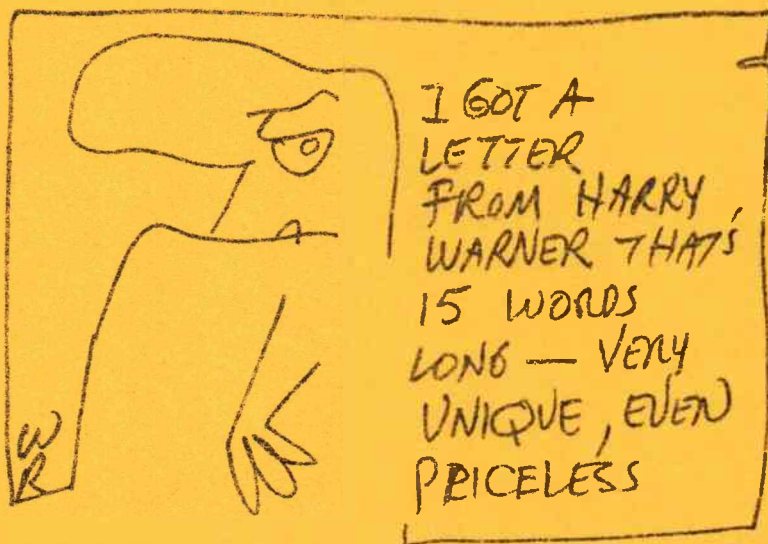


Philosophical Gas

14



PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

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AN UNPROTECTED ARM IN A CAGE OF BUSH-FLIES!

What a title for a fanzine. If I didn't have so many fanzines running at the moment I would think seriously of using that. It's an advertisement for some spray-on insect repellent, and I haven't seen it for years. It came on right after the Prime Minister's policy speech, and besides seeming somehow appropriate at the time, it took me right back to the days when I had a tv set.

Lots of things have been taking me back lately. For example, I conceived the idiotic notion of doing some study via correspondence with the University of New England recently, and was advised that I should produce evidence of my (ha!) scholastic career. So I wrote to the College of the Bible, and received the following from the Principal:

COLLEGE OF THE BIBLE
of Churches of Christ in Australia

Principal:
E. Lyall Williams, MA
Telephone: BL6541

Elm Road
Glen Iris SE6

14/11/72

Dear John,

Enclosed herewith is a certification regarding the work done by you in 1957. The years have rolled by. I trust you keep well and are finding expression in your work. Do you still play the piano ad lib?

I keep very well. At present the atmosphere is relaxed. Examinations are over and we are on the last week of the term waiting for Graduation on Friday night with the various social gatherings tucked in as usual during this week.

I hope you are successful in being able to do some university studies.

With kind regards,
Yours sincerely,
E. L. WILLIAMS

Dear me, yes, the years have rolled by. Or, as Bellerive put it, "the years doth rolleth onward". When I get near a piano I still play ad lib, yes - as those who went to the Adelaide convention in January this year will testify. And I do not find expression in my work, no. Anyway, the "enclosed herewith" read as follows:

To Whom It May Concern,

This is to certify that Mr John Gordon Bangsund studied theology in the above College for one year in 1957.

Examinations at that time were on a term basis. The following are the subjects taken in that year and the terminal examination results:

Old Testament	80	77	81
New Testament	83	81	83
New Testament Greek	96	92	89
Church History	65	77	92
Homiletics	65	74	75
Pastoral Theology	83	80	78

So now you know what a bright young bloke I was at the age of 18. I am very proud of that 96 for Greek, and still annoyed that it wasn't 100. I lost four marks because we were asked to decline some verb or other, and I declined it only in the masculine gender, not thinking that the feminine and neuter were also required (and I knew them, too).

Oh well. Now I have that document anyway, and it might be useful sometime. I can't take on the work with the University of New England, because it costs rather more than I anticipate having in February next year, and because I can't see any end to my fannish commitments just yet. Maybe in '74 I'll have a bash at it.

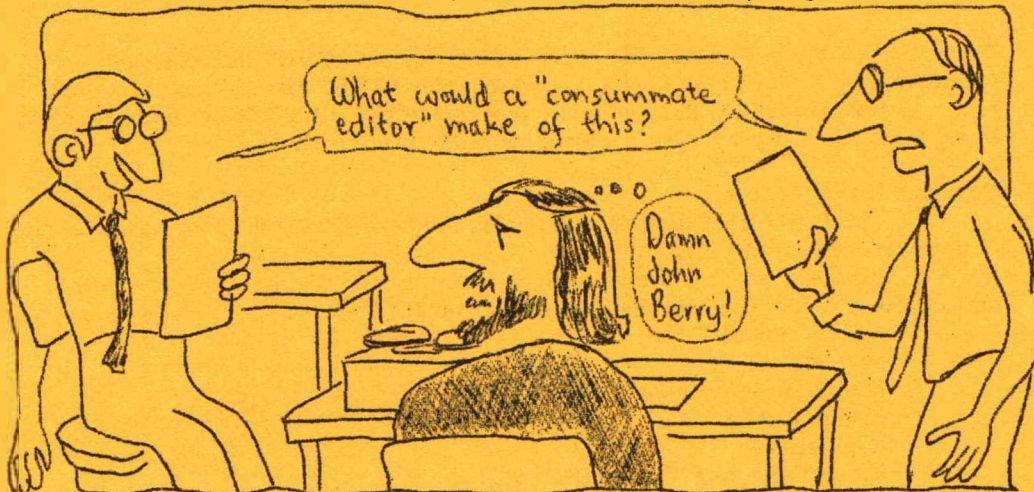
But it's awfully tempting to gaffiate and do a bit of academic study. At present my qualifications consist of Victorian Intermediate Certificate and four Leaving subjects. If I put in a year on Classical Greek, and passed, I would automatically achieve Matriculation status, with a language - which would qualify me for entry into an Arts course in any Australian university. I think I could do it, too. Classical Greek is rather different from "New Testament" (more accurately, "koinē") Greek, in grammar and so on, but at least I have a fair vocabulary somewhere in the recesses of my mind, and I think I could pass the first year in this subject at least. Certainly the Greek alphabet gives me no trouble at all, and if the university insisted on accents (which the ancient Greeks didn't use, dammit) I could probably master those. Koinē Greek, if you are interested (and even if you aren't), was a sort of pidgin Greek current around the first centuries before and after Christ. It was widely used in commercial circles. For many centuries it was believed that the New Testament was written in some kind of holy language, since it certainly wasn't classical Greek, but discoveries during the 18th and 19th centuries showed that it was just a debased lingo for the use of barbarians, and not the least bit holy.

Anyway, all this scholarly talk is just academic - if you'll pardon the expression. I have no chance of raising the money I'd need to do the course next year, and I have the feeling that fandom will see to it that I won't have the time.

Maybe I'd better just give up any idea of academic attainments and wait for the honorary Litt. D. someone will feel bound to confer on me about half a century from now - if I live that long.

• • •

Look, I really am sorry about this, but since I prepared the results of the 1972 Anzapopoli I have had a burning ambition to score some points, if not win, in the poetry category. Not that I write poetry, you understand, but I have a fair amount of doggerel and ill-conceived verse lying about, which some voters next year might mistake for the real thing. I am also after a few points for art, so I will fill this page with something or other. Fiction? Surely you realize by now that I don't write anything else?



THE BALLAD OF THE READERS

Invocation & Apology

Calliope! Fair Muse of Verse!
Lend power to my Rhyme
(And make my readers all confess
I'm born out of my time).
Forgive Thou my effrontery
By writing downright whoreson
And speaking of these lofty things
In the style of Henry Lawson.

(Note: The polite fiction is
maintained that Hansard is a
more or less verbatim transcript
of Parliamentary proceedings.
For this reason the sub-editors
are referred to as "readers".)

* * * *

The Ballad

Across the stony syntax,
Across the rolling drone,
Alf, Bob and John, the readers,
Make marks that are their own.
And well their headphones fit them,
And light of heart are they,
For Byrne and James and Mulvihill
Have lost their voice today.

Their encyclopædic knowledge
Is wondrous to behold,
But they work in symbiosis,
Our three readers brave and bold:
Bob's specialties are politics
And science; John is best
On music, books, theology;
And Alf knows all the rest.

Of all the wise committees
They've meetings heard galore,
And rarely is a question asked
They haven't heard before.
They hum a song of someone
They hope will lose his seat,
But even if he doesn't
They'll ne'er admit defeat.

"What means 'resile'?" "What's OTC?"
They cry, and someone's brain
Yields up, "Like in resilient"
And "O'erhead Travelling Crane".
"But what is NEF?" says one
Whose mind has gone on strike;
The other two in chorus say,
"Any effin' thing you like!"

Beyond the hazy thinking,
Against the tortured prose
And yon blue line of wisecracks,
Each chunders as he goes.
But thitherward the readers
Proceed with all their might:
They'll turn the stuff to English
Though it take them half the night!

And so the long day passes,
With strain on eye and ear.
One wonders what these gifted men
Are doing, working here.
Such knowledge! Such percipience!
But Alf and John and Bob
With characteristic modesty
Say, "Well, we need the job".

Now mighty is their muscle
And fertile is their brain,
But like the wee corpuscle,
Their labour is in vain:
The Member's twisted lingo
They alter out of sight,
But when the Member sees it
He thinks he said it right!

There must be some more reason;
Modesty's not enough.
Why do our brilliant readers
Rot their minds with all this stuff?
The Judæo-Christian ethic
Is the seat of their complaint:
They hate it when they're working
And feel guilty when they ain't!

Of all the words in Hansard
One word in four is theirs
(And if they need a fifth word
There's an Oxford full of spares).
In English they are fluent,
Likewise Strine and Hansardese,
And a smattering of fourteen more
From Greek to Japanese.

One day when they depart this life
And wing their way on high,
They'll be called to that Committee
Which meets up in the sky,
And the great Recording Angel
Will say, "O'er is your strife!"
But... we need a little subbing
On this bloody Book of Life!"