

One of the things I like about
Adelaide, said Keats, is that it
is so well laid out.

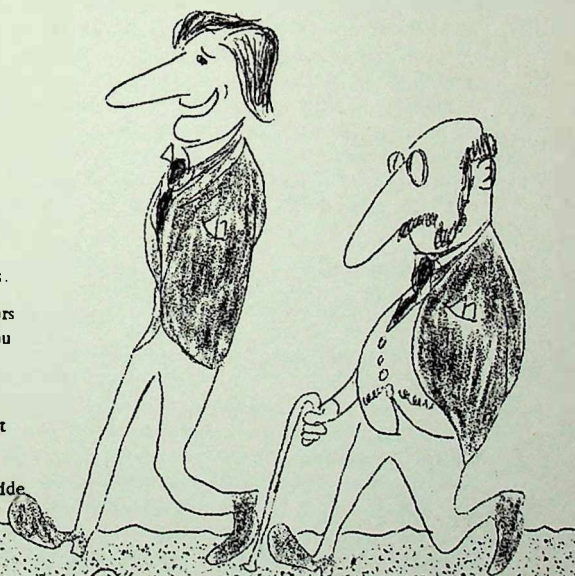
Like a corpse, said Chapman.

You can't mean that! said Keats.

I repeat merely what its detractors
say, said Chapman. What do you
plan to do this Sunday night?

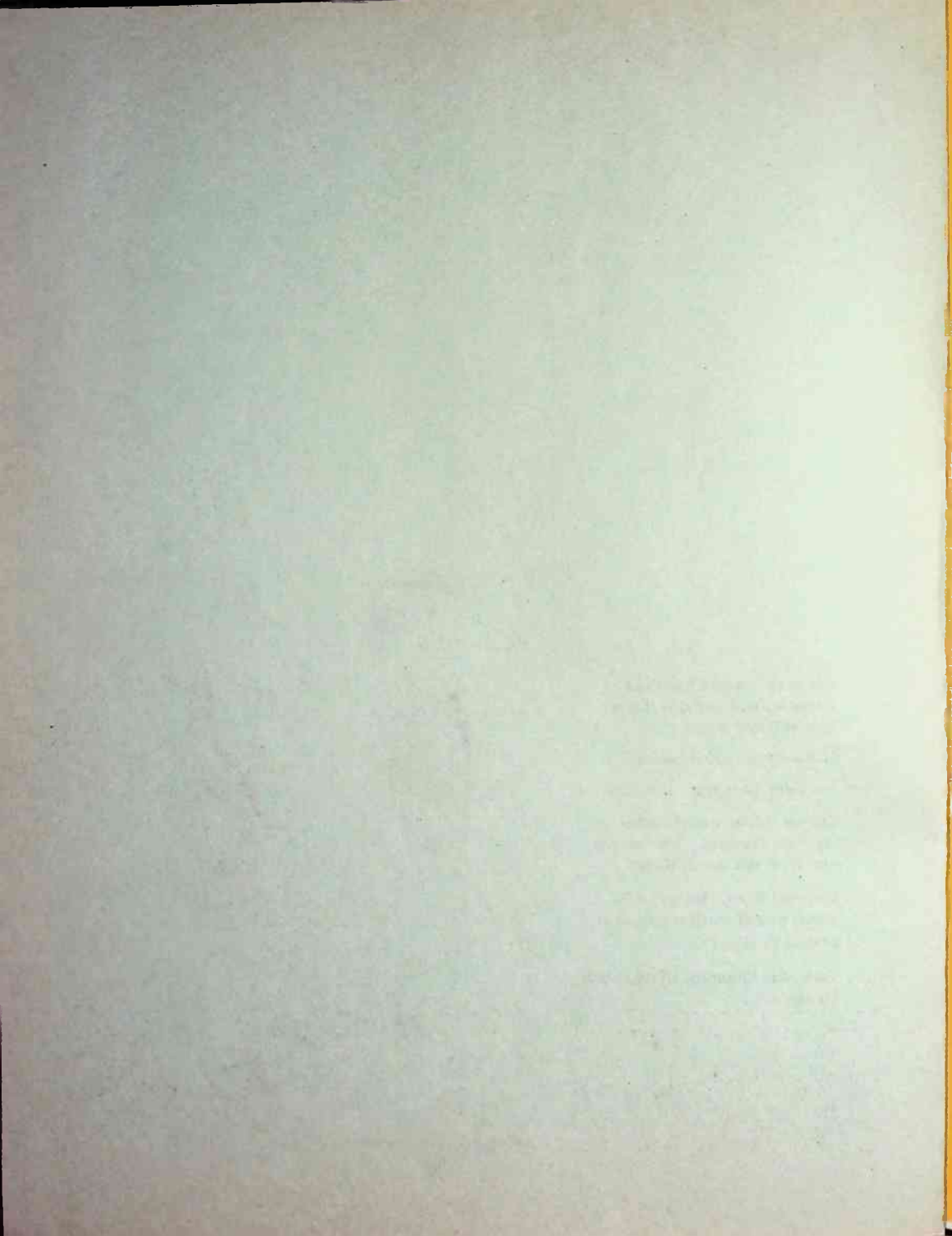
Um, said Keats. But we could
always go and watch television at
Bangsund's place!

True, said Chapman, trying to hide
his enthusiasm.



Philosophical Gas

33



Some time about early November last year I wrote to Rigby Ltd, publishers, of Adelaide, applying for the position of paperback editor (as advertised in the local morning newspaper). Someone's lines got twisted. Before I knew quite what I'd done, or was doing, I was being interviewed by Mike Page, Rigby's publishing manager, for a position as his assistant and eventual successor. When he rang me at the Australian Government Publishing Service (Publishing Standards and Design Section), I thought for a few moments that he must be a salesman from Rigby's who happened to be passing through Canberra. Then his name rang a bell somewhere, I looked up some back issues of The Australian Bookseller we had in the library, and I realized that he was the Michael F. Page, author of various novels, award-winning editor of other books and publishing manager of Rigby's. I forget how we arranged it, but somehow Sally got a clean suit and tie to me, and about lunchtime I met Mike on the steps of the National Library. He immediately discounted the idea that he should be interviewing me for the job of paperback editor; obviously, he said, whatever I had applied for, the firm must have felt I was worth interviewing for the job as his assistant (the advertisement for which I hadn't seen). We talked for an hour, and he said he'd let me know. A few days later he rang me at work and said that Rigby's really needed someone with more experience than I have for that job, but that he could offer me a position as general editor. Before he could even name the miserable salary (by public service standards), I had accepted. And here I am. Editing Frank McManus, wondering what I'm doing here.

I hesitate to say this, knowing my audience, but... I like my job. Truly. It doesn't stop me from wondering why I'm here, when I could be back in Canberra, unemployed because of Malcolm Fraser's policy of sacking public servants who aren't quite public servants (as I was), and some who are (as Sally was until last Friday). Maybe something deep down warned me that I would be one of the first victims of the so-called Liberal government (apart from Robert Heinlein, our new Prime Minister is the only person in a position of power I know of who has admitted to being a disciple of Ayn Rand; not that it mattered - he could have mentioned Ben Bova, A. J. Liebling or Thomas Love Peacock, for all the great Australian public cared) and prompted me to talk my way into a job in Adelaide, where it doesn't cost as much to be poor as it does in Canberra. I leave such premonitional-adventitious-psyhic speculation to my younger or more impressionable readers. If you reckon it was my stars did it, I don't believe you. I have no time for astrology. Nor does any other Tauran I know.

On Tuesday 6 January, a little after mid-day, I found myself in the little speck on the map of New South Wales called Grong Grong. This was fortunate, since I'd driven some miles out of my way to look at the place. Whatever Grong Grong may have been in the past or may become, it is enshrined in the memory of those aspiring writers who took part in Ursula Le Guin's writers' workshop before the 1975 World Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne, and I have no doubt, in Ursula's. I wasn't at the workshop, worse luck (nothing will keep me from the next one!), but enough had been said about Grong Grong during the Worldcon to make me plan a roundabout route to Adelaide that would allow me to make this pilgrimage.

It was worth it. Grong Grong is the quintessential no-account Australian country town. In its total lack of importance to anyone who lives anywhere else, Grong Grong stands as the symbol and archetype of science fiction fans and writers everywhere.

Because I'd gone some miles out of my way, and because the Falcon we'd foolishly bought kept on flooding its stupid carburettor or something, I spent the first night at Hay, instead of Tooleybuc. This was unfortunate. I'd drafted an article before I left Canberra called 'I stopped the night at Tooleybuc', and in all honesty I can't write it now. 'I stopped the night at Hay.' No, it'll never sell. Damn that Ford!

About 4 pm on Wednesday 7 January I drove into Adelaide, and went straight to the Afion Private Hotel on South Terrace. I had driven 400-odd miles, and foolishly let my right arm hang out the window most of that distance, so I was sunburnt from wrist to earlobe. I wish I could report that the cheerful atmosphere and old-world comfort of the Afion soon made me forget my agony: alas, the atmosphere was that of a home for wayward children, and the old-world comfort so old that only a Spartan would recognize it as comfort. I had a bed in my room, and a rickety table, and a hard chair, and a small wardrobe with a door that wouldn't stay shut (I believe these are specially manufactured for the poorer sort of hotels and lodging houses, certainly throughout Australia, possibly throughout the world, and are part of an evil conspiracy the nature of which even Dick Gels dares not guess at). To boil my electric jug I had to put it on a box on the chair under the light switch, where the only power point was. To fill the jug I had to walk down a flight of stairs, up a flight of stairs, into the bathroom, and back, hoping no one was looking, since there was probably a rule against it. There were rules against most things.

Marc Ortlieb, brave soul, visited me in my room: ask him what it was like. When he came I had to open the door leading to the balcony, because he doesn't smoke, and I do, and the only ventilation in that room was provided by a few slots in the wall, about ten feet up.

Before I saw my room the manager rattled off the Seventeen Basic Rules, took my rent-in-advance (vide Rule 2.a.ii et seq.), and handed me a letter from Robin Johnson. I read the letter, and swore all over again that I would in future be kind and considerate to Robin, because he is one of the most kind and considerate men I have ever met, and right there, in that grotty private hotel, I felt a surge of love for him and for fandom in general that I have not felt for some time. Robin, I said aloud to those dismal blank walls, is a Good Fellow! Then a vague memory of a midsummer night's dream wafted into my head, and I giggled. Friar Puck! I said, tears of pain and merriment stinging my eyes. I was becoming delirious, what with the sunburn, the elation of being in Adelaide, the despondency of being in that hotel, the joy of being a fan, and the awareness that I hadn't had a drink all day.

I drove to the Norwood post office, where I stood around for half an hour and eventually got a postal address. I came out, my arm throbbing in the 35° heat, and I saw the chemist's shop opposite me on one corner, and the Norwood pub on the other. I bought some ludicrous sunburn lotion at the former, and wearing it, spent an hour or so in the latter.

My first love in Adelaide, chronologically, this time round, is the Norwood pub. I walked in there with my arm (up to my earlobe) bathed in that white gunk, ordered a gin and tonic, and sat down, and no one in the place gave any sign of giving a damn. I drank a silent toast to Adelaide, to Robin Johnson, and to Australians everywhere who don't give a damn what you look like in a pub.

By Friday I had leased a house in the hills (or Mount Lofty Ranges, if you want to be pedantic about it), something they said couldn't be done, but a small thing really, of little account, to we Sons of Analog and Coming Rulers of the Sevagram. The house I chose is a modest little place with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a passable lounge and dining room, and a 'family' room (ideal for one's sf collection). It's okay. Overpriced, of course, but it's okay. It's just about big enough for Sally and me, and the cats, and our books and things, and our few sticks of furniture. When we arranged our stuff about the place there was one wall left absolutely blank and wasted, except for the picture window in it, so we bought a piano to go there. Now it's just like home.

29 February: Home, as I have often remarked, have I not? (I have), is where the duplicator is. At present the old Roneo 885 is languishing on what I refer to as our back porch (actually it's more a kind of back entrance hall), a little room about 2 x 2 m with three doors and just enough space for a fanzine factory along the blank wall. Dylan, the black and white one, sleeps on the Roneo; Donovan prefers the washing machine, a couple of metres away in the laundry. There's probably something of cataclysmic significance about this, but it eludes me. What eludes me not at all is the sad fact that the Roneo is unhappy these days. It's only five years old, and when new was the wonder and envy of Melbourne fandom. The work it did in its youth at Bundalohn Court, St Kilda, was superb. I compare my fanzines of 1970-71 with those I have published since, and I wonder whether I have lost my art or the Roneo its heart. Perhaps the moves, from St Kilda to the squirrel-infested garage in Leichhardt Street, Kingston, to the bathroom in Wentworth Avenue, Kingston, to the second bedroom at Red Hill, to the garage at Turner, to Dylan's bedroom here at Bridgewater, have affected it. Maybe the stencils it has to endure aren't as good as they used to be, though lord knows I buy the best I can find for it (Roneo R680 Executives); maybe the paper I feed it isn't good enough; maybe this IBM is out of sympathy with the stencils; or maybe I'm just getting old and careless. I don't know. All I know is that my hard-won reputation as a junior master of fannish duplicating is rapidly disappearing. Whatever the reason for this, I crave your indulgence, and I hope the quality of my writing has not fallen off as much as the reproduction of it.

Since the beginning of 1975 I seem not to have published as much as usual. Part of the reason for this is that in May 1975 I became a professional fanzine publisher, and not much of my work in this capacity has been seen by fandom. Just for the record (that is, here I go bragging again, in a faintly apologetic manner), since 19 May 1975 I have edited, or at the very least had some hand in, the following exciting publications:

- Interim Report of the National Superannuation Committee of Inquiry
- Purse Seining for Jack Mackerel in South-Eastern Australian Waters
- Cracking in Brick and Block Masonry
- National Sports Coaches Seminar 1975
- Bibliography of Geology and Geophysics of the South Pacific
- International Trade in Forest Products
- Annual Report 1974-75, Department of Science and Consumer Affairs
- Royal Military College Historical Journal, 4-1975
- An Outline of Australian Naval History
- Royal Australian Navy College Magazine, 1974-75
- Australian Electoral Office: Instructions for Presiding Officers and Assistant Presiding Officers
- 1st Annual Report, Trade Practices Commission
- 1st Annual Report of the Insurance Commissioner
- Annual Report of the Health Insurance Commission
- Proceedings of the Conference on Women and Health, Brisbane 1975
- Education in the Social Sciences: a handbook for teachers
- The Westudy Report
- Canberra Technical College Handbook 1976
- Canberra Technical College Union: Students' Guide 1976
- 153rd Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Public Accounts: Delays in occupancy of leased premises
- IAC Report on the Aerospace Industry
- Canberra School of Music Handbook 1976
- Proceedings of the Second Australasian Parliamentary Seminar

- States Grants (Secondary Schools Libraries) Act: Annual statement of payments 1974
- 2nd Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Land Tenure
- Scleractinia of Eastern Australia (Australian Institute of Marine Science monograph 1)
- Report on the Aboriginal Secondary Education Grants Scheme
- River Murray Commission Report 1975
- Book Bounty Act: Return for 1974-75
- Commonwealth Teaching Service Annual Report 1974
- Policies for Development of Manufacturing Industry (various studies, including Smelting and Refining of Non-ferrous Metals, The Petroleum Refining Industry, The Human Factor in Manufacturing Industry)

The above (Isn't this exciting!) for AGPS, the following since 12 January for Rigby's:

- The Vanished Fleet: the Australian coastal passenger ships 1875-1961
- Canberra Sketchbook
- Colonial Life in Tasmania
- Kensington and Norwood Sketchbook
- Geraldton Sketchbook
- Old Victorian Country Pubs Sketchbook
- The memoirs of Francis Patrick McManus

Eat your heart out, Andy Potter!

(I have to say that, because I eat my heart out every time Andy sends me Algol, and it seems only fair, you know... How's the old Quick Frozen Foods, Andy? Hey, you're one of them there railway nuts, aren't you! I wonder how many other fans are railway nuts. It happens that Rigby's have published yards of books about Australian railways. I'll publish a stocklist of their railway books, if anyone is interested. Ships, too: we have lots of books about ships.)

Working at Rigby's is great, as I've already intimated. But I have to admit that Frank McManus's memoirs are enough to drive a man to drink. In my case, enough to drive a man to drink more - not a pretty sight. I come home after a wearying day of Frank grappling with the Red Menace that's haunted him for half a century, and fall victim to my own - and I'm not talking about Gestetner correcting fluid. I refer of course to the insidious pleasure of the wrath of grapes. With Sally working an odd shift at her new job - 4-10.30 pm at the Lands Titles Office - there is constant temptation to drown my fury and frustration over the ex-senator's book in Mozart and claret. The Mozart is fine; more and more I come to understand what Peacock meant when he said 'There is nothing perfect in this world except Mozart's music.' But the claret! Oh dear!

Fortunately, I have now found an antidote to the hateful memoirs of Francis Patrick Vincent McManus. I wonder whether you'll believe me when I tell you what that antidote is. It is a three-volume fantasy for children by Ursula Le Guin.

I have admitted in the past that I couldn't get into the Earthsea trilogy. I said as much to Ursula, and for a moment she looked sad (not for herself, I felt, but for me). I am delighted to report, to the Grand Mistress of Fantasy and all her devotees in my audience, that since 1968, when I was too old for such things, I am now grown young enough to appreciate Earthsea. I am so overwhelmed by the beauty and the wisdom and the truth of her creation that I am almost inclined to rank the books higher in my esteem, as I think Ursula does in hers, than the best of her sf novels.

This is a strange and wondrous thing, that the books mean so much to me now, and that they waited patiently until I most needed them.

Unless you are very new to Philosophical Gas and its predecessors, you will know that I am an almost incurable romantic, idealist and cynic. You will know that I have a pretty sharp wit, which can be entertaining at times in print, but in conversation more often boring or hurtful. I have a sense of humour, too, which is something quite distinct from wit and more valuable, and that's what I'm trying to develop, in my writing and in my conversation. Wish me luck!

My main reason for wanting to get out of Canberra was that politics was corrupting me. I was so close to it, first at Hansard and then at AGPS, and apart from the Public Service and Money, Politics seems the main topic of conversation in Canberra anyway. Sally and I were becoming quite morbid about it, allowing it, despite ourselves, to take over our feeling and thinking. The sad thing is that idealism plays no part in politics, and even plain old common sense is a liability in the diabolical machine that is politics today. You can't trust the politicians, because they have suppressed their idealism and common sense to survive in the machine. You can't trust the newspapers, because their owners want to run the machine, and their employees prefer to sacrifice their feelings and principles rather than their pay-packets. (Can you blame them? I can't, because to some degree this is what I have done since I became a journalist. And I understand perfectly, now, why alcoholism is the journalist's major occupational hazard.)

I wasn't at Rigby's more than two days before I'd got the reputation of being a goddam eastern-state intellectual socialist and stirrer. My fault entirely, and I'm working on repairing the damage. I was born, and have lived until last month, in the eastern part of Australia, so I can't do anything about that. In Australia I pass for an intellectual (which means basically that I'm intelligent enough to know that I am not what the world calls an intellectual); I am a socialist, because I believe that the only truly good society is that which plans for the maximum individual freedom compatible with the minimum needs and rights of the masses; and I'm a stirrer, because I can't help expressing my unpopular opinions in conversation, writing and (less often) action. I don't think I'll change much in my head, but there is room for change in the way I talk and the way I act, so I'm working on that, too.

In Don-o-Saur 44 Don Thompson, one of the most gifted, modest and lovable blokes I've ever met, quoted me on the subject of fanzines. He spoke briefly of that panel at the World Convention, when Mike Glicksohn asked us to define the purpose of the fanzine, and he says 'John Bangsund provided the definitive answer. "To spread love" he said.' Don, I said that, and I believe it, and I want to put my fanzine where my mouth was. Other people have the inestimable advantage of just doing it, without defining it. Leigh Edmonds, for example, and John Berry and Susan Wood and Harry Warner and dozens of others. I must work at it, because there is so much hate in me, and so often it gets through, despite my intentions.

Wit is a very ready weapon and outlet for hate. Humour is an aspect or reflection of love. I have wit enough, and most of it I think is of the harmless, playing-with-words kind; irony and sarcasm, which are less harmless, and sometimes deadly in their malice, come naturally to me. So I aim at true humour, which is the gentle tempering of life's absurdity by one's keenness of it - and ultimately, perhaps, at some fusion of wit and humour. But that is an awesome aim. To achieve that, one must aspire to the stature of a Thomas Love Peacock, a Cervantes, a Shakespeare, an Ursula Le Guin.

But, as Ron Graham said to me at the Melbourne Convention in 1974, you must aim higher than you think you should - and when you've achieved that aim, aim higher again. Ron, Don, Ursula, all my long-suffering readers: thank you. I'm trying.

Cheers!
J.B.

Speaking of love, I... I beg your pardon? Oh? Yes, I know, I signed off on that last page, but Sally read what I had written, and she said that wasn't enough for one issue. Also she pointed out that in the second-last paragraph on that page, six lines from the bottom, I somehow missed out the first three letters of the word 'awareness' - and by gum she's right. I can't imagine how a thing like that could happen, unless it's the Ronco's fault.

Great little critic, my wife. A lady of perception and taste. Cooks good, too. And as if that were not enough, she's the best collator I've ever had. Some people are just born lucky.

2 March: I had letters yesterday from the two elderly authors I've been working on since I joined Rigby's. Tim Fitchett, who is 80 by my reckoning, thanked me for my friendly letter to him. I thought he would blast hell out of me. (You must understand that I'm pretty new to this game.) Today I gave my edited version of his manuscript for THE VANISHED FLEET to our production blokes, and felt quietly proud. The subject of the book (mentioned two pages back) is not one that will drive people in their thousands to the bookshops, but it's a subject worth writing a book about, and Mr Fitchett has done a good job of it; not only that, he has illustrated his subject with scores of exquisite paintings. Part of my object while working on this book has been to attempt to make the story match the illustrations. With the best will in the world, with a vastly more experienced editor than me, with a vastly better writer than Mr Fitchett, I don't think that could be done. If you love ships and appreciate the art of representing them in line and water colour, you'll love this book. Robin Johnson (now there's a bloke who keeps on cropping up in this publication, and I'm sure that must Mean Something) gave me a copy of Tim Fitchett's earlier book, DOWN THE BAY - the story of the Port Phillip Bay Excursion Steamers -, and I treasure it, not least because it includes my grandfather's old ship, Reliance (and how did Robin know that?). DOWN THE BAY is being reprinted. Please demand both of Mr Fitchett's books from Rigby's, claiming that your local shop doesn't carry copies, and make it very clear that I sent you. Okay? Ta.

But speaking of love... Well, it's odd, it really is. I wrote a lengthy and friendly (but honest) letter to Mr McManus, telling him what I thought he should do with certain parts of his book. And he wrote back, and he said he looked forward to our future co-operation, and, bloody hell!, he has re-written the chapters I suggested he should.

If you ever wonder about editors, I believe I shall enlighten you somewhat if I go on talking about what I'm doing at Rigby's in future issue of this pantoprismatic journal.

With the letters from Mr Fitchett and Mr McManus there came over me a Sense of Power. And, believe it or not, a sense of humility (which is another aspect or reflection of love). Neither of these blokes knows the difference between 'that' and 'which'; probably you don't either. I do, and that's why I'm an editor. Great: I'm an editor. I'm passable at chess and cryptic crossword puzzles, too. But am I a writer? More important, am I a man? I'll stick my neck out and answer: maybe, but not yet.

Today I feel something very like love for Frank McManus - and that is very strange. I don't think it's because he accepted my ideas on re-writing some of the chapters in his book. I think it's because I wrote to him honestly, if circumspectly, and he responded in the same way. My advice to him may have been entirely wrong, but he accepted it, and (because I gave him that advice and see things that way) I think his

book is now much better than it might have been. I suggested that he state quite clearly in his preface why he became involved in politics, because this is something a lot of us want to know - not particularly about this man, but about politicians in general. And about ourselves, because the temptation, the urge, is there, to become involved in this messy business, but we don't, and we wonder if there is something lacking in us, or if there is something really nasty about those who do become involved.

(If I were writing a second draft of this stuff, all those 'ifs' would become 'whethers'. Please pardon me if I lapse into colloquial speech in this journal. It's all first-draft stuff, composed as it occurs to me, on-stencil, and I assure you that I edit better than I speak - and Philosophical Gas is a conversation, after all.)

Frank McManus has now told me, and told his future readers, why he went into politics. For that I reckon I deserve some little footnote at least in future Australian histories, but I won't be upset if I don't get it. He's doing his best, and I'm doing my best, but history isn't much concerned with that kind of thing. And I'm not concerned with history. As Graham Hall remarked to me, in a letter years ago, 'What has posterity ever done for me?' No, the concern is immediate. Let's do the best with the material at hand. To be an editor for an author whose basic beliefs one does not share, and to present what he has to say as best one can, seems challenge enough. And if one is satisfied with the job done, it's reward enough.

Now let me admit it. I am never, ever, satisfied with the job I have done. I am delighted by your enjoyment of what I have done and what I am doing, but I am not satisfied. Don't mistake me: recognition is wonderful, be it a Hugo, a knighthood, a doctorate or what-you-will. But recognition is not satisfaction. The man that takes satisfaction from small recognitions is a small man, and I am much too conceited to settle for such things.

A quick change of subject. Robert Silverberg comes to mind. At the 1975 Worldcon I gave Bob an armful of Hugos, all of them for other people. He seemed a little upset about this. He should not have been upset, but it was only human of him to be so. He knows that he is worthy of more recognition than all the Hugos Dick Geis and Harlan Ellison and all the others who go on winning Hugos could ever signify; he knows it, and yet is upset that he doesn't win Hugos. Well, the Hugo Award, wonderful as it is, is merely a toy rocket-ship, awarded to its recipient by (at most) a few hundred science fiction fans. Beyond those few fans are many thousands of readers that love and admire the writings of Robert Silverberg (or whoever); and beyond them again, in importance, are those people who know Robert Silverberg (or whoever) and yet love him and admire him.

I think I voted for Bob in only one Hugo category. Does this mean I am lacking in appreciation, in respect, in admiration, in love for the man? I should hope not. There is a fundamental difference between popularity and true worth, and between excellence (or popularity) in one field, or one work, and overall excellence. After Ursula Le Guin, I would say that Bob Silverberg was the most appreciated person and artist at that convention in Melbourne. At times Wilson Tucker outshines Bob Silverberg as a writer; and more often Bob Tucker outshines Bob Silverberg as a congenial or entertaining presence. I revere Tucker as a writer almost to the point of idolatry, and I admired his showmanship, indeed his sheer energy, in Melbourne immensely. But I appreciated Silverberg more - and that is saying a lot. If I felt that I was the only person in that gathering to feel this way, I wouldn't venture on the subject. But I was not alone. Ursula was the convention, no doubt of that. Three other people made that convention, depending on who you were: Bob Silverberg, Bob Tucker and Forry

Ackerman. Forry is a great guy, no doubt about it, and I would have loved to talk with him for hours; but he is not enough reason for me to go to a convention. Bob Tucker also is a great guy, and I love him. Lee Harding came to me one day during the convention and said, wide-eyed, 'Do you know, for a moment there we managed to suppress Bob Tucker and get Wilson Tucker, the writer, talking!' Bob and Wilson Tucker, alas, are still two different people to me. I only met Bob, and he was fabulous, but I had hoped to meet Wilson Tucker, too, but I didn't. Bob Silverberg just came as himself, and for those of us that love Bob Silverberg, that was more than enough. I didn't talk enough with him, either, but he made more of an impression on me than anyone else at that convention (always excepting the Divine Ursula, for whom - I envy her not at all in this regard - fate has decreed that she should always be so far beyond us and so close to us as to be utterly awesome).

And Bob had Barbara with him. To be happily married to a woman like Barbara Silverberg, there must be something special about the man.

I think I started off talking about recognition and satisfaction. I think I started talking about Bob Silverberg because he is not sufficiently recognized, and because he is the kind of man that will never be satisfied. And I think I started talking about Bob because he is pretty much the kind of man I am - give or take a few awards, achievements and so on. I suspect that we are about the same age, which is interesting up to a point, but not awfully important.

If I ever resolve this conflict between wanting to be recognized and wanting to be satisfied within myself, I shall probably tell Bob the secret before I let on to anyone else. I expect no less a favour from him, if he beats me to it. But somehow I don't expect either of us to resolve it. Some few, I suspect, are born to overcome the conflict without knowing they have done so; the many never know the conflict; and those of us that are in between the few and the many go on wondering.

4 March: I'm a little concerned about what I have written in the last few pages, because I have been doing something I'm not used to - speaking openly, not just of myself (which I have done often enough in the past, to the unutterable boredom of all but those few of my readers that forgive everything and everyone), but also of other people. This is a pretty new experience for me, and I'm not sure that I should go on with it. Before you say Yes! yes! go on!, let me tell you a tale.

Once upon a time there was a great mage named Johnson, and lo! he called upon one whom he considered if not an equal at least a bloody menace, named Bangsund. And Bangsund confessed unto Johnson that he often wrote letters to people, and typed stencils about people, and next morning destroyed that which he had writteneth. And Johnson the Two-Thirds Wise (he had not at that time achieved perfect mastery) said unto Bangsund 'I must say that's pretty stupid' - or words to that effect - 'What you write first is usually most true, and that which cometh after but a pale reflexion of your true meaning and finest art' (or something like that). Some weeks after that, Bangsund happened to be writing to Johnson the Nine-Twelfths Wise - which proves that it was quite a few weeks after - and bearing in mind his admonition, he told him exactly what he thought about some goddam trivial thing or other, and the mage Johnson was most sorely troubled by his tidings. And Johnson admonished Bangsund for his writings, and Bangsund reminded Johnson of his original wisdom, and Johnson did bite his lip sorely.

But maybe Robin was right, after all. If he wasn't, and if what I have written so far in this strange issue is unwise, you may blame it all on the wisdom and example of two

lovely, wise and wonderful women - Susan Wood and Ursula Le Guin. On Susan, because in her fanzine Amor she opens up her heart and says lovely things about all kinds of unlovely people; on Ursula, because I started reading her Earthsea trilogy before I started typing this issue and have only just finished reading it, and in it she says all that needs saying to anyone who feels the need to say anything to anyone. Between them, Susan and Ursula have bewitched me - perhaps, who knows? (special! extra!) for this issue only, but we'll see, we'll see.

A Wizard of Earthsea. The Tombs of Atuan. The Farthest Shore. These are but their use-names; their true names are Ged, Tenar and Lebannen. And the rune on the ring that binds them all is the she-bear. As long ago as 1988 I was lost in admiration for Ursula Le Guin. You see me now, middle-aged and grotchty, found in admiration for Ursula Le Guin. There's a difference; I can feel it, even if I can't label it yet.

I refuse to discuss the books. If you want to know exactly what I thought of them, read them, when you're ready.

My lovely colleague Penny and I were talking briefly this afternoon of Tolkien and T. H. White and Ursula Le Guin and science fiction, and I mentioned that I had no special training in the suspension of disbelief, not having started reading science fiction until an advanced age, and Penny said 'There must have been something' - and as she said it, I realized that there was. 'It was my religious upbringing' I said - and as I said it, and knew it to be true, my other lovely colleague, Peter (he would blush to be called lovely, and I would never say it to him, but why shouldn't a man who respects and honours and loves his male and female colleagues equally use the same word to describe them both?), who will admit to possessing a Doctorate in Divinity if pressed, came within hearing. I repeated what I had just learnt: 'An upbringing in religion surely prepares one for literary works of fantasy.' He seemed a little distressed, for religion is not fantasy to him. A failure in communication, that. 'Fantasy' does not mean to him what it means to me, nor does 'religion'. Religion is that which binds, to me. And in a sense, fantasy is that which releases - to bind more truly.

Do you know why I love Earthsea and cannot imagine myself reading Tolkien again? It's not because Ursula has a greater mastery of story-telling or of imagination or of language than Tolkien had; it's because she has a fantastic sense of humour. Simply that.

When I was about half-drunk the other night (it could not have been more than that: more than half-drunk I can't type at all), I said that humour is an aspect or reflection of love, that true humour is the gentle tempering of life's absurdity by one's awareness of it - and even though I wrote these things, I am inclined to believe them.

It is a strange and wonderful thing to believe what one has written.

To write what one believes is an entirely different, and very ordinary, thing. Anyone can do that. I have written what I believe often enough and easily enough to know that.

Ursula, have you re-read the Earthsea trilogy lately?

Do you believe what you wrote there?

Do you find it strange and wonderful?

Is there more to say about Earthsea? - or have you said all you can bear to say?

Or are Urras and Anarres part of 'Earthsea', too?

Along with whatever you are writing now. For better or worse, about Earthsea or not, something you have to say, believing in now - and believing, despite yourself, later?

WE GET LETTERS

Oh yes, we get letters all right. Some we even answer. Mainly we're so busy writing letters of our own we don't get round to answering the ones that come in. But we will, we will. Things are gonna be different here in South Australia, yessir. (And Ms & Ma'am.)

Tonight I read through a pile of letters worth answering and letters worth publishing that would break your heart, it really would, especially if you'd written a fair few of them. A veritable who's-who of fandom, it was. By golly.

But enough of that maudlin studd (I swear this IBM has a mind of its own, or is telepathic or something: I was thinking of a long, fabulous letter from Jack Wodhams when it typed that non-word back there. What I meant to type was) stuff. Disregarding the pleas from earnest subscribers, 1968 to date, most of the letters related to an article I published in PG last year or thereabouts by Professor Meredith Thring, on 'The Creative Society'. All the letters but one may be reasonably summed up as pessimistic, ranging from wistful-pessimistic to chilling-pessimistic. Here's the exception:

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE
'Heathwood'
11 Cherry Garden Avenue
Folkestone Kent England
24 June 1975

I often wondered 'Whatever Became Of John Bangsund'. It was nice of you to send me PG 29, which informed me. Apart from my first marriage staying happily put, the patternless pattern, dead ends and Chaos Come Again of your life seem roughly

analogous to mine. Maybe we were both born on the wrong planet.

Six years ago I was a disillusioned freelance author. My Macdonald hard-cover, THE FLESHPOTS OF SANSATO, had died the Death of 1000 Cuts in the NEL paperback form. It was a philosophical narrative, but in paperback most of its Philosophical Gas had been excised. The narrative itself had been chopped up like an eel and the segments scattered to the four winds. People who'd read good reviews of the original, but bought the paperback, told me I was losing my touch. They hadn't noticed that damnable word 'abridged' on the flyleaf.

It was the culminating idiocy of a whole string of idiocies perpetrated on my books by their publishers. I'd long debated whether publishers or politicians were the most ignorant, arrogant, tasteless and craziest creatures in all creation. I awarded that palm to publishers - current addressee excepted.

So I got a job with publishers (cum-booksellers, subscription agents, back issue dealers): Wm Dawson & Sons Ltd (est. 1809). And never wrote again.

And then a few months back, unexpectedly, the film rights of my FOUR-SIDED TRIANGLE sold for the second time. To a French TV/film company - the film to be directed by Claude Chabrol. No fortune ensued: only enough to exist, carefully, for a year without benefit of Dawson's, if I chose. I didn't choose. I didn't wish to return to the precarious position of a poor pen-man plagued and prostrated by potty publishers. Especially at a time when fiction was being strangled to death by roaring inflation in this Sceptre'd Isle.

I had twice thrown up horrible, exhausting, soul-killing - but safe - jobs for full-time writing. Both times the publishers did their own kind of soul-killing in the end. However, my family urged me to try again - third time lucky and all that. I wavered. Then I read Thring's 'The Creative Society' in PG 29: about the need to find

self-fulfilment through the exercise of one's creative talents: 'Quality of life may be best defined as the individual's deep feeling of how worthwhile his life is.' Apart from allowing me to eat, and more importantly, drink, there didn't seem much worth while in my life at Dawson's.

I think that article affected the Shape of Things to Come, for directly afterwards I handed in my notice.

So here I am, into my second month of freelancing and my sixth decade, finding publishers even more offhand and uncommunicative, if possible, than they were of yore. Firms like Ballantine Books and MacMillan can't even muster the courtesy to acknowledge letters. Could be, of course, that they've lost the faculty of reading: illiteracy is on the increase and, oddly, I've always found it more prevalent among publishers than in almost any other profession. Plumbers' mates are L.I.T.'s by comparison.

About the last, and possibly the only useful, thing I did ere leaving Dawson's was to provide your librarian friend Grant Stone of Murdoch University with an almost complete collection of New Worlds (leaving search-feelers still out for the balance). I had difficulty locating the very rare first three issues (by a coincidence I had a story in the first issue, but I wouldn't part with my only copy) - and then found my son-in-law had them and was willing to sell.

The assistant manager of my department at Dawson's visited Murdoch University last month - and received congratulations on his efforts!

:::: It's a cruel world, Bill, no doubt of it. Some even find it cruel. (Tonights typos are brought to you courtesy Wolfgang Blass, maker of the superlative 1973 Shiraz that won the Jimmy Watson trophy. Wolf lives up the road a few miles from here, and we plan to call on him real soon now.)

Publishers are odd, as you say. I mean, you said more than that, but who knows who's reading this? Do you recall the old fable of the bat in the war between the animals and the birds? Of course you do. At AGPS in Canberra journalists were idiots and we were something else - except me: being a journalist as well as a public service editor, I was the bat around the place. Now I'm here in Adelaide, a publisher's editor, goshwow, and I'm right in between the publishers and the authors. I mean, if you take the old old story of the curate's egg, and the bishop is the publisher and the cook the author, I'm the poor bastard that has to say 'it's good in places, my lord.' I'd rather be freelancing, but I haven't anything I feel like freelancing about yet (give me time, just give me time), so there I am.

I admire your courage, Bill, and I hope that film makes a million. Need I say I admire your work? I suppose I must, given the present shape of our audience. I mean, most of them probably weren't hardly born when Hurst & Blackett (was it? - someone like that), publishers of elegant romances for idle ladies, momentarily went berserk and published THE FOUR-SIDED TRIANGLE in their eminently forgettable series. Someone in my past has forgotten eminently to return my copy, so I can't even tell Sally she should read it, dammit.

If the film looks like being made, and looks like being anything approaching the success the book should have been all along, and if you're scratching around for an Australian publisher, may I recommend my employer's services?

But why do I go on about that book? Dammit, I want to see your next, and the one after that - and all the others you have in you. Don't tell a soul, but I'm a Temple fan.

27 March New typewriter? Well, yes, it is. Didn't think you'd notice, actually. It's an IBM Selectric (dual pitch, correcting ribbon, hot & cold running corfluo), the kind of machine used by the New Breed of Fans, and if it's good enough for Edmonds and Bowers and Glicksohn, it's okay by me.

No, I haven't sold the beautiful little Executive. Extravagant offers will be considered.

I'm not sure about this machine's balls (saving your presence, Ma'am!). The book says that this Courier 12 element is 'fair' for stencil cutting, the almost unreadable Dual Gothic and Light Italic 'good', and the Delegate 'marginal' (which is American for useless) - and that's all I have at present. Technical notes from other Selectric users would be appreciated.

AN ODD THING: I showed my design for the cover of ASFR 21 to a lady named Lyn, who works in our Art Department at Rigby's and knows what's what in this kind of field, and she asked me whether I was interested in science fiction. I confessed that I was, up to a point, and she said that she had met some sf people in England. In 1973. In Birmingham. When she was a waitress at a hotel there. Small world, eh? Any reader who recalls with fondness a waitress named Lyn at the 1973 British SF Convention may contact her cautiously through me, up to a point.

Now, where were we? Ah, yes: letters.

ROB GERRAND
863 Hampton Street
Brighton Vic. 3186
25.1.76

I see you were prevailed upon to intervene with the All-Seeing One. Not, I hasten to assure you (far be it from me - or anyone for that matter - to suggest that you would have the temerity to be other than modest and diplomatic), that you averted an Earthquake/Flood Disaster, or sought to avert one; merely that you discretely interposed the idea of diverting it elsewhere. Where, I'll not inquire. But I'm keeping my eyes peeled and ears dewaxed for news from afar of devastation inexplicable. Self interest, enlightened or otherwise, doesn't come into it. Your intercession was simply and nobly in behalf of your Premier's good reputation; that is my information.

True, true, Rob. For the benefit of outlanders I should explain that a clairvoyant late of these parts predicted an earthquake and flood for Adelaide, to occur on 19 January. Sally, back in Canberra, was a bit worried that day; and looking at all those humourists in the streets with snorkels and swimming togs on the morning of the 19th, so was I. But as some have suggested, it seems to have been my unwitting function to get to Canberra in 1972 to save Australia from an elected McMahon government, and to get here to save Adelaide from a more natural disaster. Where I'll be needed next, who knows?

In the kitchen, washing up, says Sally, reading over my shoulder, since we have dinner guests tonight.

So that will have to be all for this issue. No, hang on, I just want to try out these other balls. Hmm. The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy whatnot. How do you work these bloody things, Leigh! See yez.