Philosophical Gas 76/77

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We have some fun times in the *Meanjin* office: it's not all post-Foucault pantopragmatics and heavy punctuation. One day Jenny was slaving away at the computer (where I couldn't see her, because what I loosely call "my" desk faces the computer's back), and I was proofreading something, when she said "Beautiful word, oblong." "Oblong?" I said. "Yes – so much nicer than rectangular, don't you think?" "Yeah," I said, getting up to make some coffee, "Rectangular Cassidy sounds ridiculous."

Welcome to *Philosophical Gas*, the Serious Journal of Clarence E. Mulford Studies. Today is 5 November in Melbourne and probably a whole lot of other places, the sun is shining, and I am not working on an Indonesian cookbook. Tomorrow I will resume work on that book, but I've had enough for today. My work has become somewhat more efficient since the publisher lent me his *Kamus Lengkap Inggeris-Indonesia Indonesia-Inggeris* (Dictionary Complete... you can work the rest out), though it's not as lengkap as I would like. My author apparently uses Javanese dialect words that are not recognized by the good Professor Doctor Wojowasito, so what chance do I have? Never mind. I have learnt some useful Indonesian words, not the least of them "jezben", which means jazz band. I have such fond memories of the works of Clarence E. Mulford... Then along came Zane Grey, and literature, and sf... Bar 20, gentlemen and ladies, if you would be so kind, letter B. Now, where's that damn piccolo?

Last month the editor of *The Society of Editors Newsletter* invited me to write a powerful piece about "the year in publishing" or somesuch – as if I would know! – so I wrote four or five pages for her about more interesting things, concluding with the following story, which I started writing in 1985.

THE SHORT CAREER OF THE FOGGY DUO

My friend Lindsay Cox, whose work has so often decorated these pages, is left-handed, I realized only recently, a natural-born southpaw. For all his good nature, bad puns and hail-fellow-well-met kind of presence, I had always thought there was something sinister about him. He started life as a Salvationist, and has maintained his links with the Army, but these days he is mainly involved with its "Crossroads" welfare and youth activities and teaching young Salvos how to play their instruments. When he's not doing that he supervises telephone installations in the Brunswick-Carlton area, or writes military history. His big project at the moment is "The Galloping Guns", a history of the Victorian Horse Artillery.

One of my few pleasures as a freelance editor is having Lindsay call in for coffee and free-ranging talk. He often volunteers to provide artwork for the first page of this Newsletter, every month on average. He insists there's a Barbara Ramsden Award for Newsletter Illustration, and wants one. "Who's this `Anon'?" he said when he saw the September issue. "I was in a bit of a hurry," I said, "and had to make do." A likely story, Lindsay almost said, but he's too polite for that. We got talking about UFOs.

No we didn't: we got talking about euphos - a quite different sort of phenomenon. I used to play a eupho in the Northcote City Band. Indeed, I have a photograph to prove it. I showed this photo to Lindsay. He looked at it and said "You were quite young then, weren't you?" I certainly was. About 15. "It's an odd thing," Lindsay said, tactfully, looking at that photo of me in my Northcote City Band uniform, with my euphonium, "People often look at me playing trombone, and they sense that there's something wrong." "An ill wind," I suggested. "I'll ignore that," he said. "What they don't seem to notice is that I put it over my right shoulder. I'm a left-handed trombonist." "Did you look closely at my eupho in that photo?" I asked. "No," he said, graciously. "I'm holding it back to front," I said. "So you are!" he said, barely concealing his mirth. "That was thirty-odd years ago!" I reminded him, but he seemed to be having some sort of nervous attack, so I didn't press the point.

On his next visit Lindsay brought me a euphonium from the spare-instrument stock he always seems to have. "Sally won't like this one bit," I said. "We'll play at lunchtime," he said. "My neighbours won't like it," I said. "I'll cut their phones off," he said. When Lindsay gets going there's no holding him, I tell you.

So there we were, Lindsay on his favourite cornpet, a sort of cross between a cornet and a trumpet, and me on this ancient euphonium he'd dug up somewhere. It was not a great sound. Our "Come All Ye Faithful" was recognizable, but what we did to the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's 9th doesn't bear thinking about.

"My friend Jenny Bryce", I said, gasping somewhat, trying not to think about the half a million cigarettes I've smoked since I last played euphonium, "has formed a group called the Barockettes - oboe, violin and cello, I think. There isn't a great repertory for that combination. Do you reckon we should join them?" "We'd be the Briquettes, right?" said Lindsay. "Right shape," I said. We put our instruments aside and got down to the serious business of what to call ourselves. The names we bandied about you wouldn't believe. We finally agreed on "The Foggy Duo". "We'll play risqué love lilts," I said. "It's pretty risky playing *anything* with you," Lindsay said.

Lindsay plays very well, quite professionally. For a time he had a jazz band, called The Original 1915 Kaiser Wilhelm Victory Band. The band dressed in old German uniforms, pickelhaubes, the lot, and Lindsay told bad jokes between numbers. His cornpet is a lovely solo instrument: you might think of it as the violin of the band, or maybe the oboe, a soaring-aloft kind of voice. The euphonium is, I'm not sure what, maybe the cello - certainly an important solo instrument in the band, carrying the melody down there in the basement while the higher

instruments are recovering. It's entirely wasted on me. The way I play euphonium you might just as well have someone standing there saying "Oompah". Fairly loudly, mind.

"There's something I must tell you, John," Lindsay said. "Yes?" "The way you play euphonium, you might just as well be standing there saying 'Oompah'." "Yes?" "You are a natural-born left-handed euphonium player," he said. "Gee, thanks, Lindsay!" I said. He started packing his cornpet. "Don't know about you," he said, "but I've got to get back to work." "Well, I have got this book I should be working on, yes." "Right," he said, biting his lip, because it was his book we'd been keeping me from, "Same time next year?" "Aw, fair go, Lindsay!" I said, "I need time to practise!"

He went back to his telephones, and I went back to his book. His spelling is bloody awful.

FEETNOTE TO THE ABOVE

That story is almost true. Most of my stories are almost true, some more than others. Alec Hope labelled them "fictive essays". The story about Rectangular Cassidy is quite true, as was the story last issue about the little old lady in the red plastic raincoat wandering into my office to have her hair done. There's a different sort of truth in, for example, my short biography of Arnold Schoenberg last issue. To describe him as "the well-known Viennese numbers-racket theoretician" is perfectly true if you set aside the normal meaning of "numbers racket" and happen to think that his invention of the tone row, consisting of twelve notes "related only to each other", resulted in something that you can't appreciate as music. The words I quoted are exactly what he said in July 1921, except that I substituted "eye-surgery" for "music". Schoenberg was a brilliant, compulsively inventive man, and in fact experimented with magnetic devices for removing metallic particles from the eye. He also devised a method of notating tennis matches, and his second numbered string quartet includes a part for soprano voice. But his quartets have nothing to do with tennis, and the wholly fictitious John Walker (replacing Schoenberg's friend Josef Rufer) appears in the story only to allow me a very obscure pun. The few words I wrote about Schoenberg's death are perfectly true, and although I have wilfully distorted some facts about his life, I hope my respect for the man shows in what I wrote. I am also very fond of his music, but I couldn't think of a way to work that into the story.

Lindsay Cox is a lovely bloke, very considerate, almost invariably cheerful, always good company. He's a compulsive joker and punster, but some of that is cover for a basic shyness and modesty - and a lot of it is evidence of a very sharp mind. The incident with the euphonium really happened, but I have embroidered this particular story a lot. I can still play the mouth-organ, but not as well as I once could, and I run out of wind pretty quickly; my stamina at the piano is likewise diminished, and sometimes even playing a record leaves me a little shaky; so the effort required to get one authentic note from the euphonium literally left me gasping. Lindsay is roughly my shape (briquettes, I should perhaps explain, are oval lumps of compacted coal

dust), but a few inches taller and a good deal heavier. He has a neat full beard, and we are sometimes mistaken for brothers. But the thing is, he doesn't smoke, he is much more active than I am, and for all that he's overweight he is physically much fitter than I am, so he probably had no idea, no real way of knowing, that I am utterly incapable these days of getting a tune out of a euphonium. But he was so enthusiastic about the two of us playing, and I thought, hell, let's give it a try. That little exchange about Sally's probable objection, and the neighbours', is almost verbatim; "I'll cut their phones off", in particular, I thought should not go unrecorded; and the rest of our conversation, even the parts that are sheer invention, I think is authentic as to tone.

I first met Lindsay at the Melbourne Science Fiction Club in 1967. He was, and is, a friend of Don Latimer, an almost legendary old-time Melbourne fan. Lindsay didn't read a lot of sf, but he liked the idea of fanzines, and he liked the idea of doing humorous illustrations for them. The first work of his that I published was the cover of *ASFR* 9. (Lee Harding, who had more or less appointed himself artistic director of *ASFR*, hated that cover so much that he resigned as "shadow editor".) For *ASFR* 10, the first anniversary issue, he did a wonderful drawing of sf and fan characters in a kind of celebratory procession; very carefully cut (because he'd done it in one long piece), it sprawled across the feet of the first three pages. He went on drawing for me, and when I moved to Canberra in 1972 the letters he sent me were full of whimsical illustrations. I next saw him at a party at Lee Harding's place at the end of 1972, and his first words to me were "Did you bring my Hugo Award with you?" Or something like that - a running joke that started when ASFR was first nominated for a Hugo. When I won the FAW Barbara Ramsden Award in 1984, the joke continued under a different name.

We lost touch during the Canberra years, and didn't meet again until 1982. In June that year Sally and I moved to West Brunswick. In those days it was strictly illegal to use a telephone answering machine without a connection authorized and installed by Telecom, so I applied for one, the technicians had trouble installing it, and Lindsay, who supervises installations in the 380/387 area, saw the paperwork. He rang me, asked rather shyly whether I was the same John Bangsund, and in no time was at my front door demanding his Hugo.

While I had been away in Canberra and Adelaide learning the basics of editing, alcoholism, divorce and bankruptcy, he had travelled in Europe, married his lovely Helen and produced a son, Jacob. His interest in German militaria, a passion I neither share nor quite understand, had been to some extent superseded by an interest in Australian militaria. He had lived at Sunbury, a satellite suburb 35 kilometres north-west of Melbourne, for some years, and had got involved with the rather run-down museum there and the local-history group. The great house at Sunbury is Rupertswood, built in 1874-76 for Sir William Clarke, now a boys' school run by the Salesian order. At Rupertswood Clarke set up what many have called a private army, and in a sense it was that, but strictly speaking it was a largely state-funded half-battery of horse artillery. Lindsay, I was rather surprised to learn, had been studying for an Arts degree by correspondence with the University of New England (the Australian one

of that name, at Armidale, New South Wales). Naturally, he had taken history as his major study; just as naturally, he had somehow narrowed this down to Australian colonial military history, and the history of the Rupertswood battery in particular. He talked endlessly about Rupertswood, and I was happy to listen and enjoy his enthusiasm, although I didn't find the precise details of accoutrements and weaponry and exactly who did what and when as absorbingly interesting as he does. He was, he said, writing a book about Rupertswood. Terrific, I said. One day, when I was editing the Victorian section of the revised edition of *The Heritage of Australia: the Illustrated Register of the National Estate* – a massive book, massively promoted, massively profitable for the Macmillan Company of Australia, and so riddled with absurd inaccuracies that it's practically useless as a reference work – I came to the revised entry for Rupertswood. I use the term "revised" loosely. Clarke remained Clark, 1874–76 remained 1874, but "half-battery of the Royal Artillery" had been altered to "half-battery of the Volunteer Horse Artillery". I rang Lindsay about this, and he was appalled. Victorian Horse Artillery, he said, not Volunteer! The officers and men were paid – you can't call them volunteers – but in any case the V is for Victorian! And so on. Not long after that, Lindsay gave me his history to look at, and I thought it was excellent – *The Galloping Guns of Rupertswood and Werribee Park: a History of the Victorian Horse Artillery*. I told him how to present it to publishers, and which publishers to approach. None of them saw its value as military, political, social and local history, so eventually I edited it, Lindsay designed it, using an Alison Forbes grid, Neil Conning typeset it, Henry Rosenbloom printed it, and Lindsay published it. Sir Rupert Clarke, Baronet, MBE, launched it one day in 1986, and Lindsay got down to the depressing business of selling it. Two years on, he still has many copies for sale, but he passed the break-even point early this year. It's a fine book, and Lindsay's reputation in his field is established. He is writing articles and papers, he is getting commissions to illustrate other people's books, and he is writing another book of his own. I'm proud of him. His spelling hasn't improved much, but I'm proud of him all the same.

DA CAPO AGAIN – DO YOU MIND? – AND AGAIN LETTER B, THANK YOU

From the books in this house I can discover nothing about Clarence E. Mulford. This doesn't mean a lot, since I do not have the books I once had, but it means at least a little: *Britannica*, for example, mentions neither the immortal Hopalong Cassidy nor his creator; nor does the *Penguin Companion to American Literature*, but the latter is a small book for its subject (yet it does give a paragraph to Zane Grey).

I read Mulford before I saw any of the Hopalong Cassidy films, and thinking back, I'm not sure which was worse in what might be called artistic terms. Certainly Bill Boyd, the screen Cassidy, was not the Hopalong I knew and loved. And trying to reread Mulford in my 20s I found, to my disappointment, that the Hopalong I knew and loved was a creation of my much-younger mind. To be frank, Mulford was just about unreadable. Disheartened, I did not attempt to reread Zane Grey, but at some stage I did buy a paperback copy of the first book of his that I ever read, *Fighting Caravans*, and I think I still have it. The memory of first reading it, the images and feelings it evoked, I

certainly still have. The characters (whose names I have long since forgotten), their predicaments and problems, and the places they passed through, stayed a while, settled in, rode away from, are still real in my mind. All I remember about Hopalong is that he limped, of course, from an old gunshot wound, tended to run out of bullets, yet somehow managed to head them off at the pass – oh, and he had a fair sense of humour, too, but offhand I can't recall an example of it. Also he didn't drink, smoke or swear. You'd need a fair sense of humour to be a cowboy and not do those things. Clarence E. Mulford may even now be the subject of academic theses, and good luck to him. I salute him as the writer who first engaged my interest in the American West.

For a time in the late 1940s and early 1950s my parents arranged summer family holidays at Seaford, in those days a place in the country, close to the beach, now a bayside suburb of Melbourne. The first place they rented for this purpose stays in my mind for various reasons. One is that here I witnessed the first quarrel between my parents, and first began to take notice of their different attitudes to life – or character, if you like. It had to do with the rent. The owner of the house hadn't specified a sum, so my father had to negotiate with him. My mother said It'll be somewhere between X and Z, hold out for X, and if necessary settle for Y. The owner asked for Z, and my father said that was fine by him, so that's what we paid. My mother was furious. They probably could barely afford X, let alone Z, but in this sort of situation I have so often done what my father did then that I understand his decision exactly. I understand my mother's reaction, too: it is almost 25 years since my father died, and my mother and I have got to know each other pretty well since then.

In those days there was a cinema at Seaford, near the main road, the Nepean Highway, and during those holidays I went there often. There were streets that led back to the house that we rented, but the short way home was a sandy track through a swamp, fringed by gums and tea-trees, and this was the route I preferred. In memory, it was a sunny, pleasant walk by day, a black and treacherous challenge by night, even by moonlight – perhaps especially by moonlight, when the track was uncertain and the trees loomed stark and threatening. At Seaford I read Zane Grey's *Forlorn River*. I recall nothing about that book except that its setting was in a place sunny and pleasant by day, black and treacherous by night, especially sinister by moonlight. This shaped my thinking about the American West at the time, and for some time after. The bang-bang-head-'em-off-at-the-pass kind of Westerns that I saw regularly at the Saturday matinees were never quite the same again. I went on enjoying them, but I knew that the real West was much more mysterious, a place of deceptively sunny daytime tracks through forlorn moonlit swamps. And one night I saw *Shane*, and knew I was right.

No, not right, not exactly: in *Shane* I recognized the West I knew from Zane Grey's *Forlorn River* and the Seaford swamp, but by then I had read many more Westerns, some by Grey, some by authors I have forgotten, and begun to realize that the West had many moods: *High Plains Drifter* (I think that was the title), for example, prepared me for what I think of as the bloody-cold Westerns – the stories of Mountain Men, and cowboys snowbound, struggling against the elements rather than against Indians and each other (though usually they had the lot to contend with).

My small collection of films on videocassette includes only six or seven Westerns, not by choice, but because Westerns have been out of favour since I have owned a VCR, relegated to the early hours of the morning and heavy-laden with commercials. *Shane* has not appeared on Melbourne TV in the last three years at least; I can't recall when I last saw it. The films I do have are John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), with John Wayne almost acting; Arthur Penn's *The Left-Handed Gun* (1958), with Paul Newman as the best Billy the Kid so far; two deliciously funny Henry Fonda films - *A Big Hand for the Little Lady* (1966, with Joanne Woodward) and *The Cheyenne Social Club* (1970, with James Stewart); Fred Schepisi's *Barbarosa* (1982), with Willie Nelson, a singer and actor I never thought I would come to like, Gary Busey and Isela Vega, and with Bruce Smeaton's music rounding it all off perfectly, a gem of a film; and a couple of others not worth mentioning in that kind of company.

I have deliberately not mentioned the (what shall I call them?) anti-Westerns I have seen and enjoyed. There have been the shocking (I use the word in its literal sense) pro-Indian films, which redressed the "romance" of the West, and not before time. And there have been umpteen send-up Westerns, of which Gene Wilder's *Blazing Saddles* is probably the best, which doesn't say a lot for that genre, much as I enjoy Gene Wilder.

Of the old-school, recognizably bang-bang-head-'em-off-at-the-pass, Westerns in recent years, I think *Barbarosa* is one of the best, despite (perhaps because of?) its strong Australian influence. There may even be a case to argue that today's "Westerns" are being made in Australia - but I'll leave that to someone else. I haven't even seen the first *Man from Snowy River*, and I don't think *Crocodile Dundee* quite comes into this discussion. Or does it? Feel free to drag it in, if you want to. I enjoyed that film as I watched it, but disliked it when I had time to think about it.

I suddenly find myself, after twenty-five years of writing in fanzines, writing about films. It's an odd feeling, and I think I'll stop now before I say anything ridiculous. Too late? Never mind.

In the first draft of this ramble, "It's an odd feeling" was followed by two and a half pages of lists and comments, which I will spare you. Having attempted to list my favourite films, I concluded that Jacques Tati's *Jour de Fête* was probably first among them. I don't know how Bruce Gillespie and others go about choosing, let alone ranking, their favourite films (or favourite anything); I had fun and wasted far too much time just starting on such a list.

How could I list favourite films without including most of Jacques Tati's? Where to begin, or end, listing films by Volker Schlöndorff, Wim Wenders, Carlos Saura, Woody Allen, Akira Kurosawa, Tage Danielsson...? Well, Tage Danielsson wasn't too difficult, since I have only seen one, that I know of, and it is very high on my list: *Ronja, the Robber's Daughter* (1984).

Oh, hell, let's have a provisional top-twenty list - but in alphabetical order. And even now I am reluctant. How on earth can I justify excluding, say, *Ran, The Magnificent Seven, Carmen Jones, The*

Tin Drum...? I can't. Make it a provisional top-twenty-five list, allowing a spot for the one I've stupidly overlooked, the one that is probably your all-time favourite.

The African Queen - John Huston, 1951
Amadeus - Milos Forman, 1984
El Amor Brujo - Carlos Saura, 1986
Apocalypse Now - Francis Ford Coppola, 1979
The Blues Brothers - John Landis, 1980
Citizen Kane - Orson Welles, 1941
Dersu Uzala - Akira Kurosawa, 1974
The Gospel according to St Matthew - Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1964
A Hard Day's Night - Richard Lester, 1964
Jour de Fête - Jacques Tati, 1949
Manhattan - Woody Allen, 1979
The Mission - Roland Joffe, 1986
Paris, Texas - Wim Wenders, 1984
Ronja, the Robber's Daughter - Tage Danielsson, 1984
Shane - George Stevens, 1953
Solaris - Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972
Swann in Love - Volker Schlöndorff, 1984
Woodstock - Michael Wadleigh, 1970
Zelig - Woody Allen, 1983
Zorba the Greek - Michael Cacoyannis, 1964

While typing that list I have thought of twenty more that should be on it, but enough's enough. I was talking about Clarence E. Mulford and books. Top twenty books? No! In fact, I don't think I'll say any more about Clarence E. Mulford and books for the moment. I have some notes here, but they can wait.

Um, some years ago in these pages I wrote at some length about a novel, a Western, by Claire Huffacker called *The Cowboy and the Cossack* (I'm sorry if I have misspelt the author's name: I had several of his books once, but none has survived the purges of 1981-85). As I recall, a film had been made of it, or was to be made. Can anyone confirm that for me? Did the film have a different title?

I MUST BE TALKING TO SOMEONE, BRUCE

Harry Warner Jr, for example. "Am I the only one", asks Harry in *Horizons* 196 (FAPA 206), "to feel irritation and exasperation at a publication like this that keeps referring to apazines distributed in other apas, includes a long discussion of a matter which is incomprehensible because the topic was first brought up in a publication we haven't seen, and attempts to supply eight needed pages of activity credit by making two of those pages a reprint?" To which I answer: no, cobber, you certainly aren't. *Philosophical Gas* has been a constant source of frustration for me these last few years. Issues have been printed and never mailed. Since I have had the computer, issues have been started and never finished, finished and never printed. Mostly this has had to do with a lack of money.

In the same FAPA mailing, Bruce Gillespie says "John Bangsund landed the sort of job he's been looking for all his life: assistant editor of

the literary magazine *Meanjin*." This is the kind of statement that I would call so almost-true as to be almost true. But as poor old Socrates went blue in the face pointing out, one must define one's terms. ("When you say swallow the hemlock, do you mean just gulp it down, or mix it with a bit of jam on a spoon and sort of ease it down? - and in that case, does it remain hemlock, or may one think of it in some conjoint sense that renders its essential hemlockness invalid? Furthermore - I beg your pardon? Just get it down? Very well, sir, but I will point out - cheers! - that you may very well have destroyed one of Western Philosophy's most poignant dialogues, yuk, ooh, bloog.") So I must point out that, while Bruce's statement is essentially correct, the word "job" there is a little misleading. One normally interprets the word "job", in this sort of context, as "full-time job". And to be truthful, there are times when I think I am working full-time for *Meanjin*, and times when I am; but the fact is that I am officially engaged to work 19 hours per week for Australia's most respected quarterly cultural journal. (Bruce calls it a "literary magazine", but that's OK: it's that too.) The other fact is that I still rely heavily for income on freelance editorial work. Quite often I find myself without this work: for about ten weeks in February-April this year, for example, my total freelance income was $400. But things are improving, and by the time you read this I should be in a position to produce *PG* much more regularly. I certainly look forward to rejoining what Jack Speer (I think) once called "the continuing conversation".

Was it you, Jack? You have certainly invited some continuing conversation in *Synapse* (FAPA 207). *Meanjin* is pronounced "me-AN-jn". The word is said to be Aboriginal for something like "spike", and it referred specifically to "a finger of land in a bend in the Brisbane River, later to become part of the site of Brisbane". That was Clem Christesen's explanation when he started *Meanjin Papers* in Brisbane in 1940. Frank Moorhouse, one of our better-known writers, has recently offered a different explanation: it is an Aboriginal word meaning "rejected by the *New Yorker*".

What state is West Brunswick in? Flux, Jack, flux. To avoid this kind of bad joke, the Commonwealth *Style Manual* commands us to write "State" when referring to New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia or Tasmania. The State in which any Australian lives may be identified easily by reference to the postcode in his/her address: NSW starts at 2000, Vic 3000, Qld 4000, SA 5000, WA 6000, Tas 7000; the Australian Capital Territory is regarded as part of NSW for postal purposes, and currently has postcodes starting with 26 (Canberra area) and 29 (outlying parts of the ACT); the Northern Territory until quite recently had postcodes starting with 57, but they now start at 0800.

So, yes, West Brunswick is a suburb of Melbourne, Victoria. So is Preston, where I live. But we make a distinction between suburb and municipality. Preston, Reservoir, Kingsbury and so on are suburbs of Melbourne, but also parts of the City of Preston; the Cities of Preston, Brunswick, Melbourne and so on are separate municipalities, but also parts of Melbourne (or Greater Melbourne, but that term is rarely used). The City of Melbourne includes the central business district (which Americans call downtown Melbourne, but we call "town" or "the city": I'm going into town; I work in the city), North

Melbourne, West Melbourne, East Melbourne, Eastern Hill, Jolimont, Parkville, Carlton, North Carlton, Flemington, Kensington, Royal Park, Newmarket and possibly parts I have forgotten; the part now occupied by the Royal Melbourne Hospital used to be called Haymarket, and the part coming to be called Flagstaff was once Flagstaff Hill. There have been many names for parts of what we call Melbourne since the Tasmanians first settled/invaded the place in 1835; in fact, before it became Melbourne, in 1837, the place itself rejoiced in many names, from what seems to have been the Aboriginal name, Berrern or Bararing, to Batmania, Glenelg, Bareheep, Bearport, Bearbrass and so on. Bareheep is my favourite in that lot, but I admit that Batmania has a certain appeal. (John Batman was the first Tasmanian invader, closely followed by John Pascoe Fawkner. Fawkner started a newspaper and revised history to make himself the city's founder, so we have the suburbs of Fawkner and Pascoe Vale, but no suburb of Batman, only a railway station of that name.)

"Mechanics' Institutes sound like education for workers." That indeed was their function, Jack. They seem to have started in Glasgow in 1800, London 1824, Hobart 1827, Sydney 1833, Adelaide 1838 and Melbourne 1839. In Australia they were often called Schools of Arts. Their original function of improving workers' education and instructing them in their trades gradually broadened until they became the basis of our adult education system. Throughout the south-eastern States there are buildings still called Mechanics' Institutes or Schools of Arts, and they still usually serve some community purpose.

The Australia Card was an attempt at a national identification system, like the social security numbers that citizens of certain foreign countries are forced to have. Such a fascist/communist/undemocratic and generally spoilsport notion did not go down well in the Australian electorate, so the Government abandoned the project. Instead, we are now required to know our tax-file number (which we already had, but rarely knew) for various purposes. Not being forced to have a card, the Australian electorate happily went back to whatever it was doing.

Yes, Commonwealth, State and municipal elections are always held on Saturdays, between 8 and 6, and they are compulsory: failure to vote incurs a fine, unless you have a good excuse. Most Australians are not required to work on Saturdays.

I will send you and Janice Eisen (and anyone else who asks) "The Foundations of Prestressed Concrete Verse". I don't want to put it in FAPA, Janice, at least in its present form; judging by its reception in ANZAPA, it would be a waste of energy. I am no longer a member of ANZAPA, by the way, but there are other reasons for that.

I can only agree with Redd Boggs' friend's description of his work as "comfortable to the eye". (Something similar, as I recall, Sir James Murray demanded in the production of his dictionary – that it be eloquent to the eye? – something like that.) I envy your ability to draft your writing, Redd. You would think that now, with a computer to help me, I would do the same. It's true that I make substantial changes, but what I'm mostly doing is dithering, not drafting. Computer-assisted dithering, as Scythrop might s-say, is what it is.

FIFTYSOMETHING

Just now, Bruce Pelz, Art Widner and other sweet-toothed bortrytis-affected drinkers among us, I am finishing off a 1985 Montrose Traminer Riesling that I bought by mistake a fortnight ago. An ideal dessert wine, I decided, as I replaced the cork and put the bottle back in the fridge, but I don't indulge in desserts. And I can report, a fortnight later, that its time in the fridge has improved this wine: it is now as sweet as it was, but has a crisp dry finish, rather in the German style. I suggest cellaring it until 2985. Meanwhile, a few months ago, or 21 April to be exact, utterly bortrytis-free, however else affected, I seem to have entered my fifty-first year and sixth decade. I wrote about this soon after to John Foyster and Yvonne Rousseau, and take the liberty of quoting much of that letter:

Thank you for the flowers - *Margaret Preston* flowers at that. There are times when I think a discreet little wall hung with Margaret Preston originals would be a great solace. For the time being I am happy to make do with nice copies like this. You'll be wondering what Sally and I did to mark our 1.5 decades of marriage and 9 decades of misspent existence. Even if you're wondering no such thing, I intend to tell you.

To mark our wedding anniversary Sally corked a bottle of 1977 Grange Hermitage that a grateful author once gave me. Corked, yes. She thought, correctly, that it should have time to breathe, so attempted to open it an hour or so before I got home. 1978, when the 1977 Grange was bottled, was not a good year for corks, and Sally, through lack of practice, hasn't quite the deftness of touch needed to deal with corks that are soft in the middle, as this one was. So when I arrived she was a little frustrated if not downright cranky and the wine was not so much breathing as gasping through the hole she had created. Having had a lot of practice, I knew exactly what to do: I reached for an auger (or if you prefer, a nauger) that I keep close by for just such situations, and within seconds had most of the cork out of the bottle. I then carefully spilt several millilitres over Sally's priceless ancestral sideboard-runner while decanting most of the rest into a carafe. This illustrates fairly well the long-established division of irresponsibility in our marriage. But the wine was wonderful, and I'll cheerfully spit out bits of cork for such a noble liquor.

On Sally's birthday we toasted distant friends with a Queen Adelaide claret, a wine chosen not for any sentimental reason but because it's about the cheapest drinkable red to be found in these parts. And on my birthday Sally stayed with her sherry while I wrecked the budget with an elderly Frascati. Almost nothing memorable happened to us on our birthdays, which is as it should be at our age.

The night after my birthday was a different matter. Sally had booked a table for 13 at the Eastern Inn, Clifton Hill. (I had suggested 15. She said "You don't trust my arithmetic, do you!" This is true, but I didn't care to discuss the matter at the time.) With Sally's nephew Andrew, we were first to arrive, which is unlike us, and we were impressed at the way those damn clever Chinese had managed to fit 13 chairs around the big round table. Then gradually the other 13

people arrived. Luckily, or perhaps it was an instant decision, Mike Daffey was just dropping Jenny off on his way to another party, so that meant we only had to squeeze two more chairs in. She Whose Arithmetic Leaves Something To Be Desired gradually realized that we (corollary to division of irresponsibility, q.v.) had forgotten to count ourselves. Never mind: we had a great time. Banquet? the nice little waitress suggested. Oh no, said Gillespie, let's do something much more complicated - or words to that effect. Never mind: we had a great time, even if the restaurant staff didn't.

Catherine and Gerald Murnane gave me a Tatts ticket, a horseshoe made up of seashells, for my growing kitsch collection, and a very nice card, which read "Don't think of this as just another birthday... / ...think of it as God giving you a promotion!" Bruce and Elaine gave us identical videotapes, of a quality we can't afford. Margaret and Colin Jevons gave us a bottle of champagne, of a quality we can't afford, but then, we don't drink champagne, so we'll save that for your fiftieth, John, and you can save it for whoever is next, and eventually it will get to Bruce, who will drink anything. Last to arrive - but I haven't mentioned the others, have I? - Teresa Pitt, Ruth Siems and Peter Esdaile, Myf and Tony Thomas - was my boss Jenny and her husband Daffey (q.v.), and they arrived bearing a large cardboard box labelled "Specially Selected Bananas Keep Cool". In this box was a Super 5 EP-1201 printer. "It was Daffey's idea," Jenny said, but I'm sure it wasn't only his.

A little before midnight we left the Eastern Inn, in general agreement that we'd had a great time, or fairly great, despite or perhaps even because of the fun with an odd number of people attempting to eat alternately (If I lean back... No, I prefer soup at this angle, really, no trouble... Some more of the chablis? - whoops, sorry...). The Murnanes came back to our place, Jenny navigating, so they arrived very quickly. I tried to convince Gerald that he should get one of these magic machines - just try it, see how easy it is! - but he wouldn't lay a finger on it, especially not *the* finger that he uses for typing. He was very keen though to buy my Adler portable, and I felt very mean not letting him.

The object of this coming back to our place was to drink coffee, according to Sally, but I didn't notice anyone doing that. Gerald finished off the "pretend beer" that was the only sort in our fridge, and the Murnanes went home, but not before Daffey arrived to hook up the printer, which I understood to be the object of this party after the party. About 2.30 Sally and Andrew took to their beds, Jenny curled up on the sofa, and Mike and I came out here to swear at the computer a bit. By 4.00 the computer was talking to the printer, by 5.30 I had stopped playing with it, and a little after sun-up I declared the party over.

And about this point I must declare the issue over (the *nineteenth anniversary issue,* I suddenly realize). I should mention that when the matter of increasing fees to allow airmailing overseas bundles comes to the vote I intend to abstain from voting; I'm in favour of it, but I appreciate the arguments against it, and I think the decision should be made by the American members.

Now I bid you g'day and hooroo, until next we meet. [2.ix.89]