



# PHILOSOPHICAL GAS 92

Done for ANZAPA and some others by John Bangsund PO Box 5005 North Geelong Victoria 3215 Australia

SPRING 1996

## THE MARCH OF MIND

15 September Frankly, my dear, I don't know which number *Philosophical Gas* is up to, but 92 seems about right, and since I resigned from FAPA last year there seems little point in calling anything I publish by any other name.

In July this year I produced my last issue of the *Society of Editors Newsletter*, the new committee asked me to go on writing my 'Threepenny Planet' column, which I am happy to do, and seems to have removed every non-member suspected of being a friend of mine from the mailing list, which I am not so happy about, but that's their business.

The semi-legendary Bill Wright came to lunch recently, along with Lucy Sussex, Elaine Cochrane, Bruce Gillespie and Julian Warner, and I promised Bill I would send him some things I've written lately. When I got down to it, looking for things on floppy disks and so on, I thought I might as well revise and reformat it all and send it to a number of people I have been out of touch with lately. This issue is the result. I'm sorry if you have seen some or most of it before.

Bill has a good memory for puns. Some that he attributes to me I can't recall making, maybe I was drunk at the time. He insists that when it was once suggested to me that I needed a frontal lobotomy I said I would rather have a bottle in front of me. Say it fast. (Say it soft and it's almost like praying.)

My sister Ruth and brother-in-law Barry came to dinner on Saturday (from Wycheproof, so they stayed the night). Barry was interested in my enthusiasm for Wilhelm Kempff's Schubert; he is used to Alfred Brendel (who of course is a superb pianist). When I put on the great Sonata in B flat D960, Barry found it painfully slow. Kempff takes 44 minutes over it, Brendel, as I recall, about 35. After a while he warmed to it, and by the end was totally won over. He was not at all won over by the Mozart Piano Concerto no.20 as played by Mitsuko Uchida and the English Chamber Orchestra conducted by Jeffrey Tate. He admired Uchida's playing, which is as smooth and sensuous as velvet, but said the orchestra was out of sympathy with her, brash, ragged and bombastic. 'There they go again,' he complained at one point, 'bang, bang, bang, all over the place!' 'We'll get that Nip,' I growled – and we fell about in helpless mirth. Hearing Barry laugh is one of the great pleasures of my life.

## Netting

By the time you read this Sally and I should have some experience on the Information Super-Rat's-Nest. As of yesterday morning we had an address and two aliases, a modem, a swag of software, and from our technician, who was to put it all together, a promise to return. I don't entirely trust his promises. He was supposed to be here at 10 on Friday; I tracked him down at 11.30; he had forgotten. When he arrived

he discovered a bit of plain 12-bore fencing wire where he was expecting double super-fine grapevine-stepover bundled optic fibre or something, so he went back to his shop. I rang him a few hours later and he said he expected some in by Tuesday maybe. This seems to be the way business is conducted in Geelong. When I rang Steve Bennett Hi-Fi about my turntable, which I last left for repair four weeks ago, the lady said Oh, that was ready *last Wednesday*! I refrained from asking how I was supposed to know that.

Barry and I had a go at connecting things on Saturday morning, and I started again from scratch this morning. Somehow I hit the right buttons, and *viola*! Having no immediate need for a viola, I tried again, and we're on the Net. Sally and I share the same pigeonhole in cyberspace, but her virtual perch is labelled [yeoland@g130.aone.net.au](mailto:yeoland@g130.aone.net.au) and mine [bangsund@g130.aone.net.au](mailto:bangsund@g130.aone.net.au). Whoever is on-line at the time gets the mail, however it is addressed. We did this because some of Sally's friends can't remember my name. There are times when I have the same problem.

## Something to do while having a brain scan [3/96]

On the day before the federal election, about 5.30, I had a bit of a funny turn – funny peculiar, as we used to say, not funny ha-ha. I rang for an emergency doctor, an indication to anyone who knows me of just how funny I thought it was, then managed to get a message to Sally, who was on her way home from work. I didn't think I was dying; the whole incident, from onset to disappearance, lasted only half an hour, but whatever it was, it was unfamiliar to me, unpleasant, and frightening. Sally arrived in a taxi, told me I could forget about doctors, and whisked me off to the Austin Hospital, where we spent the next eight hours or so. Neither of us had thought to take something to read, so it was a long, boring night. I went for nine hours without a cigarette, by far the longest time I can recall in the thirty-six years I have been addicted to the vile weed, but oddly, I didn't feel any craving; my theory is that my body was too preoccupied with other things to register nicotine deprivation.

That night I had more tests than I have had in the last five years, and when I wasn't being tested I was hooked up to a heart monitor. None of the tests worried me particularly, but Sally had mentioned feeling claustrophobic when she had a CT scan recently, and when I saw the CT machine I thought, yes, that could be a bit claustrophobic, so as I was wheeled into it for my brain scan I decided to close my eyes and listen to some music.

I started with the Goldberg Variations, but quickly realized I didn't know them well enough to keep me going so I thought symphony, Beethoven, any will do, and along came the Third, a bit of a surprise because the Seventh is my favorite, but that

was OK. First movement. No worries. Second movement. Fleeting thought: when I was young I told someone I would like this played at my funeral. Funeral? Scrub that. The movement continued. Then – *panic* – I couldn't remember the third movement, couldn't think of *any* of it, except *yes* the horns, the *French horns*, and as I thought that, in they came, but they were playing the third movement of the *Seventh* – blind panic! I'd lost it! – but a voice was saying It's *your* symphony, skip to the fourth movement, and instantly it started. I was totally relaxed again, immersed in the fourth movement, all those variations, when I felt a bump and realized I was being wheeled out of the machine. 'I had a momentary panic in there,' I said to the nurse. 'Oh?' she said. 'I was listening to Beethoven's Third and I couldn't remember the third movement.' 'Oh,' she said. I thought she was going to say it happens a lot, but she didn't.

The hospital's verdict was that I had had an angina attack. My GP doesn't rule that out, but suspects I had something much less romantic. The tests continue, and to be on the safe side I've changed my ways a bit. In a sense, the main thing that has changed was forced on me during those long, tedious hours at the hospital. I had nothing to do but wait. I could have been worried, anxious, irritated, frustrated, angry, but none of that would have sped the hours or helped in any way, so I just waited, and as I did so I felt that I had taken a step away from myself. I have had a lot of stress in recent years; at times I have said that it worries me sick – just an expression – but in fact that is what has happened: I have literally let things worry me sick. I decided I had stopped that.

The election count was a good test of this decision. Intellectually I was appalled at what was happening; at times it touched me emotionally and tears came to my eyes; but nothing I could do would change anything, so I didn't get angry, didn't let it worry me, didn't take it to heart. When the count stopped for the night I switched the TV over to the football. My team was being thrashed. Hey, enough's enough, I thought, extinguished the TV and went to bed.

The highlight of the **Australian Grand Prix**, staged in once lovely Albert Park on 10 March, apparently occurred very early in the race when a Peugeot driver crashed his car and walked away unharmed, which seems to have surprised everyone except other Peugeot drivers.

#### Richard Walsh: 'not a gourmand', claims well-known author

[4/96]

The 23 March issue of *Good Weekend* has a long and interesting article about Richard Walsh, 'The Man Who Can't Keep Still', by David Leser. Leser devotes a few paragraphs to Walsh's impact on Angus & Robertson ('like a pestilence'), including his sacking of Beatrice Davis, and quotes Frank Moorhouse on the competition between Walsh and Brian Johns (then at Penguin) for A&R's top authors.

Johns was far better at commissioning writers than Walsh. This was partly because Johns understood the 'publisher's lunch'. Walsh didn't. 'Richard, being a workaholic and not a gourmand or hedonist, couldn't quite see the point,' says Moorhouse. 'I tried to teach him the point of it, but the best I got out of him was the Black Stump and we had an entree and a main course and then he said, "You don't want any dessert do you?"' looking at his watch. So I ordered two and he waited patiently while I ate my way through them.' The publisher's lunch is obviously very different from the editor's – in my case paracetamol with coffee and a biscuit – but it's other aspects of eating that I want to talk about here.

Last year Yvonne Rousseau sent me an illustrated article from the *Adelaide Advertiser* about the eleventh annual Gourmet Weekend 'in the charming Clare Valley'. The article was headed 'Gourmands gather for Clare cuisine', and Yvonne wondered whether the heading was 'the work of a sub-editor with a personal spite against the persons in the photograph', since the word 'gourmet' was used consistently throughout the story. I started drafting a powerful piece on the subject for this column, but was somehow distracted. Now here is Frank Moorhouse claiming that Richard Walsh is not a gourmand. What does he mean by that?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1933) defines **gourmet** as 'A connoisseur in the delicacies of the table', and traces it to Old French '*gourmet, gromet, gromet*, a wine-merchant's assistant, a wine-taster'. On the verb **gormandize** it is unequivocal: 'To eat like a glutton; to feed voraciously.' On the noun **gourmand** (from French '*gourmand* . . . of unknown origin') we find '1. One who is over-fond of eating, one who eats greedily or to excess, a glutton. *Obs.* [*Obs. = obsolete*]; 2. One who is fond of delicate fare; a judge of good eating.'

This goes completely against our general feeling that gourmand = glutton, gourmet = epicure. The *Penguin Working Words* says 'A *gourmand* is a glutton. A *gourmet*, however, is a good judge of fine food.' Stephen Murray-Smith's *Right Words* says much the same. Greenbaum & Whitcut's *Longman Guide to English Usage* says 'A *gourmet* is a connoisseur of fine food and drink, a *gourmand* is simply greedy; the one is a polite term and the other rather rude.' Bill Bryson, in his *Penguin Dictionary of Troublesome Words* – pretty much echoing Fowler, sixty years on – gives a more useful distinction:

A gourmet is someone who takes a great deal of interest in, and trouble over, his food. A glutton is someone who enjoys food to excess and is not notably discriminating about what he shoves in his mouth. A gourmand falls between the two: he may be no more than a slightly greedier gourmet or no less than a glutton with some pretence of taste. In all instances, though, *gourmand* should convey at least a suggestion of disdain.

The best discussion of the matter I have seen from an Australian viewpoint is Pam Peters' in her *Cambridge Australian English Style Guide*. Pam makes the point that 'the two words may be acquiring different grammatical roles': '*gourmand*' as the noun, '*gourmet*' as adjective. Until this demarcation is registered in dictionaries, Pam suggests, 'writers who wish to target the older distinction will need to use alternative verbal means such as "epicure" and "glutton"' (the neat distinction that I borrowed above).

The *OED*, you may have decided, is way out of line, but then, it does represent English as it was understood in the late nineteenth century. Oddly, if you will pardon the digression, we are lucky to have its definitions of the words at all. A century ago, Oxford was getting very cranky about James Murray's slow progress, and about the *size* of the dictionary, which was originally meant to be only eight times as big as *Webster's*. In 1896 Murray was 'feeling that rather than see the Dictionary deprived of its whole character it would be better to let it end at *F*, hoping that "some future age, under happier conditions may be able to resume it"' (Elisabeth Murray, *Caught in the Web of Words*, 277). This didn't happen, and Henry Bradley finished the letter G in 1900.

The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993), which I have described as 'an abridged edition of an *OED* not yet published', stays with the original *OED* definition of **gourmand**: '1. A person who is overfond of eating; a glutton.'

LME [late Middle English]. 2. A person who is fond of, or a judge of, good food; a gourmet.' On the noun **gourmet** it extends *OED* slightly ('A connoisseur in eating and drinking; a judge of good food'), and it adds the adjective, which I presume was not current in Murray's time: 'Of the nature of a gourmet; of a kind or standard suitable for gourmets.' Where the *New Shorter Oxford* seems most to part company with the simple distinction of, say, the *Penguin Working Words*, is on **gormandize**. The verb extends *OED*: 'Eat greedily; indulge in good eating' (my italics). The noun omits *OED*'s 'Now chiefly as an alien word (spelt *gourmandise*)' and summarizes the rest: 'Orig., gluttony. Now chiefly, indulgence or connoisseurship in good eating' (my italics again).

My 1962 *Cassell's New French Dictionary* translates the noun *gourmandise* as 'Gluttony, greediness' (in the plural, 'sweetmeats') and the noun *gourmand* as 'Glutton, epicure, gourmand'. Back to square one.

In American usage the matter is simple, to judge by the *New York Public Library Writer's Guide to Style and Usage* (HarperCollins, 1994):

**gourmet, gourmand.** The original distinction – a *gourmet* is a connoisseur and a *gourmand* is a glutton – is increasingly being lost, as dictionaries show the two words to be synonyms.

And thus (as Caxton so elegantly put it in the prologue to his translation of the *Aeneid*) bytwene playn rude & curyous I stande abashed.

Enough of this pseudo-scholarship! The truth about the Australian usage, I reckon, has to do with our well-known dislike of affectation (in others, that is; in ourselves the same thing is an endearing foible). I therefore rule that a *gourmand* is someone who enjoys *coq au vin* and a five-year-old King Valley chardonnay, and the more the better; a *gourmet* is a poney twit who can tell you which side of the hill the chook came from, and insists on doing so.

### Jillong dreaming

[8/96]

Spirit said go to the Society of Editors' AGM: it's probably your last chance to attend a meeting for some time. Flesh said get an early night: there's a lot left to pack. I told Spirit to attend AGM while I rested Flesh; it came home late, high on good fellowship and half drunk, as I expected. Missed, said Spirit: eighteen AGMs in a row you've been to, this the first you've missed. I thought you were about to say that I was missed, I said, wondering about the accuracy of that eighteen in a row. Oh, I think you were mentioned – anything left to drink? There's a cask in the fridge, I said, the rest is in Geelong. And that's how it was. Three days later the fridge was in Geelong, and everything else. Moving was hell. It always is.

In 1836 a couple of squatters, John Cowie and David Stead, established a run west of Corio Bay, forty-odd miles south-west of the settlement that became Melbourne. The names Corio and Geelong seem to have been used interchangeably for the bay and the settlement; both are anglicized versions of Aboriginal names for the place, and both could refer to cliffs or birds, but my private translation, entirely unsubstantiated, of 'Jillong, Coraiyo' is 'White men! There goes the neighborhood.'

Squatters didn't like Aborigines much: 'savages', they called them. One can only wonder what the Aborigines called them, these death-colored invaders. The squatters took over vast expanses of land to graze their strange beasts, and they guarded the land jealously, as if they owned it. From time to time the Aborigines came back to the district, to see the old places, to see what was left to eat, to see what their pallid neighbors were up

to. The squatters and their employees, for their part, weren't at all happy about these neighborly visits. Incursions, they called them – incursions by 'threatening natives'. Cowie and Stead erected a rudimentary tower on a hill overlooking the area they had acquired, and from it they hung a bell. When threatening natives were sighted in the area, the bell was rung to alert everyone on the property. It must have made an awesome sound, that bell, in that tranquil, beautiful place. The settlers called the place Bell Post Hill.

Geelong developed as a port, a town and a centre of heavy industry, serving the graziers and farmers of the Western District ('Australia Felix', Major Mitchell had called it). In this century, oil companies built their refineries at Corio. The Ford Motor Company built its factory there. (The first ute in the world was built there: a utility vehicle with a passenger cabin and, over the rear wheels, an open cart. It was invented by a Ford engineer named Lewis Bandt, father of the composer Ros Bandt.) Geelong, naturally enough, seems very pro-Ford. There are plenty of Holdens around, but Fords outnumber them possibly as nowhere else in Australia. Renaults are exotic and, fortunately, neutral.

(I write this on 14 July. Did I mention that we bought a Renault? I didn't. It's a 1981 Virage Estate, which sounds more like a wine of dubious provenance than a Renault 12 station wagon, but it runs well. 'Virage' means nothing more romantic than 'turning, cornering; turn, bend, corner'; *un virage en épingle à cheveux* is not some kind of collision with a horse, but a hairpin bend. I was rather hoping that 'virage' meant 'virago', but the French for 'virago' is, um, 'virago'. You can learn a lot from cars.)

Geelong is Victoria's biggest regional city. Its biggest industry, sad sign of the times we live in, is gambling: not even the automotive sector has a higher annual turnover. But its productive industrial heart is north of the city, which is why some people passing through tend to think of Geelong as a nasty, noxious place. It isn't. The city is congenial, in places charming and elegant; from just about everywhere you can see church spires on the hill, and from just about everywhere there are views of the sea. Geelong itself is not exactly where Sally and I have moved to: we have moved to what the locals call an outer suburb, in peak hour a good ten-minute drive from Geelong Town Hall.

As Geelong's northern suburbs spread west from the Ford factory, the old squatters' bell may have been remembered in naming Bell Park (but the grazier John Calvert Bell, after whom Bell's Beach is named, had extensive holdings throughout the district). By the 1960s residential development had gone further west, right up Bell Post Hill, and that is where we are. Opposite the house is a park, in which there is a rudimentary tower topped by a stylized painted bell. It's probably not the original bell post, and may not be exactly where the bell post stood, but I haven't asked. There is a very old house on the other side of the park, and I haven't asked about that either. Next to the old house is a community centre, and a branch of the Geelong Regional Library, which could be handy. There will be time to investigate such things, after we've unpacked.

From our front porch we look out over the park to Corio Bay, and beyond to the Bellarine Peninsula. 'At night', the owner of our house said this afternoon, 'you can see the lights of Clifton Springs, and if that tree wasn't in the way, Portarlington.' It's true. You can. The experience doesn't compare with Jude Fawley's vision of Christminster, or even the night view over the water to Jay Gatsby's place, but in its way it's a pretty sight. Way beyond sight, thirty kilometres as the gull flies, on the south-east of the peninsula, is Queenscliff.

I spent the first year of my life at Queenscliff, and am fairly confident that I could find the little cottage that my parents rented all those years ago. There's a bell there, too, as I recall, to be rung in the event of shipwreck. And there's a fort, built to protect Victoria from the Russians. It seems to have worked.

#### Apology, sort of

My object in writing this column is, most of all, to entertain you, and – when I am writing about words, style, usage and so on – perhaps to give you something to think about. In my long dissertation on words for food-lovers in the April *Newsletter* I may have overstepped the mark. Readers familiar with my way of doing things will know that my 'rule' on the difference between a gourmand and a gourmet was not a rule at all, but just one more way of expressing the confusion of these two words. If I had to give some practical advice – and I really should have, but couldn't resist a joke to wind up the piece – I would say that no-one minds being called a gourmet, but some may take deep offence at being called a gourmand; so, to avoid any possible trouble, prefer 'gourmet'. Do not, under *any* circumstances, alter 'gourmet' to 'gourmand' in a manuscript. You are, of course, free to utter the words 'Poncy twit!' under your breath or at the top of your lungs as and when you please.

#### Ryrie eleison

[9/96]

Saturday 17 August, about 1.20 p.m. I'm sitting in my car in Ryrie Street, a few metres from Steve Bennett Hi-Fi, where I have just left my turntable, again. I put a new cartridge in the turntable about Christmas 1993, and I didn't get the balance quite right; it played records very nicely, but when the arm reached the end of its arc, where it's supposed to automatically lift off, it didn't. I decided I must have that seen to some time, and stopped playing records. A month ago I rang Steve Bennett, described the problem, and he said No worries, bring it in, so I did. Ryrie Street is one of Geelong's main streets, the equivalent, say, of Lonsdale Street in Melbourne, a busy street in these parts. Sometimes it's hard to find a parking spot, so you have to be prepared to walk half a block, or even further at very busy times of the day, which I did. Two days later Steve (or someone – they all sound alike: interested, knowledgeable, unhassled) rang to say the turntable was fixed. The next Saturday Sally and I went to look at Portarlington again, followed the Esplanade as far as St Leonards, decided again that we could handle living there some day, then headed home. On the way, realizing we were in Ryrie Street, I stopped outside Steve's shop and collected the turntable. Next day I connected it up, and it still didn't work properly, so I rang on Monday, Steve or someone said No worries, bring it back, and I said it could be a week or so, and he said No worries. Whatever the Latin is for 'No worries', I reckon that should be Geelong's civic motto.

On Friday afternoon Denis from Evtek delivered my new computer and set it up. It took a while, because someone in his shop had installed a widget where he was expecting a wadget. Along the way I realized that the keyboard wasn't the one I had ordered. I like a big chunky Enter key, and this one didn't have it. No worries, said Denis, pop in next week and we'll change it over. What if you take it with you, I said, and I'll call in tomorrow? Sure, he said, no worries.

So today I collected my keyboard (a Honeywell 104, with the very useful Windows 95 keys *and* a chunky Enter key), then drove on to Ryrie Street to leave my turntable at Steve Bennett Hi-Fi. It has been a miserable sort of day, cold, windy, drizzling rain. I parked a few metres from Steve Bennett's, turned the ignition off, and the Renault's motor knocked and spluttered, which it has been doing for a few days now, and at the last

splutter I saw steam, or possibly smoke, rise from the front of the car. One thing at a time, I thought, and attended to the turntable. A young man I'd never seen before at Steve Bennett's said Yes, I spoke to you when you rang: no worries. I went back to the car, started it, and it immediately cut out. Tried the choke: no difference. The motor wouldn't run. What to do? I walked back into the shop and asked the young man I'd never seen before if I could use his phone. Help yourself, he said. Rang the RACV, explained the problem, and the young woman sympathized and said what an awful day it was for something like this to happen, and I really thought she was about to say I should pop in for a cup of tea while I waited, we're only a block away – there was that note of genuine concern in her voice – but instead she said it shouldn't be too long.

So I'm sitting in my car in Ryrie Street, wondering what I was doing six months ago, a fortnight before my Clayton's heart attack and the change of government, thinking of the emotional roller-coaster I have been on since, too many things bad and good to think about, so I stopped, and sat back and relaxed.

The RACV bloke got the car going, no fuss, apologized for the weather when I mentioned not being long here from Melbourne, and said if the car's temperature gauge went much past half-way I should stop. You should make it home, he said. I didn't. The gauge went into the red within three blocks. I stopped. The rain was bucketing down. I lit up another packet, sat back, and wondered where I would find a telephone this time.

When the rain eased a bit I started walking back along Ryrie Street. The first cross-street I came to was Fenwick Street. Dare I? I thought. Hell, why not? I walked up Fenwick Street to C. J. Keane & Co., estate agents, to whom I pay my rent regular as clocklike every fortnight. You *poor thing!* the receptionist said, No, not that phone, come in *here* where it's *warm!* I thought she was about to offer me a cup of tea, but I suppose there is a limit to the agent-tenant relationship, even here, so she didn't. We talked about how I was finding Geelong, the fickleness of cars and the awful weather. I thanked her for the phone, she said Oh, it's nothing, I *do* hope you'll be all right, and I walked back to the car. Where I sat, philosophical, wondering which church that is opposite, on the corner of La Trobe Terrace (St George's Presbyterian (1860)), thinking about how I'm finding Geelong and other miscellaneous thoughts, waiting for the towtruck.

One of the miscellaneous thoughts came from calling into my neighborhood pharmacy a few days ago. Mr Briggs's pharmacy is at 20 Beauford Avenue, and we're at 34, so it's an easy stroll, and there's a medical clinic and a chiropractor between, and a senior citizens' club opposite, so we're pretty well set up here. Standing in the pharmacy, idly proofreading the stock, as one does in such places, I was delighted in a perverse sort of way to see in the foot-care section 'Scholls Callous Pads'. Footpads and cutpurses, I thought; I must write something about this for the *Newsletter*.

The towtruck arrived. I grabbed my bag and keyboard and stood in the drizzle as the Renault was winched up onto the truck. The driver was making odd signs to me and saying something I couldn't hear: the truck and the winch were pretty noisy. It turned out that he was urging me to get into the cabin, which eventually I did. Well, he said, where are we going? I don't know any Renault repairers in Geelong, I said, so the lady at the RACV suggested you take it to your depot; I can call a taxi from there. No! he said, I meant where are *you* going, where do you live? – I'll drop you off. Bell Post Hill, I said, tentatively (as one might say Frankston, Penrith or Aldgate in a bigger town). No worries, he said.

## Footpads and cutpurses

The *OED*'s last entry for 'callous' reads: 'Callous *sb.*, erroneous spelling of *CALLUS*.' The *New Shorter Oxford* suggests that the erroneous spelling is at least three centuries old, and the *Australian Concise Oxford* allows it without comment: '= *CALLUS*'. *Macquarie* ignores it. The *Penguin Working Words* notes: 'It is correct to write of *calloused skin* (skin made hard) or *callused skin* (skin marked by calluses), but there is no such thing as a *callus nature*.' So there. As for the noun 'pad', one of the many meanings recorded by *OED* is 'A highway robber; a highwayman. Cf. *FOOTPAD*. *Obs.*' So Dr Scholl is not wrong – a callous pad is a cushion for afflicted feet – but the idea it suggested to me, of a sort of heartless bushranger, isn't wrong either. A definite illustration of Nick Hudson's dictum that not being wrong isn't the same as being right. You can learn a lot from pharmacies.

## Who needs editors

when word-processors come with spelling checkers *and* these days grammar checkers? WordPerfect 6.1 for Windows has the latest version of Grammatik, which according to the blurb 'rewrites incorrect sentences with a click of the mouse'. It doesn't, actually. It makes polite suggestions about your spelling and grammar, and you can accept them if you like, but it gets itself into terrible tangles. I tried it out on last month's column, and it became very confused on agreement of number; it couldn't get out of one sentence because every correction it made required a contradictory correction. I'll spare you the finer points of that. Among many other things, Grammatik said that 'hell' is offensive, 'ute' should have an initial cap, the town I live in is 'galling' and the car I drive is a Ranald Virago.

What we really need is a fact checker. *That* kind of program would have pointed out that the suburb of Bell Park is named after Bell Park, a property established by John Bell next door to John Calvert's Morongo; that Bell and Calvert were related; and that I have been gravely misled on the matter of John Calvert Bell.

## More Adventures in Prestressed Concrete

### Verse: The Magic Rectangle

[10/96]

Last year I started writing a little essay about what editors do in their spare time, which was, of course, about what I do in my spare time, or to be more exact, that time around midnight when I'm not ready for bed, dare not make a noise, and don't feel like reading. The truth of the matter is that I don't do much at all; sometimes I just sit and think, and sometimes (I feel that someone has said this before) I just sit. I wasn't going to pretend that at such times I invariably think about Prestressed Concrete Verse, although that is usually when I do think about it, but I was going to proceed to a minor exercise in the craft that might have amused you. The drafting of this little essay was interrupted, first by a bout of paying work, then by a prolonged period of personal upheaval and compulsive alliteration, and the upshot of this is that I didn't get back to what I had in mind last year until last night. My notes are somewhere, probably, but I don't need them: the thesis is simple enough to reconstruct.

This is the thesis. It is possible to take the numbers 1 to 32 and arrange them in 20 lines of 8 numbers in such a way that every pair of numbers in 32 (496 in all, from 1 and 2 to 31 and 32) occurs at least once, *and* – this is the bit that really makes it fun – that every line adds up to 132.

I hesitate to affront your intelligence by setting out the solution here, but will do so for the sake of readers who had trouble with their 11-times table at school and are still unsure about Fibonacci numbers, factorials and things like that.

01 14 07 12 32 19 26 21  
15 04 09 06 18 29 24 27  
10 05 16 03 23 28 17 30  
08 11 02 13 25 22 31 20

01 15 10 08 32 18 23 25  
14 04 05 11 19 29 28 22  
07 09 16 02 26 24 17 31  
12 06 03 13 21 27 30 20

01 04 16 13 32 29 17 20  
14 15 03 02 19 18 30 31  
07 06 10 11 26 27 23 22  
12 09 05 08 21 24 28 25

01 09 03 11 32 24 30 22  
14 06 16 08 19 27 17 25  
07 15 05 13 26 18 28 20  
12 04 10 02 21 29 23 31

01 06 05 02 32 27 28 31  
14 09 10 13 19 24 23 20  
07 04 03 08 26 29 30 25  
12 15 16 11 21 18 17 22

That's the prestressed part of this PCV. Now I allocate a letter to each number, sometimes the same letter to several numbers, and this is what happens.

S B S M B K L I  
E I R C A I N E  
U H S B E R E U  
E S U C S N T R

S E U E B A E S  
B I H S K I R N  
S R S U L N E T  
M C B C I E U R

S I S C B I E R  
B E B U K A U T  
S C U S L E E N  
M R H E I N R S

S R B S B N U N  
B C S E K E E S  
S E H C L A R R  
M I U U I I E T

S C H U B E R T  
B R U C K N E R  
S I B E L I U S  
M E S S I A E N

Pretty basic, isn't it – not much to show for the effort involved – just four of my favorite composers in chronological order, no rhyme and little reason. But what fascinated me when I did this the first time (on paper, last night) was the second last block of letters. This is what I saw first:

S R B S B N U N  
B C S E K E E S  
S E H C L A R R  
M I U U I I E T

I wasn't expecting that. I looked further in this block, and of course Schubert, Bruckner and Sibelius are in there, too – Schubert on the diagonal down from top left, Bruckner starting on line 2 and – yes, I'm sure you can see that. What makes this interesting is that the letters originally had numerical values, and we know that each horizontal line adds up to 132, so here

we have *diagonals* that must add up to 132. Now, you may wonder why I started this whole sequence of numbers with 1 14 7 12 instead of 1 2 3 4. This will require a little digression.

#### A little digression

The first issue of *Meanjin* for 1991 explored something called 'Language Poetry'. A lot of it looked like any other sort of modern verse, some of it was fascinating, and some of it, to be charitable, was less interesting than a short list of composers in chronological order. One of these Language Poets seemed to be doing something similar to what I have called Prestressed Concrete Verse, so when he came into the office I got chatting to him in a tactful way about what I was doing. (I was usually courteous to contributors, and this one was dead serious about something that PCV was originally intended to poke fun at.) 'Magic squares,' he said, totally uninterested, 'yeah, it's all been done.' Obnoxious man! I suddenly found something urgent to do in another room. I had never heard of magic squares, and wondered what they were, but decided I would rather ask someone else. No-one I asked could tell me. Early this year, looking for something else in my 1965 *Britannica*, I stumbled over its long article on the subject. Magic squares have been puzzled over since antiquity and their unique properties applied to matters military and statistical, among others. (Utterly fascinating: you can learn a lot from old encyclopedias.) One of the basic magic squares is four lines of four numbers, 1 to 16. It looks like this:

```
01 14 07 12
15 04 09 06
10 05 16 03
08 11 02 13
```

No matter how you add up the numbers, across, down, diagonally in any direction, you always get 34. So I thought I would use that this time, instead of the rather prosaic sequential square I started with last year.

This is how Messiaen looks when the original numbers are restored:

```
01 09 03 11 32 24 30 22
14 06 16 08 19 27 17 25
07 15 05 13 26 18 28 20
12 04 10 02 21 29 23 31
```

Note that, as I said above, the numbers add up to 132. Not only there: each set of eight numbers, across, down (two columns, separated by three others), and diagonally in any direction, adds up to 132. So what we have here is a *magic rectangle*.

#### And that's not all

A little frenzied calculation reveals that what we have here is in fact *five* magic rectangles. A little fitful contemplation explains why this is so – and why I didn't need to start with a magic square to create magic rectangles. I could have started with the numbers 1 to 16 in any of the 20,922,789,890,000 possible ways of arranging them and would have achieved the same result. (If you don't mind, I won't attempt to demonstrate this here.) The secret, such as it is, is in the way I manipulated the numbers.

Now that I see what I have done, it is so obvious that I'm not sure why I bothered. Maybe this is what the Language Poet meant. In a curious way the whole exercise puts me in mind of Oscar Wilde's story 'The Portrait of Mr. W.H.' You haven't read it? Oh, you *must*! Stop counting those numbers and *do it now*!

30 September That's all the reprints for the time being. I have written a lot more than that for the *Newsletter* this year, but a fair bit of it concerned a quiz that I set in the April issue. The answers, and some of the correspondence about the quiz, took up five of the July issue's seven pages. The version you have here of my September column is complete; for some reason the editor of that issue cut out the sections headed 'Footpads and cutpurses' and 'Who needs editors'. I don't know whether the editors of the October issue intend to run them there, nor what they intend to do with the Adventures in Prestressed Concrete Verse. I have faxed them and left messages on their answering machines, and short of driving 80km to Brunswick and knocking on their doors I'm not sure what more I can be expected to do. The committee hasn't appointed a *Newsletter* editor this year: they are taking it in turns to produce it. The last time the committee did this, in 1981–2, the Society almost ceased to exist, but as I said, that's their business.

#### NOTES ON ANZAPA 171

This should be fun. Sally has commandeered the mailing and all I have is a page of rough notes that I made a few weeks ago.

**Perry Middlemiss** In my ceaseless quest for Bangsunds on the Web I have been bemused to find so many references to me – most of them in pages you have put there. *The Best of ANZAPA 1982–83* is great stuff, as we have come to expect from you, but don't think we take it for granted: for what you are doing you should be made an Honorary Life Member. The drawing on page 4 I did for an issue of the *SocEds Newsletter* announcing a boat trip on the Yarra, which I remember fondly (the Society doesn't do that sort of thing any more). :: The *Colloquies* of Erasmus, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* . . . ah, dear gone days when I had such books! (Leanne saw them at Kew in 1978.)

**Terry Frost** It could be forty years since I last heard Yma Sumac. (Sally says she's never heard of her.) What a voice! The rumor in those days was that her *real* name was Amy Camus. I can't think why.

**Richard Hryckiewicz** I regret that I haven't read a solitary book on your list. *Not even Doc Smith*? No (\*blush\*). You see, I was 24 when I started reading SF, far too old. I wish I'd started earlier, but I frittered away my youth reading Erasmus and Burton and stuff. Sad, really.

**Janice Murray** The stuff about CDs is hilarious. So far I haven't found anything like this on the Net. (But it's early days yet.)

**Leanne Frahm** On animal husbandry: I made a note to quote from a poem about a bloke who failed at every kind of farming he tried, then died and started a worm farm. I thought it was by e. e. cummings, but I can't find it. Oh, stop kidding, *of course* you know e. e. cummings.

**Mike O'Brien** I am troubled by this mansion that Keith Curtis has bought 'overlooking Mt Wellington'. Is it a rather tall sort of house?

**Mark Ortlieb** Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* isn't highbrow music. Oh, all right, it could be. I just don't know what 'highbrow music' is. The original songs on which Orff's fun-music was based were popular around the 12th–13th century. There's an excellent reconstruction of the original *Carmina Burana* by the Clemencic Consort on a Harmonia Mundi France 3-CD set. Lovely, gutsy music. Cheap, too.

**Bruce Gillespie** I last visited Sydney in 1975, too, I think; Sally thinks it was 1974. Bert Chandler signed some of his books for her. I last visited Perth in 1967 (the last time I saw Brian Richards), Brisbane in 1975 (on the trip to Townsville, where I first met Jean Weber (Hi, Jean!)) and Hobart in 1985 (yes, it was that long ago, Mike: the last time I spent a night out of my own bed); I left Canberra in 1976, Adelaide in 1978, and have not been back to either; I have never been to Darwin. As for the great OS, I am the only member of my immediate family who has never had a passport. Globe-trotting is not my line. I get to the front gate most days, to check the letter box for bills, less often to the PO box, and that's it. I'm planning a major excursion to Melbourne real soon now. :: I remember those gantry things at Cheshire's well: I worked there in 1959–60. Sometimes when a customer annoyed us we would send off his money with just enough force to get the carrier about halfway, then someone would have to find a broom to move it. Ah, them was days, Joxer.