Bernard Smith, art historian, lecturer and critic, born in 1916, was Professor of Contemporary Art and Director of the Power Institute of Fine Arts, Sydney University, from 1967 to 1977. Among his many publications are *Place, Taste and Tradition* (1945) and *The Boy Adeodatus: The Portrait of a Lucky Young Bastard* (1984). The National Library’s Manuscript Collection holds Smith’s papers at MS 8680. Covering the period 1938–99, they include correspondence (principally with Jack Lindsay, 1979–88) and many handwritten drafts, notes and typescripts of his talks, lectures, addresses, as well as his book reviews and published articles. This material is amplified by three interviews held in the Oral History Collection.

Our cover photograph of Bernard Smith is drawn from the Library’s Alec Bolton Portrait Collection. Alec Bolton (1926–96), in addition to his work as a photographer with a special interest in writers, was a significant figure in Australian publishing. After working as Angus and Robertson’s London editor, he became the first Director of Publications at the National Library in 1971. His innovative publishing programme at the Library included the diary of James Burney (who accompanied Cook on his second voyage), the letters of Vance and Nettie Palmer, Augustus Earle’s drawings and the bestselling Captain Bligh’s *Bounty* notebook. For twenty years, Bolton also ran his own private printery, Brindabella Press, renowned for its finely printed and illustrated books and broadsides, mainly poetry, by writers including his wife, Rosemary Dobson, Judith Wright, A.D. Hope, James McAuley and Kenneth Slessor.

Alec Bolton (1926–1996)
Portrait of Bernard Smith, Fitzroy, 1987
gelatin silver photograph; 17.7 x 12.7 cm
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Contributors

Don Anderson, an Honorary Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Sydney, is an Editorial Adviser to ABR.

Christopher Bantick is a Melbourne reviewer.

Geoffrey Bolton is an historian at Murdoch University.

Kate Burridge’s new book, Blooming English, is reviewed in this issue. She teaches at La Trobe University.

Tony Coady is Professorial Fellow and ARC Senior Research Fellow in Philosophy at the University of Melbourne. He has recently co-edited, with Michael O’Keefe, Terrorism and Justice: Moral Argument in a Threatened World.

Peter Craven’s 2002 editions of The Best Australian Essays and The Best Australian Stories will be published this month.

Dianne Dempsey is a Victorian reviewer.

Vesna Drapac is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of Adelaide.

Mary Eagle is a curator and author of many books about Australian art.

Delia Falconer is the author of The Service of Clouds (1997).

Morag Fraser is Editor of Eureka Street.

Raimond Gaita is Professor of Philosophy at Australian Catholic University and Professor of Moral Philosophy at King’s College, University of London.

Andrea Goldsmith’s new novel, The Prosperous Thief, is reviewed in this issue.

Gideon Haigh’s latest book is The Vincibles.

Nick Hudson is a Melbourne publisher and author of Modern Australian Usage (1997).

Clive James is the author of many novels, memoirs, and collections of essays and poetry. His poem ‘The Place of Reeds’ first appeared in the TLS.

Miles Lewis is Reader in Architecture at the University of Melbourne.

Catharine Lumby is Director of Media Studies at the University of Sydney.

John McCarthy is a Canberra historian.

Brian McFarlane is an Honorary Associate Professor of Monash University. His Encyclopedia of British Film will be published in 2003.

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Brian Matthews is Director of the Europe–Australia Institute at Victoria University. His books include A Fine and Private Place (2000).

Donna Merwick is a Fellow at the Humanities Research Centre and the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University. Her book Death of a Notary was reviewed in the September issue.

Kate Middleton is a Melbourne poet and librettist.

Bruce Moore is Director of the Australian National Diction- ary Centre at the Australian National University. His many publications include The Australian Oxford Dictionary (1999).

David Nichols is a lecturer in Australian Studies at Deakin University, and in Housing Policy at RMIT, Melbourne. He is the author of The Go-Betweens (1997).

Edwina Preston is the author of Not Just a Suburban Boy, a biography of Howard Arkley.

Brendan Ryan lives in Melbourne and is the author of Why I Am Not a Farmer (2000).

Lyndall Ryan is the author of The Aboriginal Tasmanians. She is Foundation Professor of Australian Studies at the University of Newcastle.

Craig Sherborne is a senior writer at the Herald-Sun.

R.A. Simpson, who died last month, wrote several collections of poetry, including The Sky’s Beach, due in 2003.

Peter Steele holds a Personal Chair in English at the University of Melbourne. His most recent book of poems is Invisible Riders (2000).


Susan van Wyk is Curator of Photography at the National Gallery of Victoria.

Apart from his many other accomplishments (including a poem on page 43), Clive James is widely regarded as one of the finest essayists writing in English. Next month, we are delighted to announce, he will be our La Trobe University Essayist: his first appearance in this long series. Mr James’s theme will be ‘On Books, Libraries and Writing’. Sydney and Melbourne readers will have a chance to hear him deliver the essay as the Inaugural David Scott Mitchell Memorial Lecture. This new lecture series celebrates the bicentenary, in November 2002, of the first book published in Australia: the New South Wales General Standing Orders, less euphonious than Mr James’s prose perhaps, but equally resilient. It also honours the great bibliophile David Scott Mitchell whose collection formed the foundation of the Mitchell Library. The first lecture will take place at the Sydney Town Hall on 18 November, at 7.30 p.m.; the second at the State Library of Victoria on 19 November, also at 7.30 p.m. Both are free to the public, courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales.

Morag Fraser, our La Trobe University Essayist in September, and a regular contributor to ABR (she reviews the new edition of Geoffrey Robertson’s Crimes Against Humanity on page 29), has announced her impending departure from Eureka Street, which she has edited with distinction for more than ten years. Ms Fraser — a hard act to follow — will finish in April 2003.

As mentioned last month, Morag Fraser will join fellow ‘dissenters’ at the next ABR Forum, scheduled for Monday, 25 November. Other speakers taking part in ‘Dissent and Its Malcontents: How liberal or tolerant is Australia in the face of dissent?’ will be the playwright Hannie Rayson and Julian Burnside QC. Peter Rose, the Editor, will chair this ABR Forum. Full details appear on page 16.

Conveniently, Readings Hawthorn presents a monthly series of readings by two poets, beginning at 6.30 p.m., free to the public. This month’s poets, Dorothy Porter and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, will be reading on Tuesday, 26 November.

Here’s an auspicious offer too good to refuse. The Menzies Centre for Australian Studies in London is interested in hearing from Australian fiction writers and poets who are planning to visit the UK, so that it can arrange readings and book launches at the Centre or at Australia House. Interested authors should contact Dr Anne Pender at the Menzies Centre: Anne.Pender@kcl.ac.uk

R.A. Simpson, who died on 2 October, was a poet of great dedication and refinement. Perhaps his uncannily long tenure as poetry editor of The Age (1969–98) had something to do with his sparing rate of publication, but his collections were always treasurable. We publish one of his last poems on page 16, and look forward to the posthumous collection of Ron Simpson’s poems and drawings, The Sky’s Beach, in 2003.

On 12 November, at Newman College, Parkville, Philip Harvey, a regular contributor to ABR, will give a paper on Irish poetry of the past three decades, based on the writings of Medbh McGuckian. Admission is free.

Last month’s La Trobe University Essayist, Peter Porter, has carried off one of Britain’s most prestigious and lucrative poetry awards, the Waterstone’s Prize for best collection (Max Is Missing), worth £10,000. Locally, the Association for the Study of Australian Literature has awarded the 2002 Mary Gilmore Poetry Prize for the best first collection to Geraldine McKenzie, author of Duty. By the time this issue is published, we will all know whether Tim Winton has won the Booker Prize for Dirt Music.

Finally, as always, we look forward to presenting ABR critics’ nominations for the outstanding books of 2002 in our December/January issue.
Butchering America

Dear Editor,

In the preface to the Symposium of your September edition of *ABR*, you invited letters, so here is mine. The majority of those who contributed to the Symposium set out, innocently or otherwise, to butcher the Americans. Sad, really, and certainly narrow of vision. It reminded me of those who used *ABR* to champion the cause of the *Tampa* boat people, those self-proclaimed refugees. It has now been proved that the majority of the latter were trying to enter via the back door because they didn’t qualify for entry through the front. In truth, they were nothing less than invaders of our country.

Not all US foreign policy is good. Please name a country with a perfect foreign policy. Many people suggest that the USA should keep out and mind its own business. Mostly, though, if not always, it is their own business, in an indirect manner. The classic example is Middle East oil. Without oil, the US economy would collapse — and with it the economies of the rest of the Western world. Had Saddam Hussein succeeded in his invasion of Kuwait, there is little doubt that Saudi Arabia would have been the next victim and the world would have been at the mercy of one man — that pleasant, well-meaning fellow who set the Kuwait oilfields on fire as a parting gesture of goodwill. Sceptics demand proof that Hussein is manufacturing prohibited items of war. If you have a spy in the enemy’s camp, do you tell the world what he has revealed and see him beheaded? Have the contributors to your Symposium not read the books of Richard Butler, or the story of Khidhir Hamza, Saddam’s bomb-maker? George W. Bush and Tony Blair are willing to put their own futures on the line while the United Nations procrastinates. If the USA enters Iraq and does not discover what it anticipates, the United Nations is finished. If he does find what he anticipates, President Bush is finished. Australians, of all people, owe a debt to the USA. Tens of thousands of US servicemen died in the defence of this country. Yes, it is easy to say that the Americans were looking after their own interests by keeping out the Japanese, but the fact remains that they saved us from the rape, brutality and plain savagery that some Japanese servicemen exercised at that time. All that the British could offer (and I am very loyal to England) was: ‘We’ll take it back later.’ Can we be confident about the consequences for Australia if the USA were to say the same? To those who proclaim the USA is a superpower trying to exert its will over other countries, I must respond with a simple comment: Thank God America is the superpower, not somebody else.

Filton Hebbard, Woy Woy Bay, NSW

The Word from Townsville

Dear Editor,

I have been contributing to *ABR* for a very long time, and consider your September edition the best ever published. Your treatment of the September 11 event has already caused much discussion amongst my Toowoomba acquaintances, some of whom are Americans. It is reasoned, thought-provoking and stimulating, if frightening. The entire issue shows that your publication has gradually developed into much more than a review of books. It is now a vibrant exposition of challenging ideas.

Noni Durack, Toowoomba, Qld

Among the barbarians

Dear Editor,

In ‘Keeping up with the Cringe’ (*ABR*, October 2002), John Rickard refers to Chris Wallace-Crabbe’s 1990 Reese Lecture here in London at the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, ‘Beyond the Cringe: Australian Cultural Over-Confidence’, as being given under our auspices ‘by a nice irony’. Nice irony, indeed. Out here on the wild frontier of the Australian cultural empire, we few hardy fellow Australian colonists are trying to spread Australian civilisation among the British barbarians. We are sometimes accused of cultural strut by the natives, but never of cultural cringe. We’re only sometimes accused of the latter by the odd visiting Australian who, perhaps put off by our name, doesn’t pause long enough to take in what we are doing. Most of the time, I’m pleased to report, the British and Australians compliment us on our even-handedness and objectivity.

Carl Bridge, Head, Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, London, UK

In defence of three poets

Dear Editor,

There were many delights in the September issue of *ABR*, such as Joy Hooton’s piece on Drusilla Modjeska’s *Timepieces*, Peter Porter’s poem ‘Ideological Moments’ and David McCoey’s review, ‘Salty Pleasures’, all of which set the juices flowing and the synapses sparkling. However, there were also unsatisfactory features, such as Richard King’s review titled ‘School of Hard Knocks’. To find, in the same issue as Juno Gemes’s letter about the plight of poetry at the Melbourne Writers’ Festival, King’s turgid, self-satisfied review of John Foulcher’s *The Learning Curve*, Graeme
Hetherington’s Life Given and Michael Sharkey’s History: Selected Poems, 1978–2000 was a great disappointment. Dismissing these books as, respectively, creating dramatic voices ‘wanting’ in ‘distinctiveness and believability’, unsuccessfully exposing ‘personal pain’ which lacks the ‘impersonal resonance’ to carry the ‘confessional’ register of the poetry, and needing ‘smartening up’ to be ‘a pleasure to read’ seemed an overly harsh and, in regard to the latter, patronising response. Not only did King condemn them for their lack of technical expertise (read formal attributes), but he also took a pot-shot at Robert Gray for his lack of insight into Fouler’s work. It reminded me of King’s Oedipal sideswipe at Bruce Dawe for technical blindness, contained in another depressing review (ABR, November 2001) in which he slammed a group of promising new poets.

A friend gave me a copy of Michael Sharkey’s History to cheer me up in moments of despondency after watching the progress of recent political events. I wouldn’t have known I was reading the same book. It is light, witty, ironic, passionate, irreverent and elegiac (all the things promised in the blurb on the back cover), and certainly not lacking in poetic technique. As in much modern poetry, Sharkey loves to play with formal boundaries to create new forms, meanings, ambiguities, cadences and rhythms. These linguistic and formal experiments (for instance, his use of couplets with their embedded half rhymes in the second line) enable his best poems to satirise aspects of contemporary society, as well as poetry itself.

I value the way Sharkey makes me think and laugh, and I enjoy the simultaneous play of language and form. None of this was obvious in King’s review, with its selective misreading seemingly designed to create a self-advertisement for Richard King and his conservative poetic prejudices. Traditional form and technique are not everything, which is not the same thing as saying that they are unimportant. Like all aspects of art and culture, they are subject to change. Not only did King condemn them for their lack of technical expertise (read formal attributes), but he also took a pot-shot at Robert Gray for his lack of insight into Fouler’s work. It reminded me of King’s Oedipal sideswipe at Bruce Dawe for technical blindness, contained in another depressing review (ABR, November 2001) in which he slammed a group of promising new poets.

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After a weekend at the recent NSW Poetry Festival, I can report that Australian poetry, both written and performed, is diverse, alive and well. It is a shame that magazines such as ABR (all too few for poetry lovers) are still used for the self-aggrandisement of critics such as King, rather than providing a forum for informed, balanced and constructive commentary, such as that of McCooey.

Molly Bloom, Bronte, NSW

Nimrod variations
Dear Editor,
I write to correct two major factual errors in Helen Thomson’s review of See How It Runs: Nimrod and the New Wave, by Julian Meyrick (ABR, September 2002). I raise them not to quibble, but because they diminish the book’s credibility and the quality of the review; and, beyond that, because I would hate to see such errors perpetuated.

First, Thomson states: ‘Three legendary productions in its first year put Nimrod on the theatrical map.’ But none of the productions mentioned was a Nimrod production; and each of them preceded the formation of the company. Meyrick discusses The Legend of King O’Malley, Oedipus Rex and Hair, but only to show what was happening in Sydney theatre when Nimrod arrived. Second, Thomson says: ‘As early as 1974, a downturn in Nimrod’s life cycle could be discerned beginning with Ken Horler being forced out, followed in 1979 by Richard Wherrett’s move ... to the Sydney Theatre Company.’ In fact, Ken was a working director until December 1979, and it is significant to Meyrick’s argument about the way the three directors worked together that he left after Richard had gone to the STC.

Thomson’s review of See How It Runs is one of the more perceptive I have read, not least because it identifies the impressive range of the book and recognises that it will ‘lift the standard of theatre history in this country’. All the more reason why I was sorry to see it marred by such blunders.

Victoria Chance, Currency Press, Strawberry Hills, NSW

Revisionism in the ALP
Dear Editor,
The revisionists continue to shape our past to fit their own needs. Neal Blewett’s review of Bob Carr’s Thoughtlines dropped a few clangers. Your reviewer had trouble recalling any intellectual politicians, and failed to mention H.V. Evatt. Evatt may be an embarrassment to the latter-day revisionists in the ALP, but he was undoubtedly a towering intellectual who sadly lost his mind at the end. To add insult to injury, your reviewer goes on to suggest that Chifley was not an outstanding leader, and that Hawke and Keating were. No doubt Carr agrees with this proposition. The fact is that the ALP was started by the unions as a socialist party. For Carr et al. to deny this, and try and create their own party under the same banner, smacks of intellectual dishonesty and opportunism.

I dipped into the new Chifley biography recently and was amazed to find that it was using Alan Reid as a source. Reid was quoted when writing about Evatt. That’s much like using Alan Bond as a guide to transparent business practice. Reid may have mellowed with age, but he was, at best, a flawed witness of the political scene. In the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s he was one of Sir Frank Packer’s heavy guns in trying to demolish the ALP. What we tend to forget is that the press at that time was violently anti-union and anti-Labor, and any use of its material is suspect.

Val Wake, Port Macquarie, NSW
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