

# Scratch Pad

No. 37 March 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.

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## ME AGAIN, NATURALLY

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Let me tell you all the things I haven't done since last September.

I haven't read more than a few mailings of Acnestis or ANZAPA. But I did have to catch up on reading some books (see later in this issue).

I haven't finished publishing the Turner Issue of *SF Commentary*. I had finished 90 per cent of it before Aussiecon 3, but I haven't gained 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.

And I haven't adequately thanked Acnestids who have sent me marvellous books over the last year or so. I will retaliate as soon as somebody in Australia publishes something brilliant.

The only thing I have done is about 30 per cent of the work on the new fanzine that Paul Kincaid, Maureen Kincaid 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 I should give him a gold star and a blue certificate. MS Publisher drives me crazy, so I've bowed out of the page design part of the 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. So I keep on working. While there's hope there's life, as somebody didn't say. But where's the million-dollar cheques with my name on them?, say I.

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## LISTS! The Epic

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### 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?

Lest 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 were 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 playlists 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: two 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 Springfields)  
(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)
- 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' — probably because the master tapes have 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. Ha ha, 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 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 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 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 Furtwängler (cond.)/Bayreuth Festival Orchestra (EMI)
- 8 Wagner: *Tristan und Isolde*  
Wilhelm Furtwängler (cond.)/Philharmonia Orchestra (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 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 and 31 (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.

# MY LISTS FOR 1999

All the above is merely a prelude to the most important part of the year — the announcement of my annual Favourite 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 Rosamund 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 Olympica' 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 Olympica' 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: *Salvation*
- 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 1 August 1999

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

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

It seems a long time since I read this one. Way back before Aussiecon 3. (There is a Red Sea at the heart of Australian fans. Its name is Aussiecon 3.) I was too late to vote for or against the damn thing, but the cover looked interesting. I thought I should read some of the Hugo nominees in the fiction categories. What do I remember? 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, halfway 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 alternative 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.)

Because you are far removed from the exciting whirl of Melbourne SF literary life, you might not be aware that this seemingly innocent little 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. The first time I read it, 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 just 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 'Rosamund Smith', as they are actually the work of Joyce Carol Oates. No luck in 'looking out' for them; Rosamund Smith isn't distributed in Australia. I placed an order with Justin Ackroyd for every Rosamund 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', seemed to be very dull representatives of their authors' work. In fact, I almost stopped reading halfway through the book, which has a stretch of dull territory. Having said that, nothing can detract from *Centaurus's* double-bungers, the two immensely 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 acclaimed it as Greg Egan's best book so far, 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 see the daily comic strip, 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 probably 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.)**

You won't be able to buy this book unless I send you a copy, and I probably won't bother, even if you are a radio nut, as I am, as it's a pitifully inadequate replica of the book that should have been written about 3LO. I presume that BBC Radio retains some of the affection in British hearts that the ABC does for many Australians. The difference here is that commercial radio was always allowed to flourish, often deriving its ideas and personnel from the Australian Broadcasting Commission, while the ABC has always had to fight for every pound/dollar. 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 its 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 talkback 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 sometime-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.)

I've already written some short comments about these books for *Steam Engine Time*, the new magazine that Paul, Maureen and I hope to publish by Easter, so there's not much point repeating myself here. However, if you're a Broderick fan and you'd like me to pick up copies of these books to send you, you should know that (a) 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); (b) *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 Jenssen 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 in 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; 280 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 asymptotic 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 . . . lift, oh my eyelids, from slumber. Pass onto another book. (If it sounds interesting, the American revised edition will appear during the year 2000.)

\*\* **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 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 iron-bound 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 Kennettism 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 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.

— Bruce Gillespie, 8 February 2000



# 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).

