

SOUFFLE

This is SOUFFLE No. 4, edited by John Baxter, Box 39, King Street Post Office, Sydney, NSW, AUSTRALIA, and intended for the 35th OMPA mailing, March 1963. Typed 24th February, 1963. Duplicated and published through the kind offices of Ken Cheslin, 18 New Farm Rd., Stourbridge, Wores., ENGLAND. A VANTY PUB.

paraFANalia. (Burn) Your work still doesn't turn me on, Bruce. Undoubtedly you have a considerable talent, but to my mind it needs a lot of shaping and apparently you aren't prepared to do anything about this. A pity.// Best part of the 'zine was Mervyn Barrett's letters, which read all the better for not having been intended for publication. One point - Merv does Merie and I an injustice when he says such harsh things about my visit to Melbourne. It isn't that Merie doesn't like crowds and lewd music and public pornography presentations - what sort of a wife would she make if this were true? - it's just that, after weeks of planning and packing and frantic celebration, we were too tired to do anything but sit and stare at the walls. It used up even the last reserves of my stamina to make it to Merv's party - Merie would never have made it past the Harding's front door-step. Next time we visit Melbourne, I'll make a point of taking Merv's flat apart just to prove that the old zing is still there.// Your "Commercial Traveller" thing would have been marvellous had it ended at the bottom of the first page. The tacked-on ending just killed the whole point.

SIZAR. (Burn). "The sf story that used singing to scare aliens" was probably John Rackham's BLINK in NEW WORLDS recently. As I recall, high sonic notes disintegrated them. All quite ridiculous.// I understand that the CND emblem is based on a semaphore diagram. Perhaps it is a composite of the semaphore positions for "C", "N" & "D"?

ENVOY 10. (Cheslin). If all the sf fans were transported to an isolated area and left there to work out their own salvation, I'm afraid the result would be something like Robert Sheckley's OMEGA; a strictly stratified caste-conscious society where day-to-day living was at best a risky business.// Your remark about how your attention wanders was hilarious - it deserves reprinting where more people could see it.// "The psychological results of submitting to anaesthetics".....reminds me of a sick story I read some years ago. You may remember it. A man is put under hypnosis and then tortured. He feels nothing, and wakes up perfectly well. But a post-hypnotic suggestion has been implanted in his mind, and when a certain key word is spoken, he immediately feels all the pain of that torture, fed back from where it has been stored by the memory cells. It's not impossible that this might happen naturally in the right circumstances, now that anaesthetics are becoming more complex and their effects further-reaching. Makes you suspect even the humble novocaine needle, doesn't it?

WHATSIT 2. (Cheslin). Are you sure these hand-painted covers are worth the trouble? If you insist on using water-colour, why not stick with patterns and abstracts that benefit from the use of bright shades? The work seems wasted on cartoons.

VAGARY 17. (Gray). Fair catch on the cover. I didn't spot the error or even get within a yard of it. However, brainy Phil, my brother, picked it in a minute, so the honour of the family has been upheld.// To my mind, your attacks on realism and modernism in art would have been considerably improved had you put them aside and thought about your arguments for a few weeks. I can't believe that you would have written all this if you had had the opportunity to look it over before publication. Just skimming through, I find clinkers like "literature has joined the cult of ugliness" and a tirade against realism in literature that makes itself ridiculous by virtue of its complete lack of supporting argument. Whatever gave you the idea that only contemporary fiction has dealt with ugliness? Surely you won't say that Dickens' novels weren't concerned with ugliness? OLIVER TWIST, BLEAK HOUSE, GREAT EXPECTATIONS...these are among the most scarifying and ugly novels in the English language. They deal with the dregs of society, they prod and pry among the debris of human society and turn up the most deformed inhabitants of the garbage tip as examples of what can happen in a civilization with rotten moral values. No Osborne or Barstow or Sillitoe or Algren could hope to equal Dickens as a scourge of sick society. And you carp about unsavoury stories! I suggest you either brush up on your novels of the 19th and 20th century or stick with the comic romances.// Exactly the same criticisms apply to your remarks on modern theatre. "Fans don't flock to the modern theatre" for exactly the same reason that ULYSSES wasn't a best seller when it was published and Robert Graves does not write poetry for John 'O Londong - because great art is always difficult and the ordinary public is not interested in complexity. They want soft sweet irrelevancies like MY FAIR LADY and THE MOUSETRAP. It may astonish you to know that there is a definite and powerful following for modern theatre, as there has always been. Although you can't see it happening, modern play-wrights like Beckett, Anouilh, Ionesco, Genet, Gelber, Wesker, Pinter et al are being listened to and appreciated all over the world by perceptive audiences whose opinions far exceed yours in intelligence and depth. Their work is being evaluated and absorbed into the body of art just as other avant garde drama by Ibsen, Shaw and Williams was evaluated and absorbed earlier in this century. One day, plays like THE BLACKS, THE DUMB WAITER and THE CHAIRS will be as common-place in dramatic circles as NUDE WITH VIOLIN and THE CHERRY ORCHARD are now. It is one of the few heartening things about the world of art that, in the end, real quality always triumphs over mere popularity.// TALKING POINT leaves itself open to all the criticisms I've applied previously, as is to be expected. You are using weak inconsistent standards to judge things of which you have no knowledge or experience. Do you have a background in architecture or engineering? Are you entitled to express an opinion on, say, Coventry Cathedral? How would you compare this work with the Ronchamp chapel of Le Corbusier? Do you feel a more rigid use of modulator theory would have improved the cathedral's construction? Can you give me the relevant stress figures in connection with the use of masonry with a comparison with those for natural stone so as to back up your statement that "beautiful building stone" should have been used in the construction? When you can, you will be in a position to discuss the matter. Until then, I think you would be wisest to keep quiet.

VAGARY. (continued) Your quote from Keats is ridiculous in this particular context, not because the poem is faulty but because you have used it to bolster a premise the poet himself would never have agreed with. Keats was no stranger to the shadier sides of the human soul. He knew more keenly than any ordinary man that the issues of art and life were more complex than any one person can understand. As witness.....

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful death,
Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain.....

Is this the poem of some fuzzy-thinking dilettante who is more interested in abstract considerations of art and aesthetics than real human feelings? I think not. You would have been closer to Keats' real views had you quoted from ODE ON A GRECIAN URN.

Beauty is Truth - Truth Beauty - that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

When you can define positively what truth is, then you will be in a position to generalise about beauty. Until then, I suggest, as before, that you keep quiet.

PACKRAT. ((Groves). I'd like to hear the reasoning that led up to your condemnation of LOKITA. Was this an especially "important plot"? I'm not sure I see why. Surely a novel perversion in a decidedly atypical person is not exactly something that holds a message for the whole world. As for "poetic twaddle", I would give my right arm to write twaddle like that. Nabokov is a supreme stylist, and one of the greatest writers working today. // This discussion of immigration v. birth control has wandered a long way from its origin. As I recall, the original discussion had something to do with the American tradition for energy. There was a theory that the Americans were more energetic because they came from stock which had more than its normal share of drive, as witness their emigration.....I don't remember any of it very clearly and I'm not going to unearth old mailings to follow it up. But concerning your present point; I won't quibble with your figures concerning population, although by failing to take into account the fact that, with immigration going on, the population is continually decreasing, you invalidate everything you say. Every few thousand people leaving earth means a drop in the birth potential of the race. After a few hundred thousand had been moved, perhaps the picture would change radically. // Thalidomide and euthanasia: I'm definitely for mercy killing. Certainly there are arguments against the practice, not the least of which is that thousands of the world's most brilliant men and women have been deformed or unhealthy in some serious way. However, I think there is some point at which we should stop interfering with nature and let the world go on as it was meant to. By killing the deformed and the maimed, perhaps we do lose another Beethoven, Einstein or Picasso. But on the other hand, by keeping them alive, we incorporate the damaged genes into the race's stock and thus weaken future generations in a way that may deprive us of the ability and the will to listen to music or see art or understand physics.

PACKRAT. (continued) As for the cripples caused through factors other than genetic - the thalidomide babies, for instance - by letting them live, we create a precedent that ensures all deformed children will live in future. The unpopularity of euthanasia for the aged has left most countries with a severe social problem and has resulted in crippling effects on most organisations, where age is generally regarded as an acceptable substitute for ability. The rejection of euthanasia for the deformed would have much further-reaching effects. I don't say that it is a good or a pleasant thing to kill off those ill-fitted to survive, but surely there is some point at which we are prepared to think of the future of the face rather than our own emotions.

CONVERSATION 19. (Hickman.) Willick back again? Oh, hell - I thought he had "hung up his beanie", to use his own quaint phrase. I used to like George, and I still think he is one of the worst-treated and least-understood men who has ever passed through fandom. But I wish he would go away, instead of hanging around creating a disturbance over nothing. This business about big bad pros is just so much nonsense. Of course pros dislike some fans, just as editors dislike amateur writers who won't take the trouble to learn their trade, as hot-rodders dislike motor-cycle gangs, as surfers dislike gremlins, as physicists dislike smart-aleck undergrads. This is the traditional and natural dislike of the shamateur by the professional. The supposition, based on this, that all sf pros are bastards who would sell their wives for 5¢ a leg is just plain ridiculous, not to mention insulting. Hundreds of fans, prominent and almost unknown, will be glad to tell you of their pleasant contacts with professional writers, and of the help and encouragement they have been given by them. Speaking personally, I have learned an immense amount through my contact with Ted Carnell, Brian Aldiss, Lee Harding, Jim Blish and other professional writers and editors. There has never been any hint of this alleged antipathy between pro and amateur, and I'm sure this is not due to any superior intelligence on my part. It is merely a matter of treating the professional with the consideration and deference he deserves, and discussing with him the things you are qualified to discuss. I see no earthly reason why some pro should feel well disposed towards a fan who has consistently told him how to write, or hounded him from room to room at a convention with talk that bores him. If he wants the society of his own kind, why shouldn't he be entitled to it? It's no less than a fan expects at a gathering of other fans. If he wants to ignore John J. Neo, editor of a five-page Nefferzine, aged 12, and instead talk to Dick Bergeron or Walt Willis, I doubt that anybody would think to forbid him. Yet for some reason, professional writers and editors are supposed to keep an open ear available for every fan who comes along with a beef to air. All the pro writer is required to do is write professionally. Fans have a simple method of expressing their dislike of the man's work or his character - they need only stop buying his stories. He has no duty whatsoever towards fandom - Willick's contention that pros owe their lives to fans because fandom has made them famous is so ridiculous that it needs no refutation. All fandom ever did for a pro writer was give him ulcers.// Rackham's nudes in this issue are the most "mechanical" I've ever seen. Doesn't the man have any sense of humour?// Old Frothingslosh is the best brand-name I've ever heard. Jack Daniels Black Label sour mash etc etc sounds a bit odd. I drink Johnny Walker Red Label myself.

CONVERSATION 20. (Hickman). I thought Warner's story was a bit feeble myself, like a sermon that the speaker couldn't really get interested in. Also, I distrust the sort of soggy philosophy that motivates stories like this - love your neighbour and we're halfway to paradise etc etc. If only it were that easy. Incidentally, has anybody read AFRICAN GENESIS? If so, I'd be interested to hear comments.

ERG 14. (Jeeves). Welcome to the John Rackham International Correspondence Club, Terry. All you require for membership is an objectionable letter from John Phillifent/Rackham. There are thousands of members. I expect I'm a founder-member. Like to see my letter? The one that ends "as a science fiction writer, drop dead! Sincerely, John."? The "Sincerely" is a nice touch, don't you think?

AMBLE 12. (Mercer). Jury service is not quite so autocratic, you know. After all, you are paid for serving, although admittedly the rate is somewhat less than the basic wage. As for "being at the disposal of The Machine", surely it's more a matter of doing your bit to support the democratic system. By your reasoning, voting would be an imposition too, as would most other ordinary civic duties.// Jim Cawthorn's Freud was marvellous. Do you know The Ballad Of Sigmund Freud? The one that begins "It started in Vienna not too many years ago// When not enough folks were getting sick"?// I'm not so sure that the formation of a European Common Market is "a valid step in the creation of a united world". Look at the repercussions if Britain eventually gets into the Market. Australia and New Zealand lose most of their European markets. Forced to sell their goods somewhere, they turn to the Near East and Pacific Islands. They form their own common market with Japan, Indonesia and other Eastern nations. The result is yet another political and economic bloc fighting for power. If anything, this would mean a step backwards rather than forwards.

UL. (Metcalf) Was it worth it, just for one page, Norm?

BINARY 11. (Patrizio). Speaking of sf movies, has Losey's THE DAMNED been released over there yet? Last I heard, it was still banned, presumably because it tends to glorify the Teds. Some of the early scenes, where a gang of jds use one of their girls to lure a tourist into an alley and then beat him up, all to the tune of a chanted "Black Leather Jacket - kill, kill, kill. Black Leather Jacket - crush crush crush", are a bit extreme.

BIXEL 2. (Rogers) Much enjoyed, Alva, but no comment. You exhibit all the signs of the mature reasoning fan, one of the most noticeable of which is a tendency to avoid contentious comments. This makes for good reading, but ruins one's mailing comments.

MORPH 29. (Roles). Your remarks about popular music seemed very sound. If only some people would really listen to the stuff, they might be pleasantly surprised. It's banal, of course, but at least it is lively and energetic, facts for which we should be grateful. By the way, what do you think of the bossa nova? That sophisticated rhythmic pattern is making some of the rockers look ridiculous.

SCOTTISHE 30. (Lindsay).

SF - A Proposition.

How comforting to drift along and say
That these things just don't count;
To ramble on about "a dream unfurled",
Or say that sf is a fount
Of blazing concepts, bright as jewels,
And turn your eyes from style and taste
And sense and depth, as if but toys for fools.

You wallow there like a slow sodden whale,
Feeding from the stream.
Each pale soft slug-like tale you chew
And, sated, lapse into a troubled dream
Where fantasies, like belches ripe,
Rumble through your tangled guts
And shake your squalid flesh into false life.

Too lazy and too dull to look around,
Your fallow mind invents
Bright childish fairy-tales to pass the time.
And so, without regard for sense,
Adventures wild and battles royal
Entertain your empty days
And take your mind from thoughts of mundane toil.

Yet all the time, before your stupid stare,
The world is burning free.
In thrusting duel, wit meets bladed wit;
A rich word-woven filigree
Challenges the questing mind,
And men of clear unclouded eye
Discover joys that dreamers never find.

John Baxter.

After vainly scanning Brian's poem for some hours, attempting to work out the rhyme scheme, I'm convinced that his best verse is that written in the following style.

There was an old man In December
Who said 'I can hardly remember
How the girls in July
Used to kiss me and tie
Knots in my tumescent member!.

The first four lines come from Brian's COMIC INFERNO in the February '63 GALAXY - the last is my guess as to the ending. Anybody got a better one?



ENGINE OF DESTRUCTION

by

Ken Cheslin.

Little did I think, at the time I successfully concluded the Black Rain case for the railway, that I would ever again enter into their employ. Ah, but even as I terminated that affair the fates were conspiring to bring about that very condition.

The first I knew of the case was when, one evening in the early spring of '64, I had a visitor. After the formalities were finished with, ie;- I had ascertained that it was a potential client, not the bailiffs,- the visitor came straight to the point.

"The first thing I require", he said, "is your assurance that the information I am about to give you will remain confidential, at least until this affair is terminated one way or the other". "You have my word" says I. "You have my cheque". he countered. Touche!

"Anyway, upon the recommendation of a certain Very High Official, and because the railway Police, the CID and MI 5 won't touch the case, I have come to you; as a last resort."

I relit my hubble-bubble and signed to him to continue.

"The facts of the case are rather singular. They are these; The tracks of the Midland Region of British Railways have on them a certain train, or rather, an Engine". I nodded, nothing unusual so far, plenty of trains He went on, his voice became confidential, "It is not one of ours!".

"A pirate" I exclaimed. "Shut up, I haven't finished" he replied. "This Engine is currently engaged in nefarious activities, to wit, it steals Scotch Whiskey tankers". I pricked up my ears, "Shows rather good taste what?" I observed. "Never mind that, we want you to put an end to its activities. Capture it, blow it up. We don't care. It must be stopped!"

"I can see" I said, "that this unusual vehicle could be a source of embarrassment to the railway. But tell me, has not the railway attempted to halt its depredations?"

"We have that, but it will not stop even when we barricade the lines" "Good Lord, you mean it crashes through the barriers" I asked, agast. He became even more confidential. He lean't forward. "Worse than that" he whispered, "it passes through them. Mr Cheslin, this particular Engine is.....a Ghost Train".

Abstractedly I spat out the fragmented stem of the hubble-bubble. "In that case, my dear sir, I suggest you consult the Society for Phycic Research, I'm afraid I will be unable to help you. The door is over there", I hinted.

"May I remind you", he said bleakly, "that you have already accepted my cheque...No, no, I refuse it, you keep it Mr Cheslin. I fear I must remind you that the penalties in a case like this, conspiring to defraud the railways, are severe, very severe." "But, but..." I p protested, in vain.

"From today you have exactly seven days to deal with the Engine", he said from the door.

"Oh woe is me!"...Well, there was nothing else for it then, I'd just have to manage the best I could.

The first thing I did was to consult Bobbie Gray, as being the only authority on the occult I knew of. The results were, not exactly dissapointing. She found out that the Engine was no true ghost in the accepted sense of the word. I nodded glumly and prepared to take my leave. She spoke again, museingly, "You know, it sounds more like some weird fannish invention run wild". Then an idea struck me. "Oho, Cheslin", she says, "what means the cunning expression you are wearing, you've thought of something eh?". "Verilly, gentle lady" I replied, "and if your dear husband was a shade less than nine feet tall I believe I might kiss you. However, there may be nothing in my idea, rest assured that if things pan out you will be amongst the first to know" so saying I took my leave.

Once back in the car I consulted my map of Cheltenham... "Hmm, weird fannish invention". I muttered.

Half an hour later I stood at the door of a certain house in the...suburbs?, suburbs of Cheltenham. I rang the bell. The door was answered by a fan of my acquaintance, who I straightaway fixed with a beady eye. "I would be happy" I said, "to have a few words with you, concerning a certain Engine of a ghostly nature currently loose upon the tracks of British Railways, Midlan Region".

He paled. I was right. "OK", he says, "you'd better come in, I'll tell you how it happened". And he did.

It all started when Eric, ie;- Eric Jones - won the spirit duplicator at the '63 convention, in a raffle. Realising that the thing was an abomination it the sight of all true British fans he decided to see if he could make something useful out of it. He did, he succeeded only too well.

He speculated that perhaps a railway engine might be made to run, powered by the spirit duplicator, more efficiently and cheaply than the deisel or coal fueled ones. It did.

Where he got the engine I didn't enquire, but after many hours of experimentation he finally had the thing running. "It was all right until the weekend the Liverpool Gang came down", he said morosely, "then, like a fool, I allowed Norman Shorrocks to mix the fuel". He paused reflectively. "The damn thing gave a blast on its whistle then, like a horse breaking its traces, it reared up, sort of, and belted away down the track. That's the last I ever saw of it, although I have heard the rumours."

"OK", I said, in my best Goon Bleary accent, "you made the thing, how do you stop it?"

"Ah, well, that is not too difficult, all you have to do is get water into the boiler, everyone knows that whisley is ruined by water".

"Yes, yes, but how do I catch it".

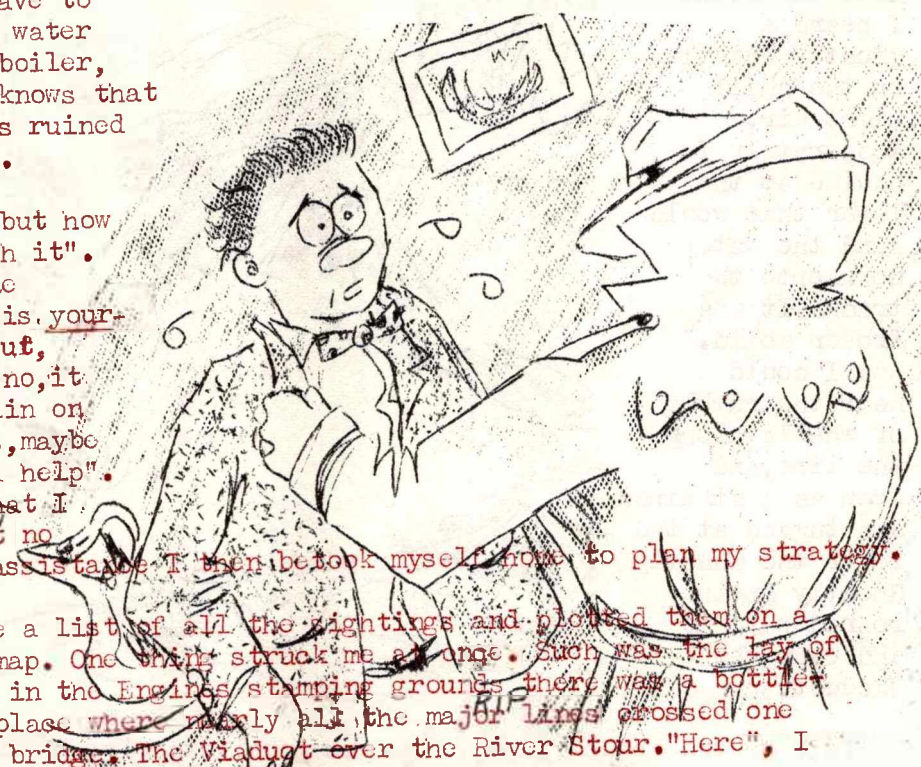
"That", he replied, "is your problem. But, ghost or no, it must remain on the rails, maybe that will help".

Seeing that I could get no further assistance I then betook myself home to plan my strategy.

I made a list of all the rightings and plotted them on a railway map. One thing struck me at once. Such was the lay of the land in the Engines stamping grounds there was a bottleneck, a place where nearly all the major lines crossed one solitary bridge, the Viaduct over the River Stour. "Here", I thought, "I will lay my ambush."

By the evening of the sixth day all was in readiness. Putting away the vision of myself being conducted Old Bailywards by 17 burly Railway Police (nappily whistling "Z CARS") I surveyed the results of my ingenuity.

At one end of the Viaduct I had caused the railway to construct a huge water-tank, so cunningly arranged that by the pulling of a single lever I could precipitate several thousand gallons of water onto the Ghost Train as it passed below.



I settled down to wait. By arrangement with the Railway only Dave and I were there. The weather was bitterly cold, iceicles were forming on the water-tank. "Iceicles on the water-tankk". I thought. Then it struck me. If the water in the tank froze, it would not pour out over the engine!

"Quick, Dave!"
I cried,
"tear up the tracks to the other side of the viaduct and ask the Stationmaster for a half-a-dozen braziers".

Even as Dave disappeared into the gloom I heard a ghostly whistle on the chill night air. Desperately I hauled at the lever that would send the water down onto the tracks. It was frozen solid. Now I could hear the rumble of wheels along the line, and even as I strained and tugged at the lever the Ghastly Ghostly Engine roared past me and over the Viaduct.

I fell to the ground, in dark despair, goal staring me in the face. Then I heard the sound of the ghostly whistle change, to a scream, then to a sheik! Immediately followed by a titanic explosion.

When I came round I was in the Stationmasters Office, the Stationmaster and Dave bending over me. "What happened" I say.

"It worked, Your Genius", says Dave, "I tore up the tracks over the Viaduct, like you said, and the Engine lept off, right into the middle of the River Stour, where its' boiler burst".

"Just like I planned" says I. "Just like I planned."

