

### **Viva L'Italia!**

The *ABR* Forums move to Sydney early next month, when Peter Porter and Peter Robb will be in conversation with Ros Pesman of the University of Sydney about all things Italian — literature, music, visual arts, politics and travel. Peter Porter has written about Italy for decades; Peter Robb is the author of *Midnight in Sicily* and *M: The Man Who Became Caravaggio*. No one interested in Italy, or good talk, will want to miss this Italian colloquy. It will take place at 6 p.m. on Thursday, November 6. The venue is the Galleries at the State Library of New South Wales, and the cost \$16.50 (or \$11 for *ABR* subscribers and Friends of the State Library). Full details appear on page 33.

### **Readers, Writers, Publishers**

That's the name of this year's Australian Academy of the Humanities Annual Symposium, which will take place at Victoria University's city campus on November 13 and 14. Peter Porter (back in Australia for several months) will deliver the keynote speech, titled 'Who Owns the Words We Use?' Inga Clendinnen will deliver the AAH's Annual Lecture ('Backstage at the Republic of Letters'). Other speakers will include Guy Rundle, Morag Fraser, Peter Craven and Peter Rose, Editor of *ABR*. This symposium is open to the public, not just Academicians. For more details, phone (02) 6125 9860 or go to [www.humanities.org.au](http://www.humanities.org.au).

### **The 2004 Marten Bequests**

Each year, due to the largesse of the late John Chisholm Marten, Permanent Trustees distribute \$108,000 in travelling scholarships for writers and artists aged between twenty-one and thirty-five. Poetry and prose are two of next year's six available categories. Each scholarship is worth \$18,000. For further information call (02) 9332 1559 or go to [www.trust.com.au](http://www.trust.com.au). Entries close on October 31.

### **National Biography Award**

This award, intended to encourage the highest standards of writing in biography and autobiography and to promote public interest in these genres, is now an annual affair. The State Library of New South Wales administers and presents the award on behalf of the benefactor Dr Geoffrey Cains. The winner will receive \$15,000. Entries close on October 24. Phone (02) 9273 1766 or go to [www.sl.nsw.gov.au/awards](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/awards).

### **Off to Dromkeen**

'Feasting from Books', a celebration of books about food, will be held at the Dromkeen Art Gallery on Sunday, October 26 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.. Head off to this BYO picnic and meet a range of authors and illustrators. Bookings are essential: (03) 5428 6799.

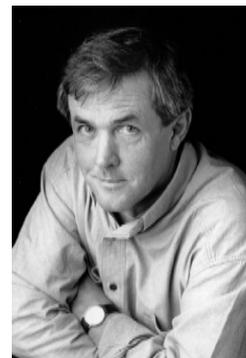
### **Melbourne Events**

Reader's Feast offers an eclectic programme of events in October. Speakers will include Gabrielle Lord (October 7), whose new novel, *Lethal Factor*, is reviewed in this issue, Gregory David Roberts (October 15) and Inga Clendinnen

(October 23), who will be discussing her new book, *Dancing with Strangers*. These events start at 6.30 p.m. and cost \$6. To book, either phone (03) 9662 4699 or e-mail [mahina@readersfeast.com.au](mailto:mahina@readersfeast.com.au).

### **Colin Roderick Award**

Don Watson has won this award for his book *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart: A Portrait of Paul Keating PM*. The other short-listed titles were Robert Jordan's *The Convict Theatres of Early Australia 1788–1840*, Anthony Lawrence's *Skinned by Light*, Tim Low's *The New Nature*, Mark McKenna's *Looking for Blackfellas' Point* and Alex Miller's *Journey to the Stone Country*.



### **The Tyranny of Distance**

The old adage was alive and feral last month, as some subscribers discovered. The September issue left our mailing house on August 29, as usual. Some people in Melbourne and Sydney received their copies on September 2, which is as it should be. Elsewhere, delivery was woefully slow, particularly in Adelaide (and the Dandenongs!), where copies were still arriving *one week later*. As you can imagine, we spoke to our friends at Australia Post and sought an explanation. A spokesman told us that new software at the Dandenong Mail Centre had delayed many deliveries, not just ours. He asked us to keep them posted, so to speak. Please keep those cover sheets coming in when you receive this issue.

### **Back to the Future**

*ABR* always welcomes comments and criticisms from readers. A few subscribers have suggested that it would be good to see a range of reviews from back issues — an excellent idea. This month, on page 64, we introduce 'First Word', in which we will feature major reissues and the original *ABR* reviews. There's no shortage of candidates; we now have 255 issues to raid. First up is Alister Kershaw on Michael Heyward's *The Ern Malley Affair*, first published ten years ago by UQP and reissued by Random House to coincide with Peter Carey's reimagining of the phantom poet's life. Meanwhile, the order form, special offer and bestseller lists have moved to page 63.

### **A Lunch Invitation**

Because we are interested in our readers' assessments of the magazine, *ABR* plans to host a series of informal lunches at our office in Melbourne. This will give you an opportunity to see how we put the magazine together, to learn about imminent features and events, and to table your own suggestions with the Editor and others associated with the magazine. But we're inviting you to a convivial lunch, not a focus group! The first of these gatherings is planned for Thursday, October 30, at one p.m. We have room for six guests (subscribers only, please). To reserve a place, ring (03) 9429 6700.

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# Letters

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**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.**

## Judith Wright and *Meanjin*

Dear Editor,

As generally happens, your note of the recent death of ‘Clem’ Christesen (*ABR*, August 2003) appears to give him full credit for the early days of *Meanjin*. Judith Wright is, unfortunately, unable to correct that view of history herself. From what I have been told of those gestational wartime years, her role was no less significant than Christesen’s. Furthermore, she certainly did a great deal (probably most) of the practical work that is essential to sustain such a journal, especially one that was determined to open windows to worlds different from the one represented by the *Bulletin*. As their contemporary, the Queensland poet Val Vallis, once put it to me, poetry ‘had to have a whiff of eucalyptus about it for the *Bulletin*’. Certainly, Douglas Stewart, the redoubtable editor of *The Red Page*, did not relish the new competition, and Vallis recalls being told, with more than a touch of *schadenfreude*, when work appeared in the fledgling *Meanjin*: ‘We knocked that back at the “Bully”.’

In such circumstances, Judith Wright’s upbringing in the austerity of New England was probably essential, and her contribution — not just as a writer — should not be forgotten.

**John Carmody, Sydney, NSW**

## Hoppin’ mad

Dear Editor,

Despite a raft of schoolboy-clever questions from me, my father never let on how he voted. Evidently, he felt that what went on behind the curtain was best kept between a man and his conscience. More’s the pity Greg Denning had to throw in his own personal politics (‘those thugs in the White House’) when he reviewed Edward Duyker’s work concerning a naturalist who lived between 1755 and 1834 (*ABR*, June/July 2003). During much of that time there was no White House and, once the building was constructed, the British torched it — along with the Library of Congress. No ‘Books Are Our Friends’ party in that Merrie Olde government. Whitewash was used to cover the blackened façade.

Perhaps the review would not have come screeching to a halt to fit page constraints had Denning’s editor exercised his rubric pencil. While academics on both sides of the Pacific drool at having a mouth-breathing moron in the White House, it’s foolish to underrate my country’s passion for revenge after September 11. On the scale of Pearl Harbour, Americans are still hoppin’ mad. And on the streets of this democracy, ‘pissed-off’ don’t mean stinky with drink.

The French — Denning sighs like a maid in the hayloft for ‘our brilliant French past’ (I always thought so many names along the Great Australian Bight were left in that language

because the Royal Navy wanted to keep up the pressure, and the dangers of invasion, in a worldwide chess match between England and Napoleon, the self-appointed republican emperor who executed publishers and lined editors up against the wall) — the French are a different matter: their profit-over-principles disgust us. They’ve lifted a page from *Lord Jim*, ‘the business of business is business’.

We don’t demand that they join the US: a Yank general opined that ‘going to war without the French is like going into combat without your accordion’. We couldn’t even rely on them getting the Germans out of France. But let’s not forget that they sold the planet’s number two oil-producing nation a nuclear reactor ‘to make electricity’, then, when Israeli jets took it out in 1982, offered Iraq a replacement.

The French remain poor masters. Look no further than Tahiti (nuclear testing) or New Caledonia (Paris policemen culled from traffic patrol to guard nickel mines), then bless the Royal Navy’s wooden frigate crews for ensuring that those monsters got no toehold in Oz.

**Jerry Briggs, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, US**

## In praise of indexes

Dear Editor,

A good index adds value to a book, while a poor index seriously detracts from it. The absence of an index is a crime. So this is a plea, in my capacity as President of the Australian Society of Indexers, to ask that it be part of your canon that a book review should desirably include a comment on the book’s index.

*ABR* is one of the premier sources of serious book reviews available to Australians, and it is widely read. If comments about indexes appeared regularly in your reviews, we believe it would raise public awareness of the value of these important tools, and would raise the standard of indexing demanded by publishers and provided by indexers.

If you ask me what constitutes a good index, I would reply that a good index is one that provides access to the detailed content of a book; is an efficient means of tracing information; and is accurate, impartial, comprehensive and easy to use. It does this by: being subject-based and including terms for concepts as well as for names and objects; avoiding long strings of undifferentiated page references; using words and phrases that reflect the language of the text; being comprehensive and providing access to all topics of potential interest; and being logically arranged.

I hope you will consider this suggestion, and that your reviewers will regularly comment on indexes.

**Lynn Farkas, Farrer, ACT**

### **Skipping the ball**

Dear Editor,

About a decade ago, I visited Western Australia. Before leaving Melbourne, I had noticed, buried inside *The Age*, a report on the latest federal funding for the states. It was bland and factual. When I arrived in Perth later that day, I saw a headline to the effect of 'Federal Funding Bias; the West Robbed Again'. That difference in response typifies what has been a fractious relationship between the eastern states and the western third of the continent. Within a year, I had moved to Perth. During my five years on the periphery of the art and literary scene in that city, I came to realise that its inhabitants had good reason to resent the eastern states' tendency to ignore them.

In *Farewell Cinderella: Creating Arts and Identity in Western Australia*, Geoffrey Bolton, Richard Ryan and Jan Rossiter, with their contributors, provide an interesting and insightful review of the history of the arts in Western Australia, but, as Wendy Were has noted in her review (*ABR*, September 2003), the claim that Cinderella has 'arrived at the ball' is not made out. It is hard to see how the Western Australian arts scene can be fully integrated with the rest of Australia when, for example, the Weekend Review section in *The Australian* publishes stories on 'new art/writing/theatre in the west', but just a few words into the article the reader discovers that 'the west' begins and ends within a few kilometres of Parramatta. I have talked with an art historian from the east who has an extensive knowledge of many Western Australian artists from the past, but who has little awareness of contemporary artists, including members of the WAIT class of 1982 whose work is well known to Perth collectors.

Based on my experiences, the Western Australian arts remain largely ignored by the Sydney–Melbourne axis. While a litany of well-known and middle-aged names in Australian literature are trotted out in *Farewell Cinderella* to support the argument that Cinderella has indeed 'arrived at the ball', the resort to those familiar names masks those young and promising writers who remain little known outside the literary scene in their home state.

Perhaps that is what is so different and fascinating about the arts in Western Australia. Perth and its environs remains a 'city-state' all too often governed by philistines. Not all that long ago, the state government found millions of dollars to erect a carillon tower, yet successive governments have been unable to fund a modern theatre complex. The Western Australian arts scene is small but fragmented, with feuds and gossip providing the frisson that comes when everyone knows everyone else. Yet it is that same hotbed that is giving rise to original and inspiring work — far beyond the cultural 'Brisbane line', whose writers, poets, painters, actors and dancers are more likely to be inspired by their unique landscape and by the view across the Indian Ocean than by looking back over their shoulders to Australia's eastern seaboard. It is cause for regret that *Farewell Cinderella* did not devote more space to that work, and that it did not raise the fundamental question as to whether it is not better for Cinderella to remain at her knitting, rather than joining her ugly sisters in cavorting at the ball.

Despite its weaknesses, *Farewell Cinderella* is a valuable work, and I look forward to its sequel.

**Christopher Wray, Ringwood, Vic.**

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**ARTS  
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Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Editorial matters should be directed to the editor; advertising/marketing ones to the assistant editor; and subscription queries to the office manager. Letters to the editor will only be considered for publication if accompanied by a telephone number, for verification.

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Our front cover this month shows dancer Brett Daffy performing in *Equalibrium* — *laughing crying deep* [sic], a piece he choreographed for Vis-à-vis Dance Canberra as part of *A Dancers' Choreographic Season* [sic], which opened in late 1994. Vis-à-vis was the name given to Canberra's professional dance company when Sue Healey took on the directorship in 1993. Over the next three years, the company would present eight seasons designed to 'extend, enrich and celebrate the language of movement'.

Ross Gould, a Canberra-based photographer with a particular interest in picturing dance, gymnastics, theatre and architecture, documented the work of Vis-à-vis from their inception in 1993 until 1995. Photographs of performances from each of the company's seasons have been acquired by the National Library.

Sue Healey's departure from Canberra eventually led to the disbanding of the dance company structure, which had been in place since 1980 when Human Veins Dance Theatre became Canberra's first professional dance company. The company structure was replaced by a model for choreographic development and the Choreographic Centre, now the Australian Choreographic Centre, began operations in 1996. More information about Vis-à-vis can be found on the Australia Dancing website at [www.australiadancing.org/](http://www.australiadancing.org/) and many more examples of Ross Gould's work can be found in the records of the Human Veins Dance Theatre (1979–88) in the Library's Manuscript collection.



Ross Gould (1948–)

Brett Daffy performing his own choreography in *Equalibrium* — *laughing crying deep* [sic], at the Gorman House theatre space, Canberra, 1994.

black and white photograph; 30.3 x 23.9 cm

Pictures Collection, an24809080

National Library of Australia

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# Contributors

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**Dennis Altman** is Professor of Politics at La Trobe University. His most recent book is *Global Sex*.

**Martin Ball** is a Melbourne journalist and reviewer.

**Tony Birch** is an historian and teaches Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne.

**José Borghino** is the Executive Director of the Australian Society of Authors. He is a freelance writer, editor and reviewer.

**Paul Brunton** is Senior Curator, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales. His edited edition of Miles Franklin's diaries will be published in early 2004 by Allen & Unwin, in association with the State Library of New South Wales.

**Kate Burridge** teaches Linguistics at Monash University.

**Simon Catterson** is a Melbourne writer and critic.

**Philip Clark** is a well-known Sydney broadcaster and journalist currently presenting the Drive Show on 2GB 873. He has interviewed Allan Fels many times.

**Isobel Crombie** is Senior Curator, Photography, National Gallery of Victoria. Her book, *Body Culture: Max Dupain, Photography and Australian Culture, 1919–1939*, will be published by the NGV and Peleus Press in 2004.

**Oliver Dennis** is a Melbourne reviewer.

**Hugh Dillon** is a Sydney magistrate.

**Gillian Dooley** is an Adelaide critic and librarian. Her new book, *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch*, will be reviewed in a future issue.

**Alan Frost** teaches History at La Trobe University. Elsewhere in this issue, Donna Merwick reviews his most recent study of Pacific exploration, *The Global Reach of Empire*.

**Raimond Gaita** is Professor Philosophy at the Australian Catholic University and Professor of Moral Philosophy at King's College, University of London. His most recent book is *The Philosopher's Dog*.

**Kerryn Goldsworthy**, a former Editor of *ABR*, has written and edited many books, and has a monthly column in the *Adelaide Review*.

**Robin Grove** teaches literature at the University of Melbourne and is currently working with the Victorian College of the Arts on a research project investigating contemporary dance and its audiences.

**Allan Gyngell** is Executive Director of the Lowy Institute for International Policy.

**Richard King** is a Fremantle writer.

**Dolly MacKinnon** is a Fellow in the History Department at the University of Melbourne. With Catharine Coleborne, she co-edited *'Madness' in Australia: Histories, Heritage and the Asylum*.

**Donna Merwick** is a Fellow at the Humanities Research Centre and the Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies at the Australian National University.

**Kate Middleton** is a Melbourne poet.

**Brendon O'Connor** is a lecturer in Politics and Public Policy at Griffith University and the author of *A Political History of the American Welfare System*.

**Peter Pierce** is Professor of Australian Literature at James Cook University, Queensland.

**Peter Ryan** is a former publisher and a regular contributor to *ABR*.

**Craig Sherborne** is a Melbourne poet, playwright and journalist.

**Peter Sherlock** is a Lecturer in History at the University of Melbourne. He is currently editing a collection of essays on family history by nine Australian historians of European descent.

**Bruce Sims** is a Melbourne-based editor, publisher and teacher.

**Lolla Stewart** is a Melbourne writer and editor.

**Jennifer Strauss** is the editor of *The Oxford Book of Australian Love Poems* and *Family Ties: Australian Poems of the Family*, and co-editor of *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*. She has published critical books on Gwen Harwood and Judith Wright and four collections of poetry, the most recent being *Tierra del Fuego: New and Selected Poems*.

**Carolyn Tétaz** is a Melbourne reviewer.

**Prue Torney-Parlicki** has recently completed a biography of the journalist and broadcaster Peter Russo.

**Angus Trumble** is Curator of Paintings and Sculpture at the Yale Centre for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut. Allen & Unwin will publish his next book, *A Brief History of the Smile*, in early 2004.

**Robyn Tucker** is completing a PhD and teaching in the Department of English at the University of Adelaide.

**Nicola Walker** is a Sydney reviewer.

**Chris Wallace-Crabbe** is a Melbourne poet and critic.