Advances

Celebrating David Williamson
Admirers of David Williamson who live in Canberra will not want to miss a celebratory event at the National Library of Australia starting at 2 p.m. on November 23. The playwright will be present. Admission is by donation, but bookings are essential: (02) 6262 1698.

Scholarship Strikes Back
Bob Carr, the Premier of New South Wales, is positively ubiquitous, with a new biography, which Beverley Kingston reviews in this issue. Mr Carr, like Neville Wran before him, has always had a strong commitment to the New South Wales Premier’s Literary Awards. He has just announced the creation of a biennial prize for literary scholarship, worth $15,000. ‘It will apply,’ he said, ‘to an outstanding book, CD ROM or DVD which presents an original and convincing perspective on one or more works of classical literature published prior to 1950 in any language, literary or cultural tradition … I hope this prize will encourage more scholars to undertake work in this area.’ So, in the classical words of Cole Porter, brush up your Shakespeare and start quoting him now.

More from Poetic A
‘Sight and Sound’, an anthology about vision, hearing and their impairment, will go to air on November 22, featuring poets such as John Milton and Judith Wright. One week later, Tom Shapcott will be the featured poet, discussing his life and work, and reading some of his poetry. Radio National broadcasts Poetic A at 3.05 p.m each Saturday.

Meandering South
The Tasmanian Writers’ Centre is seeking applications from Australian and indeed overseas writers for a series of writers’ residencies in 2004, as part of the Island of Residencies programme. Residencies of approximately one month’s duration are available in Hobart, the Meander Valley and elsewhere. Successful applicants will receive a return airfare, accommodation, a fee for leading a writing workshop and a contribution towards living expenses. For further information or application forms go to www.tasmanianwriters.org/island-of-residencies.htm.

In Your Face
Write in Your Face, an initiative of the Literature Board of the Australia Council, is on again, supporting emerging forms of writing by young writers. Writers must be aged between sixteen and thirty and ‘using language in innovative ways. This may involve zines, e-zines, comics, multimedia, multi-art forms, websites, live performance and spoken word.’ Applications ($5000 maximum) must be received by December 8. For more details, contact Jill Jones on (02) 9215 9052 or at j.jones@ozco.gov.au.

Writers at Rotunda
The 2nd Rotunda Festival of Story, Song and Dance continues throughout much of November, concluding on the 23rd. Rotunda events take place at Victoria University’s Sunbury campus. Guests include Ramona Koval (pictured below) and Maureen McCarthy, who will be in conversation at 6.30 p.m. on November 8; and Graham Reilly, who will speak at 7 p.m. on the 12th. For more details, contact Bruno Lettieri on (03) 9218 3202 or at bruno.lettieri@vu.edu.au.

E-mania
Just a reminder to subscribers to give us your e-mail addresses if you haven’t already done so. This, increasingly, is how we disseminate advance information about ABR events and news. And this certainly doesn’t just apply to Victorians. ABR will be presenting lectures and forums in most states and territories in 2004. Subscribers (and indeed others wishing to join the list) should send their e-mail addresses to Dianne Schallmeiner: abradmin@vicnet.net.au.

Special Offer for School Libraries
Nothing pleases us more than when a school library joins the growing list of ABR subscribers. Enticing more libraries to subscribe has been a priority, and a successful one, in 2003. We hate to think of schoolchildren, and their teachers, not having access to Australian magazines of ideas. Parents might like to enquire at their children’s schools as to whether they take ABR, and to urge them to do so if they unaccountably don’t! Meanwhile, in a spirit of extravagant end-of-year goodwill, we have a special offer for schools that are unfamiliar with ABR or that don’t have the means to subscribe at present. ABR is offering ten complimentary one-year subscriptions to Australian state schools that have not subscribed before. Just ask your school librarian to contact us and to mention this special offer.
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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.

Ali Ismail Abbas
Dear Editor,
Chris Goddard has written a powerful letter (ABR, August 2003) arguing that the photograph of Ali Ismail Abbas should not have accompanied my essay ‘Only As a Last Resort’ (ABR, May 2003). To tell the truth, I don’t know whether or not he is right. I am writing only to clarify the record. Peter Rose graciously accepted all responsibility for publishing the photograph (ABR, August 2003) and, thereby, all responsibility for whatever criticism its publication provoked. He did, however, consult me about the photograph, and I readily agreed that it should accompany my article, without, I’m now ashamed to say, thinking as much about it as Goodard has shown that I should have.

Raimond Gaita, St Kilda, Vic.

More cock-ups than spin
Dear Editor,
As a former propagandist with the British government of some twenty years’ standing, I think Mick O’Regan, in his review of Bridget Griffen-Foley’s Party Games (ABR, September 2003), overstates the importance of spin doctors and of their influence on the media. As Margaret Thatcher’s press secretary Bernard Ingham was wont to say: ‘There are more cock-ups than conspiracies in government information work.’ The media like to play along with the fiction because it makes them feel more important, but the fact is that government information work is a complicated job where departmental policy makers have more influence on the final outcome than any information officer working in the minister’s office.

What I find more worrying about the tone of O’Regan’s review and, presumably, the content of Party Games is the damage that was done to one of my teenage political heroes. H.V. Evatt was an intellectual giant of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s in Australia. As a jurist, historian and politician, Evatt had no equal. During the founding of the United Nations, the New York Times hailed him as one of the world’s most important smaller power leaders. The London Daily Mail described him as the outstanding personality of the Paris Peace conference. Very little of this got back to the anti-Labor Australian press. R.G. Menzies knew that he had met his match in Evatt, and resorted to every dirty trick in the book to wrong-foot him. Menzies was a failed war leader who had to reinvent himself to get back into politics. The fact that the press of the day went along with this had more to do with their publishers’ politics than any attempt by the Menzies political machine to manipulate them. David McNicoll, in his memoirs, often mentions his trips to Canberra running errands for Sir Frank Packer. The media scene in those days, as I recall, was conformist and predictable.

I suspect that one of the problems for people such as O’Regan and Griffen-Foley is that they have no personal experience of the times they are writing about. Instead, they rely on archival records and television footage. The repeated revision of our recent past — events that took place within living memory — is, to my mind, one of the most worrying aspects of the current state of Australian scholarship.

Val Wake, Port Macquarie, NSW
Our front cover this month shows a portrait of a woman and her child, taken at the turn of last century in the Tilba district of New South Wales. The photograph is from the William Henry Corkhill Tilba Tilba Collection, held at the National Library of Australia, which is the subject of an essay in this month’s issue of *ABR*.

Between 1890 and 1910, Corkhill recorded the lives of his family and neighbours on thousands of glass plate negatives, less than a thousand of which have survived. When the negatives were donated to the National Library in 1975, they lacked any records identifying their subjects, but, in many cases, captions have been provided by descendants still living in the district. The people in this haunting photograph, however, remain unknown.

Seated against a paling fence or wall, the woman supports the body of her child, who seems too still for sleep. The child’s nightdress and cropped hair speak of fever and suffering, a suffering echoed in the contained anguish of the mother’s face. The composition of the photograph recalls the *pietà* and reinforces the impression that the child, gravely ill, is near death.
Contributors

Don Anderson was a judge of the 2002 Kibble and Dobbie Awards for works of fiction and non-fiction by Australian women.

Patricia Anderson is a Sydney art critic for The Australian.

Alan Atkinson is currently writing the second volume of his award-winning The Europeans in Australia.

Grant Bailey is a Sydney-based writer and reviewer. He works full-time as an editor of educational books.

Rod Beecham, formerly literary editor of the Independent Monthly, is a freelance reviewer.

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

Simon Caterson is a Melbourne writer and critic.

Inga Clendinnen’s latest book, Dancing with Strangers, is reviewed in this issue. The LRB article she refers to in her La Trobe University Essay was republished in The Best Australian Essays 2002.

Peter Craven is the editor of The Best Australian Stories, The Best Australian Essays and The Best Australian Poems (all published by Black Inc.), the 2003 editions of which will be reviewed in coming issues of ABR.

Gillian Dooley is an Adelaide librarian and reviewer. Her book From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction: Conversations with Iris Murdoch is reviewed in this issue.

Martin Duwell teaches at the University of Queensland. His anthology, The Best Australian Poetry 2003 (UQP), will be reviewed in the next issue.

Brian Ellis is Emeritus Professor at La Trobe University, and Professorial Fellow in Philosophy at the University of Melbourne.

Andrea Goldsmith’s most recent novel, The Prosperous Thief, was short-listed for the 2003 Miles Franklin Award.

Lisa Gorton is a writer and reviewer living in northern New South Wales.

Jeffrey Grey is associate professor of history at the Australian Defence Force Academy. His next book, a collection of essays on aspects of official history, will be published in early 2004.

Bridget Griffen-Foley’s latest book is Party Games: Australian Politicians and the Media From War to Dismissal.

John Hirst is Reader in History at La Trobe University and the author of many books, including Convict Society and Its Enemies and The Sentimental Nation: The Making of the Australian Commonwealth.

Nathan Hollier is co-editor of Overland magazine and editor of the essay collection Ruling Australia: The Power, Politics and Privilege of the New Ruling Class.

Nicholas Jose’s most recent book is Black Sheep: Journey to Borroloola.

Margaret Robson Kett is a Young People’s Services Librarian and lives in Western Australia.

Richard King is a poet and critic, and lives in Fremantle.

Damien Kingsbury is writing the third edition of The Politics of Indonesia for OUP.

Beverley Kingston joined the School of History at the University of New South Wales as Bob Carr was completing his honours thesis. She is now working on a short history of New South Wales for CUP.

Virginia Lowe runs the Create a Kids’ Book assessment service and has been a university lecturer and librarian.

Michael McGirr is the fiction editor of Meanjin. His books include Things You Get for Free.

Colin Mackerras is a China specialist who works at Griffith University in Queensland. He has published numerous books and articles about China, including Western Images of China.

David Matthews teaches English literature at the University of Newcastle.

Bruce Moore is Director of the Australian National Dictionary Centre in the Faculty of Arts at the Australian National University. He is editor of many lexicons, including The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary.

Geoff Page’s latest books are Darker and Lighter and Drumming on Water.

Allan Patience is Professor of Political Science and Asian Studies, Victoria University, Melbourne.

Robert Reynolds is an ARC Australian Research Fellow at Sydney University and the author of From Camp to Queer: Remaking the Australian Homosexual.

John Rickard is the author of Australia: A Cultural History, and has written widely on Australian theatre. He worked for some years as an actor and singer.

Jennifer Strauss’s most recent collection is Tierra del Fuego: New and Selected Poems.

John Tranter’s new poetry collection, Studio Moon, is reviewed in this issue.

James Walter is Professor of Politics at Monash University. His most recent book is The Citizens’ Bargain.