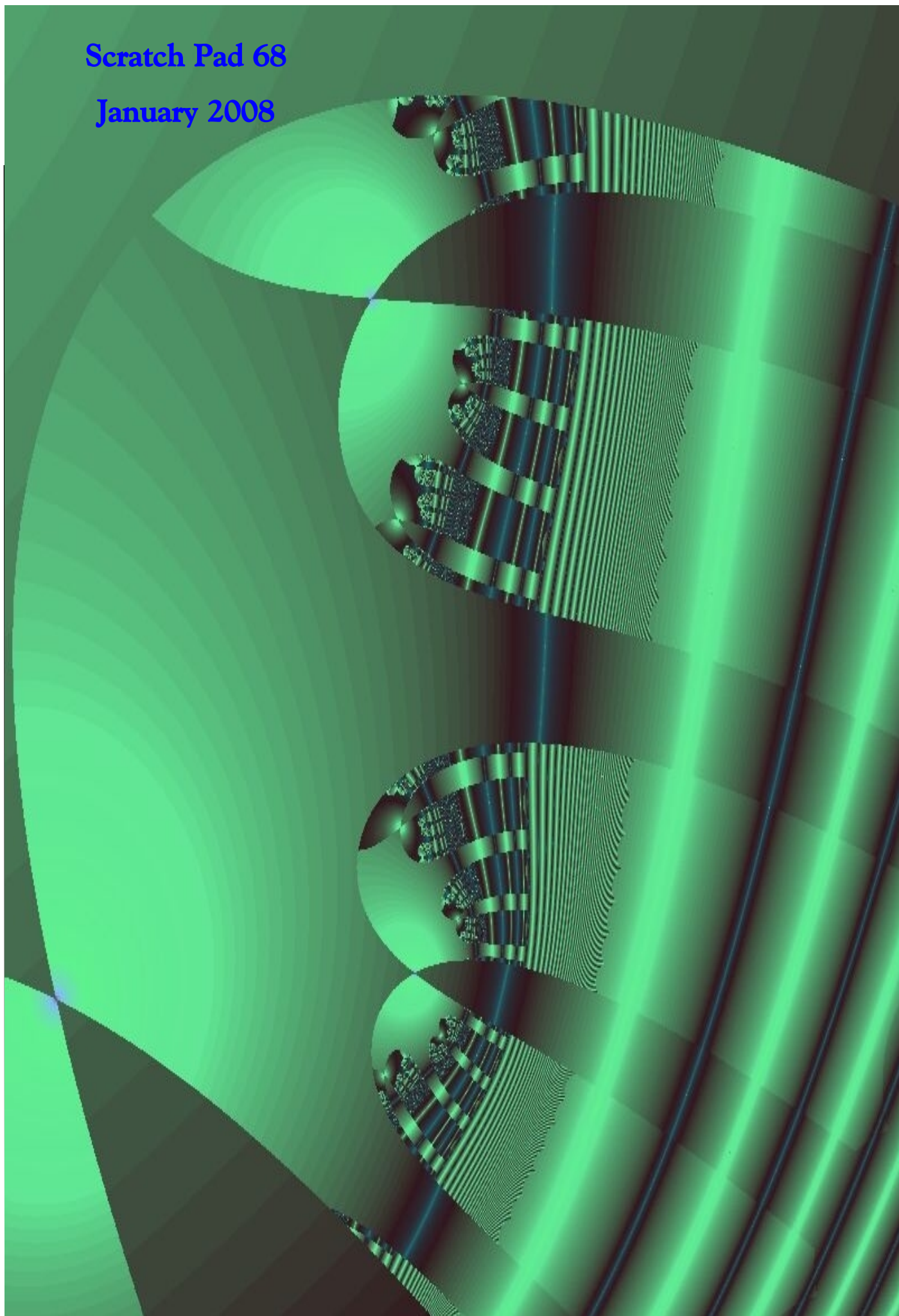


Scratch Pad 68

January 2008



Scratch Pad 68

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Robin Johnson: The Big Heart of Australian Fandom

by Bruce Gillespie

During the Awards Ceremony at Nippon, the 2007 World Convention held in Yokohama, Japan, Robin Johnson, former member of ANZAPA, was given the Big Heart Award. This is Forry Ackerman's annual award to a person who has given lifelong service to fandom. Murray MacLachlan asked me to write the following piece for the next issue of *Ethel the Aardvark*, the fanzine of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club.

At my first convention, the Melbourne SF Conference of 1968, I knew three people when I arrived. At the convention I met a few more people, including a sixteen-year-old David Penman, who later became Jim Penman, of Jim's Mowing, Jim's Tree Lopping and Jim's Window

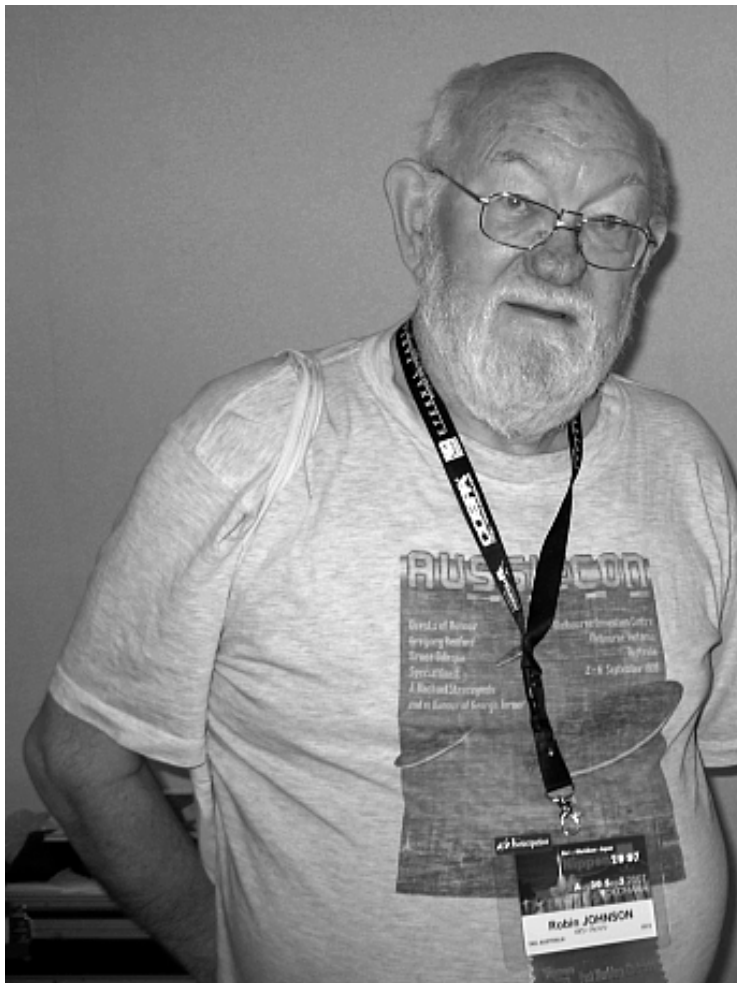
Cleaning.

During that convention I became aware of a Voice — a very pukkah English voice, constantly nattering to lots of members of the convention. A visiting English fan or author, I thought to myself. Why would a bloke with such a distinguished accent ever talk to me?

In August 1968 I joined ANZAPA, with Mailing No. 1. Thanks to the help of John Bangsund, Lee Harding and Leigh Edmonds, I published my first fanzines. I received a friendly, informative letter of comment from a Robin Johnson from Sydney. He seemed to think we had met, but I couldn't remember him.

In January 1970, I travelled to my first interstate convention: Syncon 1, held in the Epping Scout Hall, in the middle of the leafy northern suburbs of Sydney. I met for the first time lots of people with whom I had been exchanging fanzines and letters of comment: Peter Darling, John Brosnan, John Ryan, Gary Mason . . . and Robin Johnson. Yes, Robin was the man with the pukkah English accent, the bloke I had been too timid to talk to in 1968. He was about my height, but seemed a lot older than most other fans. He was already balding, but wore a toupee, and had that round shape that later I would imitate. He was actually in his early thirties. He was very easy to talk to, although it was often difficult to work out where the conversation might lead. Conversation with Robin seemed perpetually baffling but fascinating.

During the days after Syncon 1, I was sitting outside a Sydney cafe on a sunny afternoon. Bert Chandler (famous English writer A. Bertram Chandler, who adopted Australia as his home during the 1950s) was sitting opposite me, and Robin Johnson was beside me. Bert told me all about the great restaurants of Sydney. I nodded sagely. In 1970, although I was about to turn twenty-three, I had eaten at a restaurant exactly once. Robin invited



Robin Johnson, Nippon (2007 World Convention), Yokohama, Japan, August. (Photo: Alan Stewart.)



Robin Johnson, Chair, Aussiecon 1, August 1975, holding the gavel, which I presume he is about to hand on to unknown persons, the representatives of the 1977 Worldcon. Bruce Gillespie, looking puzzled as usual, also faces the camera. (Photo: Helena Binns.)

both of us to visit his flat in North Sydney.

In 1970, Robin lived in the kind of tower-block inner-city apartment that did not yet exist in Melbourne. We took the lift up from street level. The corridor outside the lift door looked like a hotel corridor. From the corridor we entered Robin's flat, which was one huge room. The floor was covered with electrical equipment of various kinds, and books and fanzines. Robin pointed to a couch and we sat down. Right at that moment he was talking on the phone. At the same time the TV was blaring in one corner. In another corner the radio was on. Some music was playing from a tape recorder. A book was open on the floor. So were several fanzines. What exactly had Robin been doing when we arrived?

Robin was always aware of the indirect method by which he interacted with the world. When he joined ANZAPA a few years later, he called his fanzine *The Butterfly Mind*. He knew that his mind seemed to flit from one topic to another, causing listeners sometimes to writhe around the floor in anguish or sometimes in helpless laughter.

Many of us felt that Robin was good company, but too disorganised to organise anything. How wrong we were. He was one of the Sydney delegates of the Aussiecon 1 bidding committee that John Foyster set up in 1970. After Robin moved to Melbourne in 1972, the committee changed rapidly. In late 1972, not long before Melbourne made its bid in Toronto to hold the worldcon, John Bangsund dropped out, and Robin found himself Chair of an upcoming world convention. If Robin felt a bit apprehensive, he didn't show it. He gathered the troops around him, gave us our various tasks, and slowly the convention took shape.

In 1973, I was in Toronto, at Torcon 2, as part of Australia's bid for the 1975 Worldcon. We won. I phoned Ursula Le Guin, who had agreed to be our Pro Guest of Honour. She sounded a bit distressed. She had forgotten about our bid. She was not sure she could get to Melbourne in August 1975, because she would be shifting continents during that month. I phoned Robin Johnson. He phoned Ursula. Robin can be a silver-tongue when he wants to be. He persuaded Ursula to remain as our Guest of Honour. Ursula told him that she would attend Aussiecon only if we held a writers' workshop during the week before the convention. Robin agreed. This was the origin of the most permanent

benefit of the events of 1975 — the Le Guin Writers Workshop.

During Aussiecon itself, Robin shed all his apparent signs of dither, and triumphed. He gathered the team that helped to put together the big circus at the Southern Cross Hotel. The blokes from the Magic Pudding Club (a shared household in Carlton) arranged to videotape the whole convention, and John Bangsund, David Grigg and Carey Handfield assembled the Program Book.

Robin remembers that he felt okay until very early on the last morning of the convention. He found himself walking up the middle of the tram tracks in Bourke Street outside the Southern Cross Hotel. He had no idea why he was there, or what had happened during the previous few hours.

Aussiecon 1 changed Robin, as it changed all of us. From then on, we found it a bit easier to conduct linear conversations with Robin. He became increasingly involved in all sorts of fannish enterprises. About twenty years ago he married Alicia, and went to live in Hobart, where he became the main organiser of two Thylacons. After he retired from his job, increasingly he was able to indulge in his lifelong passion — flying around the world. In this way, the man with the impeccably pukka English accent became Australian fandom's permanent ambassador.

In 2005, the fans of America and Australia raised the money to send me to two San Francisco conventions that were being held a week apart. As I entered the door of the hotel of Potlatch, the second convention I attended, the first person I saw was Robin Johnson. 'I decided only a week ago to attend Potlatch,' he said a bit ruefully. 'I'd better not shake hands; I've got a terrible cold.' The next two people I saw were Jean Weber and Eric Lindsay, also from Australia. Thanks to Robin, overseas fandom has probably long since decided that Australia is only a few hundred kilometres off the coast of California.

Because Robin now lives in Tasmania, I don't see him often. Each time we meet, the conversation always takes unexpected turns and leaps. Robin himself never seems to change, although he has had some health problems in recent years. He seems to be the one guarantee that there is an entity called Australian fandom. At its centre is the Big Heart of Robin Johnson.

— Bruce Gillespie, 22 September 2007

As apas (amateur publishing associations) amalgamate or die (except for ANZAPA), we will need somebody to write a descriptive history of them. Not all of them stretch across continents, like FAPA and ANZAPA. Some have been confined to age groups, such as APA-45 (members born since 1945), of which I was a member in the early seventies, and some are confined to interest groups within fandom, such as The Secret Garden. Below Tim Marion tells about some apas that were confined to friends living close to each other — the 'New York apas'. His article is also about the problem of trying to pack an infinite collection into finite space. (Elaine and I postponed this problem by moving house.)

Fannish archiving blues

Tim Marion

I've frequently been very discouraged by the piles of fanzines, magazines and, most predominantly, comic books that have been piling up in the apartment for the last several years. I haven't archived the comic books in over five years. I was in the midst of plastic bagging and boarding my comic books in May of 2002 when my bestest cat, Wickie, had a heart attack and perished. Since I had known at the time he was ailing, I felt guilty

about not spending the time with him instead of taking care of the piles of paper. Consequently, the comic books have piled up ever since.

Worse, I never bothered to properly archive my fanzines. At one point I had decided I had Had It with fandom and hid out in my roommate's apartment for many years, venturing forth only to work or to shop. The fanzines people had sent me in my youth were standing



up like books, filed alphabetically by title inside of cabinets, and since then I had decided it would be better to utilise that space for storing duplicate action figures still in their blister packs (yet another collection, it turns out). These fanzines I then bothered to plastic bag and stand upright in magazine boxes, said boxes going on top of what my long-suffering roommate refers to as 'the Breakfront' (a rather large China cabinet that has served as the repository for my slowly growing and now overflowing hardback book collection). This was not the ideal way to store these, as none of the fanzines was rigid enough to stand up by itself unless I packed the boxes very tight, rendering it problematical to file or find anything in the future. I figured I had to devise a better way for storing these. Someday. In the meantime, collections that were either sold to me or given to me by Dan Steffan, Michael Dobson and Arnie Katz, along with fanzines received at this apartment, lay in undignified piles, unprotected, and in inappropriate boxes.

Boxes of unread magazines and fanzines began to predominate the living room until my roommate, Jeff Kleinbard, told me I had to Do Something with them all. 'Find some place to store them,' he said. 'And not in the living room.' In another conversation sometime, about a totally different subject, he let slip the phrase, 'your side of the living room closet'. From there, I couldn't help but start thinking. Hmm. My side of the living room closet. That's a huge closet, which already has the remnants of those other collections that were passed on to me, as well as the mailings of many apas in which I was involved in my youth. The closet is/was dominated mainly by Jeff's boxes full of Stuff, which, along with my stuff, he has occasionally, over the years, shuffled around like it is some giant Rubic's cube.

I took a good look at the closet. If I cleared out Jeff's stuff from 'my' (presumably the righthand) side, and got rid of a lot of the useless junk of my own I had stored there, how many 'banker's boxes' could I fit into that space? Quickly I calculated I could store around thirty boxes there (which may, repeat, *may* comprise everything, fanzine-wise), if I really had the courage to part with so much other stuff.

When Jeff again started again complaining about the space I was taking with the boxes, I started getting desperate to clear out the space. I excavated deep into the dusty bowels of the closet and quickly brought ol' Rex downstairs and left him outside the laundry room. This immediately freed up a good bit of space. By 'Rex', of course, I am referring to an electric M4 Rex Rotary mimeo machine. I had used an M4 Rex when I lived in Virginia almost 30 years ago, but it was not that Rex. No, this was a Rex given to me by Brian Burley. Considering Brian's recent passing, parting with the mimeo was made especially difficult. But I had to remember I really I had no use for it. If I ever do a fanzine again, it's going to be photocopied, like the last issue of *So It Goes* was.

I had to remember that somewhere along the way, I had, perhaps fakefannishly, completely lost the talent for mimeography. Once I could get sharp, crisp results out of my M4, both for *So It Goes* and for my FAPazines (late 1970s). But, as my talent for dittography (using ditto machines) failed on me, so did my talent for mimeography. My last few attempts to use it seemed incredibly faded; it seemed like I just couldn't ink the pages thoroughly enough. When I realised in 1980 that I was going to be gafiating (partly because of this diminishing talent), I mentioned in passing conversation to Moshe Feder that I should get rid of it. Moshe had the

good grace to suggest to fringe-fan/TV fan Barry Gillam that he buy the mimeo. Barry came over to the apartment where I was staying with Hope Leibowitz and I showed him how to operate it and he seemed satisfied. Meanwhile Barry's mother bonded with Hope in the kitchen, and since I didn't have a bank account at this tender point of pioneering in my life, Hope told Mrs Gillam to write the cheque to her. It didn't make it any easier parting with the mimeo when I heard Mrs Gillam loudly and pointedly say to Hope, while looking at me, 'If the thing even works!' I didn't say anything at the time, and just looked away, and let my baby go. A month or two later Barry sent me some of his efforts — a listing of upcoming genre treats on TV. It was rather well-reproduced with blue ink on light green paper, both of which I had given him. From this, of course, I concluded that it really was my talent at mimeography which had faded and not the mimeo's ability to reproduce.

I carried downstairs the Rex that Brian had given me, using both hands, and with one of the hands I was also carrying a huge plastic bag full of cat litter. Carrying something like 60 pounds was both difficult and awkward to me, since I hadn't been working out like I had in the past. Fortunately in this 'new' building where I've been living (for the past 27 years) there is an elevator. With some degree of regret, I recalled when Brian had first given me that mimeo. I brought it 'home' to Hope's apartment in the Bronx. With me were Elliot Shorter and a friend of Brian's. Both she and Elliot were amazed when I picked up the mimeo with both hands and promptly started running up three flights of stairs, three steps at a time.

Back in the present, I left these two heavy items in front of the laundry room, a place where tenants know to leave bulk items which are being disposed of. With some degree of difficulty, I squatted all the way down to the floor. At the same time, a tall fellow with shoulder-length grey hair, a native Indian perhaps, gestured to me to hand the mimeo to him. Since he wasn't wearing a uniform, I thought he was another tenant. Since he wasn't speaking, or perhaps could not speak, I mistakenly thought that he was mistaken in asking for the mimeo; surely he could have no use for it. I ignored him and continued to set it down on the floor. To my surprise, he found a finger purchase underneath the paper tray, lifted it up easily in one hand, and the huge bag of cat litter in the other hand, and strode off easily with them. Obviously he was a custodian of the building, which was part of the reason why he wasn't in uniform (only the maintenance people wear uniforms, apparently).

As the tall fellow strode away confidently with my mimeo dangling off of one hand, I had time to say only a brief but sad (and silent) goodbye to Rex.

Another item I disposed of, with only a minor degree of difficulty, was a set of crystal goblets from Tiffany's. A friend of my boss had given these to me as a Christmas present when I worked in barter advertising. I had never had any use for them; I never entertain. The only person who I thought might have use for them was Sheba (also known as 'She Who Must Be Obeyed'), my present boss at the legal firm where I work. Since I didn't bother unwrapping the goblets, I can only hope they were intact at the time I turned them over to her.

I started boxing the fanzines along with many apa mailings that were available. Fortunately I had prepared well for this project. Knowing I would eventually have to Do Something more proper with all the fanzines, and integrate all the different collections and piles, I had, for many months already, been accumulating letter file



boxes as well as expanding 'accordion' file folders, both manila and redwelds (the latter which can also fit the manilas, if need be). This way the fanzines would both have more organisation and have something to keep them straight. Also, of course, on some fanzines I would actually use some of the magazine-sized backing boards I had purchased from Bags Unltd. Also now I would, more sensibly, be filing the fanzines by the editor's name and not by the fanzine title.

It was somethen around this time that Jeff decided to go visit his half-brother Harold. Harold is much older than Jeff and has a family of his own in Florida, and was anxious to see Jeff after a lapse of several years. Neither he nor Jeff are getting any younger, so a trip seemed appropriate.

Jeff told me that Harold wanted pictures of both Jeff and the neighbourhood. Jeff and I live in the Lower East Side, the site of the Henry Street Settlement — an important Jewish landmark.

'I could take a picture of you exposing yourself in front of the synagogue!' I suggested helpfully, if not irreverently.

Jeff laughed at the obvious joke but then assured me firmly that he would most certainly not be needing my help.

I, in turn, assured Jeff that when he returned, he would see a totally different living room. It will, I told him, be infinitely worse than he ever remembered. Which was true, as it turned out; like many hurts, it has to get worse before it gets better.

Now that I was actually set up for the project, the actual process of doing it seemed intimidating. Not just due to the amount of work and time involved, but also due to the many painful, sad and sour memories associated with many of the fanzines — remembering all the feuds, betrayals, controversies, etc. In many cases, a fan editor may not have considered me good enough to

receive an excellent zine he may have done, but here I have all the issues, nonetheless, bah-ha-ha (diabolical laughter). And of course, there were many pleasant memories involved too, and much beautiful art.

On initial digging through one of the piles that Arnie left me, I was startled to discover two, small, art-orientated fanzines. One was called *Popular Topography*, or perhaps that should be *Typography*, depending on where you look and whom you believe. I quickly recognised the logo as being one of my own, and indeed, this was obviously a fanzine started at a convention, during a room party. I must have thought we were working on a one-shot and was then disappointed when I never got a copy, not even after the convention. Here at last I had a copy, only to discover that most of the issue is devoted to Don Herron artwork; indeed, it's almost a portfolio of his drawings. If I had known that, I almost certainly would not have done the logo, as Herron seemed to bear me an incredible amount of resentment at the time. The other problem with it was that it looked like a vast vat of grease had been dumped on this copy, making some of the pages almost transparent, and ruining the representation of Herron's (admittedly good) art. I sure am sorry that the editor never thought to send a copy to the guy who did the cover logo, and sent it to Arnie Katz instead.

Another fanzine I came across was called *Voyages*, and was several full white pages of elaborate Bill Rotsler doodlings. I had seen good art from Bill before, but I was truly amazed with what he seemingly so casually scribbled across those pages. This is surely the most beautiful art I have ever seen by Rotsler. I was overwhelmed.

Since all this was taking a good time of time, I decided to have some musical accompaniment. I carried my huge CD player into the living room and played Kate Bush, John Barry film scores, and especially, Pink Floyd. When I was a teenager, I mainly played Steeleye Span



records while my friends who went to the alternative high school with me played Pink Floyd records. As I played *Dark Side of the Moon*, many of the lyrics seemed especially poignant with what I was going through emotionally while strolling down memory lane with the fanzines.

From 'Breathe':

smiles you'll give and tears you'll cry
And all you touch and all you see
Is all your life will ever be.

From 'Time':

then one day you find [30] years have got behind you
No one told you when to run, you missed the starting
gun
The sun is the same in a relative way, but you're older
And shorter of breath and one day closer to death.
Every year is getting shorter; never seem to find the
time
Plans that either come to naught or half a page of
scribbled lines.

The latter could very well describe fanzines that were never finished.

As it turned out, most of the apa mailings that came to hand easily were apas of which I had never been a member! I was especially and immediately impressed with APA-F. This was a local NYC weekly apa in the mid-1960s, and these mailings were no doubt passed along to me by Arnie Katz. I was surprised both by how thick these weekly mailings (or 'disties'?) were, as well as by the quality of the membership. Steve Stiles contributed wonderful coloured ditto covers. Besides him, members included Ted White, Jon White, and Marion and Walter Breen (Marion, of course, being better known as 'Marion Zimmer Bradley'), and other famous luminaries. Even Dave van Arnam was a member! Gadzooks, I had completely forgotten that Dave van Arnam used to be a fan. In the late 60s, before I discovered fandom (and when I was ten years old), I knew him only as the author of a 'barbarian novel' I had picked up (this was before I had discovered the phrase 'sword and sorcery'); one which to my young mind seemed a little more sophisticated and sensitive than the usual Conan-clone fare (I am referring, of course, to van Arnam's novel *Star Barbarian*, which had a stunning Jeff Jones cover).

Then I came across the next NYC local apa, TAPS. Well, actually, TAPS was not a NYC local apa, it just sort of metamorphosed that way.

TAPS stood for the Terrean Amateur Press Society and was a rotating letter apa (meaning each editor took a turn at being editor/publisher) started by Arnie Katz in 1963. (Just don't ask me what a 'Terrean' is.) When I first decided that I wanted to get into apas In A Big Way in 1972, I came into contact with a West Coast fan named Larry Nielson, since deceased, who edited an apa-index zine called *South of the Moon*. Larry was also someone who was accumulating apa memberships, and suggested my name for 'Speculation' in TAPS. Speculation, of course, meant that I would receive one or two mailings in the hope that I might decide to participate. However, I didn't really care for the idea of joining. I didn't like the fact that no one gave titles to their contributions; they were all uniformly introduced as letters. 'Dear TAPS,' each members' contribution would begin. Friendly, but it didn't feel valid to me, in terms of the Complete Apa Experience (whatever that was). More-



over, I really didn't want someone else reproducing my contribution each time — what if they couldn't do as good a job as I could? And the membership didn't really offer me anyone whom I was not already in an apa with; all these guys were apa veterans who were not really contributing anything inspired, just passing time. Not only all that, but there weren't really any membership spots open. There was a full complement of 12 members, plus several contributing WaitListers, and at least one complimentary member, Harry Warner. With the exception of Harry's and maybe Larry's contributions, I really didn't feel like the apa had anything to offer me I couldn't miss. (And Larry was leaving, as it turns out; one of the reasons why he suggested my name for Speculation.)

A couple of years passed and the membership is comprised mainly of fans in New York City. Moshe Feder, Hank Davis, Mark Blackman, Jon Singer, Norman Hollyn, Gary Tesser, Susan Palermo . . . even my roommate, Jeff Kleinbard, was a member. I had so much fun reading through these mailings which were written by people who, in a year or two after these writings, would become my friends (if many of them weren't already). Somewhere along the way I imagined what it would be like to go back in time and try to fabricate some sort of identity for myself and join TAPS and the fun. Seems like this was an area of fandom I missed out on during a time in which I was active.

And what joy! A disassociated page from a mailing (a back cover?) is a photo page of current members, circa 1976! Here we get to see the BAP himself ('Bedford Avenue Pro', or Hank Davis) on the phone, Morris Keesan looking off and talking, a fully bearded Lou Stathis with his arm around, and being somewhat familiar with, Susan Palermo? (Can't be sure; sometimes have a hard time recognising her in pictures.) While a separate photo of Gary Farber seems to look on. In the lower left corner, Gary Tesser is easily (and typically?) captured asleep on film. Then there's a short-haired guy, maybe in a military uniform. Is that Bruce Arthurs, who was temporarily stationed near me when I lived in

Virginia? And someone else, who? Barry Smotroff, maybe? And in the middle of the page are Jon Singer and Moshe Feder, sitting together, trying to look natural (Jon succeeds). I'm sure at the time it was put together it was a lot of fun, but these people surely didn't realise what an important, fannish historical document they made! (And yes, I'm being serious.)

Then there were the APA-Q mailings. This was, and still is, in a fashion, the NYC local apa that started in the later 1970s. If I ever wanted to go back in time just to contribute to an apa, it was this one. Profusely illustrated by Stu Shiffman and contributed to by many of the brighter lights of the New York City fandom, it had an ineffably fannish feel to it that is still, in retrospect, irresistible. Unfortunately, one of the very first mailings I came across I had to mutilate in a minor way. It had a charming Ross Chamberlain cover printed on crisp, stiff paper, and the first contribution was Moshe's. Not a problem, except that Moshe very carefully taped a Q-tip at the top of his zine as a goof. Since I saw that the hard, wooden Q-tip was fraying through the stiff paper stock of the cover, and since I knew they might be tightly packed in the banker's boxes, I very carefully and delicately took a pen-blade and cut through the tape and removed the Q-tip, which I probably disposed of. A subsequent call to Moshe to inform him of my perfidy went unreturned. Perhaps he didn't approve.

Around this time Jeff came back and freaked out over all the boxes all over the living room floor. He told me that if it was going to take so long to complete, then I never should have started the project; but of course that didn't make sense because I started the project not just to better archive the fanzines (and comic books and magazines . . .) but because he was complaining about boxes all over the living room. He ended up giving me some impossible deadline to clear out all the boxes.

During a later, saner moment, Jeff waxed enthusiastically about his visit with Harold and Harold's family. Jeff told me about the huge volumes of archival photos that Harold had kept of this neighbourhood. In particular, Harold gave Jeff an 8 by 10 blow-up of the shoe store that their grandfather used to have. 'Goodman's Shoes' it was called, as a huge sign proudly proclaimed. Many years later it became, for a year or two at least, the site of Moses de Figueroa's 'Wonderworld' (comic book store).

I was plastic bagging the TAPS and APA-Q mailings when I thought to read some excerpts to him. From an APA-Q zine dated 15 June 1979, I actually have a second issue of an apazine — it seems I became active in APA-Q just as it was slowly starting to decline. I start the zine whining about how there's no need to introduce myself as everyone already knows me and my life is boring anyway. Then I write about taking Eric Mayer and his wife to their first showing of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. 'Then on Saturday there is Jim Frenkel's party and *Saturday Night Live* with Eric Idle as the Guest Host and *****KATE BUSH!!***** as the musical guest. Sunday I may see Jeffrey Kleinbard and play Frisbee. Maybe life isn't so empty after all,' I concluded on a somewhat positive note.

From TAPS I read aloud to Jeff the following: 'This is my resignation letter to TAPS. I am resigning because at this moment in my life I am moving around so much that I can't seem to get ahold of the latest mailing in time to comment on it for the next. I could keep giving you an update on my trip but without my feedback to you I feel this is egoising. However, before I vanish into the

haze here is a thumbnail state-of-my-union undress.' That was the first paragraph of Jeff's last contribution to TAPS.

At this point Jeff really seemed to Get It. 'I think I understand now,' he volunteered one day after I read him the above. 'Harold archives the neighborhood and family history. You're archiving fans and fannish history.' And he also dropped his pronouncement about having to get rid of the boxes in just a few days.

So everything was going fine, as detailed above, but then . . . Disaster struck. My beautiful, white, fluffy Turkish Angora cat, who had kept me so much good and faithful company while bagging and filing these fanzines, never begging for too much attention, was finally starting to decline. This decline was even more inevitable than it usually is for cats as I had already been told by my vet that Casper had kidney cancer. Twice a day, for several months, I was giving him both a steroid and thyroid medicine, and once a day an antibiotic. Although it was a lot of trouble preparing special little meals for him (containing the medicine, the easiest way of giving it to him) twice a day while fending off all the other cats, I treasured those times, as I knew it was keeping Casper healthy and happy.

But now he finally started showing less and less interest in eating his special little meals . . . or any other meals. I immediately stopped filing fanzines and started devoting all my time to him. I would come home from work and be so glad to see him still alive. I would turn on *Dark Side of the Moon* and play it (not too loudly) for both of us.

From 'Breathe (Reprise)':

Home, home again.

I like to be here when I can.

When I come home cold and tired

It's good to warm my bones beside the fire.

I was dropping the pills down his throat but he was still uncomfortable physically; it was difficult for him to even find a place to lie down. Apparently his kidneys had become larger, tumorous, and literally inflamed. He was burning up, and couldn't find a cool enough place to sit. Soon he was, to his shame, losing control of his bladder. Seeing how uncomfortable he was, I took him to the vet and gave him the gift of The Great Release. Now Casper really is a 'friendly ghost' — one I see only in my dreams.

And of course afterwards I have just been so damn depressed that it's really hard doing anything. The litters still have to be changed, but it's hard to motivate myself to file the fanzines. At least this time I don't feel like I've neglected my little furry buddy for the love of inanimate paper. But I guess much of that guilty memory is resurfacing, as well as sadness for my current loss.

Jeff, in turn, has understood. 'Do you think you'll have them out by May?' he asked, a couple of months after Casper passed. Now May has passed, and the cats are started to use the sides of the unfolded banker's boxes as a scratching post.

Wish me luck! Writing this has helped.

From 'Time':

The time is gone, the song is over
thought I'd something more to say.

— Tim Marion, 2007

Bye bye Johnny: 24 November: the morning after

by Bruce Gillespie

Election Day, 24 November 2007, began as a bright, shiny Melbourne spring day. We had invited Elaine's two sisters and their partners to dinner, so Elaine had committed herself to a day's shopping and cooking. I had committed myself to vacuum-cleaning the carpets, a job I put off as long as possible. Two opinion polls, on the two days before the election, claimed a neck-and-neck contest between Labor and the Coalition. Every poll for most of the previous year had given Labor the win by margins varying from 6 to 10 per cent.

We've been to some miserable Election Night gatherings. Despite the congenial company, Election Night 1996 at the home of Charles and Nic Taylor was memorably depressing. As the Howard Government arrived, we hoped that a Howard Government would not be as bad as we anticipated. It proved to be much worse. The 1998 election, which we watched at home by ourselves, was even more depressing. Labor bounced back, gaining 52 per cent of the two-party-preferred vote, yet still could not win enough vital marginal seats. Howard's mob seemed to have perfected the skill, formerly the monopoly of Hawke and Keating, of retaining marginal seats even while the rest of the country seems discontented. 2001 was the fascist loony election, as Howard trounced immigrant boats and sucked up to his good friend George Bush. The result of the 2001 election became Australia's worst moment since 1954 — evil incarnate in the faces of the crocodiles of Canberra, reflecting, it seemed, the slaving faces of one's fellow citizens. Habeus corpus out the window. Madness, Afghanistan. Madness, Iraq. Then came the advent of Mark Latham, who for awhile put Labor 10 per cent ahead of the Coalition. For a few months we thought he might become Mark Antony, but in the end he proved to be Cassandra posing as Cicero. The 2004 election was depressing, because we couldn't help feeling that Labor might have won if Latham hadn't shot himself and everybody else in the foot at the last moment. The voters disliked Latham so much by the time of the election that they allowed the Coalition to achieve the impossible: control of Senate. Its real agenda — war against workers — was put into effect.

A few weeks ago, ABC radio pundit Brian Coster made the most pointed observation about the 2007 situation: Howard lost this election because he gained his heart's desire in 2004: he won the Senate. He gave the game away. He pissed on the head of his 1996 supporters. By stripping away all those workers' rights, won over the last century, he made defeat possible. Until Howard pushed through the 'WorkChoices' legislation, many voters had been able to live with Howard. Howard out of control came as a shock for many. They turned. Smart new gleaming Kevin Rudd was elected Labor leader in place of tired old Kim Beazley. Suddenly Labor was leading the Coalition by 10 per cent.

Election Night 2007 was much longer than anybody anticipated. For us, it started nervously. The first results gave a swing to Labor of only about 3 per cent, not enough to change government. Maybe all those results came from country booths. By about 10 p.m. we felt at last we could begin celebrating. Maxine McKew's joy at winning Howard's seat (whether in the end she does make it or not) allowed us to feel a lot happier.

Neither set of opinion polls were proved correct. The over-optimistic polls through 2007 proved incorrect, but so were the final neck-and-neck polls. It took nearly two hours for a confirmation that the real swing was 5.8 per cent overall, with some astonishing swings in some electorates, especially in Queensland (14.1 per cent in Dickson, and over 15 per cent in one of the others). Julia Gillard, Labor's deputy prime minister elect, sitting with the ABC TV team, grew more and more confident. Nick Minchin, who had smirked in victory over the last dozen years, proved pleasantly gallant in defeat. Anthony Green, master psephologist, and Kerry O'Brien, master interviewer, looked much older than three years ago. By 11 p.m. they revealed themselves as dead tired.

Eventually Howard conceded, with one of the best speeches of his career. Howard looked all-to-human, conceding not only government but his own seat, and I was tempted for a minute or two to forget all the harm he's done — to Aborigines, to workers, to university students and staff, to potential migrants, to first-home buyers, among many others. Rudd in victory went on and on, with what we hope will be one of his worst speeches. Rudd victorious hardly inspired confidence, with his machine-chiselled good looks and clichéd assurances. I wasn't much convinced by Hawke in 1983, either, and I was right. The only one of the current mob of politicians I like is the Greens' Bob Brown, but I can't share his confidence that the vote will matter a damn in stopping the Tasmanian forests being converted to wood pulp. Labor politicians can be bought, just like Coalition politicians. I just hope there are enough Greens in the new Senate to allow it to become vital and nippy again.

My reasoned reaction to this election is fairly cynical. Howard has so poisoned the political waters during the last few years that I don't see how they can be purified. My personal reaction is coloured entirely by my private superstition. Hawke gained government during 1983. During 1984, Brian McCurdy at Macmillan offered me the permanent-freelance job that kept me going until early 1996. They were my good years. Howard arrived in 1996. By the middle of 1997, I no longer had guaranteed freelance work. While Howard reigned, my career went bung slowly, until now I'm almost down and out. Even Elaine is scratching with work, although for most of the last fifteen years she has done well. Will the return of Labor bring returned prosperity to the Gillespie-Cochrane team? Or will the new Labor era prove merely

a rerun of old Coalition times — bread and dripping forever?

How did the Election Night gathering go? Very well. Elaine's cooking proved as wonderful as ever, and we all had a great time. I finished vaccing the two main rooms, but I still need to finish the rest of the house. The main niggle came from Elaine's sister Valerie, who was dismayed to find that Fran Bailey (Lib.) was returned in her

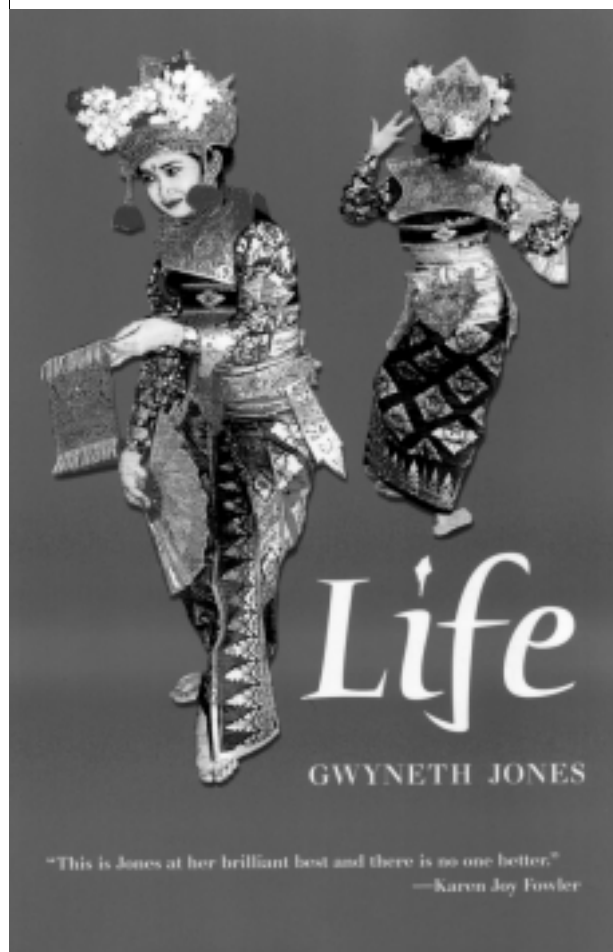
seat. 'I don't like Fran Bailey,' said Val. 'I've met her!' Four days later, Bailey is struggling to hold her seat. It might be two weeks of careful vote counting before we find out that outcome — or even whether John Howard has become only the second Australian prime minister to lose his own seat.

— Bruce Gillespie, 28 November 2007

Favourites of 2005

Favourite novels read for the first time in 2005

- 1 *Life* by Gwyneth Jones
(2004; Aqueduct Press; 370 pp.)
 - 2 *The Plot Against America* by Philip Roth
(2004; Jonathan Cape; 301 pp.)
 - 3 *Resurrection* by Leo Tolstoy
(1901; Penguin; 568 pp.)
 - 4 *Winter on the Plain of Ghosts: A Novel of Mohenjo-Daro* by Eileen Kernaghan
(2004; Flying Monkey; 254 pp.)
 - 5 *The World as a Clockface*
by Philomena van Rijswijk
(2001; Penguin; 406 pp.)
 - 6 *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro
(2005; Faber & Faber; 263 pp.)
 - 7 *Flicker* by Theodore Roszak
(1991; No Exit; 688 pp.)
 - 8 *Replay* by Ken Grimwood
(1986; Grafton; 366 pp.)
 - 9 *The Limits of Enchantment* by Graham Joyce
(2005; Gollancz; 250 pp.)
 - 10 *Longleg* by Glenda Adams
(1990; Angus & Robertson; 339 pp.)
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Why is Gwyneth Jones's *Life* the only totally satisfying new novel that I've read in the last three years? (I've read nothing better in 2005, 2006 or 2007, except for the three classic novels — *The Tree of Man*, *War and Peace* and *All the King's Men* — re-read recently.)

Life is the story of two biological researchers, their love affair, the discoveries they make, and the people who are violently opposed to their discoveries. The book is a great adventure, a story of a seemingly doomed love, and Jones writes very well. Is that too much to ask of a modern SF (or any other kind of) novel? It seems so. Perhaps I'm just not picking the right novels from the library shelf or stack of review copies.

The Plot Against America tells the story of what might have happened to characters like Philip Roth's own family members if air hero Charles Lindbergh had been chosen as the Republican candidate for the 1940 US Presidential election, and had won. The real Lindbergh's Nazi sympathies are a fact of history. Roth speculates on the ways in which some sections of the Republican Party might have used Lindbergh to begin an anti-minority groups pogrom throughout America. Roth's scenario is all too likely; his characters are wonderful; but his solution to the dilemma sounds rather unlikely.

My sister bought me a copy of Tolstoy's *Resurrection* for Christmas 1966. Finally I read it in 2005. This is one of the advantages of keeping books and not throwing them out. Tolstoy the novelist shows a great ability to laugh at himself and his own shambling culture (Russia at the end of the nineteenth century), but Tolstoy the idealist and utopian becomes a bit tedious by the end of *Resurrection*.

I don't like epic fantasy much. Novels in this genre are usually backward-looking, plodding and sterile. Kernaghan sidesteps my prejudices by (a) telling an

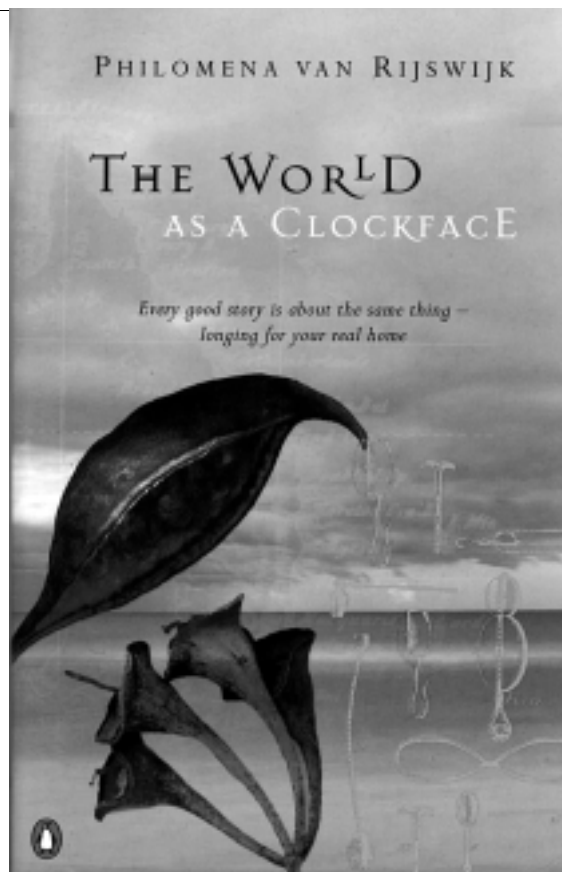
entire epic tale in 250 pages — without the need for a sequel; (b) telling a story set in ancient India, a place and era I don't know at all; and (c) writing strong, vigorous prose. Her characters come to life, especially her ambiguous main character, who defeats powerful forces but in turn is defeated by the concept of power. Kerneghan has been publishing since at least the early 1970s; it's a pity we rarely see her work outside Canada.

The World as Clockface is an impressive Australian historical fantasy, but so far it has remained ignored. Maybe that's because Van Rijswijk's style owes more to Garcia Marquez and Borges than to English-speaking writers. Maybe it's because her story is ethereal, quirky and complex. Maybe it's because Philomena van Rijswijk doesn't realise she has to press the flesh at conventions to become well known. If you find this handsome Penguin Australia paperback in secondhand stores, buy it.

Never Let Me Go was a hot tip to win the Man Booker Prize in 2005, but didn't. It's the sort of understated narrative of the type that often wins. The characters are so self-effacing they almost disappear into the page. The prose is exquisite, but not exciting. It is definitely an SF novel, and a good one. We are told the lives of several students at an English public school (= private school). We are told that the school is unique, and the students are special, but it takes much of the novel to find out how and why. The book's proposition is that people can be persuaded to believe any proposition, no matter how repellent, if the proposition is introduced slowly, without fanfare, all implications hidden. We are asked to speculate on how and why, in the late 1940s, the direction taken by the alternate British society in this novel deviated radically from the direction that British society actually took. Are the two societies really much different from each other? Ishiguro treats these huge questions in a whisper-quiet way, and doesn't begin to answer them.

Theodore Roszak's *Flicker* and Ken Grimwood's *Replay* would have been top of the list if each had not been written in a slapdash pop style. Each author has been so overwhelmed by the sheer gobsmacking excitement of his own idea that he has written a book that might have been much better.

Flicker, not the multi-million-selling *The Da Vinci Code*, is the ultimate conspiracy novel. Our hero gradually uncovers evidence of the activities of a mysterious secret society that has ruled the world since the Middle Ages. (From reviews, I gather it's the same secret society that appears in *The Da Vinci Code*.) In the twentieth century, it has found a sure-fire way of conquering us by using the psychological properties inherent in the flicker of film — the twenty-four-times-a-second subliminal dark bit between each frame. Does this sound silly? Of course it is. But Roszak is such a film nut that he makes his proposition sound possible. He loves



paranoia and conspiracy theories, and his main characters are convincing. What he has really written is a satire on conspiracy novels.

Replay has a nice fantasy premise about a man who can replay his life, attempting to repair the mistakes in his earlier lives. This process has limitations, and it's the limitations that make *Replay* different from many similar SF stories. The book fails to be convincing because the main character is unconvincing. Ken Grimwood writes basic-writing-school prose. *Replay* is one of those bad books that would be enjoyable if made into a good movie.

The Limits of Enchantment won the World Fantasy Award for Best Novel. It has two powerful central characters, a wonderful setting (the untamed bits that remain of England's countryside), some effective use of magic, and a crisp style. It has some very fine paragraphs, but the situation is settled a bit too neatly.

I could say much the same about *Longleg*, an acknowledged Australian classic. It has no fantasy element, but its main character is so detached from the rest of Australian society that we feel we are reading about an alternative universe. Its first section is the strongest; the last section is a bit conventional.

Favourite books read for the first time in 2005

- 1 *Little Kingdoms: Three Novellas*
by Steven Millhauser (1993; Vintage; 239 pp.)
- 2 *Life*
by Gwyneth Jones (as above)
- 3 *The King in the Tree: Three Novellas*
by Steven Millhauser (2003; Vintage; 242 pp.)
- 4 *Adaptations: From Short Story to Big Screen*
edited by Stephanie Harrison
(2005; Three Rivers; 619 pp.)
- 5 *The Plot Against America*

- by Philip Roth (as above)
- 6 *Resurrection*
by Leo Tolstoy (as above)
 - 7 *Miracle Fair: Selected Poems of Wislawa Szymborska*
(2001; Norton; 159 pp.)
 - 8 *Winter on the Plain of Ghosts: A Novel of Mohenjo-Daro*
by Eileen Lanigan (as above)
 - 9 *A Traveler's Guide to Mars: The Mysterious Landscapes of the Red Planet*
by William K. Hartmann (2003; Workman; 468 pp.)
 - 10 *The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic and Madness at the Fair that Changed America*
by Erik Larson (2003; Vintage; 447 pp.)
 - 11 *The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy, Vol. 1*
edited by Bill Congreve and Michelle Marquardt
(2005; MirrorDanse; 256 pp.)
 - 12 *The World as a Clockface*
by Philomena van Rijswijk (as above)
 - 13 *Never Let Me Go*
by Kazuo Ishiguro (as above)
 - 14 *Tesseract 9*
edited by Nalo Hopkinson and Geoff Ryman
(2005; Edge; 391 pp.)
 - 15 *Tolstoy* by A. N. Wilson
(1988; Hamish Hamilton; 572 pp.)
 - 16 *The Birthday of the World and Other Stories*
by Ursula K. Le Guin (2002; HarperCollins; 362 pp.)
 - 17 *A Tour Guide in Utopia*
by Lucy Sussex (2005; MirrorDanse; 267 pp.)
 - 18 *Flicker*
by Theodore Roszak (as above)
 - 19 *Replay*
by Ken Grimwood (as above)
 - 20 *The Limits of Enchantment*
by Graham Joyce (as above)
 - 21 *Longleg*
by Glenda Adams (as above)

2005 was my Year of the Short Story — as can be seen from my article on short stories in *Steam Engine Time* 7.

Little Kingdoms, an early Steven Millhauser collection, and *The King in the Trees*, his most recent collection (as far as I know), show him at the top of his abilities, giddy with intellectual self-confidence. He grabs plots from fantasy, and transforms them with grim Escherian logic into psychological labyrinths. To follow these characters through these labyrinths is to feel breathless, exhausted by intellectual ecstasy. Millhauser breathes into his closely argued structures a passion that one rarely finds in conundrums by Borges.

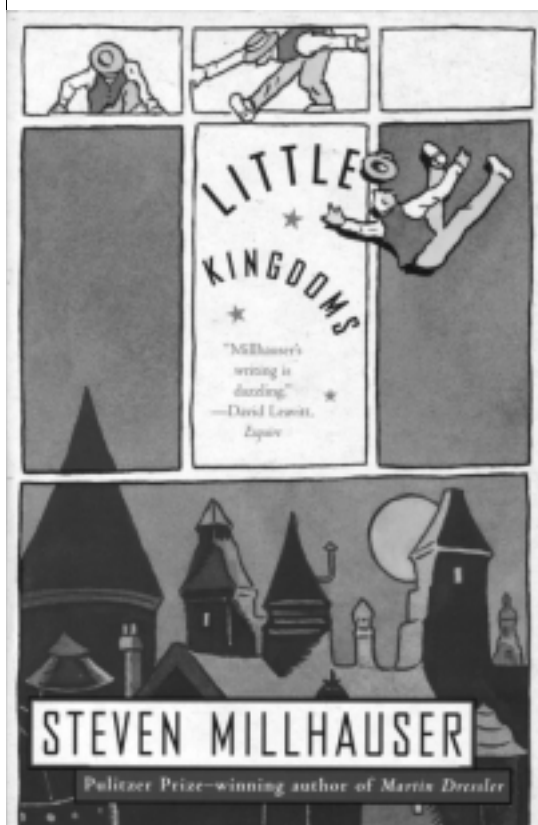
Adaptations is based on the proposition that many more great movies have been based on good short stories than on good novels. Stephanie Harrison, the editor, has dug out some fine but obscure stories that have been made into good films. ('Reading the story that inspired

a beloved movie,' she writes, 'is a little like meeting your mother-in-law for the first time. It's never less than a revelation.') Dorothy M. Johnson's 'A Man Called Horse', the best story here, was made into a film starring Richard Harris that no one much liked. 'Minority Report', not one of Philip K. Dick's best stories, was made into one of Steven Spielberg's best movies. Many stories written by famous people (such as William Faulkner's 'Tomorrow') were made into movies I've never heard of (Joseph Anthony's *Tomorrow*, 1953). Some films I should have seen, such as Frank Perry's *The Swimmer*, are based on the best works produced by their authors, such as John Cheever's short story of the same name. The only film here listed that is as good as the short story is Josif Heifits' Russian film of Anton Chekhov's 'The Lady with the Pet Dog'.

The other short story collections on 2005's list also yielded overflowing riches. *The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy, Volume 1* reminded us of how much good short Australian fiction is being published these days. *Tesseract 9* does much the same thing for recent Canadian SF and fantasy. Both volumes seem much more interesting than the usual 'Best Of' collections, which concentrate on American or British SF and fantasy.

After a few years of enthusiasm, I've almost stopped reading volumes of poetry. I've done this because I find it very difficult to remember individual poems. I know I should write down my favourite lines from my favourite poems in each volume, but I don't. Even if short stories are not as well written as poems, it's the story element that is memorable, not the fine sentences. Nevertheless, *Miracle Fair: Selected Poems of Wislawa Szymborska* is a potent collection of memories and reflections on a life spent under various oppressive regimes, coloured by the loss of Szymborska's husband some years ago.

I should read more books about astrophysics, especially if they include a photograph library as potent as that found in *A Traveler's Guide to Mars*. The text illustrates the photos, taken by satellite, speculating on how long ago these events occurred, and about what we are actually looking at. What we see is a planetscape heavily scoured by gigantic geological events. Most of these events occurred billions of years ago, but some have happened within the last million years. Some events, such as evidence of flooding water, seem to have taken place recently. At one time Mars was alive. Might



life still exist there somewhere? This book is an attractive blend of speculation, science and photographs.

The Devil in the White City is a documentary book that reads like a novel. The book's blurb says it clearly: 'Bringing Chicago circa 1893 to vivid life, Erik Larson . . . intertwines the true tale of two men — the brilliant architect behind the legendary 1893 World's Fair . . . and the cunning serial killer who used the fair to lure victims to their death.' This is a ripping yarn, which tells of the design and construction of the unbelievable Chicago World's Fair despite endless setbacks; and the seedy story of the serial killer who came to town. The World's Fair itself reminds me of the vast impossible emporium featured in Steven Millhauser's novel *Martin Dressler*.

A. N. Wilson's *Tolstoy* biography is a bit of a plod to read, but Tolstoy's life is such a mixture of the heroic

and the ludicrous that the book itself is memorable. I presume somebody somewhere else has written the classic biography of Tolstoy, but this will do for the time being.

Ursula Le Guin's *The Birthday of the World* and Lucy Sussex's *A Tour Guide in Utopia* are necessary-to-the-library-shelf state-of-the-career collections.

Le Guin returns to the adventures of her Hainish investigators, but none of the stories has quite the exhilarating quality of her recent collections of fantasy stories.

Sussex's collection is a satisfying reminder that she continues to win awards (especially for 'Merlusine') and blaze her unique trail in Australian fiction. This volume is just one of several recent places where 'Kay and Phil' (1994) has been reprinted. My favourites include 'The Gloaming', 'Runaways' and 'Frozen Charlottes'.

Favourite films seen for the first time in 2005

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 <i>A Fistful of Dynamite</i> (<i>Duck, You Sucker!</i>) (restored version)
(1971) directed by Sergio Leone | 6 <i>Kiki's Delivery Service</i>
(1989) Hayao Miyazaki |
| 2 <i>Kansas City</i>
(1995) Robert Altman | 7 <i>Sunset</i>
(1988) Blake Edwards |
| 3 <i>The Ruling Class</i> (complete, restored)
(1972) Peter Medak | 8 <i>The Final Cut</i>
(2004) Omar Nain |
| 4 <i>Monsoon Wedding</i>
(2001) Mira Nair | 9 <i>Collateral</i>
(2004) Michael Mann |
| 5 <i>The Company</i>
(2003) Robert Altman | 10 <i>Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were Rabbit</i>
(2005) Nick Parks |
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2005's list is an odd assortment of films, from various sources, mainly seen on DVD. Only two films from this list can be sourced to the ever-helpful Dick Jenssen: *The Ruling Class*, completely restored, both in film stock quality and length, so much so that I felt as if I were watching large sections of it for the first time; and Michael Mann's *Collateral*, an offbeat crime buddy movie, distinguished mainly by the clarity of the digital night photography.

The afternoon when I saw *A Fistful of Dynamite* was the last time I visited the mighty Astor cinema in Prahran, Melbourne (our last picture palace, and our last repertory cinema). Since moving to Greensborough, I find it too difficult to get there using public transport. Now the Astor is on the market, and I might never visit it again. *Duck, You Sucker!*, which is the closest anyone can get to the original Italian title, is not so much a Western as a political thriller set in Mexico. Very funny scenes alternate with scenes of high melodrama; the photography, acting and direction are awe-inspiring. To think that a few years ago I had never seen a Sergio Leone movie!

DVD has brought some delights for Robert Altman fans. None of his low-budget 1980s movies has appeared, and there is still no sign of *Short Cuts* or *The Player*, his two commercial successes. *Kansas City*, only twelve years old, feels like one of Altman's best ensemble movies of the 1970s. For some reason it was released in Australia on DVD in 4:3 ratio, but it's still worth watching. It tells of a kidnap plot that goes completely wrong, set against the Kansas City jazz scene of the 1940s.

Jennifer Jason Leigh is memorable in every scene of her role as the kidnapper. Harry Belafonte, acting against type, is a particularly thuggish gangster. The Kansas City jazz music is fabulous.

It's impossible to overpraise *The Ruling Class*, one of the few all-British movies made during the early 1970s. This is Peter O'Toole's other great role — other than in *Lawrence of Arabia* and *My Favourite Year*. As the dipsy, hippy heir to a title, the Jesus-Christ-lookalike son who must 'cured' of his 'madness', O'Toole is magnificent. As the 'cured' head of a ruling class family, lusting for power and vengeance, he is even better. *The Ruling Class* is full of great British actors, especially Arthur Lowe, as the bolshie butler, nearly stealing the show from O'Toole. Because the film was cut when first released, the current DVD is probably the first chance Australians have had to see it complete.

Monsoon Wedding is a perfect example of my favourite type of film: films about people being people. A well-off Indian family puts on an Indian wedding, a vast affair of several days' celebrations, many pavilions and endless expenditure. Dad really doesn't have the money to stage the wedding, but he will do anything for his daughter. The wedding has been arranged; She is just about to meet He for the first time. But she is a modern daughter, involved with somebody else. Fortunately, the melodramatic implications rarely take over the film; most of it is based on well-observed family comedy. A special lift is given to the film by a romance 'below stairs' between two lower-caste people who happen to be working on the wedding preparations.

The Company is the second of Altman's final trilogy of films. Visually, it is the best. It tells of one season of one of America's finest modern ballet companies, the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago. The costumes, sets and choreography are astonishing; the interaction between caste members a bit perfunctory, at least by Altman standards. Malcolm McDowell, as the impresario, dominates the film.

Spirited Away is the film that made me a fan of the animated films of Hayao Miyazaki. Of the others I've seen since, *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *My Neighbor Totoro*, two of his early films, are my favourites. Both are filled with the sense of being a child. The child 'stars' of each are more realistic than the live children in most other films. Kiki, a witch who has just turned twelve, must go out in the world and earn her fortune. With her wonderful companion cat, she sets up a delivery service in a large town. Her adventures are genuinely interesting, and the animation is filled with flying, as in most Miyazaki films.

Blake Edwards has been America's finest director of comedy movies since the early 1960s. *Sunset* is one of his best, with its rosy evocation of a Hollywood during the early period when real cowboys were often hired to play cowboys. James Garner and Bruce Willis make perfect buddies, with Malcolm McDowell (again) as the villain. Lots of mayhem, splendidly choreographed and photographed.

The Final Cut is my kind of SF film: a low-budget, minimal- melodrama film about one vital future change in society. In this film's near-future society, those who can afford it are fitted with a device that makes life-long records of their memories, selections of which are played back at the person's funeral. Most relatives and friends use these playbacks to write hagiographies of the dead. Robin Williams, in his most understated, convincing performance so far, is the device's inventor who discovers its dangerous implications.

Collateral might better have been called *Collaboration*. An ordinary guy (Tom Cruise), a taxi driver, is co-opted by a psychopath (Jamie Foxx) to help him make a hit. There are plenty of good action sequences, but Michael Mann keeps the emphasis on the edgy ambiguity of the relationship between the two men. Digital filming gives *Collateral* a vivid night look unmatched by any other recent film except *Noise*, the recent Australian thriller.

The Curse of the Were Rabbit is the first full-length Wallace and Gromit animated feature. I feared the worst, but have now enjoyed this film four times. The characters of Wallace and Gromit are developed and extended, the new characters are vivid, and the pictorial detail, both as scenery and a source of jokes, is sumptuous. It's a pity that claymation, this particular form of animation, is very labour intensive. There's still no sign of the next Wallace and Gromit.

Favourite short fiction read for the first time in 2005

- 1 'The Little Kingdom of J. Franklin Payne'
by Steven Millhauser (*Little Kingdoms*)
- 2 'A Man Called Horse'
by Dorothy M. Johnson (*Adaptations*)
- 3 'The Sepia Postcard'
by Stephen Millhauser (*The Barnum Museum*)
- 4 'Revenge'
by Steven Millhauser (*The King in the Tree*)
- 5 'Babylon Revisited'
by F. Scott Fitzgerald (*Adaptations*)
- 6 'Coming to Terms'

- by Eileen Gunn (*Stable Strategies*)
- 7 'The Gloaming'
by Lucy Sussex (*A Tour Guide in Utopia*)
- 8 'An Adventure of Don Juan'
by Steven Millhauser (*The King in the Trees*)
- 9 'No 3 Raw Place'
by Deborah Biancotti (*Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy, Vol. 1*)
- 10 'Bones'
by Rjurik Davidson (*Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy, Vol. 1*)

I've already talked about most of the anthologies these stories are taken from. Preparing these lists reminds me I really should write something extensive about the writing of Steven Millhauser. 'Little Kingdom' compresses more magic, wonder and delight into one story than I've found in any recent genre fantasy story. It's not just that he writes better sentences than any other fantasy author (except perhaps John Crowley); it's that the fictional persona of Millhauser is itself magic, hovering over the world like a guardian spirit. This spirit sees all, which is why 'Revenge' and 'The Sepia Postcard' reveal as much about the good and evil inherent in humanity as they do about fantastical happenings.

'Coming to Terms', from Eileen Gunn's *Stable Strategies*, her 2005 career's collection of stories, already has picked up prizes and nominations all over the place. It's a pointed meditation on home and family.

'The Gloaming' is Lucy Sussex's best story for some time. It sweeps along in one breathless movement, from statement of place, time and character through to its

arresting conclusion. It's a good year when I can find a subtle, graceful ghost story.

Two other fine ghost stories by Australian writers are also on this list.

In Deborah Biancotti's 'No 3 Raw Place', a couple have just moved into the new house. Life becomes increasingly difficult in this house. But what is being haunted — the people, the house, or the whole neighbourhood? — and what is the nature of the haunting? Seemingly a simple story, it burrows away into the memory and stays there.

'Bones' introduces the work of Melbourne author Rjurik Davidson to me, but I'll keep looking out for more of his work. I had expected him to be some old gaffer like me, because of his enormous enthusiasm for and knowledge about the post-World War II jazz scene in Australia. Instead, Davidson is a young go-getter who seems to have dug deep to find the origins of this wonderful story about the legendary visit here of an American black jazz band. The story is filled with the spirit of jazz.



(Tentative) Favourite popular CDs bought during 2005

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Neil Young: <i>Prairie Wind</i> | 7 Bettye LaVette: <i>I've Got My Own Hell to Raise</i> |
| 2 Jackson Browne: <i>Solo Acoustic Vol. 1</i> | 8 Rolling Stones: <i>Rarities</i> |
| 3 Tom Russell: <i>Hotwalker</i> | 9 Jimmie Dale Gilmore: <i>Come On Back</i> |
| 4 Bob Dylan: <i>No Direction Home</i> | 10 John Prine: <i>Fair and Square</i> |
| 5 Martha Wainwright | 11 Rolling Stones: <i>A Bigger Bang</i> |
| 6 John Hiatt: <i>Master of Disaster</i> | 12 Bruce Springsteen: <i>Devils and Dust</i> |

I can guess what your reaction to this list will be — how predictable a Gillespie list! — only one of these performers began recording after 1972! (Odd one out is Martha Wainwright.)

Guilty as charged. My income has dropped sharply during recent years, so I tend to buy CDs by people I know and love. When I pick up a new CD to play, I will pick up the new CD by Neil Young, Tom Russell, Emmylou Harris, Jackson Browne or Bruce Springsteen rather than someone whose name I've only read in a review.

The last twenty years have proved that the oldies in pop music improve with age just as surely as do the oldies in classical music or jazz. (But how will the Rolling Stones prance that stage when they are in their seventies?) The recent film *Heart of Gold* shows a Neil Young much older than we could have imagined even ten years ago. His voice is as fine as ever. His band, orchestra and backing singers are great. The film gives us a second chance to appreciate the sterling songs on Neil's *Prairie Wind* album. Usually I don't like Neil Young's laidback albums as opposed to his rock and roll albums. The 'nice' CDs seem to be packaged to aimed at listeners who want another *Harvest* or *Harvest Moon*. On *Prairie Wind*, the feeling surpasses niceness and nostalgia. Now that he has reached middle age, Neil celebrates the lives of his parents and friends during their struggling years. Neil's Canada is a major actor in these songs. The melodies

are sweet, and the lyrics have the strength of formal poetry. Worth listening to over and over again.

Jackson Browne must also be sixty-plus, but according to the photos on his CDs he still looks like a hippy boy. His newer songs do not have the spritzig of the 1970s songs that made him famous. Therefore, on *Solo Acoustic Vol. 1* he sits down at a solo piano and plays his well-known songs, making them sound much better than they did originally. This time I can hear all the words. After his disappointing polemical albums of the last twenty years, Browne returns to the front rank of singer-songwriters.

Tom Russell remains the great undiscovered American singer-songwriter. Each year he produces an album of high-quality American songs, sometimes in ballad mode and sometimes in rock or Mexicali style. Each year his new CD is condemned to the sidebars of the review columns. *Hotwalker* is Russell's tribute to the great Californians: the hippies, carnies and other free-living souls of the 1960s. Between the songs, carnie anecdotes ('rants and raves and carny music') are supplied by Little Jack Horton, who was active during the glory days.

No Direction Home, the movie, is one of the great rock documentaries. Unfortunately, a lot of the best performances from the film are not on the double-DVD set, and the best of the unearthed alternate versions of songs on the CDs do not appear in the film. There are one or two

newly discovered tracks here, as well as startling reinterpretations of Dylan's best 1960s songs. Put the two together, the CDs and the movie, and you prove that Dylan's reputation rests on the quality of the lyrics. As a music personality, he can be either mysterious or inadequate; take your pick.

Martha Wainwright was welcomed to Australia because we already know her father (Loudon) and brother (Rufus). In 2004, she performed in the *Came So Far for Beauty* concert tribute to Leonard Cohen at the Sydney Opera House, then toured Australia promoting her first CD. Her startling voice and ferocious, heartbreaking lyrics have made her many friends. *Martha Wainwright* shows her exuberant talents, except for her interpretations of the great torch songs of the 1930s and 1940s, which she sings so well. Make sure you buy the second version of the CD, which contains three extra tracks.

(Agonised aside: does anybody out there have a recording of Martha Wainwright singing 'Hard Times', which she sings as an encore to her nightly shows? I've heard that track *somewhere*, but cannot find it our CD collection.)

John Hiatt is another accomplished singer-songwriter whose CDs are often passed over. *Master of Disaster* is his best CD since *Bring the Family*, but I suspect it has sold no better than its predecessors. Hiatt tends to be labelled as 'country', but he's really a master rock-and-roller, whose lyrics are as strong as his beat.

Betty La Vette nearly succeeded in 1972. Atlantic recorded her then, then buried her record. (A French label released it recently as *Child of the Seventies*.) For years she scrubbed floors, waited behind counters, and

performed whenever possible. Now in her sixties, she has been rediscovered. Her voice remains as strong as Aretha Franklin's. She writes her own songs and sings other people's songs; they all reflect her current mood of defiance and optimism. *I've Got My Own Hell to Raise* does just that.

2005 was going to be the Rolling Stones' recording year, but people seem no longer interested. *A Bigger Bang* is the best set of new Stones songs since 1980's *Tattoo You*, but it still has a few clunkers. Radio doesn't play anybody older than thirty, so the Stones went back on stage and made half a billion dollars. A much better CD is *Rarities*. It still doesn't include many of the rarities that Stones fans know about from decades of bootlegs, but it has enough unfamiliar blues songs to make it worth buying. One day the Stones will re-find their true selves, and made another great blues album.

Two more trustworthy singer-songwriters are Jimmie Dale Gilmore (*Come On Back*) and John Prine (*Fair and Square*). Prine has been ill during recent years, and seemed to have stopped writing new songs. *Fair and Square* proves that his ability to observe life and make fun of it is as acute as ever. For most tastes, Jimmie Dale Gilmore might have too gentle a style. However, his choice of songs is always exemplary, and his voice remains one of the great pure treasures of current American music.

I'm not sure about Bruce Springsteen's *Devils and Dust*. I've played it only once. The lyrics are more incisive than the tunes. The performances are a bit too laidback for my taste. But it's a lot better than his *Magic* CD of 2007.

Favourites of 2006

Favourite novels read for the first time in 2006

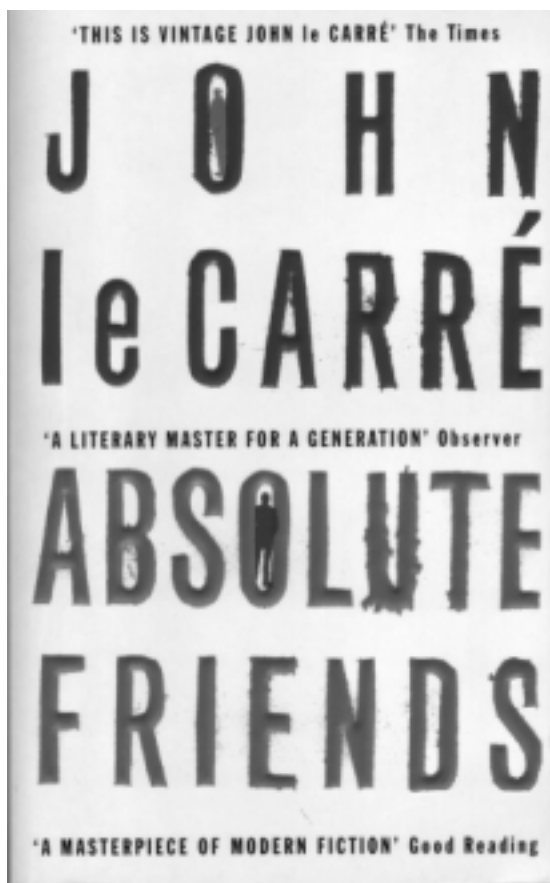
- 1 *Absolute Friends* by John Le Carré (2003; Coronet; 383 pp.)
- 2 *Gifts* by Ursula K. Le Guin (2004; Harcourt; 274 pp.)
- 3 *The Magician's Assistant* by Ann Patchett (1997; Fourth Estate; 357 pp.)
- 4 *A Patchwork Planet* by Anne Tyler (1998; Chatto & Windus; 288 pp.)
- 5 *A Giant's House* by Elizabeth McCracken (1996; Jonathan Cape; 259 pp.)
- 6 *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* by Siegfried Sassoon (1930; Faber & Faber; 236 pp.)
- 7 *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* by Siegfried Sassoon (1928; Faber & Faber; 324 pp.)
- 8 *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson (2004; Virago; 282 pp.)
- 9 *Provender Glead: A Bildungsroman* by James Lovegrove (2005; Gollancz; 331 pp.)
- 10 *The Mimic Men* by V. S. Naipaul (1967; Penguin; 257 pp.)

Are great novels still being published these days? Again in 2006 I faced the same problem as I faced in 2005: how can I pick a humdinger *real* Number 1 novel, when I cannot find any great new novels?

Absolute Friends is not a great literary novel, although it's not badly written, and sections of it have genuine lyricism. That's not the point. It's the only novel for the year that had an interesting story: a story of two lifelong friends trapped inside a conspiracy about which I couldn't possibly drop any spoilers. *Absolute Friends* is a much more succinct and interesting than Le Carré's *The Constant Gardener*, which was made into a great

film. *Absolute Friends* would make an even better film.

Gifts didn't make anybody else's 'best of' lists because, hey, it's only YA, isn't it, and it's only a fantasy novel? I thought genre readers would have had enough nous to recognise *Gifts* as a return to form for Ursula Le Guin — not that readers of her short stories would concede that she'd ever lost form. This novel has much of the power of the 'Earthsea' trilogy. Its centre is a grim parable based on the failure of the main character to use his personal 'gift'. The wild country setting is fully lived in. The book is self-contained, although it points forward to sequels.



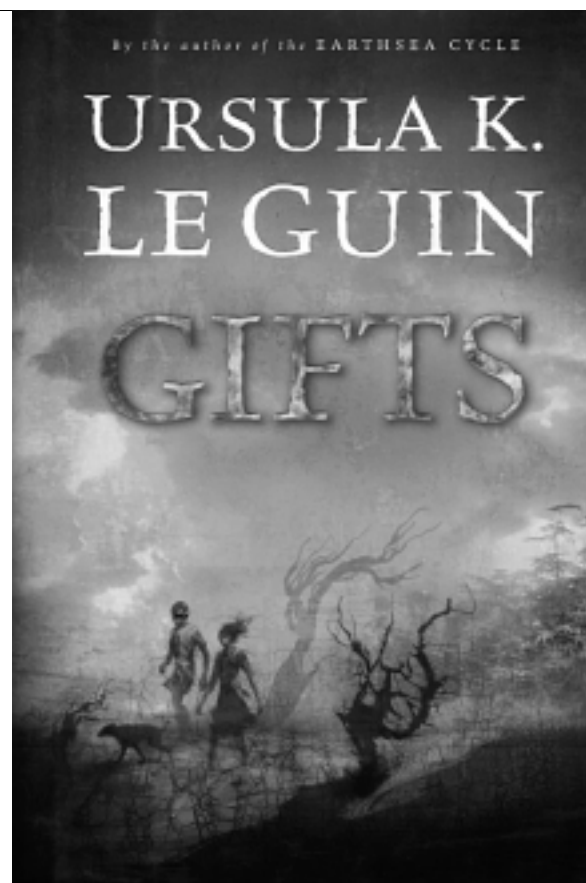
Those who enjoyed the big magician films of 2006, *The Prestige* and *The Illusionist*, will see some parallels with *The Magician's Assistant* — it's not the magic that matters, but the relationships between magicians and magicians, and between magicians and audiences. The story is in the title: the main character spends her life fulfilling a role as a 'mere' magician's assistant, without realising that she is the actual magician. Gender politics are implied rather than preached, and Patchett's style is brisk and vivid throughout.

Anne Tyler's *A Patchwork Planet* is the tale of a young man who finds himself by caring for old people so that they can stay in their own homes. I can't remember what happens in the book, but I do remember two magnificent pages that summarise the dilemma of many older people better than any other article, story or novel I've seen. No wonder I still buy every Anne Tyler novel — for the small surprises rather than the big effects.

A Giant's House is about a sensible adult woman who falls in love with a young boy who cannot stop growing. I enjoyed getting to know these two people, but there really isn't much more to the story, since the tale can end only one way. The novel is made interesting by the development of the off-centre relationship between the two characters, and the surrealistic (actually realistic) measures taken by the townsfolk to accommodate the ever-growing boy.

Gilead is a deeply American novel of a strange revenge, written by Marilynne Robinson, whose *House-keeping* was one of the best novels of the 1980s. All I can remember about Robinson's latest book is that it is stuffed full of fine writing, which I enjoyed reading.

I enjoyed Siegfried Sassoon's books, while thoroughly disapproving of the person who tells the tale and the



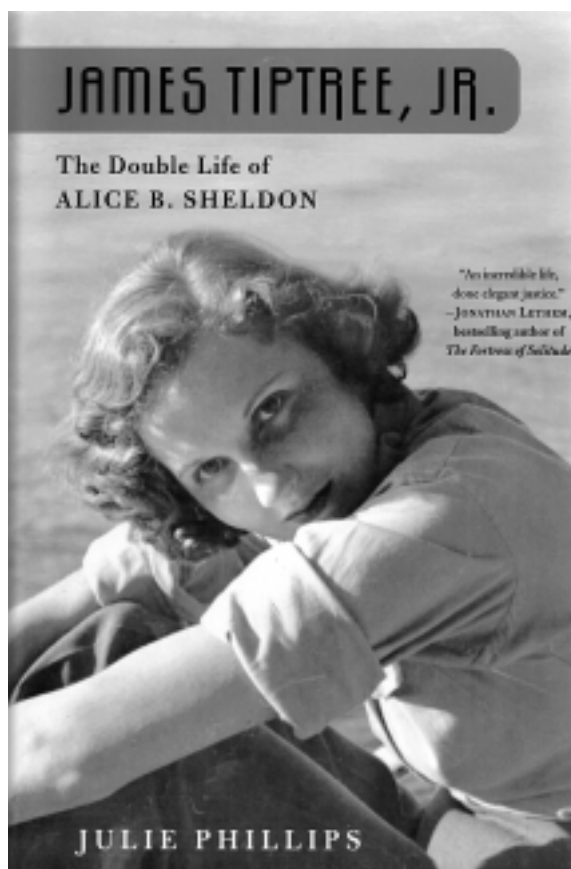
world he comes from. *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, as the title suggests, tells of growing up in a privileged although not particularly rich family. Sherston, the main character, grows up among horses and the hunting fraternity; he goes off to Eton at the end of the novel. *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* propels this rather aimless, uselessly well-educated character into the trenches of World War I. It is one of the great books about that war. It is based on Sassoon's own experience: he became one of the first British officers to find a way to leave the trenches without being shot as a deserter. (He is an officer and gentleman, after all.) Sassoon's work doesn't maintain quite the distance from his subject matter that would allow one to call it great writing. The power of his writing, in the novels as well as in his memoir, *The Old Century*, lies in the clarity of his recall of pre-World War I privileged Britain.

Provender Gleed contains little fine writing, but it's the most original novel on the list. Provender Gleed lives in a sideways Britain. Provender, of the Anagrammatic Detective Agency, is hired to solve a baffling mystery, which he does after many amusing adventures. The ending is a bit predictable, but the rest of the book is jolly. I'm surprised this did not win at least a few of the British SF and fantasy prizes of 2006.

In *The Mimic Men*, V. S. Naipaul shows how a politician can begin to lose his grip just at the moment of greatest triumph. This should be a comic premise, but *The Mimic Men* is a bit glum and pompous for my taste. The main character is a clever fool. He rides to success in West Indies politics. Thrown out of his country, he repents at leisure in London. The author and reader can see clearly the origins of his failure, but he never does.

Favourite books read for the first time in 2006

- 1 *James Tiptree Jr: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon* by Julie Phillips
(2006; St Martin's Press; 469 pp.)
- 2 *The Stories of Paul Bowles*
(2001; Ecco; 657 pp.)
- 3 *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan
(2006; Lothian; 100 pp.)
- 4 *Absolute Friends* by John Le Carré
(as above)
- 5 *The Best American Short Stories 2005* edited by Michael Chabon and Katrina Kenison
(2005; Houghton Mifflin; 411 pp.)
- 6 *Conjunctions 39: The New Wave Fabulists* edited by Peter Straub
(2002; Bard College; 448 pp.)
- 7 *Gifts* by Ursula K. Le Guin
(as above)
- 8 *The Fat Man in History* by Peter Carey
(1974; University of Queensland Press; 141 pp.)
- 9 *What Henry James Knew and Other Essays on Writers* by Cynthia Ozick
(1993; Vintage; 362 pp.)
- 10 *War Crimes* by Peter Carey
(1979; University of Queensland Press; 282 pp.)
- 11 *My Father's Ghost: The Return of My Old Man and Other Second Chances* by Suzy McKee Charnas
(2002; Tarcher/Putnam; 306 pp.)
- 12 *The Magician's Assistant* by Ann Patchett
(as above)
- 13 *A Patchwork Planet* by Anne Tyler
(as above)
- 14 *The Grinding House* by Kaaron Warren
(2005; CASFG; 217 pp.)
- 15 *Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs* by Gerald Murnane
(2005; Giramondo; 225 pp.)
- 16 *The Giant's House* by Elizabeth McCracken
(as above)
- 17 *Memories of an Infantry Officer* by Siegfried Sassoon
(as above)
- 18 *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* by Siegfried Sassoon
(as above)
- 19 *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson
(as above)
- 20 *The Old Century, and Seven More Years* by Siegfried Sassoon
(1938; Faber & Faber; 305 pp.)
- 21 *The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy, Vol. 2*
edited by Bill Congreve and Michelle Marquardt
(2006; MirrorDanse; 286 pp.)
- 22 *No One Writes to the Colonel* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
(1962; Penguin; 157 pp.)
- 23 *Provender Gleed: A Bildungsroman*
by James Lovegrove (as above)
- 24 *Fantastic Lives: Autobiographical Essays by Notable Science Fiction Writers*
edited by Martin H. Greenberg
(1981; Southern Illinois University Press; 215 pp.)



What is *the* book of 2006? No contest. Julie Phillips' biography, *James Tiptree, Jr: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon* has won most of the awards it's been eligible for, including the National Press Club Award for Biography and the Hugo for non-fiction book. I can think of only two other biographies of equivalent quality, both of them Australian: Hazel Rowley's of Christina Stead and David Marr's of Patrick White. Phillips does her best to answer such questions as: what kind of person was Alice B. Sheldon? why did she feel the need to adopt a masculine name in order to write fiction, and why did most of her readers accept the Tiptree persona for a long time? and; why did she gravitate towards writing science fiction? Not only is Phillips an elegant writer about Sheldon, her mother and father, and many of her friends, but she juggles these three questions throughout the book, showing how they reflect on and help to answer each other. From the point of view of an SF reader, I am grateful that Phillips does her best to account for Tiptree's science fiction. However, she never quite understands the science fiction itself. The discussion of Sheldon's epistolary relationship with Ursula Le Guin is a special pleasure of the book.

It would be nice to find a really good capsule review of *The Stories of Paul Bowles*. I could quote it here, and save myself the trouble of trying to describe an indescribable American writer. I'm grateful to Dick Jenssen for alerting me to Bowles. I just wish Dick liked writing lit. crit. about his own favourite authors. I could use words like quirky, obsessed, vivid, etc. Not adequate.

The best I can say is that Bowles takes an idea — or a scene, or a character — for a walk, to see where it, he, or she will end up. Bowles spent many years living in exotic places, which supply the stages for his stories. A stranger, frequently a naive American, arrives in this or that exotic place, and makes some vital mistake about what he or she is experiencing. This mistake can lead to a powerful insight, or a ruinous misstep. Bowles's passion is for observing what happens, not in sympathising with the characters. That's left to the reader. Bowles leaves out all details but the essentials, and frequently he skips some essentials.

If *SF Commentary* were appearing regularly, and I had caught up on all the writing I want to do, I would have already published a double-page spread on Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*. This novel without words, entirely composed of paintings, is the most distinguished work yet produced by a member of the Australian SF and fantasy community. Its awards include two Premier's Literary Awards (South Australia and New South Wales), the Australian Children's Book Award, an Aurealis and a Ditmar. I failed to understand the exact story that Tan is telling, but page after page, I was staggered by the paintings, both hyper-realistic and exuberantly surrealistic. They present the experience of an immigrant who arrives in a really alien country, full of incomprehensible buildings and machines, inhabited by strange little creatures and vast threatening monsters. Tan has stated that *The Arrival* gives some idea of his father's experience when he first arrived here. Australia is a weird country, mate.

I read *Best American Stories 2005* with great anticipation, because the guest editor is Michael Chabon (author of *The Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* and editor of two pioneering issues of *McSweeney's*), and I had already been told he is the first *Best American Stories* editor in fifteen years to choose any stories from genre sources. I can't say I was excited by the fantasy genre stories in this volume, but I was excited to find the extent to which genre fiction now extends its spell over American literary fiction. For instance, Tom Bissell's 'Death Defier' is a powerful war story, set in Afghanistan, with fine, understated writing. The crime stories in this volume work well, both as genre crime fiction and stories of psychological insight.

Conjunctions 39: The New Wave Fabulists could be described as a collection of 'slipstream' stories. Or is 'fabulist' the word for this year's crop? Some commentators are now talking about the 'Conjunctions group' of writers. As the subtitle suggests, these stories are supposed to remind us of the 1960s New Wave. These writers are less ideological than Moorcock's crew, more fun, and not really interested in fantasy as a genre. Crowley's 'The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines' has no fantasy element in it, but it is full of wonder because of the way it explores the lives of its two main characters. I would list 'Little Red's Tango' (Peter Straub) as one of my favourite fantasy stories ever — but its strength lies in its multised presentation of a mysterious, offbeat main character.

The first person to alert me to the fact that Peter Carey's *The Fat Man in History* is a book of Australian science fiction stories was Robin Johnson, way back in 1974 when the book first appeared. I bought it then, and finally read it in 2006. (That's why Elaine and I have built a library; we never know when we might feel like reading a book bought thirty-three years ago.) What nobody except Van Ikin (in *Science Fiction*) has ever acknowledged is that *The Fat Man in History* remains

the best single-author collection of Australian SF and fantasy stories. We didn't realise this because Carey made the sensible commercial decision to remove any suggestion of genre links between his books and SF or fantasy. His second collection, *War Crimes*, also has some brilliant SF stories, but an Aussie writer on his way to world literary stardom need never admit this. One result of this obfuscation is that few critics or readers realise that his best writing is in his first two collections. The clipped, sarcastic prose of these short stories is far more perceptive than the more 'literary' prose of many of his later novels. You might still find these collections in secondhand shops.

I don't read as many critical books as I should, but few critical books yield as many original insights as does Cynthia Ozick's *What Henry James Knew*. The section on Henry James is good, but not as radical as Ozick's bomb-in-the-marriage-bed analysis of the personality and poetry of T. S. Eliot. In her chapter on Virginia and Leonard Woolf, she shows the extent to which Leonard sacrificed his own life to keep his wife alive and writing. Her chapter on Edith Wharton is also an eye-opener.

I would never have discovered Suzy McKee Charnas's *My Father's Ghost* unless I had seen it on a counter at Potlatch in San Francisco in March 2005. Although it is Charnas's best book, it has received no publicity in the SF community. No wonder SF and fantasy writers are wary of writing autobiography; few SF readers care for deeply felt personal stories. Charnas's story is about her father, but it's equally about her and the era they shared. Her father was not an easy person to like, or even to stay in touch with, but his story is powerful.

The Grinding House, as I showed in *Steam Engine Time 7*, is one of the twenty-first century's best single-author collections, from Australia or anywhere. Kaaron Warren has a ferocious, unforgiving, almost barbaric vision that is matched only by Margo Lanagan in some of her fiction. Warren should be as well known as Lanagan. This will happen.

Warren and Lanagan lead the current Australian SF pack, along with Dowling and some names new to me in *The Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy*, Vol. 2. As with Volume 1, I cannot help noticing that Australian writers stay fairly much near home, both in time and location (Earth). Our fantasy and horror writers, such as Dirk Flinthart and Martin Livings, seem to be doing better than our SF writers. Congreve and Marquardt seem to favour newer writers, but it's nice to see Leanne Frahm (from the class of 1979) contributing 'Skein Dogs'.

Recently I heard Gerald Murnane reading a few passages of *Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs* on the ABC's daily books program. The readings showed that Murnane writes very successfully for the sound of his own voice. I hope plenty of Australians heard the readings, which give some idea of how to read his books. There are many delicious and surprising pages in this collection of pieces, although it's not clear whether they should be called 'fictions' or 'essays'.

I bought *No One Writes to the Colonel* way back in the early 1970s, when Garcia Gabriel Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was my favourite book of the year. This slim book of slim stories set in Macondo (the Spanish American country whose story is told in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) shows mere flashes of the brilliance of Garcia Marquez at his best.

Forgive me, for I cannot remember who sent me a copy of *Fantastic Lives* after I complained in *Steam Engine Time* about the lack of biography or autobiogra-

phy written by or about SF writers. These short autobiographies are all intriguing, although Van Vogt's had me scratching my head. Was he as barmy in real life as he was in his fiction? Philip Jose Farmer's piece is the

highlight of the book: he tells more about his life, especially his sexual experience, than most SF authors have ever done (outside of fanzines). This book should be reprinted regularly.

Favourite films seen for the first time in 2006

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 <i>Senso</i> (remastered)
(1954) Luchino Visconti 2 <i>Sullivan's Travels</i>
(1942) Preston Sturges 3 <i>Children of Men</i>
(2006) Alfonso Cuarón 4 <i>La chambre des officiers</i> (<i>The Officers' Ward</i>)
(2001) François Depeyron 5 <i>Crash</i>
(2005) Paul Haggis 6 <i>The Constant Gardener</i>
(2005) Fernando Mereiles 7 <i>My Neighbour Totoro</i>
(1988) Hayao Miyazaki 8 <i>Ascenseur pour l'échafaud</i> (<i>Elevator to the Scaffold</i>)
(1957) Louis Malle 9 <i>Napoleon Dynamite</i>
(2004) Jared Hess 10 <i>The Passenger</i>
(1975) Michelangelo Antonioni 11 <i>Kenny</i>
(2006) Shane Jacobson 12 <i>Ride the High Country</i>
(1962) Sam Peckinpah 13 <i>The Prestige</i> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (2006) Christopher Nolan 14 <i>Inside Man</i>
(2006) Spike Lee 15 <i>A History of Violence</i>
(2005) David Cronenberg 16 <i>Heart of Gold</i>
(2005) Jonathan Demme 17 <i>The Palm Beach Story</i>
(1942) Preston Sturges 18 <i>Beyond the Sea</i>
(2004) Kevin Spacey 19 <i>Croupier</i>
(1999) Mike Hodges 20 <i>A Prairie Home Companion</i>
(2006) Robert Altman 21 <i>The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou</i>
(2004) Wes Anderson 22 <i>The Strange One</i>
(1957) Jack Gurfiein 23 <i>V for Vendetta</i>
(2006) James McTeague 24 <i>Sideways</i>
(2004) Alexander Payne 25 <i>Scanners</i>
(1981) David Cronenberg |
|--|---|

2006 was such a rich year for film viewing that I would need an issue of **brg** as long as the average *Sight and Sound* to cover my favourites.

There is one link between many of these films: I could have not have seen them without the help of Dick Jenssen, who really likes buying films on DVD. That applies to nine out of the twenty-five. For quite a few of the others, after I had seen the film at a cinema I was able to pick up the DVD version only through Dick's help.

For instance, I saw a complete print of Visconti's *Senso* at the cinema. Having only ever seen a butchered, pinked-out print in 1965, I felt as if I were seeing the film for the first time. But the cinema print advertised as 'remastered' must have itself been reissued more than twenty years ago. It is in a bad state. Only when I was able to look at the recent overseas DVD of *Senso* (thanks to Dick) could I gain some idea of what the original looked like. The DVD print is still a bit faded, but gives some idea of the richness of the original colour. *Senso*, an non-opera operatic film set in 1848, was obviously a major influence on the films of Sergio Leone (especially the battle scene in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*), but Leone has never featured a female star as imperious and entrancing as Alida Valli.

I have heard about Preston Sturges's films for thirty years, but I had not had a chance to look at some of this best films until this year (thanks again to Dick Jenssen). *Sullivan's Travels* is the most original American film of the 1940s, apart from *Citizen Kane*. Now we can see on

DVD that the remastered print makes the film look as if it had just been released. *Sullivan's Travels*'s originality derives from its script, as it propels its rich film director hero across America in an attempt to make the perfect movie-of-deep-social-commitment. Hollywood does not appreciate his proposed movie (to be called *O Brother Where Art Thou?*, a film that the Coen Brothers eventually made a few years ago). Nothing in *Sullivan's Travels* fits the boundaries of the conventional 1940s film. Sturges's *The Palm Beach Story* (my No 17 for the year) is also original, funny and beautiful.

I've only heard one adverse comment about *Children of Men* — from Melbourne's own Julian Warner, who highlighted all the familiar plot devices that afflict Clive Owen during his pilgrimage across a blasted future Britain. No matter; the main character has no control over his future, no matter how resourceful he seems to be. In a world where no children have been born for many years, there is one pregnant woman. We can see that she is significant only if her pregnancy is the first of many. Isolated, she becomes merely a pawn and a symbol for various manic power groups. The film is a terrifying parable about what we humans, even in a nominally organised society, can do to each other if we all lose hope. Cuaron puts the viewer right in the middle of the action. When I first watched the film in the cinema, I kept ducking as the bullets whistled around Clive Owen. The best sequences will set a new standard for action photography.

I would never have known about *The Officers' Ward*

if Dick Jenssen had not seen a review in *Sight and Sound* and bought the DVD. This may not be the ultimate movie about World War I, but it feels like it while you are watching it. It does not look at trench warfare in France, but at the people whose bodies were mangled during warfare. Depeyron, the director, shows clearly that effective treatment was not available for members of the ranks. A small group of officers, however, benefited from the pioneering plastic surgery experiments first attempted during World War I. The main character's face is reassembled; somehow he and the fellow officers in the ward also have to put their lives together. It would be interesting to see an Australian version of the same story, as no film (as far as I can remember) has yet been made about the years after the return of our World War I survivors.

Crash and *The Constant Gardener* are the two recent movies, apart from *Children of Men*, that give me some hope that current popular cinema might stay intelligent. Two of these English-language films are by Spanish directors.

Crash is not David Cronenberg's infamous movie based on the J. G. Ballard novel. Paul Haggis's movie is a multistrand story about one day in the life of some Los Angelinos. In each story, people's lives come apart. The main emotion that tears them apart is rage, often engendered by some trivial event. In most cases, the rage expresses itself in some form of interracial conflict. Yet Haggis makes clear that the malaise runs much deeper than people screaming 'You're another' at each other. He doesn't provide any answers, but he does provide a rich collection of dramatic scenes and memorable characters.

The Constant Gardener, although based on a John Le Carré novel, is a mirror image of *Children of Men*. Britons believe they live in a 'civilised' society that could never be torn apart. Kenyans live in a torn-apart post-colonial society that might yet be able to gather up the pieces. In *The Constant Gardener*, civilised people prove themselves to be barbarians by the way they conduct drug experiments on people in Kenya. Covering up these experiments leads to the death of the main character's wife, and hence to his pilgrimage across Europe and Africa, which often feels like the pilgrimage in *Children of Men*. Much in *The Constant Gardener* is memorable, especially some bits added to Le Carré's original story.

Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro* is one of the earliest of his animated features, and one of his best. Elaine and I have now watched it four times. Its magic grows. Its magic is based on Miyazaki's observations of children. These cartoon children are more lifelike than any children I have ever seen in a live-action feature. The giant amiable wood spirit Totoro also comes fully alive, and the giant cat-bus is Miyazaki's best invention.

If you watch enough American thrillers, you begin to believe that all the possibilities have been played out. Not so. Louis Malle's *Elevator to the Scaffold* (France, 1957) has an effective gimmick — the prison-like aspects of an elevator(lift) cage — that I haven't seen used again in any later film. It's just waiting to be remade! Dick Jenssen passed over the DVD to me because I was interested in the famous Miles Davis soundtrack (which I have on CD). The plot itself is taut, with no shortcuts. The remastered print is superb.

In some other years (such as 2005), *Napoleon Dynamite* would be near the top of the list. As Jared Hess (and before him, Wes Anderson) proves, Americans can do quirky movies, just like the British and the French. *Napoleon Dynamite* is a tall, awkward teenager who lives

in an American small town. This feels like a real town, filled with oddities and dullness, not one of the idealised bits of candy usually found in American films. After Napoleon's grandmother dies, his very odd uncle takes custody of the family. Napoleon, skinny, gormless, totally un-with-it, doesn't run wild; he lurches into young adulthood. His Mexican friend is the other star of the movie, as well as his never-quite-girlfriend and the other people in town.

I suspect in that in 1975 audiences decided that Antonioni's *The Passenger* was a 'difficult' film simply because it was directed by Antonioni. Critics forget that it is one of his best films. These days *The Passenger* can be seen as a fairly mainstream combination of road movie and thriller, starring Jack Nicholson at his 1970s best. In handsome colour and widescreen, it takes the viewer all over Europe in the search of a contact who never turns up. The last scene might seem puzzling at first viewing. As Dick Jenssen points out, you have to keep your eye on the other side of the screen (other than the side Antonioni points toward) to find out what really happens.

What *Napoleon Dynamite* does for small-town America, *Kenny* does for Melbourne. It's a mockumentary about Kenny, whose job is installing portaloos at public events. These public events show a rich underside of Australian life. Kenny is a modest but richly raconteur of events in his own life. His father, a ghastly old bugger who is so funny that he dominates the film. Shane Jacobson plays Kenny, his father plays his father in the film, and his son plays his son in the film. So *Kenny* is not about poo jokes, but about the difficulties of getting on with members of one's own family. Kenny's visit to a vast portaloos convention in Nashville widens the scope of the second half of the film.

I haven't liked Sam Peckinpah movies, but I did enjoy his first feature, *Ride the High Country* (1962). Several cowboys, at least one of whom has a secret agenda, protect a shipment of gold to be brought back from a mining camp high in the Rocky Mountains. Nothing goes right, and the relationships between the characters keep shifting. The CinemaScope high-country photography, fully restored on DVD, is the star of the film.

Until I began concocting this list, I'd forgotten how many fine films did hit the mainstream cinemas during 2005 and 2006. As those of us who have read Christopher Priest's novel *The Prestige* know, many aspects of the plot must remain unrevealed until the ending. Christopher Nolan (*Memento*) and his scriptwriters are clever enough to deal with the complexities. This handsome, superbly photographed film, set in the nineteenth century, alters none of the main assumptions of the book, but supplies some clever bits and pieces to account for the difference between film and book. I recommend reading the book first.

Inside Man is also a very clever thriller, set in a modern bank. It is a heist movie within a heist movie, with Clive Owen the dominant personality, even while wearing a mask. Multiple red herrings are flung, but I did not guess how the robbers were going to get away with it. Whatever it is that they were trying to get away with.

It's obvious by this stretch of the list that I've given the individual films position numbers just as a matter of convenience. In some other years, *The Prestige*, *Inside Man* or *A History of Violence* would be near the top. They are still near the top, but 2006 has an inflated top.

A History of Violence will remain famous for being the movie in which David Cronenberg went legit. Nobody

turns into a creepy-crawly; no characters jump out of a TV set or a typewriter. Yet, like Cronenberg's *The Fly*, it is a film about the redemption of a person who has been forced to undergo a painful transformation, this time of the soul and mind. Viggo Mortensen was the second-best thing in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy; in *History of Violence* he emerges as one of the world's top three actors (my other nominations are Clive Owen and Chris Cooper). Mild-mannered at the start, his character takes care of some baddies who motor into town (for this is really a modern Western), reveals himself as anything but mild-mannered, then pauses to explain everything to his wife and child. Cronenberg shows his real skill is directing actors, rather than spitting out special effects.

I've already talked about *Heart of Gold* in my comments on Neil Young's recent CD *Prairie Wind*. At first, *Heart of Gold* seems to be just another rock documentary. Neil and his current band premiere *Prairie Wind* on stage at the famous Ryman Auditorium in Nashville. *Heart of Gold* is directed by Jonathan Demme, not your average video director. Demme gives a different colour and staging for each song, and constructs a narrative based on Neil Young's intersong patter. The film adds up to a Young family autobiography — the nice Mr Young, his lovely wife Pegi and their friends, who sing country-style ballads about the folks left behind in Canada. This side of Neil Young is amplified during the second part of the film (the second concert at the Ryman) which features mainly songs from *Harvest*, Young's most popular album. I loved every minute of it, but one does need to see Jim Jarmusch's *Year of the Horse* (now ten years old!) to gain some insights into Neil Young the wild man rock and roller.

From here on, the list is an assortment of very good films that might well cry foul for being pushed so far down.

Beyond the Sea took years to reach Australian screens. It did well at Australian arthouse cinemas, such as Carlton's Nova, probably because Australia is one of the few places left with lots of baby boomers like me who loved Bobby Darin's records in the 1950s and early sixties. Kevin Spacey, who wrote, directed and stars in the film, is the ultimate Darin fan; he learned to sing and perform like Darin. *Beyond the Sea* is not a dreary biopic (such as *Walk the Line*), but a snazzy musical, influenced by Bob Fosse, about the life that Bobby Darin probably lived in his mind. (The references to Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* seem deliberate; Fosse had a short life and merry one, while Darin always knew that a childhood illness would kill him before he hit forty.) The songs are great; the dancing is great; the dialogue is sometimes a bit dull, but it doesn't matter.

Croupier introduced Clive Owen to the world. I had seen him on TV before then, but *Croupier*, directed by veteran Mike Hodges (director of the first *Get Carter* in the 1960s), reveals him as a true star. His character, the croupier of the film's title, does not gamble; he watches other people gamble. He thinks himself rather superior to everybody. It turns out he is being watched. Nicely underplayed intrigue and humour throughout.

A Prairie Home Companion, Robert Altman's last film, is based on a genius concept that doesn't quite come off.

Originally Altman was going to make a film set in Lake Wobegon, the mythical town that is the subject of Garrison Keillor's story each week on his America-wide radio program *A Prairie Home Companion*. Inventing a story about the making of the program itself — a hypothetical last night because of the closure of the Fitzgerald Theatre — is also a superb concept. Unfortunately, some of the pizzazz of the radio program is lost. Much of the music performed in the film falls into the nostalgia-country category. The actual weekly program contains music from many categories. The film contains no Lake Wobegon story. Elaine points out that the whole film is like a long Lake Wobegon story. Garrison chatters to an angel backstage. She tells him which of his jokes caused her to laugh so much that she was killed in a road accident. That's a PHC genius moment. But . . . but . . . I can't help feeling that this wonderful movie might have been sharper.

The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou is my second encounter with Wes Anderson, but it's his first film to win me over. (*Rushmore* is very conventional when you ignore the brilliant surface details.) *Steve Zissou* is so zany that it might have been written by Garrison Keillor. Its main character is a sort of lunatic Jacques Cousteau, rounding up friends and relatives to go exploring underwater. Weird dangers and adventures pile up. Every image is original and funny.

I would never have known about *The Strange One* if Dick Jenssen hadn't mentioned it. It's the only film directed by Jack Gurfein. It's one of the few films starring Ben Gazzara. Based on a Calder Willingham play, it tells of a conniving bastard (Gazzara) who seeks to hold power over every soldier in a military academy. Very hard-hitting stuff for 1957, especially as the situation is meant to represent the way power works throughout American society. Like many films based on plays, its performances and script are more interesting than its cinematography and direction.

When I first saw *V for Vendetta*, I was going to include it in my Top 5 for the year. In my long-term memory, it has sunk a bit, especially when compared with *Children of Men*, whose gritty surface is more convincing than the cartoony look of *V for Vendetta*. It's a clever film, also set in a future British dictatorship. Tearing down the dictatorship is left to V, played by Hugo Weaving, who wears a mask throughout the film. Despite this handicap, Weaving brings the character to life.

Again, in an ordinary year for films, *Sideways* would have been in the top ten for the year. Not as sharp as director Alexander Payne's *Election*, it still has enough genial good humour to keep me happy for a couple of hours. Two guys go in search of girls and a good merlot in sunny California; Paul Giamatti is very good as the amoral, stumbling guy who keeps on keeping on.

Scanners is not really a very good film, but no viewer will ever forget it. It is filled with early versions of classic Cronenbergian images, including an exploding head. A nice riff on *The Power*, it is most interesting for its indications of the later talent. Thanks, again, to Dick Jenssen for making available to me all the Cronenberg works. I'll absorb them slowly.

Favourite films watched again (and again) in 2006

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 <i>A Canterbury Tale</i>
(1944) Michael Powell and Emric Pressburger | 11 <i>Top Hat</i>
(1935) Mark Sandrich |
| 2 <i>I Know Where I'm Going</i>
(1945) Michael Powell and Emric Pressburger | 12 <i>Three Women</i>
(1977) Robert Altman |
| 3 <i>Vertigo</i>
(1958) Alfred Hitchcock | 13 <i>The Producers</i>
(1968) Mel Brooks |
| 4 <i>The Triplets of Belleville</i>
(2003) Sylvain Chomet | 14 <i>T-Men</i>
(1947) Anthony Mann |
| 5 <i>The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother</i>
(1975) Gene Wilder | 15 <i>Saboteur</i>
(1942) Alfred Hitchcock |
| 6 <i>A Wedding</i>
(1978) Robert Altman | 16 <i>Blithe Spirit</i>
(1945) David Lean |
| 7 <i>Tales of Hoffman</i>
(1951) Michael Powell and Emric Pressburger | 17 <i>Violent Saturday</i>
(1955) Richard Fleischer |
| 8 <i>Hope and Glory</i>
(1987) John Boorman | 18 <i>Heaven Can Wait</i>
(1943) Ernst Lubitsch |
| 9 <i>Space Cowboys</i>
(2000) Clint Eastwood | 19 <i>Swing Time</i>
(1936) George Stevens |
| 10 <i>The Gay Divorcee</i>
(1934) Mark Sandrich | 20 <i>The Thirty-nine Steps</i>
(1978) Don Sharp |
-

This odd category was made possible — even necessary — by Dick Jenssen's help in tracking down the new prints of classic films that keep being released overseas, but often not in Australia. Revisiting digitally remastered old favourites on DVD often feels like seeing them for the first time, especially after watching the hours of commentaries and extras usually provided with these films.

Not a lot I can say about these films that I didn't say when I saw them for the first time. The greatest satisfaction is that Britain's finest directors, Michael Powell, is at least receiving his due. Most of his films are now restored, although I still haven't been able to see a new print of *The Spy in Black*. I like *A Canterbury Tale* and *I Know Where I'm Going* better every time I see them. The new editions come a host of extras, including film critic Ian Christie's commentaries.

This list includes films I thought I would never see again.

The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother is Gene Wilder's tribute to both Conan Doyle and Mel Brooks, his mentor. The first half-hour of this film is my favourite sequence of cinema humour. The rest of the film isn't too bad.

To me, the highlight of cinema during the 1970s was

the ten-year contract that enabled Robert Altman to make one masterpiece after another, without interference. I was beginning to think I would never see these great films again. Some are still not on DVD, and they are being released in no discernible order. The first ones released, such as *The Long Goodbye*, were issued in pan-and-scan format in Australia. Fortunately, *A Wedding* and *Three Women*, two of my favourites from the seventies are issued in widescreen format. *A Wedding* is the best example of Altman putting together a group of people in one location (a wedding reception in a mansion), then letting the audience work out who they all are. *Three Women* comes from the ultra-mysterious, proto-David Lynch aspect of Altman. This film seems to owe a lot to the imagery of J. G. Ballard, including an empty swimming pool. Shelley Duval, Cissy Spacek and Janice Rule are the stars.

Hope and Glory is the other film I thought had disappeared. It's John Boorman's personal film based on his experiences as a boy in London during World War II. He shows us that, if a person were not actually killed during the blitz, the war was often a liberating experience. The barrage balloon episode is my favourite moment in *Hope and Glory*.

Favourite short stories read for the first time during 2006

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 'Little Red's Tango'
by Peter Straub (<i>Conjunctions</i> 39) | by Tom Bissell (<i>Best American Stories</i> 2005) |
| 2 'The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines'
by John Crowley (<i>Conjunctions</i> 39) | 5 'Pages from Cold Point'
by Paul Bowles (<i>The Stories of Paul Bowles</i>) |
| 3 'Silence'
by Alice Munro (<i>Best American Stories</i> 2005) | 6 'Here to Learn'
by Paul Bowles (<i>The Stories of Paul Bowles</i>) |
| 4 'Death Defier' | 7 'The Smile on Happy Chang's Face'
by Tom Perrotta (<i>Best American Stories</i> 2005) |

- 8 'Pastor Dowe at Tacaté'
by Paul Bowles (*The Stories of Paul Bowles*)
- 9 'The Grinding House'
by Kaaron Warren (*The Grinding House*)
- 10 'Fresh Young Widow'
by Kaaron Warren (*The Grinding House*)
- 11 'You Are Not I'
by Paul Bowles (*The Stories of Paul Bowles*)
- 12 'Justice Shiva Ram Murthy'
by Rishi Reddi (*Best American Stories 2005*)
- 13 'The Circular Valley'
by Paul Bowles (*The Stories of Paul Bowles*)
- 14 'The Fourth Day Out from Santa Cruz'
by Paul Bowles (*The Stories of Paul Bowles*)
- 15 'The Puzzling Nature of Blue'
by Peter Carey (*War Crimes*)
- 16 'Withdrawal'
by Peter Carey (*The Fat Man in History*)
- 17 'Crabs'
by Peter Carey (*The Fat Man in History*)
- 18 'Exotic Pleasures'
by Peter Carey (*War Crimes*)
- 19 'A Schoolboy Prank'
by Peter Carey (*War Crimes*)
- 20 'No One Writes to the Colonel'
by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (*No One Writes to the Colonel*)
- 21 'Skein Dogs'
by Leanne Frahm (*Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy, Vol. 2*)
- 22 'The Building'
by Ursula K. Le Guin (*Changing Planes*)
- 23 'The Red Priest's Homecoming'
by Dirk Flinthart (*Year's Best Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy, Vol. 2*)
- 24 'The Hortlak'
by Kelly Link (*Magic for Beginners*)
- 25 'The Wrong Seat'
by Kaaron Warren (*The Grinding House*)
- 26 'The Hanging People'
by Kaaron Warren (*The Grinding House*)

I've already talked about many of these stories when discussing the volumes they come from.

I've been an Alice Munro fan since I read her collection *The Moons of Jupiter* in 1983. 'Silence' is her most memorable story, because of its subject matter: it tells of a mother's suffering when her daughter disappears voluntarily. The mother eventually finds where the daughter is living, but the daughter wants nothing to do with her. Only Munro and a few other authors could write such a terrifying, yet non-mawkish tale.

Since at the moment I don't have time to write long reviews, I won't talk about individual Paul Bowles stories, or individual Kaaron Warren stories. If you buy the *The Stories of Paul Bowles* or *The Grinding House*, you'll probably find yourself bowled over.

Seek out the 2005 edition of *Best American Stories*. The stories I mentioned will, I feel, become known as American classics.

You'll notice my lack of enthusiasm about the Book Everybody Was Talking About during 2005 and 2006: Kelly Link's second collection, *Magic for Beginners*. I'm still waiting to be struck by Link's superiority as a writer of fiction. Yes, I can recognise her *talent*; I just can't see that she does anything interesting with it. I read story after story, scratching my head. Are her stories fashion statements? or fables with no meaning? 'The Hortlak' is as odd as the others, but I warmed to its slight tale of the wistfully ineffectual people who run a roadside fast-food store patronised by the zombies who live in the canyon over the road.

(Very tentative) Favourite popular CDs bought during 2006

- 1 Old Crow Medicine Show: *Big Iron World*
- 2 Neil Young and Crazy Horse: *Live at the Fillmore East, 6 and 7 March 1970*
- 3 Solomon Burke: *Nashville*
- 4 Sam Moore: *Overnight Sensation*
- 5 Chris Smither: *Leave the Light On*
- 6 Paul Burch: *East to West*
- 7 Tom Waits: *Orphans* (3 CDs)
- 8 Ray Charles: *Ray Sings, Basie Swings*
- 9 Jerry Lee Lewis: *Last Man Standing*
- 10 Sufjan Stevens: *Illinoise*
- 11 Various: *Leonard Cohen I'm Your Man*
- 12 Ben Harper: *Both Sides of the Gun* (2 CDs)
- 13 Golden Smog: *Another Fine Day*
- 14 Bruce Springsteen: *We Shall Overcome*
- 15 Jan Preston: *Queen of Boogie Woogie Piano*

Why is this a 'very tentative' favourites list? Because I still haven't had time to listen to a lot of the CDs I bought during 2006. When I redo the 2006 list in 2016, it will probably be very different.

My must-listen-to-when-I-get-around-to-it list includes most of the five-CD boxed set *RT: The Life and Music of Richard Thompson*; Keiran Kane, Kevin Welch and Fats Kaplin's *Lost John Dean*; Karen Dalton's *In My Own Time*; the Gourds' *Ghost of Hallelujah*; and the Staples Singers' *A Family Affair 1953-1984*.

Neil Young's *Living With War* is disappointing, so it is not here. I agree with Neil Young's anger about the US's

war in Iraq. Some of the songs on the CD could be good, but the whole performance suffers because of the white-hot heat with which Neil and the gang recorded it. Many of Neil Young's albums are tucked away in the desk drawers for years after they are recorded; *Living With War* should also have been vintaged.

Paul Simon's *Surprise* should have been the other Great CD of the Year. The lyrics are brilliant; Paul Simon remains the world's greatest pop lyricist. But why has he forgotten how to write a tune? Why has he deliberately removed the melodies?

It's a good year when I discover a new band. Old Crow

OLD CROW MEDICINE SHOW



Medicine Show has had a few CDs out already, but *Big Iron World* is the first I've heard. When recently Old Crow Medicine Show played on the first *Prairie Home Companion* to be broadcast on the ABC's Radio National for fifteen years, the group came across as a bluegrass band. On *Big Iron World* they come across as a rock and roll band with a light touch — young blokes who love traditional American music, offering original (and slightly mocking) interpretations of other people's songs. Special delights include the old blues song 'Down Home Girl' (made famous by the Rolling Stones on their third album), the Grateful Dead's 'Minglewood Blues' and the gospel classic 'God's Got it'. The band's members are also very good songwriters.

Crazy Horse, Neil Young's perennial sidekick band, hasn't changed much over the years. However, in 1970 its leader was still Danny Whitten. It was Whitten's death in 1972 that impelled Young to record several of his best albums, including *Tonight's the Night*. *Live at the Fillmore East* is the first of what Neil Young's fans hope is a series of remastered concerts from the early days. Until now, this material has been heard only on bootleg records based on crummy tapes recorded by people holding up little microphones during performances. It turns out that Neil has been maintaining his own tape archive. Lots of long versions of early Young classics here, including (inevitably) 'Down by the River'. The depth of the interplay between Young and Whitten can be heard during this concert.

Solomon Burke is a honey-voiced blues singer who began recording in the late 1950s, and had his biggest hits during the 1960s. Age has merely improved his voice and performance skills. Recently his recording career has been revived. *Nashville* is a CD of top country songs recorded in blues style. Buddy Miller, the producer, gathers the usual bunch of guest stars. The blues and country styles do not clash; they complement each other perfectly. Best performance is Tom T. Hall's song 'That's How I Got to Memphis'.

Solomon Burke never really disappeared; he has been feted by many rock performers, including the Rolling Stones. Sam Moore, on the other hand, had to quit performing for many years after the 'Sam and Dave' partnership ended in the late 1960s with the death of Dave Prater. Thirty-three years after his first solo record was notably *not* released, Sam Moore has finally become an *Overnight Sensation*, a powerful set of old and new

songs. The guests include Billy Preston (just before he died), Eric Clapton and Bruce Springsteen. Every song is propelled by the energy of a man who can now shout 'I'm here at last! Listen to what I can really do!' Nobody sounds better than an old blues singer.

Chris Smither is a white singer-songwriter who sounds bluesier with every record. The main difference between him and Sam Moore and Solomon Burke is that Smither is starting to *feel* old. His songs and voice are full of wistful regrets and hints at ancient problems left unresolved. His voice becomes more gravelly yet more mellow with each CD. His guitar-based tunes and arrangements keep improving. 'Leave the Light On' is my Song of 2006, but I bought the CD for Smither's rendition of Bob Dylan's 'Visions of Johanna'.

Paul Burch is a young singer-songwriter who brings the same sense of authority to his songs as does Chris Smithers, Greg Brown, Tom Russell and others masters of the modern song. *East to West* is a great CD, and I'm looking forward to its sequel.

Tom Waits' voice is as unlovely as the scraping of shoes on ground gravel. However, his songs keep improving. *Orphans*, all three CDs of it, takes up many modern issues, plus the usual affairs of the heart. I find it difficult to make generalisations about a set that I've barely explored yet.

You might remember those fake records that Frank Sinatra made during his last few years of life, including 'duets' with people he had never met? Ray Charles' record company has tried to do something similar, taking a set of demos by Ray Charles, presumably recorded a few years before his death, and putting them together with performances by a band that calls itself the 'Count Basie Orchestra'. Put them together as *Ray Sings, Basie Swings* and the result should be awful. For some reason, it works. I presume that very clever band arrangements were written around the demos, as the posthumous result is one of Ray Charles' best CDs. (By contrast, *Ray*, the CD soundtrack of the biopic film, is a disappointment, as the versions of Ray Charles standards used on the CD don't seem to have the sparkle of the versions used in the film.)

Although three of my listed performers began their careers in the seventies (Chris Smither, Tom Waits and Bruce Springsteen) and three began during the sixties (Sam Moore, Neil Young and Leonard Cohen), no less than three began their careers in the 1950s (Ray Charles, Jerry Lee Lewis and Solomon Burke). Of those, two (Charles and Lewis) had a major part in inventing rock and roll. Jerry Lee Lewis seems to be the liveliest of them today. On *Last Man Standing*, his 2006 CD of duets with everyone from Willie Nelson to Kid Rock, his singing sounds a bit blurry, but his voice is as good as ever, and his piano playing even better. He no longer writes songs, so this is very much a 'greatest hits' presentation. Everybody seems to be having a good time.

Having written about the performers whose CDs I appreciate the most — the golden oldies who have returned to the studio in recent years — I can now talk about some of the newer people.

One of them, Ben Harper, actually appears on the current Top 40. He must be very young. *Both Sides of the Gun* includes one CD of ballads, and one of blues rockers. The latter, in particular, includes *my* type of Stonesish blues.

Leonard Cohen I'm Your Man has had to rely for airplay on the ABC and community radio stations, but it seems to have done well. The movie for which this is the soundtrack was a success in Melbourne at the Nova

Cinema. This concert of performances of Leonard Cohen songs was recorded at the Sydney Opera House during as *Came So Far for Beauty* tour of 2004. Martha Wainwright's two songs are triumphs, as are performances by most of the guests. I particularly liked the guest spots by Wainwright, the McGarrigle Sisters, Jarvis Cocker, the Handsome Family and Beth Orton.

I have yet to make up my mind about Sufjan Stevens. *Illinoise* contains almost too much brilliance to be heard at one sitting. Influenced by Brian Wilson, Van Dyke Parks and one or two others from the sixties, Stevens makes pretentious theatrical pop music sound substantial. Commercial radio does not seem to have adopted him, although there's still a chance he might produce a hit record.

Golden Smog is one of those well-kept secrets of American roots music. On *Another Fine Day* they still sound tuneful and passionate, as on their other records. This is for people who want to enjoy contemporary

music, not agonise over it.

Bruce Springsteen picked a great band of acoustic musicians for *We Shall Overcome*, his tribute to Pete Seeger, but I can't help feeling he could have picked a set of songs more representative of Seeger the firebrand. Seeger did revive old American folk songs, such as 'Erie Canal' and 'Froggie Went A-Wooing', but his essential songs were his protest songs. Not much protest to be found here, only lots of singalong.

Hidden away in Melbourne is Jan Preston, perhaps the last performer in the world of pure boogie woogie piano. Both *Queen of Boogie Woogie Piano* and the earlier *The Piano Has the Blues* should be known throughout the world, but you probably won't find them outside of Melbourne. It's a pity that this fine piano playing and singing is seriously under-recorded; her style of music deserves an A-grade producer such as T-Bone Burnett or Joe Henry.

Favourite classical CDs of 2005–06

- 1 Katarina Andreasson/Mats Lam/Swedish Chamber Orchestra:
Vasks: *Violin Concerto (Distant Light)/Musica Dolorosa/Viatore*
- 2 Various: *John Adams Earbox* (10 CDs)
- 3 Gundula Janowitz: *The Golden Voice* (5 CDs)
- 4 Richard Tognetti:
Bach: *Sonatas and Partitas for Violin* (2 CDs)
- 5 Lindsays:
Beethoven: *Complete String Quartets* (8 CDs)
- 6 Hagen Quartet:
Mozart: *String Quartets* (7 CDs)
- 7 Andrew Manze/Richard Egarr:
Biber: *The Rosary Sonatas* (2 CDs)
- 8 Pieter Wispelway/Dejan Lazic:
Beethoven: *Complete Sonatas and Variations* (2 CDs)
- 9 Angela Hewitt:
Couperin: *Keyboard Music No 3*
- 10 André Previn, Charles Dutoit, Vladimir Ashkenazy (conds), Joshua Bell, Lynn Harrell:
Prokofiev: *Complete Concertos* (3 CDs)
- 11 Fitzwilliam Quartet:
Shostakovich: *String Quartets 3, 8, 13*
- 12 Angela Hewitt/Richard Tognetti (cond)/Australian Chamber Orchestra:
Bach: *Keyboard Concertos* (2 CDs)

I did not come into money during 2005 and 2006. Anything but. I did not need new versions of most of these pieces, as I already own CDs of my favourite

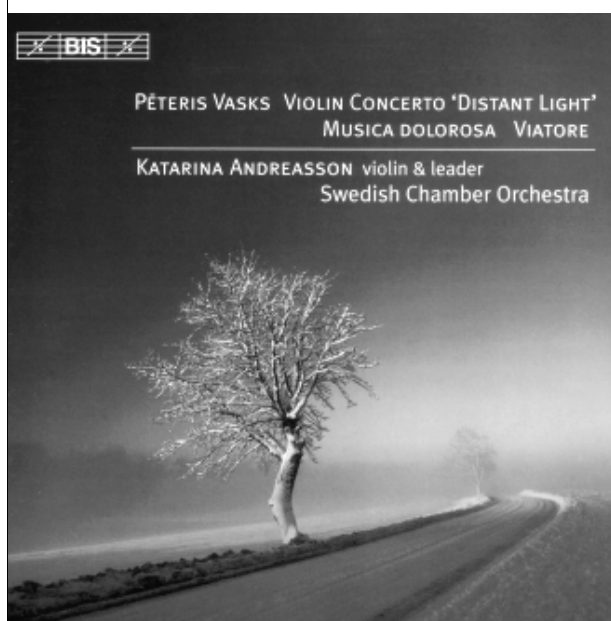
versions. I bought these boxed sets mainly because they were very cheap on the Sale table at Readings in Carlton. (Dave and Ruth at Readings know how to sell stuff to me.) I like to compare versions of pieces of great music.

Three of these entries, however, are CDs of music new to me.

When I was in San Francisco in early 2005, Charles Brown alerted me to the *John Adams Earbox*, all 10 CDs of it. When I got home, I ordered it from Readings. I haven't listened to every CD in the set, but I do feel I'm getting a hold on the music of America's best recent composer.

I owe the discovery of Peterin Vasks to 3MBS, Melbourne's subscription classical station. This unearthly yet melodious music (*Distant Light*, his violin concerto, composed in 1997) unfurled out of the radio one day, so I went in search of Vasks. I've found only three Vasks CDs in Melbourne shops so far, but sooner or later he'll have an audience as devoted as Part's or Gorecki's.

I've known about Biber, the eighteenth-century composer, for a few years. Elaine and I have bought a few of his magnificent requiems and masses. Because of recent performances by Andrew Manze, many people have recently discovered Biber's chamber music. Manze and Egarr's version of the *The Rosary Sonatas*, two CDs of glorious violin sonatas, put Biber into the front rank of



baroque composers.

Gundula Janowitz has been one of my favourite German sopranos since I discovered classical music in 1968. She appears on many great Beethoven recordings, especially Karajan's 1962 recording of Beethoven's Ninth. Many recordings on this five-CD set have never been released before, at least not on CD. Her voice is not Schwartzkopf's, but it has a silvery other-worldly quality unlike anybody else's.

My favourite version of the Bach sonatas and partitas for solo violin is that of Itzhak Perlman. Australian Richard Tognetti's set comes a close second.

Ever since I bought the Alban Berg Quartet's version of the Beethoven quartets, I've wanted a less muscular, more lyrical set. The best versions I've heard on radio have been by England's Fitzwilliam Quartet, but I've never seen a boxed set of their CDs. I have heard great Lindsay Quartet versions of other chamber music, so I thought theirs would be The Alternate Version. Not really. They play a bit too fast, and a bit too nicely. But their versions are very different from those by the Alban Berg Quartet, so I'm glad I bought the new set.

The Hagen Quartet plays the Mozart quartets as well as it's possible to do so, but the quartets themselves are not as interesting as Beethoven's, and rank a long way behind Schubert's. I haven't played the whole set yet.

Until 2007, I had thought Pieter Wispelway's playing of the Beethoven cello sonatas was the best version I'd

heard. In 2007 arrived the low-budget double CD release of the Rostropovich 1962 version. Rostropovich blows all other cellists out of the water. Sorry, Mr Wispelway; and I still enjoy your versions a lot.

Angela Hewitt is the piano/harpsichord wonder performer of the last ten years. One CD of Couperin harpsichord music is very satisfying, but with any luck the full set will appear in a neat little box (at a budget price).

I don't know Prokofiev's concertos well, so this neat three-CD set is a very effective way of adding to my knowledge base. Ashkenazy plays masterly versions of the piano concertos. The only disappointment of the set is the Harrell version of the *Sinfonia concertante*. (A month or so ago I found the Rostropovich version. Wow!)

No sign of a boxed set of the Fitzwilliam Quartet's version of the Shostakovich quartets. This single CD, with the third, eighth and thirteenth, is very good. Do I really need another version of the Shostakovich quartets? (Of course.)

I can never find a satisfactory version of the Bach keyboard concertos. On my ancient LP version, bought from the World Record Club in 1970, the orchestra drowns out the harpsichord. On Angela Hewitt's version, the keyboard part seems a bit polite. Does anybody have further suggestions?

— Bruce Gillespie, 15 November 2007

Letters

Letters in reply to AMERICAN KINDNESS: THE BBB TRIP REPORT

MARTY CANTOR
11825 Gilmore, Apt 105,
North Hollywood CA 91606, USA

I was born in Hartford, Connecticut. I moved from Connecticut to Southern California when I was eleven, in 1946. Sierra Madre Canyon, though, is where I moved to and lived several years after I moved out of my parents' house. That little place is where I left my heart and to where I would move, again, if I could. The City of Sierra Madre is a three-square-mile town-village abutting the San Gabriel Mountains (to its north) — that is, part of the Angeles National Forest. To the west of Sierra Madre is the much larger city of Pasadena; and, to the south and to the east is the medium-sized city of Arcadia.

All of this is in the San Gabriel Valley. The San Gabriel Valley is directly to the east of the San Fernando Valley. About two-thirds of the San Fernando Valley is part of the city of Los Angeles, and North Hollywood (where I live and where LASFS has its clubhouse) is part of the city of Los Angeles.

The major east-west freeway which is about a mile south of Sierra Madre is called the Foothill Freeway. The Huntington Library (where we both revelled in the beauty of the Japanese Gardens) is just south of Pasadena. Sierra Madre Canyon is a tongue of the city of Sierra Madre, poking into the Angeles National Forest on the north part of the city.

LASFS is in North Hollywood; and, if the map I sent you shows Universal City/Universal Studios (which is near the southeast part of the San Fernando Valley), LASFS is about three or four miles northwest of there. I might recommend that you see if you can find a map of the San Fernando Valley — which is the northwest one-third of the city of Los Angeles — you will find 11513 Burbank Blvd., North Hollywood, 91601, about one-third of the way from the east end of the valley. The clubhouse is about midway, a few blocks each way, 'twixt Lankershim Blvd. and the Hollywood Freeway (the 170).

10 July 2005

[*brg* Again, thanks, Marty, for your hospitality, and those maps you sent me. I wish I could say that they gave me a good idea of the structure of greater Los Angeles. It's just too big and complex for a tiny mind like mine to comprehend. Thanks again for taking me to all those places, especially the Sierra Madre Canyon.*]

BILLY PETTIT
3747 Oak Brook Court,
Pleasanton CA 94588, USA

I received the preliminary version of your Trip Report and read it. Very enjoyable too. I have a few minor quibbles, but nothing serious. One point that I caught

causes me to go into thought about culture mores. You mentioned that Earl came 'down from Kingman'. But Arizona is south of Nevada. And you, just like I did in Canada, live in a country where civilisation is on the southern edge. Any place that is in the boondocks is to the North. So a language and mental image develops that country cousins come Down to the city. Americans have a similar image of yokels coming down from the mountains. And, of course, the world out West is backwards and weird. There are hundreds of jokes about California being the land of fruits and nuts, with all innuendos intended.

Anyway, Earl came *up* from Kingman, and your reference set me off on a wonderful introspection of cultural mores influencing language. Thank you for that. I love thinking about language change and its causes.

[*brg* I got the impression from Earl Kemp himself that he had driven south from Kingman to Las Vegas.*]

Another general comment comes to mind. Your report spends some word count about food and your problems eating. But not nearly enough words about your impressions. For example, I really wanted to see more about Potlatch and its concept of a Con. And would it work in Australia? I really expected a dialogue on the Philip K. Dick panel and the various points raised. I know you are passionate about his writing, but that didn't come through. I know you were not happy about Lenny's opinions. There is no reason for you to tone your disagreement into nothingness. Fandom is full of divergent opinions.

[*brg* *SF Commentary* 80 is running three years late. With a lot of help from Lenny Bailes, Howard Hendrix and others, I will include a summary of the Potlatch discussions on Philip K. Dick and *A Scanner Darkly*.*]

Another minor example: you really didn't like the sweet potato when we ate out. Well, say so. It is the main reason I like that restaurant — sweet potatoes are hard to find. And lots of people don't like them. It's an acquired taste, usually from very poor circumstances as a youth. So Joyce Katz likes them, but none of my kids do. Point is, you are not being offensive by having likes and dislikes. You sure as hell won't hurt mine nor Joyce's feelings by saying you didn't like them. Probably 95 per cent of fandom would agree with you.

[*brg* My aim in the Report was to write, write, write, then cut, cut, cut, so that everything would fit a 44-page format. Hence I didn't get around to discussing the differences between national types of sweet potato. All I can say is that the sweet potato I ate that night in Las Vegas was much *sweeter* than the equivalent Australian vegetable.*]

There are other similar points where it would have been okay to show your real feelings: the level of poverty visible in SF; our ridiculous politics and incompetent leadership, etc. Most fans would agree with you. I don't agree with Buck Coulson's opinion on being a good guest. (And he was a famous curmudgeon to boot.) Fans are highly tolerant of individualism; they lock in on fannish accomplishments of which you have a fantastic record. Enough people thought so to spend money to meet you and listen to you. You will not disappoint by having opinions. And you will not be a bad guest by seeing the negative and the positive.

So what did you Really think of the US and US fans? Would you live here happily? Would you thrive in LA? Is American politics weirder than Australian? Is our Mohave uglier than the Nullarbor? See — there are all sorts of things to give the Bruce G. feelings, analysis and reporting.

13 September 2005

[*brg* I suspect that I made myself unpopular in 1973 because I kept offering people my comparisons between Australia and America. This trip, the differences between Australia and America in 2007 seemed much smaller than the differences between America 2007 and America 1973. The ordinary people I met in America have lost a lot of their self-confidence, probably because of the growing divisions between rich and poor in society. My American friends have grown old along with me, and are now facing an uncertain old age fighting an expensive and cruel health care system. Howard, our would-be Bush, has had less success at dismantling the national health system than he had hoped for when he took office, so I suspect older Australians feel much better about the immediate future than do Americans. No, I could not live in America now. I have little income here, but I would have none there. I've never travelled across the Nullarbor, but I found the Mohave totally fascinating.*]

MURRAY MOORE

1065 Henley Road,
Mississauga ONT L4Y 1C8, Canada

An envelope from Robert Litchman in today's realmail. The wrong size, and too early, to be a *Trap Door*.

No, it's *American Kindness: The Bring Bruce Bayside Fund Trip Report*, 44 pages, all Bruce, all the time.

I have only looked at the photos. Hard to choose whether Randy Byers or Ian Stockdale is the subject of the least flattering photo. Ian looks possessed while Randy looks harmless. Very harmless.

I wouldn't let either of them babysit our children. It's a moot point, because Russell is twenty-one and Dennis is eighteen. But you take my meaning.

Bruce, is that you with Carol Carr, or a lifesize cardboard cutout of yourself?

2 June 2007

[*brg* I really did get to meet and hug Carol Carr, once. *Sigh* Fandom doesn't get much better than that.*]

WILLIAM BREIDING

PO Box 1448, Morgantown WVA 26507, USA

As you may or may not know, I'm one of your biggest fans. I came late to your game in the nineties, even though I knew about you via Cy Chauvin since my entry into fandom in 1973.

I want to thank you for including me on your mailing list for *American Kindness*. I know that in the twenty-first century every hard copy is invaluable.

Your report was so candid and funny that I was completely beguiled. Your running patter about trying to find good (or enough) coffee in two of America's coffee cities (Seattle and San Francisco) was hilarious; your self-deprecating image was funny and touching, and I wish I had kept this in mind when we finally briefly spoke about Australian SF. I am truly a fanzine fan — I'm socially awkward until I get to know someone, and have often felt that I am an acquired taste. I felt I had failed

to connect with you because of my own shortcomings. As Bill Bowers once wrote after we'd spent some time alone together, 'We found out that we are both basically pretty quiet guys.' But this in no way hindered a friendship nurtured through decades of fanzine activity.

You were brought to America by the 'vast' network of fanzine fandom that respects who you are and what you do, have done, and continue to do. I, on the other hand, was brought west by the kindness of a few friends (Jeanne and rich started and completed the fund, in that order) and, amazingly, were able to drum up enough cash to pay for airfare, room for two nights and pocket cash! As I told John Hertz, forget about the Hugo Awards and the FAAN Awards: I have achieved the two highest honors a fanzine fan could ever wish to attain: I was chosen for a reprint in the 1992 *Fanthology* (Year's Best Fan Writing) and I have been the subject of a one-off fan fund. The first is about objective worth; the second, subjective (yes, I love my friends in San Francisco and miss them very much). I fear that most of the fans at Corflu were probably going 'huh!' about the fund that brought me there, for the amount of impact I made!

I got the worst case of flu after Corflu. I stayed for a day or two with Gary Mattingley and Patty Peters, and gave it to them both. I returned to Tucson, and went to bed for another three days. Grrrr.

4 June 2007

[*brg* The main thing is that we both got to Corflu 2005 only because of the generosity of our friends. It was nice to catch up, William, and one day we really will have that heart-to-heart natter.*]

This happens all the time now with locs. I start and never finish them. I recently found a loc I had started to *Banana Wings* nearly two and a half years ago! And of course, I lost my train of thought: I remember having the entire architecture of this loc figured out last month. But now it is gone, like the wistful memory of a dream.

Anyway, I very much appreciated receiving *American Kindness*. I found that I was very responsive to it and to you.

I know I owe you all kinds of locs for *Steam Engine Time*, but please! keep me on your hard copy list. I'll send you folding money when I can.

6 July 2007

TED WHITE
1014 North Tuckahoe Street,
Falls Church VA 22046, USA

[*brg* It would have been good if Gordon Eklund has continued writing novels and short stories of the standard he set in the early seventies. I take it that you discovered him for *Amazing* or *Fantastic*?]

Yes. I published his first professional sale, 'Dear Aunt Annie', in *Fantastic*. Subsequently I gave him a safety net when he went into writing fulltime, guaranteeing to buy any story he thought was good that he couldn't sell to a better-paying market, sight unseen. I also serialised his first novel, *Beyond the Resurrection*, and gave him editorial help with it.

[*brg* He was even at Corflu 2005, and I didn't realise it. If only I been able to natter to him.*]

Too bad. Gordon's an easy guy to talk to. I've known him

personally since around 1961, when I met him at the Seattle Worldcon. I'd known him in fanzines for a short time before that. He was very young, then, maybe four-teen.

[*brg* As the very first OnePerCenter, I trust you've received your Trip Report by now? If not, the Post Orfal is really doing a bad job this time.*]

Yes, I have received it, thank you very much. I thought I'd mentioned that to Robert, but it must've been on a different list. Nicely done, Bruce. Up to your usual high standard. I haven't read all of it yet, but I did look at all the pictures.

6 June 2007

CURT PHILLIPS
19310 Pleasant View Drive,
Abingdon VA 24210, USA

For a while now I'd been thinking that I was the very first OnePerCenter, but in searching through my old e-mail from that period I see that Ted White did apparently send in his donation before me and a few others may have done so as well. I *think*, or maybe I've imagined, that the *OnePerCenter* thing was my idea in the first place, but now I don't know if I can trust that memory either. But if not, why do I have that impression?

Of course, it's not actually an important question to anybody but me, and only important then as it reflects on my ability to remember details. But it's one thing to simply forget small details, and quite another to actually misremember things that didn't happen at all. When I start finding 'invented memories' I have to wonder if that in itself is something I should worry about? But then, on the other hand, if I just wait a few days I'll probably even forget that I was worried about what I wasn't not remembering . . .

I finished a quick read-through of *American Kindness* this afternoon and will settle down to a leisurely and thorough read soon. You have a wonderful ability to bring the reader quite into your narrative and have him walk along with you on your journey, rather like the writings of one of my favourite writers, Nevil Shute. That's the sort of writing that I most enjoy. And I even bumped into my own name there on page 25 — always a pleasant experience. I'm glad that you enjoyed getting those issues of *Lighthouse* that Joyce and Arnie kindly passed on for me. I just wish I could have given them to you in person. I think that your trip report is exceptionally well done, and you've written a book to be proud of. Who knows? Maybe someday I'll be able to get you to sign my copy for me in person. Less likely things than that happen all the time — or at least they do in Fandom . . .

Great covers by Dick Jenssen, but what's the significance of the little monoplane hovering over your left shoulder?

7 June 2007

[*brg* The significance of the little monoplane? I felt I had been squeezed into one after I made the journey back to Melbourne from Los Angeles. :: Sorry we didn't meet in 2005, Curt. I'm hoping you'll get here in 2010.*]

DAVID BRATMAN
1161 Huntingdon Drive,
San Jose CA 95129, USA

I've received your trip report, and read it with great interest. It's always delightful to get a fresh perspective on things I know well, from Alan and Janice's spare bedroom and the Pike Place Market (if I ever get to Melbourne, I shall have to visit the Queen Victoria Market to which you compare it) to the LASFS and La Brea tarpits. In fact there are very few public things you saw on this trip that I haven't, and that made the report all the more fun to read. Also knowing the people — you reached four of the five major fan centres in the far-western US (the fifth being Portland), and it looks as if you got full value out of the experience.

And it's good to know that you enjoyed our little conventions. Potlatch and Corflu coincided once before, at Seattle in 2000. This time we decided to run them separately, and I was the only person who served on both committees. I attend both as often as possible: the good serious conversations outclass most of what happens at larger conventions. Worldcons, because they have so many people, are better than Baycon (the local) or Westercon (the west coast movable convention). It's true that the neighbourhood of the 2005 conventions in San Francisco is not of the best, and that the Ramada is gloomy, but it has sufficient usable meeting space, gives us good rates, and is very easy to reach by public transit, so Bay Area Potlatches keep coming back. For Corflu, our other affordable choices were either too isolated (way out of town), too drab, or with too small meeting rooms.

By the way, you had Gold as your element on the Corflu badge at Tom Becker's insistence. We were pleased to have you.

I'm not sure if it was pressed on you how remarkable it was to see so much of Mount Rainier in Seattle. Usually the sky is overcast, and the mountain, some 60 miles away, is invisible. Every couple of weeks the sun comes out, and the sight of this huge mountain scares the daylight out of visitors who'd had no idea it was hiding there. I wonder how much of your description of the dim light might be due to the fact that, though a mild one, it was winter when you were here. Perhaps our light would not rival Australia's even in the summer, but it can certainly be piercingly bright, say, right about now (summer solstice).

[*brg* Temperatures were cold in the mornings while I was in Seattle, but during the day we had the sunniest February weather people could remember. The difference between American/European and Australian light is remarked on by many Australian overseas travellers, even those returning here in the middle of winter.*]

It's not an interest I wave around at parties a great deal, because I know it's boring to those who don't share it, but I'm yet another fan who's a serious classical music listener. In fact, I am that rare creature, a professional classical concert reviewer. (It's only part of my income, but they do pay me.) I write for a website at <http://www.sfcv.org>. I wonder if you remember what work(s) by Aaron Jay Kernis that Charles Brown played you. I've heard a couple of pieces of his in concert (not that I've reviewed), and wasn't very impressed.

21 June 2007

[*brg* I don't have the technical background to review

classical music regularly, although I wrote quite a few (unpaid) short reviews of new classical CDs for the *Melbourne Report* when it was being published. I'm hoping to review classical and popular CDs in the revived *Metaphysical Review* . . . if I can revive it. You'll be welcome to contribute.*]

MIKE MCINERNY
83 Shakespeare Street,
Daly City CA 94014-1053, USA

Thanks to you and Robert Lichtman for that wonderful trip report. I'm enjoying the heck out of it. What a wealth of detail. I didn't see you taking notes, but you must have total recall.

As to your comment about working instead of retiring (in your trip report), I really don't need the money, but I do want to have health insurance, and here in the USA the health care system is very damaged. Most people get the health insurance from their jobs, which makes it important not to quit too early. Also work is a stabilising thing — keeps me from too many idle excesses. Of course, every six months or so at work they change the health care coverage and increase the costs and the deductibles get bigger and the copays increase!

26 June 2007

[*brg* You help back up my comment to Billy Pettit about one main difference between America and Australia — the health system. Lots of people have health insurance here, but it seems to be much cheaper than in America, and confer greater guaranteed benefits. Because of Medicare, the rest of us are not completely abandoned; and the incoming Labor government might even restore Medicare to the effectiveness it had before 1996.*]

R-LAURRAINE TUTIHASI
currently in transit

I just finished reading your trip report and have a few comments.

I learned something new. I hadn't known that the Smith of Smith Corona was the same as the one in Smith and Wesson.

I have some theories about the Corflu flu. When I first got to Corflu, I shook hands with some local (to the area) fan, whose name I've since forgotten, who said he had just gotten over the flu. From past experience, I know that a person at that stage is still contagious. I didn't tell him, as I didn't want him to feel bad. But I later came down with it; in fact, I spend the last night of the con soothing a very sore throat with alcoholic beverages.

From what you relate, I probably suffered multiple exposures. What you had doesn't sound like full-blown flu, and could be explained by the fact that you were tired from being up for two days on your flight from Australia and the fact that you didn't have prior exposure to our local cold germs.

I shouldn't blame potholes on Schwarzenegger. They existed prior to his administration.

If are equipped to play a region 1 DVD, I can send you my video of Corflu at no cost to you. I also have your little talk that you gave at the LASFS, if you're interested.

[*brg* Thanks very much for the DVD of Corflu 2005. I don't think I can bear looking at myself on panels, but I appreciate the chance to view the Lupoff/Robinson panel, which I missed.*]

Despite what Robert Lichtman said, and perhaps you already know this by now, KMZT didn't disappear (which I also feared); it was transformed into an AM station. I have this from a person who works there.

As for the light, I think you were just here at the wrong time of year. Believe me, things are much brighter in summer. And possibly you didn't spend too much time in areas of the country where the light might have been brighter even in winter. We were in Australia during your winter (before and during the last Aussie-con), and the light wasn't terribly bright in much of your country. The exception was the Alice Springs and Uluru areas.

The cost of living in LA, as far as home prices goes, varies from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. This is also true in the Seattle area when you leave the city itself.

After having flown to Australia and back in tourist class, I, too, wouldn't travel that far again without being able to fly business or first class. I'm petite, and I still found tourist class very uncomfortable.

I plan to order *The Incomplete Bruce Gillespie*, but not until we have relocated. We are moving to Tucson, Arizona, as soon as we sell our current house.

As a final point, I just want to say that there's no period in my name. Properly written out, it's R-Laurraine Tutihasi, which a hyphen. If you abbreviate the first name, it would be R. Tutihasi.

3 July 2007

CASEY WOLF

14-2320 Woodland Drive,
Vancouver BC V5N, Canada

I finished reading *American Kindness* — I tried to skim but was just too interested and had to read every single word. It was very fun. I was happy to read about Lee and Barry Gold, who I met many years ago when I went to LA to visit my friend and theirs, Reprints Winston (well, really Rita Prince Winston, but since she tends to re-use her fan writing uncompunctionously — noncompunctionously? — a lot — it seems a good name). I'm glad you didn't make Lee and Barry very very ill or break their bones. That seems like a Good Thing. Janice at least seems to have forgiven you for afflictions you caused her.

I know well that hideous feeling of being trapped in travel circumstances you can't change, and to Tim of the intercontinental transit I say, 'Hail Fellow and Well Met!' I'm glad you had him, and Elaine, to midwife you home. I sympathised with Flicker, but thought he was a bit hard on you when you didn't offer him your bare knees. But I suppose it was just a measure of his affection for you that he could be that miffed by your rejection.

13 September 2007

Letters in reply to recent *brg*s

LLOYD PENNEY

1706-24 Eva Road,
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2, Canada

Many thanks for *brg* 47. Now, there's a handsome cat on the front cover. By the way he's posing, I suspect he knows how handsome he is. Give him a skritch behind the ears for me.

Looks like you've had some very good luck in your editorial career just lately. I could use a little of that myself. I am still working about 10 hours a week at the *Globe and Mail* putting things onto their website, but I'd like to get back into a regular editorial position the way I used to. I have some new directions for my resumé, and just lately, there's been lots of opportunities to apply to. Maybe some of your luck will rub off.

It is difficult to make a living in editorial work, as you and I and a number of other fans know. Yet, we stick it out, and thank Ghu for our loved ones who help us get through financially.

Ah, more handsome fellows on pages 3 and 4. As you can tell, I am a cat person, although I'll happily cuddle up with a happy dog. All the cats look content, and you must have some fond memories of those who have passed since. That is the good pets do for us, to teach us about love, and about grief when they pass away.

My own parents live near the top of a major highway near a ski resort, about a hundred miles north of Toronto. They are quite independent, and my brother David lives with them. I've been watching the weather channel here, and that area may have been hit with as much as six feet of snow over the past week. I should

call and see if they're all right, but with David there, I'm sure they are.

There was rich brown, and Bob Tucker, and now comes word of Lee Hoffman passing away. This year's Corflu starts tomorrow, and what terrible news to launch it with. I hope it won't spoil the big party Pat Virzi has laid in for the assembled (of which I can't be there) in Austin. A symptom of getting older is when so many familiar names from your past are passing away. That especially applies to fabulous fannish names, and we are all diminished by their losses.

8 February 2007

It's been a hectic time lately, and finally, a long-term problem has been solved, and I am at last relieved, and I have lots to write about. First of all to learn are you and your readers in *brg* 49.

That great news is that I finally have a full-time job. I was offered the job this very morning, and I more grabbed it than accepted it. As of 24 September, I will be an Editor, Electronic Publication at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind in Toronto. Beautiful building, great job, fairly easy to get to, nice folks . . . they offered me the job; they're great folks! Salary is a little beyond what I was hoping for, and they offer all the training I could want. Now to actually go and work there, and see what it's like. I'm sure it will be great, especially with such a burden off my back, and a doubling of the meagre money I make now. The greatest benefit they are offering me is a return to a normal life with normal hours and normal salary by the end of the year. More reports later.

[*brg* Congratulations — I trust the job has worked out okay. My congratulations are soured by a note of envy. Despite all the crap that our recently deposed Treasurer went on with — that the labour market is so active that older people are welcome back into the workforce — the opposite is still true. At the age of sixty, I have no hope of gaining a regular job, and, it seems, decreasing hopes of gaining freelance work. So hang onto that job as long as possible, Lloyd!*

We return you to your regularly schedule loc. I sometimes feel old at 48, so I can only imagine how I'll feel when and if I get to 60. Congratulations on this achievement, and please have many more in comfort.

Like Tony Thomas, I very much enjoy radio, and have tried mightily to get into radio and voice work. I have some CDs and DVDs with my efforts on them, and more are about to come out. I may have the chance to do a lot more of that at my new job, which contains numerous recording studios.

Just this past summer, we had the chance to get a cat for ourselves, one owned by friends who thought she might like to come live with us, seeing how much she seems to love us when we visit. Momcat almost made it to Etobicoke; Yvonne was referred to a food allergist, and she was found to be allergic to a long list of foods and other things, and one thing is a cat. Momcat is getting up in years, so I hope we can spend a little time with her before she passes.

I was somewhat right when I said in my letter that blogs were starting to fade. There are fewer blogs out there, but they have been replaced with other software technologies, like MySpace and FaceBook, bloglike things with many more features.

Casey Wolf is someone I don't think I've ever seen in a fanzine, and here she is from Vancouver. Casey, will you be in Montreal for the Worldcon in 2009? If so, see you there. Perhaps you'll be at VCon in Vancouver in October. You said you wanted to read a Canadian fanzine . . . so would I. Dale Speirs puts out *Opuntia* on a fairly regular basis, but outside of his zine and a few clubzines, there is nothing, in English, anyway. The Aurora ballot for this year recently came out, and all three nominees for Fan Achievement (Publication) were French-language.

[*brg* I've still never seen a copy of *Opuntia*.*]

It is Friday evening as I type, Yvonne has been ecstatic at my new job since she fielded the original call this morning, and we plan some celebrations tomorrow. I suspect we'll celebrate even more once I am there three months. Seeing I start on September 24, three months later is Christmas Eve. A good job I can keep? I can't think of a better present.

14 September 2007

GREGG TREND

Bruce, you're still youthful. I'll reach part of the title of that Beatles' song, and fortunately, I have someone(s) who still need me. Never had big birthday parties at fifty or sixty, but one with about seventy people when I was forty (because I thought forty was a real turning point — when I had decided I wasn't going to work in advertising much longer . . . as it had killed off acquaintances of mine in the biz who were in their early to mid fifties).

My beard (I've had one in various shapes for thirty-six years now) started turning grey at about forty-five. As

for my hair, well, I inherited some extreme genes and started losing my hair in my early twenties, so now I'm mostly bald. I don't believe in head-shaving, only letting nature take its course.

I've been involved in fanzine fandom since 1958, but pubbed only three zines early on, from August 1958–August 1959. I've pubbed many apazines, and edited/designed one clubzine (the last complete issue of *Seldon's Plan*, the OO of the Wayne 3rd Foundation; I think that was in 1983). I drew small illos for *Cry of the Nameless*, *Shangri L'Affaires*, *Void*, *Xero* and *Yandro*, plus work for Brian Earl Brown, Howard Devore and Lynn Hickman, among others. Therefore, you may or may not be familiar with my work beyond my comments in this venue.

Your party sounds like it was both exciting and educational! During my fortieth (though my wife and her younger sister were working hard) I was mostly going around making sure everyone had enough to eat and drink. Since it was in late June, it was an indoor-outdoor affair. At least half the people there were not fans.

I've only seen photos of Art's place, but it seems very cool. Art is a *very* entertaining, interesting fan. (I could tell that from *Yhos* long before I met him in person.) I can't believe he'll be ninety! He has so much energy. Yeah, he must be the only one to have attended all Dittos, because the last one I attended in Toronto (2002) was quite small (as was the Corflu in 2005). What is it about Toronto? To me (and my mundane friends) Toronto is a cool, interesting city.

20 February 2007

DAVID LANGFORD,
94 London Road,
Reading, Berks RG1 5AU, England

It was good to see Mark and Claire and Tony Keen at Picocon — one of my main reasons for coming to an event run by students who always get something hideously wrong. This time, through lack of forward planning, they couldn't even manage to arrange function space in the Students' Union building which is the invariable venue: there were periodic announcements in the bar, urging attendees to finish or abandon their drinks and make their way through London streets to the building where actual program items happened.

I don't do LiveJournal, partly out of perversity and partly because I loathe the culture of would-be-cute icons and anonymous screen names. However, a fan (in fact, Charles Platt's daughter!) set up an LJ syndication page which informs those interested when a new *Ansible* appears. From this I learn that 227 LJ users currently read me by this route. 'Amazing — there's this old fogey who publishes on a retro website thing with no smileys, and doesn't even tell you what music he's listening to! Weird creepy stuff . . .'

Have I mentioned that the on-line archive of *Checkpoint* is now complete? <http://checkpoint.ansible.co.uk/> . . . the search engine allows you to find and read all the old reviews of your fanzines, another mighty time-waster.

22 February 2007

TONY THOMAS

486 Scoresby Road, Ferntree Gully VIC 3156

[*brg*: I see from the Shakespeare Society leaflet that you give a talk about new books every meeting, so you must be used to preparing and delivering Nova Mob style talks. It occurs to me that a good subject for the Nova Mob would be supernatural and/or science-fictional scenes, themes or otherwise in the Shakespearean plays.

But if you wanted to do something like this, you would need to email Julian about it. I think he still has gaps in the 2007 program.

I'm still slightly puzzled as to how the Shakespeare Society works. I take it that the episodic play readings are a separate meeting from the regular meeting of the society. And presumably actual presentations of the plays would be presented in full dress, in small theatres around the city?*

I'll think about a Shakespeare-related Nova Mob talk for the future, but for the moment I'm too tied up with other commitments.

My Books talks for the Shakespeare Society are about every other two-hour monthly meeting (fourth Saturday), which meeting usually comprises a long talk, up to about an hour (my next is on Theobald, as I mentioned), plus sometimes one or more short talks, such as my books talks (either a review or something related to current reading), plus a sonnet reading, sometimes a little performance.

In addition, on the second Saturday, there's a monthly reading (preceded by a rehearsal) of one of Shakespeare's plays, or, a couple of times a year, some other related play or poem. I'm in the middle of directing *Henry VI Part 2*, which you saw me giving out scripts for, having directed *Henry VI, Part 1* last month. (Over the last six or so years I calculated that I've now directed thirteen of Shakespeare's plays, about a third of the oeuvre.)

These rehearsed readings, with a little movement, minimal props, can be quite good. Lots of the audience, usually twenty or so, plus fifteen or so actors, use the readings to become familiar with plays they don't know very well, or at all, as well of course as hearing again the familiar dozen or so. Many of the regular readers have acting experience of various kinds, including professional. They're held at the English Speaking Union in Toorak Road South Yarra, just near Punt Rd, on the second Saturday of the month. *2 Henry VI* is on next Saturday, starting 1 p.m.

There are no regular full productions put on by the group, but occasionally a production comes about generated largely from the group's readers. These have included *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Collingwood Children's Farm a few years ago, *Rape of Lucrece* at Brunswick Mechanics Institute, a *Henry V* that I was in at the Richmond Library and Latvian House, and *Cardenio*, Shakespeare's late lost play with Fletcher. This latter is a purported version, as claimed by an American handwriting expert — in fact, almost everyone knows this is in fact a play by Middleton, *The Lady's Tragedy*. We did a couple of versions of this at La Mama's Courthouse, to extremely underwhelming response. An audio version of *Hamlet* is currently being contemplated, using 3MBS facilities. There are also several playwrights who are or have been members, and there are sometimes Shakespeare spin-offs in production, such as Enzo (brother of the notorious Mario) Condello's Shakespeare and the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, that I was in for two productions at the Courthouse

playing a horny bisexual lord.

But I couldn't recommend any of these productions as being much good. Unlike the Chambers Theatre productions of *Hamlet* (at the Athenaeum upstairs) and *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado About Nothing* (at Theatreworks) over the last few years, which I was either in or worked as dramaturge for (dramaturge here meaning script editor and language coach). Unfortunately though, Chambers has now closed down.

I'm rambling on on a Saturday when I've just finished the new Lee Child thriller, and should be getting back to *Nova Swing* and cutting down the hedge.

7 April 2007

DORA LEVAKIS

Yarralin, via Katherine, NT

I arrived here at Yarralin a fortnight ago this Saturday, later than expected as I'd spent four nights in Darwin and two in Katherine.

Darwin was extremely hot and thus a shock to the system, but at least it cooked that nasty chest thing I'd had sitting around since May. Yarralin is very hot also, but it's a dry heat with cooler nights and mornings. Very dusty too. Most kids here get around in bare feet and happily scuffle in all sorts of stuff including the poo left by the wild horses that roam the community.

One child was playfully kicking poo dust up into the air last Friday until I protested. This was a day when I broke protocol and entered the community area to collect kids after a total of only eight turned up to school. That would have meant students for me. Have had a number of around fourteen since, and though that mightn't sound many, as much as I love them, they're hard work. The children here are in the habit of getting up and going, jumping, talking etc. etc. etc. as they please; difficult to introduce a lesson. My approach, then, is circular rather than linear — success being measured by meaningful connections more than by what lessons get through in a day. Mightn't see particular children for days and need to pick up in a relevant way.

Have unwittingly committed two faux pas. As an art teacher I am always asking students to use 'more colour'. Here, a child's sibling called Carla has died so it is forbidden to say her name. Kids were most offended to hear me say colour and even today I slipped up; it's hard to avoid.

I am starting to learn the community's language from the kids, and when I asked today what a particular word that I'd heard used constantly in the yard meant, I was angrily told that I can't say that. When I questioned, my best student paused for a while, then said that that's Nicola's blackfella name and you not allowed to say it.

This is an isolated and insular area — can get frustrating that am seeing the same adults frequently. Am not one to like to be 'married' to anyone, but the landscape is pretty. Love the pink soil and blue shadows.

The school day begins at 7.30 a.m. This morning had to freshen up with ice from fridge as had no water!

2 August 2007

JULIAN WARNER

13 Frederick Street, Brunswick VIC 3056

After buying copies of the Beethoven Triple Concerto and Brahms Double Concerto by Oistrakh/Rostropovich/Richter for both you and me for what I

thought was the cheap price of \$20 each, I discover that Readings in Lygon St, Carlton, now has a large number of CDs in the same EMI Classics 'Great Recordings of the Century' series available for \$9.95 each. I just picked up *The Devil's Trill: Showpieces for Violin and Piano* by David Oistrakh and Vladimir Yampolsky.

If there is anything in the range shown at <http://www.emiclassics.com/groc.php> which you would like — let me know and I will see if Readings have a cheap copy.

9 August 2007

[*brg* The worst part about the current Readings sale is that I already have all the versions I want — often bought at \$30 each when they first appeared on CD in the late eighties. My own favourites among those advertised in the monthly Readings catalogue include Elisabeth Schwartzkopf singing Strauss's *Four Last Songs*, but other truly great performances in the set included Karajan's version of Beethoven's Triple Concerto.*]

Since your email I was in Hill of Content on Bourke Street, browsing for books, and looked through a book that claimed to list the 100 best and 20 worst classical recordings. The writer, knowledgeable but rather pretentious, claimed that the Karajan version of the Beethoven Triple Concerto was one of the 20 worst! He also claimed that Richter had 'disowned' the recording.

He listed this along with some 'no-brainer' inclusions, such as a recording of Satie's *Vexations* and other works that are guaranteed to test the listener's patience.

15 August 2007

[*brg* The Karajan is Elaine's nomination for Concerto I Could Not Live Without — although neither of us filled in the ABC FM form and sending in our nominations.

I had also heard the story about the three soloists disowning the Karajan version of the Triple Concerto — but what the hell? Who cares if nobody likes you very much (and nobody much liked Karajan) if you could turn out records the way he did? His 1962 set (just re-released yet again) is my benchmark set for the Beethoven symphonies; also both his two versions of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*; and he was superb at the entire work of some composers, such as Richard Strauss. On the other hand, all his versions of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* are dull — very reverential. The truly great Klemperer version, my favourite classical CD, is always around in the shops.*]

The book I was referring to at a recent gathering was *The Life and Death of Classical Music: Featuring the 100 Best and 20 Worst Recordings Ever Made* by Norman Lebrecht. Half the book is Lebrecht's potted history of recorded sound in classical music and the remainder is his 100 best and 20 worst. I'm sure you, Bruce, would enjoy the book, if only partly because it is a book of lists. It will probably contain much for both of you to rail against. A lot of the book appears to be based upon anecdote and personal opinion rather than strictly factual accounts — so there is plenty of scope for disagreement. Lebrecht is an adept name-dropper and speaks even of the deceased as if they were acquaintances or a friend of a friend. I have a copy now if you wish to borrow it at some stage.

26 August 2007

You were asking about recent purchases that were more in your sphere:

- Bach: *Mass in B Minor*, Karajan; Schwarzkopf; Hoffman; Gedda; Rehfuß; Ferrier; Philharmonia

- Mozart (as finished by Süssmayr): *Requiem in D Minor*, Kempe; Grummer; Hoffgen; Krebs; Frick; Berliner Philharmoniker
- Mozart: *Serenade in D*, *Serenade in G (Eine Kleine Nachtmusik)*, *Notturmo in D*, der Spass, Savall; Le Concert Des Nations
- Beethoven: Triple Concerto: Karajan; Oistrakh; Rostropovich; Richter/Brahms: Double Concerto: Szell; Oistrakh; Rostropovich (as previously discussed)
- Various: *Tarentule — Tarentelle*, Paniagua; Atrium Musicae de Madrid (a collection of tarentellas from different countries)
- *Music for the Spanish Kings: 15th and 16th Century Spanish Music*: Jordi Savall and Hesperion XX
- John Cage: *Roaratorio* (more Tony's thing than yours)
- *The Devil's Trill: Showpieces for Violin and Piano*: Oistrakh; Yampolsky
- *Missa Luba/Missa Criolla/Misa Flamenca* (my only regret being that the *Criolla* is the new re-recorded version with Carreras: not quite as earthy as the original)
- Terry Riley: *Les Yeux Fermes/Lifespan* (again, more for Tony — or Roger (requiescat . . .))
- *Tous les Matins du Monde*: soundtrack by Savall and chums
- Rachmaninov: Piano Concerto No 2/Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No 1: Karajan; Richter; Warsaw Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony
- Beethoven: *Five Cello Sonatas*: Rostropovich; Richter
- Rachmaninov: Piano Concertos 2 and 3: Stokowski/Ormandy; Rachmaninov; Philadelphia Orch.
- Tchaikovsky: Piano Music: Richter (on Regis)
- Beethoven: Piano Sonatas Nos 1, 7, 17/*Andante Favori*/Schubert: Piano Sonata in A Major; Fantasy in C Major/Schumann: Fantasy in C Major: Richter.

Then André Previn doing the Orff *Carmina Burana*; Du Pre and Barenboim doing Elgar's Cello Concerto (what else?); and Keith Jarrett (that renowned classicist) and Michaela Petri doing Handel recorder stuff.

Not too dreadfully eclectic.

The first two listed CDs are in the EMI Classics Historical series in simulated brown paper covers (!). A lot of that series is straight opera: Callas, Melba etc.

12 September 2007

I'm listening to Klemperer conducting Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem* as I type. You can't get much more German than quoting 'Deutschland Über Alles' in the first few bars! I also picked up the GROC version of Klemperer doing Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* — which is a lot more operatic than I was expecting for a solemn mass. There is an earlier recording of Klemperer doing the *MS* (possibly live?) on the Testament label, but at three times the price. The sleeve notes to the version I have claims that the live performances of 1956 and 1960 in London were disappointing to both conductor and critics.

Other recent items I've picked up which you might appreciate are:

- Kronos Quartet: *Black Angels*: covering Crumb, Tallis, Ives, Shostakovich and Istvan Marta. There were more vocals on this than I was expecting, and some decidedly un-string-quartettish music. It

shouldn't surprise me for a group that did Reich's *Different Trains*, I suppose.

- Morton Feldmann: *Triadic Memories*, played by Markus Hinterhauser on piano. Less sparse and spartan than the string-driven Feldmann stuff but still quiet and minimalistic. Probably one for Bangsund or Edmonds.
- Muddy Waters: *Muddy 'Mississippi' Waters Live*. I have at last picked up the 2 CD Epic Legacy Edition of this set, which I've had on vinyl for a long time. The second CD illustrates just how powerful a performer Muddy was without illustrious white boys accompanying. Nonetheless, the first CD is very solid stuff, and should probably be a cornerstone of how electric blues should be done.
- *Columbia Rockabilly, Volumes 1 and 2*. The names I know are Carl Perkins, Marty Robbins, Link Wray, Johnny Horton, Rose Maddox, Lefty Frizzell, Johnny Cash and Billy 'Crash' Craddock. There are still a lot of names I don't know, but good performances all round. I haven't checked on recording and release dates, but there are some quite countrified songs with references to *not* being rock'n'roll. There are a few boogies, from the fad of the time, some vain attempts at new dance crazes, and occasionally some downright awful lyrics (cf 'It's a Great Big Day' by Derrell Felts: a nadir of banality).

And now my father has me trying to find recordings of works by Eduard Strauss — yes, the young lad of the family. Lesser known. I don't mind waltzes, but I'm not sure about the 'polka schnell'.

26 September 2007

DAVID J. LAKE

7 8th Avenue, St Lucia QLD 4067

I am sorry to hear of your mother's death. My mother died when I was 62, and she 92, in England on the other side of this planet, but cared for by my elder brother (who is now also gone).

You do go in for big parties! I avoid them — I can't cope with more than about 10 or 12 people at one time. Well, perhaps I don't have more than 10 or 12 friends. But you do have some fascinating ones. I wasn't aware of Tony Thomas — but I perceive what may be a close affinity between him and me. *Pericles*! I was working on the authorship of that play in 1969, and I have exactly the same views as Tony. I helped to prove by an analysis of rhymes that Acts I and II are indeed by George Wilkins. I got my PhD on work like that — on the Middleton canon (yes, he did have a hand in *Timon*). And I have corresponded with MacDonald Jackson, and Brian Vickers is a personal friend of mine (we met in London a few years ago, and he keeps me up to date on his latest work). Of course Shakespeare collaborated — writing plays in his time was a bit like churning out TV series scripts. People wanted new plays in a hurry.

I saw a perfectly mad performance of *Pericles* in Brisbane recently. Thaisa, *Pericles*' wife, was played by a young girl in a red fright wig, mainly for laughs. In fact, they guyed the whole play, which I didn't think fair. Shakespeare's bit at least is well written.

I looked for Philip Pullman, but the first book of his trilogy seems not to be in Brisbane bookshops.

I hear that Oscar Redding has just done a film of something purporting to be *Hamlet*, set in bits of Melbourne, with Horatio as a glove puppet and *Hamlet* completely mad. Oh dear. Why do directors try to prove

themselves cleverer than Shakespeare? 'That's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it.' Such are the words of Hamlet himself, Act 3 scene 2, and they show (a) Hamlet was not mad; (b) he was a very good judge of play productions.

17 August 2007

It just happened this morning that I was shuffling your older publications, and I came across *Metaphysical Review* No 28/29, August 1998, with a long letter from Robert Mapson, much concerned with death. He mentions me and my wife Marguerite (who had not yet then died) on p. 65. On that same page, high up in the second column, he says wonderfully: 'What I hate about death is how it takes away so much, not just the person who has died, but also their memories. Even those few things left in the memories of those remaining are eventually lost.'

I have been thinking about just that recently. Marguerite has been dead now nearly nine years, and I still miss her terribly; above all I wish I had asked her more questions about herself and her early life. All those memories of hers — gone, lost for ever. And I, foreseeing my own death — I have an amazing memory for old tunes, tunes my mother used to sing in the 1930s, poems she recited that went back probably another hundred years. I suppose we have no real memories of our first three years, but deducting that, I have 75 years worth of stuff. Much of course, utter trivia. But trivia fills up a good deal of the life of the human race. You can write a huge autobiography, if you wish — but you can't get more than a fraction in, and even the book will at last be lost. (In the end the planet will be lost, too, and the universe.)

The human condition: I agree entirely with Mapson. I also am a pessimist, and feel that the suffering in life outweighs the joy. There are no happy endings — except in comedies and fairy tales, which lie. I want out!

But whenever I try to imagine an alternative — a 'heaven', if you like — I come up against impossibilities. Immortality would be utterly boring, unless in an infinite world always open for more exploration; and even then, you couldn't have Love. Love is only possible in the presence of danger, fear and the possibility of death. All positive utopias are sketches of 'heaven', and they are all utterly boring worlds.

Perhaps Sophocles was right — in one of the Choruses in *Oedipus at Colonus* he has the old gentlemen say 'the greatest blessing is never to exist — the next best is to die immediately after birth.' And, a propos of that, I recently saw a letter in a *New Scientist* that made me gasp. About cloning humans, this fellow said: 'It is better to be a clone than not to exist at all.' Exactly the opposite of Sophocles — but philosophically, a logical howler. A non-being cannot be benefited (or hurt). Sophocles was thinking backward, from people who have had painful lives. It is not nonsense to say: 'I wish I had never been born.' But to go the other way — from null to something — that is a laugh!

At last I've found something to laugh at. Pardon this long diatribe, and find something to make you feel cheerful.

30 September 2007

STEVE JEFFERY,
44 White Way, Kidlington,
Oxon OX5 2XA, England

I'm sending you a CD of Norman Shelley reading A. A. Milne's Pooh stories, recorded in the 1950s. The readings are great fun. As a fan of the original Pooh stories, it's one of my treasures. My enthusiasm doesn't extend to the Disney spin-off stories, apart from the original movie, which I saw at a young and, I suspect, impressionable age. I think it was even my first encounter with postmodernism, in the bit where the Tigger gets stuck up a tree and the narrator turns the page round 90 degrees so he can slide down the margin to safety. And, if I remember rightly, in the Blustery Day, where words from the book get blown across the screen.

25 August 2007

{*brg* The Norman Shelley readings of the Pooh stories are wonderful, wonderful, wonderful. To listen to them is to travel straight back to childhood, when I listened to the same versions on the giant old bakelite radio that dominated the living room for the first twelve years of my life. Thanks again, Steve, for this magnificent present. (Perhaps somebody Out There might find and copy Norman Shelley's other great work — apart from the Winston Churchill speeches during World War II, which he is said to have both written and delivered — his 1950s radio version of *The Wind in the Willows*, called *Toad of Toad Hall*.*]

ANDY SAWYER,
1 The Flaxyard, Woodfall Lane,
Little Neston, South Wirral L64 4BT, England

Has anyone else noticed this? When you remove two feet of books from the 'W' section to make room for new books, and then start to shuffle everything back along the shelves, by the time you get to the 'B' section you only have space to insert two slim paperbacks. Where does it all go?

26 August 2007

ROSS CHAMBERLAIN
6200 Old Trail Road,
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Your August 2007 issue of **brg** celebrating your Big Six-Oh arrived a week or two ago, well within the month it's named for, and I apologise for not acknowledging it earlier. I've quite enjoyed reading it, though of course there are many names there I don't know and topics I get bewildered at. Didn't occur to me to egoscan it so it was a bit of a surprise to find myself nestled among the LoCs, albeit with material selected from Trufen to so perfectly fit its own topic that it tests set theory.

You could not have had a better birthday present, I think, than the Pooh-like story of your birthday party by Jennifer Bryce, and it's nice to know that the Rare Spotted and Herbaceous Backson has Found Its Proper Place. I hesitate to think what many of us fen in the States would have used the Pot to Put Things In for.

Personally, I got somewhat lost in the course of the search for the Perfect *Pericles*. I somewhat got into Shakespeare with Olivier's *Hamlet* and the version of *Julius Caesar* that had Marlon Brando as Marc Antony and James Mason as Brutus (and the aging Louis

Calhern as Julius), though in fact I'd much earlier seen and delighted in the 1935 *Midsummer Night's Dream*, with young Mickey Rooney as Puck and James Cagney great portrayal of Bottom. It also introduced me to Mendelssohn's wonderful score . . . I'd read *Julius Caesar* from a school textbook before seeing the film; and the *Hamlet* was especially enhanced by being assigned to see it along with a lovely schoolmate I was sweet on at the time. Over the years I think *Hamlet* has remained my favourite, and there was even a time when I had longings for the thespian life when I had my own ideas of how I'd play him. Now, I suppose, I'd be far more suited as Polonius.

I've not limited my appreciation of Shakespeare's plays to these, but there are many that I've neither read nor seen. However, as you can judge from the above, the academic and historical ramifications of who wrote the plays has always taken a back seat to my enjoyment of their content and portrayal.

Aside from noting that I'm trying hard *not* to be grumpy in my senior years, and that I delighted in the list of singles you and Yvonne Rousseau provided the young Vida (discussions of rock elsewhere in the zine failed to draw me — I'm more of a Beatles fan than of the Rolling Stones, and my preferred groups include Crosby Stills & Nash (& Young) and Creedence Clearwater Revival) — I think I must retire quietly back into the fannish mists. I always enjoy your commentary in Trufen. Thanks again for the fanzine.

1 September 2007

MARK PLUMMER
59 Shirley Road, Croydon,
Surrey CR0 7ES, England

I was pleased to see Robin Johnson pick up the Big Heart. An entirely appropriate choice. This year's Worldcon caught me rather by surprise. I'd been aware of British fans setting out eastwards up to two weeks before the convention started, and had been reading Live-Journal reports of it being incredibly hot which were making me feel remarkably pleased that we'd chosen not to go. But I barely registered that I was no longer reading about fans wandering around Japan and was now reading about fans at Worldcon.

We'd just had breakfast on Saturday morning and Claire said, 'Aren't the Hugos today?' A quick bit of googling reminded me of what I'd forgotten, that the Hugos were indeed being presented on Saturday and a relatively early start combined with the time difference meant we could expect the results before lunchtime. I knew this because a local fan had suggested hiring a pub room with wifi access so London fans could have a Hugo party with live results but we'd written it off because the results would probably come in too early.

In the end we received an email from what we took to be a Japanese mobile phone at 11:22 a.m. containing the message 'Science fiction 5 yrly and Langford and Wu' — we later found out it was from Spike (Tom Becker was our designated acceptor, hardly a demanding role) — and we spent the next three-quarters of an hour prodding the web for other results before the finally came through courtesy of Kevin Standlee and Cheryl Morgan.

I was genuinely pleased to see *Science Fiction Five Yearly (SFFY)* win the fanzine Hugo. It seems to be a positive vote for *our* kind of fandom.

8 September 2007

[*brg* Hugo wins for *Banana Wings*, Claire Brialey and/or Mark Plummer would also be wins for our kind of fandom. :: It's such a pity that Lee Hoffman did not live to receive in her own hands the culminating award of her fannish career. Congratulations to everybody who helped to keep *SFFY* alive during recent decades, and published the last edition in 2006.*]

JOHN PURCELL
3744 Marielene Circle,
College Station TX 77845, USA

This loc feels like I'm coming off a long layoff, which is a really weird feeling. The last letter of comment I wrote was 4 September, which was only four days ago, but for some reason it feels like weeks. Really strange, and I just can't explain it. Of course, it may be the fact that I just counted twelve fanzines in my To Be Read pile, including the latest *Steam Engine Time*, which is compiled from posted downloads and old-fashioned paper zines posted via snail mail. That might have something to do with it.

So anyway, congratulations on your recent birthday. It certainly looks like everyone had a great time at the bash. There is no way that 100 people would show up at a sixtieth birthday party for me unless I invited all of my colleagues at Blinn College. Fortunately, this event is seven years off, so there's no need to be concerned. Yet. But it is very doubtful that the number of attendees will approach the number of years I will have accrued. In any event, happy birthday, Bruce! May there be many, many more.

[*brg* I seemed to have confused you, John. When I turned fifty in 1997, I invited 150 people, and 99 turned up on the night. When I turned sixty this year, I was disappointed that I had to keep the numbers to 50. I invited 59 people, and 50 turned up. The uninvited 100 don't invite me to events any more.*]

Jennifer Bryce contributed a sweet little faanish pastiche for this issue. I really like the idea of the Hundred Acre Wood being analogous to Australian fandom. This was really quite clever, and makes me wonder about what Bruce Bear's half-full Useful Pot is an allusion to. Beer glass? His mental state? Memory banks? Oh, bother . . .

Okay. The study of Shakespeare's *Pericles* was interesting. I have read a lot of Willy's plays in my career as an English student and now teacher, but this is one that has flown under my radar. Tony's essay is notable not only for discussing the play and its authorship, but for examining the way that various editors have changed the text over the years. While the actual language essentially remains the same, the deletions certainly reveal editorial bias as to what each editor deems relevant or necessary for furthering the events. The Oxford edition appears to be the most comprehensive version, but there are positive things to be said about the other editions, such as the streamlining of the plot by omitting unnecessary verbiage or scenes that have little to do with the story or add to the drama.

Yes, there is a huge debate over whether or not Shakespeare collaborated on or stole these writings, and excellent essays have been written concerning whether or not a man by the name of William Shakespeare really existed, a composite author, or if it was the nom de plume of another writer. We may never know. The bottom line remains that whoever really did write these

dramas, comedies and poems was excellent, and our literature is much richer for it. Besides, it's pretty cool that one of the lesser plays was being performed. Now I'd like to see a production of *Pericles*, thank you very much. This is a well-written piece and I enjoyed reading it.

I think you've got something here with your Theory of Creative Grumpiness. This almost makes me look forward to old age. Already I have been getting fan mail from the AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) telling me I can sign up now if I desire. And I just might take them up on that offer. Getting discounts on rental cars, hotel rooms, meals, plane fare, etc., sounds like a great deal for a fan. Anything to cut any aspect of convention costs sounds like a wonderful idea!

8 September 2007

MURRAY MOORE
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Mississauga ONT L4Y 1C8, Canada

I wish I had LoCed *brg* 47, to increase the number of Canadians in the lettercol from three to four. I wondered for a second about Murray MacLachlan, but he does not seem to be the Canadian singer/songwriter, Murray McLauchlan. Good first name, though; not common; dignified, yes, dignified but with hints of wisdom and good humour. You can trust a Murray, I always say.

I read Tony Thomas's 'The Perils of *Pericles*' sitting at a picnic table within sight of the Festival Theatre in Stratford, Ontario. Tony includes a reference to a Stratford, Ontario Shakespeare production.

The weather was perfect. I had stopped on the way at Wilfrid Laurier University, in Waterloo, to deliver to our younger son Dennis odds and ends. We had driven Dennis to Waterloo, and his first year in university, on Labour Day.

I was not in Stratford to see Shakespeare. Yesterday I saw a double bill of Albee's *A Delicate Balance* and Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*. And what happened during *A Delicate Balance* will interest Tony because Tony is a sometime actor.

The Stratford Festival mounts productions in four locations in central Stratford. *A Delicate Balance* was being performed in the Tom Patterson Theatre. The Tom Patterson Theatre is my favourite of the four theatres. It is the only theatre not owned by the Festival. Outside the Festival season the building is used by residents to play tennis and volleyball.

The Festival Theatre is famous for its thrust stage. The stage in the Tom Patterson Theatre is 90 per cent thrust and 10 per cent proscenium arch. The audience sits in a horseshoe around three sides of the stage on ordinary stairs on stepped levels that you see in gymnasiums. The benefit is that the actors are close to the audience.

A Delicate Balance, Edward Albee, 1967 Pulitzer Prize-winning drama. Heavyweight cast including Martha Henry as Agnes and Fiona Reid as Claire. David Fox is Tobias. Fox is the replacement for Stratford's Pavarotti, William Hutt. Hutt retired two years ago but came out of retirement to play Tobias. I had a ticket to see Hutt perform in *The Tempest*, his official last role, but because I went to the Milwaukee Ditto two years ago I switched my *Tempest* ticket for an *Into the Woods* ticket.

Hutt was announced last fall as a cast member of *A Delicate Balance*. Early this year Hutt withdrew from the

cast. News of his illness followed (leukemia, I think it was). Hutt died last spring. Fox took the Tobias role. Fox is only in his third year in the Stratford company but he is an award-winning veteran of the thriving Toronto theatre scene, beginning in the early 1970s.

Before the first of the two intermissions Fox is in trouble. He hesitates so long that a female voice from the rafters gives Fox his line. And within 30 to 60 seconds Fox can't remember his line. He asks, 'Line, please.' For the rest of the performance he was fine.

During the intermission a veteran usher told me she had never witnessed an actor balk. The woman on my right said she was worried that Fox was having a stroke. His hands were shaking when he was pouring a drink in character. Fox's face is gaunt. His cheek bones are prominent, as are the tendons in his neck. I am guessing he is in his late sixties-early seventies; his appearance of course could be natural aging. I wish him well.

In baseball terms what Fox did was balk. In baseball a pitcher balks when he interrupts his throw to home plate and instead throws to his teammate on first base in an attempt to pick off a runner not standing on first base. When a pitcher balks the runner walks, not runs, to second base.

The closest to a balk that I have seen during the performance of a play occurred two years ago during the performance of a George F. Walker play. Well-known actor and playwright Michael Healey was substituting for an actor unable to perform. Before the start of the performance we in the audience were told that Healey had performed the role but ten years previous and that he might have a problem remembering his lines. Therefore Healey was going to hold a copy of the script. Refunds would be given to anyone who was upset.

Healey held the pages through the performance but I never saw him look at the script. If Healey did, or if he turned the pages, he did so when the audience was looking at the other actors.

The other disruption that I have witnessed was mechanical, not human, error. Early this year, after the intermission in the Soulpepper Theatre production of Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, the curtain on one side of the stage caught, such that audience members on that side could not see all of the stage.

Actor Oliver Dennis broke his blocking to move to the trouble spot and, as casually as possible, freed the curtain. But the rising curtain caught and pushed off his hairpiece. The result was a laugh from the audience and a split second acknowledgment of an unscripted smile from Dennis.

Are you really Australian, Bruce? I have never seen a photo of you with a beard.

10 September 2007

[*brg* Thanks for the long, juicy letter of comment. I trust Tony Thomas will be pleased much other interest in theatre among my readers.

I wore a beard for two years — October 1975 to December 1977 — but I could never recognise the person in the mirror when I looked in it, so I shaved it off. My life improved greatly from then on, so I've never regrown it.*]

Toronto theatre audiences are too generous in their standing ovations. I don't stand just because other people stand. But yesterday I was one of the first to stand at the conclusion of a Soulpepper performance of *Three Sisters*. I stood and clapped my hands despite the nose ring.

The opening was simple and striking. The lights came

up and the entire cast was sitting on chairs in a line at the back of the stage. Several characters spoke, and then the group stood and walked elsewhere on the stage and continued speaking or left the stage.

The actress playing Olga — d'bi.young.anitafrika — spoke first or maybe second. Olga had a long speech. I was sitting in the third row and I was feeling sorry for d'bi.young.anitafrika. She was speaking and her hands were one in the other unmoving in her lap and her nose was running. I could see the moisture under her nose. Almost as bad as not remembering her lines.

But what I was seeing was a silver nose ring, the ring that you see in the nose of a bull, but without the space to tie the end of a rope. In the nose of Olga, sister of Irina and Masha and of Andrei in a 1901 play.

I am liberal or at least I like to think I am, so I don't object to colourblind character casting, even though I have to work harder as a member of an audience. Also I had to filter her Caribbean accent. I allow that if I shared her accent I would think that all of the other actors were good; too bad about their clashing accents.

d'bi.young.anitafrika is an excellent actress. But wearing the nose ring was bad manners. A nose ring, unlike a pacemaker, can be removed temporarily, surely. Or, as Olga is unmarried, she could have been given a moustache.

16 September 2007

CASEY WOLF

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Vancouver BC V5N, Canada

A teensy bit of publishing news: my story 'These Old Bones' has been selected for Ahmed Khan's new anthology *SF Waxes Philosophical*, which will have stories by Michael Bishop and Matt Hughes — I may as well give you the list:

- Michael Bishop: 'Diary of a Dead Man'
- Douglas van Belle: 'The Squirrel That Didn't Bark' (novella)
- Paul Carlson: 'Waveform'
- Sean Foster: 'Different and Again Different'
- Ren Holton: 'Lords of Light'
- Matt Hughes: 'Liw Osfeo and the Worm'
- Luke Jackson: 'The Saving Power'
- Ahmed A. Khan: 'The Shores of Id' (I have reasons for including one of mine; see below)
- Ted Kosmatka: 'The God Engine'
- Marian Powell: 'Categorical Imperative' (changed title, pending author's approval)
- Ian Shoebridge: 'The Day the World Lost Gravity'
- Steven Utley: 'Chaos and the Gods'
- Jetse de Vries: 'The Third Scholar'
- Casey Wolf: 'These Old Bones'

Another story, 'Claude and the Henry Moores', which I may have sent you, has been accepted by *Storyteller* magazine, which is not a bad sale from my point of view. It is a Canadian magazine that features fiction from several genres, has a lively and professional presence, is respected, and pays. So although no American has ever heard of it, it is still a good sale and I am happy with it.

And finally, 'The MagniCharisma Machine' was given an honourable mention in the Writers of the Future contest, which is better than nothing, as they receive thousands of submissions due to their huge prizes and lack of entry fees.

So, a little egoboo for a generally hopeless author. (That is, I am happy with my writing — though not at all to the self-satisfied or bragging stages — but I am embarrassed by my inability to get stories accepted. I really don't write what people want, just what I want, which I guess *should* be reward enough.)

No idea yet if I'll be able to make it to Oz this year. Still hoping. My Tasmanian friend wants me to come in April or May. Since I was hoping to escape allergy season here (February–April), I will come as early as I can in her time slot, if i can get reliable cat-sitting. My buddies are increasingly delicate. Fintan is pretty robust, and I use him as my kitty garburetor, eating what the little Mr Fussybudgets reject (Fintan's the only one not on a special diet). But Sparky's chronic pancreatitis is reaching new depths and he can turn very suddenly to a very bad state.

Fluffy, with his nemaline rod myopathy (think muscular dystrophy and you're almost there), has lived a long life, at nearly eight, but is having hair-raising downward turns that we have so far been able to lift him out of again. However, it is only because I am really on my toes that I notice immediately when he is out of sorts and don't dismiss it as nothing, and it is hard to find a cat-sitter at all, let alone one who is willing to devote the time needed to do it right when the kitties are delicate (let alone one who is willing to take the risk). What is nothing in a normal cat could be the end for Fluffy if not attended to — and thus it was that (for example) I spent all of Monday going back and forth in a borrowed car to my distantly located vet, having him tended for a mysterious constipation that had him completely exhausted. And thus it is that the cats' other mother (the one with the pay cheque and the allergic roomie) is putting most of her disposable income into vet bills these days. (Well, she did say it was *disposable*.)

I thought that you, being a cat person, might find those tidbits of interest.

I'll be passing on your trip report to my friend Howard, who always reads your zines when I am done with them, and from him they will go into the fannish shrine.

13 September 2007

Ahmed has a very small press publisher who did his last anthology, and did a good job, from what I understand, but can't pay a cent, and so he is looking around to see if he can find someone who can, with the understanding that if he can't find anyone, they'll still do it. It's been awhile since I eavesdropped on the conversation so I don't know where things are right now.

I would never have read (or heard about) George Turner if not for you, or Garner's *The Owl Service*, for example, and I have received great pleasure from both of these acquaintances. Although your articles don't earn you money, at least you can get them published. With fiction you would have trouble achieving either, if your luck is like most of ours.

If you truly want to write fiction, you absolutely could. It isn't so much a gift — the having of ideas — as a result of a certain action, the action being writing, with the co-action of scrutinising everything in your path and asking, 'How could I use that?', but most of the time I don't start with ideas, anyway, certainly not well-developed ones, and many people I know write this same way. In fact, much of my favourite writing does. The advantage of this is that it takes you in directions your conscious mind would definitely reject, as with my story 'Miss Lonelygenes' Secret', which was distasteful to me

for the first, oh, seven drafts. I now appreciate it, but if I had thought out ahead of time what the plot would be I would have said: 'Yuk, no! What's behind door number two?'

This style of writing starts with a feeling, an image, a line of dialogue — a colour, even — which you then doggedly pursue, gaining more and more information which by its existence limits and directs the story. I find it an exhilarating chase, although there is often the fear that it will land me up in a bush with no story, just a bunch of burrs in my clothes.

But that doesn't happen if you brazen forth. Stick around long enough and you always figure it out. (Sometimes we are talking hours, sometimes we are talking years.) So if you want to write stories, just start. They will come. (And I will read them and critique them and coddle you along, if you like.)

I know we are told that is a naughty way to write. We are supposed to work out everything in advance: plot, technology, history of everyone down to their earliest surgeries. And this is a venerable way to write a story, too. But it has been misrepresented as the only and best way to write, and in fact it only works for a certain type of brain, not all brains. And even those brains who do take to that style probably would benefit from the suggestion I am making, as an exercise for getting their creative juices flowing, and finding out what is behind their 'thinking' mind, if nothing else.

My vet called yesterday. She had begun to think it was not a fecal blockage Fluffy was experiencing, but a urinary problem. Not necessarily crystals, but, because of his weakened muscles, simply an inability to empty the bladder once it filled to a certain point. The fact that he didn't ever seem to pass faeces, but the lump slowly dissolved away, supports her idea that it was the muscles we were feeling, bunched up in an effort to pass the urine, not faeces.

I was quite alarmed — he has had crystals twice in the past. (The second time shouldn't have happened, but my cat-sitters decided to save me money and took him off the crystal-preventing food when I was in Haiti.) I had given him a little contraband recently because he had lost his appetite dramatically and was worryingly ill. I was trying to get him eating again. We didn't test the urine but it seems possible that he had in fact started to block — either way, no more contraband, and no more dry food, even though he vastly prefers it. He needs lots of fluid to keep things nice in there.

This is why i'm not sure whether or not I can come to Australia. I need to nail down some pretty alert cat-sitters, and so far no one has committed. Wish me luck! (and fluffy and sparky, more to the point).

15 September 2007

[*brg* Casey has since written to say that she has suffered a very unfortunate 2007, and that personal health and accommodation problems will probably delay her long-anticipated second trip to Australia. I met her in 1985 during her first trip here.*]

ROBERT ELORDIETA

20 Custer Circle, Traralgon VIC 3844

The only time that I see movie trailers is when I go to the cinema to watch a movie. Otherwise I don't see any trailers at all. It has been a very long time since I have been invited to a preview screening too. The most recent trailer that I saw was *Seeker*.

Two action movies that I have seen at the cinema recently were *Die Hard 4* and *The Bourne Ultimatum*. It was at the *Bourne* movie that I saw the trailer for *Seeker*. I preferred the *Bourne* movie to the *Die Hard* movie. *The Bourne Ultimatum* was a great finish to the *Bourne* trilogy.

I can tell you which book series the *Seeker* movie is based on. The reason I can tell you is because I have actually read all of the books in the series quite a while ago. When I saw the trailer it looked familiar to me. I then saw the book at K Mart and I recognised the title, author and picture on the front cover of the book. I couldn't believe it that it had been made into a movie. The book had been written in 1973. The book series is a children's book series written by Susan Cooper. *Seeker* is based on the second book, titled *The Dark is Rising*.

I didn't know that the Anime movie, *Howl's Moving Castle*, is based on the novel written by Diana Wynne Jones. I still haven't seen the movie. I haven't read Diana Wynne Jones, but one day I might.

15 September 2007

BEN INDICK

428 Sagamore Ave.,
Teaneck NJ 07666-2626, USA

Congratulations for the splendid Chandler Award!

At a mere stripling age of sixty, which you think is a lot, but is nearly a quarter-century less than my old cocker eighty-four, you have nothing ahead but natural catastrophes.

[*brg* I realise this.*]

I have just recovered, I hope, from four broken ribs, incurred when I fell after clambering off the table from my fortieth and final radiation treatment for a resurgent prostate cancer making its return some fifteen years after I had the damned prostate gland removed. For better or worse, I am still here, but that is part of the old age syndrome.

More important, my son Michael Korie, who also managed to fall and break bones in one hand, is busy like Tony Thomas theatrically. He was lyricist for *Grey Gardens*, an off-Broadway and Broadway success, and the attention he received resulted in calls for work with big names. His play is now in print, and also is in the running for Best of the Year for the initial, off-Broadway show, whose ending, softer and more pat, differed slightly but significantly from the Broadway version. Not Shakespearean, but nice. I am not going to quote his lyrics, but *Pericles* could use him.

19 September 2007

CHRIS GARCIA

1401 North Shoreline Boulevard,
Mountain View CA 94043, USA

Two **brg*s* drop by, and now I am LoCing on Saturday, which is my recent LoCing day. I'm very pleased to see that I get to comment on a couple of Gillespie zines because that makes me think of Australia, which reminds me that Geelong is in the Finals!!! You don't know how long I've been waiting for Geelong to win the Premiership and it's looking like this is our year! It was fun when Janice Gelb came back to NorCal a while back and we sat and talked Footy while the two native Aussies

didn't watch!

[*brg* I'm one Aussie who wouldn't bother talking about or watching footy, although even I noticed that Geelong did well in 2007.*]

OK, on to zines!

Sorry to hear about the death of your mother. It's amazing that your mother's birthday is exactly the same as my Grandmother's. Strange things like that seem to happen to me. It's amazing how families come together for funerals and weddings in much the same way. I've noticed it, especially following my father's death. It was exactly the same way we all came together for my cousin's wedding. There was the same annoyed rushing, same last-minute preparations, same children running around, the same inappropriate jokes being made by me and those younger members of our family.

Happy 60th, Bruce! I'm turning 33 on 21 October, but I'm not celebrating until 21 February. Why not? I'm having a 33 1/3 birthday party. Since I'm gonna make it to 100 (come hell or high water) that'll be 1/3 of my lifespan!

Creative Grumpiness? Sounds like a good thing. I may well start following these steps after my 33 1/3 party, right as I enter into my second third!

And King Vidor's *War and Peace* might be one of the ten best Hollywood movies ever made!

23 September 2007

GREG BENFORD

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rvin CA 92697-4575, USA

Congrats on 60!

Insights galore from 'The Perils of *Pericles*' by Tony Thomas; I like erudition delivered without the trappings of academe.

When he says, 'It was in 1612, a quarrel between Stephen Belott and Christopher Mountjoy, two French Protestant wig-makers, for non-payment of a dowry. Prior again: Both Shakespeare and George Wilkins gave depositions. Shakespeare had lived in Mountjoy's house, and testified that he had known Belott and Mountjoy for ten years "or thereabouts". Wilkins had known them for seven years.' — is this the document which bears Shakespeare's signature as an X?

24 September 2007

ROBIN JOHNSON

30 Mona Street, Battery Point TAS 7000

[*brg* In **brg** 50, I congratulated Robin Johnson on winning this year's Big Heart Award at Nippon, the 2007 World Convention held in Yokohama, Japan. I asked Robin for his side of the event.*]

I caught up with John Hertz in Japan. I was talking to him a few minutes before the awards ceremony, and he previously asked me if Dave Kyle had been seen at the Con. Dave it was who had taken over the duty of running the Big Heart Award from Forry Ackerman, for whom it is now titled. Presumably John was checking I'd be on hand! I certainly had no idea what was to happen. I do remember last year when Filthy Pierre got both the Big Heart and the First Fandom award (I think



Hugo Awards winners, accepters and others, Nippon, Yokohama, 2007. Robin Johnson, Big Heart Award winner, is second from left, standing. (Photo: Lisa Freitag, courtesy Locus Publications.)

it was), neither group knew for sure he was there!

Dave, though no longer a young man, has been one of my oldest friends in fandom since I was living in the UK in the sixties. I have enjoyed visiting him and his wife Ruth at his home in northern New York state, and at many conventions over the years. He usually travels by courtesy of the US Air Force, as a reward for long years of service, rather as I have been known to travel widely thanks to my British Airways pension. Japan had proved a little too difficult for him this year, as it turned out — and I left John in his white-tie formal attire to find a seat in the auditorium.

The ceremonies — for there were several — were introduced in both English and Japanese by George Takei, who was GoH at MedTrek way back when.

My recollections of the ceremony are hardly to be trusted, but it seems to me that John announced a Japanese fan as this year's winner, followed by the comment that he had died during the year, and then announced my name. I was called up to the stage to be presented with my plaque by Peggy Rae Sapienza and Perianne Lurie. As someone receiving an award a few minutes before had said that they were 'gobsmacked', which described me too, I couldn't say that as well — and as a result have totally blanked on whatever it was I did say. Probably fairly banal, but I hope it did not sound too ungrateful.

I found out later that 'gobsmacked' is not a word familiar to many outside Australia and the UK — good-

ness knows how it appeared in Japanese translation.

Before the Hugo Awards there was a lengthy stage presentation by some very athletic rubber-suited men and monsters throwing each other around in near-darkness, lit mainly by their eyes; and this year's Hugo incorporates a figure of Ultraman as well as Mt Fuji and the rocket — it was shown off before any were given out.

18 November 2007

Farewells

During the last twelve months, not only have we lost many famous fan personalities, such as **Bob Tucker**, **Lee Hoffman**, **rich brown** and **Dick Eney**, but also several ANZAPA members have lost relatives and close friends. Regular Gillespiezine readers who have been bereft include **Lucy Sussex**, who lost her mother early this year, **Frank Weissenborn**, who lost his father, and **Rosaleen Love**, who kindly sent me her eulogy for her husband **Harold Love** when he died on 12 August after a long illness. Rosaleen also sent me the obituary from the London *Independent*, 12 October 2007, which alerted me for the first time that Harold has been one of the world's leading seventeenth-century scholars, responsible for *Scribal Publications in Seventeenth-century England* (1993), which, according to *The Independent*, 'dismantled the assumption, based on centuries of tradition that by the late 16th century, the printed word had all but taken over from manuscript'. Harold Love's great reputation might have been apparent in Britain, and to his students and colleagues at Monash University, but his passing went unnoticed by Australian newspapers.

Best wishes to us all during this melancholy year of 2007 (except, of course, for those readers who had a great 2007), including my sisters and I. On 25 August, **Elaine** helped **Jeanette**, **Robin**, her partner **Grant**, and me to plant the remaining ashes of our mother, who died on 4 March, under a red *Grevillea lavandulacea* bush here in Greensborough. Thanks to Elaine's care, so far our mother's bush has survived the drought.

— **Bruce Gillespie**, 3 December 2007

Back cover: Edible Greensborough

It's pleasant to be able to invite people to share some good nosh in the Far North. This extract from the Age's 'Epicure' section backs up my belief that we can take people to some good restaurants in Greensborough. Best of the places listed is Urban Grooves, which has amazing cakes and desserts, and the best coffee in Greensborough, and serves tea in a pot. Greensborough Italian Restaurant is also very good, but its staff work on the basis that when Greensboroughans go out for dinner, they want to stoke up for the coming week. Not listed is Cafe Spice, the best Indian restaurant we've found for years (because of its fresh ingredients). It's down the bottom of Main Street, near the station (not quite opposite item 4, the Cake Kitchen). I've only just tried Lemongrass, a Thai food restaurant that's opened since this list was published. It is next door to Eos (item 6).

POSTCODES

3088

Greensborough

Treed, hilly and watered by the Plenty River, Greensborough is a flourishing service centre that feeds greenies from the hills and townies alike. Long-established food outlets delight loyal locals, but a few recent additions showcase the area's diversity and talent.



10 OF THE BEST

1 Sculli Brothers Growers

Fresh, ground floor, Greensborough Plaza. The Sculli family has kept Greensborough healthy since 1960, offering fresh produce in a beautiful shop.

2 Urban Grooves, 99 Grimshaw

Street. With staff keen to please and the food to back them up, this classy cafe/bar spills out onto the pavement. Lively atmosphere and

fresh, earthy decor. Comfortable spots for reading while sipping.

3 Amato's Deli, ground floor, Greensborough Plaza. For all

your esoteric food needs, or just a judicious selection of local and imported cheeses, see Amato — if you can get a spot at the counter.

4 Greensborough Cake Kitchen, 71 Main Street. First-

rate pasticceria, gelateria, and cafe. Try to worm the recipe for Russian Delight (a fruit and nut slice) out of them — I can't.

5 Baristas Coffee Co. Ground Floor, Greensborough Plaza. A bright, nook-filled little cafe. Decent coffee. Good choices for vegetarians and the health-conscious. A shopaholic's retreat.

6 Eos Greek Taverna, 88 Grimshaw Street. Santorini in suburbia, especially the courtyard in summer. Locals love

the lamb, but dip fanciers indulge with dollops of the *htipiti*, a delicious feta, roasted capsicum and chilli combination.

7 Huong Trinh Bakery, 44 Main Street. Lovely baked goods. Try a ham and cheese mayo bake plus an almond croissant for a sustaining lunch.

8 Greensborough Italian Restaurant, 73 Grimshaw Street. A long-term success with assured style, friendly service and traditional home-style fare.

9 Linh Linh 2, 32 Main Street. Good Vietnamese in a pleasant atmosphere. Real value for money. Renowned for speedy service.

10 Greensborough Hotel, 73 Main Street. Where Greensborough parties. Big, tasty meals, good wines by the very affordable glass.

