



## PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

*The Journal of User-Definable  
Pantopraxistics*

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26 October With my ten limp American dollars I sent a sad little covering note to Robert Lichtman about *Philosophical Gas* 79, printed in April but not yet seen by FAPA, this computer, languishing in hospital with a dendritic disorder, and a gap in my teeth. A few days later the computer is bursting with rude health, I can pronounce tall words with a single breath, and a small grant from the Adams Foundation enables me to send you PG79. The temperature in Melbourne this day is expected to reach 30°, I am wearing shorts for the first time since last summer: what better way to celebrate this pleasant concatenation than to stay indoors, stooped over a cool keyboard, writing about my teeth?

### IN THE GUMS OF A MUMBLING GALE

is the title of an essay I started writing in 1976 that so far has not proceeded beyond the second page. I have many similar works in progress, but few titles of that quality, so I'll use it here before I forget it.

Dylan turned 16 a few weeks ago. Do you remember Dylan — the only Australian cat mentioned by name in the fiftieth anniversary issue of *Amazing Science Fiction* (June 1976, page 129)? Dylan is also probably the only Australian cat who has met Ursula Le Guin, Susan Wood, Mike Glicksohn, John D. Berry, Terry Hughes, Bill Rotsler, Bob Tucker, Bob Bloch, Chris Priest, Terry Carr, Vonda McIntyre, Don Fitch, Fred Patten, Sheryl Birkhead, Jerry Kaufman, Grace and Don Lundry, Art Widner (he greeted Art very warmly), Bert Chandler, George Turner and Gerald Murnane. Imagine what he would be worth if

he had been autographed! Enough perhaps to pay his dental bills. Last week he broke a tooth — I think it's correctly described as a canine, but I'll call it his top left fang. Off to the vet to complete the extraction, \$187, *ding!* thank you, have a nice day. So far so bad. During dinner that night one of my teeth fell out, not a real tooth, only porcelain, but not just any tooth: I think it's correctly described as my top left canine. Dylan is a cat who demands no less than total sympathy, but this is ridiculous.

On Monday I went to Ron's computer shop and collected Number Two Computer (this one: a 386SX-16 clone made by Mr Chia in far-off Taiwan, with 2Mb RAM, 44Mb HDD, 360kb/1.2Mb and 720kb/1.44Mb FDD; Sally has inherited Number One Computer, the Epson XT) and proceeded down High Street, Thornbury, to Mr Knowles' dental repair shop. I said very little to Mr Knowles, or to anyone else for the next twenty-four hours. Ron was an exception. I rang Ron and said 'Ipf nop worping!' 'It was working OK for me,' Ron said, and pressed me for detail, which I preferred not to go into. I took the computer back.

Sans computer, sans teeth . . . I felt bloody miserable, and made little secret of it. I even hinted at my feelings in a note to Robert Lichtman, who as far as I know is a gentleman in every respect and has certainly never done anything to me to warrant such treatment for which I apologize.

Mr Knowles charged me \$25 for his work, a trifle for such a boon: I would gladly have given him a valuable autographed cat for his trouble. Ron brought the computer back, along with his colleague Manny, who said there was nothing wrong with it. They set it up. It didn't work. Humidity was mentioned, along with the source of power, ghosts and other theological concepts. They took it away. Two hours later Ron brought it back again: Manny's brother Danny had found a propensity to intermittent synaptic reluctance in a bit of wire between the widget and the wadget. The computer was fixed. It performed all of its basic advertised functions with gusto. I offered Ron a cat, but he's given them up. I farewelled him and went in to dinner, real dinner, the kind of dinner you have with teeth. I felt oddly content. I felt like a drink, but I've given it up.

'You're drinking!' Geraldine Corridon said last night at the Society of Editors' twentieth anniversary meeting. Her dismay was understandable: Geraldine is a wonderfully sympathetic listener, and I have spent too much of her time lately talking about not drinking. I felt I had let her down. I may attempt to explain at the committee meeting next Monday. She may not wish to listen.

I gave up drinking on the first day of September. To satisfy myself that I really had given up, on 11 October I had a 1987 Tolley's Gewürztraminer. I didn't like it as much as I used to, and my liver complained about it next day, so that tended to confirm my belief that I have given up drinking. On my way to the meeting last night at least two thoughts



crossed my mind: that I had not consciously decided to drink at the meeting, but had forgotten to bring mineral water with me, and therefore would drink at the meeting; and that it would be ironic if I were pulled up by police for a breath test after almost two months of abstinence.

It was a great meeting, and I enjoyed the 1988 Garafoli Verdicchio. On the way home I was pulled up by police for a breath test, my first, as I mentioned to the officer. He said nothing and waved me on. 'What was the reading?' I asked him. 'Oh, nothing really,' he said. Scientific proof that I have given up drinking!

## POEMS AND THINGS

The first comment on PG79 came from my niece Juliette Kirsten, age 14. One of the 'poems' doesn't make sense, she said; there's a line missing. Oh, the ignominy of it! Not that it makes much sense *with* the line, but it was meant to be the definitive version. So:

### ERRATUM

**For:** Thelma Mina Fretta Opsy Celia Jess  
Hilda Mina Ada Anna Wanda Lou  
Ita Mina Katty Livia Delia Poll  
Ruth Thelma Ada Livia Zulma Vela  
Yva Queenie Ita Ruth Lou Jess

**Read:** Thelma Mina Fretta Opsy Celia Jess  
Hilda Mina Ada Anna Wanda Lou  
Ita Mina Katty Livia Delia Poll  
Ruth Thelma Ada Livia Zulma Vela  
Thelma Trix Katty Gilda Plurabelle Lou  
Yva Queenie Ita Ruth Lou Jess

Well, I went to the Annual General Meeting of The Society of Editors (Victoria), and I volunteered to do the newsletter. I'm enjoying it. I wrote an account of the meeting, and it went rather like this:

It was a drak and stromy, cold as brass, and the clocks were striking 18 as the boss and I walked up Grattan Street to the Asti. All I really need to know, I said, I learnt at the Editors' AGM. Keep low, stay sober, don't volunteer. You skipped kindergarten too? she said. Oh yes, I said, the day I turned 3 I was out doing paper rounds. I don't believe you, she said, And you watch yourself, JB, or you could end up on the *committeee*. Yes, ma'am, I said, but I knew I'd gone too far before we even walked into that room. The roar of blue biros, the smell of the crowd — how it all comes back! Not that there was much of a crowd when Jenny and I arrived — just *Maitre D* and us, in fact — but it wasn't long before the place was swinging, and I felt at home, dammit.

The AGM followed the accustomed routine: lots to eat and drink, Colin Jevons taps glass, President rises and welcomes everyone, committee members deliver reports, President delivers report, committee stands down, Vane Lindesay assumes chair, new President elected, new committee elected, everyone goes home. This year Basil Walby introduced some general business. He had been present at the RMIT School of Journalism's graduation ceremony and noticed that

exceedingly valuable prizes were being handed out to people who topped their classes — except in the Editing course. Since our Society got this course going and takes much pride in it, Basil suggested that we go a step further and establish some kind of, well, you know, not the sort of thing that the multinationals can afford, prize. His motion to this effect was endorsed unanimously, and I can report that the committee has since allocated \$250 for this purpose.

When it came to electing a new President, some fool with a sense of history exceeded only by his odd sense of humor and lack of decorum nominated Barbara Burton, who graciously declined, and Janet Mau was elected unanimously. . . . At the committee meeting on the following Monday specific tasks were given to the new committee members, and in line with ancient tradition, the key posts of Secretary and Treasurer were given to absent members — Michelle (in Paris at the time) and Geraldine (in Mexico).

Ruth Siems, on behalf of the assembled and absent members of the Society, moved that the outgoing committee be thanked for their work, and this was passed with unconfined acclaim.

You blew it, JB, someone said. Yeah, back to the paper rounds, I said. Anything left in that bottle?

One of the things I am enjoying about doing the newsletter this time round is making contact with people in the editing trade overseas. I couldn't resist writing to Edvard Aslaksen in Oslo, for example. He is president of the International Association of Scholarly Publishers, and its newsletter editor. He sent me a stack of his newsletters, and they are full of news, wickedly funny in places, a joy to read. And it's good to be in touch again with the Freelance Editors' Association of Canada. John Ricker, in Vancouver, does their newsletter; like Edvard, he has the knack of being serious without being grave.

Through *Publishers Weekly*, in whose columns she has lately had a running battle with Florence King ('an equal-opportunity provocateuse with a bad word for everybody', especially editors), I met Lillian Rodberg, of Emmaus, PA. Lillian confirms that there seems to be no organization in the USA like our Society of Editors, and says that in moments of madness she has often considered founding one. I had asked her what organizations American editors might join, and the four she belongs to (two of them not primarily for editors) I knew about: Council of Biology Editors, Editorial Freelancers Association (New York), Medical Writers Association, Society of Indexers.

All Fapans are editors by avocation, but I don't know whether any of you (apart from Bruce Gillespie) are editors by trade — publishers' editors, journal editors, copy editors, people who earn a living from working with other people's words. If you are one, or if you can tell me about organizations that editors might join where *you* live, I'd love to hear from you.

Now, Arthur, we were talking about WordPerfect 5.1. It comes up well on a LaserJet, doesn't it?