

Philosophical Gas

The seventh of its kind, published by John Bangsund GPO Box 4946 Melbourne 3001 Australia for members of ANZAPA and (this is where the story really starts) APA-L. Commenced 11th September 1971, destined to appear in the October mailing of the former organization and I-have-no-idea-when in the latter. Robin Johnson talked me into it. BWV 103

[illegible]

COME TO GAY, RECKLESS MELBOURNE!

No, that is not the official slogan of the Australia in 75 bidding committee, but the title of a review in this morning's "Australian" of THE RUSH TO BE RICH: A History Of The Colony Of Victoria, 1883-89 by Geoffrey Serle (Melbourne University Press, A\$9.90). I have read neither the book nor even the review, but I have read Mr Serle's earlier volume on Victorian history, and on the strength of that recommend the present volume. (I think that's all the literary criticism you'll find in this issue, people.)

It's the title of the review that interests me. Can it be that someone on "The Australian" dares use the word "gay" in its uncolloquial sense; or is no-one on that newspaper aware of its contemporary slang meaning; or is it a singularly appropriate pun which I would only appreciate by reading the review? Let me confess I am not even strongly interested in that aspect of the title: I just have a sad story to tell about un-gay reckless Melbourne, and it was odd that that headline should leap out of this morning's paper at me as I was thinking about how to tell you that story. (And I'm still thinking about it. Like most of my fanzine material, this is being composed on-stencil, and I am possibly even more interested than you are in what I will say next. Possibly? Very likely.)

Since Diane left, nearly fifteen months ago, I have shared my (very large, comfortable, and far too expensive for one) flat with various people. First with Stuart Leslie, who was down from Sydney for a while to play a vital but I gather undemanding role in a play at The Athenæum. Then, for some months, with Peter Innocent. (Someone described him recently as a "fringe-fan". He is not. He is a book-designer, one of the best, and in the course of apparently attempting to absorb all-the-world's-best-literature asked me to sell, lend or recommend to him the dozen or so most important sf novels; he also likes reading what I write; and I regard him as a friend: but I doubt this makes him any kind of sf fan, fringe or otherwise.) For some weeks, Peter overlapped with Robin Johnson. Robin had decided to take a job in Melbourne, moved down from Sydney (all the best people do it), and spent a month or so camped in my loungeroom. After Robin's departure to take up residence with Leigh Edmonds in the unlikely Melbourne suburb of Moonee Ponds, I enjoyed a rather blissful (but expensive) month or so with no-one in the flat apart from me, always excepting Grushenka of course. (There are those who describe Grushenka as my cat. I, who know far better, describe

myself as Grushenka's human.) Then, just before Easter, I advertised in "The Age" for a flat-mate. (Ursula Le Guin, in a recent letter, said "A flat-mate sounds to my ears a little like something a flounder would want" - and that has caused me to think a little: not only on the matter of whether the word is not familiar to Americans, but also on the concept of floundering.) That advertisement produced about a dozen responses - from memory about six ladies and six men - and all but two or three of these people fairly obviously would have proved to be congenial folk to live with. I congratulated myself on the brilliance of my advertisement, and chose Miss Valma Brown. Nor was I wrong to so choose. Val is a very pleasant person, and most of the time we got on just fine. We are still good friends. Unfortunately (for me: quite happily for them) Val and my good friend Leigh Edmonds discovered each other and, about two months ago, went off to live together. Since then I have had my books, my records (but nothing to play them on) and the ever-faithful Grushenka.

So... Last Tuesday I called in at "The Age" and handed the following advertisement to the clerk at the front counter: "Girl wanted - preferably rich, beautiful and cultured - to share enormous 3 br flat with starving writer and cat. You're not rich &c? I'm not quite starving either. \$12.50 per week. 94-3303." Not exactly the kind of copy-writing that would land me a job with Hansen Reuben McCann & The Other Bloke, but carefully worded to appeal to that (pardon me) broad section of female-kind which would likely produce a selection of basically suitable people to choose from. The first word of the ad was particularly important, since ladies looking for a flat to share with someone else usually start off looking at ads in "The Age" commencing with the word "girl".

Someone - William Graham DD, or some other friend of Dick Nixon - once pronounced Melbourne the least sinful city in the world. I'm seriously beginning to wonder whether that might not be true. The front-counter clerk said, admittedly smiling a little as he said it, that I would have to take the ad up to the Classifieds department on the fourth floor for approval. "Why?" I asked. "Oh, I just think they'd better okay it - that's all," he said. So I went up to the fourth floor.

The clerk there read the ad, and said he would have to show it to his boss. "Why?" I asked. "We've had a bit of trouble with this kind of thing," he said, "but I think it should be all right. I'll just show the boss."

I'm from the
New York Times...

...we're the
'All the News that's
Fit to Print' people.
Could I see all your
documents and
evaluations on the
Vietnam war?

We're the
'Only what's
needed to keep
us in Power'
people.

'THE THREAT
FROM THE NORTH :
-SEE WORLD WAR II.
? ? ?

Petty

The boss's name was Mr Power. (I immediately thought that this would appeal to members of Women's Lib: I could see from the look on his face that he was not going to let this ad pass, not in a million years.) "We can't allow this," he said. "Why?" I asked. "Well," he said, slapping the sheet of paper I'd typed the ad on, "it's obvious, isn't it?" "No," I said, "I'm afraid it's not obvious at all to me." "Well, I mean, you're a man, and you're advertising for a girl flatmate!" "Yes?" I said. "Well, we can't allow that, no." "Do you mean to tell me," I asked, "that it is the policy of The Age that for a gentleman to wish to share accommodation with a lady is immoral or criminal - or what?" Mr Power, perhaps I should mention, was a little, wizened man of maybe sixty. His reply to the last question was, "Hmph, it is the prerogative of the company to refuse any advertising it does not think fit." "Of course," I said, "it is the prerogative of any newspaper to refuse to print anything it likes. I know that. But I would just like to know what you find objectionable in my advertisement." He didn't answer - at least not in anything approaching English. He just mumbled something about obvious-prerogative-trouble-with-police-young-girls-mumble-can't-accept-anyway.

So I changed the ad. It hurt, because I knew I was letting myself in for a stack of phone calls from people I didn't want - people who would know they weren't wanted if they didn't appreciate the original ad. It now read: "St Kilda. Person wanted to share enormous 3 br flat with starving writer and cat. \$12.50 per week. 94-3303." (Which wouldn't even get me a job with The Age.)

And that's the way it turned out. It's 7 pm as I write, and I've had fourteen phone calls so far. Three people have come to look at the place and me: two men and a girl. The men didn't seem too interested, and I don't expect to see or hear from them again. The girl? I'm not sure. I think we'd probably be okay. She will let me know how she feels about it on Monday, and I feel there's about an even chance she'll decide to come in with me.

If she doesn't, and nothing else eventuates, next Tuesday I'll go to my local newsagent and place the following advertisement: "Girl wanted to share large flat in St Kilda. Preferably 21-30, mature, intelligent. 94-3303." And I shall sign it, "Wilhelmina Grimble".

No, Melbourne is not reckless (at least not in areas where recklessness is fun, only in big, dangerous things - as Robin could tell you in greater detail than I), but there would seem to be some sections of the community which would prefer us to be gay.

It might have something to do with the grand old Australian tradition of mateship.

Meanwhile, in Sunny Queensland...

Last week, as Life Went On in many parts of this fair land, one section of the Queensland press became a little confused. It was a fairly dull week, actually, despite Sir Don Bradman's decision that the Test Match with South Africa would be called off, the invasion and

desecration of the Liberal Party's head office in Melbourne by young activists, and the invalidation by the High Court of the Commonwealth Trade Practices Act.

The Brisbane "Courier-Mail" somehow got the two last-mentioned events mixed up, and on page 18 of its 4th September edition ran an article which began thus:

"JUDGES' POINTS ON TRADE ACT VALIDITY

SYDNEY. — These are the reasons given by the seven High Court justices who yesterday invalidated the Commonwealth Trade Practices Act in a majority decision.

A Liberal Party spokesman said they scribbled slogans on a wall, and pushed a female employee against a wall as they headed for inner offices.

Giving the majority judgement, the Chief Justice..."

Gay Sydney, reckless Brisbane, or just another example of the widespread need for better poorreading?

S p a c e d - O u t

Towards the end of Scythrop 23 I mentioned that my most regular correspondents are the Sales Tax Department and the National Library of Australia. Most of my letters from the latter read as follows:

"Dear Mr Bangsund,

We do not appear to have a copy of the following publication in the national collection:

Scythrop 28 (or - you name it)

As Section 201 of the Copyright Act, (1968), requires Australian publishers to deposit a copy of all their publications in the national collection, I should be glad if you would forward a copy, preferably of the first issue, to the following address:

Legal Deposit Section
National Library of Australia
CANBERRA ACT 2600

I shall then advise you whether copies should be sent regularly.

Yours faithfully,"

Unless you have at least a modest collection (say, two or three dozen) of these letters, you haven't really made it in Australian fandom. You should also have similar letters from your State Library to the same effect, but these libraries (although equally entitled to your publications) are not as vigilant as the National Library.

My most recent batch of such letters from Canberra concerned my failure to supply them with "Australian Science Fiction Yearbook" and "Australian Science Fiction Directory". They should worry! - other people have paid for them! (But I hasten to add that all payments for those two abortive publications have

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been credited to Scythrop subscriptions, with the option of refund.) There was also a letter about my "Halliford House Newsletter". These things keep on coming back to haunt me.

I wrote a lengthy reply, attempting to explain briefly the phenomenon of fan-publishing, and suggesting that if the National Library were really interested in putting together a science-fiction-and-fanzine collection they might look into Toronto's arrangements for its Spaced-Out Library.

My letter was received kindly, and one of my suggestions provisionally approved.

That suggestion was that I should act more or less as the National Library's agent for fandom, or vice versa, by inviting Australian (and overseas for that matter) fan publishers to send me a copy of anything they would like to see placed in the Library's collection, which I will then pass on to the Library.

I think it's a good idea. What do you think? By sending me one copy of your fanzine, I will understand that that copy is for me and I will file it in its usual place - either in the Australian-fanzine stack in the back room or in the wastepaper bin, depending on my reaction to it. If, however, you send me two copies, I will know that whatever I do with my copy the second is intended for the National Library - and I will pass it on.

The point that I have tried to make to the Library is that fanzines fall into several classes, but basically (a) those which accidentally come under Section 201 of the Copyright Act, and (b) those which do not (such as most apazines). Most Australian fans do not realize that they often do publish things which they are legally required to supply to the National Library and their own State Library.

My arrangement with the National Library, if approved by them and by fandom, would cut out a lot of correspondence and research on their part, allow fans to deal with me rather than Canberra, and also establish a distinct and obviously useful fanzine collection in the National Library.

Whether we can persuade Canberra to go on to build up something like Toronto's special sf library is another matter, but I think we can, and this fanzine arrangement would provide the basis for it.

At this time I am only concerned with Australian publications, but I know (from previous correspondence) that the Library is interested in overseas fanzines, too. I'll keep you posted on developments. Later I might come to some arrangement with Toronto - but only if the local idea works. For the moment, Australian fan publishers might care to put the Spaced-Out Library on their mailing lists. The address is: Spaced-Out Library,

Toronto Public Library, 566 Palmerston Avenue, Toronto 174, Ontario, Canada.

Apart from general reactions to these suggestions, I would appreciate hearing from -

- # People who have large collections of fanzines they wish to dispose of, with some indication of price required, if any. (Be realistic.)
- # People who have had dealings with the Spaced-Out Library, who know something about it which I might not know, or who have actually seen it.

You will appreciate, from the circulation of Philosophical Gas, that all the above constitutes a sort of pilot survey. When I have your comments I will have some idea whether to take the matter further and propose it to fandom-at-large.

Some ANZAPA comments

Heaven (and stations west thereof) knows I am not a constitution-fan. Because of this, Leigh, Paul Stevens and I went to some trouble one night at the Glen Eira Road laundromat to devise a short, simple, workable constitution for ANZAPA to replace the original one, which, with all its subsequent barnacles, was not working well and was the subject of frequent discussion in the apa. The new constitution was adopted, with very few changes. I quote from it:

6. A President shall be elected annually by means of a popularity poll (called the "Anzapopoll"). His duties shall be to organize the following poll and to "encourager les autres".
7. The Anzapopoll shall be conducted by the President in conjunction with the August mailing.

It is now 12th September, and I have seen no sign of an Anzapopoll from Leigh Edmonds, current President. This is not exactly what I call "encouraging the others". As founder, current President, and joint-proposer of the current constitution, of ANZAPA, I think Leigh might have been expected to put his numerous and entirely worthy other interests to one side for the couple of hours necessary to fulfil this rather small obligation. (So I just rang him to tell him this, and received a not unexpected reply. But he hopes to do it Real Soon Now.)

In the amended constitution there was a typo which has been faithfully reproduced by Gary and Dennis. An amendment has now been officially proposed, in order to restore the word "Amateur" to our official title. (Pack of legalistic nits, these OE blokes.) At the same time, Gary and Dennis have ignored the English spelling used in the original amendment. Example: The word "organise" will not be found in the Oxford Dictionary. (Pack of pedantic nits, these OED blokes?)

And so to bed. Thank you, LA folk, for having me.