

PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

No.28 Winter 1974



In this issue...

The Return of Keats and Chapman!

- Etcetera!



Philosophical Gas

'at least as interesting as the potential copulation
of dragonflies' — Mike Glicksohn

NUMBER TWENTY-EIGHT

WINTER 1974

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EDITORIAL

THE MARCH OF MIND

26 June 1974: Someone was remarking only recently how long it seems since this journal last published an Anecdote of Keats and Chapman. Come to think of it, it was me. I was talking to Leigh Edmonds, telling him he had absolutely no chance in the wide world of winning DUFF (next year, that is: I think I rang him to congratulate him on his well-deserved win this year, the cow), and generally passing the time in idle, witty chat of a fannish nature, and I happened to mention that I had stumbled upon a nice pun but had no idea what to do with it. 'Write a Keats and Chapman story,' Leigh said. So I did.

KEATS AND CHAPMAN were discussing poetry.

'I have often wondered' said Keats 'what exactly is meant by the expression "poetic justice".'

'I always imagined it to be a singularly appropriate punishment meted out to some wrongdoer,' said Chapman. 'And such a thing, with respect, seems to happen more frequently in poetic creations than in real life.

On the other hand, it may have its origin in some historical occurrence.'

'Such as?' said Keats.

'I am thinking,' said Chapman 'if you will forgive me, of some possible connection between the bard and the barred, the court and the caught, the...'

'I am finding it difficult to forgive you,' said Keats sternly.

'So sorry,' said Chapman. 'But you can perhaps imagine some learned judge, in some far-off time, handing down his decisions in verse...'

'I cannot,' said Keats.

'...and becoming known far and wide as the Poetic Justice,' continued Chapman. 'I can just see him, addressing some quivering miscreant thus: I find the accused a veritable worm:

Sweet Thames, run softly, till you end your term.'

'Lord preserve us,' moaned Keats.

'Or: Bid daffadillies fill their cups with tears,

For thou art in the jug for fifteen years.'

'Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour!' sobbed Keats.

'Or: The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,

But winding slowly o'er the rack's for thee.'

'Enough! Enough!' cried Keats.

'Really?' said Chapman. 'Do you accept my conjecture?'

'Oh, certainly,' said Keats, in a rare outburst of sarcasm. 'I don't know how to thank you for this brilliant hypothesis.'

'All retributions gracefully conceived,' murmured Chapman modestly.

You didn't like that story? Ah well, one man's mete is another man's poisson, I guess. Anyway, you can blame Edmonds. (The whining heard whines slowly o'er thee, Leigh.)

And that was the Return of Keats and Chapman. What's next?

WHAT'S NEXT? I'm glad you asked. I find myself asking the same question so often these days.

Sally and I have recently rejoined the human race, by acquiring a television set. It wasn't an auspicious time to do so: on the night we brought it home the producers at the ABC went on strike (translation for overseas readers: ABC = Australian Broadcasting Commission, our very own poor-man's BBC), so there wasn't much to watch on channel 3 except the test pattern, and nothing much on 7 except the commercials. I understand - fair dinkum, cross-me-heart - that the ABC's ratings went up during the fortnight when there was nothing to watch but the test pattern.

I am sorry to report that tv hasn't changed much in the four years since I last had a set, except that there's a strange and lamentable lack of Westerns. (Readers who keep abreast of my work will realize instantly the profound implications of this observation. My definitive study of the Western movie proceeds, you will be pleased no doubt to learn. Since my first exploratory statement on the subject - in Rataplan, I think it was, or maybe some other scholarly journal of the sort - I have established that All Vegetables Are Brothers!) (No! - pardon me! - that was another line of study altogether. Dear me. I get so confused at times. The work on Westerns is basic stuff I have to do to gain entry to the University of Ard-Knox's course - quite gruelling, I understand - in Locally-Compact Pandemics. The study of vegetables in society, their philosophical implications and sociological overtones, has to do with another discipline altogether. I am well on my way towards gaining my MBE at the University of Ard-Knox, and my thesis on The Ruta-baga In Western Culture is nearly completed. I think I should get my degree, Master of Biblical Engineering, without watching Westerns, but a knowledge of Locally-Compact Pandemics is essential if I am to pursue my doctorate. But I shouldn't be boring you with this academic stuff.)

Meanwhile, to strike a serious note: E#

We had a minister at the Northcote Church of Christ, many years ago, named Will Graham. He was a great man, in his own special way, and I haven't met many like him since. He used to tell us stories about outstanding modern Christians. One of them, I recall, was Mahatma Gandhi; maybe he was an honorary Christian. Another was Chiang Kai-shek. I doubt that the Methodists would wish to claim Chiang as an outstanding Christian these days, but way back then in the late 1940s... well, I guess you could be forgiven for not knowing much about Chiang then. Oh, and there were lots of others. Albert Schweitzer, for instance. There's a man to give you pause. When I was half the age I am now I wanted to be another Albert Schweitzer. Somehow, now, at the age of 35 and rapidly pushing 60, I doubt that I will ever gain the academic qualifications awarded by the University of Ard-Knox (which I invented, dammit!), let alone the doctorates in medicine, music, philosophy and theology that Dr Schweitzer possessed; and for all that I admire the man still, I do not wish to live as he did.

Another bloke Mr Graham used to tell us about was an American-educated African who set up a college or something back home. Nothing in my reference library gives me a clue to his existence, or his name, so I have to rely on memories dating back a quarter of a century; and those memories insist that he was called Aggrey of Achimota. The same memories insist that he had a favourite sermon or talk based on the fact that a piano has white keys and black keys. Play only the white keys and you get some

kind of melody - even Leigh Edmonds could tell you that. Play only the black keys and you still get some kind of melody ('Oh can you wash your father's shirts' springs immediately to mind - and a whole lot of Scottish tunes). Play black and white together and you get harmony.

We used to learn all kinds of great stuff like that at church.

But even back in those days it seemed to me that a lot of people weren't interested in the white notes or the black notes or harmony or anything: they just wanted to play in the cracks between the notes. Maybe widen the cracks if they could.

The piano is an ideal vehicle for this kind of allegory: black and white, straight contrast and so on. Perhaps these days we should forget pianos and concentrate on violins. On a violin you can play an E-sharp. On a piano you can't: you get an F, or you break a fingernail in the crack.

Henry Kissinger strikes me as a man who knows how to play E# on any instrument you care to mention. I don't think he would ever have made Mr Graham's list of outstanding Christians, and I must admit that he isn't on my list of outstanding anything, but his E# is about the one reassuring note I hear these days. 'Every agreement forms the basis for the next disagreement,' I think he said recently, or something to that effect. And that sounds like E# to me. It's a long way from Aggrey (?) of Achimota (?), but it's spot-on 1974. Worse luck...

DURING the last month or so I have been planning a new magazine. Seriously. The material I have either on hand or lined up deserves much more circulation than Philosophical Gas can give it. Knowing this, I got some quotes on type-setting, because I decided I should take the plunge and go offset. The lowest quote I got - and I only asked for quotes from people around Canberra who own IBM Composers - was \$4 per page. I can't afford that. So I thought I would look into the matter of hiring an IBM Executive, thinking that I would prefer to type the stuff myself anyway. You lose italics and fancy typefaces, but it's better than paying \$4 per page. I went to my local friendly IBM man, and he had no Executives available for hire. But he did have two Executives for sale. The previous day he had received three IBMs which he had ordered fifteen months ago, and he had sold one already. Of the two remaining, one was quite unsuitable to me. So... I leased another IBM Executive: you can see its work on the next page. Between 10.15 am, when I looked at his two machines, and 1.15 pm, when I collected the one I wanted, the other machine had been sold and taken away.

Meantime I had been rousing up quotes for printing my new magazine. People take their time about this kind of thing in Canberra, but I now have enough quotes to go on. The cheapest is \$356 (plates and printing \$213; collating, stapling, trimming &c \$143) for 500 copies. Add to that 15 cents postage and 3 cents per envelope, and you get a grand total of \$446 per issue. Okay: I charge A\$1.00 (=US\$1.50) per copy, and all you simpletons out there send me subscriptions by return mail. I make \$54 per issue! Fantastic. On the other hand, I sent out 300 copies of PG 26, and of those 200 were marked 'This is your last issue unless I hear from you.' I have had some kind of response from about 15 of those 200.

I love my new IBM. After my car and my Roneo it is the most expensive piece of machinery I have ever acquired. I think I'll have lots of fun with it. But there won't be any new magazine from me, not for a long time. To produce and mail one issue would have cost me about as much as the IBM; I don't have that kind of money; and that's that.

A. Bertram Chandler

STARBOARD WATCH

OUR POETS WERE DRUG UP WRONG

In a recent issue of *Amazing*, Ted White has yet another anti-Establishment editorial. In it he clambers aboard Heffner's band wagon and joins the editor of *Playboy* in lambasting those wicked cops who harry the poor harmless marijuana users.

I've never smoked pot. The main reason for my not having done so is, I suppose, lack of opportunity. In any case, it's an opportunity that I should refuse to take if it came up during a tour of duty. The Company's rule about drinking - about not drinking, that is - on sailing day is one which I observe. Alcohol and ship handling don't mix. I imagine that the mind-expanding drugs and ship handling wouldn't mix either.

The trouble with marijuana is that there is so much hysteria on both sides of the fence. Law enforcement agencies and their spokesmen would have us believe that it is an aphrodisiac (if it were, its use would be far more widespread), that its users become violent criminals, that it is habit-forming, and that inevitably one graduates from it to the more dangerous drugs, such as heroin. On the other hand, the pot smokers make a new religion of their favourite way of getting stoned and claim that it gives them access to some Cosmic All.

Marijuana may be habit-forming. Tea is habit-forming; so is coffee. And alcohol. And especially in my case, tobacco. If I don't have my pot of tea (at sea) or my mug of coffee (at home) to start the day it is a major disaster. I like a drink as much as anybody - too much, at times - but I can stop drinking any time I feel like it and don't miss liquor one little bit. On the other hand, if ever I appear at our nudist club not wearing a pipe it is bruited abroad that I am running around naked.

When I was writing 'Gateway to Never' I read everything on the subject of marijuana that I could lay hands on, including 'The Marijuana Papers'. Included in this book are stories and poetry written by people under the influence of the mind-expanding drug. Frankly, I was not impressed. No doubt this material seemed marvellous to the people writing it, and possibly equally so to

anybody reading it who happened to be well and truly stoned at the time, but there was nothing there that could qualify as deathless prose or poetry.

It all reminds me of one of the late John Campbell's editorials, in which he raised the interesting point that it has been the alcohol-swilling cultures which have gone places, putting men on the moon and sending unmanned probes all around the solar system, while those cultures which have got their kicks from hashish and similar drugs have never amounted to much, at least in so far as material progress is concerned. I'll carry John's idea a bit further. It is the booze-loving poets who have made their enduring marks, while those who have hymned the hallucinogens have produced nothing at all that springs to memory. All right, there was Coleridge and his 'Kubla Khan', but Coleridge did not write any verses in praise of opium or hashish or whatever it was that he was using.

Even old Omar seems to have preferred wine to hashish, which must have been around in his day. (I am writing this without my reference library ready to hand.) But just suppose that instead of being a wine-bibber Omar had been a hashish-user. Would he (or Fitzgerald) perhaps have written something like this:

Give me a book of verses 'neath the bough,
A loaf of bread, a pipe of pot, and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness -
And Wilderness were Paradise enow. ?

In the Bible there are numerous references to alcoholic beverages, from Captain Noah's getting drunk after running the Ark ashore on Mount Ararat to Paul's injunction to Timothy to 'use a little wine for thy stomach's sake'. There are many references to liquor in the works of Shakespeare. In much more recent times we have Housman. Could he, would he, have written:

The troubles of our proud and angry dust
Are from Eternity and fail us not;
Bear them we can, and if we can, we must;
Shoulder the sky, my lad, and smoke your pot. ?

And there is just no substitute for his other lines in praise of honest ale:

Malt does more than Milton can
To justify God's ways to Man.

I'm sorry: I just can't resist the temptation...

Hash does more than Housman can
To justify God's ways to Man.

But I don't believe everything I write.

THIS IS WHERE WE CAME IN

Quite a few times I'd seen the book - 'We Are Not The First' by Andrew Tomas - on display in various bookshops, and decided that it wasn't for me. On the cover of the Sphere edition is a picture of a sort of flying saucer, or flying pie, hovering over a cloud of whipped strawberry-flavoured custard. The piecrust is decorated with an assemblage of human faces, or the same face over and over, with eyes, noses and Mona-Lisa-ishly smirking lips. I found it quite off-putting. Oddly enough, I did eventually want to read the book, and then of course couldn't find it anywhere. Finally I located a copy on the paperback racks of our local library, and this was doubly fortunate, since if I'd paid good money for it I should have been very annoyed.

The reason for my sudden show of interest was that the book was strongly recommended to me by a Faithful Reader in Mount Maunganui, New Zealand. It was my first visit to that country for seven years, and the ports in which I discharged and loaded were the ones in which I knew nobody. However the Company's house organ had reprinted, with my permission, an interview with myself by the Hobart 'Mercury', and every branch manager had shown this to the local press, so I was interviewed a few more times, and then of course various Faithful Readers knew where to find me.

Sam, who entertained me in his home, is a very nice bloke indeed, and very well read. But he is also a UFOlogist. He is not the sort of UFOlogist, however, who goes all the way with Adamski and his like. He has no more time for Little Green Men from Mars or Beautiful Blondes from Venus than I have. And in any case, UFOlogists tend to flourish in New Zealand, especially in the North Island. There have been some very odd sightings in the Mount Maunganui area, putting one in mind of the 'ghost rockets' which haunted the skies of Sweden shortly after the conclusion of World War II. Oh, there seems to be something there - but what?

Sam, his family and I discussed science fiction (we all like it), UFOs (heaping scorn upon Adamski & Co.) and 'Chariots Of The Gods' (which we all take with a large grain of salt). Finally we got around to 'We Are Not The First' (which I had not then read).

I've read it now. I've just finished reading it, in fact. Like Erich von Daniken's masterpiece it kicks around the ideas that the professional science fictioneers have been kicking around for ages, but like all the books of its kind, it is not sufficiently well written to induce even a temporary suspension of disbelief. And the facts, such as they are, are very untidily marshalled.

Mr Tomas attempts to prove that past civilizations reached technological levels even higher than our own and then perished, leaving no trace except for a few scraps of half-remembered knowledge. I admit that there is something in that idea. The ancient Egyptian priesthood, for example, knew far more than they should have known in their day. They were priest-scientists. And Moses, who wrote Genesis, was educated as an Egyptian priest. His account of the Creation, starting with the original fire mist and finishing up with the arrival of Homo Sapiens on the scene, tallies very closely with modern theories about the Beginning. He was the first science fiction writer - a scientist who wrote so that he could kick ideas around to see if they yelped. He wrote the first Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden story. He wrote the first Noah's Ark story. And every subsequent bastard in the field (myself not excluded) has been rewriting them ever since. (I think I'm the only one, though, who had Adam and Eve and Lilith on the Ark's passenger list...) All right, all right, I know that learned readers are going to drag in Gilgamesh and all sorts of other odd bods, but I like the Moses idea. I find it amusing to watch the reactions of the conventionally pious when I air it.

But with reluctance I tear myself away from Moses to return to Mr Tomas. Of him could almost be said what was said of Charles Fort: 'The trouble with him is that he believes everything he reads in the papers.' The trouble with Mr Tomas is that he believes everything he reads in the old legends. He's a real sucker for alchemy - as big a sucker as the kings who financed the researches of the alchemists must have been. Con-men have flourished in every age and there has never been a shortage of their natural victims, those in whom cupidity and stupidity are combined. But the alchemists, according to Mr Tomas, were using successfully knowledge that had survived the destruction of Mu, Atlantis or wherever.

Transmutation was not the only technology possessed by the ancients. They also had anti-gravity: how else could they have shifted enormous blocks of stone around? Like Mr von Däniken, Mr Tomas has absolutely no idea what can be accomplished by unlimited manpower - especially at a time when there were no Unions and no Awards - and primitive machines such as water-soaked expanding wooden wedges and the Spanish windlass. (I have used both successfully, after a sophisticated differential purchase failed to cope.)

I am not a very learned man. My mind is a junkyard full of rusting scraps of useless information - except in the very limited field in which I am qualified to speak with some semblance of authority. I have always rather prided myself on my navigation, and as a navigator, I know rather more about astronomy than the average

layman. When I say astronomy I mean astronomy of the old-fashioned applied variety, dealing mainly with the mathematics of the relative motions of celestial objects. Almost invariably in books such as 'We Are Not The First' there is some gross absurdity glaringly obvious to one of my qualifications, and I suspect that readers skilled or qualified in other technologies would find equally glaring absurdities in their fields.

The one that appalled me is a beauty. I quote, with suitable emphasis:

Like the story of the Suez Canal the history of navigation has had a number of interesting pages. Modern Italian shipping companies must have got the idea of luxury liners from the ancient Romans. Two Roman ships found in the Twenties at the bottom of Lake Nemi in Italy were restored between 1927 and 1932. The vessels were large and wide with four rows of oars. Accommodation was provided for one hundred and twenty passengers in thirty cabins with four berths each, as well as quarters for the crew. The boats were richly decorated with mosaic floors depicting scenes from the Iliad, walls of cypress panelling, paintings in the lounge and a library. A sun dial in the ceiling showed the time, and it is thought that a small orchestra entertained the passengers in the saloon.

After my mind had finished boggling I tried to work out the mechanics of a shipbourne sun dial, and came to the conclusion that such an instrument would work fairly satisfactorily if it were gyro-stabilized. But there is nothing to indicate that these fabulous galleys were equipped with gyro-compasses, or compasses of any kind...

After that effort I kept the salt-shaker handy while I ploughed through the rest of the book.

Um, a funny thing happened on this page. There was going to be a Lindsay Cox drawing, and I had it laid out beautifully &c, but as I started pasting in the bit of electrostencil I discovered I had laid it out beautifully for A4 size, not quarto. You dumdum, JB! Sorry, Lindsay. Sorry, folks.

The March of Mind

-continued

4 July: Last weekend Sally and I went to Sydney for a friend's birthday party, and we thought that, having driven something like 300 km (actually about 190 miles, but as of 1 July distance in Australia is officially measured in kilometres, and if I have to get used to it, you might as well, too), we might as well see some other friends while we were about it. We had a late lunch with Shayne McCormack, at a place called Harpoon Harry's. The restaurant wasn't much to look at, but the food was awful. And the wine. Shayne showed us lots of photos of herself with Isaac Asimov, with Bob Bloch, with Bob Silverberg, with... Fortunately Sally hadn't heard of any of these people, except the three mentioned (because she has read Asimov and heard me talk of the two Bobs), otherwise we might have both turned green with envy and thrown bits of underdone shazlik at her in uncontrollable pique and envy. (I wonder how 'shazlik' is really spelt: I can't find the word in any of my dictionaries.)

Then we went to see Bert Chandler. He looked older than I've ever seen him - but that stands to reason, I suppose. We talked of this and that, and he autographed three of his books for Sally. (If I don't watch her, Sally will have read more of Bert than I have soon.) He had just received his copy of 'John W. Campbell: an Australian tribute' - which rather surprised me because I posted it early in May - and I asked him what he thought of it. Naturally, his comments were kind. I have never heard Bert make an unkind comment about anyone, except Colonel Khadaffy (I feel I need some new dictionaries). But he did say that, after reading Redd Boggs's article in the book, he felt I should ask Redd to write a column for Philosophical Gas entitled 'Port Watch'.

The birthday party was just great, but not quite what we or our friend had expected. Four of us had a delightful dinner at a French restaurant at Tahmoor, about 100 km from Sydney. On Sunday Sally and I drove back to Picton, across the mountains to Wollongong, and back to Canberra via the Princes Highway. It was a good weekend.

We've had a mail strike in these parts for

what seems an unendurably long time, but last week everyone went back to work on some pretext or other, and the accumulated mail has started to arrive. I have had nine items of mail from overseas in three days, including the June FAPA mailing (May, sorry). Yesterday there was a letter from Mike Glicksohn, and before I lose it I think I'll start the letter column.

MIKE GLICKSOHN 23.6
141 High Park Avenue
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I've just come upstairs from sitting in the garden to let you know that I've been enjoying a very warm sun, a very cold martini, and a very fine fanzine, PG 26. It's probably the only Bangsund publication I've read within a reasonable time of its creation and I wanted to express my appreciation of it.

As I sat there enjoying life, to some extent, I was distracted by what appeared to be a United Nations General Assembly of the dragonfly world. When first I started reading your fanzine, I happened to notice two dragonflies on the clothesline engaged in what seemed to be a very ritualistic and frustrating courtship. I alternated my attention between the pages of PhilGas and the clothesline, and saw the insect population grow to seventeen, at last count. (They tend to move around at a somewhat frenetic pace, making accurate scientific observation difficult.) I never did see any successful completion to the preliminaries, although I freely admit to not paying constant attention. The contents of your zine were at least as interesting as the potential copulation of dragonflies, you'll be delighted to know. I'm sure that this concentration of dragonflies bodes ill for mankind, and I can only hope that this warning will allow a few of you in Australia to preserve civilization as we know it for a few months more than it might otherwise survive.

... I wonder how much of your answer to Doug and Seth is meant to be sarcastic? Perhaps it's my misanthropic nature, but I interpreted those paragraphs as reflecting my own lack of complete enthusiasm for the would-be pros who write at such length about how they haven't time for the trivialities of fandom. (Sarcastic? Jealous? I'm not sure, Mike. But friendly, I hope.)

A fanzine such as this is enough to make one give up publishing. Or enough to inspire one to try harder to reach its level of excellence. It has been a pleasure reading it, and I look forward to buying you a drink in '75. Just don't be embarrassed if I'm tongue-tied in your presence: I've spent a year and a half wondering why I'm being honoured when there are so many people infinitely more deserving of the recognition. I've got a year more to wonder. By the time I get to Melbourne I'll be lucky if I can utter a coherent word.

(I think you just said it all, John.)

18 July: Robin Johnson stayed with us for something less than twenty-four hours recently, on his way back from a conference about FM radio in Sydney. I'd better not go into the subject of FM, mainly because I'm still pretty confused about what's going on, but I should mention for the information of readers in civilized countries that we don't have FM radio here, not yet. Robin is involved in the current negotiations, and so is Arthur Davies, one of Canberra's more active fans (you don't have to be too active to be one of Canberra's more active fans), so don't be surprised if when we get FM it turns out to be dominated by fandom. ('Here is the Locus International news, read by Mervyn Binns. First, the headlines: Robert Heinlein's latest novel stinks, according to an eminent critic in Boulder, Colorado. Andy Porter, recently revealed to have been secretly married for some years, last night gave birth to twins. Ghoddminton is to be introduced at next year's Olympic Games in Albuquerque...') This paragraph is getting out of hand.

Robin Johnson stayed with us recently, and taking advantage of an unusual bout of drowsiness on my part - brought on, I suspect, by too much coffee -, tricked me into agreeing to rejoin the Worldcon committee, if invited. No-one has invited me so far, except Robin, but I have the feeling I'm back on the committee. Naturally the important and time-consuming responsibilities thereby added to my already heavy workload make the very thought of starting a new magazine quite impossible. Quite, Robin agreed. Quite, thought Sally, who for the last few months has been driven quietly mad with my protracted and finely-detailed indecision. And that's that, I thought, echoing what I announced publicly back on page 4, no new magazine from me, not for a long time.

The new magazine is called Parergon, and the first issue will appear about the end of September, lord willing and Roneo's paper stocks permitting. Contributors include George Turner, Bert Chandler, Meredith Thring and... Who? did you say? Meredith Thring ScD C.Eng FIMechE FIEE MICHemE FlntP FlntF FRAeS, Professor of Mechanical Engineering, University of London. When I wrote to him asking permission to publish a speech he gave on local steam radio, I thought I should warn him that the likely reaction from the pessimistics who read my

stuff (that's you lot, yes) would be that he is a hopeless idealist. Dr Thring replied: 'I agree with you that people will say I am a hopeless idealist. My only reply is that the practical people have got us into this mess and idealism is the only hope of getting us out of it.'

George Turner's article, one of the very best I've seen by him (which is saying something), is more or less about Frankenstein. Another hopeless idealist. The woods are full of 'em.

Anyway, watch out for Parergon, folks - the magazine that nearly wasn't. Now, back to the Locus International news, read by

SYDNEY J. BOUNDS	31.5
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Many thanks for Scythrop 28 and PG 26. Both nice productions and I especially like the illos in Scythrop. But what really makes this mag is George Turner's nostalgic piece. I consider him, as I've told Bruce (Gillespie), the best sf reviewer in the business. More Turner!

You are right about people over here being interested in the humdrum detail of life in Australia, so your editorial in PG is appreciated. As is the Walt Willis piece. Edmonds's 'Hell' is not my cup of tea; have you all got religious hang-ups down-under?

«No, we haven't, thank God.»

LEIGH EDMONDS (D.V.)	13.12
PO Box 74	
Balaclava Vic. 3183	

Last time we spoke on the phone I said that you had interrupted my writing a letter to you. You've probably wondered why you never received it and the reason is because I lost it. Speaking modestly, I think it was about the best letter I've ever written, and it had for its subject 'Spelling and typing errors in Bangsund fanzines'. (I guess the scrap of paper needed to cover that subject would be easily enough lost, Leigh.) (I'm just trying to be obnoxiously superior for Mike.)

Philogas 26 arrived last night, and having read through most of it, I see that you've already noticed the first of the two mistakes I saw in Skythrob 28. The other mistake occurred on

page 26 but since I had to cross page 19 on my way from the front to the back I feel like passing a comment on the jet plane going down in flames. I thought this to be a very strange picture to appear in a Bangsund fanzine because I have always thought that you were a peace loving and violence abhorring type person. If my conjecture is not wrong then what is a scene of such violence doing in one of your fanzines? (Making a point maybe?)

I guess you are suffering from a 'Knights of the Air' syndrome. I don't think I've ever seen pictures of piles of dead bodies in any of your fanzines, maybe not even one dead body for that matter, and yet here we have a picture of a machine in which somebody has died or is about to die. I guess that's where the syndrome comes in really; the machine is a lot bigger than the man and when you don't see the man you don't think about him. Even in 1916 when aeroplanes were much smaller than they are now people saw the plane rather than the man so everybody got the idea that war in the air was so much nicer than war on land or sea, everybody except the pilots I guess. Really the whole thing comes down to packaging.

The people who like to think about war as some sort of enjoyable pastime (you said 'past time' there, Leigh: should I have left it that way?) should be thankful to the modern military-industrial complex for packaging war because they have made it far more pleasant to look at. Pictures of the trenches in World War I are not very pleasant to see; they are so messy. However during that time they invented tanks and planes. I suppose you've seen pictures taken of modern battlefields with knocked-out tanks and trucks scattered around in a pleasingly random manner, and I think you'll have to agree that this sort of picture is much prettier than pictures of corpses piled up. Of course if you opened up the hatches on one of those knocked-out tanks you'd come across something worse than a simple pile of bodies, at least I assume you would. I suppose it all comes down to the same thing anyhow: no matter how it happens, people get killed.

So much for the weighty issues in modern society, and more about spelling errors - in this case the misspelling of MiG. The term MiG is derived from the names of two

Russian gentlemen, Artem Mikoyan and Mikhail Gurevich, who set up an aircraft design team during World War II. I can't blame you for writing MIG instead of MiG. They all do it the wrong way in the papers, so you get used to seeing it like that. (Would you insist on my spelling Fiat F.I.A.T., Leigh? S.A.A.B.? S.I.M.C.A.? Can't see anything wrong with MIG, really: I can even pretend I'm giving the 'and' an initial capital. Why do we waste time and paper talking about this kinda stuff anyway?)

By peering closely at the picture I see that the plane in question is a MiG 17 (Fresco). How's that for being one up? (Just great... yawn.) I know it is a Fresco because it looks like one. Those hours of study time in the school library spent looking at pictures of aeroplanes and reading specifications has finally proved to be of some worth. (Uhuu. If you had spent the time studying you might have learnt not to write things like 'Those hours... has' - but I shouldn't criticize you like that: I used to spend lots of similar time drawing motor-cars.)

I think I had a few things to say to and about George Turner in the other letter, but I can't remember what they were. I will strive to remember all the George Turner stories I've heard or read so that in 30 or 40 years time I'll be able to impress people. If he is as important as those reviewers or critics or whatever would have us believe then the trouble should be worth it.

And now a comment on Philosophical Gas 26: I hate you, I hate you. There should be a law against producing such good fanzines and when I'm elected king I'm going to make sure they take your duplicator and typer away.

PHILIP JOSE FARMER 30.5
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Thanks for the Scythrops and the Gases. I especially like PG because there is a light-hearted acrimony-free tone about it. (Sir, there is an explanation for that. You will no doubt recall Cervantes's characterization of someone or other, maybe an innkeeper: 'He was a fat man and therefore a good man.' Similarly, I prefer the quiet life. Let the lean and wiry Geises and Gillespies of fandom publish the serious, provocative, pungent stuff, says I.)

I relished Le Guin's article and Vonnegut's speech in PG 25, though I thought it a shame that I had to read the works of American writers in an Australian fanzine. ((Why?)) But this is a circuitous world, and what do I care how the current flows so long as at least two wires run into my house? ((Exactly. Fanzines are the newsletters of the peculiar global village which is sf fandom, and what the hell whether they come from Canberra, New York, Stockholm, Cape Town, Munich or wherever.)) ((And of those two particular articles, one was originally published in an American fanzine and the other written at my request. Just think: your letter (when I get back to it) may only be read in an Australian fanzine, and would not have been written but for that fanzine.)) ((Jeez, I do carry on, don't I. Have I ever told you, sir, how much I enjoy your writing? No? Well, I do, but I'm not going to come right out in print in front of George Turner and say so. I'm sure you'll understand. Let's have a fresh paragraph: I've wrecked this one.))

I am a Vonnegut aficionado, though I like best his non-sf book, 'God Bless You, Mr Rosewater'. His finest work is, I believe, 'Cat's Cradle'. I don't share your liking for 'Player Piano'; for some reason I've never been able to finish it, though I've tried thrice. It is a rather mundane book and it takes a conventional approach to a cybernated society. By the way, have you noticed how much Vonnegut resembles Mark Twain in physical appearance?

((I hate interrupting letters, I really do, but when I'm asked questions or feel otherwise impelled to break in, I can't stop myself. On Vonnegut: My favourite Vonnegut novel is the last one I read, whichever that happens to be at any given time - and I have re-read Vonnegut more often than I have any other sf writer, even including yourself, sir. I suspect at times that 'Player Piano' was the first sf novel I ever read, but I can't prove it. Anyway, the last time I read it was in 1969, when I reviewed a new British edition for 'The Professional Engineer'. Maybe it is rather mundane and conventional, but that doesn't spoil the book for me - perhaps because I am rather mundane and conventional. Certainly, what Vonnegut had to say back in 1952 or whenever still held a vital message for the engineering profession in 1969, and, I believe, for mankind in 1974. Mankind tends to be mundane and conventional, and I would still recommend 'Player Piano' to anyone

concerned about where we are heading - but not especially as a work of literary genius. I have this problem with literature, that when a book or a poem or something says exactly about society or the human condition what I feel but cannot express, my literary judgement, such as it is, tends to be over-ridden. So my favourite poets are Thomas Hardy, Robert Graves and Alec Hope. I love Wordsworth, if we take things back as far as him, but with him I skim over the things I find repugnant for extra-literary reasons. In science fiction, unless a novel or story is so absolutely brilliant that I forget my philosophical hang-ups, I tend to enthuse over those works which reflect my attitudes. Does that make any kind of sense? ::: I think Kurt Vonnegut resembles Mark Twain in more ways than physical appearance.))

One of the many things I enjoyed in PG 26 was Willis's column. I'm happy to learn about Flann O'Brien and intend to get his books. What Willis says about the characteristics of Irish literature seems to be true: their most Irish-of-the-Irish writers write a prose and have a worldview that is unique, wild, fine-textured, unmatched and, as far as I know, unimitatable. Lafferty, however, proves that you don't have to be a native Irishman to be an Irish writer; you just have to have a fortunate and happy melding of Celtic genes with Celtic spirit. Joyce isn't, I believe, a 100% example of the truly Irish writer; there's too much of the Latin in him, Roman sand thrown into his Celtic gears by the Jesuits.

Honor Tracy said in her 'The Straight and Narrow Path' that though the Irish are separated from England by a narrow sea and are easily accessible from Europe, they might as well be several thousand miles away. They don't think like Englishmen or Europeans. I got a big charge out of her English anthropologist who was taking a vacation in an Irish village after some years of study of a Congo tribe. After a while he began to notice certain remarkable resemblances in the mental attitudes of the Irish villagers and those of the Congolese natives.

I don't know, though, what Willis means when he says that Irish is the oldest spoken language in Europe. If he'd said the weirdest, I'd have agreed. But I fail to see how Irish is any older than any other language in Europe. If he meant by 'oldest' the least changed or most archaic, he is wrong. Lithuanian is much more archaic, closer to the parent Indo-

George Turner says 'Character determines action.' Heraclitus said it first in the 6th or 5th century BC: 'Character determines destiny.' He wasn't giving advice to novelists when he said this, but it applies. Nor was Ecclesiastes (or Solomon) teaching a course in creative writing when he said 'Consider thy latter end, my son, and be wise.' But it applies.

RICHARD MASON	nd
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Island Bay S.2	
Wellington New Zealand	

Vis a vis hell I'm glad to see you declaring a moratorium on theology or we could all end up arguing about pins and I'm no angel SF after all is about ideas not morality.

«Um, you are Mae West and I am Ludwig of Bavaria, and we can't go on meeting like this. :: Does recycling fall into the category of ideas or morality?»

'This is your last issue unless we hear from you.' Yipes! My 1st Bangsundzines, and already in danger of being cut off the mailing list? I'll resume sending Godless immediately. (I've been sending issues for about the last year, but never heard anything back, so cut you off the list.) ¶Good lord! - so you have, too. My records really are in a mess, which is why a lot of people got that last-issue message

I see you have the same feeling I do amongst groups of fans, that I'm the most inarticulate and least knowledgeable of them. For instance, the discussion on Flann O'Brien, an author I had never heard of, but one I shall definitely seek out... Real Soon Now. Like most fans, I'm always falling farther behind in my reading by buying more books than I have time to read.

(Also, Bruce, you'll have to watch how many 'thats' get into your sentences.' Sorry about this nit-picking. In a kind of reaction against my job (which is editing politicians - for the sake of anyone who just came into the room) I have been publishing letters more or less verbatim lately. ::: George Turner can fight his own battles - indeed he is very good

at doing just that - but I confess that I get very annoyed when I read the kind of useless criticism of his work that you have mentioned, Bruce. I am proud of my friendship with George; I admire him to the point of mutual embarrassment; and I am proud that I was accidentally the cause of George's emergence as one of the world's finest science fiction critics. The review of Armytage's 'Yesterday's Tomorrows' was first published in ASFR 18, back in 1968. In that issue George had an article 'On Writing About Science Fiction', which he illustrated with reviews of the Armytage book and some novels (if I could find my file I would list the titles). Harry Warner said that the lead article should be reprinted every year as a basic guide for anyone attempting to write about sf. About the same time I published a review by Don Symons of a book about Velikovsky, and George said that if he had known I had that review on hand he would have preferred me to publish it in the place of his Armytage review. In a part of your letter which I have omitted, Bruce, you say 'maybe I should nominate him for best fan writer' - and you are by no means the first to say something like that. All of this comes down to some basic things I feel like saying about George Turner, sf and fandom:

- (a) In my un-humble view, George is one of the top four contemporary critics of sf - the others being Aldiss, Blish and Lem - and he is not the least of them.
- (b) George is not a fan. To be a fan, quite apart from any other qualification, you must claim or admit that you are a fan. George insists he is not a fan; and therefore is not.
- (c) After seven years or so of fairly close contact, I don't know what makes George Turner tick. The arrogance, if you care to call it that, of some of his writing and some of his conversation is one aspect of one of the most humble men I have ever met. His devotion to art is total; I know that. His knowledge, experience and memory are mind-boggling; that also, believe me, I know. He could, if he wished (and so far I haven't been able to talk him into it), write utterly fascinating things about art, about music, about war (his novel YOUNG MAN OF TALENT reflects only part of his war experience) - about just about any bloody thing you care to mention. The man has no interest in autobiography - not his own, anyway. (Getting that article about Melba out of him was, I reckon, one of my more memorable achievements.) His stories

about the theatre are delightful. His opinions on film are, if anything, even more provocative than his opinions on sf - and every bit as soundly based.

I didn't set out to write all this about George Turner - or, to be more exact, my feelings about George Turner - but in some way which I admit I don't understand completely, your comment, Bruce, that some people have told you that 'Turner spends much time talking out of his arse' annoyed hell out of me, and this is my totally inadequate response to that kind of talk.

George wrote an article for Scythrop 26 about Bruce Gillespie and SF Commentary. In the course of it he said some things about me which were as puzzling as they were complimentary. Bruce wrote a long letter of comment on this article, which I published in PG 13, and in which he says "My own handbook for reviewing is George's article 'On Writing About Science Fiction'." In a postscript, Bruce said something like 'But if it takes a George Turner to write about us, who do we get to write about George Turner?' I have no immediate answer to that.)

GEORGE TURNER
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7.5

The Campbell book arrived yesterday and I am much impressed. It is a very striking job indeed, carrying this style of production as far as it can reasonably go without absolutely pouring money into it. A handsome work which, with the small print run, may well become a collector's item. You would be wise to save a few for yourself - they'll go much better at the 1998 Convention than the usual tray of matches and bootlaces and torn copies of 'Buck Rogers Meets The Wolf Man'. (Or was it Abbot & Costello he met? And is there a difference?)

I am pleased to see that John Foyster's speech, which bored me to tears as a listener, makes excellent reading. (What did he do wrong? Simply fail to project?) And you managed to collect some unexpected material. I knew the Pinkney article of course but the Australian EEB bit was a surprise.

Your personal inscription to me is gnomish, veiled in mystery. All I did was write an article demanding of me, and sycophantically

change the ending when you didn't like it. Still, it's nice to let it fall casually open at the flyleaf when showing visitors.

I am on leave for another three weeks and working fairly solidly on a novel called 'Second Chance', which you may have heard of as 'Amateur Hour' or something else before that. (Probably 'Skylark of Space'.) With luck I may get the draft finished before I go back to making beer. At any rate I have discovered what it seems to be about - and have forgotten what it was once supposed to be about. It is a very bad novel, structurally, but may get by on its individual bits.

(I thought it was about the philosophical bases of morals, the concept of individuality, liberty, social responsibility in science, and the worth of Anthony Trollope - but it's a while since we last talked about it. And it started out with the title 'That Has Such People In It'. Are you still writing the same book?)

I recall threatening to visit Canberra about now, but I cannot do so. Melbourne is turning on marvellous things just for me, like 'Tannhaeuser' and 'The Magic Flute', the Old Vic Theatre Company, a new David Williamson play, films by Bunuel and Bergman. In the face of such magnificence, who could leave? In any case I've spent all my money, save a pittance for sausages and mash once a day (cups of tea free at the Old Folks joint in Blessington Street) and a loaded bankbook for opera and such fal-lals.

Fact is, my passion for prints got the better of me, and I rampaged through the shops for three days and - wait for it - four hundred dollars before collapsing in technicoloured poverty. So, no Canberra. In any case, said he nastily, it's warm here.

(Do you have any openings for assistant beer makers? It's bloody freezing here in Canberra - below 0°C last night, and into the minus degrees several times in the last week or so. And we've run out of oil and no-one will sell us any, so we're huddling over radiators. Robin Johnson turned pale blue the night he was here recently. Aren't you glad you blew your money on Works of Art instead of a visit here? Of course you are. On the other hand, we are disappointed. And after all the nice things I've been saying about you. Feel guilty, go on.)

Last night the radio went insane. The ABC

broadcast 'Peccata Mundi' (The Sins of the World, you Latinless Greek scholar (libel!)) a 'Concertante for Small Orchestra, Choir and Four-track Tape' - and a Speaker telling us what it meant every 64th bar or so.

Science fiction it was, no less. Some parcel of twits arrived here after we'd knocked ourselves off with fusion bombs or LSD or unrestrained licentiousness or something, and spent fifty minutes explaining to each other that we died for the sin of pride, and that we weren't all that hot as a species anyway. The Speaker was the composer, who, unfortunately, had the same simplified ideas about speech as about music. And the lines he gave to the chorus (one imagines them with hands raised and mouths pursed primly, being terribly disapproving of the ruins of Earth) would have disgraced Amazing Stories, 1929. The music wasn't bad enough to be interesting. I know now what Constant Lambert meant when he spoke of 'the appalling popularity of music', and may make a courageous but fore-damned attempt at claiming a percentage rebate on my radio licence.

But there's two hours of Schumann tonight. I shall listen to his 'Scenes from Faust', and slaver over my Turner 'Venice' and thirteen Van Gogh self-portraits, and drink Twining's English Breakfast with just a touch of Orange Pekoe, and know that this crumbling remnant of a suicidal civilization is the best of all possible worlds. And here am I, its fairest flower of decadence, ageing gracefully (with just an occasional hint of senile venom), wrapping myself happily in the past while thinking spitefully about five abominable novels that Sayers bloke has just sent me. But one of them is 'Last Exit to Brooklyn'. Beaut bit o' perv, eh? I'll read that one in bed.

ps: I know you will print whatever suits your yellow press talents, so I am resigned to the idea that after the next issue of Bangsund Follies everybody will know I am a profligate wastrel who reads dirty books in bed.

(I never thought you were anything else, cross me 'eart, George! And where else should one read dirty books? :: I prefer Twining's Earl Grey or Darjeeling, with Lapsang Souchong on special occasions, but English Breakfast is fine by me. Do they really serve that and orange pekoe at the Old Folks joint in Blessington Street? I might move back to St Kilda yet.)

DAVID GRIGG 8.5
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I nearly fell out of my chair the other night when Leigh Edmonds told me that the Campbell book had appeared. It was like seeing a copy of Canto 2, or hearing that Dickens had written an ending to 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood'. Not content with astounding me verbally, Mr Edmonds quickly produced a copy of the fabled tribute, and at last I held it in my hands.

We've joked about the book for so long that the actual appearance of the beast has caused us, I think, to consider afresh our ideas about it. A copy arrived in my mailbox last night, and I've been fondling it and browsing through it since.

About a year ago I said to you that even if the book took another two years to publish it would be worth the wait. (You will recall that I had been reading the stencils.) It was worth the wait. It is still an unequalled tribute to Campbell, and it was worth doing.

I haven't read the book yet. This isn't a letter of comment, just a thank-you for sending me a copy. And thanks for listing me as one of your production assistants, even if my only contribution was to be enthusiastic about the book when you weren't, and to fill up your glass when you started running off the first few pages!

((David, I have carefully built you up in the pages of this journal as the person who kept the grog away from me while I ran off the first part of the Campbell book, and just look at you! - telling the awful truth! But your visit early last year, and your enthusiasm, were very timely. I have since realized that other people should have been mentioned in the book - Tony Thomas, for example (perennially the forgotten man of Australian fandom) - but you certainly deserved being mentioned, and I thank you for your faith in the book. Let's know how you feel when you've read it.))

BEN INDICK 9.6
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It is very astonishing to receive in one fell swoop my first issue of Scythrop, and find it

is my last, also Gas, and before I even look at them find they will be final unless I reply. If I weren't so breathless I'd say - 'Help'.

Damned good stuff, John, very damned good. I don't recall getting a zine in a long time with such a uniformly good level of writing. Even beats your work for (sob) Kwalhioqua. And neat as can be. Frankly, twelve-twelfths better than such pretentious pap as Algol. ((Ben! How can you say that! Algol features such famous writers as myself and Ursula Le Guin, to name only several, and if my stuff's neat I don't know what's the right word for Algol. You can say what you like about Algol and my friend Andy Porter, and I don't even mind if it's all true, but don't expect to say it in my fanzine without protest from me. Hell, I've been a friend of Andy's, man and boy, since he was neo-high to a BNF, and I ain't about to stop now. Sir.)) ((That's two hundred and forty-three drinks you owe me now, Andy. My pleasure.)) I'm sorry I missed umpty-ump previous issues, but add them to the thousands of other nice things I've missed and it averages out not too bad.

I liked very much Miss Australia 1898 (revealed later to be Dame Nellie, inventor of toast), a winsome charmer, and even if George Turner only did meet her at cheek-pecking age, I'm certain he'd remember her. However, I'm rather annoyed at you for those ghastly photos of Melbourne, all too 'cunningly selected'. YOU, SIR, HAVE DESTROYED A DREAM! Where are the Wallabies? The Kangaroo? And in that mass of concrete, where can a eucalyptus tree survive, and without its succulent leaves, WHAT HAPPENS TO ALL THE CUTE LITTLE KOALA BEARS?

John, I'm furious. Thirty years ago my sailor-brother brought home from Down Under a stuffed koala bear (no, not a real one) for my three-year-old sister. HOW CAN I TELL HER SHE'LL FIND NO REAL ONES OUTSIDE OF BRONX ZOO, N. Y.? It's all well and good for YOU to stand there and tell ME that my lousy verschlugginer TV and films have destroyed YOUR notions of an America with Redskins and Bison roaming around: everyone knows they are gone with nickel beer. BUT AUSTRALIA WAS OUR LAST HOPE! Heck, now that I think about it, even Yvonne Googalong ((who?)), a genuine 'aborigine', looks like any ordinary suburban tennis-

23 July (8.50pm): Well, we've just listened to the Treasurer's speech on Inflation and the Government's immediate schemes to curb the nasty beast - and I can only say that I approve entirely. I expected a shock - I had no idea what, but something - and I was not disappointed. There was no mention of increased income tax. The method of determining unemployment benefits has been altered in such a way that I can expect at least half a year on my present salary if I find myself out of work. And fags have gone up by 4 cents a packet. And postage rates go up on 1 August by roughly 30%. And grog will cost more. And &c. Pensioners will get an extra \$5 per week - the biggest single rise they've ever had. And &c.

Now, here's my own personal contribution to the fight against inflation:

Until 31 December the subscription rate to Philosophical Gas is REDUCED to A\$2.00 - US\$3.00 - £1.20 - for six issues. From 1 January 1975 it will revert to the same amount for four issues. As indicated earlier, all subscriptions lapse with no. 29. Therefore all subscriptions received between now and the end of December will be regarded as commencing with no. 30.

It is possible that the new postage rates (not detailed in the Treasurer's speech) will make it considerably cheaper to post PGs 27, 28 and 29 in one lot than in two. If this is the case, I apologize for the delay and urge you to get your subscription to me quickly.

As always, published letters of comment are regarded as worth at least one issue, substantial contributions four issues, and trades (by mutual agreement) 'all for all'.

And now, if you will pardon me, I have to do some detailed figuring about the new postage rates, how much cash I can raise in the next seven days, and (you guessed it!) &c.

Stay happy. It ain't worth being anything else!

Three cents for
a fag! Omigod!

