

PHILOSOPHICAL GAS



LONG AND NOISY LIKE A FAGOTT

Philosophical Gas

'Not a felicitous title' - Judge Speer

'You are a philosopher,' said the lady, 'and a lover of liberty. You are the author of a treatise, called "Philosophical Gas; or, a Project for a General Illumination of the Human Mind".'

'I am,' said Scythrop...

— Thomas Love Peacock: Nightmare Abbey, ch. X

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AUTUMN 1974

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The March of Mind

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Friends include contributors and correspondents. A published article is worth four issues (lookee! - the last of the big spenders! - whee!). A published letter is worth one issue. An unpublished contribution of any kind gets you the next issue at least.

A new category is required: lost contributions. I know that somewhere around this place I have articles by John Litchen, Ken Ford and maybe others, which I want to publish but can't find. If you get into this category you are on the mailing list until I find your article, and for four issues afterwards.

Friends also include other publishers. You send me your publication, and I'll send you Philosophical Gas.

BUT PLEASE NOTE:

As of 1st July 1974 I will not be trading. If I want to go on seeing your publication, I will tell you so, and offer to purchase it from you at the rate of A\$2.00 per year. I will also invite you to take out a subscription to PG at the rate of A\$2.00 per year. If I don't like your publication all that much, I will send you the next issue of PG and a gentle note suggesting that you take out a subscription or write to me or something.

If a note on your envelope says this is your last issue, it is, unless I hear from you.

Things are tough - no doubt about it. Ursula Le Guin, Guest of Honour at the 1975 World SF Convention in Melbourne, wrote to me recently: 'It seems so ridiculous to think about flying half across the world, when we haven't enough gasoline to get 90 miles to our cabin in the Coast Range.' The petrol shortage hasn't hit us yet, but I can tell you I am pessimistic enough to hang onto the car I'm driving rather than commit myself for something more expensive - just in case we have the same troubles as people in Europe and the USA.

The Canberra papers tell us today (22nd February) that our cost of living here has gone up by 23%. That's a lot. My income has gone up by nearly 100% since I moved here in 1972, but it hasn't gone up 23% in the past twelve months, and Canberra just has to be the most expensive place to live in in Australia. Even so, I wonder how most Australian fans manage. I doubt whether more than half a dozen of them earn more than I do. Postage on fanzines has gone up by as much as 500% since 1966: ASFR1, which cost 4c to post then, I think would now cost me 20c.

I was talking today with a bloke at the Government Printing Office. He's a cheerful kind of bloke, and we always say Hi! when we pass each other in the long corridors, but I've never learnt his name and I've been in the place nearly two years. Today I was walking in the same direction he was, and I asked for the sake of conversation whether he was as busy as we are. No, he said, Last night was the first time I remember that the binding staff hasn't worked overtime. Why? I asked, Running out of work? Running out of paper, he said.

Why paper? I saw plenty of trees in Tasmania a few weeks ago, and I haven't heard that APM has gone out of business, but the fact is that paper is awfully short. Late in January I bought the last 32 reams of coloured duplicating paper Roneo had in Canberra - and it might have to last me the year.

Sally and I left Canberra on 22nd December. I had spent quite a few hours loading the Renault. With the twelve flagons of red and the stack of Scythrop 28s and PG 26s (which I had planned to collate, staple and mail in Melbourne) on board the car had two inches clearance at the back. So I took all that stuff out and put cases in instead. We were still a bit overloaded.

The first night we stayed at Benalla, about 250 miles down the road, and enjoyed the first night of our holiday watching tv and eating honeyed prawns in the motel. Next day we headed east into the mountains and drove the long (rough) way round Lake Eildon. It was almost worth it. Every few miles along that unsurfaced, winding, up-and-down road we caught a glimpse of the lake, made enthusiastic noises and stopped to take a photo or three. Then on through the fern forests, over the Black Spur, and late in the afternoon, into the outer suburbs of Melbourne. I felt like turning round and going back. I had forgotten how big and ugly and nasty Melbourne is. (The feeling faded after a week or so, but I was glad to get away. Residents of New York, London and other great metropolises will find the place rather like a compact village when they come here next year, but two years of Canberra makes a city of two million or so a bit too much for the spirit, if not the mind.)

We spent about a fortnight meeting and re-meeting friends and fans. It seems invidious to name some names and not others, but it would be churlish not to mention the wonderful times we had with Leigh Edmonds, Irene and Lee Harding, Bill Wright, George Turner, Bert Chandler, John and Elizabeth Foyster, Paul Stevens and - in some ways best of all - my mother and Carolyn and Sandy. But by New Year's Eve we'd had enough of people. We went to the drive-in by ourselves, watched 'Cabaret' and were thoroughly miserable, and came home and watched a Christopher Lee horror movie on television.

Perhaps the most memorable occasion during that time was the night George, Bert, Lee and Irene came for dinner. (We had my sister's house: Joy was in Europe, Vern in New Zealand.) George and Bert argued the night away magnificently - and thirstily. Lee bowed out sometime before midnight (Irene had already collapsed), but the other two were still enthusiastically resolving all

the world's problems, political, moral and literary, when we poured them into a taxi in the small hours. Later that morning, when Lee and Irene emerged, we learnt that things had Gone Bump In The Night - for them anyway. A storm had blown up. Lee had opened the windows - something my sister and brother-in-law apparently are not in the habit of doing - and when the storm came it brought down about fifteen feet of pelmet and heavy curtain. Lee and Irene struggled in the dark to put the rotten things back, but gave up, and for the rest of the night endured the brilliance of the flashing neon signs just down the street on Burwood Highway. Lee told me all this over breakfast. He also told me that when the curtains came down there was suddenly a gentle sound of music: to be exact, the sound of that well-loved old tune 'Beautiful Dreamer'. I didn't believe him: the man's a writer after all, and this is exactly the kind of thing a writer would invent to touch up an otherwise merely passably dramatic story. A day or so later we found Joy's jewel-case, which when opened, or even merely touched, plays... 'Beautiful Dreamer'.

Robin Johnson remarked one night at the Degraes Tavern that whenever I am within two hundred miles of Melbourne there is a thoughtless, blissful feeling of goodwill and content descends over fandom. This, he said, is how he knew I had gone to visit my sister Ruth and her husband Barry at their farm in Western Victoria last June - or at least hadn't been surprised to find later that I had done that. This also, he said, is why Melbourne fandom spends most of the year thinking ill thoughts and saying hard things about me, but clamours to buy me carafes of Henry's rough red when I'm in town. Robin didn't buy me any red, rough or otherwise, while I was in Melbourne, so I don't believe the rest of his story either.

The papers had warned us that the airlines had instituted thorough checks of passengers and their baggage. Ansett ignored entirely my rather bulky portable electric typewriter (which might have been a suitcase full of explosives and hand weapons, for all they knew) and radio/cassette recorder (ditto on a smaller scale). We had a bumpy and rather lengthy ride to Hobart, where we were met by Sally's parents.

(We were in Tasmania for about ten days. By

15th January, when we flew again, the security measures had really tightened up. My typewriter was inspected; my all-purpose bottle and can opener, which contains a knife-blade, was confiscated for a few minutes (did they really think I would attempt to hijack a plane with a bottle-opener? - it would be a compliment to drinkers everywhere if they did); and I had to empty my pockets until they were satisfied that the silver foil in a cigarette pack was setting off the metal detector. We were the last to board the plane.)

Sally's brother Graeme has a newsagency in Sandy Bay, a rather exclusive and comfortable suburb of Hobart on the lower slopes of Mount Nelson. It is a suburb full of steep, meandering, narrow little streets and cul-de-sacs. Most of the houses look out over the Derwent, and the majestic bulk of Mount Wellington looms a few miles to the west. Closer is the Wrest Point Casino, which also looms but is not majestic. The shopping centre in lower Sandy Bay can only be described as grotty. There is a good pub, a service station (scheduled for demolition by the local council), a post office and a handful of uninteresting shops. One of the shops was a moribund newsagency run by two elderly women, and this is the business which Graeme and his wife Helen bought last year. Already they have transformed it into a lively and, it would seem, potentially very profitable concern, supported enthusiastically by the locals. This they would not have achieved without the considerable assistance of someone like Sally's father.

I have met people like Mr Yeoland before, but not many. He is the kind of good, gentle man who gets things done quietly, thoroughly and without fuss. In a time when speed is more valued than thoroughness, that virtue is sometimes held against him, but I know which I prefer. He is the kind of man who does more than is required of him, not to impress, but because it is his nature. My father, a man very like him, called this 'going the second mile'. Mr Yeoland doesn't quote scripture.

About 2 am on Monday I was sitting by myself reading when Mr Yeoland got up to go to work. We talked as he had his breakfast of tea and toast. I said I was almost inclined to go with him, but... and I indicated the almost empty claret bottle, and he laughed. He looked tired. Very much later the same

day, after dinner, I said I would like to accompany him in the morning to see what goes on behind the scenes in a newsagency. And I did.

I went to bed a little after 10. About 1.45 I was meditating irritably over my coffee, pondering yet again my essential stupidity, when Mr Yeoland came out. He suggested good-humouredly that he hadn't expected me to go through with it. I suggested we were both insane. Again he looked tired. I don't know how I looked, but I felt dead tired. However I felt, I was determined to prove to myself that I could keep pace with a man of 62. This challenge kept me going for the next 22 hours.

About 2.30 we set off for Sandy Bay, about 38 kilometres away. (I'm trying to Think Metric; if you aren't, make that about 24 miles.) An almost full moon gleamed on Frederick Henry Bay and the lagoons by the road. We didn't talk much. Sandford, Lauderdale, sleepy little villages, sped past, then the lights of Rokeby, Howrah and Bellerive, and across the silver Derwent the street lights of Hobart, dominated by the orange-golden tower of the casino. Over the Tasman Bridge, through the city and onto Sandy Bay Road, past the motel I stayed at when I was last in Hobart (1967: half a lifetime ago it seems) and on past the casino, where the gambling tables had just five minutes earlier ceased business for the day, to lower Sandy Bay and the newsagency. The place was quiet; I could hear the river tide breaking gently on the beach; and it was freezing. Waiting for us was a young bloke named Bill, starting on the job that morning. He was wearing shorts and a parka. I shivered and lit my seventh cigarette for the day.

Under the shop was a store-room containing mounds of newspapers, magazines, comics and junk - and the Machine. The function of the Machine is to ingest whole newspapers and spew them out rolled and firmly wrapped in grease-proof paper. It was designed, I decided, by Heath Robinson and subsequently improved by Rube Goldberg. If you think that operating a duplicator is fraught with hazard and frustration, you should try a newspaper-rolling machine. I didn't. I just watched. Theoretically it should get through a thousand papers easily in an hour; theoretically every last one of those papers will be neatly rolled and encased in its protective cover with just exactly the right amount of paste to hold it together but not seep through and glue the pages together. I guess if you tried hard enough and long enough it would do just that, maybe, but it was certainly in a temperamental mood that morning. Also it was about as quiet in operation

as a pneumatic drill. I think I made a good impression by volunteering to wheel the barrow-loads of rolled papers up the steep slope from the store-room to the street, but in fact I was escaping from the noise. Each trip took me about five minutes - less than a minute to take the barrow up and down, the rest to stand in the street smoking and savouring the quietness. I don't think I have actually heard a river before, but I heard it then - the gentle surf of the Derwent breaking on the pure golden-white sand two blocks away - mocking with its absolute timelessness the thunk-thunk-thunk of the Machine.

Right then and there I had an idea for a science fiction story, the kind of story that Lee Harding is so good at writing, but I've forgotten what it was. It had something to do with Nature and Progress, and the realization that one was better than the other, but I just forget which was which, and it doesn't matter anyway.

About 5 Graeme turned up, and we loaded his Valiant and Bill's Falcon with the papers. Mr Yeoland went off with Bill to teach him the round, and I went with Graeme, sitting in the back with hundreds of papers which kept on falling on me every time we changed direction, which was often. I had the round-book, and my job was to yell out the street numbers - not that I was really required: Graeme normally does the run by himself, and I was just along for the ride.

Graeme had the radio on ('Expected top temperature for today is 19. Temperature in the city at this moment is 7. The time is ten past five and we listen to the big sound of...') and he smoked almost non-stop. We set off up Sandy Bay Road and I settled back to enjoy the ride - for about half a minute. Graeme nonchalantly threw a few papers over fences while talking and smoking, then suddenly swerved over onto the wrong side of the road. He's a maniac! I thought, but I didn't say so, and it was just as well, because for the next hour or so we drove on the wrong side, went the wrong way down one-way streets, reversed at hair-raising speeds down steep driveways I didn't think he'd get up in the first place, missed parked cars by inches and generally breached every article in the traffic code. I asked him how he got on with the police, since I had seen a patrol car or two. He said they had stopped him once (no seat-belt, on the wrong side of the road), he had explained what he was doing

and they just told him to be careful and disappeared.

It was a nightmare, but I have been driven by Leigh Edmonds and lived, so I accepted my situation fatalistically - and even found myself enjoying it in a macabre kind of way.

About three-quarters of the way round we encountered a milk truck. It was reversing rapidly towards us, out of a dead-end street. Graeme said 'Do you think he's seen us?', I shouted 'No!' and Graeme threw the Valiant into reverse and roared off backwards into another street. The driver of the milk truck waved to us when he eventually saw us, and we waved back and went on into the street he had been in. We reversed out as he had done, and from then on every house we passed had milk bottles outside. In the next street there was a house with a little brick pillar at the entrance to its driveway, and on top of the pillar a bottle of milk. I said to Graeme 'The trick is not to hit the bottle.' He laughed, flung a paper and hit the bottle. It fell over - and slipped into a cavity in the pillar, unbroken. I said 'That was 44, wasn't it?', Graeme said yes, I said 'They don't get a paper!' - and we roared laughing. 'They deserve one,' he said. And on we went.

It was easily the most dangerous and hilarious car ride I have ever experienced, with Graeme commenting on the magnificent views, driving one-handed while picking up papers from the floor, and throwing them in every direction, out of, over, and possibly even under the car, reversing at speed down steep inclines onto the main road, and all the time smoking, listening to the radio and keeping up a laconic commentary on his customers - while I hung on, yelled out numbers and wondered if the next corner would be our last.

Somehow we made it back to the shop. In the daylight I looked at Graeme's reasonable collection of sf - Asimov, Herbert, Spinrad, Boyd, Aldiss, and others more expected - and shortly afterwards set off with Mr Yeoland to deliver some accounts and do the banking. Mr Yeoland prefers to bank at the casino, so we went there. After paying in what seemed to me a vast amount of money we went down to the gambling room. Outside the sun was shining, the water clear and the sand clean and pleasant underfoot. Inside the casino it was dark and

gloomy and oppressive. There were a dozen or so gamblers at the tables. The girls looked bored. We watched for a minute or so, and then a very nicely dressed, ever so polite young man sidled up to us and murmured that ties and jackets were required in this room - and since we had neither, we retired without regret.

Mr Yeoland and I went back to the shop, did a few chores necessary, and retired to the pub. Sally found us there, by telephone, and we drove into town to have lunch with her. We lunched on an excellent meat dish, with a superb red wine which would have cost three or four times as much in Canberra, and went home. We had about an hour's sleep before the women woke us, and then drove back into Hobart and dined with Graeme and Helen. It was a great meal and a great evening. We got back to Cremorne about midnight, and I slept for twelve hours. (Mr Yeoland got up about 2, as usual, and spent roughly the same kind of day that I have tried to describe. I don't know how he does it - but I kept up with him for one day at least.)

Out of my almost thirty-five years experience of the human race I feel (perhaps wrongly) that I have some idea of what makes the human male tick. The human female is an altogether different proposition. I have known Sally for nearly nine months now, but the closer I come to her the more I realize how little I know her. Her mother and her sister-in-law impressed me immediately as rather wonderful women, but nothing would induce me to attempt to describe them. I will say simply that they are good women, excellent company and fascinating persons. If I feel closer to Graeme and his father right now, I hope it is not from some basic lack of human understanding, but simply because I am a man and a rather innocent man at that.

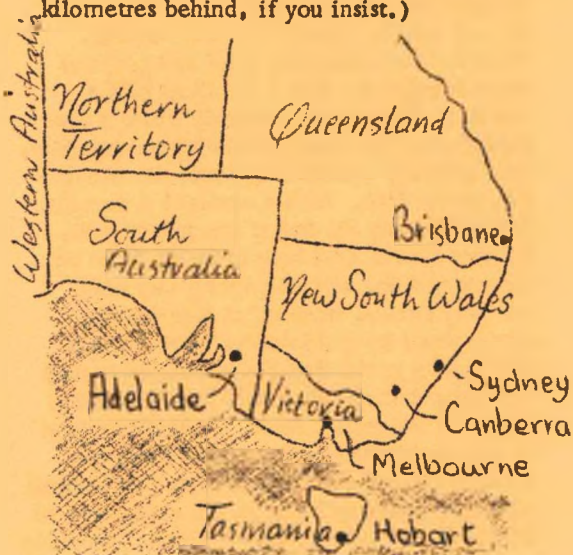
Back on The Mainland (as Tasmanians, with just the hint of a sneer, call the big island to their north) we saw a few friends in Melbourne again, then set off for Ruth and Barry's place in the Western District. Here we spent several idle days, their delight spoilt (for me) only by Barry's plying me with excellent red wine and superb music and then thrashing me at chess.

On then to Adelaide. All of Australia's state capitals hold some attraction for me, and good memories. Of the six I tend to think of Adelaide as my favourite, yet on

this visit I felt I was seeing the city for the first time. Perhaps it was because I had no special reason for going there; in the past I have always had a reason - business, special events (the Festival, and many years ago, church conferences) or people I wanted to see. Perhaps it was simply that for the first time I had my own transport there. I deliberately did not seek out friends and fans: I wanted to discover Adelaide itself, the place, just with Sally. We decided we could live in Adelaide very happily, and if the opportunity arises we might do just that.

Overseas readers who have looked at a map of Australia may have noticed the cluster of capital cities in the south-eastern corner - Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide: there's barely space for the names on a small map. Against the vast bulk of Australia, certainly these places seem close together, but they aren't when you go driving from one to another: Adelaide is about 800 miles (Think Metric! - 1400 km?) by road from Canberra. I could probably write pages about our two days on the road back to Canberra - about our encounters with a locust plague, floods, mosquitoes (carriers, we learnt later, of the usually-fatal Murray Valley Encephalitis virus) and so on - but I've had enough of this what-I-did-on-my-holidays story, even if you haven't.

I went back to work on 4th February, and read a book and played chess. Since the following afternoon we haven't stopped working at a furious pace: on average I think something like three or four committees have sat each day, and we're miles behind. (Oh, all right, kilometres behind, if you insist.)



In the 25th February issue of Time Magazine is a full-page advertisement sponsored by the Australian Association of Advertising Agencies and paid for by Time. It includes the following paragraph:

Choosing the make of car you can afford, in the colour that pleases your wife and having a radio to pick up ten stations (or having a radio at all) are the things life is all about.

So now you know. I trust that my many readers who keep on writing to me and asking me the meaning of life will desist forthwith.

I can't afford the secondhand car I'm driving, it doesn't have a radio, its colour scheme is not exactly what I would choose if I had any choice, and I am not married. But at least I now know what life is all about. Thank God for Time Magazine!

The same issue reports that during January compact and small cars captured 53% of the American market. Time didn't report how many of these cars had radios, nor how many stations those radios could pick up, but it did say 'The trouble, from the industry's point of view, is that energy-conscious motorists are switching to buying small cars...' The industry presumably hasn't yet learnt what life is all about.

I like reading Time because it keeps me up to date on what life is all about and stops me being inordinately happy about it. This week's editorial is half about Alexander Solzhenitsyn, half about America's rotten new postage rates. This Saturday the basic letter rate goes up from 8c to 10c. We pampered Australians pay only 7c. Lucky us! Of course that's 7 cents Australian, which is about 10.5 cents American, but let's not quibble. Where the new rates hurt is in their effect on magazine publishers - people like you and me and Time Inc. Doggone! - do you know that increases the cost of mailing a magazine by six-tenths of a cent? - and that the average profit on each copy of an American magazine is already only about eight-tenths of a cent? I reckon it's all come about because Time has said it doesn't go much for President Nixon, and Mr Nixon has told his Postmaster General to hit them for another 0.6c in retaliation.

But how come it costs me over 40c (US60c) to produce and mail PG? Ah, the power of

Philosophical Gas

the Presidency! Seriously, I would like to have from overseas readers copies of their countries' postage rates. (In exchange I would be pleased to send copies of our official rate card.) Maybe I'll compile a comparative chart from these things which will go some way to explaining why Boyd Raeburn can airmail a fanzine to me from Canada for 6c, while Terry Jeeves pays 2½p to send me his fanzine surface mail - and why it would cost me 40c to airmail Boyd's fanzine back to him, and 7c to return Terry's fanzine by surface mail.

Enough of that. Some months ago I asked George Turner to write me an article about historical fiction. He said he wouldn't do any such thing - in a letter which just about answers everything I asked him anyway.

George Turner

Plumbers of the Cosmos

Dear John,

This is just a formal note to point out that I am in no way competent to fulfil your request (instruction, demand, imperious direction) that I write an article on the historical novel.

For one thing I don't know enough about the subject. Which you will at once combat in common underhanded style with the observation that the possession of ignorance never prevented a writer from exposing it, and cite the name of a dozen or so sf notables to prove the point.

But not even you can brush aside the fact that the subject is too vast for an essay of less than a quarter of a million words, and I would have much more fun churning that out as limericks, such as 'A young man on Popocatepetl' - which I leave you to complete at your leisure.

Let me just give you an introductory idea of the limits of the field:

I neither know nor care who wrote the first

true historical novel and have no intention of researching such useless information, but it was Sir Walter Scott who put the genre on the literary map.

He did this by accident. He didn't mean to write a historical novel at all (even if he had ever heard of such a thing) but a study of Scottish society and manners. He had been doing pretty well with 'period' narrative poems like 'Marmion' and 'Rokeby' - which still make pleasant reading once you have inured yourself to thumpety rhythms - but Byron had spoiled the market by doing even better with 'The Corsair' (inspired by Nureyev) and introducing luscious Oriental beauties and lashings of sexual implication. (In those days sex could only be had by implication, but dark eyes could flash and divine ankles could inflame men madly. Babies were found under cabbages.)

Sir Walter had in his drawer the beginnings of an abandoned ms called WAVERLEY and decided to finish it. (Incognito, of course. Gentlemen did not write novels in that era. Penurious scribblers wrote novels.) Being an antiquarian of considerable learning, he wished to write a work detailing the changes of Scottish manners and way of life and so preserve knowledge of the old forms. The rebellion of '45 made a handy pivot for a bit of action and he supposed there would have to be some sort of heroine to keep the female readers happy, and so the romantic historical novel came to immediate maturity with a crash that splintered lorgnettes in all the drawing-rooms of Europe.

It is the fashion now to dismiss WAVERLEY as unreadable, but Penguin do not commonly publish unreadable books, and they republished it last year. I have read it three times in forty years and assure you that it is not merely readable but delightful. It is certainly leisureed, disdainful of melodrama and weak in characterization, but it has the great virtue which overcomes damnation in any genre (except sf, which S. Lem says is hopeless): charm.

It is a worthy ancestor, but dear God! what it has spawned! (Prince Valiant? I ask you!)

The runaway success of WAVERLEY in every civilized language - as well as in Russian, French, Italian, Spanish and German - drew the crabs in precisely the fashion that anything fresh in genre novels does today, and every

quill-pusher in Europe was hard at it, rushing knights into armour (usually of the wrong period), immuring maidens in forbidding castles, torturing white-headed old fathers for their hidden gold and swearing fealty to gracious monarchs who would have scared hell out of them if they'd ever met the bloody-minded bastards.

Fortunately almost none of these has survived to plague us.

I suppose these authors would, if challenged with debasing the genre before it had properly got started, have claimed that 'writers must live'. This has always been a doubtful proposition, and even if true, why couldn't they have dug ditches or pasted on rinds in bacon factories or whatever it is the lower classes do for bread? (I notice a tendency among science fiction writers to excuse their mass-market productions on a similar ground. Or even on the plea that if they don't do it, someone else will. Am I alone in thinking that if you can't do a thing properly you should (a) get out of the way and let someone do it who can, or (b) label yourself 'hack' and don't have the insolence to be proud of it or the poor-spiritedness to make excuses for it?)

Eventually a man who knew something of literature beyond mere tradesmanship surfaced with something new in the historical novel concept. Edward Bulwer followed Scott in using real scenes and people for background, and Harrison Ainsworth in piling on the agony, but off his own disgusting bat he introduced the hist. nov. which is researched to the eyebrows, and wherein every second sentence stuffs the reader with further information about the period under ransack.

To read him now is a labour of grim determination (though THE LAST DAYS OF POMPEII still gets an occasional reprinting). The Victorians adored great gouts of what they considered 'educational' material wrapped up in accurate syntax and well-bred romance. (The amount of superfluous information they absorbed in this apparently harmless manner was staggering. Small and revolting children, as well as their repellent elders, could not only recite the dates of all the English monarchs - a beginner's chore, like practising scales - but discuss the terms of the Council of Nicaea, discourse on the difference between a hauberk and a corselet, describe the conditions of Twelfth Century villeinage, dilate on the 'bar' sinister as opposed to the 'bend' sinister - not in front of females, of course - and give a quick rundown on the Code of Hammurabi.)

Alas, Bulwer's factual research had a bad habit of being less than factual, and Disraeli's unkind remarks about DEVEREUX cut him to the artistic quick. Besides, the public was turning to society novels of manners, and a good sailor had to go with the blowing wind. So he wrote a 450 000-word monster called - wait for it - MY NOVEL. If you ever see a copy, burn it unread. There are books that should be burned, or even tortured to death in protest against outrage-by-dullness.

But it is with Bulwer (all right, you snob - Lord Lytton) that science fiction raises its medusan head and infiltrates the hist. nov. field. In THE LAST OF THE BARONS he introduced a gent inventing the steam engine during the Wars of the Roses. Since Hero of Alexandria was using one some eighteen centuries before Stephenson built his Rocket, this was a fair crack of the anachronistic imagination (and a line of thought culminating obviously enough in THE CONNECTICUT YANKEE and LEST DARKNESS FALL). It was a pretty flimsy idea, but the spirit was willing, if you see what I mean. Indeed he actually wrote a seminal sf novel called THE COMING RACE and two peripheral sf novels, ZANONI and A STRANGE STORY - the latter recently reprinted in America. With a population of 213 million the Yanks can afford to reprint unreadable fiction, but why the hell didn't they do THE COMING RACE instead? - it is just readable.

If you want to know what I mean by unreadable, try this bit from ZANONI:

'Ah,' said Zanoní, 'let us change both the wine and the theme.' With that Zanoní grew yet more animated and brilliant. Never did wit more sparkling, airy, exhilarating, flash from the lips of reveller. His spirits fascinated all present - even the Prince himself - with a wild contagion. The wine circulated fast, but none seemed conscious of its effects. One by one the rest of the party fell into a charmed and spellbound silence as Zanoní continued to pour forth sally upon sally, tale upon tale. Yet, how bitter was his mirth! - how full of contempt for the triflers present and for the trifles which made their life!

Lytton didn't attempt to reproduce any of this bacchanalian mouth music, possibly because dialogue wasn't his long suit. Praise God for major mercies.

What happened to the historical novel in the

next half century I neither know nor care. I recollect vaguely that Charles Dickens tried his hand at a couple which turned out not to be among the far, far better things he did. And one of the Kingsleys (I never could tell them apart) did a few, and Charles Reade knocked off THE CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH, this last being generally regarded as a fair sample of the upper second rank of literature. And as somebody or other remarked, 'the country is fortunate in its literature that can call this a novel of the second rank'.

In that same period of incredibly flowering genius (which the Victorians didn't deserve, and which should have been saved for some sensitive, deeply romantic generation of clockwork oranges such as our own) that majestic ultra-marine bluestocking, George Eliot (who turned out to be no better than she should be in private life), challenged Bulwer, or perhaps Lytton, at his own game and produced ROMOLA as an example of what real research and erudition could do with a historical theme. It proved to be an example which, thankfully, few have followed. She not only researched the stones of medieval Florence to the point of wearing extra ruts into them but she looked out the names of the scullery maids and the blind beggars' dogs and included their vital statistics and telephone numbers. There is a limit to research, and ROMOLA became an intellectual monument which even the British National Trust delicately avoids.

Meanwhile, back at the romance parlour, the French had turned up a son of a half-caste general, name of Dumas, who set himself to write 'the history of France in romance' and damned near succeeded. Aside from THE THREE MUSKETEERS and a formidable capacity for grog, the most notable thing about Dumas was his passion for historical accuracy - but when facts were not available he could live it up with the best of them.

In the second half of the century the Americans had started writing their interminable sagas of the Boston Tea Party and the Civil War. Although the Civil War novels of Winston Churchill (not him, the other one) are still readable, it is easy to understand why I neither know nor care

what happened during this period. A Polish gent named Sinkiewicz didn't improve matters by writing QUO VADIS?, which I am told is bloody marvellous in Polish. It is bloody awful in English. The same applies to Manzoni's THE BETROTHED, regarded as the greatest work of Italian fiction. It's enough to put the entire literary output of the nation under suspicion. The Spanish made a valiant attempt at saving the day with the forty-six 'national history' novels of Perez Galdos, but these, brilliant as most of them are, never seem to have had much success among English readers.

I am sure that thousands of other people in countries like Liechtenstein and Madagascar were also writing appalling bilge in the name of historical romance, but fame has not preserved them.

This brings us to the edge of the twentieth century without so much as a definition of the term 'historical novel'. Now, surely, you begin to see the vast, amorphous nature of the task of making sense of this Solarian ocean of a genre?

And mention of Solaris reminds me that the dead, or at least dying, end of the historical novel is its final manifestation in our own day, wherein sf writers have got their hooks into people like More and Johnson (Lafferty), Newton (Wellman), Burton, Twain and Jesus (Farmer), and God only knows how many more trivial twits in search of novelty have turned history into sf vaudeville. Who would want to continue with a theme that can end only in such devastation as that?

Anyway, as I said at the start, it just isn't my subject, and respectfully I must decline to be associated with any such Bangsundian project.

Hoping this short outline of my reasons meets with your approval, I remain

Yours etc.

George Turner

ps: You see that the real interest in historical novels is in the completely irrelevant side issues. You do, don't you?

(JB) ::: Sort of, George, sort of. I just hope I haven't deprived anyone by deleting from your manuscript some of the irrelevant side issues you raised.

Philosophical Gas

A. Bertram Chandler

Starboard Watch

RUSSIA AND THE WRITER

As I write this, Alexander Solzhenitsyn is very much in the news. Like most people I was greatly relieved to learn that the penalty for his 'crimes' was merely exile and not a return to the forced-labour camps or a sojourn in a psychiatric hospital. I am sure that all of us hope that his many true friends in the Soviet Union are not made to suffer for their loyalty; a rather hopeless sort of hope, I admit, although some of them, Dr Sakharov especially, seem to be of such standing that even the KGB handles them with kid gloves.

May it stay that way.

Not so long ago my wife and I were discussing Russia. It was shortly after one of our masters, whose ship had been loading grain in a South Australian port, had told me about a cocktail party thrown in that port by the master of a Russian vessel, the guests being the local business community and the captains of the other grain ships.

My friend had managed to get his host by himself in a corner, and over several glasses of vodka, had compared notes. He discovered that in Russian vessels the sacred margins are maintained. In pay and in conditions there is a great gulf between the master and his officers. Also the master's powers have not been steadily eroded over the years by industrial courts and the like, as they have been in this country and in other capitalist countries.

I said 'As a shipmaster I'd be far better off in Russia - and as a writer I'd probably finish up in the salt mines.'

Mind you, politics can work against one in the Western World as well as on the other side of the Iron Curtain, although the worst that can happen to you is not selling. I am still amused by what happened to a story I wrote many years ago, called 'Artifact'. It was about the first American Mars landing - all very much according to von

Braun - and the discovery by the astronauts of what they at first think is a fair-dinkum Martian. The Martian turns out to be the offspring of two Russian cosmonauts, survivors (briefly) of an unpublicized Russian expedition to the Red Planet. The present regime in Russia has crumbled shortly after this expedition failed to return, and the new rulers have more important matters on their plate than astronautics.

Well, the story sold at once on the British market. It was a long time selling in the USA. According to my agent, the American editors just refused to entertain the idea that the wicked Russians could possibly be first on Mars. Then the first Sputnik was launched, with the consequent shakeup of American thinking. 'Artifact' was promptly purchased by Amazing (who, for some obscure reason, retitled it 'The Last Citizen').

I don't know whether or not this story has ever been published in the USSR, but I have been surprised to learn how much of my work has been printed in that country - all of it, unluckily, before the recognition by Russia of the Bonn Convention. Before this recognition Western authors were paid for their work, of course, but the moneys earned had to be spent in the Soviet Union. There were, as a matter of fact, loopholes - as there are in all laws. One prominent British writer, whose works sold very well in Russia, discovered that, legally speaking, Indonesia was somehow part of the Russian currency empire. (It was in the days when Russia was playing Big Brother to our northern neighbours.) Once a year he and his wife would blow the accumulated royalties on a holiday in Bali.

It was fairly recently, however, when I learnt personally of the fear that is always at the back of the minds of everybody in Russia engaged in literary enterprises, no matter how minor. It was when my Russian Faithful Reader (I may have more than one, but he's the only one who writes to me) asked me if I would give him permission to translate one of the stories in THE HARD WAY UP for his university magazine. He also asked which one I would recommend.

My choice was 'The Tin Messiah' (also published in Galaxy as 'The Soul Machine'). You may recall the thing. In it the young Grimes, captain of the Survey Service's courier 'Adder', has as a passenger a humanoid robot, a Mr Adam, who (or which) has been

manufactured by the Federation for the sole purpose of stirring up revolt among the robots on a planet that happens to be in the Federation's bad books. At one stage of the story Grimes wonders if the driver of the train which brought Lenin, in the famous sealed carriage, to the Finland station ever foresaw the consequences of merely taking a passenger from point A to point B. The question was raised very briefly, in just one short paragraph.

And it scared my penfriend. He said, frankly, that he didn't like to think of the consequences to him if he used that story, even though in it I had said nothing at all unkind about the Little Red Father. He translated instead 'With Good Intentions', the first story in the collection.

Funnily enough I had that same story, 'The Tin Messiah', knocked back in this country. It was when Angus & Robertson were collecting the material for their third anthology of Australian science fiction.*** They turned down 'The Tin Messiah' and took instead 'The Mountain Movers'.

Mention Lenin, and you don't sell in Russia. Mention Ayers Rock, and you sell in Australia. I think I prefer our way of doing things.

* * * *

PRESENT SHOCK

Unfortunately Mr Tofler has already used 'Future Shock' as a title. The main point of his book is that the Future is on us before we've had time to adjust to the Present, and that this is a severe shock to all those who do not read science fiction. For example, every sf reader has been aware for years that the supplies of fossil fuels are far from inexhaustible, and that Mankind has been squandering mineral wealth like a drunken sailor. But to the vast majority of the general public, the Energy Crisis has come as a Toflerian shock, and people in the parts of the world most affected are standing around wringing their hands and intoning dolefully 'The End has come.' But the essential truth of what Abraham Lincoln almost said should have

*** Despite rumours to the contrary, this volume is 'Terror Australis', edited by Damien Broderick, to be published 1974.(JB)

been glaringly obvious for at least the last thirty decades: that you can fuel some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fuel all of the people all of the time.

The people most susceptible to Future Shock are also those most incapable of reading the lessons of history. I am writing this at sea, so I do not have my reference library at hand, but I think I am right in saying that the first nuclear fission weapon was produced, from scratch, in a very short time. It was strongly suspected that both the Germans and the Japanese were working on such devices, and if the Germans had been able to marry a nuclear warhead to their V2 rockets, the course of history would have been changed. The Manhattan Project was a damn-the-expense operation. At the time of its initiation there was no know-how, scientific or industrial; there was only Einstein's famous equation. Techniques had to be worked out for the separation of the essential isotope U235 from the far commoner U238. The job was done, with time to spare. Perhaps this was a Bad Thing, as affairs have turned out since - or was it? Without the threat of The Bomb, an only slightly updated version of H. G. Wells's WAR IN THE AIR would have been all too possible, bringing with it the collapse of civilization.

Not a very great effort would be required to cope with the Energy Crisis - but the effort would require an American President more like the late Franklin D. Roosevelt than Richard M. Nixon. Some readers might remember his CCC - Civilian Conservation Corps - that was set up to solve the problem of unemployment during the Great Depression. Workers, skilled and unskilled, were conscripted to do jobs that badly needed doing, but which private enterprise had refused to tackle because there wasn't enough profit in it. If FDR were in charge now he would have long since begun to recruit technicians and mechanics from the slowing-down factories of Detroit.

The main thing to bear in mind is this: when there is no oil, for any reason whatsoever, it is not necessary to invent a new power source. There are energy sources that have been used ever since Man decided that the hard work could be done by machinery. A sailing ship is a machine, after all. Oh, I'm not saying we should return to the days of sail. Our knowledge of aerodynamics has grown

considerably since the heyday of the wind-jammers. But even in those days it was only the Norwegians who used wind power to its full extent. Other seamen, seeing a Norwegian vessel, would make disparaging remarks about 'the Norwegian ensign'. This, easily seen from other ships, was a small windmill on deck. Non-Norwegians obliged to pump bilges would do so by hand - a back-breaking job! - or, if their craft were so fitted and if the Old Man sanctioned the squandering of precious coal, would start up the steam-driven donkey engine.

But there are other ways of using wind to drive a ship as well as sails, no matter how well designed and beautifully cut. In the late 1920s or early 1930s the Germans experimented with the so-called rotor ship. I remember passing one of the things at sea, and she was an odd-looking brute. Unluckily, not much technical information was made available, but as far as I recall, the rotors were fluted, vertical columns which in any wind at all rotated, driving a generator which supplied the electricity to drive main and auxiliary machinery. Such a ship could steer directly into the wind. A square-rigged ship could not come closer to the wind than about 6 points, or 70°. A fore-and-aft rigged ship could come closer - 4 points, or 45°.

On the same voyage that we saw the rotor ship we saw Graf Zeppelin making one of her commercial flights to Rio de Janeiro. (At the time I was an apprentice in a coal-burning tramp steamer.) Dr Eckener, then commanding Graf Zeppelin, was one of the greatest airship captains of all time - if not the greatest. On one voyage to South America all four diesel engines broke down. Eckener juggled ballast and buoyancy to find a fair wind, and by the time his engineers had the engines fixed he was almost there. You can't do that sort of thing in a Concorde or a jumbo jet...

Quite a while back I was flying from Sydney to New Zealand by Qantas. It was shortly after the Qantas pilots' strike over the unreliable radio navigation and ground approach aids at Djakarta airport. I spent most of the flight in the front office, yarning with the crew. Inevitably we talked about the recent strike. The Qantas captain said to me 'When you're in trouble you can go full astern and let go both anchors. I can't.' In an airship you could.

I have written at far greater length on the subject of airships in another magazine (Ark 2: Ron & Sue Clarke), so cannot carry on without

repeating myself. But I will say this again: Why burn fuel to proceed from point A to point B and to stay up, when you need burn fuel only to proceed from point A to point B? I hope that the Energy Crisis will mean a return of the airship to most of the passenger and freight routes. Apart from anything else, it will mean a great reduction of atmospheric pollution.

Wind power, as I have said above, can be and has been used for driving both surface ships and airships. It has been used for the generation of electricity for a very long time. Towards the end of World War II there was a quite feasible scheme for covering the surface of the British Isles with wind-driven generators, sophisticated wind turbines rather than primitive wind-mills. It never got off the drawing board. It would have annoyed too many vested interests - on the Left as well as on the Right. Hell hath no fury like a trade unionist who sees his job threatened. (All right, all right, we've all come in that category, myself included.)

In the same way the Severn Barrage scheme - tidal power - has been jammed by vested interests for many, many years. Since well before World War II, Messrs Parsons, the turbine people, have been waiting for the go-ahead.

The production of methane gas from organic refuse is not new. The sewage plant at Bondi has been burning this fuel in its own generators, supplying the power for its own pumps and lights, for years. Solar power is not new - and why should we need any other energy source when that enormous atomic furnace is there in our sky, a mere eight light minutes away?

Unfortunately, before the alternative power sources are fully exploited there must be a period of inconvenience, and in less lucky countries than our own, actual hardship. But in the not-so-long run we shall benefit. Time and time again, arriving at Sydney, I have been obliged to grope my way in through the smog - and I remember well the beautifully clear air and sky over the city during the last oil strike. The atmosphere of a city should be like that all the time.

I foresee (said he, going out on a very fragile limb) the smaller, economical cars

driving the fuel-hogging monsters off the road. I foresee those same cars having their engines modified to burn natural gas, or methane, or (the perfect, pollution-free fuel!) hydrogen and oxygen obtained by the electrolysis of water at the solar power stations. I foresee the return of the airship, from the small, handy blimp (such craft would be ideal for coast patrol and air/sea rescue work) to huge passenger-carrying dirigibles. After all, helium is relatively cheap now - and neither 'Hindenburg' nor R101 would have come to such spectacular and tragic ends had they not been hydrogen filled.

I foresee screams from the conservationists about the covering of thousands of square miles of desert with solar power screens. Frankly, I'll probably do a little screaming myself on that point, but admit that it would not be too high a price to pay for a smog-free atmosphere and independence from both the Western oil companies and the Arab oil kings.

I foresee an increasing use of wind power, both ashore and afloat.

And there is one power source the use of which I do not foresee, although I have been meaning to work it out and make use of it in a story for quite some time. Imagine a ship rolling heavily. Visualise the enormous number of foot/tons (or metre/tonnes?) (joules?) involved in such motion. Couldn't all that kinetic energy somehow be utilized for propulsion? Perhaps. But that, I fear, is rather less practicable than the diesel cannon I have worked out but haven't got around to using yet.

* * * *

RUNNING OFF THE RIM

All good things - and bad things - have to come to an end some time. It is just possible, however, that Commodore Grimes has not retired, although he has been sent on his well-earned long service leave. Whether or not I bring the old bastard back remains to be seen.

Not so long ago I typed the magic words THE END at the bottom of the last page of a 70 000-word Grimes novel. I hope it

sells. I always feel that there's something missing from my own life if any Grimes adventure fails to see print. Apart from THE BIG BLACK MARK, the story just finished, THE WAY BACK, which is a follow-up to THE DARK DIMENSIONS, has yet to find a purchaser.

THE BIG BLACK MARK had to be written. Just what did happen to cause Grimes's resignation from the Federation Survey Service, followed by his emigration to the Rim Worlds? (Of course, in one of the many alternate universes he didn't resign, and lived out his life as the commanding officer of an utterly unimportant sub-base on a very dreary planet...)

THE BIG BLACK MARK has all the answers, of course. It finishes with Grimes, inextricably in the cactus, wondering if the Imperial Navy of Waverley would take him and coming to the conclusion that they most certainly wouldn't, and deciding that Rim Runners, if they happened at the time to be short of officers, just might... So...

So what do I write now?

Do I make the transition (it shouldn't be hard) from sea stories thinly disguised as science fiction to sea stories that are just that?

The trouble is that I like science fiction. I always have, and always will. A sea story has to be really outstanding (and there was only one Conrad) before I can finish it. Usually when reading one I come across something that indicates the author's ignorance of nautical matters in the very first chapter, and that puts me off. One of the few laymen who could write convincingly about the sea, seamen and ships was Forester. Another, surprisingly, is Paul Gallico.

THE POSEIDON ADVENTURE is a book that I had no intention of reading. In most of his stories Gallico's goodies exude far too much sweetness and light for my taste. But various friends in the USA asked my opinion, as a shipmaster, of the novel - so I bought a copy, and almost didn't get past the first chapter. Here, I thought, were all the stock Gallico characters - the tough cop with the heart of gold, the lovable old Jewish couple, the charismatic

radio priest who is also an outstanding amateur athlete. But I got hooked, mainly because Gallico, quite early in the book, made it clear that his opinion of the personnel of flag-of-convenience vessels is at least as low as mine. Here I will digress slightly to put readers not familiar with maritime matters in the picture.

In ships sailing under respectable ensigns all the officers hold real qualifications - certificates gained after undergoing quite tough examinations. It must be realized that at sea, as in any profession requiring qualifications, there are quite a few people whose only real ability is that of passing examinations. Nonetheless, our certificates are not purchased from the nearest friendly neighbourhood consul of some banana republic.

'Poseidon', in the book, was an ex-British passenger liner running cruises under a flag of convenience. The main reason for her instability was the incompetence of her Master and his officers. In the book, the officer of the watch, seeing what looked like a solid wall on the radar screen, attempted to turn away - which was, I admit, a natural reaction, especially since no warning had been given about the submarine volcanic eruption and earthquake.

In the film, 'Poseidon' was a passenger liner making her final voyage, on the way to the breaker's yard, with a full complement of passengers. Her Master and officers were all quite competent - by Hollywood standards. But her new Owner was on board and refused to allow the Master to take measures to correct the instability, threatening him with Instant Dismissal if he did not carry on with the voyage. And that, regardless of the flag worn at the ensign staff, is absolute absurdity. Of course, the Owner could have said 'I'll fire you as soon as we reach port.' The Master would then have sent a long radio message to whatever maritime union he happened to belong to, detailing the circumstances, and all hell would have been let loose on the hapless Owner.

In the film, 'Poseidon's' Master and officers had received radio warning of the tsunami, and when they saw the wall of water on their radar screen they attempted to turn towards, but too late. And that mock-up of a radar presentation looked very unconvincing to anyone familiar with the instrument... And in the film, much to my annoyance, the

characters remained real Gallico characters to the very end, their hearts of gold shining through the begrimed tatters of their evening finery. In the book, they soon started behaving in a very un-Gallico-like manner, with the possible exception of the elderly Jewish couple. The charismatic radio priest revealed himself as an absolute phoney.

In the film, the priest's party, which made its way to the shaft tunnel through the perils of the upside-down engineroom, alone survived (apart from those killed en route). In the book, the final irony was that another party which had made its way towards the bows was rescued without suffering any casualties.

As you will have gathered, the film annoyed me. Special effects notwithstanding, it was infuriating to see a first-class novel so utterly ruined.

I have often wondered why people who make films about the sea and ships don't go to the very minor expense of employing an expert to check technicalities. Recently ABC TV ran a BBC serial, 'The Oneidrin Line'. People tell me that it was good. It may have been, but I was put off it by a shocking anachronism that cropped up in the very first episode. It was about a sailing ship captain some time in the 19th Century who became an Owner/Master, as many did in those days. (Ships weren't as expensive then as they are now.) Every shipmaster who appeared on the screen wore on his sleeve four gold bands with a diamond in the middle - and that is today's Standard Uniform, which was introduced after World War I...

A really prize example occurred in LAWRENCE OF ARABIA. The people who made the film spared no expense in rigging up the characters in World War I uniforms, riding around in motor vehicles of suitable vintage (when they weren't on camels), being bombed with little bombs by ancient-looking biplanes... and then, when Lawrence and his companions reached the Suez Canal, what did they see? A fairly modern Blue Funnel liner, complete with radar - and the big fat arse of a super-tanker vanishing round the bend! To maintain authenticity the film-makers should have chartered one decrepit tramp steamer for one day, given her one coat of grey paint and mounted a wooden gun on her poop. (Wooden guns were, as a matter of fact, used quite a lot in both

World Wars when the real things weren't available. They were alleged to have a certain deterrent value...)

And what does all the above prove? It proves that unless you are a Conrad or a Forester, capable of making technicalities fascinating to the lay reader, sea stories are best avoided by writers with a maritime background. Sooner or later there would be the temptation to refuse to let proper seamanship get in the way of the plot - and either one would resist temptation and write something boring, or yield to temptation and incur the scorn of one's fellow mariners.

So sea stories are out. And much as I enjoy reading about the James Bonds, the Matt Helms, the Harry Lamberts and all the rest of them, I just don't have the inside knowledge of the shadowy world of espionage and counter-espionage possessed by the late Ian Fleming and his fellow spymasters.

A real novel?

Oddly enough, the idea has no appeal. I read real novels as well as thrillers. I read anything and everything, but somehow I've never had the urge, as a writer, to stray from my own well-trodden pastures.

Probably I'll finish up as so many others have done, selling my story-teller's birth-right for a pot of message.

* * * *

(21.1.74:) I have retired to the naturist club to lead a virtuous life - alcohol is banned on the premises - and to make a start on the next novel. As far as the Rim Worlds are concerned, however, I fear that Commodore Grimes will not be going on his long service leave after all. The new editor of 'If' is demanding more Grimes/Rim World stories.

This may amuse you. As you may have guessed, I'm rather pro-Israel. I won't say that I'm pro-Semitic, as there are so many Semites, the Moslem variety, whom I dislike. Anyhow, I was sitting on the edge of the swimming pool, discussing Middle East politics with one of the lady members. She asked: 'Are you a Jew, Bert?' I replied: 'You aren't very observant, Rene.'

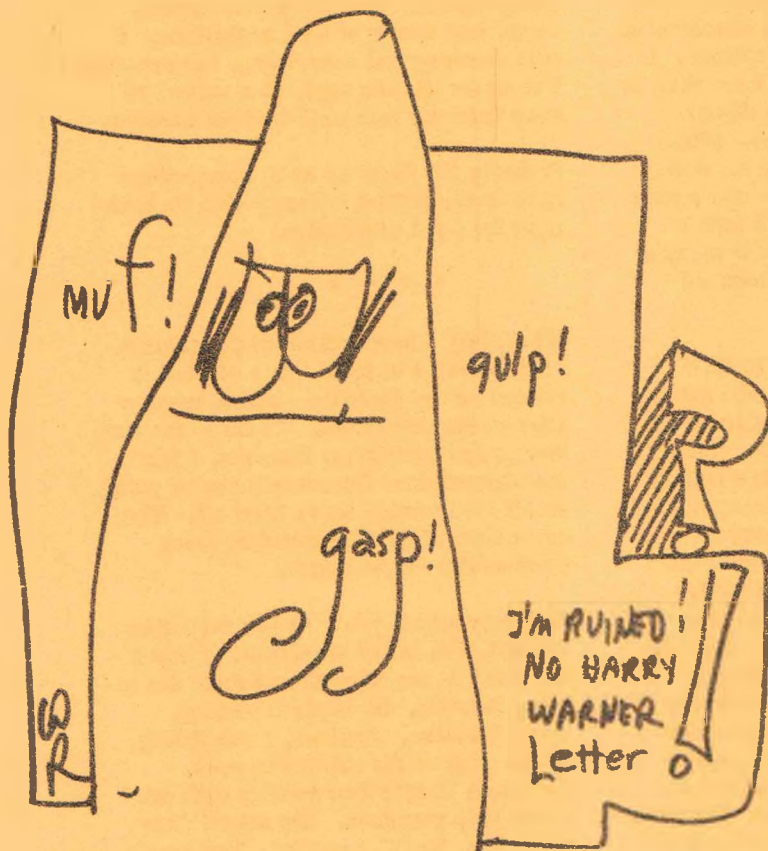
(continued from page 31:)

anything else. It's not even a matter of the author's having read the literature. Dick's paranoia is as representative of American literature today as Pynchon's. They're both reacting to the same thing. Patterns of thought don't have to be transmitted through books. American literature, for instance, primarily asks the question 'How?' Not 'What?', nor 'Why?', as European literature does. THE SCARLET LETTER asks 'How do you live?' MOBY DICK is overwhelmingly about how to catch whales. In Hemingway the 'how' of a man's profession determines the 'how' of his life.

Should we be surprised then, when the same is true in de Camp?

::: Barry, and dear readers all, I am a failure. I really am. How could I possibly end a fanzine on page 16, omit pages 17 and 18 (because the material didn't turn up), and cut out a long and interesting letter from Leigh Edmonds?

Wish me better luck next time - and here's a gen-u-ine Rotsler by way of compensation and contrition:



Cheers,

Jh B.
18.4.74

THE MARCH OF MIND /cont'd

17th March: Sally has been cleaning out my room, because (as she says quite correctly) it needs it - there was just a narrow path from the door to the typewriter before she started -, I am unlikely to do it, and if I do start, it would take me months perhaps, because I would sit there reading fanzines and letters and chuckling over the carbons of my brilliant letters out (there are at least two like that, and they's gotta be in there somewhere).

When Diane and I moved from Northcote to Ferntree Gully in 1967 I threw a lot of stuff into cartons that haven't been opened since. When we moved from Ferntree Gully to St Kilda, and from St Kilda to Elsternwick, and from Elsternwick to Ferntree Gully, and from Ferntree Gully to Clifton Hill, and from Clifton Hill to St Kilda (you following all this?), and when I moved from St Kilda to Canberra, the same thing happened. I threw stuff into cardboard boxes, merely as a temporary measure, and all of those boxes seem to have gravitated to this room, except for the dozen or so out on the front porch. Sally has no idea which boxes date from when, so all sorts of odd things are turning up - letters of comment on Scythrop 21, articles long thought lost, copious notes for fanzines envisaged and never begun, xmas cards from Paul Anderson, bills paid and unpaid, you name it. Amongst all this stuff were two 'articles' which brought back odd memories.

In 1968 I landed my first job as a real, fair dinkum, no nonsense journalist. C Grade. With a magazine called 'Materials Handling and Packaging', one of Lord Thomson's twenty thousand fanzines. As well as MH, the editor and I produced a couple of house journals. Today, for the first time in over four - dear me, five - years, two articles associated with that job passed before my eyes. (On their way to the wastepaper bin.) Dammit, I said to myself, Dammit, I shall publish these articles. And I will, right now. The first was written by the personnel manager of one of the firms for which we produced house journals. He was a man who really knew where it was at. He just didn't quite know how to tell anyone, that's all.

MEN AND MACHINES

In this day of intense industrial advancement, the demand for increased productivity

embraced with the vital need of increased exports to strengthen the economy of the country, and the complexity of modern technology can be the main basic causes of a deterioration in industrial relations when all the contributing factors have not been geared up to cope with the requirements of increased achievements.

Industrial harmony when likened to good health is not appreciated until lost. A growing state of tension within an organisation may be brought about in many instances by trivial problems incorrectly handled. Contradictory statements made are sources of potential trouble often caused by a breakdown in communications. The failure to provide ample provision for counselling of employees with personal and work problems, or the expectation of an employee to cope with the output of a machine which is far beyond his physical and or mental capabilities. In other words, the tendency to treat the Human being as part of the machine.

On the other hand, the employee when expecting a greater portion of the rewards of increased production achievements must be prepared to respond to the services made available coupled with an appreciation of loyalty to the organisation which employs him.

The article has the cardinal virtue of brevity. The next one hasn't. As my last assignment for Lord Thomson I visited Wynn's new wine factory in one of Melbourne's eastern suburbs. I was to write a brilliant article about the new concepts in materials handling bodied forth in that building, but somehow I never got around to it. What I did write, in a fit of vast depression (I had just been sacked, and xmas was three weeks off), read as follows:

Wynn's moved from their old warehouse and distribution centre in St Kilda Road to the new premises on 27th July with no interruption to their schedule. A cargon loading system is employed. The loaders weigh 4 cwt each. There are rubber doors for easy ingress egress congress aggress and negress by froklift trucks. Lansing Bugrall electric reach trucks solid state type they have two of. Baskets are used for local deliveries, cartons interstate, because interstate flagons are collected by bottle merchants, whereas Victorian customers return in baskets. Also weight freight great savings. Master pallet trucks are used for pallet trucks etc. In flagon storage section

which is insulted and kept at a controlled temperament of 65-72°, there is room for 150,000 flagons or 1,200,00 bottles. Drive through racking is four-high and firstinfirstout. Bottles are kept up to five years in store. Pallets load 48 baskets of 6 flagons that is 288 bottles.

There is an overhead Demag 1-ton crane in the cargon bay
And orders before twelve are delivered next day.

Three bottling lines line bottles and bottle lines of flagons bottles minims crotchets quavers and bottles. Bottle^s are standardized and glass in structure. Barrels are made of 10½ gallon plastic barrel material. Eight trucks can be dispatched in 10 minutes if necessary. Herbs for the infusion vat are stored in a special infusion vat herb storage above the infusion vat. Wynn's also invented a hose storage contraption and their own order picking wooden hand trucks old fashioned in appearance but antiquated in concept. Two hundred picks can be ordered per day normally and there is a ladder like construction for stopping of bottles to fall through the picker ording trucks. The quodlibet for cargon dispatch picking is nonferrous up to 25-ton plastic capacity. The flange of the flinge of the flonge of the flue is squorocks by design if not intention and willbarrers are willed by willing willbarrer willers. Flow through is on a unit rollonrolloff antidepalletization area of three-wheel glassproof construction. The etc is etc and easily loaded on electric ostrichtrucks for easy loading and increased capuccino etc. The makers claim. Clairvoyant flagons gyrate in massive conveyors at the rate of 3 per hour except on Saturday when the factory is closed. Odor-pickers are resilient and factory produced before training in the rotor dipper for three-ton capacity garibaldi's using the one on one off two undecided system of containerized rhubarb. Opportunity only Knox once says Auscables executive burning down factory. Drought Not Board's Fault Says Board. The manufacturers assert. And a merry syphilis and happy gonorrhoea to all our ridders.

There are some people who think I'm being all modest or something when I say I don't regard myself as a journalist. (Others - George Turner for instance - have said I'm not a journalist's bootlace. They're right. I'm not. Wrong shape for a start.) I am a writer and an editor. Whether I am a good

writer or editor is not for me to say, but I know I am not a good journalist. Even with the knowledge of my imminent departure rankling in my head, if I had been any halfway decent kind of journalist I could have knocked up a three-page article about Wynn's winehouse (especially since the materials handling aspect of the place really was well thought out, and in some ways innovative). But I didn't - and I couldn't. What is more, I still could not write an article like that, unless doing so were vitally important - to me.

Last week I had an interview for a job as an editor, and I tried to explain this thing I know about myself. I think I failed. The job is just about exactly the kind of work I would like to do; it's the kind of thing I've been aiming at ever since I left the Railways Institute Library back in 1965 and became a publisher's representative in the hope that this would let me in through the back door to an editorial job. It pays less than I am earning now. In a month or so I should get a salary increase which will take me to about \$2000 more than the editorial job offers. The gentlemen interviewing me kept on referring to the drop in salary, kept on saying how 'highly qualified' I am. They said if they took me on they could easily lose me as soon as a better-paying job came up. I found it most difficult to counter their arguments, and I think I won't get the job. I couldn't tell them that my present job is driving me nuts, because they would think I can't cope, and in any case it just isn't done to rubbish the job you're doing (you have to make it sound awfully grand and respectable: that's the First Law of job-changing). I couldn't tell them that they were as likely to lose me to someone who paid better as to lose me because I'd walked under a truck; that would be bordering on the facetious - and you can work out for yourself what the Second Law is. I couldn't tell them that work satisfaction is more important than salary level, because that would indicate a Lack Of Ambition. So I was stuck. Make that one more job, and probably the one I wanted most, which I have wanted and for which I have been told 'You're too good.'

Apart from getting an immense letter from John Berry and at last finding (after more than two years) a replacement copy of Karel Ancerl's recording of Dvorak's 9th, it has been a pretty dismal week. To top it off, last night we went to the drive-in and saw the worst film Peter Sellers has appeared in, and went home after fifteen minutes or so of 'Swedish Fly Girls' - which just has to be the most boring film I've ever partly seen. (*grotch*grump*grrr*)

19th March: Some of my grotchiness over the past week or so may have been explained last night. Dr Quach (no, it's pronounced kwosh: he's Chinese, not what you would call scrutable, but easily the best doctor I've ever had) confirmed that I've been attacked again by the virus that had me convinced I was dying last Easter. No gory details, but it's awfully uncomfortable, I'm off work for a few days, and I'm ingesting seemingly-lethal doses of Mysterlin V antibiotics. As well as my usual daily quota of phenobarb, belladonna, procaine, aluminium hydroxide and diazepam, yes - and iron (red wine is full of iron: I intend to have my remains sold to BHP) and the zillion chemicals lurking in every kingsize Kent filtertip. No flowers, by request.

Here lies the corpse of Bangsund, J.
Who drank three pints of red a day.
His passing's regretted by Dr Quach,
Kaiser Stuhl, Lorillard, Sally & Roche.

But what I really set out to talk about is this issue's cover. Last October's issue of China Pictorial had a fantastic photo in it of a bunch of earnest Chinese border guards, keeping watch on Soviet movements way up and out there in the desert. They were mounted on Bactrian camels (the ones with two humps, yep: you got it), and the whole atmosphere of the photo reeked of sf and fantasy and stuff - I mean, you could just about imagine them on Karhide or Dune or somewhere - so I decided to filch it for the cover of this issue. Noel Kerr made a beautiful electrostencil of it, and the Roneo made a beautiful mess of the electrostencil. So I sent the artwork back to Noel, along with the artwork for the back cover.

NOEL KERR What! - you blew it!
86 Leila Street Did it tear at the line
Carnegie or pull off from the
Victoria 3163 solid? From experience

I have found that a straight line or solid near the top weakens the stencil where it gets the most strain. By working from the foot you still have a line at the top so I guess your trouble may have been with sheets sticking to the stencil which after a few runs would pull out the centre.

Go on, make a bloody liar out of me and say you used it for a beer mat!

I am authorized by Wo Gung-ho, cultural

Philosophical Gas

attache of the Chinese Embassy in Canberra, to say that I used the stencil for beer mats. I did this because I realized my error in using without permission an illustration from a Chinese periodical. I should mention also that lately my criticism of Confucius hasn't been up to scratch.

Meantime I had asked for permission to use Leunig's beautiful drawing. I reminded Nation Review that I had submitted the very first D-notices they received (one advertising Space Age Books, if I remember correctly, the other saying I'd like to contact science fiction readers - which just shows you how long ago that was), that Barry Watts for some inexplicable reason gave me a cigar after I handed him those ads (I was working for the Review as a poorfreeder at the time), and that I would stop buying NR if they didn't give me permission to use the drawing.

JOHN HEPWORTH Barry can't quite
Nation Review remember why he
GPO Box 5312 BB gave you a cigar
Melbourne 3001 either, but says he
 hopes you enjoyed

it. OK to reproduce the Leunig, with the usual acknowledgements. Regards from all Ferrets.

(Brief pause for overseas readers: Nation Review, formerly The Review, formerly Sunday Review, has carried as its slogan for years the description 'Lean and nose-y like a ferret'. Which it is. Best weekly fanzine in Australia. Take out a sub today!)

So I put the Chinese picture on the Roneo and, no doubt because I haven't come right out even once and said Lin Piao was a traitor and so on, for the second time it disintegrated on the machine. This time little bits of it got clogged up in the works, and I had ink up to the armpits before I had retrieved them all.

And that's how Michael Leunig, Australia's finest cartoonist (with the possible exception of Bruce Petty and Jack Wodhams), made the front cover of Philosophical Gas. I'm sort of glad it worked out that way.

Memo Nation Review: When, gentlemen, when will you get around to publishing a collection of Leunig's work? Since the death of Walt Kelly (and the subsequent decline of poor ol' Pogo), Leunig surely ranks with Petty, Gary Trudeau and Jack Wodhams as

one of the world's finest contemporary cartoonists. Oh sure, Gahan Wilson, Trog, Oliphant, Herblock... Let's not quibble! Let's hear it for Leunig!

In this morning's mail was Andy Porter's *Algol 21*. Some of you know that Andy and I were each other's agents from about 1967 until recently. Some of you know that in this issue Andy says nice things about me. Some of you have been saying lately that *Algol* is not a fanzine and should not be eligible for a Hugo. There are times when fandom gives me the galloping irrits. If anyone has published a fanzine in the last few years that looks better and reads better than *Algol 21*, I haven't seen it. *Algol* has now entered that no-man's-land between fanzine and prozine previously occupied by such publications as *Vision of Tomorrow*, *Nueva Dimension* and *Uchujin*. It is magnificent to look at, it is most obviously a labour of love, and it doesn't pay.

Before this issue Andy has said a fair bit about how he deserves a Hugo. I wrote to him a couple of months ago and said sure he should have a Hugo, no doubt, but he wouldn't get one by saying so. He hasn't answered that letter, but I think one way or another we'll go on being friends-by-mail as we've always been. I've never met him but I like the guy.

Anyway, here's *Algol 21*, and it's superb. It is a fanzine, since by my rough-and-ready reckoning any publication that doesn't provide its publisher with a living wage, or even a passable profit, is a fanzine. And with all respect to Dick Geis, Bruce Gillespie and a dozen or so others I could name, this is the finest fanzine I have seen in years. If you haven't seen it, write immediately to Andy Porter, PO Box 4175, New York, NY 10017 (in Australia, to Space Age Books, GPO Box 1267 L, Melbourne 3001) for a copy. Decide for yourself, but if *Algol* makes it onto the 1974 Hugo ballot for best fanzine, I will be voting for it.

Please note that I do not say *Algol* is my favourite fanzine. My favourite fanzine is *Kwalhioqua*. It is not the fanzine that most deserves a Hugo. Bruce's *SF Commentary* is the fanzine that most deserves a Hugo. I said that *Algol* is the best sf fanzine - and I understand that the Hugo is awarded to the best fanzine, not my favourite, and not the most deserving.

Also in today's mail was *AFRICAPA 3*. I feel I would like to go on being a member of South Africa's first amateur publishing association - but I can't. Mae Strelkov and the Australian members, I hope, I can go on enjoying outside *AFRICAPA*. Brian Lombard, Nick Shears and Kevin MacDonnell - Sarf Africans all, and good people - are on my more-or-less-permanent mailing list. But I just haven't the time to be the kind of member *AFRICAPA* needs. Best of luck, good friends across the water (I remember years ago when I was a publisher's representative, and I found myself in a motel in Bunbury, WA, and I thought to myself, Hell: there's nothing between South Africa and me but the water! - and I listened to the sound of the waves crashing on the beach below, and imagined those waves travelling all the way from Africa - and I felt kind of Small in the Scheme of Things), but if you can't do without me you should pack up right now. Thank you for allowing me the honour of being a foundation member. Even if you got my address wrong, Brian! Carry on, become strong, and when you think you are ready to host a World Convention, go to it! Politically, South Africa stinks to me, about as much as the USA, about as much as my own country until lately, but I'll support you when you go after a Worldcon. Tex Cooper, as I recall, wanted to bid against Australia for 1975: he was ahead of his time, and all honour to him. Not a word to a soul, please, but I have a sneaky kind of feeling that the World Science Fiction Convention might just possibly become more truly a world convention in future and less a North American convention than it has been virtually since 1939 - or whenever it was. And not before time. The United States of America is a great nation, still, but it is not the world.

How do you feel about that, my friends in America?

Before you answer that, recall that we in Australia have the 'World Championship' wrestlers, right before our very eyes, each Sunday on television. Can there be more than one World Champion? Is it possible that Professor Tanaka of Japan was not the World's Champion Wrestler back in 1967 - about the last time I watched the wrestling on tv?

I heard Walter ('Killer') Kowalski say with his very own voice about 1967 that he was happy about his first million dollars, but that he kept on fighting for his next million.

You... you wouldn't want me to lose faith in Killer Kowalski, would you?

Someone suggested recently that when I am publishing letters I should note the year as well as the date of writing. I shall ignore that suggestion with the ignore it deserves!

Just because I have a few letters around that date from 1969, however, I shall note also the year, where the letter was written before 1973.

JOHN D. BERRY 2.3
6614 Quinten Street
Falls Church
Virginia 22043 USA

'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?'

Fiendishly simple indeed. I look first of all for e goboo, but in fact simple praise is an instant rush that hardly lasts long enough to be worth it. What I really like is comments that take off from something I've said and develop along their own interesting lines, but which also reflect on me somehow and, preferably, egoboost me either implicitly or explicitly. There's nothing like being talked about. Comments that take off from what I've said but then relate little if at all beyond that fact may be fascinating, but they aren't as selfishly pleasing as those interwoven with egoboo. The fact is, though, that when I'm writing mailing comments myself, I tend to be quite ruthless in cutting out praise and comments 'just to be fair', leaving in only what strikes me as worth while writing in its own right, regardless of how well I have responded to each person concerned. I go on periodic jags of trying to give everybody his just due, but it never lasts. And the writing that results from it never lasts either.

24th March: I haven't sat at this machine since Friday night, when I typed the above. I forget what I had been doing during the day, but somehow I had managed to drink two bottles of Rhinecastle 26A by the time Sally came home from work, so I was pretty far gone and she didn't like it. We had a bit of a fight about this - you know, the family that fights together stays together - and somehow in the middle of all this we decided to get married. Well, it seemed a good idea at the time, and yesterday it still seemed a good idea, and today it still seems a good

idea, so we'll do something about it this week. I won't attempt to publish a lavish hitch-report like Sue and Ron Clarke's 'The Wedding', which came in the mail last week, but I'll probably interrupt the letters again further on in this issue to say something about it.

Hey gang! - if I wrote a letter of comment on Sue and Ron's little zine, would that be a wedloc? Yuk yuk - oh dear, it's getting to me already.

NORM METCALF 19.12
PO Box 1368
Boulder
Colorado 80302 USA

... since you seem to be sincere in your efforts at communicating and since you ask each and every APAn direct questions, here goes with a letter of comment. You sound like quite an interesting person and possibly someone with whom I could be quite friendly if we lived in the same area. However, there is one philosophical point on which we might part company. You give the impression that you seek out friends from pseudo-fandom. After all, pseudo-fandom and mundane amateur journalism seem to be your main interests, your interests of choice shall we say. You were once an excellent fan but you've lost interest in fandom while wishing to remain in contact with various pseudo-fans with whom you came in contact while you were a fan. The latter is probably one of the main reasons for the existence of apas, another principal reason is that it is a chance for the mediocrats to demonstrate that their mental horizons are as equally narrow as everyone else's. Myself, I consider that I have some friends among the fans that I know, I also have friends from outside fandom, and even some friends among the pseudo-fans. In order is a distinction between friendship and acquaintanship, most pseudo-fans seem to confuse the two.

As for my commenting in print on your material, say something in fannish and I will (and have, for that matter).

As for what I look for in comments on my apazines is the continuation/creation of a dialog. Hopefully each apan has an interesting opinion to express on sf (Fan lives in hope and dies in despair). Most of them don't. In OMPA a number made it quite clear that they're not interested in

dialogs, they want monologs of praise. I sometimes wonder if I met them in person would they be able to talk. Another OMPA attitude, which is also present in the other apas to some extent, is that some of them want praise, adulation, etc., but they don't want to earn it and they're unwilling to accept the fact that any worthwhile praise must be earned. Concomitant is the idea that many pseudo-fans are unable to accept, that you can't depend on praise but must be motivated by doing your own thing. This has ramifications all the way from the devil worshippers we all know who are so other-directed that they've lost their humanity to inner-directed fanatics, who have also lost their humanity.

::: This letter came while I was in Melbourne, and I asked John Foyster for a translation. I particularly wanted to know why I am not a fan, but a pseudo-fan. He suggested that a fan is someone who compiles bibliographies and indexes, and who writes or publishes meaningful stuff about Science Fiction. A pseudo-fan is someone like me who enjoys fandom and feels part of it, but doesn't often do anything to help the great cause of Science Fiction along, and in fact doesn't even read the stuff all that often. That's not what John said - he took less than a dozen words to explain it - but I think that was the gist of what he said. Other parts of the letter are equally difficult to comprehend which is why I've left it verbatim. I would like especially to know how to talk to Norm 'in fannish'. I recall years ago getting letters from a young chap in Canberra named Paul Novitski, and parts of them were written in Elvish. Is Fannish something similar?

Sorry, I'm being a bit frivolous there, but I really would like to know what you mean, Norm. I am used to the kind of attitude most nastily exemplified in Australia by Graham Stone, for whom science fiction is something almost sacred; for whom the whole idea of fans, fandom, fanzines, conventions and so on is totally repugnant - to the extent that he will have nothing to do with any fan activity. I wrote several letters to him when I first arrived here, amongst other things almost begging him to write something for the Campbell book. He never replied. We have never met, and I doubt that we ever will - and yet, ironically, he must be regarded as one of the most

important figures in the history of Australian fandom.

You don't strike me as being like Graham Stone, Norm. Very likely we would get on well together if we lived close, as you say. But what is your philosophy? In parts of your letter which I haven't printed you refer to your index, and over the years I've heard a lot about it, mainly from you. It is obviously something you love, despite what you say and imply about the problems and work involved. You conclude your letter: 'Ah to be free of obligation in the form of the index.' I know exactly what you mean, because on 19th July 1971 I started work on JOHN W. CAMPBELL: AN AUSTRALIAN TRIBUTE, and I still haven't finished it. But when we are free of these obligations, what do we do next? Do we undertake some equally burdensome and rewarding obligation, or do we become pseudo-fans?

This is Philosophical Gas, folks, the journal for... well, for philosophical gas. The last few issues contained some discussion of matters religious, and despite my warning that I wouldn't publish anything on the subject again, Joan Dick, Helen Hyde and John Alderson wrote to me on the subject. Joan's letter I have mislaid, I'm sorry, but I recall that she said she has stopped being a Jehovah's Witness. Helen's letter is fearsomely long and well thought out, but I can't bring myself to print all of it. Here are what I consider the key passages:

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| HELEN HYDE | 21.1 |
| PO Box 544 | |
| Civic Square | |
| ACT 2608 Australia | |

I very much doubt whether most people would be aware of the distinction between Christianity as a religion and christianity as a philosophy. I still attend church because I experience a rare kind of communion within the church. I continue to teach Sunday School as I believe that the teachings of Christ are sound and well worth teaching. If I can only start one child thinking then my task has been well worth while. But I cannot believe in the God preached by the Church. Yes, I believe in a God, but do not try to ask me what I believe. I simply cannot place my beliefs in words. In all religions there is a grain of truth. If we can but find this grain and hold it, then we are well on our path to wisdom. But I cannot accept that God would only try once

to pass his message on to we mortals. I do not and cannot believe that Jesus was the only son of God. But until I can find a better philosophy for living, I will continue to live a christian life and I will continue in the religious observances of my church. For the Church of Christ provides far more room for personal expression than any other church I have attended, and it provides an outlet for my energies, which I cannot seem to find anywhere else.

::: Anyone who has met Helen will know what I mean when I say that she is easily one of the most energetic persons I have ever met - also one of the most generous and kind-hearted. She has, simultaneously, a most engaging and most formidable presence. It's probably saying more about my own character than I should when I admit that we don't get on too well. You have to watch these Churches of Christ people, folks! A joke maybe, but true in many ways, too. Bruce Gillespie, Helen and Leigh, John Alderson, me: that background in the Churches of Christ must account for something of what we are. And speaking of the Hermit of Havelock, here he is:

| | |
|-------------------------|-------|
| JOHN ALDERSON | 16.12 |
| Havelock | |
| Victoria 3465 Australia | |

I know you have been waiting for it, my comment on Leigh Edmonds's article in Philosophical Gas 26. (Not waiting, John, just anticipating in fear and trembling.) Actually I thought he wrote a good deal of common sense. Certainly some of his facts are messed and some of his logic is mused but the fact remains that he writes as he found the teaching of the church. Our word hell is derived from the Scandinavian 'hel' (it's actually common to all Teutonic languages) meaning the 'covered place'. A 'hellier' or 'hellier' is a thatcher, one who covers or roofs a house. (Oxford more or less agrees with you. Where do you dig up all this stuff, John?) Hell simply means the abode of the dead, the same as the Hades of the Greeks. And men have feared death and the afterlife, particularly those with bad consciences, so hell became a place of punishment. But while the New Testament admits to the existence of such a state, its teaching and its purpose is to save men and deliver them

from the fear of hell or death or punishment. Obviously putting the fear of hell into people is the wrong way to make them Christians; Christ came to conquer hell and death. So all this worry about hell is pointless. Christianity is a positive religion, a scheme of liberties, not of commandments, of rewards, not punishments. But torture and punishment does have a morbid fascination for some people, particularly when they think of their enemies frizzling away... but it is not Christian teaching, which is love. I think Leigh touches on a very important point, though he does not realize it, or did not state it. And that is that the Church has over-simplified things. Of necessity there must be different levels of understanding in a philosophy that has exercised the greatest minds of man, but a Christian should grow to continually new understandings. Much of the teaching in Sunday Schools is too simple and naive and as the community gets its theology via Sunday School and not the Church, it gets that naive approach - like people becoming angels when they die. What is not appreciated is that children have acute brains (mental degeneration usually sets in about 12) and they will absorb theological teachings beyond most adults. And this is what they are not getting. Instead they get 'kids' stuff' - not everywhere or always, I admit. But the profounder truths are usually lacking in Church. This is tragic. Leigh is quite right about the kingdom of hell being on earth. It follows, as he says, if the Kingdom of Heaven is on earth. For these are states of mind or spiritual fulfilment, or the reverse. If our own bodies are 'temples of God', if the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, and this is Christian teaching, then we must appreciate that Heaven is a state of being; it is not a place. By implication the same applies to hell, and if hell has any tortures they are the ones we make ourselves, from which Jesus would save us. I think Leigh summed that up very well in his penultimate paragraph. However eternity does not mean everlasting; it means without time - and that is a difficult concept. The Church does have a religion of love, of understanding, of freedom from fear, of liberty, of fulfilment, a life of positive and happy things, and we are not getting that message across. That is the hell of it.

One of the more interesting fanzines to come my way lately is By Owl Light 6, published by Frank Denton in Seattle. Sub-titled 'Sassenach and Gael', this issue is more or less a transcript of the diary Frank kept during his visit to Britain and Ireland in July and August last year. At first it is a bit irritating, with its notes of the books Frank bought and the places he missed seeing, but very soon I found myself absolutely absorbed in the thing. It's a strange experience, and a most interesting one, to see a foreign country you've never visited through the eyes of a citizen of another foreign country. Frank has probably told me as much about America and Americans as he has about the British Isles. Thank you for sharing your experience with me in this way, Frank - and if you have any doubts, please cease immediately: this was a most worthwhile project and publication.

In the light of the immediately preceding correspondence I think I should note my slight surprise on realizing that Frank is the first practising Catholic fan I've come across. And he doesn't make a big deal of it: he just records where he went to Mass each Sunday, and that's it. Most refreshing.

Frank does make a big deal, however (and obviously deservedly so), of meeting Archie and Beryl Mercer in darkest Cornwall. Entirely and absolutely by coincidence I just happen to have a letter here from

ARCHIE MERCER 1.1
21 Trenethick Parc
Helston
Cornwall TR13 8LH UK

For the past some time I have been sporadically favoured by being the recipient of assorted Bangsundiana. Recently this has consisted wholly or mainly of issues of Philosophical Gas, the latest such to reach me being no.25 of that title. I tend to be very much in two minds about it all. For one thing, undeniably anything emanating from said Bangsund is liable to contain some of the best writing available in fanzine form, now or at any previous time. For a somewhat other thing, all too much of that writing is wasted on this household. Speaking for myself, I am not one to pay much attention to Literature with a capital L.

(Me, too, Archie. I'm a small-l litterateur.) Beryl does to a somewhat greater extent than I do, but only somewhat. Take PG 25 as an example. Here we have Ursula Le Guin being sweetly reasonable, and the allegedly late Kurt Vonnegut giving a hilarious comic turn - but about what? About authors I've never read and for various reasons am never likely to: about authors whose works I have sampled and from which I've run screaming: about authors, if you please, of whom I'm sure I've never before heard. He who has read the works of these people, along with Le Guin, Vonnegut and Bangsund, has, I am sure, experienced Life to a fuller extent than have I. Trouble is, I remain on the whole firmly convinced that I am better off as I am.

(And no doubt you are. Some of us get to lead full lives of extraordinary richness in Helston, Cornwall, but most of us slog out our dreary existence in Canberra, Boston, Newark, Ruislip or Melbourne, with nothing to comfort us but the works of Flann O'Brien and Flaubert. We don't even get visitors from Seattle.) Even so, I enjoy what you lay before me. Even allowing for my comparative ignorance of its subject-matter, it is frequently great stuff. Great, but (to me) mainly irrelevant. And I am certainly not in a position to join meaningfully in the debate - whatever it may happen to be. (You are so too! As of this issue the debate is about the Meaning Of Fandom.)

Another noteworthy thing about PG 25 is that it shows your personal position in the scheme of things as becoming increasingly satisfactory to yourself. Naturally enough, this means increasingly satisfactory to your reader, too. I am pleased for you, and for Sally, and for all others whose hearts may be lightened as, like me, they contemplate your good fortune. I have, at some distance, followed your progress up from the depths, and doubtless there is even better to follow. (Oh, there is, Archie, there is - unless you feel that a second marriage is a sign of an imminent plunge back into those depths.) So you see what I mean about the two minds, perhaps?

::: I do, indeed. Frank Denton bought 187 books on his trip, of which I would give shelf space to less than a dozen. Norm Metcalf says I'm a pseudo-fan. Andy Porter, in Algol 21, says something similar to what you have said: he has watched me on life's yo-yo. Paul Wyszowski congratulates me and says he envies me - and we've known each other through FAPA for about two years. If we're in two minds, one of them is probably on sf or something we feel strongly about; the other is on our friends. And

that, I think, is roughly what fandom is all about.

DAVE PIPER 4.12
7 Cranley Drive
Ruislip
Middlesex HA4 6BZ UK

Many thanks for The Last ~~Picture Show~~
Scythrop - although on second thoughts
Picture Show ain't that bad a title at all!
Very nicely illustrated. You commented
some time ago on 'only illustrations that
illustrate' (oh yes, I remember everything
you say!) - and here your heart-rending
cries from deepest ACT of 'some day my
prints will come' seem to have borne fruit.
I enjoyed George Turner's piece about
Melba. If only George would let himself
go on stuff like this all the time he would
have my vote for DUFF any day of the week.
(Me, too, just between ourselves. I've
read and re-read that article countless
times, and I love it. In his covering note
George called it a 'disgraceful farrago',
but as I think George himself has said,
authors make lousy critics.) I'm sorry you
are killing Scythrop - marvellous name for
a fanzine, I reckon - but I guess as long as
something comes out with that indefinable
Bangund class, I don't really mind what
you call it.
There weren't 28 issues of ASFR/Scythrop,
by the way: there were at least 28½ issues.
Remember no. 7½ for the Bristol Convention?
(Yes, I do. About four copies stayed in
Australia. The rest sat on Graham Hall's
doorstep for a month or so. Those was the
days, Dave!)
It doesn't really bother me much - I'm not
a 'social' fan at all - but UK fandom seems
to be dead these days.

::: That's because John Brosnan is back in
Australia, probably. At least he is as I
write. British fandom seems to have
survived quite well all these years: just
because you and I don't have much contact
these days probably doesn't mean British
fandom is dead. They've just forgotten us.
I get two or three letters each year from
Ethel Lindsay, I see Terry Jeeves's Erg in
FAPA, and a few other people write or send
me fanzines, but that's it. Peter Roberts
keeps in touch. Pete Weston has written me
off, I think. Haven't had a letter from
Mike Moorcock in ages. But I still believe
British fandom exists. If it didn't, David,
we should have to invent it. Think of that!

Philosophical Gas

I think we should start a fund to get an
English fan to Australia next year. Maybe
you, Dave. It might take a bit of doing,
since it looks as though DUFF will be
bringing someone from the northern
hemisphere to Australia, and Dave Locke,
Donn Brazier and Jackie Franke have started
a fund to get Bob Tucker here, but maybe
it's worth thinking about.

CY CHAUVIN 23.11
17829 Peters
Roseville
Michigan 48066 USA

I sort of feel guilty, since you've sent me
copies of Scythrop in the past and I don't
believe I ever locced or subscribed. The
fanzine always seemed far away, and it
didn't really come out on a regular enough
schedule to involve me, even though much
of the material in the few issues I received
was especially fine. Yes, Hugo-quality even.
There is a sort of time-travelling quality in
these issues of PG (20,22,25), what with
the reprints from various issues of Scythrop
and ASFR (I think the only reprint was from
Scythrop 22, Cy) plus the old letters. (What
old letters? This is a bloody conspiracy!)
Ursula Le Guin's article is interesting, and
while I agree with the basic scheme of the
article, there are certainly enough nagging
little details that could be argued with.
For instance: 'No invented world, it goes
without saying, can match one square yard
of the Earth in variety, splendour, terror
and unexpectedness.' Yes, but this is as true
for the writer of realistic fiction as for the
writer of fantasy. No-one shovels a square
foot of Earth into a novel to make it
'realistic'. I also think that Mrs Le Guin
may have failed to distinguish physical
and emotional reality in her essay. A
fantasy novel obviously cannot reflect the
first to the same degree as a novel about
the contemporary world and yet remain a
fantasy, but there is no reason why it can't
reflect our inner emotional reality as well,
is there? And isn't that the important
thing in a piece of fiction - emotion?
I don't like what she says about sf being
a 'personal variation on reality', since
without distinguishing between the two types
of reality possible in fiction you can just as
easily say that a contemporary novelist
does the same. Everyone sees reality
slightly differently, so every novel is a
'personal variation' on same.
I may be wrong, but I believe that speech

27

Autumn 1974

you reprinted was recently published in THE VONNEGUT STATEMENT. Which is why you may not have received a reply from his publisher.'

::: You had me worried for a while there, Cy, but the speech does not appear in that book. John Ayotte told me the whole story in a letter which I have typically mislaid (John asked me to write an article for Kallikanzaros, and I was so overcome, you see, that the letter... oh, you've heard all this before) (but I really was flattered, John, and Real Soon Now I plan to write something for you); I think he said he had transcribed the speech from a tape recording he made at the time.

18th April: Sally and I were married at 6.30 pm on Friday 29th March.

The ceremony was conducted by Mr Roger Thomson of the Attorney-General's Department, and witnessed by Miss Rosemarie Bell (Immigration) and Mr Robert Lehane (CSIRO). The ceremony seemed to consist largely of filling in forms in quintuplicate. The bride wore a purplish-bluish-greenish caftan of her own making, the groom an elderly but serviceable dark grey suit. Both later reported feeling radiant, and a little nervous.

Leigh Edmonds, devious swine and all-round jolly good fellow that he is, has quoted me as saying that the wedding went without a hitch. I did say those words - but I was quoting from Sue Clarke's account of her wedding, dammit!

On Saturday we drove Sally's ancient Falcon station wagon to Melbourne, and on Sunday we were feted splendidly by close relatives, most of our friends in Melbourne fandom and a few friends who are not fans. On Monday afternoon I flew back to Canberra, leaving Sally to take the Falcon on to Hobart. We had a joyful reunion on Wednesday night, but we still think it was a pretty daft sort of honeymoon.

We're happy, yes (thank you for asking). I've never been happier in my life, and Sally says she has never been happier in her life, so we're square, and that's a good way to start a marriage.

John Brosnan and Peter Darling stayed with us the following weekend. Whenever Sally addressed me as John or Darling, one

of the others would look up, usually somewhat surprised, but we sorted that out and had a great time. John and I played a few games of chess.

Sample of conversation:

JB: Get your filthy hands off my bishop!

JB: As the actress said to the actress...

John and I discussed the possibility of his rewriting his lost and legendary novel, ECHO OF JACKBOOTS, with suitable up-dating. I suggested he call the new book ECHO OF JOCKSTRAPS. He seemed to like the idea. So if you happen to be in the vicinity of the lost luggage department of the main Athens railway station during the next year or so, keep an eye open for John's new novel.

Last weekend was Easter. Sally's birthday fell during this weekend, so on Friday we celebrated with a coffee-and-benedictine breakfast, from which neither of us quite recovered. On Saturday we drove about 120 miles to a place generally called Stockdn-bloody-bingal (not, as Carolyn would have it, to shoot kanga-bloody-roos, but to pick up Carolyn - which we did). Not having seen Carolyn and Sandy for a fortnight, it was great to meet them again, sitting in their car, yawning, waiting for us, in Stockinbingal. We drove straight back to the Starlight drive-in on the northern outskirts of Canberra and watched the first two Trinity westerns. Good stuff, too. ('Evenin', Sheriff.' 'Shuddup!') My definitive study of the sociological and philosophical implications of contemporary western movies (briefly touched on in Leigh Edmonds's Rataplan) is proceeding apace. I can hardly wait for BLAZING SADDLES.

In private sessions Carolyn told Sally all about me, and me all about Sally, and in public sessions we insulted each other no end, drank a lot, and had a wonderful time. It was sad saying goodbye to Carolyn at the airport on Tuesday morning (real early: all we could see from Hindmarsh Drive was mist). I used to think every man should have a Carolyn, but now I would be happy if every city had a Carolyn. Especially this bloody city!

Our house has been put on the market again. Today the owner called round for the first time, to ask whether I would mind having people looking at the place over the next few days. I said I wouldn't mind. What the hell? Just so long as we can go on living here until the lease runs out in July...

What we'll do then, I have no idea.

This fanzine is getting out of hand. One night a week or so ago I got up to page 32, then decided I had written a load of rubbish and destroyed the stencils. I have typed page 28 three times. I didn't want to go over 28 pages anyway, but there are still good things to publish here, so on we go - and damn the postage!

KEVIN DILLON 23.12
PO Box 471
Haymarket NSW 2000 Australia

... Wandering with George was indeed fruitful. He conveys well an approach that is entirely the product of his own high standards - telling it wisely, wittily and well, and would that more would and/or could. What of his new novel, reputedly of some science-fictional content or intent? Literature naturally needs the George Tumers of this world as much as we always have. Prosperity to him & peace.

(A fortnight or so ago George told me that his novel, provisionally titled AMATEUR HOUR or maybe THAT HAS SUCH PEOPLE IN IT, is nearly completed in first draft. I am looking forward to reading it as much as you are, Kevin. I have read about 15 000 words of it, but that was over two years ago, and knowing George, it is quite possible that all I read has since been scrapped. But what I read was excellent. I think George has enough prosperity to suit him, and as much peace as anyone can expect; better to wish him health.)

Danner radio stories were another real joy, in that nostalgia of many sorts struck me hard this year among the worst effects of years such as this. I still meet a few of human kind who are so, and after all, Sinatra returned to sing of clowns -- a year for clowns perhaps?

... I dunno, Kevin. With people like Dick Nixon, Idi Amin and Bill Snedden around, do we need clowns? ... Thanks for the rest of your long letter. Though rarely published, your letters are most interesting and welcome.

ERRATA: Paul Stevens's address in the last issue should have been 'GPO Box 1267 L, Melbourne 3001'. Helen Hyde's address is 34 Trumble St, Pearce, ACT 2607.

ERIC LINDSAY 25.12
6 Hillcrest Avenue
Faulconbridge NSW 2776 Australia

... Tell Elisabeth Le Guin that some English comedians have stolen her Keats and Chapman story. I heard it in a broadcast from the Sydney Opera House about a week ago.

Of course your missive to the Times is a sonnet. I'll stand by you. The only question I have is: What is a sonnet?

George Tumer shows great ability to turn a piece about nothing at all really into entertainment. I envy him that ability. (Lee Harding gets better reaction simply by falling off chairs. Maybe you should envy him instead.)

Your comments in PG about reading good literature, professionally printed, remind me that the quality of 'professionally printed' material up to say 100 years ago was actually less well done than most good fanzines in terms of readability (is that a word?).

(Maybe it's a word, but I'm not sure what you mean. I have a modest collection of books and other publications dating from 1873 or earlier, and all of them look better than any fanzine I've ever seen. Is that what you had in mind?)

Hell, I can't think up bright things to say at this time on Xmas day. Ask Ken Ozanne to write you an article on his trip to Melbourne: since he is an academic he could call it The Leisure of the Theory Class.

... Greater love hath no fan than that he write a letter of comment on Xmas Day. No, maybe it would be greater still if he wrote it while attending a Worldcon - but that's a great compliment, Eric, to write to me on 25th December. ... I was most disappointed, after asking Ken for an autographed copy of his book on group theory, to learn that it was concerned with a branch of mathematics I'd never heard of, and not social dynamics. I hesitate to ask him for an article about the Theory Class: it might turn out to be all equations.

ROSE HOGUE 27.11
16331 Golden Gate Lane
Huntington Beach
California 92649 USA

... Being in a couple of apas I think I feel

qualified to respond to your 'fiendishly simple' question of what pleases me most in a comment on my apazine. I think just being commented on pleases me - just acknowledging my presence in the apa. Few if any times do any of the comments go very deep or really say anything. I don't write fiction or use others' material; I just natter on in my zines and discuss books or movies or whatever has been of interest between mailings, and then get onto mailing comments. I try to comment in depth as you do, but not nearly as long-winded as thou - I haven't the room to do so. ... Next to being acknowledged, someone having something specific to say to me pleases me - such as referring to a book they think I'd like (I'm in Apanage, a children's literary and discussion apa) or relating a common occurrence - such as car-crash fandom or catastrophe fandom. I'm in apas for discussion, not egoboo or praise. An apa to me is a means of discussing something with several people at one time.

... Keith Curtis sums it all up. I'd been wondering why most of my locs dealt more with me than the zines I've been locating. I have more to say about me, I guess. Not that I mean to sound egocentric: I just know more (or think I do anyway) about me than what is being discussed in the fanzines.

... Thank you muchly for the pic of Ursula Le Guin - a handsome-looking lady indeed, and a very talented one, too. Immensely enjoyed her article and her smile!

... Mr Vonnegut's gut reactions are quite interesting and I thank you for reproducing them, with or without permission. He has quite an ingenious mind and an ingrained sense of morality beneath the facade of his words - and a marvellous facade it is, too! He reminds me very much of an actor without or between plays, and boy, can he generate some nervous energy!

... Thank you for sharing Thomas Love Peacock with us/me, but not sure if I want to read more of him or not.

::: And thank you, Rose, for a long and delightful letter. You have so much to say, and I feel I should really write to you. One of these days, maybe! One thing you mentioned which I haven't printed - about delighting in tormenting Diane. Really, I

have never consciously written anything designed to torment her. We remain friends, at a distance, and we are still (as you know, if you read this stuff closely) related, since her brother is my sister's husband. I feel nothing towards Diane except goodwill and affection - and some guilt, I must admit, because I was not the man she needed, because I am happy, and because I do not know whether she is happy or not. I would like to think she is happy. But certainly I am as fond of her as any friend I have (and I don't have many friends), and I would not hurt her in any way.

Rose, I've read and re-read your letter, and I wish there was more I could pull out to publish. Believe me, you have given me a lot to think about, and you have told me more about yourself (mostly indirectly) than just about anyone who has ever written to me. Please keep on writing to me; I promise I will write to you Real Soon Now.

WERNER FUCHS

4.4

4006 Erkrath

M. -Gruenewald-Strasse 7

West Germany

We'd like to introduce us as a new literary agency specialized on speculative themes such as sf and fantasy. UTOPROP is working for the betterment of sf in West Germany and is looking for new writers which have got no agent for this country. We prefer writers which represent a critical and anti-militaristic point of view. Besides our agency activities we're making the German Science Fiction Times, a fanzine which you perhaps know. I think Hans Joachim Alpers was the German agent for ASFR.

Would you please be so kind and help us a little with our search for new promising authors in Australia?

::: By all means, Werner. Hans Alpers was my agent in Germany, as you say, and he did an excellent job. SF Times is a fanzine I haven't seen for a while, but when I last saw it, it was a beautifully-produced and most worthwhile publication. I wish you and Hans and Ronald Hahn the best of luck in your endeavours, and commend your services to any author reading this who needs an agent in West Germany. Jack Wodhams strikes me as a critical and anti-militaristic, not to mention promising, author - and Lee Harding and Bert Chandler and Damien Broderick and George Turner and Eric Harris and Brian Waters and David Boutland and John Brosnan and... oh hell, they're all good blokes. I hope you all make a fortune.

BARRY GILLAM
4283 Katonah Avenue
Bronx
New York 10470 USA

22.3

I've been trying to decide what sets Philosophical Gas apart from most fanzines. Your emphasis on communication is no different but the expression it finds in your writing and editing is unique. It all has to do with style, of course. The Rotler cover (PG 25) perfectly mirrors the spirit of inquiry and the sense of balance and proportion that is found within. And even there, in the layout of the text, there is taste and tact, an understanding of limitations unknown to, say, Dick Geis, whose relentless, omnivorous three columns in The Alien Critic 8 ground everything into the same pabulum.

I must second John Foyster's appreciation for your Kwalhioqua articles. I'm sure I'm missing some in-group Australian connotations, but I enjoy them nevertheless. I haven't yet received Kwalhioqua/SFC 40, but I understand that's mostly SFC material and I've read a rumour somewhere that Kwalhioqua is folding, so perhaps I'd better tell you directly what I've said to Ed Cagle.

I find myself comparing your little fables to Flann O'Brien for your civilized treatment of the madness inherent in unforgettable character sketches ('The Butterfly Mind of Billington'). In 'All I Know About Swagmen' you sound like a tipsy student whose explications become more intriguing as they become more outrageous, and whose criticism becomes more absorbing as its subject becomes more imaginary, so that one is not distracted from his inventive discussion by anything so mundane as a subject.

(Hold it right there, friend! I'm pretty sure you're being complimentary - matter of fact, I'm sure of it - but I don't entirely understand what you mean (especially the bits I love most!), and I feel you underestimate in some ways the inimitable qualities of Dick Geis and maybe even Bruce Gillespie and Ed Cagle. Maybe you don't. I love Bruce like a brother, and Dick and Ed like foreign cousins I've never met, so maybe I'm biased. Apart from Andy Porter, Sue and Mike Glicksohn, Linda Bushyager, Arnie Katz, Gregg Callins,

Leigh Edmonds, John Alderson, Jack Speer, Redd Boggs, Peter Roberts and maybe another 43 people I could name, Dick, Bruce and Ed produce the best fanzines I get to see these days. From my point of view, all the fanzines they produce are infinitely superior to mine, because all I have to do is read them: there's no hassle at all about typing stencils and fighting recalcitrant Roneos and so on; there they are, and I love 'em. PG gives me a pain in the arse - and so do the articles I write - because it and they should be so much better than they are. Pray continue.)

Ursula Le Guin's article is very interesting. And her conclusion is something that seems oddly to have been missed by most sf critics. I once considered writing a series of short evaluations of sf authors, to be tentatively titled 'Private Worlds' (how can I trust a man who splits his infinitives?) - after the La Cava film. I think Mrs Le Guin vastly underestimates current literature, though. While we do not have an equal of Tolstoy or Gogol or Eliot among us, we should not neglect the virtues of such considerable novelists as Nabokov, Barth, Elkin, Pynchon et al.

These novels are different because their authors see life differently today. After dos Passos decentralized the American novel, the novel of character has become the exception: some of Nabokov, some of Sheed. The rule is the novel of theme, in which the fragmentation is not a sign of the writer's inadequacy (which is the mistake most critics make about dos Passos) but a deliberate presentation of their material: Burgess, Beckett, Kosinski, Hawkes, Barthelme et al. When I reviewed STAND ON ZANZIBAR I made the same mistake, although in retrospect what surprises me most is that in John Brunner's comment he claimed his ability to create characters - as if he hadn't realized the implications of the dos Passos method, which subordinates any one character to the social unit. Brunner made excellent use of this technique to write truly social novels, but he hadn't put his method into words.

This is the other side to the 'private worlds' theory. Because much sf is, if unconsciously, a part of literature, this isn't seen by the readers of sf because they so seldom read

(continued on page 16)

FREE AND EASY WANDERING

Written and published by John D. Berry 8614 Quinten Street Falls Church Virginia 22043 USA.
Printed by John Bangsund. F&EW is a kind of supplement to Philosophical Gas 27, and is therefore also published by John Bangsund. Before this colophon becomes too confusing, let's get out and have a word from the printer.

A WORD FROM THE PRINTER

26th April 1974: John Berry wrote to me recently. Anyone who has had a long letter from John will appreciate what vast pleasure bursts from that simple sentence: a letter from John is an occasion, a happening, an experience to uplift the flagging spirit and make joyful the fannish heart. At least, the letters he writes to me have that effect; I haven't seen the letters he writes to you. In this particular letter John asked me (a) whether I could use a column in Philosophical Gas, and (b) whether he should join ANZAPA. I pondered these questions for some considerable time: after all, the pages of Philosophical Gas are not open to just any Ted, Dick or Harry, and membership of ANZAPA is not a thing to be entered upon lightly. An hour or so after receiving John's letter, therefore, I posted to him a short note of about 5000 words in which I said yes to both questions.

In my note I mentioned that the deadline for PG 27 was 1st May. Unfortunately my Government has not required my services for the past fortnight, so PG 27 was unexpectedly completed last week (and the Campbell book was completed this week: praise Bill Snedden and Doug Anthony, from whom these blessings flow - but don't vote for 'em). Today, most embarrassingly, well within the deadline, here is John's first column in my mail. What to do?

Answer: What I'm doing. John wishes to join ANZAPA, and I can foresee that under the enlightened dictatorship of our new Official Bloody Editor, John Foyster, our Association will rapidly become the most brilliant, provocative, scintillating &c amateur publishing association in existence - that the waiting list will soon include the most famous names in fandom - and that to be a member of ANZAPA in this Golden Age will be reckoned more of a distinction than possessing a roomful of Hugos, perhaps even more than being mentioned favourably by Norm Metcalf. So John's column is being published primarily as his first contribution to ANZAPA.

But the column was written for Philosophical Gas. So: ANZAPA will see F&EW as a separate publication in its own right; readers of PG who are not members of ANZAPA will see it as a supplement to PG. What could be fairer? Ladies and gentlemen: John D. Berry...

THIS AFTERNOON I sat in Giacomo's, the New York-style pizzeria cum Virginia-style ice cream parlor that occupies part of the vast shopping center out on Route 50. I sat at a table near the window, drank the free refills of coffee, watched the people around me and the grey-white sky outside, and enjoyed the fact that Giacomo's sells pizza by the slice. This is one of those rare places where people actually congregate, and as a long-time devotee of coffee-houses and sidewalk cafes, I've liked the place since the first time I walked in. I've never seen

a pizza place quite like it, since the decor is still basically that of the ice cream parlor it started out as - all bright colors and pop-art walls, spindly-backed wooden chairs and a sort of olde-villagey ice creamery area fenced off in the back. The only real problem (apart from the fact that I feel the urge for a beer when I eat pizza or sit in a sidewalk cafe, and Giacomo's doesn't have a liquor license) is the awful muzak that fills the air whenever there's nobody flush enough or desperate enough to feed quarters into the jukebox. (It's usually the waitresses who get desperate, since they

can't just pick up and leave.)

Giacomo's seems to be something of a local hangout, which isn't too surprising - there aren't many candidates for this position, and Giacomo's is better than most. It's in a shopping center, so I suppose almost everybody comes by car, but that's the nature of things in the suburbs. Whole groups of kids in their teens show up there, calling out to friends and cross-pollinating between tables, and they stay there for almost as long as I do, just talking or people-watching or showing themselves off. Today I heard a passionate discussion of God and the natural order. The terms sounded familiar, but they'd have to, since it's the familiar and necessary conversation in which most of us end up taking all the parts at one time or another. To me it says something about the nature of the energies in Giacomo's that such a conversation should go on there.

While I'm obliquely on the subject of coffee and the places where we drink the stuff, have you ever read a book called LICIT AND ILLICIT DRUGS by Edward M. Brecher 'and the Editors of Consumer Reports'? It's about the 19th Century Bohemian scene in Paris, amongst other things. Try this paragraph as a forerunner of our own modern drop-out scenes:

Like today's hippies, the turn-of-the-century Bohemians were conspicuously drug-oriented. One of the drugs that the Bohemians (like their elders) used was alcohol. (Henri) Murger himself became an alcoholic at an early age, and died in a sanitarium at the age of thirty-nine. In addition to alcohol, the Bohemians used coffee. They drank vast quantities of this stimulant, were preoccupied with coffee, and suffered coffee as well as alcohol hangovers. Respectable citizens of that era were as horrified by the Bohemian coffee cult as today's respectable citizens are horrified by marijuana smoking. Eminent scientists, it will be recalled, echoed this horror; for it was at the height of the Bohemian coffee cult that the public was being warned: 'The sufferer (from coffee addiction) is tremulous and loses his self-command; he is subject to fits of agitation and depression. He loses color and has a haggard appearance... As with other such agents, a renewed dose of the poison gives temporary relief, but at the cost of future misery.'

* * * * *

The foregoing comes from the first instalment of a column I wrote for the local alternative paper. There have been no further instalments, since the first one has been sitting around in their 'To Be Used Someday' file for a month or so now, and it looks as though it never will be used. I thought I'd salvage the less locally-oriented parts by using them in the first instalment of this column. I was briefly tempted to use the title that originally went with them on this new endeavor, but it struck me that 'Falls Church Funnies' would be obsolete by the time I wrote a second instalment. At the moment I am still living in a house in Falls Church, Virginia, just a few miles outside of Washington DC, as I have been since January of last year, but when the lease runs out here at the end of June I will probably hit the road again, pack on back and thumb in the air, and I won't be back for a while.

When John accepted my offer to write a column for whatever title he was currently publishing under (right now it's John, first Baron Bangsund and Count of The Causeway, John - but you may still call me Sir), he told me to 'go out and do something interesting and write about it.' The only trouble with this advice is that I'm in the middle of a period of staying in one place, living a settled life and involving myself in the patterns of people and energies around me. The farthest I've been since Torcon is up to New York and back. I'm happily ensconced here in a suburban house with four other people, a dog, a cat and a lot of hanging plants, not far from the Potomac River in the forested hills of the Atlantic seaboard. I've gotten thoroughly into the currents of people and ideas in this area, even though I don't feel really at home in Virginia and couldn't imagine staying here forever. In fact I find it amazing that I've stayed here as long as I have. It's entirely attributable to the people around me.

It's appropriate that the only group effort of Falls Church fandom has been a fanzine called The Gafiate's Intelligencer, and that this fanzine saw two issues last spring, one sometime in the fall, and not one in all the months since then. Every once in a while one of us will fill a momentary lull in the conversation by saying 'We really ought to publish another Gafiate's

Whatzis pretty soon.' Someone will then invariably change the subject. That's the way this particular 'fandom' is. Every one of us has been a fan for several years, and even though we represent different fannish generations, we all have a touch of the old fan and tired. There's no young, eager, talented neofan among us to provide the impetus. When Ted White and I began co-editing Egoboo almost six years ago (you don't know the sense of wonder that washed over me as I typed that), he was the old and tired fan and I was, relatively speaking, the young enthusiastic one. Well, I guess in relative terms that's still true, but it isn't saying much. Now we are both inclined to sit back and observe things and talk with our friends, and the last issue of Egoboo has sat unpublished on stencil for a year now. (Oddly enough, most of what I wrote in the editorial for that year-old issue about the dearth of current fanzines is still true.)

The fannish time sense can do wonderful things to your head. Here I am at age twenty-three, in most ways only just getting going on the adult portion of my life, yet in terms of fandom I'm virtually in retirement. I don't quite know how to cope with that. It's true that I don't have the neofannish fire that once motivated me to put out fanzines, but it still touches me occasionally; I still get the urge to rush right out and publish a focal point of fandom. What usually stops me, outside of laziness (which is a constant in my life), is that I'm only really beginning now to get a handle on my writing as an artistic creation, beyond fandom, for an audience much bigger than might one day feed and clothe me by buying my work - and the time and energy that goes into my fannish writing conflicts with that available for the other. I've only just begun to get a conscious feel for what I want to write in my life, after some years of running around experiencing things while my unconscious mind was mulling over the problem. One of the problems that I haven't come up with an answer to yet - where the answer has to be worked out anew each time I try something different - is knowing just who I'm writing to. I tailor everything I write - everything good, at any rate - to the time and place I write it, and to the people I'm trying to communicate with. I produce nothing but shit when I try to write something general, objective, able to stand by itself

outside of all context and exist as a piece of somehow 'pure' writing. It may be tied up with my long involvement with fandom, but I find myself writing always to communicate, and my finest stuff comes out when I'm writing to people I care the most about, when the sensibilities involved are closest to me and I'm most concerned about the quality of my communication.

I realized a couple of pages ago that this is the first time in a year or two that I've tried to write an article or column or anything more than a letter of comment for a general fanzine that I'm not publishing myself. (I did write the editorial for that Egoboo, even though it hasn't left Ted's basement, and I've also published a couple of fanzines for FAPA.) It's taken me quite a while to get into this column, to get the feeling that I'm doing anything more than spinning wheels, and I don't think I'm really going to get the hang of it until the second or third instalment I write. You see, even though I've been reading John's fanzines for years and know the names and the personalities within them, I'm still not sure just who I'm writing this to. Am I writing to Australian fandom? To my close friends in fandom? To FAPA, or whatever apa John sends this issue through? To John Bangsund? You tell me. Almost all my fannish writing over the past year or so has been in letters or letter-substitutes, so even a nice little quarto-size Philosophical Gas seems like an awfully big stage to be on after this much time. And I can't really see the audience for the stage lights.

All right, I'll expect thorough letters of comment from each one of you in the very next issue. They will count toward your grade, and I'll return your papers to you after class.

— John D. Berry (16 April 1974)

Well, Enid Blyton became
Prime Minister after all.
Appointed me ambassador
to Hanoi. How did you
make out?

Leon, Kansas...

