

250 and all that

On the verge of our 250th birthday (well, 250 issues — in April), we introduce a few design changes this month, all aimed at greater readability. Our thanks, as ever, go to Chong, of Text, for his advice and support in this regard.

Laudable Works

Collected Works — that bravest of bookshops, and indispensable resource for poetry lovers — has a new and rather historic home; the entire first floor of the famous Nicholas Building, 37 Swanston Street, Melbourne, overlooking St Paul's Cathedral. Collected Works has had many outlets since Kris Hemensley and friends founded it in 1984. To celebrate and support the new shop, several poets will take part in a Buy a Book Benefit at 7 p.m. on Friday, 7 February. Call (03) 9654 8873 for details — or to buy a book!

Our chief sponsor

Two thousand and three marks the second year of La Trobe University's chief sponsorship of *ABR*. This happiest of partnerships will once again greatly assist us to bring the best of Australian writing and ideas to readers here and overseas. Last December, Professor Michael Osborne, the Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University (pictured here with Robert Manne, Chair of *ABR*, and Peter Rose, Editor), launched the summer issue during a lively party at the *ABR* office.



Good news from Strawberry Hills

A few days later, we were delighted to receive from the Literature Board of the Australia Council a Key Organisation Program Grant of \$95,000 for 2003. This further support from the Australia Council, an indispensable source of funding for artists, companies and publications throughout Australia, is hugely appreciated at *ABR*.

Death of the Book?

Colin Steele, in a letter to the editor published in the summer issue of *ABR*, foreshadowed 'a major seminar on the Future of the Academic Book in Australia' to be held in Sydney at the National Maritime Museum on 7–8 March. More details are now available about *Death of the Book? Challenges and Opportunities for Scholarly Publishing*. Speakers will include Iain McCalman, Malcolm Gillies, Louise Adler, Robin Derricourt, Sue Rowley and Cathrine Harboe-Ree.

Archived at Flinders University: dspace.flinders.edu.au

For more information about the seminar, go to www.humanities.org.au or contact the Australian Academy of the Humanities on (02) 6125 9860. John Thompson, meanwhile, takes issue with Colin Steele's letter in this issue.

Parodic *Poetica*

Brian Matthews, elsewhere in this issue, reviews John Clarke's new novel, *The Tournament*. Clarke's many admirers will also want to hear a live recording of his parodies, on *Poetica* (Radio National): 3.05 p.m., Saturday, 8 March.

Finally, a Harwood Collected

Several years after OUP UK's putative edition of Gwen Harwood's *Collected Poems* (really a selection), UQP this month publishes a true *Collected Poems*, edited by Gregory Kratzmann and Alison Hoddinott. The editors will be joined by Tasmanian poet Stephen Edgar in a conversation at Fullers Bookshop at 2 p.m., Sunday, 16 February.

New from the National Library of Australia

The National Library has just published *A Collector's Book of Australian Dance*, by Michelle Potter, Curator of Dance. Ms Potter will discuss her book at the Library on Sunday, 16 February. To book, call (02) 6262 1698 or e-mail: friends@nla.gov.au.

History-making and black sheep

The State Library of New South Wales, too, has a busy programme in February. On the 20th, at 6 p.m., Greg Dening will discuss 'The Wonders of History-making', while Nick Jose will talk about his new book, *Black Sheep: Journey to Borroloola*, at the same time on Wednesday, 26 February. To book for these or other events call (02) 9273 1770 or go to e-mail: bookings@sl.nsw.gov.au.

Pandanus highlights

In the summer issue, the demon of hyphenation attacked Pandanus's advertisement, changing the headline 'Holiday Reading' to 'Holiday Read – '. We're sure you got the message, but apologise to our friends at Pandanus nonetheless.

Say that again!

And finally, for those who missed Andrew O'Hagan's hilarious review of several 'celebrity memoirs' in the *London Review of Books* (2 January 2003), here is an example of his incisive writing:

If you want to be somebody nowadays, you'd better start by getting in touch with your inner nobody, because nobody likes a somebody who can't prove they've been nobody all along. Today's celebrities hack their cloth to suit the fashion of the times: the less you do the more you are doing, the less you know the more you are knowing, the less you wear the more you are wearing, and so say all of us ... And that's where the story ends: you don't have to be good at anything, and you don't have to have done anything, except to have somehow been a celebrity and known what that costs. Readers will forgive you anything except your uncomplicated success.

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Letters

ABR welcomes concise and pertinent letters. Correspondents should note that letters may be edited. Letters and e-mails must reach us by the middle of the current month, and must include a telephone number for verification.

Pushing ahead

Dear Editor,

Beverly Kingston has written a rather world-weary review of my book *The Commonwealth of Speech* (ABR, December 2002/January 2003). I read it not long after writing to a senior person at my university complaining about the quaint attitude which central committees in the university world seem to take to the Humanities. Much of what I said to him can be recycled as a response to the review.

In summary, the review says, 'This book is a joke. Don't bother exercising your brain with this one.' Kingston sees it as a backward-looking book, 'yearning,' she says, 'for a purer, better, simpler pre-capitalist society'. Actually, the book was put together with the understanding that the Humanities are undergoing fundamental changes, changes which have a lot to do with audience participation. As I said in my complaining letter, historians are still encouraged, by those who are not practitioners themselves, to write big books and publish learned articles, to keep on churning out commodities of culture. That's what gets the promotions and research money, at least at my university. And yet some of us are not only writing about new forms of communication, but also (not me, in this case) using new forms of communication as part of the discipline. New ways of 'doing History' — its search for an audience — are what this book is mainly concerned with, the product being contingent on that.

It was deeply depressing to read the review, and not only because of its verdict on the book. It comes not long after Keith Windschuttle's heart-sinking piece in *The Australian* summarising some of his new publication, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*. Windschuttle aims to take the discipline of History back to some golden age, when it was all about facts. Beverly Kingston is, of course, more sophisticated than that. And yet I sense in what she writes some of the same dead weight of intellectual correctness, just a little more up to date, which my book was trying to make its way around.

In historical work, there is not only continually new subject matter and new theory, but also new ideas about what it's all for and new forms of relationship between creator and consumer. Unfortunately, my book treats these last two as moral issues, even spiritual ones. This seems to be where Kingston's impression of 'yearning' comes in. Those of us who had our intellectual training in the 1960s and 1970s are poorly equipped to make connections of this kind — except in strait-jacketed ways — and we resist any possibility that they might be the way of the future. Skilled professionals, as we were taught to be, don't yearn either backwards or forwards. Although these issues are vitally important to the book, I'm

aware that I've only scouted around their edges, and I would have been grateful for a bit more constructive comment.

Kingston rightly says that the book picks up points pursued in my *Europeans in Australia*, Volume One (1997). When she reviewed that book, she sounded just as tired — 'very dreary', was her judgment then. Volume Two will be finished this year, and I've got a five-year fellowship to spend on Volume Three. For some people, all up, half a million words of futile boredom.

Alan Atkinson, Armidale, NSW

Happy on the whole

Dear Editor,

Thanks for John Monfries's review of the second edition of my book *The Politics of Indonesia* (ABR, December 2002/January 2003). I thought, on balance, the review was pretty fair. I especially liked Monfries's use of the 'pedant's corner' idea, which seemed to note that these criticisms were not major. However, I'd like to take issue with one of them, and two other matters.

Monfries says that 'dénouement' means resolution of a story, not fall of a politician. I would have thought a politician's fall was the end of his story, in a practical sense. In any case, *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* states that dénouement means 'the final unravelling of a plot or complicated situation'. That is what I intended.

Regarding Hal Hill's acknowledgment of Indonesian economic history, in the reference I cite, Hill indeed fails to note Indonesia's exceptionally low per capita GDP under Sukarno. As a consequence, his claims for the rises under Suharto lack context. Big percentage increases are much reduced if they are working off a low base. That is, twenty per cent of very little is still not very much at all. Hill, like many other economists, missed such context.

Monfries also places me in the tradition of foreign political scientists from earlier times who lost left-wing friends. I happily note that I was often in close agreement with many of them, and much admire their work. To be considered in their tradition is humbling. I have also lost friends in Indonesia, though mostly through struggles for self-determination. It is from them that I get my qualified sense of Indonesia's 'nationalism', which, as the term is commonly used, is grossly inaccurate in the Indonesian context. What should be used, instead, is 'state-ism'. Indonesia is clearly a state, albeit a fragile and perhaps failing one. But it is, in its entirety, a long way from being a 'nation' — that is, a people who understand themselves to have a common political identity. I have spoken to too many people in Indonesia who simply do not agree that

they are part of a 'nation' for me to not accept that there is something at least qualified about the application of this term.

But if, in the end, Monfries still thinks there is much in my book that is essential reading for students, I am more than happy with that.

Damien Kingsbury, Geelong, Vic.

Hands off Mama

Dear Editor,

For a bookman — reader, reviewer, obsessive collector of signed editions and erstwhile university librarian — Colin Steele (*ABR*, December 2002/January 2003) is curiously tenacious and long-winded in his advocacy of digital publishing. His demand for 'extensive discussion' and his assertion that we face a 'watershed' in the future dissemination of academic information have been his constant refrains over most of the last decade. But does anyone really disagree with him? What windmills is this latter-day Don Quixote tilting at? The survival of traditional publishing? The survival of university presses as producers of fine quality, readable and marketable books accessible as much to a broad audience as to an informed and specialist one? The continued survival of the book itself, still as eagerly awaited, collected, read, lent and loved as it ever was since the Gutenberg revolution made books accessible in a way they had never been before?

Surely no one disagrees with Steele's assertion that digital publishing offers many advantages to the world of scholarly communication: pre-prints, academic theses, peer-reviewed electronic monographs and much else. To take one example, of course theses should be digitised and presented to the world at the point of creation (or successful lodgement). That makes good and obvious sense. But digitisation should not be used as an argument to prevent the transformation of the best theses into readable books in the way they have always been. Not every thesis deserves translation into a book, but many do, and, in this comfortable, convenient and pleasurable form, the arguments and ideas of the best theses will reach a wider readership, will reach out, indeed, to lay readers as well as to scholarly ones. There is simply no evidence that computer technology has yet supplanted traditional methods of communication, though it has diversified the possibilities. Steele's broad digital brush assumes only one kind of reader for the products of scholarly research and writing, but the evidence of bookshops and of journals such as *Australian Book Review* and the *Times Literary Supplement* and their equivalents is against him.

While books continue to flourish, by Steele's own evidence several Australian universities are actively looking at the ways in which digital publishing might supplement and extend the traditional hard copy publishing of university presses. At the same time, the major libraries of record in this country have been active in testing and exploiting digitisation as a means to deliver wider scholarly and community access to the archival and documentary record.

Not all these ventures have been successful, and none has been inexpensive. But there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Australian scholars have been as willing to embrace technological alternatives — where they are relevant and meet a need — as their counterparts overseas. I doubt however whether anyone, Colin Steele apart, seriously sees the question of scholarly communication in simplistic terms of technology versus the book.

Part of Steele's gripe seems to be that the costs of traditional publishing have forced some university presses to subsidise their core business by finding ways to reach out to more popular markets. So what if the University of North Carolina Press saved its budget by publishing *Mama Dips Kitchen*? So what if the University of Queensland Press has flourished on the back of the popular literary successes of authors such as Peter Carey and David Malouf? More power to them for doing so, and for finding the ways, in difficult times, to survive, to flourish and, importantly, to preserve their traditional domain and services, which are still relevant and still valued.

John Thompson, Curtin, ACT

Below the surface

Dear Editor,

Aviva Tuffield's review of three memoirs (*ABR*, December 2002/January 2003) opens with the apparently uncontested doctrinal belief that the current memoir boom is new. A serious look at Marcus Clarke, Mary Durack, Martin Boyd, Patrick White, Barbara Baynton, Helen Garner, Kate Jennings and many others spread across two centuries of writing reveals the literature of a people who do not avoid reality by constructing stories. The memoir is often just below the surface of the novel.

Recently, I have been researching the biography of the late G.M. Glaskin, an Australian author of popular fiction in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1959 Glaskin sent his British publisher a novel set in Singapore during the turbulent 1950s. He named himself as the principal character and argued to keep it that way, but his publisher could not cope with the blatant autobiographical, naïve, unsophisticated, know-all Australian persona in what purported to be a novel set in an exotic location. As Glaskin had already published three bestsellers, two of them prizewinners, the publisher overrode the author's arguments and released the novel *Lion in the Sun* in 1960 with the persona given a fictional name.

The predominance of memoir may be attributable to some authors' need to describe the strangeness of life, where reality is often surreal, as well as having something to do with their self-doubt. I like memoirs because they fill in the gap the grants committees and the publishers have created by not funding the research for, or publishing, the different histories of indigenous and immigrant peoples of Australia. The memoir points at the diverse characters within the accepted description of being Australian. As such, they have their place on the bookshelf.

Carolyn van Langenberg, Blackheath, NSW

Verandas for the uninvited

Dear Editor,

Miles Lewis remarks that Philip Drew's *Leaves of Iron* is 'a flawed work, pretentious, naïve, adulatory and uncritical' (*ABR*, November 2002), and questions the publication of *Touch the Earth Lightly* or the lateness of it. I'm not an architect (my discipline is Australian literature), but my reading tells me that *Leaves* can be seen in the context of Drew's trilogy. *Leaves* was followed by *Veranda* and *The Coast Dwellers*, with *Touch* as a kind of supplement. Drew expounded a theory of Australian spatial culture by focusing on the topography of the coast, the architect Glenn Murcutt and the architecture of the veranda, and by significant referencing of Australian literary and visual culture.

Whereas Drew claims that Murcutt's houses don't have verandas, in *Coast* Drew speaks of Murcutt as treating the veranda as a model for the entire house. My theoretical understanding is that Murcutt's houses do what a veranda does superbly — that is, enable you to be in touch with the landscape while also being protected from the harsher elements. Lewis remarks that Beck and Cooper speak of the veranda as a cultural metaphor — but 'for what?' he asks.

Drew has successfully expounded it, albeit poetically in part, in *Veranda: Embracing Place*. His main thesis is that the coast is the veranda of the continent; spaces that are borders or edges have similar qualities. The veranda is the place for receiving the uninvited, the space between the outside and inside, between openness and shelter. On the veranda, you might have just arrived, you might be just leaving.

Metaphorically, then, it stands between the known and the unknown. It is a transitional or transformative space; a dynamic space that is in flux, unpredictable, ambivalent, ambiguous; breathing space before immersion in immensity; a catalyst that facilitates dwelling by annexing the outer world to our inner space. Moreover, Drew has remarked that, to truly inhabit our world, we, the non-indigenous, need to step off the veranda. Paul Carter, in *The Lie of the Land*, says similar things about being able to live in Australia: about being grounded and treading lightly.

Lewis is angry about what he describes as the obfuscating language of Murcutt, Beck and Cooper. While I understand his frustration with a lack of clarity and precision, much of Drew's and Murcutt's language is poetic. I don't mind this. Carter himself speaks of 'poetics' and *poiesis*, of a different process of knowledge-garnering.

Moya Costello, N. Brighton, SA

Innuendo-bees

Dear Editor,

Why was Miles Lewis's review of Glenn Murcutt: *A Singular Architectural Practice*, by Haig Beck and Jackie Cooper (*ABR*,

November 2002), so nasty? Why does he think he can wink and nudge and twitch as if he'd been bitten by a swarm of innuendo-bees? I don't like his tone.

According to Lewis (and the italics are mine), Glenn Murcutt is only 'an *apparently* sincere and unassuming man', who has achieved 'an *improbable* international stature', recently winning the '*presumably* important' international Pritzker Architectural Prize. Bursting with mockery, he declares: 'Here, for once, is an Australian architect who deserves to be studied and documented.' Lewis then goes on to reject all aspects of the Murcutt phenomenon: buildings, drawings, interviews, books. According to him, the book by Beck and Cooper is not serious; it is banal, containing 'pretentious twaddle'. And he situates it in 'a whole world of architectural writing (nay, discourse) in which words do not have precise meanings'. The facts, he says — one imagines Lewis wears a self-satisfied Mr Beanish smirk while composing the review — the facts 'are sprinkled through it like the currants in a very meagre spotted dick'.

Another thing that upset Lewis was not being informed by the authors what Murcutt's houses cost. And he would like to know if those houses leak, because that is 'an excellent indicator of really good architecture'. Finally, it seems, Lewis is bothered by the fact that Beck and Cooper are married *and* write books together.

I asked a number of bookshop owners if they were having trouble moving the latest Murcutt book. Nope, they told me, on the contrary, the books are walking out of the shops.

To put Lewis's uncouth and unfair outburst into perspective, readers of *ABR* might like to know that the 'villains', Haig Beck and Jackie Cooper, have worked in architectural criticism and publishing, internationally and in Australia, for over thirty years, and that they are the authors of a number of books and the founding editors of the highly acclaimed architectural journal *UME*. Haig Beck is also a professor in the same university department as his reviewer, and I am left wondering: a) if thereby hangs a tale, and b) who is the real 'spotted dick' in this story?

Evelyn Juers, Artarmon, NSW

Pritzker Who?

Dear Editor,

Though a paleontologist with only a layperson's interest in architecture, I was surprised to see Miles Lewis's comment in his 'Obfuscating Stucco' (*ABR*, November 2002) that the Pritzker Prize is 'presumably important, even though most of us had never heard of it before'. Is there a more prestigious international award in this field that has escaped my notice? Or is Lewis having us on?

William Riedel, Greenock, SA

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Melbourne's Queen Victoria Markets were officially opened in 1878, though markets had operated in the same location for some time before that. Previously, the site had served as Melbourne's first official cemetery (interring some 10,000 settlers, including John Batman). In their colourful subsequent history, the Markets were the subject of a 1960 Royal Commission relating to allegations of racketeering and price-fixing, and were the site of some gangland shootings.



Our cover image is drawn from a series of twenty-eight photographs of the Markets taken by Jeff Carter in 1956. It shows officials from the Health and Agriculture Departments checking the conditions under which the market foodstuffs were handled and sold. Carter used a small-format, hand-held camera without flash to capture candid, unposed images. Carter was born in Melbourne in 1928, and was an itinerant worker before becoming a freelance photographer for magazines ranging from *Pix*, *Walkabout*, *Women's Weekly* and *Man*, to *Paris-Match*, *Stern* and *National Geographic*. In addition to having conducted a number of interviews for the Library's Oral History Collection, he has published numerous books of his writings and photographs since the mid-1960s, depicting among other subjects Sorley's travelling vaudeville circus, Donald Campbell's 'Bluebird' land speed attempt at Lake Eyre, and portraits of rural workers and fishermen.

Jeff Carter (1928–)

Queen Victoria Markets, Melbourne, 1956

gelatin silver photograph; 26.7 x 27.3 cm

Pictures Collection, an24056747

National Library of Australia

Contributors

Robert Adamson's many books include *Mulberry Leaves: New and Selected Poems, 1970–2001*.

Gillian Appleton chaired the NSW Literature and History Committee from 1999–2002. She is the author of *Diamond Cuts* (2000), a memoir of her late husband, Jim McClelland.

Judith Armstrong's first novel, *The French Tutor*, will be reviewed in the March issue.

Judith Beveridge lives in Sydney and has published two volumes of poetry: *The Domesticity of Giraffes* (1987) and *Accidental Grace* (1996). A third is due this year.

Tony Birch is a Melbourne historian.

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Tony Blackshield is Emeritus Professor of Law at Macquarie University and co-editor of *The Oxford Companion to the High Court of Australia* (2002).

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Stathis Gauntlett is Professor of Hellenic Studies at La Trobe University.

Kerryn Goldsworthy is an Adelaide author and critic. Her essay 'After the Academy', first published in *ABR*, appears in *The Best Australian Essays 2002*.

Warwick Hadfield has played, written and talked about sport for the best part of fifty years.

Gideon Haigh's many books include *The Vincibles* (2002).

Laurie Hergenhan's recent books include (with Frances de Groen) *Xavier Herbert: Letters*, and the fifth, enlarged edition of *The Australian Short Story* (both 2002).

Gail Jones's novel *Black Mirror* is reviewed in this issue.

Margaret Robson Kett is a WA reviewer.

Brian Matthews's many publications include *A Fine and Private Place* (2000). He is currently finishing a book about the MCG.

Kate Middleton is a Melbourne poet.

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Michael Williams is a Melbourne reviewer and editor.