



Sparrowgrass & battle-twigs #79

Sparrowgrass & battle-twigs is a small fanzine produced by Roman Orszanski primarily for the assorted members of ANZAPA. This is intended for the April 2022 mailing. I can be reached at PO Box 3231 Rundle Mall, Adelaide SA 5001, or electronically via email at websmith@internode.on.net

The Play's the Thing



Wednesday, 6 April: A friend took me to see a musical written around the music of Bob Dylan. It was being staged by the State Theatre Company (of SA) at the recently rebuild Her Majesty's Theatre. Since the last performance I saw there was a concert by Amanda Palmer several years ago, I was also looking forward to looking at the revamped theatre. The play was set in 1933, during the depression, in a boarding house in Minnesota. We follow the lives of the guests and owners over a couple of years as they deal with various issues.

The two hours pass quickly, as there is constant movement, dancing and singing.

The lead singer at one stage will move from front of stage backwards with their microphone & stand, be surrounded by six others and form a backing group for the next song, replete with percussion. A core band at the back of the stage provides live music, and characters wander across the stage as scenes change and the story continues, sometimes with dancing and partying (as on New Years Eve_).

Lots of movement, dancing, singing and interactions between the characters. The songs are carefully chosen to match the story (or perhaps it's the other way around, as the story was written to explicitly make use of Dylan's songs).

Excellent acting by the main characters, telling a story of heartbreak and disappointment during the great depression.

Good play, great songs and superb staging. The sound was clear and excellent. It's already had a Sydney season, and will conclude its Adelaide run this weekend. The Melbourne season starts on April 29th, runs for a month at the Comedy theatre. Highly recommended. 🍷

Lisa McCune playing the wife of the guest house owner, at times melancholy and at times joyfully hyperactive



I did manage some other live theatre during the festival/fringe:

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? directed by Margaret Harvey was on at the Dunstan Playhouse. Edward Albee's play was given an added twist by the racially diverse casting of this Australian production.

The set was extraordinary, including a swimming pool on-stage!



Gerald Smith suggested we catch a play at the Bakehouse Theatre one night. I caught up with him and Karen at the Coopers Alehouse for dinner at 6, then we set off for the theatre (a short walk/ride away) to get there in time for the 7:30 start.

It was a short play (many of the fringe shows run just under an hour), dealing with a farmer who had declared his property an independent kingdom (hmm... what happened to that real-life Australian "principality"?). He's invited his two grown children to join him on the property so that he can settle the question of his succession.

The two siblings don't get on well, but both are suspicious of their dad's motives.

It turns out the tax department are investigating the kingdom...

A reasonably funny play, and we were seated a couple of rows away from the rest of the audience (fringe shows often play to small crowds). After the show, we noted we were a short walk away from Gary Mason. While we were tempted to pay him a surprise visit, we chose not to. Next time, maybe!

The Bakehouse often hosts Terry Pratchard plays, since the Artistic Director, Pamela Munt, has permission from Terry to adapt his works to plays.



The Unseen Theatre Company has presented several of them. Perhaps next time...?



The Last Continent, Unseen Theatre Co, 2014

On the last weekend in February, City Lights Bookstore organised a two day symposium around the new collection of essays which were be discussed at the April Nova Mob meeting.

I thought I'd attend the sessions via Zoom: given the time difference, the first day started with the Keynote session at 5:30am Sunday morning, Feb 27th.

Keynote: Andrew Nette & Iain McIntyre, editors of *Dangerous Visions & New Worlds* talked about the book and the birth and growth of "radical" SF through the sixties.

The first session after the intro was "Imagining New Worlds - What activists can and have learnt from sci-fi" hosted by

Iain McIntyre. Panelists included Annalee Newitz and Shelley Streeby, talking about activists and SF.

By this time it was near 8am, so I left the house to walk down the street to my local *Cafe Troppo*, located on Whitmore Square. I went for tea with lemon, and a Roo-ben bagel (using kangaroo for an aussie variant of the reuben sandwich).

Replete, I returned home to an online session "*Wild Seed: Reflecting on the work and impact of Octavia Butler*", which was moderated by Mimi Mondal with Alexis Pauline Gumbs and adrienne maree brown. This was a fascinating talk, because the participants talked about actions inspired by writings of Octavia Butler — I hadn't realised there were passionate devotees driven to act.

Session four was a very interesting session: "Final Programmes and New Fixes: A conversation with Michael Moorcock". Because of time zone differences, it was pre-recorded. Basically an interesting chat about

Moorcock, Blue Oyster Cult, Deep Fix and the various novels he produced.

Day 2 of the Symposium dawned (literally!) at 5:30am Monday, with session 5 on *The Forever War: Vietnam's impact on sci-fi*. Moderated by Andrew Nette with Terry Bisson and Marge Piercy — was of great interest as I'm a big fan of Marge Piercy's work.

Session six was *Session Six: The Bridge of Lost Desire: A Conversation with Samuel Delany*. Daniel Shank Cruz talked to Samuel Delany.

Ten Thousand Light Years From Home: Reflecting on the work and impact of James Tiptree Jr — Lucy Sussex

moderator, Karen Joy Fowler and Jonathon Letham as panellists, looking at the influence of feminism on SF.

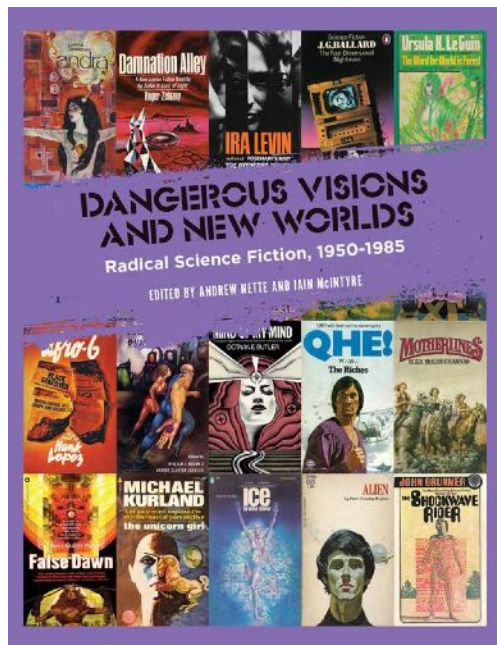


The symposium ended with a discussion *False Dawns and Wandergrounds: Dystopia, Then and Now*

Moderated by Nick Mamatas with Matt Bell, Cory Doctorow, Vandana Singh, and Ann VanderMeer



I think my favourite session was the wandering reminiscences of Michael Moorcock, but all the sessions are up on youtube so you can judge for yourselves: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWfKZcM_ZG8&list=PLxXxLZH0AYdCi_6gGhFK_vBLXcXQ37bz8&index=9



Culture Consumed

Slow Horses

A new series from Apple TV+, based on a series of books on Slough House, where failed MI5 agents are left to flounder.



There's a great cast including Gary Oldman, Dame Kristin Scott Thomas, Jack Lowden, Olivia Cooke, Saskia Reeves and Jonathan Pryce. If the first two episodes are indicative of the series, it's a spy drama worth watching. The story is based on the 2010 novel of the same name by Mick Herron. 🐾

Peaky Blinders

The story continues, as our hero has to deal with tragedy, betrayal and the end of prohibition. As expected, excellent watching. A few surprises and some satisfying endings. 🐾



The Endgame

Elena Federova (in Blue) is an international arms dealer. She has just been arrested by US security services on entering the country. While

being interrogated, her agents seize five banks in NY city, including the Federal Reserve. Despite being a captive, Elena appears to be completely in control, as she organises events to reveal corruption of her captors.

She's also playing cat-and-mouse with FBI agent Val Turner, whom she once shot in the desert. What does she hope to achieve? 🐾



Facts

I enjoyed the webinar from the Australia Institute¹, and am now reading the book published this year by Ed Coper. He's looking at the spread of disinformation, and looking at why and how it can spread. Most importantly, he also looks at how it can be blocked or corrected. *Hint: we are not rational beings.* 🐾

Orphan Black The Next Chapter season 2

Yes, the new season of Orphan Black is now available from realm.fm It continues the story from the TV series, with Emmy award-winning actress Tatiana Maslany reprising her multiple roles. Written by Madeline Ashby, Lindsay Smith, E.C. Myers, Malka Older, Heli Kennedy, and Mishell Bake. Excellent listening! 🐾



¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMSbwO1jqb0>

I think the woeful response to the floods in the eastern states (both lots!) will finally persuade a lot of voters that it's time to vote the bastards out. Current polling suggests that we're likely to get a minority government backed by climate concerned independents; hopefully this will lead to some sensible climate policy, as opposed to the "gas led recovery".

Re the question of who's in Marc's photo... I'd wager that I'm between Claire Brialey and Eve Harvey, with John Harvey and Mark Plummer just to the left of Cath Ortlieb in the top row. Spike Parsons is between Eric and I, in the row behind us.

The zoom meeting with Leigh is now online at youtube as part of the fanac.org series:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=yh6FLBOWCDs



Saturday, 9th April: I decided to take advantage of the time extension to add some Culture Consumed notes (see p 5).

Anyhow, hope you're all well and enjoying yourselves. I'm off to get some nice Hot Cross buns in the morning, after my bike ride to Glenelg to the Orange Spot Bakery. Take care! 🍷 Roman

Lots of dancing and singing in *The Girl from the North Country*

