



ADVANCES



THE CHOIR OF THE JUST

Peter Craven's review of the *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature* has generated much comment, some of it favourable, some not. Much of the latter was concentrated on the Internet, with the kind of reflexive, personality-driven, *bien-pensant* umbrage that often passes for literary discourse in the blogosphere. James Joyce's phrase 'the choir of the just' springs to mind. What comes through is a shrill note of intolerance, the implication that because certain people disagree with other people's views, the latter should not be aired. So much for liberal values.

Happily, this issue carries measured letters from Nicholas Jose, General Editor of the anthology, Ian Britain and Sylvia Martin. Peter Craven replies to the former letters.

We also discern a theme in this month's mailbag: a view held by some that *ABR* publishes reviews principally to excite controversy (or a 'stoush'). While *ABR* welcomes debate – surely a good thing in any robust culture – provocation is not our *raison d'être*. Each year we publish hundreds of writers. We choose them because of their expertise and the interest of the pairings. We are not mind-readers. We don't sit around speculating about how people will respond to particular books. Good reviewers such as Peter Craven surprise their editors; they don't parrot them or indulge their marketing dreams.

One further note: Professor Jose's article on the genesis of the anthology, first published in July–August 2009, now appears on our website, as does Peter Craven's review.

STEELE'S WORLD

Kathleen Steele is the winner of the 2009 *ABR* Reviewing Competition. Ms Steele reviewed Charles Siebert's

Roger's World: Toward a New Understanding of Animals. She wins \$1000, and her review appears on page 46.

Kathleen Steele, on learning of her win, commented: 'I am grateful to *ABR* for offering a competition that encourages critical review. As a regular reader, I have enjoyed the personal insight and incisive criticism from the diverse range of academics and authors who contribute to *ABR*, and feel honoured to have had my review chosen by a magazine where such quality abounds.'

This year we received more than 100 entries. Popular titles were David Malouf's *Ransom*, Christos Tsiolkas's *The Slap*, A.S. Byatt's *The Children's Book* and Tim Winton's *Breath*. No surprises there; but non-fiction was multifariously represented too.

John Clanchy was placed second for his review of *Ransom*. The third prize went to Evelyn Wallace-Carter for her review of Robin Headlam Wells's *Shakespeare's Politics: A Contextual Introduction*.

CLIVE OF KOGARAH

Not all new septuagenarians celebrate this milestone by publishing three books, but Clive James, who turns seventy on October 7, does nothing by thirds. *Opal Sunset* is a selection of his poems from 1958 to 2008. James, in *The Revolt of the Pendulum: Essays 2005–2008*, collects his recent literary journalism, the new volume in an indispensable series of critical writings. It is good to see his birthday tribute to *ABR*, which appeared in our 300th issue (April 2008). Finally, in November, Picador will publish his fifth volume of autobiography, *The Blaze of Obscurity*.

ABR has for many years welcomed the opportunity to publish poems by Clive James. Indeed, in his tribute to *ABR*, James described the magazine as

his 'most welcome landing strip' in Australia – 'it was my Edwards Air Force Base'. This month we have much pleasure in publishing 'Monja Blanca', first published in *The New Yorker* on 27 July 2009.

PUNCHING ABOVE ITS WEIGHT

Small presses, especially those issuing poetry, battle against the odds, so it's always worth noting their new publications. Punter & Wattmann now joins the ranks of major publishers of anthologies. This month Lyn McCredden reviews *Motherlode: Australian Women's Poetry 1986–2008*, edited by Jennifer Harrison and Kate Waterhouse. There is more to come this year. Michael Farrell and Jill Jones have just edited *Out of the Box*, an anthology of gay and lesbian poetry which includes poets such as Pam Brown, David Malouf and Dorothy Porter (whose posthumous collection, *The Bee Hut*, is reviewed by Gig Ryan in this issue). Then there is John Leonard's *Punter & Wattmann Anthology of Australian Poetry*. Both will appear on November 22, a nice present for St Cecilia.

GREAT CONTENDERS

Our cover boy and *Open Page* interviewee this month are both finalists in the 2009 Melbourne Prize for Literature, worth \$60,000. Gerald Murnane and Alex Miller join Barry Hill, Shane Maloney and Hannie Rayson in the running for this triannual award in recognition of a Victorian writer's published oeuvre.

The winner of this prize, as well that of the Best Writing Award 2009, will be announced on November 11. Last month's *Open Page* interviewee Nam Le's *The Boat*, and *ABR* contributor Lisa Gorton's *Press Release* are finalists in this category. For further information see page 14.