PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

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José, can you see?

QUINCENTENNIAL NOTES In April 1492 an Italian adventurer named Cristoforo Colombo went to the court of Ferdinand and Isabella in Spain with a crazy scheme: if he sailed due south-west he would either fall off the edge of the world or discover Australia, which is much the same thing. Ferdinand and Isabella thought that was pretty silly, but if he took a priest or two with him maybe they could convert some savages along the way, so OK, they would sponsor the deal. There's just one thing bothering us, they said to Colombo, You have such a funny name – would you mind changing it to something more dignified? Of course he didn't mind, and in August Cristóbal Colón set sail for the Great South-West Land. The rest is sea-story: he discovered another place entirely. To show their gratitude for Colombo's achievements, the settlers who followed him named the place after another Italian adven-turer, Amerigo Vespucci, who claimed to have discovered the land of the free and home of the brave in 1497. This was five hundred years after Leif Eriksson discovered Ameriground, and a very long time after the folk who lived there discovered it. Later settlers redressed this somewhat by adopting the romantic name Columbia for certain national purposes, but again on condition that Colombo change his name. Since he was no longer available for comment, his name became Christopher Columbus whether he liked it or not. For some of the above reasons, but especially because Spain is conducting the 1992 Olympic Games, the United Nations has declared 1993 the Year of Indigenous Peoples.

27 September What nonsense! Well, the bits I made up are. Russel Barsh, Associate Professor of American Indian Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle, and member of the UN Year of Indigenous Peoples co-ordinating committee, told me that 1992 was that committee's choice for its Year, but the UN deferred to the wishes of Spain and the USA and postponed it to 1993. The violence anticipated by the UN if indigenous peoples got mixed up with the quincentennial celebrations or the Olympic Games was relocated to Los Angeles, Sarajevo, Nagorno-Karabakh and Rostock to mark the Year of the New World Disorder. But you know all that.

What you probably don't know is that I watch *Sale of the Century* on TV most nights. It's a dreadful program to watch at the appointed time, but I tape it while Sally and I watch the ABC news, and later we watch the tape. By skipping the commercials we can get through the show in ten minutes. But why watch it at all? Partly for the same reason that I play Scrabble on the computer – to reassure myself that some part of my brain is still working – and partly because I learn things. In recent weeks, for example, I have learnt that Australians younger than me tend not to have heard of Amerigo Vespucci, and that Kiri Te Kanawa first came to wide public attention when she sang Desdemona in Verdi's *Aïda*. I suppose just about anyone would attract some attention by doing that, but I heard it first on *Sale of the Century*. I first heard of Verdi's *Rigalotto* on the same program.

Working for *Meanjin* helps to reassure me that some part of my brain is still functioning. Sadly, in late January I was disemployed from that job. I wasn't exactly sacked, and I didn't resign, and my name still appears on the title page as Assistant Editor, but since February I have worked for *Meanjin* as a freelance. I don't miss the office much, the hassle of getting there and the vertigo of being there, but I do miss the people – Jenny and Philip and David and Helen and Victor and visiting Associate Professors of American Indian Studies, to name but a few. When people like George Papaellinas or Michael Sharkey dropped in, or the Live Poets Society (John Forbes, Laurie Duggan, Alan Wearne et al.), all work ceased: it's hard to concentrate on work when you're laughing yourself sick.

Bev Roberts had that effect at times, too. Bev was my predecessor, and for a year or so she worked for the Ministry for the Arts in our downstairs room. After Jenny, Bev was my favorite person in that building. She is a poet with a wonderfully wicked sense of humor. I saw her on TV a few nights ago, reading a poem to a humorless audience in a main street of Geelong. She was there as part of an election rally in support of Joan Kirner, Premier of Victoria, whose government goes to the polls next Saturday and is unlikely to be returned. Labor will lose office if the two Geelong seats go to the Liberals, or if any two Labor seats in the State go to the Liberals. Geelong has had more than its fair share of the recession, and it blames the government for it, of course. Bev's poem was entitled 'Blame Joan Kirner', and the gist of it was if *anything* goes wrong, blame Joan Kirner. There was a verse that said if your footy team loses, blame Joan Kirner. Geelong lost on Saturday.

Geelong lost to the West Coast Eagles, the Perth team, in the AFL Grand Final. A lot of people in Victoria, including people who don't follow Australian Rules football, think it's a crying shame that the VFL brought four interstate teams into the competition and renamed itself the Australian Football League. Sally doesn't think people are silly enough to vote Labor out just because the AFL premiership cup has gone interstate for the first time. It's not silliness: politics and football are a dangerous mix, and people just get caught up and confused and behave irrationally when the two come together. Take soccer.

I first became interested in soccer when I learnt that Marcuse was playing for Manchester United. I've often wondered what became of him. By the time I realized that this bloke was just Mark Hughes, no relation, I had become a passionate supporter of Sheffield Wednesday, the only one in my street actually. But enough of this chatter: let's move on to the heavy stuff.

Muphry's Law

Printers have persecuted me without a cause
Psalm 119 : 161

Some readers have wondered why I claim only to edit the *Society of Editors Newsletter* 'in places'. Some suggest that I am too modest, or that I deliberately include a mistake or two in each issue, on the Islamic principle, or simply to make them feel superior. It is for none of these reasons. It is because of my deep respect for Muphry's Law.

Muphry's Law is the editorial application of the better-known Murphy's Law. Muphry's Law dictates that (a) if you write anything criticizing editing or proofreading, there will be a fault of some kind in what you have written; (b) if an author thanks you in a book for your editing or proofreading, there will be mistakes in the book; (c) the stronger the sentiment expressed in (a) and (b), the greater the fault; (d) any book devoted to editing or style will be internally inconsistent.

An example of (a) is a review in the *Age* of Julie Lewis's *Olga Masters: A Lot of Living* in which Laurie Clancy criticizes the proofreading; the review consistently misspells Dorothy Hewett's surname. You can probably recall with no trouble, but some anguish, examples of (b); I will mention only the absence of a list of illustrations from Lloyd Robson's award-winning *History of Tasmania, volume 1* and hurry right along in case the Fellowship of Australian Writers gets wind of this and demands that I return its plaque.

Shirley Purchase's *Australian Writers' and Editors' Guide* is the dictionary I consult first on any matter of Australian style, and it rarely fails me. In her acknowledgements this distinguished colleague uses the word 'meticulous' to describe another distinguished colleague's proofreading. There is a touch of black magic about that word, perhaps reflected in its etymology (Latin *meticulosus*, fearful, from *metus*, fear). Some scholars contend that it should be specifically mentioned in Muphry's Law: 'using the word *meticulous* to describe editing or proofreading guarantees faults in the work'; others maintain that it is amply covered by (b) and (c). Certainly I can think of no other reason for the novel *Coonardoo* being attributed to 'K. S. Pritchard' when *AWEG*'s entry for Katharine Susannah Prichard says emphatically '(*not* Pritch-)'.

In *The Complete Guide to Editorial Freelancing* (Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1974) Carol O'Neill and Avima Ruder acknowledge the assistance of 160 editors and friends, which is very generous of them. Or could it have been a marketing ploy? (We should sell at least 160 copies of this one, Mr Dodd. I am sure you are right, Mr Mead.) It's a fairly useful sort of book, worth the fifty cents I paid for it some years ago in a remainder joint, but I have never been able to get past page 38. On this page the authors remind us that 'Country names change, and a book that uses an old-hat appellation will seem dated' (a sentence typical of their light-hearted style, which I would have edited in places). They then tell you where to look for up-to-date place names and give a few examples of countries recently renamed, among them Cambodia, now 'Sri Landa'. *

Muphry's Law is no respecter of persons. The editor of the English translation of the *Jerusalem Bible* (Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1966) does not thank his proofreader, but he does list the 'principal collaborators in translation and literary review', among them such eminent people as J. R. R. Tolkien and James McAuley. My copy is not just a first edition – it is a copy that got through before the press was stopped to correct a little mistake in Genesis, chapter 1: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, and God's siprit hovered over the water.'

Over the centuries Muphry's Law has been particularly evident at work in the Bible. The misquotation that heads this piece is from the *Printers' Bible* (*c.* 1702), so called because in that verse 'printers' replaced the princes that David was complaining about. There have been other misprints: the original King James version of 1611 was riddled with them. In an edition of 1823 Rebekah's damsels (Genesis 24:61) inexplicably became 'camels'. An Oxford edition of 1820, known as the *Large Family Bible*, renders Isaiah 66:9 as 'Shall I bring to the birth and not cease to bring forth' instead of 'cause to bring forth'. Another, in 1804, had a son coming forth 'out of thy lions'; nothing to do with Daniel – it should have been 'out of thy loins' (1 Kings 8:19). The *Wicked Bible* of 1632 left the word *not* out of the seventh commandment: 'Thou shalt commit adultery.' An edition printed in the reign of Charles I replaced the word *no* in Psalm 14:1 with *a*: 'The fool hath said in his heart there is a God.' The first Bible printed in Ireland, in 1716, transposed two letters in John 5:14: 'Behold, thou art made whole: sin on more.'

These curious facts I have on the authority of the Reverend Doctor E. Cobham Brewer, tireless compiler of curious reference books, including two of my favorites, the *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* and the *Reader's Handbook of Famous Names in Fiction, Allusions, References, Proverbs, Plots, Stories, and Poems*. Brewer died in 1897, before he had finished correcting the proofs of a revised edition of the *Reader's Handbook*. My copy includes his daughter Nellie's preface to that edition, and I will end this ramble by quoting from it.

> I thank, too, most warmly, the proof-reader, who has shown so much patience, and has helped me in every possible way in what might have been a very hard task; he made it not only an easy but an exceedingly pleasant one.

And, bless her kind heart, she seems to have got away with that – almost as if Muphry had smiled upon her.

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* Sri Landa was in fact the name given by an infamous religious sect to its commune in the mountains near Trilby, Virginia – which, oddly enough, is where the original old-hat Appalachians came from.

How I Became an Editor

I wish I could write a piece like 'Muphry's Law' for every issue of the Newsletter. Musing on this in the September–October issue (not yet finished as I write), I said that I have neither the talent nor the time to do so – and went on to write the next five pages. I am an undisciplined writer: I start with inspiration, and continue with improvisation and digression; what results may be entertaining, but it's no way to write essays, book reviews, meeting reports or jacket blurbs. Back in the April issue I said that I would write 'next month' about the *Oxford Writer's Shelf*, but I still haven't done so. It's terrific. I use it every day. Every editor with a computer should have it. But a review of the *Oxford Writer's Shelf* demands more than fifteen words, and so far they haven't come to me. Unprofessional? If I were in the business of writing, yes. But I am in the business of editing, and as Teresa Pitt once so succinctly put it, we become editors in order to avoid being writers.

I begin this account of how I became an editor with a quotation that may come as a surprise equally to Fapans and readers of the Newsletter.

> **fanzine** (fæ·nzīn), orig. *U.S.* [f. *FAN *sb.*² + MAGA)-ZINE.] A magazine for fans, esp. those of science fiction.
> *Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. I (1972)

Oxford's first citation dates from 1949. Peter Roberts, in Peter Nicholls' *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* (1979), gives 1930 as the date of the first known fanzine and credits Russ Chauvenet with inventing the word in 1941. Peter Roberts continues:

> [The] early fanzines were straightforward publications dealing exclusively with sf or amateur science and were produced by local fan groups founded in America by the more active readers of contemporary professional sf magazines. As interest grew, however, and sf fans formed closer contacts and friendships, individual fans began publishing for their own amusement and fanzines became more diverse, and their contents more capricious; fan editors also began to exchange fanzines and to send out free copies to contributors and letter-writers. Thus fanzines abandoned any professional aspirations in exchange for informality and an active readership – characteristics which persist to the present and which distinguish fanzines from conventional hobbyist publications. . . . The smaller fanzines are often written entirely by the editor and serve simply as letter substitutes sent out to friends; others have limited distribution within amateur press associations such as FAPA.

A. Langley Searles (still publishing the *Fantasy Commentator*, the fanzine mentioned in Oxford's 1949 citation) and Russ Chauvenet (who invented the word) – and Bruce Gillespie, John Foyster and I – are among the 65 current members of FAPA (founded 1937). Fans have a word for this: time-binding. They also have a term for FAPA: elephants' graveyard. I have been a member since 1971, and I am one of the youngsters.

Bruce Gillespie publishes several fanzines, among them *SF Commentary* and *The Metaphysical Review*. In recent years he has published in the latter a kind of continuing anthology called 'The Best of John Bangsund'. *TMR*'s publication schedule is fortunately infrequent, so Bruce hasn't scraped the bottom of the barrel yet, but I thought he was going close to it a few months ago when he said he would like to reprint my first extended piece of fanzine writing – an account of my visit to the Adelaide Festival in 1964. Sir William Walton was one of the distinguished guests at that festival, so the piece was called 'Sir William and I in Adelaide'.

Bruce usually writes a few lines introducing his selection; this time I volunteered to do it, and I finished up with an 1800-word article – which, with his permission, I am about to reprint. It's an essential part of the story of how I became an editor. You may be bemused, as Bruce was, that the words 'edit' and 'editor' do not appear in the article. They will certainly appear in the addendum. What I wanted to do in the article is summed up in its title: it is said that the Golden Age of Science Fiction is 13; for me it came a little later.

Glimpses of a Golden Age

It's hard to believe now, but from 1961 to 1965 I was respectably employed as a librarian at the Victorian Railways Institute. In my spare time, which seemed endless, I read good books, listened to good music, watched good films, travelled a lot around Victoria, and wrote about these and other things in a diary. Something of a republican even then, when Queen Elizabeth visited Melbourne in 1962 I didn't stay in town for the show but went off to Portland, stayed in a cheap pub, and read nothing but Shakespeare for three or four days.

I lived alone, but I had a social life that now seems extraordinarily active. I joined the ALP, indeed belonged to the same branch as Barry Jones (then emerging as Australia's greatest TV quiz champion, now national president of the party). I was moderately active in Amnesty, writing swingeing letters to foreign dictators, who never wrote back. I went to concerts and films and exhibitions, usually with some bright girl I had met in the library. I did not watch television. I did not read science fiction. At a party in 1963 I met Lee Harding, a writer of science fiction. I was 24. My life was about to change in a way I could never have imagined.

'You go through Bayswater and head for The Basin,' Lee said when I accepted his invitation to dinner, 'you'll come to a service station on your right, then our place is the third house along. You can't see it from the road.' Lee and Carla's place was full of books and music, and I felt at home the moment I arrived. And we had so much to talk about! I believe I stayed the night. Lee was very tactful about science fiction, barely mentioning it. Knowing my background as a theological student, before I left Lee gave me a copy of Arthur C. Clarke's 'The Nine Billion Names of God' and invited me to comment some time on the theology in it. The hell with theology! I was

suddenly and most unexpectedly hooked on science fiction. Lee introduced me to the best and most interesting writers, and I couldn't get enough of them. On a long trip to Queensland later that year I read nothing but sf. Some of the places I stayed in are linked still in my mind with the books I read there.

Lee also introduced me to fanzines and fandom, and eventually fans. I met the fans' voices first. Lee was part of a round-robin continuing conversation on tape with John Foyster, John Baxter and Bob Smith. I think I met John Baxter first, on that trip to Queensland. We sat at either end of a sofa in his Sydney flat, sneaking glances at each other, because Lee had told us that we looked and talked alike. Apart from agreeing that we didn't, I remember little of that meeting with John Baxter. His interests overlapped with Lee's, but not much with mine. I met John Foyster about Easter 1964. I couldn't quite relate the man to his voice or his fanzines, and didn't know what to make of him at all. He was the youngest of us. He seemed at once shy and arrogant, considerate and condescending. I had never met anyone with such a sharp wit. When I read Shelley's comment on his friend Peacock, 'His fine wit makes such a wound the knife is lost in it,' I thought instantly of Foyster. We established a mutual respect from the start, but it says something about both of us that I was surprised, years later, to realize that he had long regarded me as a friend: such a great honor I thought he bestowed sparingly. John Foyster is probably friend to more people than anyone else I know.

In 1963 Lee and Carla became, almost literally overnight, my best friends. Lee was an enthusiast, a man born to make discoveries and share them as quickly as possible, then move on to the next. I have something of that in my own nature, so Lee and I sparked each other off. I spent most weekends at Lee and Carla's place, and during the week Lee and I had long conversations on the telephone. 'Are you two lovers or something?' my mother once asked me – a question that embarrassed me no end. 'Tell her I've got a bum like a peach,' Lee suggested when I told him. He wasn't quite as fast as Foyster, but close.

As I recall, Lee didn't actively encourage me to write. In fact my first fanzine writing appeared in John Foyster's *Satura* – a letter or two, maybe other things, nothing of any merit. But I had been writing for years, in my diary and occasionally elsewhere, and I desperately wanted to convince Lee that I had at least the makings of a real writer, the sort of writer who could be published, perhaps even for money. One night I gave him a short story to read. He read it, in total silence. He finished it, got up quietly from his chair, walked quietly to the back door, opened it, and shouted into the night: '*Speeee*-yew!' Well, I didn't think much of it either, but I was hoping for some sort of constructive comment. As he came back into the room and we fell about in convulsive laughter, I knew he had given me far more than that.

The third Adelaide Festival of Arts was held in March 1964. I took a fortnight's leave from the library and went to Adelaide. I had visited Adelaide three times before, during the 1950s, and had good memories of the place. It is still my favorite Australian capital city: Sally and I lived there for a while in the late 70s, and would have stayed there indefinitely if there had been work for me. My budget for that trip in 1964 was minimal, though it seems luxurious now. I had paid for my train fare and modest accommodation, and for tickets to the main things I wanted to see, and had a few pounds left over. I did a lot of walking in Adelaide, far more than I could believe when I moved there twelve years later, but I was young then. It was early autumn. Everything about the place was luminous, golden: the train's early morning descent through the glorious Adelaide hills, the trees along the Torrens, the late sun on the city buildings, the day's memories as I returned to the caravan park at Hackney.

At the Railways Institute in Adelaide, where I was welcomed as an emissary from some higher plane of existence (my library had thirty branches, theirs none), I was given an office and a typewriter, and there I wrote another story, 'The Beheading of Basil Pott'. From that office, and from my little rented house in Hackney, I also wrote a lot of letters to Lee Harding. When I returned to Melbourne I couldn't believe Lee's excitement. He wanted to publish my story. He wanted to publish my letters. He wanted to publish a *fanzine*. He had published fanzines before, but nothing like what he had in mind now. This one would be something really special, and he would call it *Canto*.

The rest of 1964, outside of working hours, was mainly taken up with *Canto*, a lady named Carolyn and a twelve-year-old car. 'An *Alvis*!' Lee cried in some mixture of disbelief and despair as I drove my limousine up his driveway at The Basin. At least he knew what it was. I had long been a connoisseur of motor-car design, and in 1952 had fallen in love with the Alvis TA-21 at the Melbourne Motor Show. I never thought I would own one, but there it was, in mid-1964, a snip at £500. Carolyn liked it. I had met Carolyn the night before I left for Adelaide, and I saw the Alvis in a used-car lot in Prahran one day on my way to her place. Lee never entirely approved of Carolyn or the Alvis.

One day Carolyn and I drove to Olympic Park to watch John Foyster running in an athletic meeting. We cheered John when we saw him, but he probably didn't hear us. Shortly after there was an announcement on the PA system: in a very plummy voice an official said that if anyone present owned a black Alvis sedan (not mine, I thought, mine is black and silver-grey), registration number WT-962 (but that *is* my number, I thought), they should inspect it at their earliest convenience, since it appeared to be on fire. The Alvis, it turned out, wasn't actually on fire, but was close to it. Carolyn and I were both smokers, and one of us had dropped live ash on a cloth that I kept under one of the front seats. The car was billowing smoke when we reached it. I doubt that John Foyster ran faster that day than I did.

Meanwhile, back at The Basin . . . I was very fond of ellipses in those days. Lee didn't seem to mind them. I can't recall now whether Lee or I cobbled my Adelaide letters together to make up the piece we called 'Sir William and I in Adelaide', but I suspect I did. The uninspired introduction and ending are certainly mine. Rereading the piece after all these years was an

unexpected pleasure: on the whole it is embarrassing, but I like its exuberance – and the touches of humor that creep in here and there between the bouts of labored witticism. But I must say that I have long since become very fond of Walton's music.

Canto 1 appeared early in 1965. As well as my piece on the Adelaide Festival, it included my Basil Pott story, a fannish comic strip based on Walt Kelly's Pogo characters that I did later in 1964, and pieces by Foyster, Bob Smith and Don Symons (a superb writer, known to the great world, if at all, as father of the rock musician Red Symons). For the second issue John Foyster wrote about Dame Joan Sutherland and Don Symons wrote about his career in gold-smuggling, and other things were written or planned, but *Canto* 2 never appeared.

In 1966 John Foyster organized a science fiction convention, the first in Australia since 1958. Today's Australian fandom, and much of its science fiction, has its origins in that convention. In turn, that convention had some of its origins in a house near The Basin that you can't see from the road, and a caravan park in Hackney that has long since gone, and a fanzine that appeared just once.

Addendum

I became head librarian at the VRI in 1962. My predecessor, a man past retiring age, had run the Victorian branch of the Returned Servicemen's League from his office and more or less let the library run itself. I was very impressed by the activities of the VRI earlier in the century, when it was a workers' educational, cultural and recreational centre – part of the same movement as the Mechanics' Institutes. For years it ran lecture meetings, addressed by outstanding men (invariably men) from all fields of endeavor, and by all accounts the meetings were packed. I recall seeing Bernard O'Dowd's name on one of the programs, and he was talking about poetry, not about parliamentary draftsmanship (his day job). There were concerts. The library thrived: among its old books that had survived was a huge leather-bound set of Wagner's operas; the dates stamped in the volumes were many. In 1962 the two main activities of the Institute were industrial training (courses on signalling, basic electricity and the like) and sport. The library's annual loan rate had peaked during the Depression, fallen slowly during the 1940s and 50s, and by comparison had all but collapsed after 1956, when television came to Melbourne. I felt like changing some of this, and I did.

I removed the maze of balustrades and grilles from the library, changing it from a fortress into a big open space. I hung framed prints of early Melbourne about the place and brought in armchairs and a goldfish tank. I set up a collection of children's books. I abolished the Dewey system from the small non-fiction section, and doubled its size. My predecessor had kept the motor-repair manuals in a locked cupboard in his office; I put them out on the shelves, and increased the section tenfold. I wrote a book column for the *Railways Newsletter* and ran ads for the library in the weekly gazette. I founded the VRI Music Club, organizing regular concerts in the library of recorded classical music, and wrote the program notes for them. I visited the branch libraries much more often than they were used to, and upgraded their collections. I encouraged the opening of new branches. My reward for all this was suspicion from the general office and enthusiasm from the library's users. By 1965 the annual loan rate had shot up to a figure approaching those of the early 1950s, and my expenditure on acquisitions had set entirely new records. By 1965 I knew I wanted to be a book editor. The general office was pleased to see me go.

The library was unusual in that it was able to buy books directly from publishers at trade rates. This meant that publishers' sales reps visited me regularly, and they usually went away happy. The reps were mostly interesting blokes (all men, yes), but I was surprised at how *unbookish* most of them were. When I mentioned this to Jim Ellis, one of the reps from Cassell's, he said that booksellers were much the same: among the people he called on there were only three who were good for a bookish conversation, and I was one of them. He could talk at length with anyone about the trade and books in general, but with me he could talk about Dostoevsky and Iris Murdoch, Nietzsche and Michael Innes, Joyce Cary and Kazantzakis and Camus. Jim was a bright, gentle, witty man, and we got on famously. He liked *Canto* when I gave him a copy. (So did Max Harris in Adelaide. On the strength of my drawings in *Canto* he commissioned me to illustrate an article by Andrew Fabinyi in *Australian Book Review*. I have not been commissioned to illustrate anything since, with good reason.)

Canto 2 went unpublished mainly, I think, because Lee Harding lost interest, or simply couldn't afford it, but in some part (I didn't want to cloud the 'golden age' with this kind of talk) because I hated the way he edited me – my writing and even my drawings. Lee's writing has always been good, in recent years very good indeed: his *Displaced Person* hasn't been out of print since it won the Children's Book of the Year award in 1980. But when it came to editing, in 1965 anyway, Lee had a tin ear. He was an interventionist editor, as every editor must be at times, but he didn't know how to intervene sympathetically. He seemed to have no respect for other people's writing, which to my mind was the first duty of an editor: not that their words are sacred, but neither are they raw material. I was sure that I could out-edit Lee any time, and Jim Ellis encouraged me in this belief.

Jim also encouraged me in the belief that I could get into book-editing by the back door. Australian publishing was still in its infancy, but there were signs that it was about to grow up in a hurry. Jim and I were confident that if I could get some kind of job in publishing, sooner or later my talents would be recognized. So I went to Cassell's and began my short career as the world's worst sales representative. Oh, I wasn't that bad, but I didn't have the killer instinct needed for the work – and I wasn't helped by Cassell's firm-sale policy. When you ordered books from Cassell's you were stuck with them: other publishers were experimenting with sale-or-return, but not Cassell's. During my two years with the company they introduced something much more controversial – the closed market. This relieved booksellers of the

burden of overstocking, but it also reduced their profit margin. The retail price of a book had always been twice its landed cost; in the closed market that price remained the same, but the bookseller's margin was reduced from half to one-third. The truly professional booksellers protested mightily. Frank Cheshire, one of the most successful and influential booksellers in Melbourne, caused a sensation in the trade when he stopped buying books from Cassell's. (But he went on buying Cassell's books, through Oxford University Press. Oxford was in a building close to Cheshire's main shop, and Frank Eyre and Frank Cheshire were good friends.)

This isn't telling you much about how I became an editor, but it may explain the kind of editor I became. I wasn't interested in the politics of publishing, or for that matter the business of publishing – more exactly, I wasn't interested in getting involved in such things and turning them to advantage. I was interested in the books themselves, and in doing what I could to get the books to the people who wanted them. I had done this at the library; I went on doing it at Cassell's. When advance copies of the *Jerusalem Bible* arrived at Cassell's no-one knew what to do with them: the company already had Eyre & Spottiswoode's *real* Bibles, and sold them in great quantities; what could they do with a new translation from Darton, Longman & Todd – and a *Catholic* translation at that? I went to Melbourne's biggest Catholic bookshop, took an order for a thousand copies, and listened to what they said about this Bible. And I read it, and loved the translation. I sold hundreds of copies to religious booksellers, and dozens to general booksellers, and single copies to little country bookshops and newsagencies in three States, from Albany to Orbost to Ulverstone (five States if you count places like Albury and Mount Gambier, which were on my country runs); by the time I left Cassell's I had sold about three thousand copies. DL&T also published things like *The Ancrene Rewle*, translated by Tolkien, and I sold a swag of those too. Cassell's were lucky to have a former theological student on their sales staff; otherwise they might have lost the agency. I was lucky I did so well with the religious list; otherwise I might have lost my job much earlier.

A new sales rep was taken on in 1967 while I was in Western Australia, and by the time I returned he had sold vast quantities of books to people I had already called on with the same list. He knew nothing about books, but he could sell anything to anyone. Soon afterwards Jim Moad called me to his office and encouraged me to resign. Jim had worked his way up from storeman to sales rep to sales manager to managing director of Cassell Australia. Jim said he had hoped I would go a long way in the company. I said I had enjoyed being a rep, even if I wasn't much good at it, but what I really wanted was to be an editor. Jim was sympathetic – but life wasn't like that, he said; sometimes it wasn't possible to do what you want to do; what *he* really wanted to do, he said, was play the stock market. Instead of which, I thought, you are stuck here as Australian head of a great publishing house. The irony of it! – the absurdity! I went off and got a job as production scheduler at a Dunlop tyre factory. It was great: I could do a week's work in two days and spend the rest of the time reading.

The first book editor I ever met was Bob Sessions. He was the editor at Cassell's, in charge of Cassell Australia's publishing. I volunteered to read proofs, and enjoyed such books as Peter Mathers' *Trap* and Thomas Keneally's *Bring Larks and Heroes*. I gave Bob a long list of queries for Keneally, and I believe Keneally accepted some of my suggestions. I can't recall Bob encouraging my ambition to be an editor. Maybe he did, in a general way. If he didn't, I wouldn't blame him. I was generally regarded as a bit of an oddball around the place anyway, a salesman who read the books but didn't sell many, a staff junior who discussed music with David Ascoli (Cassell UK sales director, and translator of the German musicologist Alfred Einstein), a practising agnostic who talked theology with religious booksellers, and a science fiction nut.

The science fiction convention at Easter 1966, held in McGill's Newsagency's warehouse in Somerset Place, was an extraordinary event. It was, as I've said, the first in Australia since 1958, and there was something of the atmosphere of a revival meeting about it, a wonderful feeling of something happening, a powerful sense of fellowship. Towards the end, when we were discussing whether to hold another convention next year and generally what to do next, I suggested that we could keep up the momentum and preserve some of the feeling of community by publishing a fanzine. The idea was well received, and people instantly started nominating editors: Harding! Ron Clarke! Baxter! Broderick! But over them all Lee Harding was saying – very clearly, magisterially even – *I nominate John Bangsund*. 'And so', John Foyster wrote two years later, 'the die was cast, since when the cast has been dying.' The die was cast indeed: that was the moment when I became an editor.

It's always fun thinking of titles for things, and there was no shortage of suggestions for the title of this fanzine. For a while I seriously considered *Jindivik*, which had a nice Australian sound and a connotation of flight. Unfortunately it was the name of a flying drone used by the military for target practice, so that was out. In my wilder moments I toyed with *The Invisible Whistling Bunyip*. If you have read Edmund Wilson on H. P. Lovecraft you will know where that came from. But on the principle that if you can't think of a name that is both clever and obvious, forget clever and go for obvious, I called it *Australian Science Fiction Review*.

The first issue appeared in June 1966. It ran 32 quarto pages and was printed on the Melbourne SF Club's Roneo duplicator in McGill's warehouse. I had typed most of the stencils in the basement of the Commercial Travellers' Club in Perth. The contributors included Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock, Langdon Jones, John Baxter, John Foyster, Lee Harding and Jim Ellis (as 'Jay Wallis' and 'Scribarius') – and Stephen Murray-Smith (a quote, with his blessing, from *Overland* 33) and Bernard O'Dowd (his poem 'Australia', probably reprinted with Lothian's permission, but maybe not). My editorial started and ended with quotes from Sean O'Casey. One of Lee's reviews had the title 'Communist Chulpex Raped

My Wife!' Such things more or less set the tone of *ASFR* from the beginning: it was concerned with science fiction as literature; it was irreverent, often funny, serious about everything and grave about nothing; it was unashamedly Australian, and its outlook was international.

One day in 1967 Bob Sessions said 'Do you know that George Turner is one of your mob?' Which mob? All I knew about George Turner was that he was a Cassell author who had shared a Miles Franklin Award with Thea Astley, and that his latest novel, *The Lame Dog Man*, was due out soon. Bob was working on the jacket copy, and he showed me what George had written about himself: he was a science fiction addict. So I arranged to meet George Turner, and we had a good talk and I gave him a set of *ASFR* (and I met his dog Caesar: 'Don't encourage him,' George said as Caesar placed his paws around my neck and licked my face), and that meeting accidentally launched George's distinguished career as a critic and eventually writer of science fiction.

That is one of the best things that came out of *ASFR*. Here is another. In February 1967 I wrote about two novels, *Planet of Exile* and *Rocannon's World*, and I said 'I feel sure Ursula K. Le Guin will go a long way' – one of my better predictions. We struck up a correspondence later that year, and in 1973 she agreed to come to Australia as our guest of honor if we won our bid to hold the 1975 World Science Fiction Convention in Melbourne. We won, Ursula came to Melbourne, and I had the privilege of handing her the Hugo Award for best sf novel of 1974, *The Dispossessed*. While Ursula was here she ran a workshop for aspiring sf writers, the first of a number conducted by distinguished local and overseas writers. Her influence on Australian sf is incalculable. But it wasn't simply a matter of a bunch of Melbourne fans saying 'Let's put on a World Convention, let's get Ursula Le Guin as guest of honor' and just doing it: you need funding for a scheme like that. The committee applied to the Literature Board. Nancy Keesing was chairman of the board at the time. In a review of George Turner's *In the Heart or In the Head* in *Overland* 97 (1984), Nancy said that it was *ASFR* and other fanzines I had sent her that convinced the board they should give us a grant.

Now you know about fanzines, or about one of mine anyway. On the strength of *ASFR* I got a job as assistant editor of *Materials Handling & Packaging*; on the strength of that I got a job at the *Age*; on the strength of that, and a rigorous test, in 1972 I got a job as a Hansard sub-editor in Canberra; from there I moved over the road to AGPS, where I first enjoyed the title of editor; from there I moved to Rigby's in Adelaide; I went freelance in Adelaide in 1976, returned to Melbourne in 1978, worked part-time as assistant editor of *Meanjin* from 1988 to 1992, and now you know the lot, or most of it anyway. Since *ASFR* it has all been downhill, and I should have stayed in the library, or the tyre factory, but some people never know when they're well off and I'm one of them and that's how I became an editor.

Notes

1. The first *Philosophical Gas* (subtitled 'a Project for a General Illumination of the Human Mind') was published by Scythrop Glowry in Thomas Love Peacock's novel *Nightmare Abbey* (1818); it sold seven copies. My fanzine of that name has appeared with decreasing regularity since 1970.
2. When my father died in 1965 I reluctantly sold the Alvis and acquired his Morris 1100. Apart from a self-destructing Humber, I have since driven eminently sensible cars.
3. Bernard O'Dowd and I lived in the same suburb, I learnt after his death in 1953. If by some chance I had visited him in his 'crag of a house' at 155 Clarke Street, Northcote, he might have shown me his letters from Walt Whitman (1819–92). So often we live so close to a distant past without knowing it: our elderly neighbors in Adelaide possessed a letter written to an elderly friend of their youth by the founder of Adelaide, Colonel William Light (1786–1839).
4. Jim Ellis died in 1979, in his mid-40s.
5. Caesar, a Great Dane, played an important role in George's *Transit of Cassidy* (1978), published by Bob Sessions at Nelson.
6. *Australian Science Fiction Review* ran for twenty issues. John Foyster published no. 19. The last appeared in 1969. A second series of *ASFR* was published from 1986 to 1991 by an editorial collective including John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau, Jenny and Russell Blackford, Lucy Sussex and Janeen Webb.
7. No, I gave up reading science fiction long ago, except some of my friends'.

Philosophical Gas

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