PHILOSOPHICAL GAS

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THREEPENNY PLANET

I published a few issues of a fanzine called *Threepenny Planet* some years ago, but since about 1982 I have used the title for my column in *The Society of Editors Newsletter*. I first volunteered to edit the Newsletter at the society's annual general meeting in June 1978. (I joined the society in Adelaide in 1976, and returned to Melbourne a few days before the AGM, so that was the first meeting I went to.) I have been elected to the committee seven times so far, and co-opted twice, not always as Newsletter editor: I was secretary in 1983–4, and I have done other jobs. Whether on or off the committee, I have produced about sixty issues of the Newsletter, and written for seventy-odd. Last year I did two issues for Karen McVicker, and as I mentioned in *Philosophical Gas* 79, being paid to produce the Newsletter gave me a lot to think about.

If you have followed the story in *Philosophical Gas* you will know that I decided to volunteer again. It was partly for the money. It was partly for the challenge of establishing a model for my successors: I believed the Newsletter could look better, and that it could be more useful, both in its content and in serving the purposes of the society.

Looking at the eleven issues I have done this year, I am as usual unhappy about the way they look. I am happy about their content: just about every issue contains a good piece of writing or valuable information. From the first issue I sent copies to anyone I thought might or should be interested. The print-run has gone from 320 to 600, the society's membership from 286 to 450. I must be doing something right.

What you have here is a sampling of what I have written for the Newsletter since July 1990. Some of it you may have read before, because what I write for *Philosophical Gas* I sometimes adapt for the Newsletter. All of it has been revised and reformatted.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

It was a drak and stromy, cold as brass, and the clocks were striking 18 as the boss and I walked up Grattan Street to the Asti. All I really need to know, I said, I learnt at the Editors' AGM. Keep low, stay sober, don't volunteer. You skipped kindergarten too? she said. Oh yes, I said, the day I turned 3 I was out doing paper rounds. I don't believe you, she said, And you watch yourself, JB, or you could end up on the *committee.* Yes, ma'am, I said, but I knew I'd gone too far before we even walked into that room. The roar of blue biros, the smell of the crowd — how it all comes back! Not that there was much of a crowd when Jenny and I arrived — just *Maître D* and us, in fact — but it wasn't long before the place was swinging, and I felt at home, dammit.

The AGM followed the accustomed routine: lots to eat and drink, Colin Jevons taps glass, President rises and welcomes everyone, committee members deliver reports, President delivers report, committee stands down, Vane Lindesay assumes chair, new President elected, new committee elected, everyone goes home. This year Basil Walby introduced some general business. He had been present at the RMIT School of Journalism's graduation ceremony and noticed that exceedingly valuable prizes were being handed out to people who topped their classes — except in the Editing course. Since our Society got this course going and takes much pride in it, Basil suggested that we go a step further and establish some kind of, well, you know, not the sort of thing that the multinationals can afford, prize. His motion to this effect was endorsed unanimously, and I can report that the committee has since allocated $250 for this purpose.

When it came to electing a new President, some fool with a sense of history exceeded only by his odd sense of humor and lack of decorum nominated Barbara Burton, who graciously declined, and Janet Mau was elected unanimously. . . . At the committee meeting on the following Monday specific tasks were given to the new committee members, and in line with ancient tradition, the key posts of Secretary and Treasurer were given to absent members — Michelle (in Paris at the time) and Geraldine (in Mexico).

Ruth Siems, on behalf of the assembled and absent members of the Society, moved that the outgoing committee be thanked for their work, and this was passed with unconfined acclaim.

You blew it, JB, someone said. Yeah, back to the paper rounds, I said. Anything left in that bottle?

NATIONAL ARTS WEEK

7–14 October An initiative of the Australia Council, coordinated by the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, planned as an annual event for five years and sponsored by all cultural ministries (it says here). This year's slogan is 'SmartARTS — Leading the Clever Country into the 1990s'. An ill-conceived slogan if ever I've heard one. When the Prime Minister said Australia must become 'the clever country' he didn't mean 'the smart-arse country', which the slogan implies; and connecting the ideas of smart-arse and the Arts can only serve to reinforce popular prejudice against the Arts.

NO TICKET NO START

is a much better slogan, and the title of Geoff Goodfellow's slim volume of poems read on-site to building workers. Geoff's sponsorship by the Australia Council as poet-in-residence with the Construction, Mining and Energy Union of South Australia was not universally applauded: the general manager of the SA Chamber of Commerce and Industry said the readings were 'pathetic' and 'an example of what is wrong with Australia'; they would 'make us the laughing-stock of the world'. Nice little book. Wakefield Press, $5.95. Stirring foreword by Brian Matthews, who is mentioned so often in this issue I'd better send him a copy. Which week were we up to?

MAY GIBBS WEEK

28 October–3 November A week to honor May Gibbs (1876–1969), author of *Gum Blossom Babies*, *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie* and other favorite reading of Janet's, and raise money to preserve Gibbs' home, Nutcote, as a gallery and museum. Activities will include a national 'Read-In for Nutcote'. Donations and requests for further information to: The Nutcote Trust, PO Box 12, North Sydney 2059 (954 5935).

JOHN BANGSUND WEEK

18–24 April 1999 A week to mark my sixtieth anniversary and raise money to preserve my PO box in perpetuity, with suitable plaque. Activities will include locating every address I have lived at (affixing suitable plaques), readings at suburban libraries from *The Society of Editors Newsletter* and *Philosophical Gas*, and if I am still around, taking me to dinner a lot. Make a note in your diary *now*.

LITERARY CRICKETISM

The thirty-oddth annual *Meanjin* vs *Overland* cricket match was played at the Domain Oval on 10 March. Your reporter, being indisposed on the day, asked David Greagg, consulting wizard and part-time *Meanjin* office person, how it went. Well, said David, play began on a deadly slow but lifting wicket, *Meanjin* batting. Demon bowler Jack Clancy took three wickets early, including that of his brother (and *Meanjin* captain) Laurie. After sixteen overs, with *Meanjin* 4 for 28 . . . my note-taking faltered. *Meanjin*, 9/104, defeated *Overland*, 12/97. Greagg (18 runs, 3 wickets, one catch) and Chris Wallace-Crabbe (3 wickets) were splendid in a great win over a numerically superior side. Someone having forgotten to bring the coveted emu-egg trophy, the victors were presented with chocolate Easter eggs, which they deconstructed in the approved manner, and then everyone went home.

Over dinner recently I heard a story about your friend and mine Nick Hudson. I have deliberately not checked

it with him because I like the version I heard. Nick was on an interstate flight, and he got talking to the bloke in the seat next to him. The bloke next to him was a BHP executive, and he was fascinated to learn that Nick was in the book-publishing business. Indeed, he confessed, he had often thought that he might open a little book-shop when he retired. 'Now that's very interesting,' Nick said, 'because I have often thought that when I retire I might open a little steel mill.'

OUR NEXT MEETING

was held on Boxing Day at my place, but everyone missed it, sorry, because the Newsletter was late, isn't it. Just as well, really: my head was throbbing from my very first game of Trivial Pursuit the night before. It took me a while to get the hang of this game, I can tell you. Everything I thought I knew about literature, history, music, politics and gas-fired telephony seemed to have vanished during Christmas dinner, but after a while my eraser-sharp mind grasped the situation, and I have to admit that I won — with the word 'butterfly', a wild guess, but that indeed was the stroke used by some swimmer who won a gold medal at the 1984 Olympics.

Our next meeting will be held on 28 February. Since Easter, school holidays and Anzac Day are conspiring against an orderly progression of last-Thursday-in-the-month meetings in 1991, it seems likely that the meetings following will be held on 4 April, 2 May, 30 May and 27 June. There will be an announcement — when? — you, that boy there. In due course, sir. Correct. Sir? Yes, boy? Shouldn't one say there *shall* be an announcement, sir? *Not* when there's an R in the month, lad.

THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF INDEXERS

meets next on 27 February for its Annual General Meeting and Dinner at the Spring Park Tea Rooms, 3 Spring Road, Malvern. There's a quaintly olde-worlde ambience about that sentence, don't you think? Why have we never thought of meeting at the Spring Park Tea Rooms, Malvern? We could wrap our shawls about us and talk about how we got into editing. But there's nothing olde-worlde about the society's activities: its members know a damn sight more than we seem to about computers, for a start, and the society is not afraid to come right out and say that not even Elmar Zalums was deemed worthy last year of receiving its highest honor, the Australian Society of Indexers Medal. Elmar, widely regarded as Australia's finest indexer, and Max McMaster, President of the ASI, were commended for indexes they had done during 1990, but the judging panel declined to award a medal this year. John Arnold, chairman of the panel, did however go a little out of his way to give his personal anti-award for no-index-at-all to Lindy Chamberlain's 768-page autobiography. He quoted from Kerryn Goldsworthy's review of the book in the Melbourne *Sunday Herald* — 'there is no index — but since when was an index a standard feature of an autobiography?' — and suggested that this book might have been much improved if it had been indexed. (Dinny O'Hearn, on the other hand, suggested mildly on the SBS *Book Show* that it might have been somewhat improved if it had been edited.)

A RIOT OF PARENTHESES

In any publication like *The Editorial Eye* you are sure to find something to argue with. I found it in David Isaacson's lead article, 'In Defense of Parentheses'. He writes: 'Sometimes a single set of parentheses does not provide sufficient means for qualification. In these cases, the writer may need to place brackets within parentheses.' To me this seems an aberration, perhaps based on a false parallel with the alternation of single and double quotation marks, but David is emphatic about it: 'Writers who indulge in layered parentheses, rather than alternating brackets and parentheses, do no favors to their readers.'

The Chicago Manual of Style (13th edn) agrees: 'Brackets should be used as parentheses within parentheses' (5.103). The US Government Printing Office *Manual of Style* (1986) seems not to rule on the matter, except by example: '(Note parentheses closed up (see rule 2.9).)' (8.97).

I would probably have let the matter rest there, but our own Freelance Register uses this style, and Cathryn and Liz were surprised at my surprise. So I went looking for rulings on the matter. They are curiously hard to find. And along the way I read many conflicting things about parentheses and brackets.

What I call parentheses are these things: ( ); brackets are [ ]; and for special occasions there are angle brackets < > and curly brackets { }. There are also braces, which are the same shape as curly brackets, but are used to bracket two or more lines of matter. These have been articles of my simple faith since Bill Winter taught me proofreading at Wilke's in 1968.

On parentheses and brackets, some authorities say they're all parentheses but the Americans call these brackets; they're all brackets but the Americans call these parentheses; these are strictly called square brackets; 'square brackets' is a tautology. Substitute 'the British' for 'the Americans' and you have a fair picture of the confusion. I'll stay with my simple faith.

On brackets within parentheses, John Bremner (*Words on Words*, lovely book) agrees with *Chicago*. So does Margaret Nicholson's 1958 American adaptation of Fowler. *The Canadian Style* (1985) [the quirkiest style guide I have ever encountered] agrees with *Chicago* and goes a step further: you should alternate parentheses and brackets *when they follow each other* — as in this sentence.

The AGPS *Style Manual* (4th edn, 1988) says (6.155): 'So that parenthetical matter within a parenthetical element does not read as an editorial interpolation, *the use of square brackets for a parenthesis within a parenthesis is not recommended* [my italics].' (An example of an 'editorial interpolation' is '[my italics]'.)

Unless I have looked in the wrong places, no other style guide I have gives a ruling on the matter. Since such eminent authorities as Fowler, Hart, Treble &

Vallins, Partridge, Gowers, Nesfield, Greenbaum & Whitcut, *ODWE* and Butcher seem to be silent about it, I suspect that they assume everyone *knows* you don't put brackets in parentheses (except to set off editorial interpolations).

I will mention that the other Fowler, H. Ramsey, in *The Little, Brown Handbook*, also seems silent on the matter, perhaps for the opposite reason, and leave the whole matter to your wonderment.

The title for this note comes from Treble & Vallins, *An ABC of English Usage* (Oxford, 1936). Under 'Parenthesis' they quote a very long sentence of Charles Lamb's, with seven dashes and umpteen parenthetical commas, and comment: 'A riot of parentheses, not uncommon in the style of Elia.'

And the title of this column, as I mentioned in 1982 but will repeat here in case you missed it, is of course from Dean Swift's *Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation* (1738): 'I was born under a Threepenny Planet, never to be worth a Groat.'

IN THE GUMS OF A MUMBLING GALE

Dylan turned 16 a few weeks ago. You may not know Dylan, but he is quite famous in places — the only Australian cat mentioned by name in the fiftieth anniversary issue of *Amazing Science Fiction* (June 1976, p. 129), for example. Over the years he has met many well-known writers — Ursula Le Guin, Vonda McIntyre, Robert Bloch, Chris Priest, A. Bertram Chandler, George Turner, Damien Broderick, Lucy Sussex, Lee Harding, John Hepworth, Gerald Murnane, Jim Hart, to name only a few. Imagine what he would be worth if he had been autographed!

Enough perhaps to pay his dental bills. Last week he broke a tooth: I think it's correctly described as a canine, but I'll call it his top left fang. Off to the vet to complete the extraction, $187 — *ding!* — thank you, have a nice day. During dinner that night one of my teeth fell out, not a real tooth, only porcelain, but not just any tooth: I think it's correctly described as my top left canine. Dylan is a cat who demands no less than total sympathy, but this is ridiculous.

On Monday I went to Ron's computer shop and collected the 386, which had been laid up with a severe dendritic disorder, and proceeded down High Street to Mr Knowles' unnatural-teeth repair shop. I said very little to Mr Knowles, or to anyone else for the next twenty-four hours. Ron was an exception. I rang Ron and said 'Ipf nop worping!' 'It was working OK for me,' Ron said, and pressed me for detail, which I preferred not to go into. I took the computer back.

Sans computer, sans teeth . . . I felt bloody miserable, and made little secret of it.

On Tuesday Mr Knowles handed over my teeth, good as new, and charged me $25 for his work, a trifle for such a boon: I would gladly have given him a valuable autographed cat for his trouble. Ron brought the computer back, along with his colleague Manny, who said there was nothing wrong with it. They set it up. It didn't work. Humidity was mentioned, along with the source of power, ghosts and other theological concepts. They took it away. Two hours later Ron brought it back again: Manny's brother Danny had found a propensity to intermittent synaptic reluctance in a bit of wire between the widget and the wadget. The computer was fixed. It performed all of its basic advertised functions with gusto. I offered Ron a cat, but he's given them up. I farewelled him and went in to dinner, real dinner, the kind of dinner you have with teeth. I felt oddly content. I felt like a drink, but I've given it up.

'You're drinking!' Geraldine Corridon said to me at the Society's twentieth anniversary meeting. Her dismay was understandable: I had mentioned my not-drinking to her a few times in recent weeks, and I felt I had let her down. I may attempt to explain at the next committee meeting. She may not wish to listen.

I gave up drinking on the first day of September. To satisfy myself that I really had given up, on 11 October I had a 1987 Tolley's Gewürztraminer. I didn't like it as much as I used to, and my liver dropped a few heavy hints about it next day, so that tended to confirm my belief that I have given up drinking.

On my way to the meeting at least two thoughts crossed my mind: that I had not consciously decided to drink at the meeting, but had forgotten to bring mineral water with me and therefore would drink at the meeting; and that it would be ironic if I were pulled up by police for a breath test after almost two months of abstinence.

It was a great meeting, and I enjoyed the 1988 Garafoli Verdicchio. On the way home I was pulled up by police for a breath test, my first, as I mentioned to the officer. He said nothing and waved me on. 'What was the reading?' I asked him. 'Oh, nothing really,' he said. Scientific proof that I have given up drinking!

REVIEW John Wright, *The Writing Machine: a writer's guide to creative computer use* (McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1990; 168pp; $16.99)

This could be the book you have been waiting for. If you know nothing about computers, it's a good introduction. If you know a little, it will give your knowledge a context and extend it. If you know a lot, you will probably enjoy reading it, may learn something, and will be pleased that you now have a book you can recommend to beginners. If you are thinking about buying a computer — your first, or something better than the one you have — this book could save you anguish and money.

John Wright is Co-ordinator of the Technology Access Program at the State Library of New South Wales, which doesn't sound too promising: a librarian who knows a lot about computers can be as boring and unhelpful as anyone else who knows a lot about computers. But this librarian is also a teacher and a good writer, some would say a rare combination of knowledge and talent. His book is intended for writers, but editors should find it useful too.

The basic facts about computers are presented in what might be called user-friendly terms; here you will find the things that manuals often neglect to tell you. The chapter on computers and health is most welcome; sometimes the hardest thing to remember about computers is that every so often you must get up and walk away from them. There are chapters on computers for disabled writers, using your computer as a desktop communication base (accessing library catalogues, for example, and using your computer as a fax machine — there are limitations, but it can be done, and it's cheap) and the wonderful things computers may be expected to do in the future. But perhaps the most valuable part of the book is the extensive discussion of the wide variety of computers (new and used) and software that you can buy, what to look for, what to avoid. I wish I had read this some time ago.

This sort of book seems to demand a few quibbles, if only to prove that the reviewer has read it and could have written a better book if only someone had asked. I have read it (in one sitting — unusual for me), and offhand I can't think of anyone who could do better. My quibbles should perhaps be regarded as author queries after the event.

A point that Wright doesn't make strongly enough is that whatever you buy, hardware or software, bargain or not, next time you look the price will have gone down. A kind of corollary to this is that books about computers are out of date before they are published. This book, happily, seems out of date only in minor things.

John Wright is a WordStar man. He is commendably honest about his biases and generally fair in his coverage, comments and ultimate recommendations. But he does not mention WordPerfect version 5.1, which has been available in Australia since about March this year (constant readers will recall that I wrote about it here in June). It has every feature noted in his two-page software checklist except 'speech synthesizer', and whatever its recommended retail price may be, you can buy it just about anywhere for $500 ($250 if you qualify for the 'educational' version, which is the same as the regular version).

I would like to have seen more emphasis on the increasing importance to writers of computers and programs that are compatible with those used by publishers. Wright's concluding recommendations are that you buy a Macintosh or a well-regarded IBM-286 clone or compatible, and one of the big three WP programs, WordStar, MS Word or WordPerfect. Will the reader remember that, or be swayed by talk of how cheap and reliable the old Microbee is?

Wright's spell-checker has missed 'you may loose all your programs', 'scientific principals' and, oddly, 'mantlepiece'; someone else, I imagine, missed 'paraphenalia' on the back cover. A few terms are neither explained nor indexed ('pop-up', 'printer emulation'), and the cover artist seems not to have looked closely at a typewriter or a computer.

□

The World Council of Churches is meeting in Canberra as I write, but Australia seems not to have noticed, even though the gathering was launched by that well-known son of the manse R. J. Hawke MHR. Of course, the Council is up against the Iraq war, which despite its ludicrous story-line and dreadful acting is topping the ratings on TV just now. Connoisseurs of such things say the WCC is way ahead on costumes and human interest, but the war is easier to follow and has much better special effects.

Let's talk about something else.

Just the other day, or 1978 to be exact, Barbara Burton said to me that among the best reference books you can have as an editor are the books you have worked on: you strike a problem of some kind and you think 'Now, didn't that come up in a book I did back in . . . ?' — and it did, and in no time you have an answer. If you have kept the book. If the publisher gave you a copy when it was published. (Most publishers do these days, as a matter of courtesy; if they don't, ask for a copy, as a matter of principle.) More recently, or 1985, in the Society's Freelance Register Elizabeth Wood Ellem noted under 'Qualifications' that in her eighteen years as an editor and indexer she had 'gained wide general knowledge useful only for editing and indexing other books' — which is different from what Barbara said only in the implication that the knowledge is in your head rather than in a book on your shelves.

And three days ago, when I said that the questions I asked in last month's 'Threepenny Pursuit' quiz just came out of my head, at the last moment, when I realized I had a blank half page at the back of the Newsletter, my *own sister* said that my head is bigger than most people's. She said it very nicely, so I couldn't take offence, but it did set me wondering just how much my head differs — on the inside, at least — from other people's heads, and in particular from other editors'.

Basically, I have a bad memory. It's hereditary. My father studied Pelmanism for years, and about all he learnt was that a good way of remembering the number 4 is to replace it with the letter R, because in most European languages there is an R in the word for 'four'. If you replace other numbers with letters you can remember things like telephone numbers with no trouble at all. If you remember the letters. And if you have never heard of Pelmanism, I am not surprised: it doesn't seem to have had much going for it. But my father was also a keen philatelist, and he had what seemed to me an incredible knowledge of the subject, right down to the most minute differences between identical-looking stamps. He knew a thing or two about books, too — their contents rather than market value or publishing history — so on the whole I think he suffered from a lazy or selective memory rather than a hopelessly bad memory. And so do I. I'm not sure whether it was fortunate or not that he once told me it was less important to know things than to know where to look them up, but since most of the time I *don't* know things, that advice comforts me to this day.

This brings me to the quiz. I honestly believed I was asking questions that any Australian editor could reasonably be expected to answer. Some, or even all, might require a bit of research, but that's a basic editing skill. In case the questions were too easy, I threw in one at the end that would be very difficult to research: you either knew the answer or you didn't. The answers to two of the questions were in the Newsletter itself; the answers to seven of them (I discovered later) are in *Collins English Dictionary*.

I heard far more answers than I read. Elaine Cochrane (who already had a copy of *The Temperament of Generations*) and Jenny Lee (who edited it) answered most of the questions without looking them up. Between them, so did the staff of the Administrative Law section of the Australian Government Solicitor's office in Melbourne. Work ceased for a time at West Brunswick post office when I lodged the mailing, and I was told that the questions were too hard. A surprising number of intended readers agreed. A former managing director of a well-known publishing house said he gave up when he'd read the first dozen or so and couldn't answer one of them. Several members I spoke to said they hadn't looked at the Newsletter yet. And the answer to one question, I am mortified to learn, I did not know at all: I only *thought* I knew. If I had known the correct answer I would not have asked question 15.

The winner is Yvonne Rousseau, who answered all of the questions correctly. Runners-up are Ian Foletta, David Meagher and Jenny Missen, who in a joint entry scored 19.66 out of 22. Here are the answers, and some comments on them.

1. What is Sir James Murray's best-known work?

The Oxford English Dictionary. If you haven't read Elisabeth Murray's biography of her grandfather, *Caught in the Web of Words* (Oxford paperback, 1979), you should rush out and get a copy this instant.

2. In which country would you find Aarhus University?

Denmark. Dr Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen of Aarhus University Press, whose appointment as president of the International Association of Scholarly Publishers was noted on page 1 of last month's Newsletter, is interested to know how this question was generally answered: 'Most people seem to think it's in Finland, but perhaps Australians will be better informed,' he writes. Of the answers I heard, most were correct; South Africa was the only other country mentioned.

3. What does SFEP stand for?

Society of Freelance Editors and Proofreaders. British society founded in 1989, mentioned in every issue of the Newsletter since August.

4. What is a háček?

The diacritical mark ˇ. Pronounced and sometimes spelt *hachek*, and sometimes called a *caron*.

5. Who is President of Czechoslovakia?

Vaclav Havel. Eminent playwright, and equally eminent dissident under the Communist regime. Often in the news since late 1989.

6. Both Shakespeare and Cervantes died on 23 April 1616. Who died first?

Cervantes. The Gregorian calendar was adopted in Catholic Europe in 1582, in England in 1752. So although Shakespeare and Cervantes died on the same date, Cervantes died ten days before Shakespeare.

7. In H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, what does H.W. stand for?

Henry Watson.

8. What does 'prove' mean in 'the exception that proves the rule'?

Test.

9. The Chicago *Manual of Style* was first published in: 1894, 1906, 1922 or 1943?

1906.

10. What is the origin of the South African place-name Soweto?

South-west townships (of Johannesburg).

11. If Mozart, Pushkin and Peter Shaffer could have a conversation, who would they inevitably talk about?

Antonio Salieri. Pushkin's 'little tragedy' *Mozart and Salieri* and Shaffer's play *Amadeus* are based on the furphy that Salieri poisoned Mozart.

12. To the nearest million, how many combinations of six numbers are there in forty-five?

Eight million. To be exact, 8,145,060. This may explain why you haven't won Tattslotto lately.

13. In electronics, what is a PCM?

Pulse code modulator. Used to convert analogue signals to digital when recording on tape (and vice versa on playback). The technology is best known from its use in DAT (digital audio tape) recorders; the term has been in common use since the late 1970s.

14. What is a redactor?

An editor.

15. 'The wattle does not bloom in *The Bulletin*,' said its editor, J. F. Archibald. Why?

The answer I understood to be correct was: Because wattle does not bloom: it effloresces. Elaine Cochrane suggested I was misinformed, and Margaret Barrett confirmed it: mosses and lichens effloresce, but wattle definitely blooms. I altered the answer provisionally to: Because Archibald believed that wattle does not bloom. Yvonne Rousseau scotched that with her answer:

Because Archibald's view of the bush was much more pessimistic than that of the aspiring poet to whom he addressed this remark in 'Correspondence', 26 February 1898. The source of Yvonne's answer is Sylvia Lawson's *The Archibald Paradox*, p.191; what Archibald wrote was 'Wattle never blooms in the *Bulletin*.'

16. Darwin, capital of the Northern Territory, is named after Charles Darwin. True or false?

True. Named by John Clements Wickham after his 'old shipmate and friend'.

17. The navigator Philip Parker King, the pastoralist Neil Black and the writer Katherine Susannah Prichard are three Australians whose names are commonly misspelt. Which are misspelt here?

Phillip Parker King, Niel Black, Katharine Susannah Prichard.

18. Which part of Australia is sometimes called 'the up country' because it has so many place-names ending in -up?

The south-west of Western Australia.

19. Who wrote about Coleridge, among others, in an essay on his 'first acquaintance with poets'?

William Hazlitt.

20. In its radio program guide the Melbourne *Age* once listed a famous play as *June and the Pastrycook*. Who wrote the play?

Sean O'Casey. The play is *Juno and the Paycock*.

21. Is the *Mahabharata* shorter than the Bible, about the same length, or much longer?

Much longer.

22. A few minutes after being named Man of the Year 1990, who sang 'Auld Lang Syne' with the pipes and drums of the Scots Guards at Wembley Stadium?

Luciano Pavarotti. So honored by Clive James for his outstanding service to World Cup soccer as Italy's 'singing goal-keeper'. I asked Yvonne if she had seen the TV program. No, from the clues 'Wembley Stadium' and 'singer' she had deduced soccer and Pavarotti. If you think *that* is clever, you should read Yvonne's book *The Murders at Hanging Rock* – the most brilliant piece of literary-historical deduction I have ever read, beautifully written, and (dare I say it?) even more interesting than its subject, Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

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Helen O'Shea told me that the Irish have entered the Iraq war, using their deadliest weapon, the Spud Missile. 'My god!' I theologized, 'Now it's Murphy's War!' I neglected to ask which Irish, and which side they are fighting on, but their failure to take out No.10 Downing Street suggests that they are as confused as any of us.

WHAT I DID ON MY BIRTHDAY

Arose at 4.20, meditated, took coffee, failed to solve *Weekend Australian* crossword, returned to bed at 7.15. Arose at 10. Bleak day, high winds, some rain. Sally gone to church. Completed crossword ('Let England share' obvious anagram for 'Hansel and Gretel', not so obvious at 7), listened to Bach Mass in B minor to 'Cum Sancto Spiritus', would have listened to end but tape has become sticky. Wondered whether CDs become sticky from lack of exercise, not that it matters, I have no CDs. Repaired to this room behind garage. Messy: books, papers, newsletters everywhere, except in corner where roof leaks. Two dictionaries to review. Turned computer on. Started writing powerful piece about dictionaries I have known. Not very powerful. Thought seriously of listing all the books I owned in 1961, looked for exercise book containing list, no luck. Lights went off about 1.30, computer rebooted in mid-sentence. Electrical storm? Turned computer off. Felt tired anyway. Remembered Jacques Loussier concert on ABC TV, went inside to watch and tape it. Started tape at 1.50, good stuff. Returned to bed about 1.58. Arose at 3.10. Took coffee. VCR off. Inspected tape. VCR must have switched off about 2.05, further evidence electrical activity. What to do? Resumed search for list of books owned in 1961. Found 1965 edition of Thorpe's *Australian Books in Print*. List of Australian books in print 1965 not much longer than list of books owned in 1961. Found *Wales' Work*, novel by Robert Walshe (Secker & Warburg, 1985), gift from George Turner, started reading 1986, put aside for rainy day. Read three pages *Wales' Work*, put aside for next rainy day. Turned computer on. Typed 'WHAT I DID ON MY BIRTHDAY'.

Now 5.30. Sally not yet home from church. These Anglicans: What do they do all day? I'll bet they're having a birthday party! Not for me, no: the vicar had never heard of me until last Sunday when I rang to say Sally's got my keys, tell her to come home soon, I've got work to do. No, a party for Her Gracious Majesty – 65 today, Lord love her. Wonder if she'll retire, you know, abdicate sort of thing, hand over reins of empire, corgis etc. to Charles III, go on the pension.

Sally home 5.50. No party, just long lunch with friends. Took rubbish out. Discussed weather. And so to dinner: rockling, with ratatouille, pasta, just a few mushrooms, chardonnay (Jamieson's Run 1989), no candles. Highlight of tonight's TV viewing: second episode of *The Singing Detective* (repeat). They don't make birthdays like they used to any more. But you do seem to get them more often these days, I'll say that.

Before we embark on this month's column, I invite you to join me in meditating for a moment on a text from the writings of Henry David Thoreau (1817–62): *Though you deal in messages from heaven, yet the curse of trade attaches to it.*

Thank you. I have always found that comforting too. (Have you ever noticed, by the way, how long Thoreau actually lived at Walden Pond?)

Thanks also to the three members who expressed

their sadness on reading the account of 'What I Did on my Birthday' last month, especially the lady who said if only she had known she would have called in with a bottle or two and played Scrabble with me. I am deeply touched. I have never played Scrabble with bottles.

□

From the wide and wonderful world of British publishing comes news that Robert Maxwell has sold Pergamon Press to the Dutch publisher Elsevier. Rupert Murdoch has sold a few publishers and closed a few newspapers here and there. Three months ago, in case you missed it, the British *Bookseller* reported 569 retrenchments from Hodder & Stoughton, Butterworths, HarperCollins, Ladybird, W. H. Allen, Unwin Hyman, Faber and a few other publishing houses. The *Bookseller*'s editorial on the matter concludes: 'it can only be hoped that the book business can find a means of continuing to use, and benefit from, the experience and talent of the victims of the current squeeze'. Membership of the Society of Freelance Editors and Proofreaders continues to rise; after it was mentioned in *Best* magazine, SFEP received over a thousand requests for information (most of them, Gillian Clarke notes ruefully in the April *SFEP Newsletter*, unaccompanied by SAE). Humphrey Carpenter has some views on British publishing. Here's an excerpt from his article on what's wrong with it, from the London *Daily Telegraph*, 9 January 1991:

Meanwhile publishing seems to be more and more in the hands of people who don't care about books. At least, they don't care about what's in them. These publishers like the glitz of working with famous authors, going to literary parties and being written about in the gossip columns. They can't be bothered to pay proper attention to the actual books.

Literary agent Hilary Rubenstein can scarcely believe how low standards have become. 'Sometimes one thinks there are no honest publishers left, so amazingly diverse are the ways in which they make cock-ups,' he says. 'The book production is awful, the printing is a disaster, the publication schedule goes up the spout, and the covers that are put on defy belief!'

Regular book-reviewers like myself get so used to inadequate indexes, wrong dates, festoons of typographical errors and hosts of other failings that we cease to mention them. As to the quality of the actual writing, I haven't the slightest doubt that modern English literature is suffering (among other things) from a dearth of hard-working publishers' editors who take the trouble to keep novelists up to scratch and make them write properly. Some of the garbage that gets into print beggars description.

□

As you may have noticed, it is a policy of the federal Liberal–National coalition, should Australians be so careless as to elect them to office, to introduce a 'broad-based consumption tax', or as they have lately been calling it, a Goods and Services Tax (or GST) – that is, a tax on everything. Various people are unhappy about it: a report ordered by the Catholic bishops and published this month by the Catholic Social Welfare Commission has come out strongly against it; Nick Greiner's Liberal–National government almost lost office in last month's New South Wales election because of it; there is concern among publishers and booksellers about its effect on our industry.

Would the Society of Editors, I wonder, campaign against such a tax? We wrote a few 'Don't tax books!' letters last time the matter came up, happily joining the ABPA and other industry bodies, and no doubt would do that again. A report in Thorpe's *Weekly Book Newsletter* some months ago suggested that the matter is easily resolved: let the government tax everything, but set the rate for books at 0 per cent. That's a neat solution, but the coalition has made such a fuss about the different rates of sales tax that it's rather unlikely they would set different GST rates. But even if they did, books are only an end product: if you think a campaign for a 0 per cent tax on books will ensure no increase in the retail price of books, think again. The GST the coalition has in mind will affect every stage of production, which could increase the price of books enormously. Every job a freelance editor, proofreader, indexer or designer does, for example, will attract the GST. We have seen it happen in the UK, more recently in New Zealand, and now it's happening in Canada. The Freelance Editors' Association of Canada campaigned against their GST, but now they are living with it.

As well as being a regressive tax, affecting most those who can least afford it, the GST forces the self-employed as well as employers to become tax-collectors. It means, for example, that when Lisa prints the artwork for this Newsletter she must add GST to her invoice; then our printers add GST to theirs; if we use couriers, they add GST to theirs; then I add GST to mine. The Newsletter is exempt from sales tax, but it won't be exempt from GST. We'll have to budget for that. That's just the Newsletter. Imagine what it will be like for freelancers, adding a percentage to every invoice, keeping track of GST charged, filling in GST forms, remitting GST collected.

I don't know whether that's a fair account of what we are in for. As the shadow Treasurer said to the bishops, it's early days yet; the coalition hasn't worked out the detail of its policy, so that makes it somehow unfair to criticize it. But if the Canadian experience is anything to go by, in the run-up to the 1993 election, and perhaps after it, you'll be reading a lot about the GST, in this Newsletter and elsewhere.

The Newsletter is edited in places and written in others by John Bangsund, using four fingers and WordPerfect 5.1 on an IBM-386 clone. Opinions expressed in the Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Newsletter editor, or the committee, or members of the Society, or the Society as a whole, or persons on the Clapham omnibus, or anyone at all really.