P H I L O S O P H I C A L G A S 7 5

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Done for ANZAPA and FAPA by John Bangsund
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Every time I start an issue of Philosophical Gas I put that note in that it's done for FAPA and ANZAPA (the order varies, and sometimes I include GRAPPA, a sort of notional apa consisting of everyone who reads this who doesn't belong to ANZAPA or FAPA), but the drafts - false starts - are rarely read by anyone, and few published issues seem to get into FAPA. This one had better get in: my membership is on the line, again. Also, it's a bit special, I suppose, being the eighteenth anniversary issue, and marking the twentieth anniversary of ANZAPA. It seems only appropriate - I do apologize, Harry: I never thought it would happen either - that it should be the first fanzine I have done on a computer. The computer is an Epson PC, it does not have a fannish name, and I have owned it for eight days - today being (Bryant? Yes, John!) 5 September 1988. The last time I started this issue it was called volume 18 number 3 August 1988 and it went something like this:

23 July The hell with work. FAPA 203 arrived yesterday, and I am in the mood to pub an itch, scratch an ish, type words words words of a philogasometrical nature on everyday occurrences, such as occurred even as I typed this sentence, when a little old lady in a red plastic raincoat came into this room to have her hair done, a service, I had unhappily to inform her, I could not perform. "You running a library," she asked or observed as I wrote out Luisa's new address and phone number for her. "No, I'm a writer," I lied. "Been doing my hair for nearly twenty years," she said, and sadly departed. I suppose it must have been a shock to her, though she didn't show it, to walk into Luisa's hairdressing salon and find it occupied by a large, bearded typist, a desk, two filing cabinets, a stereo system and a lot of books. I wondered fleetingly whether I should tell her about FAPA, knowing that I would be telling FAPA about her. I wonder who she is, how long she has lived in Preston, how she looked and what she talked about that day in 1968 or 1969 when Luisa first dressed her hair.

Luisa and Jose are Spanish. We are renting their house (or rather, one of their houses - they own three that I know of; but this is the one they lived in for nearly twenty years) at 15 Gillingham Street, Preston. Luisa worked for many years as a hairdresser, and at some stage acquired a salon in Bell Street, one of the main east-west through-roads in Melbourne's northern

suburbs. Her salon was demolished when Bell Street was widened a few years ago, so she set up shop in this room behind the garage, the room that is now my very own office - and airconditioned at that. Very pleasant, and you never know who's going to drop in. The house itself is pretty comfortable too.

The house at Kingsbury, which we happily vacated on 16 June, was pleasant enough as a house but quite unsuitable to my working habits and Sally's sleeping habits. The neighbours were rough and noisy, the suburb was miles too far from anywhere we wanted to go - except La Trobe University, just across the road, where I expected to find some work but never did - and on the whole we spent a pretty miserable year there.

In November, desperate for work, I got a part-time job as proofreader for a small jobbing typesetter in Brunswick. That was OK: I liked the people and coped with the work, even though I was expected to do a full-time job in part-time hours. But I never quite got over the feeling of "What the hell am I doing here!" - my boss later said he could tell that, but no hard feelings - and in January I left.

Suddenly I had more freelance work than I could handle, and just as suddenly, early in March, I got another part-time job, as assistant editor of the quarterly literary journal Meanjin - and it's the most interesting, challenging and satisfying job I have ever had.

The editor, Jenny Lee, is an extraordinary woman, fourteen years younger than me and ten times as energetic, with a very clear vision of the journal she wants Meanjin to be. She knows her way around computers, and is the best all-round editor I have ever worked with. I could write pages about her, and eventually probably will, but that will do for now. On my first day, 8 March, she introduced me to the office computer, an IBM XT turbo clone (with WordPerfect 4.2 word-processing program), and about lunchtime said she might as well go to Adelaide for a few days to catch up with some writers and let me get used to the computer. Considering that I'd had no experience at all with computers, apart from playing with Damien Broderick's cute little machine one night, it was probably a good idea to throw me in at the deep end like that. In the first week I learnt the basic stuff, like using the cursor (the cursor, dummy, not the space bar!); by the end of the second week I was editing on-screen and had lost my first file, a proud if humiliating moment.

6 September In the first draft of the above there were several references to my work on the index to the magazine Overland. This interminable job was given to me in October 1985 by the magazine's founder and editor, Stephen Murray-Smith. Stephen died on 31 July. He was (as Bruce Gillespie has so aptly put it) to Australian literature what Terry Carr was to science fiction. I wrote "something about Stephen" for the August issue of the Society of Editors Newsletter, and I will reprint it here. I should explain that Meanjin (founded in 1940 by Clem Christesen) and Overland (founded 1954) always enjoyed a friendly rivalry, especially while Clem was editor of Meanjin (he retired in 1974). For years they were two of the three or four best literary journals in this country (and still are among the best, but there are many more these days), and though differently embodied, their

concerns have always been similar. Overland's motto says it best: "Temper democratic, bias Australian". Here, first, is a note that I wrote for the March issue of the Newsletter:

Literary cricketism attained new hierarchies of discourse at the 200th or thereabouts annual Meanjin vs Overland match at the Domain Oval on 28 February. I didn't notice who won, but everyone had a good time, and the highlight of the day was Ian Mair's presentation of the coveted emu-egg trophy. He hadn't noticed either, and had forgotten entirely what Stephen Murray-Smith had told him to say, so he sang for us, word-perfect, if somewhat wavering as to pitch, all of Sir Henry Newbolt's "Play up, play up, and play the game".

SOMETHING ABOUT STEPHEN

Dr Stephen Murray-Smith, AM, Honorary Life Member of the Society of Editors, died on 31 July, aged 65. An outline of his career, publications and distinctions may be found in the Oxford Companion to Australian Literature.

Stephen was a fearsome, loving man. I first met him in 1959, when I was a bookseller's assistant at Cheshire's, that vast underground treasure-house in Little Collins Street. I wondered why it was that my fellow counter-jumpers suddenly became very busy in distant parts of the shop whenever Stephen came down our stairs, but did not wonder long. He was gruff, he was in a hurry, he made you feel personally responsible for the iniquitous cost of books and for not having those he wanted in stock. And it was rumoured, behind the stacks and in the tea-room, that he was a Communist. I found him fascinating. We didn't talk much, but we seemed to get on - the rest of the staff were happy to leave him to me - and one day he gave me a roneoed invitation to a cricket match, of all things. I knew of his magazine, Overland, and of Clem Christesen's Meanjin, but neither interested me much (I was too busy at the time reading the Great Classics of World Literature), and the thought of a cricket match between two literary magazines struck me as faintly absurd. The thought of attending such an event (all those writers, artists, intellectuals!) terrified me - it was as unimaginable as dining with Mr Cheshire or Dr Fabinyi - so I stayed home.

In 1963, when I was head librarian at the Victorian Railways Institute (and had read the classics as far as page 4 of Finnegans Wake, which seemed a good place to stop for the time being), I attended Stephen's series of lectures on Australian literature at the Council of Adult Education, across the road. He remembered me, talked most interestingly about his work on Mechanics' Institutes (of which, he pointed out, the VRI was one of the few survivors), and offered to set up an exhibition in the library of rare and early editions of some of the great Australian books. Knowing the library's patrons better than he did, realizing also that he was talking about his own books, I declined the offer. Not long after that I was again invited to a Meanjin vs Overland cricket match.

A ball-by-ball account of my relationship with Stephen over

the years would include many instances of not going to these odd literary-magazine cricket matches - and eventually of going to them, enjoying myself hugely and wishing I'd started earlier. (I wrote about the 1988 match in the March Newsletter. That glorious day was the last time I saw Stephen.) But I am not writing an account of our relationship, just as I am not writing an obituary.

The fearsome aspect of Stephen was much more apparent to people who didn't know him than to those who did, but it was real enough all the same. He was a man of great authority, and a man always ready to fight for his convictions - of which he had more, and more firmly upheld, than most of us. Whether it be social justice, scholarship, editorial standards, the proposed Australia Card or the lack of service on interstate trains, you challenged his authority and convictions at your peril. I sometimes think that you could hardly claim to know him at all without having crossed him and felt his lash. And felt the love in it, for everything Stephen did sprang from his huge love.

I will give you three more glimpses of Stephen and conclude this note.

Stephen was always a great champion of George Turner's work, indeed one of the first to recognize its value, so it was fitting that he be asked to launch George's 'essay in time travel' (an unclassifiable book, part autobiography, part history and analysis of science fiction, part philosophical enquiry), In The Heart Or In The Head. Fitting that he be asked, but I was a little surprised that he accepted: at the time he was extraordinarily busy, and not well. He came to the St Kilda Library and spoke for half an hour about George, his work in general and this book in particular. What he said that night was the best review the book ever had; he detailed its great qualities, quoted parts he had marked, related part to part and theme to theme in ways unsuspected by author or editor, and ever so gently led up to asking George to write another, rather different book. We learnt later that Stephen had stayed up most of the night before, reading and thinking about George's book.

I spent a few hours at Stephen's place one day last summer, checking what we fondly thought would be my last queries on the Overland Index. After lunch I watched this great fearsome man playing with his tiny grandson Joseph, the two of them rolling about the floor in mutual joy.

Not long after I returned to Melbourne ten years ago, finding the freelance going hard, I decided (not for the first time) to apply for a real job, and with some trepidation I asked Stephen if he would be my referee. Of course, he said, in one of those succinct three-line letters of which he was a master, 'I'll always go in to bat for you.'

Bloody cricket again! But that was the Stephen I knew, the sort of man he was, a man who would always go in to bat for you.

I'm glad I wrote that when I did, on the first two days of August: in the next few weeks I heard and read so much about Stephen that I began to wonder whether I'd ever known him at all. Of course I had. Stephen knew and had dealings with a vast number of people; all of them knew him in one or more of his many capacities, but it was the same man they all knew. About four

hundred of us were at his funeral, perhaps the same number at the memorial meeting at the University of Melbourne. The speakers at that meeting included Manning Clark, Geoffrey Serle, Geoffrey Blainey, Thomas Shapcott, Barry Jones and, most moving of all, David Martin: "We can't get on without him!" David said, "But we will pretend that we can."

BOOZECTOMY, or BACK TO 1984

In an issue of PG that never made it into FAPA, towards the end of 1984, I wrote at some length about my liver and gallstones, giving up alcohol and losing a lot of weight - fascinating stuff, but not for the faint-hearted.

At the end of July 1984 the doctor I had been seeing worked out what had been troubling me for nearly twenty years: I had a gallstone as big as the Ritz. Also, the alcohol I had been taking for almost that long to relieve the pain had just about wrecked my liver: "not cirrhosis yet" was how he put it, and that frightened me enough to give up alcohol.

Without alcohol, I lost interest in food: I had got into a cycle of going on drinking while there was something to eat and going on eating while there was something to drink, and that cycle was now broken. So between 31 July and 31 December 1984 I lost 76 pounds, down from 224 to 148. During that time I had a few tests, notably an ultrasonic scan, which fascinated me, "seeing" my innards, live, on TV ("You have a very photogenic heart," the sister said, but I suppose she says that to all the fellers), and which merely confirmed what was already known: cholecystitis (gall-bladder stuffed), remedy cholecystectomy (cut it out). That was the object of losing weight, to reduce the amount of flab the surgeon would have to carve through on his way to the gall-bladder.

The doctor who had diagnosed all this disowned me, and I'm still not sure why; maybe he didn't want a patient who couldn't afford treatment in a private hospital (I prefer not to think that of him), maybe he just didn't want a patient who lived half an hour's drive away; but when he referred me to the specialists at Royal Melbourne Hospital he described me as "a former patient of mine", which sounded pretty final.

There's something a bit Dickensian or Hogarthian about Royal Melbourne Hospital. I suppose there is about any public hospital, or public anything. Waiting to see the gastroenterologist, I sat in a long narrow corridor with scores of people who looked poor, untidy and quite unwell. I probably looked the same, come to think of it, but that didn't cheer me up. I badly needed a cigarette, but smoking is not allowed in hospitals, because someone might catch something from it. What, I wondered, might I catch from one or more of these crook-looking people? Maybe they just look bad because they're all dying for a smoke too. So I sat there glumly, trying not to think of my future, trying to congratulate myself on giving up grog and losing weight, and playing with the letters in "gastroenterology". I forget what I came up with, but the gastroenterologist found it amusing when I told him. Also, I had great difficulty pronouncing "gastroenterologist" (it doesn't exactly roll off the tongue) and found myself thinking of him as "gastropodiatrist". From

there to founding the discipline of gastropodiatry was a small step, and I soon invented a new and effective weight-loss program, the gastropo-diet, which allows you to eat and drink anything you like, providing you use only your feet to get it to your mouth.

Meanwhile - and this is where the Greeklike-tragicomedy really starts - I had acquired a new doctor, a lady doctor. "John Bangsund?" she repeated, quite puzzled, when I answered my name at the clinic. "But you're not 100 kilograms!" she said. "Bless you, ma'am," I said, and in her surgery told her some of the foregoing. "Well, losing all that weight is certainly good, but we'll have to do something about the tiredness and dizziness and so on. We'll have to build you up." And in the course of discussing my building-up she said something that she should never ever have said to me - something demonstrably true, and just as demonstrably not to be said to me at that time, if ever: "You know, a glass or two of wine with dinner won't hurt you."

That was late November, early December. On the first Saturday in December there was a federal election, Bruce Gillespie and Elaine Cochrane came to dinner, and after dinner Teresa Pitt and Colin Jevons and some other people called in - a great night, a night more or less engraved on my mind. Recalling my doctor's remark - well, not exactly recalling, because I hadn't thought of much else since she said it - I decided that night to have a glass or two of wine. It was a good wine, a very nice Rhine Riesling, and it tasted awful - how could I have liked this stuff so much? - but I persevered.

I persevered so well that by August 1985 I was back to 170 pounds, by August 1987 getting on for 230. On 30 August this year I weighed 101.5 kilograms on my present doctor's scales. That's close enough to 224 pounds (or 16 stone, as we say in these parts), which is precisely where I was on 31 July 1984. My gall-bladder is intact, and as far as I can tell, not causing any problems, but it has to be attended to some time. My liver is no worse than it was four years ago, but that's bad enough, so on 30 August I gave up alcohol again. Twelve days on, I weigh 209 pounds, naked on the bathroom scales, and I have that mixed feeling of virtue, boredom and occasional frustration that I became familiar with last time.

This time I am not wondering what is happening to me, I am not discovering the hard way what I can and can't eat, I am not preparing for an operation. In fact, surgery may not be necessary now: lithotrity (lithotrypsy? - smashing the little rocky horrors to bits from outside, whatever it's called) is now developed, or so I understand, to the point where even my Sisyphean boulder can be treated. Cholesisyphectomy. Rockofages-ectomy (let me roll moss-and-self-free). No, what I am doing is giving my liver a rest. Losing weight is a bonus.

The most congenial doctor I have seen since 1984 - a young bloke who gave up his practice to go into medical research a few months after I started going to him - sheer coincidence - told me I shouldn't worry about my liver and what effect drinking has on it: "The cigarettes will get you first," he said, cheerfully. "Or a bus," I said. "Yes," he said, "you could be lucky."

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PRESTRESSED CONCRETE VERSE

There has only been one, that I know of. In PG 74 I wrote a powerful piece on "The Foundations of Prestressed Concrete Verse", which has been comprehensively ignored by ANZAPA (any Fapan who would like a copy, please ask), and in it I presented a problem of a theoretical, arithmetical and time-wasting nature that has since, briefly, been dubbed the Bangsund Conjecture. The friend who dubbed it also solved it. For ANZAPA's unconfined pleasure I will now publish the solution; FAPA may take some joy from wondering what the problem was, but probably not much. It may not look the least bit interesting, but take my word for it, this is a masterpiece of PCV construction.

1 2 3	1 2 4	1 2 5	1 2 6	1 2 7	1 2 8	1 2 9
4 5 7	5 6 8	6 7 9	7 8 3	8 9 4	9 3 5	3 4 6
8 9 6	9 3 7	3 4 8	4 5 9	5 6 3	6 7 4	7 8 5
1 4 8	1 5 9	1 6 3	1 7 4	1 8 5	1 9 6	1 3 7
2 5 9	2 6 3	2 7 4	2 8 5	2 9 6	2 3 7	2 4 8
3 7 6	4 8 7	5 9 8	6 3 9	7 4 3	8 5 4	9 6 5
1 7 9	1 8 3	1 9 4	1 3 5	1 4 6	1 5 7	1 6 8
2 4 6	2 5 7	2 6 8	2 7 9	2 8 3	2 9 4	2 3 5
3 5 8	4 6 9	5 7 3	6 8 4	7 9 5	8 3 6	9 4 7
1 5 6	1 6 7	1 7 8	1 8 9	1 9 3	1 3 4	1 4 5
2 7 8	2 8 9	2 9 3	2 3 4	2 4 5	2 5 6	2 6 7
3 4 9	4 5 3	5 6 4	6 7 5	7 8 6	8 9 7	9 3 8

Since about the time of Aussiecon 2 I have been trying off and on to write a definitive survey of the origin, significance and abiding worrity of prestressed concrete verse. "The Foundations of PCV" at least presented some of the theoretical stuff, but I have trouble with the historical, not least because it keeps on changing. Art Widner and Terry Hughes appeared in the first version, for example, walking up Little Collins Street, talking metaphysical stuff about Crux Australis and the like. (There are many copies of that one, also yours for the asking, but I'm afraid it's full of bad arithmetic.) Anyway, here is the latest attempt. You will notice that it doesn't get far.

The origins and development of prestressed concrete verse have not been particularly well documented, although I have done my best to explore the phenomenon from time to time in the pages of Philosophical Gas: the Journal of Locally Compact Pandemics. From the response to my articles in that slim, sporadic publication (established 1970, circulation 30, estimated readership 5) I would judge that prestressed concrete verse is not at present perceived as being at the cutting edge of the newly renascent art-technology fusion interface. Further, and I say this with caution but some confidence, it is possible that I am the only practitioner in the field of prestressed concrete verse construction. Assuming this to be the case, and that present readers have not followed the discussion in Philosophical Gas, I shall begin at the beginning and briefly trace the

progress of prestressed concrete verse, giving where necessary examples of my work in the field.

It would be easy to say that it all began with Arnold Schoenberg, the well-known Viennese numbers-racket theoretician, on that day in July 1921 when he announced to his companion John Walker: "Today I have discovered something that will assure the supremacy of German eye-surgery for the next hundred years." Easy to say, but difficult to swallow: it is true that his experiments with twelve numbers "related only to each other" (nur aufeinander bezogenen) had some value, and in fact anticipated in some ways my own much later work, but his attempts to apply the twelve-number theory to what was known then about magnetic interferometry were futile, and of no interest to eye-surgeons in Germany or anywhere else. He turned then to constructing string quartets based on precise notation of body movements and ball-path geometry in doubles tennis matches (one of them, indeed, included a fifth part for soprano umpire), and died in 1951 murmuring "Harmony... harmony...". A great man, Schoenberg, for all his faults. But the origin of prestressed verse lies not in his twelve-number principle, nor in closely observed ball games, but in the "Rule of 78" and the game of Tattslotto.

The Rule of 78 was invented by money-lenders to improve their cash-flow by making sure that borrowers pay interest faster than they repay the amount borrowed. It is called the Rule of 78 because of a simple calculation based on a twelve-month loan: if you add up the numbers from 1 to 12 you should get 78. The money-lenders did this, divided the total interest payable by 78, and decreed that from the borrower's first monthly repayment they would take 12/78ths as interest, from the second 11/78ths, and so on. If you add up the numbers from 7 to 12 you should get 57; so in the first half of a twelve-month contract the borrower pays 57/78ths (73 per cent) of the interest. By such means a newly married young couple may borrow $80,000 to buy a house, and five years later, when they are planning their divorce, discover that they still owe $79,500 and therefore must stay together. This is the money-lenders' main contribution to morality and community standards.

The object of the game of Tattslotto is to get your money back. This seldom happens to anyone. True, every week we are told that a certain number of people have won half a million dollars, a million, sometimes more, and it is unlikely that these people put more money into the game than they won, unless they were very rich to start with. But I do not know any of these people personally. I do know a lot of people who, like me, have not got their money back and do not have the strength of character to stop playing. Or perhaps it is strength of character that keeps us in the game - an understanding and acceptance of the Kantian imperative of the game, that if we stopped playing then everyone should stop, and the game would be over. Taken to its logical conclusion, this means that the horse-racing industry, the stock-exchange industry, indeed every form of industry that does not create wealth by actually producing something, would instantly collapse and throw the capitalist world as we know it into unthinkable chaos if I stopped playing the game of Tattslotto. For the moment, this is not something I would like to have on my conscience.