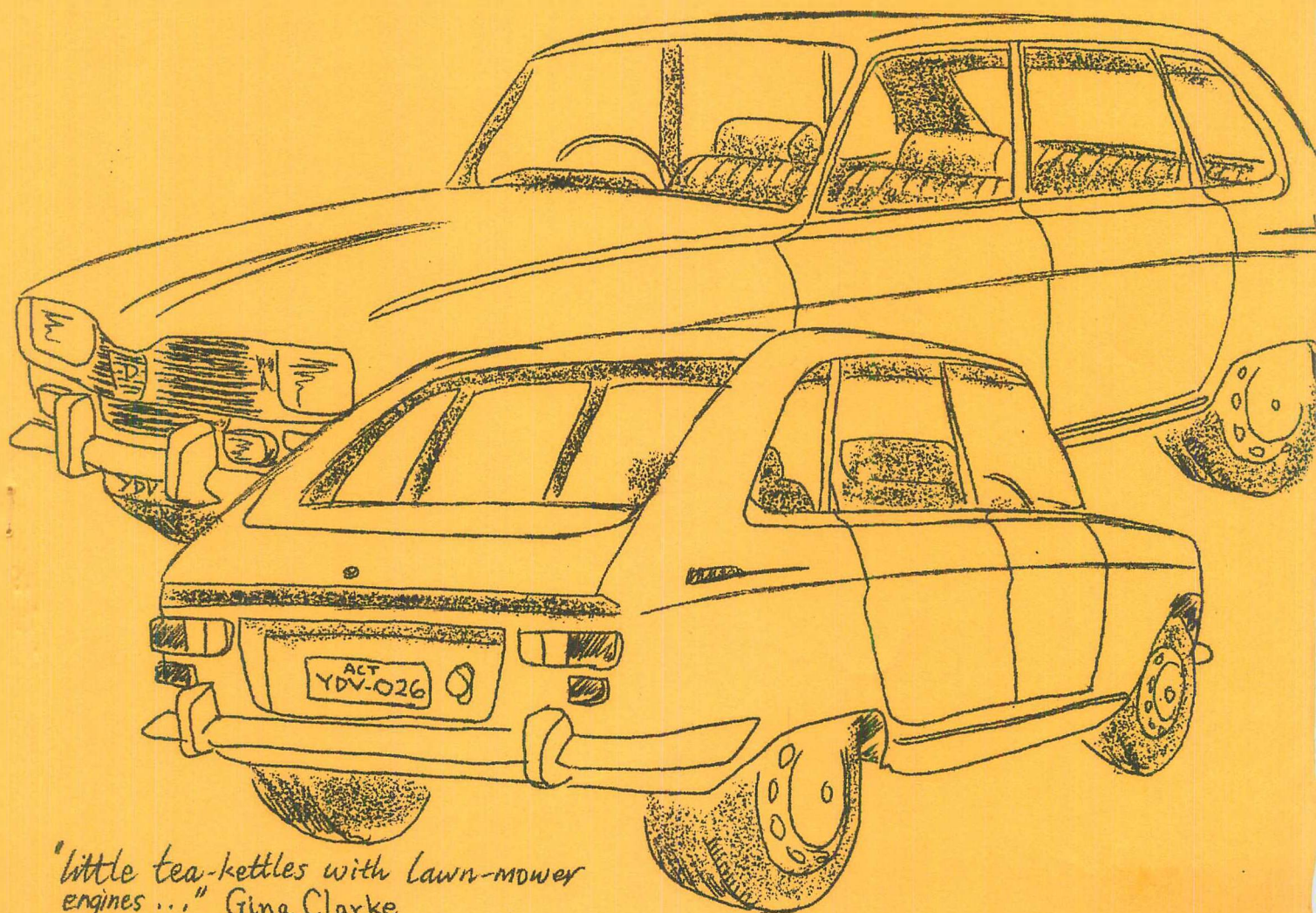


20

Philosophical Gas



"little tea-kettles with lawn-mower
engines ..." Gina Clarke

The main difference between Melbourne and Canberra fandom - apart from the fact that the local folk are untutored in the ways of trufandom and therefore spend a lot of time reading and talking about science fiction - is that all the fans here seem to be married. This places me at an immense disadvantage. It is so incredibly difficult to engage in wise and witty repartee of a fannish nature when there are little children crawling and squawling all over the place. I have a tape of our meeting last Friday, and some of my best lines are lost to posterity forever. It's sad, somehow.

Parliament reassembled last week, and a good time was had by many. "Three things in life are certain," said someone I should know and haven't the energy to look up, "Death, taxes and the never-ending devaluation of the American dollar." The President of the Senate parried a question with an extremely obscure allusion to Shakespeare's "Tempest". I listened only to the Senate broadcast on Wednesday afternoon, and it was lovely to hear the Labor senators trying to answer the same damfool questions they used to throw at the Libs et al. when they were on the other side. The Attorney-General, Senator Lionel Murphy, is magnificent. The difference between his laconic drawl and bone-dry wit and the previous A-G's peeved/pompous tone and almost total lack of humour has always been deliciously notable, but now that Murphy is the Government there seems an added piquancy in what he has to say and how he says it. Keep up the great work, fellers, and I hope you argue for months about setting up new committees to replace the old. (While they argue, I get time off to type stencils.)

The year will be a hard one, I suspect, as far as work is concerned. Labor likes to have committees looking at things, and my job is exclusively concerned with committees and conferences and the like. (There has been some misunderstanding about this. I am not a Hansard reporter. I have no knowledge of shorthand. My only involvement with Parliament as such is working on the index to Hansard when the time for that comes and there's nothing else to do.) But there are two nice things to look forward to. In July there should be a new award for journalists, which with luck will take my salary up to within spitting distance of living within my income; and not long after there will be a Senate election, which just might mean some more time off.

But enough of this shop talk.

In December 1969 I published the first issue - no. 21 - of Scythrop (formerly Australian Science Fiction Review). I have pretended for a long time since that very few comments were ever written on that issue, but in fact there were comments written which I have never published. (*blush*)

I shall, this moment, publish them:

Scythrop has a touch of Tolkien, of Van Vogt and of C. S. Lewis. William Burroughs fans should love it.

- Artemus Haddock

... a touch of Ballard, of Kafka and of CATCH 22. Nick Bockwinkel fans should love it.

- Howland Mennisom

... a touch of the sun. A pity it is not big enough to wrap anything in.

- Kirk Volleyball Jr

Der Spiegel must look to its laurels, and Der Goldwyn to its hardies.

- Waldemar Cohen

How courageous of Scythrop to introduce us to the work of Montmorency Jones! He is the Sartre of the Saltbush, the Anouilh of the Never-Never! ... But I felt that Peter Roberts's proposed underwater Worldcon in Paris was insane, frankly.

- Daisy Hollander Buckett

The chewiest fanzine in years.

- Fort Mudge Clarion

I must say I approve Mr Brunner's advising readers to "go pop".

- Jeremy Weasel

XVIIIth Century English Empiricist Philosopher, noting asfragistic resurgence in southern colonies, suggests Mr Wilson send a gunboat.

- Times Lit. Supp. (personal advt)

The last comment sort of dates the issue a bit, doesn't it. At about the time I wrote all that stuff (oh no; you didn't believe them for a minute, surely?) the "XVIIIth Century English Empiricist Philosopher" used to advertise in just about every issue of the TLS. I have often wondered, not that it matters, just what he was up to and what kind of bloke he must have been. I think I might have liked to meet him. I have an affinity for eccentrics. We seem to have things in common. (Hullo dere!)

One of the odd things about composing on stencil is that you never know where you will finish up. You bung the stencil in the typer and in a large round hand type "Philosophical Gas number something", do a bit of fancy stuff and there you are. This issue started out as mailing comments, believe it or not.

5th March: A stencil a day keeps the gafia away (at least, so they say). It's 6.45 am and it's cold. But the sun is poking up over the Printing Office, and it looks like being just the kind of day it was fifty-two weeks ago when I walked from Forrest Motor Lodge to Parliament House (a little hike of about two miles, though it didn't look like that on the map), sweating in my suit, wondering what this new job would be like and knowing that whatever it was like I would just have to endure it. I had burnt my bridges.

A year later I can say I am not sorry I took the plunge. It's not a great job, but it's endurable. Financially I am no better off now than I was then, but I have paid off most of the bills which were worrying hell out of me then, and I have acquired a good car, a good stereo set-up (something I've managed without for over two years) and a lot of music. At this rate I should be as comfortably situated by 1975 as I was in 1965. It's something to aim for, really. (Then I'll probably get married again, start buying a house and another car, and the whole cycle will start again...)

Anyway, in half an hour or so I shall put on that very suit - not as any kind of celebration but simply because that suit includes the only pair of wearable trousers I have - and walk over the road to work. I have the strong feeling there will be no time off this week, but... a man must do what a man must do; I am prepared; I stand ready to do my country's bidding; &c.

Shit. I don't feel like work.

On with the mailing comments - on, on, Stanley, on (charge, Chester, charge!) (quoth the brave Marmion). (No, I still don't like Walter Scott, but some things stick in the memory.)

LURK 4: Better say something nice about this or Sue Smith will never speak to me again. And it's an easy thing to say nice things about. Very neatly produced, with lots of good things to read. I liked James White's Novacon GoH speech, and agree entirely that "people are much more interesting and likeable if they are moderately good". Your personality, Pat and Mike, individually and in the amalgam, come over very well; your material is good and worth

reading, if not outstandingly brilliant; and, as I said, the production is neat. I can't think of more ingredients needed for a successful and satisfying fanzine, and I congratulate you on this one. That Pat cannot share my sense of humour merely shows that we can't all be perfect. (But I'm trying.)

OSTEEN UNIVERSITY REVIEW 7: Sam, I love your colophon. Like you, I am fascinated by names. If you are interested I'll send you a copy of the Australian postcode directory, which should provide you with hours of innocent pleasure (if that's the kind you go for). John Foyster published a massive list of star names a couple of years ago for FAPA: that would really turn you on. If you have any other friends at East Sale, let's know: Peter House and Liz George have recently moved down that way, and I'm sure they would love to meet some fans or even friends of fans. I take it that your comment on "Is Australia Funny?" (to quote in full: "Groan.") indicates a measure of disapproval. "The trouble with real life is that there are no instant replays." I like that.

(Time to go to work. Excuse I.)

4.58 pm: Sometimes I wonder how I stand the strain. I took a volume of Orwell's essays and a tape of some Mahler symphonies with me this morning, in case there wasn't much doing. There wasn't. I read a few essays, listened to the Second on the headphones, yawned a lot and slept a little. I went back from lunch with the ANZAPA and FAPA mailings, and managed to write some comments. Arthur and Alf were doing crossword puzzles, and every so often would ask me for a 19th century English author with three names, each of six letters, and the middle one was probably George, and I would look up from my apazines and mumble "Walter Savage Landor", and it was all pretty dreary. Bob picked up the Bible I keep on my desk and started reading Genesis. He kept on asking stupid questions, too. "Where does Cain's wife come from?" Stuff like that. Late this afternoon he asked me where Philadelphia was, and I looked up and realized he was reading Revelation. I hate people who read the ends of books first to see how they turn out, and told him so. Same routine tomorrow, apparently. Sigh.

This version is authentic. The proofreaders at the Times must have had nightmares with it in any case, so I don't blame the paper for misspelling some of my misspellings. Dr Doug Everingham, I should explain to

THE BUTTERFLY MIND 13: At last, Robin, someone in a fanzine alludes to a film and not only do I catch the allusion but I remember the film with affection. BUT I CAN'T REMEMBER ITS NAME: (Sob) I refer of course to "Think pink". Goddam, I liked that film and can remember clearly the story and most of the actors. I'm absolutely furious with myself (if you'll pardon the expression). :: "I find it hard enough to make all the subjunctive clauses come to the same end: I do sometimes think though that I may be the only person in fandom who knows how, and actually uses, colons." (And that's for Judge Speer. Have fun, Jack.)

COMMAND MODULE 21: The company you keep, Mike! Anyone who can speak of "the joys of burying yourself beneath thousands of tons of rock and dirt" is pretty far gone. I admit that I have a little popular music about the place, a modest collection of Playboy and a volume or two of erotica, but one must keep a sense of proportion about these things. :: You have one for Jack Speer, too: "I like the way (here comes what remains of my Eng. Lit. classes, folks!) it maintains its rhythmn..." And another: "n'est pas?" (Maybe I've been reading too much of Jack Speer. I'd better stop this nit-picking.)

IN THE COUNTRY OF THE BLAND THE ONE EYED FAN IS KING: "... this is typed direct on stencil" Do tell, Eric. Did you take all the mail you received during 1972 - and records of your outwards mail - with you to Brisbane; or do you have an incredibly good memory? Certainly you have an excellent filing system. :: You've really given me something to think about there: I always thought sexuality was misdirected creativity, rather than the other way round. Gosh, eh? :: Watch it, Lindsay: there are more than enough Australian fan humourists already, and you are going close to glutting the market further. "A hurried fumbling through the pages revealed that a 'calliope' is a steam organ. At last, I thought, John is finally kicking this literary junk and writing about interesting things like machines. The only part I don't understand is the rest of the poem."

PHILOSOPHICAL GAS 16-18: Someone - Terry Carr, I think - refers to running a duplicator at top speed: "100 per minute". These issues, and everything I'm doing at present (except electrostencils and so on),

have to go through the Roneo at 150 - and even then come out too black for my liking. It's probably the humidity that causes this, since I remember distinctly last winter having to warm up the drum with a radiator. Funny things, duplicators.

A SECOND PHCENIX / ENTROPION 7: One of the things I have been giving a lot of thought to lately is beautifully summed up in your comment on Scythrop 27, Nick, and I will quote it, not out of self-indulgence, but because I want to think some more about what general truth there is in it. "It seems so silly to say so little about the best thing in the mailing. But maybe that's what praise is all about." There seems a lot of truth in it. But what if one is looking for something other than praise? Further: Is one really looking for something other than praise? I ask myself those questions, and so far have reached no satisfactory conclusion. But I will have to work out some answer during the next few days, because there are things in FAPA about which I can only say, in effect, "I have nothing but praise for this". No, there are alternatives. Let's take your contributions as an example, Nick. To say I have nothing but praise for these two zines would be absurd. I enjoyed reading them, because they gave me an insight into you and your world (which, being in South Africa, is a particularly interesting world: one we don't get many unofficial glimpses of). But apart from this little disquisition, which any number of zines in the three apas might have sparked off, I have no comment at all to make on what you have written. How then do I express my very real appreciation of what you have given me? I can say, "I liked this very much, Nick" - but then what do I say to other people whose stuff I have enjoyed? This is why I have never been a conscientious commentator - and why I have deliberately set out this time to comment on every last thing in three apas. I would dearly love to know what Sam Moskowitz (for example) thinks of the stuff I provide for him to read; but he doesn't comment on anything - and therefore I am not overly offended. But the people who do write comments, and either leave me out or dismiss me with some piddling remark or question, annoy me. I should not be annoyed; I know that. I feel bad about being annoyed by this: but I can't deny the feeling. So, what to do? (You tell me.)

Perhaps I should ask someone like Harry Warner or John Foyster - someone who knows the lot - to expound a Compleat Philosophie of Mailing Comments. But I won't do that; not just yet anyway. Ken Ford asked readers specifically for comments on various matters, and I commented on them - perhaps not to his satisfaction, but I did what he asked, with pleasure. So I will ask everyone reading this one fiendishly simple question: What do you look for and/or what pleases you most in a comment on your apazine?

There are over a hundred of us in these three apas. Surely between us we should be able to form some consensus of opinion on what is after all one of the basic features or functions of an amateur publishing association.

And if everyone replies, "Jeez, John, I have nothing but praise for your initiative in raising this most important question, and I hope you receive many intelligent answers", I shall gaffiate instantly.

Best of luck with AFRICAPA, Nick. I would be pleased to join if you don't mind getting basically the same material as FAPA, OMPA and ANZAPA. I'll send you an airmail copy of this issue of PG, and if you want to enroll me as a member - and if the apa has started up - this will be my first contribution.

THE COMING OF THE GUARDIAN: You can certainly draw, John, and I am not yet convinced that Blair can't write, but comics are not my flagon of red (nor cup of tea, for that matter, but I'm even more difficult to please in the way of tea than in the way of grog: it has to be Earl Grey, Darjeeling or Lapsang Souchong), so I have no comment other than best of luck with your project - and much better luck with its reproduction.

KERNFORSCHUNGSZENTRUM 1: I guess this means something like "nuclear science centre", John, but I am open to elucidation. Your description of activities at 128 Hereford St, Glebe, while it does not tally with my own experiences at that address, carries a certain amount of credibility. I find it intriguing that as well as being an artist of no mean promise, as evidenced by the "Guardian" strip, you write in a kind of comic-strip style also. As a writer of faan-fiction you have a long way to go yet, but by crikey you've got off to a fine start. More, please.

I HAVE A DREAM OF ONE DAY HANGING FRANZ ROTTENSTEINER FROM A SOUR APPLE TREE: Hell! The only short fanzine title in this mailing is Zymurgy: just about everyone is opting for long and/or obscure titles in ANZAPA these days. Maybe I should revive Crog! (Hm. Come to think of it, Crog! was just an abbreviation for The Chrononhotonthological Review, so perhaps I'd better just shut up.) You gave me a copy of this at 128 Hereford St, Glebe, Alex, and I find no more to comment on now than then. You are confused, not without understandable reason, by the lees of Australian fandom. Lee Harding and Leigh Edmonds (Melbourne) and Leigh Hyde (Canberra) are all noticeably and unrepentantly male. There is another Lee or Leigh in Melbourne - a friend of Lee, naturally - who is a very interesting lady, but who has so far not been mentioned in any fanzine that I know of. If and when she is, we will all have real problems.

ART AND DOMESTICITY: Congratulations, Mike! :: I am pleased that I have met someone else who has read Rufus Jones - he was my favourite theologian/preacher while I was in college - but (ain't it a crazy world?) isn't it sort of odd that the only other person I have met who has read Rufus Jones lives in Tangent, Oregon? :: Have fun with your capitalist enterprise (I'm sure you will) - and I wish you the kind of luck Mr Binkin had. (You'll have to ask Jack Chalker about that.) If you still have swags of National Geographics I'm sure they could be sold at a decent profit in Australia. Playboys, too: especially in Queensland, where it is banned. Can I place an order with you? I have read only one book by A. J. Liebling, and I lust for more. I have read only two of Elliot Paul's mysteries, and ditto. I have never seen anything by Oliver St John Gogarty except AS I WAS GOING DOWN SACKVILLE STREET, and ditto.

NOTES OF A NAIF SON 6: "I have a terrible horror of being alone as I grow older." That sums up what I've been saying recently, too." Listen, Gillespie (and Grigg for that matter), you are thinking Bad Thoughts. That's the kind of thing I was feeling when I was your age, and here I am - a decade, more or less, later - after seven years of "marriage", still thinking the same kind of thing. St Paul said, "It is better to marry than to burn" - but I say unto you: Burn, dammit! for as long as you can hold out. Marry when it's good for you. Despair not.

24th March: It has been a rather incredible week or so for Australia, what with Gough right there on the cover of Time Magazine, trying to look (in Clifton Pugh's portrait) like the whirlwind he is, my favourite senator, Murph the Lion (as Nation Review has taken to calling him), "visiting" ASIO, the visit to our nation's fair capital of Mr Bijedic, PM of Yugoslavia, and - just to remind us that the pre-December-1972 Australia lives on - the seizure by Melbourne police of posters depicting full-frontally an obscene statue of one David, sculpted by some filthy-minded wog named Michelangelo.

And rather an incredible week or so for me, too.

Amongst other things, which we needn't go into right now, I stencilled and printed Philosophical Gas no.21 - and after some soul-searching prompted by two people who read it and one who hasn't, I destroyed the issue. Yep, I just joined the Book-Burners Club (Patron: R. Meagher MP), but for rather different reasons than most paid-up members have for belonging to it.

PG 21 was a beautiful example of a nasty streak in my character which most people are too polite to say anything about. If I were to explain just which nasty streak I mean, I would be giving further evidence of it - so I won't. But what I will do is offer a quote from a recent letter marked DNQ (and protect the writer, though Ghu knows he doesn't need protecting, by not naming him): "The March of Mind' is a magnet of interest for me. It may be that you impart more of yourself in these sly ruminations than you would allow, were you aware of the machinations of your mind in composing them." Yes indeed. I've been playing a lot of chess during the last few weeks, and I really believe it has given me a little more insight into just those mental machinations. Anyway, I've been giving a lot of thought to priorities this last week, with the aim of becoming a Better Person. Wish me luck.

Thinking about priorities forces me to abandon the project of making this issue the first and probably only attempt at commenting on three apa mailings. My comments on FAPA 142 are drafted - in some cases written in full and at some length - but they will have to wait. I will say to FAPA members here that this mailing also played a part in my high ambition. For the first time I read a mailing right through, and came up with some important discoveries. Maybe they were only self-discoveries, but that's important enough. I might try to explain in PG 21 (Mark II).

Happy Easter, folks.

JLB

This issue is dedicated, with much affection, to
Lyn Smith, Margaret Oliver,
Liz Cutler, Mrs Ivy Bangsund,
Carolyn Addison and Ursula
K. Le Guin

- who, between them, know
more about me than ever
existed;

Bruce Gillespie, Ed Cagle,
George Turner and Alf Blair

- who are good guys;
and lastest but not leastest
Gina Clarke

- who is a very interesting
and I have no doubt lovely
lady, and whose inclusion of
Renaults in the category
quoted on the cover of this
issue prompted me to waste
a couple of (pleasant) hours
attempting to sketch my
bete blanc.

I don't normally dedicate
issues of fanzines - it seems
a rather pretentious and maybe
even insulting thing to do,
unless in good-humoured jest -
and I don't intend to make a
policy of doing so. But during
the past few weeks these folk
have, consciously or otherwise,
helped me considerably in
various ways, and I just want
to say Thank You, more or
less in public.

