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# \*brg\* 98

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A fanzine for the December 2017 mailing of ANZAPA (Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) and a few others.  
Published by Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard St, Greensborough VIC 3088.  
Phone: (03) 9435 7786. Email: gandc001@bigpond.com. Member fwa.  
Cover: Denny Marshall.

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## We get letters, believe it or not

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I usually print somewhere between 10 and 20 copies of *\*brg\**, extra to the 28 needed for ANZAPA, to send to Very Good Friends Indeed. *\*brg\** 97 sparked letters of comment from most people to whom I sent it. Thanks very much.

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**JOHN LITCHEN**  
**PO Box 3503,**  
**Robina Town Centre QLD 4230**

Thanks for letting me know about Brian Aldiss. Although I haven't thought a lot about how old he must have been, since he continued to write and publish work up until recently, now that he is gone I'm going to miss something new from him. I only hope I live as long as he had, because there are far too many good books yet to be read.

I remember Eastercon 1978 quite well, since Brian and I and a couple of other people shared a few cognacs together in my Volkswagen campervan parked in a side street by the venue. He entertained us with stories about his adventures in Singapore and other parts of Asia for quite some time.

I also took Roger Zelazny, his wife, and young son with my wife Monica and our young son Brian in the same campervan on a trip to Healsville Sanctuary a few days later.

Both events have stayed in my memory and will remain there for ever.

I wasn't aware of any friction between the two guests, but then I was simply there to enjoy myself and spend time with friends and two of my favourite authors.

I also note that Jerry Lewis died just recently. He was also someone I regarded highly when I was much younger. A true comedic genius who was often underrated.

I guess time takes care of all of us sooner or later;

we can only hope that it is later rather than sooner.  
(23 August 2017)

**YVONNE ROUSSEAU**  
**Reservoir VIC 307**

Receiving the sad news that Jack Wodhams has died of Parkinson's Disease, I remembered that I had reviewed him long ago when I was the sf reviewer for the *Australian Book Review* in the 1980s. Looking this up, I found that in the same article I'd reviewed Bruce's *SF Commentary Reprint Edition: First Year 1969*. I attach a copy of this review to demonstrate how different things seemed to me then.

(17 October 2017)

**[\*brg\* Yvonne's article is reprinted in *SF Commentary* 95, which was released last week.\*]**

**DENNIS CALLEGARI**  
**159 Kilby Road Kew East VIC 3102**

Very enjoyable, especially for the reminiscences of Brian Aldiss, who I never met (though it seems that the Harry Harrison autobiography captured him rather well). I haven't read any of Aldiss's writing for years. I'll have to dig around to find some of my old paperbacks.

You also mentioned Tom Petty. It's funny that (despite me thinking of myself more of a literary guy than a music guy), the news of Petty's death

affected me more than Aldiss'. Maybe music has a deeper visceral influence than writing.

(22 October 2017)

**MURRAY MacLACHLAN**  
**35 Laird Drive, Altona Meadows VIC 3028**

Thank you for your kindness in sending me a copy of \*brg\* 97. I saw the mustard-yellow package poking out of the mailbox and thought that the most recent web-based purchase had arrived: the Jefferson Airplane *Volunteers* on CD, necessary because of the live bonus tracks from the Fillmore East in November 1969. Instead, we receive 16 pages nicely balanced between the sercon Aldiss tribute, Gillespie analecta, and various corrections and amendments.

Naturally, in making comment one must start with Yvonne Rousseau, and from my New Zealand childhood I do remember reading the Milly Molly Mandy stories, which I thought were better than my sister's Enid Blytons (she had a full run of the Famous Five) notwithstanding that plainly they were meant for quite young readers. In hindsight what I received from my childhood reading was a profound sense of dislocation, as all these English stories set in village pastoral paradises may as well have been on another planet rather than merely half a planet away. Growing up in *Lord of the Rings* country, the rest of the world was as strange as New Zealand appears to those viewing it from afar.

You highlight the rock and roll aspects of the late Tom Petty's career; others have spoken to the 'softer commercial aspects', to the punk aspects, or (in one memorable *Rolling Stone* summation) to the humour. My music-loving friend in Christchurch is only interested in the first three albums, and even then in *Damn the Torpedoes* he believes Petty made an artistic mistake but wise financial decision — having written 'Louisiana Rain', Petty used that as the template for the course of the rest of his career. Contrast this with 'American Girl', 'I Need to Know', and the stunning 'Breakdown' off the first two albums. They had punk attitude, an authenticity that is hard to maintain when producing a record with West Coast sensibilities, chops and tricks. The live version of 'Breakdown' on *Pack Up the Plantation: Live!* is stunning. The audience sings the entire song — verses as well as choruses — and Petty as singer doesn't need to sing a word. In that moment the song has moved from ownership by the writer to ownership by the people — it's not Petty's song any more; it's a part of the lives of the audience. In that sense there's a Woody Guthrie aspect to his songwriting as the song becomes larger than the artist. Most of *Pack Up the Plantation: Live!* was recorded at the Wiltern Theater in Los

Angeles in 1985, and it's the early songs that shine. By the way, it's not *Shootout at the Plantation* and in truth it has been released on CD, albeit in a shortened form; because it was a 2 LP set two of the songs have never been released on CD. My favourite Tom Petty live performance is from a bootleg that I bought in LP format (these days it is 'vinyl' or, even more cringeworthy, 'vinyls') back in 1982, called *Heartbreak in New York*.

It's from a live performance on Long Island in 1977. In fairness, the last couple of songs fade but the rest of the concert is mighty — impassioned, tight, loud, and with a tinge of despair which adds a sharp edge to the performance. It's much like what happened with Bob Seger in 1972, wondering 'Are we ever going to make it big? We've got the songs, we've got everything, and it's still not happening? Damn, let's give 'em hell!' Indeed, we were lucky enough to see the same moment in Martha Wainwright's career, just before she became a hot property. Such moments are glories. Having broken through with *Damn the Torpedoes*, Petty lost that edge, but what saved him from becoming uninteresting was, as you say, the calibre of his songwriting, along with the doofus good humour that came through most prominently on *Damn the Torpedoes* and the *Travelin' Wilburys*, and a looseness of feel that came through in *Let Me Up, I've Had Enough*, *Full Moon Fever*, and *Into the Great Wide Open*.

In short, there's enough 'in spite of's' in Petty's career to make his legacy endure: punk and rock and roll aspects despite the superficialities of West Coast production; looseness of feel and good humour despite the strictures of radio-friendly songwriting; superb musicianship and songs despite the craft evident in his approach to songwriting.

**[\*brg\* Tom Petty's career curve would seem a lot less smooth if you watched the DVD or Blu-ray of *Runnin' Down a Dream*, Peter Bogdanovich's four-hour documentary about Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Essential listening also are the two CDs by *Mudcrutch*, Petty's original band gathered together a few years ago, and the four-CD boxed set *The Live Anthology*, which includes great performances from his entire career. The important thing about Tom Petty is that I kept looking forward to the next CD. (I wasn't going to finish with 'and now there won't be any more', but I did read that Tom and the Heartbreakers had recorded most of his new album when he died.\*]**

Regarding Brian Aldiss, we've covered that topic at a recent Nova Mob. As I said then, your experience of wonderful hospitality is at considerable variance

to my receiving one of the rudest letters I've ever received.

(25 October 2017)

**CAROL KEWLEY**  
**Albion VIC 3020**

Thanks for the latest \*brg\*. I like the photo of you and Brian Aldiss at Stonehenge.

(25 October 2017)

**LEIGH EDMONDS**  
**Ballarat East VIC 3350**

As you know, I was in Sydney last week going through Ron Graham's fanzine collection, which runs to five archive boxes of Australian fanzines and another fifteen or so boxes of overseas ones. I only got through four of the Australian boxes, which included a great many early Australian fanzines, if not originals then good photocopies. Towards the end of the last day I came across a stack of *SFCs*, not many in comparison to your total output but I also found that you had only published 46 or so issues before the end of 1975, which was a relief. Lots of thick issues too. After battling through those I come home to find another Gillespie fanzine in my letter box.

I enjoyed the various pieces in this issue about Aldiss. I saw him at that 1978 Easter convention but did not get to talk to him. Which might have been just as well, because I doubt that I would have had anything to say to him. On reflection, he is still probably my favourite sf writer, though I've had brief passions for others like Priest, Niven, Ballard, and I wouldn't mind reading more Benford after the pleasure that his recent one gave, but Aldiss is still probably my favourite. So thanks for putting that in.

The other thing I enjoyed was Stephen Campbell's letter. After having not met him for decades I've bumped into him a few times in the past couple of years and enjoyed his company and his insights into life. I hope his display goes ahead, and I look forward to reading about it and seeing some pictures in the future. I think I share his feeling about cats. We've had Lily-Belle and Jo-Jo for over 17 years now, so they won't be with us much longer. Jo-Jo is getting quite frail, and whatever time he doesn't spend complaining about the state of his food or water supplies he spends lying in a warm place or getting cuddles. Lily-Belle hasn't reconciled herself to old age yet, and still does a lot of hurtling around the house — that's when she isn't letting me know about the poor state of the food bowl, if not in quantity most certainly in quality. For such little animals they will leave big holes in our

lives when they finally die. But Valma says we're getting a Russian Blue next, so there will be another little distraction around the house.

(31 October 2017)

**[\*brg\* David Russell is my fannish hero, plugging away there in Warrnambool for years, isolated greatly by his unwillingness or inability to operate a computer, but still determined to stay involved in Melbourne (and world) fandom. One of his main interests is comics and cartoon drawing. About ten years ago I discovered that Stephen Campbell was also living in Warrnambool. Two comics fans, two longtime SF fans, living in the same country town, without knowing of the existence of each other! So I suggested that David call on Stephen, who has been living in Warrnambool as company for his mother, who died only very recently. He keeps doing his paintings, but as David told me recently, has in fact finished only a few paintings for a future exhibition. He also doesn't have a computer, and although he lives on barely nothing himself, resents my converting *SF Commentary* to download-only because I can't afford to print copies!**

**If Robin ever feels like driving on a fannish expedition, you and he could do worse than trundle down and call on David, who will show you around Warrnambool (especially the amazing Tower Hill reserve), and take you to Stephen's place. However, the weekend I visited David and his family a few years ago, Stephen was away from Warrnambool. But we always have a great conversation when we catch up (such as at the Birthday Bash last February).\***

**WILLIAM BREIDING**  
**3507 N. Santa Rita Avenue, Apt 1,**  
**Tucson AZ 85719, USA**

Enjoyed \*brg\* 97, especially those old photos of you, particularly with Brian Aldiss, such the Australian nerd! I love the one of you and Brian and Margaret, and studied for a long time the body language of each.

While I was saddened by the death of Tom Petty — he seemed the least likely of all the rockers to die — it was your news that Milt Stevens had died that shocked me; I had not heard. He was among my favourite of the LA fans, always a fun presence at cons and one of the best loc-hacks fandom ever had.

In reference to Tom Petty you mention the Byrds. I recently read *Riot On Sunset Strip*, by

Dominic Priore, a history of the pop scene there in the early-to-mid 60s (including the larger LA scene of jazz and blues as well). While reading it I realised I had a huge gap in my collection. No Byrds whatsoever. I quickly rectified that by asking my friend John Fugazzi where to start with them. He alerted me to the fact that you could buy the five classic albums as a boxed set for a mere \$21 American. I thus gorged on the Byrds for a few days, and what a treat it was.

On your list of books read so far this year there are a number that I will be searching for, mostly the memoirs and the books about writing/literature, all of which look particularly intriguing to me. (Dunno about that dark avian fantasy anthology though!)

Always a pleasure to read a 'new' Bruce Gillespie piece, and much enjoyed your talk of Aldiss's *Hot-house*, a book that I loved when I read it, probably back in the mid 1980s, when I was on an Aldiss jag, and read many of his mid-career novels all at once. It was only later I discovered what a great short story writer he had been.

Sorry to hear about the financial cock-up and your retirement. I have no retirement cash at all, so will be working long after I'm dead, no doubt. Glad, though, to hear of your continued work assignments. And I am proud to know I am one of the few, the chosen, to receive *\*brg\**. But after seeing how much postage you had to pay for such a slim volume, I would encourage you to save your hard-earned cash and maybe send me a PDF in the future, as there is a rumour that the world has turned and Bruce Gillespie has finally gone all digital, all electronic!

(2 November 2017)

**[\*brg\* But not for this ANZAPA fanzine, \*brg\*. It must remain print only, because ANZAPA members are committed to staying off the Internet.**

Glad to have been able to guide you to the Byrds at any stage of their career. I wish that series of five-per-pack Original Series had extended to the following five Byrds albums. However, no such second packet was released in Australia. The last two or three albums are excellent, although only McGuinn was left from the original band. Byrds fans still go *pooh!* when you mention *The Byrds* reunion album of 1974, but it was the first Byrds album I bought, and it has some brilliant singing and playing by McGuinn, Crosby, Clark, and Hillman. Gene Clark's version of Neil Young's 'See the Sky (About to Rain)' is one of the greatest tracks of the 1970s. That album led me to Gene Clark's miraculous *No Other* and his small number of other solo albums.\*]

**PETER SIMPSON**

**Apt 29, Chelmer Lodge,  
111 New London Road, Chelmsford,  
Essex CM2 0FY, England**

The death of Brian Aldiss was sad. I always had a soft spot for him since the 1970s when the late Peter MacKay and I met him at Unicon in Melbourne in 1978. He was very approachable. Somewhere I have a photo (at least I hope it didn't get lost in our move!) of Peter, Brian, and me — the photographer was George Turner! Years later I saw Aldiss at the (moderately) famous P. K. Dick convention held in Epping over here. I remember him saying that he had been commissioned/had written a screenplay based on Dick's *Martian Timeslip*. Whatever happened to that, I wonder? Among the few SF books I kept after our move were a couple signed by him.

**[\*brg\* I have a copy of that screeplay, because Brian sent it to me, but I don't know where it is in the house. In fact, I have an uneasy feeling that it did not make it from Collingwood to Greensborough, because there seems to be an entire box of memorabilia and books that went missing in the move. All of Elaine's paperbacks of Nietzsche (of all writers) are still missing, but she was able to replace them when Penguin went on a Nietzsche publishing splurge a few years ago. I'm still hoping that the 'missing' box will someday be found and its contents revealed.**

**You'll remember that Philip Dick's view of the atmosphere and terrain of Mars was made redundant in the year the book appeared, because of the first satellite fly-by of Mars. What I remember of the Aldiss script for *Martian Time Slip* is that Brian attempted to explain everything in the novel in terms of today's science — but he spent one or two episodes explaining too much. The resulting TV script, a six-parter, would have weighed far too heavily on the heads of the average British TV watcher, and would have been unsalable to American TV. But Aldiss obviously had fun unravelling the complexities of the original novel — and the human conflict story of *Martian Time-Slip* could still make a great movie, possibly set on an as-yet-unglimpsed planet in a solar system not too far from ours.\*]**

I'm glad that you have had some paying work — maybe Tom Disch was too pessimistic! You never know what is round the next corner. Case in point: I won £25 on the national lottery a couple of weeks

ago, my biggest win ever. I can offset it against the hundreds I have probably wagered — sorry, ‘in-

vested’ — over the years.

(23 November 2017)

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## Maybe next year ...

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2017 has disappeared in a sherbert fizz of non-happenings — or rather, happenings that have stopped me doing most things I wanted to do. I spent the first two months of the year working on a gigantic index, then three months of no paying work, which produced little more than *SF Commentary* 94, then four months of unexpected, non-stop paying work (indexing), then weeks of recovery, and the rest of the time finishing the 96-page *SF Commentary* 95. You can download your copy at <http://efanzines.com/SFC/SFC95P.pdf>, or the landscape(widescreen) format at <http://efanzines.com/SFC/SFC95L.pdf>. And I still had to leave out four articles from No 95 and bump them

to No 96.

Nothing in fandom gives me more pleasure than reading ANZAPA contributions and writing mailing comments. But I do need to find the time to read the mailings. Mailings have averaged 240 pages/240,000 words every two months during the year. I’m behind four mailings, so suddenly I’m faced with nearly a million words to read before I can write mailing comments. Marcel Proust was never like this. (And it took me three years (1969–71) to read *Remembrance of Things Past*.)

So here’s a little bit of diversion while waiting for free time to read a million words ...

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## Messing about in books

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### Much-anticipated sequels

It’s been a strange year for book reading. It’s a long time since I’ve read such a large number of books in one year (76 so far, with a month to go). I decided to not worry about reading Worthy Books (although I did read three Virginia Woolfs), but go with the flow of books as they fell in front of my eyes.

This is not always a good idea. There’s one category of books I’ve read that I should have left in the boxes. They are the Much-Anticipated Sequels. They are the books you read because the author’s previous book was very enjoyable. They are the books the author writes too quickly because her or his publisher can smell the scent of money before the manuscript is finished.

### CLOSED CASKET

**Sophie Hanna (HarperCollins;  
2016; 371 pp.)**

This is a sequel to a book I haven’t read. Sophie Hanna already had a substantial writing career when she wrote *The Monogram Murders*, a Poirot novel approved by the Agatha Christie estate. The reviewers liked it. By the time I sought it out, it had sold out. I bought the sequel, and can only hope the previous novel was a lot less boring than the sequel. In *Closed Casket*, Hannah shows that she has learnt all the superstructure of the Christie Mystery without being able to add the novelty and excitement of a memorable Christie novel. Forgettable.

### EUROPE IN WINTER

**Dave Hutchinson (Solaris;  
2016; 297 pp.)**

A sequel to those fine alternative-history novels, *Europe in Autumn* and *Europe at Midnight*, it seemed unnecessary to me. Yes, there are lots of strings still hanging at the end of *Europe at Midnight*, but none is pulled, let alone tied off, in the third novel. This reads like the usual middle novel of a trilogy, where everybody treads water in the bay off the coast while waiting to storm the battlements in the last episode.

Maybe a fourth novel will take up the underlying themes of the first two.

**THE PIGEON TUNNEL: STORIES OF MY LIFE**  
**John Le Carre (Viking; 2016; 310 pp.)**

should have been one of the books of the year. In 2016 Adam Sisman published *John Le Carre*, one of the best biographies I've read. Sisman admitted that there were many facts of Le Carre's life about which he could only speculate. John Cornwall (John Le Carre) claims that the Official Secrets Act prevent him from revealing details of 10 years of his life. *The Pigeon Tunnel* was Le Carre's chance to set the record straight, fill out mistaken details in the biography, or provide dramatic new insights into his life. But we readers should have remembered that at the heart of Le Carre's outlook are Secrets — not merely Official Secrets, but much deeper secrets about his life, loves, motives, and actions. And the only way Le Carre can approach the secrets of his own life is by writing fiction. He has no intention of revealing all in mere autobiography. So all he offers in *The Pigeon Tunnel* are a series of diverting stories about various adventures he's undertaken while researching the more superficial aspects of his novels. He also name-drops a lot. This is the equivalent of a good late-night party story-telling jag during which raconteurs swap stories seem to reveal all, but merely provide a bit of entertaining boasting.

**THE MASSACRE OF MANKIND**  
**Stephen Baxter (Gollancz; 2017; 453 pp.)**

is very disappointing to me, although until three-quarters through reading his novel I thought he might have produced something original. It doesn't resemble *The Time Ships*, which is the romp that made me a fan of Baxter's books. It is a rather solemn sequel to H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, set in the alternative history stream that is established in the original novel. The characters suffer a fair bit of gruelling action, and the book remains interesting until toward the end. By the end, however, I couldn't see the point of the book. H. G. Wells wrote short books that said everything he wanted to say in as few words as possible. Greater praise than that cannot be said of any author. Over the years since *The Time Ships*, Baxter has become a writer who takes more and more words to say less and less. But *The Massacre of Mankind* could have been so good!

**SINCE WE FELL**  
**Dennis Lehane**  
**(Little Brown; 2017; 418 pp.)**

is the latest Lehane novel. While reading it, I enjoyed the experience, and gave it four stars. A few months later I cannot remember anything about it! And the one thing you can say about all of Lehane's best novels is that you don't forget the situations or the solutions. All the fire seems to have gone out of this fine writer.

**WIMMERA**  
**Mark Brandi**  
**(Hachette Australia; 2017; 264 pp.)**

is not a sequel, but has been quite a success. The Readings readers have just voted it into the Top 10 Fiction titles of 2017. It is to be avoided at all costs. It is supposed to be an intense psychological drama set in Victoria's dry Wimmera district, but a few months later I cannot remember the characters or even any special aspect of scene setting.

**FORCE OF NATURE**  
**Jane Harper (Macmillan; 2017; 380 pp.)**

is one of two most bitter disappointments in this list. In 2016, Jane Harper scored a surprise hit in Australia with her first mystery novel *The Dry*. *The Dry* is a first-class example of the kind of novel where the reader is so misdirected that she or he keeps looking in the wrong direction until the last section of the book. It seemed to me that *The Dry*, with its deft evocation of human deprivations and drought conditions in the Australian wheat country, had been coming to the boil in the author's head for some years. My guess is that the publisher, ever keen to cash in, cracked the whip so that Jane Harper produced her sequel, *Force of Nature*, several years too early. The Big Surprise turns out to be not surprising. Most readers will guess it long before the Big Reveal. The evocation of becoming lost in Australia's high country old eucalypts forest is the book's only strength.

**FIRST PERSON**  
**Richard Flanagan**  
**(Chatto Windus; 2017; 400 pp.)**

is an even greater disappointment than *Force of Nature*. His previous book, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, was my favourite novel of the year in which I read it. That memorable and ambiguous novel stays in the memory because of the



ambiguities of the last third as much as because of the tortuous tale of World War II prisoner-of-war deprivations related during the first half. Richard Flanagan has just undertaken an exhaustive (and no doubt exhausting) tour of Australia promoting his new book. But there is nothing in it beyond the tale that Flanagan tells during his interviews: that many years ago he was hired by a publisher to ghost-write the 'autobiography' of an elusive con man (in real life, John Diedrich), who had no intention of telling the truth about anything. This situation is not developed beyond its initial premise by page 100, at which point I gave up reading.

## Other sequels and series

While leafing through 2017's book lists, I found some sequels and series-parts that do work:

### THE END OF THE DAY

**Claire North (Orbit; 2017; 403 pp.)**

is part of a series of highly successful fantastic-concept novels produced by Claire North (whose real name is Catherine Webb) during recent years. The concepts are almost more exciting than the books themselves. North has just won the World Fantasy Award for *The Sudden Appearance of Hope*, her previous novel. Its viewpoint character, Hope, disappears from the consciousness of the people around her unless she is physically close to them. (Australian readers will remember that Lee Harding's *Displaced Person*, from the 1970s, had the same idea; it won the Australian Children's Book Award and stayed in print for 20 years.) What should have been a sombre book has enormous energy, because Hope is determined to survive despite her unique handicap. In the same way, although *The End of the Day's* subject is death (or Death, one of its main characters), Claire North invests it with an enormous love of life, even during its most sombre moments. The main character, Charlie, is the Harbinger of Death. That's his job description. What seems like an interesting if exhausting life (as Charlie travels all over the world) becomes more difficult as Death keeps placing Charlie in ever more difficult end-of-life situations.

### THE NIGHT FERRY

**Michael Robotham (Hachette Australia; 2007; 408 pp.)**

is an early novel from this Australian thriller writer who sets almost all his novels in Britain. The title is

misleading, because the final confrontation between the investigator and the illegal immigrant importers does not take place on the night ferry journey of the final part of the book, but hinges on a series of almost accidental meetings that take place when you think the situation has been solved.

### DARWIN'S BLADE

**Dan Simmons**

**(Mulholland/Little Brown; 2000; 440 pp.)**

is an oddity of a book from Dan Simmons, who seems to have given up writing science fiction during recent years. This is one of those thrillers that depends on highly detailed information about contemporary events and skills (in particular, the skills of gliding and sniper rifle shooting), but is actually a fantasy, because the main characters cannot lose, no matter how dangerous any situation they face. This would make a great movie, but I wouldn't envy the special effects man trying to stage the final confrontation.

### A LEGACY OF SPIES

**John Le Carre**

**(Viking/Penguin; 2017; 265 pp.)**

is a prequel, rather than a sequel, but it works well enough. In particular, it is a prequel to the two classic Le Carre novels, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* and *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*. Peter Guillam (played startlingly well by Benedict Cumberbatch in the recent film of *Tinker Tailor*), long retired, is recalled by MI6 to 'sort out' the mystery of an operation that went wrong back in the sixties. As he suspects, he finds he has been recalled to take the fall for other people's mistakes. To save his skin he needs to find out the truth of a situation that was never clear to him in the sixties. At the end of the novel, he has a brief meeting with George Smiley (whom Le Carre admits in interviews must be about 110). The plot as it reveals itself is not too surprising. What's surprising is that Le Carre's writing is as sprightly as ever, although he was 86 when he wrote *A Legacy of Spies*. (He wrote the book because the BBC wants another blockbuster to follow the success of their recent series *The Night Manager*. In the new book, Benedict Cumberbatch should star as Peter Guillam, of course, but who could replace Alec Guinness as Smiley?)



### **THE GOLDEN DAY**

**Ursula Dubosarsky (Allen & Unwin; 2011; 152 pp.)**

### **THE BLUE CAT**

**Ursula Dubosarsky (Allen & Unwin; 2017; 166 pp.)**

### **THE RED SHOE**

**Ursula Dubosarsky (Allen & Unwin; 2006; 184 pp.)**

I had had *The Golden Day* on my shelf for some time. I knew nothing about Ursula Dubosarsky, except that she is Australian, and her books are marketed as Young Adult. I don't know where I picked up my copy or why I read the first page, but the writing was so delicious that I had to buy the book. When finally I picked it up again recently, I could not put it down. Its story is fairly simple: it's the opposite of that of *Picnic of Hanging Rock*. In *The Golden Day*, the teacher/governess goes missing, not the school girls. The mystery is enticing, but not as interesting as the main characters (the girls who are left behind) or the writing itself. The final section is memorable — the kind of ending that Joan Lindsay might well have considered for *Hanging Rock*.

The other two Dubosarsky novels, currently available in Allen & Unwin YA editions, are not quite as effective, but in both of them seemingly ordinary events and people suddenly transform themselves into deeply disturbing situations. The ending of *The Blue Cat* is particularly unsettling.

### **UNDER THE COLD BRIGHT LIGHTS**

**Garry Disher (Text; 2017; 286 pp.)**

### **HER**

**Garry Disher (Hachette Australia; 2017; 197 pp.)**

One good novel from Garry Disher in a year makes it a Good Book Year; two good Disher books in a year is almost too much to hope for.

*Her* is a book I did not like much when I first read it. Disher cuts his prose to the bare minimum of words, because his viewpoint character is a child who lives so much in poverty that she has few verbal or physical resources. While reading the book I found the prose unsatisfactory — but now I cannot get the book out of my head! The main character does not even have a name for much of the book. Her father is a total brute, who keeps his wife and kids purely for their labour value. From time to time the family travels around the back roads of

Victoria, trying to sell the poor objects they've made. This way of life maintains a bare existence until the coming of World War I and the Spanish flu that followed it. Desperation sets in, especially as the main character seeks to escape the family.

*Under the Cold Bright Lights* is much easier to read than *Her*, but not as memorable. It shows Disher's abilities as a crime writer at their best. He introduces a new police character, somebody who has to prove himself although the other coppers tend to ignore him. He is faced by three situations that eventually are linked. Like the Inspector Challis books, *Under the Cold Bright Lights* is set on the Mornington Peninsula, where Disher lives. Does anybody who lives on the Peninsula find it as interesting as he does?

### **UNNATURAL DEATH**

**Dorothy L. Sayers (New English Library; 1927; 286 pp.)**

### **STRONG POISON**

**Dorothy L. Sayers (New English Library; 1930; 224 pp.)**

### **BUSMAN'S HONEYMOON**

**Dorothy L. Sayers (Hodder; 1937; 452 pp.)**

**LORD PETER WIMSY STARRING IAN CARMICHAEL: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION (BBC, distributed by Madman; original production 1972–75; 6 DVDs; 1002 minutes)**

**DOROTHY L. SAYERS MYSTERIES FEATURING LORD PETER WIMSEY AND HARRIET VANE**

**(BBC, distributed by Warner; original production 1989; 3 DVDs; 500 minutes)**

At the beginning of October, I discovered in Dymock's in Melbourne a boxed set of the DVDs of five of Dorothy L. Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries, made for TV from 1972 to 1975, starring Ian Carmichael. My eyes go all sort of funny if I try binge-watching, but I did catch at least one episode a night until I had watched them all. All are superbly filmed (although would be thought Very Slow by today's binge-watchers), and Ian Carmichael is superb as Wimsey. I had seen a few episodes of *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* on Masterpiece Theater when I was staying in Houston in December 1973. The adaptation of my favourite

Lord Peter Wimsey mystery, *The Nine Tailors*, is particularly powerful.

A few weeks later, thanks to Dennis Callegari, I discovered a DVD set of a further three Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries, this time with Harriet Vane, starring Edward Petherbridge. Made for British TV in 1989, they are not nearly as interesting as the Ian Carmichael films, but do include *Gaudy Night*, my other great favourite among the novels. I announced these discoveries on Facebook, as one does so foolishly, and Janice Gelb offered to sell me a couple of the novels I was missing. I already had seven of the novels or short story collections in the 1989 editions issued by New English Library (when it still existed). In Dymock's a week later, I discovered another six novels or short story collections in the Hodder editions of 2016.

Why the excitement? Watching the TV series reminded me of the delights of Sayers' use of the English language (with deliberate echoes of the prose of P. G. Wodehouse) and the oddities of the plots and humour. Reading the three novels *Unnatural Death*, *Strong Poison*, and *Busman's Honey-moon* alerted me to depths of Sayers' humour and characterisation, qualities that cannot be transferred completely to the TV screen. (Also, Harriet Walter, who plays Harriet Vane in the 1989 series, is a bit wet — never as interesting as the Harriet

Vane character of such novels as *Gaudy Night*.)

Why has Dorothy Sayers not stayed as popular as Agatha Christie, the only mystery novelist to whom her works can be compared? (a) Sayers seems to offer even more of an insider view of aristocratic English society than Christie does, although in fact she was much more of an outsider. Much of the humour in the Wimsey novels could be taken as satire, whereas Christie always accepted the assumptions of the society in which she had grown up. (b) Sayers is much wittier than Agatha Christie, therefore probably more difficult to read for middle-class consumers of mystery novels. (c) Most strikingly, Sayers' 'mysteries' are nowhere near as mysterious or intriguing as those of Christie at her best. Sayers' interest is in her characters and landscapes (and cityscapes). Often we are made aware of the culprit about halfway through the novel, and merely wait for Wimsey (and Vane) to find an ingenious way of trapping him into revealing himself. (I can remember only one female culprit in the books I've read.) I remember great scenes in Sayers' novels, not great revelation scenes, as in the best of Christie.

Complete sets of the Lord Peter Wimsey books should be issued more often than once every 30 years.

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## A letter to Loudon

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Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard Street  
Greensborough VIC 3088, Australia

2 December 2017

Loudon Wainwright III  
c/o Blue Rider Press  
Random House LLC  
375 Hudson Street  
New York NY 10014 USA

Dear Loudon:

A few weeks ago I bought your autobiography *Liner Notes: On Parents & Children, Exes & Excess, Death & Decay, & A Few of My Other Favorite Things* at Readings Books and Records, Carlton, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. I enjoyed it greatly, and wanted to send you a letter of appreciation. I note in the book that you no longer wish fans to contact you by email, so I'm sending this letter via your American publisher.

You mention in Chapter 32 your first trip to Australia in 1982. You might not know that I am

directly responsible for that trip. Your promoters were David Vigo and Cliff Hocking, you might remember. I had been friends with Kitty and David Vigo since 1975, when Kitty attended the Ursula Le Guin Writers Workshop in Melbourne, of which I was the organiser. A few years later Kitty introduced me to her husband David Vigo, an up-and-coming concert promoter. He gave the impression that he was looking for new acts to introduce to Australian audiences. I suggested to him that you, Loudon Wainwright III, would make an ideal performer to play in venues such as the Dallas Brooks Hall. David and Cliff took up my suggestion, and promoted you at concerts around Australia, including the Dallas Brooks night, which I attended. At the end of the night, David said to me, 'You know, that man really is a poet, isn't he?' It was a great concert, but I cannot remember who was the support act.

However, a few months later David confessed that, although some of your concerts had done well, others hadn't. Hocking & Vigo had lost money. I assume you were much better known in Melbourne and Sydney than anywhere else.

That hiccup didn't seem to stop your love affair

# Liner Notes Loudon Wainwright III On Parents & Children, Exes & Excess, Death & Decay, & a Few of My Other Favorite Things



with Australian audiences. I saw you later when you toured with Richard Thompson the first time (when unfortunately he played electric guitar, solo) and then the second time (when Richard revealed his brilliance on the acoustic guitar). That concert, at the National Theatre in St Kilda, was on the date of my 50th birthday, and was a present from my wife. It happened six months after your 50th birthday. The only major Melbourne concert I missed was your gig at the Continental Cafe. Steve Smith from Readings rang to offer me a free ticket, but that day I was suffering from one of the worst colds I've ever had. I did hear your interview with Brian Wise on 3RRR, however.

I first heard you singing on Chris Winter's *Room to Move* program on ABC Radio in 1972. That was the only program that played album tracks. Australia had not yet adopted FM radio, and AM music radio was devoted to bland Top 40 hits. Fortunately, Melbourne already had its share of import record shops. Your *Album II* became one of my Top 10 favourite albums as soon as I heard it, and its position has never been challenged. I liked *Album I* slightly less, but it also includes many of my favourite Loudon Wainwright songs.

The 1970s was a time of loud parties and (in my case) being desperate and dateless until Elaine and I got together in early 1978. Many of those parties ended with loud collective singing of 'Wine With

Dinner' or 'Unrequited to the Nth Degree'. Suicide songs sounded much jollier in the seventies, when we were all in our twenties.

Fortunately, Elaine likes your albums as much as I do, and many times we have settled visitors down in front of the speakers to listen to one of them. We're not sure those visitors ever came back, but Elaine and I had a good time.

For many of us, your life and songs have echoed the paths of our lives. I was born in February 1947, and you, I believe, in September 1946. When you agonised in song over turning 50, I was being brought up short by that birthday as well. However, my fifties was my favourite decade. Ten short years later, you seemed a lot more miserable at turning 60 than I did. And in 2017 I have been waiting for your 70th birthday album. I'm a bit worried that it hasn't appeared yet.

I have discovered a great deal more in *Liner Notes* than I have found in any other autobiography or memoir written by a musician. Indeed, most musicians, either pop, jazz, or classical, seem incapable of telling readers anything about their real lives. Peter Sculthorpe's (Australia's best classical composer) memoir is a monument to blandness, and those by Glyn Johns and Linda Ronstadt didn't even tell much about their music, let alone their inner lives and experiences. Neil Young merely toddles about his inner playscape in his two books of memoirs, and in Dylan's *Chronicles Part I*, nothing is revealed.

There is much I had hoped you would write about. Since Chaim Tannenbaum plays on many of your records, I was hoping you might devote a chapter to him. And since you toured at least twice with Richard Thompson, I was hoping you might share some insights into that enigmatic man.

But any doubts I might have about *Liner Notes* can be balanced against the fact that you quote from many of my favourite Loudon Wainwright songs. Not all of them (including the best songs from *History*), so I'm hoping your next book will be your *Collected Lyrics*, to sit beside my copies of Paul Simon's and Bob Dylan's songs.

Our lives could not have followed more different paths. Despite my interest in women, few of them returned that interest. However, the one I married in 1979 is a genius, without whom I would have been long since mad, broke, or dead. I've travelled very little, have no musical performance ability or singing ability, but I have devoted my life to collecting the LPs and CDs by the greatest performers in the world. I own a complete Loudon Wainwright III collection. They are the tracks of my life.

Best wishes  
Bruce Gillespie