

Ann Nugent (ed.)  
BLAST, NO. 7  
\$10 pb, 56 pp, 18324568

**B**last reinvented itself as a poetry-centric magazine in March 2005, and is now something akin to the Chicago-based *Poetry* – a lot of poetry, followed by critical writing about poetry – though *Blast* is shorter and Australian. Like *Poetry*, it is an upper-echelon affair, born from a philosophy of quality. The problem with the new *Blast*, for better or for worse, is that many of the same names keep coming up. Kevin Brophy, Jan Owen, Michael Sharkey and Leon Trainor have featured in four out of seven editions. Elizabeth Campbell, Bruce Dawe, Mike Ladd, Paul Magee, John Jenkins, Philip Salom, Petra White appear in three out of seven. The problem, you ask? They are all good poets!

This edition starts with three poems by Peter Steele. ‘Mending Gloves at Anglesea’ is a sombre but sanguine meditation on time and travel. It begins ‘Uphill from Demon’s Bluff and the long blue haul / to pack-ice’, but roams in the mind to North America, ‘that zone where anything goes that goes’, and then into history for examples of attire synonymous with identity, like ‘the jewelled bordered, macing flash / On the hilt of England’s sword / When Elizabeth came to town’ – the adornments that have ‘bodied us out’. The poem humbly returns to the repaired leather gloves, that ‘will proclaim / The amateur status of the wearer, / Ferric and stoney by name’.

Petra White’s ‘Spring’ also concerns fashion, but from the cynical perspective of *Cosmopolitan*-style advertisements that associate new clothes with happiness: ‘When gazing upon seas rich in dolphins, make a white / shirt pop with statement bangles.’

There are many insightful and stimulating poems, and a few quirky ones. For example, Thomas Shapcott’s ‘The Rat’ is a take on personal heritage that sees a rat as ‘an ancestor’ for moving the family in the Black Plague of 1347.

*Blast 7* is an engaging and polished anthology.

**Andrew Burns**

Steve Grimwade & Lisa Greenaway (eds)  
GOING DOWN SWINGING, NO. 26  
\$24.95 pb, 107 pp, 9780980405316

**A** journal with an ego, *Going Down Swinging* (*GDS*) is not afraid of blowing its own trumpet. There are two editorials: Steve Grimwade’s, written in the voice of his infant son, claims that *GDS* is the ‘finest literary journal on the planet’ – but this is cheeky enthusiasm, not arrogance. Lisa Greenaway’s editorial is best summed up thus: ‘we want the people who never pick up a literary magazine to pick up *GDS*’.

The writing is provocative, surprising, energetic, and the construction, physically and stylistically, is terrific. Instead of having separate sections for different genres (which can be fatiguing), a couple of poems are followed by a short story, a comic, a street artist profile, a couple more poems. It helps to break down the genres, which can be ambiguous anyway, and to focus on the creativity. The result is a quality book that will appeal to more than just other creative writers, though some of the contributions may prevent it from landing on more conservative coffee tables. The most disturbing is Jennifer Lee’s ‘Our Father’, a macabre tale of terrifying paternal abuse that goes in for Tarantino-type gratuity. If you don’t like this story, you may like the next, Jason Cotter’s ‘Good Day For It’, an elegantly written story about a country boy on the morning of his father’s funeral. Its deliberate slowness and careful unveiling of detail work to poignant effect.

An audio CD is included inside the cover with twenty-four tracks; the first track, Emilie Zoey Baker’s ‘Llegends’, about home-grown celebrities, is a hilarious start to a zany mix of slam-style, spoken-word poetry and more beat-driven spoken-word songs. Again, the quality is impressive

*GDS* is published once a year. In this instance, the advantages of extra production time and a concentrated budget are considerable. For a thirty-year old magazine, it feels surprisingly youthful.

**Andrew Burns**

Phillip Edmonds and Dominique Wilson (eds)  
WET INK, NO. 10  
\$14.95 pb, 65 pp, 1832682X

‘**S**cience fiction and fantasy’ is the cover theme of *Wet Ink*. Not all the contributions adhere to it. Michael Welding’s essay on utopias and dystopias is a good introduction to the theory surrounding literary projections of both idyllic and apocalyptic futures. He notes that, before white settlement, the antipodes was often the subject of fantasy, referring to Robert Paltock’s *The Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins* (1751), in which a mariner shipwrecked somewhere in the Australian and Antarctic region discovers that the inhabitants can fly. He also jokes that flying was regularly depicted in speculative fiction but that the banning of humour (at airports) is just another case of political realities outstripping the literary imagination.

Catherine Harris’s ‘Space’ is a sci-fi story set in an overly bureaucratic world obsessed with the bottom line. Jenny, the protagonist, lives in a commune called the Centre, where everyone has strict duties. When a batch of 2000 babies arrives, Jenny is made the ‘Interim Infant Flow Coordinator’. This half-real, half-manufactured world is eerie.

Coincidentally, one of the best realist stories also features babies. Chris Womersley’s ‘What the Darkness Said’ is a touching story of a small boy who loses a brother then tries to retrieve the status quo by replacing him. It is a convincing portrayal of childhood innocence in the face of family trauma.

There are two long interviews in *Wet Ink 10*. Petra Fromm interviews Sean Williams, who says his social phobias give him more time to write, and discusses the gulf between realist and non-realist fiction, lamenting the narrowness of the conventional definition of an Australian novel. Moya Costello interviews Tony Birch and Jen Webb about the role of the short story. *Wet Ink 10* is a good blend of theory and creative writing, with a healthy emphasis on the latter.

**Andrew Burns**