paper and left 7s 6d profit. Ron didn't have time to help produce the magazine in 1962. Because I lost contact with him at the end of 1962, he was never to know that he had helped sow the seeds of *SF Commentary* and other strange growths.

During the 1960s, the highlight of the end of each year was the production of the Top 40 Hits of the Year. Why not produce a chart of Bruce Gillespie's Favourite Hits of the Year?

### 1962: My favourite year

1962 I remember as my favourite year — the last year of childhood, since it was the last year I could get away without doing much homework, and could devote all my free time to my hobbies. My super-hobby was hit parade lists, and it was the best year ever for pop music, when the best records by my favourite performers — such as Roy Orbison, The Shadows, Frank Ifield, Gene Pitney and RobEG — were all released within twelve months.

Not that you would guess this from looking at the list of the records that actually sold best during 1962:

### 1962 Top 10 of the Year

- 1 'Stranger on the Shore' (Mr Acker Bilk)  
(British instrumental for clarinet and orchestra)
- 2 'Wolverton Mountain' (Claude King (original US version); Kevin Shegog (Australian version))  
(C&W novelty song)
- 3 'Can't Help Falling In Love' (Elvis Presley)
- 4 'Silver Threads and Golden Needles' (The Springfielders)  
(British C&W up-tempo ballad; Dusty Springfield was

- lead vocalist in the group)
- 5 'Roses Are Red' (Bobby Vinton)  
(US syrupy ballad)
  - 6 'I Can't Stop Loving You' (Ray Charles)  
(US blues version of C&W classic; from LP *Modern Sounds in Country and Western*)
  - 7 'Midnight in Moscow' (Kenny Ball's Jazzmen)  
(British trad jazz instrumental based on a mangled Russian folk song)
  - 8 'I Remember You' (Frank Ifield)  
(Australian Frank Ifield with first British hit; C&W ballad with that fabulous yodel at the end)
  - 9 'The Stripper' (David Rose Orchestra)  
(US jazz instrumental)
  - 10 'Dream Baby' (Roy Orbison)  
(One of several hits for Roy Orbison during his most successful year)

The list that now interests me much more is:

#### My Favourites Records of 1962

(based on my weekly Top 10 lists)

- 1 'The Crowd' (Roy Orbison)  
(The Greatest Pop Single Ever, although it did not sell many copies for Orbison)
- 2 'Ginny Come Lately' (Brian Hyland)  
(Very syrupy ballad; I liked it because I was feeling equally syrupy about a girl at school during that year)
- 3 'Dream Baby' (Roy Orbison)  
(Up-tempo ballad; it is still often played on Golden Oldies radio)
- 4 'Leah' (Roy Orbison)  
(Stretch those tonsils, Roy. Still sounds as great now as it was when I heard it first)
- 5 'Silver Threads and Golden Needles' (The Springfields)  
(Dusty Springfield never sounded better than when she led the Springfields)
- 6 'Midnight in Moscow' (Kenny Ball's Jazzmen)  
(The best of several jazz hits during the year when Melbourne's youth divided into 'rockers' and 'jazzers'. The distinctions disappeared in 1963 after the Beatles appeared)
- 7 'Love Letters' (Ketty Lester)  
(Jazz-influenced country ballad by contralto Ketty Lester, who was never heard of again)
- 8 '5-4-3-2-1-Zero!' (RobEG)  
(Australian electric slide guitar instrumental; 'RobEG' was stage name of Robie Porter, who has been producing records in America for the last forty years)
- 9 'Evergreen' (Roy Orbison)  
(More than usually lugubrious Orbison ballad, released as a single only in Australia)
- 10 'Can't Help Falling in Love' (Elvis Presley)

How did 'Can't Help Falling in Love' get there? These days I can think of many dozens of singles I like better than the Elvis Presley ballads of 1962. I would pick as No. 2 'Peace Pipe', an instrumental by the Shadows that was played on 3KZ all the 1961–62 summer; and No. 3 would be 'Guitar Tango', also by the Shadows. But I still play the Shadows constantly, whereas some of the other singles have been unavailable on LP or CD for a long time. Nobody has ever reissued the great singles recorded by Ron Tudor at W&G and Astor in the early sixties, including Bobby Cookson's Orbison-type ballad 'I Could Have Loved You So Well' —

because the master tapes have probably long since disappeared.

#### 1963: My lists escape from pop music

In 1963, I began to break away from pop-music-based lists by producing my first Favourite Books of the Year. The items on the very first list now seem very peculiar:

- 1 *Atlas Shrugged*  
by Ayn Rand (1957; 1084 pp.)
- 2 *East of Eden*  
by John Steinbeck (1952; 567 pp.)
- 3 *Gone With the Wind*  
by Margaret Mitchell (1936; 1011 pp.)
- 4 *My First 2000 Years*  
by Viereck and Eldridge (1929; 512 pp.)
- 5 *Fury*  
by Henry Kuttner (156 pp.)
- 6 *Pastures of Heaven*  
by John Steinbeck (188 pp.)
- 7 *Not as a Stranger*  
by Thompson (1955; 702 pp.)
- 8 *Hawaii*  
by James Michener (1959; 905 pp.)
- 9 *Murder in Mesopotamia*  
by Agatha Christie
- 10 *The Diary of Anne Frank*  
(1955; 224 pp.)

Until now, I've never had the courage to reprint 1963's list. No wonder! Doesn't this tell you everything about being young (sixteen), bookish, idealist (without any clear ideals), and fond of thick books. (Paul Stevens once asked a teenage customer in Space Age Books what kind of a book he was looking for. 'Thick,' was the answer. 'It must be a thick book.')

I began my life's reading journey with *Atlas Shrugged* (in which Ayn Rand admits that her idealised characters have an emotional age of sixteen), loved the lunacy and defiance of it, and let it slice through all my previously unquestioned religious and social beliefs. Within six months, I saw that its economic propositions were idiotic and had become a proto-socialist, probably under the influence of John Steinbeck (*East of Eden* and, in 1964, *The Grapes of Wrath*).

I liked many of these books just because they were b-i-g and sprawling and overwhelming. Today I couldn't read *Hawaii* or *Gone With the Wind*. Some books, such as *My First 2000 Years*, have disappeared from memory. And some, such as *Fury*, I swore that I'd reread, but never have. *Not as a Stranger* and *The Diary of Anne Frank* rang true to a teenage idealist, but even in 1963 I knew that *Not as a Stranger* wasn't written very well.

I discovered 'fine literature' the next year, 1964, when I took English Literature in Form 6 (Year 12), and the Hunger for the Great overwhelmed me during my university years. At the same time, I was reading every SF short story I could find.

#### I discover that other people are interested in lists

My life changed greatly from 1967 to 1970. In 1967, I discovered *Australian Science Fiction Review*. In its pages, people such as John Foyster listed their favourite works of science fiction. I found I was not alone in making lists.

Because of meeting John Bangsund and Lee Harding and watching nine times a film named *2001: A Space Odyssey*, I discovered classical music. Here was music I could enjoy

and learn about without bothering to write lists. Vast amounts of information were available on the record jackets of classical records, but the only available classical music list was the uninspiring *Billboard Top 100 Classical Albums*.

I spent 1969 and 1970 in the Victorian country town of Ararat attempting to become a teacher. At the same time I began to publish my own fanzines.

I abandoned making lists of pop records in early 1970. By then, I had already been publishing *SF Commentary* for a year, and there was no time left for other hobbies. I was living at Ararat, and could listen to only one radio station, 3BA Ballarat. Its play list was limited. By the end of 1970, the pop music boom that began in late 1963 had ended. A few years ago, Philip Bird sent me 3UZ's Top 100 lists for every year during the 1970s, and I could recognise only a few of the songs. After FM radio began in America (in 1968) and Australia (in 1975), pop music fractured into warring factions. Radio stations began to play songs one after the other, without back announcements. No wonder I haven't listened to pop radio since 1974.

Since the mid 1960s, I had been attempting to find and read every short work of science fiction published in the English-speaking world. Long before publishing *SF Commentary*, I began to write my own list of **The Best Short Science Fiction Stories of the Year**. The first list was for 1964:

- 1 'Alpha Ralpa Boulevard' (Cordwainer Smith) *Best from F&SF, 11th Series*
- 2 'No Great Magic' (Fritz Leiber) *Galaxy*, December 1963
- 3 'Time Lag' (Poul Anderson) *Best from F&SF, 11th Series*
- 4 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes' (Roger Zelazny) *F&SF*, November 1963
- 5 'Waterspider' (Philip K. Dick) *If*, January 1964
- 6 'Drunkboat' (Cordwainer Smith) *Amazing*, October 1963
- 7 'To Plant a Seed' (Neil Barrett Jr) *Amazing*, December 1963
- 8 'The Sources of the Nile' (Avram Davidson) *Best from F&SF, 11th Series*

As I wrote more and more for fanzines, I began to write my annual lists of Favourite Films, Favourite Short Stories, and Favourite Books (as well as Favourite Novels). After 1972, I began to print them once a year in *SF Commentary*. The letters of comment poured in. People such as Robert Mapson from Western Australia began to send me their own lists every year.

It was Joseph Nicholas who reminded me that lists are not self-explanatory. During a lively exchange of correspondence in ANZAPA (the equivalent of an Internet 'flame war'), Joseph took me to task for publishing my lists without annotations. Ah hah, I thought, another way to fill fanzine pages: short reviews of all the books I've read between mailings.

On Eidolist, an Internet exchange list that was begun by the people in Western Australia who edited *Eidolon*, I discovered an active field of creative endeavour: inventing new lists! One of the perpetrators is Jonathan Strahan. Either he runs the world's largest computer database of trivia, or he has paper lists as voluminous as mine. His most recent list was Best Australian SF and Fantasy Books of the 1990s (his No. 1 was Damien Broderick's *The White Abacus*). Here's my list:

#### Favourite Australian SF and Fantasy Books 1990–1999:

- 1 George Turner: *Genetic Soldier* (1994)
- 2 George Turner: *The Destiny Makers* (1993)
- 3 George Turner: *Brain Child* (1991)
- 4 Greg Egan: *Distress* (1995)
- 5 Greg Egan: *Axiomatic* (1995)
- 6 Lucy Sussex: *The Scarlet Rider* (1996)
- 7 Greg Egan: *Quarantine* (1992)
- 8 Sean McMullen: *Call to the Edge* (1992)
- 9 Lucy Sussex: *My Lady Tongue and Other Tales* (1990)
- 10 Lucy Sussex & Judith Raphael Buckrich (eds.): *She's Fantastical* (1995)
- 11 Jonathan Strahan & Jeremy G. Byrne (eds.): *The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy* (1997)
- 12 Leanne Frahm: *Borderline* (1996)

It's hardly necessary to say that my list excludes books I haven't read — hence the absence of Jonathan Strahan's No. 1, *The White Abacus*.

There's not much commentary I can provide on this list without repeating the mini-reviews I published when I first read the books. George Turner became Australia's best SF story-teller with *The Sea and Summer* in the 1980s. The books he published between then and his death kept up the standard. One day I will find the time to write the definitive reviews of *The Destiny Makers* and *Genetic Soldier*. I find Greg Egan's work more variable than George Turner's, but *Distress*, his most personal work so far, is a special favourite of mine. *Axiomatic* includes several of Egan's best short stories.

People on Eidolist disagreed most strongly with each other when discussing anthologies. Very few anthologies or collections stand up well if judged on the *average* quality of their contents. I judge an anthology on its *best* stories. Each collection I've listed has two or three stories that I would consider for any list of Favourite Australian Short Stories (SF or non-SF).

I don't know how to categorise *The Scarlet Rider* — fantasy? horror? dark fantasy? — but I do know that in it Lucy Sussex proves that she has the most distinctive 'voice' in Australian SF or fantasy. The same can be said of the stories in *My Lady Tongue*.

#### Millennial and centennial listomania takes over the world

In the 1960s I thought I was the only person in the world interested in making lists. By the end of 1999, every journalist in every newspaper or magazine was hard at work on The Best of Everything for the Year/Century/Millennium. Shakespeare was named as the Writer of the Millennium, and *Citizen Kane* as Film of the Century, although many film fans now disagree with this judgment. I won't reprint any of the many Centennial and Millennial Lists (they're all on the Web somewhere), but here I reprint one that appeals to me. It was compiled from the votes of the readers of *Gramophone* magazine in the UK:

#### Gramophone Ten Greatest Recordings Ever Made

- 1 Wagner: *The Ring*  
Sir Georg Solti (cond.)/Vienna Philharmonic (Decca) (14 CDs)
- 2 Elgar: Cello Concerto  
Jacqueline du Pré/Sir John Barbirolli (cond.)/London Symphony Orchestra (EMI)
- 3 Beethoven: Symphony No. 5  
Carlos Kleiber (cond.)/Vienna Philharmonic (DG)
- 4 Puccini: *Tosca*  
Maria Callas/Victor de Sabata (cond.)/La Scala Choir

# THE BEST OF BRITISH: THE BILLINGER COLLECTION



Andy Butler's talk at Aussiecon 3. (Photo by **Paul Billinger**, as are all the photos on these two pages.)



Dave Langford — more Hugos for the mantel.



'Where are the British fans?' 'In the bar at the Centra. Where else?':  
*Left to right:* Mark Plummer, Claire Brialey, Andy Butler, Noel Collyer, Elizabeth Billinger.





The Assembled Acnestids, the Tuesday before Aussiecon 3, outside Slow Glass Books, Melbourne.  
*Left to right:* Bruce Gillespie, Mark Plummer, Pat McMurray, Claire Brialey, Elizabeth Billinger, Andrew Butler, and Dave Langford.



Two Aussiecon 3 panels:  
*Above: Left to right:* Helen Merrick, Damien Broderick, Andy Butler, Richard Harland, Charles Taylor.  
*Below: Left to right:* John Douglas, Bruce Gillespie, Maureen Kincaid Speller, Bill Congreve.



## AUSSIECON 3: THE CATH ORTLIEB COLLECTION

Other photographers at Aussiecon 3 aimed their cameras at the writer celebrities, but Melbourne's **Cath Ortlieb** had her eye on the people who matter — the fans. The next four pages feature Cath's photos.



Dave Langford, fannishly friendly with Leanne Frahm, Jane Tisell and Marc Ortlieb.



Heather (l) and Karen Johnson. Heather is Karen's mother, but she had more fun at Aussiecon than Karen, who was co-organising the very successful Children's Program.



Phil Wlodarczyk and Frances Papworth clutch Reynaldo the sheep, most recent FFANZ winner (Phil and Frances went to New Zealand, too).



Perry Middlemiss, Aussiecon 3 Chair, at the Closing Ceremony receives the Convention's gift from a strange person in tutu (Greg Turkich).



A highlight of Aussiecon: Marc Ortlieb (centre) presents the Best Pro Artist Ditmar to Nick Stathopoulos (left), who insists on giving it to Shaun Tan (right).



The ANZAPA Collation Party:  
*Above:* LynC, Joyce Scrivner, Roger Sims.  
*Below:* Michael Green, Leanne Frahm, Bill Wright, LynC.





**Strange goings on at Aussiecon 3:**

*Above:* Beard tickling by Roman Orszanski. It's Leigh Edmonds' beard, closely monitored by Sally Yeoland.

*Below:* Goanna watching by Weller, Jeanne Mealy and John Stanley: the Melbourne Zoo trip (Royal Zoological Gardens, Parkville).



- and Orchestra (EMI) (2 CDs)
- 5 Bach: *The Goldberg Variations*  
Glenn Gould (Sony)
  - 6 Mahler: *Das Lied von der Erde (Song of the Earth)*  
Kathleen Ferrier/Julius Patzak/Bruno Walter  
(cond.)/Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (Decca)
  - 7 Beethoven: *Symphony No. 9*  
Wilhelm Furtwangler (cond.)/Bayreuth Festival Or-  
chestra (EMI)
  - 8 Wagner: *Tristan und Isolde*  
Wilhelm Furtwangler (cond.)/Philharmonia Orches-  
tra (EMI)
  - 9 Schubert: Lieder  
(Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau/Gerald Moore) (DG)
  - 10 Richard Strauss: *Four Last Songs*  
Elisabeth Schwarzkopf/George Szell (cond.)/Berlin  
Radio Symphony Orchestra (EMI)

When I listed my favourite pop records during the 1960s, usually I disagreed with everybody else. With the *Gramophone* voters, I've finally found an amorphous group of

list-makers, somewhere out there, with whom I agree.

I will probably never buy Solti's 14-CD version of Wagner's *The Ring*, because I don't like Wagner's music. But it is clear that this has been the most ambitious and successful recording project of the century.

From the *Gramophone* listeners' poll, the CDs I own are Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10. To them I would add my own favourites, Klemperer's 1962 recording of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* on EMI, Karajan's 1976 recording of Haydn's *The Seasons*, and Beecham's 1960 version of Brahms' Symphony No. 2, also on EMI. And, at No. 1, my Desert Island Disc, a CD to which I could listen every day without finding it familiar or tiresome — Daniel Barenboim's first recording of Beethoven's Sonatas Nos. 30, 31 and 32 (recently re-released, with all the other Beethoven sonatas, in an EMI 10-CD package for \$45).

That's why it was worth being born, and growing up, and making all those lists, and relentlessly searching for new and great music: to find a performance and a recording such as this. Music is the heart of everything; a list provides a mere sketch map of the heart.

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## MY LISTS FOR 1999

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All the above is merely a prelude to the most important part of the year — the announcement of my annual Favourites lists. It doesn't matter if *you're* bored. I'm breathless with excitement to announce the results:

### Favourite Novels 1999

- 1 *The Silent* by Jack Dann (1998; Bantam; 286 pp.)
- 2 *Voyage* by Stephen Baxter (1996; HarperCollins Voyager; 359 pp.)
- 3 *The Fabulous Englishman* by Robert McCrumb (1984; Houghton Mifflin; 274 pp.)
- 4 *Biting the Moon* by Martha Grimes (1999; Henry Holt; 301 pp.)
- 5 *The Dragon Man* by Garry Disher (1999; Allen & Unwin; 239 pp.)
- 6 *A Witness to Life* by Terence M. Green (1999; Forge; 240 pp.)
- 7 *Starr Bright Will Be With You Soon* by Rosamond Smith (Joyce Carol Oates) (1999; Dutton; 264 pp.)
- 8 *Time on my Hands* by Peter Delacorte (1997; Phoenix; 397 pp.)

The subtitle of this list is **'Read For the First Time During 1999'**. Hence it does not include my actual Favourite Novel for the year: Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, which I last read in 1960. Along with *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*, it is the greatest story ever told, even if a bit longwinded in its second half.

Of the Top 8, two are by Australians (Dann and Disher) (Jack Dann calls himself an Australian these days, so why should I disagree?); three by Americans; one by a Canadian; and two by Britons. Wot, no Icelanders? I've talked about these books already in the pages of *Cosmic Donut*. For me *The Silent* retains its special dark, pulsating power.

### Favourite Books 1999

- 1 *Going Into a Dark House* by Jane Gardam (1994; Abacus;

183 pp.)

- 2 *Missing the Midnight* by Jane Gardam (1997; Abacus; 181 pp.)
- 3 *The Silent* by Jack Dann (as above)
- 4 *The Twinkling of an Eye: My Life as an Englishman* by Brian Aldiss (1998; Little Brown; 485 pp.)
- 5 *Voyage* by Stephen Baxter (as above)
- 6 *The Fabulous Englishman* by Robert McCrumb (as above)
- 7 *Biting the Moon* by Martha Grimes (as above)
- 8 *Infinite City: 100 Sonnetinas* by Alex Skovron (1999; Five Islands Press; 103 pp.)
- 9 *The Dragon Man* by Garry Disher (as above)
- 10 *A Witness to Life* by Terence M. Green (as above)

Repeat of above comment about **'Read for the First Time in 1999'**. *Les Misérables* towers above any twentieth-century novel.

British novelist and short-story writer Jane Gardam has skills of brevity, poise and perceptiveness hardly glimpsed in Australian fiction. She's funny, too, and fond of deep mysteries. *Going into a Dark House* is the best book of short stories I've read for many years, and *Missing the Midnight* is also wonderful.

*The Twinkling of an Eye* obviously deserves a long appreciation, which it doesn't seem to have received. Perhaps I've missed the long reviews. Perhaps Aldiss has already told us many of the interesting bits. Or perhaps the Aldiss body of fiction is a much greater achievement than any autobiography could be. Still, *The Twinkling of an Eye* has been woefully neglected.

Apart from Alex Skovron's collection, *Infinite City*, I read no poetry last year. Hunger levels rise; Skovron shows how approachable and enjoyable poetry can be.

### Favourite Short Stories 1999

- 1 'Zoo-Zoo' by Jane Gardam (*Going into a Dark House*)
- 2 'Bevis' by Jane Gardam (*Going into a Dark House*)

- 3 'Moon Six' by Stephen Baxter (*Traces*)
- 4 'Missing the Midnight' by Jane Gardam (*Missing the Midnight*)
- 5 'Dead Children' by Jane Gardam (*Going into a Dark House*)
- 6 'The Damascus Plum' by Jane Gardam (*Going into a Dark House*)
- 7 'The Difficulties Involved in Photographing Nix Olympia' by Brian W. Aldiss (*Not the Only Planet*)
- 8 'A Map of the Mines of Barnath' by Sean Williams (*Centaurus*)
- 9 'The Chance' by Peter Carey (*Centaurus*)
- 10 'Blue Poppies' by Jane Gardam (*Going into a Dark House*)

Again I have a problem with that subheading '**Read for the First Time in 1999**'. If I had read it for the first time during 1999, and the full power of it had hit me, I would have put at No. 1 or 2 Damien Broderick's 'The Magi' (just reprinted in *Centaurus*, the big collection of Australian SF edited by Dave Hartwell and Damien Broderick). I didn't 'get' the ending way back in 1982, and I'm not sure I do now, but I missed the significance of the almost uniquely horrifying middle bit about the inhabitants of the good ship *Southern Cross*. In this story Broderick sticks the stiletto deep into the darker fantasies of the Christian religion.

Of the stories that I've listed, I can only repeat my praise of the divine Jane Gardam, whose story about a nun and a lion ('Zoo-Zoo') is light-filled, mysterious, and full of sentences I would die to have written. Gardam's ghost stories (even 'Bevis' is a kind of ghost story) are very satisfying.

'The Difficulties Involved in Photographing Nix Olympia' remind me, if I need reminding, that Aldiss remains the best short-story writer in the SF field. Sometimes I think he and Le Guin are the only SF people who really know what a short story can do and be.

'Moon Six', if technically a bit of a ragbag of a story, has great intensity because in it Stephen Baxter expresses most of the obsessions about time and destiny with which he's been filling gigantic novels during recent years.

And if any proof need be offered that Australian SF can be very good indeed, grab *Centaurus* and read Sean Williams' transcendent 'A Map of the Mines of Barnath' and Peter Carey's dark take on the future, 'The Chance'.

#### Favourite Films Seen for the First Time in 1999

- 1 *The Sixth Sense* directed by M. Night Shayamalan (1999)
- 2 *The Shining* by Stanley Kubrick (1980) (complete version)
- 3 *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* by Clint Eastwood (1997)
- 4 *Exile in Sarajevo* by Tahir Cambis and Almar Sahbaz (1995)
- 5 *Dead Ringers* by David Cronenberg (1988)
- 6 *Point Blank* by John Boorman (1967)
- 7 *The Grifters* by Stephen Frears (1990)
- 8 *Le Testament de Dr Cordelier* by Jean Renoir (1959)
- 9 *Out of Sight* by Steven Soderberg (1998)
- 10 *Joe's Apartment* by John Payson (1996)
- 11 *The Last Metro* by François Truffaut (1980)
- 12 *Valmont* by Milos Forman (1988)
- 13 *City of Lost Children* by Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro (1995)
- 14 *Eyes Wide Shut* by Stanley Kubrick (1999)
- 15 *Die Hard* by John McTiernan (1988)

Did movies actually improve during the nineties, or have I been fooled by Dick Jenssen and Race Mathews, who have been showing me the best examples of recent movies? Not that I can watch old black and white movies any longer, as I can't justify the expense of installing cable TV. There seem to be some hotshot directors around at the moment and, better still, hotshot script writers.

I won't talk about *The Sixth Sense*, because you might not have seen it yet. Anybody who does see *The Sixth Sense* must see it a second time. And to judge from the box office, they see it again and again. The cinematography and acting are remarkable, but the rock-hard strength of this film is its understated script. You get to the end of the movie and realise that an American director has actually allowed the most important scenes to occur *off camera*. Eh?

But Shayamalan is not American; he's Indian. And he was also the script writer. I don't know how he was allowed to get away with such brilliance, but I wish him well for all his future projects.

*The Shining* was reviewed with much grunting and scratching of heads when it first appeared, but that could be because the version shown in Australia lacked more than 20 minutes of the original. Fortunately I was able to see it for the first time this year, and see it uncut. None of the reviewers said that *The Shining* is nearly as abstract a film as *2001: A Space Odyssey*, resembling it more than any horror movie. This is human disintegration as seen through the eyes of the vast hotel Overreach, and the images become increasingly abstracted as the 'horror' increases. The final chase in the snowbound labyrinth is too beautiful, too overwhelming, to take in at one showing, so fortunately I was able to see it twice this year. (Thanks, Dick and Race.)

I don't have room or time to talk about the other films in detail. It seems to me that aesthetics have returned to the cinema in a big way, from Clint Eastwood's breathtaking dance-of-the-camera as it lilt through lush Savannah; to the beauty entangled in horror that Cambis and Sahbaz found in besieged Sarajevo; to the slow blending of identities, in the images as well as in the story, in *Dead Ringers*; to the frenetic 1990s images of death and destruction that leap out from *Point Blank*, a film made in 1967; to the nervous confrontations of people on the edge in *The Grifters*; to the divinely mad image of Jean-Louis Barrault belting people as he barrels down the footpath, almost leaping out of the screen, in *Le Testament de Dr Cordelier*; to . . . You get my point. The camera — the director's eye — is still the hero of any film.

#### Favourite Popular CDs 1999

- 1 Terry Allen: *Salivation*
- 2 Norma Waterson: *The Very Thought of You*
- 3 Tony Bennett: *Sings Ellington Hot and Cool*
- 4 Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris: *Western Wall/The Tucson Sessions*
- 5 Various: *Return of the Grievous Angel: A Tribute to Gram Parsons*
- 6 Ray Wylie Hubbard: *Crusades of the Restless Knights*
- 7 Townes Van Zandt: *Anthology 1968-79* (2 CDs)
- 8 Johnny Cash: *At Folsom Prison* (complete)
- 9 Counting Crows: *This Desert Life*
- 10 Kevin Welch: *Life Down Here on Earth*
- 11 Kevin Welch: *Kevin Welch*
- 12 Mercury Rev: *Desert's Songs*
- 13 June Tabor: *A Quiet Eye*
- 14 Kevin Welch: *Beneath My Wheels*
- 15 Stacey Earle: *Single Gearle*

When I went through my lists of CDs received, I found that I hadn't listened to about 30 of them. So this list is tentative. It will probably be quite different this time next year.

The devil — Terry Allen — has the best lines. The cover of *Salvation* is a drippy picture of Jesus that Terry Allen found in a Texas country town. Allen does not share many of the loonier attitudes of his fellow Texans, and he doesn't mind making fun of them. 'Southern Comfort' and 'Xmas on the Isthmus' are the two classic songs on *Salvation*, but 'This Ain't No Top Forty Song' would make a great Top Forty song if there were still any good songs on the Top Forty.

Nos. 2 and 3 are by singers who are approaching seventy (Norma Waterson) or over seventy (Tony Bennett). Norma's style improves as her voice deteriorates, but Tony's voice has never sounded better. These are the finest arrangements I've heard of Ellington songs.

Most of the rest of the CDs on the list can be called 'alt country', rather than 'No Depression style', as *No Depression* magazine, the flag bearer for alternative country, seems to have disappeared. Because Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt are now too old to be played on American country radio, they fall into the alt country field (country-style CDs that in America are played only on college and alternative radio stations). Emmylou Harris has picked up a lot of tips while working with Daniel Lanois on *Wrecking Ball*, so *Western Wall* sounds like a super-Lanois production. Lots of great songs as well.

The performances on *Return of the Grievous Angel* are variable, although they all sing better than Gram Parsons ever did. The CD is worth buying for Lucinda Williams' version of the title song.

The only two pop albums here are by Counting Crows, sounding the way REM would sound if they hadn't gone off the boil, and Mercury Rev, who have an indescribable sound, midway between shining and ghostly.

#### Favourite Classical CDs 1999

- 1 Leonard Bernstein (cond.)/Vienna Philharmonic/Concertgebouw:  
Mahler: *Complete Symphonies and Orchestral Songs* (15 CDs)
- 2 Marcus Creed (cond.)/RIAS Kammerchor:  
Schubert: *Nachtgesang (Night Song)*
- 3 Kent Nagano (cond.)/Halle Orch.:

Mahler: *Das Klagendelied*

- 4 Wilhelm Furtwangler (cond.)/Berlin Philharmonic (1945):  
Beethoven: Symphony No. 9
- 5 Maxim Vengerov (violin)/Daniel Barenboim (cond. & piano)/Chicago SO:  
Brahms: Violin Concerto/Violin Sonata No. 3
- 6 Marta Argerich (piano)/David Rabinovitch (violin & cond.):  
Mozart: Piano Concertos Nos. 10, 19 and 20
- 7 Wilhelm Backhaus: *Great Pianists: Backhaus I*:  
Brahms: Piano Concerto No. 2/Intermezzo;  
Beethoven: Sonatas
- 8 Gerald Moore: *The Unashamed Accompanist*

It is hard to go past these latter-day Bernstein versions of Mahler's Symphonies No. 1 and No. 9, unless you happened to have bought the older versions, with the New York Philharmonic, that were released by Sony a few years ago. In the DG set, even the very odd performances of the No. 4 and the *Song of the Earth*, with tenor and baritone instead of soprano and contralto, have great authority and validity.

Schubert's *Night Song* for small choir and piano or small orchestra can sound like the works of a barbershop quartet, but not here. Immense energy and seriousness, plus Hyperion's splendid engineering and acoustics.

Kent Nagano's version of *Das Klagendelied* is much better than any other I've heard.

Furtwangler's old version of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, transcribed from 78s, is hardly better than the great recordings of the seventies (although it must have been overwhelming in the concert hall) but it's worth hearing for its intense, slow and lyrical 3rd movement.

The next three are great interpretations of music that would otherwise be over-familiar. Usually I dislike Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 2, but Backhaus makes it into a new piece of music. (I would like to have won Tattslotto this year so that I could have bought the complete set — at \$2500 — of the Philips Great Pianists series. A great achievement, with every piece on 200 CDs picked by Tom Deakin.)

Unavailable for many years has been Gerald Moore's wise and very witty *The Unashamed Accompanist*, his introduction to the art of playing piano as an accompanist. Buy it while you can.

Bruce Gillespie, 24 February 2000

## BOOKS BOOKS BOOKS

### Books read since 5 March 1999

- \*\* Books highly recommended.
- \* Books recommended.
- ☹ Books about which I have severe doubts.

\*\* **MISSING THE MIDNIGHT** by Jane Gardam  
(Abacus 0-349-11017-4; 1997; 181 pp.)

\*\* **GOING INTO A DARK HOUSE** by Jane Gardam  
Abacus 0-349-10661-4; 1994; 183 pp.)

I can't describe how good these stories are, or how finely pitched is Jane Gardam's style. She's one of those great authors who leaves out everything but the essentials, then leaves out some of the essentials, or at

least enough to make stories intriguing and uncomfortable in their implications. The best story in both volumes is 'Zoo-Zoo' (from *Going into a Dark House*), an anarchic trip with an old nun who meets a lion, and much else besides. This story includes some of the best-written paragraphs I've ever read. Gardam is particularly good at ghost stories that are not quite ghost stories, such as 'Old Filth', 'Dead Children' and 'The Meeting House'.

- \* **FIREFLAUGHT** by Andrew Whitmore  
(HarperCollins Voyager 0-7322-6449-9; 1999; 349 pp.)  
Andrew Whitmore is the first to admit that *Fireflaught*



is an expansion of *The Fortress of Eternity*, his only previously published novel. Local HarperCollins commissioned this version, but seems to have made little effort to typeset the additional material clearly so that it makes sense. The sections taken from the earlier version still have a sprightly ring to them, while most of the new sections seem unnecessary. *Fireflaught* has the usual gang of pilgrims travelling across one of those maps you always find at the beginnings of such books towards a mysterious, dark-magical destination. Whitmore doesn't give a stuff for heroics or idealism, and neither do his main characters. Each of them has an unheroic reason for undertaking the 'quest'. I don't know what fans of heroic fantasy would make of these anarchic, even salacious goings on, but they are entertaining enough for people such as me who rarely read heroic fantasy.

\*\* **CHOCKY'S COMING HOME** by Frank Weissenborn and Guy Browning (86 Publishing 0-958690-0-5; 1998; 149 pp.)

This is an unusual and attractive attempt at self-publishing. Frank Weissenborn writes the story and Guy Browning takes the photos that are combined into a distinguished little book. *Chocky's Coming Home* traces two interlinked stories from the not-too-far future of a dishevelled, broken-down America. In a deadpan not-quite-Ballardian style, Weissenborn slowly reveals the story of the friendship between the main character and an 'alien boy' who, as the title shows, is based on the Chocky from John Wyndham's late-career novel. Nothing very surprising happens, but the book is full of sharp, unexpected insights.

\*\* **THE DRAGON MAN** by Garry Disher (Allen & Unwin 1-86508-046-2; 1999; 239 pp.)

Garry Disher has temporarily abandoned Wyatt, his tougher-than-tough guy of five novels, in favour of 'the Dragon Man', Hal Challis, the country policeman who is just as laconic and businesslike as Wyatt. He roams the Mornington Peninsula, which Disher knows well, observing carefully, nattering to the locals, and carrying out his duty until a host of small, unrelated crimes interconnect. Disher is Australia's best crime novelist; it's a pity that the rest of the world hasn't discovered him yet.

\*\* **THE ART OF ARROW CUTTING** by Stephen Dedman (Tor 0-312-86320-9; 1997; 285 pp.)

An industry of Aussie-boosting has grown up within Australian science fiction circles, but not many books or stories justify the excitement or put-about sense that 'Australian SF is getting better all the time'. One Australian novel that is totally self-assured is Stephen Dedman's *The Art of Arrow Cutting*, a strange mixture of horror novel and mystery, with much of the feeling of good SF. Its characters hurtle across the American landscape, one of them pursued for a black-magical secret she has stolen in Japan, the other not quite sure why he is helping her, and only slowly realising how dangerous it is to be around her. He's a wanderer; he goes along for the ride. *The Art of Arrow Cutting* has little depth of feeling, but it is a satisfying thriller that depends on the sparse grace and energy of Dedman's prose.

\* **DOWN THERE IN DARKNESS** by George Turner (Tor 0-312-86829-4; 1999; 352 pp.)

Although I enjoyed *Down There in Darkness* a great deal more in book form than when I read it in manuscript,

I can never put out of my mind that George Turner did not want to write this book, wrote it on assignment, then was left with it as his only unpublished novel when he died. The bitterness of the experience of writing it spills over into the bitterness of the book itself. Read it for interest, but read *Genetic Soldier* first.

\* **THE CENTURION'S EMPIRE** by Sean McMullen (Tor 0-312-86131-6; 1998; 383 pp.)

Sean McMullen begins with a promising premise: a group of people from the early years of the Roman republic discover a way to cold-preserve themselves. They disappear from the world for centuries, then wake for short periods, enjoying a limited form of 'immortality'. The first half of the book tells the stories of crises of the group at various times in history, when the leaders must be woken. Unfortunately, McMullen includes little material from 'The Deciad', his award-winning short story from 1985 that was the seed for the novel. When the survivors reach the twenty-first century, he turns the novel into a rather confusing thriller, full of endless betrayals and surprises. This gives a strange pointlessness to the narrative. A pity, since he would have done better to preserve in the second half the first half's quiet tone of unfolding of historical processes and the main characters' motives.

\*\* **INFINITE CITY: 100 SONNETINAS** by Alex Skovron (Five Islands Press 0-86418-576-6; 1999; 103 pp.)

I knew Alex Skovron as a friend and work colleague before I became aware of his status as one of Australia's best-regarded poets. During the last fifteen years he has produced several fine books of poetry. His latest, *Infinite City*, maintains the standard of excellence. Each poem is ten lines long, one verse of six lines plus one of four. Only one poem is eleven lines long. Within this severely limited structure, Skovron covers a fair range of modern experience, from the domestic to the national, from the particular to the sublime. Some poems owe much to the sensibility of Italo Calvino, as the book's title suggests, while others are more like the poems Cheever might have written if he had not been a writer of short stories. There is nothing over-exuberant or flashy here; instead, Skovron gives pleasure from placing every word in exactly the right place.

\*\* **THE SILENT** by Jack Dann (Bantam 0-553-09716-4; 1998; 286 pp.)

Mundy McDowell tells his own story of the period from when his parents were killed and their farm destroyed during the war until he is rediscovered by relatives after wandering through the Northern Virginia backwoods, usually hungry and often in great danger, for more than a year. Mundy is affected so strongly by the horrors of the book's first pages that he can no longer speak. His quick thinking gets him through a large number of encounters that would have finished off most people. He feels protected by several spirits of the dead, including a ghost dog, as he walks the line that separates death from life. This feeling of being alive and ghostly at the same time gives the book its power. All the detail, related in Mundy's mock-naïve style, is realistic; but the meaning is mysterious. While watching humanity at its worst, Mundy passes beyond humanity.

\* **THE MARRIAGE OF STICKS** by Jonathan Carroll (Victor Gollancz 0-575-06615-6; 1999; 282 pp.)

Quite a few Carroll fans hoped that *The Marriage of Sticks* would be the 'come-back' novel after *Kissing the*

*Beehive*, which many of us must have felt was Carroll's least interesting book. *The Marriage of Sticks* is certainly much more sinuous and complicated than *Kissing the Beehive*, but a month or two after reading it, I feel that it has made little impact on me. Earlier Carroll novels have a razor-bright feeling shining from them, a sense that everything is at stake, but might vanish in a moment. In *The Marriage of Sticks*, the magic circle of events is designed to teach the main character some essential truth about herself, and I don't believe this ever happens. If she had become a changed person, as the end of the book asserts, she could never have written the rest of the narrative in the way she has. Her basic characteristic is her inability to register others' pain, but the book itself also shows a failure of feeling. The truth is that Carroll enjoys writing about his main character as we find her at the beginning of the book; unlike her, he can't change his temperament because of some Damascus experience. Some essential quality has been missing in Carroll's writing since *From the Teeth of Angels*, which reads like the last will and testament of a writer about to fall silent. Perhaps, in his heart of hearts, Carroll has done just that.

\*\* **TRACES** by Stephen Baxter  
(HarperCollins Voyager 0-00-649814-0; 1998; 359 pp.)

\*\* **VOYAGE** by Stephen Baxter  
(HarperCollins Voyager 0-00-648037-3; 1996; 595 pp.)  
I should have read these books in reverse order, and both of them before reading *Titan*. But *Titan* made me into a fan of Stephen Baxter's work, so now I'm catching up. I'm still not sure why I'm a Baxter fan, since his writing style is threadbare at best, not a lot better than that of Larry Niven, whose work I can't read. But Baxter has much more interesting ideas than Niven; he takes nothing for granted, even while he seems to be the advocate for heroic science. *Voyage* is as absorbing as *The Right Stuff*, which obviously inspired it, but while reading *Voyage* I had the fun of realising that all this detail is both minutely accurate and extravagantly fictional. Even Baxter realises that going to Mars in the eighties would have deprived NASA of many of the projects that have been much more fascinating, such as the Hubble telescope and the Outer Planets Fly-by. The real strength of *Voyage*, however, is the skill with which Baxter writes about his main characters. He slowly lets us get to know these people, without 'doing characterisation', as many 'hard SF' writers do. Therefore the book's emotionally charged last line is just right.

The short-story collection *Traces* shows many of the same skills, but only a few of the stories, such as 'Moon Six', have the power of Baxter's best novels. I enjoyed this mixture of standard SF, semi-fantasy, and alternative-worlds stories. Beside 'Moon Six', my favourites were 'No Longer Touch the Earth', 'Mittelwelt' and 'Downstream'.

☞ **CHARLES FORT NEVER MENTIONED WOMBATS**  
by Gene DeWeese and Robert Coulson  
(Doubleday 0-385-12111-3; 1977; 173 pp.)

I'm glad I wasn't lent this book (thanks, Alan) before Buck Coulson died, as I would have had to say the same thing as I'm saying now: that this is the worst novel I've attempted to read in many years. I had heard that part of the action takes place at Aussiecon I, Melbourne, 1975. However, the only fannish references occur early in the book, while the main characters travel on the

same plane as the Americans who came out to Aussiecon together. This section is not very well done. There's a bit of palaver in Sydney, then the main characters travel to the Australian countryside. Nobody reaches Aussiecon! The action and jokes are unbelievably trivial. Do not under any circumstances read this book.

\*\* **TO SAY NOTHING OF THE DOG, or HOW WE FOUND THE BISHOP'S BIRD STUMP** by Connie Willis  
(Bantam 0-553-09995-7; 1998; 434 pp.)

You've all read it, so I don't need to talk much about it. Elaine enjoyed it more than I did. I thought it could have been at least 150 pages shorter. I did get very sick of the 'bishop's bird stump' of the title, as well as many other elements that are repeated throughout like incantations. I enjoyed living in this sunny world, and almost worked out the time-travel complexities at the end. But not quite; I fear that the poor reader is not meant to tie the ends together.

\* **DISTANT SIGNALS AND OTHER STORIES** by Andrew Weiner  
(Porcépic Books 0-88878-284-5; 1989; 236 pp.)

\*\* **THIS IS THE YEAR 2000** by Andrew Weiner  
(Pottersfield Press 1-895900-14-X; 1998; 192 pp.)

Andrew Weiner sent me both these books (which I suspect have never been exported from Canada to Britain or Australia) out of friendship, and like a rotten friend, I hadn't got around to reading *Distant Signals and Other Stories* until now. If I had read the book in 1989 when it appeared, I would not have had the satisfying experience of making a direct comparison between Weiner's early stories and his work from the 1990s (*This is the Year 2000*). His stories have improved rapidly during the decade. In his early stories, Weiner shows much feeling for language and a clear perception of some really interesting byways of science fiction. Comparisons to Kafka and Ballard come to mind, but not too insistently. In his early stories, Weiner shows only one consistent failure: an inability to bring together all the elements of his story into a satisfying conclusion. After reading many of the early stories, I felt 'Is that all there is?' In *This is the Year 2000*, Andrew Weiner becomes a much more powerful voice. The best way of describing his stories is to say they would be urban fantasies if they weren't also SF. He plays with fantasy and horror elements as well as fairly standard SF ideas, but the cumulative effect is to reveal urban life as seen by a total outsider. Everything is made strange and interesting, although on the surface Weiner is usually not writing about spectacular subject matter. Where aliens appear, they are familiar figures; only the humans are odd. My favourite story is 'The Map', with its familiar idea (the little antique shop that disappears the next time you go looking for it) and a surprise twist on the alternative worlds idea (what would really happen if you slipped unexpectedly between alternative worlds?). There are many other quiet, fine stories, such as 'On Becoming an Alien', 'The Disappearance Artist' (which could be expanded into a novel) and 'Going to Meet the Alien'. Andrew Weiner's stories appear regularly in the American magazines; it seems a pity that these two collections are also not widely available.

\* **DARWINIA** by Robert Charles Wilson  
(1998; Millennium 1-85798-815-9; 320 pp.)

Overnight in the year 1913 people in America wake up

to find that the other half the world, especially Europe, has been turned into Something Else — all sort of prehistoric, but not quite. A new continent to explore. No sign of the people who lived there. The good bit of *Darwinia* is the story of one man who explores the new continent. It proves more dangerous than he had suspected; not only does he encounter strange creatures, but strange humans are also on his trail. Then, half way through, the bloody author tells us what should have been kept a secret until the end of the novel. Not only are things not what they seem, but they are ludicrously more different than you could possibly imagine might be the real situation. At about this stage my eyes started to droop. There should be a law of Conservation of Weirdo Effects to protect authors from going whacko. This could have been a good novel.

\* **IN PURSUIT OF THE PROPER SINNER**  
by Elizabeth George

(1999; Hodder & Stoughton 0-340-68931-5; 568 pp.)

I read this. I got to the end of its 568 large pages. I remember that I enjoyed it, although it should have been 250 pages long. But I cannot remember a single thing about it! Enough said. Elizabeth George should spend some of her royalties (deservedly earned from earlier books) on a good long holiday.

\* **LOVE AND GLORY** by Robert Parker  
(1983; Delacorte 0-385-29261-9; 207 pp.)

An oddity. It's not part of the Spenser series. It has little of Parker's usual canniness of approach, although it has something of his smart-arse style. My guess is it's a first novel, written long before the first Spenser novel was sold. Probably a *roman à clef*, it's about a guy who loves and loses, then triumphs again. Real first novel stuff, probably accepted by a grateful publisher after Parker became successful. Not a waste of time to read, since it's concise and clear and funny, but hardly a feather in Parker's cap.

\*\* **TIME ON MY HANDS** by Peter Delacorte  
(1997; Phoenix 0-75380-838-2; 397 pp.)

Any novel with a title such as this is certain to use the time-travelling device proposed by H. G. Wells in *The Time Machine* or a variation on the time-travelling magic used by Jack Finney in *Time and Again*. Either way, the purpose of the writer will be to send a character back to a past era in order to improve the present. The real purpose of the author is to visit a favourite bit of the past in order to recreate it in loving detail. Historically minded authors, including Jack Finney, are quite welcome to keep writing such novels. But they should avoid a *cute* past. They should never think that the past was simpler or sunnier than the present. This, in essence, is what is wrong with *Time on My Hands*, although Delacorte is skilful at hiding it. The main character is sent back into the past in order to correct the present, i.e. the America of the 1980s and 1990s that was dominated by Ronald Reagan as president. In order to deflect Reagan's 1930s career path, the main character makes friends with him. The author creates a pre-war California that any modern Californian would love to live in: one without freeways, smog and large areas of Los Angeles. As readers, we find, to our surprise, that we get to like ol' Ronnie. As SF readers, we are deflected from the cute by the 'tragic', i.e. yet another demonstration that you can't change the past without becoming stuck in the alter-

native present you've created. Ending indecisive; sequel screamed out for. Somewhere in the rush, the precise significance of Ronald Reagan in world politics is lost.

\*\* **GEORGE TURNER: A LIFE**  
by Judith Raphael Buckrich

(1999; Melbourne University Press 0-522-84840-0; 214 pp.)

This seemingly straightforward biography has caused quite a kerfuffle around town. Not as much kerfuffle as the *MUP Encyclopedia of Australian Science Fiction*, but the connection between the publisher, MUP, and the problems of both *George Turner* and the *Encyclopedia* is not accidental. First, the good news. This is a very readable book, full of the sorts of information about George Turner that would have been unavailable without Judith Buckrich's six years of work. George Turner had no intention of revealing his secrets, and it's only Buckrich's fortitude that has uncovered anything that might be called a biography. Second, the bad news. Many people noticed when the book appeared that the information in many of the photo captions was wrong. I happened to know that Judy Buckrich had been sent the correct information long before press time. Had she sent on the correct captions? Or had her corrections been ignored? Then Yvonne Rousseau, eagle-eyed life member of the Society of Editors, when reviewing the book for the *Age*, discovered to her horror and astonishment that many of the quotations from George's texts were inaccurate. Whose fault could this possibly be? And does knowing this destroy the basic enjoyment of reading the book? For some people, yes. For me, the book remains an invaluable set of clues for trying to work out the most enigmatic person I've ever met. I feel more and more that Judith Buckrich's argument about Turner's novels is irrelevant to their real importance, which means that somebody should write a very different book about the fiction. But now that George Turner is dead, writing any other biography of him is an impossible task. *George Turner: A Life* is one of the few biographies or autobiographies of an SF writer that is both valuable and enjoyable to read.

\*\* **JOBS OF OUR OWN: BUILDING A STAKEHOLDER SOCIETY** by Race Mathews  
(1999; Pluto Press 1-86403-004-X; 308 pp.)

In *Jobs of Our Own*, Race Mathews writes about 'distributism', the 'third way' of social organisation, the 'stakeholder society' of employee-owners, that some people, especially in the Fabian movement, see as an alternative to shareholder capitalism on the one hand and government-controlled socialism on the other. Distributism, which evolved from a number of movements during the late nineteenth century, has been tried out in several communities, especially Antigon in Canada and Mondragon in northern Spain. Mathews gives a clear account of the development of distributism in Britain and at Antigon in Nova Scotia, but presents Mondragon without telling the story of how and why this experiment developed. (Race did relate this story in his Melbourne launch speech, giving it a strength that the book lacks.) And distributism? Many of its ideas are the same as mine, but to me they are part of the idea of socialism — i.e. that each person in society is an owner and beneficiary of the whole economic setup, and that a socialist government is merely a manager of that setup. What excites me about *Jobs of*

*Our Own* is its feeling that the Great Battles have not been lost; if the war against monopoly capitalism has to be fought all over again, let's get on with it.

\*\* **TIME FUTURE** by Maxine McArthur

(1999; Bantam Australia 1-86325-194-4; 454 pp.)

I've become very fond of this book in the process of doing notes for a much longer review (in the next *Nova Express*). The first time I read *Time Future*, I could not connect the wealth of establishing detail at the beginning with the vast range of explanatory detail at the end. Second time through, everything fell into place except the 'explanation' at the end. The main character is the harassed commander of a 10,000-person space station in which everything has gone wrong. Alien spaceships are preventing anybody leaving or entering. Damage to the station threatens its vital systems. Halley, the commander, has to solve problems and puzzles that don't seem to connect with each other. Some of the aliens are pompous nuisances; many of the humans aren't much better. And nobody will let Halley get a wink of sleep. She's exasperated, but keeps up her spirits with a nice line of sarcastic patter; she keeps faith, although some of her good friends have been murdered and nobody much wants to help. And when the *real* crisis hits . . . well, I've read many 150-page books that seem much longer.

\* **THE BUSINESS** by Iain Banks

(1999; Little Brown 0-316-64844-2; 393 pp.)

Am I the only person who's noticed that Iain Banks doesn't seem to care about quality control anymore? When he makes an effort, he can be the best current British novelist, as the first chapter of *The Business* shows. But throughout most of this novel he seems just plain lazy. The setup is nice, with its WorldWide Organisation That Controls All Governments, the 'Business' of the book's title, that for non-apparent motives recruits the unreliable main character. A send-up of Conspiracy novels? Not really; Banks proves to be merely lazy about motivations and methods. The second half is really slack. The main idea is thrown away in a sexist side plot and a 'solution' that is silly and complacent. Take a holiday, Mr Banks, before writing the next book.

\*\* **MOONSEED** by Stephen Baxter

(1998; HarperCollins Voyager 0-00-649813-2; 535 pp.)

In *Moonseed* Baxter has so much fun destroying the world, and destroying it in so much loving detail, that I feel a bit churlish in noting that the book is about 200 pages too long. What starts as a hymn to geology develops into the slambang equivalent of all those movies about gigantic volcanoes and panic-stricken people. Destroy! Destroy! goes Mr Baxter, hurling thunderbolts at the poor bastards (us), but the mayhem goes on too long. Worse, it becomes all the same kind of mayhem. The ending is not convincing, but the first half is deliriously entertaining.

\*\* **A WITNESS TO LIFE** by Terence M. Green

(1999; Forge 0-312-86672-0; 240 pp.)

If I said this was a sweet book, it would give the wrong idea altogether. That would hide the tense strength that gives power to its fantasy principle: that Martin Radey's spirit is set free by his death, to wander restlessly through forty years in the lives of members of his family, until his spirit achieves a resting place. Green believes in the admirable art of compression: long vistas of human history are sketched convincingly as a

large number of characters are brought to life. Its sweetness lies in Green's ability to make a satisfactory pattern from what could have been unruly material. This is a companion novel (rather than a sequel or prequel) to Green's memorable *Shadow of Ashland*.

\* **THE REMORSEFUL DAY** by Colin Dexter

(1999; Macmillan 0-333-76158-8; 374 pp.)

I hardly need to issue a spoiler warning when I tell you that this is the novel in which Colin Dexter kills off Inspector Morse. The cover says clearly that this is 'the last Inspector Morse novel'. What's puzzling is Dexter's motive in committing the foul deed. The acknowledgements thank the producer of the *Morse* television program, but say nothing about John Thaw, its main actor. A year or two ago, I read that Thaw now owned the TV program, but had sacked Kevin Whatley from the role of subsidiary copper. Is this novel, then, Dexter's revenge on Thaw for mucking around with his (Dexter's) world? Bloody expensive revenge! Let's hope he has some interesting notion for his next series. (This is the first Dexter novel I've read, and it's little more than perfunctory in style and content, despite the great deathbed scene at the end. At its best, the TV version of *Morse* did have style and substance, so I'll miss it.)

\*\* **BITING THE MOON** by Martha Grimes

(1999; Henry Holt 0-8050-5621-1; 301 pp.)

*Biting the Moon* is such an original book that it's hard to describe anything of the plot. It begins with two girls, one who has free time on her hands, and another who escaped from a motel room, but cannot remember how or why she had been held in the room. She cannot remember her captor, who had not returned before she escaped and hitched a ride away from the motel. She cannot remember any events before those of the morning in which she meets the story-teller. The story takes place in the mountains of the eastern seaboard of the USA; the two girls' journey takes them through some of the most beautiful country in America, delectably recalled by the silver-tongued Grimes. I cannot see any relationship between this Martha Grimes, who has made herself into one of the most exciting American novelists, and the Martha Grimes who writes increasingly dull detective stories set in Britain, yet the blurb assures us they are the same person. The two previous novels by the real Martha Grimes are *Hotel Paradise* and *The End of the Pier*.

\*\* **STARR BRIGHT WILL BE WITH YOU SOON** by Rosamond Smith (Joyce Carol Oates)

(1999; Dutton 0-525-94452-4; 264 pp.)

It was Yvonne Rousseau who mentioned that I should look out for the crime novels of 'Rosamond Smith', as they are actually the work of Joyce Carol Oates. No luck in 'looking out' for them; Rosamond Smith isn't distributed in Australia. I placed an order with Justin Ackroyd for every Rosamond Smith he could find, but so far only one novel has appeared — her latest. It is worth waiting for — the first novel about a female serial killer I've read. Oates catches the tone of all those rough-and-tumble books about male serial killers, while adding a fair bit of memorable imagery of her own.

\*\* **CENTAURUS** edited by David G. Hartwell and Damien Broderick

(1999; Tor 0-312-86556-2; 525 pp.)

I've written a rather pursed-lips review of *Centaurus* for

the Aussie issue of *Foundation*. My feeling was yes, there are some very good stories in this large collection, but why wasn't it *all* exciting? Even I have a sense of patriotism! Put together the best of the last twenty years of Australian short SF and fantasy and you should have a blazing, fabulous, drop-jaw collection! But it's not here, which is such a pity, as this is the first American-published collection of Australian SF to be published since (as I recall) *The Altered I* in 1976. The most difficult aspect of writing the *Foundation* review is that I already knew why Damien wasn't able to include some of the stories he wanted (especially Leanne Frahm's 'On the Turn') — David Hartwell knocked them back. Other stories, such as Greg Egan's 'Wang's Carpets', are uninteresting representatives of their authors' work. In fact, I almost stopped reading half-way through the book, which has a stretch of dull territory. Having said that, nothing can detract from *Centaurus*'s double-bungers, the two impressive stories at the end (Damien Broderick's 'The Magi' and Peter Carey's 'The Change'); Kevin McKay's much-read and much-loved 'Pie Row Joe'; Sean Williams' 'A Map of the Mines of Barnath', which is new to me; and a fair number of other treasures. Don't miss this collection, but don't treat it as the definitive survey of Australian short SF. (That's the one I would edit if given a chance.)

\*\* **TERANESIA** by Greg Egan

(1999; Victor Gollancz 0-57506-854-X; 249 pp.)

Elaine bought the hardcover edition of *Teranesia* at Aussiecon 3. (Thanks to Andy Richards, who imported hardbacks directly from Britain for the convention; the local distributor now imports only trade paperback editions.) Elaine put it in her bag, and read it at night while placating cats. She finished *Teranesia* quickly, and said it was one of Greg Egan's best books, especially because of the strength of its characterisation. Therefore I had high expectations when I read it, but felt a bit disappointed. Egan does place his main emphasis on his main characters during the first half of the novel, but lets the central section of the narrative dissipate, then at the end refocuses the book, not on the main characters but on the Big Idea (which, I admit, is pretty Big, but I had to have it explained to me). Here is a failure to integrate the Big Idea with the many interesting paradoxes of the main character, but the many enthusiasts for *Teranesia* would disagree with me. *Distress* was a much more successful integration of character, image and idea, which makes it all the more disgraceful that I haven't yet written a long review of it.

\*\* **THE LIVES BEHIND THE LIVES . . . :**

**20 YEARS OF 'FOR BETTER OR WORSE'**

by Lynn Johnston

(1999; Andrews McNeel Publishing 0-7407-0199-1; 213 pp.)

Only interesting if you follow the daily comic strip in *The Age*, although if you read the book, you would want to buy collections of *For Better or Worse*. Canadian Lynn Johnston began the strip twenty years ago, its main characters based on her and her husband and family and friends. It's the only daily strip with chronological integrity. The main characters are now well into their forties; the oldest son has finished college and is trying to find work writing; one daughter has just gone to college and another is rollicking through school days.

Only Farley, the dog, had a supernaturally long life, until he was replaced by Edgar. Johnston took a year to steel herself to kill off Farley. Humane, funny, wise, and often unapologetically sentimental, the strip is about as good as daily comic strips get. Johnston's twentieth-anniversary memoir doesn't tell the whole story of the life of the person who does the inventing, but she does fill us in on lots of unpublished stories about her characters. The illustrations remind us that Lynn Johnston's drawing style improved greatly over 20 years, but also shows that the strip has lost some of its initial *Peanuts*-like vigour.

\* **TIME: MANIFOLD I** by Stephen Baxter

(1999; HarperCollins Voyager 0-00-225768-8; 456 pp.)

I also bought this in hardcover, also from Andy Richards, at Aussiecon 3, and expected to enjoy it a lot more than I did. Baxter, like so many other successful SF writers, is now churning out books much too fast for their constituent parts to have hit the side of the brain on the way through. Baxter's mind teams with vast and fabulous ideas, and so many of them are in *Time* that I can't work what could be left for *Manifold II* or *III*. *Time* is intriguing for its first half, but then becomes a vast shapeless balloon of undigested and increasingly disconnected Big Ideas. Add to this the difficulty that one of the few unifying ideas — for statistical reasons the human race *must* be hit by a super catastrophe within the next 200 years — is as silly at the end of the novel as it was when introduced at the beginning. We know how carefully Baxter can integrate detailed information, big ideas and interesting characters — I just hope he goes back to doing this.

\*\* **A PRINCESS REMEMBERS**

by Gayatri Devi and Santah Rama Rau

(1976; Century 0-7126-0389-1; 335 pp.)

Elaine put *A Princess Remembers* on the 'Doubtful' shelf. This is the shelf on which one person in our household puts books to be thrown out, and from which the other person picks books that he or she reads and puts back on the 'To Be Kept' shelf. (That's why we have a book-overcrowding problem at our place.) Elaine began to tell me some intriguing stories from the book — for instance, that when she was three, while visiting London with her parents, Gayatri Devi found how to get from the Dorchester to Harrod's, and every week ordered hundreds of pounds of toys and sweets on her parents' account. In this autobiography, the Maharani of Jaipur tells, in a tone of delighted surprise, tales of complicated families and a level of extravagant spending that could never have been matched by any European squillionaire. Until shortly after World War II, Indian royalty owned not just palaces, but fleets of palaces, armies of elephants, hundreds of servants. They were also, according to the Maharani, worshipped by their subjects. After the war, they had more and more of their power and riches taken away from them. Before the war, as she was growing up, and then as she became the third wife of the Maharajah of Jaipur, Gayatri Devi shows a sheer enjoyment of everything, especially pomp, ceremony and vast expenditure, that makes one almost ashamed to complain occasionally about living in a three-bedroom little house in Collingwood. To her credit, she spent her life slowly breaking the rigid confines of palace life and entering politics and post-Partition public life. In 1947 she gained what *The Guinness Book*

of *Records* acknowledged as the largest majority ever in parliamentary history (about 750,000). By the time of the book's publication, all her family were dead, including her husband and siblings, and it's Gayatri Devi's vast love for her family which, in the end, makes this a memorable book.

And that, fittingly enough, was the last book I read for the year, the century, the millennium. The first book I read for the year 2000, the twenty-first century, and the third millennium, was:

\*\* **SNOW FALLING ON CEDARS** by David Guterson (1994; Bloomsbury 0-7475-2096-8; 345 pp.)

Great title, isn't it? A pity I could never buy it in hardback. In Australia, it was one of the first British books imported only in the trade paperback edition. Lovely cover, but I would like to be given the choice of which edition I buy it in.

I wanted to read this book before toddling off to watch the film (directed by Australian Scott Hicks). When I finished the book, I decided that *Snow Falling on Cedars* is so cinematic that I had no need to watch the film. The novel is a very skilful mixture of flashback, murder mystery, trial story, and ferocious-weather story. The flashbacks include a dramatic reconstruction of one of the most unfortunate episodes in American history: the internment of all Japanese-Americans during World War II, no matter how many generations any particular person's family had lived in the USA. The novel tells a wonderfully understated love story, instructs you on how to fish in Puget Sound while surrounded by fog, and gives you the feeling that it should have been called *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*. Which is why I read next:

\*\* **IF ON A WINTER'S NIGHT A TRAVELLER** by Italo Calvino (transl. William Weaver; 1979; Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 0-15-143689-4; 260 pp.)

If this novel is *about* anything, it's about Italo Calvino larking around with elegant ideas — an Italian Tom Stoppard. In structure, it's about people who never quite get around to reading beyond the first chapter of a novel called *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, because it turns out that when any person finishes one chapter, it is not the first chapter of the book that that person thinks he or she is reading, but actually the first chapter of quite another book, one he or she has never heard of. The other chapters have got lost. There's not much more to this flummery than that, but Calvino's style is so buoyant, funny and absorbing that I could forgive him any obscurity.

\*\*\* **TIME AND THE HUNTER (TI CON ZERO)** by Italo Calvino (transl. William Weaver; 1967; Jonathan Cape 224-61827-X; 152 pp.)

So inspired was I by *If on a Winter's Night* that I actually reread a book. I don't have any policy against rereading books; it's just that there are always too many not-yet-read books lying around for me to consider doing anything but reading one of those. But reading one book by Calvino is so inspirational that I had to go back to the Calvino book I read first in 1970. If you don't recognise the title, it's because it's the only time it has appeared under that title. It's been *T Zero* ever since, as it was for the American edition and even for the paperback of this first British edition. (The cover is

also atrocious; I hope the Cape publicity staff were embarrassed enough to resign *en masse*.) In its nine stories, five of them about Qfwfq, the amusing eternal clown who starred in *Cosmicomics*, Calvino covers as wide a territory as Marcel Proust did in *Remembrance of Things Past*, and in several million fewer words. The central image of the story 'T Zero' is that of the eternal hunter forever trapped: 'if there's one interval of time that really counts for nothing it's this very moment, definable only in relation to what follows it, that is to say this second in itself doesn't exist, and so there's no possibility not only of staying in it but even of crossing it for the duration of a second, in short it is a jump of time between the moment in which the lion and the arrow took flight and the moment when a spurt of blood will burst from the lion's veins or from mine.' Calvino alternates constantly between abstract statements and vividly earthy illustrations, combining elegant insights with funny pratfalls in a way that constantly reminds me of the music of Mozart. 'Blood Sea' tells in 3000 words the whole drama of life's move from the ocean to the land, in a story about Qfwfq in the back seat of a car careering along an Italian highway trying to place his hand on the knee of a lady while the lady's boyfriend is trying to steer. 'Priscilla' is the story of the first living cell as it divides within itself, then splits into the first and second living cells. The result is a profound meditation on memory, ecstasy and the minutest elements of human experience. *T Zero* is reprinted every few years, usually in America. Don't miss it or *Cosmicomics*, its lighthearted but equally well-written companion volume.

\* **THE SOUND OF MELBOURNE: 75 YEARS OF 3LO** by John Ross, Margaret Geddes, Garrie Hutchison and Tim Hughes (1999; ABC Books 0-7377-0823-6; 160 pp.)

ABC listeners tend to think of ABC radio stations as 'theirs'. Given that, it's surprising how much 3LO Melbourne has changed since it began in the late 1920s. During the 1930s it presented a wide mixture of material, then became the ABC's 'serious' station (the equivalent of BBC Radio 1) until the late 1960s, when 3AR, the other ABC station in Melbourne, became the 'serious' station and 3LO became the 'light' station. However, its functions were crippled by the fact that it had to broadcast all parliamentary sessions while either the House of Representatives or the Senate were sitting. It was difficult to grab an audience, especially in competition with the aggressive pop music commercial stations, when people never quite knew whether 'Parliament was on' or not. When parliamentary broadcasts moved to 3AR in the early seventies, and then to their own radio station, a long line of 3LO managers took on the difficult job of increasing ratings while maintaining 'standards', whatever they might be. The station that evolved during the seventies and early eighties now features 'personalities' who combine talk-back radio and interviews. Middle-of-the-road popular music, which was a central feature of 3LO's programs until the 1980s, has almost disappeared, except for Australian performers. 3LO presenters are seen as intelligent and vaguely left wing, as opposed to the presenters on 3AW (the main commercial rival), who are not. The rest of commercial radio has disintegrated into a weird mixture of golden oldies stations, ethnic stations, and public (subscription) stations.

*The Sound of Melbourne* would be a good book if it told that story, plus featured a few photos. Instead, here are a lot of photos, often insufficiently explained, plus grabs of information that add up to something like the story I've just told. The central impression I get is that 3LO managers have shown a universal ruthlessness over the years. Time and again we are told about the incredible popularity of somebody-or-other at some-time-or-another, only to find that person disappears abruptly, and somebody else is imported to 'lift the ratings'. Coups and counter-coups must be guessed at, however; according to this book, all is always sweetness and light at 3LO. One day somebody will tell the real story, but he or she had better hurry while the documentary evidence is still around.

\*\* **THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

by Rory Barnes and Damien Broderick  
(1999; HarperCollins Voyager 0-7322-6474-X; 392 pp.)

\* **STUCK IN FAST FORWARD**

by Rory Barnes and Damien Broderick  
(1999; HarperCollins Voyager 0-7322-6562-2; 227 pp.)

These books have very similar covers, but . . . Despite the cover, which makes it look like a UFO book, *The Book of Revelation* is a major novel about growing up slightly twisted in the 1970s (the main character is screwed around by the fact that he believes he was kidnapped by aliens when he was a kid and they did Really Nasty Things to him, a belief that affects the way he deals with the rest of the human race for the rest of his life). *Stuck in Fast Forward* is a forward-time-travel romp for young adults, which loses its way only because its interesting characters are eventually overwhelmed by the exuberance of its inventions. Although I haven't read much of 1999's YA output, I suspect that *Stuck* is the best of the bunch and should win the Aurealis Award in the category.

\*\* **SOUTH OF MY DAYS: A BIOGRAPHY OF JUDITH WRIGHT** by Veronica Brady  
(1998; Angus & Robertson 0-207-18857-2; 586 pp.)

The year 2000 is turning into a very good year for reading books. Veronica Brady's biography of Judith Wright, Australia's most important poet and (if there were any justice) Australia's next Nobel laureate, will be hard to beat as the Book of the Year. Brady's style is clear, uncluttered, and without affectation. Judith Wright's poetry could also be described the same way, but it has grandeur as well. Brady lets Judith Wright speak for herself; made 'grand' through her achievements and aspirations. This book is astonishing not because of any particular literary pizzazz but because Judith Wright's achievements are astonishing, and Brady knows how to present them clearly. I've read Wright's poetry, but I had no idea of her achievements in the field of ecological protection. Often believing that she was supporting a lost cause, she has been a major figure in saving large sections of Australia from destruction — first the Great Barrier Reef, then Fraser Island, and then many smaller projects. Even more impressive is the vision of Australia that leads her into action: her belief that the land should be returned to its original inhabitants, who knew how to live on and with it, and that the depredations of white Australians should be curbed when possible. Her vision is so complete and unshakable that reading Brady's book has been a great help in giving shape to some thoughts of mine that were just that — nothing more than wispy

thoughts. Judith Wright is now in her eighties, deaf for many years, and with limited sight, but her ferocious devotion to getting on with the job is a slap in the face to somebody like me, who's pretty good at watching other people get on with the job.

\*\* **THE HARVEST** by Robert Charles Wilson  
(1992; NEL 0-450-58694-4; 489 pp.)

Both Dick Jensen and Race Mathews had recommended Wilson's work a few years ago, so I expected to admire this book more than I did. I enjoyed it a lot, but it's a bit of a mess: too long, too many elements just flung in; and an inability to come to terms with its ostensible themes. An alien spaceship visiting Earth circles overhead. It does nothing for a year. At the end of the year, it puts the Earth's population to sleep and offers them eternal life, if they will metamorphose into a different sort of human being. Some people — one in 10,000 — refuse the offer. *The Harvest* is their story, although we are told the stories of a few of the people who accept the aliens' offer. Wilson just keeps evading the issues he's set up. The book is not really about eternal life, since the people who accept the offer must change, and eventually join the aliens. The book is not really about nanotechnology, which here is merely the magic method of changing humans into Something Else. The book could have been about transcendence, but instead stays with the characters who choose not to transcend. So in the end it's about being good solid Americans who refuse to become airy-fairy aliens. This would be really boring if the group of Americans didn't include some people of the type that might have persuaded the aliens that humans needed a bit of transcending. The mayhem provides a sort of story; far more interesting is the *Earth Abides* landscapes and cities emptied of people. Wilson's talent is visual; he's not too bad at dealing with people; but he'll do anything rather than deal with a solid idea.

\* **THE SPIKE** by Damien Broderick  
(1997; Reed 0-7301-0497-4; 289 pp.)

There's enough in *Stuck in Fast Forward* and *The Harvest* about nanotechnology to prompt me into investigating Damien Broderick's non-fiction book *The Spike*, which had been glaring at me on the to-be-read pile since 1997. Damien Broderick might know a bit about nanotechnology, and so might the people he quotes, but not much chewy information escapes into the pages of *The Spike*. All Broderick does is repeat, over and over again, how this huge spike (the vertical bit of the graph of exponential increase in technology during the next fifty years) is going to happen, and we don't have any idea what it'll be like until it hits us, but it'll change everything beyond recognition. He creates a thirst for information, then doesn't provide the kind of hard information that would be interesting. Instead, just more gosh-wow. My reaction to the nanotechnology section is the same reaction as I would have now to all those articles in SF magazines in the fifties that described the coming wonders of 'clean' atomic energy. Nanotechnology will have vast consequences, as Broderick says, but none of the ghastly consequences of exponentially expanding matter-creation sources are even guessed at. *The Spike* is not the product of the interesting Damien Broderick. The interesting Broderick has an acid tongue, believes nothing and nobody, cuts down nonsense and nonsense-sayers, and laughs at all true believers. But here is Broderick the

True Believer . . . Pass onto some other book.

\*\* **QUITE UGLY THIS MORNING** by Christopher Brookmyre

(1996; Abacus 0-349-10885-4; 214 pp.)

News of Christopher Brookmyre's novels doesn't seem to have hit Melbourne yet. Thanks to Lizbeth and Paul Billinger from Acnestis for sending me *Quite Ugly This Morning*. This, Brookmyre's first novel, is not quite as grungy as the packaging suggests, but it contains a number of memorable scenes, especially the first, which should turn the most ironbound stomach. At heart, though, this book is a comfortably old-fashioned detective story. The scene is Edinburgh. The main character is a raffish newspaper investigator with a talent for burglary and charm; he's on the trail of one of those scummy fat cats who did so well out of the Thatcher years. In this case, the baddy has profited greatly by taking over a NHS local service area, and tries to cover his tracks with a spot of murder. Future investigations of Kennetism in Victoria will probably uncover much the same bodies. A major character in *Quite Ugly This Morning* is the stupidest and most entertaining criminal in recent crime fiction.

\*\* **PUTTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JOHN CULSHAW** (1981; Viking 0-670-58326-X; 362 pp.)

I've been telling people about *Putting the Record Straight* since I read it in the mid 1980s. Worse, Elaine and I have been trying to remember John Culshaw's anecdotes accurately, since they are all about the insane backroom operations of the classical music recording industry. But I was never able to quote directly from it, because I found it impossible to buy a copy in Australia. Recently Dick Jenssen found it through amazon.com, and A\$63.80 later I now have a copy of one of the world's most readable books — provided you love music as much as I do. The book is inaccurately subtitled as 'the autobiography of John Culshaw', since Culshaw was one of those wonderful personalities who disappears from his own story, while telling marvellous anecdotes about everybody else. As recording engineer and manager of Decca during the 1950s and 1960s, he was responsible for many of the greatest recordings of the century. The reader infers this, since Culshaw's main concern is for the quality of the recordings he is making, whereas the company's main interest was in cutting costs and making absurd deals. My favourite Culshaw story is this: one Decca executive showed horror 'on discovering that whereas the music of Verdi's *Otello* was out of copyright and therefore did not carry an obligatory royalty, Boito's "book" — the libretto — was not. He rang me in a panic, and I explained that whereas Verdi had died in 1901, Boito

lived until 1918, and that as a general rule copyright applied for fifty years after the death of the artist. "Then why don't we get another book?" [he] asked.' Also wonderful is Culshaw's description of what happened on a Vienna Sunday morning when the *Tosca* fusillade of muskets were fired just outside the opera house; and the tale of what happened when Karajan discovered that Decca's Zurich agent was screwing him for a million dollars a year by the simple expedient of putting the royalty cheques in a Swiss bank in March and drawing the money out in September to hand onto the rightful recipient. If ever you see this book in a secondhand shop, buy it. Better still, if ever you see Culshaw's *Ring Resounding*, buy it immediately and sell it to me at some absurd mark-up.

\* **DARK KNIGHTS AND HOLY FOOLS: THE ART AND FILMS OF TERRY GILLIAM** by Bob McCabe (1999; Orion 0-72281-827-9; 192 pp.)

Thanks to Alan Stewart for giving me this to review for *Thyme*, but I'm not sure I'll be able to write much more for him than I'm writing here. The stills are wonderful, and much of the information is useful (especially details of Gilliam films that were never made, such as *A Scanner Darkly* and *Gormenghast*). Although it relies in long interviews with Gilliam, this book doesn't really tell me more about the films than I can work out by watching them. On the one hand, I liked hearing about the problems Gilliam faced when working with the rest of the *Monty Python* crew, but on the other hand I didn't gain any new insights into *Twelve Monkeys*. This is a fan's book; not much use to the critics.

\*\* **DAVID BENNETT: A MEMOIR** by Race Mathews (1985; Australian Fabian Society Pamphlet No. 44; 0-909953-25-2; 58 pp.)

I would not have known about this booklet if Race had not sent it to me, but it might still be available from the Australian Fabian Society. David Bennett was Race Mathews' best friend until he died of cancer in 1984. He was also a powerful figure in the Australian Labor Party, the Fabian Society, and Australian education. Race Mathews sent me the pamphlet because for nearly thirty years I have been interested in the ERA School, of which Bennett was the principal during its difficult first year and a half. Mathews skilfully recalls the various political turmoils through which Bennett lived, worked and fought, especially the hopes and fears engendered by the alternative education movement in the early 1970s. Mathews is also honest enough about the brutal day-to-day business of politics to make me glad that I never entered the field.

— Bruce Gillespie, 15 February 2000



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# THE MAILING COMMENTS

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MAILING No. 191, OCTOBER 1999

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## **Sue & David Grigg: MEGATHERIUMS FOR BREAKFAST No. ???**

We have seen the new house, and wish we could buy a house of similar size at a similar distance from the GPO. Worth waiting for. While sneaking a look around your house, I found myself coveting bookshelf-fillable walls, rather than looking at all the features people usually covet in other people's houses.

## **Margaret Orchard: BLAZON 1**

Welcome back, Margaret. I had wondered why I missed you at Aussiecon, but it seems that you attended only on the Wednesday night before events officially started. We missed you because we were too late returning to Centra to find the group we expected to dine with, which would have included you.

I doubt if I could live in a large shed, no matter how well appointed. I trust it is well insulated from Ballarat winter winds.

## **Eric Lindsay: KINGDOM OF THE BLAND**

In my Fan GoH speech, on my own behalf I pointed out that 'Personally I have blamed John Bangsund for almost everything that has happened to me in fandom'. I would equally blame John Foyster and Lee Harding, and by extension, Merv Binns, except that their influence is a bit more indirect.

## **Jack Herman: NECESSITY 30 — EVOLUTION**

Jack, I very much enjoy your return to ANZAPA — and fandom. Thanks for the detail about what you've been up to. Your professional life has been through more changes than mine since you've been 'away', but that could be because I've given up any hope or desire of landing a full-time job again in my life.

I was able to give your new (to me) address and email address to Marty Cantor, who was asking about you on Trufen. I trust he was able to get in touch.

We seem to agree about current films more than we ever agreed about SF books. *Gods and Monsters* is one of the best movies of recent years because, as you say, it's based on 'words, characters and acting, not special effects'. Which is also the main attraction of *The Sixth Sense*.

I haven't seen *Heat*, *The Usual Suspects* or *Grosse Pointe Blank*, but I'm also a fan of *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Get Shorty* and *Out of Sight*.

I can't agree with you about the program for Aussiecon 3. The general opinion seems to be that the emphasis on things literary made the program very different from the programs at American conventions these days. Yes, I'd like more individual talks, but there were quite a few scattered throughout the five days. I gave two of them.

## **Gerald Smith: HAVING FUN IN MELBOURNE: AN AUSSIECON THREE CONVENTION REPORT**

I just realise the concession offered in the title of your convention report, Gerald. A Sydneysider admits it's possible to have fun in Melbourne!

John Foyster was complaining in *eFNAC* that few convention reports had been produced so far by Australian fan writers. He should have stayed in ANZAPA. One great convention report after another, including this one.

My only disappointment with the convention was the meals, or rather, the meals I had to have in a hurry at times when the usual suspects had disappeared entirely. If only there had been one really great eatery on the Centra premises, I could have always found somebody to eat with. Or, if I had had spare time, I would have hot-trammed it back to Chinatown.

The only trouble with staying at the Centra would have been attempting to hold a room party, a practice banned by the management. But I wanted to retreat to peace and quiet when I returned to my room, and the Centra offered plenty of that.

Your heading is 'And the Guests Were Fun Too'. I looked for my name, and it isn't here! Oh, heartbreak.

I didn't see any of the other program items you mention, except for the Closing Ceremony.

I never did put my head around the corner on the mezzanine floor at the Centra, so I probably missed quite a few impromptu parties. I wondered what was going on around there, if anything, but was always in too much of a hurry to stop.

I finally caught up with you and Womble at the ANZAPA party, which was one of the highlights of the convention. Thanks to those who organised it.

## **Leanne Frahm: FROG OF FROG HALL No. 9**

Another great con report. Thanks, Leanne. I'm glad you managed to catch up with Petrina Smith. I saw her across an aisle at the launch of Judy Buckrich's book, but she disappeared before I could speak to her. She never seems to have a permanent address, so I don't know how to catch up with her at the moment.

## **Richard Hryckiewicz: ANYTHING BUT AVERAGE No. 24**

I wish you had supplied details of the intolerance you encountered at Aussiecon. To me, everything seemed very open-ended and everyone very easy-going. I didn't get the feeling of being dominated by Americans at the convention. The stronger feeling was that we were helped out greatly by overseas fans who provided personnel to cover some emergencies that would otherwise have been very embarrassing.

You've never talked about your experience of chiropractic with us. We both make a fair bit of use of our chiroprac-

tor, since earning one's daily bread on a computer is a sure way of doing dreadful things to one's spine. It's taken many years of manipulation to get my spine flexible enough for me to work day after day. If I do all my exercises each day, including lots of useful ones that he and the masseur have given me, I can keep going.

Intellihance, the program that sharpens images, doesn't come as part of Photopaint. Dick Jensen pulled it from CD-ROM or Web site a few years ago. I copied it into the Plug Ins folder of Photopaint. I suspect it would work just as well as a plug-in for Photoshop, Corel Draw, or Illustrator. Kai Tools works much the same way: install it, then copy all the .EXE files to the Plug Ins folder for your photo/illustration program.

It's a great pity you've left ANZAPA, but I'll make sure I get a copy of this issue to you. I trust you can return soon.

### **Sue Grigg: MEGATHERIUMS FOR BREAKFAST No. 21**

Always painful to hear about the loss of any cat. Sounds to me, though, as if Eccles actually got locked in somewhere unreachable. You probably *did* hear his miaow during the day. This happened to TC some years before he died. He disappeared entirely, but Elaine kept hearing his very faint miaow after midnight when she was calling around the back lane after the traffic died down. After five days, suddenly she heard an unmistakable TC yowl. She yowled, and he yowled, and suddenly I saw him at the first-floor kitchen window of the large building next door. He had been hiding in the building all the time, surviving by stealing the extras from the plate of LJ, the cat who lived there. But he wouldn't show himself. Once we knew he was there, we called the owner, who was kind enough to come over at some absurd hour and let Elaine through the front door, to be reunited with Her Favourite Cat. So never give up on a missing cat — he or she is certainly trapped somewhere.

I'm envious of Kathryn's Enid Blyton collection. Not that we'd have anywhere to store them *if* my mother had kept all the Blyton books we had as kids and *if* she'd sent them to me. She's given me a few of my favourites, which were still at her house in Rosebud. I had given up reading Blyton by the time I was thirteen, but I was still reading the occasional Biggles and William book.

Yes, that is one of the best Leunig cartoons. It would take a very large book to feature my favourite Leunigs, which come from two periods: the *Nation Review* days, and a golden period at the *Age* during the late eighties and early nineties.

### **Bill Wright: INTERSTELLAR RAMJET SCOOP October 1999**

Wonderful convention report, with the emphasis on the right things: Historicon, the parties, Dave Langford, Paul Kincaid's speech (which has appeared in *Acnestis*, so now I must find it and photocopy it for you; perhaps he would send it to you on disk).

Sorry to have doubled up on photos. But since you probably send your spare copies to a different audience from mine, no harm is done. Also, I didn't run your third page of photos, and although that picture of the maniacal young Foyster has been on my computer for years (thanks to Dr J), I've never published it.

If I had the money, I would like to stay in the Centra for a week, and simply wander around that side of town . . . swim in the pool, take the boat down to Williamstown and

St Kilda, sample the restaurants at Southbank, and walk down through South Melbourne and back again. A pipe dream.

Stefan is as on the ball as ever. The real GST will be even worse. Telstra article good, but articles about AFL football are a bit lost on me.

Another good Leunig.

Thanks for the comments about the ideological bent of Kennettism. It's strange, but it's only possible to see the twisted quality of the Kennett mind when we compare it with the very minor changes in emphasis made by Bracks so far. Just to have a few ministers who at least pretend to listen to the people Out There — the ears ring with the strangeness of the new tone. None of this solves the problem that Kennett has stuffed up things good and proper by selling off everything that was worthwhile in the State. If Bracks can manage this intolerable situation, he might prove to be the premier none of us could have expected or suspected when he began his campaign. Strange days, with glimpses of hope.

But who can do a Bracks on the national scene? At one stage I thought Beasley had it in him, but now I am a doubter.

Bill, you read John Bangsund's reminiscences of the 1975 Dismissal in a recent *Metaphysical Review*. Sally included them in her long article about her life and John's, which was also pretty much the story of Australian fandom from 1972 to the 1980s.

I'm glad you met Phil and Frances at last, Bill — two of the people who make Melbourne fandom rather special. I wish they didn't live so far away. Elaine and I can't ever get out to Seville, and they're usually too busy to call in here during their trips to the city.

I agree, Bill. I have no choice about growing old, but I refuse to compound the felony by growing up.

### **Karen Johnson: ANZAPANS ONLY No. 8**

I've had dreams as long and complicated as yours. I've written lots of them in my journals. But I can never work out what they mean. I'd be nice to be one of those dream experts I hear occasionally on radio — they listen to the most puzzling dreams and sure enough, here's the easy solution to your dream! I can't do that for you. The only message I get is one of panic and flight, which is the main feeling I receive from most of my own dreams.

So what *is* your Web site, Karen? You don't list it here.

Thanks very much, **Heather**, for your note. Great to have met you at last. Whatever happened to that restaurant-and-wine night we were going to arrange? For an event like that, Elaine and I are even willing to travel to the wilds of Croydon.

### **Michael Green: REALITY MODULE No. 12**

Thanks for the tribute to Colin Watson. I didn't meet him very often, and never sat down to talk to him at length. He put much of his effort into his library and the Dandenong Valley SF&FS, which I was never able to visit. The librarian who took over at Dandenong Valley Regional Library when he retired split up the fine SF collection. I'm told that bits of it started appearing in secondhand shops all over Melbourne. No wonder fans are wary of depositing their loved items in university or other libraries.

I'm impressed that anybody younger than me or Ursula Le Guin (who dedicated a story to him) remembers Paul

Goodman. He was one of the prophets of the alternative education movement in America in the late sixties and early seventies, but his work would find few supporters in today's schools and universities. I read some of the Goodman books I bought during the early seventies, but soon found his writing worthy and challenging but just a bit dull.

### **Maureen Kincaid Speller: SUN, RIVER & THUNDER**

Maureen, a hearty welcome to you and Paul. Distinguished recruits indeed.

What I can't work out is how you and Paul manage to be members of more than one or two apas at a time. Reading ANZAPA and Acnestis mailings takes up much time in which I should be reading books; and I'm struggling to find time to contribute to both. Yet you seem to be in about ten of them! You and Paul live in a different space-time continuum from mortal fans. (Nonchalantly, you go on to list all the other things you do in fandom.)

We've almost forgotten heavy rainstorms in Melbourne over the last four years. Yes, there has been the occasional storm with lightning and a bit of rain, but the drought is threatening to become permanent — just as George Turner predicted in *The Sea and Summer*. (The Melbourne 'winters' George describes in that book — winters that are merely cooler intervals between autumn and spring — resemble actual recent Melbourne winters.)

Our last lot of renovations lasted only two weeks, but they created a carpet of dust over everything. They also provided a playground for cats. Each cat would clamber down from the ceiling, covered in dust, with spider webs all over its whiskers. Their best fun was climbing the framework the builder inserted to hold up the middle of the roof before he put in the new wall. One day we saw all five cats sitting in different spots in the framework, just like dolls in a shadow box.

Your discussion of bookshops concentrates on mega-shops like Borders. The mere existence of the giant bookshops has made me keen to continue visiting the good smaller bookshops, such as Brunswick Street Book Shop in Fitzroy or Readings in Carlton. And even Readings moved to much larger premises to counter the threat from Borders.

### **Paul Kincaid: BOOKS TO FURNISH A ROOM**

The word is 'fill', Paul, not 'furnish'. Books in boxes fill my room, allowing a narrow passage by which I can reach the desk and computer. Books have long since furnished all the rooms at 59 Keele Street. There is no more space on the shelves or for extra shelves. I don't know what to do next.

Welcome, Paul. The quality of the writers one meets in ANZAPA these days! Reminds me of the era when one bumped into Bangsund, Edmonds, Foyster and Middlemiss in the same mailing.

Thanks for the life history, Paul, since you haven't had to introduce yourself in any of the other venues in which we've met. You seem to have been more ambitious about publishing fiction than I have ever been, and I've had little luck in selling reviews professionally. Also, you have abilities that I don't find in myself, such as organising convention programs and writing pieces such as 'Imaginary Landscapes'.

Your piece was magnificent, especially the paragraphs about your grandmother's house and the surrounding area. The only comparable writing I've seen recently is Aldiss's description, in *The Twinkling of an Eye*, of the houses

in which he spent his early boyhood.

If I had time, I would retaliate by reprinting an attempt I made (and abandoned) in 1976 to write everything I could remember of my first five years of life. I found I could remember vastly more than I expected; the piece went on too long, and petered out; with lots of editing, some of it is still readable, but it will have to wait until a later mailing.

At school, I disliked sport even more than you did, especially as I found I had absolutely no ability at sport. Besides, like you, I only liked 'reading and daydreaming'. Leave out the daydreaming: I was bored by anything but reading. I didn't want to 'go outside'. I hated the sun. Most other kids were ghastly monsters. It was only later in life that I discovered the world might be worth looking at it for its own sake. And it was only much much later that I began to enjoy the company of other people.

### **Roger Sims: MUTTERINGS OF A MAD WRITER No. 1**

Great to see you back, Roger (with assistance from Pat). Thanks for the gripping medical drama. I hope I never have to go through such an experience, but I probably will at some stage or another. And it was also great that you were able to get to Aussiecon 3.

Thanks for the convention report. I never found out if I was supposed to receive a Guest of Honour ribbon, but by the end of Aussiecon I was wearing so many ribbons, another one would have been got lost.

Thanks for the comments about my GoH speech. Because of the brightness of the stage lights, I will never know who did or did not attend my speech. I've been surprised since September by the people who've come up to me and said they were there, including quite a few people I thought were at the Nicholls party.

### **LynC: FROM THE LAIR OF THE LYNX No. 3**

Thanks for your comments about Estelle and your family. Anything more you want to write about Estelle in future mailings would be welcome.

### **Cath Ortlieb: YOU REALLY KNOW YOU'RE HOME WHEN YOU FIND A WOMBAT IN YOUR BED No. 65**

Thanks for the reminder about the precise status of the Wright Collection. It's one of the most valuable resources in Melbourne; I just hope it's used. The other valuable collections of Australian fanzines seem to be:

- Grant Stone's at Murdoch University (Leigh Edmonds assures me that the collection is catalogued and accessible)
- Irwin Hirsh's personal collection
- The collection Greg Pickersgill has been assembling at his home in Britain
- Robert Lichtman's in California — he is doing his best to collect as many Australian fanzines as possible
- John Foyster and Yvonne Rousseau's custody of the Allan Bray collection, which I assume includes many valuable items.

And Marc Ortlieb's collection must be quite impressive. Mine would be if it were organised and catalogued.

Cath, don't you sometimes wonder: why me, Lord? Treatments for cataracts and other eye problems seem to be improving rapidly, but any threat to the eyes gives a fan the heebie-jeebies.

Thanks very much for lending me *Edge of Darkness*. It seems much more daring and disturbing to me now than when I first saw it. In 1985, the discussion of plutonium, Reagan's Star Wars policy, and atomic warfare dominated my thinking about what I saw. These days? The subtleties of the first three episodes seem more important than the boys'-own adventures of the last three episodes, despite the many brilliant touches in Episodes 5 and 6. On second viewing, I can see that Troy Kennedy Martin has written a complex fable of betrayal and moral decrepitude in British life, contrasted with Craven's gullibility — but making the point that even Craven had been part of the British system of organised betrayal in Northern Ireland, and his ghostly

daughter Emma is eventually shown to have betrayed everybody she worked with. Politics aside, what gives *Edge of Darkness* its profundity is the depth of Craven's obsession with his lost daughter, which mirrors Martin's obsession with Earth itself, which humans might still destroy. No wonder I think of *EoD* as the modern equivalent of the Orpheus and Eurydice story.

**Sorry to people I've left uncommented upon. And apologies for not writing my comments on Mailings 192 and 193. I've read them. Time has run out. See you soon.**

— Bruce Gillespie, 1 April 2000

## *Guess who?*



Is this the mug shot from hell? Or a photo taken at the first Norstrilia Press meeting? Only George Turner might know, and he isn't telling. Found in the George Turner Fan Photo Collection: Bruce Gillespie and Carey Handfield, 1975.