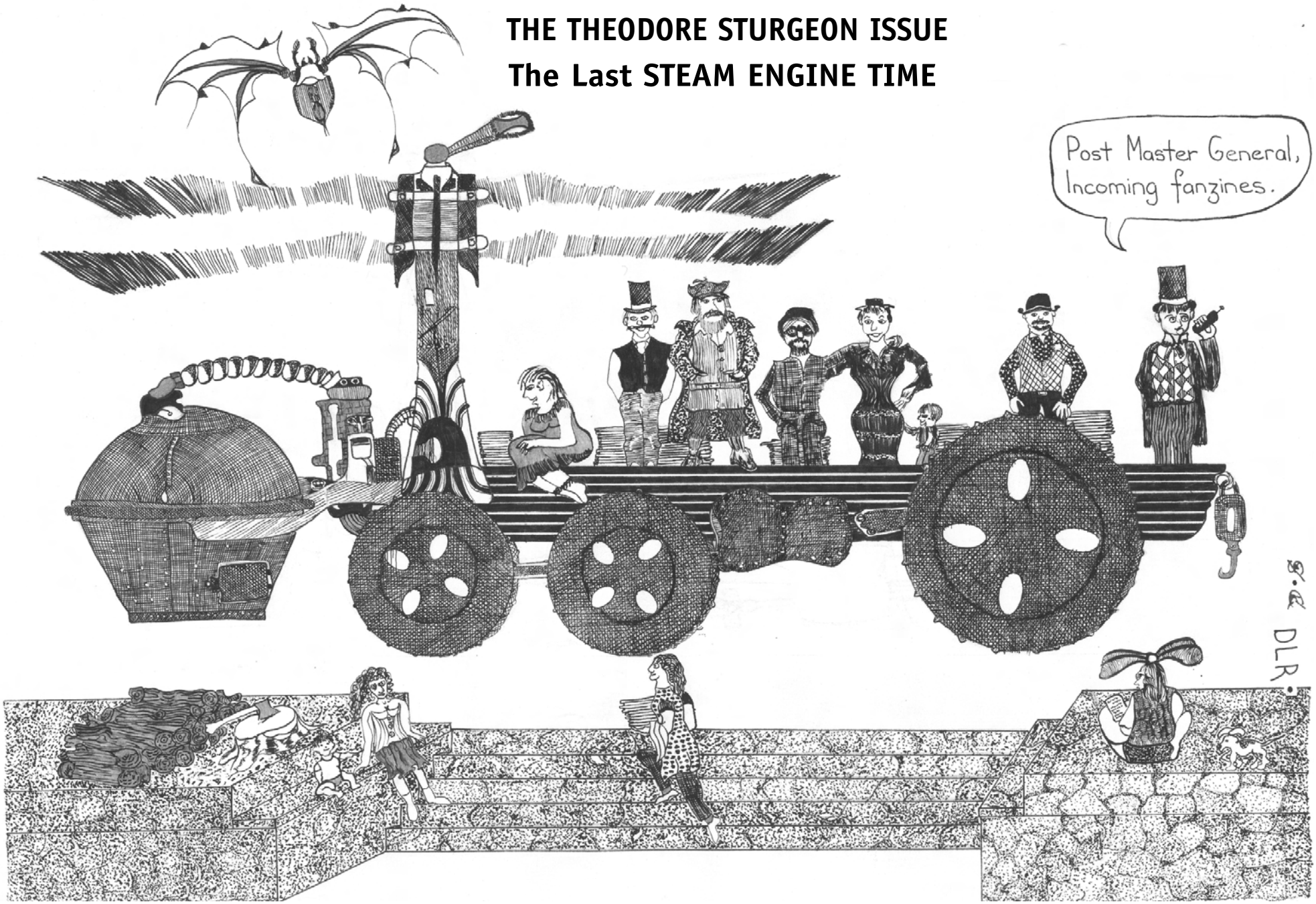
STEAM ENGINE TIME 13

THE THEODORE STURGEON ISSUE

The Last STEAM ENGINE TIME



If human thought is a growth, like all other growths, its logic is without foundation of its own, and is only the adjusting constructiveness of all other growing things. A tree cannot find out, as it were, how to blossom, until comes blossom-time. A social growth cannot find out the use of steam engines, until comes steam-engine time.

— Charles Fort, *Lo!*, quoted in Westfahl, *Science Fiction Quotations*, Yale UP, 2005, p. 286

Steam Engine Time 13

Steam Engine Time **No 13, March 2012**, 118 pages, was edited for the last time by
Bruce Gillespie (gandc@pacific.net.au), 5 Howard St., Greensborough VIC 3088, Australia, and
Janine Stinson (tropicsf@gmail.com), PO Box 248, Eastlake, MI 49626-0248 USA and published at
http://efanzines.com/SFC/SteamEngineTime/SET13.pdf. Members fwa.

Illustrations: Various book and DVD/Blu-ray covers; plus: **Stephen Campbell and David Russell** (front cover:); **Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)** (p. 4); **Ed Emshwiller** (p. 16, 17); **Brad W. Foster** (pp. 70, 74, 75, 76, 77, 80, 98); **Helena and Mervyn Binns** (pp. 72, 73); **Amy Harlib** (p. 84, 99); **Stephen Campbell** (pp. 102, 107); **Kathleen Jennings** (p. 118).

Contents

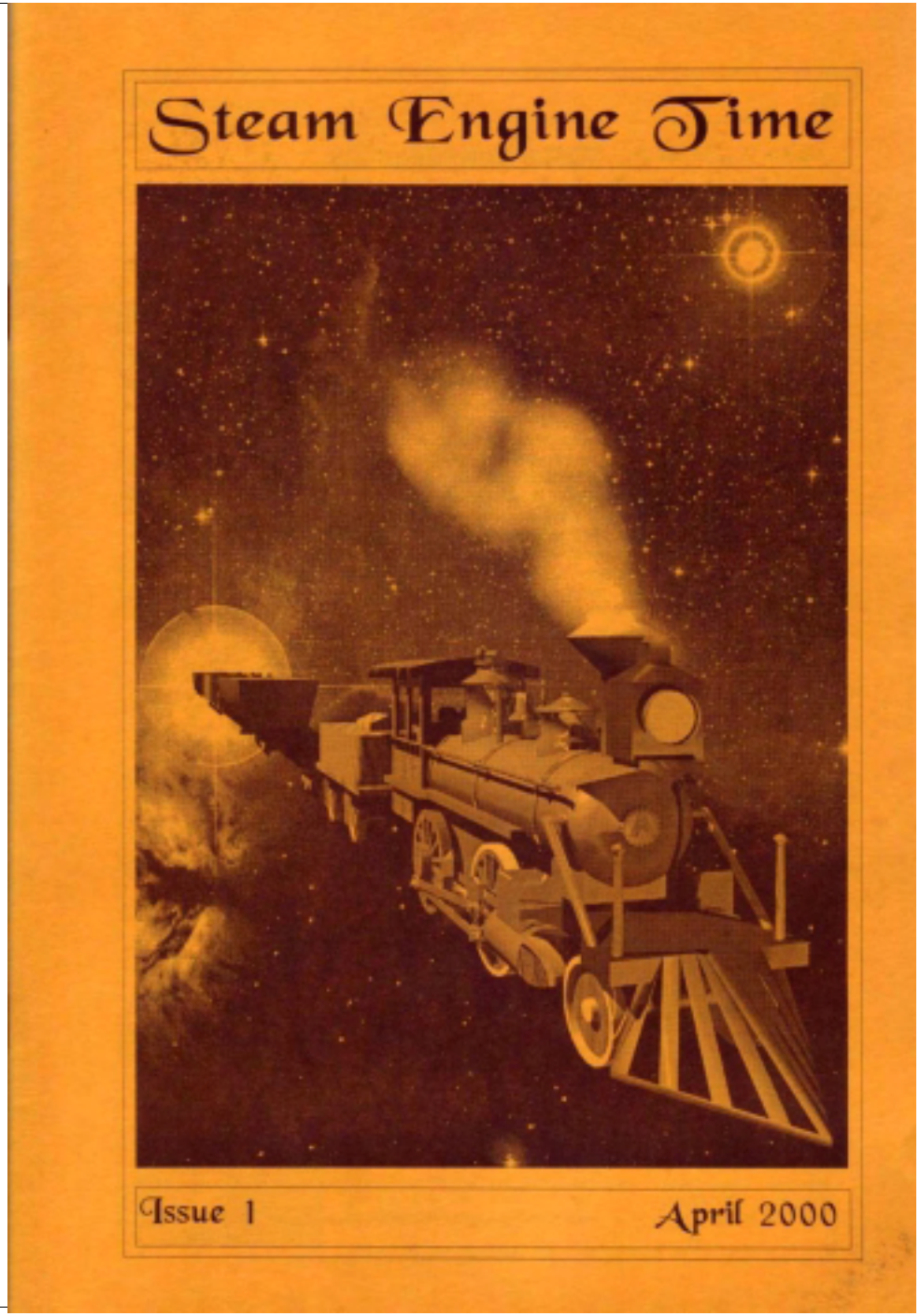
Editorial

Farewell to Steam Engine Time

Beginnings

Steam Engine Time was the result of a dinner after the Hugo Awards ceremony at Aussiecon 3 in Melbourne in 1999. Maureen Kincaid Speller, Paul Kincaid, and I were all too tired to attend the traditional Hugo Losers Party, so we relaxed around a table in the Chinese restaurant of what was then the Centro Hotel, just off the convention itself, and caught up with the natter we had been promising ourselves all convention. I knew Maureen and Paul, resident in Folkestone, Britain, principally from the pages of Acnestis, the apa of sparkling writing we were in at the time. Our interests in science fiction and criticism seemed very similar. Dinner and wine led to creative speculation. Why don't we publish an international magazine of longer articles about science fiction and fantasy? We would share expenses and workload, avoiding the need to post copies overseas from either country. Within a few weeks of reaching home, Maureen emailed me the suggested name: 'Steam Engine Time', complete with the quotation from Charles Fort you can find on page 2 of most issues of the magazine.

In practical terms, the editor of the first three issues of *Steam Engine Time* was Paul Kincaid. He had some valuable contacts in British fandom and academic circles, he and Maureen wrote superbly about science fiction, and Paul managed to master the desktop publishing program Microsoft Publisher sufficiently to invent an effective, elegant page design for each issue. The problems came with the practicalities. Maureen and Paul produced too many copies of the first issue, then faced the problem of posting them. The response was good, but hardly as overwhelming as the initial print run might have inspired. I printed enough for the Australian readers. With the second issue, the content was even more exciting than in the first, but somehow copies did not reach people. And



by the time No 3 was edited, both Paul and Maureen found themselves with other interests, and as far as I know no copies were sent out from Britain. However, Maureen had put together a comprehensive fan address lists, so eventually I printed another 100 in Australia and sent them airmail to the people I knew were interested in the magazine.

This brings us to the end of 2001, then long silences between the editors of the magazine. I assumed that Paul and Maureen did not want to continue, and let the matter slide. Already I was planning to revive *SF Commentary*, the magazine I began in 1969, and I had my hands full with my apa obligations (Acnestis, until it folded in 2005, and ANZAPA, of which I became the Official Bloody Editor in 2004). I had great plans for reviving *The Metaphysical Review*, but that never happened.

In this way *Steam Engine Time* died for the first time somewhere between 2001 and 2003. One regret of mine was that we could no longer continue with Ditmar's (Dick Jenssen's) series of cover graphics. For each issue, he added another steam train to the pack of steam trains seen tootling through deep space.

Jan Stinson becomes co-editor

Steam Engine Time would not have appeared again after No 3 if it had not been for Janine Stinson. She wrote to me in 2004, from Michigan. We had never met (and still haven't). I had enjoyed the light and breezy tone of her fanzine *Peregrine Nations*. There had been nothing to indicate that she was interested in sercon (serious and constructive) fanzines, but she said that she hoped she could come on board as co-editor of a revived fanzine. However, recently bereaved and supporting a son, she had no cash to put into the venture, and would not be able to print and post copies for American/ British/European distribution.

We gave it a go, and you, the readers, rallied to the magazine. Several Ditmar nominations and wins followed, and a Chronos Award from Melbourne fans, so I was very pleased to be able to send Jan her own trophy after *Steam Engine Time* won Best Fan Publication in Melbourne in 2010.

I had to redesign the interior of the magazine slightly so that I could collate the pieces in Ventura rather than Publisher. Dick Jenssen was still willing to supply covers (although we had to give up the massed steam engines idea after Number 3), other fan artists began to send interior illustrations and back covers, and the flow of articles and letters swept in. Jan suggested that we post issues of *SET* on efanzines. com as PDF files, but redesign each issue from a 'portrait' layout (longer than wider) to a 'landscape' layout (wider than longer) to better suit the computer/ e-book screen. This use of double layout, one for print and one for the Web, has been very successful.

The only difficulty was sharing editorial duties, especially as (I quickly discovered) Americans have a quite different style of punctuation and spelling from Australians. Jan would scout for material in America, and send on any letters of comment she received. We found that, if we both worked originally in Word, the combined file for the letter column could easily be converted to *SET* layout style.

As many readers will remember from her editorials, Jan came slam bang up against the realities of Real Life. She found it increasingly hard to make a living, and the pension she was living on ran out when her son turned 16. She had to begin an entire new career of freelance editing and writing at just the time of her life when she might have hoped to be taking it easy. This led to clinical depression, so Jan has found herself increasingly unable to take part in the *Steam Engine Time* process.

It was with great regret that she wrote to me a few months ago:

> Much as I would like to continue with *SET*, I realize now that I'm not in a good mental/emotional position to do so. While the depression meds and therapy are working well, I know now that I have to avoid overloading myself (for values of me and no one else) or I'll be right back down the pit. So, I'll bow out now. I apologize for the long silence. And I'm sorry I never got any editing done on the next ish (that's what I remember happening [or not], at least).
>
> Have fun with your next editing job and I'd be pleased if you kept in touch, if you choose. I find that I read very few fanzines these days.
>
> New email address is tropicsf@ gmail.com. I seldom check the earth-link mail nowadays.
>
> Regards & regrets, Jan
>
> (27 October 2011)

Best wishes, Jan. May the world again turn bright for you.

Where to now?

Several people have suggested that I might find yet another international editor or editors in order to continue *Steam Engine Time*. But where in a 2011 world of easy options — blogs and Facebook and suchlike — would I find another person who (a) enjoys the hard work of writing material, drumming up articles from contributors, and printing, envelope stuffing, and posting print copies of a fanzine?; (b) has the income to pay half the postage bill?; and (c) has the time to put into such an enterprise? I know why I do it: it's what I do, the way our cat Harry eats food because it's there. I can't afford to pay overseas postage any more, so I'll be relying ever more on the marvellous Bill Burns and his efanzines.com site to distribute electronic copies, but I continue to enjoy editing the magazine.

I might as well consolidate all my SF and fantasy efforts back into *SF Commentary*, which ebbs and flows like a meandering river from decade to decade. Some writers send me articles about all the things in which we're interested other than SF and fantasy; for the time being they will appear in *Scratch Pad* on efanzines.com, and **brg** in the print edition (primarily for ANZAPA). I'm well aware that what I really need to publish is a generic *Bruce Gillespie Fanzine*, but that title is a bit clunky.

Steam Engine Time readers deserve an index of the run of the magazine. The trouble is that the landscape-shaped edition on efanzines.com has page numbering that is different from that of the equivalent print (portrait-shaped) edition. No matter. Please let me know if you want a copy of the index when it's finished.

— Bruce Gillespie, January 2011

Just the lists, Bruce, just the lists

I like to publish my 'Favourites' lists in *Steam Engine Time* as well as an extensive commentary on each list. No time for that now. It took me a week, from 1 to 7 January 2012, just to compile the following lists for 2011.

Favourite NOVELS read for the first time in 2011

1 *Cold Mountain*
Charles Frazier (1997) Sceptre. 438 pp.

2 *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*
Charles Dickens (1839) Penguin English Library. 974 pp.

3 *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*
Kate Atkinson (1995) Black Swan. 490 pp.

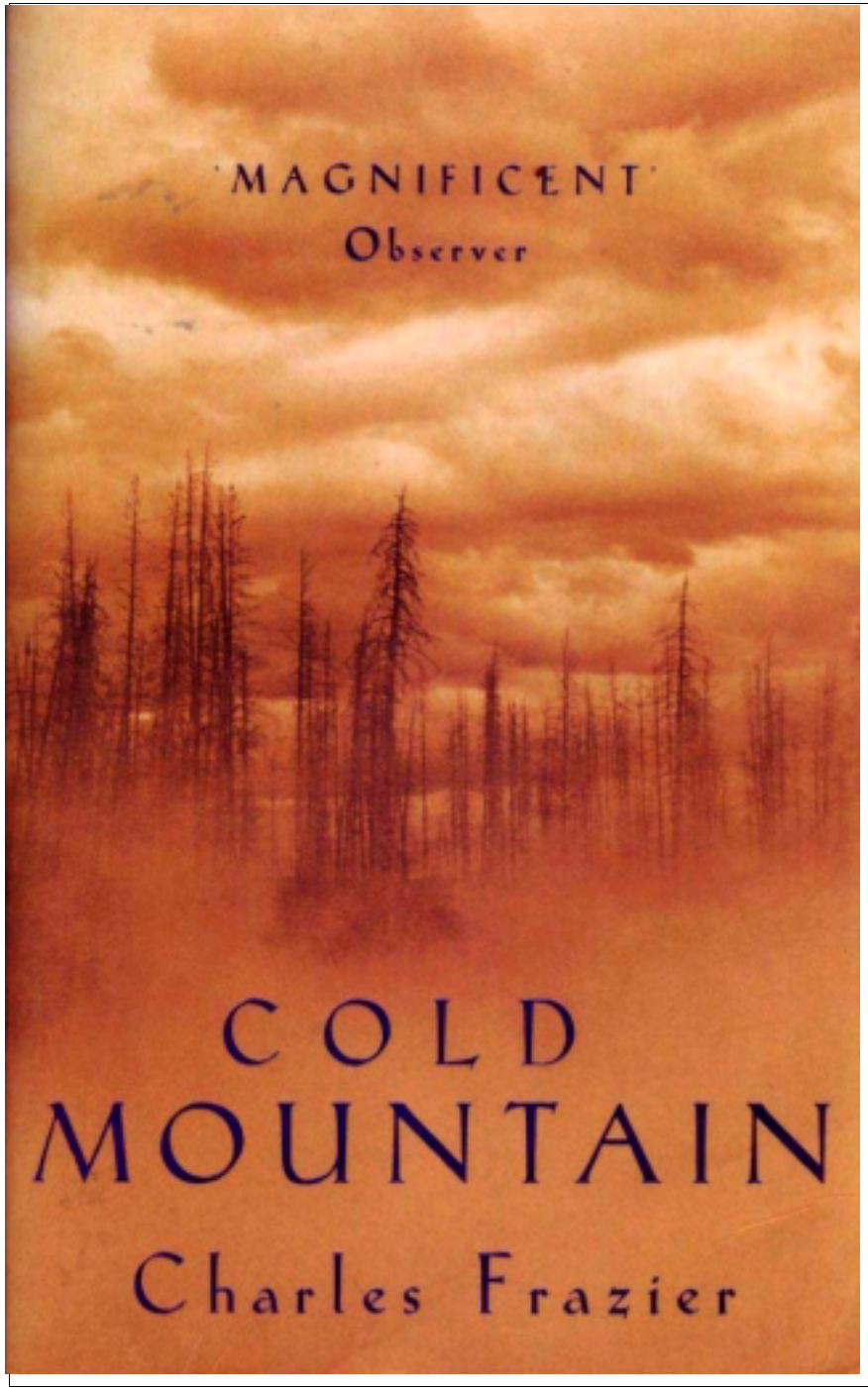
4 *The Islanders*
Christopher Priest (2011) Gollancz. 339 pp.

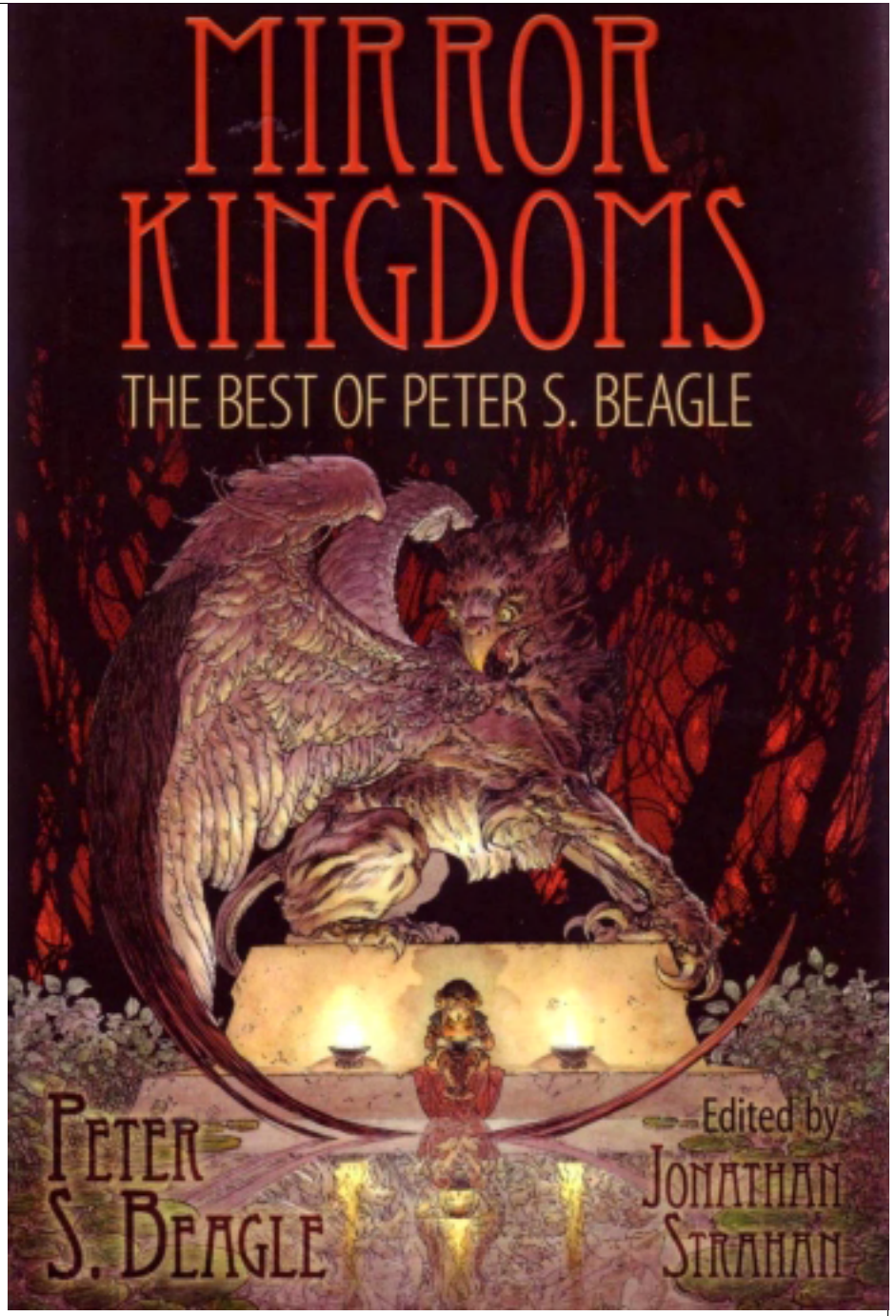
5 *Anna of the Five Towns*
Arnold Bennett (1902) Penguin. 256 pp.

6 *Small Vices*
Robert B. Parker (1997) John Murray. 308 pp.

7 *Whispering Death*
Gary Disher (2011) Text. 330 pp.

8 *Mr Wakefield's Crusade*


'MAGNIFICENT'
Observer
COLD
MOUNTAIN
Charles Frazier


MIRROR
KINGDOMS
THE BEST OF PETER S. BEAGLE
PETER
S. BEAGLE
Edited by
JONATHAN
STRAHAN

Bernice Rubens (1985) Abacus. 190 pp.

9 *The Last House-Party*
Peter Dickinson (1982) Hamlyn. 222 pp.

10 *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*
Mark Haddon (2003) Vintage. 272 pp.

11 *The Philosopher's Apprentice*
James Morrow (2008) William Morrow. 411 pp.

12 *A Darker Domain*
Val McDermid (2008) Harper. 392 pp.

13 *Mistification*
Kaaron Warren (2011) Angry Robot. 410 pp.

14 *The Insider*
Christopher Evans (1981) Faber. 215 pp.

Favourite BOOKS read for the first time during 2011

1 *Cold Mountain*
as for Novels

2 *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*
as for Novels

3 *Magic Kingdoms: The Best of Peter S. Beagle*
Peter S. Beagle ed. Jonathan Strahan (2010) Subterranean. 454 pp.

4 *The Girl With No Hands and Other Tales*
Angela Slatter (2010) Ticonderonga. 210 pp.

5 *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*
as for Novels

6 *The Islanders*
as for Novels

7 *Human Chain*
Seamus Heaney (2010) Faber. 85 pp.

8 *Life*
Keith Richards with James Fox (2010) Weidenfeld & Nicholson. 564 pp.

9 *Anna of the Five Towns*
as for Novels

10 *Small Vices*
as for Novels

11 *Whispering Death*
as for Novels

12 *Perfecting Sound Forever: The Story of Recorded Music*
Greg Milner (2009) Granta. 416 pp.

13 *Mr Wakefield's Crusade*
as for Novels

14 *The Last House-Party*
as for Novels

15 *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*
as for Novels

16 *Morning Knowledge*
Kevin Hart (2011) University of Notre Dame Press. 86 pp.

17 *Being an Actor*
Simon Callow (1984/1995) Penguin. 240 pp.

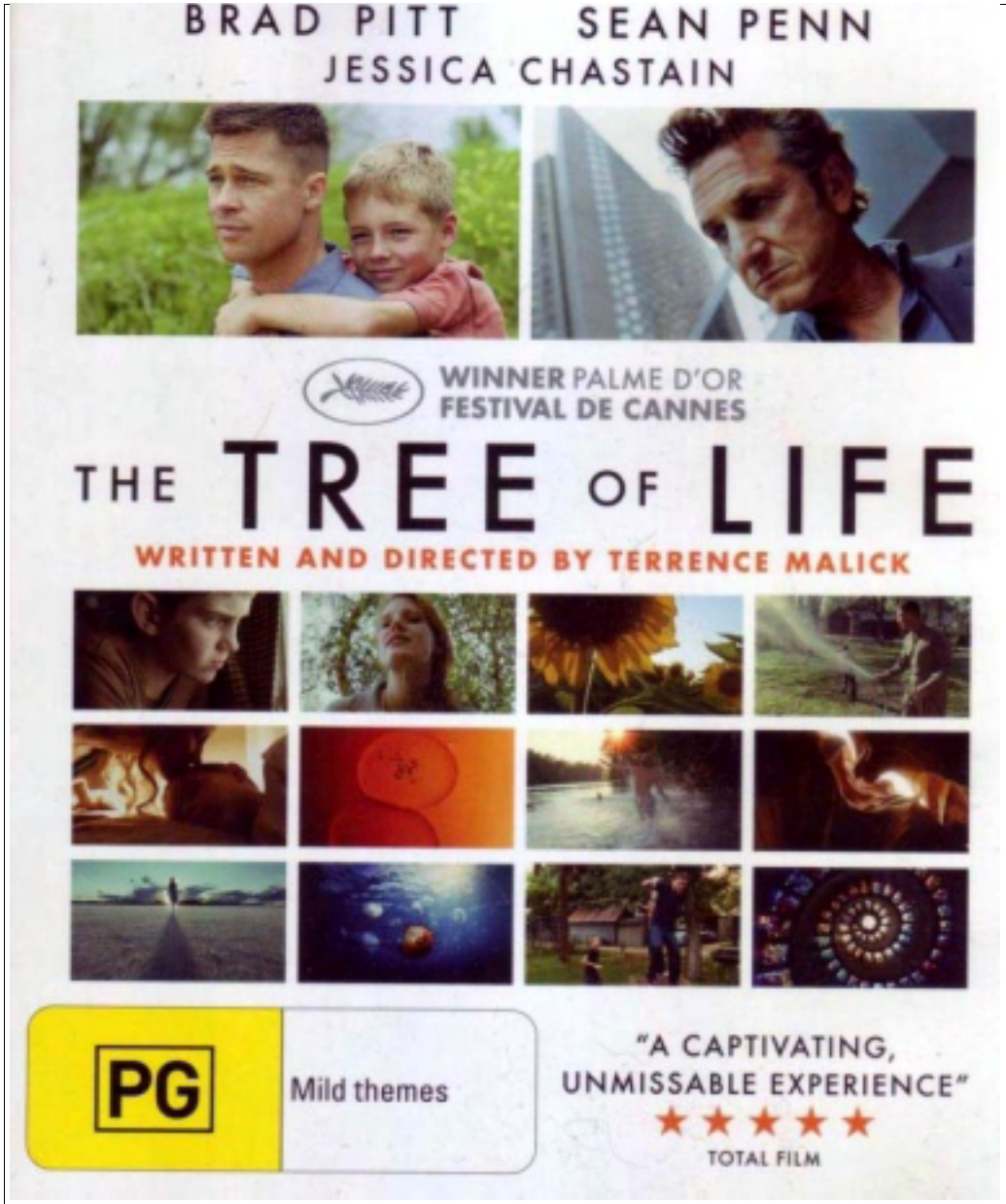
18 *Listen to This*
Alex Ross (2010) Farrar Straus & Giroux. 366 pp.

19 *Franklin and Eleanor*
Hazel Rowley (2010) Farrar Straus & Giroux. 345 pp.

20 *The Philosopher's Apprentice*
as for Novels

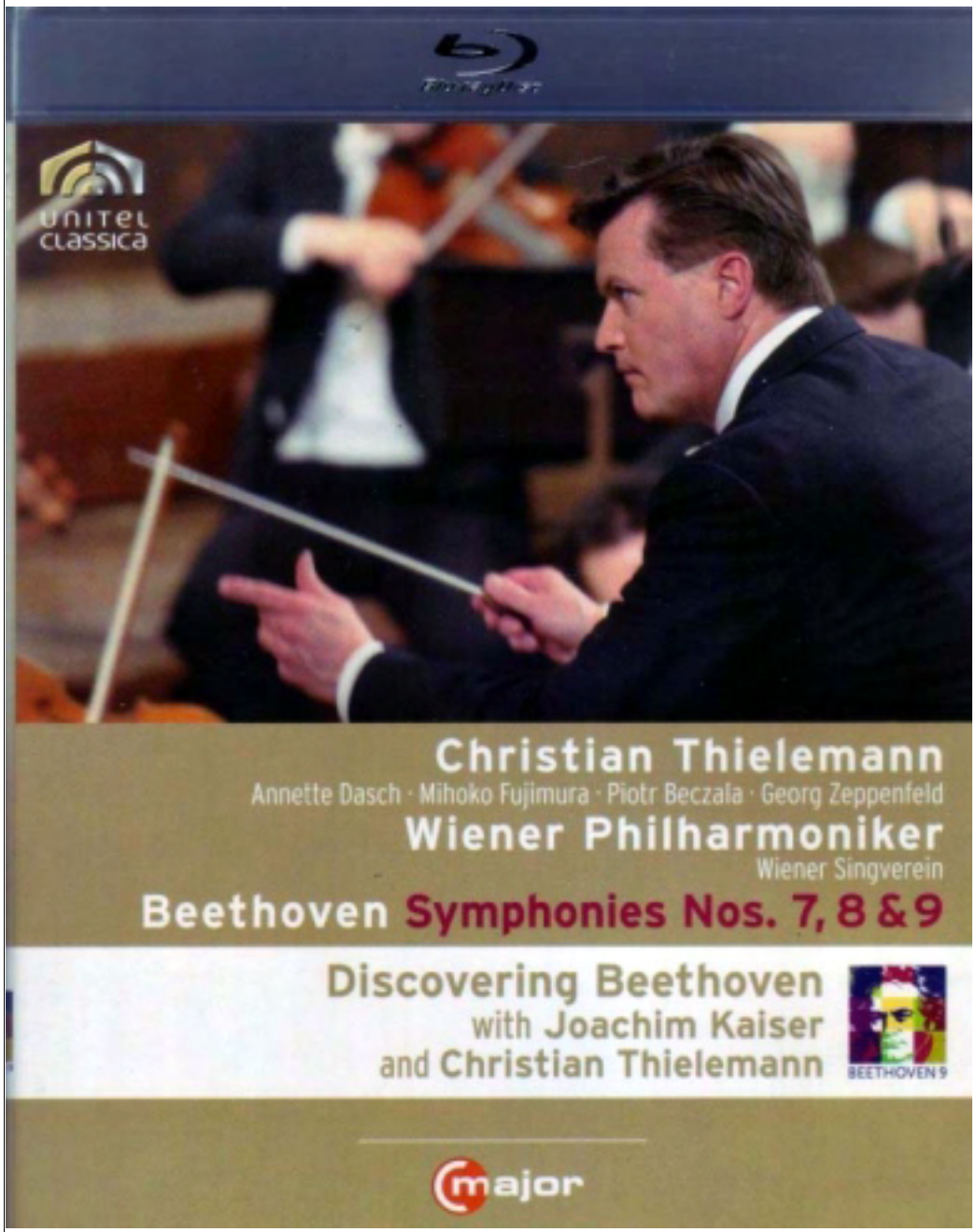
21 *A Darker Domain*
as for Novels

22 *Mistification* as for Novels



Favourite films seen for the first time in 2011

1 *Red Beard* (1965) directed by Akira Kurosawa
2 *The Tree of Life* (2011) Terence Malick
3 *Howl* (2010) Rob Epstein & Jeffrey Friedman
4 *Nicholas Nickleby* (1947) Alberto Cavalcanti
5 *The Messenger* (2009) Oren Moverman
6 *Metropolis* (remastered complete) (1928/2010) Fritz Lang
7 *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) Frank Capra
8 *Lonely are the Brave* (1962) David Miller
9 *Radio Days* (1987) Woody Allen
10 *The King's Speech* (2010) Tom Foster
11 *Les Miserables* (1935) Richard Boleslawski
12 *House of Strangers* (1949) Joseph L. Manckiewicz
13 *Boy* (2010) Taika Waititi
14 *Hereafter* (2010) Clint Eastwood
15 *Elizabeth* (1998) Shekhar Kapur
16 *Cry of the City* (1948) Robert Siodmak
17 *The Lincoln Lawyer* (2011) Budd Furman
18 *True Grit* (2011) Joel & Ethan Coen
19 *The City of Your Final Destination* (2009) James Ivory
20 *Cold Souls* (2008) Sophie Barthes



Favourite music DVDs/Blu-rays seen for the first time in 2011

1 *Discovering Ludwig Van Beethoven: Christian Thielemann and Vienna Philharmonic Play Beethoven Symphonies* (2010) (6 Blu-rays) Various directors

2 *'Once, at a Border': Stravinsky* (2008) Tony Palmer

3 *Who Is Harry Nilsson? (And Why Is Everybody Talking About Him?)* (2010) John Scheinfeld

4 *Margot* (2008) Tony Palmer

5 *Rolling Stones: Some Girls: Live in Texas 1978* (1978/2011)

6 *Jeff Beck Performing This Week: Live at Ronnie Scott's* (2008)

7 *Paul Simon and Friends: Gershwin Prize for Popular Song* (2007) Linda Mendoza

8 *Jeff Beck Rock and Roll Party Honouring Les Paul* (2010) Milton Large

9 *The Passing Show: The Life and Music of Ronnie Lane* (2006) Rupert Williams & James McKie

10 *Ladies and Gentlemen The Rolling Stones* (1974)

11 *Mrs Carey's Concert* (2011) Bob Connolly & Sophie Raymond

Favourite films seen again during 2011

1 *The Conformist* (1971) Bernardo Bertolucci

2 *Solaris* (1972) Andrei Tarkovsky

3 *Apocalypse Now Redux* (1979/2001) Francis Ford Coppola

4 *Rashomon* (1950) Akira Kurosawa

5 *The War Game* (1967) Peter Watkins

6 *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1952) Anthony Asquith

7 *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955) Ingmar Bergman

8 *Wild Strawberries* (1957) Ingmar Bergman

9 *True Grit* (1969) Henry Hathaway

10 *The Edge of the World* (1937) Michael Powell

11 *All About Eve* (1950) Joseph L. Mackiewicz

12 *They Might Be Giants* (1971) Anthony Harvey

13 *To Catch a Thief* (1955) Alfred Hitchcock

14 *The Dam Busters* (1954) Michael Anderson

15 *American Graffiti* (1973) George Lucas

16 *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962) Vincente Minnelli

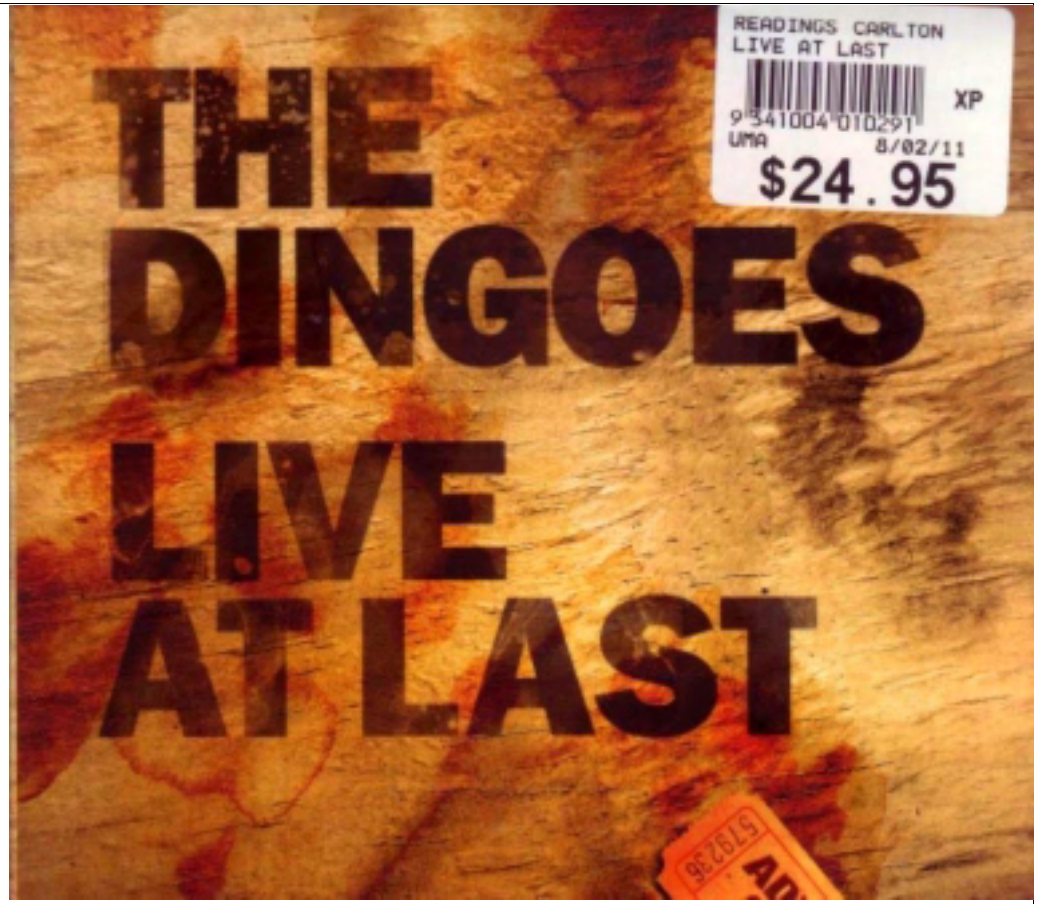
17 *The Lost Thing* (2010) Shaun Tan & Andrew Ruhemann

18 *Start the Revolution Without Me* (1970) Bud Yorkin

19 *The Power* (1968) Byron Haskin

20 *Howards End* (1992) James Ivory

21 *Went the Day Well?* (1942) Alberto Cavalcanti



Favourite popular CDs heard for the first time in 2011

1 Dingoes: *Live At Last!* (2 CDs) (2011)

2 Tom Russell: *Mesabi* (2011)

3 Kate & Anna McGarrigle: *Oddities* (2011)

4 Rolling Stones: *Some Girls Bonus Material* (2011)

5 Rolling Stones: *Some Girls Live in Texas '78* (+ DVD) (1978/2011)

6 Ben Waters: *Boogie 4 Stu: A Tribute to Ian Stewart* (2011)

7 Caitlin Rose: *Own Side Now* (2010)

8 Greg Brown: *Freak Flag* (2011)

9 Dave Alvin: *Eleven Eleven* (2011)

10 Buddy Miller: *The Majestic Silver Strings* (2011)

11 Dr John: *Gris Gris* (1968)

12 John Hiatt: *Comes Alive at Budokan* (1994)

13 Neil Young: *Live in Chicago 1992* (2) (2011)

14 Neil Young: *A Treasure* (2011)

15 Emmylou Harris: *Hard Bargain* (+ DVD) (2011)

16 Pigram Brothers, Alex Lloyd, Kaisey Chambers & Shane Nicholson: *Mad Bastards* (2011)

17 Ry Cooder: *Pull Up Some Dust and Sit Down* (2011)

18 Ray La Montaigne & Pariah Dogs: *God Willin' & the Creek Don't Rise* (2011)

19 Willie Nelson, Wynton Marsalis & Norah Jones: *Here We Go Again: Celebrating the Genius of Ray Charles* (2011)

20 Harry Nilsson: *Harry* (1969)

21 Guy's All Star Shoe Band & Garrison Keillor: *Shake It, Break It, and Hang It on the Wall* (2) (1996)

22 Eric Clapton & Wynton Marsalis: *Play the Blues Live from Jazz at Lincoln Center* (+ DVD) (2011)

23 Paul Simon: *So Beautiful or So What* (2011)

24 Jeff Beck: *Live at B. B King Blues Club* (2003/2011)

25 Joe Ely: *Satisfied at Last* (2011)

Best popular boxed sets or reissues bought during 2011

1 Loudon Wainwright III: *40 Odd Years* (4 CDs + DVD)

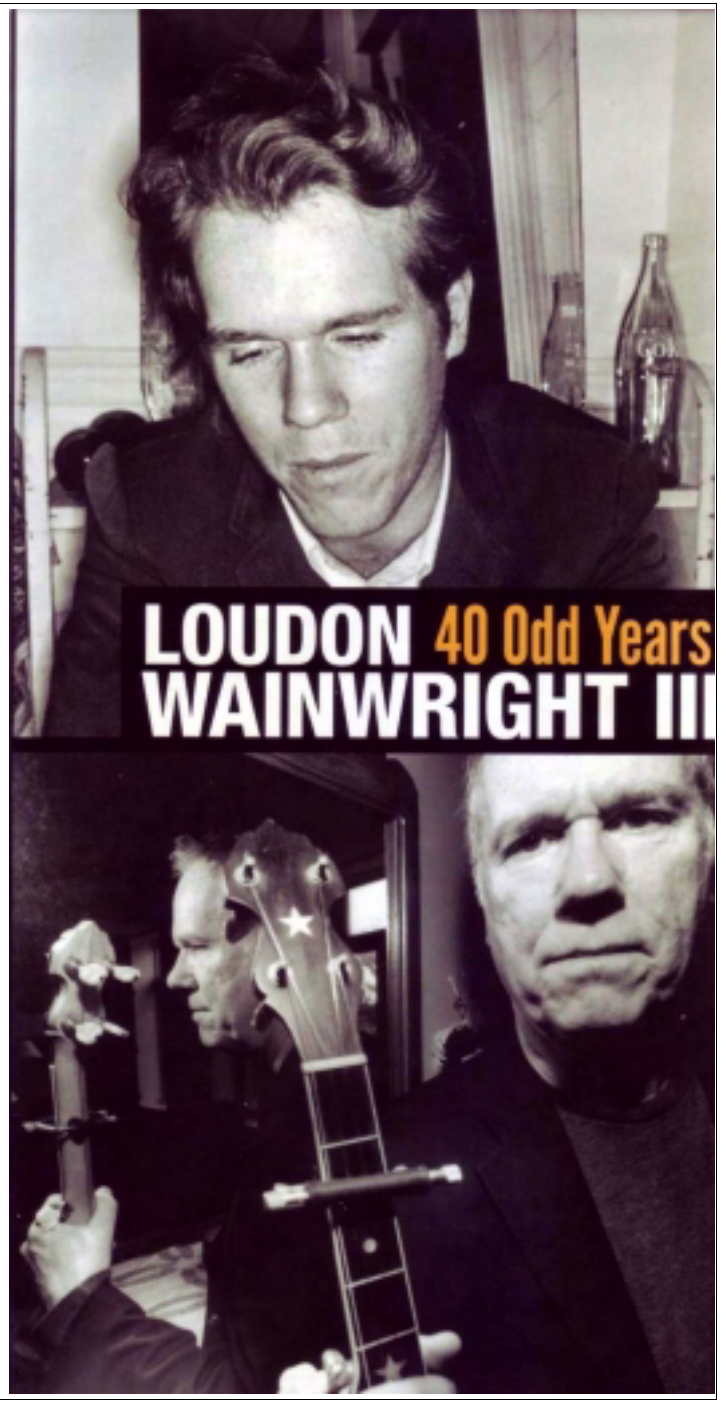
2 Simon & Garfunkel: *Bridge Over Troubled Water* (reissue) (+ DVD)

3 Kate & Anna McGarrigle: *Tell My Sister* (2 reissue CDs + CD of demos + unreleased tracks 1971–74)

4 Jayhawks: *Hollywood Town Hall* (6 bonus tracks)

5 Jayhawks: *Tomorrow the Green Grass* (23 bonus tracks) (2)

6 Various: *O Brother Where Art Thou?: 10th Anniversary Edition* (2)



7 Tom Petty & Heartbreakers: *Damn the Torpedoes Deluxe* (2)

8 Rolling Stones: *Some Girls* (remastered) (+ new bonus material) (2)

9 Richard & Linda Thompson: *Live at the BBC* (3 + DVD)

10 *Dr John Original Albums* (5)

Best classical boxed sets bought during 2011

1 Alfred Brendel (p.)/Bernard Haitink (cond.)/London Phil. Orch.: Beethoven: *Sonatas and Piano Concertos* (12 CDs)

2 *The Decca Sound* (50 CDs)

3 Angela Hewitt: *Bach* (15 CDs)

4 *Marta Argerich Edition: Chamber Music* (8 CDs)

5 *Marta Argerich Edition: Solos and Duos* (6 CDs)

6 *Marta Argerich Edition: Concertos* (4 CDs)

7 Sir Thomas Beecham: *The Later Tradition* (8 CDs)

Classical CDs heard for the first time in 2011

1 Georg Solti (cond.)/Chicago Symph. Orch./Vienna Singverein: Mahler: Symph. 8 (1972/2011) (*Decca Sound* boxed set)

2 Marta Argerich (p.) etc: Shostakovich: Piano Quartet in G minor/ Piano Trio 2/Janacek: Concertino for piano, violins, viola, clarinet, horn and bassoon (2004/2011) (*Marta Argerich Edition: Chamber Music*)

3 Peter Maag (cond.)/London Symph. Orch.: *Mendelssohn in Scotland*: Mendelssohn: Symph. 3/*Midsummer Night's Dream* overture and incidental music (1959/1960/2011) (*Decca Sound*)

4 John Eliot Gardiner (cond.)/Orchestre Romantique et Revolutionnaire: Brahms: Symph. 4/Beethoven: *Coriolan* Ov./etc. (2010)

5 Angela Hewitt (p.): Bach: *Goldberg Variations* BWWV 988 (2000/2010) (*Angela Hewitt: Bach*)

6 Candida Thompson (cond.)/Amsterdam Sinfonietta: Brahms: String Quartet in C minor (string orchestra version)/Schoenberg: *Verklate Nacht* (2011)

7 Marta Argerich (p.) etc.: Beethoven: Violin Sonata 9 ('Kreutzer') /Franck: Violin Sonata in A (1999/2011) (*Marta Argerich Edition: Chamber Music*)

8 Angela Hewitt (p.): *Bach: The Six Partitas* BWV 825–830) (2) (1997/ 2010) (*Angela Hewitt: Bach*)

9 Richard Tognetti (cond.) Australian Chamber Orchestra: *Renegades*: Vaughan Williams: *The Lark Ascending*/ Kats-Chernin: *Torque*/Schubert: String Quartet D 956 (2003)

10 Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli (p.)/Carlo Maria Giulini (cond): Beethoven: Piano Concertos 1, 3 (1980, 1987) (*Michelangeli Boxed Set*)

11 Paul Lewis (p.): Beethoven: Sonatas 30/31/32 (Boxed Set) (2010)

12 Stephen Hough (p.)/Lawrence Foster (cond.)/City of Birmingham Symph. Orch.: Mendelssohn: Piano Concertos 1, 2/*Cappricio Brillant*/*Rondo Brillant*/*Serenade and allegro giocoso* (1997)

— Bruce Gillespie, 10 January 2012

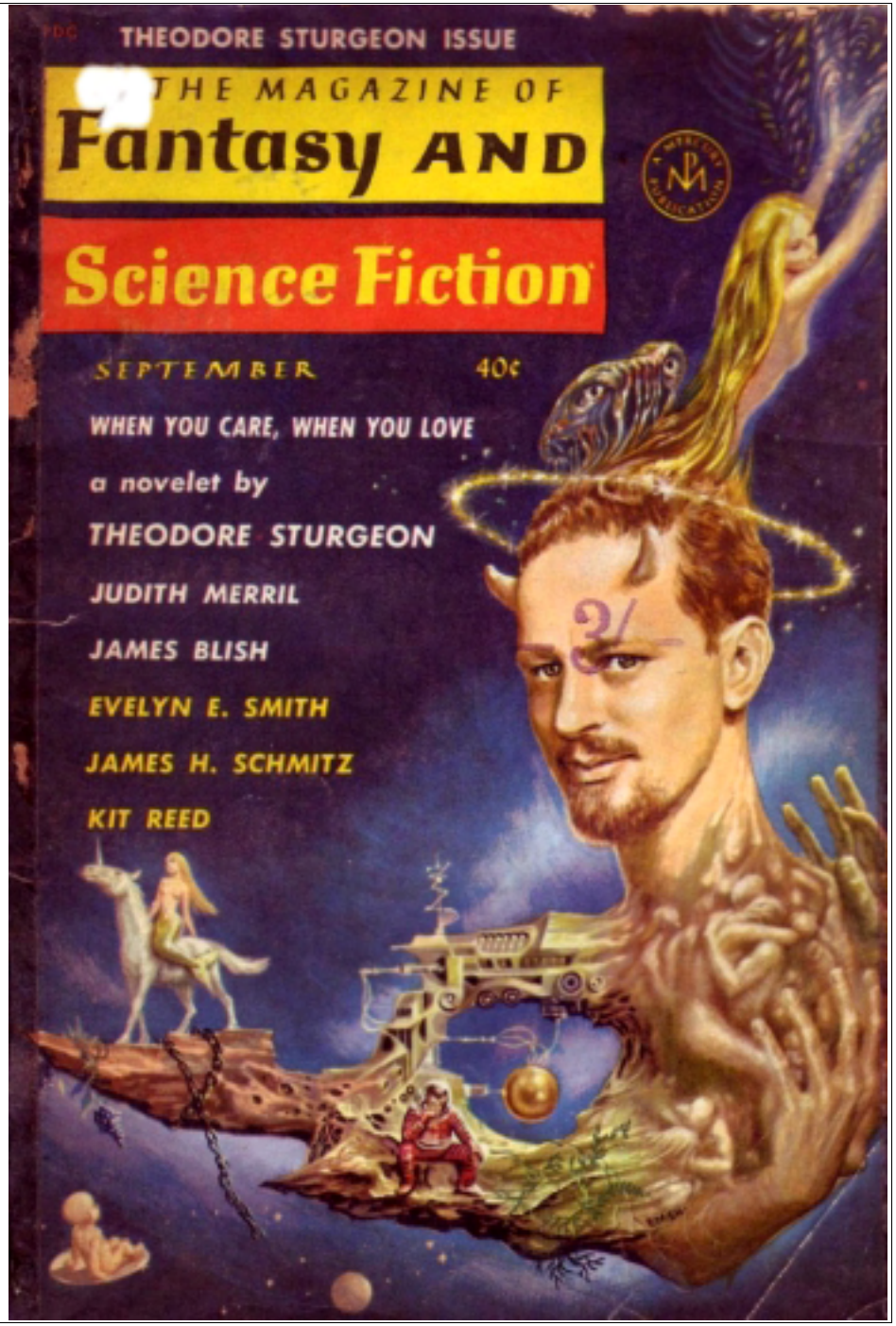
Matthew Davis lives in Worcestershire, UK where he has worked in public libraries. This essay is the first of three studies of classic science fiction authors which, by detailing their individual lives and their attempts to analyse personal concerns, hope to give an overview of the opportunities and trends of science fiction in the twentieth century as a developing commercial field with its own standards as a genre and as a means of artistic self-expression.

The work of Theodore Sturgeon

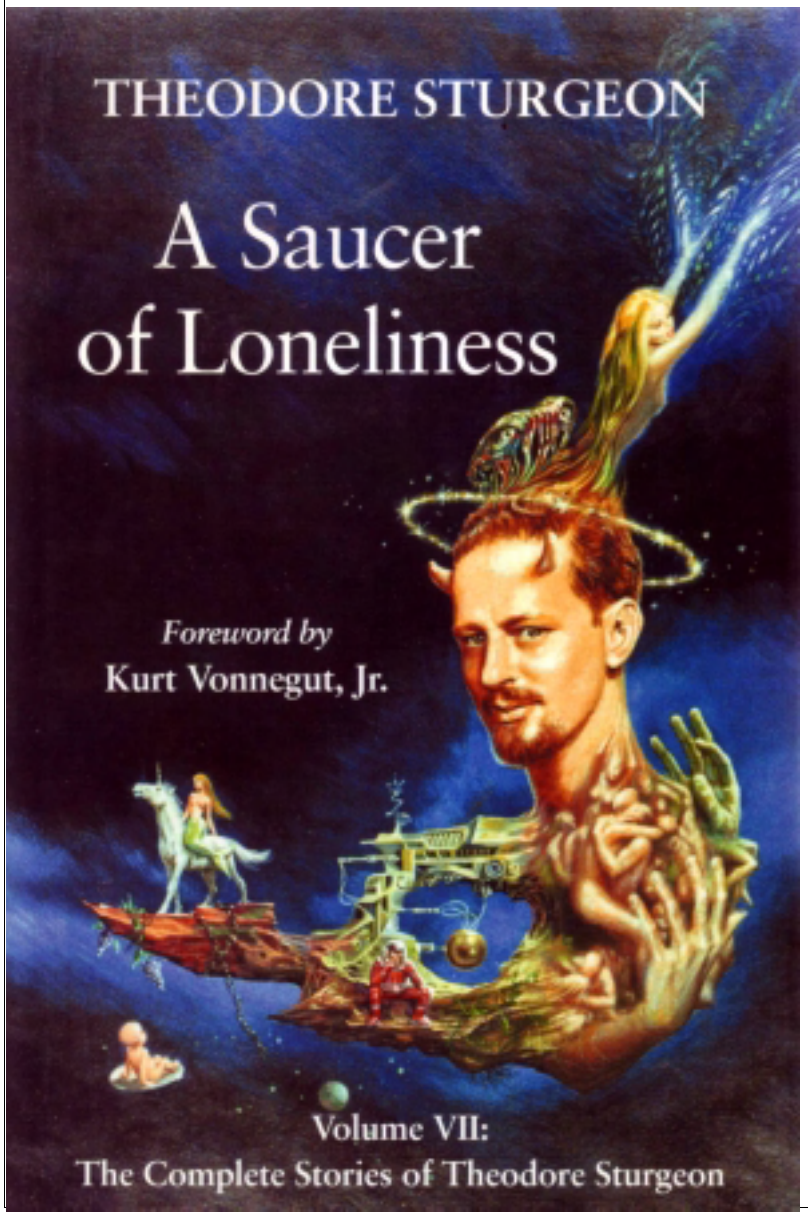
by Matthew Davis

> In the beginning is the word, but before the beginning is that complex mechanism called The Author. Conviction and caring must live in him personally — deeply personally — before he can project it by means of his work. His objective must be to entertain, and at that he may succeed beautifully; there's nothing wrong with entertainment, and I for one would hate to live without it. But by itself it does not move nor shake nor teach nor provoke, as does all lasting literature (Theodore Sturgeon, *Twilight Zone Magazine*, November 1981).
>
> I want someone to love me and I want to love someone (Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio*).

The influence and authority of literature rests not simply in the power of



brg For many of us who had never met him, the Ed Emsh painting of Theodore Sturgeon, on the cover of the Theodore Sturgeon special edition of *F&SF*, September 1962, was *the* haunting face of the man and the writer. So haunting that it has been used at least three times: (previous page) the original use for *F&SF*; (below left) Vol. VII of the *Complete Stories*; and (below right) an LP of Sturgeon reading his own stories. For a photo of Sturgeon more or less as I met him in 1973, go to page 37. *



Sturgeon's books

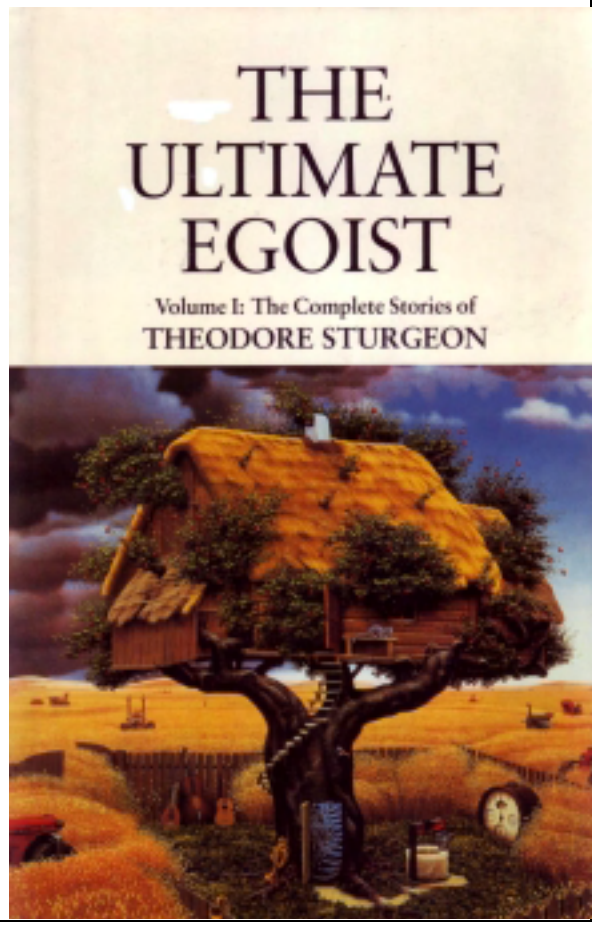
Without Sorcery 1948
The Dreaming Jewels 1950
More Than Human 1950 (simultaneous Ballantine and Farrar Straus & Young editions)
E Pluribus Unicorn 1953
Caviar 1955
A Way Home 1955
The King and Four Queens 1956
I, Libertine 1956
A Touch of Strange 1958
The Cosmic Rape 1958
Aliens 4 1959
Venus Plus X 1960
Beyond 1960
Some of Your Blood 1961
Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea 1961
Not Without Sorcery 1961
The Player on the Other Side 1963
Sturgeon in Orbit 1964
The Joyous Invasions 1965
... And My Fear Is Great ... 1965
Starshine 1966
The Rare Breed 1966
Sturgeon is Alive and Well 1971
The Worlds of Theodore Sturgeon 1972
To Here and the Easel 1973
Sturgeon's West 1973
Case and the Dreamer 1974
Visions and Venturer 1978
The Stars Are the Styx 1979
The Golden Helix 1979
Alien Cargo 1984
Godbody 1986

The Complete Short Stories of Theodore Sturgeon

North Atlantic Books has released the chronologically assembled *The Complete Short Stories of Theodore Sturgeon*, edited by Paul Williams, since 1994. The series runs to 13 volumes, the last appearing in September 2010. The volumes offer an excellent presentation of Sturgeon's best work: the short fiction. Introductions are provided by Harlan Ellison, Samuel R. Delany, Kurt Vonnegut, Gene Wolfe, Connie Willis, Jonathan Lethem, David Crosby, and many others. Extensive 'Story Notes' are provided by Paul Williams and (in the last two volumes) Sturgeon's daughter Noël.

The volumes include:
I. *The Ultimate Egoist* (1937 to 1940)
II. *Microcosmic God* (1940 to 1941)
III. *Killdozer* (1941 to 1946)
IV. *Thunder and Roses* (1946 to 1948)
V. *The Perfect Host* (1948 to 1950)
VI. *Baby is Three* (1950 to 1952)
VII. *A Saucer of Loneliness* (1953)
VIII. *Bright Segment* (1953 to 1955, as well as two 'lost' stories from 1946)
IX. *And Now the News...* (1955 to 1957)
X. *The Man Who Lost the Sea* (1957 to 1960)
XI. *The Nail and the Oracle* (1961 to 1969)
XII. *Slow Sculpture* (1970 to 1972, plus one 1954 novella and one unpublished story)
XIII. *Case and The Dreamer* (1972 to 1983, plus one 1960 story and three unpublished stories).

— *Wikipedia* entry on Theodore Sturgeon



words but also in the figures of the writers themselves. Shakespeare, Byron, Goethe, in differing ways, are all totemic figures. In more modern days we look to writers whose works eloquently describe or encapsulate some flaw of the soul made explicable in their authorised biography. The struggles of the soul and an author's attempts to express them on the page are exemplified in ways as different as the Neo-Romantic alcoholic calamities of Dylan Thomas, the sexual, political and moral convolutions of Graham Greene or Hemingway's death-dance of machismo. The penny-a-word milieu of science fiction would seem to preclude such mythic agonies of artistic perfection. Science fiction writers like Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, or Arthur C. Clarke, operating by the same principles of self-capacity as their fictional protagonists, seem self-assured, know what they want to say, and having a modicum of ability are able to produce whole libraries to order. Yet sf and its writers have always been on the borders of bohemia where literary life is most interesting. Philip K. Dick has left his irrefutable mark as an ever-more significant icon of late twentieth-century culture. But it was Kurt Vonnegut who created the popular image of the archetypal sf writer in his Kilgore Trout: a financially hobbled, irrepressibly insightful and imaginative, yet artistically hopeless hack.

Any book of curious facts can usually be relied upon to inform its readers that 'Kilgore Trout' was based upon the science fiction writer Theodore Sturgeon. Vonnegut had personally known Sturgeon in the late 1950s, but it is ironic that Trout was based upon Theodore Sturgeon. As the science fiction author and critic Norman Spinrad has pointed out, Trout is more of a nightmare version of the career that Vonnegut could have taken than a true depiction of the real life Sturgeon.[1] Sturgeon was famous to fans and sf critics for the high standard of his art, while his battles with writer's block meant he was incapable of simply churning out reams on demand. Sturgeon wrote over 200 stories and 11 novels, but the balance of his professional and adult life was dominated more by periods of silence than of productivity. Sturgeon aimed to be an artist in fiction, but the means and circumstances of his writing necessitated that much of what he wrote was first draft — a sure method of heightening the stress of creation. Fans and critics following his bibliography can't help but be aware of his more blatant periods of writer's block, but frequent claims that he had a golden streak of 10–15 years centred around the 1950s are the result of careful management of material by magazines and publishers. With the publication of the 13-volume posthumous *The Complete Stories of Theodore Sturgeon* accompanied by the release of complementary materials, it is now obvious that Sturgeon was rarely capable of producing fiction for even a couple of years without becoming blocked. The burden was only compounded by an ever-expanding family and sequence of ex-wives. The extreme urgings and offers of support from friends, the emergency proffering of ancilliary projects by devoted publishers and editors, or the revived inspiration and boost in self-worth from a new romance could only go so far in papering over the cracks in creatively lean times.

Besides the impact of individual stories and his overall importance to the history and development of contemporary science fiction and fantasy, that the man himself was personally beloved by the field's writers and fans only adds a further sheen to the semi-legendary figure of Theodore Sturgeon. Theodore Sturgeon's pre- eminence in the first half of his career bred the widespread assumption that he would be the breakthrough artist, the one writer sure to cross over into the mainstream, forcing audiences to realise the worth of science fiction. Sturgeon was one of the giants of the Golden Age of Science Fiction. He was regarded with awe by his sf contemporaries, Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and Ray Bradbury. In his earliest works in sf magazines he was notable for *sprezzatura* and a refreshingly askew approach to his stories. In his prime, Sturgeon brought artistry and emotion to sf. He introduced love and sex and challenged his audience's assumptions. Sturgeon was passionate about artistic challenges but cognisant of the demands of the genre. The sf critic James Blish wrote that Sturgeon 'has made himself the finest conscious artist science fiction has ever had'.[2] This was during the decades when science fiction and its writers were unregarded, unrecognised, and barely profitable, consigned to disreputable, lurid magazines. His friend William Tenn noted that Sturgeon 'aspire[d] to starve for art in the pulps'.[3] Fans may sometimes overpraise his poetic prose, but there is no denying that Sturgeon often composed his stories like the stereotype of the enraptured poet. Many of his stories were inspired, unmediated outpourings. Such a recurrence resulted in Sturgeon having a strangely dislocated understanding of what he, his talent, and his craft actually brought to his stories' composition, further complicating his relationship to the process of writing.

Sturgeon had 'a sensitivity for style and subject in a field that admired muscular prose and strength'[4] Colleagues were impressed by his ability to unravel his work, with a conscious employment of metrical, grammati-

cal, and syntactical nuances. He delighted in wordplay, shifts of tone, comic sequences, and striking effects. He employed fantasy, horror, and science fiction tropes in varying combinations to contrast each aspect and heighten a story's overall impact. Sturgeon had the knack of writing in the immediate moments of his often semi-articulate characters, his descriptions succinctly evoking the emotions, perceptions, and sensory impressions of his characters, alien worlds, and strange, new concepts. His imagery introduced emotion, rapture, despair, and infatuation, so placing him and his work beyond the usual matter and manner of sf stories. Instead of the mere action or idea-oriented aspects of genre fiction, his work was distinguished by his ability to embody sf ideas in present and affecting images and situations. Yet Sturgeon never indulged in inchoate poeticism. His words were chosen to communicate cogently and facilitate rational and emotional understanding.

There was a ready conflict between the intensity of his personal and poetic apprehensions and the need to express them within the objective forms of a story suitable to genre markets. There was always the hope that Sturgeon might be a better writer outside of the genre ghetto, but as he developed, Sturgeon's hopes, themes, and interests found natural expression through the accessories of fantasy and science fiction. But he could never write a typical genre set piece, and so each story was a new struggle with form, character, narrative, and resolution. Each story required him to find a new mechanism through which the characters, and therefore Sturgeon as the writer, confront their emotions and responses to the world. Each story had to become a solution found in the pressures and necessitous spontaneity of short story writing. Even at the very beginning of his career, his personal notes and letters to friends, family, and editors reveal the perpetual pattern of his intense, almost self-destructive working methods. He despairs that when he isn't about to miss a deadline then he's already late and so is reduced to frantic all-night sessions at the typewriter. Yet it is then that he can wring out lengthy works of great quality and insight, long short stories in a couple of hours, novels in barely a month. But still he finds he can never produce on demand in a regular manner, shamed by all his mechanisms for delay, avoidance, and distraction, with inevitable knocks to his faith and confidence in himself a writer, and the resultant guilt about unmet responsibilities.

> So I never do anything until I must ... And when I do, it isn't work. It's all first draft. I never rewrite. I can't. By the time a story's finished it has to go to the post office with a special delivery stamp on it or I'll get evicted ... I've been up for 36 hours and there's a blue line around the edges of my vision. I take five grains of Dexedrine sulphate and write for 30 hours without stopping. I drink black coffee and eat raw beef and take ten grains, then five, then two and a half ... Point is, this isn't work. I write beautifully. But suppose I could write with all my faculties ... Suppose I could write a story and put it away ... But I can't ... I'm unfit and unworthy and unable to achieve an excellence that is a real excellence.[5]

Sturgeon 'lived on crisis, and if he wasn't in a crisis, he'd create one for himself. His life was completely disorganised, so it was impossible for him to do his best work consistently' was the assessment of his friend Alfred Bester.[6] Sturgeon was a man of practical talents who couldn't direct them, and so his skills acted as more of a hindrance. Being easily distracted by his ability and ingenuity in solving the little problems life threw at him was a consolation and distraction from his inability to face up to larger tasks. An eccentric way of apprehending the world channelled into a personal delight in carpentry, engineering, and radioelectronics is little compensation for an inability to handle money, live up to the responsibilities of his contracts, or the long-term commitments of a family. 'I'm not a writer,' he told Judith Merril, with whom he had an affair in early 1947. 'A writer is someone who has to write ... The only reason I want to write is because it's the only way I can justify all the other things I didn't do.'[7]

His personal charm and charisma kept the wheels spinning and his life viable when others would have been brought to heel by ineluctable facts. Cyril Connolly's truism that 'All charming people have something to conceal, usually their total dependence on the appreciation of others' applied. Editors and fans gave him the appreciation he needed after a childhood that had instilled powerful feelings of inferiority. As he wrote about love, so they loved him and his writings in return. Colleagues like Isaac Asimov and Brian Aldiss noted that women flocked to him, that he was the sort of man young women would want to mother.[8] He would accrue five wives/long-term partners, usually significantly younger than him, and seven children. Sturgeon responded in kind to the women attracted to him, his writing block often brought to an end by the start of a new romance reviving his sense of self-worth. The women described in his stories are often fictionalised versions of his current lover or wife. Sturgeon falls shy of being quite so explicitly autobiographical a science

fiction writer as either Harlan Ellison or Fritz Leiber, but the knowledge of what he is doing at any given time, whom he is with, and how he feels, are fairly accurate indicators of his capability to write. 'I wish I could share the total experience with you. But to do that you would have to live inside my skin for all those years in all those places, undergoing a good deal of joy, but a fairly heavy load of stress, of poverty, of loneliness, of self-denial and self-abnegation. You'd have had to experience the same sense of failure and unworthiness and certain peaks of joy so great they created guilt'.[9] The agonies of this creator can sometimes be traced simply by indicating the dates of his employment. The turmoil of his life shapes his career and his work. At the same that his life turns him away from the work he wants to do, so it offers us a demonstration of how the myth of the romantic suffering artist can play itself out in a world of jet engines, atom bombs, and tax returns.

Early years

Theodore Sturgeon was born on 26 February 1918 in St George, Staten Island, New York City. His name at birth was Edward Hamilton Waldo. He was the second son of Christine and Edward Waldo. Christine was an independent-spirited journalist for a movie-related newspaper and an occasional poet. Edward Waldo, who was a colour-and-dye manufacturer of middling success, left his family when his son Edward was five. In summer 1928 Christine remarried to William Dickey Sturgeon (known as 'Argyll'), an immigrant Scottish college professor, who had been courting her for the previous two years. Edward and his older brother Peter were adopted by their new stepfather and their surname legally changed to Sturgeon. At the same time Edward's name was legally changed to Theodore. Christine was still bitter towards her ex-husband and wanted to erase his namesake, and her son had always been called Teddy or Thuddy. 'Theodore Sturgeon' is occasionally misidentified as a pseudonym; it was in fact his legal name.

Argyll was highly intelligent but evidently a deeply frustrated man. He proved to be manipulative, parsimonious, culturally censorious, sexually prudish, a harsh disciplinarian who denigrated his new sons' intellectual attainments. That Peter would end up founding the American branch of MENSA may have been some form of compensation for the one son. The two boys lived in fear of his hair-trigger temper, his bizarre caprices, and shamed by an unrelenting, intimidating sense of their unworthiness. Left-wing politics was often the barely sublimated resort for the expression of social conscience by father-haters of the period, and both boys would participate in the Young People's Socialist League for several years in the 30s.

In September 1929 the family moved to Philadelphia, where Argyll was a professor of modern languages at the Drexel Institute. Ted's stepfather arranged for the 12-year-old boy to enter the Overbrook High School, which meant he was naturally the smallest child in the class and the target of bullies. So lost was he in his first year that although he attended all his classes he was marked absent because he'd never heard of home room. To compound his agonies, he was in regular danger of flunking his classes, to his stepfather's disgust and anger. To encourage his sons, Argyll read improving books to them. His selection of respectable works happened to include the novels of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. By the age of 12 Ted had sought out more by these two writers as well as similar works by other authors. He started to buy back issues of *Amazing Stories* and *Weird Tales* from a schoolmate.[10] These magazines he hid from Argyll, anticipating his disapproval and disdain. One day Ted came home to find Argyll had torn up Ted's secret science fiction magazine collection and left the scraps for Ted to tidy up from his bedroom floor.

However, Ted found a purpose at high school, becoming a star athlete after discovering an obsession for apparatus gymnastics. In a little over a year he gained four inches and 60 pounds, and became captain and manager of the gym team. He won a two-year scholarship to attend Temple University upon graduation, and an athletic scholarship that would have covered the last two years of university. He planned on getting a degree in physical education, then joining the Barnum & Bailey Circus to become an aerial gymnast.

Unfortunately Ted contracted acute rheumatic fever when he was 15. He spent the next six months flat on his back, and his heart would remain enlarged for the rest of his life. He was sent to live with family in Canada to recuperate in the summer of 1934. It was there he was able to spend at least one week living out his dream, when he secretly worked at a circus to pay for repairs to a car he damaged hot-rodding.[11] It was also while recuperating that he learnt to play the guitar. Robbed of his aims, Sturgeon became dispirited and faltered at school. After six years of high school Sturgeon graduated in 1936, but was too ashamed and resentful to attend the graduation ceremony.[12]

Aware that his parents wanted to be free of him, Theodore had set his eye on a career in the navy, and spent most of the next three years at sea. He won a scholarship, and started with six months on a school ship, the Pennsylvania State Nautical School. In Nautical School, he found himself subject to institutional brutality and bullying, learning 'that people in authority will purposely amuse themselves by hurting others'.[13] He completed one term, and then dropped out of Nautical School in spring of 1937. He used his cadet credentials to get an Ordinary Seaman's papers, and shipped out as an engine-room wiper with a steamer outfit called the Merchant and Miners Transportation Company, then served on various ships. Meanwhile his mother and Argyll took the opportunity to move to Scotland, while Theodore's brother Peter went off to fight in the Spanish Civil War in 1938.

In spring 1938, during a period between ships after a confrontation with other crewmen, Sturgeon was in New York City. It was then he sold his first story 'Heavy Insurance' to the McClure Syndicate. McClure's was a newspaper syndicate that would pay five dollars on publication — in this instance, 16 July 1938. 'I was in the merchant marine, working on a coastwise tanker, and I worked out a way to rob the American Express Company of several hundred thousand dollars. I did my homework: I wrote to the company and found out precisely how they shipped this and that and the other thing, got it all worked out and then wrote it as a short story because I didn't have quite the guts to do it myself.'[14] McClure's was prepared to buy one story, sometimes two, a week. Sturgeon was booked on a ship for the rest of 1938, but when he returned to New York City from January to July 1939 he lived on five or ten dollars a week on West 63rd Street (where Lincoln Center is now).[15] The room cost him seven and a half dollars and he lived on whatever was left, sometimes on 'a tasty tomato soup out of water and ketchup'.[16]

The stories Sturgeon wrote for the McClure's newspaper syndicate were of the 500–1000-word short-short variety. Minor works, they had a certain charm, and because of their brevity read more like bouncy anecdotes. They show a ready skill and aptitude, as Sturgeon largely avoids clichés and demonstrates a concern for the people in his stories. He tackles punchy descriptions, scenarios, and characterisations, and there is of course a reliance upon the gimmick or twist ending. They feature the youthful working out of searches for love, dignity, and bravery, and resentment against authority. These stories also exhaust the journeyman writer's reliance upon exhuming his immediate experiences. In total, it is estimated that by the beginning of 1940, Sturgeon had published about 40 stories with McClure's, a little short of one a week over the previous year. However, since they were his sole market, Sturgeon was totally dependent upon McClure's. Any story written to tie in with a seasonal theme that was rejected by McClure's was work and time wasted that Sturgeon could not afford.

Sturgeon's correspondence to his mother in Scotland, a means of connecting with her own unrealised literary ambitions, and his fiancée Dorothe Fillingame back in Philadelphia, offer a testament to the roller-coaster ride of emotions that his career provoked. Unlike the later Sturgeon, Sturgeon at this time insists he is nothing more than a commercial entertainer. 'There is no such thing as prostituting my art. I have an artistic approach towards things which afford me, personally, amusement, but I do not regard my writing as an art, but a craft ... I have no message, no ardour, no lessons to teach. I am a teller of tales.'[17] Though proud of his ability to sell, the discrepancy between the work Sturgeon thought was respectable and those that elicited approbation from his editor or mother was a foreshadowing of future conflicts. Furthermore, Sturgeon's conflict is indicated by his continuing debate over the idea of his prostituting his ability despite his working in what he insists is his chosen commercial arena. Sturgeon's was not the temperament of the salesman, the happily jobbing author touting his wares: 'Just one regret can throw me out completely for weeks. The more work I do the worse I feel, the worse I feel the less money I make.'[18] Sturgeon's ability to produce and his assurance of his and his writing's worth seem wholly determined by his mood. In contrast to the previous letter, a letter in 1939 to his fiancée is a panegyric enumerating, how when he is in love, he has an exultant sense of influence, conviction, and power, sure of his ability not merely to sell but to assert change in the world at large.[19]

John W. Campbell

In early 1939 a friend showed Sturgeon the first issue of a new fantasy magazine called *Unknown* (March 1939), and encouraged him to write for it. Sturgeon went to see John Campbell, *Unknown*'s editor, who was also editing the science fiction magazine *Astounding Science Fiction*. Later on, Sturgeon would realise Campbell had been the author of some of his favourite thrilling science fiction in *Amazing Stories* from 1930: 'Piracy Preferred', 'Solarite', and 'Black Star Passes'. Campbell rejected

Sturgeon's first submission, but Campbell was enthusiastic to see other works from Sturgeon. At the same time he also gave Sturgeon a piece of editorial advice that Sturgeon was to take to heart for the rest of his life. Campbell advised him that a story always should show some change in the protagonist's character, that he should be different at the end than from beginning. Even 35 years later Sturgeon would still insist 'true suspense is impossible for me if the central character cannot develop, age, fail, die, or even learn'.[20]

Sturgeon would end up selling 11 stories to *Astounding* and 15 to *Unknown* between April of 1939 and June 1941. Though 'A God in the Garden' was his first sale, it was published in *Unknown* (October 1939), a month later than his first published science fiction story 'Ether Breather' (*Astounding*, September 1939). 'Ether Breather' was not only voted the best story in the issue but also of the year. Curiously, the name of the hack writer in that story was Ted Hamilton. Sturgeon would use the pennames 'E. Waldo Hunter' and 'E. Hunter Waldo', when magazines would run two of his stories ran in the same issue.

In the summer of 1939, Sturgeon wrote 'Bianca's Hands', a story he found prevented him from writing anything else until he had put it on paper. Bianca is a deformed idiot strangely possessed of beautiful hands that seem curiously independent of and superior to Bianca. Ran is a young man who develops an obsessive passion for Bianca's hands. Sturgeon sensuously recounts Ran's courting of the hands, and how Ran's perception of the world is transfigured by his love. Ran marries Bianca, and on the wedding night, submits in a sexually suggestive manner to his strangulation by the hands. It is an early instance of Sturgeon's interests in the freakish and the psychosexual, and is the first real indication of Sturgeon's largely unacknowledged kinship with Faulkner and the later Southern Gothic writers, such as Tennessee Williams, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers. The story is alert to beauty in the strangest places, but its fetishism and sado-masochistic asphyxiation are understandably shocking. What it says about the vulnerability of love and that its resulting consummation may be a submitting to death is a fearful image deliberately inexplicable. Sturgeon was convinced that he had written a great story and held it back for better markets than McClure's, but when he did try to sell it he found that not only was it unacceptable but that it provoked enraged revulsion from editors. Suffering from a combination of failing sales and the first significant signs of writer's block Sturgeon shipped to sea again between July and October 1939.[21]

In March 1940 Sturgeon, against her parent's wishes, married his 21-year-old high school sweetheart, Dorothy Fillingame. To please her, Theodore tried to convert to Roman Catholicism before the marriage, but he was too questioning to accept it.[22] Upon marriage, Dorothy changed her name to Dorothe so it would be more similar to Theodore. While on their honeymoon Sturgeon wrote a horror story called 'It' in a ten hour burst. The couple moved to a rented apartment in Staten Island later that year.

Sturgeon was always taken aback that such an horrific story as 'It' was written during 'the peak of joy' of his honeymoon. 'It' is a shambling, filthy, undead, mould creature. It leaves a trail of death in its wake, though its destruction is born out of implacable inhuman curiosity, rather than from fear, anger, or evil. Its wanderings carry it toward the backwoods life of a loving family whose history and ties of affection Sturgeon enumerates. The story methodically presages the ineluctable destruction of the family's young daughter, rather like the scene in *Frankenstein* (1931) between the monster and the little girl at a lake's edge. Sturgeon plays against the expectation he has skilfully built, and though she survives, the story ends with a list of everything that has been lost and the psychological scaring of the daughter. The weirdness and disgust of the creature aside, 'It''s horror lies in the threat the monster poses to the family. Written at the start of his marriage after a long courting, 'It' may express Sturgeon' s fear of his relationship's susceptibility to destruction by random forces. 'It' made an immediate impact upon the readers of *Unknown*, standing out for the oddity of its monster, its emotional power and succinct descriptions. The story would have an influence as a model for a style of horror writing. The figure of the creature would also have a long impact, and in 1975 Sturgeon was awarded the 'Inkpot Award' at the 1975 San Diego ComicCon for writing the inspiration for such long-running comic monsters as The Heap, Man-Thing, and Swamp Thing.

Upon returning from his honeymoon Sturgeon returned to writing. Sturgeon had only published four stories in Campbell's two magazines before his marriage. Sturgeon stopped writing for McClure's, and all of his work upon his return was now intended for Campbell, with 'It' as the first publication of this new stint. Not only did Campbell's magazines pay higher rates than any of the similar publications but Campbell was an attentive editor who gave great support and guidance to his stable of new sf writers. When Campbell died in 1971 Sturgeon wrote, 'There isn't

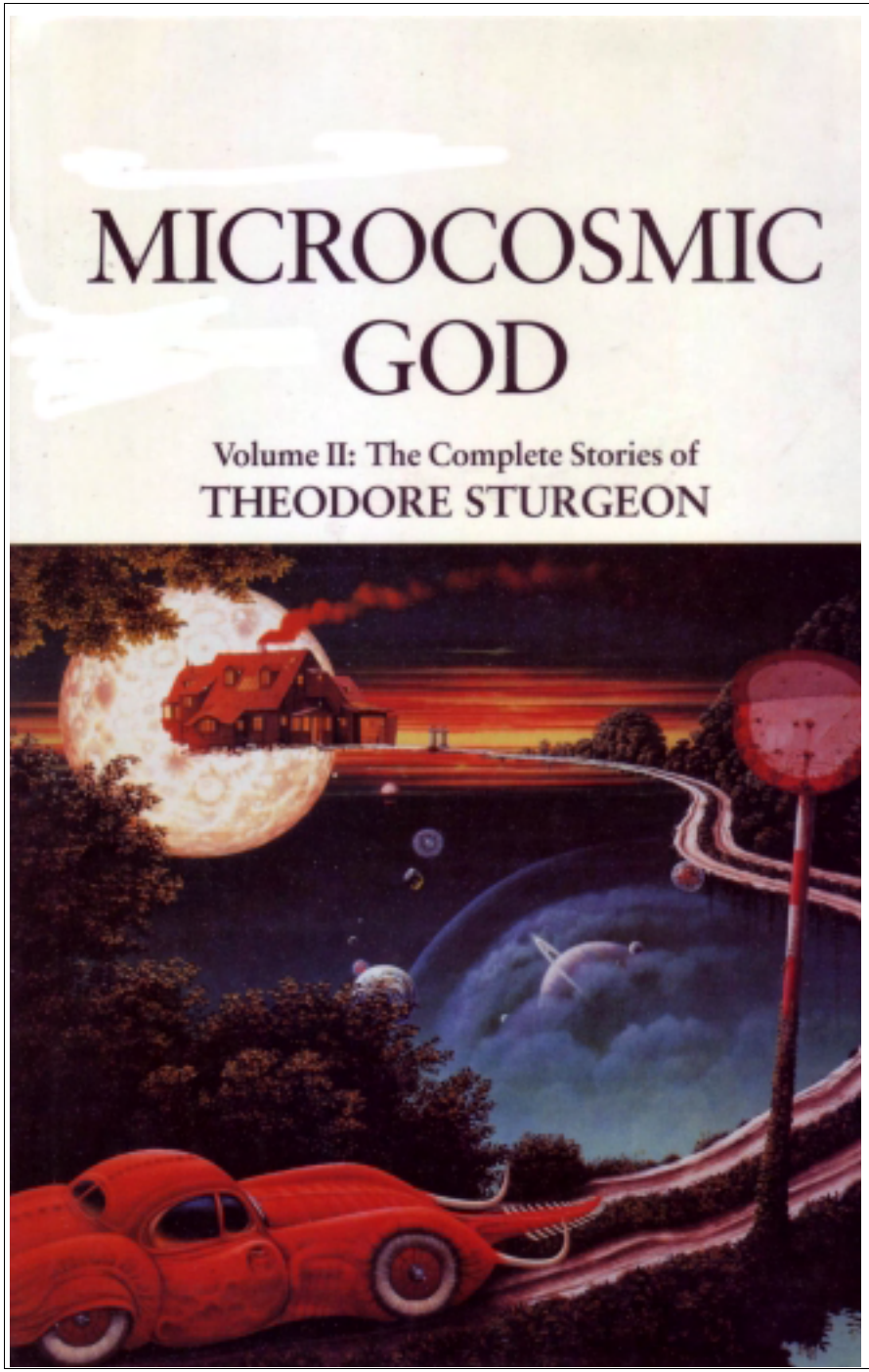
a word's worth of work I do this day that hadn't got Campbell's touch on it somewhere ... He was uncompromising in his work and his demands'.[23] Campbell established personal relationships with his writers, talking over the content of their work and the way it was written, insistent yet curious, debating with them in frequent conversations, and establishing his expectations of the science fiction and fantasy his magazines would publish. In this manner Campbell would nurture the writers who would define the Golden Age of Science Fiction. Campbell had been appointed editor of *Astounding* a little over a year before Sturgeon first contacted him. Campbell had dropped the lurid aliens abducting women in tin-pot brassiere elements of earlier science fiction, and eased out pulp writers for whom science fiction was just one outlet, in favour of building up a group of dedicated former science fiction fans. Besides Sturgeon, this group would include L. Ron Hubbard, Isaac Asimov, and Robert Heinlein, who were all first published by Campbell within the same couple of months. Through rigorous mentoring and editing, Campbell would establish *Astounding* as the home of a type of science fiction that required more competent writing and greater scientific rigour. His writers not only developed together but were also in competition to create better and more fascinating stories, aware that they had a special purpose as the pioneers in a new form of literature.

The stories Sturgeon wrote for Campbell from spring 1940 through the summer of 1941 brought a glib, whimsical witticism to the pages of Campbell's magazines. He introduces mermaids, fairies, and other unusual creatures into the modern world, with supernatural agents and aliens demonstrating the same human foibles as the everyday folk they meet. His stories were often brash with knockabout humour and brisk exchanges of dialogue. Unlike 'It' and 'Bianca's Hands', there is more wit than feeling to these pieces. But this joshing quality makes them stand out from many other sf–fantasy pieces of the time, and may also give some flavour of Sturgeon's style around his peers. Sturgeon's pleasing manner and tendency to the atypical meant than on the several occasions he published stories under pseudonyms readers immediately wrote to identify them as by Sturgeon. That Sturgeon's stories sometimes can only offer a reasonable proficiency in contrast to the wooden gesticulations of his supposed peers, and their resulting contemporary praise often does him no justice to modern readers. Given the standards of the time, some of the contemporary praise for his writing may now seem fulsome and craven. What can be a striving for emotional effect in his writing may now seem just to be histrionics. Sturgeon's most successfully received story of this period indicates how much he was to remain persistently at odds with the standards of the science fiction community.

'Microcosmic God' appeared in *Astounding*, April 1941. In true sf style, the story features two pulp-style arrogant, conscienceless, power-crazed protagonists, who in their own ways and at different levels indulge their schemes of megalomaniacal exploitation. A scientist, Kidder secrets himself away on an island and develops a synthetic microscopic life form, the Neoterics, whose rapid life-span he exploits to force their evolution. The Neoterics worship Kidder as a threatening god and are compelled to produce marvellous inventions. Kidder's banker, Conant, evilly exploits Kidder in turn, and has a bomb produced so that he may secretly hold the president of the USA to ransom. At the last minute Kidder creates a shield over his island, putting an end to Conant's plot, and the story ends on a note of mystery as to what may further ensue. The story has the benefit of being told in an often unexpectedly bouncy breezy style. Almost immediately after its publication Sturgeon repudiated the story. He was proud of its concept but felt that the story had not been properly told, sometime suggesting that it had a poor style and cardboard characters, on other occasions that he had not done the idea justice. Despite Sturgeon's qualms, 'Microcosmic God''s fame was enduring. It was galling for Sturgeon to be told that this was his best story, and to have it repeatedly reinforced by finding it again and again in anthologies he was asked to review. Decades later, a survey of the membership of the Science Fiction Writers of America in 1969 to select the 'greatest science fiction stories of all time' had 'Microcosmic God' voted joint 4th.

Given that Sturgeon's later works were animated by a sympathy for society's outcast, misfits, and underdogs, it may be that the older Sturgeon was perturbed that the story had simply accepted the fact of the Neoterics' exploitation and had failed to reach a morally satisfying conclusion. In Sturgeon's stories from this period, there are occasional tiny hints of later themes that would dominate his mature works. Often what is merely a purely supplemental piece of background colouration flourishes into a major device. For instance, the society in 'Pokerface' (1941) has 'balance' and telepathy. And as we shall see later, what looked to be little more than a quirky encapsulation of an independent but cranky scientist in 'Microscopic God' would prove to be oddly prophetic:

> He was an odd sort of apple and always had been. He had never



graduated from any college or university because he found them too slow for him, and too rigid in their approach to education. He couldn't get used to the idea that perhaps his professors knew what they were talking about. That went for his texts, too. He was always asking questions, and didn't mind very much when they were embarrassing ... He never opened his mouth without leaving his victim feeling breathless. If he was talking to someone who had knowledge, he went in there and got it, leaving his victim breathless. If he was talking to someone whose knowledge was already in his possession, he only asked repeatedly, 'How do you know?'[24]

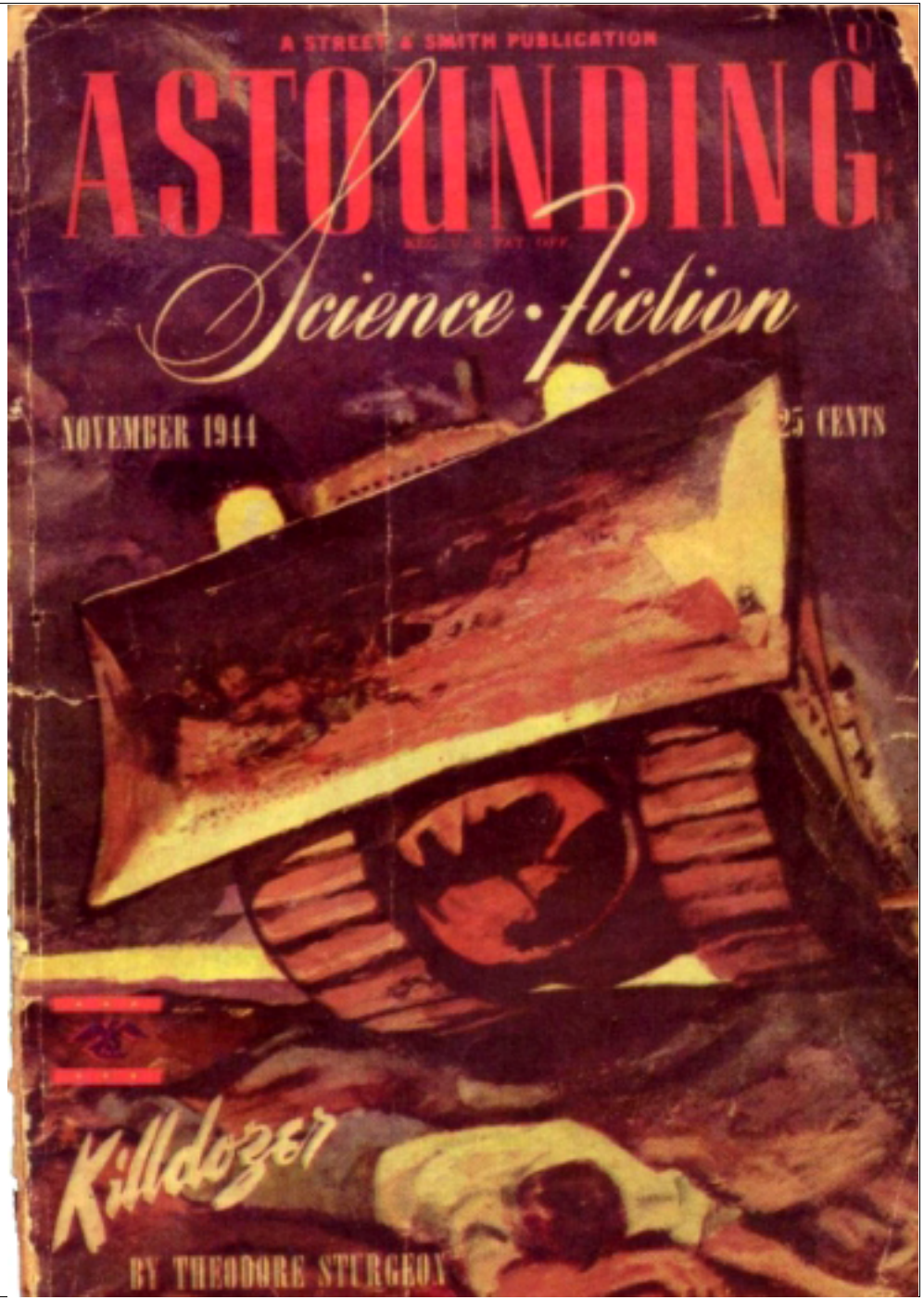
Failure and rebirth

Repeating his earlier situation at McClure's, as *Unknown* and *Astounding* were Sturgeon's only market, any story rejected by Campbell was a failure and could only be packed away in hope of some future sale. His work, particularly for *Unknown*, would have an enormous influence on the future of contemporary fantasy, but neither fannish adoration nor influence pay the rent. Campbell never expected his writers to live off their writing. It was a rewarding hobby, and many of his writers had proper jobs in the sciences. Sturgeon had only his writing, but Campbell did provide him with the opportunity to supplement his income by writing the comic 'Iron Munro', based on a character from Campbell's fiction, for the same publisher in 1940. Theodore and Dorothe had a baby girl, Patricia, in December 1940. By late 1940 Sturgeon was looking for a regular income to compensate for his irregular writing life and to bolster the knocks it inflicted on his confidence. In June 1941 the family moved to Jamaica, where Sturgeon had secured a job managing a hotel owned by his mother's family. All of the stories that subsequently appeared in Campbell's magazines from the latter half of 1941 through 1943 were written and purchased before the Sturgeons' move. These also included a batch of stories by James H. Beard given by John W. Campbell to Sturgeon for rewriting.

Sturgeon was still just 23 years old. His hotel post, 90 miles from Kingston, would take care of immediate needs, and he hoped the change of scene would restart his creativity and writing ability. Instead he was crippled by writer's block. 'The tropics is funny. The sun's going to shine tomorrow the way it's shining today, and you can put it off; and also I was running a hotel and I was extremely busy. I'd been very recently

married and had a baby by that time and, uh, I don't know, it just got lost.'[25] Then America went to war at the end of 1941, killing off the tourist trade, and the hotel was closed down. Sturgeon's wife had to take a secretarial job at Fort Simonds and Sturgeon was reduced to selling hosiery door to door. His earlier heart ailment kept him out of the army, but when the American armed forces began building a base at Fort Simonds Sturgeon applied for a job as Chief Assistant Steward in February 1942. The position meant he ended up handling the mess hall, barracks, and food warehouse. Sturgeon was later moved to a gasoline and tractor lubrication station. In his own words, he 'fell in love' with the bulldozers and got hired as operator. 'If you know anyone with an inferiority complex you can cure him by putting him in the saddle of a caterpillar D-8 for a few months ... It does to you what marriage does.'[26] After the base began to fold up he was stationed in Puerto Rico from August 1942 to December 1943, and finally in St Croix in the American Virgin Islands. A second daughter, Cynthia, was born in 1943 in Puerto Rico. Sturgeon was unable to write at all during his employment by the army. Then in nine days in May 1944 he wrote a 28,000-word adventure story, 'Killdozer'. 'Killdozer' is about a construction crew building an airstrip on a small pacific island during World War II who accidentally release an ancient alien energy creature that possesses and brings to life their bulldozer. The story becomes a cat-and-mouse game as the murderous bulldozer proceeds to kill off the members of the crew until the few surviving workers manage to destroy the bulldozer and the energy alien.

Sturgeon sent 'Killdozer' directly to John W. Campbell, who accepted it for $542.50. At the same time he had written two other stories (now lost, but both situated in the Pacific during WWII) and sent them to his agent, who was unable to place them (she would soon go onto greater success as Eleanor Roosevelt's agent). Sturgeon's government contract had a clause paying airfare to the United States, so he flew back in October 1944. He went with the aim of procuring a new agent and then making arrangements to return. The trip was only supposed to take 10 days, instead it turned into eight months as Sturgeon was crippled by depression and unable to act, or get together the money or the energy to fly back to St. Croix. Sturgeon stayed in Manhattan, sleeping 18 to 20 hours a day, reduced to eating with his half-sister three times a week. After waiting eight months, Dorothe, who was still back in the islands with the two children and no money, decided she'd had enough, and asked for a



divorce. They were divorced in a civil court in St Thomas in June 1945, with Dorothe retaining custody of the childen. In his later assessment Sturgeon would admit that the marriage had failed because he had been immature, whereas Dorothe was mature and it had all got too much for her. Sturgeon had also become disgusted with the way he was perpetrating the same intemperate behaviour and abuse on his children that Argyll had inflicted on him.[27]

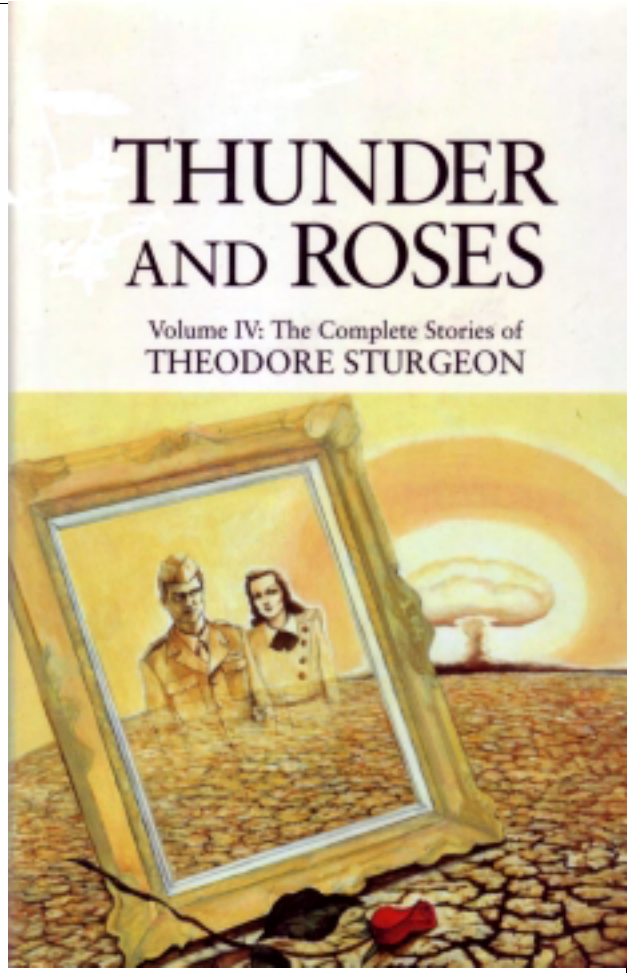
The only compensation was that Sturgeon's return to New York coincided with the publication of 'Killdozer' as the cover story for *Astounding*, November 1944. The story made a stir in sf circles, and Sturgeon found himself a star among sf fans and writers, and the story was even optioned as a film. Sturgeon moved in with L. Jerome Stanton, John Campbell's Assistant Editor at *Astounding*. By his own admission Sturgeon was in a 'zombie-ish condition'.[28] In March 1945 he got a job as copy chief in the advertising section of a wartime firm that made quartz crystals. That job had ended when he flew back to try to talk things through with Dorothe, and when he came back to New York he was more depressed than ever. He wrote to another high school girlfriend, Rita Dragonette, and eventually she came to live with him in Stanton's apartment. Dragonette was a poet, and after Sturgeon broke his writer's block they would co-write the story 'Make Room for Me' in 1946 (revised by Sturgeon for later publication). Sturgeon was also socialising with the John W. Campbell stable of writers, such as Heinlein and L. Ron Hubbard. Sturgeon was meeting every day with John Campbell, now only the editor of *Astounding* since *Unknown* had folded because of the wartime paper shortage. After much coaxing, at the end of 1945, a year and half since 'Killdozer', Sturgeon wrote a new story, 'The Chromium Helmet', in John Campbell's basement in New Jersey. Not only was it Sturgeon's first story in several years, but in retrospect Sturgeon would identify it as the first of his 'therapeutic stories': 'the search to create the optimum human being'.[29] Sturgeon's study of the 'optimum man' would normally consist of analysing everything that causes people to be damaged and incapable, and then proffering a solution.

Sturgeon spent most of 1946 working as a literary agent in the sf field (understandable given his dissatisfaction of the previous couple of years), with clients like William Tenn, A. Bertram Chandler, James Blish, Damon Knight, and Judith Merril. Sturgeon also nursed an unrealised hope of starting his own science fiction magazine, to be called *If*. Sturgeon would gift his clientele to the Scott Meredith Agency in 1947, so being incidentally responsible for one of the most influential literary agencies in sf. It was Sturgeon who gave the young Judith Zissman the writer's name 'Judith Merril' while they were conducting a romance in early 1947.[30] His stint as an agent also made him more aware of venues other than just John Campbell where he could sell his fiction. Sturgeon found his stockpiled, earlier Campbell rejects were welcome at *Weird Tales*. Besides his unsold old stories he would publish another eight new stories with this magazine before his next period of silence.

The crime and horror stories he wrote during this period would begin to explore in idiosyncratic manners and with striking devices the idea of mutual existence that would define the mature Sturgeon's work. 'Cellmate' (1947), a straight horror piece, has a prisoner discover that his hulking idiotic cellmate secretly harbours a super-intelligent conjoint twin possessed of terrible psychic powers (an abbreviated alternate version of *More Than Human*). In 'Die, Maestro Die!' (1949), written in an energetic hep slang, the plot's action initiated by the protagonist's violent resentment and jealousy, is balanced against the sympathy, support, and cooperation of a jazz orchestra for its individual members based on their sense of cohesion when performing together. Sturgeon also places his marker on the idea of *Syzygy*: 'two organisms let their nuclei flow together for a time. Then they separate and go their ways again. It isn't a reproductive process at all. It's merely a way in which each may gain a part of the other'.[31] For Sturgeon it becomes an overarching phrase, employed repeatedly, to encompass various, usually telepathic or extra-terrestrial, mechanisms of psychic interface by which his characters might intimately share their feelings and cooperate. Sturgeon's first instance is the blatantly titled 'It Wasn't Syzygy' (1948), in which a young man discovers he is the projected, incomplete fantasy of his lover, and since he unconsciously lacks the ability to fully realise himself, he is trapped as a semi-person. 'The Perfect Host' is an innovative sequence of first person narratives tracing a series of mysterious murders and suicides, all eventually revealed to be the result of a parasitic entity that feeds on emotions. The last sections features a puzzled and disturbed Sturgeon wondering what he has written, and the last chapter is the conceptual entity hoping to infect readers. Not only does the entity inhabit other people but there is a sequence where it is divided and feels a sexual urge to reunite with itself. In 'The Professors' Teddy Bear' (1948), a young boy finds that a creature symbiotically feeds off his childish fantasies, callously realising them as horrific adult futures,

trapping the boy in an inescapable cycle of death and guilt. Related to his idea of syzygy, but within the context of real human relations, is a sequence of stories in which his protagonists find themselves in some sort of romantic or symbiotic triangle. 'It Wasn't Syzygy' had featured the young man, his girlfriend, and another man. 'Make Room for Me' (1946, rewritten and published in 1951), 'Hurricane Trio' (1947, revised in 1955), 'Largo' (1947), and 'Perfect Host' attempt to explore how three lovers can live together, examining their interaction, with merging and conflicting waves of love and jealousy. At this point in Sturgeon's career, he is largely unable to imagine how this can function naturally, and so love falters on the protagonists' unworthiness.

The science fiction Sturgeon wrote in the next few years after his writer's block is almost obsessed by the dropping of the atomic bomb. Sturgeon had written a poetic editorial, 'August Sixth, 1945', in the December 1945 *Astounding*, which was partly a hymn to science fiction for predicting the power of the atom, yet also slightly aghast at what nuclear bombs means for humanity. (Man) 'learned on August 6, 1945, that he alone is big enough to kill himself, or to live forever.'[32] 'Memorial' (1946) may be the first atomic doom story written in the wake of Hiroshima. A scientist tries to create a terrifying memorial to the power of the bomb, but only ends up provoking a nuclear holocaust. In admonitions such as 'The Sky Was Full of Ships' (1947), 'The Love of Heaven' (1948), and 'Minority Report' (1949) Sturgeon returned to the idea that man has a viciousness, destructiveness, and capacity for self-destruction that is so powerfully inimical to universal life that humanity must perforce be isolated or stopped if necessary by alien powers. In stories like 'There is No Defense' (1948) and 'Unite and Conquer' (1948), man is still the enemy that man must overcome, but Sturgeon now emphasises that real cooperation and the will to refrain from violence will be man's salvation. Sturgeon's best story on this theme was 'Thunder and Roses' (1947). It prefigures *On the Beach*, as the last surviving Americans must refrain from retaliating in a nuclear war to give the few remnants of humanity a chance to survive. Rather than the space opera of many of the other stories in this atomic nihilistic vein, Sturgeon's arguments and story are grounded in his characters and the immediacy of their situation. An army base after the nuclear holocaust, stricken by despair, suicide, madness, is visited by a chanteuse, Starr, whose altruism, beauty, and talent inspires a young soldier to believe in his own goodness, strength, and courage. The solution of Sturgeon's story relies on no technical gimmicks, nor does it try, as 'Memorial' demonstrated would be ineffectual to terrify people into better behaviour. Instead it is an investigation of how realistically to make people believe in their better selves and hope they will altruistically sacrifice themselves for the future of humanity.



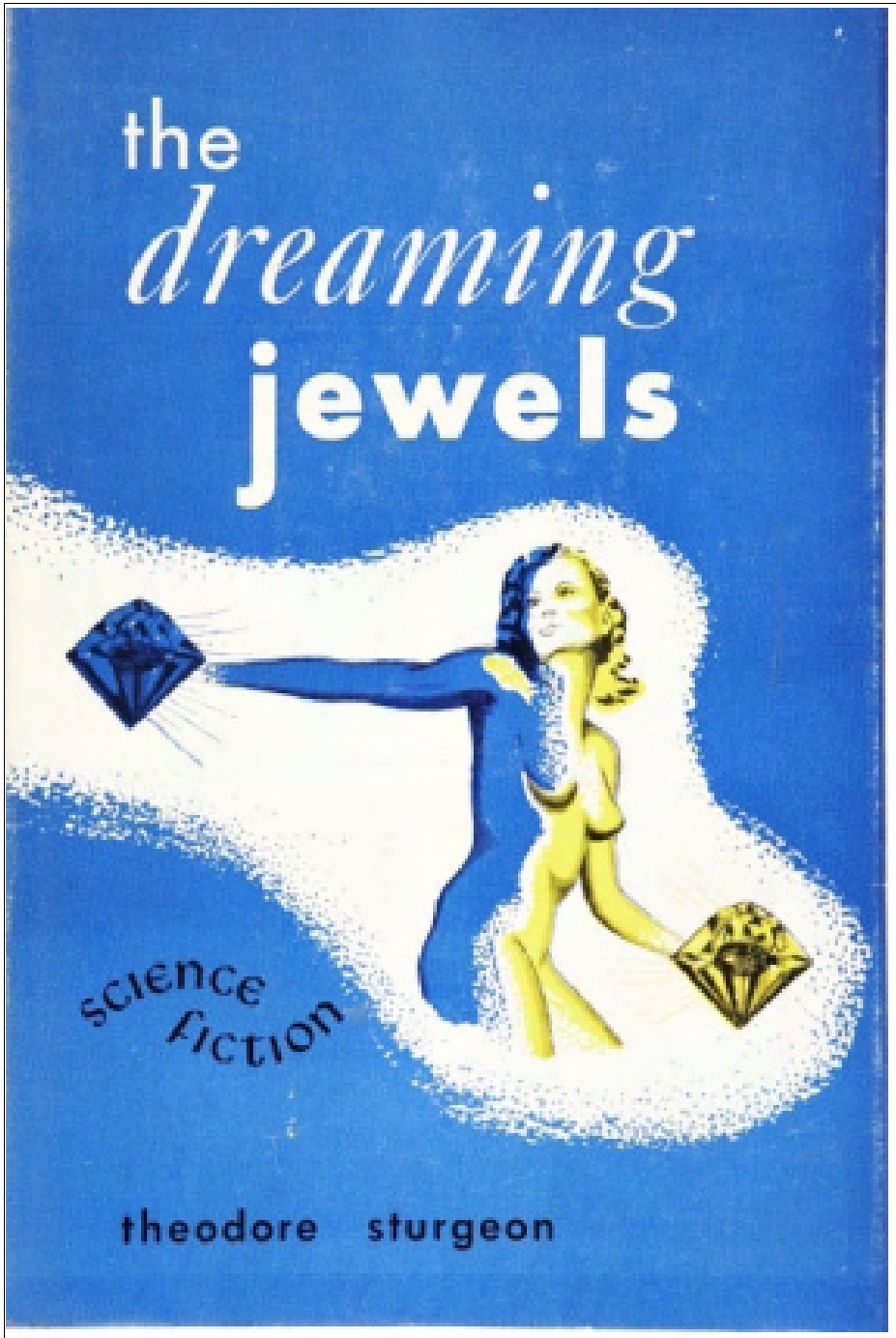
In 'Maturity' (1947), Sturgeon attempted some analysis as to how this better humanity might be found, and also the consequences of the previous decade of his own life. Robin English has an overactive thymus that has prolonged his adolescence. Inventive yet impractical, surrounded by ingenious creations he fails to sell, he is buoyed along by childlike wonder, playfulness and curiosity. Since he is also 29, the same age as Sturgeon when he wrote this story, the extent to which Robin is a self-portrait did not go unremarked by colleagues at the time. A young female endocrinologist takes several kinds of interest in Robin, and tries to heal him, temporarily succeeding, with Robin producing operettas, paintings, and power brakes, but eventually he accedes to his own death. The story presages several elements of the classic 'Flowers for Algernon'. For Sturgeon, it becomes an essay in addressing what is a working definition of maturity. It is also an early exploration of the conflict between the individual realising himself or adjusting /conforming to society's concept of normal success: to accept

the man Robin naturally is or impose the role that the doctors envision for him of productively applying his talents and skills when he is 'well'. Robin is the first of Sturgeon's many evolved humans, an 'optimum man' all of whose parts are 'each working at the top of its capacity and in absolute harmony'.[33] The argument repeats in 'Maturity' that the truly mature man would not be a standard superman, but instead a Christ-like figure 'who would understand everything, and do what he could for people'.[34] In a later story, 'It Opens the Sky' (1957), a character insists, 'You just don't increase intelligence by a factor of five and fail to see that people must be kind to one another'.[35] Robin's own definition, from the assumption of his own advanced mental development, is that 'Enough is maturity ...', which in the aftermath of his death has suicidal overtones.[36] But only a couple of years later, Sturgeon expands on the idea of what is enough. He does not mean enough of one thing, but everything in balance, the good and the apparently bad. It is a process of moving back and forth, encompassing everything, not merely stasis. The idea of ying-yang is so important that he repeatedly reproduces the symbol itself so his readers will understand that if life is understand as a journey in a straight line across the circle then it will have to include equal amounts of black and white.

A brief love affair gave Sturgeon the confidence to exhume his old manuscript of 'Bianca's Hands' and submit it to a short story competition being run by the British magazine *Argosy*. In March of 1947, he won the contest's first prize of £250, the equivalent of $1000 (Graham Greene took second place). As important as the money was (and it was desperately needed to pay off outstanding debts from Jamaica), and besides being a public acknowledgment of his ability outside of science fiction, Sturgeon's editing of 'Bianca's Hands' prior to submission at last made him aware of how much he consciously knew about writing, that he was not just an uncontrolled talent.[37] 'Bianca's Hands' was proof that he was recognised as a successful writer. He continued to further extend his range of markets, and in 1948 he would sell to *Varsity* and *Shock*. His recently published stories attracted the interest of other editors, so he began writing cowboy stories for Don Ward, though overtures from *Good Housekeeping* and *Cosmopolitan* came to nothing.

'Thunder and Roses' caught the imagination of the 5th Worldcon at Philadelphia in late 1947. Philcon I was only the second convention after World War II, but as the first since on the upper east coast, it was the first significant opportunity for adult fans and writers, who were situated in a majority about New York City, to associate en masse. One of the more memorable features of that convention was Sturgeon performing the title song of 'Thunder and Roses' accompanied by showgirl Mary Mair. Sturgeon had been living with the singer Mary Mair since spring 1947, a period that briefly crossed over with his time seeing Judith Merril that may be reflected in the story 'Hurricane Trio' and the importance of the *ménage a trois* theme in similar stories from that time. Sturgeon also contracted to publish his first book, a hardcover anthology *Without Sorcery* for Prime Press, a small fan-run science fiction publisher. Before mainstream publishers realised there was money in sf and fantasy at the beginning of the 1950s, such sf books as were published were the limited edition product of very small regional specialist presses. In this instance, Prime Press was the offspring of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Association, hosts of Philcon I. Sturgeon took it on as an opportunity to rewrite 'Maturity'. The idea that an sf author might be so concerned as to want to rewrite a story that had already seen successful publication was a novelty, and only served to heighten the myth of Sturgeon as sf's dedicated artist. The collection was also distinguished by the unusual inclusion of notes accompanying each story explaining the practical facts and circumstances of its composition.

Though 'Without Sorcery' was dedicated to Mair, their relationship was already shaky, and in October 1948 the two temporarily split. In the immediate aftermath Sturgeon sank into a few weeks of desperate inactivity. With the encouragement of a magazine editor, Sturgeon wrote his first novel, *The Dreaming Jewels*, on spec, but at the last minute the editor changed his fiction policy and rejected the short novel.[38] In immediate need of money Sturgeon took a job at Time Inc. as Assistant Circulation Manager writing direct-mail copy for *Fortune* magazine. He was very good at it: 'Direct mail for Time, Inc. paid off at 2.3%. I wrote three 4% letters, and became a local hero.'[39] Almost immediately he took the job, *The Dreaming Jewels* was accepted by Howard Browne, the new editor of *Fantastic Adventures*, to be published in the February 1950 issue.



Reknown

Sturgeon was briefly married to Mary Mair in 1949. He was blocked from spring 1949 into early spring 1950. He would 'come home from work, and try to write and find that I couldn't'.[40] Through the highly artificial means of writing one page a day, he was able to write one story during this almost year-long period, 'Shadow, Shadow On the Wall'. A story about a young boy whose imaginative fantasies come to life, eliminating his abusive step-parent, it was an indication of the powerful resonance of the personal concerns fictionalised in *The Dreaming Jewels*. Sturgeon fell in love with Marion McGahan, whom he had met through Jay Stanton in early 1950. He was 31, and she was 20. They lived together in Brooklyn for a while. He still worked at Time, Inc. in Manhattan, and she worked in the Brooklyn Public Library. In spring of 1950 Sturgeon expanded and revised the *Fantastic Adventures* magazine version of *The Dreaming Jewels* (literally, using the magazine pages cut up as galleys) for hardback publication in autumn of the same year.[41]

> They caught the kid doing something disgusting out under the bleachers at the high-school stadium, and he was sent home from the grammar school across the street. He was eight years old then ... but everyone jumped on him when it got around. His name was Horty — Horton, that is — Bluett. Naturally he caught blazes when he got home.[42]

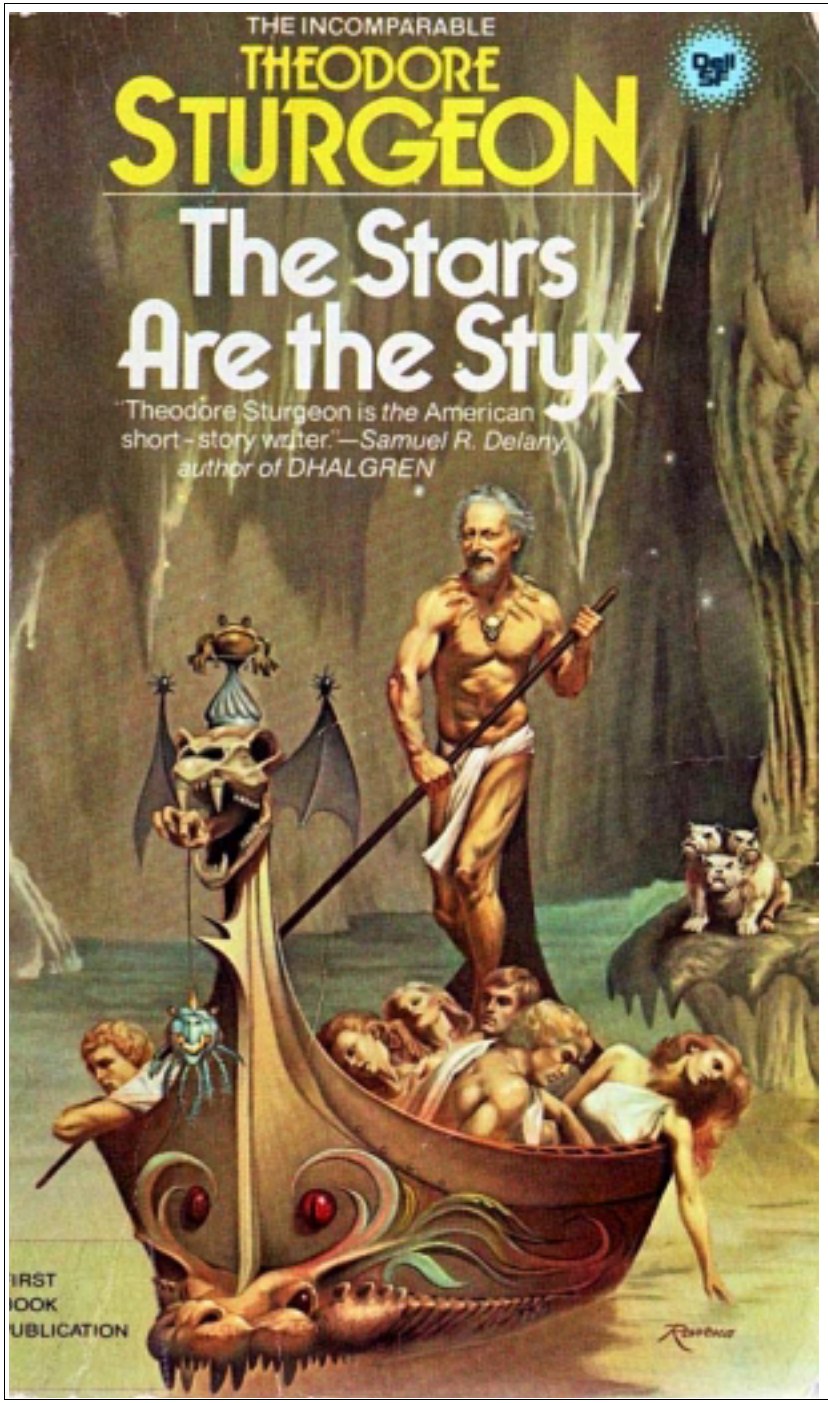
The hero of *The Dreaming Jewels*, Horty, is an orphan, and he finds himself the victim of his stepparents' physical and emotional abuse. This final time it is so extreme that three of his fingers are accidentally severed. Horty runs away and meets up with a circus, where he finds refuge, acceptance, and inclusion in a new family among the carnival freaks. The eight-year-old boy is disguised as a midget girl to escape detection by the circus owner, Pierre Monetre, otherwise known as 'Maneater'. Maneater has an obsessive lust for power, a hatred of humanity, and a will to hurt, stemming from his own sense of rejection and frustrated sense of superiority. Maneater has discovered the existence of alien crystals. When the crystals mate in their dreams they create freakish incomplete copies of Earth life in reality. Since the crystals 'strive for nothing mankind wants, take nothing mankind needs', Maneater is searching for a human–crystal interface so he can exploit the crystals and dominate the world. No reader will be surprised to discover that Horty is that mutant–human production of the crystals' syzygy. The novel

builds up to the final confrontation between Horty and Maneater. There is, however, an odd diversion where Horty transforms into a woman to protect his childhood sweetheart from his stepfather, now become a judge. Horty, of course, defeats Maneater but accidentally kills Zena, the midget who has cared and mentored him all this time.

The Dreaming Jewels is something of a juvenile novel heavily freighted with symbolism, a fantasy that is reliant upon sf and horror elements, all told in rather a fable-like way. The précis above should give an indication of how much the story draws upon Sturgeon's childhood, and it is that feeling of childhood injustice and discovery which gives the novel much of its power. As such, *The Dreaming Jewels* is a lot more explicitly autobiographical than the typical first sf novel. At the beginning of the novel, Horty is the same age as Ted when Argyll entered his family's life and the name of Horty's stepfather, Armand, shares a syllable with Argyll. Later Sturgeon would castigate the novel for having 'two evil step father types'.[43] As Horty grows up, we are treated to a procession of the books he has read, his interest in radios, tapes, and guitar-playing which serves almost as much as a self-portrait as Robin English in 'Maturity'.[44] Like many genre juveniles, the book charts the protagonist discovering his magical powers and responsibilities. The book also champions the humanity of outcasts over the cruelty and villainy of adults (an alligator man is telepathic so he can further feel the disgust of normal people). Yet in this early attempt to explore what it means to be human and more than human, Horty eventually proves to be merely a superman, and these aspects are best emphasised in the character of the midget, Zena. Zena is yet another character who feels ostracised from mankind, but her sensitivity to personal hurt is the incentive for her to care after others. Besides trying to look after Horty, she exposes him to a world of arts, literature, history, and sciences. No matter how afraid she is, she will risk her life to protect him, and incidentally sacrifice her life so Horty will triumph. Sturgeon resurrects her at the end of the novel because 'the fact that her death, upon earning her right to survive, is bad art'.[45]

Besides the publication of *The Dreaming Jewels*, Sturgeon's importance in the close-knit world of New York science fiction was confirmed at the start of the new decade with the arrival of two new, more literary science fiction magazines. Barry Malzberg argues that in the late 1940s Sturgeon had kept open the possibility of style-oriented sf built upon configuration and mood, employing internalisation and quirky characterisation for when H. L. Gold and Anthony Boucher founded their magazines.[46] The inaugural issues of Boucher's *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* (an offshoot of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*) and H. L. Gold's *Galaxy* (funded by an entrepreneurial publisher in Italy), each had a Sturgeon story. 'The Hurkle Is a Happy Beast' (*F&SF*, Fall 1949) was the last story written before his writer's block prior to *The Dreaming Jewels*, while 'The Stars Are the Styx' (*Galaxy*, October 1950) was the first story written after *The Dreaming Jewels*. Sturgeon had also been instrumental in winnowing the slushpile for *Galaxy*'s earliest issues (where Edgar Pangborn's first sf story, 'Angel's Egg', was one of his discoveries) and would occasionally edit or rewrite others' stories at Gold's request. Much of Sturgeon's classic fiction of the next decade would appear in these two new magazines, whereas Campbell would publish only one Sturgeon story in the 1950s. It may be that Sturgeon's use of the sciences was uncongenial to Campbell. Sturgeon's theme that aliens were often superior to humanity would certainly have gone against Campbell's expressed tastes, while the other two magazines were more inclined to indulge the ir-rational fantasies, emotive and heavily stylistic forays of Sturgeon's maturity. Sturgeon's prominence was only confirmed in the 21 January 1950 *New Yorker* report on a meeting of the NYC sf fan society The Hydra Club, where Sturgeon was the name on every mouth because of *The Dreaming Jewels*. The first issue of many science fiction magazines in the 1950s would be distinguished by a contribution from Sturgeon.

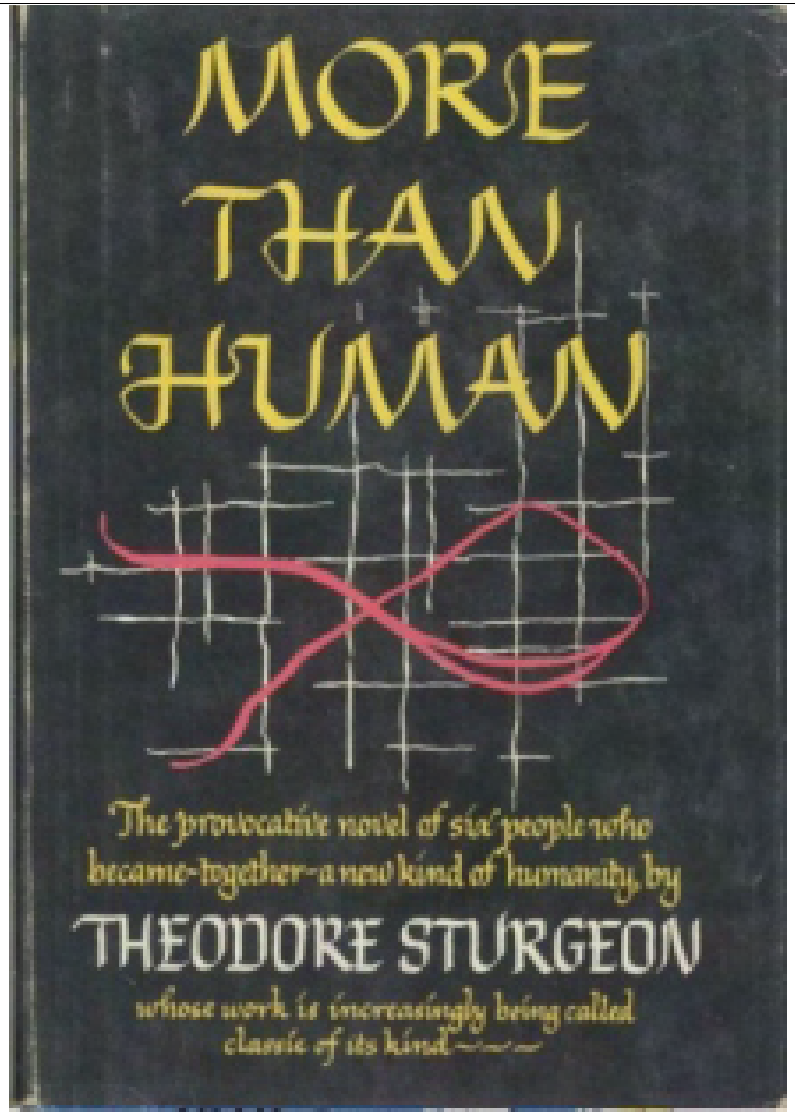
His appearances and talks at conventions in the early 1950s produced quotes and formulations that were repeated in fanzines and critical essays. The burgeoning sf critics of fandom debated his definition in a talk to the Little Monsters of America, NY (13 July 1952) that 'a good science fiction story is a story built around human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its scientific content'. It was startling, not least for predicating his idea of science fiction not upon scientific gimmicks, but upon human problems. Personally, for Sturgeon, it would mean that his idea of what he was attempting to achieve in his fiction was sometimes hamstrung by the need to find some realistic gimmick for his conflicted humans. Since Sturgeon only came to John W. Campbell by accident and then wrote more that was suitable for *Unknown* than *Astounding*, it is sometimes worth considering just how native Sturgeon was to science, for all that he would write enthusiastic essays and columns. In his ideal, the scientific and the human had to illuminate each other, not simply act as background to each other, depending upon the writer's strengths and



interest. 'A great many of those who hold that the best of sf stands up with the best of any literature, seem to lose sight of the fact that it is perforce different from other fields.'[47] When writing of human needs, Sturgeon would feel constrained to express them in the context of scientific descriptions and, at worst, hackneyed futuristic adventure settings. Sf critic Damon Knight sometimes felt that 'the plots of his short stories are mere contrivances to let his characters expound themselves'.[48] Sturgeon would later often repeat that 'good science fiction is good fiction'. For all that he could appreciate the awe of scientific concepts, he would argue that 'Arthur C. Clarke often creates a Thing Story and not a People story. Good fiction is never — not Ever — primarily about Things.'[49]

At conventions in the early 1950s he was already touting his 'Sturgeon's Revelation', which would become more famous as 'Sturgeon's Law'. It was a defence of the science fiction genre, 'which was wrung out of me after twenty years of wearying defense of science fiction against attacks of people who used the worst examples of the field for ammunition, and whose conclusion was that ninety per cent of SF is crud. Ninety per cent of everything is crud.'[50] 'Sturgeon's Law' ironically proved an easy offhand method for faux-sophisticates to dismiss anything. Sturgeon himself had a more balanced view, for instance writing of a novel by Norman Spinrad that it 'falls in that great 90% of all fiction (and indeed all things) which gives good fiction (and things) something on which to stand and be noticeable'.[51]

Sturgeon was also a participant in one of the more controversial ventures associated with science fiction. Dianetics, 'the New Science of the Mind' was the product of L. Ron Hubbard and much championed by John W. Campbell in the pages of *Astounding* in 1950. Sturgeon was an early convert, even helping Hubbard rewrite an article submitted to *Amazing Stories*, 'Dianetics: Supermen in 1950 AD'. Sturgeon said that early Dianetics was a 'synthesis rather unlike anything done before, and totally practical stuff that really and truly worked. And the thing, the blueprint behind it, was solid and reasonable'.[52] Dianetics appeared to offer a working model of the mind. Sturgeon's own fiction is about healing people, with the narrative cunningly forming the process of therapy for his characters. One editor would semi-mockingly describe Sturgeon's stories as 'the examination of convoluted people writhing in the embrace of their neuroses'.[53] His stories are often resolved through the idea that the psyche is a mechanism that when in error can be corrected and



realigned through logic and understanding. (The late story 'Uncle Fremmis' parodies this assumption with a country mechanic who repairs the psyches of the international jetset elite with a swift blow to the back of their heads just like an engineer trying to start an idiosyncratic motor with a well-timed canny kick.) Dianetics 'auditing' is a process of stimulating anamnesis, the recalling of the past to mind and relating past joys and sorrow, followed by analysis and insight. At worst, sometimes the breakthroughs in Sturgeon's stories can be a little too pat, demonstrating few of the likely aftershocks and after-effects of mental awakening. It is, for all Sturgeon's innate sensitivity to human weakness, of a piece with the pragmatic view of the world afforded by sf. It was the aspect of Dianetics as psychiatry made easy for engineers that made it so suitable to 'Astounding'. Sturgeon would be a practising Dianetics auditor for a few years at the beginning of the 1950s. He also discussed Dianetics in an early symposium in *Marvel Science Fiction* in 1951, and would later defend John W. Campbell against Martin Gardner's criticisms in a review of *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*.[54]

Traces of his interest in Dianetics can be found in many of his most famous works. Sturgeon's novels and stories feature lengthy psychiatric sessions, probing of repressed memories, with a subsequent release of emotion and dispassionate rationalising to restore the protagonist's psychological balance. Sturgeon said of the psychiatrist in 'Baby is Three' and in 'Some of Your Blood', 'his operative technique is basically basic Dianetics'.[55] Sturgeon's exploration of the relation between individuals and the human race was also coloured by Dianetics. In 1950 both *The Dreaming Jewels* and *The Stars Are the Styx* saw the same formulation: 'The base of survival emerged, a magnificent ethic: the highest command is in terms of the species, the next is survival of group. The lowest of three is survival of self. All good and all evil, all morals, all progress depend on this order of basic commands. To survive for the self at the price of the group is to jeopardise species.' It is an idea often explored in Sturgeon's fiction, but the 'Self–Group–Species' formulation was cribbed directly from a Dianetics diagram.[56] In all of Sturgeon's employment of motifs from Dianetics, it may be too difficult to determine whether they formed Sturgeon's ideas, or simply found accord with his existing ideas.

More than *More Than Human*

Sturgeon and Marion married in 1951, after his marriage to Mair was annulled. Ted was secure in his job (by now he had been transferred over to the promotion department of Time International), and enjoying his central role in the active social life of the science fiction world in New York City. Marion harboured the long-time dream of living in the country with a writer, and she prevailed on Ted to make it come true for her.[57]

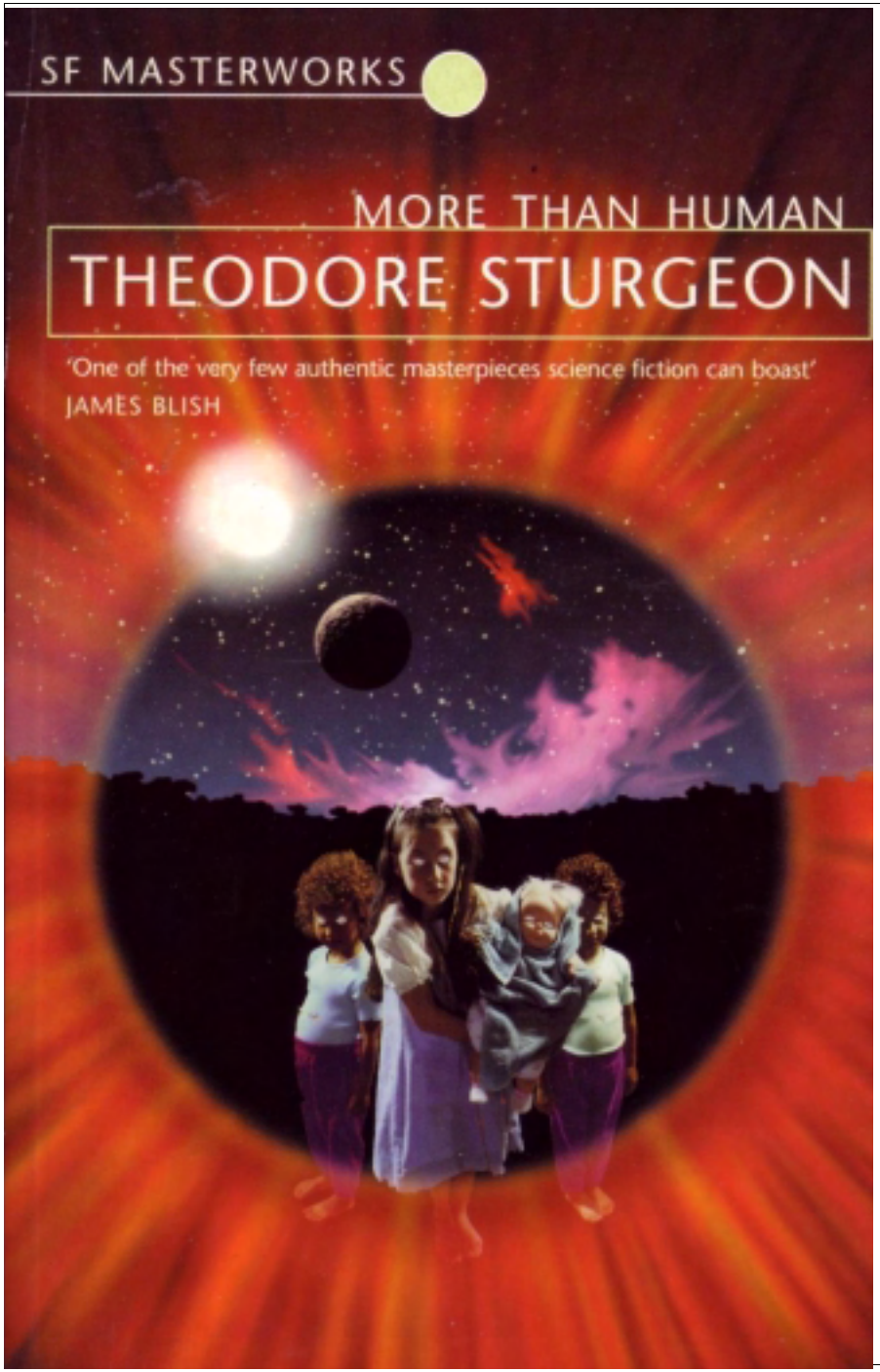
Sturgeon wanted to make her happy and Sturgeon would be able to return to his writing. His stories published in 1951 alternated between fiction that explored and expanded the themes that intrigued and defined him, and stories like 'Excalibur and the Atom' and 'The Incubi of Parallel X' that were little more than lengthy adventure stories.

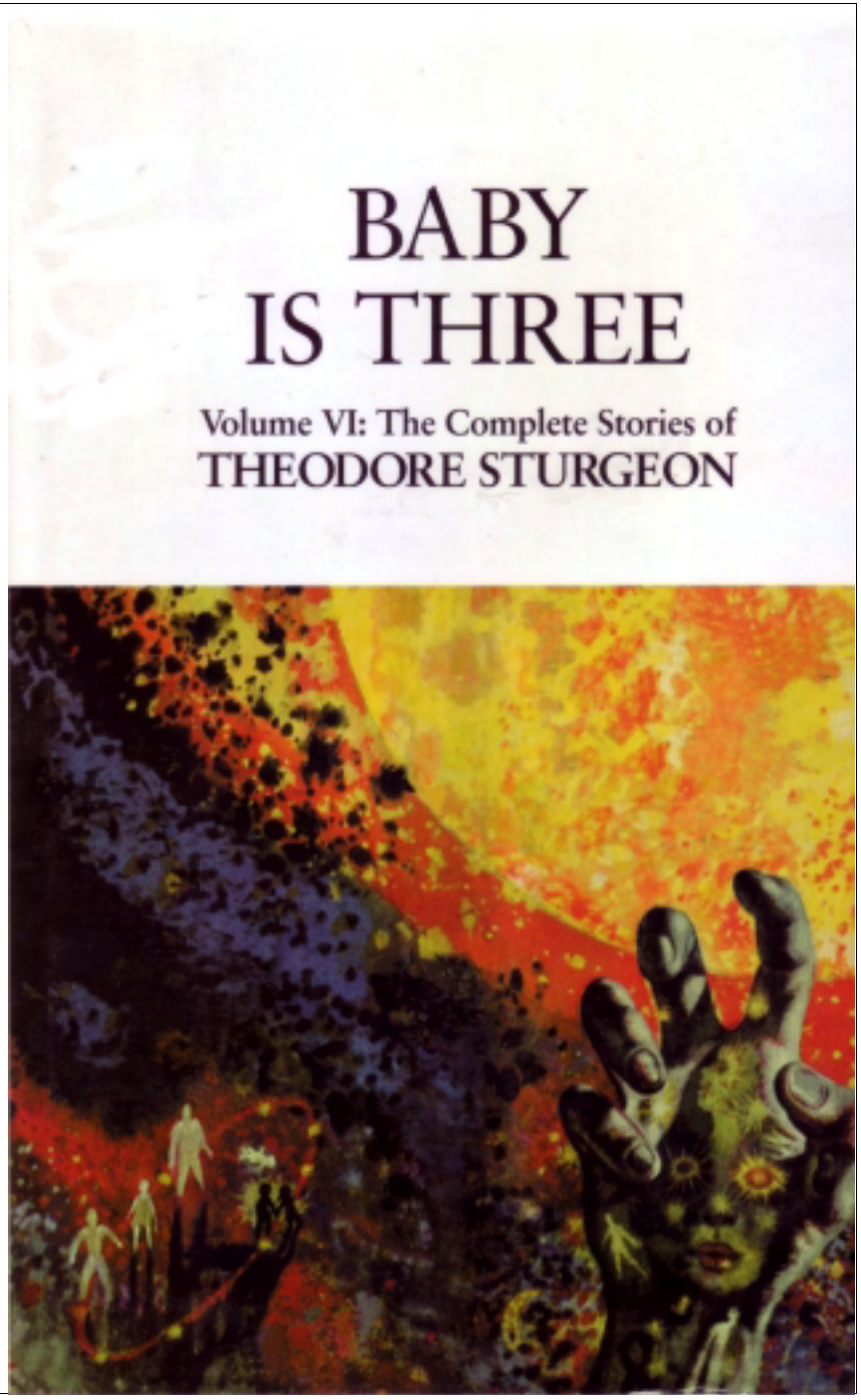
Sturgeon was distracted from writing fiction in the latter half of 1951 by new opportunities in television. 1951 saw two almost simultaneous sf series attempt to broadcast serious science fiction for grown-up audiences. The producers wanted to use thought-provoking stories, often adapting classic sf stories from the magazines. Sturgeon was a pioneering contributor to both series, writing scripts for each. *Tales of Tomorrow* was the first to reach the screens, broadcast on ABC. Sturgeon's 'Verdict From Space', an adaptation of his earlier nuclear parable 'The Sky was Full of Ships', had the honour of being the premiere episode (3 August 1951). He provided the story for the episode 'Enemy Unknown' (23 November 1951), and wrote a second screenplay, 'The Miraculous Serum', adapted from 'Adaptive Ultimatum' by Stanley Weinbaum (June 1952). Sturgeon also wrote scripts for CBS's *Out There*, but under the pseudonym 'Edward Waldo', adapting 'Ordeal in Space' (November 1951) by Heinlein and his own 'Mewhu's Jet' (December 1951). The series were relatively short-lived. Sturgeon's feelings were that the work required of him, the restrictions of live broadcasting, and the unsatisfying final results were not recompensed by his wages.

In 1952 the family moved to a little stone house back in the woods of Congers, in suburban New York state, near to Marion's mother. Sturgeon's first son, Robin, named after the lead character in 'Maturity', was born in 1952. 1952 only saw three stories in magazines from Sturgeon, as a result of his work for television in 1951. One of those stories, though, was 'Baby Is Three', which would be the basis of his most famous novel, *More Than Human*. 'Baby is Three' and *More Than Human* are explorations of evolution and human nature, of psychiatry and psychic powers. A group of misfits, each possessed of a particular psychic power, is brought together, to discover that together they 'blesh', a combination of blending and meshing, to form a Gestalt creature that will be the next stage in human development. The story had been inspired by the image of a monk caring for a group of abandoned children in Pearl S. Buck's *Pavilion of Women*.[58] *More Than Human* would be the most famous instance of Sturgeon's recurring idea that misfits and deviants have a unique contribution to make to society, from the carnival freaks of *The Dreaming Jewels* to the dissatisfied malcontents of *The Stars Are The Styx* (1950) who will colonise new planets for humanity.

Sturgeon was contacted by Ian and Betty Ballantine, who were just founding a new paperback publishing house, where each book would appear simultaneously in paperback with a hardback from Farrar, Straus & Young. The Ballantines contracted Sturgeon to expand 'Baby is Three' into a novel. Sturgeon would slightly rewrite 'Baby is Three', bookended by two other novellas. Each section employs different voices, and so the book embodies the theme of Gestalt, of disparate, incomplete parts that are greater than the whole. Betty Ballantine would claim that the title *More Than Human* was Ian's contribution.[59] *More Than Human* was published in 1953, the same year Ballantine also published two other classics of science fiction, Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. *More Than Human* won the 1954 International Fantasy Award, has remained constantly in print since, and is a regular contender on most lists of best science fiction novels. As a novel written during one of Sturgeon's rare periods of prolific production, *More Than Human* also embodies and reconfigures many of the ideas, themes, and slogans of the fiction he was writing between 1951 and 1954.

The first section, 'The Fabulous Idiot', follows the central character of Lone, who will unconsciously draw a series of handicapped individuals to him. Lone, referred to as the 'Idiot', is a homeless young mental defective, and at first is little more than a bundle of sensations, attempting only to evade pain and hunger. He meets a young lady, Evelyn, the first person with whom he has a brief but full telepathic union, which when it ends teaches him about the pain of loss and loneliness. Lone is eventually adopted by a poor lonely farmer, Prodd, but Lone leaves after he learns that the farmer's wife is expecting a baby. It is Lone's loneliness that draws the others to him. 'A Saucer of Loneliness' (1953) was almost Pentecostal in its message that loneliness is universal, while 'The Sex Opposite' (1952) describes a scream that 'was the echo of their own first cry when they lost the first warmth and found loneliness, early, as everyone must'.[60] Sturgeon's interest in psionic powers took the form of what James Blish described as 'telempathy', in his Syzygy-themed stories or 'The Touch of Your Hand' (1953), in which individuals and societies communicate and share knowledge through touch. For Sturgeon, it was a metaphor for total communication, empathic sharing, of participating and merging in an open, honest community. Isolation and privacy are rarely positives for Sturgeon, but simply anguished, shamed conceal-


SF MASTERWORKS
MORE THAN HUMAN
THEODORE STURGEON
'One of the very few authentic masterpieces science fiction can boast'
JAMES BLISH


BABY
IS THREE
Volume VI: The Complete Stories of
THEODORE STURGEON

ment, the result of the fear of being exposed, rejected, and punished.

Lone is soon joined by Janie, a stubborn child, and mute twins Bonnie and Beanie. The farmer's wife dies after giving birth to an infant, known as 'Baby'. '[Lone is] the central ganglion of a complex organism which is composed of Baby, a computer; Bonnie and Beanie, teleports; Janie, telekineticist; and myself, telepath and central control. There isn't a single thing about any of us that hasn't been documented: the tele-portation of the Yogi, the tele-kinetics of some gamblers, the idiot savant mathematicians, and most of all, the so-called poltergeist, the moving about of household goods through the instrumentation of a young girl. Only in this case every one of my parts delivers at peak performance.'[61] Robert Silverberg, over 50 years later, would worry that 'empathy', 'teleport', and 'telekineticist' are sf jargon, in-words that Sturgeon forgets the public may not know, and indicative of the expository info-dumping, typical of sf pulp mags, that Sturgeon could never quite shake.[62]

Lone functions as the telepathic equivalent of an idea Sturgeon was developing at this time, and would return to often: 'the specialising non-specialist'. They are holistic geniuses who specialise in seeing the interaction between specialities, transferring information. They are praised not for their mastery of facts, but because of their manner of thinking as interfaces. In later stories, where the emphasis is on practical competence, Sturgeon's specialising non-specialists can sometimes be merely a slightly self-flattering way of addressing sf's habits of cross-fertilising different fields. But 'the way of thinking' (also the title of one of his stories) is important, since it is this that Lone fundamentally lacks, and which others will bring in later instalments, particularly in ethics. The five live hidden away in Lone's backwoods retreat. Each has proven incapable of functioning on his or her own, but together they add up to a complete being, a gestalt: as Baby tells Janie, 'the I is all of us ... We can do practically anything but we most likely won't. He says we're all a thing, all right, but the thing is an idiot' because they are handicapped by Lone's deficiencies.[63] 'The Fabulous Idiot' is both Lone, and also a description of the current state of the Gestalt, for all its powers and potentialities, still isolated and unable to communicate outside itself.

The second section, 'Baby is Three', occurs several years after 'The Fabulous Idiot'. The section is one long psychotherapy session between the psychiatrist Dr Stern and Gerry, who is trying to recover lost memories. Gerry is a teenager, an abused street urchin consumed by anger and hatred, who was taken in by Lone after being close to death. When Lone was killed, Gerry replaced his function in the Gestalt. The group was soon adopted by Evelyn's sister, Alicia, known as Miss Kew, who tries to educate and care for them. Soon, however, Gerry learned that domestication and normalisation had weakened their Gestalt. The Gestalt itself was at the point of death though each member would continue to live happily and secure. Gerry's ruthlessness serves the Gestalt, though, for he is willing to do anything to preserve it against separation. At Dr Stern's prompting, Gerry breaks through his block to realise he killed Miss Kew, who had been unable to escape the con-sequences of her father's sadistic, repressive parenting, to save the Gestalt. 'And My Fear Is Great' (1953) similarly charted the growing sense of community, maturity and psychic powers of a young man, who discovers that he must reject his apparent mentor, an older woman, since her morality is in fact impaired by received prudishness, as too, Merlin in 'Excalibur and the Atom' (1951) proves to be the villain because his sense of righteousness is too repressive. The Gestalt recovers, but is now conscious of its own loneliness, the only one of its kind in the world, and has retreated to live alone in the woods. 'You can have practically everything. And none of it will keep you from being alone'.[64] Dr Stern's final words to Gerry are that he is not cured, but must learn to handle guilt and behave ethically. Now that Gerry is fully conscious of his power in ordering the Gestalt, Gerry regresses into childish viciousness. 'Everybody's had fun but me. The kind of fun everybody has is kicking someone around, someone small who can't fight back. Or they do you favours until they own you, or kill you ... I'm just going to have fun, that's all.'[65] 'Talent' (1953), similar to Jerome Bixby's classic short story of the same year 'It's a Good Life', offered, in a humorously horrific fashion, the spectacle of an amoral child with powerful fantastical abilities, and the consequences when the child knows 'I can do anything I want to' as the parent has no power to control or guide it, only to placate.

The third and concluding section, 'Morality', again occurs several years after the previous instalment. This section centres on the character of Lt. Hip Barrows as he tries to recover his lost memories.

> Little Hip Barrows was a brilliant and beautiful child, to whom the world refused to be a straight, hard path of disinfected tile. Everything came easily to him, except control of his curiosity — and 'everything' included the cold injections of rectitude administered by his father the doctor,

who was a successful man, a moral man, a man who had made a career of being sure and of being right. Hip rose through childhood like a rocket, burnished, swift, afire. His gifts brought him anything a young man might want, and his conditioning constantly chanted to him that he was a kind of thief, not entitled to that which he had not earned; for such was the philosophy of his father the doctor, who had worked hard for everything. So Hip's talents brought him friends and honours, and friendships and honours brought him uneasiness and a sick humility of which he was quite unaware ... It took him even longer to learn that in Service it is the majority, not the minority, who tend to regard physical perfection, conversational brilliance, and easy achievement as defects rather than assets.'[66]

Hip is, like Horty in *The Dreaming Jewels*, another Sturgeon *manqué*, even down to a scene where his father destroys his childhood collection of magazines. 'I had trouble when I was a child and the first thing I learned was that I was useless and the things I wanted were by definition worthless' is Hip speaking, but could as easily be Sturgeon writing of his own childhood.[67] Unlike *The Dreaming Jewels*, though, rather than merely revisit his childhood traumas, in *More Than Human* Sturgeon will try find a way of converting them into experiences that can contribute to future development.

As first expressed in *The Dreaming Jewels* and *The Stars Are the Styx* via the example of Dianetics, Sturgeon develops a measuring stick of morality that will encompass the survival of the species. The 'We' of the survival of the Gestalt is expanded into the 'We' of Humanity. *More Than Human* is the first formulation of a belief he will propound throughout the rest of his career: Morals are the rules and codes by which an individual survives within a group. Ethics are the rules and codes for a society's survival. Hip will explain to Gerry:

'Do you know what morals are? Morals are an obedience to rules that people laid down to help you live among them. You don't need morals. No set of morals can apply to you. You can obey no rules set down by your kind because there are no more of your kind. And you are not an ordinary man, so the morals of ordinary men would do you no better than the morals of an anthill would do me. But Gerry, there is another kind of code for you. It is a code which requires belief rather than obedience. It is called ethos. The ethos will give you a code for survival too. But it is a greater survival than your own, or my species, or yours. What it is really is a reverence for your sources and your posterity. It is a study of the main current which created you, and in which you will create still a greater thing when the time comes. Help humanity, Gerry, for it is your mother and your father now; you never had them before. And humanity will help you for it will produce more like you and then you will no longer be alone.'[68]

Prior to the above speech, Hip has been taken care of by Janie, rebelling against Gerry and the Gestalt, who nurses him back to health. Hip's condition is eventually revealed to be the consequence of discovering an invention of Lone's. Gerald mentally attacked Hip, driving him to a mental breakdown and amnesia, fearing that Hip would reveal this discovery and therefore the Gestalt. Hip turns out to be the Gestalt's single missing element, its conscience, without which it cannot take the next step in its development. Whereas Miss Kew was killed because her adherence to conventions was destroying the Gestalt, Hip is essential to the Gestalt because he is the one who has 'the insight called ethics who can change it to the habit called morals'.[69] Hip is just as damaged by his father as Kew was by hers, but he refuses to accede to his conditioning. In a 1951 autobiographical piece Sturgeon had insisted 'I think that no-one can achieve the stature of a man unless he has been unjustly hurt'.[70] Aside from Dr Stern, who is a facilitator, every character in *More Than Human* has proven damaged — not just the members of the Gestalt, but Evelyn and Alicia have been warped by their sadistically repressive father, while the Prodds are obsessed by their childlessness, with the husband descending into a fugue state of madness after his wife's death. In a later review, Sturgeon will comment, 'a man is not worth reading about unless he is somehow vulnerable'.[71] Hip confronts Gerry, finally making Gerry ashamed of his actions, and leading him to accept the necessity of change. Shame is the recognition of the moral consequences of one actions. At long last, after wrestling with it for years, Sturgeon, the man who had been shamed by his stepfather, who had become a crusading nudist to show how he didn't need to conceal himself, finally manages to make a positive of his shame, to show how it can be the foundation of moral behaviour. The Gestalt matures, completing its evolution into a fully realised being, and is finally made conscious of the existence of other Gestalt beings.

The final revelation to the Gestalt is that previous Gestalt creatures have been responsible for inspiring humanity's greatest achievements. 'Here was one who had whistled a phrase to Papa Haydn, and here one who

had introduced William Morris to the Rossettis. Almost as if it were his own memory, Gerry saw Fermi being shown the streak of fission on a sensitive plate, a child Landowska listening to a harpsichord, a drowsy Ford with his mind suddenly lit by the picture of a line of men facing a line of machines.'[72] In 'Sex Opposite' (1952), the alien creatures claim that their species has been responsible for creating the feelings that produced most of human culture. In the magazine introduction to 'Sex Opposite', the editor's rubric said that Sturgeon's one story to tell was that 'somewhere in the universe are alien beings that can help man to gain his rightful heritage'.[73] Sturgeon's aliens are never invaders or superiorly arrogant; that is always the human position. In the stories of the nuclear period, Sturgeon often presents a humanity that is too destructive and must be forcibly prevented from associating with the rest of the universe. In 'The Rule of Three' (1951) the decision the aliens must make is whether humanity can be saved or whether it must be quarantined. Rather than simply instructing or bringing new inventions, when the aliens in Sturgeon's stories act to help and save humanity it is by causing a change in human psychology. Their devices impede mankind's capacity for fear, anger, and self-destruction so that it can develop and improve at its own pace. In 'The Travelling Crag' (July 1951), an angry recluse is possessed by an almost religious tranquillity and becomes a great writer. Sturgeon's alien inspirations and new psychological balance are opportunities for Sturgeon to write about the thrills of new romance, raptures of bliss, and the manifold wondrous experiences life offers. It is these feelings, not fear, anger, and the will to dominate, that will be responsible for humanity fulfilling its potential. One of Sturgeon's facilities is the ability to express pleasure and excitement. It is significant that, as the title of one story tells us, 'The Hurkle is a Happy Beast' (1949). Sturgeon's panegyrics on human potential are almost always spiritual rather than technocratic. Sturgeon's ideal of telepathy would forever preclude the possibility of these negative emotions.

> You are cursed with a sense of rejection, and your rejection begets anger and your anger begets guilt; and all your guilty reject the innocent and destroy their innocence. Riding this wheel you totter and spin, and the only basket you can drop your almighty insecurity is an almighty fear ... If every human being, regardless of language, age, or background, understood exactly what every other human being wanted, and knew at the same time that he was understood, it would change the face of the earth ('Fear Is a Business', 1956).[74]

Such villains as are in Sturgeon's works of the 1950s are noted for their skilled yet innate exploitation of humanity's fear and anger, inverting all of Sturgeon's ideals. The oppressive dystopia of 'Granny Won't Knit' (1954) is made more vivid since Sturgeon humanises the pseudo-parental authority as not simplistically repressive but as fearful and jealous. The villain of the 'The Dark Room' (1953) exploits an alien whose telepathic influence increases and feeds off jealousy, vengeance, and suicide. The charmers of 'The Comedian's Children' and 'Mr Costello, Hero' are psychopaths exploiting the charm for which Sturgeon was famous. 'The Comedian's Children' (1958) is Sturgeon's assault on Jerry Lewis's telethons and his exploitation of the sick. 'Mr Costello, Hero' (1953), an attack on McCarthyism, is a studied reversal of all Sturgeon believes in. Costello expertly perverts Sturgeon's ideals of cooperation and an integrated society into fascism by exploiting people's fears, making everyone suspicious of anyone who wants to be alone. He turns them into a mob set against his scapegoats, a thousand hands to be directed by one man, which was Osser's own misguided aspiration in 'The Touch of Your Hand'. The story was originally to have been called 'Never Alone', which is of course, Sturgeon's own idea of everything that cripples humanity. In the end Costello is stopped, and condemned to an isolated planet, where he still works his methods, even if it is only on ants, 'boss over an anthill'.[75] Ants are Sturgeon's recurring metaphor for the failures of group-think. The passionless voyeurism upon and subsequent murder of an innocent alien in 'The Other Celia' (1957) is a negation of Sturgeon's belief in the virtue of empathy.

In his acknowledgment of the worst that humanity can do — of sorrow, sexual aberration, insanity and cruelty — Sturgeon has more in common with the Southern Gothic writers than with much of science fiction. Sturgeon and the Southern Gothics write about outcasts and misfits who are marginal, dispossessed, artistic, thwarted, and pathological, yet curiously innocent, who must learn how the world operates since they are in danger of being sacrificed to society's propriety. Physical and sexual oddity and extremity are the order of the day, normality may be a consensual delusion, and everyone is easily damaged and hurt. Stories are suffused with the fear and guilt that betoken aggression, an attention to the maimed and the lonely, and the neurotic illusions that support them. The urgency of human needs is expressed in poetic imagery by characters who struggle to articulate their individual view of the world, whose difference provides a new insight on the world. All of these writers

have been accused of being the victims of the same sentimentality and self-pity exhibited by their characters. Similarly, since they have all written stories notorious for brutal endings, and are overly concerned with sick and twisted humans, their proclaimed love of humanity has been described as barely disguised sadism and perversity.[76] In the world of the Southern Gothics, tragedy is the usual result, their protagonists destroyed by the world. Except in a few instances, Sturgeon's characters are repaired and offered happiness and true achievable hopes. The mysterious horror of 'Bianca's Hand', 'Bright Segment', and 'The Other Celia' lies in the extent to which human nature is not made cogent and readily explicable. Sturgeon believes the Gordian knot of human nature can be unravelled. Where the Southern Gothics can only see desperation, hatred, and anger exploding in horrific finales, Sturgeon works to produce characters who become agents morally free to chose. What Sturgeon brings to the same situations as the Southern Gothic writers is a real belief in mankind's agency.

> If there is a posture in philosophy which I cannot tolerate, it is that which implies that man's acts and man's inspiration are incapable, unassisted, of solving man's problems. If such were the true case, we might as well slide the whole shebang off the Left Bank and, helpless, let all hope, all religion, and particularly all radical dissent, sink and bubble and be gone. For why else bother?[77]

Sturgeon employs horror and disgust so that he can heighten the plight of the victimised and shock his readers into rethinking their assumptions. Sturgeon wants his readers to feel horrified by cruelty, hypocrisy, and intolerance. Sturgeon's work is full of abnormalities, physical deformation, and bodies in strange permutations. If Sturgeon's readers are sometimes shocked by the apparent perversity of the lovers he depicts, Sturgeon wants his readers to consider in what love really resides. The almost brutish protagonist of 'Bright Segment' (1955) comes to care tenderly for a nearly dying young girl, but when she is almost well enough to leave him, he beats her up again so he can continue to experience his feelings of need and love. He is only malign because he is incomplete and unaccepted. The violence is merely the extreme expression of his loneliness and previous psychological and emotional crippling. 'I cannot and will not accept profound disgust with humanity — preferring to regard this and other documents as terrifying and accurate projections of what might be and therefore informative of how to change course actively and with purpose'.[78]

At his best, Sturgeon had the ability to express physical impressions within the consciousness of his protagonists. 'The idiot lived in a black and grey world, punctuated by the white lightning of hunger and the flickering of fear. His clothes were old and many-windowed. Here peeped a shinbone, sharp as a cold chisel, and there in the torn coat were ribs like the fingers of a fist. He was tall and flat. His eyes were calm and his face was dead.'[79] He is not only willing, but also able to let his characters speak for themselves. Sturgeon repeats W. B. Yeats that 'the best poetry, the real poetry, came from the lips and hearts of the people, speaking in their own idiom'.[80] Sturgeon's empathy is usually grounded in a cogent realism, describing the world in a way that also expresses the character's individuality. 'It is only necessary to care about what people think they see, which is only another way of caring about what people are.'[81] His aliens and his idiots are not quite able to ignore the discrepancies and irregularities of everyday life, and so express their view of the human world in a style of jumbled-up simplicities and concepts, as in 'The Clinic' (1953). Sturgeon's control of style emphasises the importance of communication. 'Communication [is] an absolute necessity to the very existence of human beings.'[82] It is necessary because it brings understanding, and is the means of identifying and empathising with another. 'But write a story well enough to force identification, and have the protagonist indulging in something weird, and let the guy be happy about it, and people explode all over the place'.[83] Some of Sturgeon's characters seem repellent, but Sturgeon handles them with such consideration that his reader are brought to understanding. In other instances, Sturgeon describes a seemingly normal character, reinforcing the reader's identification, only for a final twist in which the character's transgression of some social taboo leaves his reader to reassess his or her beliefs.

It was a plea for tolerance towards homosexuals that Sturgeon found provoked the most extreme cries of outrage, of abusive letters written in 'purple ink with green capitals'.[84] 'The World Well Lost' (1953) is written from the point of view of Grunty, a solitary technician. He and his captain have been assigned to return a pair of loverbirds back to their home planet. Eventually Grunty realises that the loverbirds are a homosexual couple. Sturgeon presents a rapture and melancholy in the loverbird's persecuted love. What the reader takes to be a natural revulsion on Grunty's part is later revealed to be his fear and anger that they might reveal his own hidden homosexuality and his love for his captain. Both the loverbird's and Grunty's revelations are late twists,

after the reader has been led to empathise with them. Only a year earlier, the beneficent aliens of 'Sex Opposite' had to hide because of humanity's murderous fear of the abnormal. '"We have to hide," the other said gently. "You still kill anything that's ... different."'[85] 'The World Well Lost' appeared in the first issue of *Universe* (June 1953), hyped on the cover as Sturgeon's 'Most Daring Story', since it had been not merely rejected by other magazines but one unnamed editor had actively campaigned other editors to reject it.[86] Given the delay, it may have been written almost contemporaneously with Philip Jose Farmer's similarly sexual taboo-breaking short story 'The Lovers' (1952). Sturgeon wrote a letter to *Thrilling Wonder Stories* insisting that 'Taboos need to be broken, either because they are bad in themselves or because of this odd quirk in human beings that makes it necessary to prove they can be broken. But when you break 'em, break 'em clean ... But if science fiction is to remain the viable genre it is, it must be capable of exploration in other frameworks — objectively, and all the way'.[87] Certainly, Sturgeon's private history meant he had good reasons to be accepting of homosexuality, since his first teenage orgasms had been from same-sex encounters, the consequence of Argyll leaving him in the care of a trusted local doctor. The doctor was secretly gay, and his 20-year-old boyfriend spent the weekend fellating the grateful 14-year-old gymnast-physiqued Ted who had been wary of his appeal, when even younger, as 'queer bait'.[88]

'The World Well Lost' was only one of a number of stories that Sturgeon wrote about sexual and romantic oddities. 'Never Underestimate' (1952) was a forthright piece about the human sex drive and how it creates inequalities and opportunities for manipulation between the sexes. 'The Silken Swift' (1953) was a tale about unicorns that overturned assumptions about love, sex, physical virginity, and personal purity. 'A Touch of Strange' is about attempted miscegenation between humans and mermaids (1957). And this is before considering all his earlier stories about threesomes and syzygy. In 'Rule of Three' (1951), Sturgeon was at last able to present threesomes where the individuals were able to harmonise and blend as gestalts, as did his 1951 rewriting of his 1946 collaboration 'Make Room for Me'. When the critic Jim Blish, under his critical pseudonym of William Atheling Jr, pointed out that Sturgeon was in danger of over-exploiting his theme of syzygy, Sturgeon was prompted to make a public statement in 'Why So Much Syzygy' (1953):

> I think what I have been trying to do all these years is to investigate this matter of love, sexual and asexual. I investigate it by writing about it, because I don't know what the hell I think until I tell somebody about it. And I work so assiduously at it because of a conviction that if one could understand it completely, one would have the key to co-operation itself: to creative inspiration: to self-sacrifice and that rare but real anomaly, altruism: in short, to the marvellous orchestration which enables us to keep ahead of our own destructiveness.[89]

Love therefore isn't simply a matter of affection, or even of meaningful relations between two people; it is integral to humanity's survival. Sturgeon was never quite so simplistically proselytising as to declare 'All You Need Is Love', but it was little wonder that he would happily find kindred spirits in the hippyish counterculture of the late 1960s. Science fiction critics and fans would take him at his word, and Sturgeon would become science fiction's expert on Love.

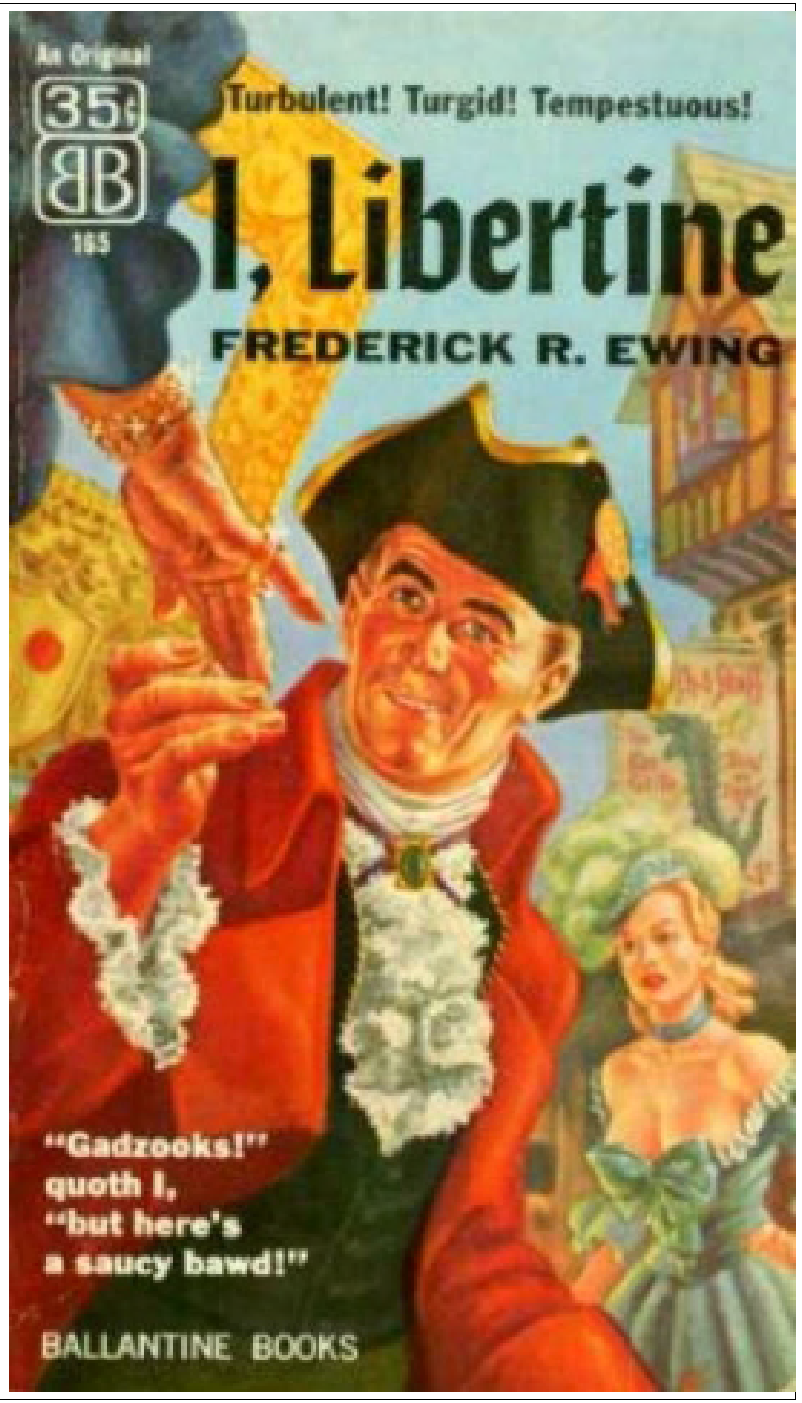
Stumbling

Sturgeon's responsibilities and family increased in 1954 with the birth of his daughter Tandy, named for a character in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. In 1954 Sturgeon wrote 'To Here and the Easel' (1954), at the urging of the Ballantines, for a piece 'that gave the reader insight into the creative process'.[90] For Sturgeon the creative process was as much about his inability to write. Sturgeon translated writer's block into painter's block, heightened by strange schizophrenic episodes from 'Orlando Furioso'. If Sturgeon hoped that his attempt at self-analysis was to prove a conclusive solution then it was a failure. The insight Sturgeon offered his blocked painter was to learn to paint the world as it is, not just the beautiful elements. 'So I had stopped painting because I had become too discerning and could find nothing perfect enough to paint. But now it occurs to me that the girl with the silver in her hair can be painted for the beauty she has, regardless of her other ugliness ... The only key to the complexity of the world living is to understand that this world contains two-and-a-half billion worlds, each built in a person's eyes and all different, and all susceptible and hungry or it.'[91] It was a plea for empathy familiar from other stories, such as 'The Touch of Your Hand' (1953), 'The Skills of Xanadu' (1957), or 'Make Room For Me' (1951): 'Through the eyes of humans are seen worlds beyond worlds ... in the dreams of the dullest humans are images unimaginable to other species. Through their eyes pour shapes and colours and a hungry hope that has

no precedent in the cosmos ... [Humans have] empathy ... The ability to see through another's eyes, to feel with his finger-tips'.[92]

It was an appealing sentiment but no solution, and by describing writer's block, Sturgeon only seemed to have presaged its return into his life. He contacted to write a novel, *Man O' War*, in late 1954 but was unable to write it. It should have been about aliens influencing humanity. Instead a similarly themed short novel was serialised in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* at the end of 1955. 'The [Widget], the [Wadget], and Boff' was a character study of the disparate inhabitants of a boarding house, and the influence that an alien observation team has on them and humanity's potential. The aliens stimulate a synaptic reflex which operates as an equilibrium mechanism essential to mankind's survival. Sturgeon advances the idea that a human being is an element in a whole culture and that culture itself is alive. 'The suggestion that not one law is common to all human cultures, past and present, was suddenly no insult to the law at all, but a living compliment; to nail a culture to permanent laws now seemed as ridiculous a concept as man conventionally refusing to shed his scales and gills.'[93] It is Sturgeon's first coherent and explicit expression of his idea of 'ask the next question' that would dominate the last decades of his life. The novel is also distinguished by the character of Halvorsen. Halvorsen is so shamed, disgusted, and repressed by what he is thinks is his libidinal abnormality that he is suicidal, but he eventually realises that it is the average that is an unnatural concept, and 'I am not unfit; I am not abnormal ... I am not alone'.[94]

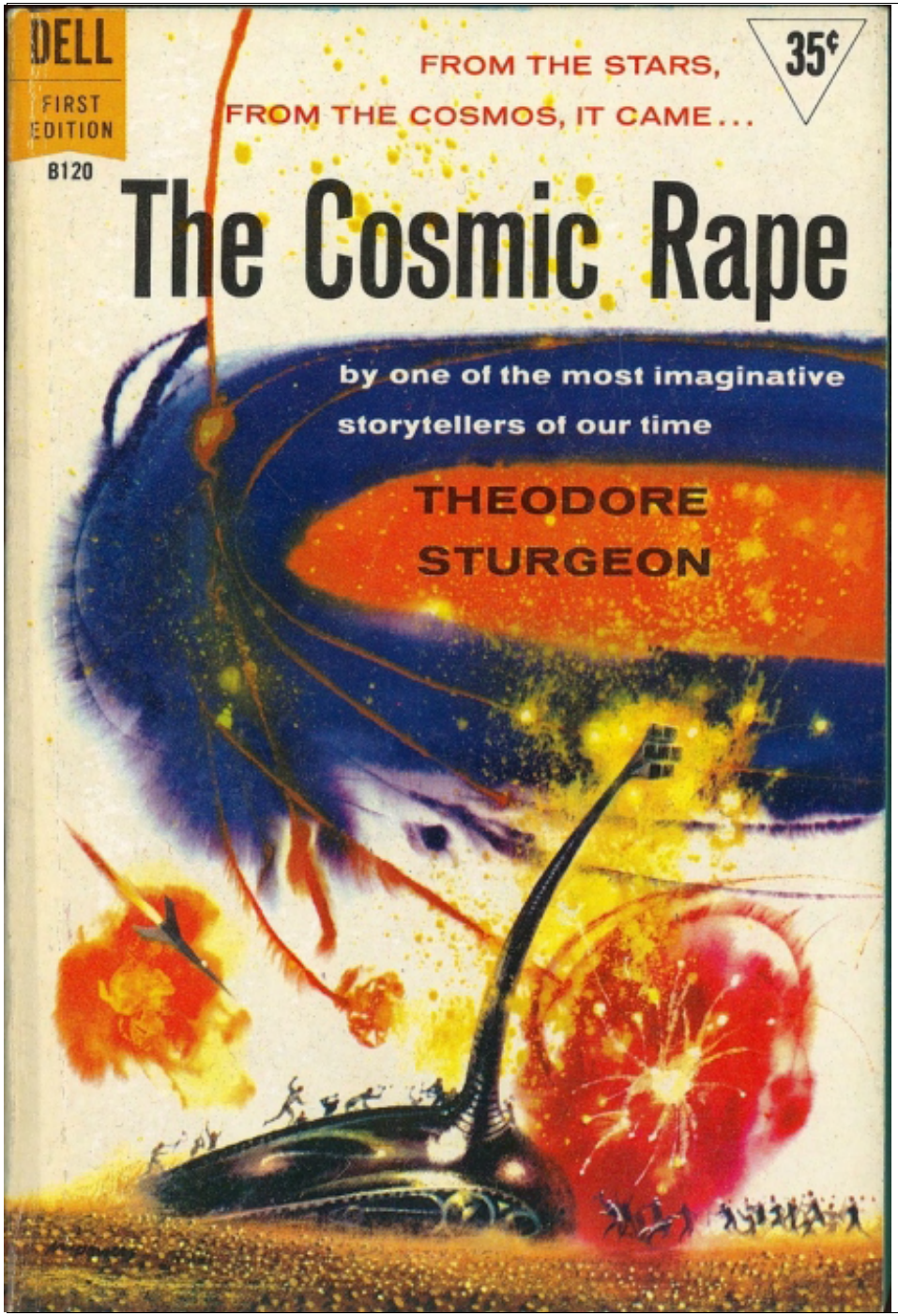
As a consequence of his block, much of Sturgeon's work in 1956 would be either the product of collaborations or assigned projects. If one were minded, one might argue that since this method of working produced stories that were no less crafted than his other stories, and in one instance a classic story, they are practical demonstrations of Sturgeon's faith in cooperation and symbiosis. His collaborations with Don Ward produced several good mysteries and westerns. It may be his connection with Don Ward was responsible for his writing a novelisation of a western, *The King and Four Queens* (1956). In early 1955 Sturgeon had written to his friend Heinlein about his desperate condition. In February 1955, Heinlein sent him not only a cheque but also a letter with various ideas and plots that might inspire Sturgeon. Two stories resulted, and in each Sturgeon acknowledges his debt by alluding to Heinlein through his main character's names. MacLyle in 'The Other Man' (1956) is a blend of two



of Heinlein's early pseudonyms, while Anson in 'And Now the News ...' (1956) is Heinlein's middle name. 'And Now the News ...' has achieved a classic status as a parable about the modern media and inexplicable mass murder. A man who is devoted to the newspapers and radios begins to regress until eventually he is incapable of reading or understanding anything, so he retreats away, delighting in his own creations, but isolated from the world. A psychiatrist intervenes, cures him, and the man becomes a murderer, taking his vengeance on a world that he cannot ignore because of his concern. The entire plot was Heinlein's, but the central section is almost a rewriting of 'Maturity' in miniature, as a psychiatrist is confronted by a man of creativity and skills, and must consider 'It is the function of psychiatry to adjust the aberrant to society, and to restore or increase his usefulness to it'.[95] That 'And Now The News ...' proceeded to do the rounds of most of the major crime and science fiction magazines because of its unclassifiable nature only demonstrates that even Sturgeon's best work could not guarantee him automatic sales.

Sturgeon's other book of 1956 was to gain him a permanent place in the annals of media hoaxes. Jean Shepherd was one of the avatars of contrarian hipness in mid-'50s New York City. Not only did his late night radio show have a dedicated following, but he also had a regular column during the early years of *The Village Voice*. To prove the worthlessness of publisher's lists and media hype, Shepherd invited contributions from his listeners to create a demand for a nonexistent book, which would also undermine the authority of cultural arbitrators who snobbishly claim to know everything. Shepherd and his audience invented the title *I, Libertine* and its fictional author, Fredrick R. Ewing, an expert in eighteenth-century erotica. Over the following days, Shepherd's listeners went into bookshops asking for *I, Libertine*, creating a growing international word-of-mouth demand, while critics appeared who claimed to be familiar with Ewing's famous work. Eventually, after being banned by the Boston Legion of Decency, the hoax was revealed, creating even more demand for the book. Attracted by the rapid notoriety developing around the book, Ballantine contracted to publish *I, Libertine*, and Sturgeon was hired to write the book since his straits were known to the Ballantines. A lunchtime meeting of all three parties is part of the myth, but no account has ever quite agreed as to the order of introduction by which Shepherd, Sturgeon, and the Ballantines came together. Shepherd had a plot, which he gave to Sturgeon, who wrote the novel in under a month in the summer, with the last brief chapter completed by Betty Ballantine taking over from the fatigued Sturgeon.[96] *I, Libertine* by 'Fredrick R. Ewing', published in September 1956, was an historical novel set in eighteenth-century London. It ought to have entertained fans of this ever popular genre, as the book is replete with genuine detail, historical cameos and references, dialogue in assorted dialects and manners, and a cast drawn from every social strata. Of a piece with the circumstances of the book's composition, the story is also a criticism of hustlers and public relations, and so Sturgeon's and Shepherd's disapproval of that type may be flagged when the protagonist's plot of conniving ingenuity is outmanoeuvred and his success is deflected.

Sturgeon's fourth daughter, Noël, was born in 1956. In 1957 the family moved from Congers to Truro, Massachusetts, near the tip of Cape Cod. Evidently some sort of mental barrier had been broken by the end of 1956, since 1957 saw another strong series of stories. Many of them were published in *Venture*, a magazine with which Sturgeon had close ties for the next year. *Venture* was a bimonthly subsidiary of *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and besides having four stories there, Sturgeon also acted as its book critic. It was a role he fulfilled from July 1957 to July 1958 when the magazine folded, and, given publication lead times, probably corresponds with Sturgeon's emigration from America. Sturgeon's reviews also cover a period when he seemed to produce little fiction, although that may be because he was finally working on the novel contracted in 1954. Sturgeon's book reviews and criticism are tumbling and exuberant. He wants to be pleased, and is equally eager to share his enjoyment with his readers. He offers books that he thinks will elicit arguments or cries of wonder. Contrary to his attitude expressed in his letters of the late 1930s, Sturgeon now insists that entertainment is not the worthiest thing a writer can do. Besides science fiction, he also enthusiastically highlights books of science, parascience, and the paranormal for their ability to challenge the reader's and society's status quo. Several times he condemns potential readers who may not enjoy a book as having 'no soul and no glands'. His *Venture* review of September 1957 would also be historically important for being the first time he committed 'Sturgeon's Revelation', later more famous as 'Sturgeon's Law', to print. Sturgeon also ventures the opinion that one of the reasons that science fiction is denigrated by the majority is because it is seen to taint science by association, in a culture where science is taking on the same standing as reli-gion. Later years would see a recurrence of Sturgeon using his familiarity with and high reputation in the sf community to get regular



assignments reviewing when he was not writing fiction.

In the latter half of 1957 on the Cape, Sturgeon finally wrote the novel contracted four years earlier as *Man O'War*, but published as *The Cosmic Rape* in 1958. An edited and reduced version of the novel was published in *Galaxy* as *To Marry Medusa*. It was the last of Sturgeon's fictions about an alien influencing humanity's development. In this case the situation is a fluke, and Sturgeon offers a rare instance in his fiction of humanity fighting back against the alien invasion. A resentful, drunken bum accidentally ingests a spore from a gestalt hive-mind, the Medusa.

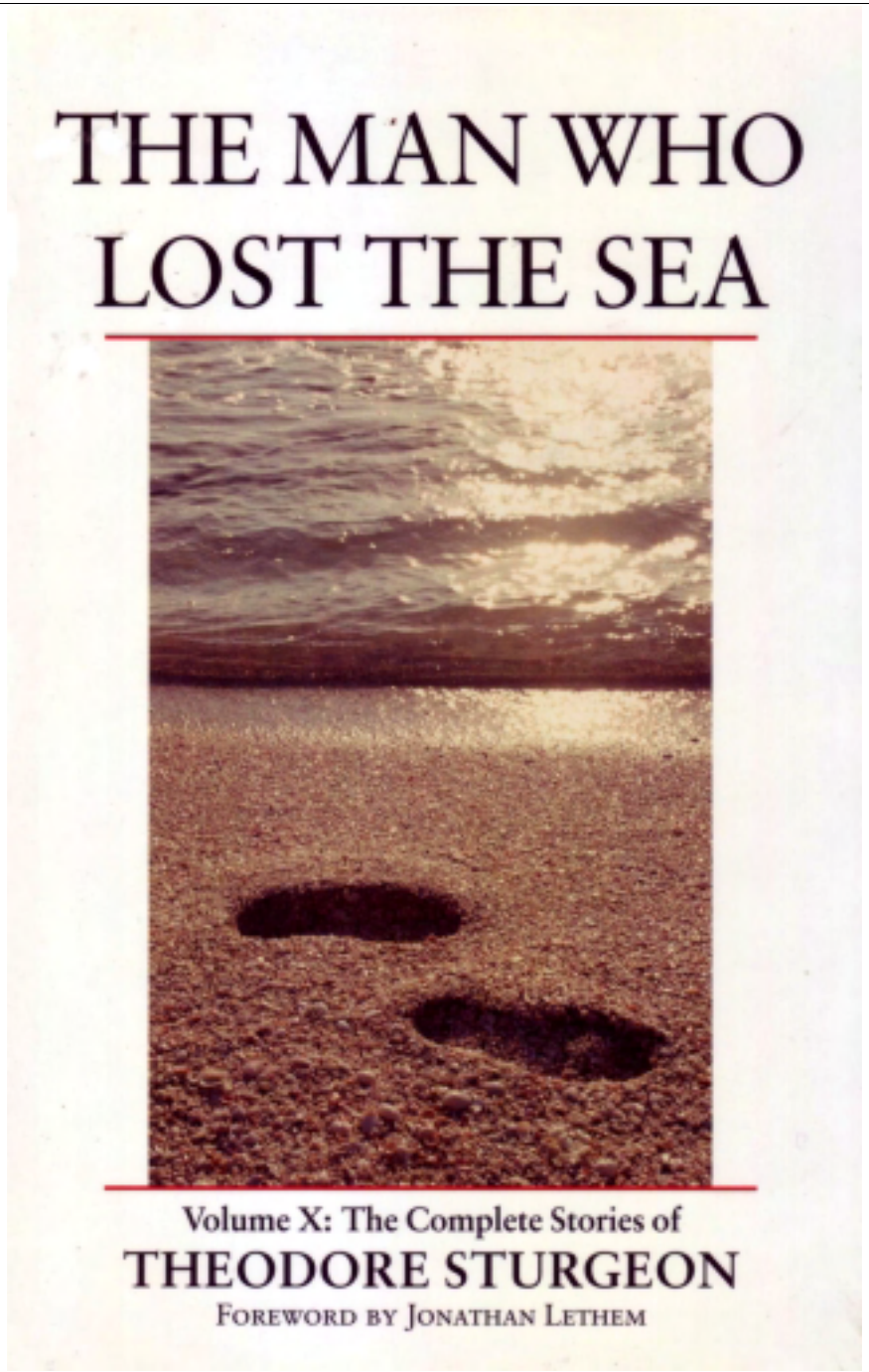
> But then the thing began to spread and grow, and in a few rocking, groaning moments there wasn't anything in his head but the new illumination, this opening casement which looked out upon two galaxies and part of a third, through the eyes and minds of countless billions of individuals, cultures, hives, gaggles, prides, bevies, braces, herds, races, flocks and other kinds and quantities of sets and groupings, complexes, systems and pairings for which the language has as yet no terms ... And over all, the central consciousness of the creature itself (though 'central' is misleading; the hive-mind is permeative) — the Medusa, the galactic man o' war, the super-conscious of the illimitable beast, of which the people of a planet were here a nerve and there an organ, where entire cultures were specialized ganglia; the creature of which Gurlick was now a member and a part, for all he was a minor atom in a simple molecule of a primitive cell.

The Medusa is surprised by humanity, since they are the first instance it has discovered of individuals having intelligence rather than species intelligence. Sturgeon's implicit criticism of the Medusa is that it is a hive, where everything is subordinate to its purposes. The Medusa comes to the errant conclusion that if it is to absorb humanity it must unify humanity. To this purpose it builds self-replicating thought-amplifying machines. 'In a split second there was orientation of a transcendent nature — nothing as crude as mutual mind-reading, but an instant and permeating acknowledgment of relationships: I to you, we to the rest of the world; the nature of a final and overriding decision, and the clear necessity of instant and specific action.' Every human suddenly has a purpose: to defeat the Medusan machines. The story is told in vignettes alternating between Gurlich and other humans.

'These were people, these are anecdotes, dwelt upon for their several elements of the extraordinary. But each man alive has such a story, unique unto himself, of what is in him and of its molding by the forces around him, and of his interpretations of those forces.' These individuals include an African tribesman and an Italian street urchin. Henry, a little boy terrified of his furious father, selflessly sacrifices himself to destroy a machine. His death is counterbalanced by a plot line following a little girl lost in the wilderness, and how knowledge is supplied by the human group mind to save and protect another of the species. In the end, the Medusa is married to humanity when the resentful, rapine-minded Gurlich has tender sex with a previously censorious spinster. Merging with the new humanity expands the Medusan's own relationships with its previously subordinated species, granting them a new freedom. 'So ended mankind, to be born again as hive-humanity; so ended the hive of earth to become star-man, the immeasurable, the limitless, the growing; maker of music beyond music, poetry beyond words, and full of wonder, full of worship.'

It was during 1957 that Sturgeon met another Cape Cod writer who was also struggling to sustain his career. The previous year Kurt Vonnegut had opened America's second, and not very successful, Saab dealership in the hope that the job would support his expanding family while he tried to develop his writing career. At a time when Vonnegut was in the middle of a year-long writer's block and about to take on greater family responsibilities, the example of the slightly older Sturgeon in similar marooned straits must have presented a minatory figure. In later years Vonnegut would turn Theodore into the homophonous Kilgore, with Sturgeon becoming the equally piscine Trout.

Winter on Cape Cod was cold and inhospitable. Sturgeon believed the family could live cheaper and happier in the West Indies, where the Waldos had long ties. Sturgeon's mother now lived in St Vincent, and she found them a place on the island of Bequi. The whole family transferred in 1958, but the house was dissatisfactory, and the family spent months island-hopping, eventually ending up on Mustique.[97] Sturgeon applied himself, writing every day but nothing cohered. There was one story he researched intensively, and over the course of a year of working constantly on it he reduced it from over 21,000 words to 4500.[98] It was the only thing he completed, he had sold no work, and his confidence was completely shaken, but 'The Man Who Lost the Sea' was finished by the beginning of 1959. The people he showed it couldn't



even understand it, but he eventually sold it to *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. By that time, Sturgeon and his family had returned to Congers, temporarily living at Marion's mother's house, preparing to move to Woodstock. It seemed a repeat of Sturgeon's dispiriting times in Jamaica. Just like then, Sturgeon also found that he'd unwittingly written a successful story to herald his return.

If 'Killdozer' made his name among sf fans, 'The Man Who Lost the Sea' would be the height of Sturgeon's recognition by the literary establishment during his lifetime. The story was collected in Martha Foley's prestigious *Best America Short Stories* for 1960. The only previous instance of Foley selecting a sf story was Judith Merril's 'Dead Centre' in 1954. 'The Man Who Lost the Sea' was without the usual props and didacticism of sf. It was a rich, complex stream-of-consciousness surfacing through currents of fear and triumph in the dazed and dying mind of the first astronaut to crash into Mars. It is a dense yet subtly knit portrait of a mind struggling to understand its situation and also unravel its formative childhood history. The story is distinguished by being written in the second person. 'Bulkhead' (1955), another story about reconciling and integrating childhood memories in the loneliness of space, had also been written in the second person. When the mind is at its most isolated, Sturgeon assumes that it must make communion with itself. It is a perfect instance of Sturgeon's dictum in 'To Here and the Easel', seeing through the eyes and feeling through the fingers of a character. Also, it is distinctly Sturgeonesque, in that, though it is an individual tragedy, the astronaut's isolated death is in fact part of mankind's larger victory in exploring space. 'God', he cries, dying on Mars, 'God, we made it'.[99] The importance of 'We' had been emphasised earlier in the story. There may be some influence from Godwin's classic story 'The Cold Equations', in which a girl has to die so that a necessary space mission can succeed. Surgeon believed Godwin's to be 'one of the most effective stories ever written'.[100] John W. Campbell had written to Sturgeon that 'The Cold Equations' exemplifies that 'Human beings CAN be sacrificed to the good of the race'.[101]

Woodstock

The family settled in Woodstock, NY in 1959, and Sturgeon had his fourth child, Timothy, with Marion in 1960. Sturgeon began writing a novella 'Oyster World', so named for oysters' bisexuality.[102] Sturgeon found the writing came easily, and the novella soon expanded into a novel, *Venus Plus X* (1960). The novel describes the discoveries of Charlie Johns (a name possibly chosen after a man who became notorious for marrying a nine-year-old girl), a contemporary American citizen who awakens in an advanced future society, Ledom.[103] The Ledoms' utopian civilisation is a direct consequence of their hermaphroditism. Interspersed among Charlie Johns' story is a series of brief scenes portraying a contemporary middle class suburban family's unwitting constraint by society's hang-ups, hypocrisies, and gender inequalities. Charlie Johns ultimately rejects the Ledoms when he discovers to his revulsion that the Ledoms' unisexuality is not natural but is in fact a surgical alteration: 'We'd exterminate you down to the last queer kid ... and stick that one in a side show.'[104] Finally, Charlie is revealed to be a Ledom, who has been brainwashed to assume the attitudes of a normal human, so the Ledoms will know whether humanity is ready to receive their wisdom. In exactly the same way, the would-be dictator Osser in 'The Touch of Your Hand' was the deformed product of another such psychological experiment to test conservative attitudes by a wiser culture.

Venus Plus X is Sturgeon's treatise that overawareness of gender and binary thinking, and sexual tension are responsible for many of society's fundamental problems. Ledom is neither a mother- nor father-dominated culture since each brings its problems. When Sturgeon expatiates on the authoritarian, intolerant, repressive, conservative quality inherent to father-dominated societies, one can't help but see Argyll in the background. Sturgeon openly acknowledges his debt to *The Disappearance* (1951) by Philip Wylie, which argued that forgetting the similarities between men and women only makes men hate women. In all, *Venus Plus X* has little plot. It is more of an extended socio-technical treatise than a novel, with the tang of magazine didactics upon it. Individual instances may be intriguing or startling, but the book is more explication than story.

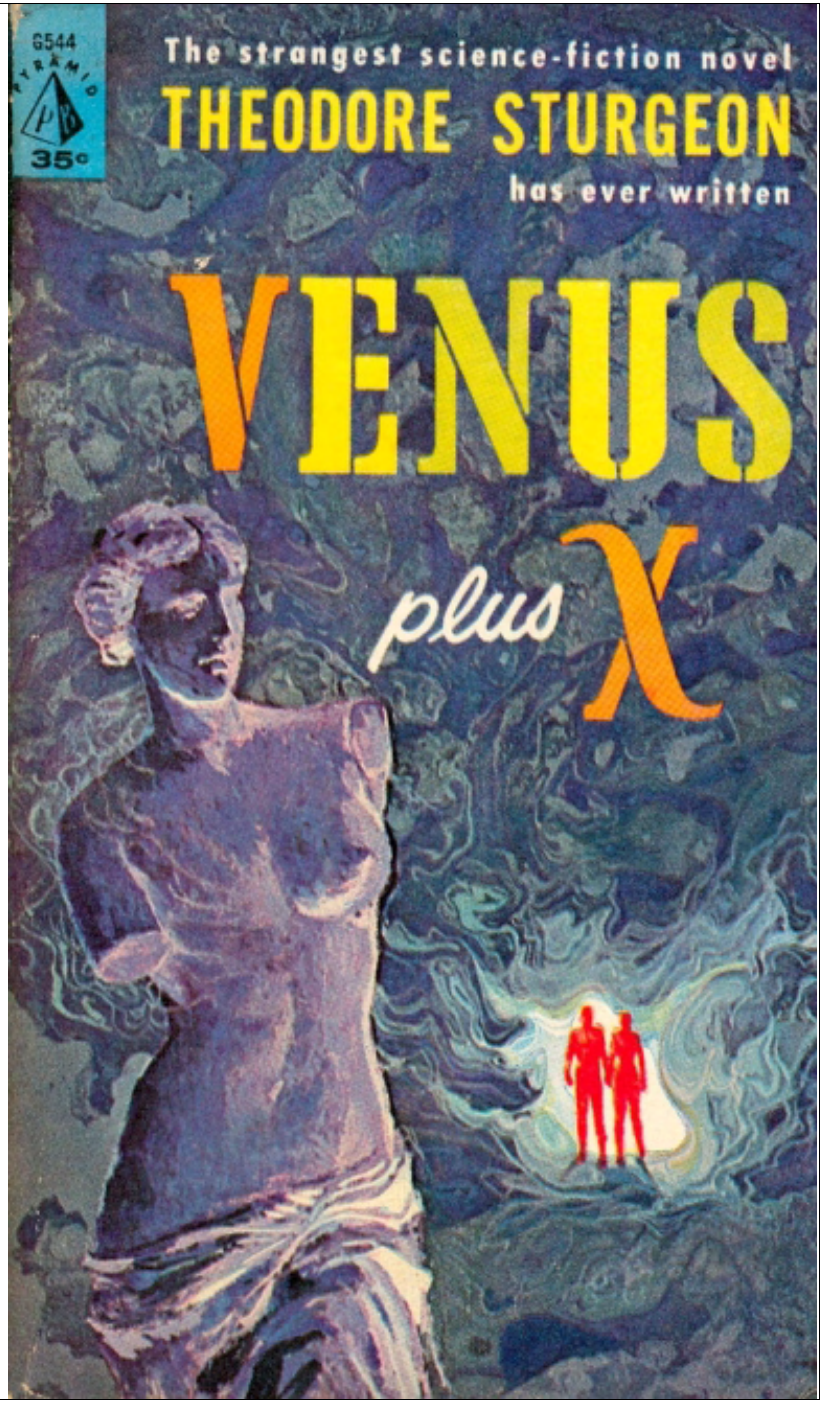
> A wave of something was generated in the grove, and was released; he could feel it rush him and dissipate; it was as tangible as the radiation from an opened furnace door, but it was not heat. It was not anything he had ever felt, imagined, or experienced before ... except perhaps by himself ... oh never by himself; it was with Laura. It was not sex; it was a thing for which sex is one of the expressions. And at this its peak, the harmonious tumult altered in kind, though not at all in quality; the interweaving flesh of the Ledom became a frame

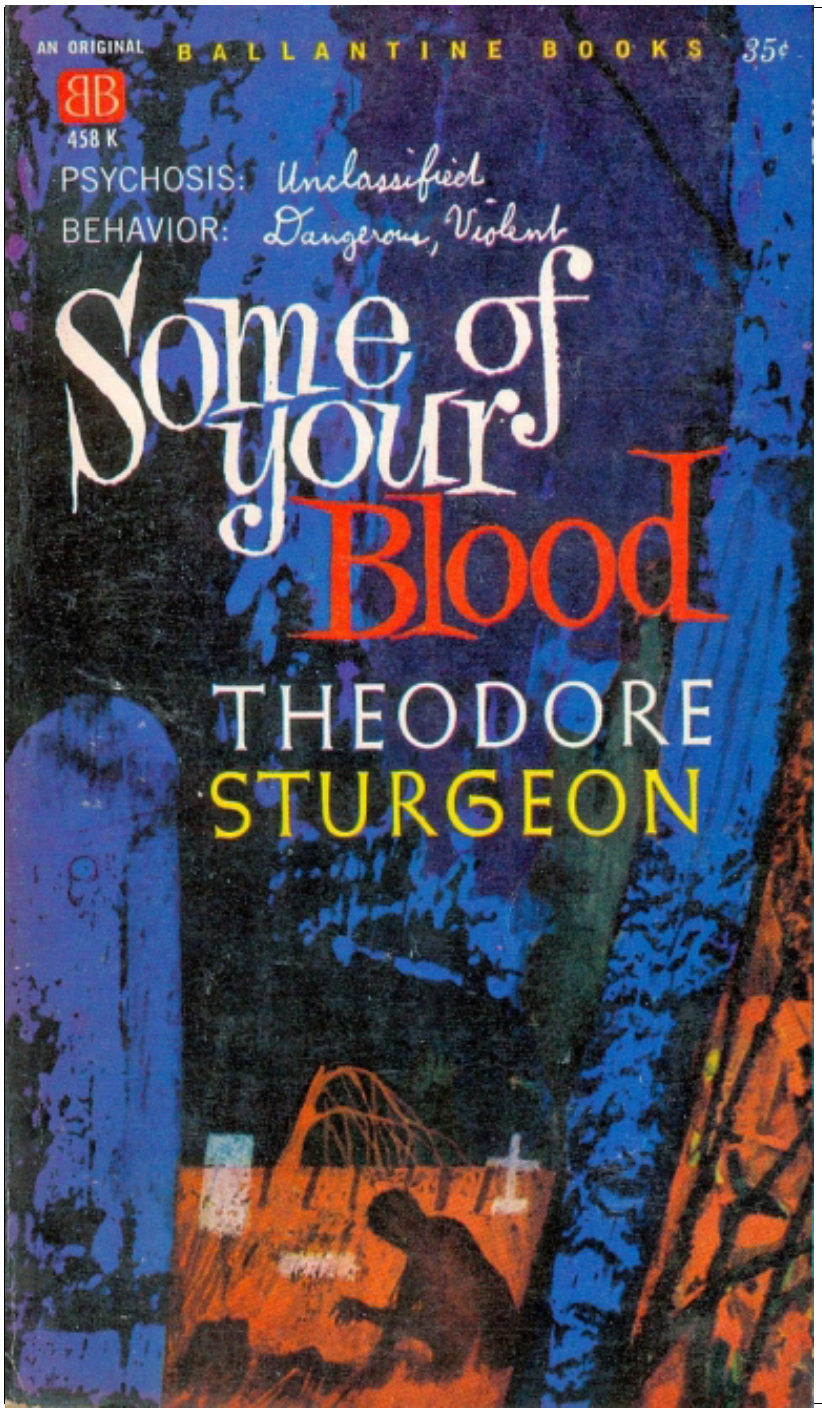
encircling the children — so many, many children — who had somehow formed themselves into a compact group; they stood proud, even the tiniest ones, proud and knowing and deeply happy, while all about, the Ledom worshipped them, and sang.[105]

Charlie John's section is at best a travelogue, with the Ledoms explaining the fundamentals of society to Charlie and the reader. 'We worship the child because it is inconceivable that we would ever obey one ... more often than not, the hand of God in human affairs is a dead hand ... Haven't you been able to see yet that the very essence of the Ledom is — passage ... Movement, growth, change, catabolism.'[106] Such conflict and drama as the book possesses are allocated to the mini-*Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* episodes. Almost a decade later Sturgeon would incidentally summarise everything that went wrong with this book: 'Good fiction cannot be wrought from ideas. Idea-pieces can be fascinating and important and moving and provocative, but they can also be (and often are) tracts, fulminations, pedantries and muddy blasterpieces. Fiction (in my personal operating definition) is people; the action and reaction and interaction of people on people, of ideas and events and growth and change. People read fiction, and fiction is at its most successful when the reader identifies with someone or some-several in the narrative, so that the narrative happens to the reader and is recalled as won experience.'[107] None of this is to be found in *Venus Plus X*.

Later Sturgeon would admit that *Venus Plus X* 'was not a reader's book; it was a writer's book'.[108] It was intended for just for one writer, though: Sturgeon. The book bodies forth Sturgeon's convictions about equality, sex, children, progress, and growth. If there may be a tendency in sf utopias to be more concerned about showing the reader space towers and matter transporters, Sturgeon's Ledom is a world that is transcendentally altered by this willed evolutionary leap in culture. In the end the book becomes his epistle on love and religion to his readers. In his afterword to the book, Sturgeon writes, 'It was my aim to a) write a decent book b) about sex. It is impossible to attempt such a thing without touching upon religion, which is impossible to do without touching rather heavily upon some of your toes.' By employing the concept of surgical alteration and the vehement disgust it provokes, *Venus Plus X* is an early instance of Sturgeon's intention for the next 25 years of asking his readers to assess their own assumptions and 'ask the next question'.

Barely a year later, in 1961 there was another novel from Sturgeon.

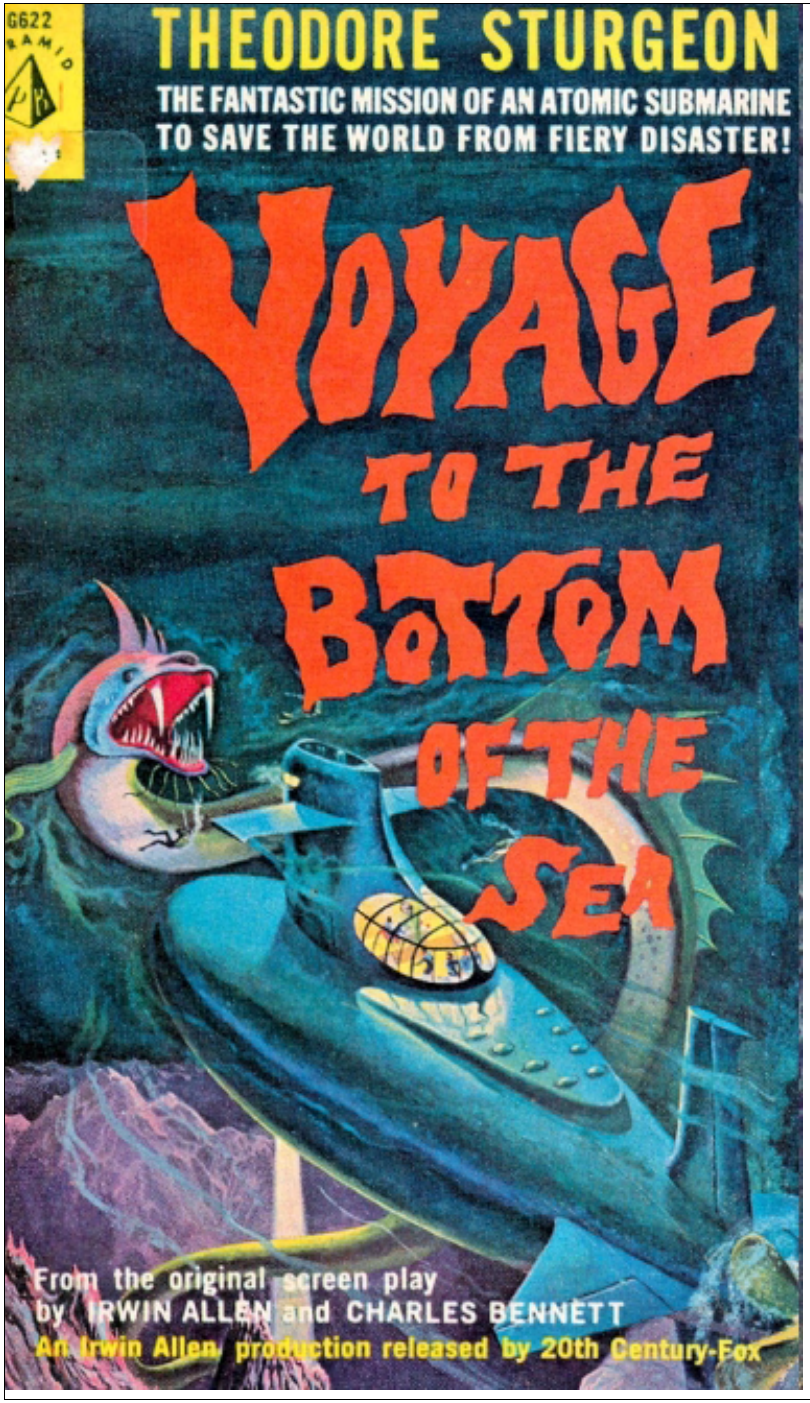




Some of Your Blood was not original to Sturgeon though. It was another product of his erstwhile patrons, the Ballantines. Betty Ballantine gave Sturgeon a non-fiction manuscript about a modern vampire. The Ballantines felt that in its original form the manuscript was too disgusting for consumption, and so asked Sturgeon to make the material credible.[109] From this inauspicious beginning Sturgeon created an original story, a classic of dark psychology. *Some of Your Blood* could be seen as an unacknowledged early instance of the non-fiction novel. The circumstances of the book's production mirror those of *The Executioner's Song*, where Norman Mailer crafted his acclaimed novelistic study of the murderer Gary Gilmore when he was supplied the factual materials by Laurence Schiller.

Some of Your Blood proves to be a psychological study offering a credible contemporary 'secular and rational' vampire.[110] The word 'vampire', though, occurs just once, and then only as a quote from Krafft-Ebing. The novel is also formally daring. It is the case file of Dr Philip Outerbridge about one patient, a soldier known as 'George Smith', a collation of Smith's autobiography, letters, memos, and transcripts of therapy sessions. George Smith is held in a military hospital for observation, after a violent incident involving a superior officer. Outerbridge is not prepared to simply sign Smith off, and asks his intransigent patient to write an account of the circumstances that led to his confinement. Smith delivers a lengthy manuscript, told in third person, in the simple and folksy manner of an undereducated backwoods kid. George was raised by his brutish drunk father and victimised invalid mother. Years later, he becomes involved with Anna, eight years his senior. Eventually, Smith finds himself placed in a juvenile home, then joins the Army, where all his needs seemed to have been met, until the incident with the officer. Outerbridge reading George's account intuits that something is missing and untold. The second half of the book details his efforts to unearth George's secret and help him.

Eventually George's secret is revealed. Such is Sturgeon's mastery of economy and nuance that George's simple narrative is later revealed to have openly told all his secrets. At first George has seemed one of life's many victims, but he is gradually revealed to be emotionally stunted, tragically damaged, and horribly dangerous. Yet George is never anything so simple as a villain, and for all his secret murders is almost an innocent. The novel centres on the love story between George and Anna, the need they have for each other. George's drinking of blood is infantile



asexual relief, not violence in itself. Murder is an unfortunate by-product, as was the case with the shocking violence in 'Bright Segment'. Sturgeon offers the extreme image of drinking menstrual blood as an act of symbiotic love, harming no one. 'Well as gently as I could I gave her, in Basic English, as clear a delineation as I could of what I call the Kinsey Boon — the great gift given by Indiana's immortal to countless millions of needlessly worried people — the simple statistical statement that no matter what we do ... we are not alone. [That] any mutual act — any one, providing only that it was not forced by one upon the other, and was an expression of love, is moral.'[111] The novel is bookended by sections that address readers in the second person, emphasising that what they are reading is fiction. The book finishes with an open-ended invitation for the reader to decide what fate George should suffer: whether he should live happily or die punished as a repellent freak? Can the reader be as understanding and sympathetic as Sturgeon?

1961 seemed to be a bumper year for Sturgeon fans. But his appearances in print that year should have raised suspicions that all was not well. The year saw a second novel, a novelisation of the film *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*. It was a pedestrian effort, which aside from a few comments about naval life, possibly stemming from Sturgeon's early experiences, and a lively first line ('At the end, the bottom, the very worst of it, with the world afire and hell's flamewinged angels calling him by name, Lee Crane blamed himself.'), otherwise did little more than re-enact the script. Novelisation was no crime, but colleagues were concerned that it had appeared under Sturgeon's own name. With so many novels appearing in such a short space of time, readers could be forgiven for being distracted from the diminution of Sturgeon's short fiction to a trickle. Then, as he had back in the late 1950s, when he'd similarly been unable to produce fiction, in 1961 Sturgeon turned to new opportunities to produce casual non-fiction. What could have been taken at face value as Sturgeon expanding into new opportunities and journalistic fields at *The National Review* and a staff post at *If* was more likely Sturgeon's own practical acknowledgment and compensation for writer's block.

The National Review was edited by William F. Buckley for the questioning conservative. Sturgeon would write a science fiction book review column for *The National Review* several times a year from 1961 to 1972. It was a mark of some respect for Sturgeon and science fiction that both were awarded a regular place on the magazine's eclectic roster, alongside literary criticism by Hugh Kenner, Guy Davenport, and Russell Kirk. 'It

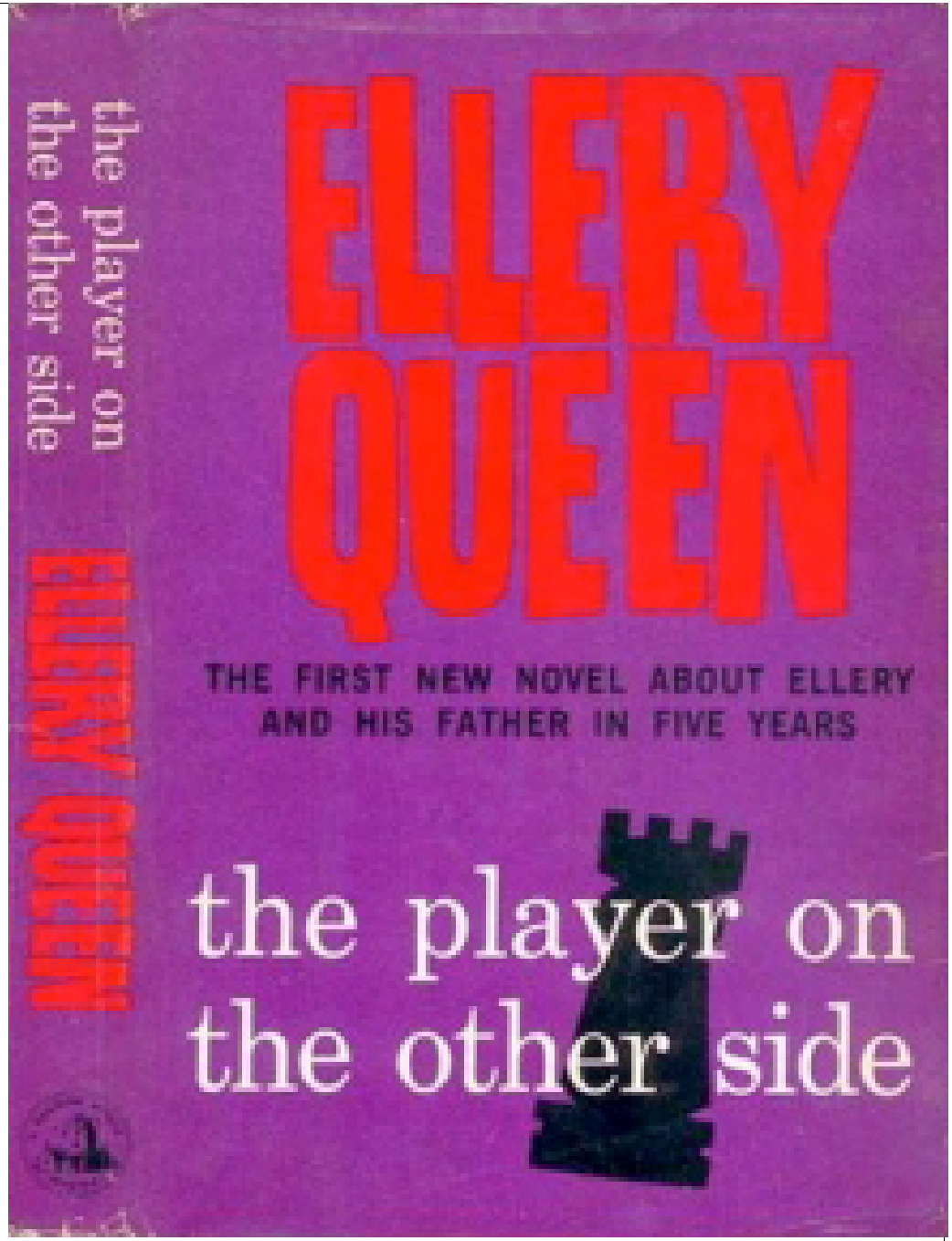
has been said of science fiction that, except for poetry, no other form of literature admits of such a degree of freedom of speech. If society doesn't suit you, you can in science fiction build a better one and see if it works. You may also alter parts of your culture and create new operating environments for the rest. Most important of all, science fiction is fiction, and fiction can never deal properly with anything but people, science fiction can orient people in and out if its pages, to new placements of the heart and the head.'[112] Sturgeon would defend science fiction for its powers of entertainment, instruction, and provocation. Rather than qualifying it merely as a distinct form of distraction, or as a brand of science boosterism, he insisted that like any good fiction it could make its readers weep, wonder, and learn. Over the next decade Sturgeon would recommend to this new audience much that was most powerful and most popular in science fiction, from writers of the Golden Age to the New Wave. In particular, though, he would regularly advocate Heinlein to the conservative/ libertarian readers of *The National Review*. '[Heinlein] makes for a degree of provocation, adrenalizing, mind-stretching, conviction-testing unmatched by any contemporary.'[113] In only one regard did Sturgeon ever show any animosity on a recurring basis, and that was to Kingsley Amis, not for his fiction but as the author of one of the earliest critical studies of science fiction, *New Maps of Hell*. 'I most emphatically disagree with the proclamation of such as Kingsley Amis, who does not does do his homework, that science fiction is characteristically asexual and unaware of love in its larger and largest senses.'[114] Given that Sturgeon was recognised in science fiction as the expert on the many forms loves takes, this may be a rare case of Sturgeon's sour grapes.

If was a science fiction magazine subsidiary to *Galaxy*, edited by Fred Pohl. From 1961 to 1964 Sturgeon took over Pohl's responsibilities for producing both an editorial and an essay for each issue. Sturgeon's combined output for most issues usually totalled about 5 or 6 pages. Sturgeon addressed some of the contemporary changes in early 1960s science fiction. In responding to fan-critic Sam Moskowitz's condemnation of 'suave writing diluting the sense of wonder', Sturgeon incidentally revealed his enormous admiration of Vercors's *You Shall Know Them* (1952); its exploration of possible bestiality and its search to define humanity was 'a towering example of what science fiction should be ... an exploration of mores, attitudes, and motivations'.[115] The majority of Sturgeon's pieces are his attempts to replicate the scientific editorialising position Isaac Asimov held at *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. Sturgeon praised Asimov for his facility to talk to anyone as the synthesiser, the great interface. Many of these columns are counterparts to Sturgeon's early reviews at *Venture* of science and parascience books, explaining new scientific discoveries and proposing practical exploitations. He demonstrates an excitement for facts, for our ever-developing world and what these new inventions and discoveries mean in regards to Man's intrinsic nature and sociocultural assumptions. There are pieces in which he makes thought experiments about contemporary social problems: America, communism, world hunger, and the atomic bomb. There is always a sense of hope, of the opening of new horizons and intellectual adventures. In all this is the old science club ethos of science fiction. In particular there are columns in which Sturgeon is excited about engineers whose ability for seeing differently or reinterpreting known facts has produced practical and financial rewarding inventions. Sturgeon writes columns where he proposes random ideas that he hopes might prove to be money-making projects. At its most fundamental level, there are pieces where he just writes about the pleasure of making things at home with his children, and riffing on the pleasures of the contents of hobby catalogues. It may be the last that resulted in Sturgeon becoming the posterboy for a campaign by Alcoa Duro-Plastic Aluminum putty.

During this period, Sturgeon achieved what was possibly the pinnacle of his recognition in the sf community. Sturgeon was the Guest of Honour at the 20th World Science Fiction Convention (31 August–3 September 1962) in Chicago. To accompany this, Sturgeon also had the accolade of a special Sturgeon-dedicated issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (see cover at the beginning of this article). The September 1962 issue had articles and bibliographies about Sturgeon. It also featured what was intended to be the first section of Sturgeon's next novel, 'When You Care, When You Love', a sensitively written story about a woman cloning her dead lover. 'Loving him doesn't mean I've stopped thinking. Loving him means I'm more me than ever, not less. It means I can do anything I did before, only more, only better.'[116] The excerpt concluded at the point of the lover being reborn, and so all practical questions as well as the possibility of loving a clone would remain unaddressed. It would be his last major piece to see print for the next five years. Many years later, in 1973 Sturgeon would review *Joshua Son of None* by Nancy Freedman, which had the same premise, and even

later Sturgeon would talk about selling his story treatment to the movies, but no further work was done on his novel. During his guest of honour speech Sturgeon would impassionedly tell his audience that 'People who love have to love themselves first'.[117] As a lecture on self-esteem, Sturgeon went on to eschew not merely the honour of his position at the convention, but also his achievements as a writer: 'I would be foolish to brag about my gift. I was born with it.; I didn't create it and I didn't earn it.'[118] Sturgeon was in the position of being most highly praised at a time when he was least able to produce the fiction for which he was lionised.

Other than exhuming a couple of short stories from the trunk in 1962 and 1963, Sturgeon seemed to have halted production of his fiction. Unknown to most at the time, he ghost-wrote a 1963 mystery novel, *The Player on the Other Side*, as Ellery Queen. Ellery Queen was the pen-name of Manfred B. Lee and Frederic Dannay, as well as the pen-name used by the story's detective in his other role as a mystery writer. The series of books dated back to the 1930s, but in the 1960s, after Lee retired, other authors were hired to produce novels under the Ellery Queen pseudonym. Sturgeon wrote one, while sf writers Avram Davidson and Jack Vance would each write several. Sturgeon's book is apparently based on a 42-page outline provided by Dannay. However, not merely details but the very lynchpin of the plot seem to originate in the hired author's regular themes and gimmicks. The plot is based on the mystery stalwart of the tontine, as the members of the rich York family are murdered sequentially, with the perpetrator of the murders identified from the start. He is the lonely, idiotic-seeming, meticulous, obedient handyman (familiar from 'Bright Segment'), whose 'brains are in his wrists'. He is manipulated to murder by anonymous appreciative letters from 'Y', whose rhetoric would be more suitable to a lover or a priest. Y is the exploitative manipulator, the cozening vindictive father-god. Besides a patented godawful Sturgeon pun, the revelation of Y's identity harks back to Sturgeon's work in the early 1950s when '[Horace Gold] begged me not to make it another of those multiple personality things'.[119] The playboy whose resentful, dissolute lifestyle masks his self-disgust is redeemed, and made to feel worthy and able to contribute to society. Two lovers ashamed of their past misdemeanours eventually understand the need to be honest to each other if their love is to fruit. An over-educated unclassifiable, ill-fit for normal practical life, harbours a fantasy of running off to operate a power shovel. When the novel concludes by pondering that everything happened 'all for the lack of a



bit of regard here, a warming hand there, a spoonful of loving concern in a critical hour', the reader knows he is in Sturgeon territory.[120] The novel also stands out for its emphasis on Ellery Queen's father's motives, feelings, and self-judgment. That the book features a sequence where Ellery Queen suffers writer's block and the novel details his loss of purpose, compounded by his family's anger at him for useless non-production, may be a different kind of giveaway on Sturgeon's part.

Sturgeon left his post at *If* in mid 1964, but the next year and a half was to see frighteningly meagre results. There was still his post as infrequent sf book reviewer for *National Review*. He also wrote two columns for *The Realist* magazine at the end of 1964. *The Realist* was a magazine of countercultural criticism and satire edited by Paul Krassner. It marks possibly the only instance of Sturgeon being acknowledged on equal footing with the likes of Norman Mailer, Joseph Heller, Jules Feiffer, and Terry Southern. Sturgeon wrote one story for *Sports Illustrated* in 1964. Since the 20th World Science Fiction Convention had taken place in Chicago, there had been significant involvement from *Playboy*, which regularly printed much good science fiction and was based in the same city. Sturgeon was to feature in a magazine round table about science fiction, corresponded about nudism, and two stories would appear in the magazine over the next couple of years. In particular, 'The Nail and the Oracle' (October, 1965), an underwhelming story about a supercomputer and the heads of the US, was an unfortunate presaging of the shortcoming of his later stories for just having people self-congratulatorily expatiate at one other about their eccentric yet supposedly penetrating insights into human behaviour. Sturgeon must also have worked on the novelisation of *The Rare Breed* in 1965, since the book was published in the beginning of 1966 to accompany the release of the film. *The Rare Breed* was another western, but unlike his previous novelisation of 1961, this book was evidently the product of craft and research and one for which, judging by his afterword, Sturgeon felt greater responsibility.

In September of 1965 Sturgeon suffered what he admitted was a complete breakdown. He moved into the home of a therapist, Jim Hayes, for round-the-clock attention. At one point Hayes's treatment would include prescribing LSD, a therapy Sturgeon had expressed interest in during his editorials for *If*.[121] Sturgeon also tried to address the nature of his recurring writer's block, and wrote a lengthy autobiographical essay (published posthumously as 'Argyll' in 1993), deliberately tracing his conflicted self-esteem issues back to his stepfather. Hayes is 'the perceptive friend', in Sturgeon's introduction to *Sturgeon is Alive and Well*, who had made explicit to him that writer's block might be an unrecognised 'silent working out of ideas, of convictions, of profound selection', and that his earliest stories prior to his mid-40s silence 'were essentially entertainments; with few exceptions they lacked that Something to Say quality'.[122] It was Hayes who also made Sturgeon fully aware that his work was about a search for 'the optimum man'. The critic Cy Chauvin would complain that Sturgeon's stories of the later 1960s and 1970s were weaker because 'Theodore Sturgeon learned to love relevance and ruined his science fiction'. Chauvin laid the blame on the editorialising and focus on contemporary issues of Sturgeon's writings for *If*.[123] Sturgeon's work did become more didactic about contemporary issues and emphatic about certain themes and mottos, but it may be the case that Hayes had made Sturgeon overly conscious of the messages he carried to the world.

The first product after Sturgeon's therapy was his story 'If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?' It was written for Harlan's Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* anthology, which would herald the New Wave of science fiction in America when it was published in 1966. Sturgeon had become a passionate advocate of Ellison's recent work, while Ellison had long admired Sturgeon, not simply for his contribution to sf, but for his sheer excellence as a writer. In his story for *Dangerous Visons*, Sturgeon accepted Ellison's challenge to all his writers to write about materials and topics previously censored in science fiction. Sturgeon not merely wrote about a taboo subject, but turned his story into an examination of what a taboo means, that prejudice is a matter of having prejudged a subject and accepted society's strictures without thinking through their meaning. Ornery, independent Charli Bux discovers the existence of Vexvelt, a planet rich in resources, but which seems to have been deliberately stricken from all records and is impossible to reach. Bux, by sheer narrative good fortune, meets a spaceship of Vexveltians on Lethe, a planet of debauchery. Bux saves them from a mob of outraged Letheans, and the Vexveltians bring him back to their planet, where Bux falls in love. Vexvelt appears to be a pastoral utopia, populated by sane, healthy, joyful natives. Bux is shocked to learn that the Vexveltians have this perfect life because they accept incest. In a lengthy lecture, Bux and the readers are informed that the taboo against incest is a mere societal quirk since incest occurs in nature. Without the taboo against incest, society on Vexvelt has developed without the

deformation of guilt, and individuals have no frustrated sexual repressions or fixations. Humanity could share in all Vexvelt's resources, its happiness, and even a cure for cancer, if only humanity would accept and adopt the Vexveltian lifestyle. It was a story idea that had haunted Sturgeon for a long time. In 1953 Sturgeon had criticised Sherwood Springer's story 'No Land of Nod' for Sherwood's unrealistic mishandling of father–daughter incest to repopulate an annihilated planet: 'It makes me mad because it is too important a story to bungle.'[124] Sturgeon had argued that it was a perfect demonstration that 'present a man with the right surroundings and his morals and ethics will adjust themselves to suit right now'.[125] Believe that as Sturgeon may, his representatives of humanity, as in *Venus Plus X*, vehemently reject their chance of salvation when it contravenes social mores:

> At last the Archive Master spoke again in a near whisper, shaking and furious. 'Abomination! Abomination!' Spittle appeared on his chin: he seemed not to know. 'I would — rather — die — eaten alive — with cancer — and raving mad than live with such sanity as that.[126]

California

By spring of 1966 Sturgeon had separated from his family. The children stayed with Marion in Woodstock while Sturgeon moved to Los Angeles. There he moved in with Harlan Ellison at Sherman Oaks. As a result Ellison would have several amusing anecdotes about the social consequences of Sturgeon's penchant for nudism. Ellison's home was also a way station for many younger writers of the New Wave in science fiction, and Sturgeon would find himself on occasion competing with Norman Spinrad for the affection of the young woman who would eventually become Spinrad's partner.[127] Sturgeon and Ellison collaborated over a long period of time on a short story, 'Runesmith', but otherwise there would be no more fiction from Sturgeon for several years.

Sturgeon's move to Los Angeles was almost certainly timed to take advantage of TV's new interest in producing better science fiction series. Harlan Ellison was established as a successful screenwriter, and reported producers eager to have Sturgeon working for them.[128] Sturgeon was involved in a script for *The Invaders*, and may have made some contribution to *Wild, Wild West*. Sturgeon's major involvement in TV science fiction was the work he did on *Star Trek*, where Gene Roddenberry was intent on creating a superior science fiction series. Following one pilot episode a year earlier, work on the series of *Star Trek* began in earnest in spring 1966. Roddenberry wanted the input of respected science fiction writers, and Ellison and Sturgeon were involved in the series before its broadcast. The first 'red shirt' crew member killed in the first episode was named Sturgeon in tribute to the author.

Sturgeon had one episode broadcast in the first series, 'Shore Leave' (29 December 1966). 'Shore Leave' was about the necessity of relaxation and play to relieve the stresses of ship life. The planet the ship's crew lands on has the property of bringing to life every passing thought and whim — an entity whose desire to please has conceptual kin in some of Sturgeon's earlier stories. It is Sturgeon's episode that introduces a history of Kirk being bullied when he was in cadet school. The episode was written with the aim of indulging the pleasure of spiralling fantasy in a scenario where anything could happen. How much of what was broadcast is Sturgeon's is debatable, since he took almost six months to produce his screenplay, and Roddenberry spent several days rewriting the script immediately before filming. The one line which has been much quoted since is evidently the work of Sturgeon. 'The more complex the mind, the greater the need for the simplicity of play.' It is a variant on one of Sturgeon's truisms derived from Occam's Razor, dating back to his time with Mary Mair. 'The great guiding principle that basics are simple . Complicated things are by their very nature not basic. What is complicated is not important.'[129]

While 'Shore Leave' was a deliberate trifle, his script for the second season was to be one of the classic episodes. If nothing else, Sturgeon gave the world the phrase, 'Live long and prosper'. Written in the first half of 1967, 'Amok Time' was chosen to air as the first episode of the second season. Fans knew that the episode was going to involve Spock visiting his home planet of Vulcan. But while viewers had repeatedly been told that Spock's race was the epitome of rationality, Sturgeon's script, with the original draft title of 'Spock Blows Top', would present Vulcans at their most primally psychosexual and violent. When the story begins Spock has come into Pon farrr, the Vulcan mating cycle, and he must hurry back to Vulcan to meet his mate, T'pring, or die. Sturgeon had previously addressed the social effect of libidinal cycles in 'Never Underestimate' (1952). On Vulcan, his wife manipulates the crazed Spock into a deadly duel with Kirk. The apparent sexism of the wife being the property of the victor is offset by her ingenuity in gaining her independence. This script is much better constructed than 'Shore Leave', from

the gradual revelation of Spock's condition to the alienness of the scenes on Vulcan, with an emphasis on characterisation and the friendship between the two leads. Sturgeon makes it explicit that Pon farrr is a disturbance of 'balance', and viewers are to assume that the Vulcan repression of emotions cannot help but result in such a violent atavistic release. Sturgeon ingeniously devises a method of making sexuality a taboo for Vulcans, their desperate shame about their irrational mating drives shielded in rituals and customs. Spock on the *Enterprise* in the first half of the story is a man trying to repress what is happening to him, and control his evident stress, yet the thought of having to confront his urges almost makes him resigned to a death by emotional pressure, similar to 'The [Widget], the [Wadget], and Boff'. That Spock is relieved of his blood lust after thinking he has throttled Kirk to death may or may not hark back to 'Bianca's Hands' (and its influence on the phenomenon of slash fiction is entirely another matter). Another Sturgeonesque fillip is the greeting between Spock and T'Pring: 'Parted from me and never parted, never and always touching and touched', which is Sturgeon's idea of the psychic interface of his lovers during syzygy. As with 'The Player on the Other Side', a story that appears to be a perfect recension of previous Sturgeon themes and ideas turns out to have external claims upon it, since *Star Trek* producer Gene L. Coon issued a $750 demand to Paramount for having furnished 'Amok Time''s story.[130]

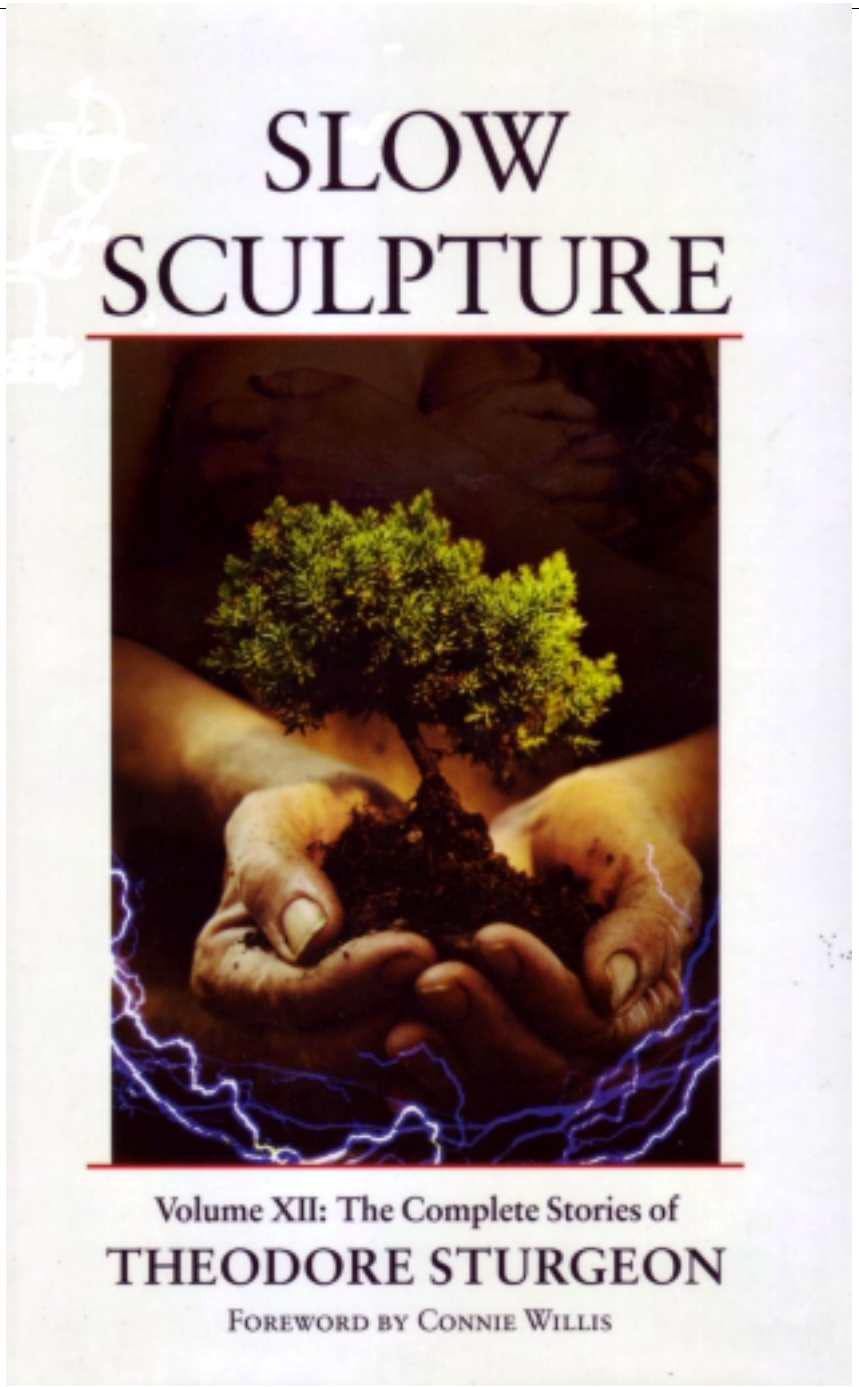
Sturgeon's other media work from this time, since it went unproduced, is barely known, and therefore contributes to yet another blank space in his CV. He wrote several more treatments for *Star Trek*. 'Joy Machine', written circa May–June 1967, featured the crew visiting a planet that has been brainwashed by a pleasure-conditioning device. The treatment is also distinguished by featuring several young children who have the same names and ages as his daughters. He also wrote a sequel to 'Shore Leave' in April 1968.[131] The series ended after only three seasons, but Sturgeon had already transferred his problems meeting deadlines to his TV work. An internal memo from producer Gene L. Coon in April 1968 insisted, 'Sturgeon had better get with it and stay with it, or he's going to find himself delaying story, script or revision to a place where he gets cut off and no payment made'.[132] Sturgeon joined with three other writers from his time on *Star Trek*, Richard Matheson, Jerry Sohl, and George Clayton Johnson, to form a collective 'The Green Hand' to sell sf to TV. Herb Solow, *Star Trek*'s producer at Paramount, gave them an office at MGM. Sturgeon developed *ET*, about 'an extraterrestrial trapped on Earth who has difficulties understanding and adjusting to what he finds on this planet', which surely has a corollary in Sturgeon's recurring metaphor at the time about explaining human behaviour to a questioning Man from Mars. Another premise was 'Gestalt Team', about future astronauts whose special talents have been blended and meshed. The Green Hand attempted a *Twilight Zone*-style antho-logy series called *A Touch of Strange*, named after Sturgeon's story.[133] Johnson, Sohl, and Sturgeon also collaborated on a screenplay of Heinlein's 'The Green Hills of Earth'.[134] Every one of these projects was rejected. Sturgeon also spent time in 1968 collaborating with Orson Welles on a film of *More Than Human*, which would have appeared in 1970. Sturgeon found Welles and the changes he wanted to make to *More Than Human* were too over-whelming, and though a script was produced by Sturgeon, Welles went on to other projects.[135]

By early 1969, Sturgeon had a new partner, Wina Golden. The two had struck up a correspondence, and she moved to Los Angeles to be with him. She would introduce him to the younger hippyish counterculture, and also introduce him to fans outside of the usual science fiction circles. Wina was a journalist and associated with the LA radio station KPFK (then broadcasting the Firesign Theatre). Sturgeon discovered that his fans included many of the biggest West Coast rock stars, such as Mama Cass, the Grateful Dead, David Crosby, and even Frank Zappa. The Grateful Dead and Crosby would repeat in interviews that their ideal of performing as a group was derived from his idea of 'bleshing', producing something greater than their individual abilities. Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young would hire Sturgeon to write a film adaptation of their song 'Wooden Ships'.[136] Through Wina's countercultural journalistic connections Sturgeon wrote some columns for the Los Angeles underground newspaper *The Los Angeles Image*. In 1970, Sturgeon and Wina had a son, Andros.

Wina's appearance in his life also prompted a new spate of stories appearing from 1969. In his introduction to *Sturgeon is Alive and Well*, collecting most of those new fictions, he gave them the title of 'Wina stories'. Many of them were inspired by Wina's incidental comments and the life and interests they shared together. Not least, the recurring element of a beautiful rapturous, often red-headed, young female is a personal tribute to Wina. The stories also capture contemporary Los Angeles life, the generation gap, and the changing attitudes in the sex wars. Ellison had also been prompting Sturgeon to return to writing short stories, and with Ellison's connections, Sturgeon published most of these

new stories in *Knight* and *Adam*, men's slick magazines.[138] The most famous of these stories is 'Slow Sculpture', which won the 1971 Hugo and Nebula awards. The story is a simple tale about the developing relationship between an isolated scientist and a young girl whom he cures of cancer. This is evidently a scenario of some importance to Sturgeon, since 'A Saucer of Loneliness', 'Bright Segment', and 'Extrapolation' also feature a man who saves then falls in love with a woman on the point of dying or committing suicide. The cranky scientist is almost a perfect clone of the one from 'Microscopic God', but at least he is now a character conversing with others. A flashback to a quarrel during a period of employment on a commercial tanker is a further point of personal identification for Sturgeon. As he heals the girl so she heals his loneliness and antipathy to society. The title of the story refers to the scientist's hobby of keeping bonsai trees. Sturgeon's imagines the tree's response to the infinite pains and decisions taken in its creation as, 'Very well, I shall do what you want, but I will do it my way', which by that point encapsulated Sturgeon's own attitude to his life.[138]

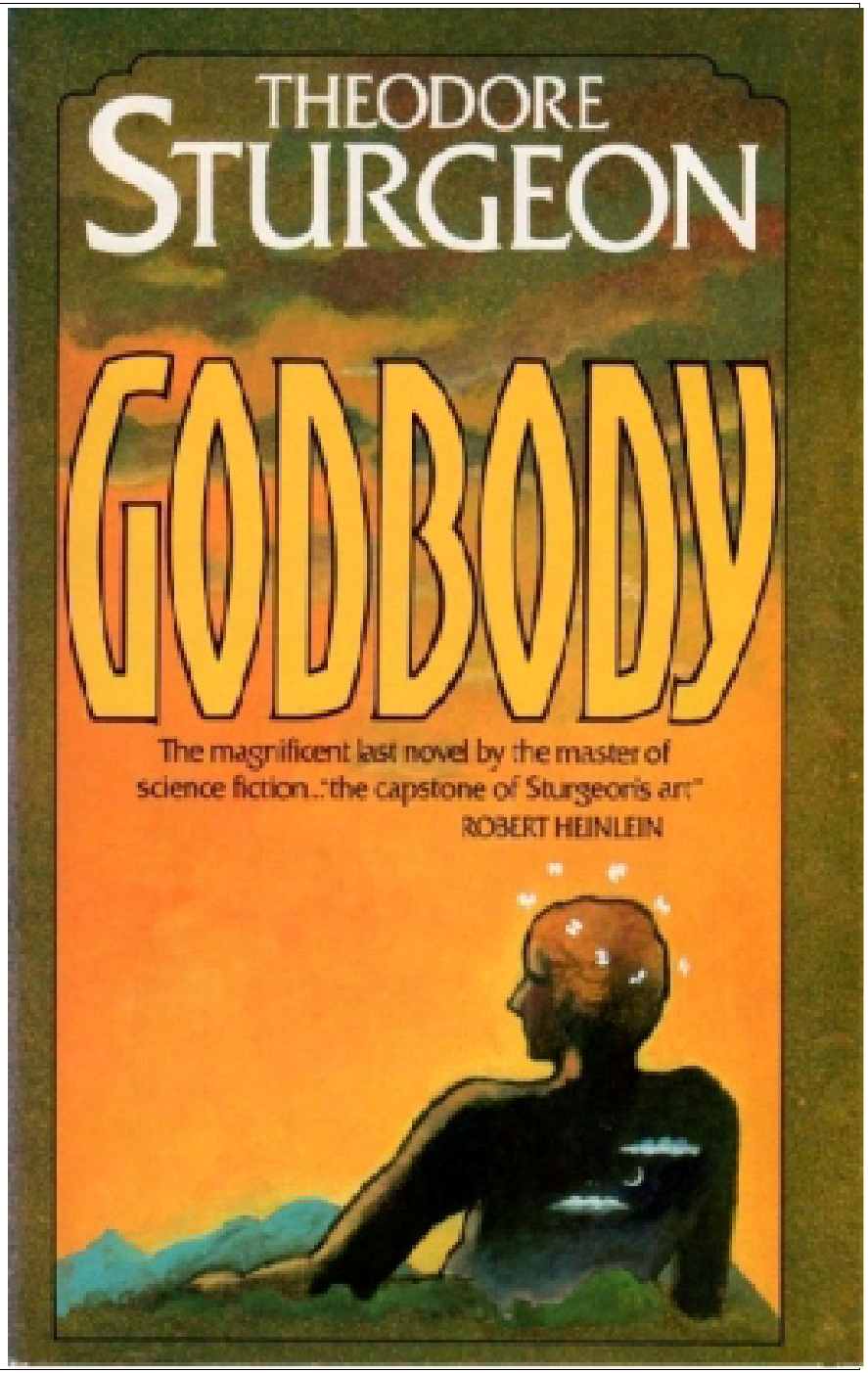
The 'Wina stories' stand out for the extent that they are direct statements of Sturgeon's beliefs, written with an idealistic conviction that is sometimes preachy. Anyone who has read much of Sturgeon's later non-fiction or attended his lectures will recognise his ideas and themes of societal stasis and 'ask the next question'. Rather than being demonstrated in the process of the narrative, or constituting the emotional climax of a work of fiction, Sturgeon's ideas are expounded blatantly and directly at the reader in the 'Wina stories', often ending with pleas for the reader to take action. A sizeable portion of the stories are little more than debates and lectures in business offices or laboratories where solutions and absolute principles are thrashed out with all the certainty of Heinlein and Ayn Rand. A frequent protagonist is the eccentric genius who has isolated himself from the military-industrial complex that would otherwise exploit or conceal his world-changing discoveries. In contrast to his pieces written in the aftermath of Hiroshima, Sturgeon now has scientists who suffer terrible agonies about their discoveries and their responsibilities to humanity and the planet. Eventually his 'specialising non-specialist' geniuses' altruism will bear fruit, as they conceive of some practical scheme which by harnessing people's commercial instincts will encourage people to think and behave in revolutionary new ways that will save the world. There is an unfortunate habit of people commending one another for their innovative way of thinking that cumulatively reads



as little more than Sturgeon patting his own back. For the first time since a sequel to 'Ether Breather' in his first year with John W. Campbell, Sturgeon would develop two brief series of stories about advisers–inventors, two about Merrihew, and two about Ejler Edgar Aylmer, but there is little to differentiate them from each other or other Sturgeonesque mouthpieces. That these schemes are always proven money-makers is possibly some element of wish fulfilment on Sturgeon's part, of a path taken where he could have seen financial reward from his hobby horses, dating back to his time at *If*. Instead of simply healing individuals as in his fictions of the 1950s, now Sturgeon wants to save the world, a feeling of potency that new love inspired in him, as recorded in his 1939 letter to Dorothe Fillingame. Critics, readers, and fans uncomfortably had to admit that these were not Sturgeon's strongest stories, but it is a testament to Sturgeon's craft and investment that it remains a subjective matter as to which are weakest and strongest.

It was Sturgeon's associations with Harlan Ellison, the counterculture, and the cutting edge of Los Angeles science fiction that put Sturgeon in the right place for his last major fictional project. Brian Kirby was a significant figure on the Los Angeles countercultural scene. He was the editor of the underground newspapers *The LA Free Press* and *The Staff* (best known to sf fans as the venues of Harlan Ellison's 'Glass Teat' and 'Hornbook' columns). Kirby was hired as the director of the now infamous Essex House series of novels. Essex House (1968–1969) was intended to be a publisher of pornography, but Kirby wanted to print serious erotic novels that would give writers the opportunity to be experimental. Kirby employed his ties to the California science fiction scene, and the Essex House list would feature Philip Jose Farmer, with several novels also sporting afterwords or introductions by Sturgeon or Harlan Ellison, though the project folded before it could print books by sf writers Charles Platt and Samuel Delany. As a sequence of pornographic novels, Essex House is distinctive, for many are manifestos of literary and sexual liberation, the sex deliberately outrageous, but the books still sincere in their hippyish youthful revolutionary intent.

Sturgeon was commissioned at the end of the decade to write *Godbody* for Essex House. It would be a contemporary highly sexual retelling of the Christ myth. The story would tell the effect of Godbody, a naked Jesus-figure spreading his gospel of sex and love in a small American town. The villagers are touched by the mysterious Godbody both spiritually and physically. (By now the importance of hands in Sturgeon's



work should be blatant). When he lays his hands on people Godbody heals their inhibition, repression, guilt, shame, and emotional pain. As importantly, sex is Godbody's means of conversion and his sacrament, teaching people how to love one another, and express that love by appreciating the joy and communion of healthy sex.

The book can be seen to have its origins in ideas first expressed in *Venus Plus X*:

> Christianity was, at the outset, a love movement, as the slightest acquaintance with the New Testament clearly documents. What was not generally known until just before the end — so fiercely was all knowledge of primitive Christianity suppressed — was that it was a charitic religion — that is, a religion in which the congregation participated, in the hope of having a genuine religious experience, an experience later called theolepsy, or seized of God. Many of the early Christians did achieve this state, and often; many more achieved it but seldom, and yet kept going back and back seeking it But once having experienced it, they were profoundly changed, inwardly gratified; it was this intense experience, and its permanent effects, which made it possible for them to endure the most frightful hardships and tortures, to die gladly, to fear nothing.[139]

Godbody is also the portrait of the town that is the site of this Second Coming. Each chapter is the first-person testimony of one of the town's inhabitants. Formally it has some resemblance to the vignette-collages of 'The Perfect Host' or *The Cosmic Rape*, although there may also be influence from Sturgeon's admiration for Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. Given the nature of the book, each character's thoughts in some manner centre on his or her perceptions and problems about sex, and subsequent revelation and healing. These include a bohemian nudist artist, a woman afraid of her own sexuality, a rapist, and the local pastor and his wife. Set against them are the newspaper owner who pulls the threads of local gossip, and the local banker, who between them effectively control the town and also embody all the social strictures. 'The way they use power mostly is to stop anything from changing and to stop anything that could be fun or loving, and to fight anything that's beautiful or young just for that reason.'[140] The pastor's final sermon is a compassionate but devastating critique of how the original teachings of Jesus have been corrupted, turning the church into the most 'efficient guilt-factory ever known on this planet'.[141]

Contemporary readers would remain ignorant of the nature of *Godbody*, since it was to remain pending for the rest of Sturgeon's life. Fans knew only that Sturgeon continued work on 'my slow-growing *Godbody*; that's the big one evolving its own massive pace'.[142] He would tell numerous interviewers throughout the 1970s, 'it will be the most important thing I've done in my life' (a sure invitation to anxiety and clutch-up).[143] It was eventually released posthumously in 1986, a year after Sturgeon's death, with a foreword from Robert Heinlein. It would appear to be completed, but Sturgeon had held it back because he knew that in some manner it was not ready for release. Essex House had folded by 1970, but it is likely that much of the work done on the novel dates to the first couple of years after it was originally commissioned. Certainly it is of a piece with Sturgeon's public declarations of the time, when readers of *The New York Times* would find themselves told that 'sex is more than a sensual explosion, it is communication'.[144] Similarly, readers of *Galaxy* would unexpectedly be lectured 'that the experience of sex isn't just the arrival point, but also a departure point ... in that new nakedness and undiluted awareness you may commune with the other human being as a human being'.[145] In Godbody's concern, understanding, and sympathy, Sturgeon may also be offering an idealised self-portrait, his hope of his effect on others. a suspicion given further confirmation by the testimony of Sturgeon's many students throughout the 1970s.

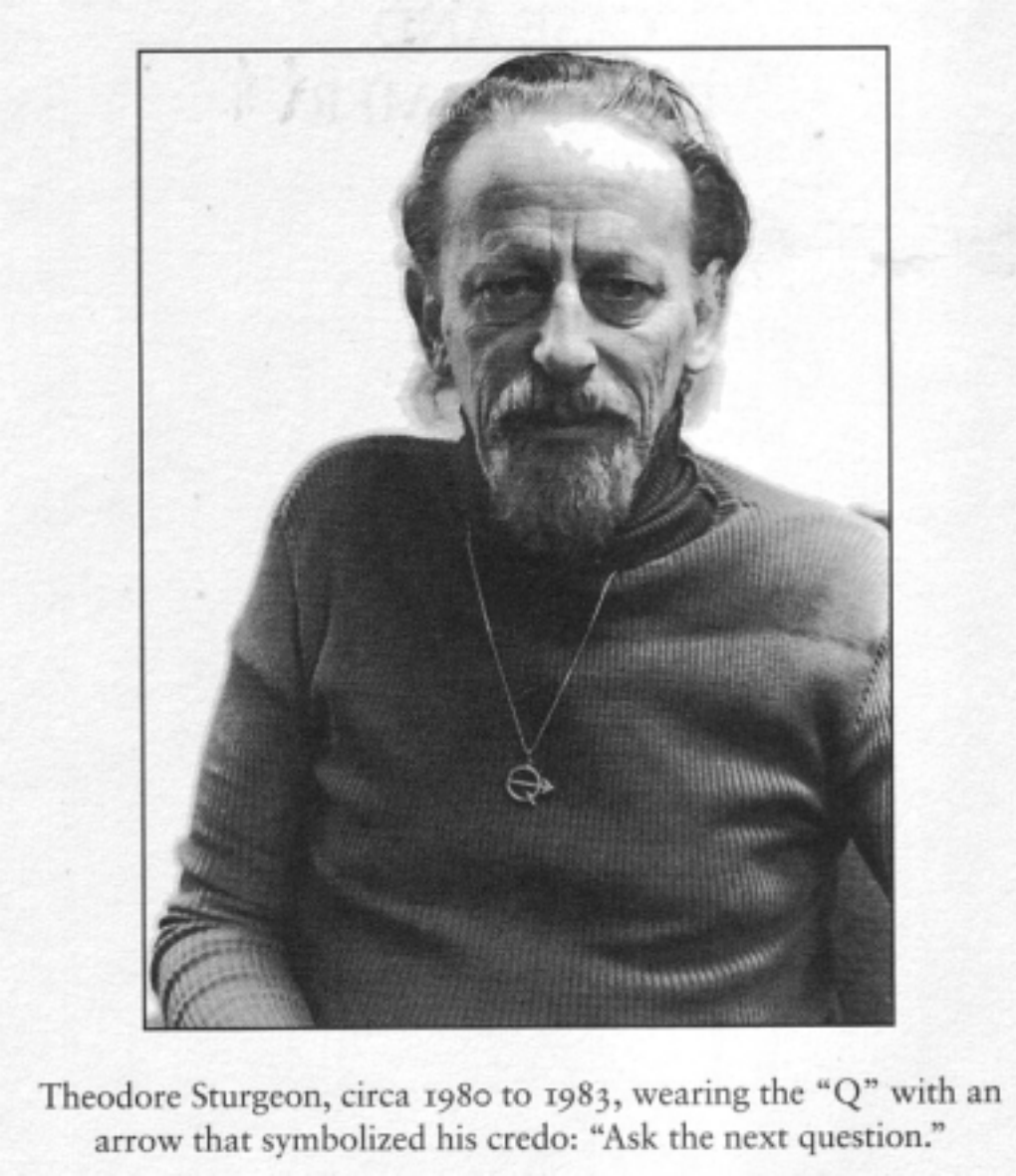
Last years

Besides *Godbody*, the effusion of the 'Wina' period had produced about 15 stories by the end of 1971, with a couple more sputtering out over the next year or so under various circumstances and in assorted venues. In 1966, when Sturgeon was unable to support himself because he was blocked, he had been able to take advantage of TV's interest in sf. The explosion of the New Wave and sf's importance to the teenagers and young adults at the end of the 1960s had the knock-on effect of high schools and universities creating sf courses and departments to satisfy a new scholastic need. Sturgeon would estimate there were 500 such sf-related courses in the mid 70s. Publishers were producing more and experimental science fiction, as well as issuing sf canon-defining anthologies, while newspapers were prepared to give greater prominence to reviews of science fiction.

Every one of these new opportunities would provide Sturgeon a role. He would become a professional reviewer, write introductions to collections and novels by new authors, and travel the world to lecture on sf and participate in workshops teaching writing. Besides simply supporting himself, he would discover new audiences. Even as Sturgeon was less capable of making himself present through new fiction, blocked for most of the remaining 15 years of his life, Sturgeon — the man and his beliefs — was more present than ever to audiences, fans, and students, as he was busy guiding and inspiring the young.

In mid 1972 Sturgeon became a professional book reviewer. He found a receptive berth in his familiar home of *Galaxy*. More impressive was that at the same time he became the regular science fiction reviewer for the *New York Times*, a position he was given because of his previous work at the *National Review*. He would hold the two posts jointly for about two and a half years, until the end of 1974. Given the torrent of books that passed through his columns, it is hard to imagine how he found time to do anything else, let alone write fiction, but it was work that proved his continuing dedication to the value of sf . Luckily he was often able to review the same books for both publications, but honour meant that he never merely repeated himself. Sturgeon's stint coincided with the aftermath of the New Wave and the expansion in publishing. While respecting the work of earlier sf authors, Sturgeon was always a firm advocate of the necessity of the New Wave, that it was sf evolving and maturing, accepting growth and change.[146] He admired the younger writers for their give-a-damn quality of relevance and dedication. Where many saw mere parading of adolescent liberation, Sturgeon argued that they told a good story and wanted to provoke in the same productive way that Heinlein provoked.

Sturgeon undertook book reviewing in 'the same hope for the thrill of first love', but it was the recurrence of 'wise' and 'profound' as praise for a book that indicated what Sturgeon was truly looking for.[147] He describes science fiction writers as mythmakers (surely applicable to his intent in *Godbody*), who describe the 'plus ultra'.[148] He returns again and again to his idea of 'fable'. 'By fables I mean narratives in which the basic statement — "moral", if you like — transcends the story line and is useful elsewhere. There is, I think, a rising tide of profound religious and philosophical thinking in the speculative field just now'.[149] 'Great and lasting fiction is fable — it states something human, something learnable, by means of the narrative and is written, or driven, by that



Theodore Sturgeon, circa 1980 to 1983, wearing the "Q" with an arrow that symbolized his credo: "Ask the next question."

statement rather than the narrative itself' (which in its negative connotations is a criticism to be made against the stories of *Sturgeon is Alive and Well*).[150] Though Sturgeon was dedicated, and determined to pass along the pleasure of his reading, by the end of his stint at both venues, Sturgeon was giving hints that no matter how hard he forged through the avalanche of books published there was an insuperable backlog that was genuinely preventing him from other work, besides creating yet more guilt about not doing justice to every book that was passed to him.

At the same time that he was reviewing, Sturgeon was a lecturer for hire, travelling almost constantly from venue to venue at a frenetic pace. The pace and demand was to remain constant for the 15 years until his death. There were lectures, seminars, and symposiums, besides writing classes and new science fiction writing workshops such as Clarion. Science fiction attracted the new interest of sociologists, scientists, teachers, and philosophy and literature departments. He was constantly met with a warm reception by articulate people, from Carl Sagan to William Burroughs, appreciative of his past works and willing to listen to the current ideas he propounded. He travelled America, Europe, and Canada. He was a guest at major universities, such as MIT, Cornell, Penn State, and UCLA. He attended science fiction conventions, *Star Trek* conventions, and comic conventions. It was 15 years of work, whose intangible yet charismatic results have little record in Sturgeon's own writings, and so may be best summed up by those he met and influenced:

> Ted gr[ew] more ensnared by a received universe that was both too small to contain him while simultaneously telling him he was a genius ... He grew more and more careless of what his actions and life choices would do to those he left behind, yet to those he met casually he was more charming than a cobra at a mongoose rally (Harlan Ellison).[151]

> People loved him almost instantly. He could get on an airplane, sit beside a stranger, and they would get off lifelong friends. I know. A hospital administrator from Oklahoma came to one of my summer Institute [on the Teaching of Science Fiction] sessions because it had happened to her, and she wanted to share the warmth of Ted's company for another week (James Gunn).[152]

> To this day I still can't believe Ted Sturgeon sat with me (crosslegged on the floor) in an empty room for at least an hour (until other fans stuck their heads in, saw what was going on, quietly slid in, and gradually filled the room at a slow pace) ... and talked with me about soft drugs (marijuana), dealing with my parents, Love in general, and ... I don't know what else. I didn't look up from Ted for at least two hours, and that's when I first noticed the once empty room was filled and I became suddenly so self-conscious that we were the center of attention that I lost all train of thought and was immediately embarrassed that all of these fans/people had heard me pouring my heart out to Ted, and they were listening to his kind (definitely NOT patronizing, but genuine) responses, his personal counseling session as it were, to this nobody fan ... everyone was silent and riveted on what Ted was saying, that my end of the conversation petered out so quickly that I felt like a dufus. But now, in hindsight, after all these years, I still cherish the fact that Ted Sturgeon and I sat alone in a quiet room (during a major party night at a major SF convention) and he took the time to speak one on one with an unknown fan ... a nobody ... and listen to what that fan had on his mind ... and not much, if any of it, had to do with SF (Dave Truesdale).[153]

He and I, with James Gunn, were conducting the writers' workshop at the Conference of the Fantastic at Boca Raton, Florida. One would-be was a plump, pallid, unhappy lady. Her story was a fantasy about a guy who tried three times to commit suicide, only to be blocked each time by a green monster from Hell who wanted him to keep on suffering ... When the story reached me, I asked the lady right out, 'Have you ever tried to commit suicide?' Unexpected response. She stared at me in shock. Then she burst into a hailstorm of tears, collapsing onto the table ... 'Three times,' she cried. Everyone looked fit to faint. 'It's nothing to be ashamed of,' I said. 'I've tried it too.' 'So have I,' said Sturgeon calmly. He needn't have come in like that. He just did it bravely, unostentatiously, to support me, to support her, to support everyone. And I would guess there was a lot of misery and disappointment in Ted's life, for all the affection he generated. Yet he remained kind, loving, giving (Brian Aldiss).[154]

He would show up at conventions and do this great guru act. He was the best guru of all. You would walk out of a Sturgeon speech feeling enlightened. And he was inspiring; he'd talk about asking the next question. And he would do the same speech over and over, but it was great, you loved it every time. But there were days, and even his own daughter said to me one time, that you just wanted to sink your fingers into his throat for doing the damn guru act (David Gerrold).[155]

'Ask the Next Question' was Sturgeon's great idea of his last decades. 'It is the symbol of everything that humanity has ever created'.[156] It was didactically inserted and explicated in the preponderance of his lectures, interviews, articles, reviews, and stories. Sturgeon first fully advocated it in its final, received form in an article written in 1967 for *Cavalier*, a men's magazine. The article was only a slight rewriting of the matter and afterword to 'If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?' The article was distinguished not simply by Sturgeon's emphasis of the phrase 'Ask the Next Question' but by his symbol of a letter Q with an arrow going through it. Sturgeon would wear that symbol as a pendant as proof of its importance. It was 'an attack on the human proclivity to stop, to cease growing, learning, changing, moving, to say, "I don't want to hear it." As soon as you say, "I don't want to hear it" you've died because you're not asking the next question.'[157] Sturgeon's ideal of humanity and civilisation in constant 'process' had already been made explicit in *Venus Plus X*. He would repeatedly insist that the dynamic equilibrium of a gull in flight outlasts the static form of pyramids. Sturgeon wanted his readers to confront humanity's desire to stop, and his injunction was to be 'life-oriented and fearlessly curious'.[158] Almost 20 years earlier Sturgeon had addressed this idea of the irrelevance of absolutism and permanence, and the deleterious effect of accepting enshrined, received ideas, preconceptions, and prejudices. Before '90% of everything is crap', his own self-identified 'Sturgeon's Law' was 'Nothing is Always Absolutely So'. It was a slight adaption of a quote from Charles Fort, 'Any answer is not necessarily the only answer', that recurs throughout Surgeon's novels, short stories, and reviews.

Despite Sturgeon going through lengthy periods of living out of a suitcase, travelling in planes, trains, and automobiles to his next destination, he still maintained some presence in media sf, largely relying upon his contacts dating from *Star Trek*. His 1972 novella 'Case and the Dreamer' was a write-up of an unproduced pilot for Herb Solow for NBC. Solow had more success as the producer of a 1974 ABC Movie of the Week of *Killdozer*, co-scripted by Sturgeon. In 1975 Sturgeon wrote an episode of *The Land of the Lost*, a series that had David Gerrold, a colleague from *Star Trek*, as script editor. When Gene Roddenberry made an unsuccessful attempt to revive *Star Trek* in the late 1970s, Sturgeon wrote an episode, 'Cassandra', for him. Sturgeon would recount being asked to write a sequel to 'Alien', as well as writing the narrative for an elaborate Laserium show (Sturgeon had an interest in lasers dating back to several articles he wrote in the mid 60s).[159] There was a trend for spoken word albums in the late 1970s, and science fiction's popular success meant it was also part of that boom. When the noted Caedmon Records issued a series of spoken word albums of science fiction classics, Sturgeon read his own 'Baby Is Three' (1977). A year earlier Sturgeon had also read 'Bianca's Hands' and an exclusive extract from *Godbody* for a spoken word album, *Theodore Sturgeon Reads* (1976), from Alternate World records, produced by Roy and Shelley Torgeson. The Torgesons won awards for similar record projects with Harlan Ellison and Robert Bloch, and Sturgeon would write several introductions and one of his rare later short stories, 'Harry's Note', for their late 1970s *Chrysalis* sf anthology series.

In 1976, Stugeon met Jayne Tannehill at a San Diego comic convention. She was in her early thirties, but still almost half his age. His 'Lady Jayne' would be his partner for the remaining nine years of his life, and Sturgeon would acknowledge her importance in arranging his obligations and his international schedule of appearances. 'She has a solid grasp on reality and reality's problems and will see to it in every way humanly possible that I take care of things in the proper order'.[160] Again there was a small output of stories over the next couple of years. The most significant of them was 'Why Dolphins Don't Bite', written for his friend Harlan Ellison. Sturgeon and Lady Jayne would establish a new home in Springfield, Oregon. When Paul Krassner, the editor of *The Realist*, became the editor of *Hustler* in the late 1970s, he hired Sturgeon as *Hustler*'s book reviewer, and Sturgeon would write a monthly column from 1979 to 1983. With a receptive audience at *Hustler*, Sturgeon at last was able to write a sexually explicit story, 'The Country of Afterward' (1979), that had been

plaguing him. An older businessman is kidnapped by a gang of nubile young women and repeatedly orgasmed into being a kinder, more considerate person, with sex panegyricised as both worship and social necessity. Sturgeon's last two published stories, 'Vengeance Is' (1980) and 'Not An Affair' (1983), also deal in explicit sexual issues. Sturgeon wrote the introductions for a series of some 20 or so translations of Russian science fiction at the end of the decade, an interest in foreign science fiction dating back to his post at the *National Review*. He spent a year reviewing for *Twilight Zone* magazine (1981–1982), then reviewed science fiction occasionally for the *Los Angeles Times* until his death. Sturgeon was also temporarily able to exert some control over his immense back catalogue. Not only did Dell reprint many of his out-of-print books, but at the turn of the decade it also published three new collections of uncollected short stories in which Sturgeon was able to pass comment on his career.

'Dolphins Don't Bite' was the result of Sturgeon being a panellist at a university science fiction seminar run by Harlan Ellison in 1975. Each panellist agreed to write a story set on the planet Medea, a shared world specially created for the seminar. The first half of 'Dolphins Don't Bite' features changing attitudes to nudity, sexual acceptance, a new strain of evolved humanity, a non-specialising specialist, admiring comments about others' ways of thinking, a guru with a childlike curiosity who has the facility of seeing others p.o.v, and a plot about bringing peace by understanding society's taboos and established procedures. The second half focuses on the society of the native Medeans who at first are isolated from the human settlers. A solitary Medean communicates with humans via an idiosyncratic, not-quite-translated English. Eventually the guru, in a scene reminiscent of Kirk's promise to Spock not to reveal what he learns of Vulcan customs, is admitted into the Medeans' community. Their sex life is violent, but it is a cycle of sex changes and changing roles. The Medeans have the ability to work in unity and share skills automatically. It is revealed that they don't speak because they have a total racial memory, resulting in a unity of sentience where each indi-vidual is aware of himself within his species. It is also revealed that their telepathy is not merely within their race but also includes the entire universe. Only humanity is isolated from this unity of sentience, and is consequently pitiable. (In 'Harry's Note' the narrator kills himself despairing at the realisation that mankind has missed its window of opportunity for further evolution.) Every aspect of the Medeans' life is experienced as a sacred ritual, and this includes their consumption of their elders' brains. It is this cannibalism that is responsible for unity of sentience, and if humans would also do so then they could participate in that unity. That is the challenge to the guru. Can he accept this and the benefits it will bring? The Medeans were Sturgeon's final reply to John W. Campbell's longstanding request to his writers: 'Write me a story about a creature that thinks as well as a human being but not like a human being'.[161] The crystals of *The Dreaming Jewels* had been an early attempt, but in the Medeans, Sturgeon invented a race whose drive is different from survival. Survival is secondary since it is 'more important to be part of that whole thing', familiar from the deaths of the little boy Henry in *The Cosmic Rape* and 'The Man Who Lost the Sea'.[162] Besides such major devices familiar from the previous 30 years of Sturgeon careers, there are appearances of assorted mottos, themes, and phrases, such as Occam's Razor and the original Sturgeon's Law. Unlike the previous decade's work, it is an undeniably well-written story. There is no preachiness. Sturgeon's obsessions and special phrases casually occur in the natural rapport between his characters. It is an emblematic summation of Sturgeon's beliefs and aims, with none of the didacticism to be found in a story like 'If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let Your Sister Marry One?' If Sturgeon wrote little fiction after 'Why Dolphins Don't Bite', this story was a finely crafted encapsulation of much that he had worked to express.

There was one last novel that Sturgeon hinted at on numerous occasions to his audience during his last five years. He quit his post reviewing for *Twilight Zone*, stating that he wanted to write a novel called *Star Anguish*. It would have been Sturgeon's attempt at a generation starship story, where an ark of humanity crosses the galaxies over centuries. It was of a piece with Sturgeon's valedictory plea to his readers to save humanity. 'Please do everything you possibly can to get this species off this planet. If we don't, we could die here. If we do, we will live forever; there are no limits to growth if we can take this path. I'm not fighting for my life, but for our immortality. Thanks for listening.'[163] Sturgeon's fraught attempts to determine upon a sociological system that would last through 30 generations on the ship can be read as Sturgeon trying to discover and realise in what form humanity's salvation could be realised, so harking back to his *Astounding* editorial, 'August Sixth, 1945'.

Whether Sturgeon would have continued indefinitely in this manner of lecturing and reviewing with periods of years between individual short stories, whether he would have satisfactorily completed any of his

pending novels, or whether he might have found some new path is pure conjecture. He had been living with a diagnosis of fibrosis, a complication from a lung ailment, since 1976. There was a three-LP adaptation of *Winesburg, Ohio* for Caedmon Records in 1983, and Sturgeon also wrote a film script of the book at the same time. His last project was devising a video teaching course in Maui in spring 1985. His health failing, he returned to Oregon, where he died of complications from pneumonia on 8 May 1985. A memorial was held on 12 May at the San Diego American Holistic Church. Lady Jayne had been a minister there, and Sturgeon had supported the church's activities. Sturgeon's books were lined up behind the podium, and after reminiscences the service ended with a 'Healing Meditation'.[164] Obituaries appeared in international newspapers, with a plethora of memoirs and reminiscences in all the magazines of the science fiction and fantasy field. Friends mourned his loss, fans and students testified to the sincere effect he and his writings made on their lives, and critics recorded the worth and influence of his career. Some also sadly admitted that 'he was an unfulfilled promise', that his last decades were just 'promissory notes, reiterating potent insights that had turned into desperate clichés'.[165]

Conclusions?

If only as a means of putting a frame on the haphazard form Sturgeon's career took, it is worth taking a step back and considering some of the paths he did not and could not take:

1 Sturgeon differed from his contemporaries, Asimov and Heinlein, not simply in matters of style and emotion, but also because he lacked their totalising fictional visions. They proved capable of turning out sequels, series, fix-ups, and future histories, so that they were in an ideal position to capitalise on the great sf publishing boom of the 1970s and 80s with the right product to stock the bookshelves for an avid readership. For Sturgeon and his readers every story began afresh. Besides a general problem with selling short story collections to the public, there is a complementary problem that it can be bewildering to decide which story collection is essential.

2 Richard Matheson and Charles Beaumont learnt how to write a brand of genre fiction that employed standard genre tropes, yet put a new spin on them with human interest and a certain amount of style. They rose through the better sf magazines like *Galaxy* and *F&SF* to the more remunerative high-end men's slick magazines like *Rogue* and *Playboy*, then into prolific achievements in television and then film. It is not the only definition of success, but it was a possibility for Sturgeon. But Sturgeon only was ever on the fringes of the media boom in fantasy and science fiction. The same problems he had writing fiction he brought to screenplays, and while the magazine editors who knew and valued him willingly tolerated his delays and conflicts over manuscripts, Hollywood only wanted it Wednesday not good. Sturgeon relied beyond reasonable expectation on the love, tolerance, and critical and financial support of his magazine editors. It is hard to imagine anyone in Hollywood writing a personal cheque to Sturgeon or a letter telling him 'It matters more that you write the way you want to than I meet my deadlines. You take your time'.[166]

3 More than most of his generation of science fiction writers Sturgeon should have benefited from the New Wave, but its heyday unfortunately coincided with a lengthy period of his writer's block. There is his story for *Dangerous Visions*. Then there are the 'Wina' stories collected in *Sturgeon is Alive and Well* and the posthumously released *Godbody*, but there is little of science fiction about any of those. Yet it is hard to imagine what might remain of the American wing of the New Wave had it been deprived of the example set by Sturgeon in his fiction of the 1950s. Harlan Ellison, Samuel R. Delany, Roger Zelazny, and James Tiptree Jr benefited from his liberation of sexuality, death, and genuine violence as subject matter for sf, as well as his exploration of emphatically stylised writing. While Ellison, Delany, and Zelazny all benefited personally from Sturgeon's mentorship and kind words, Alice Sheldon's (James Tiptree Jr's) attempts to inveigle him by correspondence foundered on Sturgeon's by-then longstanding conflicted inability to answer letters.[167] Meanwhile, Sturgeon's influence may be felt in the campus classic *Stranger in a Strange Land*, if the rumour of Heinlein modelling his charismatic hero Michael Valentine Smith on Sturgeon has any basis in fact.

4 As seen above, friends and admirers highlight the guru aspect that Sturgeon adopted in his later years. However, Sturgeon's turn as a guru was as much impelled by his concern for individuals as the self-esteem to be won by being seen to be wise and caring. He did have his own gospel, which he propounded at every opportunity for

the last 15 years, but it was no exploitative, remunerative pyramid scheme. Rather it was a heartfelt exhortation for his youthful audience to always 'ask the next question'. 'The growing edge is a life manifestation, dynamic and changing, as is common to all living things. The established, the conventional, is subject only to refinement, and refinement of refinements, an activity to the keepers of monuments and the polishers of tombs' is talk more appropriate to an empowerment session than a book review.[168] He was a man whose time had come, and people came away inspired by his hippyish thoughts about the optimum man. For all of Sturgeon's certainty about the importance of 'asking the next question', Sturgeon was far too susceptible to discipleship himself, and believing that the next craze in personal development was always worth investigating. When asked what was essential for a science fiction library in 1949, Sturgeon would recommend Alfred Korzybski, Charles Fort, and the Kinsey Report, all at that time indicators of contrarian attitudes and questioning opinions.[169] Before his dabbling in Dianetics, Sturgeon had shown an interest in Ayn Rand (hence 'The Ultimate Egoist' is not called 'The Ultimate Egotist'), but Sturgeon had eventually adapted her 'I'-oriented philosophy into 'We'.[170] Sturgeon would recommend *Atlas Shrugged* in his *Venture* sf review column, as similarly he would recommend Carlos Castenada in his *New York Times* sf review column. He would not be ashamed to attend a Maharishi Yogi week-long symposium, or an est course at the end of the 1970s. Fortunately for all concerned, Sturgeon lacked the ability or ruthlessness possessed by his friend L. Ron Hubbard to truly capitalise on his ideas in a 'Church of Sturgeontology'. It must also be accounted a minor miracle that Vedanta and its claims of cosmic consciousness somehow managed to pass Sturgeon by too.

Sturgeon's lasting contribution may be that in a field that prioritised ideas and the impersonal sublime awe known as 'sense of wonder' Sturgeon made his readers connect with their personal humanity. Sturgeon invested more emotion in a man and a woman sat together in a late night cafe than anyone could in the crises of an intergalactic empire. His stories are about people caught in strong emotions. He is capable of writing about characters, not merely puppets of purple prose, who feel fear, desperation, panic, and love. Contemporary critics wondered if Sturgeon wasn't in danger of 'embarrassing his younger readers, who like science fiction precisely because it puts little stress on their own untried emotions'.[171] But testimony after testimony by grown men recounts how Sturgeon made them cry as young boys. Instead of power fantasies, Sturgeon made his readers alert to the emotional challenges of growing up. Instead of offering the adventures of competent supermen, Sturgeon's stories are about his characters battling to see a new direction as a better person and trembling on the threshold of a more mature future life. His stories of bettering and evolving humanity act as parables of growing up. Sturgeon offers the possibility of optimism and self-esteem to teenagers. He has experienced their alienation and injured innocence, their need for recognition, gratification, acclaim, and, of course, love. Rather than the reward of a cosmos to conquer, Sturgeon offers the flashes of rapture in the everyday. He captures people subtly, precisely, delineating their actions, feelings, and awareness of their surroundings, and catches their conversational styles. This is the heart of the matter, not a mistaken science club belief that indoctrination in vectors and isotopes will gave adolescents a handle on the world. Sturgeon consoles his readers' hurt and anxiety, explaining that it is all a necessary part of growing up, and that they are understood. That no matter how excluded they may feel they will have a place in society. 'It isn't often the strong straight healthy ones you take. It's the twisted sick one that can be made the most beautiful. When you get to shaping humanity you remember that'.[172]

Sturgeon wrote that 'fiction is fact the way it ought to be'.[173] Several times in his fiction Sturgeon explicitly tells his readers he can't let a character, or even humanity en masse, die because it is Bad Art. On a case-by-case basis, each story by Sturgeon was an attempt to heal the world. James Blish feared that Sturgeon's preoccupation with love, having only one theme as an author, would cripple him. Blish was half right. 'To capture his characters at a moment of self-revelation which simultaneously spoke to the makeup of human nature and the weaknesses in the facade of modern society' is no easy task.'[174] Let alone to compound it with a plausible, satisfyingly transcendent solution. Sturgeon said his theme was the 'optimum man'. Where Heinlein's stories are about the competent man reordering the world, Sturgeon's stories end as the damaged protagonist becomes whole and he realises how he may go ahead in the world to which he is now better adjusted. Like a residue from Rand's 'objectivism', Sturgeon's stories employ reason to adjust oneself to perceiving and acting healthily in the real world. This

ideal of the optimum man as the man who fits society, can work within it, apply himself, and contribute to society's moral development, is the rigorously thought-out fantasy of a man who was rarely capable of functioning so productively. A bohemian life may have appeal, and few lives in science fiction are more bohemian than Sturgeon's, but it is usually the consequence of having little choice in the matter. Bohemians can only live their lives this way and grasp on to such opportunities as present themselves. Though undoubted effort and art went into his best work, his writings would never have mattered were it not for those same animating, messy impulses that so battered his life. The persecuted, resentful boy who spent his last decade insisting that the most important emotion to address in a potential audience was 'loneliness' was the writer who created the fantasy of a Gestalt where every person has their natural place and shares telempathic understanding. The need for love shook his fiction, the product of his need for sharing, openness, and survival. The more he thought of his fiction as fables, where 'the story is larger than the narrative', the greater the burden he placed on himself.[175] If his work and his career shook apart repeatedly, how can any writer be expected to find new ways of healing humanity time after time in 7500-word bursts? His best work embodies his ideal of the science fiction writer, 'a prose-poet, story-teller and people-expert', providing a vision of maturity and also of what maturing might mean for the whole field of science fiction.[176]

> Nothing can withstand reason and experience (Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*).
>
> A biography, and especially a literary biography, has the distressing power to displace and confuse its subject's significance (Guy Davenport, *The Hunter Gracchus*).

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— Matthew Davis, October 2011

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Dick Jenssen, whose artwork and writing often appears under the name Ditmar, has often acted as an advisory editor to *Steam Engine Time* as well as providing many of the magazine's covers. Australia's Ditmar Awards are named after him, and on the two occasions when he himself has won Ditmar Awards for Best Fan Artist, he has named *Steam Engine Time* as one of the magazines that had influenced people to vote for him.

Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)

Sturgeon's breakthrough

Ruminations on 'The World Well Lost' by Theodore Sturgeon

There's more to say

In a talk I gave several years ago, I mentioned that Theodore Sturgeon's story 'The World Well Lost' was an amazing breakthrough in the positive depiction of gays — not only in SF, but in the wider literary world. Unfortunately, I had so much else to discuss that I gave far too short a shrift to his work. I feel that I must redress the balance somewhat. But to explain just why the story is such a landmark, for me if no one else, I must give a brief background of the social environment of the 1950s.

The world which was very well lost

The story first appeared in the US — in the first issue of the magazine *Universe*, June 1953 — and was, immediately, a centre of controversy, largely because of the prevailing attitudes to homosexuality and morals. Australia was very much like the US in these regards, but with an even more inflexible and puritanical approach to moral rectitude and to personal freedoms. It may seem unbelievable to us at the turn of the new century, but fifty years ago Australians were subject to an incredible amount of censorship and thought control. Films were banned or mutilated by the censor's scissors so that even the totally innocuous *The Thing from Another World* lost major portions. Books and magazines were banned, and thus no Australian was deemed fit to read, or even see, *Weird Tales*. These are seemingly trivial examples, but if pieces like these were found unsuitable for the mythical 'general public', imagine how more substantial works (D. H. Lawrence, Leo Tolstoy, for example) suffered by being banned, and how films (by Ingmar Bergman, Henri Clouzot...) were emasculated.

It should be no surprise to learn, then, that homosexuality was anathema to Church, State and Police. In the US, homosexuality was still — officially — a mental illness. Here, gay-bashing was treated as a non-offence (and if a gay reported one, he was considered the criminal rather than the victim), to the extent that it seemed to be routinely practised by the police themselves. In fact, if rumour is correct, at least one Adelaide murder was perpetrated by the police — and was quietly swept away. On a more personal note, at least one of my gay friends (two, I suspect)

was forced by his parents to undergo electro-shock treatment to 'cure' him of his antisocial illness. Unsuccessfully, of course, but leaving him with lifelong emotional scars. Just *being* gay was a crime, as one of my friends discovered when, in the middle of a lecture at Melbourne University, the police burst in and arrested him because an ex-lover had accused him of being so.

For most gays, then, their lives had to be of a schizophrenic quality — socially straight, privately gay. But if one *was* discreet, then one survived in a covert, hidden manner. The closet was, for most, a necessity, and self-doubt, even self-hatred, was a common, crushing burden. Strangely enough, though, for someone as unsure of themselves as I was, I was nonetheless always secure in my sexuality (the reasons are another story) and while I was *very* discreet, I never denied, or tried to hide my gayness. As one wit put it, I 'was in the closet with the door wide open'. Anyone who knew me more than just casually would have known, or suspected, that I was gay. But I was lucky, and the bigotry that fell on others seemed to pass me by. I *knew* that gays were neither all stereotypical, nor perverts preying on the young, nor mentally sick, nor evil — because I knew a lot of gays who were none of these things, and who seemed to be, by and large, much more preferable to the bulk of straights. But, nonetheless, there was always the hope, the need perhaps, that we would eventually be seen by the heterosexual world for what we were — people who loved as well and as deeply and truly as all humanity, but whose objects of affections were not the norm.

As often happened, science fiction gave me hope that my hopes were not totally unrealistic with the appearance of Sturgeon's story. There were positive gays in literature well before Sturgeon (a great number of the characters in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* were gay, were most definitely *not* stereotypes, and the majority could be cast as role models), but most novels or stories which were *predominantly* gay ended in death, or at the very least, in tragedy.

Sturgeon's breakthrough

I will not, cannot, say too much about the plot of 'The World Well Lost', because I would like all who read these words to read the story, but I must say something.

The Earth has been visited by a pair of aliens, beautiful, charismatic, lovable, and very much in love with each other. Humanity is enraptured, partly in love for the pair themselves, but mainly in love for their love. (Should this seem unlikely, just think of how almost everyone responds so positively, and emotionally, to Pandas. And if a pair of Pandas cuddle, well ...)

> Like a sudden bloom across the face of the world came the peculiar magic of the loverbirds. There were loverbird songs and loverbird trinkets, loverbird hats and pins, bangles and baubles, coins and quaffs and tidbits. For there was that about the loverbirds which made a deep enchantment. No one can be told about a loverbird and feel this curious delight. Many are immune even to a solidograph. But watch loverbirds, only for a moment, and see what happens. It's the feeling you had when you were twelve, and summer-drenched, and you kissed a girl for the very first time and knew a breathlessness you were sure could never happen again. And indeed it never could — unless you watched loverbirds. Then you are spellbound for four quiet seconds, and suddenly your very heart twists, and incredulous tears sting and stay; and the very first move you make afterward, you make on tiptoe, and your first word is a whisper.
>
> This magic came over very well on trideo, and everyone had trideo; so for a brief while the earth was enchanted.
>
> There were only two loverbirds. They came down out of the sky in a single brassy flash, and stepped out of their ship, hand in hand. Their eyes were full of wonder, each at the other and together at the world. They seemed frozen in a full-to-bursting moment of discovery; they made way for one another gravely and with courtesy, they looked about them and in the very looking gave each other gifts — the color of the sky, the taste of the air, the pressures of things growing and meeting and changing. They never spoke. They simply were together. To watch them was to know of their awestruck mounting of staircases of bird notes, of how each knew the warmth of the other as their flesh supped silently on sunlight.

And then the aliens' planetary government contacts Earth, explains that the loverbirds are criminals, demands their extradition, and declares that Earth will forever be shunned as 'a world well lost'. The main story then begins and concerns the flight to the aliens' home of Dirbanu with them as prisoners. In the course of this journey one of many twists complicates

the plot — even though the morphology of the individual aliens is as different one to the other as the morphology of man is to woman, they are revealed to be of the same sex. And hence Dirbanu is depicted as a planet of homophobes. But when the nature of the aliens is exposed, so is human homophobia — even though, for some, the revelation simply increases their appreciation and affection for the aliens.

Themes

- By initially concentrating on the loverbirds' emotional immersion in each other, Sturgeon is pointing out that their acceptance by humanity is *not* based on surface appearance — because, after all, they *are* aliens — but on what lies beneath.
- Dirbanu's homophobia, on the contrary, is based entirely on surface, and so is seen to be irrational and illogical because it ignores much deeper, more positive and substantive concerns — love itself.
- The love of the aliens for each other transcends any trivial accident of surface, and is so powerful that humanity responds in a flood of acceptance and affection.
- The homophobic response of humans illustrates just how perverse their bigoted reaction is, for the aliens have not changed, only the interpretation of their behaviour by small minds fostered by societal hatred.
- What is being said, then, is that what is important is love itself and not the object of that affection.

Although it is not made explicit, I believe that Sturgeon's major theme is that while surface appearance is important for the act of *falling* in love, it is largely trivial for the state of *being* in love. Most everyone falls in love for superficial reasons — we have a physical (or erotic) ideal to which we respond, and which triggers feelings of lust and affection. Once we know more deeply the object of our amorous attentions we may, if we are extremely lucky, actually be in love with that person — not the surface, which usually is still erotically arousing — but with the person, the inner core, the very soul. In short *we fall in love with the form, but are in love with the content* — it is the package that attracts, but it is what is inside the package which creates our love.

This is an idea that is found in literature of quality, but not at all often in more popular branches of writing — geared of necessity towards a more general audience and for whom, especially in Hollywood films, falling in love is a euphemism for falling in lust. (Once again, an excellent example of the difference between falling and being in love is to be found in Proust, in *The Way by Swann's* which is the first part of his *In Search of Lost Time*.) In my view this is what *real* love is all about — even if the object of our love changes physically, we still love the person because the innermost being is unchanged. The ravages of time will not, cannot, if our love is true, make our love diminish, but will cause it to grow, vaster than empires and yet more slow (as Marvell would have it).

The story is enhanced by the quality of Sturgeon's prose, which, for someone who claimed that he was not gay himself, displays a passion and a poetry redolent of approval of all forms of love, appearance notwithstanding. In fact, the story concludes with what I take to be lines of poetry, though I can discover neither the source nor the poet:

> Why must we love where the lightning strikes
> And not where we choose?
> But I'm glad it's you, little prince,
> I'm glad it's you.

These lines have stayed with me for the last fifty years, and encapsulate much of the true meaning of being gay. It is love, gay love, straight love, any love which matters, and not the accident of form.

'The World Well Lost' is one of my favourite SF stories, one of my favourite short stories, and one my favourite romantic stories. We, and science fiction, would be all the less had it never been written.

Where to find it

At present I can find this story in print only in the Sturgeon collection *Saucer of Loneliness*, available from amazon.com.

— Ditmar (Dick Jenssen)

Letters of comment

brg* At last ... the Lloyd Penney letter of comment on *Steam Engine Time* 10. Lloyd's letter did not reach me the first time he sent it.:

LLOYD PENNEY
1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke,
Ontario M9C 2B2, Canada

I discovered science fiction and *Star Trek* around the fourth grade from my mother bringing home the Carr, Wollheim, and Gold anthologies, and from the family gathering around to watch *ST* on television on the NBC station in Buffalo, New York. To me, they were much the same, but the *Enterprise* didn't go to the wondrous places the authors did in the anthologies. SF led me to fandom, and fandom led me to good friends and acquaintances around the world. While I am firmly ensconced in SF from the '60s, '70s, and '80s, I am experimenting a little with the steam-punk movement, mostly in the way of costuming, and for the more genteel networking it provides. It's been fun so far, and I haven't done any costuming in more than 20 years, so it's brought back some good memories, and it's fun.

I am a bibliophile. Being a bibliomaniac wouldn't allow me to travel or have room to live in a small apartment. I'd love to have my own bookstore, but we all know that, as enjoyable as they may be, bookstores are money sinks. I always carry at least one book with me, but it's better than staring at the ads in the subway.

A town not far from Seattle is attempting to be Canada's Hay-on-Wye. Sydney, British Columbia, on Vancouver Island now has several dozen bookstores, and a friend has already taken a day trip to the island to do some shopping and exploring. He says it's a book fiend's dream, to walk out of one bookstore, and into another, all day long.

(14 March 2009)

SET 11: I know there's been some controversy lately about how women seem to be left off the Hugo ballot most years, and that perhaps fewer women are nominating or voting, or fewer women are being published, or women's writing isn't getting the same promotion as men's writing. I don't claim to know what the situation is, but any article that can showcase the best of our writers is welcome, and a further education that can only assist us in our understanding and enjoyment of SF&F. I still hope that one day we can simply celebrate the best of our writers, and not have to differentiate them in terms of race or nationality or gender or sexuality. We're getting better at it, but we still have a long way to go.

Even with all that said, we can focus in on a select group, and Australian women are setting the pace for most others. (Canadian SF authors enjoyed a renaissance of publishing and popularity years ago, and now, the names Sawyer, Wilson, Gardner, Pohl-Weary, Huff, Czerneda, and many others are everywhere.)

I have worked as an editor (not a book editor, but close), and I would like to think that an editor is

necessary. But my editorial work, for the most part, has been proofreading, copy editing, sense checking and looking for inconsistencies. Editors want whatever it is they want, and they seem to want something different for each collection they're working on. I have expressed interest in working on a future *Tesseracts* anthology. Publishing is a very difficult industry to get into in this country, and editorial work goes to the lucky few.

brg* Today you could not gain a job as a publisher's editor in Victoria without passing one of the several tertiary courses offered in Editing and Writing. When I entered the industry, there were few editors, let alone freelance editors, and one could only enter the profession through a series of accidents. The same accidents have kept me out of fiction editing and mainly confined me to school and university textbook editing.

I've met Ursula K. LeGuin only once, and that was at an SF event in Toronto. We chatted as anyone might meeting someone new, and not as reader to author. I wish I had, but I also hope there will be the opportunity later on to talk with her. I am not sure how well she travels these days. With the Ghibli treatment of *Earthsea*, she must have wondered how they could have gotten it so wrong. A logical extension of Terry Morris's article is to ask how authors feel about how their works are turned into TV shows or movies. I can think of Tanya Huff's *Blood Ties*, and of Robert J. Sawyer's *Flashforward*. I think both Tanya and Rob have been happy with the way their books have been treated, but I also think that both of them had some level of feedback into the television production and the final product we got to see on the little screen.

Babylon 5 is one of my favourite shows, and the last one I actually had the time and interest to follow faithfully. Many of the literary cons I go to are set to show off popular writers, and give you the opportunity to meet those people. They also bring to the fore a sense of community in the people who attend. Yet, I often don't see that same sense of community in media SF conventions. I'm not the type to worship at the feet of an actor who is there to make some easy money when he's not on a shoot. The actors are mostly distant, while the authors will mingle, mainly because they are fans themselves.

SET 12: I have always looked at going through book stores, usually used book stores, as a treasure hunt, and it's the hunt that the most fun, not necessarily what it may be that you find. The comfort of being surrounded by books, the familiar titles and names you find on those books, the memories of some great stories, the smell of musty paper, the books lost in a box or on a hidden shelf found perhaps for the first time in years ... this is the hunt for me. If I find nothing I want, that's fine, for I have enjoyed the hunt. If there is a book or two that I had wanted or had been looking for, that's a bonus. Modern big-box bookstores in Canada like Chapters and Indigo are big and roomy, with lots of new books, places to sit, and often a coffee shop attached, but that isn't the hunt.

George Zebrowski's essay illustrates for me my own prejudices about literary and media SF. I made my way into fandom more than 30 years ago through *Star Trek* fandom; I needed the welcome into a group of like-minded people with similar interests. The social aspect of a club was just what a lonely student needed. But, I quickly asked what else is there, and I met other fans who told me what was available, and as one Isaac Asimov said to me at a Worldcon, 'Welcome to a larger world.'

I found a couple more of the Ace collections of A. Bertram Chandler's Grimes stories recently, and remember thinking, this is the stuff I like: adventures in space, travelling out to the Rim, and meeting strange and dangerous civilisations. This is what got me reading SF in the first place. I've been to the Bertram Chandler website a couple of times, and confirmed for myself that it was Chandler, and not Heinlein, who spoke of Liberty Hall and insulting the cat. Those adventures were great, and partially autobiographical, I suspect.

(4 March 2010)

brg* The following letter went astray by a year. I simply did not receive it by email, but fortunately Merv was able to retrieve it from his system.

MERV BINNS
PO Box 315, Carnegie VIC 3163

Thank you for the March 2009 issue of *Steam Engine Time*. It was great to see some of our old photos reproduced, but I must admit that I am upset that I have not been able to get my memoirs out for people to read and show a lot more of our old photos. The photo of me that you used with the old duplicator was taken by someone in my 'office' at 4 Myrtle Grove, Preston in the 1950s. I do not have the photos you have of Syncon 2, but I do have others, which will appear in my memoirs.

A. Bertram Chandler:

My Life and Grimes

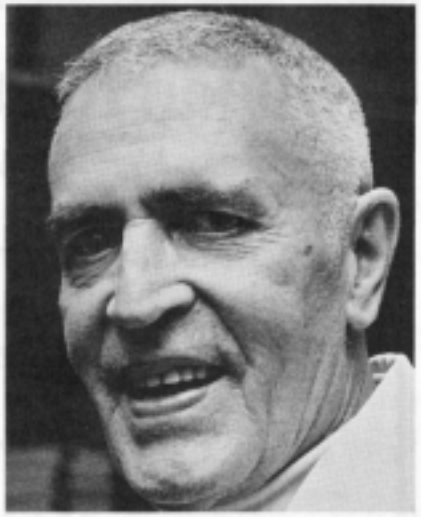

Photo by Jay Kay Klein

I was born on March 28, 1912, in Aldershot, in the county of Hampshire, in England. Most of my earlier years, however, were spent in the small market town of Beccles, in Suffolk. (Just in case anybody is interested, Beccles is the birthplace of David Frost.) I was exposed to education first at the Peddars Lane Council School and then at the Sir John Leman Secondary School which was founded by John Leman during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. I pride myself on my collection of neckties—British Merchant Navy, three major shipping companies, one learned society—but an Old School Tie I do not possess, although I could obtain one if I so desired. The reason for this is that I am not one of those who regard their schooldays as the happiest days of their lives.

Had I not succeeded in becoming the Headmaster's bete noir I should probably have matriculated and stood a going chance of good on to a university, in which case I should have become an industrial or research chemist. As it was, my promotion to a higher form being blocked, I left school at the age of 16 to go to sea as an apprentice in the Sun Shipping Company (known to its personnel as the Burn Shipping Company) of London.

This was a tramp concern, its few ships engaged mainly upon Indian coastal trades, although there were occasional wanderings elsewhere in the Far East and, although very infrequently, to Australia, the U.S.A., the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean. (While I was with them just once to Australia —to Fremantle—and just once to the U.S.A., to New Orleans and Houston).

Having completed my four years' apprenticeship, I studied and sat for my Certificate of Competency as Second Mate of a Foreign Going Steamship and rejoined the service of the Sun Shipping Company as third officer. After a further three years, mainly on the Indian coast—and on the Calcutta coal trade at that—I'd had tramps in a big way. After a spell ashore working at various odd jobs, I joined the Shaw Savill line as fourth officer.

Shaw Savill—a very old company that now seems to have gone into its decline—maintained passenger and cargo services from England to Australia and New Zealand. Whilst in their employ, I became very well acquainted with the part of the world in which I was eventually to take up residence—also, during World War II when the Shaw Savill's vessels deviated from their well-worn trantlines, I came to know New York quite well.

My first visit to New York was shortly after Pearl Harbor. On a later visit, greatly daring, I decided to visit the editor of my favourite magazine, *Astounding Science Fiction*. At our first meeting, John Campbell complained that he was very short of material and suggested that I become one of his contributors. I thought that he had to be kidding; nonetheless, the next time in New York I had for him a 4,000 word short story—*This Means War*—that it had taken me all of a fortnight to peck out of my ancient Remington. Finally back in London—we'd crossed the Atlantic in a *very* slow convoy—I found a letter, and a cheque, waiting for me.

That started me off. For the remainder of the war years, I wrote mainly for *Astounding*. John, in those days, would ask his contributors to use a nom-de-plume when submitting to other magazines, so *Astounding* rejects sold elsewhere would carry the George Whitley byline in the U.K. and U.S.A. and that of Andrew Dunstan in Australia.

Then the war was over and, shortly thereafter, I got as high as I was destined to get in the Shaw Savill service—chief officer. My last ship in their employ was a cargo-passenger liner, and in her, during a voyage from Liverpool to Sydney, I met the lady who was to become my second wife. Resignation from Shaw Savill, emigration to Australia, divorce, remarriage, a fresh start.

I joined the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand—like Shaw Savill, a very old company and, also like Shaw Savill, one that seems to have gone into its decline and fall—as third officer. Most of my service was in ships under the Australian flag, although my first command, *Kanna*, was of New Zealand registry. Australian coastal trades, New Zealand coastal trades, trans-Tasman, Pacific Islands... Some of my experiences I have used in fiction, some have yet to be used. The things that happen to me should happen only to John Grimes. (They usually do, *eventually*, sometimes—but not always—slightly improved upon.)

Ah, yes. Grimes. Somehow he just sort of happened—a minor character at first and then taking charge. And always one jump ahead in rank. When I was still chief officer he was Captain Grimes. When I was made master he was Commodore Grimes. When I was sort of honorary commodore he was made an honorary admiral. When my wife wants to annoy me she refers to him as Hornblower.

My ambition is to write *the* Australian science fiction novel, *Kelly Country*. This will be one of those alternate universe efforts, a world in which Ned Kelly—freedom fighter as well as bushranger—successfully fights the Australian War of Independence and founds a dynasty. And just as George Washington had his British shipmaster, John Paul Jones, to handle the naval side of things, Ned Kelly will have *his* British shipmaster, John Grimes, to do likewise.

Grimes—the original Grimes, not his nineteenth century ancestor—has already been involved with Ned Kelly. This was in *Grimes at Glenrowan*, written for Isaac Asimov's, the first of the Kitty and the Commodore series. (In the third story, *Grimes Among the Gourmets*, I draw heavily upon my recent experiences in Japan.)

Nonetheless, at times I can sympathize with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who killed off Sherlock Holmes and then was pressured by his readers to resurrect him. Quite often I have toyed with the idea of sending Grimes on Long Service Leave. There have been two non-Grimes novels written during the last few years. One, *The Bitter Pill*, was published only in Australia and failed to find a market elsewhere. The other, *Selenauta Rising*, has been bounced by *everybody*.

Perhaps if I rewrite it, with Grimes as the protagonist, it will sell....

Notes on Grimes

Like Gaul, Grimes is divided into three parts - Early, Middle and Late. The novels and short stories featuring Grimes were not written in the correct chronological order career-wise. Only one publisher, Hayakawa Shobo of Tokyo, has endeavoured to sort matters out.

Early Grimes
All these cover Grimes' Survey Service career, from Ensign to Commander.
The Road To The Rim
To Prime The Pump
The Hard Way Up
The Broken Cycle
Spartan Planet
The Inheritors
The Big Black Mark

Middle Grimes
All these deal with Grimes' life and hard times subsequent to his resignation from the Federation Survey Service and prior to his becoming a citizen of the Rim Worlds Confederacy.
This period keeps stretching....
The Far Traveller
Star Courier
To Keep The Ship
Matilde's Stepchildren
Star Loot
The Anarch Lords
Find The Lady

Late Grimes
Probably there will be one or two Late Grimes novels prior to *Into The Alternate Universe* and at least one subsequent to *The Way Back*.
Into The Alternate Universe
Contraband From Other Space
The Rim Gods
Alternate Orbits
Gateway To Never
The Dark Dimensions
The Way Back

Irene Pagram's artwork for the *SF Commentary* featuring Lem's *Solaris* reminded me of the eye-catching artwork she did for me for Space Age Books, on our windows and on, for instance, the paper bags. I think the Russian movie version of *Solaris* was so much better than the American one. Tarkovsky captured the atmosphere of the story so much better than did Soderbergh, and I think that the surface of the planet was, despite the obvious limited special effects they were using, very well done and convincing. I thought the American movie lost the plot entirely.

Reading *SET* and *Locus* is a very frustrating experience, because I see all these books mentioned that I do not have and I can't afford to purchase; but I did read Dan Simmons' first two books in the 'Hyperion' sequence some years back. They were mindblowing: not quite the type of thing I was used to reading, but fascinating none the less. I did not get around to reading the last book in the sequence, *The Rise of Endymion*, but as I skim through all the old books in my current reading marathon I will reach it on the shelf soon.

I keep going back to *The Ascent of Wonder*, edited by David Hartwell and Kathryn Cramer, with an introduction by Greg Benford. The introductions to each story, explaining where they fit into the hard SF firmament, have added enormously to my enjoyment of some classic tales and others by such as Sturgeon, Asimov, and other authors. I have appreciated the editor's choice of some of the other stories, even if they left me cold. I realise how authors ranging from Edgar Allan Poe and Rudyard Kipling, whose tales in this case were wonderful, up to such as William Gibson and J. G. Ballard, fit into the hard SF category. I do have a much clearer understanding why I like some authors and their style and I dislike others. This volume is no doubt one of the most important SF collections published, and has given me a whole new way of appreciating all the SF that I read.

(16 April 2009)

I was particularly interested in the article by Frank Weissenborn on A. Bertram Chandler and his writing. As much as I liked the man, I must admit that his science fiction, in particularly the Grimes stories, were in a style I like to refer to as comic book: simply good yarns with a bit of fun. I had always hoped that he would write something with a bit more substance to it, and he did try with *False Fatherland*, which I thought was at least a step in the right direction. I also enjoyed *The Deep Reaches of Space*, which was a 'Rim' tale, but at least it did not have Grimes as the hero. If Grimes was Bert's own alter ego, the writer George Whitley, who, after a dose of LSD finds himself in the body of the second-in-command of a space ship in this tale, is even more so.

Chandler's magnum opus, in my opinion, was *Kelly Country*, into which he put a lot of time and effort. It was set in an alternate Australia where our in famous outlaw Ned Kelly becomes a political leader and instigates a revolution. Bert spent a lot of time and research on this novel, even visiting the Library of Congress in the USA to check on the use of weapons and such in the American Civil War, which coincided with Kelly's revolt. He loved lighter-than-air aircraft, an interest that he made plain to me on occasions, and in his stories such as *Kelly Country*.

What I remember about Bert (I always knew him as Bert, although overseas he was called Jack) was his sense of humour. I can hear him now telling a story in his halting speech, chuckling to himself while he was telling it. Frank has endeavoured to put Bert's writing in perspective, and he certainly deserves more recognition for his contribution to the SF field.

SF critics and historians have tended to ignore and dismiss Chandler's works as unimportant, which is a shame, but fans in the USA appreciated him enough to make him Guest of Honour of Chicon IV World Convention in 1982. He was very popular with Japanese fans, and editions of his books there have some great artwork on the covers.

You told me that Frank is working on a piece on Wynne Whiteford, so I have dug out some articles by and about him which you can pass on to Frank, which we will send with this letter. If he has any questions about Wynne and his books I will be happy to answer them if I can. It would be great if Frank can carry on this project, and cover other Australian authors such as George Turner, Sean McMullen, and others.

(27 March 2010)

The article on the following two pages was scanned for me by Merv and Helena from Chicon IV (World Convention 1982) Program Book, but is actually an expansion of an article that Bert Chandler wrote originally in 1966 for a very early issue of John Bangsund's *Australian Science Fiction Review*. Merv and Helena also sent me some information about Wynne Whiteford to send on to Frank Weissenborn, as well as Chandler's poem 'Kangaroos Don't Smoke' — at 6 pages,

too long to reproduce here. They also sent me photos of some of the Japanese covers for the Chandler novels.*

LEE HARDING
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I found the article on Bert Chandler by Frank Weissenborn in *SET* 12 interesting and certainly overdue, but as the writer is identified as being Melbourne based, I was surprised to see the omission of the non-Grimes novel, *A Bitter Pill*, published in hardcover by Wren, an expansion of a short story from *Vision of Tomorrow.* And as for Paul Collins, wasn't it a semi-porn story of Bert's in the first issue of *Void* magazine that encouraged Paul to bolt to Melbourne from Queensland? As for reading his works onto audiocassettes, all those who knew Bert — myself included — realised he had a serious speech impediment! And no mention in Frank's article of *Frontier of the Dark* being an expansion of an early *Astounding* story — superbly illustrated by Edd Cartier? And *False Fatherland* was serialised in *Amazing* as *Spartan Planet*, during Harry Harrison's brief tenure as editor.

Not good enough, Bruce! — two typos of the first page of *SET* 12 (groan). Cheer up. As Joe E. Brown said to Jack Lemon, 'Nobody's perfect' — and he was smiling when he said it.

(12 March 2010)

brg* Only *two* typos? Have you ever tried proofreading on screen?

Surely anyone who sets out to write this sort of article (on Chandler) should get his facts right i.e. if he hasn't access to a relevant magazine or book, he should either have a good memory of reading same or be responsible enough to find someone who *has*. Frank needs a fact checker ... Incidentally, Campbell blurbed the original novelette of *Frontier of the Dark* as quite possibly a fantasy, but he thought readers would like it anyway. He did much the same for Henderson Starke's *Casting Office*.

Frank *could* have asked Dick Jenssen or myself — and maybe others — who have the relevant information.

(12 March 2010)

I had the pleasure of meeting Isobelle Carmody some years ago, and was embarrassed by her praise and the fact that I'd been an enormous influence on her writing. Hemingway: '*Praise to the face is open disgrace*'. Not familiar with Cecelia Dart-Thornton, who also mentioned being influenced by *Displaced Person*, but there was a woman in one of my old classes, held in Hobart, who'd written her thesis on *Displaced Person*. And only recently, I met her again at 45 Downstairs — lo! 20 years on — and discovered that her daughter, who was performing in the show, was one of my daughter Maddie's fellow classmates at BAPA. That damn book continues to haunt me ...!

(14 March 2010)

Your list of favourite film 'critics' in *SET* 12 has one glaring omission: David Thomson. His *Biographical Dictionary of Cinema* is an essential item that should be on every movie lover's bookshelf: he is, by several light years, the best *writer* on film I have encountered, second only to James Agee (no mention of Agee, either!) To cite one brief example, from his entry for Eleanor Powell in the aforementioned: His opening para:

> You are in solitary confinement for the rest of you life. There is a screen built into the cell wall, and it is a condition of your sentence that you may have just one sequence from a movie to play on that screen. This is my choice; black and white and a hard reflective floor, a set that recedes into darkness. Fred Astaire in all white with a black bowtie. Eleanor Powell wears three-quarter heels and a dress that stops just below the knees. She wears short sleeves and puff shoulders; the skirt is magnificently light and fluid, moving to the profound, yet casual, tap masterpiece, 'Begin the Beguine', from *Broadway Melody of 1940*. Much of the dance is in exact unison, but there are fleeting solos and

imitation repeats, as well as exquisite arm movements, especially from Powell. I know of nothing as exhilarating or unfailingly cheerful, and maybe the loveliest moment in films is the last second or so, as the dancers finish, and Powell's alive frock has another half turn, like a spirit embracing the person. Give credit to Norman Taurog, who directed, to dance director Bobby Connelly, to Astaire as always, but still this is a rare Astaire dance in that the lady actually holds the eye. Powell was not much of an actress, she was a modest singer, and she was single-mindedly a tap dancer. But this is a rapture.

(25 March 2010)

I'm not much moved by Roger Ebert's writing. He's an enthusiast, all right — and even he gets his facts wrong, now and then — but rather bland, and if it's writing you're after, Thomson's your man — even if he does suffer from occasional and minor memory lapses, which — unlike Dick Jenssen — I can forgive for the brilliance of his writing, for which he has no current peer. Andrew Sarris's *American Cinema* is almost my bible — it was the book that unwrapped cinema for me, and I followed his reviews in *The Village Voice* throughout the 60s, thanks to John Foyster; you're welcome to borrow my well-read copy of AMC. It's dated, of course — the cut-off date is 1967 — but invaluable for introducing the French concept of the *auteur* to a wider audience.

26 March 2010

brg* I don't go searching for film critics or criticism, so would miss most of them, especially if their collections of crits are not readily available. It was Dick Jenssen who put me onto Roger Ebert, and I usually find I agree with his reviews for the *Chicago Sun-Times* site. Peter Bogdanovich is the most interesting critic I've read, but I've only been able to find one or two of his books. His *Pieces of Time* is my favourite book of film criticism. Pauline Kael was a sparkling writer, but when I searched through her books recently I was depressed at how many of her opinions on individual films were the opposite of my own. (But she did express exactly what I love about Visconti's *The Leopard*.) My own favourite film reviewer was *The Age*'s Colin Bennett, before he retired in the late 1970s or early 1980s. His prose was that of an urbane gent, that of the sort of person and writer I always hoped I might turn into (but never did), and he told you his prejudices and let you make allowance for them. His values were entirely cinematic, compared with the rather leaden values of Margaret Pomeranz and David Stratton on SBS's *At the Movies*. Bennett always talked about the stylishness of a movie (or lack of it), and rarely about whether it suited his own views of reality. His reviews during the 1960s were as much of an education to me as anything I learned at university. His reviews were never collected in a book, or if they were, I have never seen a copy.

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SET 11: Jan Stinson mentions (p. 4) in passing a book by the Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft. I haven't read the book in question (*Between Allah and Jesus*), but I have read other Kreeft books, some of which I liked, and some not. Kreeft can be an annoying and obtuse curmudgeon, but at the top of his form he is readable and insightful. He does have some interests overlapping those of the SF community, particularly in C. S. Lewis and Tolkien, and he also sometimes makes stray comments on other works of SF and fantasy. I recently discovered that he has a fairly good website at www.peterkreeft.com, including a large number of talks than can be downloaded for free, many of them on Lewis or Tolkien. I know from locs that many *SET* readers, like me, are still functioning without broadband connections, but I have been getting around that by using a computer at the public library to download lengthy files to a flash drive, so that I can take them home and play them either on my own computer or on an MP3 player.

I have read a fair amount of urban fantasy of late, particularly in the period since I retired and acquired more time for reading. In the broad sense, urban fantasy goes back at least to the 1940s, to works such as Heinlein's 'Magic Incorporated' and Fritz Leiber's *Conjure Wife*. Indeed, the 'Urban Fantasy' article in Clute and Grant's *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997) spends most of its time on the nineteenth century, although that results from spreading the definition net wide indeed. However, some-

what annoyingly to those of us comfortable with the older usage, there has emerged a modern sense of 'urban fantasy' requiring that the setup and plot meet a much narrower set of criteria reminiscent of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: almost always a strong female protagonist, generally a detective-style plot with an admixture of romance, generally a fairly noir feel, and so forth. Moreover, in this narrow sense urban fantasy is usually, although not always, written by a female author (hence the discussion's inclusion in the Women's Issue). There are now so many authors working in this subgenre that, despite my reading, I have only a little overlap with the writers that Jan mentions. I quickly bailed out on Justina Robson because her setup, which attempts to combine magic with highly advanced technology, seemed to me to be too silly to permit suspension of disbelief. On the other hand I enjoyed several Kelley Armstrong novels. Of authors not mentioned by Jan, I have also enjoyed Mercedes Lackey's old 'Diana Tregarde' series, and the works of two male authors, Jim Butcher and (as I mentioned in my loc printed in *SET* 11) Sergey Lukyanenko ... While this loc was in progress, I also read S. M. Stirling's just-published *A Taint in the Blood*, the start of new urban fantasy series. This novel turned out to be much in Stirling's usual vein, translated into urban fantasy. It was readable, but I still find it regrettable that the market seems to prefer this sort of thing to Stirling's non-magical alternate histories.

I was particularly interested to see Jan's article on C. J. Cherryh in *SET* 11, since in the olden days I did some writing on Cherryh myself. I had an article on her in Andrew Porter's *Starship* for Spring 1979, and I wrote the article on Cherryh for *Twentieth Century Science Fiction Writers* (1981). Both treated Cherryh as an important up-and-coming writer. In subsequent years, however, her work appealed to me less. Partly this was because some of it struck me as being humdrum conventional military SF, and, to boot, SF where to my ear the military diction did not ring quite true, and partly because other novels depicted the protagonists as 'going native' (conforming themselves to the cultures of alien species) in situations where I did not think this was an appropriate outcome. Although I remember coming to those conclusions, I came to them years ago, and it's possible that I would not defend them today, or that Cherryh has changed direction subsequently. I really should give her another try, and I will also try to find the cited Borgo Press book on her.

SET 12 has another of Bruce's many lists, this time of favourite books first read in 2009. As I have probably already mentioned to you, I don't myself have the sort of mind, or the sort of record-keeping, that would allow me to enumerate everything I had read for the first time in a given year, nor to rank the works even if I knew them. However, I will strive to extract from your lists what I can. You rank *Gormenghast* and other Peake works near the top. I don't think I will make another attempt on Peake any time soon, but I did recently read all three (huge) volumes of C. S. Lewis's *Collected Letters*, and among other things (one such other thing being that Lewis exchanged several letters with John W. Campbell Jr's younger sister), I noted that Lewis wrote an enthusiastic fan letter to Peake after finishing *Titus Groan* and while still in the middle of reading *Gormenghast*. Like you, Bruce, Lewis makes a comparison to Tolkien: 'If they tell you it's deuced leisurely, and the story takes a long time to develop, don't listen to them. It ought to be, and must be, slow ... Give me a good square meal like *The Faerie Queen* or *The Lord of the Rings*' (HarperSanFrancisco edition, Vol. 3, p. 919).

Bruce lists *It's a Wonderful Life* as his favourite re-seen movie of 2009. Connie Willis, in, if memory serves, a Christmas anthology, expressed her preference among classic Christmas movies for *Miracle on 34th Street*. I'm with Willis on that one. A couple of years ago *Miracle* finally came out on an inexpensive DVD, so now I can conveniently rewatch it every Christmas season without having to run it down on the TV schedule. I also, within the past year, finally saw the Russian equivalent film, a movie that Russian TV runs every New Year's. This is *The Irony of Fate, or, Enjoy Your Bath!* (1975). It's a sharp-edged romantic comedy about a guy who gets so drunk with friends at a Moscow steambath that, after riding out to the Moscow airport to see one of the friends off for Leningrad, he gets on the plane himself, disembarks in Leningrad without realising

where he is, gives his address to a taxi driver, and finds himself on an identically named street in Leningrad at an apartment building built to the same standardised design as his own, with an identically numbered apartment where his key fits the lock. New Year's Eve comedy and romance ensue. Watchable, but I prefer *Miracle*. There was a recent sequel to *Irony*, which I have read about but have no desire to see. It seems to be a contrived business, where it develops that (contrary to the clear implication of the original) after events of the first movie, the couple lost their nerve and broke up, eventually marrying and divorcing others, so that thirty years later romance can reignite and their respective children can also fall in love.

On the decline of classical music (p. 17): I think that I once, many years ago, wrote you that in Baltiwash we had four mostly classical radio stations. We are now down to two, both non-commercial (one each for Baltimore and Washington). I think this decline is supposed to be attributable both to people listening to Internet audio or satellite radio and to people listening mostly to their own collections. And the recordings in those collections are now one-time acquisitions: in contrast to vinyl or tape, CDs take a long time to wear out, and backed-up digital files at least in theory never go bad. Moreover, my own experience confirms the view, evidently expressed by Lebrecht, that most CD publishers may have priced themselves out of the market. I can't remember the last time I bought a classical CD that was not (1) budget priced, as with Lebrecht's cited Naxos imprint (although there also are, and I think always have been, other low-end lines), (2) remaindered, or (3) used.

As you may know, a number of companies now offer (supposedly) university-level lectures combined into mini-courses on CD. I have listened to a lot of these (from the public library; they sell at retail for stiff prices) on various topics, and I have found the most difficult ones for me are the couple of courses I have tried on music history and appreciation. Despite having going through elementary school at a time when music classes were still part of the curriculum, having played in a symphonic band in high school, and having casually listened to tens of thousands of hours of classical music, my lifetime background in musical theory seems to be thin, and I was encountering so many new concepts in those audio courses that my progress was about as slow as it would have been in a math course or foreign-language course. I really should borrow those courses again for another listen-through. (I calculate 'tens of thousands of hours' from a very conservative estimate of an average 10 hours a week for 50 weeks a year, or 500 hours a year, for 40 years, or 20,000 hours — and it was really more like 42 years of classical listening, even excluding school music classes and symphonic band. Very impressive-looking when one adds it up!)

On SF-related nonfiction: by the late 1970s, having had ready access to huge research libraries as an undergraduate and grad student, I had read very nearly all of the then-existing books of genre-SF history or criticism in English and Russian, plus a few more such books in other languages. It is therefore a little daunting to realise how far behind the curve I have fallen in the 30 years since then, although the blame is to be divided between my own inaction and the huge proliferation of books in the field. Of the 15 'Recent Books about SF' that you list (p. 26), I have read exactly one (I think), Disch's *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of*. At least I own the book, and I just looked at it again after literally blowing the dust off of it. I am fairly certain I actually read it, but a lot of it looked unfamiliar on a flip-through, so I laid it aside for another look Real Soon Now. (I have read some Darrell Schweitzer essay collections; I don't think those include either of the ones on your list, but I would not swear to it.) I know I have read a few recent books about SF not appearing on your list, but I can't, as requested, supply more titles, since the details have all faded in my head. If you are looking for a complete list of books on the topic, have you fooled around with the on-line Library of Congress catalog, at www.loc.gov? They probably have a subject heading that, allowing for some cataloguing lag, would generate a list of at least all the SF hist-crit books that they had chosen to retain, which probably would be most of the important ones. As a deposit library, the LOC theoretically receives a copy of everything copyrighted in the US, but I gather they immediately discard a lot of it. I don't offhand know to what extent British Library holdings are listed

online, nor to what extent the English-language Big Two libraries are usefully supplemented by other online catalogues, whether from university libraries or from the national libraries of the Commonwealth countries.)

I just noticed an odd bit of capitalisation trivia. When, as in the Disch title, the preposition 'of' is displaced to the final position in the title, it is capitalised, whereas it would be lower-cased if the title were *The Dreams of Which Our Stuff Is Made*. Is there a convention that the final word of every English-language book title is to be capitalised regardless of other rules? Not a point I've ever noticed in style manuals.

brg* Thanks for picking this up. According to my own rules, I should have made 'Our' lower case, on the grounds that it serves as a conjunction, like 'the' or 'a'. I would maintain 'Is' as upper case because it serves as a verb here. Increasingly, academic publications in Australia are using minimal capitalisation for all names, e.g. *The dreams of which our stuff is made*, not the way I wrote it. If one uses maximal capitalisation, most editors will still mark as lower case words like 'of', 'the' and 'a'. Some will use maximal capitalisation in the main title of a book or paper, then miminal capitalisation for the subheading, but I don't.

Frank Weissenborn's A. Bertram Chandler article amply exhibits the uneven nature of that author's work, where stories and even whole novels all too often degenerated into trivial jokes or into tall tales making no pretence at verisimilitude. Chandler does not strike me as having been all that significant a figure in the history of SF. I am inclined to believe that Australians make too much of him, because of the historical accident that he was one of the first regularly selling genre-SF writers to make his home in Oz. On the other hand, I concede that perhaps he strikes some Australian national resonance to which we Americans are deaf. After all, I have sometimes had the feeling that overseas readers cannot understand what Americans see in Heinlein.

(31 July 2010)

brg* Having recently won an 'A. Bertram Chandler Award for Lifetime Contribution to Australian Science Fiction', I value the name of Chandler not just because of his achievements, uneven though they might have been, but because, instead of standing rather aloof from the Australian SF community, as he might have done, he became an Australian, and was a valued visitor to fan clubs, conventions, and dinners whenever he made landfall. He was the 'senior Australian SF writer' while he was alive, rather being merely an English writer who had happened to settle here.

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There has been so much hype in newspapers recently about *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy because of the movie release. Is the book *that* good? Cormac McCarthy is considered to one of America's great novelists in the latter half of the twentieth century and deserves the respect that is given him in the mainstream press, but looking at my notes relating to *The Road* (I always list and write a synopsis and make some comments about every book I read for future reference) I see that I wrote that it was one of the most unrelentingly depressing novels I've ever read. (Thank God it was short!) Like all McCarthy's fiction or the films from his novels that I have read or seen my impression is of relentlessness with an apocalyptic feel to the ultraviolence depicted. And it seems no resolution either. What kind of ending did *No Country for Old Men* have? The film, I mean, because I didn't read the book.

Films are often less than the book or completely different. The film of David Brin's *The Postman* was absolutely awful when compared to the book.

I can't imagine what they will make of the film of *The Road*, which is basically a road story about a dying father and his son travelling across a burnt and devastated America in search of other good people. On the way they encounter extreme violence and cannibalism while they slowly starve. There is little food to be found, most having been looted earlier, and what little they find goes to the boy while the father starves. His only hope is to find, somewhere, other good people who will look after the boy.

There is no mention of what caused the disaster, since presumably the protagonists all know what happened, so there is no need to speak of it, just as there is no need to name the father or the son. They know who they are, and that's all that matters.

Perhaps this is a literary device, an allegory or something like that referring to the universality of everyone, but it doesn't really matter. The reader can imagine whatever scenario he or she likes that could eventuate in the situation found in the book.

A story like *The Road* can't be ghettoised or lumped into any genre, whether mainstream or speculative fiction. It is what it is and it is beautifully written, and will no doubt have a wide audience. That it resembles SF is good for those of us who have been lifelong fans because it shows SF is a literature that can achieve greatness with the very best writing.

But ultimately a reader's reaction to any story is subjective. In my case I prefer a somewhat less depressing ending. I want to come away satisfied that I have been moved or entertained or made to think about the world in a positive way. I do not want to leave the story and feel depressed for days or weeks after having read it.

I definitely remember while reading this book that it made me think of Wilson Tucker's *The Long Loud Silence*, which I recall had a protagonist travelling across a devastated USA trying to get back across the river that separated the country into two halves. One half was normal and life went on while the other half was utterly destroyed and the few survivors fought each other to stay alive, and when the food ran out they only had each other as a food source they reverted to cannibalism.

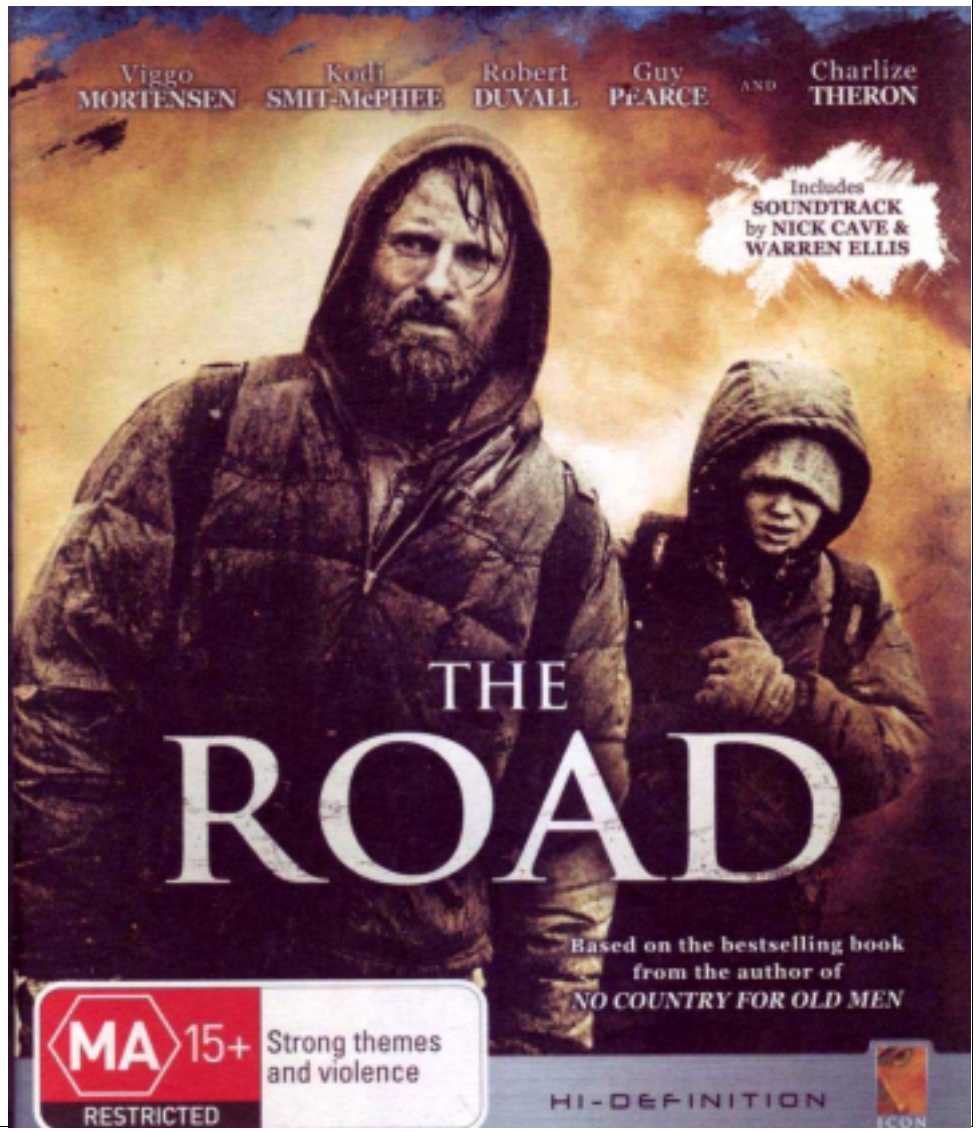
I must admit I liked post-apocalyptic stories when I was younger and, although I don't remember a lot of specific details, I do remember stories like *Alas Babylon!*, *The Day of the Triffids*, *The Death of Grass*, *Earth Abides* and, much later, *The Postman*, among many others. The books I remember were all written by SF writers, but there were also many mainstream writers who, thinking they were doing something special, also attempted post-apocalyptic novels. I must say I never found them to be as interesting as those written by the SF writers. Who can compare with the masterly work produced by Octavia Butler with *The Parable of the Sower* and its sequel *The Parable of the Talent*? But general reviewers often raved about them, in much the same way as they are doing now about *The Road*.

I did however go and read your article about the *The Long Loud Silence* in *SFC* 79: The Tucker Issue, second edition, and after that I'm glad I didn't try to reread the Tucker book.

(26 January 2010)

Nice colour images. And wow! what a surprise to find my book listed as one of your favourites for the past year. I find that to be quite an honour and I do appreciate your comments regarding the book. From my point of view they are constructive and spot on as always.

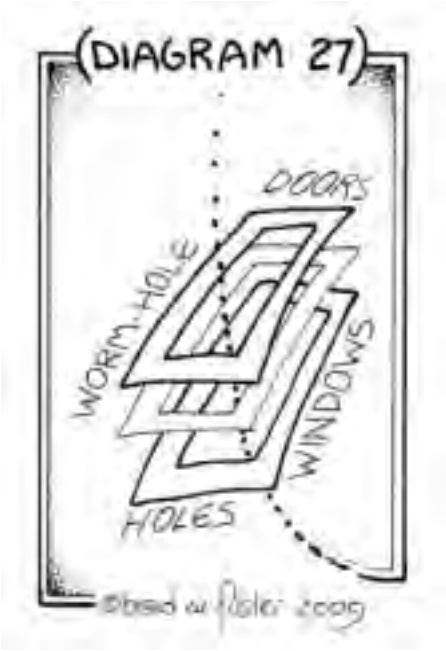
Fragments was written not long after I moved from Melbourne to the Gold Coast. It was meant to be for the family, my brothers and sisters,



and a few nephews and nieces and one or two friends. I printed a limited number of copies without photos and had them handbound in leather. Each member of the family got a copy as a Christmas present in December 1996. Before I actually wrote anything we had a few discussions by phone and in person when we got together to talk about what we remembered about Dad and the various stories he told us over the years.

We didn't want to know about that stuff when we were young, but now that we were older and Dad was no longer with us, if we didn't get those memories down in a more permanent way, they would be gone forever and no one other than a few of us would even know he existed. (Mum was also gone, so we couldn't ask her either.)

So *Fragments* had to be written, for our sakes if nothing else.



Being of such a fragmentary nature, the only way to put it together was as we remembered things, which meant not in chronological order. I envisaged each short bit as if it were a photograph and that all the photos were in an album. If you flicked through the album at random you would see all these different images that didn't actually connect until you got towards the end where it all began to coalesce into a bigger picture. What I needed was a beginning. I remembered Dad telling us not long after he went for his first trip back, and after the troubles he had just to get into what was then an incredibly repressive Albania — and this trip back was after 55 years in Australia, and with him just past 75 years old — when he finally got to the town where he was born and where he spent the first 14 or 15 years of his life, he could not remember it, nor could he remember where he had lived. It had changed greatly in half a century, and not for the better. I wrote that first scene in the book as if were a novel, with a bit of poetic licence.

In fact I wanted the whole thing to be more like a novel than a biography. Perhaps I was too ambitious, but the family loved it.

In the edition leather bound in 1996, the second first-person narrative bits, our collective memories rather than Dad's direct memories, were typeset in Helvetica to distinguish the two first-person streams. In the printed version with the photographs I simply used the same font, but made it slightly smaller to distinguish it. I thought it looked better that way, but maybe I was wrong.

After moving to the Gold Coast, I joined the local writers' group and contributed some articles to their newsletter. At one meeting I met a Greek author, a poet, who said he liked the article. We got talking about how he came to Australia from Egypt. One thing led to another and I told him about Dad and how he came to Australia way back in 1924. I lent him a copy of the leatherbound *Fragments*.

He rang me a few days later to say that reading it had brought tears to his eyes. He insisted on translating it into Greek. There are many Greeks, he told me, who had experienced similar things, but no one had written about it in this way before.

He translated it, then insisted we enter it into the Agelidis Foundation competition for an unpublished long story in Greek. I made the required copies and sent them to the Foundation (in Melbourne), which receives entries from all around the world, in Greek of course. This was in 2007. You can imagine my surprise when I was told it had won the first prize.

One of the judges then insisted it be published in Greek, and offered to help facilitate this. After a year of back-and-forth emails it turns out she was after lots of money, thinking perhaps I was desperate to see it published.

For Chris's sake, because he was the translator, I did want to see it pub-lished in Greek so in the end he and I took on the task of preparing the file in Greek for publication.

At the same time I decided to do another edition of it in English, which is the one I sent to you. There are some minor changes in it if you

compare it to the leatherbound limited edition done for family members, most notably the addition of some photographs. There is also a slight amount of historical text here that doesn't appear in the 1996 copy.

We did a launch at a Greek Association in Melbourne. Every copy I took in both languages was sold. More recently, in Brisbane I was asked to talk about this book by the cultural committee of the Greek Orthodox Community of St George at their clubrooms. It was a well-attended function, with several other Australian Greek or Australian authors with some Greek connection all speaking about their writing. This was a great success, with each author selling considerable numbers of books.

So your listing in *SET* was a lovely surprise.

brg* Thanks for this further information about *Fragments*. I recommend the book, and hope people get in touch with John about it.

I loved the article about *The Terminator Chronicles*, 'The Dancing Cyborg' by Ray Wood. I watched the first series and recorded it, but somehow set the damn recorder onto a different station during the final episode and got something else entirely. I was frustrated that, when the DVD collection of the first series came out, I had to buy it to get the final episode. It's a pity Ray didn't go into the second series, which finishes with Cameron doing the most unexpected thing, which emphasises her evolving humanity. A brilliant and most unexpected ending, which 'terminates' the series but leaves it open for possible future episodes. Probably they won't make them, though.

I didn't go to South America. I went to Mexico, where I spent a year in 1968, returning via Miami, New York, Toronto, Stuttgart, Rome, Nairobi, Johannesburg, and Perth. Mexico is actually part of the North American continent, sharing the space with the USA and Canada. Too many people think the whole continent is only the USA, or the USA and Canada. They always assume Mexico is part of South America, because from there on down it's all Spanish, except for a couple of places like Belize where a form of English is spoken, Guyana where French is spoken, and Brazil, which is Portuguese-speaking.

I'd been back a couple of years and unmarried when my cousin came down from Sydney and told us that she was going to visit some girls from Chile with whom she had worked in Sydney. They had just arrived for a year in Melbourne after spending a year in Sydney. As quick as a flash Mum got her to invite them over to our place for dinner so I could practise talking in Spanish, which I had learnt while in Mexico. I met Monica, and the rest is history.

Monica's brother was the only writer of SF in Chile, of whom I wrote about for John Bangsund in a special edition of his fanzine *Philosophical Gas*, which he retitled *Gas Filosofico* for that edition because it also included two poems I had written in Spanish as a way of remembering the language. (That's got to be 30 years ago, or thereabouts!)

Once I met Monica I didn't need to write poetry in Spanish any more. (Monica's brother, Hugo Correa, died last year.)

(24 February 2010)

brg* 'Hugo Correa' is a familiar name to me. Have any of his stories or novels been published in English in editions I might have seen?

RAY WOOD
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I've had some miscellaneous thoughts about that image of the Dancing Cyborg.

I. I'm reading Joseph Campbell (*The Masks of God*; *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*) with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, at present. It's the transcript of the TV series where Moyers interviewed Campbell. One exchange was this:

Moyers: Do you see some new metaphors emerging in a modern medium for the old universal truths?

Campbell: I see the possibility of new metaphors, but I don't see that they have become mythological yet.

Moyers: What do you think will be the myths that will incorporate the machine into the new world?

And I thought of the 'Dancing Cyborg' in terms of such 'machine' myths. It isn't just that our tools, our machines, our technology are not enough to save humankind; it's also that our mere humanity alone is not enough either — twelve millennia of our fairly chaotic and bloodthirsty attempts to achieve civilisation have proven that. It may be the merging of

machine and human that we need.

And the cyborg Cameron is an image of how we humans can't put *all* of our faith into our technology to guarantee us a future, nor can we put it *all* into the merely human part of us: perhaps we should have faith in an equal combination of them both. It's the addition of intelligence to our tools that just may help us cope with ourselves, and that may give us some hope of a future.

So our ultimate tool may just save us from our *selves*.

The constant fear in the humans of Cameron in *Chronicles* is superlatively answered in the second season. (I don't imagine it matters if I reveal things from the second season, as it seems that you've had more than enough of that series, and will never watch the rest of it.)

The explosion of the car she was in at the end of the first season damaged her, and she reverts to being a Terminator out to kill John, but recovers. Now and then she malfunctions, and so is even more dangerous than before. So she herself, with no prompting to do so, inserts an explosive in her head beside her brain chip, and gives John a switch that will detonate it and destroy her if she goes haywire again.

It's the intelligent machine that's proven perhaps too dangerous to humans, deliberately handing back absolute control of itself to the humans who created it.

I was sorry that the series ended in only two seasons. Despite all its faults, and despite its makers for me not even being sure where they were taking the program, they had the germ of a magnificent story in Cameron and John Henry (a major second season cyborg), without, I believe, realising what they had. So for me, it was the glimpses of this magnificent story/machine-myth that I got now and then that made it worth my watching the series after all.

I suppose that this must happen quite often in making films, that their makers miss what the real story is: a far deeper and more powerful story than the one that they did extract from their material. And I wonder how often such makers realise what they missed later on.

I love that directors so often these days return to films they made, and re-edit them. Yeah, they often make things worse: it's revealing that in almost every case their director's cuts end up over indulgently longer, sometimes ridiculously longer *(Betty Blue*, for example). The only exception that I know of is *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, which Peter Weir made shorter.

I don't know if you've watched all the different versions Ridley Scott has put out of *Blade Runner*. The *Five-Disc Collectors Edition* contains the 'All-New Final Cut', which is truly magnificent, and makes his half-a-lifetime reworking this film over and over so worthwhile.

Some day our computers may let us load a film in, and not only extract what we want from it, but allow us to create another film entirely from the characters and events in it. Maybe then I can create a *Cameron's Story* or something like that from this messy and muddled *Chronicles*. I'd love to be able to do that.

II. I sometimes think that the greatest dream in SF is to escape, that it's the most escapist fiction genre of all. This is because it's a *twin* dream: to escape from the earthbound locale of our planet, and also to escape from the prison of our body.

I've sometimes thought that you might be able to see all the themes of SF in that ancient Minoan myth: of Pasiphaë and the white bull whom she fell in love with, and secretly mated with at night, and who impregnated her with the Minotaur; then of King Minos' chief scientist, Daedalus, building him the Labyrinth in which to imprison the Minotaur; and then of Daedalus's and Icarus's flight through the sky from Crete.

It's as if Pasiphaë yearns for the more-than-human body, and Daedalus for the more-than-Earth environment: in his case the Labyrinth is an escape from the surface we walk upon, into the underground, into the unconscious, and his eagle-winged flight is an escape from that same surface into space, into super-consciousness: the two of them battering against the 'prisons' they find themselves within.

The Minotaur, half man, half bull; Cameron, half woman, half machine; examples of similar metamorphoses. And I think also of Picasso's portraits of people who are half human, and half geometry, also a combination of ancient human and modern machine. (The Minotaur was one of his constant themes, too.)

For me the Dancing Cyborg image is a most potent one, open-ended,

you might say, as all good myths are: horizonless, in that you can explore their ramifications endlessly.

III. Thinking of the *Terminator* films — well, the first two anyway — and the *Sarah Connor Chronicles*, I think of *T1* as relentlessly single-minded, and the best of the series. *T2*, on the other had is richly complex, far more so than *T1*, but it lacks *T1*'s mythic power and poetry. At the same time I find Schwarzenegger's cyborg Terminator in *T2*, and how it begins to grow more and more human, the most suggestive and powerful element in those two films. (His Terminator says at the end of *T2*; 'Now I know why humans cry', for example.)

His cyborg is for me the most interesting character in *T2*, more so than the humans, and I feel that *Chronicles* misses out by not following that up. But it does hover around it in the character of the cyborg Cameron, a hovering that is encapsulated most significantly in the Dancing Cyborg image.

The second season of *Chronicles* is dissipated all over the place, largely directionless: various themes start to be developed and are then dropped. But through it are tantalising glimpses of Cameron's gradual development, and increasing complexity. She floats somewhere between machine and human, moving towards sometimes one, and sometimes the other. And I kept on thinking about the series' makers: 'You're missing the bus! Get with your Cameron character!'

I was interested to see that the program was scripted by a *committee* of scriptwriters chaired by the series' originator, Josh Friedman. They'd thrash out ideas in committee, and then one of them would peel off to script an episode. Seems to me an invitation to disaster: scripts by committee.

IV. I was recently re-reading Erich Fromm's seminal 1942 book, *The Fear of Freedom*. In his chapter 'Mechanisms of Escape' he discusses one such mechanism 'which [he says] is of the greatest social significance':

> This particular mechanism is the solution that the majority of normal individuals find in modern society. To put it briefly, the individual ceases to be himself; he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns; and he therefore becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him to be. The discrepancy between 'I' and the world disappears and with it the conscious fear of aloneness and powerlessness. This mechanism can be compared with the protective colouring some animals assume. They look so similar to their surroundings that they are hardly distinguishable from them. The person who gives up his individual self and becomes an *automaton*, identical with millions of other *automatons* around him, needs not feel alone and anxious any more. But the price he pays, however, is high; it is the loss of his self. [My italics]

It was his use of the word 'automaton' that fascinates me. And I thought yet again of Cameron gradually growing more human and more complex. (Incidentally, there's one beautiful episode in season 2 where she's in the Los Angeles Public Library — she sneaks off there at night to study books in her search to know more, under the tutelage of a paraplegic librarian, who gets her to read and discuss *Othello*, for example.)

An amusing contrast: Fromm's 'automata' escape from their individuality, and lose their selves in a robotic conformity; but the automaton cyborg Cameron on the other hand sets out to achieve individuality and to search for some kind of combination machine–human self. The two kinds of automaton are moving in opposite directions.

V. I recently read a review by Margaret Wertheim in *The Australian's* Review of Books of neurophysiologist Richard Gregory's 1998 book *Mirrors in Mind*. There's a passage in it about handedness, which was made much of in the *Chronicles* episode that has the Dancing Cyborg image in it, 'The Demon Hand':

> Even without a looking glass, our bodies encode a sense of mirroring — most noticeably in our left and right hands. The question of handedness, of why left and right hands are so quintessentially different when the arrangement of their parts is a mirror image, has also been a deep philosophical problem. It turns out that handedness is deeply embedded in our biology, because many organic molecules (such as sugars and amino acids) have both left and right-handed forms. Even though the chemical composition is the same, the physical arrangement of the atoms can be made in two different ways, one of which may be beneficial, while the other may be poisonous. Such was the case with thalidomide. Today chemists know that when developing new drugs, two enantiomers, as they are called, must be isolated and tested separately. Mirror images, it seems, are not always benign.

(14 February 2010)

Thanks for forwarding Jerry Kaufman's post that includes comments on 'The Dancing Cyborg'. I hadn't thought of Maria in *Metropolis* in terms of dancing cyborgs. It's so long since I saw that film that I'm not sure of this: but isn't Maria a more robotic figure than cyborgian? Of course that's just a quibble.

Thanks for inserting the reference marks in the online 'Dancing Cyborg'. But — and I feel pretty poor for so constantly harping on this — there's still the missing ellipsis to insert. This is on p. 45 of the online version.

> ***brg* This is finally correctred on the online version, as are a number of other unforgivable mistakes.***

More on the 'Dancing Cyborg' article. I said :

> Until now we've used our tools to reshape our external environment. But now we're starting to reshape our internal environment as well. In a way, we're finally seeing our bodies themselves as tools that we can also re-shape to suit our dreams and desires.

I was interested to read recently something that Lev Grossman says in a review, 8 September 2010, *Time*, 'William Gibson Serves Up Zero History': 'It's a basic tenet of science fiction that our tools shape us as much as we shape them . Which is certainly true of my point about how our tools are today starting to reshape our internal environment'.

In *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 7–8 May 2011, the article '10 Giant Leaps for Mankind' lists a 'Human body shop, by 2030: Dr Anthony Atala, Wake Forest University': 'What we can foresee is a ready made supply of organs, off the shelf, that you can just take out and plug in as needed.'

The same article includes 'Telepathy by 2030: Kendrick Kay, University of California at Berkeley':

> Kay is even assembling a 'dictionary of thought'. He has devised a computer program that can decipher the radio signals emitted from the brain. He says: 'It is possible to identify, from a large set of images, which specific image was seen by an observer. It may soon be possible to reconstruct a picture of a person's visual experience from measurements of brain activity alone.' In Japan, engineers at the Honda Corporation have even created a robot that is controlled telepathically by the thoughts of a worker wearing a helmet. (20 October 2010)

JERRY KAUFMAN
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The one article that I enjoyed the most was Ray Wood's 'The Dancing Cyborg'. Considering that I watched only one or two episodes of the television series, this seems odd. However, Ray's reading of the movies and series, and the associations he found with other cultural manifestations, fascinated me. After finishing it, I thought of another dancing cyborg that Ray doesn't mention (if memory and a quick review of his footnotes do not deceive), Maria in *Metropolis*. Instead of the dance humanising the robot Maria, it perverts the act of dancing and demonstrates the inhuman, even demonic character of the cyborg. Maria dances to seduce and anger the workers in that film — it's something the flesh-and-blood Maria would not have done.

I liked very much the covers on issue No 12 by Ditmar.

So far as I can tell, *Gramophone* stopped being *The Gramophone* decades ago.

Keep up the good work — it's great to have you and Rich Coad putting out fanzines with this level of intelligent and informal sf comment.

Have I ever told you, Bruce, that the title of **brg** always makes me think that it's an onomatopoeic representation of a vaguely rude noise?

(2 May 2010)

brg* All depends how you say it. I've always said it 'bee-are-gee': a rock group with an extra initial.

NED BROOKS
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Nice issue, especially the Taral and Steve Stiles artwork!

I am puzzled by Lyn McConchie's notion of 'small fan groups' whose 'early records are handwritten' — are there any such groups? I'm 72 and never belonged to one! And if I had, and had been responsible for writing records, they probably would be quite illegible. My handwriting has always been atrocious. My mother, who was born in 1908, did learn and even taught one of the penmanship systems that were popular at the time. But she didn't teach it to me. The oldest fan group records would hardly be earlier than the 1930s, and typewriters were widely used by then. Even the early 1900s mundane apas that H. P. Lovecraft and Frank Belknap Long belonged to did not publish handrot — they were into letterpress printing and looked down on even typewritten text.

Perhaps there were NZ fan groups with handwritten records. It had not occurred to me that the current crop of students would not be able to read handwriting. I never had any problem with halfway decent scrawls, and still get letters from a few fans who write by hand. I have seen old manuscripts that seemed illegible to me — a biography of John Buchan reproduces one of his pages in facsimile, and all I could think was that his novels should be credited as much to the typesetter as to that scribble.

The Southern Fandom Press Alliance (SFPA) was plagued with handrot zines back in the 60s — I offered to run for OE on a platform that anything illegible would not be distributed, but got insufficient support. One of these was just a gag: the editor would corner another fan at a convention and somehow talk him into participating in a handwritten oneshot called *Ignite*, which I think got as far as 13 issues, reproduced I think by xerox.

(14 February 2010)

brg* In ANZAPA, of which I am the official editor these days, member Lucy Schmeidler has been forced to handwrite and photocopy several contributions over the last year. Her fanzines are completely legible. Mine would not be.

My mother taught penmanship before she was married — but she never taught it to me. When I was 17 my parents gave me a typewriter — they should have given me one sooner. It wasn't a matter of finances. It did not occur to me to ask for one. I still get letters in cursive from several fans — some do it better than others, and all do it better than I could. I can usually make out the words from context. If I had to produce text without a machine, I can letter legibly. Where did cursive come from anyway? Once Gutenberg's invention made literacy widespread, who took the notion to make the swirly cursive messes in place of lettering in imitation of printed books? I have seen some of my old pre-typewriter school papers — they are atrocious. Calligraphy is all very well as an art form, but I don't see why the average literate person was ever expected to master it.

Much thanks for the spectacular issues that appeared in yesterday's mail!

The postal gnomes did not bother to cancel the Harry Houdini 'Centenary of Powered Flight' stamps, which were a novelty to me — I had no idea that Houdini had anything to do with powered flight! But I see that Wikipedia knows:

> In 1909, Houdini became fascinated with aviation. That same year, he purchased a French Voisin biplane for $5000 and hired a full-time mechanic, Antonio Brassac. Houdini painted his name in bold block letters on the Voisin's sidepanels and tail. After crashing once, Houdini made his first successful flight on November 26 in Hamburg, Germany.
>
> In 1910, Houdini toured Australia. He brought with him his Voisin biplane and achieved the first powered flight over Australia, on March 18 at Diggers Rest, Victoria (near Melton), just north of Melbourne. Colin Defries preceded him, but he crashed the plane on landing. Houdini proudly claimed to reporters that, while the world may forget about him as a magician and escape artist, it would never forget Houdini the pioneer aviator.
>
> After his Australian tour, Houdini put the Voisin into storage in England. Although he announced he would use it to fly from city to city during his next Music Hall tour, Houdini never flew again.

Most of the books you review I have not read, and probably would not read. About the only 'new' SF I read are the stories in *F&SF* — and some of those don't hold my interest. And though I read the Le Guin 'Earthsea' tales when they came out, and remember enjoying them, I doubt I could reread them now. The older I get, the more I prefer things written before I was born. I did like Le Guin's *The Telling* (2000), once I got past the utterly dismal and useless first 30 pages.

Spectacular cyber-art covers, but I still much prefer the cartoons by Taral and Steve Stiles!

I read *Titus Groan* in college in the late '50s, a first edition found in an Atlanta used-book store. I had never heard of Mervyn Peake, and was attracted by his artwork for the dustjacket — then I read the first page and was trapped. *Gormenghast* was great as well. *Titus Alone* was more difficult, and I think the re-editing was an improvement. I heard recently that there is to be a fourth volume.

Thanks for mentioning *Dean Spanley*! I have the Lord Dunsany book *Talks with Dean Spanley*, but didn't know it had been filmed.

You are right about the 'treasure hunt'. In college I found Mervyn Peake and Tolkien and Dunsany, and in the 1960s Arthur Machen. And the spectacular illustrated book *The Ship that Sailed to Mars*, at the 1963 DisCon. And *The King in Yellow* — a curious anomaly, as none of the later books by the same author have anything like its eldritch charm. The last writer I was so taken with as to get all her books was Tanith Lee.

(21 March 2010)

GILLIAN POLACK
Chifley ACT 2606

I've already taken a look at *SET* 11. Very nice it is, too. How funny that the comments about Gillian-as-feminist should be in that issue! I need to think about it all and get back to you with a proper reply, but a couple of the comments caused me to reflect upon my US publisher's thought that I should keep my feminist self very, very quiet. I have since discovered that US feminist stereotypes have almost nothing in common with most Australian feminists. My feminism is soft and gentle and almost Fabian in its outlook.

Right now, I'm focusing on improving my health. The doctor at the hospital said that this sort of scare (two major health scares in three years!) when I reach menopause, as my chronic illnesses and peri-menopause might be triggering interesting stuff. I'm going to politely ask the world to send me only good news for two years, I think. Right now, the world is not obliging, of course.

(14 February 2010)

I thought you'd be interested in knowing about this: http://www.awritergoesonajourney.com/index.php?option=com_jmylife&view=list&catid=2&sort=none&Itemid=279. It's a way of getting news about fan interest in books to booksellers and publishers. The idea is that readers who can't get their favourite writers or books they're after in their local bookshop can vote for it here (or enter it, if it has no entry) and the shops and publisher will be informed of the amount of interest. The idea and discussion that led to it is here: http://chuckmck1.livejournal.com/21011.html. This is fan driven. It can only work if book-buying fans voice their needs and wishes every time they have one. The more books

that are listed and voted for, the better the profile will be of books that aren't stocked in shops that readers want to see.

(23 March 2010)

I think *SET* has been quoted in Spanish! The writer says that my comments on the relationship of Le Guin to anthropology are right. It doesn't give a source, but my only recent Le Guin comments were for *SET*, and the words correspond.

I still owe you a letter. For once, my health is not the cause of delay. The fact that I'm doing a second PhD (with Van Ikin as supervisor) is.

(3 May 2010)

I love 'best of' lists even if I never agree with them — maybe because I never agree with them? Some of the books you mentioned (the Gormenghast series, Bishop's *The Etched City*) I fall in love with over and over. Michael Chabon's writing is something I only discovered recently. All his Judaisms are alien to me, which is a comforting thought, that there can be so many Judaisms in one person's creation and that they can all be foreign to someone Jewish from a different background.

I really enjoyed Pamela Sargent's piece, full of insights into both the writer and the industry. I've recommended it to the members of CSFG and especially to the members of our crit groups. It's full of need-to-knows.

(25 June 2010)

MARK PLUMMER
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I've barely skimmed the latest issue of *SET* on efanzines — by which I mean *SET* 12, I should clarify, just in case you've produced another one while I was downstairs making the coffee. I'm guessing No 12 still is the latest issue, though, because now I've analysed the timings of Bill Burns's announcements to fmzfen I reckon *SET* 13 isn't due until about 6:30 tomorrow morning our time so I think I'm still within the window. But anyway ...

(15 February 2010)

Yes, *SET* arrived here when I was on strike again — an embarrassing dispute with the government over civil service redundancy packages. It's embarrassing because it motivated by a downgrading of the existing deal from really quite exceptionally generous to merely very good indeed, and I don't suppose industrial action will get us much sympathy with the population at large. It doesn't even get a great deal of publicity as the dispute is happening at the same time as a threatened national rail strike, the most serious in a decade and a half, and an ongoing action by British Airways cabin crews. The latter hit some of the American Corflu travellers — Earl Kemp was delayed on his outgoing trip and the Stileses are having to return a little early — while the former, if it goes ahead, could hit fans returning from the Eastercon.

We currently have the Stileses as house guests until they return home on Sunday morning. Then Monday evening I have to collect what I assume is some Aussiecon promo material from the DHL office, Tuesday is dinner with James Bacon and his wife plus the TAFF delegates, Wednesday is back to James's for dinner with Chris Garcia, and Thursday we're off to the convention.

Mention of Corflu reminds me to ask whether you'd like a copy of the Corflu fanthology. I can't give you a copy as they're not mine to give away but I do have a few of the overruns here: £6 each plus postage for 98 perfect bound A4 pages, edited by Claire, Randy Byers, and me and featuring about 40 contributors.

And of course we wish you could have been at Corflu too, or Eastercon for that matter, although at the moment I don't hold out great hopes for the latter aside from some good company.

(27 March 2010)

DICK JENSSEN
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New Scientist, 6 February 2010, has a story on 'Hot Green Quantum Computers Revealed'. It seems that in the alga 'Chroomonas' there is some quantum superposition involved in the capture of sunlight and subsequent photosynthesis! Good old Greg Egan ...

There is a slight — very unimportant — error in *SET* 12, page 19. For Item 51, the director is Tarsem, not Tamsen. (15 February 2010)

GARY FARBER
somewhere in America

Nice potted history by George Zebrowski of SF editing, and good to see Terry Carr recognised. His denigration of non-writer sf editors is a bit silly, though, because it's obviated by so many counter-examples of good and important non-writer editors in the field. To make a point he takes a critique that has some truth to it and jimmeys it up into a grossly melodramatic exaggeration.

And are there truly universally accepted or known answers to 'Which SF novel has been called SF's great holy book?' and 'Which writer has been called SF's Shakespeare, and why?' to the point that these are shibboleths?

'If SF has its Gore Vidal or Edmond Wilson of reviewing, it's Langford.' It's 'Edmund'.

(16 February 2010)

CHRIS GARCIA
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I very much enjoyed *Steam Engine Time* 11 as I read it on my little One Laptop Per Child screen. I'm a big fan of Urban Fantasy, though there are two types of Urban Fantasy. There's Urban Fantasy that Tim Powers specialises in, especially in his novels such as *Expiration Date* and *Earthquake Weather*. Carrie Vaughn's Kitty series of werewolf novels are a favourite of mine as well. I usually hate series — I just don't have the attention span to go years and years reading a single storyline — but Carrie has made me a fan of her characters.

On issue 12, I have to get that Christopher Priest book on the making of *The Prestige*. I was lucky enough to get sit-down time with Ricky Jay recently as he talked about *The Prestige* in some detail, pointing out the flaws in the film and the book and then giving both packages massive raves as pieces of work. I was on a panel with Chris at Eastercon in 2008 and I had yet to see the film, read the book or anything by Chris in fact. Now I am glad I hadn't or I'd have been a simpering fanboy. Nice guy, though. The director of *The Prestige*, Christopher Nolan, is a personal fave too, and I've loved his films since I saw his first big splash, *Memento*. I think he did a great job with *The Prestige*, especially with David Bowie, who has a tendency to go way over the top in roles where he is meant to go over the top.

brg* Everything that's interesting in Christopher Nolan as an artist, up to and including *Inception*, is already in his first film, *Following*. Highly recommended. I'm told it's on DVD.

I miss being in ANZAPA. At the moment, I'm only a member of one apa, seeing if I can get back into the swing. If I can (and fortunes in the area of fortune smile on me) I may well return at some point. I certainly miss all the great writing in there, especially the Gillespie stuff! And I completely remembered Ditmar (and a certain fella named Gillespie) on my Hugo Ballot.

My list of favourite books I read in 2009 would pretty much read like a Mystery list (mostly Hard Case Crime books, with *Zero Cool* being the best of them). I read a lot of Steampunk (*Boneshaker* and *Soulless*) and a few other bits a pieces. It wasn't my best year for reading, sadly.

brg* Chris, since you are the most prolific fanzine editor for many years, perhaps ever, you have to suck in time from some other activity.

Films: you listed a favourite from the Cinequest Film Festival, *The Man in the Red Shoes on the Radio*, which was such a delight. I got to handle the Q+A with the director, which was nice. I also loved *Juno*; rewatched it in 2009 and was just as impressed. Milt Stevens and I talked about it at BayCon last year. I wouldn't have expected him to be as big a fan of it as I was but, in fact, he was! *The Duelists* is another one I've seen probably a dozen times and still can't get enough of. *Moon* I've only seen on the computer and it was great, but I get the feeling I should try and find a way to see it on a big screen.

Mine of last year? Danish films take the cake. *Brodrer* (*Brothers*) is a great one, as was a Dogme 95 film called *Open Hearts*. *The Substitute* was the film we watched on a sorta in-house double-date between Linda and I and our friends Kevin and Andy. It's both science fiction, hilarious and serious at the same time. That's Danish film-making for you. I also watched *The Boss of It All* from Lars Von Trier, which was a great comedy and instantly a fave. Of course, *Let the Right One In* and *Jennifer's Body* were both great horror films. It wasn't a bad year for movies for me.

I'm glad to see Mathew Sweet on your list, not because I love that CD (I haven't heard it) but because I'm glad that one of my favourite artists from the 1990s is still recording!

Jonathan Strahan's list is sorta what I would expect. Sadly, there are a couple of books on that list that I actively despise (*Spin* and *Pattern Recognition*), but *Accelerando* is on there, which is a great one. So is *Brasyl*, which I think is one of the best science fiction novels I've ever read (though it was up against one of my all-time fave AltHist novels, *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, for the Hugo, and thus didn't get my vote).

There are seven of my all-time top ten films on our list of Films of the Decade. *Donnie Darko* is up there, immediately followed by *State and Main*. I love David Mamet's films, and that's my fave of his films. *O Brother Where Art Thou?* and *Monsoon Wedding*, two very different films, I can watch at any time and know I'm in for a good viewing experience. *Gosford Park*, *Northfork* (great film that almost no one I know has seen!) and *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* all live towards the top of my list.

I've chatted with Peter Bogdanovich a few times, most recently at Cinequest, and I am always interested in hearing his take on film, but more interesting, I always ask to hear his imitations of Orson Welles and Hitchcock. They're hilarious.

Pauline Kael is one of those critics who never got it. She was never transformed by the splash of film. She missed the boat entirely on the 1960s and especially the 1970s. She loved *Nashville*, for example, but completely missed the point in her praise!

I really think that if he had a bigger resonant chamber, Niall Harrison would be exactly what Kael was. He's an amazingly good writer and has a take on science fiction that I might not agree with, but I understand and he presents it beautifully.

Ah, the Turk. We were supposed to have one built for our up-coming exhibit at the Museum, but alas, it's not happening now. Sad, I love the Turk. Even more sad, I hated the *Sarah Connor Chronicles*. Just bored the hell out of me.

(16 February 2010)

JAMES ALLEN
261 Carrick Drive, Gladstone Park VIC 3043

I was very pleased and proud to be made a Life Member of the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Now I am in a period of reappraising what I do in fandom and why I do it. For example, I am going to Continuum 6, but have resisted the urge to volunteer for panels (also I actually want to see some of the panels and find out more about what they are about). I am gleefully using the C6 website to check the program, as website updates have replaced progress reports. The 'pull' model of distribution, where interested fans go and get the information they want is easier for con committees than the 'push' model, where they send stuff out (often by expensive snail mail), perhaps to fans who are not that interested. The trick is to know that something is available, so that I can go get it. The web is a solution to the Australian tyranny-of-distance problem.

(17 February 2010)

brg* My own model remains the opposite. If somebody gets in touch with me to tell me about something, I might notice it. I rarely go to websites to look up information. Therefore usually I have little idea of what is being produced by small press publishers. None of them sends me review copies, and I cannot look for something I do not know exists (or is already out of print by the time I see it listed or reviewed somewhere). I can, however, praise Russell Farr of Ticonderonga Publications, who these days maintains an active publications-notifications presence on Facebook.

A couple of weeks ago, I wanted to read Ray Bradbury's *A Sound of Thunder*. I googled it and read a web copy, deleted the illustrations I didn't like, then downloaded and printed it out, all 9 pages. It makes those times searching though anthologies in libraries seem so long ago. I am watching the whole e-book phenomenon, but cannot afford a dedicated reader. I do get the odd out-of-copyright item from Project Gutenberg and just read it on the home computer, and of course I download stuff from e-fanzines, which is a great resource.

(18 February 2010)

HARRY BUERKETT
705 S. Anderson, Urbana IL 61801-4301, USA

I'm still working on several projects (including the novel and short

stories), but nothing at the moment appropriate for your journals, alas. My co-author on the Philip K. Dick Eastern Philosophies paper, a professor of comparative literature at Fresno State University, CA, is currently embroiled in his own work, and so I'm afraid the PKD paper is on the back burner for now.

Has anyone to your knowledge expressed interest in making a film version of *Norstrilia*? Say, Peter Jackson, perhaps? I think it could be much better than the *Dune* efforts, with a third the amount of material to work in (though I'd like to see 'Mother Hittons' worked into the mix, and maybe 'The Ballad of Lost C'mell'), and they might even get the ornithopters right for once.

(19 February 2010)

I found the latest *SET* (12) fascinating, and had my wife, Felice A. Kaufmann, Managing Editor of *The Council Chronicle*, copy the Joanna Russ article 'The Wearing Out of Genre Materials', from *College English* 33:1, found in the archives of her organisation, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), headquartered here in Urbana. What Russ didn't see coming in the vampire genre was parody and satire in such works as Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and followers. We're seeing it now with the zombie genre, especially *Shaun of the Dead* and *Zombieland*, in film, and *Pride & Prejudice & the Zombies* in literature. Her idea that all tropes move to and work as metaphor is of course in keeping with Saussure's signifiers and signifieds, in his sign theory of language as metaphor, expanded upon by Kristeva's work in the late 1960s on *signifiance* and (later) *transposition*. If Russ had continued with these thoughts, expanding upon them, then maybe we would have had America's own Julia Kristeva in Joanna Russ. Certainly her idea that 'one author's work will be on different levels of evolution' and that 'the whole process is usually quite complex' (51) bears significantly on the work of Bob Tucker, as I'm finding out.

(26 March 2010)

Yes, you've put your finger right on the sticking point, so to speak, of genres: by the time a genre has become established, it's already calcified to a large extent. It takes someone like John Campbell or Fred Pohl or Michael Moorcock to shake up the establishment and pump some new life into the living corpse (maybe that's the origin of vampires and zombies and the explanation of their recurrence). But reaction is often comment (critique), and comment becomes pastiche, pastiche parody, and parody broad comedy. And by then, as Russ pointed up, 'the whole process is usually quite complex', and the transposition of tropes becomes a mess best left untangled. It's a Gordian knot, the solution to which is Alexander's sword.

I think of parody and satire as outside of genre, and so in effect a broad genre of criticism in and of itself. As genre are so often market driven, and therefore artificial, I find it best to stand outside the market and look in. From that vantage point one can see that pasties are pasties, and rolls are rolls, and croissants are croissants, but they're all made of the metaphor that is language, and use the same ingredients (tropes) in different and idiosyncratic ways (transposition). Parody makes its sponge cake out of a real sponge.

(27 March 2010)

brg* It all depends on the quality of the chef.

GREG PICKERSGILL
3 Bethany Row, Narberth Rd, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire SA61 2XG, Wales

I have recently (just yesterday in fact) been leafing through some older issues of *SFC* and found them most entertaining and stimulating. I'm genuinely boggled by some of them — take issue 52 of June 1977 (good grief, over 30 years ago!) for example, an interesting piece on D. G. Compton, and a letter column featuring a host of people who were/are all Big Names in SF and fandom. Even your WAHF list looks like it would have made a super lettercol in a lesser fanzine!. Look it up and see.

And there the 'Tucker Issue', which, apart from anything else makes me want to read *The Year of the Quiet Sun* again; your highly laudatory review makes me wonder whether in fact I missed something, perhaps the whole point of what I thought (many years back) was a rather uninteresting book.

While I'm here, may I ask you to let me know which are the most recently published issues of **brg**, *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life*, *SF Commentary* and *The Metaphysical Review*. I would like to keep my runs of these

fanzines as complete as possible (some of the comparatively few I feel so about) so I'd like to know what I need to look out for.

(20 February 2010)

brg* *_brg_* is my ANZAPA-zine. Extra copies are available on whim; that is, to people who take the trouble to keep in touch when they receive a copy. _The Great Cosmic Donut of Life_ was the equivalent fanzine for Acnestis until that apa folded in 2005. I had been combining non-mailing comments material from both into a fanzine called _Scratch Pad_, which can be downloaded by anybody as a PDF file on efanzines.com. These days I put the non-mailing comments sections of *_brg_* into _Scratch Pad_. _SF Commentary_ has just staged yet another resurrection, for its Fortieth Anniversary, which actually took place in January 2009. No 80 has been released both in print and PDF format; _SFC_ 80A is available only as a download; and Nos 81 and 82 finally appeared in early 2011. _The Metaphysical Review_ has not appeared since 1998, but *_brg_* is coming to resemble it (featuring material on all my interests other than SF and fantasy). All this takes vast amounts of time and money (especially overseas airmail costs), which are severely limited. In future, not many people will receive paper copies of my fanzines.

BRAD FOSTER
PO Box 165246, Irving TX 75016, USA

Got notice the other day that *Steam Engine Time* 11 had been posted online. Checked it out, looks like some good reading to get back too, and only slightly saddened you weren't able to fit in any of the half dozen or so pieces you have of mine in there (three of my little toons, and four of the Argent designs). Of course, not every issue has to have my stuff. However, when got the amazing note that you had also finished issue No 12, with even more pages than No 11, and still no Foster contribution, thought maybe I should write to see if you still wanted to use any of those or not?

(16 February 2010)

brg* I've already emailed Brad to say that I didn't receive the pieces that he sent me. That's the trouble with emails; they seem to disappear from time to time, without an alert being sent back to the sender. Brad has sent his pieces of art again, as you can see in this issue of _Steam Engine Time_.

SET 11: I liked the choice of the piece from Taral to go with that editorial. Also how I went 'Wow' reading Lyn McConchie's piece on someone not being able to read cursive handwriting. Hard enough for those of us who have learned the style, since handwriting can vary so widely from person to person. But can imagine these days, with so little of it around, it can look like alien script to someone. (I wonder how they handle it when they get a wedding invitation that uses the oldfashioned scripts still?)

Issue No 12: I was pleased to see the first two volumes of the 'Gormenghast' series at the top of your list. It's a series of books I've already reread several times, and will probably do so again. I also felt a bit let down by the third volume, mainly because it left the amazing world of Gormenghast castle behind.

My own reading habits are pretty much all over the map. But there was a standout for me: China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*, crammed full of new ideas and a driving story that kept me glued to the book until done, and sorry when it ended. Since my reading habits are dictated mostly around what I can find at a discount at the used book store, I've only been able to follow that up with his *Iron Council*: slower start for me, leading to a smashing ending. I'll be keeping an eye out for more China in the future.

(9 April 2010)

brg* If you had been able to make it out to Australia in 2010 for Aussiecon 4, you could have shaken hands with China Mieville as you both received Hugo Awards. I was standing (as a presenter) right behind Mr Mieville when the group photo was taken, but didn't introduce myself because I couldn't think of any reason why he would know me.

LYN NUTTALL NSW

I see my favourite film writer Pauline Kael mentioned.

Just looking at your lists (the chart habit persists, I see):

Film:

30 *The Great McGinty* (Preston Sturges) 1940

I watched half a dozen Sturges films last year: I bought a boxed set. All recommended:

- *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944)

- *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* (1944)
- *The Palm Beach Story* (1942)
- *Sullivan's Travels* (1941)
- *The Lady Eve* (1941)
- *Christmas in July* (1940)

I must have watched seven: I'd already seen *Sullivan Travels*. The seventh was *The Great Moment* (1944): fascinating but not in the same class as the others.

I don't often come across a fellow admirer of the Archers. (Same goes for Sturges.)

2 *A Canterbury Tale* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger)

3 *I Know Where I'm Going* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger)

6 *The Red Shoes* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger)

I admire all of those, especially Nos 2 and 3, but I haven't seen:

4 *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger). I recommend *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), but I'm guessing you've seen it.

(23 February 2010)

brg* Many times, as I have most of the Powell and Pressburger films. I'm a member of the PnP e-list, where members discuss all aspects of British film, not just the films of the Archers. Martin Scorsese is the great PnP fan; his editor, Thelma Schoonmaker, is Michael Powell's widow, and Scorsese has been a fanatic about the films since the early 1950s. He has put a lot of his own money into remastering the prints for DVD and Blu-Ray. The latest Powell & Pressburger film to be remastered is *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. Friends of mine are hoping that *A Matter of Life and Death* (*Stairway to Heaven* was the American title) will be next.

RANDY BYERS
1013 N. 36th Street, Seattle, WA 98103, USA

I've been working my way slowly through the Joanna Russ collection. She was always one of my favourite writers, but reading the evolution of her thinking now is very strange. Radicals really are consigned to the margins, aren't they? And I'm so unradical myself these days that I find myself feeling put off by her proscriptions and declarations. Have I become the enemy? It has been bracing reading.

Anyway, how are things Down Under? Looks as though I won't be coming to Aussiecon after all. I'm thinking I might go to Novacon instead, which I've always heard is a really good con. Might pop over to Belgium with some friends to drink beer, while I'm at it.

(27 February 2010)

brg* But you fit in so well into Australian fandom, Randy. Hope you get back to Melbourne soon.

PAMELA SARGENT
15 Crannell Avenue, Delmar, NY 12054, USA

Thanks so much for the links to *Steam Engine Time*, and I look forward to the printed copies. I am amazed and flattered that you made it an issue 'in honour of' me! It looks like an issue I will really enjoy reading.

Please also pass on my thanks to your co-editor Jan Stinson. I was very moved by her editorial remarks, as I have had a lifelong struggle with manic depression (or bipolar disorder, as it's now called), and in the past decade or so, the depressive phase has been much worse and much more of a problem than the manic moods. I know exactly what she's talking about — I've been there too many times — so please pass on my best wishes to her. And I will pass mine on to you directly.

(1 March 2010)

PAUL ANDERSON
17 Baker St, Grange SA 5022

A bit surprised at some of your 2009 film entries and those from the 2000–2009 decade. Nice to mix the millennia that way.

Brenda and I prefer both *Howl's Moving Castle* and *Laputa* to *Spirited Away*. I didn't actually finish *Children of Men*.

Naturally there could be endless squabbles over the order of films, but I

have only seen 12 of your 50. And seven from the 2009 lists.

I take it that *The Philosopher's Stone* is more representative of the Harry Potter series. Not sure it is the best of the bunch. Reviews differ on that.

I enjoyed the Bond pair, but can understand leaving them off. However, there is a lot more going for those films than any of the Moore list, or probably all but *Dr No*.

However, I am surprised at the absence of the Timur Bekmambetov films: *Nightwatch* and *Daywatch* repay viewing. These are two of the rare ones that we upgraded to DVD after seeing them at the Palace/Nova. I'm waiting for *Duskwatch* to complete the trilogy as written. The reviews on the Rottentomatoes website were absolutely polarised.

Belatedly I noted the absence of Adam Roberts from your lists of books. Curious as to your reaction to him as, after seeing *Yellow Blue Tibia* on the Locus Recommended Reading List for 2009, I borrowed it from the local library. Brenda has now read it in quick time to high praise. Possibly be my next book as well.

(17 March 2010)

***brg* I failed to finish the first in the 'Nightwatch' series of books, so haven't bought and watched the Russian movie versions, which people tell me are far more interesting.**

I enjoyed Adam Roberts' *Yellow Blue Tibia***, but thought it fell apart at the end. I used to receive Adam Roberts novels as review copies from the publisher Hachette, but now I don't.***

I'm pretty sure I have a copy of 'The Crowd' on a vinyl somewhere in the Orbison section of the record shelves; not that they get played all that often. I play *Black and White Night* more often, now that I have it.

Both should be available for viewing/listening on Youtube. Certainly I caught up with 'The Crowd' again there when you mentioned it so long back. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6td9cl9Z9Fw&feature=related is the link to the song.

I think you mean *The Fastest Guitar Alive*, the 1967 movie Roy was in. The song you want was not in the movie, but it was included in the album from the movie three months ago. That's if you can find a CD of the soundtrack ...

(21 March 2010)

brg* YouTube is a mystery to us. Elaine has the only computer in the house that is connected to the Internet, and she doesn't have speakers attached. Also, our download bills seem to be quite high each month, merely from incoming emails and attachments, so we don't download anything else except Facebook (and the monthly bill more than doubled after I joined Facebook).

RICK KENNETT
PO Box 118, Pascoe Vale South VIC 3044

Spare a thought for my Carnacki co-writer Chico Kidd who holidayed in Cuba a couple of months ago. Though she sent postcards to several people, including myself, apparently none has ever arrived. Certainly not mine. 'So much for Fidel Post,' I told her.

brg* Is your collection of short stories still available for download?

No. But I have it on CD as well as a paperback, so I can email you a copy if you like. An odd coincidence. A few days before you got in touch, I had another email forwarded to me from the US asking after the collection. It was from a fellow who works at Merrill Lynch (of all places) who is a space opera fan and was interested in my habit of crossing the SF genres with the ghost story, something the Minnesota librarian also took special note of. Seems he'd bought some magazines with my SF ghost stories in them, particularly the 'Cy De Gerch' space operas — including that novel I self-published in 1982 or 1983 that you typeset. It was for sale at ABE. Now there's a ghost that haunts me.

brg* Have you placed a proposal with Barbara and Christopher Roden (Ash Tree Press) for them to publish one of their beautiful anthologies of your work?

Yes. A few years ago. Though they were accepting of the proposal and several stories were sent, nothing has ever come of it, and I suspect nothing ever will. The Carnacki stories were first submitted in May 1999, with a couple still being written at that time. Publication was in June 2002. I sent Ash Tree Press several of my stories for a possibly collection in late 2004.

(18 March 2010)

LIZ DE JAGER
34 Kimberley Road, Beckenham, Kent BR3 4QU, England

I am so excited to have received my copy of the magazine featuring my interview with Kaaron Warren. How unutterably cool is that? I of course bragged on Twitter about it and discovered that Kaaron is on there too! Her publishers Angry Robot love me right now. And of course, Kaaron too!

But, the *real* reason (apart from saying thank you so much for sending it along) is to check with you if you'd like any other pieces for the mag at any other stage? I am happy to do it gratis, for free, for a byline? I'll be honest and say it will look great on my writing CV for approaching literary agents with my own writing in the near future. I hope you don't think I'm forward? If you do, I'd like to say that it's not meant in a grabby, me-me way, because I genuinely liked the mag and the in depth articles. I would love be able to be a part of something like this! Do let me have your thoughts. I'm happy to look at features and reviews etc.

23 March 2010

brg* I'll take up your offer any time. I hope you enjoy this issue as well.

CY CHAUVIN
14248 Wilfred, Detroit MI 48213, USA

Your article about treasure hunting — and books about SF — is good in perhaps unexpected ways: but I'm going to wait until I have a chance to reread that Joanna Russ article that seems critical to it before I reply. (The two online reviews I read of her collected essays were disappointed in it; but I take it that you recommend it.)

I saw *Brideshead Revisited* complete just a couple years ago (I saw only a few episodes previously). I really love the opening and closing theme music by Geoffrey Burgon, and taped it from the TV. I tracked down his website but never found if any of his works on CD.

I like Carol Kewley's cover for the 'Women on SF' issue, but I haven't had a chance to read much beyond a few words of the editorial.

(23 March 2010)

I've had a chance to re-read the Russ article 'The Wearing Out of Genre Materials' (that issue of *Vector* was filed and easy to find). It really is a stunning article; I love her line 'fiction is *a wish made plausible*'. How lovely! But it does matter what you wish for; and what the writer may wish to make plausible won't interest everyone. For instance, I just can't take all these alternate history stories; something about them makes me terribly uneasy. Patrick McGuire mentions a Stirling novel that makes John Carter's Mars scientifically possible, and that's another wish I don't have any desire to made plausible. But I'll read almost anything that Diana Wynne Jones writes, and enjoy it (so I'm not any better, really). But a wish to make plausible some truly important idea — that might be something else again.

I also the idea she takes from George Bernard Shaw on how to produce a bad popular play: take the most daring idea possible and then run away from the consequences. (A good play or story, she adds, would develop the consequences.) It's the daring idea that's exciting — and the consequences.

From the title, I also expected that 'the wearing out of genre materials' would mean the inevitable decline of SF. But instead, Russ writes: 'Science fiction is the only genre I know that is theoretically open ended: that is, new science fiction is possible as long as there is new science. Now only are there new sciences — mostly life sciences like neurobiology — there are a multitude of infant sciences like ethology and psychology. More important than that, all of science — indeed, all philosophical (or descriptive) disciplines — are beginning to be thought of as part of one overarching discipline .... Science fiction, therefore, need not limit itself to certain kinds of characters, certain locales, certain emotions or certain plot devices.' Ah, the wonderful optimism of the 1970s! She is perfectly right of course. And it is always the case that I wonder why writers haven't made more of SF than they do. I understand your frustration at finding the good stuff. Maybe it's the market expansion: while theoretically there should be the opportunity for more SF to be published, bad SF expands far more, and is hidden even deeper in the dross. Its mostly not useful (as almost you suggest yourself) in the search for the treasure of good fiction to read various theories as to why SF is bad.

I am surprised, though, to find that I am sensitive to the hard science 'frisson' or 'buzz' — I noticed it first when reading Gregory Benford's novel *Artifact* for the first time perhaps five years ago, after I lost much

of my desire to read SF. The novel was ordinary until I read the physics explanation of the mysterious artifact unearthed in an ancient tomb in Greece — it wasn't the archaeological artifact but the physics that was interesting, far more so than the plot or characters, and it gave me that tingling 'buzz'. I found it a short while later again reading a more recent Greg Bear novel. And again, even more surprisingly, in an old James Blish novel, *VOR* (how could a novel based on 1950s science do this?). (The novel did have additional interest because of what you might call the 'patina' of its age, and characters, but it certainly isn't one of his best.)

One of the discouraging reviews I read of *The Country You Have Never Seen* by Joanna Russ is by Karen Burnham and posted here: http://spiralgalaxyreviews.blogspot.com/2008/09/country-you-have-never-seen-by-joanna.html (her website is worthwhile — it's called *The Spiral Galaxy Reviewing Laboratory*). However, I'll take your recommendation to heart, although both her review (she liked *The Issue At Hand*) and the other one I read seemed well considered.

(20 April 2010)

Aussiecon would be fun. It's actually more affordable in money than it is in time, although I must admit than when I checked plane fares last year I was unnerved when those were more than the total cost of everything in Montreal. (You mention not remembering when whether I had ever stood for DUFF — actually I did once, and that's what led to the my writing 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Melbourne', since I promised to write a trip report whether I won or not — and clever Irwin Hirsh held me to my promise!)

(20 April 2010)

brg* I didn't catch up with you during my 2005 trip to America, and you can never afford to get to Australia, so it looks as if we will never meet. Which is a pity, since it's hard to think of many other people to whom I have been writing for 42 years or longer and have still not met. Franz Rottensteiner is another ... and Gian Paolo Cossato.

GIAN PAOLO COSSATO
Cannaregio 3825, Calle Fontana, 30121-Venezia, Italy

I enjoyed the article about Sarah Connor. I have been bitten by the television series bug. *Sarah Connor* happens to be one of my favourites (*Mad Men* and *Life on Mars* UK edition are some of the others). The specific episode around which the article rotates was particularly outstanding. Summer Glau is good as Cameron, but here they managed to exploit her previous life experience as a ballet dancer, adding a very poetic touch to the closing of the episode. To make a comparison, the film *Terminator Salvation* left me totally cold. A waste of time, actors, and special effects. I haven't seen *Avatar* as I have not gone to the cinema since 1991. There must be something to it if it upset people so different from one another (the Chinese government, the Catholic Church, etc.). Perhaps the simpler the plot the easier the interpretations it is open to (banal, a friend of mine called it).

Your country has proved to be an useful source of DVDs. I managed to find the four seasons of the *Lexx* (it was not available on Amazon except at very outrageous prices via external sellers) and *Firefly* in Blu-ray (Australia and Europe have the same region). It has not yet been issued in Europe in Blu-ray. I got interested even in your local character *Halifax*, and a few more.

I have sent you a couple of DVDs. One is a fairly detailed view of what is important in Venice (in English too) done professionally (not by me) and perhaps a bit monotonous; the other is a collection of my stuff. You have been using some of the images from the 1910 book about aviation. This time you shall find the whole lot scanned from page 1 to 289. The images are fairly detailed, as you will discover. I realise the text is in Italian (I did not send you the OCR version, which I have done but have yet to decide how to assemble it) but the 200 and more pictures, drawings, and illustrations might prove captivating. Feel free to give a copy to whomever might be interested (just mention the origin). Perhaps some of your acquaintances can read Italian. I find the text open to a number of considerations: an extract of a letter of Victor Hugo celebrating the conquest of the air, a very funny (but somehow not so much out do date) set of rules to be followed by the passengers of a balloon, the idea that airplanes would have been the final answer to wars, and even before that the peculiar request by an 'inventor' of a flying machine, a fellow named Gusmao, to the king of Portugal, Giovanni V, in 1704, for the exclusive right to use it and the description of its advantages. He even obtained the concession by verdict and the money thereof. He died poor and forgotten.

Healthwise I have improved my eyesight. I had both eyes operated on for cataracts. I can finally read without glasses from a decent distance after 40 and more years. While the Italian health insurance might not be at its utmost (in some parts of Italy, especially in the south, is at its downmost), at least the basic health (and more) is covered, and if your GP is away for any reason a substitute should be always available, or so say the regulations. We actually enjoy that form of insurance the American GPO calls 'socialist' and Obama has managed to implement, even if it pales in comparison with what we get. I read somewhere that Harlan Ellison had to forgo total anesthesia because it had to pay it out of his own pocket. Here you might die because the anesthesiologist did something wrong, but at least no one will ask you for your money, whatever your income is. There is a ticket to pay on medicine not deemed vital (the ones I have to take daily for my heart condition are free) but the figure is fixed and not taxing regardless of the cost (and if your income is not up to it you might get them for free too). And anything requiring hospitalisation is free (I have to go there every four weeks for my other problem).

(28 March 2010)

brg* Anybody who wants to see what Gian Paolo looks like, and find out about the fate of his bookshop in Venice, can download from efanzines *Scratch Pad* 75 and look at pp. 27–8. These photos did appear in **brg** as well, but I have no print copies left.

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

Many thanks, as always for *Steam Engine Time* (11 and 12) and **brg**, which arrived a day or so before I went to Corflu Cobalt and promptly got swamped with more fanzines I can remember at any one time since the mid 90s, and then with even more books and CDs from Vikki a day later on my birthday. Faced with this embarrassment of riches I am doing the mental equivalent of flapping my hands and running round uselessly in small circles, but when I calm down I intend to settle into some serious reading and loccing.

Meanwhile, have you heard this? http://www.passionato.com/preview/TN4b7a7b65ab4c5/ It's from James Whitbourn's *Luminosity*. One of Vikki's work colleagues is in the choir, and mentioned it was going to be premiered on Radio 3 and to keep an ear out as I like choral music. I adored it, so she got me a copy for my birthday.

(29 March 2010)

brg* Thanks for sending it to me.

I really ought to give C. J. Cherryh another try. I read *Tripoint* years back and my impression of it was confused, although I no longer recall whether that was a comment on Cherryh's writing or my ability as a reader.

Thanks for reprinting the interview with Kaaron Warren in *SET 11*. I still haven't got round to reading *Slights*, which has been on the shelf since I picked it up in the Borders closing-down sale before Xmas, and now I've just bought her latest novel, *Walking the Tree*, along with Rob Holdstock's last novel, *Avilion,* sadly the only one of his Mythago novels I'll now never have signed.

I've also bought a copy of *Solaris* after discovering, to my chagrin, that I didn't have a copy of this on my shelves.

Fascinating article from Pamela Sargent on 'Are Editors Necessary?', but which leaves an equally open question as to whether good editors are an endangered species, and perhaps ought to be collected and preserved by writers who appreciate them.

Darrell Schweitzer and I will have to agree to disagree on the thesis that 'virtually all science fiction is religious to some degree' and how well this is demonstrated by a detailed analysis of Niven and Pournelle's *Inferno* and extrapolating this to the whole genre. That SF concerns itself with the same deep questions as religion tries to answer is not the same thing as contending that SF is religious, any more than contending astrology and astronomy are one and the same because they both deal with the nature of stars and planets. The questions they ask, the answers they give, and the mindsets behind them (the appeal to supernatural agency over a reliance on testable proof) are radically different. I'm not saying no SF is religious in nature; some of it undoubtedly is, and I'd even agree that when SF (or fantasy) that is used to mount a deliberate attack on religion it betrays a religious concern from the opposite direction, but to co-opt the whole of the middle group as 'virtually all' is, for me, a step too far.

Janine Stinson, I'm pleased to see, defines her terms for urban fantasy at the very start. Which is a lot less frustrating than a recent *Locus* issue on the topic, when having started to define urban fantasy in the way I understand it (fantasy in which the idea of the town or city is integral to the work, not just as a scenic backdrop), the editors abandon this barely half a page later and devote the rest of the issue to discussion of the current 'paranormal romance' subgenre. Now I'm sure there are cross-overs between the two, paranormal romances featuring vampires, were-wolves, and the inevitable Kick Ass Heroines (to the extent they even gain their own three letter acronym, KAHs) that only work effectively in the context of the city, but that doesn't make them urban fantasy *per se*, to the point they coopt the whole genre, or else we're going to have to devise another new term to discuss works like Mieville's *Perdido Street Station* and *King Rat*, Swanwick's *The Dragons of Babel*, Bishop's *The Etched City*, and Harrison's *Viriconium*. Oh, did somebody just say 'New Weird'?

(31 March 2010)

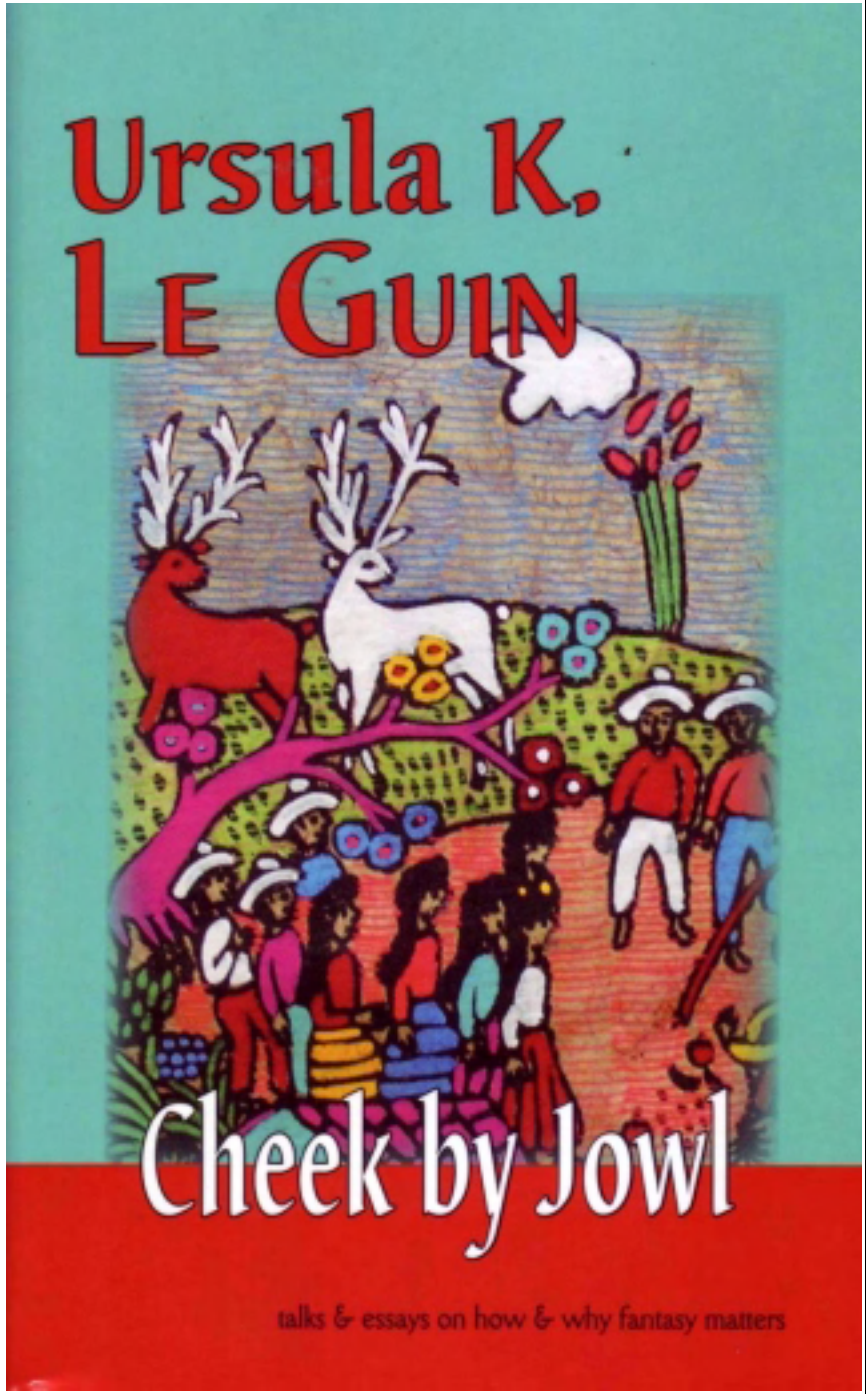
I've seen reviews of Priest's *The Magic: The Story of a Film*, but never even heard of *'IT' Came from Outer Space*. The fact that these come from Priest's own GrimGrin Studios is something that makes them unlikely to turn up on the shelves of my local Waterstones, in which I also drew a blank on Le Guin's *Cheek by Jowl: Talks and Essays on How and Why Fantasy Matters* (Aqueduct Press), which Sue Thomason mentioned in her last contribution to the Prophecy apa.

> ***brg* *Cheek by Jowl* was nominated for a Hugo in 2010 for Best Related Book, and I think it's won one of the other top prizes. I received my copy for Slow Glass Books in late 2010.***

Since I won't be at Eastercon, I'll have to hope these appear on a book table at the BSFA/SFF AGM later this year (which is usually good for critical books) or at NewCon 5 later in the year.

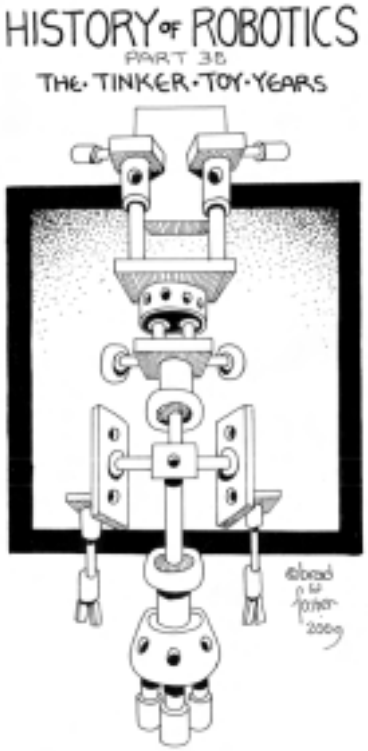
The AGM is where I picked up both Kincaid's rather awkwardly titled *What It Is We Do When We Read Science Fiction* and Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, although I've not yet picked up Clute's less self-explanatory titled *Canary Fever*.

I'm surprised, Bruce, that you omitted to mention Kincaid's book coming out of a series of discussion articles in the *Acnestis* apa a number of years



ago, and which I remember provoked a fair amount of argument and comment. (I've just noticed I'm mentioned in the Acknowledgments page as well, and didn't receive a copy either, although given Beccon's budget and that I'm no longer the reviews editor for *Vector*, I wasn't too surprised or particularly miffed by this omission.)

I have, currently, about 6'6'' of shelf space devoted to critical books on SF and fantasy alone, although there's another foot or so for the various edition of the SF and Fantasy Encyclopedias that are too big or heavy to test the wall fixings, and another yard of *Foundation* and other journals. I sometimes go through phases where it seems I prefer reading *about* SF than reading SF itself, as if the reality of reading the works themselves can't quite match the claims made for them. At that point it's always salutary to pick Blish/Atheling's *The Issue at Hand* off the shelf and remind myself that the supposed Golden Age of SF actually contained a lot of cheap plated tin, and the best of today's SF often outranks it by miles on all levels.



Is a 'treasure', in the context of Bruce's Nova Mob talk and editorial and article in this issue, a book or work that validates one's own view and reading of SF, or one that unexpectedly challenges it and encourages you to engage in an argument with it?

***brg* Of course. But the treasured quality of such books should always be the sparkling quality of prose and unexpected insights offered by the writers, rather than whether the opinions agree or disagree with one's own. I suppose my favourite writers about SF would be David Langford and Christopher Priest, but the difficulty with Dave's work is that often he is forced to review, humorously and ever so politely, works that stick in his craw. I wish somebody would wave money at him (or Chris Priest, or John Clute, or even me) to produce an equivalent of David Pringle's splendid *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels*. Indeed, it's about time Pringle was asked to a *200 Best Novels* (or preferably, *200 Best SF Books*).**

Since I wrote the above paragraph about a year ago, Damien Broderick has produced a new book of '100 Best Novels' as a sequel to Pringle's, and many other critical books, which I must order over the Internet as a Print on Demand book.*

I read critical works for a number of reasons. (I started that sentence by writing two, then three, and then like Monty Python's Spanish Inquisition, kept thinking of and adding more as I went along.) To remind me, and sometimes get a better appreciation, of books I've read and enjoyed; to discover and learn about new, interesting sounding books; for the art and — in the case of writers like Clute — the performance of reviewing and criticism itself; and also to argue with and against, if not with the author then with others who have read and commented on the same book. And while I wouldn't feel confident to challenge someone as sharp and acerbic as Russ, Kincaid's and Mendelsohn's works fall definitely into the latter camp, because they lay out an agenda and argument I can test against my own reading of a lot of the same works. So I can contest Kincaid's 'We' by saying that that might be what he does when he reads science fiction, but it's not always true of me, and therefore of everyone, while admiring his writing when he does engage closely with a topic, and more frequently, an author who he obviously admires and who inspires him, like Keith Roberts, Christopher Priest, Steve Erickson, or Steven Millhauser. In fact Kincaid is at his best in those moments, as well as being one of the few critics to pay them the attention they deserve.

Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics* (which you don't mention, perhaps either because you've not seen it, or because it concentrates on fantasy rather than SF) is structured differently, springboarding from an article 'Towards a Taxonomy of Fantasy' (*Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2002) as an attempt to classify fantasy into five main types (the fifth, 'Irregulars' inevitably being all those that don't fit the first four, and something of a giveaway for the strength and rigour of the argument). Taxonomic games of forcing square pegs into round holes are always easy to pick arguments with, and this one threatens to come apart almost immediately when Mendlesohn admits the genre granddaddy *Lord of the Rings* can be equally a Portal-Quest as an Immersive Fantasy, or even

(for the inhabitants of the Shire) an Intrusion Fantasy. When your ur-text proves so undecidable and ambiguous, you start rolling up your sleeves and readying the green ink.

Critics like Kincaid, Mendlesohn, Langford, and Clute, as well as Broderick, Jones, or Russ are at least those who know SF from the inside. (Gwyneth Jones's *Deconstructing the Starships* (1999, Liverpool) is often as uncompromising and unforgiving as Russ's *The Country You have Never Seen*.)

When academics from outside get involved, the result is often statements of the 'bleedin' obvious' dressed up — or disguised — in incomprehensible jargon. I sometimes wonder if these are really as devoid of original thought as they appear, mere obscurantist smoke bombs, or whether they are intended as firecrackers, thrown into the academic milieu to see what sparks fly.

Ray Wood's 'The Dancing Cyborg' is one of the best articles on SF I've read in ages, and I haven't even watched the *Sarah Connor Chronicles*. But I want to now. Now this is a treasure, and it definitely fits my second definition above, of discovering something new, and interesting. It's one of the most sustained meditations on a single image or sequence that I've come across in ages. And yet I'm astonished that it manages this without once mentioning the equally iconic image of the Maria/robot in *Metropolis*, or C. L. Moore's cyborg dancer in *No Woman Born* (1944, *Astounding*), even if it does relegate Pris and her designer Sebastian's family of automata in *Blade Runner* to a footnote.

I'm left wondering how consciously the series' writers and producers put in all those references and allusions that Wood so carefully unravels and lays out for us, or whether the cyborg/doll image is so firmly embedded in our collective psyche, from the Greek myth of Pygmalion (and even before, perhaps, to God creating Adam out of clay), to the Golem of Prague, and onto Frankenstein's creature and the SF robot and cyborg, that it is all there waiting to be triggered by a single iconic image. If so, it is quite brilliant, and elevates the *Chronicles* from the movie tie-in entertainment series I originally dismissed it as to something approaching art. (Art, I am coming to believe, is designed to evoke an emotional or intellectual reaction without dictating what that reaction should be. It's what separates it from journalism or polemic.)

My fear for the future is not from Artificial Intelligence, which has proved stubbornly resistant to the last 30 or 40 years of research, but that the mobile phone networks that now proliferate across the planet will one day link up and wake up, like SkyNet, and give rise to a form of Twitter-induced Artificial Inanity.

(3 April 2010)

DARRELL SCHWEITZER
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First, a subversive thought. Consider Jan Stinson's definition of 'urban fantasy' as 'a fantasy work featuring a contemporary setting in which supernatural rules and entities are real in the human realm (whether known to humans or not), and the main characters are either supernaturals or humans, and are often strong female characters as well'. I suppose it depends on how you feel about the character of Mina, but otherwise that strikes me as a letter-perfect description of *Dracula* (1897). It also fits *Conjure Wife* (1943) quite well, not to mention much of the other contents of *Unknown Worlds* and the popular fantasy of the '30s and '40s generally. Thorne Smith surely qualifies. Jan has actually made the slip of failing to define 'urban' fantasy settings as 'urban', but merely as 'contemporary' (to the authors and the first generation of readers presumably), so by that definition, *The Golden Ass* (about AD 180) is

also an 'urban fantasy', for all most of it takes place in semi-rural Greece.

In other words, the label is being used far too inclusively and very sloppily by a lot of people who may even think they've invented something new, rather like the second-wave Steampunks who don't even seem to be aware of what was being done in the 1990s. In publishing, what we're seeing is that what was called 'paranormal romance' a couple years ago is starting to be called 'urban fantasy', as if this is a new category, and the work of Emma Bull (whom Jan cites), Charles de Lint, Will Shetterly, and others of their generation never existed.

Lyn McConchie's 'Illegible History' reminds me of an anecdote I heard recently from a teacher, who taught one of those non-credit remedial courses — called 'bonehead' courses by teachers — so common in American universities, which are used to bring alleged high school graduates up to a level where they can do college work. 'Bonehead English' is the commonest, for educating subliterate freshmen to the level where they can read a textbook or write a paragraph or two on a test. This one happened to be Bonehead Math, which was, presumably, mostly simple arithmetic. For some reason, I forget why, the students had to mark the time of their arrival. It was rapidly discovered that many of them did not know how to read a clock with hands. They could only read a digital clock. Eventually a digital clock had to be acquired.

Now if I were teaching that course, I would have stopped and given the students one extra bit of remedial catch-up. I'd teach them something I learned in kindergarten or the first grade — how to tell time!

Sometimes it's not that cultural change has made something obsolete, but that the people are just plain ignorant. Handwriting, I think, began to deteriorate with the advent of the typewriter. Before then, writers had to turn in 'fair copy' in what was called 'printer's hand', which was a clear form of writing a printer could set type from. I live in Philadelphia. Souvenir replicas of the Declaration of Independence are sold to tourists and schoolchildren everywhere. I have one, on pseudo-aged paper, as these things always are. I cannot help but notice that once one learns (as any literate person can quite quickly) to compensate for the eighteenth-century long-S, the tiny handwriting, which was done with a quill pen, is extremely legible. I also note that nineteenth-century handwriting, such as we seen in books about the American Civil War, also tends to be considerably more legible than much twentieth- century handwriting. It's true that some handwriting styles go out of fashion with time — Elizabethan handwriting is quite impossible — but I think what we're seeing here is just a breakdown in skill and aesthetics. People stopped caring what their handwriting looked like. It was seen as something purely utilitarian. With the advent of the inexpensive telephone call, many people stopped writing letters anyway.

Of course there were such matters as individual skill and style. H. P. Lovecraft, who wrote enormous amounts of letters by hand, did not have very legible handwriting. Sprague de Camp described his struggles going over mounds of Lovecraftian epistles with a magnifying glass, trying to decipher the eldritch squiggles. (I visited Sprague while he was writing his Lovecraft biography. He had an entire desk covered with xeroxes of Lovecraftian correspondence, to the depth of one or two feet. He read all those letters and made notes of their contents.) Sprague's own handwriting, incidentally, was immaculate.

I will confess that mine is not, but when I was in college (1970–76) the handwriting of essay tests and the like was still the norm. I actually had to *ask permission* to typewrite term papers, as this was a relatively rare skill, and raised suspicions of having availed oneself of a term-paper factory. I preferred to type. It was faster, neater, and easier. I was already in fandom, and quite accustomed to typewriting long letters of comment like this one, which would have been quite a tedious job if I'd had to handwrite them neatly and legibly. So I am part of the problem too. I began to regard handwriting largely as something I wrote quickly, as scribbled notes for my own eyes only. I'd never gotten high marks for penmanship in grade school. Now I disregarded most of what I'd been taught (something called the Palmer Method, which involved lots of graceful loops, as I recall) and wrote lazily, like everyone else. I still *can* write clearly and legibly, either to address a piece of mail or even to fill in the caption of a cartoon I've drawn, but, like most people, I otherwise don't bother.

With some younger people today, it may be that they just don't have the patience or attention span to puzzle out semi-legible handwriting. Otherwise the answer might be quite simple: teach penmanship. Do students really not hand in written test papers any more?

Why should Jeff Hamill apparently regard it as a surprise, let alone a 'shortcoming', that Stanislaw Lem dismissed Marxism? How could Lem

have done anything else? He had, after all, suffered under a Marxist regime for most of his adult life, and one which was imposed on his country by foreign military conquest. He knew its hypocrisies and its monumental failures intimately. He must have appreciated the bitter irony that the whole Soviet Empire came crashing down as the result of a Revolt of the Workers, who, once they found their strength in Solidarity, realised they had nothing to lose but their chains. Of course this was 'the Stalinist official dogma' or some variation of it, i.e. Marxism in *real life*, as opposed to some philosophical abstraction that only exists in American universities. Lem, in other words, went along with the majority of mankind and cast Marxism into the scrapheap of history, along with Divine Right of Kings, the Mandate of Heaven, and the tribal laws of Attila the Hun. Are there any real Marxists left in government anywhere on Earth? Sure, in Russia there are a few old party bosses who miss their special privileges. Some of the rank-and-file feel they were done out of their promised pensions, without stopping to wonder how the bankrupt state is to pay for them. Meanwhile, 'Red' China has become an economic superpower by the simple expedient of discarding Marxism — and Maoism, for that matter. North Korea is a kind of divine-right monarchy, so I am not sure that really counts. Fidel Castro seems to be sincere. Hugo Chavez seems sincerely determined to repeat the mistakes of generations past. (He will, I predict, bankrupt his country and then be deposed.) That's about it. Even Vietnam is struggling toward party-regulated capitalism on the Chinese model. Surely Marx must be accounted as not only one of the least successful philosophers of all time, but one of the greatest of all architects of human misery. How could Lem, being an intelligent and observant man, and also someone interested in science, do other than reject Marxism as too mystical, too elitist, too dogmatic, and impos- sible to implement in real life? Quite simply, Lem knew pseudo-science when he saw it.

brg* Did Marxism ever have anything much to do with Marx? I wish I could say I had read Marx's works, but it's my impression that his detailed analysis of the problems of capitalism were accurate during the nineteenth century, and could be applied equally now.

On the further subject of Lem, I think the only way you can restore the value of your otherwise defaced copy of the Walker edition of *Solaris* is to become so famous that the annotations will add to the value of the book. If it were a book written in by, say, Damon Knight before he wrote a review of it, then it would become an important associational copy. Handwriting by just anyone is defacement. Handwriting by a famous critic makes it a unique copy worthy of study.

My own approach to this is to lay a piece of paper in the book, on which I make notes. Sometimes in the last I have been known to scribble notes in pencil on the back of the review slip that comes with the book, but for the collector even that is a defacement unless the notes are by somebody extremely famous. Laid-in notes by any run-of-the-mill critic, even me, would probably add to the value of the book in the used-book market, as an associational item, as long as the book itself is not defaced.

(30 March 2010)

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I retired from Wilmington Trust. In a way I have Gotten Away From It All. My disconnect from current science fiction might be explained by the following:

- Film: the '40s
- SF: the '50s
- Music: the '60s

to me are the parameters of excitement.

Of course it is said the golden age of science fiction is 13, and the golden age of pop might be 19, but that wouldn't explain my alignment with movies that were made before I was born. SF's loss of me is compensated for by the second most astonishing thing in the last 30 years (the first is the web and internet). I refer to mainstream culture taking up the ideas that were the domain of a handful of propeller beanie nerds in the '50s. SF is everywhere now. Of course, 90 per cent of the movies, TV, and comics are crap, but as Ted Sturgeon said, '90 per cent of everything is crap.' Note: I am thrilled and amazed by the publishing of his stories in a uniform series as well as the Phil Dick Library of America volumes. I will download *SET*; sorry my finances don't permit a real subscription. Online makes good sense compared to hard copy and postage. Thanks for keeping me in the loop.

(31 March 2010)

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As someone who reads a lot of women writers, I found *SFC* 11 fascinating.

I remember getting my copy of that first *Women of Wonder* anthology, and it was good. So was the next one.

As I suspect you do not, I do read a fair amount of urban fantasy; at its best it can be a delight. But there's an awful lot of crap out there, not least in the kind of 'Occult Romance' field, where apparently the ability to write rather poor sentences seems to almost be a qualification. I did read *War for the Oaks* (Emma Bull), and remember it as a lot of fun. In the end, though, the only book by her (in collaboration with Steven Brust) that continues to stand out is *Freedom and Necessity*: nineteenth-century urban fantasy? I have read some of Kelley Armstrong's novels, and they aren't bad (and the sentences aren't bad, either). There are far too many vampire romances out there, and most aren't very good. The one series that continues to deliver is Charlaine Harris's 'Sookie Stackhouse' stories, mostly because Sookie is an intelligent, sharply observant narrator (and Harris knows her grammar: this is the copy-editor inside the reader in me talking). When his publisher told him it was what was selling, Guy Gavriel Kay wrote *Ysabel*, a kind of urban fantasy, but with the kind of historical–mythical depth one associates with his writing, and is very good indeed. His new novel *Under Heaven* returns to his historical writing; there is little if any 'magic' in it, but perhaps the sections dealing with the life in the capital city and court of his alternate Tang dynasty China could be called a kind of 'urban fantasy'.

Lyn McConchie's 'Illegible History' struck a chord with me, not so much because I am interested in fannish history (I'm not really that kind of fan, but I do understand: the library at University of Alberta is collecting a lot of pop culture, and is getting some big fanzine collections precisely for their historical interest), but because I can't even read my own writing from some time ago (it was always bad), and I do want to recall some things I wrote in my journals.

Pamela Sargent's article is directed toward SF&F publishing, but, as someone who edits (mostly poetry, but lately mysteries and even a straight piece of fiction) for a small press (where, yes, we cannot afford to pay freelance editors, except in some very special cases), I agree with all her general points. As a reader, especially with some of these huge novels that come our way (especially by either first-time writers or stars, i.e. people who need the help she talks about as they are beginners, or people who have become bestsellers, so the publishers figure they can save on editing because their books will sell no matter what), I find that I am continually 'editing' as I read, which does take away from my readerly enjoyment. It's especially debilitating when you find yourself cutting sentence by sentence at unnecessary modifiers, etc. No novelist myself, I would not be so good at asking the necessary questions about story arc, where to put certain actions etc, but when looking at a MS, one does try to think that way and can sometimes ask the right question. My experience has been that if, as editor, one asks an author either 'What do you think, is that working here?' or 'There isn't quite enough characterisation for this figure; can you add a bit somewhere?', the author will be grateful for the query and jump to fix things. But that other response, the one that doesn't know from the inside what the writer has planned, can often warn of missed opportunities, little things missing. Sargent's comments about the state of editing in 2009, about the even greater problems today as cutbacks and attitudes of the big multinationals that own the publishers undermine any editing process (and dismiss editors), are, alas, dead on.

I've read a lot of C. J. Cherryh over the years, and I have enjoyed most of what I've read. I recently reread *Cyteen*, about which I wrote an article once, especially about the various levels of politics at play in it. I also read *Regenesis*, its fascinating sequel. Where the former took up two decades from before the death of the 'original' Ari Emory, the latter covers less than a year after the 'new' Ari takes over Rejeune, although through the notes the earlier Ari has prepared for her copy, we also get a lot more information about what has been happening on Cyteen and among the various factions on Earth, Alliance and Union. Her under-

standing of how politics works is one of Cherryh's strengths, and is also at play in the 'Foreigner' series, which is perhaps my favourite of hers. Cherryh tends to construct fairy human(oid) aliens, but they are different, and the differences are the fulcrum on which her complex plots turn. In the Foreigner books, it's Bren's slowly growing comprehension of how the culture of the atevi is tied to their 'hardwiring' and works marks him as a kind of human culture hero, an Outsider who can move among many different cultures to create situations where communication and peace rather than war are made possible.

I've long been a Le Guin fan, and so it was interesting to read about the failures of various filmmakers to do right by the Earthsea tales. They should work. But I've often thought that about a lot of SF&F, and the failures remain for all to see. I've always enjoyed her thinking in essays, too, so I appreciated Gillian Polack's article on her thinking in all her work.

Darrell Schweitzer is always interesting, if somewhat infuriating to me. I remember him coining 'non-functional word pattern', and being pissed by it then, as now. But then I read a lot of modern poetry. I like narrative, and certainly enjoy it, but remember finding much of the so-called New Wave more interesting than what resisted it. As he admits, there was a general gain, so that the best SF&F writers today just construct more complex and interesting narratives because they take the writing seriously at all levels, including taking care of their sentences. There's something of a disconnect between his reiterated arguments against New Wave and his defending Kelly Link against today's guttersnipes (where does SF belong again?) in much the way that some of us defended earlier writers that way. Martin Morse Wooster also has that problem. Of Delany's novels he's only read *Dhalgren*? Which he's certainly correct about, but as far as I'm concerned the earlier novels are just fine as stories, and the four volumes of the Neveryon tales are full of complex and delightful stories. But then, as you know, I am big on Delany (as I seem to recall you're not). I also found his modernist novella, 'Atlantis: Model 1924,' an amazing read.

Unlike Patrick McGuire I have enjoyed almost all the Dan Simmons I have read. But, despite all, I won't be reading either of the Niven–Pournelle Inferno books.

(20 April 2010)

Re George Zebrowski: I'd agree about the importance of the editors who suddenly came into their own in the '70s. Terry Carr was very important to the new ways/waves of SF in the US, and his influence still lingers. As Zebrowski says, 'What is denied too often today is the chance for readers and viewers to grow — to go on to more demanding fare, in their SF and other media.' Then there's what he calls 'an authentic package', although I'm not sure about that term 'package'. It's an intriguing concept, but, as he says, publishers have the final say. I wonder if the Brits are just better at this?

I thoroughly enjoyed Ray Wood's 'The Dancing Cyborg,' although I missed *The Sarah Connor Chronicles*. It's an interesting argument, and certainly works partly because of his personal commitment to finding that 'very large image for science fiction'. The historical references, and the larger allusions also help. This is truly the kind of piece one always hopes to find in *Steam Engine Time*. It might be of interest to check out Charles Stross's *Saturn's Children*, as it is set in a future where all humanity has died, and the solar system is 'inhabited' by various 'self-aware robots', including the narrator, 'designed as an empathic sex-slave', and profoundly wishing that there might be a human being to service, but nevertheless caught up in political games that take her from Earth to Venus to Mercury and then to the outer system, in the kind of wild (idea-laden) adventure Stross is becoming famous for. Great fun, and (to anticipate your own comments in general) well written as/for genre fiction.

Your 'the treasure hunt': I have to admire, with some wincing, your ability to collect so obsessively, Bruce; I simply don't go that far. But your tale of finding, every so often, that moment of discovery and treasure is itself a delight; and then there's that question of trying to find the kind of criticism that helps to satisfy the continuing desire to find another piece of treasure. I can sympathise, but I am not quite so hard on either the works or myself. For example, I share the desire to read books in which the writing is superb, matching the narrative push and the scope of the ideas, but I can enjoy a fiction includes just some of those aspects. I feel I found a lot of what I want in my latest delight, Michael Swanwick's *The Dragons of Babel*, as he is a stylist, but also knows how to stand genre on its head while somehow paying homage to its deepest desires.

I wonder, though, about your comment on '[w]hat we expect of a true critic': I can see that someone who can 'make a pattern of the whole

field' might be somewhat awe-inspiring, but I am no longer sure that I would find such a critic the most useful to me. I say this with, among others, Northrop Frye in mind; he certainly had the big ideas about literature, and was able to fit everything into his system, but, for me, eventually the individual great works he forced into his square holes were more interesting for their specific rough edges. So perhaps to make that pattern and then talk about each individual work in terms of how it fits will tend to lose focus on the individuality of the specific qualities of a fiction. I have come to be most interested in the aspects of a work of art that mark its separation from others of its 'kind.'

brg* I have to agree with you rather than me here, because I realise I gave the wrong impression in my article in *SET* 12. I avoid the kinds of critical books that offer Giant Generalisations (and Vast Overarching Structures). My favourite critics are people like Arnold Kettle, E. M. Forster, Henry James, Edmund Wilson, and Gore Vidal, and even Australia's own Peter Craven, who concentrate on the details of books, but do so in a way that shows they have read everything in a particular field. Since the end of the seventies I've been reluctant to call myself an SF 'critic', because it has become impossible to keep up with more than a tiny percentage of published SF. Even so, as soon as I decided I could not 'read the field', I became much better at putting out my antenna to detect authors I would enjoy if I had time to read them. This principle has served me well. I am still not a speed reader.

As to your lists in the Editorial, well I'll take them up later, in my response to **brg**. I do hope your knee is better, that you continue to eat properly, and that you still have lots of paying work, even if it slows down the production of your fine zines. I must get hold of *The Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*; but I have now read *Gentlemen of the Road*, which was great fun without being any too deep, nor does it ever promise to be. What it does do is both emulate Leiber's style, while going it just a bit better in terms of an underlying Yiddish-joke quality that subtly insinuates an undertone of cultural loss and sadness.

(11 May 2010)

MATTHEW DAVIS
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Over the last year or so I've been browsing through my DVD archive of the *New Yorker*. Among other things I've been tracking down the appearance of material about SF, fantasy, and supernatural fiction up to the end of the '70s. I don't know that I'll ever make anything of it. In the late '60s and '70s Gerald Jonas was a one-man propagandising force, and the magazine published quite a lot about Arthur C. Clarke and *2001*.

I enjoy reading *The New Yorker*, but it has an unrealistic reputation, which is only enhanced by science fiction's cultural cringe. *The New Yorker* publishes many great and respected writers, but unless they're in-house staff who only write for the magazine, almost any author you can point at has produced his or her best work outside of the magazine. Many of the things SF is interested in and does are things *The New Yorker* will never be interested in. Its attitude to science is a million miles from the essays of Willy Ley, Asimov, or Bruce Stirling. *The New Yorker*'s expression of the individual in society and the products of culture are also quite different from those to be found in SF mags. Tom Disch is probably the only person in SF who could genuinely say that he personally was unacceptable to *The New Yorker*. And that was because Robert Gottleib was editor in the '80s, and when Tom was kicked out of Knopf in the late '70s Gottleib is on record making a dreadful vowing to do everything in his power to destroy Tom's career.

The veneer of decorum and sophistication the magazine has created for itself has much to do with achieving a level of acceptability to its enormous subscription base in the heartlands of America. You point at Lem being published in *The New Yorker*. I would argue that his work was most likely published because it fitted in with the glazed parodies and refracted satirical short stories that George Trow and Veronica Geng were publishing at that time.

As to what I've read over 2009: I don't usually think that way. But here's what I can recall, in no particular order:

- **Simon Raven**'s 'Alms for Oblivion' decalogue, his book on the 'English Gentleman', and the collections of non-fiction *Boys Will be Boys* and *The World of Simon Raven*.
  'Alms for Oblivion' is quite good, covering a cast of upper middle class moderately disgraceful characters from immediately post-WWII to the mid '70s. Briskly and efficiently written (ah, the virtues of a good classical education), they're quite good at uncovering the attitudes of a whole social tranches, and are sometimes quite funny, often well plotted, and each book usually has some excursion into the uncanny

and contributes to an overarching philosophy about the decline of contemporary Britain. Two of the books suffer from not really contributing to the larger story, as during the period in real time that they cover Raven was off elsewhere and so hasn't quite got the material to hand. Apparently in later books Raven becomes markedly odd, as a refreshing frankness about sexual appetites in 'Alms' turns into a relishing of the homosexual corruption of teenage boys, and his idea of evil becomes distinctly gamey. However, Stephen Fry now makes a lot more sense: Simon Raven riding hard on G. K. Chesterton.

- **Thomas Bernhard:** *Concrete*; *Wittgenstein's Nephew*; *The Loser*; *Cutting Timber*; *Old Masters*; *Yes*; *On the Mountain*.
  Relentless indignant monologues denouncing the gross appalling offence of the world and everyone in it, where life is a painful incurable disease, and society made of ignorant hypocrites whose every action cruelly oppresses the few sensitive people. Lengthy sentences where the same words and phrases recur like a furious cuckolded husband angrily slamming his hammer at wonky nails. But his obsessive yet all-encompassing contempt, almost breathless in its torrent, is horribly hilarious. Shaw would surely include him in the 'futile pessimists who imagine they are confronting a barren and unmeaning world when they are only contemplating their own worthlessness' category.
- Everything I could lay my hands on by **Kenneth Tynan**:
  all the books, letters, diaries, and assorted biographies and memoirs by wives and academics, as well as lots of uncollected stuff in *The New Yorker*, a cultural diary throughout 1968 in *The Observer*, and various uncollected pieces in which he airs his fetishes. Tynan's energy makes more sense when you realise he largely stopped reviewing just after the age of 35, whereas most of the theatre critics at any given time don't get started until their mid 40s, and have usually been in place for some 15–35 years subsequent to that. Tynan's work has more of the spirit of the *NME* about it. (My thoughts, at horrendously great length are at http://www. ukjarry. talktalk.net/tynan.htm).
- **Garnett's *Lady into Fox:***
  which is as good as everyone says. It rather recalls 'If you love somebody, let them go, for if they return, they were always yours. And if they don't, they never were'.
- The first 10 years of **John Updike**'s short stories in *The New Yorker*: most of them are suffused in a barely suppressed religious quality that accepts God's creation and the institution of married life as worth celebrating — hence the patented glossy shimmering Updike style. There a few stories in which the lead character suddenly loses his or her faith, and the annihilating vision of a destructive derelict paranoid world, marred by trash and confusion, is precisely and emphatically P. K. Dick. So Dick is the anti-Updike and Updike is the anti-Dick. There's more to the latter half of twentieth-century America and its culture than that encompassed by these two, but each is ying to the other's yang.
- So I also read the later **Philip K. Dick** short stories and finally got around to *The Man in the High Castle*.
- **John Gray:**
  some 15 or so different books I shan't list because he's not bloody worth it. Over the years Gray's political and supposed philosophical opinions have clogged up most of the British newspapers and journals. His current thoughts often seemed to contradict his previous statements, and in general he intrigued but irritated me. He's shifted from liberal to Thatcherite to Blairist to apocalyptic naysayer. I thought it might be interesting to chase him down. But it proved to be not so much an intellectual career as the equivalent of Mr Toad's Wild Ride, veering from side to side, no apologies or self-awareness. More often than not, the position he's attacking is one he held only a couple of years earlier, with the only attempt to suggest that he was right to have held that opinion then, but you'd have to be stupid to hold it now, is a belief in the tides of history to which one ought to intellectually accede. Pfaaughh! is the only appropriate response, but at least he has no hold over me now. Although it still peeves me that he does bring Isaiah Berlin and Schopenhauer into disrepute by association by getting his nasty fingerprints all over them.
- I read several books of poetry by **Roy Fisher**.
  I happened on him by accident. 'Birmingham is what I think with'. What animals are to Hughes, tunnels, embankments, canals, and factory walls are to Fisher, capturing the industrial ghastliness of the Black Country: 'the exhausts patter on the dirt'. Unlike postwar English 'Movement' poets, Fisher is modern: choppy stanzas, disassembling perception, but not quite the solipsistic incomprehensibility of some American high modernism. Some are prose poems, with extended semi-surreal images rolling across each other that wouldn't appear out of place in Moorcock's *New Worlds*.

- I read **Michael Donaghy**'s few books of poetry. If you appreciate Michael Chabon sentence by sentence then you'll also like Donaghy. His employment of metaphor, self-awareness, and his use of myths and stories ought to also make him quite popular with the Neil Gaiman adoring masses.

  brg* I thought I was the only person not a member of the 'Neil Gaiman adoring masses'. I will look out for Michael Donaghy.

- I read eight or nine books of poetry by **Carol Ann Duffy** covering her career to date. Which led to:

- A collection of **Caryl Churchill**'s plays from the 1970s.
  Largely interesting but no more than that. If she didn't exist you'd have to make her up to fill a necessary gap in 1970 British theatre and culture. Unfortunately, for all the intelligence, research and composition, I don't think she has great lines. I'm sure actors can get quite a lot out of her on stage and really make things happen. But she doesn't leap off the page like Stoppard or Alan Bennett or Peter Barnes, whom I can all gleefully reread.

- I dug out my fairly comprehensive **Ronald Searle** collection and spent a lot of time just running my eyeballs over his drawings. I did write a lengthy piece about it, but the three magazines that I thought might be interested all folded last year. So since the internet will accommodate any length, I made my piece more comprehensive (even bloody longer), scanned about a 100 pictures and posted this all online at http://ukjarry.blogspot. com/2010/02/ronald-searle-1.html.

  brg* Since I compiled this letter column Ronald Searle has died at the age of 91. Some people you see are dead you thought were dead decades ago; others, like Searle, shock you with their deaths although they reached 91.

- I've lost the reference, but I found a great site online that had posted hundreds of **underground comix**. So that was an education. Crumb, Kim Deitch, S. Clay Wilson, Justin Green, Bill Griffith, Art Spiegelman, Sharon Rudahl, Jay Lynch, Jaxon, Greg Irons. *Zap*, *Last Gasp*, *Rip Off*, *Air Pirates*, *Arcade*, *Comix Book*, *Weird Sex*, *Young Lust*, *Bijou*, and scores and dozens more. A broad array of humour, satire, surrealism, horror, and science fiction. I also found a few who intrigued me whose careers came to a sudden stop. Andy Martin, who did a very good surreal strip for *Yellow Dog* in the style of Ralph Steadman and Gerald Scarfe, seems to have pretty much vanished from the history books. Jim Osborne did horror comics in various styles of illustration familiar from *Weird Tales*, but as his art got better and better his subject matter got more offensive and sordid, until at the end in the mid '70s it's like Aubrey Beardsley illustrating *I Spit on Your Grave*.

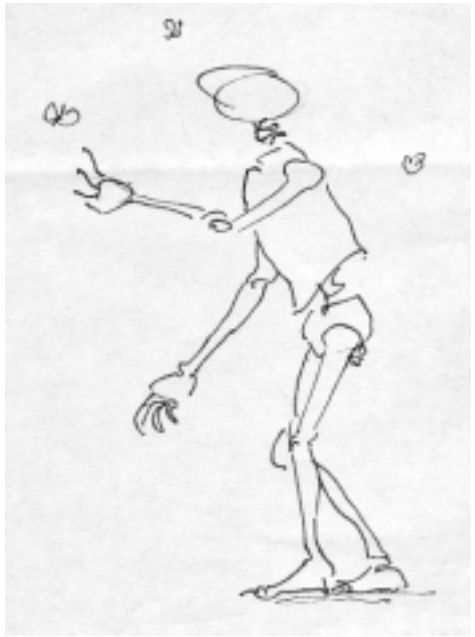
- I can eat fantastic quantities of chocolate, so about 15–20 minutes a day on the exercycle just about compensates. In the course of pedalling to nowhere I've read most of the first five years of *Private Eye* (early '60s) and the first couple of years of *National Lampoon* (early '70s). If something can make me laugh after I've passed the 12-minute mark, that's a genuinely great piece.

  Early years of ***Private Eye*** are totally unlike the magazine of the last 30–40 years. Totally different layout. Christopher Booker produces longish pieces where he's really thought about his point of view, the piece's format, and what jokes to make. There are all sorts of great cartoons and illustrations by Willie Rushton. Silliness by Peter Cook. All sorts of stuff by outside contributors like Scarfe, Steadman, Spike Milligan, N. F. Simpson. Nowadays the mag is topical but not satire in the sense of it being a worked-upon crafted piece. Shame.

  National Lampoon starts off rather poorly, but is then great for about the next five years. Its weakness is the opposite of *Private Eye*. It's a full-length magazine, so the danger is for pieces to get flabby and fat to fill out pages. Its contributors are much younger than *Private Eye*'s by the late '60s–early '70s, and so much more accurate in pinpointing everything that was stupid, crass, and hypocritical about the hippies and baby-boomers who would come to dominate the next 30 years of mass culture. It's also of interest to SF fans. A couple of issues are specifically devoted to Horror, Science Fiction, and Visions of the Future. Quite a few pieces are also pseudo-histories, mock articles, or other playing about with formats and extrapolations of contemporary issues that wouldn't look out of place in SF mags and anthologies of the early '70s. Sturgeon and Ed Bryant have stories in the mag. When Michael Parry looked fit to be England's answer to Roger Elwood in the 70s he anthologised a number of Chris Miller's raunchier SF-type stories. And when the editors of the mag needed to fill a couple of pages, almost every piece of fiction by some new writers is usually in an obvious SF vein. All of which shows how SF had

permeated youth culture.

- From browsing *National Lampoon* and *New Yorker*, I found a strange writer, **George W. S. Trow**, who was important to both. Most of his stuff lies uncollected in the two magazines. He wrote parodies, reportage, cultural criticism ('The Context of No Context'), and short fiction, in his slightly idiosyncratic emphatic way. He's fascinating because all his individual elements never quite cohere: upper class WASP preppy, devotee of New York's black lifestyles, rigid cultural snob, and homosexual. Whatever he writes there's always some element of self-awareness that is haring in a contradictory direction, compounded by his unmistakable writing style. More than you'd ever want to know is here: http:// ukjarry.blogspot.com/2009/10/george-ws-trow-1943-2006.html.



- **Nicholson Baker:** *Box of Matches*; *The Anthologist*.
  I enjoy Baker. In the case of the latter book, having read around various poetry American blogs this year, the character of the narrator seemed quite authentic. Maybe it's because of the whole MFA business in American universities, but there's this situation believing that being a poet is something essential and innate, while also insisting that it's something proven by the whole accredited process. The idea of prosody that is expounded in the book is a hook to hang it on, but you wouldn't tolerate it for five minutes from someone real sat across the table.
- Several big histories of the 1970s: ***When the Lights Went Out*** about Britain didn't quite manage to successfully alternate between detailed history and retrospective reportage. ***Strange Days*** by Francis Wheen is a hilarious roundup of paranoia in the '70s. ***The 70s: They Were Brilliant*** proved a rather weak grab-bag of cultural ephemera and names from the times.
- **Edmund White**'s memoir *City Boy* was a genial literary and sexual tour of New York city and White's career in the '70s. While the bit that got the papers interested were his interactions with Susan Sontag, I was much more horrorstruck by his stories about Harold Brodsky. I kept stumbling across references to Brodsky all last year in recent reviews and essays. I have a horrible suspicion that that means the great cultural subconscious is preparing to inflict upon us some attempted Harold Brodsky revival. God help us all.
- I read a couple of anthologies of assorted **Henry James short stories.**
  James's style has certain virtues, but sometimes the circumlocutions can be rather unnecessary and I was rather taken aback when one in this category was exactly the same as one I use because of my stammer. Makes me reassess his style and his attitude to self-expression, and whether he had some speech impediment. I can't be bothered to give myself over to Leon Edel's multivolume biography to find out, though.
- **Saul Bellow:** *Collected Short Stories*; *Seize the Day*; *Herzog*.
  So much detail, trying to incorporate the plenitude of the world, jostling adjectives, as protagonists free-associate and slip into retrospection and reveries, so that the task of discrimination is the Bellovian necessity for the reader, not his characters. But not the numinous piety of Updike or Nabokov. His characters struggle to persevere in the world, and their overweening sympathy for themselves. So much detail about his characters' faces : 'Through the face we apprehend, not the bodily life of a man, but the life of his soul'.
- **Datlow's *Poe* anthology**
  which I really read only for my requisite dose of Kim Newman-delivered nerdgasm.
- **Heinrich Von Kleist**'s short fiction
  to which I have nothing to add that nobody else hasn't already said. Classics for a reason. But his depiction of a world where people are destroyed by the conflicting and implacable demands of religion, nationalism, sex, family, and fate do rather recall much that was best about Tom Disch.

I'm sure there's more, but that's all I can recall. Lord only knows what you make of it. Lord only knows what I make of it.

(10 April 2010)

brg* Some people read more quickly than I do, and you are one of them. Maybe you read books from midnight until 2 a.m. instead of watching DVDs and Blu-rays, as I do. Maybe you spend much of the day commuting. My years of commuting, 1965–73, were the years when I read most of my favourite major books.

MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER
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I thought both the Pamela Sargent and George Zebrowski articles on the relationship between editors and writers were quite interesting. I speak as someone who has always been a mundane writer and editor: I don't write fiction, and I've only edited one novel. (I don't think I have the ability to tell a novelist that there are problems with her plot structure.) But I've always prided myself on being able to do both jobs well. I've always found that being both a writer and an editor helps me on both sides of the publishing fence. I tell writers I edit, 'I'm a writer, so I won't over-edit your manuscript.' I tell editors, 'I'm an editor, so I know how to be a reasonable writer.' (For example, I know that screaming fits to your editor are always counterproductive.)

Pamela Sargent suggests that the relation of editor and writer is comparable to doctor and patient. Might I suggest that the relationship of editor to writer–editor is that of a psychiatrist analysing another psychiatrist? I know what good editing is, and I know when I've been edited badly. But *everyone* needs to be edited. Writers have a right to complain when the editor bungles the job. For example, when my book *Great Philanthropic Mistakes* went to one editor, all she cared about was insisting that I put page numbers at the end of every article I cited. I was always taught to put page numbers for book references, since you might look at the book, but that articles were short enough that page numbers were unnecessary. I complained mightily, and her decisions were overturned. (A subsequent editor turned out to do a very good job.)

Sargent's question about whether 'editor' has been replaced by 'manuscript herder' is a very good one. After all, we now have an award — Editor (Long Form) — where readers do not know how much line editing acquisition editors actually do. I believe most Hugo voters think the award is for 'the editor who bought more books that I like than his competitors'. Line-editing skill has nothing to do with winning this Hugo. All that matters to the Hugo voter is which authors are in the Hugo-winning editor's portfolio.

George Zebrowski's article was also provocative. He neglects the one writer–editor still standing: Stanley Schmidt. In fact, all of *Analog*'s editors since 1938 — Campbell, Bova, and Schmidt — have been writer–editors. I'm such a fitful reader of *Analog* that I don't really know how Schmidt's continued writing career affects his editorial judgments, and I've never seen anything from any writer of today who explains how Schmidt's advice makes his prose better. Maybe that's because Schmidt's such a self-effacing guy that we underestimate his achievements. (In 2011 Schmidt will have edited *Analog* longer than John W. Campbell did.)

I'll pass on one editing joke. In Robert Harris's *The Ghost,* the hero is given an awful draft of the memoirs of Prime Minister Adam Lang and asked what he thought of it. 'The words "Hiroshima" and "1945" come to mind ...' Any book editor has seen manuscripts this bad.

As someone who collects books about SF, of course I found Bruce Gillespie's piece of interest. Carl Freedman's *Conversations With Ursula K. Le Guin* is part of a long series of interview collections that the University Press of Mississippi has done over the past 20 years with American literary figures. (I own an early 1990s collection of *Conversations With Tom Wolfe.)* Freedman also edited *Conversations With Isaac Asimov* in 2005, and last year published *Conversations With Samuel R. Delany.* Other people have edited volumes in this series, collecting interviews with Ray Bradbury and Octavia Butler. The books in this interview series are attractive, but limited in scope because they deliberately exclude the science fiction press, but include far too many interviews from obscure but pretentious literary quarterlies. Surely an academic assembling an interview collection would track down pieces from *Science Fiction Chronicle*, *Locus*, *Foundation*, and some prozines. Freedman does not use these sources, although in his Delany collection he does reprint an Adam Roberts interview from the revived *Argosy* and Jayme Lynn Blaschke's interview from his underrated 2005 collection *Voices of Vision*.

I'm sure you would be interested in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Cheek by Jowl,*

a little book published by the feminist Aqueduct Press last year that collects recent articles she has written on fantasy and children's literature, many from publications librarians read. The title essay is an over 50-page article about fiction with animals in it, including books that realistically try to portray animals' lives, novels where animals and humans interact, and fantasies with animals in them. She is highly enthusiastic about Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and the novels of Ernest Thompson Seton. She also is good at skewering Philip Pullman, noting that the relations between humans and daemons in the 'His Dark Materials' trilogy changes so drastically in the three books that dramatic tension and logical coherence are eliminated.

I'm glad Bruce decided to bring back his 'best of' lists. I love these lists, and one reason why I grabbed a stack of *Metaphysical Review*s at the titanic fanzine giveaway in Glasgow in 2005 was to see some of his lists from the 1980s. I'm glad he likes Norman Lebrecht; Lebrecht's book on conductors, *The Maestro Myth,* is superb and a very funny explanation as to why you would not want to work for Arturo Toscanini. I also see that in America Simon Winchester's *Bomb Book and Candle* was renamed *The Man Who Discovered China.* But in the best mysteries of the decade, who is Garry Disher and why is he as good as Lehane, Rendell, or Le Carre?

(29 March 2010)

brg* Garry Disher is my favourite among the generation of Australian mystery/detective/crime writers who have become popular during the last 30 years. Others are more popular, especially Sydney's Peter Corris and Melbourne's Kerry Greenwood, and some, such as Ballarat's Peter Temple, are more stylish. But Disher lives down on the Mornington Peninsula, is mainly interested in the vicissitudes of the lives of ordinary people, and has a good plain style that includes neither clutter nor clichés. I have no idea whether our mystery/detective/crime writers have achieved success overseas. Recently Peter Temple achieved a different kind of success: he took out the Miles Franklin Award, Australia's most prestigious literary award, with *The Broken Shore*, a genre mystery novel.

TERRY GREEN
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To say that I've been both busy and distracted would be an understatement. I've just finished all my marking and entered the final grades for the 'Fundamentals of Creative Writing' course that I teach at the University of Western Ontario (25 students). The course ended April 7. My teaching is done now until September.

My sister (17 years older than me) died in November, and I'm the executor for her estate. Among everything else, there was a condo to sell — which was finalised April 1st. The dust is still settling on the whole thing. And to compound the whole unbelievable situation, her son (57 years old), who was the real estate agent for the deal, died March 11, before the deal closed. I'm looking after his (chaotic) affairs as well (he was a bachelor).

Did I mention that I've been distracted of late?

All this, and family and work and ... Well, you get the idea.

But I do still read. And I wanted to assure you that your work is not just being mailed out into the void, but enjoyed and appreciated, if in some silence. In fact, it was a welcome bit of a different kind of distraction.

'The Treasure Hunt: Books about SF' is a great piece. It's a fine example of creative non-fiction (a segment in the course cited above). And we've talked before about the value of bio-graphy and autobiography and memoir. Combining them with critical, literary thinking is terrific, and I think you should do more of it.

It's 8 a.m. Sunday morning. The house is just stirring. I've just finished (as mentioned earlier) entering my final grades on an Excel sheet, finishing a second cup of coffee, and wanted to get this off before something new sideswipes me (we've lost six family members in the past 20 months ... unbelievable ... an avalanche). I had four siblings. I have one left. And I don't know what it all means.

(12 April 2010)

brg* Since I've got to know and appreciate my two sisters, and their families, and Elaine's two sisters and their families, much better during the last 20 years, I can appreciate the blow that you've been dealt. I've recently attended a birthday celebration (100 people) for Jeanette's 60th and the 60th of her partner Duncan. My other sister, Robin, one year younger than me, was there, and many of our friends. Thanks for the reminder to appreciate their company.

GUY SALVIDGE
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I'm trying to comprehend the purposes of your various magazines. It seems that **brg** is mainly letters and more personal things, yes? (I noticed some duplication between that and *SET* in terms of 'best of' lists etc). I guess that *Steam Engine Time* is a fanzine for more 'official' stuff, for want of a better word. (More long reviews, etc) Then there is *SF Commentary*, appearing somewhat irregularly. Am I right in thinking that the most recent issue of this is 79, which appeared in 2004? And *then* there is something called *Scratch Pad*, which I haven't looked at yet. And *The Metaphysical Review* as well ...

In *Steam Engine Time* I know most if not all of the names of SF writers discussed. I'm drastically less familiar with those in the fan community in Australia and overseas. It's all new to me. I've even managed to compile a new to-read list based on tidbits here and there, including things that have been sitting on my shelves forever, such as C. L. Moore's 'Vintage Season' and Sturgeon's 'Baby is Three.' And then there is Priest's *The Separation* as well. (I've been a fan of Priest over the years, so I'm looking forward to that.) Reading your fanzines for the first time in 2010 is like arriving three or more decades late to a conversation, but it's fascinating reading nonetheless.

It seems from your comments throughout various issues that managing to actually get these magazines printed and shipped off all the time is a big financial burden. This will show how little I know about the world of fanzines. I hadn't realised that you *give* these magazines away as a matter of routine, including free shipping? On a meagre publishing budget? Looks like the SF community owes you a lot for your tireless work over the decades (as evidenced by your Chandler award). Thanks for putting me onto efanzines.com as well — probably limitless reading to be found there.

(5 May 2010)

I have already explained the separate functions of my fanzines in reply to Greg Pickersgill earlier in this letter column. Briefly: *SF Commentary* (1969–) is my long-time fanzine of material about SF and fantasy, eclipsed during the last decade by *Steam Engine Time*, an international fanzine of longer articles about SF and fantasy. **brg is primarily made up of mailing comments on other fanzines in ANZAPA (Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Assocation), with some issues containing material about all my interests other than SF and fantasy. The web version (as a PDF file downloadable from efanzines.com), deleting the apa mailing comments, and substantially redesigned, is called *Scratch Pad*. *The Metaphysical Review* was my major magazine about my non-SF interests, but it stopped in 1998 without meaning to.***

ANDY ROBERTSON
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SET 11: I feel that the article on editors is somehow a theoretical concept. People who have published books into double figures have 'editors'. In general these days authors work through literary agencies, who pass on such details secondhand. This means that there's nothing subtle about making changes — if the author doesn't want to, then he or she asks the agent to go elsewhere — or bits of discontinuity through hacking down chapters just remain in the finished article to annoy the reader, and to ensure that the author's next novel will sell fewer copies. Magazine editors are a different kettle of fish — they don't pay enough for agents to bother with, so in that case they do have direct author contact, and both parties benefit from it.

Interesting to note (from *SET* 12) that you're a Chris Smither fan. He's someone I've only seen play live once (bizarrely, as a support for Carolyn Hester). I've only got his *Leave the Light On* album — his stuff is difficult to find in the stores. (As with everyone else, most of my collection comes from mail order or from the 'man with the sandwich box' at gigs.)

Ray Wood's 'Dancing Cyborg' is especially significant now that we have an automaton prime minister called Cameron.

The 'Writer/Editor' article was well put; editors usually are writers in the larger field of things rather than someone who regards him- or herself as a novelist or strictly as an SF author. But writer–editors do seem to get away with indulgences that the lone wolf authors can't get a look in on.

Films I don't talk about. I have a 10-minute attention span for the screen before I wander off like a drunk. Even DVDs are watched in mini-sections over a month. Print I can read for hours. Hence I'm hoping you'll keep your print issues going as long as possible for there will soon come the day when the screen stays blank forever. (1 June 2010)

brg* Andy's magazine *Krax* is a lively poetry magazine. I think he heard about me from Steve Sneyd, ace promoter of SF and fantasy poetry.

PETER SIMPSON
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Thanks for your letter alerting me to your continued existence! Nice to hear from you. Sorry that I never write but, as I'm sure I must have mentioned before, I seldom read SF nowadays. The trouble is, everyone I use to like has died! I notice William Tenn is the latest to 'pass over'. I must re-read some of his stuff. I have just pulled down the collection *Of All Possible Worlds* from the shelf (which I notice I bought from good old Ashwoods in Pitt Street for the sum of 75 cents!).

Having said that, I still like to read *about* SF. I'd prefer to continue receiving hard copies. I continue to try to milk as much use out of my old computers as possible — I've only just retired one that ran Windows 3.1 — not because there was anything wrong with it but simply because modern files are so huge.

I'm still well (I think). I retired from the BMA two and a half years ago and have spent my retirement doing absolutely nothing. It's great, although the English weather is a bit depressing. We had a trip out to Australia when I retired and did pass through Melbourne and I wondered about giving you a call, but ... I am still in touch on an intermittent basis with Keith Curtis down in Tasmania, who refuses to have e-mail!

(28 April 2010)

brg* I was a bit surprised to see you write that you didn't get in touch when you were in Melbourne. It would be great to catch up. Last year I met for the first time Nick Shears, who moved from Britain with his family about ten years ago, and has been living near Brisbane since then. I am quite willing to take the train into the city, and visitors are always welcome at our place (but ring first).

WILLIAM BREIDING
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Steam Engine Time 11/12 was something of a depressing read, over all. The Sargent and Zebrowski pieces on editing and the state of the art, 1996, deserved printing after all of these years. They cast a bleak warning. I suspect it his only gotten worse for the writer and the aligned editor in the last 15 years. (While reading both of these pieces I kept wondering how the folks at Tor must have felt, none of them writer–editors, yet almost all true blue fans, some of them astute at critique, nearly all of them intelligent, critical thinkers.)

In many ways I am an antifan. Not the actifan I once anticipated being, as a teenager in the garrets of San Francisco, discovering the first glow of SF and the alien culture that was fandom. (It *was* alien culture; being thrust innocently into the fanzines of Donn Brazier and Ed Cagle was a struggle.) The longer I've lived the less I've liked the sound of my own voice, which is antithetical to the fannish way. While I love fanzines still, I respond only in the right moments of receipt. Thanks to those fan editors who've indulged my silence.

Your 'Treasure Hunt' left me feeling blue, much in the same way that Disch's *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of* threw me into a fit of despondency. Disch had outed me as an emotional, non-critically thinking being. While I admired Disch as a fiction writer, his non-fictional representation of himself was mostly distasteful to me. I was not surprised to read in Steve Jeffery's loc of Disch's revealed faults online. But that does not mean that Disch lacked acute sensibilities, or that he wasn't often right. You clearly made the point that SF is adolescent in nature ('the golden age of SF is twelve') as did Disch: Why this depresses me, I'm not certain. My first line of argument (to myself) was: 'That's okay! Never grow up!' But that's ultimately empty sounding. Perhaps the view of myself at 50-something as a general failure at just about everything (just living a life) makes it hard to hear that I've embraced a literature that's basically child's play. Or maybe what's really bothering me is that in my own treasure hunt I've found so little recently in SF that has excited me, moved me profoundly, or caused to change me in some way. Even just a deep absorption, and immersion would be gratifying. Lately my foraging in SF has been so barren that I've begun to despair of finding gold ever again. But I still have an entire wall of the full range of SF (1930s–2008) unread, and awaiting exploration. Certainly there must be something there for me? I can't blame individual writers (though that would be easy!); instead I want to blame the genre itself for whatever it is I'm not finding. But in the end, it can only be me that's to blame. Even authors whose work I've admired don't move me; I'm sitting there shaking my head, thinking, 'What's wrong?' Whatever's wrong is likely in me. I've lost something. And I sure would like to find it again.

Of course, this is cyclical. I go through periods when I find SF grotesque. No matter how good the writer, there's something inherently missing. So I spring off into the mainstream, on the hunt. Sometimes I find it, sometimes I do not. This winter I lived and breathed Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead.* That book was pure gold, or perhaps it just came at the right moment. I followed that with Toni Morrison's *Beloved.* Oh, what a weird, queasy book. Not as immersing as Rand, but certainly strange and interesting. A hiatus should be pursued? Science fiction locked out of the reading room? Return refreshed, sense of wonder newly glossed and waiting to be caressed? (Your own list of favourite books read in 2009 contains no SF, with the possible exception of Ryman, though you do have fantasy and horror listed. Perhaps your treasure hunting has been as bereft as my own?)

It came as no surprise that of the books about SF that you read, none of the authors were really able to impart why they thought a book was gold. Often it is too personal. (Who, in fandom, aside from you and me and Paul Kincaid, is deeply in love with Steven Millhauser?) As an example: when John Clute is not busy impressing himself with his sense of language I find him much too forgiving. To be of any use to me as a critic or a reviewer, or a guide, we have to agree on some basic tenets of why a book is worthy. Too often we do not. His gosh-wow moment may not be mine. The glow of gold is in the eye of the beholder. (Okay, before Steve Jeffery or Jan can ask me to support my claims, I hereby decline!)

I very much enjoyed the slightly irreverent tone of Frank Weissenborn's piece on A. Bertram Chandler's work. Chandler is a guilty pleasure for me, best taken in very small dollops, once every decade or so!

(4 April 2010)

***brg* This is the letter I sent in reply to William:**

A pity you were depressed by material that I found very enjoyable. I've always liked the glint of battle in Disch's eye, which is why I was surprised that he did commit suicide. But even in that act he was defiant, planning the event at least a year in advance, choosing everything carefully so he would go out on the right note. The pleasure of his critical writing is the clarity, humour, and swagger of the prose itself, rather than what he says.

I was disputing Disch on the distinction between 'children's literature' and 'adolescent literature'. Most children's literature is pretty good stuff, teaching kids how to grow up, but the main element of what I think of as adolescent literature is the daydream that somebody Up There or Out There is going to come along and save me from my idiocies and propel me to fame and fortune. Far too many SF stories do not have competent heroes (the traditional claim made for Heinlein's heroes) but heroes chosen by the author to succeed no matter what they do (Heinlein's actual heroes). Disch doesn't quite make that distinction, but he should have.

I wouldn't worry about saying 'what's wrong?' when faced with your wall of SF. Somebody once said that disillusionment is simply the act of seeing things clearly for the first time. The books don't change; you do. I would have thought leaving behind some old enthusiasms would give you a chance to move onto other things. Having said that, I'm been fairly disappointed recently in almost everything I've read, not just SF. It seems to me that most general literature is dull in the same way that average SF is dull: it's comfortable, self-congratulatory, depends on the reader being asked to make up for the lack of brilliance of the writer. There are not many writers who still bleed onto paper.

I read Ayn Rand a long, long time ago, at the end of adolescence, so I remember her as an adolescent enthusiasm. But at least her heroes don't succeed merely because the magic fairy touches them on the shoulder. And 'success' in *The Fountainhead* is an ambiguous quality, isn't it? As it was for Frank Lloyd Wright, upon whose work the story is supposed to be based. The only reason we remember Wright as a success is that he blithely ignored the fact that he was broke most of the time, spent lots, and lived well anyway.

Ryman's *Air* is SF, about as good as I've ever read; it reminds me a lot of Disch's great three SF novels, where the characters are as important as the future world in which they live. But you're right; I'm struggling to find any SF novels remotely as good as that.

I don't know why people don't love Steven Millhauser's work. He always has an element of pure magic in his work, especially his major novels. His main characters are wonder workers.

I agree with you about John Clute: in writing about many SF novels he often shines up jalopies so that they gleam like Rolls Royces.*

ERIC LINDSAY
544 Carlyle Gardens, Beck Drive North, Condon QLD 4815

On re-reading parts of *SET* 11, I noticed Lyn McConchie writing of encountering a 20- or 30-year-old who had problems reading handwriting. Like Lyn, I recall inkwells. Indeed, I recall having to fill the inkwells at school. Even then nib pens were in decline.

It seems likely Lyn in correct in assuming the computer will replace most writing. Certainly my handwriting has declined from the copperplate I learned at school to something I can hardly read. Even doctors no longer require illegible handwriting, since their computer printer now spits out prescriptions. However I found myself looking at my phone, and particularly a little application called, appropriately, Paperless. Just the thing for those little lists I used to scribble on paper.

However Lyn was writing of preserving handwritten history. National libraries are increasingly concerning themselves with this. It certainly is not too early for fan historians to consider it, using cutdown versions of what libraries use. Obviously scanning handwritten material is relatively easy. OCR is another thing entirely.

However, I am reminded there are open source Gotcha capture systems that specialise in transcribing unknown material. These Gotcha make access to a web site (such as perhaps eFanzines) conditional on showing you are a human, and not a spam bot. They present two disguised words to be typed. One is a word known to the Gotcha system, and is used to give you access to the website. The other challenge word is a piece of unidentified scanned text from an image capture. If several people give the same interpretation of that word, the capture system adds another word to the translation of handwriting into searchable text.

(3 December 2010)

SHERYL BIRKHEAD
25509 Jonnie Court, Gaithersburg, MD 20882, USA

I have been trying to write *something* for months. Synopsis: the electricity went out; came back on; desktop computer did not; totalled car; electricity went out again. I was afraid that the new iMac would be fried. I fell in the dark and now I know what a Baker's cyst is. I killed the 12-year-old laptop that I am now typing on, but this second life may not be a long one.

After all this, nothing works right. The way I worked up over the years to do artwork now won't. The new printer is horrible and persists in printing out straight lines across anything that was scanned at *any* point. HP says the lines don't exist, hence they cannot help me remove them. Anything typed in the iMac cannot be communicated to this old Wallstreet since the Wallstreet will only read floppies and Zip disks (and maybe DVDs; not sure), nothing USB; and the iMac reads USB but no floppies, no Zips. So, in essence I cannot print consistently and cannot go from one computer to the other.

I must admit that I knew this would be a problem because I had looked into the new Macs a while ago and was told that with the new chip both hardware and software would be incompatible. But it all happened so fast. I had no time to prepare and figure out what the heck. Oh yes ... this old Wallstreet has only minimal Internet capability. I cannot use the laptop any place online other than at the desk with the desktop. Not very practical.

Next problem: to bring the Wallstreet back to life, the connector to the adapter had to be repaired. I don't seem able to get what little left of the battery reserve to recharge, and it keeps dying on me after the warning that it is running on reserve and will go to sleep. Okay — now you know.

This all means I have no idea how to do about 99 per cent of what I knew how to do before. I am not even sure I will be able to print this since this old computer tends to just curl up its toes and die every now and then

Irritated does not do my feelings justice. If I manage to kill the Wallstreet a second time it will be donated and I will have to figure out something else and decide what happens to the laser printer--since it is my only access.

I still try to keep the stack of zines I need to read (etc.) handy, but with the computer woes still plaguing me, it is becoming more and more apparent I need to either give up on the portable computer and go to all handwritten locs (I know they are less than truly legible!), or start a fund and figure out how I can get the best and most reliable model in my price range.

Well ... only took 4 tries and 45 minutes to print ... sigh.

(15–23 July 2010)

brg* Sounds like a job for Eric Lindsay, but he's on the wrong continent (Australia). No wonder I have no temptation to update computers or change my setup in any way. A new computer would be quite cheap, but I would have to spend vast amounts of money to update all my software. And, as you say, the real problem would be to access all my old information files. I'm saving a fair bit in USB sticks, but most of my old files and photos are on CD ROMs or Zip disks.

MICHAEL BISHOP
Pine Mountain, Georgia

Just wanted to thank you — a little belatedly owing to some furious work here on a retrospective volume of my short fiction for William Schafer at Subterranean Press (an explanation, not an excuse) — for the three magazines you sent me all the way from Australia, namely, *Steam Engine Time* 11, *Steam Engine Time* 12, and *SF Commentary* 80.

The only thing I've read with focused attention so far is Pamela Sargent's 'Are Editors Necessary?', a piece that I found just as compelling and hence valuable to me today as it must have been for its readers upon its presentation as a speech at a Science Fiction Research Association gather-ing in Wisconsin in 1996.

(8 September 2010)

STEVE SNEYD
4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield,
West Yorkshire HD5 8PB, England

SET 11: Of the writers in 'urban fantasy writers on the rise', I'd only ever read anything by one of them, Justina Robson. I had one of her 'Quantum Gravity' series to review for *The Zone* website a few years back. I found it a guilty pleasure: enjoyably daft, and over the top. I would have said it has a contemporary setting only if that's taken to cover other altiverse strands, and also that it is more science fiction than fantasy. Its fantasy-type creatures, races, and settings all have 'realistic' explana-tions in the Intersection, via a quantum portal of dif-ferent universes.

Coincidentally, I've just read what I regard as very much contemporary fantasy (though not by a woman, it has a very strong female character in it): Colin Cotterill's *Disco for the Departed* (Quercus, Books 2006, hb), in which Dr Siri, disillusioned state coroner in Laos, has to solve a murder with the aid of his assistant Doris (the strong woman). It rates as fantasy because Siri hosts the spirit of an ancient shaman, Yeh Meng, and solves the crime with the aid of departed spirits. The book, one of a series, also draws heavily on the uneasy interface between communist bureaucracy and ancient beliefs and traditional culture for its conflicts, and fascination. Without knowledge of the culture (though the picture convinces) I've no idea if Siri and the other characters are 'racefail' characters (reference point raised by Terry Morris in her article on the 'Earthsea' books).

This reminds me of an article recently passed on to me by Mark Plummer, 'I Didn't Dream of Dragons' (Deeper D live journal post, 13 January 2009), which, summarised, says that Western/white writers can't win; in fantasy they're either colonising or ignoring non-Western folk and mythlore, and both directions are despicably incorrect. It's a Catch-22 situation. He didn't mention the danger ever lurking there for a Westernised Asian-origin writer like Salman Rushdie, who draw on folk belief from his culture of origin for *The Satanic Verses*, and received a death sentence fatwah for his pains.

Terry Morris's article: I admire her honesty in admitting that she'd forgotten the details of the *Tales from Earthsea* movie by the time she came to write the piece. I've often written a review quite a while after reading the book, but never been so upfront about confessing to recalling a blurring of detail. In my case I stick to the journo's motto: 'It's the art of conveying information while concealing ignorance', in my case forget-ting.

Has anybody else come across the radio adaptation of *A Wizard of Earthsea*? It was on our R7 digital station last year, in a number of instalments. I've never read the book, so I have no idea how faithful it was, but it gripped me reasonably, though I'd guess it was aimed at a mid-teens audience.

I must admit I've only ever read one C. J. Cherryh novel, back in the nineties. Although it had sufficient impact on me at the time for me to write a Tangish poem responding to its mood and setting, I have no idea which novel it was. No title on the J. G. Stinson bibliography rang a bell, although the list did remind me that I've never come across a copy of

Port Eternity, which somebody once described as Arthurian SF. If only I could risk digging in the time tombs down to the 1993 layer and could find the poem — but I can't face the dig.

Enclosed is a copy, as exchange with *SET* 11, the Women's Issue, of my reprint of Lilith Lorraine's poetry. She is covered in a book I would highly recommend: Eric Leif Darin's *Partners in Wonder: Women and the Birth of Science Fiction, 1926–1965* (Lexington Books, 2006).

(non-dated letter)

We also heard from ...

JAN CREGAN (Rozelle, NSW) was going to catch up in Melbourne a few months ago, but it didn't happen.

ART WIDNER (Gualala, California) wanted to know, 'Is Janine Stinson the former Janine Webb?' By now Art will have realised that Janeen Webb is very much her own woman, having won the Peter MacNamara Award at Aussiecon while Art was in the audience here in Melbourne. Art, recently turned 94, has just completed what I think is his fourth trip to Australia. He had fun at Aussiecon.

GEORGE ZEBROWSKI (Delmar, New York) promises to send more of his excellent essays.

DAMIEN BRODERICK (San Antonio, Texas) wrote of *SET*s 11 and 12: 'Formidable! Well done!' And to you, Damien, for winning 2010's A. Bertram Chandler Award for Lifetime Achievement in Australian SF.

STEVE CAMERON (Mooroolbark, Victoria) keeps promising to send a subscription. That would be a great help, and I like written contributions as well.

VAN IKIN (Crawley, Western Australia) has published a magnificent recent issue of his *Science Fiction* featuring the life, career and opinions of John Foyster, who died in 2003.

BOB SABELLA (Budd Lake, New Jersey): 'Two issues in one day? That's somewhat amazing. I look forward to reading them both.' Unfortunately we will no longer be seeing Bob's own fanzine *Visions of Paradise*, for Bob died suddenly in December 2011, not long after retiring from a lifetime of teaching. I did not meet Bob, but we have corresponded for over 30 years, and Bob has been posting his fanzine on the Internet for some years.

DAVID PRINGLE (Selkirk, Scotland): 'Amazing that you hadn't read Peake's "Gormenghast" books until now! But then I must admit that I haven't read — in many cases, I haven't even *seen* — most of the other books you list.'

AMY HARLIB (New York, New York) sent some artwork. I have recently published some of her reviews in *SF Commentary*, and I trust she will send further artwork and reviews.

SIMON BROWN: 'Life in Thailand proceeding more smoothly now after some 18 months adapting.' Simon hasn't published much recently, but he does contribute a brilliant historical short story to **Gillian Polack**'s recent anthology *Baggage*.

ALISTAIR DURIE 'particularly liked the Pamela Sargent article on editors — most illuminating'.

ANDREW PORTER (Brooklyn, New York) read through *SFC* 11, 'hoping there'd be some references to the "Women and Science Fiction" article by Susan Wood I published, or the article about C. J. Cherryh by Patrick McGuire, or Le Guin's essay "Dreams Must Explain Themselves" about the EarthSea stories, but, sigh, nothing.' Jan and I weren't trying to do biblio-graphy or anything like a survey, just trying to stir a bit of interest from contributors about recent writing by women in the SF/fantasy field. Since I cannot put my hands on these articles in a hurry, why not write your own quick survey of them? :: Great to catch up with you now that you've finally been able to visit Australia. (Andy first planned to visit in 1975; one of his visits fell through because his mother died, and another one did because he fell very ill.)

BRENDAN FREDERICKS (Gollancz/Orion Books, Hachette Livre, Sydney, NSW) liked the magazines, and said hello to me at the pre-Hugos Orbit Party during Aussiecon 4.

DORA LEVAKIS (Yarraville, VIC) has done many amazing things recently, including an exhibition of her art, a visit to Tuva in Central Asia, and teaching in the Top End of Australia's Northern Territory.

MICHAEL MOORCOCK (Bastrop, Texas): 'Cor! Can't wait!' I must emailed him that the print copies of *SET*s 11 and 12 were on their way.

CLARE McDONALD (Melbourne, VIC) downloaded copies, but might not have had time to look at them. She was the very efficient Membership Secretary for Aussiecon 4. Several people have mentioned her organising efforts before and during the convention. Recently she married, and became **CLARE McDONALD-SIMS**.

DAVID GRIGG (recently moved to Mill Park, VIC): 'There always seems to be something filling up all my time — among other things I'm trying to learn how to program the iPhone/iPad; rewriting my shareware software so that it supports German language; working on a "magic mirror" exhibit for the Australian Pavilion at the Shanghai Expo; building a web site selling postcards; and half a dozen other things.' David delivered his file of back issues of ANZAPA to me — thanks! — and we had fun at his 60th birthday.

GUY LILLIAN (Benton, Louisiana) trades print copies of his Hugo-nominated *Challenger* for *Steam Engine Time*; yes, I do realise the honour bestowed. He and Rosy attended Aussiecon, but we didn't catch up socially except at Murray Moore's FanEds Lunch.

JAMES DOIG (Canberra, ACT) sent me an amazing article based on tapes that former Melbourne fan Graeme Flanagan made during Melbourne's Cinecon in 1981, when Bob Bloch was the guest of honour. Unfortunately, James did not get to Melbourne for Aussiecon.

IAN MOND (North Caulfield, VIC): 'I'd be keen on the paper version. And happy to pay as well.' This doesn't seem to have happened yet, and Ian and I are still negotiating on a Massive Fabulous Article that I still hope to publish.

KAARON WARREN (Canberra, NSW) is the one Australian author I most wanted to meet, and this finally happened at a book launch at Aussiecon. At the convention, she won a Ditmar Award for her superb novel *Slights* and launched her new collection *Dead Sea Fruit* (Ticonderonga Press). Copies of her new novel *Walking the Tree* were available in the Dealers' Room, and I have recently read and enjoyed *Mistification*, her third novel.

HAL HALL (College Station, Texas) has finally retired. He has been on my mailing list for more than 30 years, and he has sent me much interesting bibliographical material during that time. I hope we can stay in touch.

JAN HOWARD FINDER ('WOMBAT') (Albany, New York) is somebody we expected to see at Aussiecon 4, but 'I've just about given up on making it to Oz for Worldcon. The hassles involved with flying are just a little bit much.' Also, he has been very ill, so his friends around the world are wishing him well.

JACK DANN (Foster, VIC) especially enjoyed the Pamela Sargent article in *SET* 11. I saw Jack a few times at Aussiecon, but did not get to speak much. He was Very Busy. Since then we've caught up at Continuum 7 (June 2011) and at Film Nights.

JOHN PURCELL (College Station, Texas) thanked me for my support for this year's DUFF race. Alas! the mighty **John Hertz** stood as well, and the other candidates just had to wait for the next contest. Great catching up with John H., but I would like to have nattered to John P. as well.

ALISA KRASNOSTEIN (Perth, WA) is publicising *Steam Engine Time* on her AsIf! website (**Alexandra Pierce**'s reviews are greatly appreciated).

KIM STANLEY ROBINSON (Davis, California) wrote in February 'See you in September.' Indeed, it happened. Thanks for being such a great Guest of Honour at Aussiecon 4, Stan, but it's a pity you had to work so hard. Please come back to Melbourne sometime for a holiday.

LOUIS DE VRIES (Ormond, VIC) is a Downloader, publisher at Hybrid Publications (distributor of **Paul Collins**' and **Meredith Costain**'s Ford Street Books) and somebody I catch up with every year at the Publications Branch reunion.

I realised last year that **CAROLINE MULLAN (Ilford, England)** has been owed some copies on her print subscription, although she is willing to be a Downloader.

ROB LATHAM (Riverside, California) seemed to think I had the funds to afford to attend the most recent Corflu — which is what I would like to do every year. It would have been good if Rob could have made it to

Melbourne for Aussiecon.

JOHN LIGHT (Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland, England) downloaded.

CAROL KEWLEY (Sunshine, VIC) has submitted more art to *SET*. She exhibited in the Art Show at Aussiecon.

LEIGH EDMONDS (Ballarat Nth, VIC) was finishing his most recent two-year history project, a history of the Tax Office, just before Aussiecon. I did catch up with him and Valma at Aussiecon, but haven't heard from him since.

DAVID KELLEHER (Narellan Vale, NSW) thanked me for details for making contact with Leigh: 'I know Ballarat well. I went to school there many years ago, and still have an elderly aunt and a cousin living there.

MARIANN McNAMARA (Adelaide, SA) received her copy okay.

YVONNE ROUSSEAU (Adelaide, SA) sent a long, detailed letter about her many objections to Connie Willis's recent novel *Blackout*, but didn't want anything published until she could read the sequel (really second half of one novel), *All Clear*. Her magnificent essay about these books has already appeared in *SF Commentary*.

STEPHEN CAMPBELL (Warr- nambool VIC) sent a great letter, which I as the 'Guest Editorial' for *SF Commentary* 80. Meanwhile, he and **DAVID RUSSELL (also from Warrnambool)** prepared a cover for this issue, and Stephen has recently published his own graphic novel *Transitoria*.

ROBERT LICHTMAN (Oakland, California) opened his envelope and found '*two* copies of *Steam Engine Time* 11 but no *Steam Engine Time* 12. Oops! Can you rectify? If there's a US fan you'd like to have that spare *SET* 11 please let me know. If not, I'll pass it on to Craig Smith in Seattle.' I sent another *SET* 12.

ROBERT ELORDIETA (Traralgon, VIC) sent lots of comments on bits of the recent two issues, and thanked me for some spare DVDs that I sent him. 'I've watched *Charley Varrick* and *The Prestige*. I enjoyed both of them very much. I'm glad that you got a chance to watch the French–Canadian film *The Barbarian Invasions*. I was lucky enough to see it at the cinema in Morwell a few years ago.'

THOMAS BULL (Doncaster, VIC) received his copies of *SET*s 11 and 12 okay. We catch up with him at various social occasions in Melbourne fandom, but I saw him only once or twice at Aussiecon.

HELENA BINNS (Carnegie, VIC) has already sent me a CD of about 2000 photos taken during Aussiecon. Without Helena, and the work of photographers like **DICK JENSSEN** and **CATH ORTLIEB**, I would have a very thin record of our time at Aussiecon.

As well as contributing the long letter of comment featured already, **PATRICK McGUIRE (Columbia, Maryland)** sent two equally long, interesting articles that were marked 'DNQ' ('do not quote').

JULIAN FREIDIN (East St Kilda, VIC) asked to be made a Downloader, but I sent him print copies of recent fanzines because his subscription has not yet expired.

With the recent release of *Inca* 5, **ROB JACKSON (Chichester, England)** has gone back to being a fanzine trader after many years lurking away from fandom. 'I love the cover of *SET* 12, though I'm not sure about the stability of Earth's climate if Saturn were that close. Or is it a scene on a terraformed Titan?' I hand that question back to **Dick Jenssen**, the artist.

FRANK BERTRAND (Manchester, New Hampshire) agreed with me that 'Yes, there is something about going over 60! I'll be 66 this coming October ... and various pieces/parts of me are starting to rebel ... not good!!! But I continue to sputter along as best I can.'

ROSE MITCHELL (West Brunswick, VIC) enjoyed most of the recent two issues, but found **Frank Weissenborn**'s piece on A. Bertram Chandler 'incomprehensible'. I found it clear enough, but it did alert me to an unpleasant side to Chandler's work that I had forgotten about or had never noticed before.

FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER (Vienna, Austria) always finds 'some publications mentioned in your fanzines that I would otherwise have missed, since I do not actively search for them. Here things are going on as usual, I still read lots of books, but perhaps not so many as I should like to do, I do some reviewing and writing, travelling between Vienna and Quarb,

to take care of the two cats of my mother.'

MARK LAWSON (Hornsby Heights, NSW) has produced a climate change book, and last I heard was hoping that the greenies (such as me) would hate it so that it would gain the publicity it needs. 'My dad has suggested that if I provoke enough people there may be a fight at the book launch. I can only hope.' Five days of exposure to Kim Stanley Robinson's arguments at Aussiecon would have convinced Mark to pulp his book and start again.

KATHLEEN JENNINGS was wondering if 'any of your publications will be mentioning the recent death of Diana Wynne Jones — and if so, whether you're interested in the illustration I did (already published on my blog) of *Archer's Goon*? I've posted it on my blog here: http://tanaudel.wordpress.com/2011/03/28/diana-wynne-jones/.'

— Bruce Gillespie,
19 September 2010, with extramaterial 12 December 2011