

Philosophical Gas

NUMBER ONE ::: SEPTEMBER 1970 ::: BWV 64 :::

Published by John Bangsund, 1/8 Bundalohn Court, St Kilda, Victoria 3182, Australia, for APA-M and some others.

Of course there is no such thing as APA-M yet, officially. Perhaps it need never be official. But for the benefit of those readers who have no idea what I'm talking about, I should provide a synopsis.

SYNOPSIS For some years now there has been talk of setting up a more or less informal, sociable and preferably adult alternative to the Melbourne Science Fiction Club. Something like this was beginning to evolve about two years ago when Leigh Edmonds, Paul Stevens, Diane and I were living in that rambling old neo-gothic flat in Redan Street (subsequently pulled down and replaced by a basket-ball court for a Church of England girls' school; sic transit &c &c), but we were too lethargic, otherwise preoccupied or something to translate the idea into action. Last month a meeting was held at Myfanwy and Tony Thomas's flat in South Yarra, and the 15-20 (I didn't count them) people who surmounted the transport problem (occasioned by a power strike that day) and attended seemed to think that the experiment was worth continuing. John Foyster and Leigh Edmonds published little fanzines for distribution at that meeting, with the idea that this harmless diversion might catch on and develop into some kind of amateur publishing association - hence APA-M. PHILOSOPHICAL GAS *1 is produced for the second meeting, at the above address on 4th September. ::: NOW READ ON

The matter of a name for this group provided just about the liveliest discussion at the first meeting. No name suggested appealed to everyone, though THE RETURNED STARMEN'S LEAGUE and THE NOVA MOB were well supported - the latter largely because of its avant-garde (if that's the term I'm grubbing about for) associations and its carthaginian possibilities (amongst them: the group's leader would be known as the "bossa Nova"; his symbol of office, the "Nova cane"; the group's meeting-place, what else but the "Casa Nova"?). Other names suggested at the meeting and since include THE BLOG & CROTTLED GREEPS CLUB (Foyster: "Crottled greeps are what you get when you didn't order them"), THE ILLUSTRATED MEN (David Boutland's idea, I think, which he undermined with his insistence that members be required to wear tattoos), THE MELBOURNE SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY (how pedestrian can you get?), THE DEMOLISHED MEN (the bester both worlds?), THE GAUSSJAMMER CLUB (a nice tribute to Captain Chandler, but it does sound more than a little like an Afrikaans swear-word), THE C'MELL CLUB (one of the few that really appeal to me) and THE HIGHER ENTELECHY, MELBOURNE (which has the advantages of unintelligibility and - well, you work out the other one). With luck the subject should provide entertainment for quite a few meetings.

The next one, incidentally, could well be held at the Degraives Tavern in Degraives Street, Melbourne. John Foyster and I talked to the proprietor about this recently, and he will be quite happy to have us meet there, providing we can guarantee an expenditure on food and grog of about \$50 - the point being that he normally closes up about 8, so we have to make it worth his while to stay open until midnight. To make a decision on this, I think we need twenty definite starters prepared to spend \$2.50.

While I'm talking about money ~~no-one/else/will/get/a/word/in~~ I should mention what's involved in organizing these meetings. Not the cost involved in having an unknown number of people meet in your house or flat: whoever provides the meeting-place can work that out for himself. But the cost of simply advising people where and when the meetings are to be held is not inconsiderable - particularly over a period of time - and I feel that something should be decided about this fairly soon. I would be quite happy to act as publicity bloke, but as you probably know, I am quite extravagant when it comes to this sort of thing (but it was a nice-looking convention handbook, wasn't it, Mervyn?), so I would like some assistance from the communal pocket and some instructions if I am to continue. The cost of the notice I sent out for this meeting was as follows: 2 electronic stencils - \$4.00; 1 ream foolscap paper - \$2.40; 75 envelopes - \$0.75; postage - 73 @ 5¢, 2 @ 9¢ (bulk packages to the university groups) - \$3.83; total - \$10.98. The average outlay for paper will obviously be less than \$2.40, the electronic stencils aren't necessary and neither, come to that, are the envelopes, but when the postage rates go up it will still cost at least \$5.50 to produce and send out 75 notices. This more or less raises the question whether the group should be formally organized (with the attendant clutter of office-bearers, constitution and membership fees), and having more or less raised it, I will (more or less) shut up.

"It's a lot of bloody nonsense, this permissiveness... Sweden and Denmark are nonentities as countries."
- Sir Henry Bolte, Premier of Victoria

Speaking of permissiveness... I must say I am very distressed to see Penguin Books taking it upon themselves to flout the law and publish PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT in this country. I know they were forced into it by the hard facts of commerce which dictate that when you pay out a colossal sum of money for a property then you must do anything needful to recoup and if possible multiply that sum; and perhaps this was underlined by the existence of an underground edition of the book, produced on a duplicator and reported to be selling well at \$2 a copy.

Commerce is all very well, but these publishing giants are very unfair to the small businessmen and connoisseurs who go to no end of trouble to procure banned books only to find them made available to any Tom, Dick or Harry with \$1.35 who cares to walk into a bookshop. This is nothing less than creeping democracy!

Excuse me. I do get carried away with this sort of thing, and PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT brings back fond memories...

I made the deal in a none too reputable public house in Port Melbourne, where rough seamen salt the air with their rough sea language. Bernie the Barracuda (I suspect that is not his real name) drove a hard bargain, but I knew I was dealing with a seasoned professional and, besides, unlike your average contemptible lilywhite suburban freedom-to-read bookshop-browser (I know no stronger term of abuse), I am prepared to pay for my pleasures.

Four weeks later, at 0320 hours, a package was dropped from an tramp steamer off the St Kilda coast by a pockmarked Lascar seaman. God knows what perils he had faced to track down and procure this item for me. I thought for a fleeting moment of the brave little man scurrying the steaming fleshpots of Christchurch, New Zealand, on my behalf, and I shuddered.

At 0322 hours I stepped from the borrowed white Lamborghini (I normally drive a gleaming silver Prince Henry Vauxhall, but I could not afford to be conspicuous), donned my wetsuit and slipped silently into what Prince Charles humorously dubbed the "diluted sewage" which passes for sea-water in these parts, and with effortlessly powerful strokes dog-paddled away into the gloom.

A long way off to my left (or, as we briny seadogs say, kerbside) I could just make out what could only be the package, fitfully illuminated by Philip Roth's language. As I drew closer the glimmer increased in intensity to a gleam and then to a glare, which would certainly have blinded me had I not thoughtfully equipped myself with a pair of expensive imported German Eulenspiegels, or nocturnal seagoing dark glasses, before striking out from shore. Whistling a melancholy theme from Richard Strauss, I grasped the package, hot to the touch despite its asbestos and sealskin wrapping, and returned, frozen to the marrow but with that quiet anticipatory joy that only we connoisseurs of the good, the beautiful and the filthy know, to St Kilda's Stygian strand.

Where, to my utter disgust, I was set upon by fourteen thickset men wearing trench-coats and false noses.

Two of them held me, five attempted to unwrap the package (silly chaps! - I lost most of my right thumb and the top joint of my middle finger that way on LOLITA, back in '59: but every schmutzig-buchhändler starts the same way), four were interrogating a passing milkman, two absently carved their initials (in Italian, thank God) on the Lamborghini's duco, and the biggest man of all, with the longest trench-coat and most extravagant false nose, addressed me in an absurd falsetto.

"Drug Squed," he squeaked.

"Oh, jolly-dee!" I exclaimed. - "What have you got?"

With murderous intent he aimed a scientific blow of his boot at my brisket. I fainted. He connected. I fainted.

"Perhaps that will teach you to watch your language!" he screamed at me a scant three hours later when I recovered. Foggily I looked around me. The book was gently smouldering on the pavement, or, rather, in the pavement. My wetsuit flumped disconsolately in the gutter. My precious Eulenspiegels lay shattered beside me. Wheezing a melancholy tone-row from Alban Berg, I raised myself to a prone position, looked about, and observed almost simultaneously that they had kicked the Lamborghini in and that I was naked and iridescent blue in colour."

"Think yourself lucky that we have discovered no drugs either on or about you," my tormentor continued. "But would you kindly tell me what this book is?"

"You waited to ask me that?" I said.

"Yes," he said, defiantly, "None of us can read and it didn't have no pictures."

"Ah," I said. "Well. Mm. In fact, this is a book dealing with the problem of noise abatement in waterfront areas. I am dedicated, if I may say so, to reducing the clatter and din that we people who live by the beach have to put up with. Naturally, since I believe in this, I do my part, and rather than offend my neighbours with the ceaseless rustle of turning pages, I generally read in the water."

My interrogator did not quite look as though he believed me. "What's the book called then," he demanded. "PORT NOISE COMPLAINTS," I said. A little old lady happening by at that moment, the man accosted her and told her to read the title of the book to him. "PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT," she gurgled, and fled.

The fourteen thickset men then gave me one kick each, in turn, and departed in an official-looking green Honda Scamp.

Now you know why I don't particularly appreciate Penguin Books' action.

I come by my banned books the honest way.

There seems to be something awfully wrong both with my stencil-cutting and my duplicating. I have got rather out of practice in both; and I have been using cheap & nasty stencils; and I freely admit that after four years as a dyed-in-the-wool (not to mention cotton, nylon and just about every other fabric used in men's clothing that can absorb duplicator ink) Roneo man, I am not as familiar with the functions of my newly-acquired Gestetner as I hope eventually to be. And thereby hangs a tale. I call it (but you need not)....

RETROSPECTIVE REPARTEE ...Episode 43,874

Him: "You've been here before!" (Accusingly)

Me: "Yes." (Squirming)

Revised, this reads:

Him: "You've been here before!" (Accusingly)

Me: "Yes - and it's a tribute to your product that I'm prepared to put up with your rudeness to get it!"

I had just bought this cheap Gestetner, you see, and I decided to lash out and buy some paper to go with it. Leigh Edmonds said that Noel Kerr had said that Gestetner were selling a discontinued line of paper at fifty cents a ream. So I walked the four blocks to Gestetner and asked the girl if this was so and she said she wasn't sure and picked up the phone and asked to speak to Mr Moon.

"No! No! Anyone but Mr Moon! Don't say anything to Mr Moon! I'm sorry I asked! I'll do anything - just let me go without seeing Mr Moon!" Thus I screamed silently to myself and (instead of bolting) like the coward I am remained to tell my most unlikely story to Mr Moon, a man who treats me like the village idiot at the best of times.

Mr Moon appeared, and greeted me with the words recorded above.

Indeed, I have been there before. Once I was thinking about opening an account there, and he talked to me the way you might (if your liver was playing up at the time) address a ragged derelict smelling of metho who asked for a couple of hundred dollars worth of your product on credit.

Once I foolishly used the vulgar term "Roneo" in his presence, and he informed me in no uncertain manner that he didn't give a damn about Roneo, that in fact Roneo didn't exist.

Once I enquired about the possibility of buying paper cut to A4 size - the official Australian Government standard size, and he abused hell out of the Australian Government, me, and anyone else who could even contemplate using anything else but the quarto and foolscap which had faithfully served countless generations of satisfied customers since Poppa Gestetner invented duplicating in eighteen-oh-dot. Sure, he would cut it for me if I insisted on being regarded as a pariah in the paper trade, but I would have to take X number of reams and it would cost the same as foolscap plus



I really didn't intend to do another page, but Leigh didn't have any room left in RATAPLAN for that vile cartoon up there, so here I am, wasting time, money and paper just to prove all over again that I have a dirty mind. Now... what to do with the rest of this page? Hmm... how about some

FANZINE REVIEWS?

LE FANAL FANIQUE (Published by Claude Dumont, 36 Place Josephine Charlotte, 5.100 Jambes, Belgium - telephone 081/331.77): Subscription appears to be 120 Belgian francs per year, if that sounds reasonable. What intrigues me about this 6-page printed fanzine is how I got it. It arrived in my letter box with no sign of my name or address on it. Has European fandom evolved its own superior postal service, or is there some simpler answer? Probably. The magazine is written in French. This did not worry me unduly, since an unread French fanzine is no less valuable to me than an unread English fanzine. But I did try to translate some of it. "John is dead depuis three days. And I have fear. Fear of what, in fact? There is not a person here... I something something something, for I am the last survivor of the Delta expedition on Mars. And, bientot -" but about that stage I stopped feeling I wanted to know more. Recommended to people who like fan fiction in a foreign tongue.