Changes at ABR
This month we welcome back Aviva Tuffield, who returns as Deputy Editor, a new position for ABR and one that reflects her seniority and her long commitment to the magazine. We also farewell, with many thanks, Anne-Marie Thomas, who filled in while Aviva Tuffield went on maternity leave. Dianne Schallmeiner remains as Office Manager, and Alastair Lamont joins our admirable team of volunteers.

National Biography Award
This year’s NBA (worth $12,500, courtesy of its benefactor, Dr Geoffrey Cains) will be announced on March 12 at the State Library of New South Wales. Six works of biography and autobiography appear on the shortlist: Richard Bosworth’s Mussolini (Hodder Headline); Miriam Estensen’s The Life of Matthew Flinders (Allen & Unwin); Barry Hill’s Broken Song (Random House); Mara Moustafine’s Secrets and Spies: The Harbin Files (Random House); Pamela Statham-Drew’s James Stirling: Admiral and Founding Governor of Western Australia (UWA Press); and Zoltan Torey’s Out of Darkness (Picador).

The Best Australian Poetry
Australians may not be buying slim volumes of poetry in numbers that would make Don Watson or Nikki Gemmell blush, but the market for poetry anthologies seems to be strong, after a few years in the doldrums. In recent months, we have reviewed several new anthologies, including the first in a new series from UQP: The Best Australian Poetry, edited by Martin Duwell. David McCooey reviewed the 2003 edition in our December 2003/January 2004 issue, and welcomed Duwell’s ‘refreshing lack of angst about the status of poetry’ and his ‘catholic’ choice of poems. ‘Advances’ was pleased to come across several poems that first appeared in ABR. Laudably, Duwell and his co-editor, Bronwyn Lea, will appoint a new guest editor each year. This year it will be Anthony Lawrence, who is already hard at work selecting poems for the 2004 edition. Meanwhile, on page 39 of this issue, Peter Pierce reviews Lawrence’s new collection, The Sleep of a Learning Man.

ABR goes to Canberra
The magazine goes on the road this month, with our first ABR Forum in Canberra. Peter Rose (Editor of ABR) and Morag Fraser (former Editor of Eureka Street) will be in conversation about that pullulating genre, life-writing. Pleasingly and fittingly, this event will be at the National Library of Australia, our national sponsor since 2002. ‘Writing from Life’ will take place in the NLA’s Theatre at 2 p.m. on Sunday, March 28. Entry is free, but bookings are essential: (02) 6262 1122.

World order a big winner
Here’s an award that all internationalists would like to carry off. Professors John Braithwaite and Peter Drahos of the Australian National University have shared the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order for their book Global Business Regulation. This prize, previously won by Mikhail Gorbachev and Gareth Evans, is currently worth US$200,000.

Creativity at the SLV
The State Library of Victoria is seeking applications for a new round of Creative Fellowships, which will allow ‘scholars and creative artists’ to use the Library’s collections. These are worth between $12,500 and $50,000 (the fellowships, not the collections), depending on the duration of the project. Applications close on March 31. You can download the form from the SLV’s website: www.statelibrary.vic.gov.au.

Fun at Faulconbridge
This year’s Norman Lindsay Festival of Children’s Literature is on March 20 and 21 at the Norman Lindsay Gallery in Faulconbridge, NSW. Some of Australia’s best writers and illustrators, including Terry Denton, James Valentine, Emily Rodda, Nadia Wheatley and Simon French will be attending. The festival offers a host of workshops and talks for both adults and children (aged eight to twelve), as well as guided bushwalks, music and performances. For more information go to www.nsw.nationaltrust.org.au. For bookings, you should call (02) 4784 3832.

Sara Hardy and Edna Walling
The Melbourne writer Sara Hardy reviews for ABR for the first time this month. It’s appropriate that she should review a new edition of Edna Walling’s A Gardener’s Log, for Ms Hardy has just been awarded the inaugural Peter Blazey Fellowship (worth $5000) in order to complete a biography of Walling, one of Australia’s most influential landscape designers. This new fellowship, which honours the memory of the late author and gay activist, has been established by the Australian Centre at the University of Melbourne, and has been made available through donations from Peter Blazey’s brother Clive Blazey and his partner Tim Herbert. It will be offered annually.

You can say that again!
‘“Blockbuster” (this common designation itself should give us pause to think again) exhibitions do not in fact serve the art they expose. What is the reality of, say, viewing an exhibition in the company of nearly 5000 other people, or even half that number? One cannot look at, or study, or contemplate the exhibits in such a press. And is there any indication that a huge exhibition stimulates increased serious interest in an artist? In the “new religion” of art, have works of art become the new relics that need merely to be glimpsed in order to obtain an aesthetic indulgence? Museums are under political and financial pressure to prove their worth by numbers, and certainly need the income, but huge numbers driven up by hype are ultimately self-defeating.’

(From The Art Newspaper editorial, February 2004)
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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.

The puzzle of PhDs
Dear Editor,
It’s pretty clear that historians can’t win, especially if they have the audacity to use a doctoral thesis as the basis for a book. As I read Aviva Tuffield’s puzzling review (ABR, December 2003/January 2004) of Clare Wright’s Beyond the Ladies Lounge, and Wright’s understandably puzzled response (ABR, February 2004), I was reminded of a debate that occurred over several issues of ABR in 2002, which spawned plenty of silly generalisations about the quality of writing in PhD theses, but not much else.

What’s really at stake in what is obviously now a hardy perennial has little to do with PhD theses, and everything to do with whether there’s a place in Australian publishing for historical writing — or perhaps any non-fiction writing — that does more than tell an easily digestible tale. I have nothing against storytelling — it’s a rather important skill for an historian, to say the least — but it’s alarming that anything that seeks to move beyond anecdotage to argument and analysis is now considered fair game for reviewers. This can only lead to the impoverishment of public culture in Australia. Of course, when academic writers dare to raise such objections they are accused of élitism, of excusing their own incapacity to write engagingly, or of promoting the fallacy that serious writing can’t also be enjoyed by a ‘general reader’. In short, they can’t win. It’s easy to sympathise with Wright in her frustration, especially as it’s clear her book has, to some extent, crossed the magic barrier between a specialist and non-specialist audience.

Frank Bongiorno, Invergowrie, NSW

Australian–Malaysian connections
Dear Editor,
Readers of ABR, including librarians, may be interested in an unusual post-colonial novel, posthumously published, involving Australian–Malaysian connections: Lee Kok Liang’s London Does Not Belong to Me, edited by Syd Harrex (Flinders University) and Bernard Wilson (La Trobe), with an introduction by the writer–publisher K.S. Maniam (Maya Press, 2003). The novel, drawing on the author’s experience, is set in the London of the 1950s and centres around a Straits Chinese narrator from Malaya (as it was then), alienated on the fringes of society, along with his drifting friends, mainly expatriate Australians. It is thus a novel of the imperial metropolis and of ‘colonials’ abroad, observed from an unusual angle, and notable for its muted, penetrating study of social interaction and setting. In post-colonial terms, it offers an interesting contrast to the experience of Christopher Koch and other Australian writers living in the London of the time.

Lee Kok Liang (1927–92), a pioneer of Malaysian writing in English, and author of Mutes in the Sun and of Flowers in the Sky, studied at Melbourne University, where he began publishing short stories, and went on to study for the Bar in London. In 1954 he returned to Malaysia to practise law, then worked both as a barrister and politician, based in Penang.

Laurie Hergenhan, Brisbane, Qld
Satoshi Kinoshita (1959–)
Woman leaning against special gear: Hellfire eighth birthday party at Blackmarket, April 7, 2000
gelatin silver photograph; 35 x 25.5 cm
Pictures Collection, an24314470
National Library of Australia

Our cover this month is by the Japanese-born photographer Satoshi Kinoshita, who arrived in Sydney in 1986 with the expectation that Australia would be much the same as the United States. To his surprise and initial discomfort, he found that it was not, but the collision between expectation and reality allowed him to take photographs that he felt were ‘stripped of any bias or preconception’. His first major photographic project in Australia, exhibited in Tokyo in 1988 as AUST — A Night in Australia, focused on portraits of ‘night people’ in and around Kings Cross, especially those attending RATS (Recreational Arts Team) parties.

The following year Kinoshita published a book, AUST II, which revealed more of Sydney by day, documenting the city’s ‘social landscape’. In November 1989, images from both series were exhibited in A Day in Australia at the Kodak Gallery. In 1992 Kinoshita began taking portraits at the monthly parties held at Blackmarket near Sydney’s Central Station, and produced his wonderful Dragtrade series.

In 1993 the Hellfire Club — with a specifically fetishist orientation and specialising in sadomasochism, bondage and discipline practices — opened at the same venue. Already well-known as the ‘house photographer’ at Blackmarket, Kinoshita has been able to create a remarkable record of the S&M scene in Sydney. Our cover shows a woman wearing a leather bodysuit, cap and corset at a party held to celebrate the eighth anniversary of the Hellfire Club.
Contributors

Patricia Anderson is a Sydney art critic for The Australian. Her book Art in Australia: Debates, Dollars & Delusions will be published later this year.

Grant Bailey has a background in law, linguistics and literature. He works as an editor of educational books.

Judith Beveridge’s new book of poetry, Wolf Notes, is reviewed in this issue.

Neal Blewett was a member of the Hawke and Keating cabinets. He is the author of A Cabinet Diary (1999).

José Borghino is the Executive Director of the Australian Society of Authors.

Simon Caterson is a Melbourne-based writer.

William H. Coaldrake is Foundation Professor of Japanese at the University of Melbourne. He recently edited his family’s records on Japan during and after World War II, Japan from War to Peace: The Coaldrake Records 1939–1956, which will be reviewed in the next issue. In 2005 he will be Reischauer Visiting Professor of Japanese Studies at Harvard University.

Liz Conor is an ARC postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Melbourne and the author of The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s (forthcoming from Indiana University Press).

Dianne Dempsey lives in Bendigo and works as a reviewer.

Mary Eagle is a Canberra writer and critic. She has also reviewed John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque for the Sydney Morning Herald, focusing on Glover’s conformity.

Stephen Edgar’s most recent book of poetry is Lost in the Foreground (2003).

Katharine England is the chair of Adelaide Writers’ Week 2004.

Peter Goldsworthy’s most recent publication is Three Dog Night (2003).

Tom Griffiths is the author of Forests of Ash: An Environmental History (2001) and contributed to the ABC’s Black Friday website.

Sara Hardy was recently awarded the inaugural Peter Blazey Fellowship for life-writing. She is working on a biography of Edna Walling.

Joy Hooton is co-author of The Australian Companion to Australian Literature (1994).

David Hutchison lives in Fremantle and is a writer and historian.


Richard Johnstone is a Pro Vice Chancellor at the University of Technology, Sydney.


Paul Kane teaches at Vassar College in the US and has published two books of poetry.

Patrick McCaughey is a former Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, among other galleries, and author of The Bright Shapes and the True Names (2003).

Brian McFarlane is the editor of The Encyclopedia of British Film (2003). He is currently co-authoring a book on the British ‘B movie’.

Christopher Menz is Senior Curator, Decorative Arts (International) at the National Gallery of Victoria, and the author of several books, including William Morris & Co. (2002).

Günter Minnerup teaches at the University of New South Wales.

Stephen Muecke is Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney.

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

Dimity Reed has retired as Professor of Urban Design at RMIT to write and advise on architecture and urban design.


Sebastian Smee writes about art and is based in London.

Jason Smith is Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Victoria. His book Peter Booth: Human/Nature is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

Ruth Starke’s latest novel is NIPS Go National. She teaches creative writing at Flinders University and Adelaide TAFE.

Jennifer Strauss is an honorary senior research fellow in the English Department of Monash University. She has published critical books on Gwen Harwood and Judith Wright, and four collections of poetry, most recently Tierra del Fuego: New and Selected Poems (1997).

Daniel Thomas now lives in Tasmania but was once a Curator of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of NSW and the National Gallery of Australia, and then Director of the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Sarah Thomas is a freelance art historian and curator living in Melbourne. Until recently, she was Curator of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia.


Garry Walter, a Sydney psychiatrist, is Clinical Associate Professor at the University of Sydney and Director of Thomas Walker Hospital (‘Rivendell’), an adolescent psychiatric hospital. He is also Editor of Australasian Psychiatry.