

IN THE GUMS OF A MUMBLING GALE

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24 October 1977 What I should be doing instead of writing this is indexing a book. I enjoy indexing, in a way. Lee Harding once tried to tell me about Cyril Connolly's concept of *second-order creativity*, and when I'm indexing, that's roughly what I am engaged in and why I enjoy it, in a way. Indexing, I hasten to say, is not some kind of weird hobby I have, but part of what I do for a living. The book I should be indexing (I'm half-way through it, so I don't feel too guilty about taking an hour or so off to write this) is *The Queensland Frontier* by Glenville Pike.

With the possible exception of Mr Pike, I am the only person in all the world who has read this book three times. There is a good chance that I will retain this distinction for ever. Certainly I expect to remain the only person who has read this book three times for money. The first time was when I second-edited it. I had better explain that. The editor (a lady for whom I have a great fondness and even greater respect) had been working on this rather large book, off and on, for some months, and had edited all but about thirty of its 350-odd pages. My job was to go through the whole book, fairly quickly, making sure that the style was consistent, the names spelt the same way throughout and so on, and to edit those untouched pages. This sort of work is called second-editing. The job took rather longer than the editor or I expected, partly because I am the kind of person who, faced with a name spelt Fitzallen, Fitzallan and Fitzalan, will not choose one and get on with the job, but will insist on finding out the correct spelling. In this respect I am a lousy editor, and it's a wonder I survive at the trade. I have often been called too *meticulous*, which I resent, because I have looked the word up in my dictionary and know what it means, and the person who says this to me has not, and that's the difference between us and the difference between our concepts of editing. It also explains why I have no desire to work for a newspaper. Any kind of commercial publisher is much more interested in getting-it-out than getting-it-right. As Napoleon probably never said, history is merely lies agreed upon - and so is publishing.

Five or six weeks ago I proofread *The Queensland Frontier*. Now I am indexing it. I don't know how Mr Pike is making out, but for the last few months I seem to have been living off his book. I may even buy a copy when it's published, out of sheer sentiment.

Mr Pike is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of Australia. He has won a literary award or two. He seems to have devoted the greater part of his life to studying and recording the history of North Queensland, and for this I honour him, admire him, even envy him. But he can't write for nuts. Within his rambling, romantic, cliché-ridden, hulking great book there is hidden a trim work of scholarship. The true function of editing, it seems to me, is to dig that valuable little book out of the non-book the author has written. If editors were allowed to do this kind of thing, we would see fewer

books, probably smaller books, certainly better books. We would also see the general collapse of the publishing industry. So we go on compromising between getting-it-out and getting-it-right, and the books go on being churned out, and the publishers and editors and authors go on being employed and unhappy.

One effect that this dreary business has had on me is that I have stopped buying Australian books published for *the general reader* — that mysterious average Australian who buys the stuff that provides me with a living. Instead, when I can afford them, I buy works of scholarship and what one historian calls 'foundation' books. In recent months, for example, I have bought such things as La Nauze's biography of Alfred Deakin, Coghlan's *Labour and Industry in Australia* and Douglas Pike's *Paradise of Dissent* (in the first category), Nicolas Baudin's *Journal*, Stokes's *Discoveries in Australia* and Collins's *The English Colony in New South Wales* (in the second). I would rather read Matthew Flinders any day than the multitude of lightweight, entertaining, general books based on his journals.

Now here's an odd thing. People like Glenville Pike just can't resist rubbishing these 'foundation' books. 'Landsborough used quaint phraseology in his journal', says Pike (a mild example of what I mean, but the closest to hand), and by crikey! so he did. But Landsborough was a bushman, and he wrote his journal while he was out in the desert looking for the lost explorers Burke and Wills. His 'quaint phraseology' is just fine by me, but Pike's isn't. Mr Pike belongs to a sad school of amateur Australian writers who can't mention pioneers without calling them *grim-jawed* or *heroic*; whose Aborigines (when they are not called *myalls* or *natives*) are invariably *wily* or *faithful*; and who can never put to sea without *setting out in the teeth of a howling gale*.

There. I feel better already for saying that. Back to work.

Before I go back to work I should mention that if your name is Handfield you have an ancestor or relative on page 90 of *The Queensland Frontier*; if your name is Foyster, your lot is on page 300; if your name starts with Mc or Mac, see the index (two out of every three grim-jawed pioneers in North Queensland were named Mc or Mac Something).

In the December mailing of ANZAPA Christine McGowan (*force of habit!* sorry! Christine Ashby) berates me for my 'habit of running FAPA stuff through ANZAPA'. I have corresponded with Christine about this, and we have reached an understanding. But when/if you see Pareragon Papers no.5, you may note that I have stopped claiming that they are published 'for FAPA and ANZAPA'. As I said to Christine, in the last twenty-two months I have published something over 190 pages, 120-odd this year; of these FAPA has seen only about two dozen pages; ANZAPA has had the lot. I didn't plan it that way. In future (while keeping up FAPA minac) I will be publishing for ANZAPA and a select mailing list. Many FAPAns will be on this list. If you want to make sure of being on this list, and if you would like to see the things I never got round to sending to FAPA, please write to me.

Quote for the month: 'In its time it was the first steel-framed building in Australia.' (These days, of course, it wasn't.)

5 November The index finished, I am taking the weekend off. It's a glorious feeling, after pounding the typewriter for a week in the line of duty, to sit here typing a stencil. Dean Grennell expresses this feeling superbly in Grue 40 (FAPA mailing 160: arrived two days ago), and his description of the mindless tyrannies imposed on him by the firm for which he writes — he is not allowed to use the word 'very', for example — would just about bring tears to the eyes of anyone who has ever been a writer, editor or proofreader for a commercial publisher. Dean also says something very important about amateur publishing, and I take the liberty of quoting him a little for my readers outside FAPA:

You see, it has come down to the point where the regallest luxury I can pamper myself with is to employ usages non-sanctioned by our vigilant and utterly omnipotent inhouse proofreading department. . . . What I am doing in Fapa, why I am staying in Fapa, is for the sweet sake of working off my personal foibles and frustrations and wimwams. Every time I employ the word very, it is a sweet spit in the eye of sovereign authority and it is ever so transfalucingly therapeutic, y'dig? When one is in the process of being nibbled to death by young ducks, one does not always respond with icy rationality. Fapa is my popoff valve and I appreciate it. That's why I stay in Fapa, all these many years. A good safety valve is a useful artifack.

In the same mailing Ken Faig has some rather different things to say about amateur publishing. I sympathize with him, too, but not quite as much.

I'm a member of APAs for the reading material which they provide, not for the pleasure of producing an amateur magazine of my own. Frankly, writing is a hundred times harder than reading for me... and the actual production of an amateur magazine, after the writing is done, is shere drudgery.

Ken goes on to write about book-collecting (would your people make you say 'bookcollecting', Dean?) and why people do it, which I found interesting. But I have two main reasons for surrounding myself with books that Ken doesn't touch on. Together with this typewriter, books are the tools of my trade. And my books are my memory.

Ken says it is disrespectful not to read a book. I agree, up to a point. But I have hundreds of books that I have no intention of reading. Example: A. W. Jose's *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18, volume IX, The Royal Australian Navy*. That is one of the most useful books I have in this room, because I often get books to work on that deal with maritime history, and it's handy to be able to check their authors' facts with an authoritative history. A lady author called on me last year and expressed surprise that I had corrected many details of fact in her book. 'How do you know these things?' she said. I said 'I don't. I look them up.' More recently I was talking to a lady who has a *Sands & McDougall's Directory of South Australia* on her shelves — a fun book, she called it — and I started rattling off the many things I find my copy useful for. 'Gee,' she said, 'I never thought of using it!'

I have a lousy memory. Some say it is a lazy memory; at times I have wondered whether it is a selective memory, or whether too much alcohol has eroded it; certainly it doesn't work properly. My father had the same problem, and he never drank, so it probably isn't the alcohol. Some things I remember easily: authors, titles and publishers of obscure books; most that I've ever learnt about classical music; the names of streets in Northcote; a lot about makes and models of cars; odd things like Bach 1685-1750, Luke 2:52 in the KJV, John 1:1 in Greek, Cherubini's full name; I can sing the Marseillaise in French, and with a bit of effort can remember (but not recite) the sonnet that begins 'They that have power to hurt' and many verses from Gray's Elegy. But I can't remember the dates of the kings and queens of England, nor governors, prime ministers, presidents, significant historical events, Melbourne Cup winners, issues of *Astounding*...

So I surround myself with books. And if my brain isn't much good at retrieving facts from its own storage, it is pretty good at directing me to the right books for information I need. That's why I say that books are my memory.

I also read books, Ken, but I don't seem to have done much of that lately. Except in the line of duty.

Ed Cox: I meant to comment on your adventure with the black widder spider, but have forgotten now what the comment was. Earlier this year I wrote some semi-informed stuff about *Latrodectus hasseltii* and other deadly denizens of the suburbs for Leigh Edmonds's semi-mythical fanzine, in the course of which I repeated the opinion of local spiderologists (the Greeks probably had a word for them) that the Australian red-back is much the same animal as the American black widow and the New Zealand katipo. I ask any arachnologist in FAPA (is that the word the Greeks had, Jack?) to comment on this, just in case I scared hell out of Mike Glicksohn in Canberra through sheer ignorance. Oddly, I haven't seen a red-back around this place since I wrote that article for Leigh in February. Maybe they're waiting for him to publish it so they can see what I said about them. What we do have a lot of, though, is *Ixeuticus robustus*, a fearsome-looking little black brute. Learned arrack-socdologists are invited to inform me on this one, too.

Where did those socdologists come from? Someone raised the subject in May, I think. As an example of my books-as-memory system, I immediately consulted my copy of Surtees's *Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour*, wherein (page 25) there is a portrait of Mr Thomas Slocdolager, late Master of the Laverick Wells Hounds. Fascinating. As an example of my unsupported memory, I haven't a clue who was discussing the word 'sockdolager' in that mailing. Oxford indicates that the word dates from about 1836, so Surtees didn't invent it.

I haven't finished reading the August mailing yet — in fact I'll probably never finish reading Harry's monograph on the works of Joe Green (or, as the Greeks called him, Giuseppe Verdi) — but it is now six days to the November deadline, and by the time I get to Phoenix... Hey! what a great idea for a song!

Ciao, mes amigos.