



NOT RECLUSIVE: UFO KIDNAP VICTIM CLAIM

Oh, perhaps I am, a bit. So would you be if you had to put up with being whisked off for weeks on end by extraterrestrials who give little if any notice of their next visit. They are like publishers in that respect, expecting me to do their bidding instantly, as if I spent my life otherwise in suspended animation, awaiting their call. Unlike publishers, they keep coming back. I can't recall much of what goes on while I am with them; in fact, at times I think I am imagining the whole thing. I mention this to put Lucy Huntzinger's mind at rest.

I do recall meeting Lucy in 1987. I wrote about it at the time, but I don't recall sending her a copy of *Philosophical Gas 70*, and there may be members of Anzapa who have not seen that issue, so here is what I wrote.

[Reprint alert]

I almost missed the 1987 Melbourne Easter Convention, but it caught up with me at a Chinese restaurant in town I wouldn't recommend to anyone but at least it was open. Management had wilfully misunderstood Michelle Muijsert's instructions in the matter, had let me in, and had distributed us to three corners of a large room, but we gradually sorted that out. Our table, quite literally, rocked. That was fun for a while, but not much. It was difficult at first talking to Lucy, what with the noise, the flight of unattended claret, the extraordinary table manners of interstate fans and the rapid inter-polation of confused waiters, but we managed. We spoke of music. Ned Rorem, Lucy said. Oh, yes, I said. Charles Ives? I said. Yes! she said. Your favorite Beethoven sym-

phony? I said. The seventh, she said. Oh God, I thought, if Peter de Vries had scripted this the next thing I would say is: Marry me! But we went on to discuss Brahms' German Requiem — her favorite piece of music, she said, and I almost lost her there, or she me, because I think that work is one of the most turgid pieces of music ever written — but she likes it because she has sung it, which is utterly different from listening to it. So we went on to, I don't know, Mahler probably, and Bach and Mozart and Simon and Garfunkel, analysis, participation, instruction, ignorance, glasnost, joy, elevation, the whole great thing about real music, and then we went home.

Johnson's curse

About the middle of November I received a curious missive at Box 1096 — a clipping from the *Society of Editors Newsletter*, stapled to a scrap of paper bearing the words 'May Johnson's curse be upon you! Block-head!' I found this unsettling, of course, which may have been my correspondent's intention, but after a while I worked out who was responsible, I think, and if I am right it was more of a quirky sort of good-natured dig than a poison-pen letter.

I toyed with the idea of reporting this in the Newsletter: *Your editor has received a curious missive from a reader who uses the pen-name 'Block-head' . . .* That would have been clever perhaps, but if I have mis-judged my correspondent it could have been stupidly provocative. If I am right, he is a bloke who has made it plain that he envies my writing and thinks it's downright criminal that I don't write for a

living (which is what he is attempting to do, with little success).

I compromised by reprinting the first half of PG 87, revising it a bit, and heading it 'Why I Don't Write for a Living'. I omitted the sentence after the words 'I never got the hang of it', then continued:

[Another goddam reprint]

My next job, three years later, was proofreading part-time for a small typesetting firm in East Brunswick. It should have been a full-time job, but the partners couldn't afford that, so I did my best to fit a day's reading into four hours, and most days I managed to do that. Things like bus timetables tended to slow me down, things you can't read for sense and literals, but most of my work could be best described as speed-proofreading. During my time with this firm, which I enjoyed a lot, I was doing very different work at home: most memorably, this was when I proofread Gerald Murnane's novel *Inland* for Heinemann. I'm not sure what to call the opposite of speed-proofreading, but reading Gerald was it: this wasn't just reading line by line, but word by word, and confirming every comma. Gerald is a very exact writer, and proofreading him demands total concentration.

Well, all proofreading demands total concentration, but the focus differs from job to job. I once had a client who was in the habit of saying 'Don't find anything wrong with it' when she gave me a proofreading job. I knew what she meant: read for sense; if you find a glaring error of fact, correct it, but I don't want to know about it; don't look anything up, don't query anything; and get it back to me by

Friday. Some kinds of proofreading shade over into copy-editing, even rewriting – but you must be very sure that your client wants you to do that kind of job, and then you must get the balance right: what is desirable at the copy-editing stage may be wanton luxury on the proofs.

I will happily proofread anything. I will happily do the *kind* of proofreading, plain or fancy, that any client wants. In other words, I don't just proofread: I proofread to order. I am more restricted when it comes to copy-editing. If my client and I agree on what needs to be done to a manuscript, and how long it might take, and I am confident that I can do it, we're in business. But I can't claim an ability to edit to order, because I don't have that ability; I'm not sure that anyone has; but I know that some people have more of it than I do. When it comes to writing to order, something in me rebels against it. I write because I want to, and usually when I want to. I feel no moral obligation to write. Sometimes I feel the opposite: black moments when I feel bound *not* to write, when I think the world needs fewer writers and more editors and proofreaders. But that's ridiculous. What we need, in this little world that we choose to work in, is not fewer anything, but better everything.

Margaret Arnott: Thanks for your comments on 'Why write?' In one paragraph you have said as much as I managed in three pages. The *SocEds Newsletter* version, which didn't contain the philosophical and fannish bits, seems to have gone over well. One bloke rang me and said I had changed his life. He had planned to get into journalism, but what I said, which tallied with what he already knew of the business, had decided him against it. I hope I haven't wrecked your life, I said; I wrote that piece to explain myself, not to change lives!

Leanne Frahm: Boswell? Famous? About two years ago *Meanjin* published an essay about literary and other developments in East Germany, and the author, an Australian, mentioned Erich Loest's book *Die Stasi war mein Eckermann* ('The Secret Police were my Boswell'). After I'd read this essay in manuscript I said to Jenny Lee that it

was a pity that even a journal like *Meanjin* could not assume these days that its readers would understand a reference to Eckermann. She agreed. I told this story to a well-known and very successful freelance editor, and tactfully explained who Eckermann was, because I knew he wouldn't have heard of him. He looked thoughtful, then said 'Who is Boswell?'

Cath Ortlieb: I have always considered the care and raising of children a truly heroic endeavor, and you have written nothing to persuade me otherwise. That you and Marc do so much else as well as parenting fills me with awe.

The Foyster mural was indeed done by Stef Campbell.

Marc Ortlieb: Colin Jevons (speaking of heroes: he and Margaret took delivery of their third daughter in December) sent me a tape of *The Philosophers' Football Match*. He also wrote me a note about his brief career in soccer: 'Did you know I once played for Manchester United? The Possibles vs the Probables, at under-12 level at Manchester Grammar School. I lasted about 20 minutes before being substituted, but play for them I did. Came close to the ball a couple of times, too.' There's scope there for an essay of moderate length about Matt Busby (who died last week) and his 'Babes', the brilliant young Manchester United team that was killed in a plane crash in 1958, with possible ironic side reference to E. O. Schlunke's great story 'The Village Hampden' and an embarrassing incident on a flight I was on from Sydney to Brisbane in 1975 with the Manchester United team and my boss John Pitson (the start of a trip to Townsville where I first met Jean Weber), but I can't begin to explain any of that just now.

LynC: 'earth mother *n.* 1. (in various mythologies) a. a female goddess considered as the source of fertility and life. b. the earth personified. 2. *Informal.* a sensual or fecund woman.' – *Collins English Dictionary*

Kim Huett: Sending Christmas cards is one of Sally's hobbies, you understand: I simply sign them, often not knowing exactly who it is I'm wishing a Merry Xmas and things. But I must say that your

card to us was one of the two I appreciated most. The other was from George Turner. After Christmas there was a different sort of card that I enjoyed getting. Let me tell you about it like this:

Extract from a letter (25.12)

A few weeks ago, when Sally was addressing a great stack of Christmas cards, I thought I should do some too. I think that every year. I should send a card to Judith Butcher, I thought, and tell her I'll be thinking of her as I watch the carols from King's College. I didn't send the card, but I certainly thought of you last night as I watched the carols. . . . Before last night I can't recall ever noticing the altarpiece at King's; even then the camera didn't get close enough for me to work out exactly what it is, but it is a nativity scene, and the style reminds me of Rubens. I would be interested to know what it is exactly – and whether it is there all the time or only at Christmas.

Judith Butcher replied (5.1):

Thank you very much for your letter. I'd much rather have a letter than a Christmas card. I enclose a postcard of the Rubens in King's College chapel [*The Adoration of the Magi*]. The picture has only been there since about 1968. It was given to the college, and there was some controversy about installing it, partly because it meant lowering the floor to make enough space for the picture between the altar and the stained-glass window. I've just been looking at a collection of comments about the chapel, and see that a man said in our local paper: 'The restored Chapel at King's College is magnificent but I feel that if the Rubens was moved to the right, say as far as the Fitzwilliam Museum, it would look even better.' I also see that in 1974 someone carved the letters 'IRA' into it.

This seems as good a place as any to stop for now. Remind me to tell you next time about Sara Paretsky, V. I. Warshawski's birthday and the phases of the moon. Before then I expect to be joining Bruce Sims in talking to the Society of Editors about such things, and probably having dinner with Ms Paretsky (along with a select group of Anzapans, if I can swing it).