

The nexus between *ABR* and La Trobe University has always been strong, and our summer issue is a good example of this, with a long essay on George Orwell's enduring influence by Robert Manne, Professor of Politics at La Trobe University (pictured in the next column with Professor Michael Osborne, Vice-Chancellor (centre), and Peter Rose, Editor of *ABR*). Two years ago, La Trobe University became *ABR*'s chief sponsor, an arrangement that has had immense intellectual and other benefits for the magazine. The partnership grows stronger all the time, and we were delighted when the university renewed its sponsorship last month. Full details of the 2004 La Trobe University/*Australian Book Review* Annual Lecture, and other collaborative events, will follow in due course.



Our first Sydney forum, held on November 6, could not have been more successful, with a capacity audience at the Mitchell Library and a lively discussion between Ros Pesman, Peter Porter and Peter Robb on Italian themes. *ABR* is presently negotiating with a number of organisations in Sydney, and looks forward to presenting regular events there throughout 2004. If you wish to ensure that you don't miss out on tickets to these *ABR* events, please send us your e-mail address so that we can add you to our mailing list.

Londoners will have an opportunity to enjoy the poetry of Peter Porter in early January. Professor Warwick Gould, of the University of London, is convenor of an international conference that will explore the poetry of this luminous and fecund poet. The conference will take place at the Institute of English Studies and the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies. The dates are January 8–9. Speakers will include Bruce Bennett (the poet's biographer), Clive James and Peter Steele. Peter Porter will read from his work during the conference. Contact the Menzies Centre in London on (020) 7862 8854 or e-mail menzies.centre@kcl.ac.uk.

The Literature Board of the Australia Council and leading publishing houses are presenting the third biennial Residential Editorial Program, to take place at Varuna — the Writers' House, in Katoomba, from March 29 to April 3.

It's not too late to apply for a spot; applications close on December 9. For guidelines and application forms, contact Robyn Sheahan-Bright, Program Manager, on (07) 4972 9760 or e-mail rsheahan@tpgi.com.au.

Throughout December, *ABR* subscribers can give away gift subscriptions for just \$55 (see page 10 for details). The first six subscribers to take out *two* subscriptions will earn a complete set of *The Best Australian Essays, Poems and Stories 2003* (courtesy of Black Inc.). The set is worth \$84.85. Go for it!

Philhellenes will be looking forward to the Fourth Annual La Trobe Greek Poetry Evenings, to be held at 215 Franklin Street on December 9 and 11. The readings and music will start at 7 p.m.. These events are free and open to the public.

Finally, we wish to thank all our contributors, sponsors, partners, board members, editorial advisers, readers and subscribers for your support throughout the year. Our ever-generous volunteers assist us in myriad ways, and we are indebted to all of them, including Cinzia Cavallaro and Vesna Rapajic, who joined us recently. If, like us, you are taking a short holiday, we hope it's a pleasant one. We look forward to rejoining you in February with more fresh writing and ideas.



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Letters

ABR welcomes letters from our readers. 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.

Unambiguous rodomontade

Dear Editor,

I have not read Elliot Perlman's new novel, but I was startled by the bilious tone of Peter Craven's review (*ABR*, November 2003). It seems to me that whatever critical flaws the book may have could have been elaborated without applying the blowtorch as intensely and personally as Craven did. If *Seven Types of Ambiguity* was a polemic, Craven's rodomontade might have been perfectly appropriate, but I thought that he was unfairly harsh. From my impressions, the book is ambitious and no doubt cost Perlman many buckets of sweat and blood to write. Is it not better to encourage literary ambition than to crush it, even when it, in Craven's estimation, does not succeed?

Hugh Dillon, Drummoyne, NSW

Reluctant reader

Dear Editor,

In his curious letter (*ABR*, November 2003) about Mick O'Regan's thoughtful review of my book (*ABR*, September 2003), Val Wake takes aim at *Party Games: Australian Politicians and the Media from War to Dismissal* while conceding he has not read it. Although I cannot speak for O'Regan, I have at least read his review and I think I am on safe ground suggesting that it, like sections of my book, was about the influence of public relations on Australian political practice, not, as Mr Wake seems to believe, about the influence of public relations on media proprietors and their outlets.

The letter notes that R.G. Menzies was a failed war leader who had to reinvent himself to get back into politics. As several writers have shown in recent years, part of this process entailed a sophisticated public relations strategy developed by early spin doctors such as Sim Rubensohn, Stewart Howard and Edgar Holt. *Party Games* does not argue, as Mr Wake suggests, that the Menzies political machine manipulated the media; rather, it demonstrates that the machine had the active support of significant sections of the media.

Mr Wake also refers to the damage that was done to his teenage political hero, Dr H.V. Evatt. One of my chapters, entitled 'Personality Politics: Menzies versus Evatt', actually focuses on the way in which, from 1951 on, the Liberal Party attempted to capitalise on Menzies' statesmanlike image while portraying Evatt as erratic, fiscally irresponsible and a defender of communism. (Mr Wake may also be interested to learn that I once wrote a thesis about Evatt, have championed work on Mary Alice Evatt, and like and respect their daughter.)

The suggestion that people such as Mick O'Regan and I should not write about times of which we have no personal experience calls for a much fuller response. All I can say here is that Doc Evatt himself wrote about the Rum Rebellion and the Tolpuddle martyrs, and Mr Wake intimates that these works of history had some value. But perhaps your correspondent bothered to read those books.

Bridget Griffen-Foley, St Ives, NSW

A brace of Leonards

Dear Editor,

There are two people named John Leonard associated with Australian poetry, each of whom is often confused with the other. One, the elder, is the accomplished poetry anthologist who edited *Seven Centuries of Poetry in English*, produced in 1987 and now in its fifth edition, and three well-known anthologies of Australian poetry. This John Leonard has written reviews in literary magazines for more than two decades. He is not a poet himself. The second John Leonard, the younger, is *Overland's* poetry editor and a practising poet, critic and poetry editor, with many published collections, the first Australian edition of which was published in 1997.

There was some confusion in 1993–94 when each edited poetry for *LinQ*, and also in 2002, when, at the time *Overland* appointed the younger J.L. as its poetry editor, the elder one was appointed poetry editor of *Blue Dog*. The issue of mistaken identity has become particularly problematic since *Overland* published a review by its own J.L. that was strongly critical of Les Murray's *Collected Poems*. The elder J.L. does not share the younger J.L.'s views about this collection or about Les Murray's work and wishes to dissociate himself from the review, but has nonetheless been flooded with phone calls in response to it. I believe he fears the review will dog him for years.

I would be grateful if you would clarify the situation in *ABR*, lest your readers also confuse our J.L. with the other. Each has established a strong reputation and identity in the field of Australian poetry, criticism and editing, but they have markedly different aesthetic and political sensibilities.

Katherine Wilson, *Overland*, Melbourne, Vic.

Les Murray, for a time, adopted the medial letter A. Perhaps one of our John Leonards, to dispel all confusion, should do the same. Ed.

The alien empiricist

Dear Editor,

Those who knew John Anderson in the 1950s might be surprised by a phrase in Nathan Hollier's review of Mark Weblin's edition of Anderson's political writings (*ABR*, November 2003). 'Philosophical empiricism and political pluralism' seem quite alien to Anderson's position. He often denied that he was an empiricist, asserting that he believed that true propositions came not only from experience (empiricism) but also from rational thinking (rationalism); so, he said, he was a realist. He occasionally used 'pluralism' (a term he fully embraced) as an antonym to monism or dualism, but more often as a synonym for determinism — 'every event has a cause' in his formulation. I suspect that he avoided 'determinism' as a term because of its association with Scottish Presbyterianism. Pluralism implied that for Anderson there were no 'metaphysical ultimates', no first or uncaused causes. To some people's surprise, that led him to deny that he was an atheist: for him, pluralism had much wider metaphysical implications.

A more accurate formulation might be that Anderson's general realism and pluralism were applied to all of the more specific philosophical areas: politics, aesthetics, and education, for instance. That, at any rate, is what Anderson thought he was doing, though I think he was a rather uncertain guide in such areas, as Hollier would seem to agree.

Ken Goodwin, Indooroopilly, Qld

Not the half of it

Dear Editor,

I would pass on Don Anderson's dismissal of my novel *The Outside Story* (*ABR*, November 2003) if it weren't for one particularly misleading pronouncement. Taking her words out of context, he says that my central character's provisional statement, 'That is where the important life of the building is, on the outside. The outside is Utzon's', constitutes 'the central proposition of this novel'. In that case, the whole thing would revolve round an affirmation of architectural authorship, and one more vindication of the heroic, martyred artist. But that's not what's going on. The student, who has been floundering round for a convincing finale to her undergraduate thesis on the subject, then *rejects* those phrases, preferring to express her concern that credit for the Opera House be shared with certain less glamorous instigators, such as John Joseph Cahill. The next chapter is called 'The Trouble with Heroes'.

In the fictional detective work of the novel, Joern Utzon is indeed vindicated, but that's not the half of it. This is about the way such a history is felt, lived and argued by ordinary people. Their lives must be imagined, and the imagining needs the wider space of fiction. That's why *The Outside Story* is a novel; and for all Anderson's strictures on how the writer should stick to her (supposedly designated) non-fictional patch, I'm completely unrepentant.

Sylvia Lawson, Newtown, NSW

Damning with faint praise

Dear Editor,

I am not sure whether Don Anderson's review of Sylvia Lawson's new novel, *The Outside Story* (*ABR*, November 2003), aimed to 'damn with faint praise', but that seems to be the result.

Take the following: '*The Outside Story*, concerned with the inside/outside dichotomy, is no less concerned with feminine/masculine, and may provoke reflection upon gender difference in reading.' Oh, it *may*? If one bothers to read it? Anderson also suggests that Lawson doesn't do bio-fiction as well as some other 'eminent essayists' because her writing is centripetal and theirs is centrifugal. Gosh! Furthermore, there is a sense of dramatic claustrophobia because 'everybody ... knows everybody else'. Both these statements sound like gobbledegook. Clearly, many fine novels are full of people who are introduced to others, and yet more fine novels where 'everybody knows everybody else': the novels of Iris Murdoch, for example, and the early novels in A.S. Byatt's Frederika Potter series. Anyway, in the case of *The Outside Story*, it simply isn't true: there are a number of characters who don't know all the others, especially the witnesses to earlier events.

More seriously, Anderson does the author a grave injustice by quoting passages of the book that, seemingly, are subtly intended to discredit her ability to write fiction. In each case, they are quotations from the main character's efforts to write the synopsis or introduction to her thesis. For that reason, they don't sound (in isolation) like riveting fiction. But Anderson has them out of context. In the novel, these passages are intertwined with the thesis-writer's own thoughts, agonisings and musings. Much 'interiority' here, Mr Anderson. A quite different picture of Lawson's prose would be given if those contextual musings were included, or if Anderson had quoted some of the dialogue between the various characters. That dialogue is sharp, often staccato, filled with rich imagery and with a very good ear for the idioms of various age groups and classes.

One also has to take issue with Anderson's ageist comment, at the start of his review. His caveat ('I trust it is neither ungracious of me nor ...') does not excuse his comment — Lawson's age and her being 'a contender for the First Novel by a Senior Award'. I find it staggering that Anderson can then state, 'There is a point to this apparent ageism', yet make no point other than about Lawson's thorough research over some years.

I hope that readers will take Mr Anderson's review with the grain of salt I think it deserves, and that they will read the book and judge for themselves. It is, in my view, an outstanding and original novel, written, as Anderson concedes, with passion and energy. But it contains much else. In many respects, it reads like a detective story. It is important, too, because of the nature of the 'the victim' — that great building — compromised, certainly, but happily not yet deceased.

Michael Jorgensen, North Carlton, Vic.

Contributors

Loretta Baldassar teaches and researches migration studies in the Disciplines of Anthropology and Sociology, School of Social and Cultural Studies, University of Western Australia.

Neal Blewett, a former politician and diplomat, is the author of *A Cabinet Diary*.

Tim Bowden, a broadcaster and author, was the first executive producer of ABC Radio's *PM*, a producer on ABC TV's *This Day Tonight* and a former foreign correspondent in Asia and North America. His autobiography, *Spooling Through: An Irreverent Memoir*, was published by Allen & Unwin earlier this year.

Troy Bramston is co-editor of *The Hawke Government: A Critical Retrospective*, which was reviewed in the previous issue. He works for a Labor senator and is completing a Masters degree at the University of New South Wales.

Ian Britain is the Editor of *Meanjin* and the author of *Once an Australian: Journeys with Barry Humphries, Clive James, Germaine Greer and Robert Hughes*.

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Sherryl Clark is a children's writer, and teaches professional writing at TAFE. *Farm Kid*, her verse novel for younger readers, will be published in May 2004.

Brent Crosswell lives in Hobart and is a reviewer and essayist.

Rosemary Dobson published her first collection of poetry, *In a Convex Mirror*, in 1944. Her latest collection is *Untold Lives and Later Poems*.

Brian Edwards lectures in literature and writing at Deakin University. His new collection of poetry, *All in Time*, will be reviewed in the next issue.

Morag Fraser is an adjunct professor in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University.

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Jacqueline Kent's biography of Beatrice Davis, *A Certain Style*, won the National Biography Award in 2002.

James Ley is a Melbourne reviewer.

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Robyn Sheahan-Bright runs Justified Text, a writing and publishing consultancy service.

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Lolla Stewart is a Melbourne writer, reviewer and editor.

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John Thompson works in the History Program, Research School of Social Sciences at the ANU where he is completing a study of the public career of the historian Geoffrey Serle. In 1998 (with Brenda Niall) he edited *The Oxford Book of Australian Letters*.

Aviva Tuffield, a Melbourne editor and reviewer, is currently on leave from *ABR*.

Richard Walsh was Editor of *OZ* and *Nation Review*; he was head of Angus & Robertson and ACP. Today he is Consultant Publisher at Allen & Unwin and a director of Text Media.

Robyn Williams has presented The Science Show on Radio National for nearly thirty years. His latest book is *2007: A True Story about to Happen*.

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Our front cover this month features Harold Cazneaux's portrait of the actor Aristides de Leoni, in character as Liliom from the play of the same name by Franz Molnar (1878–1952). *Liliom*, written in 1909, proved very popular and was filmed in France in 1933–1934 by Fritz Lang, with Charles Boyer in the lead role. The character Liliom, a tough circus spruiker whose conflicting qualities of brutality and tenderness combine to defeat him at every turn, would become Billy Bigalow when Rogers and Hammerstein used *Liliom* as the source for their musical *Carousel*. De Leoni was born in Argentina and educated in Vienna, where he played Liliom in the original stage version. A skilled musician who had trained as a diplomat, he arrived in Australia in 1924 and stayed for nearly three years before moving to the US to further his career as an actor.

Cazneaux's portraits of De Leoni were commissioned by Sydney Ure Smith for the 1 November 1924 issue of *The Home* magazine. Ure Smith's patronage proved valuable for Cazneaux, whose association with *The Home* began with the first issue in 1920 and continued until the last issue in 1942. His photographs, often reproduced in sepia on toned art paper, became a feature of the magazine. Cazneaux's chosen title for the portrait, *Apache*, refers to the name current in Paris at the turn of the twentieth century for gangsters and members of the criminal underworld.



Harold Cazneaux (1878–1953)

Apache 1924

photograph: 36.8 x 26.5 cm

Cazneaux Collection nla.pic-an2383915