
Scratch Pad 11

Based on the non-Mailing Comments section of *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life No. 2*, a magazine written and published by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Victoria 3066, Australia (phone (03) 9419-4797; email: gandc@mira.net) for the August 1995 mailing of Acnestis.

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LET ME INTRODUCE MYSELF

- I was born on **17 February 1947**.
- Lived at Oakleigh, a suburb 13 km south-east of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, then all round Melbourne; some time in the country; then inner suburbs.
- Parents: Frank (d. 1989) and Betty; two sisters: Robin (b. 1948) and Jeanette (b. 1951).
- Went to school at Oakleigh State School (now called Oakleigh Primary School) for Grades 1 to 6 (**1953–58**). Then to Oakleigh High School (now defunct for lack of students, although it had 1100 of them in 1959) for Forms 1 to 4 (**1959–62**). Then to Bacchus Marsh High School (50 km west of Melbourne) for Forms 5 and 6 (**1963 and 1964**). Three years of Arts, majoring in English and History, at the University of Melbourne (**1965–67**) followed by a perfunctory year of Diploma of Education (**1968**).
- Bought my first copy of *Australian Science Fiction Review* in **1966**, but joined fandom only at the beginning of **1968**.
First convention: 1968 Melbourne Science Fiction Conference.
- Thrown to the wolves in **1969**: attempted to teach for two years at Ararat Technical School. Liked teaching about as much as D. H. Lawrence did. Worst two years of my life, but . . .
- Began publishing *SF Commentary* at the beginning of 1969. The first eighteen issues appeared in its first two years!
- Beginning of **1971**: by a weird series of accidents I gained a job I liked: editor/writer for the Publications Branch of the Education Department; invaluable pressure course in learning to edit magazines and books and write for magazines.
- **1972**: Gained first Ditmar Award and first Hugo nomination for *SF Commentary*. Kissed a woman for the first time. (Don't laugh immoderately. If it hadn't been for fandom giving a boost to my minuscule self esteem, I might never have got around to kissing.)
- **1973–74**: Quit Publications Branch to do my one and only Big Overseas Trip. Four months in Canada and USA (Torcon to beginning of January 1974); one month in Britain (all of January 1974). I recovered, although most of the people I stayed with didn't. Met in America someone I wanted to marry, but for the usual complicated reasons, didn't.
- **1974**: Became a freelance editor, and lived in a wonderfully grotty flat in Carlton Street, Carlton. Met Elaine for the first time, although she doesn't remember the event.
- **1975**: Many exciting turn-ups, including the formation of Norstrilia Press with Carey Handfield (and, later, Rob Gerrand). Our first book was *Philip K. Dick: Electric Shepherd*. Also Aussiecon I, Melbourne's first Worldcon. I was officially co-ordinator Ursula Le Guin's Writers' Workshop. Rotten co-ordinator, but I did get to meet Ursula, attend the Workshop and write some stories. Attempted to share my life and grotty flat with a wonderful woman. This lasted from August until October.
- **1976**: Did various lugubriously awful things, such as falling in love with a woman who was already in love with someone else. Wrote agonised fanzines about all this. Finished the year sans flat, sans job, sans much hope at all. Everybody should have a year like 1976 to remind them how good the rest of their life can be.
- **1977**: Invited by Elaine and Frank, the bloke she was living with, to share their large flat in Collingwood. I brought with me two cats (my cat Flodnap, and Flodnap's cat Julius) to add to the household's Solomon, Ishtar and Apple Blossom. Gained a half-time freelance job as Assistant Editor of the magazine of the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association. Was flat broke most of the year. Elaine and I found that we lived quite comfortably in the same house.
- **1978**: Frank finished his medical course, and was posted to Tasmania to do his internship. After what seemed to us an uninevitable series of events, what other people took as inevitable happened: in early March Elaine and I began 'living together' rather than 'living in the same house'.
Early April: freelance work began to pour in, and I

left the VSTA job. Phew!

Norstrilia Press bought an IBM Electronic Composer (a cross between an IBM golfball typewriter and a computer). I began several profitable years of typesetting books for NP, Paul Collins, Hyland House and several other publishers.

- **1979:** Elaine and I get married almost exactly a year after we started living together. A small event, with 14 close relatives. The wedding photos show that I had lots of hair then, and Elaine had very long hair.
- **1980-84:** My work began to disappear, even as Elaine decided to become a proof-reader and editor. Not enough money to publish *SF Commentary*, so it did not appear for eight years. In a fit of madness, I published *SF Commentary Reprint Edition: First Year 1969* in an edition of 200 copies; 80 of them are still unsold.
- **1984:** Macmillan offered me the arrangement I'm still working under: I stay a freelance, but work mainly for them, first as an editor, then as a desktop publisher. With real money in my pocket for the first time in three years, I began *The Metaphysical Review* (and revived *SFC* in **1989**). Elaine rose quickly from being a freelance proof-reader to being a full-time proof-reader, to gaining a full-time job as editor.
- **1985:** Financial disaster! I bought a CD player, and then began buying CDs. Lots of them. Virtually bankrupt by 1987, but Elaine rescued me (and got me to cut up my Bankcard). CDs are still my favourite waste of time.
- Not much after that except keeping our collective

heads above water. Elaine's mother died in 1987, my father in 1989, and Elaine's father a year later. Grow old; wear trousers rolled; disappearing hair; much death of old cats and acquiring of new cats: present crew are TC (16 years old and fading), Oscar (11 years old), Theodore (10 years old), Sophie (five years old), and Polly (seven months old).

Elaine became a freelance editor, also working at home, a couple of years ago. Because she's one of the few maths/science editors in Victoria, she has plenty of work.

In summary?

My story is that of a very shy lad who happened to find science fiction fans, the one group of people who could (partially) socialise me and give me a place to exist. Fandom has been very kind to me.

My story also shows the yearnings of someone who would have liked to do something magnificent in the literary line, but could never work out what it might be, and is now sure that he hasn't the talent to do it. I've never written a novel because I could never think of an idea that might stretch to 60,000 words. I've had a few stories published, but, dispirited by my own stuff, have written no fiction for ten years.

Outside fandom I tend to be branded the 'sf nut'; inside fandom, I tend to point outwards the bigger world of literature of which sf and fantasy are just parts.

Which is where Acnestis comes in. Some members, like **Yvonne**, seem to have read everything, while others, like **Ian**, cheerfully admit to not having read any of the classics. There should be a good conversation in here somewhere.

FAVOURITE SF AND FANTASY STORIES EVER: **In reply to Ian Sales**

Ian, you really raised an Acnestan storm when you challenged us to name our favourite sf stories.

I've read only three of your favourites: the first three ('Gomorra', 'And I Woke' and 'Tempunauts'), and only one of them, the Delany, is a favourite of mine. I can't remember anything about the Tiptree, and I can't remember anything about the Dick except that I've enjoyed many Dick stories much more than that one.

To concoct my list, I reach for huge bundle of lists of Favourite Short Stories of the Year. From them I pulled out the sf and fantasy stories. Here they are, in the year in which I read them:

1964:

'Alpha Ralpa Boulevard' (Cordwainer Smith) *The Best from F&SF, 11th Series*

'No Great Magic' (Fritz Leiber) *Galaxy*, Dec. 1963

'Time Lag' (Poul Anderson) *Best from F&SF, 11th Series*

'Drunkboat' (Cordwainer Smith) *Amazing*, Oct. 1963

'The Sources of the Nile' (Avram Davidson) *Best from F&SF, 11th Series*

'Waterspider' (Philip K. Dick) *If*, Jan. 1964

1965:

'The Saliva Tree' (Brian W. Aldiss) *F&SF*, Sep. 1965

'All You Zombies' (Robert A. Heinlein) *Best from F&SF, 9th Series*

'What's the Name of that Town?' (R. A. Lafferty)

Galaxy, Oct. 1964

'The Great Cosmic Donut of Life' (Ray Nelson) *F&SF*, Sep. 1965

'The Bomb in the Bathtub' (Thomas Scortia) *The Fourth Galaxy Reader*

'Soldier, Ask Not' (Gordon R. Dickson) *Galaxy*, Oct. 1964

'Four Brands of Impossible' (Norman Kagan) *F&SF*, Sep. 1964

'The Big Front Yard' (Clifford D. Simak) *The Hugo Winners*

'On the Storm Planet' (Cordwainer Smith) *Galaxy*, Feb. 1965

'The Dead Lady of Clown Town' (Cordwainer Smith) *Galaxy*, Aug. 1964

1966:

'On the Sand Planet' (Cordwainer Smith) *Amazing*, Dec. 1965

'The Third Guest' (B. Traven) *Fantastic*, May 1966

'The Game of Rat and Dragon' (Cordwainer Smith) *The Third Galaxy Reader*

'Light of Other Days' (Bob Shaw) *Analog*, August 1966

'By His Bootstraps' (Robert A. Heinlein) *Spectrum 1*

1967:

'War Game' (Philip K. Dick) *Galaxy* No. 77

'Scanners Live in Vain' (Cordwainer Smith) *You Will Never Be the Same*
'Prospector's Special' (Robert Sheckley) *Galaxy* No. 77

1968:

'The Heat Death of the Universe' (P. Zoline) *New Worlds*, July 1967
'Send Her Victorious' (Brian W. Aldiss) *Amazing*, Apr. 1968
'Auto-Ancestral Fracture' (Brian W. Aldiss) *New Worlds*, Dec. 1967/Jan. 1968
'The Girl and the Robot with Flowers' (Brian W. Aldiss) *The Saliva Tree and Other Strange Growths*
'The Egg of the Glak' (Harvey Jacobs) *F&SF*, Mar. 1968
'Multi-Valu Motorway' (Brian W. Aldiss) *New Worlds*, Aug. 1967

1969:

'The Beast in the Jungle' (Henry James) *Selected Tales of Henry James*
'A Figure in the Carpet' (Henry James) *Selected Tales of Henry James*
'Ouspenski's Astrabahn' (Brian W. Aldiss) *New Worlds* 186, Jan. 1969
'The Worm That Flies' (Brian W. Aldiss) *World's Best SF* 1968
'Aye, and Gomorrah' (Samuel R. Delany) *Dangerous Visions*
'Masks' (Damon Knight) *World's Best SF* 1968
'Man in His Time' (Brian Aldiss) *Science Fantasy*, Apr. 1965
'Casablanca' (Thomas M. Disch) *New Worlds* 183, Oct. 1968
'Since the Assassination' (Brian Aldiss) *Intangibles Inc. and Other Stories*
'It's Smart to Have an English Address' (D. G. Compton) *World's Best SF* 1967
'Who Goes There?' (John W. Campbell) *Adventures in Time and Space*
'Farewell to the Master' (Harry Bates) *Adventures in Time and Space*

1970:

'Priscilla' (Italo Calvino) *T Zero*
'Blood, Sea' (Italo Calvino) *T Zero*
'The Form of Space' (Italo Calvino) *Cosmicomics*
'The Night Driver' (Italo Calvino) *T Zero*
'The Time Machine' (Langdon Jones) *Orbit* 5
'The Asian Shore' (Thomas M. Disch) *Orbit* 6
'The Cage of Sand' (J. G. Ballard) *Dark Stars*
'The Sign in Space' (Italo Calvino) *Cosmicomics*
'All at One Point' (Italo Calvino) *Cosmicomics*
'Heresies of the Huge God' (Brian W. Aldiss) *Dark Stars*
'Somerset Dreams' (Kate Wilhelm) *Orbit* 5
'The Custodian' (Lee Harding) *Vision of Tomorrow*, May 1970

1971:

'The Secret Miracle' (Jorge Luis Borges) *Labyrinths*
'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' (Jorge Luis Borges) *Labyrinths*
'Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (Jorge Luis Borges) *Labyrinths*
'In the Penal Settlement' (Franz Kafka) *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*
'The Burrow' (Franz Kafka) *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*
'The View from This Window' (Joanna Russ) *Quark/ 1*
'The Immortal' (Jorge Luis Borges) *Labyrinths*

'What Rough Beast' (Damon Knight) *Off Centre*
'Continued on Next Rock' (R. A. Lafferty) *Orbit* 7
'Let Us Quickly Hasten to the Gate of Ivory' (Thomas M. Disch) *Quark/ 1*
'Bodies' (Thomas M. Disch) *Quark/ 4*
'The Encounter' (Kate Wilhelm) *Orbit* 8
'The Pressure of Time' (Thomas M. Disch) *Orbit* 7
'Twilight' (John W. Campbell) *The Mirror of Infinity*

1972:

'Heads Africa — Tails America' (Josephine Saxton) *Orbit* 9
'Inconstant Moon' (Larry Niven) *All the Myriad Ways*
'The Power of Time' (Josephine Saxton) *New Dimensions* 1
'The God House' (Keith Roberts) *New Worlds Quarterly* 1
'Weihnachtsabend' (Keith Roberts) *New Worlds Quarterly* 4

1973:

'Ellen Terhune' (Edmund Wilson) *Memoirs of Hecate County*
'In Hot Pursuit of Happiness' (Stanislaw Lem) *View from Another Shore*
'The Last Day of July' (Gardner Dozois) *New Dimensions* 3
'The Direction of the Road' (Ursula K. Le Guin) *Orbit* 12

1974:

'Things Which Are Caesar's' (Gordon R. Dickson) *The Day the Sun Stood Still*
'Colours' (Thomas M. Disch) *Getting into Death*
'And Now the News' (Theodore Sturgeon) *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*
'Gomez' (C. M. Kornbluth) *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*

1975:

'Mr Hamadryad' (R. A. Lafferty) *Stellar* 1
'The Stars Below' (Ursula K. Le Guin) *Orbit* 14
'And He Built a Crooked House' (Robert A. Heinlein) *Where Do We Go From Here?*

1976:

'The Night Wind' (Edgar Pangborn) *Universe* 5
'Running Down' (M. John Harrison) *New Worlds* 8
'The New Atlantis' (Ursula K. Le Guin) *The New Atlantis*
'Late' (A. Bertram Chandler) *Beyond Tomorrow*
'The Women Men Don't See' (James Tiptree Jr) *F&SF*, Dec. 1973
'The Ins and Outs of the Hadhya State' (Philippa C. Maddern) *The Altered I*
'An Infinite Summer' (Christopher Priest) *Andromeda* 1
'In the Lilliputian Asylum' (Michael Bishop) *Orbit* 15
'Live? Our Computers Will Do That For Us' (Brian W. Aldiss) *Orbit* 15

1977:

'The Kozmic Kid' (Richard Smead) *Fantastic*, July 1974

1978:

'A Chinese Perspective' (Brian W. Aldiss) *Anticipations*
'Second Variety' (Philip K. Dick) *The Best of Philip K. Dick*
'Pie Row Joe' (Kevin McKay) *The Rooms of Paradise*

1979:

'Under the Garden' (Graham Greene) *Strangeness*
'The Holland of the Mind' (Pamela Zoline) *Strangeness*

'The Disguise' (Kim Stanley Robinson) *Orbit 19*
 'Seven American Nights' (Gene Wolfe) *Orbit 20*
 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' (James Tiptree Jr)
Aurora
 'Inhabiting the Interspaces' (Philippa C. Maddern)
Anticipations
 'Albert's Bellyful' (Francis Payne) *Transmutations*

1980:

'The Old Folks at Home' (Michael Bishop) *Universe 8*
 'The Doctor of Death Island' (Gene Wolfe) *Immortal*
 'Kingmakers' (Robert Thurston) *New Voices 1*
 'Children of the Kingdom' (T. E. D. Klein) *Dark Forces*

1981:

'Out There Where the Big Ships Go' (Richard Cowper)
The Web of the Magi and Other Stories
 'End-Game' (J. G. Ballard) *A Backdrop of Stars*
 'The Button Molder' (Fritz Leiber) *Fantasy Annual III*
 'Sandkings' (George R. R. Martin) *Best SF of the Year 9*
 'Hour of Trust' (Gene Wolfe) *The Island of Doctor Death*
and Other Stories and Other Stories
 'The Persistence of Vision' (John Varley) *Nebula*
Winners 14

1982:

'The Mask' (Stanislaw Lem) *Mortal Engines*
 'The Unicorn Tapestry' (Suzy McKee Charnas)
Fantasy Annual IV
 'Letters to the Postman' (Robert Aickman) *Intrusions*

1983:

'Life the Solitude' (Kevin McKay) *Dreamworks*
 'Firewatch' (Connie Willis) *Best SF of the Year 12*
 'After-Images' (Malcolm Edwards) *Interzone*, Spring
 1983
 'Above Atlas His Shoulders' (Andrew Whitmore)
Dreamworks
 'Venice Drowned' (Kim Stanley Robinson) *Best SF of*
the Year 11
 'Lirios: A Tale of the Quintana Roo' (James Tiptree Jr)
Fantasy Annual V

1984:

'Saving Face' (Michael Bishop) *One Winter in Eden*

1985:

'The Battle of Acosta Nu' (Gerald Murnane) *Landscape*
with Landscape
 'Oh, For a Closer Brush with God!' (Brian W. Aldiss)
Twenty Houses of the Zodiac
 'The Twist of Fate' (David Grigg) *Urban Fantasies*
 'Press Enter ■' (John Varley) *Best SF of the Year 14*
 'The Fittest' (George Turner) *Urban Fantasies*
 'Slow Birds' (Ian Watson) *Best SF of the Year 13*
 'The Bullet That Grows in the Gun' (Terry Dowling)
Urban Fantasies

1986:

'Deep End' (J. G. Ballard) *The Terminal Beach*
 'The Terminal Beach' (J. G. Ballard) *The Terminal*
Beach
 'A Letter from the Clearys' (Connie Willis) *Fire Watch*
 'The Overloaded Man' (J. G. Ballard) *The Voices of*
Time
 'All My Darling Daughters' (Connie Willis) *Fire Watch*

1987:

'Aura' (Carlos Fuentes) *The Slaying of the Dragon*

'With the Gypsy Girls' (Mircea Eliade) *The Slaying of*
the Dragon
 'Stone Quarry' (Gerald Murnane) *Mearjin*, 1986/4
 'A Gift from the Graylanders' (Michael Bishop) *Best SF*
of the Year 15

1988:

'On the Turn' (Leanne Frahm) *Matilda at the Speed of*
Light
 'On for the Long Haul' (T. Coraghessan Boyle) *Greasy*
Lake and Other Stories

1989:

'Look on My Works' (Kate Grenville) *Expressway*
 'American Dreams' (Peter Carey) *Personal Best*
 'The Failure of the Bay Tree' (Marion Halligan) *The*
Hanged Man in the Garden
 'The Observatory' (Liam Davidson) *The Shipwreck*
Party

1990:

'Dinner Party' (Gardner Dozois) *Light Years and Dark*
 'Summer's Lease' (Joe Haldeman) *Light Years and*
Dark
 'The Lecturer' (John Kessel) *Light Years and Dark*
 'God and Her Black Sense of Humour' (Lucy Sussex)
My Lady Tongue and Other Tales
 'Over the Edge' (Petrina Smith) *Mirrors: Redress*
Novellas
 'The Wanda Lake Murders' (Robert Thurston) *Light*
Years and Dark

1991:

'Varicose Worms' (Scott Baker) *Blood Is Not Enough*
 'The Moon' (David Brooks) *Millennium*
 'Goats' (David Smeds) *In the Field of Fire*
 'The Shores of Bohemia' (Bruce Sterling) *Universe 1*
 'Credibility' (John Kessel) *In the Field of Fire*
 'Dream Baby' (Bruce McAllister) *In the Field of Fire*
 'The Shobies' Story' (Ursula K. Le Guin) *Universe 1*
 'Shades' (Lucius Shepard) *In the Field of Fire*
 'Lazarus' (Leonid Andreyev) *Blood Is Not Enough*
 'My Country, Tis Not Only of Thee' (Brian W. Aldiss) *In*
the Field of Fire
 'The Game of Cat and Eagle' (Craig Strete) *In the Field*
of Fire
 'Voices' (Michael Bishop) *Close Encounters with the*
Deity
 'Carrion Comfort' (Dan Simmons) *Blood Is Not Enough*
 'The Extra' (Greg Egan) *Eidolon 2*

1992:

'The Fetch' (Robert Aickman) *The Architecture of Fear*
 'Nesting Instinct' (Scott Baker) *The Architecture of Fear*
 'Penelope Comes Home' (M. J. Engh) *The Architecture*
of Fear
 'The Doorkeeper of Khaat' (Patricia A. McKillip) *Full*
Spectrum 2
 'Rainbow Bridge' (Kim Stanley Robinson) *Remaking*
History
 "'A History of the Twentieth Century, With
Illustrations'" (Kim Stanley Robinson) Remaking
History
 'The Eyes of the Green Lancer' (Sean McMullen) *Call*
to the Edge
 'A Plague of Strangers' (Karen Haber) *Full Spectrum 2*
 'In the Memory Room' (Michael Bishop) *The*
Architecture of Fear
 'Zurich' (Kim Stanley Robinson) *Remaking History*

'The Haunted Boardinghouse' (Gene Wolfe) *The Architecture of Fear*
 'Erosion' (Susan Palwick) *The Architecture of Fear*
 'The Lunatics' (Kim Stanley Robinson) *Remaking History*
 'Muffin Explains Teleology to the World at Large' (James Alan Gardner) *The Best of the Rest of the World 1990*
 'The Deciad' (Sean McMullen) *Call to the Edge*

1993:

'Children of the Wind' (Kate Wilhelm) *Children of the Wind*
 'Ashland, Kentucky' (Terence M. Green) *The Woman Who Is the Midnight Wind*
 'Apartheid, Superstrings and Mordecai Thubana' (Michael Bishop) *Full Spectrum 3*
 'Matter's End' (Greg Benford) *Full Spectrum 3*
 'The Gorgon Field' (Kate Wilhelm) *Children of the Wind*

1994:

'Snowman, Snowman' (Janet Frame) *You Are Now Entering the Human Heart*
 'The Ragthorn' (Robert Holdstock and Garry Kilworth) *A Whisper of Blood*
 'The Moose Church' (Jonathan Carroll) *A Whisper of Blood*
 'One Last Zoom at the Buzz Bar' (Alison M. Goodman) *The Patternmaker*
 'The Lordly Ones' (Keith Roberts) *The Lordly Ones*
 'Rand, Rat and the Dancing Man' (Keith Roberts) *The Chalk Giants*
 'The Walk' (Greg Egan) *The Patternmaker*
 'An Empty Wheelhouse' (Sean McMullen) *Metaworlds*

Sorry about that. I get a bit carried away when I start delving into my lists. But I do think sf/fantasy is a short story field. These are the stories that stay clearly in my memory, sometimes even after 30 years. There are lots of 'mainstream' stories that I like, but I remember few of them as well as I remember the stories listed above.

The list gives a good idea of one of my obsessions. From the mid 1960s until the mid 1970s I tried to read every science fiction and fantasy story published in English. In 1975 I realised this was an impossible task.

It had become impossible to track down all the anthologies, and I was now way behind in my reading of the magazines. I abandoned the magazines, and tried to buy and read all the anthologies. In the early 1980s I became way behind in *that* enterprise. Until a few years ago I was still trying to *buy* every original fiction anthology, but I've given up that enterprise as well. Still, when faced with the irresistible temptation of Justin Ackroyd's *Slow Glass Catalogue* I'm more likely to buy a book of sf short stories than a novel.

The list leaves out stories read before 1964. I don't have the lists to fill in that gap. Cordwainer Smith's 'A Planet Named Shayol' is a mighty story from the first issue of *Galaxy* I read. Jim Harmon's 'The Place Where Chicago Was' was in the same issue. Alfred Bester's 'They Don't Make Life Like They Used To' was in a 1962 *F&SF*. I remember a magnificent R. A. Lafferty story called 'E Being'. And the novella version of Ballard's 'The Drowned World', which has remained so vividly in my memory that I don't think I've ever read the novel.

If pressed for a 'best best', I would have to step outside the genre to Stanislaw Lem's 'The Mask' (*Mortal Engines* and several anthologies since) and Italo Calvino's 'Priscilla' and 'Blood, Sea' (from *T Zero*).

Followed by? 'All You Zombies'? Any one of a dozen Cordwainer Smith stories, especially 'Alpha Ralpa Boulevard'. Aldiss's 'The Worm That Flies', or any one of a dozen that pop up in the lists. Leiber's 'No Great Magic'. Stop.

If there are some names you don't recognise, they are Australian authors who have appeared only in Australian anthologies, especially Leanne Frahm's 'On the Turn', from Damien Broderick's anthology *Matilda at the Speed of Light*. If the book is no longer available I'll photocopy any Australian story you really want to read.

When I read the magazines, I spotted many authors before everybody else did. (But if so, where is Michael Bishop's first published story 'Piñon Fall' on the list?) Neil Shapiro? Remember him? The only writer who legitimately captured some of the strangeness of Cordwainer Smith's fiction. Disappeared in the mid-1960s. Whatever happened to Norman Kagan, who wrote 'Four Brands of Impossible'? What has happened to Britain's own Langdon Jones? Slippages and gaps.

RECENTLY READ

Everybody's doin' it, so I suppose I'd better do it too: report on books recently read. The trouble is that either I've been mucking around with enticing new computer software late into the night, or I've been catching up on reading old apazines (nearly two years of ANZAPA and the last few issues of *Acnestis*). And then there are the issues of *Q*, *The Gramophone* and *Rolling Stone* that must be read and gutted.

So, going backwards from the most recently read books until I get sick of writing this stuff:

Greg Egan: AXIOMATIC (1995; Millennium 1-85798-281-9; 289 pp.).

This is Greg Egan at his best. There are the few duds here, of course, stories that are not stories but lists of ideas. But 'The Caress' is still moving, even on my third reading of it, and 'The Safe-Deposit Box' is a classic story based on an idea that's probably been used before, but

never to anything like this effect. A few odd omissions in this collection, such as the maniacal 'The Extra', but the equally maniacal 'The Walk' is here.

Henri Troyat: DIVIDED SOUL: THE LIFE OF GOGOL (1971; Minerva Press 0-308-10170-7; 489 pp.).

Nikolai Gogol: DEAD SOULS (1842; Signet Classic CY-919; 278 pp.)

Elaine had tried reading Troyat's biography of Gogol some time ago. She gave up on it because of Troyat's writing style, and would have thrown it out. However, we have an agreement that I must give the okay to selling a book, and she must give the okay to me selling any book I want to chuck out. Before I could read the biography, I thought I should read Gogol's most famous book, *Dead Souls*, which has been sitting on the shelf for more than 20 years. *Dead Souls* is a sparkling, bitter realist comedy about a bloke who tries to conduct a neat

little swindle in a Russian provincial town in the early nineteenth century, only to find himself bested by the dumb cunning of the locals. An extraordinarily vivid picture of the backblocks of Russia at the time, plus some vital social comedy, with that edge that keeps reminding me of Voltaire's *Candide*.

I can see why Elaine did not like Troyat's *Divided Soul*. Gogol himself is perhaps the most repellent writer whose biography I've read; a superprat among prats. Halfway through the book, I didn't care much what happened to this supremely self-destructive fool. To make his point, Troyat writes about Gogol with that slightly over-the-top frenetic style typical of nineteenth-century Russian writers. (Much of the biography is based on the diaries of Gogol and his contemporaries.) If you don't like this style anyway, or don't see that Troyat is taking the piss out of his subject matter, you would find this a hard slog. Entertaining enough, but I wouldn't want to read any more *about* Gogol the ghastly twerp.

**Ellen Gilchrist: VICTORY OVER JAPAN
(1984; Faber & Faber 0-571-13446-7; 277 pp.).**

Contemporary American short stories, by an author who owes more than a little something to fellow Southerner Eudora Welty. Most of the stories don't quite work, grouped as they are in little bundles. Some stories work independently, and others only as a set, adding up to a novella. Uneasy stuff about daffy women characters, some of whom (Miss Crystal) forever memorable. Not a bad read, but I won't be searching for any more Ellen Gilchrist books.

**Fritz Zorn: MARS
(1977; Knopf 0-394-51755-5; 241 pp.)**

This purports to be the memoir of a Swiss writer working under a pseudonym. 'Fritz Zorn' is supposed to have finished this book at an early age, then died of cancer. You can see why when you read the book. He and Life don't get along too well at all. But this narrative could also be a clever put-on, a parody of the middle-European novel. Oddly compelling, because it's written in a limpid prose that reminds of Hermann Hesse, who was a cheerier writer than Zorn.

**Ruth Rendell: THE KILLING DOLL
(1984; Arrow 0-09-939950-4; 237 pp.)**

I am, as you will discover when eventually I get around to publishing My Favourite Novels of 1994, a fanatical fan of the non-Inspector Wexford novels of Ruth Rendell/Barbara Vine. *The Killing Doll* is potentially one of her best books, with its penetrating observations of two psychotic personalities under great strain, but somehow she never brings all her bits and pieces together into an entire structure. 'Is that all there is?' is how I reacted at the end.

And that carries me back to the beginning of June. The words counter tells me that this fanzine is already 10,161 words too long already. I just don't have the energy to write more, but I'll keep notes on books I read from now on.

— Bruce Gillespie, 21 July 1995