

WORDY-GURDY 2

Written, published and printed by Bruce Gillespie, GPO Box 5195AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia as an attempt to save my ANZAPA membership. April 10 1978.

Six pages to go.... I meant to publish a big issue of *Supersonic Snail*. Treally ruly. But it will be at least 100 pages long. I've hardly set typewriter to stencil for three months, so I haven't typed the 100 pages. I will do it - as long as all my other great plans work out. (Does this paragraph sound familiar to you? Sort of like the Gillespies of yesteryear? If it doesn't, you haven't been in Australian fandom very long.)

I'm typing this at not-quite-the-end of Unicon IV, otherwise known as the 17th National Science Fiction Convention. The fizz of it all is still in my head, and anyway, the convention hasn't finished yet. Still time for almost anything to go wrong, or at least give a kick in the tail. It's hardly the time to give a verdict on the convention, except to say that I enjoyed it. But I have been thinking that:

- 1 Anything's possible. Roger Weddall said, Let there be a grandiose and gigantic convention, and there was a grandiose and gigantic convention. Roger (or Alan Wilson or Mick Joseph) said, Let there be overseas guests of honour (without the excuse of a workshop or Australia Council grant), and there were overseas guests of honour.
- 2 So what else is possible? I've been asking myself this during the last few weeks. If we actually have, at last, after all these years and letters and fanzines and good wishes exchanged, Brian Aldiss and Roger Zelazny sitting with us and talking and laughing and drinking, what else is possible? If we can actually have a local publisher with overseas connections, Hyland House, commissioning an original-fiction anthology in Australia, what else is possible? ... And I look out from the metaphysical shroud with which I cover myself, and see light, and a woman I love who wants me, and I throw off the shroud for once, and all sorts of other good things happen to me, even me, then what else is possible? For truly the impossible has happened.
- 3 It is not in my nature to be ebullient for long. I begin to get suspicious. But I've been in despair for a long time, and now I do feel ebullient, so I hope it stays that way. But it all has so much to do with a change in the atmosphere of one's surroundings, that I hope I can soak up as much as possible from the new air before it changes again. "Let the despairing be hopeful; let the happy beware." I should pay attention to the first injunction more often.

4 What is possible in the science fiction field? When I listen to Brian Aldiss, I believe that anything is possible. He talked about the struggle he needed to make to create *Barefoot in the Head*. He talked about his own pleasure which he derives from the plot of his latest novel. Of course I do say to myself, Now why can't I think of that? But also I feel that if Brian can delve into his head and find handfuls of treasures, then couldn't I as well? I don't know. I haven't put in the same kind of life-long effort.

Brian likes to refer to himself as a genius, and laugh heartily at the same time. On the grand scale, that's a big joke. Geniuses? There's Joyce and Proust and (I think) Marquez and Calvino and some others. But in another sense, Brian is right. On one afternoon, George Turner gave a talk about the traps before the beginner writer of science fiction. I don't believe that Brian Aldiss ever had to avoid these traps, or learn "writing skills". A deep writerly instinct seems to have been there from the beginning; many years of work have refined that instinct and widened the talent extraordinarily. "Genius", in this case, seems to be a base level of self-confidence -- an ever-flowing ebullience, if you like. I feel the same thing myself when I write (some) articles for *S F Commentary*. When I sit down to write those sorts of articles, I feel liberated and ennobled... that all I need do is work hard enough on the project at hand and something fine will emerge. When I sit down to write fiction, I feel just the opposite. I feel like a kid who's left school at fifteen who's faced with a page of maths problems. Sometimes I've kept writing stories, but usually I feel that I'm merely saving myself from sinking, rather than swimming. In which case, George's hints for beginner writers are rivetingly interesting.

It seems that there are a lot of hopeful writers in Australia who are in my position when they come to writing fiction: not only are they not geniuses, but they're not sure that they have a genius inside them. What keeps me going - what makes me want to start writing a story this weekend - are the brave and fine words of people like Aldiss and Zelazny about the flow of the imagination, about the novelty left in science fiction, about the joys to be found inside one's head. I hope that inspiration stays on.

5 Meanwhile, I still haven't caught the name of the girl who won first prize in the short story contest. I hope that stories which win this year get printed somewhere. I'm very pleased that Petrina Smith won a prize. And look at what's happening here in Australia, as in America: the really fine new writers seem to be mainly women. (Of course, it's not good that such a fact can still be thought remarkable - but things have changed a lot during the last ten years.) That "genius" I was talking about - Pip Maddern has it, and so has Petrina Smith. Now we have to make sure that their names stand beside those of Wilhelm and Le Guin and Saxton.

6 24 hours later:

*Dirty Dealings At Unicon, or:  
HOW I LOST THE AWARD*

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Twenty four hours ago, when I wrote the previous two pages, I felt fizzy and splendiferous. I still feel fizzy and splendiferous (so much so that I wonder what I *will* write on this page), but the events of yesterday threatened to ruin the convention for me altogether.

When Elaine and I got to the convention yesterday, Jay Kay Klein came up to me and said, "Congratulations on being disqualified for your award." I knew immediately what he was talking about. The night before, at the Banquet, I had been pleased so much when I won the special award this year for Contribution to the Australian Science Fiction Field. I knew that the vote for me had been strong, since I had counted the votes myself - which was the problem. Various fans, mainly from Sydney had (so I've heard) stacked the Business Session and voted the Ditmar for Best Fanzine be taken away from *Yggdrasil* because the two editors, Alan Wilson and Denis Callegari, were both on the Convention committee. However, the objectors to *Yggdrasil's* win thought that they could hardly take this action without disqualifying me as well.

Needless to say, I was rather upset by the whole stuff up (I *like* having a fourth award sitting on my shelf). But then a lady-fan-who-will-remain-nameless came up to me and made some remark which showed that she believed that Justice Had Been Done. There was a definite manic gleam in the eye. I thought to myself: Jeez, there are people who actually care about all this. At this point I felt like throwing back my head and laughing about the whole business. Anyway, Elaine and I went back home, and played the first music we've heard since Thursday (some bright, intricate Pergolasi) and then went out to dinner with Roger and Judy and Devin and Trent Zelazny, and Roger Weddall and Alan Wilson. After King Wah food and a bottle of white and a bottle of red I felt fine again... Also, I still have the block of blue, gold-laced lucite which Roger and Brian Aldiss did give me on Sunday night (and thanks to the lady in red for the kiss as well). And, to cut a long joke short, the recount of votes gave the award to the Norstrilia Press team (of which I am one, and so this award is probably ineligible as well), so I have some claim to the trophy anyway.

But a pause for a policy statement: It is my belief, based on my counting of the votes, that I did fairly win the award for Contribution to the Australian Science Fiction Field. I received the most first votes, and nearly all second preferences, after redistribution. And I thank everybody who voted for me.

Now I've made my policy statement, I can say some of what I really think. I think that John Bangsund or John Foyster or Carey Handfield, as chief Norstrilia Press man, should have received the award. Which Norstrilia Press did.

And I can also say that *Yggdrasil* should have received its award. But having said that, I can still see why people were annoyed. I'm still annoyed at being placed in a difficult situation. Roger Weddall made me Returning Officer, but he took away most of the responsibility for making the awards. Things should have happened quite differently. I should have prepared the nomination ballot, received the nominations, and prepared the voting form. Nobody but me should have known the results until they were given out on Sunday night. (And, of course, I would not have placed myself anywhere on the ballot.) Instead, Roger and (I presume) committee members insisted on running most aspects of the ballot, except for the final count. Under these circumstances, he should have left my name off the Contributions ballot. Instead, I was embarrassed to find that, when I came to count the votes, there was my name and I had to see whether I won or not. I pointed this out to Roger, and he said, "Everything will be all right." I'm sure another politician who liked breaking the rules (GW not RW) said the same thing plenty of times.

All this is quite apart from the fact that lots of people did not receive their ballot forms. I don't know how much this matters. In 1976, I was Returning Officer. I ran things scrupulously, and everybody did get their forms and they all had plenty of time to vote. But only 30 ballots were returned. This year, despite all the kerfuffle, more than 50 ballots were returned, and interstate people affected by the postal strike and the Committee's inefficiency had time to vote on Friday. And I think that if, this year, I had been a proper Returning Officer, and had run the whole ballot scrupulously and had sent out both forms in time, that *Yggdrasil* would still have won. Okay, most of the *Yggdrasil* votes must have come from MUSFA members. But quite a few votes must have come from other people as well. And MUSFA people care about their magazine and their members, while most other fans don't give a stuff about what wins (even if they will take some trouble to take awards from true winners).

- 7 Enough gripes and disgruntlings. Congratulations to Cherry Wilder for her win for Best Australian Novel. (With the proviso that the award would have gone differently according to my count of the votes.) :: Congratulations to Frank Payne for the win for "Albert's Bellyful". Again, a proviso. Of course, most of the votes for this story come from MUSFA members, because the story appeared in *Yggdrasil*. But that block vote was unanimous, and other people must have supported the story as well. I'll try to find some way to get it into general circulation as soon as I've sorted

out problems of getting *SFC* <sup>extra</sup> viable again. (I think I'd trade all the awards I've got for 300/subscriptions - about as many as I need so that *SFC* can be self-supporting.) :: I don't think *The Silmarillion* should have appeared on the ballot form, but I notice that nobody but me is disputing that award. I think *Our Lady of Darkness/The Pale Brown Thing* is the best s f novel for years - but again, is it s f? :: *SFC* did get a decided pat on the back, with two of the Atheling winners (Andrew Whitmore's Compton article, 1st, and George's Silverberg article, 3rd). My own prejudice is towards George's article. To me, it is George's best article ever - a remarkably perceptive account of one author's total achievement. But, as somebody said to me, who will praise the article if he or she believes all that perception had been wasted on an unworthy object? :: And Don Ashby's Terra Australis awards went to Good People - it's about time Robin and Kitty were awarded something like these.

Having said all that: If the national convention had, this year, cut out awards instead of multiplying them, and if they had made one award for Australian SF Achievement, that award should have gone to *The Weeping Sky*, by Lee Harding.

- 8 Apologies to Roger Weddall, etc, Dept.: After the previous two pages, Roger will think that I've been as nasty to him as have some other people. All I'm really accusing Roger of doing is appearing to break the rules as well as actually breaking them. Rules usually need to be broken so that the right results will be achieved. But you need to cover your tracks just a bit. Roger kept saying to me that certain procedures did not matter, but they did. Ho hum. It was a great convention and a remarkable success. And I'm intensely glad that I had no more to do with the running of it than I did. I hope you recover from Unicon IV, Roger.
- 9 Roger Zelazny is a person I like as much as I like Aldiss, but I did find myself siding with Aldiss' literary opinions during the Convention. I was glad to hear him defending literary criticism as a tool of the writer. It's fairly plain to see which writers in science fiction have no acquaintance with criticism at all. (That doesn't include Roger Zelazny, who mainly agreed, when pressed, with Brian's position.) A good literary critic defends, or is informed by, high values. It seems to me that most s f writers have low or no literary values. They walk snuffling along the ground. Critics have their heads in the air, it's true, but they might be able to raise some writers' eyes off the ground. This is not likely to happen, since, as the questioner yesterday said, 90 per cent of litcrit is unreadable as well. I read some critics for pleasure, and I don't read critics who write badly. My favourite critic during recent years has been Edmund Wilson. I don't agree with him very often, but he writes about books in the way they should be written about. Henry James is my other great favourite.

10 Did I mention that I resigned from my position as one of the editors of the VSTA's *The Secondary Teacher* magazine on the day before Unicon started? Not that I've finished work there yet. My official last day is April 21.

Well, that's how things are, right at this moment. Three months ago, I wrote something for *SFC 53* about my probable 1978. That's become so ludicrously out-of-date that I will need to scrap that stencil before I publish the issue. (Yes, real soon now.) Even two months ago, I believed that nothing good would ever happen to me again. Now things are moving so fast that I dare not guess where they will end up.

So - take a deep breath - right at this moment, I am anticipating that, as from April 22 1978, I will be a full-time freelance editor and writer again. Sigh of relief. Of course, being a freelance is a bit harder work than receiving a fortnightly cheque whether I work hard or not. But being a freelance is the way I like to live. Taking a job is something to do when necessary. Of course, I feel guilty that I've left Bernard Slattery in the lurch. But if my decision to leave can actually persuade the VSTA Committee and Executive to decide what they want to do about the magazine, then Bernard might gain a lot from this move. Cross fingers.

Elaine and I are looking for a house. Preferably it would be just like my old place at Carlton Street, but bigger. A view of a park would be nice. High ceilings, thick walls, and a sense of Victorian elegance are all in our list of requirements. But mainly we need garden space for the four cats, and the equivalent of three bedrooms - a big bedroom, a decent-sized study (bigger than my cramped work-room at Johnston St), and a bookroom/study. That's for all the things that can't possibly go in the other rooms. Also, we want a spacious lounge-room so we can hold \*parties\*. At this moment, I can't even guess how these ambitions will work out. To get what we want at the price we want, we might even have to move into the kind of suburb where nobody drops in. If so, then we don't really need the \*party\*-sized lounge-room. Or we might even give up in disgust and accept an attractive offer that's been made to us so that we will stay at Johnston Street and not move at all. That's a desperate move indeed - especially as we found a place that was 95 per cent right for us in Clifton Hill a few weeks ago - but the other 5 per cent was too important to ignore. Dicy business, finding houses, especially as neither Elaine nor I have a car.

Does all that sound unlikely? Yes. How will it turn out? Who knows. Listen for further exciting episodes.

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*Wordy-Gurdy 2* is a very miniature version of *Supersonic Snail*. If you're not a member of ANZAPA, and you send a letter of comment, then you get the next issue of *Supersonic Snail*. And that will be a good issue, probably more than 100 pages long. Here's hoping I'm back in print before the 10th Anniversary mailing. \*brg\* 28.3.78.