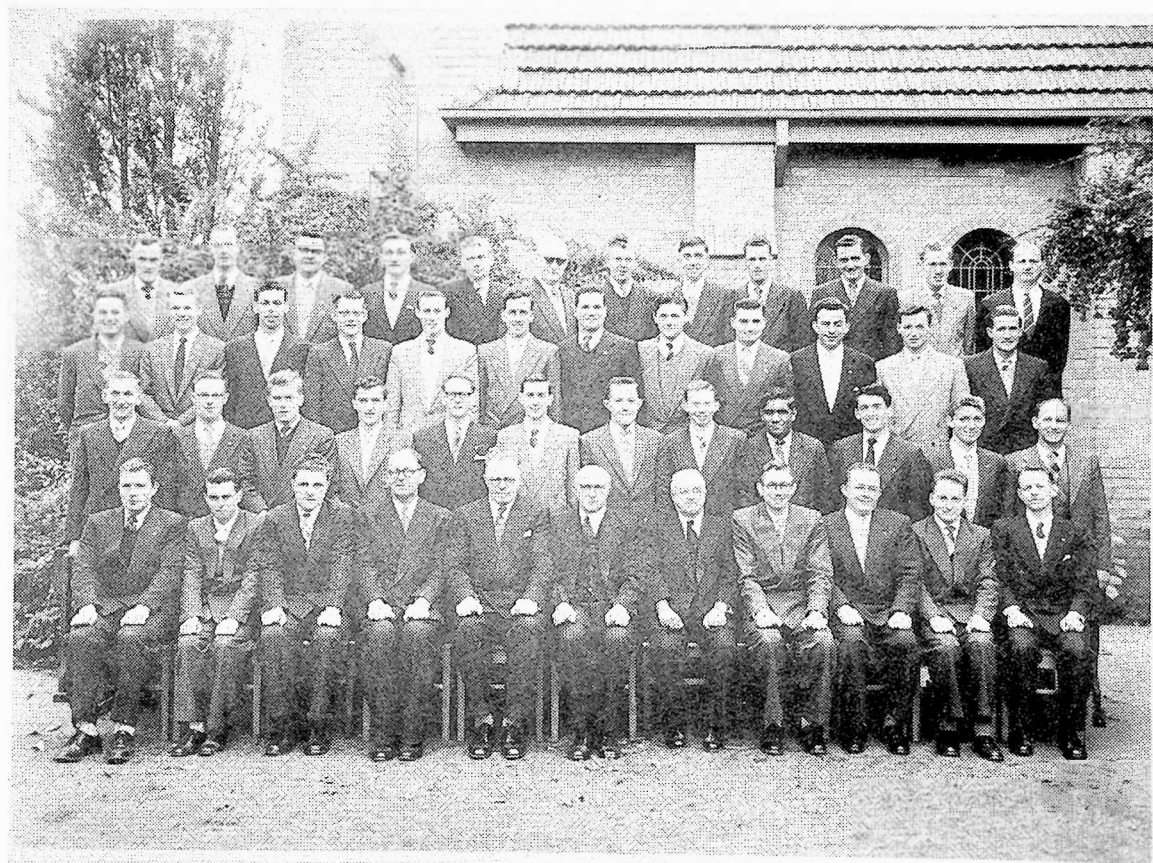


PHILOSOPHICAL GAS



Number 70

May - June 1987

ODD LINES

or: PHILOSOPHICAL GAS (the *acurate* journal of significant imponderables)

are published regular as clocklike by John Bangsund
PO Box 80, West Brunswick, Victoria 3055, Australia
for members of ANZAPA, FAPA and GRAPPA

And this is number 70, dated May/June 1987. Bryant? Thank you, John, and as you have heard, these are odd lines. Jane? Yes, Bryant, and coming up today also we have notes on the Melbourne Easter Sci-Fi Convention, right after Willard with the weather. But first: this is NBG. Today. April 30th, 1987.

[illegible]

No, I don't watch Bryant and Jane and Willard and John and all every night. NBC's "Today" show starts at midnight in Melbourne, and sometimes I'm in bed by then, or out here typing things. But I do enjoy the show when I see it. Our own SBS Channel 28 provides more world news in 30 minutes than "Today" manages in two hours, but "Today" gives me the American view of things, in a smooth magazine-style format, and that's OK, if I have time.

Sally and I, after living in this rented house for nearly five years (the longest time either of us has lived anywhere since leaving home, Sally in 1970, I in 1957), have reached some major decisions lately. We replaced the fluorescent lights, some of which had literally been on the blink for some months. We paid an indecent amount of money also to have a modern TV antenna erected on the roof (and started watching SBS and listening to 3MBS for the first time since we left Kew in 1980). Then we sort of crossed our fingers and waited for our landlord to tell us to move out. We're not very superstitious, but we thought we'd really tempted fate this time.

But before that... Early in March ABC TV screened "Horowitz in Moscow", which I couldn't watch because we'd earlier agreed to watch a film on another channel. The following Sunday Sally realized she would be in Hobart when the last episode or two of "Paradise Postponed" came on (or "Payment Deferred", as her mother called it — and not a bad description at that).

And about the same time... Well, back in November 1985, Sally was driving the Renault one Saturday morning, doing approximately 0 km/h (= 0 mph) at the time, on account of she had stopped, when a poor bugger who couldn't help it but should have known better — subsequently known as "the defendant" — ran into her, knocking the Renault about a bit and giving Sally a bad dose of whiplash. Whiplash, like RSI, is sometimes considered by those who have experienced neither to be a peculiarly Australian imaginary condition, but call them what you like, I can attest (from observation) that both are very painful. Eventually our insurance company made Sally a take-it-or-get-stuffed kind of offer of compensation that we couldn't refuse (mainly because the alternative was a court case of a protracted nature that could easily have ended in a lesser settlement), and about the end of February we found ourselves with over \$2000 in the bank and no bills to pay until mid-March. So we decided to get the Renault fixed.

Our poor, long-suffering, faithful old Renault: so white it shone that happy day we bought it in 1976, so smart and new-looking though two years old even then; so bedraggled and neglected in 1987, paid for three times and mortgaged four. We listed everything we could think of wrong with it, and I drove it carefully to our favourite Renault repairer at Mont Albert. He was out. So I killed some time looking at the Renaults and Peugeots in his little dealer's yard, but not much, because within seconds I fell in love with a bright yellow Peugeot 504 there, a 1978 GL automatic. "Would you like some coffee?" Julia said. "Ken won't be long." A lovely lady, Julia. I've known Ken since 1973.

when Sally and I were down from Canberra in our first Renault 16 and having a few troubles with it, and my sister Joy suggested I see him. Sally has long since spent some years with State Insurance, and we've met, tried and heard about many Renault/Peugeot specialists in this very large town. Ken is the best. And talking to Julia (at first I thought she was just a lovely lady who worked for Ken, not his wife) I began to realize just how special Ken is — a man with a sharp mind, a perfectionist in everything, loves cars (especially French cars), knows everything about them, and trusts people. He could have gone a long way, become a rich man, but you know enough about him already to understand why he hasn't. But he's comfortable: he can afford, just, to go on doing what he loves and is good at — providing he takes it easy, because he has a heart condition. I guess Ken Schwind is about my age, maybe a year or so older, and I like him a lot. Until that day I didn't know his surname, but I spent a bit of time in his office talking to Julia and sitting back and looking around, and I saw his framed certificates for all sorts of things, nicely lettered "Kenneth John Schwind", and learnt from those also where his business name, Kenjon Motors, came from.

Ken looked at my list of things needing attention on the Renault, and sighed. Not audibly: he just shrank a bit. "That Peugeot," I said. "Lovely car," he said. "I think I might just possibly be able to buy it." "Bloody nice car," he said, "but you'll have to look after it better..." and refrained from saying the rest — "*than you have that poor Renault!*"

I spoke to my two favourite finance companies, mentioning each to the other, and AGC let us have the Peugeot, setting what it would cost and what we owed on the Renault against Sally's insurance pay-out, the trade-in price for the Renault (not much) and our perceived ability to pay up for another four years, and of course the basic market value of the Peugeot. (HFC got the consolation prize, which I will come to: the VCR.)

On 17 February a whole bunch of us went to a Chinese restaurant in town to celebrate Bruce Gillespie's fortieth birthday. A great day, a great occasion, fun all round. But it might have been otherwise for Sally and me, because it was the day before that, 16 February, that I had taken the Renault to Mont Albert and fallen in love with an ageing Peugeot. When Sally came home that night I said "Poor old Renault etc. etc. cost so much to fix etc. etc. saw this fabulous Peugeot 504, automatic, looks like new etc. etc. we can manage it. I think, etc. etc." and Sally *heard* "504" but what registered in her mind was *bright yellow Peugeot 404* — and she simply could not understand why we should exchange a passable Renault 16 for, of all things, a Peugeot 404. And bright yellow! (In Canberra, in 1975, we'd briefly owned a nice but mechanically impossible grey, manual, Peugeot 404.) My enthusiasm began to sway her, but her doubt was obvious. And the price! Had I flipped, too much proofreading irretrievably softened my brain? "We could ask Margaret," she said, "She drives one, I think. Who else do we know?" "Well, why not ask the vicar?" I said, "It's the same as Father David's..." "You mean," she said, not daring to believe I meant any such thing, "*you mean one of those!*" "Uhuh," I said, or to that effect. Bright yellow, like Father David's, and automatic, like his, probably older, but an Anglican-approved car. So we went to Bruce's party and hugged everyone — which we would have anyway, but the Anglican-approved Peugeot somehow made it more fun on the night.

I don't go to church, and am rarely seen at sf conventions, but Sally's vicar is one of my favourite people (and his wife is another). The Reverend Father David Farrer, Vicar of Christ Church, Brunswick, Dean of Coburg, and — I think I've got this right — Canon of St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, is an extraordinary man, just like Ken out there at Kenjon Motors, exactly the right man in the right job. One night last year we had David and Helen to dinner, along with Bruce and Elaine, and I said "I don't know how we should address

Father David. He has more titles than Macbeth." "Call me David," he said, which we did. Elaine produced some artefacts she'd brought that week from Papua New Guinea, including a penis-gourd, the like of which David and Helen had never encountered, but they made a great recovery and we all had a good time. I forget where this story was leading, if anywhere, it now being exactly four weeks since I started it, but it might have had something to do with this clipping from the Brunswick *Sentinel*, 28 April. Note that Father David is vicar of Christ Church, Glenlyon Road, no connexion with the Brunswick Church of Christ, Glenlyon Road, which doesn't go in for crucifixes.

Church robbed

A BRUNSWICK minister has appealed to anyone who knows the whereabouts of a crucifix stolen from the Church of Christ in Glenlyon Rd to contact him.

The cast iron crucifix was one of three items taken from the church on Easter Thursday.

Rev David Farrer said although he was concerned about the seven prong candlestick and a bell which were also stolen, the theft of the crucifix attached to an external wall, was most disturbing.

"The crucifix was a central focus of the small memorial garden we have behind the church where the ashes of numerous local residents have been scattered," Rev Farrer said.

The removal of the crucifix was noticed late on the Thursday but the bell and candlestick were noticed missing earlier in the day.

The bell, inscribed with the name "Iris" and the candlestick were taken from inside the church.

Rev Farrer said: "If the church had been locked the bell and the candlestick would not have been stolen, but we shouldn't have to lock the church. People should be able to come and go as they like."

Rev Farrer said if anyone knew where the crucifix, the candlestick or the bell were they should either contact him or the Brunswick police.



REV. Farrer with an identical candlestick to that which was stolen. The mark left by the crucifix can be seen in the background.

"Mon Dieu!" I expleted, when I read this, "Jean Valjean ees at large again!" Anyway, that's our vicar, and that's enough about religion for this issue — except to mention that March this year was the thirtieth anniversary of my entering the College of the Bible of Churches of Christ in Australia. I am trying to find a photo of me at the college to use on the cover of this issue.



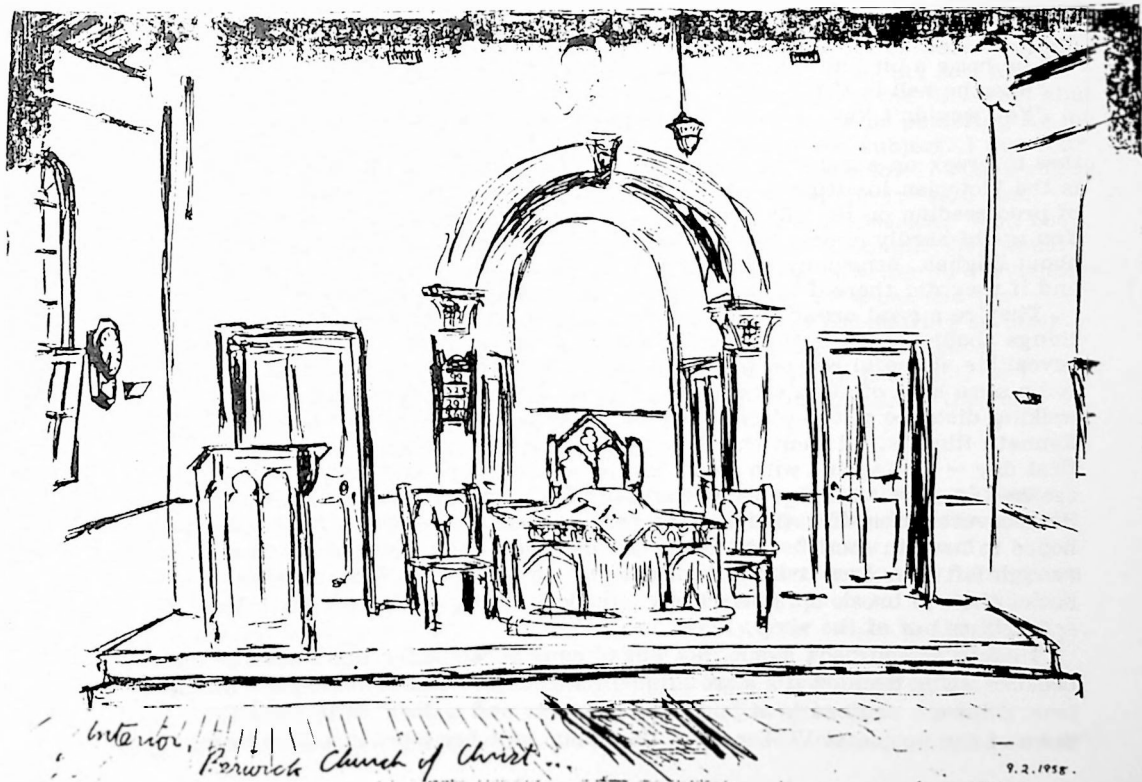
without luck so far, but I have spent a pleasant hour examining other antiquities, among them these two um rough sketches. Above, the chapel at the College of the Bible; opposite, the business end of the Berwick Church of Christ. For those not familiar with the interior appointments of such chapels I should explain that the recessed area directly behind the communion table is the baptistery, which rather resembles a tiny swimming pool when operational. In this particular pool, one night in 1958, I baptized a bloke who looked about half as nervous as I felt, and I've often wondered since how he made out. The Romans have a neat expression that translates roughly as "the sacrament is OK even if the celebrant is a bum", but it isn't in the Bible so I'm not sure whether it applies to Churches of Christ. I hope he's all right. Lord knows, he had faith enough.

More theology?

Well, sort of. We bought a VCR, as I've almost said several times, the best hi-fi stereo model that the least money can buy, and on Easter Sunday Bruce and Elaine and Jenny Bryce came for dinner and a look at our new toys. By night a bright yellow Peugeot 504 looks pretty much like any other bright yellow car, but they admired it anyway, and Jenny said it was bigger than her VW, which it is, but she made it sound like a tribute to our good taste, great intelligence and general spiritual superiority; it's a gift Jenny has, and we all love her for it. During the evening, after I'd recorded the

Mahler Second simulcast (Haitink, Concertgebouw, terrific), I tried to demonstrate the remote-control gadget that comes with the machine, but nothing happened, because at that moment Dylan the cat had quietly joined us and positioned himself in front of me, where he could watch too. "I think the box is dead," I said, "but we can only prove it if we open the cat."

Lucy Huntzinger graciously laughed when I told her that story the next night. I almost missed the 1987 Melbourne Easter Convention, but it caught up with me at a Chinese restaurant in town I wouldn't recommend to anyone but at least it was open. Management had wilfully misunderstood Michelle Muijsert's instructions in the matter, had let me in, and had distributed us to three corners of a large room, but we gradually sorted that out. Our table, quite literally, rocked. That was fun for a while, but not much. It was difficult at first talking to Lucy, what with the noise, the flight of unattended claret, the extraordinary table manners of interstate fans and the rapid interpolation of confused waiters, but we managed. We spoke of music. Ned Rorem, Lucy said. Oh, yes, I said. Charles Ives? I said. Yes! she said. Your favourite Beethoven symphony? I said. The seventh, she said. (Oh, God, I thought, if Peter de Vries had scripted this the next thing I would say is: Marry me!) But we went on to discuss Brahms's German Requiem – her favourite piece of music, she said, and I almost lost her there, or she me, because I think that work is one of the most turgid pieces of music ever written – but she likes it because she has sung it, which is utterly different from listening to it. So we went on to, I don't know, Mahler probably, and Bach and Mozart and Simon and Garfunkel, analysis, participation, instruction, ignorance, glasnost, joy, elevation, the whole great thing about real music, and then we went home.



Still 26 May, p.m. I wanted to do something special for FAPA's fiftieth anniversary in August, like resigning, but I've already done that to celebrate my fifteenth anniversary in FAPA, last November, and look where that got me. Now I'm back in my accustomed position of knowing that I'll be thrown out of ANZAPA if I don't contribute six pages in the next week or so, and FAPA if I don't get eight pages in by August, so I must do something. In fact I've done about fifteen pages in recent weeks, but they're awful; the two least awful I kept, so as to have somewhere to start this morning. The most awful contain mailing comments. I can't believe some of the dreadful things I've said to, well, people we know and admire. So I think I'll avoid mailing comments just now (except to point out to FAPA cataloguers and analysts that John Foyster should have been credited with *Australian Science Fiction Review* series 2 no.1, not me; I wrote an editorial for it, but John co-published it and sent it to FAPA). What I'll do then is this. Talking to Yvonne Rousseau recently, I realized that I have probably never shown ANZAPA or FAPA some of the stuff I wrote in 1980-81 for *Australian Book Review*; it was all rather fannish, probably a bit wasted on ABR's readers, and probably that explains why John McLaren didn't invite me to continue my column, which I called "Word Games". So I'll reprint some of this material. Any objections? The alternative, mind, is brief reviews of what I've seen on TV lately. No objections. OK.

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## WORD GAMES

Reprinted from *Australian Book Review*  
and newly annotated for readers who  
like that sort of thing

"I'll be home a bit late tonight, love — I'm going down to VISE."

"Who the hell is Vi?"

"You wouldn't know her. Keeps the best massage parlour in St Kilda Road."

How to break up a marriage, ten easy lessons, inquire within. Actually VISE<sup>1</sup> is the Victorian Institute of Secondary Education, and I've been doing a spot of proofreading on its jolly little publications. Rewriting, some might call it. You would hardly expect the educators of Australia's youth to know much about English, especially the tricky bits like verbs and commas and stuff, and if they did there'd be no work for me, so I'm not complaining.

They're a good crowd to work with there at VISE, and one of the best things about the job is that there's a John Foyster<sup>2</sup> in the building. I won't reveal his shameful reason for being there. Neither will anyone else. It seems to be some kind of state secret. Another good thing is that within easy walking distance of the place is one of the best bookshops in the country, Kenneth Hince's.<sup>3</sup> I went there, naturally, during my lunch break on the first day — and again, with John, on the second day. Ken was shocked to see me two days running, since the last time we'd met there was in 1976. He recovered himself sufficiently to mention some first-edition Peacocks he hopes to have in soon.<sup>4</sup> John could see me calculating whether I'd have enough left over from selling the Renault<sup>5</sup> to buy an old VW as well as the books (how to break up a marriage, advanced diploma) and somehow he spirited me out of the shop.

I haven't been back again, not out of consideration for Ken's nerves but because we've decided it's more efficient for me to work at home most of the time. I have a dictionary at home, for a start, and a desk all to myself. Some of the people at VISE reckon I've been sent home because I've been

seen fraternizing with Foyster, but that can't be true. All sorts of people there fraternize with Foyster, from the tea-lady down.

And suddenly light dawns! It's nothing to do with efficiency! Like any seasoned pro, I turned up for work with a good supply of coffee and a mug and an ashtray, and they came in handy, but on the second day, at a time not appointed for tea breaks, and entirely without the tea-lady's permission, I made a cup of coffee — and I used one of *her spoons*. That was stupid. That's probably the real reason why I'm back working at home. How could I have forgotten so much about the Public Service as to slight the tea-lady? Oh, what a fool I've been!

The good thing about working at home, reading the course handbook for Year 12 Economics, say, or Pure Mathematics or Lithuanian, is that I can listen to music all day, and if I feel like it I can even drink beer while I'm working.<sup>6</sup> The bad thing is that after the second or third bottle all this alien stuff, whatever language it's written in, starts making sense. First rule in editing academics: when they start making sense you are losing your concentration.

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Lee Harding<sup>7</sup> has had a mystical experience in a tower. At Geelong.<sup>8</sup> "The Buck Mulligan of the science fiction world," I said. "Who", said Harding, whose brain has rotted from reading too much of that crazy star-wars stuff, "is Buck Mulligan?" "Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed,"<sup>9</sup> said Damien Broderick,<sup>10</sup> approximately. Damien reads as much sf as Lee does, but he's younger. "You mean Hop Harrigan," said Lee, and went on to tell us about some mystical experiences he'd had as a youth with Hop Harrigan.<sup>11</sup>

Damien and Dianne<sup>12</sup> have acquired a very pleasant house in the better part of Brunswick,<sup>13</sup> that stimulating multicultural suburb where the best phonebox graffiti these days are in Turkish, and we were dining there. The food was heavenly, the conversation almost as good. I'm not sure how the ladies felt about it, but I became a little irritated — no, envious is a better word — at all the high-powered professional writers' talk that was flying about, so I was forced to admit modestly that I had just made my first sale to the UK. That shut them up, by crikey, for a few seconds. They didn't seem to be pestering me for details, so I volunteered them before they could change the subject. I won four quid in the *New Statesman's* comp. Look it up. It's the issue for 27 June. vol.99 no.2571. "I'm thinking of joining the SFWA," I said. "You can't," said Lee. "Why ever not?" I said. "It's the Science Fiction Writers of America," said Lee, "and sales to other countries don't count." What a blow! I thought they would let anyone join. The talk moved on to what it's like being a writer-in-residence — the night was full of that sort of thing, and grants and advances and the avarice of publishers and so on — so I let slip that I was considering an offer from Collingwood Tech<sup>14</sup> of an appointment as proofreader-in-residence. A damnable lie, as it happens, and it didn't impress them in the least, so I gave up and listened to Irene<sup>15</sup> and Dianne and Sally talking about the real world.

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Keats and Chapman<sup>16</sup> often had mystical experiences in towers. One of them happened while they were in Germany doing a spot of proofreading for a local publisher. The first few books they read in their rented tower did not overtax their knowledge of German, but during the third week they were given a job that nearly drove them crazy. It was a very long, intense, convoluted novel by someone named Dan Vinniken about twenty-four hours in the life of an ancient astronaut. This rather improbable being had spent a day in June 1904 wandering the streets of Darmstadt, apparently quite undetected, observing the stolid Hessian burghers and poking about in their minds by some sort of alien psychic means. The story was hard to follow, and the author's



style was the most complicated abuse of the German language the friends had ever seen; after a while they gave up checking the spelling, as the typesetters had before them. Altogether they spent six weeks on the book, and for most of that time they were haunted by the feeling that they had been there before, a feeling intensified by the author's frequent use of the mystical term "déjà voodoo" and many other slogans and names that began with the letters DV.<sup>17</sup> At last they reached the end, and were annoyed rather than surprised to discover that the last sentence in the book was the same as the first sentence. "Well," said Keats, "what do you make of that?" Stately, plump Chapman took off his spectacles, dusted them, and said: "Vinniken's fake." Keats fell sobbing on a great pile of galley proofs.<sup>18</sup>

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That story, such as it is, is dedicated to Lee Harding. Lee and I had a mystical experience on a mountain one night, years ago, and he has never come down from it, bless him, and I read Joyce, pardon me, rejoice for him, winner of the Australian Children's Book of the Year award in this year of some surviving grace 1980. The book is called *Displaced Person*, it is not an autobiography, and if you don't rush out and buy a copy you're an enemy of the people.

What happened on that mountain? Well you may ask. I have read and heard several versions, so my memory is confused. What I do remember is that we were standing there one chilly night somewhere near Mount Dandenong,<sup>19</sup> and I was dying to go home because I was freezing, but I stayed because I'd been a bit rude and unfeeling towards Lee in recent weeks or years and I really did like the man. He was going on and on about how he wanted to be a writer, had always wanted to be a writer, and was a writer, but somehow he wasn't making it, and here he was nearly 30, and what do you do when you're nearly 30 and not making it and all you've ever wanted to do is be a writer? and so on. "Be a writer," I said. He looked at me with a wild surmise — silent, upon a bit of a hill in the Dandenongs<sup>20</sup> — and then we went home. Well, what would you have said? Anyway, he has gone on being a writer, and he's very good at it, and I am happy for him.

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It's time I confessed that I have always wanted to be a writer, too. What I mean by that and what Lee means are different things. I don't want to sit for weeks on end over a cold typewriter, poisoning myself with cigarettes and hard thoughts about the human condition, resenting phone-calls from Porlock,<sup>21</sup> getting nothing in the mail but bills and summonses and polite rejections from idiot publishers and invitations to address gatherings of lit'ry folk at no cost to myself — in short, frittering away my life in sustained creation. All I want to do is be a writer, with a modest dozen or so books on my shelf each positively reeking with exemplary taste and bearing my name on its spine; I don't want to have to work at it.

More than anything, though, I have always wanted to be a philanthropist, just a simple, secretive, plain-living and very rich philanthropist. What do you do when all your life you've wanted to be a philanthropist, and here you are, past 40, without a savings account, and you've never even learnt how to fill in a Tattsлото coupon?<sup>22</sup>

But it could be worse. There are wilder ambitions. I might always have wanted to be a tea-lady.

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Keats and Chapman attended the world's first and so far only performance of Karlheinz Stochasm's<sup>23</sup> massive composition for several large orchestras, chorus and regimental artillery, the *Cantata for the Victims of Eureka*.<sup>24</sup> Afterwards, Keats asked Chapman what he thought of the work, and Chapman admitted that

### On tempting fate

On page 729 I spoke of our crossed fingers and waiting for the landlord to give us the old heave-ho, and it's happened: we are required to vacate the premises by 3 August. Young Nick, the titular owner, has married (he might have waited a bit: 24 is much too young to be married), and is anxious to start paying off his mortgage without our help.

We'll keep the post office box at West Brunswick until April 1989 at least. ANZAPA will learn our new address in the August mailing, FAPA in August or November, and others reading this in PG 71, The Society of Editors Newsletter or the Weekly Book Newsletter. I might even have a little card printed, taking this opportunity to remind a lot of former clients of my continued existence.

I've wondered why I am taking this particular move so badly, and it occurs to me that this is only the second time in thirty years of renting that I have been asked to leave a place. The other time was in 1968, when Leigh Edmonds, Paul Stevens, Diane and I had to leave the place in Redan Street, St Kilda, because the new owners wanted to demolish it. There, I feel better already for realizing that. But not much.

he had quite enjoyed some of the choral themes in the last movement. "You mean melodies," said Keats, who hadn't liked any of it. "Themes," Chapman insisted. "But themes aren't what they sing!" cried Keats. "They so rarely are," said Chapman.



Macmillan's have not been treating me at all well lately. Here it is nearly April and I have not yet received a review copy of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, which makes me think I have been quite overlooked. Further, though I have no doubt I would make good use of the New Grove at any time, I had most desperate need of it just after Christmas.

Picture me, if you will, sitting quietly at the Foysters'<sup>25</sup> place on the evening of the 28th, meditating upon peace, good will and the future of man under Reagan, taking care the while not to smoke too many cigarettes at once because it does terrible things to my friends' wallpaper — a cosy yuletide scene indeed, and a memory to be treasured. Suddenly the mood was shattered and my ash went everywhere when John started asking me, all in a rush, a lot of silly questions about music. *Who wrote Mozart's 39th? How many horns in a horn trio? What do the following have in common: Fidel Castro, Yehudi Menuhin, Tommy Flynn? In which opera does the heroine say "Gak!" and die? What instrument handles water music?*

Well, that sort of interrogation might unsettle a lesser man, but I just fired answers back at him as fast as I could make them up. *Danzi Finzi Mackenzie. Four including shooehorn. Characters in an unperformed opera by Karlheinz Stochasm. None. Bath tuba.*

It was the bath tuba, I think, that unnerved him. "You'd better have this," he said, handing me the *National Times*, "You seem to know more about this stuff than I do."

And that's how I became involved in the *National Times* Music Quiz Competition, ruining my holiday (Sally was in Tasmania, building snowmen on the beach at Cremorne), driving myself and everyone around me mad for the next week. There were 100 questions, twenty each on Opera, Mozart,

*Further Adventures in Prestressed Concrete Verse*

The following poem is part of a much longer sequence entitled "Quadrella". In "Quadrella" I simulate in minimal verse the possibilities inherent in choosing four horses to run first, second, third and fourth in four races. "Foursquare" concentrates on just one race. If you find neither rhyme nor reason in this work, you will have grasped one truth about horse-racing and prestressed concrete verse.

*foursquare*

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You are quite right. It raises yet again the eternal question: What is poetry? That it is verse may not be denied — and prestressed concrete verse makes no claim to be poetry except in the Greek (and Scottish) sense that it is something made. In the long run it may simply be that Shakespeare's poetry and Wordsworth's, Heine's and Eliot's, A.D.Hope's and Les Murray's, is more interesting — just as Peter Sculthorpe's music is more interesting than Philip Glass's. *Meanwhile, back in 1981:*

Orchestral Music, Chamber Music and Twentieth Century Music, but because many of the questions had several parts or required multiple answers, I finished up looking for 190 answers. And look for them I did. My more creative answers might have satisfied John Foyster, but I had the feeling that they wouldn't fool the judges.

By the time I got to Mervyn Binns's<sup>26</sup> New Year's Eve party I had about seventy answers. "Happy New Year yourself," I said to Mervyn, who operates a retail space-opera establishment in Swanston Street, "Who wrote Mozart's 39th?" "Damned if I know," said Mervyn, genially, "Isaac Asimov?"<sup>27</sup> Why don't you ask George Turner?"<sup>28</sup> An excellent suggestion. I cornered George, who knows even more about opera than he knows about science fiction, which is an awful lot, and extracted a dozen answers from him (all but one, it turned out, correct). He did not know who sang Figaro at the first performance,<sup>29</sup> claiming not to have been around at the time. You never know with George, but I took his word for it and went off to pester someone else. Myf and Tony Thomas<sup>30</sup> said some of my answers were a bit unlikely, and that I was welcome to look them up in their paperback Grove, which was very decent of them, but at the time I thought that would almost be cheating. Besides, they do live a long way out, practically in the bush, beyond Wantirna.<sup>31</sup> Noel Kerr<sup>32</sup> said it was a pity none of the questions were about Dave Brubeck,<sup>33</sup> because he knows a lot about Dave Brubeck, and I said "Who?" and there was a bit of

a friendly scuffle, and just then Damien Broderick<sup>34</sup> jogged past, muttering something about "Drunken loon!", and then we all joined hands with Lee Harding and sang "Auld Lang Syne", and then we went home.

The party continued next day at Damien and Dianne's place. Christine Ashby<sup>35</sup> asked me what I was writing for the Age's funny-writing competition,<sup>36</sup> and I asked her which modern composer died after tripping over a dog,<sup>37</sup> and we all had a good time again. There was a lady at the party who looked remarkably like Valma Brown.<sup>38</sup> Slim, vivacious, reddish-haired — but Valma lives in Canberra and usually spends Christmas skiing in Brisbane, or whatever they do in Brisbane at Christmas. This lady had come to the party not knowing what Damien and Dianne's friends might be like, and was quite charmed, in an embarrassed sort of way, at the number of people who cuddled her without being properly introduced. I knew she wasn't Valma, because she couldn't tell me who had written a concerto for Ondes Martenot.<sup>39</sup> Also, she was smoking. I think Valma only moved to Canberra because she couldn't stand all the smoking that still goes on in Melbourne.



The rest of my answers (I ended up with 154 correct by my reckoning, 146 by the judges') came mainly from the *Gramophone* magazine, of which I seem to have accumulated several hundred issues over the years, and Jenny Bryce's books on modern music. Jenny plays oboe ancient and modern, and I thought she would have a few useful books about the place, and I was not wrong, but by the time I borrowed them I was feeling a bit dejected about the competition. All the libraries I usually go to had closed down for the snow season, or whatever they close down for at Christmas. In desperation, prepared if need be to buy Einstein's *Mozart*, Kobbe's *Complete Opera Book* and other standard works, I scoured the bookshops of Melbourne — to no avail. Trudging through the relentless heat, I discovered just one thing: that books about music cost the earth. That the \$1700<sup>40</sup> Macmillan's charge for the New Grove wouldn't buy you more than two or three feet of other standard references and monographs on individual composers.

The competition closed on 7 January, and I posted off my entry on the 5th. On 11 January the *National Times* announced a new deadline, the 14th, and I went around fuming for a day or two because I'd wasted a week and the libraries were open again.

The official results took up two pages of the issue for 18 January. The three prizewinners were the secretary of a philharmonic society, a doctor who composes in his spare time and a music teacher. The judges' comments made it clear to me that I had run fourth or fifth.

Why did I go in for the competition? Was it to impress John Foyster, who knows I'm not as clever as I think but thinks I don't know that? Was it to prove that a competent book editor can find out anything about any subject if he sets his mind to it? Was it simply to win first prize?

Not, I think, the latter. First prize was two season tickets to Musica Viva, and I haven't been to a musical concert since I was barred from the Union Theatre for snoring through the entire second act of Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (or possibly *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*: I always get those two confused),<sup>41</sup> which was many years ago, when I was still constitutionally capable of listening to music and not smoking for an hour or more. I used to sit through entire Bruckner symphonies at the Melbourne Town Hall without too much discomfort. But these days, no, I just wouldn't last the distance at a concert.

Am I really as far gone as that? Surely not? If someone gave me a free ticket to something I liked, wouldn't I make an effort? It could be the first step towards rehabilitation and a return to a normal, full and productive life. I could go for long rides on trams. I might eventually become a librarian. It's something to think about.

Oddly enough, while I was thinking about that, the Age decided to give away fifty (50) pairs of season tickets to Musica Viva. All you had to do was match up the portraits and autographs of twelve composers, which was a damn sight easier than answering questions like *Which composers supplemented their incomes by (a) working as assistant to the architect Le Corbusier, (b) winning the jackpot on an Italian TV program, (c) teaching Greek at Harvard?*<sup>42</sup> Then your entry had to be one of the first fifty opened.

Have you ever wondered why so many classical music concerts are absolutely ruined by people coughing? I am now in a position to tell you why this is so. These people are *smokers with free tickets*, trying to redeem themselves and regain their place in normal society. Be gentle with them, kind reader. They have to start somewhere.

Me? No, I believe I came fifty-first.

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#### Notes

1. Now VCAB — Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Board.
2. Distinguished Melbourne fan, recently exiled to Adelaide.
3. Since moved to South Caulfield, which is a long hike from St Kilda Road.
4. Ken was duped in the matter of those Peacocks. The owner simply wanted a free valuation.
5. Since sold — see p.730.
6. More likely claret, but I thought I shouldn't admit that in a journal sometimes read by my clients.
7. Distinguished Melbourne writer and semi-retired fan.
8. Victoria's second-largest city, situated on Corio Bay, about 75 km from Melbourne. Governor Bourke named it in 1837, using the Aboriginal name for the district, "Jillong", which possibly means place of the white sea-bird, place of the white cliffs, or white man come there goes the neighbourhood.
9. James Joyce, *Ulysses*, p.1. Damien actually quoted a passage much further on in the book, which I couldn't recall at the time of writing. It is interesting (but not very) to speculate on the relevance of this opening sentence to Tarzan's first English lesson in the film *Greystoke*, which, you will recall, consisted of the words "mirror" and "razor".
10. Distinguished Melbourne writer and critic.
11. I didn't see "Hop Harrigan" until late one night in 1985, when an episode was shown on "The Golden Years of Television". I'm glad I spent so much time as a child reading Edgar Rice Burroughs when I could have been watching TV.
12. Di Hawthorne, distinguished Melbourne person, formerly of Sydney, and until recently constant companion of 10 (above).
13. Not yet Melbourne's most trendy suburb, but give it a year or two. Certainly stimulating and multicultural, and as for Turkish graffiti, it has started appearing even on the hallowed walls of Christ Church: "Allah loves you," a recent graffitist declared — an ecumenical message not lightly to be suppressed, but suppressed it was. "Brunswick" is not a corruption of an Aboriginal name; the suburb isn't even named after the European Braunschweigs: W.F.A. Rucker, the German-born land speculator whose name is perpetuated still in Northcote's Rucker's Hill, in 1839 bought a lot of what was then unwanted bush country on the Sydney road immediately north of Melbourne, and named his holding after Captain George Brunswick Smyth, officer in charge of the Port Phillip military police. Why? I don't know. But I do find it fascinating that so many Australian place names from those early times are people's (usually men's, of course) middle names, rather than surnames.

In my youth, Brunswick was the western terra incognita, just as Preston was the northern, Collingwood/Fitzroy the southern and Heidelberg/Ivanhoe the eastern. Northcote was home. When I first read Bulwer-Lytton's memorable phrase (in which book I have quite forgotten) "the hedgeless plains of vast Mile End", it was Victoria Street, Brunswick, west of the railway, that sprang to mind. Later, in 1976-8, I lived in Adelaide's Mile End, which was neither vast nor hedgeless, but that's another story.

14. Collingwood College of Technical and Further Education. Bruce Gillespie and Elaine Cochrane live in Collingwood. The area was first called Newtown, but in 1842 Governor La Trobe asked Surveyor Hoddle to rename it after Admiral Lord Collingwood, who took charge at Trafalgar when Nelson died.
15. Irene Pagram, distinguished Melbourne person, to whom Lee Harding (see 7 above) has the honour to be married.
16. Not the historical Keats and Chapman. This is a poor imitation of the genre invented by Brian O'Nolan, the "Keats and Chapman anecdote" (see any decent book or article about Flann O'Brien).
17. DV — Deo volente: "God willing". The expression "deja voodoo" was borrowed from Don Ashby. cf HCE in J. Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*.
18. Probably because the author and/or "Vinniken" had hopelessly confused *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.
19. Mount Dandenong is the highest hill in Melbourne's immediate vicinity, so it is studded with transmission towers, but is nevertheless pleasant to visit. The name apparently comes from the Aboriginal "Tanjenong", meaning decent-sized hill. Lee and I worked in those days for Don Symons as photographic-darkroom persons in various popular cabaret joints — a subject that cries out for, um, enlargement. But not here.
20. See Keats, J., "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer" (1816).
21. See, if you must, Coleridge, S.T., *Select Poetry & Prose*, ed. Stephen Potter, London, The Nonesuch Press, 1962, p.93.
22. I still have no savings account, but I have long since learnt how to fill in a Tattsлото coupon. These two facts are not unconnected.
23. Born Charles Henry Guest, Melbourne, 1944. Founder of contemporary Australian cerealism, heavily influenced by such composers as Schnapp, Kräkl and Paff.
24. It is unclear, even in Stochasm's work, exactly who the victims were at Eureka. The leader, Peter Lalor, eventually became a member of the Victorian Parliament, and had a Melbourne suburb named after him. See Carboni, R., *The Eureka Stockade* (1855).
25. John Foyster (see 2 above) and Jennifer Bryce.
26. Distinguished Melbourne fan, until recently proprietor of Space Age Books, now backyard bookseller (and still very much worth knowing).
27. American writer.
28. Distinguished Melbourne writer and critic.
29. The answers to this and other questions in the *National Times* Music Quiz Competition are in this room or the next at this moment, but an hour's search for them was fruitless. We may never know.
30. Distinguished Melbourne semi-retired fans. Myfanwy Thomas is John Foyster's sister, A.G. Thomas is a classical scholar, both know more about anything you care to name than I've ever heard of.
31. Eastern suburb of Melbourne. Name adopted 1913 from Aboriginal word meaning sound of rippling water.
32. Distinguished Melbourne fan, expert printer and comics scholar.
33. American musician.
34. See 10 above.
35. Born Christine McGowan. DUFF winner. Has dog.
36. I had the misfortune not to win this competition, and the good fortune not to be mentioned among those who weren't good enough.
37. See 29 above.



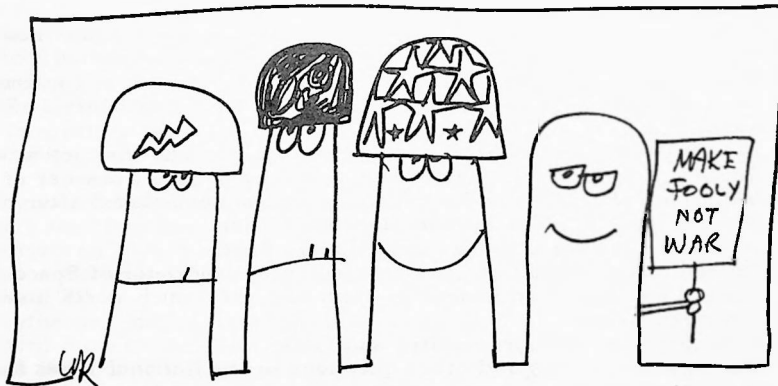
38. Distinguished Melbourne fan, originally from Brisbane, now resident in Canberra, married to Leigh Edmonds.
39. See 29.
40. Now \$2500. Guess I'll wait for the paperback.
41. In 1981 I thought that was amusing. I have since come to appreciate Monteverdi's music. The opera I was unable to enjoy (in 1971, if I remember correctly) was in fact neither of those mentioned, but *L'Orfeo*.
42. See 29.

I intended to reprint more of my ABR columns here, but these two will have to do. The first (which ends towards the foot of p.736) appeared in September 1980; the second I have only in manuscript, and it is dated March 1981.

The photo on the front cover was taken about August 1958, and published in the 16 September issue of *The Australian Christian*, national fanzine of Churches of Christ, price fivepence-halfpenny. Not a particularly appropriate picture to mark FAPA's fiftieth birthday, nor even the thirtieth anniversary of my brief career in the clergy, but it will have to do.

Now I have a job to finish and a house to find, so it's hooroo until next time.

JB 2.vi.87



Back Row: F. A. Stone, C. S. Badcock, C. H. Dow, I. N. Richer, S. G. Pinches, A. S. Williams, J. W. Somerville, D. R. Hull, K. A. Mason, R. Holt, F. C. Trinham, E. S. Sanders.  
 Second Row: C. G. Henderson, D. G. Nelson, R. K. Sansome, A. G. Mathieson, T. H. Ede, K. J. Harvey, T. A. Morrison, R. W. Tippet, B. C. Snoxall, J. W. Way, G. K. Moyes, M. J. White.  
 Third Row: O. R. Clark, M. D. Hamilton, R. M. Scott, K. J. Parry, N. L. Garwood, A. M. Norris, J. K. Ludgater, R. B. Elbourne, S. Graham, P. Andrews, K. J. Hank, R. E. Hillbrick.  
 Front Row: J. G. Bangsund, B. L. Pryor, P. Shannon, K. A. Jones, A. E. White, E. L. Williams, R. T. Pittman, K. J. Clinton, D. M. Hughes, G. Setzmann, D. K. Thoday.  
 Absent: D. Keir, A. J. Emmett.