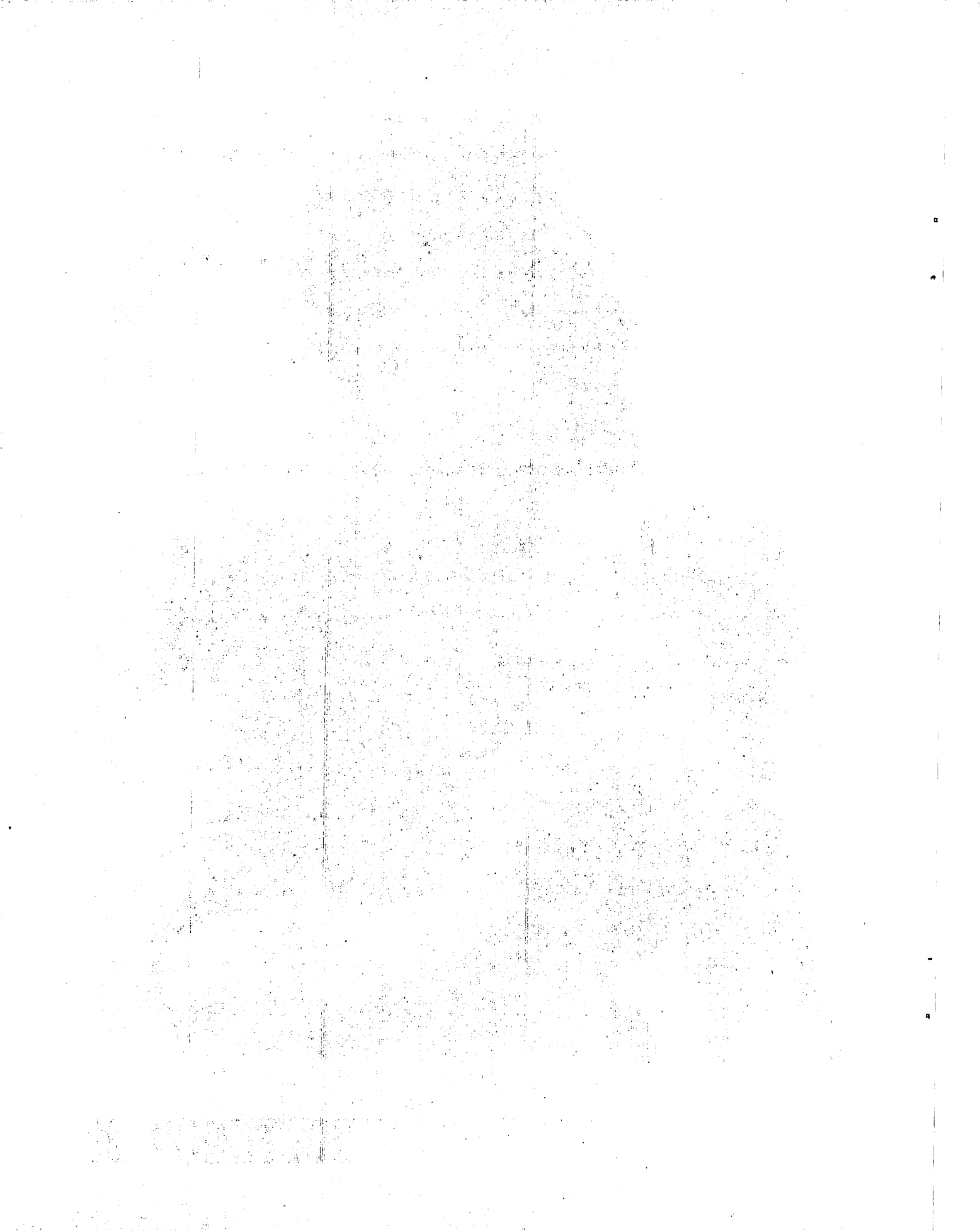
SCYTHROP 28



SCYTHROP 28 : Summer 1973/4

Contents:

AVE ATQUE VALIUM

This is the last issue of Scythrop. It isn't all that pften that I change policy in mid-publication, but it has happened this time. In the editorial notes which I wrote for this issue four months ago I announced that Philosophical Gas had ceased publication, and that in future I would only be publishing Scythrop. On second, third and subsequent thoughts, I have decided that PG should continue (since it is what I really feel like publishing) and that Scythrop should cease.

There is good reason for this. When I started Australian Science Fiction Review, over seven years ago, there was a need for it, and I felt strongly the urge to respond to that need. ASFR happened at a time when there was a crying need for a fanzine which could ably and regularly review the state of the art. John Foyster and Lee Harding, primarily, and some other folk (Brian Aldiss, Jim Blish, John Baxter and the late Ted Carnell among them) made ASFR, with a little help from me. But not much help from me. Even then I was far more interested in science fiction as a branch of literature than as an object of specialist and scholarly study, and gradually my prejudice showed. In 1969 I changed the magazine's name to Scythrop, and since then, sporadically, have more or less used it as a medium for talking about anything which interests me. Sure, science fiction still interests me - no doubt about that - but there are other things...

The tradition (if it may be dignified by that name) of ASFR has been most ably carried on by Bruce Gillespie in his SF Commentary. I hope he never stops: it's a great fanzine, and I love it. Jim Blish once dedicated a volume of critical essays to Dick Bergeron, Dick Geis, Leland Sapiro and me - 'keepers of the flame'. As well as being proud, I've always felt funny about that, because Foyster and Harding should have been mentioned there instead of me. More recently, George

Turner and Bruce Gillespie have shown themselves to be amongst the most worthy 'keepers of the flame' - and I sincerely hope that Jim Blish will dedicate a book to them, since they deserve it more than I ever did.

In 1968 Leigh Edmonds started up the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association, and I suddenly and delightedly discovered that the most rewarding activity in fandom is talking to a small number of fannish friends. (I don't think it is entirely coincidence that Gillespie's editorial in SFC is entitled 'I Must Be Talking To My Friends'.) You know that the basic attitudes to fandom have always been FIAWOL - Fandom is a Way of Life - and FIJAGH - Fandom is just a Goddam Hobby. I think Bruce would agree with me that neither is quite right, that there needs to be a new slogan: FIF! - Fandom Is Friends! That's the way I've found it, anyway.

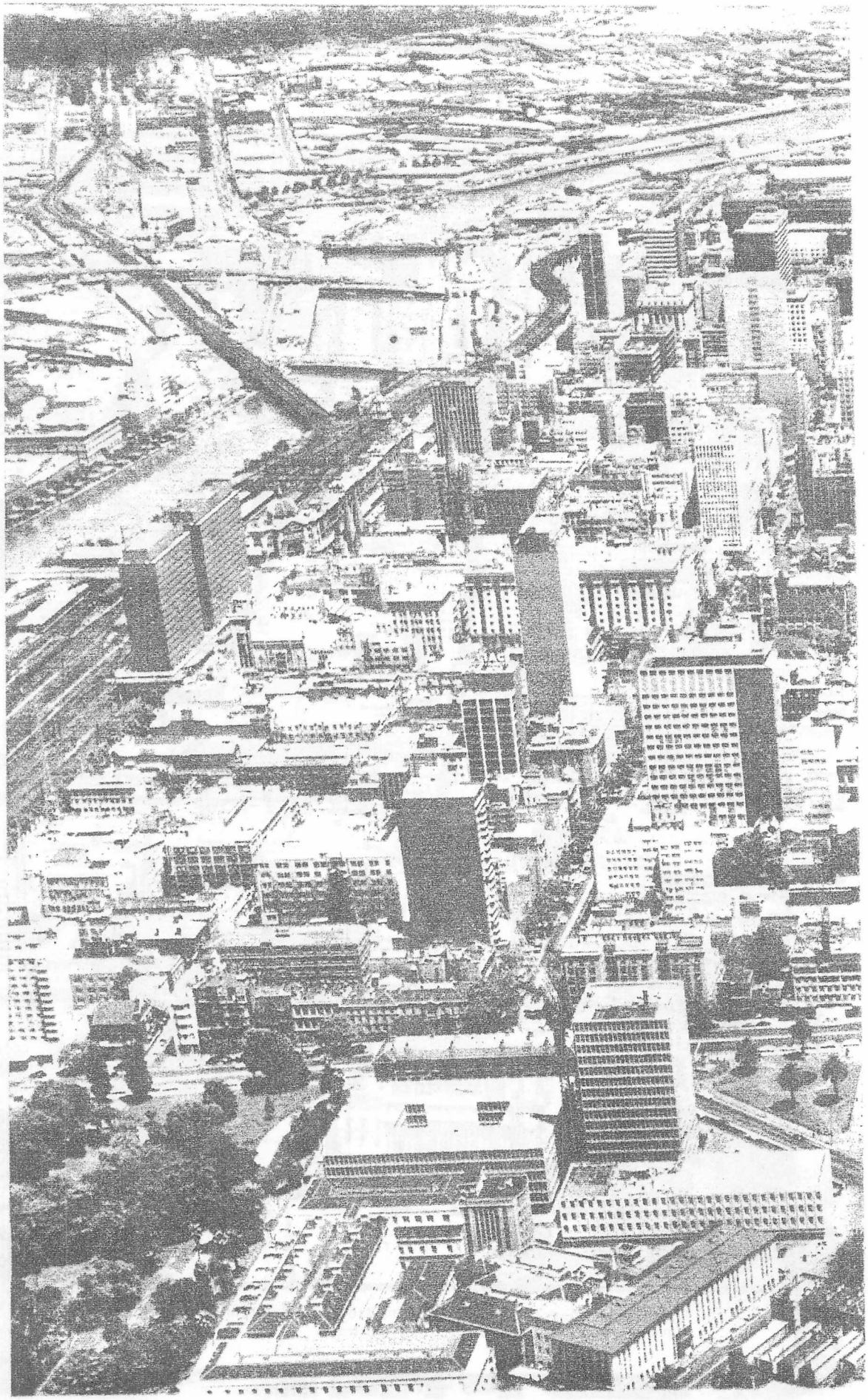
In an early issue of ASFR I suggested that Australia might be the place for a World Science Fiction Convention. With the enthusiastic support of Andy Porter in New York this evolved from a suggestion into an idea, and from an idea to a campaign, and from a campaign to a victory. Melbourne, Australia, is the site for the 33rd World Science Fiction Convention, in 1975. Today (23rd October 1973) I received in the mail a copy of the first progress report of Aussiecon '75. Andy and I aren't mentioned, except as members, but I don't mind. This is something we started, and less than two years from now it will be a reality. With any luck it will be the best, most memorable, Worldcon ever staged.

For a while I was Chairman of the Australia in '75 bidding committee, but I was living in Canberra and the bid was from Melbourne, so I couldn't continue. Better men and women have taken over the job, and I am happy. I resigned from the A75 Committee a day or so before we won the bid, not from any unwillingness to help the committee, but because I feel too cut off here in Canberra to do anything worth while. Oddly, perhaps, I wanted to stay on the committee - if for nothing else, for the reason that I did not want to be eligible for a Hugo award. I might be kidding myself entirely about this, but I want to make my attitude quite clear: If anyone at all feels inclined to nominate me for any Hugo award in 1975 he is wasting his vote. In 1975 you can forget me entirely; I will not accept any nomination, nor any award.

Buying me a drink is another matter entirely. But if you feel that way, I think you should buy George Turner a drink first. Read his articles in this issue and I think you will see what I mean.

Peace!

- JB



SCYTHROP 28

Edited, printed & published by John Bangsund : Parergon Books
PO Box 357 Kingston ACT 2604 Australia

PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

SCYTHROP's editorial used to be called 'The March of Mind', but with the demise of Philosophical Gas as a separate publication I have decided to appropriate its title for the gallimaufry of selected garbage written by myself and purple passages composed by others which passes for an editorial in this publication.

It was my original intention that this issue should be partly, as usual, about science fiction, but mainly about Melbourne. After all, Melbourne is to be the site of the biggest science fiction convention ever conducted in Australia, and quite possibly the 33rd World Science Fiction Convention, in 1975 - and I felt that I should do my little bit to dissuade intending overseas visitors by publishing an issue of this journal devoted to the horrors of Melbourne in particular and Australia generally.

It didn't work out that way. I designed the cover and illustration pages (all cunningly selected to put off any civilized outlander who might have romantic notions about this country) long before I had articles to go with them. Accidentally these pages were electrostencilled and run off last November, so I had to ask friends to write articles to fit the artwork. And they did.

One of the articles I enjoyed reading so much that I decided not to use the others in this issue at all. Instead I decided that this rather special number should be devoted almost entirely to the work of the finest and most illustrious author ever to appear in Australian fanzines: George Turner. George made his first fanzine appearance in the First Anniversary Issue, so it seems also appropriate to dedicate this issue to him.

For permission to publish his 'Conception, Intellect and Art' I am indebted to Angus & Robertson (Publishers) Pty Ltd. This article started out as an address delivered by George to a seminar at La Trobe University, Melbourne, during 1972.

20th June: I received a delightful pocsarctd (damn: I can never spell that) a couple of days ago from

URSULA K. LE GUIN
3321 NW Thurman St
Portland
Oregon 97210 USA

A daughter of mine who plays the cello and was pleased by the tale of Keats & Chapman and the themes ((Philosophical Gas 22)) wishes you to know the following history:
Keats was feeling rather ill, and his friend Chapman, a man well versed in ancient Homeric medicines, advised the following treatment: To take a rawhide thong 18 inches long, and each day to bite off one inch from the end, chew it thoroughly, and swallow it. 'This,' Chapman said, 'was a sovereign Greek prescription for ailments of the digestive organs.' Keats at once procured a strip of rawhide and followed Chapman's instructions. Nineteen days later Chapman called upon the poet and inquired whether the treatment had worked. Palely, Keats shook his head. 'The thong is ended,' he said, 'but the malady lingers on.'

With lots of love from all of us at the Watergate,
Ursula (and Elisabeth)

Mm, yes. Ah, Elisabeth, that's not bad at all. Not quite Hugo quality like your mother's work, you understand, but not bad, not bad at all. I feel I can predict confidently for you a Great Career as a cello player. (At this moment, just between you and me - not a word to anyone - I am listening to Pierre Fournier and some character named Oistrakh playing Brahms's Double Concerto, and I feel I prefer cello players to science fiction writers. But promise me you won't let on to Them, okay? Okay.)

Watergate jokes are not unknown to we colonials. A few days ago at work Ed Hunter, our dirty-minded and entirely loveable technician, asked us if we had heard the story about Spiro Agnew playing golf somewhere in Florida. 'Yes,' I said. 'He picked up the ball and got dial tone.' 'No,' Ed said, a bit disgusted-looking - and he proceeded to tell us a story about Spiro T. Ragwort playing golf somewhere in Florida or wherever, and the punchline was something like, 'Oh, alligators! That's okay. Just so long as they're not watergaters.' Real scream of a story it was. I looked at Ed sort of blank-like, which disappointed him no end, then I laughed and said, 'I get it!' He picked up the ball and got crocodile tone.' Ed stalked off in the direction of his atomic absorption spectrometer or whatever it is that makes the funny noises through the wall behind my desk, muttering to himself. Today my Tandberg blew up. I suspect he hasn't much time for paronomasians like myself.

I'd never heard of paronomasia until today, when I was looking up the spelling of some other word and came across it. (I'm like that with dictionaries. On the way to the word I want I find so many other good words that I just get lost for an hour or so. It happens with any dictionary, but Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable is the most dangerous in this respect, which is why I don't have a copy on my desk at work.) Paronomasia is the clinical term for what Peacock somewhere calls Carthaginian remarks. Carthaginian? Punic. I'm sure you understand. I prefer to call it 'the Phoenician touch'.

I'm sure you know by now that I work for Hansard. (If you didn't know, you do now. If you don't know what Hansard is, look it up in your Funk&Wagnalls.) My favourite senator - no kidding - is Senator Mulvihill. He's hell to work on. I mean, he speaks a language which is incredibly like English; you know exactly, or at least you feel that you know exactly, what he's talking about; but when it's transcribed, what he has said becomes the most heart-breaking gibberish you ever saw in print (outside of fanzines, that is). Recently he described something an Opposition senator said as 'carpeting criticism'. Now I don't care much what you think, but I can't help loving a bloke who says things like that. Senator Mulvihill is the Rick Sneary of the Australian Parliament. (I can't help loving Rick either, even though he doesn't write to me these days. Years ago Rick wrote a letter to me about John Campbell's 'whinny harangs', and I've never forgotten that.) When people ask me what I do for a living I say I am employed to make Montaignes out of Mulvihills.

3rd July (at his residence, suddenly):
I expect a Public Outcry. Nothing less will do. The judges appointed to draw up a short-list of possible future national anthems have failed miserably in their task. Before next January we, the Great Australian Public, will be forced to choose a new anthem - but what choice have we? There is Waltzing Matilda (straight, or as revised by Douglas Stewart), Advance Australia Fair!, Song of Australia and the half-dozen the anthem quest judges have selected. Of the latter, on a quick reading, the best seems to be by one David Boutland - better known to science fiction readers as David Rome. (But what happened - what, I say - to my entry, and John Alderson's and Ron Clarke's? Eh? Well, I forgot to submit mine, but that's begging the question.) Incensed, and righteously so, I sate down this very day and inscribed the following missive to the Editor of The Times (the Canberra Times, that is):

Sir:
The entrants for the Anthem Quest
Have given us their very best;
They make this place sound pretty good,
As any national anthem should;
Their every perfect sentiment
Can surely meet with no dissent:
Those lofty aims! that noble stand!
Those glorious gums! that sunny strand!
They've sung their praise of our fair land -
But none of them is worth five grand!
Allons, enfants! (and dames and fellers) -
We know Australia's über alles -
But let us vote (with one accord)
To waltz along with good old Maud!
Yrs fitfully, JB

I was in strife even before I posted it. My friend Alf at work said 'Who's Maud?' 'Maud is short for Matilda,' I said. 'In a pig's eye,' he said. 'Anywhere,' I said. Anyway, I can't prove it yet: all I know is that Henry I's daughter, Matilda - the one who had all that trouble with Stephen, way back when - was also known as Maud; and I have asked Sam Moskowitz to stand by to prove that Waltzing Matilda dates back to the 12th Century and is actually all about that lady. Anyway, Matilda doesn't rhyme with 'accord'. I wish people wouldn't be so pedantically critical about my work.

Then when I referred to my verse as a sonnet I was rubbished again. Now, I ask you! It's got fourteen goddam lines, hasn't it! Most of the goddam lines rhyme, don't they! If it's not a goddam sonnet, what is it? Even Terry Jeeves could tell you it's a sonnet. We geniuses, Terry - people like you and me and SaM and that Asimov chap I keep hearing about - we few, laden with the burden of Art, lead a... lonely... misunderstood... kind of existence, do we not? We do. But we have our reward, oh yes. In the streets little old ladies and young clergymen speak kindly to us. It isn't much, but it's... it's something.

I think I might be in trouble soon in South Africa, too. Brian Lombard, in Cape Town, kindly invited me to join the newly-formed Amateur Publishing Association of Southern Africa (Africapa, for short), and I responded with the first issue of a slim publication entitled REVOLTING TALES OF SEX AND SUPER-SCIENCE. Probably picked up that title from a Rotsler drawing, come to think of it, but I don't mind if he doesn't. But can you imagine what the South African Customs will do if they happen to open the envelope I sent to Brian? Africapa, and with it South African fandom, will instantly disappear, quietly and mysteriously. Despite investigations by fearless South African television newsmen, nothing will ever be known of their fate - partly because South Africa does not have television. It's a shame really. I mean, it'll be a shame if it happens.

South Africa will have a real problem - if you'll pardon me talking crazy science fiction stuff for a minute - when they get round to introducing television. Will they go for colour (horror!) or (oh, heaven forfend!) black-and-white?

This kind of speculation inevitably reminds me of a parliamentary committee on which I have the honour of working at present. The Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence is investigating 'the adequacy of the Australian Army to perform its necessary part in the defence of Australia', and it got under way on 20th June. And, believe me,

the committee is digging up some fascinating things. Take Brigadier Ochiltree, for example, the very first witness to appear. 'The Australian serviceman,' said the good and gallant gentleman 'is a non-political piece of equipment. He gives his loyalty to whatever government might be in power at the time.' Not like those rotten servicemen in Greece and Egypt and other heathen places who don't like their government and have the disloyalty even to overthrow it, no sir - not our soldiers. 'A factor that is frequently overlooked,' he continued 'is that soldiers are liable to get their heads shot off, sailors are liable to be sunk, airmen are liable to crash, but they do this uncomplainingly...' One feels a quiet but proud swelling of the bosom. One wishes the Brigadier could take time off to write a national anthem.

Later, in the same hearing, one of my other favourite senators, Senator Carrick, was disputing with Professor J.D.B. Miller the possibility of adequately forecasting the trend of international relationships even on a short-term scale - say the next decade. (Who knows when we might declare war on New Guinea, or Noumea, or Tasmania?) Senator Carrick said 'There will always be significant imponderables.'

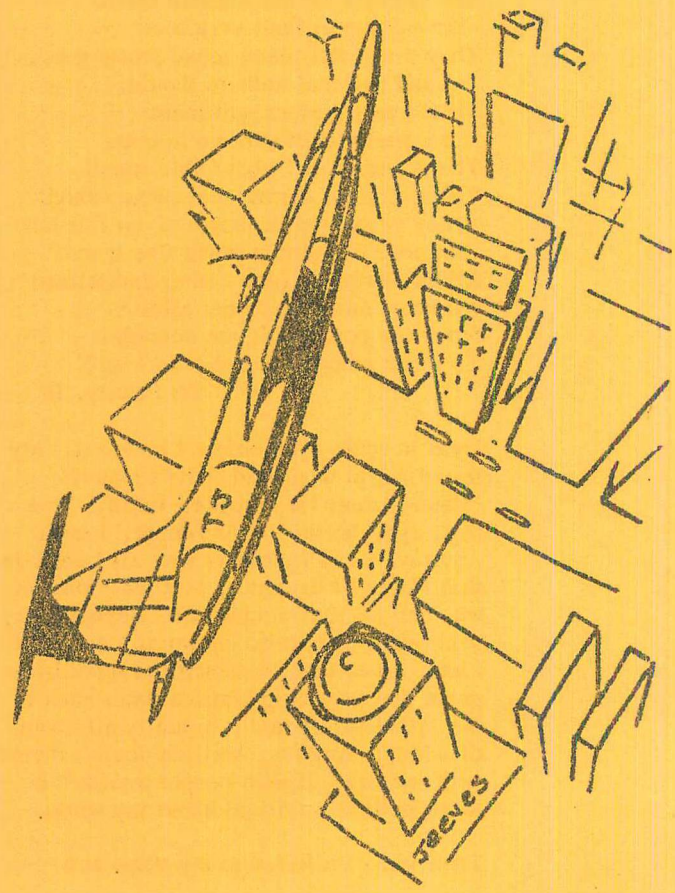
And he's right, you know! There always, definitely and without a doubt, will be significant imponderables. But... I don't find them especially worrying. What scares hell out of me is the insignificant imponderables. What happens, say, if the price of kohlrabi goes up steeply and without warning in the major provincial centres of Upper Volta? 'Imponderable,' you say 'and furthermore, insignificant.' But it is precisely this kind of thing that could plunge us irretrievably into an holocaust of inconceivable dimensions!

Think about it.

While you are thinking about it I will go on typing up George Turner's articles in this issue - if you will pardon me.

Cheers,

JHB



George Turner:

HOME SWEET HOME
and
Other Tearful Glimpses of the Dear Nostalgic Past

WE WERE busy getting pie-eyed, which is nothing unusual, at Bruce Gillespie's place - which is distinctly unusual. Not that Bruce is anti anything, but he publishes so much that he rarely has time to drink tea, let alone exotic alcohols.

At any rate John Bangsund, who dotes on exotic alcohols, flashed this sheet which he claimed would one day be the cover of Scythrop 28. There could be no mistaking the identity of the woman trying to look demure (which she never was in life) in her get-up for some tatty opera (even the best opera was tatty in her day) and I could only conclude that John had succumbed to the dreaded Canberra Rot. (And who can be sure he hasn't?)

I asked gently 'But why Melba?', and he answered, with that peculiar lack of logic which goes down so well with children, idiots, unmarried mothers and George Turner, that 'it seemed a good idea at the time'.

And he added, because he doesn't know when to stop, 'I thought you might do an article about it.'

It's the type of impertinence which can only be capped by a greater. I delivered my body blow with studied nonchalance. 'Frankly,' I told him 'there have been singers whom I much preferred as artists, but she was a most pleasant person to meet.'

It stopped him cold. He had never before realized just who my true contemporaries were. (Until that moment I hadn't quite realized it myself.) Never did name-dropper savour his art more sweetly.

'You mean you knew Melba!' Reverence throbbed in that claret-cosseted voice. I couldn't have made much more impression by claiming to have wolf-whistled Lizzie Borden. It's the unexpectedness that stuns them.

Yes, I knew Melba. (That is the sort of statement that might be described as almost, slightly or minimally true. The facts will emerge later.)

Having no desire to write such a fatuous piece for his spasmodic rag, I pressed advantage, enquiring with just the right touch of coolness what he fondly imagined might be the connection between Melba and science fiction.

For a moment I had him on the rails, but he's resilient, by God, he's resilient.

Murmuring 'I'm sure you'll think of one,' he flipped glass to lip with an insolent flourish, engulfed an indecent glug of claret and started talking to someone else before I could lay tongue to suitable curse.

* * * * *

This historical introduction was included to give you some insight into the real personality of Bangsund and of the kind of in-fighting demanded if you are to survive under his tyranny. More than simple one-upmanship is required against a man who is not ashamed to hit and run - with his claret in one hand and your scalp in the other.

* * * * *

When that I was a little tiny boy,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain...

That's when I met Melba, but I don't think it was raining.

It was all due to the fact that I was a choirboy at the time, and every year we used to...

To hell with that. Let me tell you about that time in St Paul's choir. It was nearly half a century ago, and Dame Nellie can wait in the wings for a few paragraphs...

... because I have been looking at some other illustrations for this projected Scythrop and my time machine has jerked to a fragmented halt in several different periods at once.

There's Ned Kelly of course, in his tinware, but he shuffled on his immortal coil in 1892, I think, and I did not actually know him. (Nor was I present at the death of Queen Anne, rumour to the contrary. I have to explain these things because part of JB's reaction to my casual mention of Melba-meeting was an unspoken 'Jesus, you must be ancient!' Like the unfulfilled teenager he is.)

But above and to the right of Ned is a group of ladies and gents who are also a little before my time. However, fashion changed less rapidly and less thoroughly in the sprawling, self-contained back-country just after World War I, and those folk, including the brat in sailor suit, would not have been out of place in my Kalgoorlie of 1920.

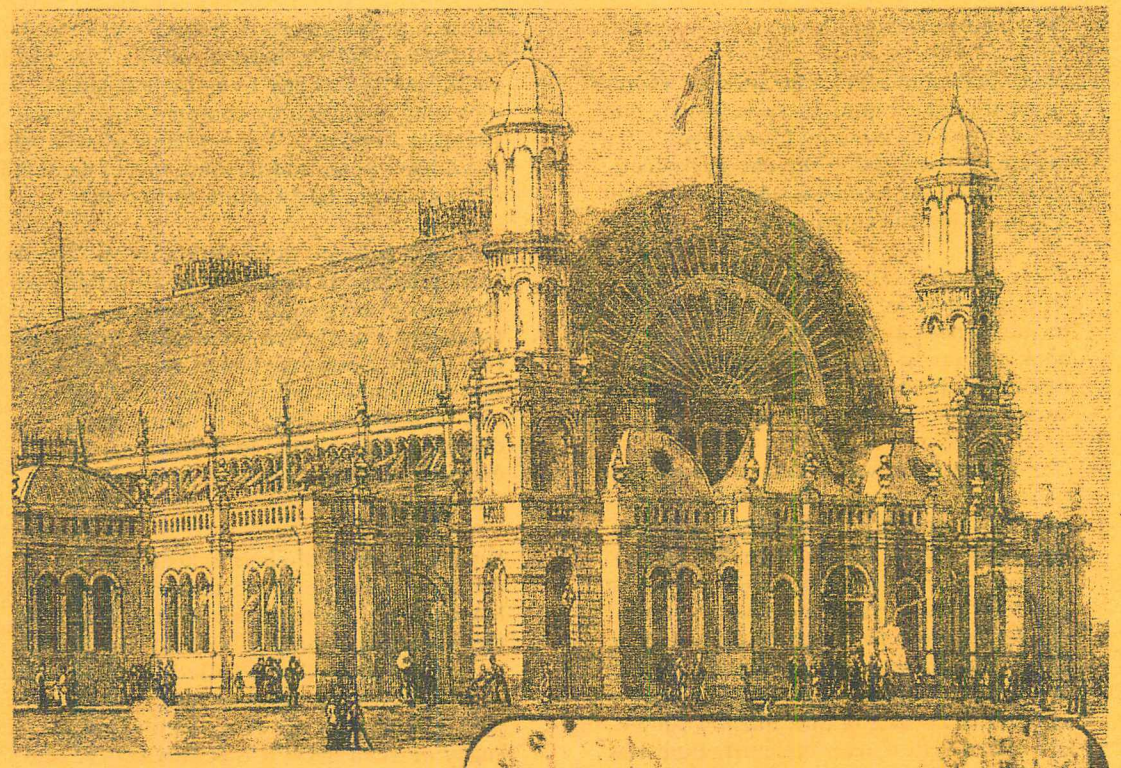
Not for them the 'Roaring Twenties' bit: that came much later - so much later that I have a distinct memory of shock when my mother cut her waist-length hair and wore a 'shingle' in 1926, and got her skirts up off the ground at about the same time. It was like having a stranger in the house. And a year or so later the other kids and I were giggling at skirts that had climbed to the knee. And a musical comedy called 'Good News' was all the rage, with its hit-song 'Roll 'em Girls' encouraging the naughtiness of rolling the stockings actually below the knee and showing the (porn! shudder!) dimpled flesh.

And there's that picture of the Exhibition Building, a vast white elephant built for something or other (perhaps to celebrate the end of the Wars of the Roses, also just before my time) and notable in my tiny eleven-year-old mind because it had, and may still have for all I know, a vast pipe organ, many of whose notes did not play.

One of the reasons for this non-playing was that the angels of St Paul's Cathedral choir - some twenty other little bastards and myself - got loose among the pipes one day while officially giving a concert of Christmas carols and souvenired some forty or fifty reeds. There's really nothing like the simple-hearted vandalism of the leering innocent.

I was about to tell of the choir, but hang on a minute because there's a picture there of a cable tram, and riding cable trams was one of the pleasures of the 20s. Ah, to sit at the front with the wind blowing crisp in your face! Also rain, dust and kicked-up road dirt.

There was a sort of camaraderie, now quite dead, about public transport in those days. It was part of the fun when the gripman ('driver' to you) failed to 'shoot' the corner when changing grip from one cable to the next at right angles to it, and we all had to pile out and push her round. And you didn't pant with despair when your last tram departed without you: you just ran like mad, caught it up in about half a block and were dragged aboard by whistling, cat-calling, encouraging passengers.



But about this choir...

Aside from a musical education of a sort - under the tutorship of Dr A. E. Floyd, one of the few people whom I have ever genuinely respected - the choir provided what passed for a secular education. And a grim proposition that was.

Choir practice lasted until about 9 each morning; then we went off to East Melbourne to start school at 10. Since we had to be back and ready dressed for evensong at 5, this meant no more than five hours schooling each day and often less.

The school itself was a hall in a back lane (it still exists, though the choirboys are educated these days at Trinity), and here the score or so of us were handled by two masters. Since our ages ranged from 8 to about 13 (few boys' voices last unbroken after that) these two poor devils had to run five or six classes simultaneously. In fact it was the one-horse country school system, in the heart of a city of a million people. But with a difference: the curriculum was classical. This meant that though arithmetic was not actively discouraged we wallowed mainly in history (and bloody peculiar history it was - King Alfred's trouble with cakes, and all that), geography (the principal exports of Tierra del Fuego are... well, what are they? - that sort of geography) and English (Charles Lamb's 'Origin of Roast Pig' was a fair sample, and remains one of my childhood delights).

And to make a full man: Latin! At the ripe (meaning grubby and probably smelly) age of 8 I was introduced to a volume whose first stark sentence remains with me yet - 'Nauta casam habet.'

First declension.

That sailor and his bloody cottage haunted me for years, if only because it seemed a stupid remark which the Latin grammar made no effort to explain.

We bulldozed through the declensions by reciting examples in unison at the tops of our voices in a thumping rhythm: 'BellUM, bellUM, bellUM, bellI, bellO, bellO' - pause to mark end of singulars and then hurtle into the plurals - 'bellA, bellA, bellA, bellORUM, bellIS, bellIS.' It didn't do much good, and to this day I can be reduced to gibbering confusion by contemplation of the Ablative Absolute. I never knew what it was, don't know now, and in some sort of paranoid defensiveness, flatly refuse to find out.

If I never became more than a toe-in-the-door Latin scholar, at least I learnt something about the basis of language - all language, not only languages - and much more when I came to French and German. I have an uneasy feeling that the direction of my intellectual life (if that be a fitting phrase for mental lucky-dippiness) was settled in that beastly, draughty, miserable hall of resounding ignorance.

But the real hell of choir-school life was contained in those immortal weeklies, 'The Magnet' and 'Nelson Lee', which chronicled the outrageous doings of a set of snotty little snobs at English schools called Greyfriars and St Frank's. They were modelled roughly (and despite their air of bonhomie) on the Rugby of TOM BROWN'S SCHOOLDAYS and we, for reasons known only to God and his soulmate Satan, copied them.

Newcomers became 'fags' and were subjected to indignities, sometimes both painful and terrifying. Among them was isolation on a deserted landing on one of the numerous little-used back stairs of the Cathedral, there to await the dreaded ghost of the Ginger Cat. (The name was not a joke: it was considered specially horrifying.) The sadistic side of memory still dwells occasionally on the rending screams of an eight-year-old who survived our pleasantries to become a remarkably successful and brutal commando officer, and I wonder if we had some part in the forming of his career.

Of course there was compulsory sport, singularly devoted to drawing blood and tears and making a man of you, and uninhibited bullying of the small by the large. I was small.

Eventually I was expelled over a matter concerning dead fish thrown down a lift well, which is too long a tale to dwell on here; suffice it that I escaped to a wider air and went to a State School. There they introduced me, tearfully complaining, to such unheard-of

subjects as Geometry, Elementary Physics and Shakespeare. Probably just in time to avert utter darkness.

All I carried with me from St Paul's was a phoney English accent which took me thirty years to lose. One side effect was a passion for Handel, Haydn, Bach, Mendelssohn and Mozart which has not subsided. But the early impact of those giants had a stultifying effect in that only now am I able to come to terms with such as Prokofiev, Ravel, Debussy, Stravinsky. Schoenberg, Hindemith and Bartok are, I fear, forever beyond me.

* * * * *

Does Melba lurk somewhere in all this? Yes. Here she is:

Every Christmas the choir did its charitable round of the public hospitals, singing carols for patients who dutifully expressed themselves delighted, and possibly were, because it was a very fine choir. Once, in the midst of this festive bawling of 'Wenceslas', 'God Rest Ye', 'In Dulce Jubilo' and so on, we found ourselves at Coombe Cottage (a fair sized cottage, believe me) at Lilydale, delivering our soprano goods to its owner, Dame Nellie no less. And afterwards she came and talked to us, so that forever we could claim that We Met Melba. She probably sang 'Home Sweet Home' as a quid pro quo, because she would sing the damned thing at the drop of a hat, but memory doesn't really record that.

Her secretary then was a willowy young gent called Beverly Nichols, who later achieved a sort of giggly notoriety as the author of a series of ladylike books with titles like DOWN THE GARDEN PATH, and a set of marvellously bitchy essays on prominent people, ARE THEY THE SAME AT HOME? Perhaps he was there. If so, he didn't register. (But Beverly is worth a memory as an oddity of modern literature. If you want to discover the Nichols style without wading through one of his moribund books, read Graham Greene's incredibly funny pastiche, 'Portrait of a Maiden Lady', in the Penguin edition of Greene's collected essays. It's a miracle of hilariously spot-on nastiness.

* * * * *

And where does science fiction get in? It gets in here, before I forget. And by the skin of its teeth only.

The best I can do is point out that a snivelling, inky choirboy who lived - God save the word - in the Era of Melba made existence supportable by adventuring vicariously among BEMs and spaceships supplied by a cavern of glories called McGill's Bookshop.

THE SKYLARK OF SPACE was king of the universe then, and I soared abroad with Seaton and DuQuesne while my tinny soprano quavered 'Oh, for the wings of a dove' - which was a pretty poor substitute. The great-greats of that day were people like Hyatt Verrill, David Keller and Stanton Coblentz. Leinster and Hamilton were old-timers in the business even then (they must have been born in the Pleistocene, a year or two before me), and Jack Williamson was reaching chubby fingers at his first typewriter. They were great days, when adventure and wonder and exhilaration and colour and a crawling at the nape of the neck were all part of the one indescribable escape into romance.

Consistency, scientific accuracy, the canons of criticism and even plain common sense had not arisen to plague appreciation and fragment enjoyment. I look back on those days like one who has kicked a particularly technicoloured drug habit - glad to be no longer in total thrall, but nostalgic for the marvellous dreams.

* * * * *

Alas, this slobbering over yesterday must wind down with a rather nasty twist in the tail of memory. Quite a peculiar twist, with a moral attached, saying: 'Put not your trust in authors and those whose provenance is romance.'

You see, some twenty-five years ago, while my mother (a grim lady with a positively badgering regard for truth) still lived, we spoke of Melba. Now, it's a curious thing that my mother and I, who rarely agreed on anything more serious than a craving for chocolate, cordially disliked the great goddess's singing, finding it

perfect in technique but lacking in human warmth, just as neither of us liked the bull-bellowings of Caruso, despite their glory of tone. We preferred lesser titans who moved our hearts more than our clinical appreciation. We were probably talking along such lines when I recalled the Coombe Cottage meeting.

And here I assume the novelist's privilege of recreating a lost conversation...

My mother put down her teacup, set her face in the sympathetic expression she wore when about to enjoy shredding someone else's dream, and said
'You have been rattling that nonsense for twenty years. But now you have achieved a species of maturity, fighting for your country and that sort of thing...' Here she raised a minatory finger to interpose 'Now, now, I do not wish to hear again your diatribe on the juvenility of patriotism. You do it well, but enough is enough. In fact, you're a bore. Where was I?'
'Melba.'
'Why? Ah, yes, I was saying that this fantasy has run uncontradicted for twenty years, but it is time to quash it. You did not meet Melba at Coombe Cottage. You did not even visit Coombe Cottage.'
'I remember well...'
'You do not.'
In the face of such authority it always paid to shut up and listen.
'The choir was supposed to visit Coombe Cottage but the visit was cancelled. Why you should have built this edifice of nonsense on a minor disappointment, if it was indeed that, is beyond me. But you were always an <u>imaginative</u> child. Unhealthily so, I often thought.'
She raised her teacup, signifying termination of the subject, then set it down again, indicating that a coda was coming.
'You did meet her once. But you wouldn't remember; you were only three. It was at your Aunt's place.' (Aunt, be it noted, was 'society' and could have Melba along home any old day.)
'Melba kissed you, I can't think why. She had such good taste in other matters. You burst into tears and would not be pacified, and had to be taken out, purple in the face.'

* * * * *

So much for the glamorous past.

It leaves me wondering uncomfortably just what did or did not happen in those olden days. Or even last week...

George Turner:

YESTERDAY'S TOMORROWS

Note: This review of W. H. G. Armytage's 'Yesterday's Tomorrows: a historical survey of future societies' (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1968) is reprinted from Australian Science Fiction Review 18 (December 1968).

THIS BOOK is sub-titled 'A historical survey of future societies', which is, I suppose, a fair description, but it is much more than that. It is a history, stunningly documented, of man's attempts to determine the direction of his own future, from the days of priestly prophecy to the contemporary use of technical groups armed with the weapons of mathematics, psychology, games theory and that whole intellectual and physical gimmickry which allows man to eavesdrop on the secrets of his own behaviour.

Science fiction rears its anything but bug-eyed head very early in the piece, occupies an honoured position throughout most of the survey (which runs to more than 90 000 words) and is edged out only in the last chapter, wherein real science takes over the running with a vengeance.

That YESTERDAY'S TOMORROWS contains a pretty good outline of the development of science fiction is incidental, a bonus which happens to be necessary to the theme because the sf writers and their progenitors have played a major role in documenting man's attempts to read the future. This bonus may prove to be the main attraction for some readers, though the hard-core thesis is never really hard and the only doubtful moments seem to be the fruit of faulty proof-reading. Professor Armytage has in fact the gift of presenting the complex in graspable form, and of never allowing the reader to become entangled by the many threads of the survey, which of necessity ranges backwards and forwards in time and space in the formative sections. He is Professor of Education and Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Sheffield University, and has published two other books on the utopian theme - one a study of actual utopian experiments (HEAVENS BELOW, 1962), the other of technological prophecies (THE RISE OF THE TECHNOCRATS, 1965), so he is no beginner in the subject.

This reviewer simply has not the erudition to judge the reliability of many of the Professor's statements, but sees little ground for doubt, and has enough general knowledge to be reasonably sure that the main argument is sound. Even if it should prove less than perfect, this book will still delight as a grab-bag of oddities for the bibliophile and the collector of outre information. There are many detectable errors of description and ascription which

the sf addict will leap upon - the introduction of slans credited to Van Vogt's DESTINATION UNIVERSE, Galaxy cited as an earlier title of Worlds of If, Science Wonder Stories confused with Amazing stories - but none of them appears to affect the validity of the thesis, in which magazine sf plays only a very minor role. In general the work bears evidence of a daunting thoroughness of research.

The mass of information is vast, and summary can offer only the barest outline. Ideas worth a whole article slip by in a couple of sentences.

The book progresses steadily from nonsense to science, as promised in the preface:

> The rise of these 'conflict models' of prediction out of what might otherwise be regarded as futuristic fantasies is the theme of this book.

Armytage begins with the Hebrew prophets, with their prophecies of national glory counterpointed by denunciation of private abuses. (SF now uses the abuses as rather sickening pointers to the future.) He moves swiftly through the Greek oracles and the Roman books of the Cumaean Sibyl, gives a quick nod in the direction of Plato searching out ideals - and suddenly, on page 14 we are at the birth of sf:

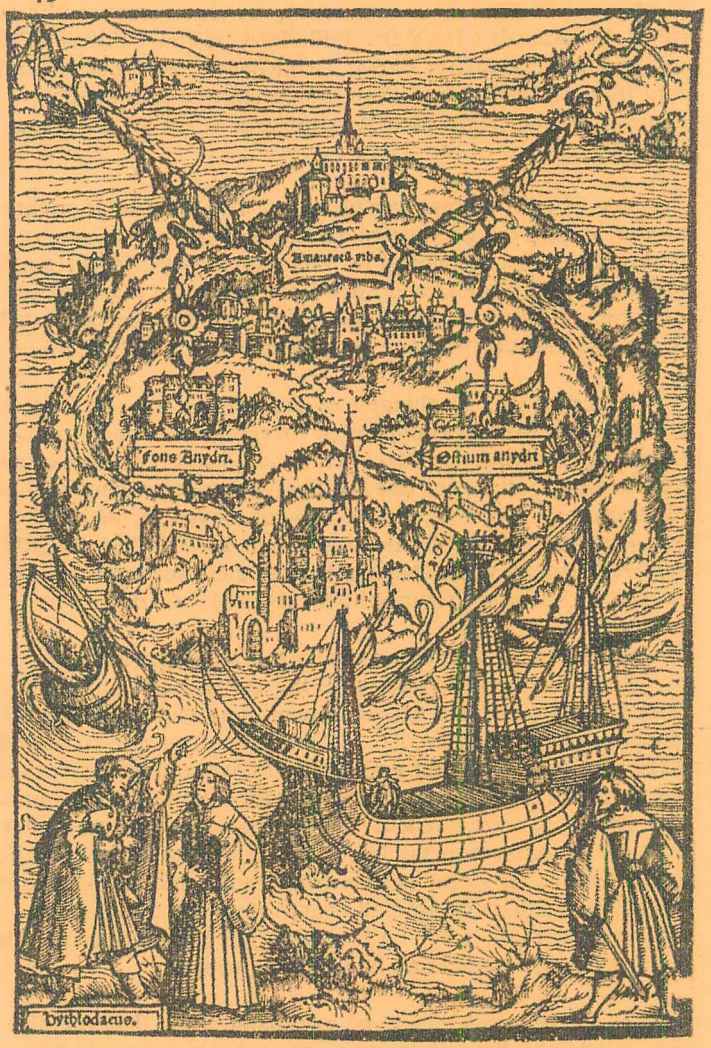
> Bacon considered the fable was a method commended for science.... In other words, inventions which men were not ready for, could be set forth in fables.

Bacon, though he produced his own utopia in THE NEW ATLANTIS, probably derived the method from More's UTOPIA (1516). Previous fabulists, such as Lucian with his moon journey, had not been concerned with science or speculation, only with a fantastic setting which would permit outrages of satires: they were not science-fictionists. More and Bacon were, in essence if not in intention.

They, like most of their immediate successors (Armytage reports 875 such literary items by the year 1800), were concerned with law, religion and politics, rather than with technological science, though the aeroplane and the submarine popped up insistently, and Baron Münchhausen's 'biographers' postulated something like a tape-recorded book. These works were not intended as prediction, but as serious consideration of the ideal human condition. Man's ambitions were not yet technologically centred. But prediction was an obvious next step, and by the nineteenth century it was flourishing - in France.

Camille Flammarion's FIN DU MONDE is well enough known; sociologist Gabriel Tard's FRAGMENT D'HISTOIRE FUTURE and novelist Anatole France's PIERRE BLANC (set in 2270 AD) are less well known; and Armytage quotes from at least six other Gallic forecasters busy with their crystal-balls. They were not adding much to the genre or to genuine soundings of the future, but earlier, in the eighteenth century, a new voice had sounded. The Marquis de Condorcet had remarked:

> All that is necessary, to reduce the whole of nature to laws similar to those which Newton discovered with the aid of the calculus, is to have a sufficient



number of observations and a mathematics that is complex enough.
The way was being prepared for investigation on a tougher than fictional scale.

In the nineteenth century a whole constellation of events pushed prognostication violently ahead and changed its nature. Steam power ushered in the age of technology, the industrial revolution took place, the principles of socialism and communism became widely disseminated, and Jules Verne became the father of technological science fiction. And this last was not the least of these happenings in its effect on prediction.

In 1857 James Clerk Maxwell applied the calculus of probabilities not to card games and elections but to matter in motion - all kinds of matter in all kinds of motion. Mathematician Laplace thought this might lead to 'social physics'. It didn't, but the

idea is not dead, and sf still plays with it uneasily. From this to the idea of actually manipulating the future was a quick move. Malthus's ESSAY ON THE PRINCIPLES OF POPULATION supplied some ideas for Darwin's ORIGIN OF SPECIES, which in turn inspired in Francis Galton the dream of a eugenically controlled society: as Armytage remarks - 'the arrival rather than the survival of the fittest'.

The day of grim utopias was upon us. The Malthusian nightmare is a dark thread through all the sf of the period (and there was a huge amount of it, including, staggeringly, a novel by Anthony Trollope), and after Jules Verne the machine age furnished the further nightmare of man ground under the iron heel of his own creation - hence Jack London's THE IRON HEEL.

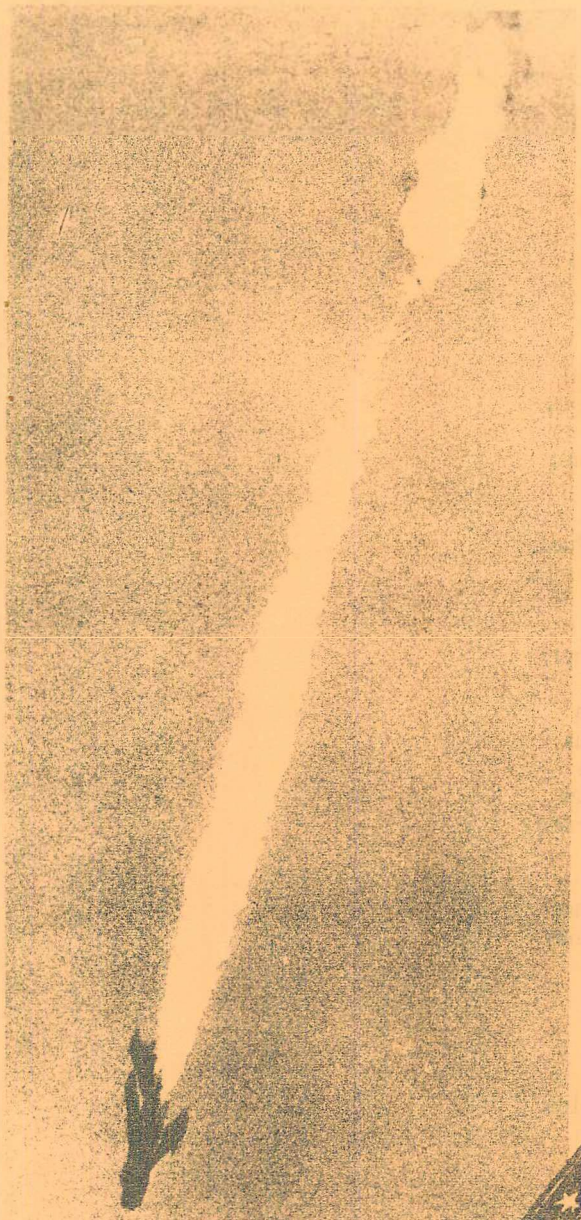
It is tempting here to plunge into the store of rare and forgotten novels by surprising people which Armytage unearthed in his research, but space forbids. (To me the book is worth having just for these references and the fascinating quotations from many of them.) As yet the scientists had not moved in, and the novelists held the field. Bellamy's famous LOOKING BACKWARD held it for many years, being probably the most successful sf novel ever written; it outsold UNCLE TOM'S CABIN.

Then H. G. Wells arrived on the scene, trailing a herd of imitators, and by 1910 nearly all the major themes of science fiction had been stated and examined more thoroughly than the modern reader might credit. By the time magazine sf arrived there was little to do but embellish the past and rediscover lost themes. SF, though immensely popular, was in the doldrums; new directions were needed. At this point sf begins to retreat from the foreground of the book, its major duty (popularization) soundly done. It seems to this reviewer that the new directions are being cautiously explored, but Professor Armytage is not concerned with this: he is a historian, not a literary critic (though there is a close connection between the two).

Utopias as such were now to be examined rather than merely postulated, and the scientists, philosophers and mainstream novelists (I wish we could get rid of that silly term) were to move en masse into the field, rather than remain lone and scattered voices. So we had, in the early twentieth century, a 'superman' period, nourished by the German sensational novelists looking over their shoulders to Nietzsche, and in England by Wells, D. H. Lawrence, Shaw and (surprise?) W. B. Yeats. There followed a reaction against the superman and mechanization - Kipling and Chesterton were doughty dissenters - and the protest reached its peak with Aldous Huxley (BRAVE NEW WORLD and APE AND ESSENCE) and Robert Graves (SEVEN DAYS IN NEW CRETE).

While the English were reacting against the violent utopias, the Americans were still pushing the dream of a technological future. The sf magazines spawned; industry plunged into the era of the gimmick. Popular culture was, as usual, a generation behind the intellectuals.

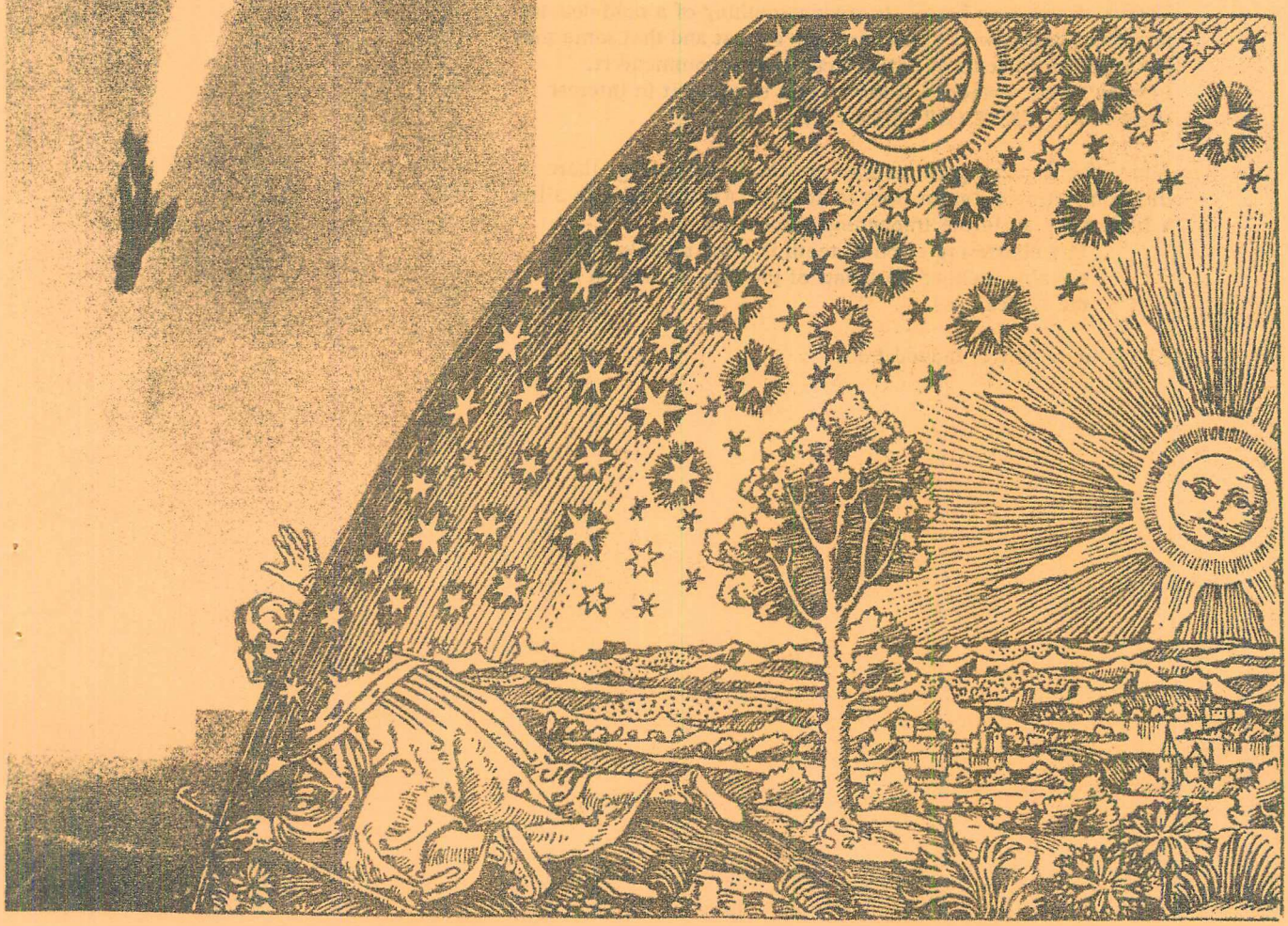
Simultaneously the Russians put politics into sf, which was to be



expected of a society where all activity is regarded as political. And the British, via Olaf Stapledon, C. S. Lewis, J. B. S. Haldane and Bertrand Russell, demonstrated religious argument as essential to any understanding of tomorrow, and lifted the argument out of sf into the realm of predictive philosophy. (Stapledon and Lewis were not writing genre sf, whatever the fans feel about them. They were creating philosophic fables, using a loose fictional form in order to reach a mass audience. Back to Bacon and More!)

All the ingredients were there, save one. The atom bomb provided it. Absolute prediction had become essential. At last the American materialist outlook and the European humanist argument joined in the effort to really discover the future, rather than theorize about it.

The second-last chapter deals with 'surmising forums' - specialist groups whose business is to sort out what will happen from the infinity of 'might-happens'. Their progenitor may be visualized as the British Royal Commission on Coal early this century - a board of experts detailed to survey resources, advise on usage and predict the exhaustion point.



What develops here I do not propose to tell: it would be tantamount to revealing the solution of a thriller. Suffice it that this chapter and the next - 'Operational Eschatologies' - are as far in advance of sf ideas as sf is in advance of popular science. They deal with things that are actually happening. They contain little that one is not at least marginally aware of, but they juxtapose ideas and factual effort in a fashion which dramatizes man's relation to tomorrow with the kind of force every novelist dreams of attaining just once in his career.

Professor Armytage makes no comments, draws no conclusions; he might well object to my outline on the ground that a reviewer with a different cast of mind would perceive a radically different structure in his book. But he gives few clues, only indicates the signposts; you follow and find out for yourself, do your own interpreting.

This is a basic textbook for the science-fictionist, be he simply a romantic seeking the lost sense of wonder (it is here), a completist seeking knowledge of the sf past (it is here), or a thinker deeply concerned with the trends and directions of his civilization (the clues are here). And every science fiction writer should regard the final chapters, especially the last, as required reading, for here are revealed areas in which sf thinking lags far behind scientific and philosophic thinking.

This is an exciting book. It gives something of a cold douche to reflect that it won't be everybody's meat and that some may even find it difficult or dull. I can only recommend it. I haven't read a science fiction novel to equal it in interest since A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ.

And if the final prognostications are rarely reassuring, there is this comforting epigram from sociologist Arnold Green to allow a little hope amid the impending gloom:

> The chattering of one's teeth is often mistaken for the approaching hoofbeats of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

I hope he is right. Indeed I do.

George Turner:

CONCEPTION, INTELLECT AND ART

WHEN I was planning this talk in conjunction with Glen Tomasetti and Frank Kellaway (for we three, speaking at the same session, wanted to avoid duplication) I announced my title, portentously, as 'Inspiration, Intellect and Art'. After an unimpressed silence Glen asked me, most gently, for a definition of 'inspiration'.

And I sat with my mouth open in failure of the answer I did not have. We discussed the word and abandoned it as either meaningless or too multiplex in meaning to pin down in a simple definition. Hence the present title.

Even 'conception' - meaning in this case the origin of the idea which is to be transmuted into or used as the basis of a work - has its difficulties.

'Tell me where is fancy bred, / Or in the heart or in the head?' asked Shakespeare. He was speaking of love, but the question will serve our purpose. Every writer knows that plaintive query: 'But where do you get your ideas?' Do we simply take a subject which interests us and say 'I will write a book about this', or are we struck suddenly, almost irrationally, by a scene, an idea or an insight which cries out to be written down? I can imagine a work being conceived, complete all but the writing, in a sparkling instant, but here we edge towards genius, a word safer left out of a discussion of ways and means. But the question remains: Where does conception begin?

Coleridge claimed to have dreamt 'Kubla Khan' and simply to have written down what was complete in his mind. Perhaps so, but I have my doubts of that 'person from Porlock' who allegedly interrupted him, whereupon recollection of the dream vanished. That interruption came too pat. 'Kubla Khan' is a completed vision as it stands. More might have been too much and perhaps Coleridge knew it.

Dante, we are told, saw the Beatrice he could never possess and the sight pierced to and engulfed his subjective world, influencing everything he wrote thereafter. This again is possibly so, but it is not possible to read the 'Comedy' or the 'Vita Nuova' without becoming aware of the tremendous intellect and talent at work. The vision was not the whole.

It is easier to imagine Petronius returning to Rome from his governorship in the east, observing the imperial city with the eyes of homesickness and bursting into a disgust of disillusioned

laughter. The 'Satyricon' was then inevitable for such a man. But this was perception rather than conception.

How about moments of completely irrational perception? A child, for instance, confronted with a yellow brilliance and told that it is a sunflower, may well make an instant identification and never afterwards be able to separate in his mind the flower and the sun. But it remains an identification only - unless he grows up to be a poet. Then talent and intellect may combine to make a poem out of a moment wherein chaos disgorged an intimation of truth.

The point I make here is that the too-commonly-bruited idea of 'inspiration' (whatever it may be) as the basis of art is too great a simplification. Any workable idea is a good idea, but a workable idea is not a work of art. Intellect and technique, as well as more subtle perceptions which are difficult to trace, must combine to fashion the eventual product. And it is these which make at worst a work of some artistry and at best a work of art.

Consider the origins of Conrad's NOSTROMO, as retailed by himself. During his seagoing days he heard the story of a man who most ingeniously stole a ship loaded with silver. He thought it might make a good yarn but discarded it because, knowing something of the criminal mind, it could only become an exercise in glamour based ultimately on sordid selfishness. Not until years later, with the tale still in his mind, did he see that if the thief had been a man of great honour and integrity, tempted by a moment of opportunity, there was here latent a deeply meaningful story of moral disintegration. Almost simultaneously he dredged from memory the figure of his hero - based on a real man he had known in his youthful gun-running days - and the groundwork was complete. But the novel was not therefore ready for writing. Plot and sub-plots were needed, a round dozen of major characters had to be created to set off the overpowering depiction of Nostromo himself, and the entire republic of Costaguana, from seaports to jungles and silver mines, had to be built in his mind. Talent, technique, imagination, knowledge and a combining intellect had to be brought to bear on the production of one of the greatest of modern novels.

After the moment of conception came the endless time of labour.

And it is the time of labour which interests us - the matter of how the thing is done.

* * * * *

I can speak only of my own methods, and they may seem chaotic in exposition. Other writers have told me of their methods and I could only reflect that I could not work in such a fashion. John Iggulden, when I told him of mine, exploded 'But you can't write a novel like that!'

So: to each his own way.

First, I believe that a person can conceive only of what is latent in himself, based on what he knows. If you doubt that, try to imagine a new colour not found in the visual spectrum. Knowledge, experience and interest must be present before the spark can strike. The idea, the capability, the urge, must be there before the combination can be set in motion by some incident or coincidence of thought.

It is easy enough to see why my first novel had its setting in wartime New Guinea. Six years of frustration and the waste of war - and the breathtaking background of the New Guinea mountains - had to find an outlet. I was, in fact, still in New Guinea when I began to sketch its beginnings on odd scraps of paper, but it was not until several years later that I met the man who fitted into place as model for the elusive central character and the book was really born. Conrad in reverse. I had everything but the character needed to centralize the conception. Having seen him, the rest went swiftly.

But my third book, THE CUPBOARD UNDER THE STAIRS, probably illustrates better what I am trying to get at.

I had always been interested in psychology in a desultory fashion, and hence in the social problems posed by insanity, but had never for a moment considered using them as the heart of a novel. Also, I was a District Employment Officer in the Commonwealth Employment Service, and therefore constantly in touch with the underdogs - the sick and underprivileged and morally helpless - who

engaged my sympathies completely. One night I was sitting in a cafe in Wangaratta and overheard part of a conversation. Two people were talking about a third recently returned from a spell in the Beechworth Mental Hospital.
'But you don't feel you can ever trust them any more... you never know...' 'It's all very well to say they're cured...'
And that ultimate idiocy: 'They have the strength of ten when the fit's on...'

This nonsense must have hit right at the heart of my concern for the people I too much worked with. Also I think I was a little drunk and over-emotional. At any rate I fell into a violent - but fortunately silent - anger against such ideas, left my meal unfinished and went home to begin immediately on the book.

So much for conception. The work remained to do.

Characters had to be constructed, an economical and realistic basic situation devised, background observed and integrated and a suitable mental ailment created for the central sufferer. This last was the real problem. I simply didn't know enough.
A crash course of intensive reading nearly convinced me that I had started something I could not finish.

After several months of chasing dead ends I took the problem to Dr Bird, who was then in charge of the Beechworth hospital, and in a single sentence he gave me the clue I needed - a suitable ailment, one of the most common of mental illnesses, which would fit the conditions I had in mind. Research from then on was simply a matter of reading case histories.

I now had all I needed - a basic character, a basic situation and a background for which all I had to do was look out of my front window.

I did not have a plot.

And I didn't need one. It is at this point that I part company with more usual methods of construction.

* * * * *

I am not much interested in plot in the early stages of writing. Any old plot will do. Truth to tell, it does for most novels, excepting perhaps detective stories. Boy meets girl, rags to riches - what does it matter? Plot is a peg on which to hang a novel: the treatment is what counts. So I tend to let plot look after itself until the work is well under way. In life that is how continuity occurs - an incident at a time, with no planned basis - and crises occur when the combination of incidents causes them. So I prefer to allow plot to emerge in its own way.

Put together two people with differing viewpoints, give them a situation demanding action, and they will at once begin to act. The man who defined plot as character in action was dead right.

Character determines action. Therefore what happens in my stories is determined by the people involved. I will allow a coincidence (since coincidences are normal in life) to start them moving, but from then on they must move as their natures dictate. If the vaguely destined lovers develop as obviously incompatible they must be separated and their affair aborted, and in the aborting the story will move a stage further, and in moving affect other characters. I will not go back and rewrite a character simply to get myself out of plot trouble. That's as wrong as falsifying the denouement of a murder mystery by fastening the crime on a passing tramp who has not previously appeared. A story, for me, has to be worked out, not constructed.

This has two very considerable results. One is that the novel often finishes as something completely different from what I had in mind at the beginning. The other is a more valuable consequence. By refusing to allow story line to dictate to me I am forced into continual rethinking of the basic ideas of the work. By facing the problems, instead of taking the easy line of manipulating in favour of my first conclusions, I often finish up with completely new ideas of the nature and implications of the problems themselves.

Thus the writing takes on the aspect of an adventure. I am forever moving into

unknown territory, and like a man on foot in the jungle, I cannot change the nature of the jungle, but must reconsider and adapt my ideas in order to survive.

This inevitably involves a great deal of rewriting as new conclusions render invalid those already set down. This is why I have never been able to complete a book in less than two years.

Only towards the end, when I feel that the exposition of the theme is complete, that I have nothing relevant left to say without overloading the story with detail, do I sit back and consider the conclusion.

The conclusion need not be 'inevitable' in the sense of Greek tragedy, but it must be a logical outcome of what has gone before. It must be sufficiently striking to make a good climax in the purely dramatic sense, and at the same time convey the statement of the book's intention.

This is not easy. I am not naturally a good inventor of plots and the self-imposed restrictions make many possible solutions unworkable. So at this point I usually relegate the whole problem to my subconscious and stop worrying about it. That subconscious I have found to be a very dependable tool: it has yet to let me down. It takes its time, sometimes three or four months, but has never yet abandoned me to forcing the plot. Admittedly some of its solutions have been less than perfect, but they have been genuine solutions and not cobbled conclusions.

* * * * *

Please do not feel that I decry the virtues of planning. Few people ever planned their works more completely than Charles Dickens, and his eminence is unchallenged. I say only that such a method is not for me.

I have made the attempt and found myself either bored to tears with the sheer bullocking tradesmanship involved or, in the odd case where I did complete a planned outline, aware that now all the problems had been solved in advance there was no pleasure to be gained from the labour of writing a work with all the challenge removed from it. That book will never be written.

For heaven's sake, there has to be some pleasure gained from a dedication which drives for months on end! For me the pleasure is in the act of creation itself, the slow growth, the emergence of conflict, the solving of problems and the final collation of drafts and false starts and incidental errors into a shapely whole.

It will be at once understood that such an attitude precludes much thought about the market possibilities of the work. (Perhaps I have been lucky. My first five novels were accepted without demur, but those halcyon days are fading. The latest, which seems to me the best I have produced, has still to find a publisher after three years of doing the rounds.) It also precludes all thought of making a living through literature, except in the one-in-a-thousand chance of inadvertently writing a best-seller. You can't make a living on one novel every two or three years.

But this suits me well enough. I work a forty-hour week at a job far removed from literature, in the Carlton and United Brewery. I remain therefore in the world I write of, experiencing it continually at first hand. I even feel that to have nothing to do but write would in some sense remove me from the intricate processes of living, dull my perceptions and leave me with too little information about what goes on in the everyday world of men and women.

This is not to say that I would turn my back on financial success: I have enough cupidity to make me run yelling to meet it. But I am sure that removal of the necessity to work for a living (for me writing is not work - it is an act of love) would diminish me both as a writer and as a human being.

Speacial pleading? Perhaps. You must make up your own mind about that.

* * * * *

What I have tried to say is that, in my view, the whole of the writer's art lies in the application of intellect to ideas which interest him. The wider the general application of these ideas the better, but they must interest him, and deeply.

Talking with Glen Tomasetti once, she used a phrase which I must pass on to you. We were

speaking of the final impossibility of conveying realism and naturalism in more than an indicative fashion, and she defined art as 'a framework to make existence manageable'. It was a phrase which called forth instant response in me. It expressed in another way my own attitude to the writing of a novel - to come to terms with experience and then simplify and transmute the experience into a work of communication.

Ultimately my attitude is selfish, in that I write to satisfy me rather than you. If you also are satisfied, that is my bonus on pleasure. But the internal achievement, the clarification of ideas, the self-education involved, is what keeps me at it.

And of course, the sheer joy of watching the work grow under my hand. Like a gardener, perhaps.

JB: This will embarrass hell out of him, but right here I feel like reprinting:

A WORD OR THREE ABOUT GEORGE TURNER

J. K. Ewers: ...the Australian novel in post-war years lacks nothing in variety. Some interesting trends may be noted. First, there is the greater preoccupation of several of our writers with style and content. Of the older novelists, Patrick White is, of course, outstanding in this respect, but several of our younger writers - in particular, Randolph Stow, Elizabeth Harrower, Thea Astley and G. R. Turner - are bringing to the Australian novel a pleasing degree of depth and sophistication.

The Times Literary Supplement: Mr Turner does not allow the reader to stay a detached spectator on the touchline. He compels one to feel passionately about his people...
His book (('Young Man of Talent')) seizes one, in a way few novels do nowadays, by the scruff of one's curiosity, making it difficult to put the book down.

Stephen Murray-Smith: The publication of 'The Cupboard Under the Stairs' is a literary event of considerable importance; it firmly places Turner among the two or three finest novelists now practising in this country. Together with his two earlier books, it assures him of a place in the Australian literary canon if he never writes another word.

J. Bangsund: With the possible exception of Thomas Love Peacock, George Turner is easily the finest writer I have ever published. I is quietly proud.

On the death of Scythrop:

I think I've said it all, essentially, over there, but some things remain to be said which are not readily amenable to versification.

First of all, I note that I have neglected to identify the illustrations in this issue. The cover-girl is of course Mrs Helen Porter Armstrong, better known as Dame Nellie Melba, inventor of the peach. The photo was taken about 1890 and shows her in her garbage as Rosina in 'The Barber of Seville'. ::: The three-part title page is an aerial view of the central business district of Melbourne. The Southern Cross Hotel, venue for the 1975 World Science Fiction Convention, is clearly discernible on the second page, about five inches up and one inch in. The Space Age Bookshop is a bit harder to see, but if you go about six inches up and two inches in on the third page you will see the dome of the Melbourne Public Library, and the Space Age is sort of diagonally opposite to your left. To the left of the Swanston Street Church of Christ, yes: you've got it. :::
The drawing on page 8, labelled Jeeves, is by Salvador Dali or P.G. Wodehouse, I forget which. :::
The building occupying page 5 is the Melbourne Town Hall. It has changed a little since that drawing was executed, but not much. :::
The noble erection on page 11 is the Exhibition Building. Beneath it is a genuine cable-tram, heading up Bourke Street on its way to Northclump (a northern suburb mainly noted for being the birthplace of the present writer, home for many years of the great poet Bernard O'Dowd and the great swimming instructor and dog-catcher Joe Fogg). :::
The next batch of illustrations I swiped from somewhere and can't readily identify. I think the one on page 17 is an illustration from More's 'Utopia', but I wouldn't swear to it. The left half of the illustration on page 19 is a still from the film 'The Apocalypse of St John the Divine', at present being shot (not to mention blown up and mutilated) in the Middle East. The dead Arab in the Russian MIG fighter is played by a real dead Arab; the actor who shot him down with an American missile was a real Israeli, but I don't know whether he's dead now or not. The bottom half of the page depicts some idealistic nut looking for Utopia. The drawing is primitive, I'm sorry, but not quite as primitive as the photo (which was taken about a fortnight ago). :::
I'm not sure whether there will be an illustration on page 25 or not: it depends entirely on Noel Kerr, Australia's foremost electro-stencillist. But if there is a picture there, it's a picture of George Turner. :::
On the back cover there seem to be a Cobb & Co coach, a typical lunch-hour crowd in Elizabeth Street, Ned Kelly, Queen's Wharf on the Yarra River (now a heliport) and the first train to somewhere.
All the illustrations in this issue were electro-stencilled by Noel Kerr and printed on a Roneo 865 duplicator.

Next I should mention that everyone who receives this issue in the mail will also be getting Philosophical Gas 26 - and if there was any reason for you to continue receiving Scythrop, you will be getting PG instead in future. No.26 is a fair sample of what you will be getting. The publication schedule is courtly, the subscription 4 for A$1.50 (that's roughly £0.75, US$2.25 - and I've just forgotten how much in Tongan pa'angas.)

Letters of comment on this issue are more than welcome: they're essential. George Turner says he writes for his own sweet self's sake, but I doubt if he'll be enthusiastic about writing more for us if we don't say something argumentative, enthusiastic or pensive about his articles in this issue. He's only human, after all, and the Melbourne 'Age' pays better than I do.

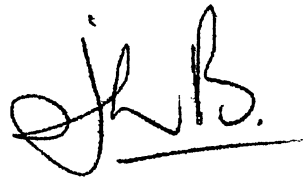
Errata: On page 10 I have accidentally left out an 'and' from George's Shakespeare quote. I know he's very fond of that 'and' and I'm awfully sorry. On the other hand, I've bunged in a missing 'or' on page 21 - and I hope Richard Walsh notices it.

Back issues: I seem to have a lot of copies of Scythrop 26 and 27 on hand, and a few other things. If you think you are entitled to them, demand them! If not, A$1.00 will get you one copy of everything I have on hand.

In conclusion: Thank you, Lee Harding, John Foyster, John Baxter, George Turner, Bruce Gillespie, Brian Aldiss, Jim Blish - and my hundreds of correspondents since 1966 - for twenty-eight delightful issues of ASFR/Scythrop.

ON THE DEATH OF SCYTHROP

We put the clock back, you and I, Scythrop,
Against the hope, the extravagant hope,
That some message might reach us from Out There
Where people live, and seem to gain some joy in living,
To show us, too, how we should live, and why.
A message reached us, sure, but it said: Die!
So we let the clock be, our pledge denied:
Life's too short for such folly as suicide.
We sit in our tower, pistols unloaded,
The madeira close to hand, and smile at the sight
Of that skull we drank from - and at the thought
Of secret rites, eleutherarchs and schemes en masse
To change the world (or something of the sort!) -
And plan... a new edition of Philosophical Gas?



23.10.1973