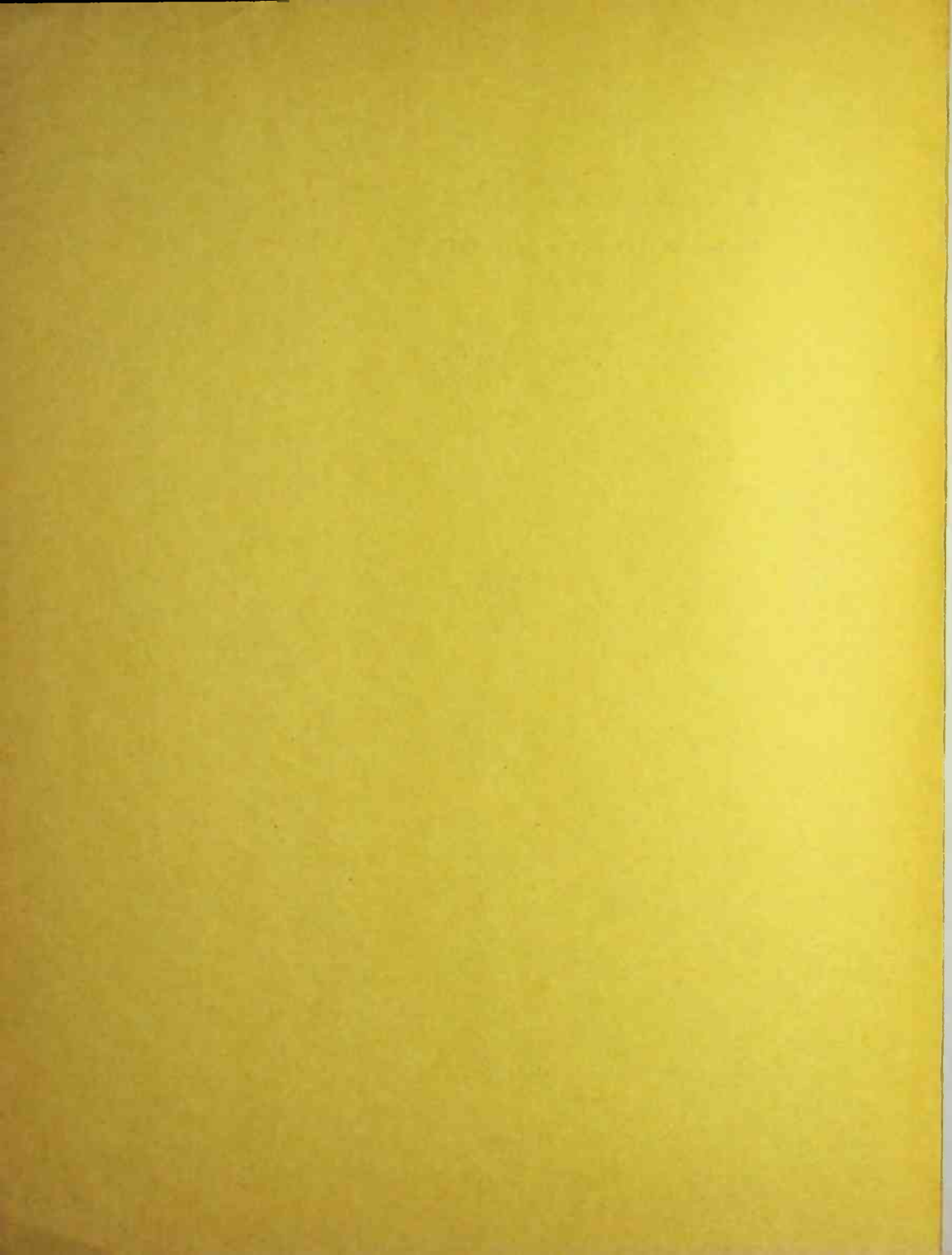


Philosophical Gas

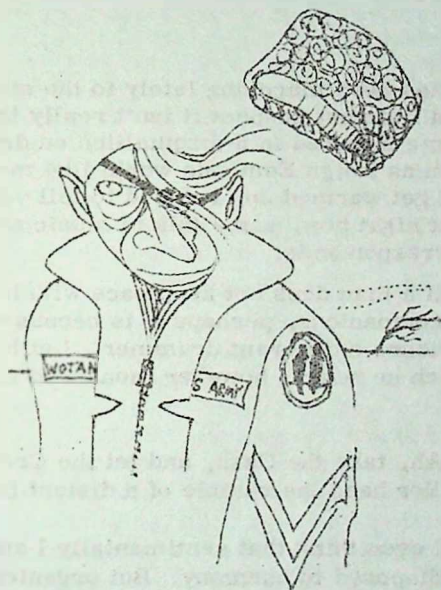
Number Thirty-One : July 1975





Philosophical Gas

Number Thirty-One : July 1975



THIS ISSUE is entirely devoted to the March of Mind. Assisting the editor in his ceaseless quest for enlightenment, inner peace and the perfect claret, we find:

Hank Thoreau	2
Omar Kyabram	2
Chas. Lamb	2
Patricia Rappolt	3
Phillip Adams	3
George Turner	4
Robert Bloch	4
A. Bertram Chandler	9
George Turner	11
Van Ikin	13
A. Bertram Chandler	15

Artwork by Alexis Gilliland

PHILOSOPHICAL GAS is published when least expected by John Bangsund : Parergon Books PO Box 357 Kingston ACT 2604 Australia

Subscriptions are appreciated; they may be remitted through Khemlani Associates or directly to the editor. When last sighted the subscription rate was A\$3.00 for six issues (too much!) or A\$5.00 for ten (cheap).

The next issue is confidently expected to appear after this one - but anything could happen. It really could. Ask Norman Gunston. Or Jim Cairns. Or Tommy Flynn (ah, yes: ask Tommy Flynn - he'll tell yer!).

The March of Mind

15 June: This mind has been marching lately to the music of a drum so distant that I almost suspect it isn't really there. I don't intend to become involved in a disquisition on drums, nor even music (much as Leigh Edmonds would like me to do that). In fact, when I get warmed up, I intend to tell you what I did last Easter. But right now, some talk of music and other things by eminent correspondents:

H. D. THOREAU If a man does not keep pace with his
Concord, Mass. companions, perhaps it is because he
 hears a different drummer. Let him
step to the music which he hears, however measured or far
away.

O. KHAYYAM Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go,
Nishapur, Iran Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!

C. LAMB I even think that sentimentally I am
Edmonton, UK disposed to harmony. But organically I
 am incapable of a tune. I have been
practising 'God save the King' all my life; whistling and
humming of it over to myself in solitary corners; and am not
yet arrived, they tell me, within many quavers of it. Yet hath
the loyalty of Elia never been impeached.

J. BANGSUND (From a letter to George Turner;)
Kingston, ACT I think that part of my motive is that I am
 trying to find out why people write (that
is, why I should write, when there are all of Beethoven's and
Mozart's double sonatas and trios out in the loungeroom
waiting to be listened to) and how they go about it. ... I'll
bet you never met a person named Praise-God Barebones in
all your life! (Sometimes I wonder about you, George. I
think you're making it all up.)

PATRICIA RAPCOLT
Literary Editor
The Canberra Times
(16 July 1974)

Further to previous correspondence on the subject of reviewing for The Canberra Times, I have given your application some serious consideration on its merits. However, a new factor is affecting our review pages. That is the reduction of space available through the need of taking more advertising matter on these pages. At this time, I do not propose to recruit any new reviewers except in the conventional fields.

PHILLIP ADAMS
9 Kildare Street
Hawthorn East
Victoria 3123
(24 March 1975)

It's funny, but I spent the other day wandering around Canberra with nothing to do, prior to a lunch with Gorton and Whitlam on the Film School. But I didn't know where to contact you. However I did bump into one of your mates a few weeks ago (his name escapes me) and I asked him to pass on my warm regards. Perhaps he did. ((Lee Harding indeed did that very thing. He's a Good Man.))

Never forget that success (that two-edged sword) always involves an enormous amount of luck. Of finding a patron, a publisher, an opportunity. I am firmly of the belief that novels superior to WAR AND PEACE have been written for the silverfish. For instance, throughout Eastern Europe there are novelists who 'write for the drawer', as they put it, quite unable to publish. Then there are those of eccentric genius who are totally rejected by their contemporaries. I remember seeing a sequence from a Brazilian feature film shot in the 1920s that was a thousand light years ahead of anything else made at the time. Or of anything else that has been made since. But that few hundred feet of film was all that survived. The director is not even a footnote in the histories of cinema.

I think you're a gifted writer and you should keep battling away. However I think you'd be wiser to re-direct your energies to the conventional media, to try and crack it for a column in Nation Review or the Australian or something. That would give you a power base on which to build and develop. I don't wish to denigrate your private publishing ventures as they're interesting and clearly give you a great deal of satisfaction. But in effect you're hiding your light under a bushel.

H. D. THOREAU
Concord, Mass.

Though you trade in messages from heaven, the whole curse of trade attaches to the business.

GEORGE TURNER
87 Westbury Street
East StKilda
Victoria 3182
(14 April 1975)

At the moment I am engaged on correcting, titivating and feeling generally disconsolate about a 130 000-word novel called BELOVED SON, which may or may not stir a chord in your memory.

((Not so much a chord as a distant but distinct drum. And in the last couple of weeks I have read BELOVED SON. Some time ago I said that this book would turn out to be as difficult, as important and as magnificent as LAST AND FIRST MEN. Having read it, I still say that (but you are a much better writer than Olaf Stapledon: need I say that?), and I am glad you didn't write something else.))

Remind me to tell you some time how Bugs Bunny, Enid Blyton, the Marquis de Sade and an unlikely person called Praise-God Barebones made absolutely no difference to my life in the space of about fifty-eight years.

((I deserved that, George. I've forgotten exactly what I wrote to you, but I recall saying something to the effect that Phillip Adams, John Hepworth, Owen Webster, Martin Boyd and Banjo Paterson changed my life in the space of four days. Something like that. It was true, too. But add George Turner, and make it ten days, and it becomes more like the whole truth. One question remains: were you really never influenced at all by Enid Blyton - or the Marquis de Sade? I was. Everyone influences me, dammit.))

ROBERT BLOCH
2111 Sunset Crest Drive
Los Angeles
California 90046 USA
(8 April 1975)

Many thanks for First Draft, which reached me today. I enjoyed your editorial comments until I reached the following observation: 'One day Ray Bradbury will die, and on other days, Bob Bloch and Bob Tucker...'

I read no further, because I must correct you. Bradbury will never die - he told me so himself. Tucker is perhaps in more danger, because when he gets to the Convention, the Australian fans are bound to hear him speak and then they'll kill him. As for myself, I died years ago: reports of my life are greatly exaggerated.

Hoping you are the same...

((Well, yes, I guess I am the same. Thanks, Bob. A few months ago, though, I wondered whether I would ever be the same again:))

THERE were more people at Canberra airport than I've ever seen there. The lounge was crowded with ambulant, perspiring bodies waiting for delayed flights and inert, somnolent bodies hoping for cancellations. (It was the same at Melbourne and Hobart airports.) After checking in I went outside for a cigarette or five and a breath of fresh air, and watched people. I like watching people. There was a very well-dressed lady vomiting decorously into the shrubbery opposite the TAA entrance. There was a Fiat-full of well-bred public servants and dogs. There were many white Government Fairlanes containing bored drivers, waiting for visiting Important Persons. (Who on earth would come to Canberra for Easter? I wondered.) The air was crisp. I was tired. I had a long way to travel.

Last time I travelled by air the plane was held up while officials decided whether my combination bottle-opener/corkscrew/pocket-knife was a lethal hijacking implement under the Terms of the Act. There was no inspection at Canberra. I could have held up the DC-9 with my bottle-opener and demanded to be flown to Kuwait or West Footscray - and it would have been entirely their fault.

A smooth flight to Melbourne. I had three hours to kill, so I grabbed a taxi and headed for the Vineyard restaurant in St Kilda, where I had arranged to have dinner with my good friends Sandy and Carolyn. The taxi-driver said he was having an incredibly quiet night (probably the fault of The Government) and suggested he call back for me about 11. I thought that was a great idea, because I really wanted to be on that midnight flight to Hobart, drunk, sober or otherwise. The driver's name was John. I enjoyed talking to him as he weaved his almost worn-out Falcon through the Melbourne traffic. He promised he would call back for me unless he got a fare to Ballarat ('Please, God!' he said, taking his hands off the wheel to raise them in mock prayer - and immediately replacing them to avoid a giddy VW fastback).

It was great seeing and talking to the girls again, even if I had a touch of jet-lag or whatever and wasn't exactly making scintillating conversation. The Vineyard's cevapcici, I decided again, is superior to the Golden Star's at Queanbeyan. I'm not a connoisseur of Yugoslavian food, but I certainly like cevapcici. The girls presented me with two beautiful books (about Cervantes and Aubrey Beardsley) to remind me that Sally and I had been married for a year. 'Dunno what she sees in you' Carolyn said.

A little before 11 John came into the restaurant, and we invited him over for a drink. He seemed a little surprised. Then it was goodbyes all round and I got into John's Falcon, and Carolyn rushed out as we were about to drive off and pointed to her new Corolla across the street (Chloe II - an impressive-looking beast) and I grinned and said 'See you soon', and we were off. I got talking to John about humour. He wanted to know Carolyn's address and phone number, but I diverted him and we talked about humour. I asked him what he thought about Benny Hill. I don't like Benny Hill. John pulled up in Sydney Road, leapt out, opened the boot of the cab and got back in with a cassette player. He drove on, one hand on the wheel, the other fumbling with the machine. Eventually he found his favourite Benny Hill track - 'The fastest milkman in the West' or something. I made complimentary noises, hoping like mad he wouldn't run into anything. He said he'd only ever once been invited to have a drink with a fare before, and that was with Kevin Dennis (the fastest used-car dealer in the South). He seemed a little moved, and happy. I liked him, I decided. Even if he damn-near killed us both at least five times on the way back to Tullamarine, I liked him.

About 2.30 am the plane arrived at Hobart, and Sally and her father were waiting for me. About 3 we got to Cremorne. Mrs Yeoland fussed over me, insisting that I should have coffee and cakes and things, but all I wanted to do was go to bed. I think I was not as civil to my in-laws as I should be, but it really had been a long day.

My Easter in Hobart was a rather dreamy and confused time. The Yeolands' house is right on the beach at Frederick Henry Bay. I spent hours just looking at the water; it changes colour with the weather and with the light. (What an incredibly trite thing to say! But there is nothing trite about Frederick Henry Bay, and Canberra is a long way from the sea.) One night I went out and took some inept photos of the full moon - enormous and bright golden-orange it was - rising across the bay. All the time I was there I was conscious of the waves crashing or gently lapping on the beach, only a few metres from the house - an unaccustomed and vaguely disturbing but satisfying sound. One day, I promised myself again, one day I shall live in a house like this in a place like this.

In January the 'Illawarra Star', carrying stuff from the Electrolytic Zinc works (where Don Tuck spends the time he can't devote to science fiction bibliography), ran into the

Tasman Bridge, with disastrous consequences. Bert Chandler may say what he will but I cursed the master of that ship when we set out for dinner in Hobart Town on Easter Saturday. We had to drive something like seventy kilometres from Cremorne to the city. We had a gorgeous meal with the Yeolands, senior and junior, at a French restaurant in Battery Point. Then we had to drive back. I admit, enthusiastically even, that the company and the food made that drive worth while, but I wouldn't want to do it every weekend. Some people do it every day.

Mr Yeoland remarked at some time during this visit that I don't say much. This is half true. When I haven't anything to say, I don't say much. When I've had a bit to drink, I say a lot. Sally, and my friends in fandom, will confirm this. But if I didn't say much at Cremorne it was probably partly because of the book I was reading there. Martin Boyd's autobiography, DAY OF MY DELIGHT, is a strangely disturbing book, and I still haven't quite come to terms with it. I'll say a bit about it before I'm finished, but not right now - except that it brought on me an attack of High Resolves and things, now, I am pleased to say, more than half forgotten. (High Resolves are no good for everyday living, after all.)

Quite apart from anything else, I went to Hobart thinking about some Australian writers for whom I have a great fondness. John Hepworth, who writes the 'Outsight' column in Nation Review, I have always associated with Tasmania. He and Sally have mutual friends. On the Friday before Easter John had a curiously ambiguous piece in his column about the suicide (or perhaps-suicide: I wasn't sure what he meant, to be honest) of Owen Webster, a local writer of whom I had heard a lot, never met, and frankly, did not admire a great deal. On Maundy Thursday there was a letter in Nation Review, signed by Phillip Adams, Stephen Murray-Smith, Barry Watts and other people for whom I have great respect, taking Hepworth to task for his 'frivolous' obituary. John can be obscure at times - I'm sure he would be the first to admit it - and I didn't know until I read that letter that Owen really had taken his own life. I went to Hobart wondering what exactly had happened, and concerned about John.

On the same Thursday I had a letter from Phillip Adams. Phil gave me advice on how to become a professional writer, and it was good advice. Establish a power base, he said; get a regular column in Nation Review or somewhere. And I read

Phil's letter, and I thought about Cwen, who had established just such a power base and got no joy from it (his final column in NR made that very clear), and I knew that if I am ever to become what the world calls a writer I should be a writer like Cwen Webster, whom I did not admire, rather than a writer like Phillip Adams, whom I admire immensely, and here was Phil advising me to follow the kind of career that led to Owen's suicide. And on the same day there was Phil's signature on a letter in NR reproving John Hepworth for what John had said about Cwen's death.

Do you wonder that I went to Hobart confused?

With the utmost respect to Phil and John, and to those who admired Owen, I do not wish to follow in their footsteps, even if I were capable of doing so, which I doubt. Not at all. My own footsteps are erratic enough, god knows, and outside fandom hardly anyone knows I exist, but I really prefer to muddle along in my own way. I confess that I would like the Big World to acknowledge my existence, but I don't lose much sleep worrying about it.

Anyway, there I am at Cremorne, watching the moon rise over Frederick Henry Bay, and reading Martin Boyd.

* * * *

That's as far as I got with the first draft of this editorial, back in April. The above was to serve as an introduction to the real meat of the editorial - a profound discussion of the writing and character of Martin Boyd, in the course of which I would skilfully define my own attitude to the purpose of writing, and especially to writing about Australia and about one's own life. Unfortunately I have not defined those attitudes, and cannot decide what it is that I like and dislike about Martin Boyd.

There is a strong feeling of decadence and disillusionment about the book, and something approaching despair. But none of this rings true; somehow it's off pitch slightly. It's almost as though Boyd realized somewhere along the line that he was living out the discarded first draft of an inconclusive and unconvincing novel by E. M. Forster perhaps, or Evelyn Waugh or Charles Morgan. A Brideshead revisited and found of no importance. Over-riding all this woolly conjectural stuff, for me the outstanding character of the book is its remoteness. Perhaps its inconsequence? But if inconsequent, why did it so move me? Utterly incapable of grappling with

such questions, I further distanced myself from the book and its author by plunging into Clement Semmler's biography of Banjo Paterson. And there the matter ended, until I was forced to think about it again today.

Now, if you'll forgive me, I shall have a large bottle of Orlando's best, some Mozart trios, and a good lie down.

* * * *

Ah, that's better. Now, some letters:

A. BERTRAM CHANDLER 23, Kanimbla Hall 19 Tusculum Street Potts Point NSW 2011 (13 April 1975)	Please note change of address. We bought the home unit as an investment but it is, pro tem, my working premises. ... You've seen my old workroom, with one wall of bookcases.
---	--

That room is now the dining-room. The bookcases, repainted to match the decor, were moved to the large living-room. The entire Encyclopædia Britannica, complete with year books, atlas and dictionaries, was taken to the home unit, also a few shelves of Chandler. (Most of the books by this author and the magazines containing his short stories were in duplicate, so quite a lot remains in the house.) Then I had the job of restowing the books in the repainted cases. I finished up with the tool shed half filled with the overflow. It's a mystery. From now on call me Clancy! (If you call me Clem, okay.)

I retired from the service of the Union Steam Ship Company of New Zealand on 28 March. I was back on their payroll on 4 April. I've got a ship, but no crew. Taking turns with another retired Master, I'm in charge of one of our vessels laid up at a small shipyard in Balmain until such time as employment is found for her or she is sold. Most portable items of equipment have been landed to the Company's stores, including, unfortunately, the ship's office typewriter, and my own machine, although allegedly portable, is too damned heavy to lug back and forth each day with my overnight bag of dagwoods, thermos bottles, milk, fruit and reading matter. The ship being dead, I have no cooks to cook my meals and no stewards to make my bed. Apart from that, the job's ideal for an introvert such as myself. And I sorely miss a typewriter. When I'm home I have no time, until things settle down, to do any writing.

When I reviewed THE DANGEROUS DESPERADOES I wandered

off on to an evaluation of my own peculiar psychology. I've been doing some more evaluating. It all reminds me of a Thurber title - 'Leave your mind alone'... Perhaps I should do just that. Anyhow, I'm in an odd situation. Every second night I am the only person aboard a ship I know quite well. She was my first Australian flag command. Do I sing myself to sleep each night with 'Goodbye, old ship of mine'? Frankly, no. And that's odd, because there is, I well know, a broad streak of ham in my make-up. But this is just a job, bringing in money at a time when it's very welcome. There's no sentimentality.

All in all, I think that I shall be able to make the transition from shipmaster to literary gent with surprising ease. One reason perhaps is that same streak of ham. As a Master I was something of a Walter Mitty. I loved the glamorous part of the job. But I was never really interested in the sordid financial details, and the even more sordid industrial wranglings never appealed to me. Or, come to that, to any Master. (Recommended reading on this subject is Monsarrat's A FAIR DAY'S WORK.)

(13 May:) I am still getting telephone calls from my publishers in Tokyo. Invariably they ring when I'm out. Then Susan assures them that I shall be in the following evening, and a time, 1730-ish, is arranged. Then I have to stay at home and wait and wait until Tokyo comes through, at about 2100.

The latest call was about illustrations, again, this time for 'To prime the pump'. They want me to supply a map of El Dorado! There was one amusing example of the troubles that afflict the translator - and the translatee. You may recall that in 'To prime the pump' there is a tussle with a fearsome underwater beastie called a 'rock ogre'. I mentioned that it was actually native to Australis but had been introduced to the waters of El Dorado because it was good eating. The translator got Australis confused with Australia and thought that the rock ogre was something infesting our own Barrier Reef...

(16 May:) My translator asked me if Commodore Grimes is a descendant of one John Grimes who was one of Hornblower's shipmates in HORNBLOWER AND THE HOTSPUR. Mphm? I've always thought of Grimes as being descended from Hornblower himself, just as Tarzan is descended from Mowgli and that horrible Golden Amazon (the Ziff-Davis incarnation) from Tarzan, and Sexton Blake from Sherlock Holmes, and

Modesty Blaise from James Bond, &c &c and &c. The question got me thinking. As soon as I can get hold of a copy of the Hornblower story I'll try to work something out. Could Hornblower's John Grimes have had a wife, or a sister? Or did Hornblower unknowingly abandon some trusting maiden to her fate, and did that John Grimes marry her just in time to save the child from being born a bastard?

Now I'd better get on with a job of work that I've been putting off - the construction of a chart of El Dorado...

:::: Buck Coulson has made a takeover bid for your Starboard Watch column, Bert. I ignored his overtures, of course. But I have so much of your stuff on hand at the moment (the recent instalments most beautifully handwritten, if I may say so) that I reckon PG 32 might be bulging with Chandler. You can call that issue Clancy.

(I wonder whether overseas readers know what the hell we're talking about!)

GEORGE TURNER
(9 August 1974)

From now on you are empowered to
fight all my battles. The feeling of
being defended in print is novel.

Have you ever noticed that it is always dissent which rushes to the typewriter, while agreement not so often sees the need to write? One result of this is that one never knows what the general reaction to one's offerings really is. And this, I suppose, goes some way towards accounting for the generally defensive attitudes of writers when discussing their profession. ((It has a fair bit to do with why some fanzines cease publication, too, George. Christ!! Oh, pardon me. I just had my last glass of Orlando's finest for the evening, and I'd forgotten that the '71 Barossa Cabernet throws a crust, and I got a mouthful. So sorry. Do pardon me. Ugh. Please continue.))

But I begin to realize how Bruce Gillespie must have felt when we prodded and poked at him in Scythrop 26. 'Arrogant'? Well, er, yes - and aware of it and occasionally attempting to do something about it, and just as often seeing the attempt go down the drain like a New Year resolve. But 'humble'! Are you suffering a hangover from a Salvation Army meeting? I know the onlooker is supposed to see more of the game, but that word had never occurred to me in any personal connection, and I just don't grasp the implication. I'll have to think about what I have said and done that has given such an impression. I know I am not

totally a bunch of thorns, but 'humble'? You've succeeded in mildly upsetting me.

Your note about fandom prompts me to expand on the subject. I am not a fan simply because I regard sf as a pleasant sideline of literature, have no extreme devotion to it (I probably was a fan from 1927 to 1930 or so, but started discovering other marvels about that time) and have so far thought of it as a pleasant relaxation from more serious interests. My reaction to fanzines is, with a few exceptions (such as *Algol*), tepid simply because I am out of touch with the springs of enthusiasm which spends itself in such a splurge of bright excitements. (Maybe if I were twenty again... That isn't a wish, merely a recollection of some of the things which infested my ecstasies at that age and now gather the dust of time.) And there are so many fanzines! I have a feeling of extreme guilt each time a complimentary copy of some new fan publication oozes hopefully out of the mail, because I feel that as a sort of fringe member of the cult (an onlooker who occasionally interjects and irritates the players) I should make some gesture in return. There was a time when I did make such gestures, but the result was such a spate of fanzines that I have retired into the attic, muttering and complaining, and slammed the door on all but a few.

Frankly, what turns me off so much fan writing is the constant ego-tripping. The editor of a publication will always impress his personality on the thing simply because he is the editor, and his 'impersonal' comments will reveal as much about him (simply because no comment is or can be impersonal) as endless pages of what he did and who he talked to - which usually turns out to be as well worth recording as a laundry bill. At this point I have to insert hastily that you and Bruce do the personal thing very well, and remain readable because you always relate to the world around you instead of treating it as an extension of your own egos.

Which brings me to your remark that I am not interested in my own autobiography. While I know what prompted it, the truth is that I am not totally uninterested but am averse to writing about myself in the sense of 'this is me, warts and all', because such writing is inevitably false if only because the writer rarely knows who he is and where his warts are. In the Melba article, you will notice, I wrote mainly of external matters which I hoped would be of interest in themselves (even if only passingly so) and concerned me only as an observer.

I could, I think, write a fabulous account (in the sense of being of the stuff of which fables are made) of that abominable choir school, but it would concern me only as one who saw the things he writes of. I would not be merely a camera, but it would be about the school, not about me.

And it was a fabulous establishment. There were, I think, twenty-eight choristers at that time, and three of them were Noel Counihan, Roland Pullen and Hector Crawford. It was a festering bed of diverse talents in spite of its hopelessness as a seat of learning.

So much for autobiography. I think you will get the idea.

As for Turner spending much time 'talking out of his arse' - my only complaint with that is the meaningless wording. I like precision in comment. Ninety per cent of what most of us write in critical mode stands a good chance of being wrong, and every reader has the right to say so. The trouble with fandom's adverse reactions is the sense that they are based on emotional rejection, which is a slippery matter. One rarely sees a reasoned rejection, but every critic would dearly love to see more of them. Reading such can be as uncomfortable as a cold douche, but at least you come out at the end of the communication cleaner than when you entered upon it.

ps: Have read a proof copy of LeGuin's THE DISPOSSESSED. Far superior to anything she has done before. But the novel of the moment is Tom Disch's 334 - the most important work in contemporary sf. Please print that statement even if you throw the rest of the letter into the fire.

29 June: One reasoned rejection coming right up, George. Meanwhile, for the benefit of anyone who might imagine that Leigh Edmonds took over this fanzine on page 12, I should explain that yesterday I went out and traded the IBM with the large face (used for pages 2 to 11 of this issue) and the IBM with the tiny face (which constant readers have become used to over the last five years or so) on this fabulous little Optima portable and a new IBM with the same old familiar tiny face. The IBM won't be delivered for about a month, so for one issue you must bear with a good old-fashioned manual typer. And for those readers who lusted after my small-face IBM I should say that it was pretty far gone: a lot of important parts had just about rusted away, what with claret, coffee and nicotine gnawing at its vitals all this time. (I shudder to think about the state of my own vitals.) Enough technical talk. Here's a bloke I've wanted to publish for a long time:

VAN IKIN
Dept of English
University of Sydney
NSW 2006
(19 April 1975)

Having read George Turner's article on Frankenstein, I just had to reply, but having decided to reply, I just had to re-read the damn book.

Turner is right to re-emphasize the role of divine justice in the novel. Mary Shelley's world is in God's hands; it is not, as a secular unit, self-righting - not an autonomous machine with built-in repair circuits, so to speak. And as Turner indicates, the evil creation does not destroy its creator; God carries out the necessary justice. (Such a rebuttal is long overdue. Back in 1972 I took an English Lit option on the gothic

novel, and the erring interpretation was all the rage - though it was resisted by the academic who took the course.)

Having agreed with Turner on this issue, I must still disagree with his tendency to erase 'science' from the novel as a thematic target. To my mind, Mary Shelley uses God-fearing public morality as a basis from which to attack the growing interest in 'science' and scientific dabbling. The novel is subtitled 'The Modern Prometheus', and the Promethean usurpation of the act of creation is the worst of Frankenstein's crimes - but I think Mary Shelley is not so much concerned with the crime itself as with isolating the social trends that lead to such blasphemy. And in her view, the road to hell is paved with scientific intentions.

At the outset Frankenstein himself is a thoroughly nice chap, a real little ol' lady pleaser. He is noble, gentle, cultivated, wise, eloquent - all the culturally approved terms apply. But then - enter science. As his scientific curiosity grows, noble Frankenstein becomes a wreck: he skips meals, shuns human company, allows his work to ruin his health. Moral: science is a health hazard. Worse, it is a virtue hazard, for science distorts his values. He becomes an obsessive ('soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose') and he loses his ability to appreciate the simple beauties of nature. The Alpine scenery provides Elizabeth with 'ample scope for admiration and delight', but Frankenstein's palate is jaded, and he is more interested in seeking the causes behind exterior reality.

Significantly, these symptoms are shared by Captain Walton, a man who is also possessed by the demonic spirit of inquiry. Walton's scientific curiosity cuts him off from normal human society, and gives him so warped an outlook that to his imagination the Pole is not 'the seat of frost and desolation' but 'the region of beauty and delight'. Walton's plight, I think, proves that Frankenstein is the victim of an insidious social trend, not simply the victim of his own personal defects.

These value judgements are curiously modern in sensibility, and they can be absorbed by even the non-religious (though they are clearly compatible with Christian values). Yet such values are not my 1975 interpolations into the text, for Mary Shelley carefully scores points against her characters for these very failings. Walton's love of the polar regions is undercut when the Pole nearly proves deadly; Frankenstein's own 'human nature' often drives him away from his work with 'loathing'; and at one point Frankenstein damns himself with a contrite description of the ideal human being:

A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind, and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to disturb his tranquillity.

Mary Shelley saw man as a quiescent, neutral creature, easily

set on the wrong paths by the cancerous ardour of scientific inquiry. Science leads man into Promethean conflict with God - and that's a battle man cannot win. Mary Shelley is using public morality and the divine apparatus to give science a good solid clout over the head.

A. BERTRAM CHANDLER
(30 June 1975)

'Bert Chandler may say what he will...'
Well, I'm saying it. Really, John... It
was LAKE ILLAWARRA, owned by the

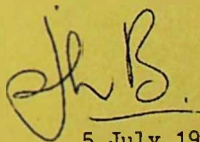
Australian National Line (I still haven't forgiven the National Times for saying that I was in that outfit) that hit the bridge. If her name had been ILLAWARRA STAR she'd have been owned by the Pommy Blue Star Line. Furthermore, she was on her way from sea to Risdon, not on her way down from Risdon. If she'd been on her way down it would have been more understandable, as that approach to the navigation span of the bridge is very awkward. Nonetheless, as I said when that bridge was built (but nobody ever listens to me), it's just a disaster waiting to happen.

:::: This is Philosophical Gas, folks, the accurate fanzine.
(Blush!)

And this was PG 31, I've just decided. I'm not happy with the Optima's performance as a stencil-cutting machine. I'll start on 32 as soon as I take delivery of the new IBM (reconditioned, actually: you don't really think I could afford a new one, do you?). That issue will contain lots of Bert Chandler, including a story not previously published, and lots of letters. Amongst recent correspondents, and possibly in the next issue: Eric Lindsay, John Berry, Susan Wood, Sheryl Birkhead, John Litchen, John Alderson, John Brosnan, Mervyn Barrett, Syd Bounds, Sandra Miesel ('You might tell George Turner his blows against the Austrian Abomination are very warmly appreciated here.'), Perry Chapdelaine, Messrs Ashby, Ashby & Ford, David Grigg, Leigh Edmonds, Robin Johnson, Shayne McCormack, Ken Sinclair, Don D'Amassa, Margot D'Aubbonnett, Joan Dick, Darrell Schweitzer, Joyce Scrivner, Paul Anderson, Mae Strelkov, Bruce Townley, Bruce Arthurs, Dave Rowe, Patrick McGuire, Ben Indick, Gregg Calkins, Harry Warner Jr and William F. Temple. Crikey! (But I'd still like to hear from you.)

May the Good Lord smile upon you and not let you pass away until the Norman Gunston Show returns to air.
(You might live forever.)

Cheers,



5 July 1975