

## PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

Number 64 : Autumn 1983

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Done for ANZAPA by John Bangsund, PO Box 80, Brunswick West, Victoria 3055, Australia. Once renowned as the regular, accurate fanzine, this issue appears six months after no.63 and I made a mistake in the second line. Have I forgotten how to type stencils? Have I nothing to write about? Does the Roneo still work? Stands the Church clock at ten to three? And is there honey still for tea?

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14 March West Brunswick is a noisy bloody place. Today is Labour Day in Victoria, and the great, colourful, rabble-pleasing Moomba Parade is at this moment happening in the heart of Melbourne. But the residents of Union Street have forgone the pleasure of throwing heavy streamers at Daryl Somers or Ossie Ostrich or whoever's starring in the big event today. They haven't even the decency to sit inside and watch the show on television. No, the residents of Union Street have decided that today they will hammer things, test engines, mow their scraggy lawns (or perhaps just take their mowers for a stroll on concrete) and converse loudly with each other and their dogs. The local unemployed hoons and yobbos who brighten our lives most nights of the week by parking their trail-bikes and dangerous cars alongside the park opposite and testing their engines, playing raucous music on their powerful Japanese stereos and yelling at each other over it all, are out there today, celebrating the Australian workingman's achievement of the eight-hour day in their own untutored dull fashion.

I give up. I've been trying to get an urgent proofreading job finished, but every time my neighbour hits his drainpipes to see whether they're still working there's an echo in my head and the words go spinning off the page. So: play some loud tinkly Mozart, put a stencil in the whirring wonder-machine, write in a large round hand 'Philosophical Gas' and comfort myself with noises of my own.

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You'll be wondering maybe about the wondermachine. So am I. Does it cut a truly fannish stencil? Is it the shape of fannish typers to come, arrived? Is it better in any respect than the shameless Selectric III, the sturdy Selectric II, the legendary Selectric I? If I live so long, and do enough proofreading to keep up the payments, I have until February 1987 to form an opinion on these weighty matters.

I don't know exactly why I came to possess an IBM Electronic 50. The fact that Sally now has a Selectric III all her own to play with explains a little. My dissatisfaction with that same machine explains a little more. But mainly it's Damien Broderick's fault. Like all top-notch sci-fi writers, Damien decided to buy one of those newfangled hi-tech typers that come with two keyboards and a TV screen, the sort that saves a busy writer's time by doing his income tax returns and cooking his dinner while he's wondering what to say next and which commands to the machine will allow him to say it. I had a bit of a play with Damien's machine and within seconds realized that as a writing instrument (not to mention source of endless innocent fun) it made the Selectric seem as useful and interesting as, say, a chisel.



But would it cut a decent stencil? For all its cathode tubery, 90mph daisy-chain printery, hummery memory and logically integrated chippery frippery, it would not. And it had its own inbuilt onboard upthere backabit cursor, which is totally unfannish. The trufan likes to do his own cursing.

So I decided reluctantly not to buy a computer, not this year. But I was ill at ease. I had not bought anything really wickedly expensive for ages, and the way the work and money was coming in I would soon run the risk of being able to clear my debts, perhaps even take a holiday. I had to do something. I worked out logically that I was not earning enough to start paying off an electronic typewriter and the sort of offset printer it would need to do its work justice. I wasn't at all sure I had time to master the alien technology of offset printing. And it even crossed my mind that my fanzine output in recent years didn't warrant new machinery of any kind, but I dismissed that irrelevancy at once. Eventually I decided that what I wanted was the sort of typewriter I lusted after ten years ago, a machine with proportional spacing and interchangeable type elements, a sort of poor man's IBM Composer. And this is it. Wheel!

There still seemed to be money left over, the Renault not having developed any serious faults since January, so I bought a Nakamichi cassette deck while I was about it. I won't say a great deal about the Nakamichi. It worked magnificently for seven days, then decided that for \$299 less trade-in it couldn't be expected to record as well as play, so it stopped recording. And erasing. It goes back to Encel's tomorrow, my knackered-michi.

The IBM 50 accepts the Selectric III's 96-character elements (which are incompatible with the earlier Selectrics' 88-character, so think hard before you get rid of your II; and if Bruce Gillespie's opinion carries weight with you, don't even think about replacing your Selectric I) and, in Australia at least, has six proportional elements. The one you are reading is called Arcadia (an egotistical little typeface, don't you think?), and it is said to be good for cutting stencils.

The other element that is said to be good for cutting stencils is this one, Modern. And that's it: two typefaces suitable for stencils. Well, we'll see about that. There's no point in having a poor man's Composer if you don't have an italic typeface, and it's absurd to have to revert to underlining (no matter how much fun it is to watch the machine doing it automatically), so I must take the plunge and experiment with the two elements considered least suitable for stencils, Boldface and Boldface Italic.

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#### AN ODD SORT OF YEAR, 1983, SO FAR

On Monday 10 January I was sitting here in this room, with the radiator on, wondering where Summer had got to. Nine weeks later, sitting here with the radiator on, I considered other wonders of our recent past. What ever happened, for example, to that predictable sort of politics we started the year with? To that haughty Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser? And that nice Leader of the Opposition Bill Hayden? As recently as 3 February they were predictably getting on with their predictable work. Then, that day, Hayden stepped aside, Fraser called a general election, and we suddenly have a Labor Government, a Prime Minister named Bob Hawke and a Leader of the Opposition named Andrew Peacock. I think I'm dreaming.



Summer in Australia means cyclones in the north and bushfires in the south. The biggest fire in Victoria started late in January up in the north-eastern corner of the state, and it is still not entirely under control. It has burnt out 2600 square kilometres of bushland along the Victoria-New South Wales border. That's about 1000 square miles, roughly the land area of Rhode Island or Oxfordshire.

The first week of February was hot — 41° on the 1st, in the high 30s for the next few days, then on the 8th 43.2° (just on 110°F) by 3pm and set to go higher, when suddenly the sky disappeared and Melbourne was overrun by the most amazing dust-storm I have ever seen. From this room I could not see beyond the house next door; from the front room I could barely make out the park over the road. The drought had come well and truly to Melbourne: countless tonnes of Mallee topsoil went whirling over and through the city, darkening and clogging everything in its path, on its way to South America.

Eight days later, 16 February, Ash Wednesday according to the calendar, all Victoria and South Australia seemed to be on fire. Seventy-two people died, over two thousand houses were destroyed.

For a few days the election campaign stopped. It didn't matter. No-one wanted an election anyway, except Malcolm Fraser. I don't know what was more depressing over the next fortnight, the stories of people who had lost everything in the fires or the grotesque spectacle of Malcolm Fraser losing an election.

Then, just when we thought it was safe to get back to everyday things like earning a living, Channel 10 spent three nights screening a film called *The Dismissal*, a re-creation of the events leading up to the dismissal of the Whitlam Government on 11 November 1975. The big question about this film was not how accurate, fair or just it was in its presentation of those events, but what on earth we would have done if Labor had not won the election.

I have a tape of Malcolm Fraser's first press conference after his appointment as caretaker Prime Minister on 11 November 1975. One of the reporters accidentally addresses him as 'Mr Whitlam', there is a burst of laughter, and Fraser says 'You'll get used to it.' I never did. He was a usurper, an opportunist interested only in gaining and retaining power, and he did it by any means at his disposal. Conceding defeat early on Sunday morning, 6 March, he insisted that he was entirely to blame, and in the next breath said he was standing down as leader of the Liberal Party. He has not attended the party's meetings since, and it is understood that he will be resigning his seat in Parliament. It was all meant to be very noble; it came over as utterly miserable, pathetic. The best irony of the whole affair was the Governor-General's request that he stay on as caretaker Prime Minister until the Hawke Ministry could be sworn in, and that took place last Friday, 11 March.

Of course I am delighted that Labor is in office, but I have nothing like the elation so many of us felt in December 1972. My main feeling is that Australia has wasted seven years. Partly because of that, perhaps even mainly because of that, I feel that I have wasted seven years. But that's another story, and much too complex to bear thinking about just now.



## JEFFERSON BRICK OF THE ROWDY

### and other quandaries

28 March The main quandary is what to do when the ANZAPA deadline is thirteen days away, you need five pages in the mailing to remain a member, and you have no time whatsoever to type stencils. The Victorian Institute of Secondary Education, Oxford University Press and Heinemann Australia say I have no time to type stencils; the Macmillan Company of Australia insists I have none. I mentioned this little problem to John Foyster — 'Looks as though I'll be out of ANZAPA this time,' was the way I put it — and his solution was simple: 'About time. Do you good.' Or words to that effect.

I should have reminded him of a night when I said 'But you won't be dropping out of FAPA,' and he said 'Oh, no, some things are sacred.' And he didn't, not that time anyway.

I could write a few pages about how busy I am. That's always fun to read. Or I could find the last few mailings and write some mailing comments. That's fun, too. Loved that bit about backing into the car over the road, Leanne. And what's Adelaide like now the Liberals are in, Paul? Good luck in Canberra, Leigh and Val! Great to see you back in ANZAPA, Gary.

Instead, I'm looking at a notebook that I seem to have started about December 1980, and wondering what some of those notes are about.

Not too many pages into this notebook there is the cryptic note 'Jefferson Brick of the Rowdy'. That seems a good place to start.

The note is there because this is a notebook I was using at Telecom, and one day David Grigg found a reference somewhere to Jefferson Brick of the Rowdy, and I jotted it down because in some perverse way the name appealed to me. Long since then, I have no doubt, David has discovered that Mr Jefferson Brick, 'a very weak, pale young man', was the war correspondent of the *New York Rowdy Journal* in Charles Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* (see page 207 in the Standard Edition). Maybe even he knew all the time.

Now, that is a book of Dickens's that I do not possess and have never read, one of a good many that could be described in those same words. It is a serious lack in my education and general cultural awareness that I have read so little of the works of Dickens. If I didn't have these stencils to type for ANZAPA I'd knuckle down this instant to reading the boring old fart. Then the moment anyone mentioned, say, Mr Lillyvick, in a flash I'd say 'Oh, yes! gosh, eh! Uncle of Mrs Kenwigs, a collector of water rates, right? Married Miss Petowker, who left him and took off with a half-pay captain. Jolly sad. *Sketches by Boz* — no! I lie! — *Nicholas Nickleby*! Page 128 in the Standard Edition, as I recall. Great stuff. Don't write water-rate collectors like that any more, do they, eh?'

The only thing I've ever found odd about David Grigg is his absurd liking for Charles Dickens. I put it down to the fact that he hasn't been in fandom long enough to realize that you have to be at least Harry Warner's age, and preferably George Turner's, to like Dickens enough to read him.

Were you reading *Martin Chuzzlewit* when you found that reference to Jefferson Brick of the Rowdy, David? Or was it in one of those odd journals we found at the Royal Society? I should document my notes more carefully.



Also I shouldn't have so many notebooks. I was about to rush right on and ask David and Marc and anyone else interested a very profound question arising from my reading of *The Wasp in a Wig*, the 'suppressed' episode of *Through the Looking-Glass*, but the note is elsewhere, and rereading the episode doesn't bring it back to mind. Worryity, worryity!

Here's a note dated 9 January 1981: 'Ask David Grigg about the gas-fired microphone and cosmic inflation.' Maybe I'll save that one up for a convention panel. 'Tell us, David,' I'll say, in front of maybe 3000 people, 'about the gas-fired microphone and cosmic inflation.' 'Certainly, John,' he'll say, producing a copy of his contribution to the June 1983 ANZAPA mailing, 'I just happen to have a few notes here in fact.'

It seems to me that we used to talk about some odd things there at Telecom. It certainly wasn't all computers and Shakespeare, Leanne. Though a fair bit of it was. And Dickens, of course. And Charles Todd.

'Without my tea', Todd was fond of saying, 'I should be odd.' Telecommunication has come a long way since Charles Todd.

Undated idea for a Keats and Chapman story: 'Best be the blind that ties!' More work needed there.

Quotes from the *Northcote Leader*, 4 February. 'One of the disabled's major hurdles was steps outside shops.' 'Most disabled never learned how to stand up for themselves.' 'And the harsh government benefits system was further crippling many disabled.' Is it possible that the only reference book young journalists ever use is Roget? Or is it just that they're all in too much of a hurry, and all have tin ears?

The Age, 10 February: 'doleful unemployment figures'.

Another unwritten Keats and Chapman story, 15 June. K and C are somewhere in Europe, maybe Paris, not long after the war (presumably), and they have a job acting as guide for someone named Watteau, as they explain to someone. 'We're guiding for Watteau.' An Irish playwright sitting near by suddenly started scribbling furiously on his serviette.

Flying saucers aren't my cup of tea.

I'm buying a watch on time payment.

Mary Keenan, a Surrey Hills accountant and tax agent, separates her work into 'concentrated' and 'fiddly'.

In September 1981 I was reading Scott's *Life of Matthew Flinders*. (A few months later I sold it. If you ever come across a copy for less than \$50, please let me know.) Page 175: 'The history of maritime discovery is strewn with rotten ships.'

9 January 1982: Sally says her sore throat is a pain in the neck.

The Age, 3 May: 'The Antarctic Treaty froze territorial claims in the continent in 1959.'

24 November: Max Harris refers to Daniel Bunce as 'an old rake of a gardener'.

14 January 1983: Sylvia Lawson, in *The Archibald Paradox*, quotes Raymond Williams: 'There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses.'



Well, so much for that notebokk. (And it's goodnight from hikm.) Here's one I started in Hobart in April 1979. What fun! Somewhere out in the garage I have my notebooks from theological college, 1957-58. Them was days, Joxer! Trouble is the funniest bits are in Greek. Never mind.

Radio news broadcast, Hobart: 'A cut-price beer war is brewing in Hobart!'

On the same page I note that I paid \$1.00 for *The Best of A.J. Liebling* (hard covers, dj, fine copy), and that I am almost up to 13 stone. How awful! There are times when I wonder how I could have weighed so little and lived. Old-timers who recall Lindsay Cox, ace cover artist for *ASFR* and *Scythrop*, may be interested to know that he's alive and well, married, with daughter (son? something like that), at 22 Lawson Street, Sunbury 3429 (744 4971). He's Telecom technician in charge of numbers beginning with 380 and 387, and (to cut a longish story short) that's how he came back into my life a few weeks ago. Lindsay got up to 19 stone a year or so ago, and is now down to something like my delicate mass. Only he's taller than me, so he looks better. And he doesn't drink. The hell with it. Some are born fat, some have fatness thrust upon them, and some eat peanuts and drink rough white while they're typing stencils.

In Hobart I found a book I never expected to see, let alone own, George Jacob Holyoake's *Sixty Years of an Agitator's Life*. Holyoake may have been a relation of mine; my genial genealogical cousin thinks it's likely, I'm not so sure, since our family name is Holyoak, and Cousin Bill (McGowan: I'm probably related to you, too, Christine) hasn't established to my satisfaction that the Australian lot were so illiterate that they dropped their ease and never noticed or cared. Be that as it may, G. J. Holyoake is important in the history of Chartism and the Labour movement, and celebrated as the last person to be convicted of blasphemy, and jailed for it, in England. John Osborne wrote a play about him, *A Subject of Scandal and Concern*. I would like to have him as an ancestor. I wrote down a few things from his autobiography in this noteboko. (At first I thought it was the influence of those peanuts. Now I'm convinced that I have digital dyslexia. At my age! Life is cruel sometimes.)

'Despite the brave homilies on virtue which abound, this is a world in which a man may be too good, and become an object of distrust by those who never lay themselves open to this suspicion. The most misgiving reader need not be afraid of the present writer. He is not too good.'

'there is a fatty degeneration of the understanding in well-fed Liberals'

'two qualities which seldom go together — advocacy and organization'

28 April: A party at Derrick and Christine's. I am cross about my drinking. Was that the party, D and C, when Foyster organized the Ducks versus Trains downhill concrete race? (Foyster doesn't drink either. You don't have to drink to be a nutter, or overweight, or both. Maybe it's the smoking.)

'what little I know best I had mostly learned myself: and as I had enthusiasm in describing the stages through which my own dulness had passed, I acquired confidence, and imparted it' (Holyoake, p.71)

Yeah, but Dickens wrote better. And speaking of music, as I must before I leave, here's a quote from the August 1979 *Gramophone*: 'It seems unlikely that a work as demanding as the Fourth would be recorded from scratch...' Groovy! Good night, all.