

January-February 2026 highlights

ABR marks the start of the long summer reading period with its annual double issue. Following on from our December Books of the Year feature, **eighteen of Australia's top arts critics nominate the most memorable performances of the year.** They write about films that 'tackle our sociopolitical moment head-on', operas 'pulsing with brilliance and intensity', and theatre productions that 'distilled an entire life into brilliant moments of clarity, poignancy, and insight'.

As the new year invites reflections and reckoning, we publish **powerful essays by five Jewish Australian writers** – Robert Manne, Ilana Snyder, Simon Tedeschi, Lee Kofman, and Dennis Altman – responding to the horrific events at Bondi Beach. These reflections will be published online as an open-access feature on the *ABR* website.



With the publication of this issue comes the announcement of the **shortlist for the 2026 Peter Porter Poetry Prize.** The field comprised 1,360 entries from thirty-two countries, the highest number in the prize's history. Ahead of the announcement of the winner in February 2026, we publish five remarkable poems by J Andros (United States), Kirsten Krauth (Vic.), Cheryl Leavy (QLD), Claire Potter (NSW), and Lisa Gluskin Stonestreet (United States).

Beejay Silcox turns a literary critic's eye to three books published on Australia's sensationalised 'Mushroom Murder' trial. Her verdict? 'It doesn't take much critical mettle to call the enterprise what it is: hasty, cynical, and vulturous. But the same could be said of much – some might say most – of the publishing industrial complex.'

In her Letter from America, ***ABR* Laureate and historian Sheila Fitzpatrick** provides a snapshot of life under the second Trump presidency. From Washington DC, with its federal government shutdown, to unsettled university campuses across the country, she surveys a deeply uneasy country. 'Shoes may still drop,' writes Fitzpatrick, 'and swords of Damocles remain poised.'

Former editor of *Meanjin*, **Esther Anatolitis**, reviews Yanis Varoufakis's memoir, *Raise Your Soul*. In today's culturally tumultuous times, Varoufakis's story of resistance must also be ours, she writes, 'because they're always watching – then one day, they'll write your name on "the list" and we'll never see you again.'

Biographer **Patrick Mullins** assesses the new Ita Buttrose memoir, the third installation in the scaffolding of her 'relentless curated and updated' brand. It is glossy and breathless, Mullins writes, but does it reveal anything fresh? '*Unapologetically Ita*, in this sense, is less a book than it is an ad.'

2025 ABR Rising Star Jonathan Ricketson reviews *How to End a Story*, the collected diaries of Helen Garner. Garner inspires him: with her deliberate, practiced skill of noticing, she reminds us that 'the textures of daily life are worth recording'.

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