

Vale Glen Tomasetti

Glen Tomasetti (born in 1929) — author, poet and folksinger — died on June 25. Tomasetti's 1976 novel, *Thoroughly Decent People*, was the first book published by McPhee Gribble (the second was Helen Garner's *Monkey Grip*). Her novel *Man of Letters* was adapted for the ABC by Alma de Groen. Tomasetti continued to write poetry into her last months. Her uncompleted biography of Hepzibah Menuhin was almost twenty years in the making.

... and Clem Christesen

C.B. ('Clem') Christesen — founding Editor of *Meanjin* — died on June 28, aged ninety-two. Christesen established the journal in Brisbane at the end of 1940, and relocated it to Melbourne in 1945. Ever since, it has been based at the University of Melbourne. Bimonthly at first, it has been quarterly since 1943.

... and Oriel Gray

Oriel Gray, a pioneer and stalwart of Australian theatre, died on June 30, aged eighty-three. In 1955 Gray's *The Torrents* was voted the best play by the Playwrights' Advisory Board, sharing this award with Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. Gray also wrote for radio and television, and published a memoir, *Exit Left: Memoirs of a Scarlet Woman* (1985), and a novel, *The Animal Shop* (1990).

A Second Salt-lick

The second issue ('Winter 2003') of this bright new poetry quarterly looks every bit as impressive as the first, with poems by Thomas Shapcott, Anthony Lawrence, Jill Jones and Judith Beveridge (one of our two featured poets this month), among many others. Now all *Salt-lick* needs to do is to clear that notorious third-issue hurdle. Help it over by subscribing: 104 Rennie Street, East Coburg, or e-mail: saltlickquarterly@optusnet.com.au.

Good Works

Australian author-illustrator Bob Graham has won this year's Kate Greenaway Medal for his illustrations in the picture book *Jethro Bryde, Fairy Child*. This is the UK's leading award for illustrators. Laudably, Graham has donated his prize money (£5000) to groups assisting asylum seekers and refugees in Australia and the UK.

Off to Shep

Readers in northern Victoria and southern New South Wales will be interested in the 2003 Country Festival of Writing, which will be held at the Goulbourn-Ovens Institute of TAFE, Shepparton, from September 5 to 7. Presenters will include Morag Fraser, Michael McGirr and Aileen Kelly. Contact Pat or Bev Crudden on (03) 5821 8217 or write to PO Box 2155, Shepparton 3632.

National Australian Maritime Museum

Oceans of Stories: Illustrations from Australian Children's Books is a new exhibition assembled by the National Australian Maritime Museum and the Children's Book Council. The theme, *Oceans of Stories*, will apply to Children's Book Week in August this year. The exhibition, featuring more than 100 works by nineteen leading Australian children's book illustrators, runs until November 2.

My Life As a Celebrity Author

Andreas Gaile reviews Peter Carey's new novel on page 10. The author will discuss *My Life As a Fake* at the Seymour Centre on August 18, at 7 p.m. On August 25, at the same time, but this time at its bookshop, Gleebooks will also feature Annie Proulx, back in Australia to take part in the Melbourne Writers' Festival.

This issue has been produced at a time of some difficulty. I am indebted to Anne-Marie Thomas (working on her first issue as Assistant Editor) and Dianne Schallmeiner for all their support in recent weeks. Ed.

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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,

There is a terrible irony in the title of Raimond Gaita's La Trobe University Essay, 'Only As a Last Resort' (ABR, May 2003). His title should surely have been the phrase that guided the choice of accompanying stills. Gaita's admirable piece contained much to ponder and praise. The Reuters photograph (by Faleh Kheiber) of Ali Ismail Abbas diminished those reflections.

We will all retain images of the invasion of Iraq. There is the shot of a dead child, taken by Akram Saleh (also of Reuters), his or her face like porcelain, completely intact and apparently at peace, but the rest of the head and body bound together, as if to stop all the bits falling out. There is the blood appearing on a BBC cameraman's lens. The cruelty and catastrophe of war has become something we cannot avoid. We are assaulted by the images even when we try to avoid them. Susan Moeller describes us all as 'passive receivers of images', which is akin to blaming the victim. The images home in on us, no matter how much we duck and weave. They are wrapped around our newspapers, inserted into our television programmes and placed in the middle of Gaita's essay.

Ali Ismail Abbas was at home when a US rocket arrived and destroyed his house, his father, his pregnant mother and several other relatives. After the terrible explosion, Ali awoke, soaked in blood, his sheets on fire. *The Times* of London reported that Jon Lee Anderson, the *New Yorker* correspondent who saw him in hospital, was shown a photograph of Ali before his treatment, his body blackened, one of his hands 'a twisted, melted claw. The other arm had apparently been burned off at the elbow ... two long bones were sticking out of it.'

That is not the photograph of Ali that is used by so many now. We see him, in *Australian Book Review* and elsewhere, after the remains of his arms were amputated, his face somehow unscathed. In your caption, Ali was 'pulled from the rubble' by neighbours. In the Murdoch press, the *Australian*, the *Herald-Sun*, the *Courier-Mail* and even the *Daily Telegraph* have all claimed a part in his recovery. Several charities and other papers have claimed his image. London's *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Mirror* are reported to be using his face and torso to raise money for good causes.

What did you see when you chose the photograph of Ali Ismail Abbas? I see the random cruelty of war, the child who, in the words of his uncle, 'wants to be normal again' but can never be. I think of the words he has spoken, his anger at being repeatedly exposed to the stares of strangers.

I wonder if you felt free to use his photograph, as others have done, because he is twelve years old and because he is an Iraqi. After all, that is how he came to lose his arms, skin, parents, family and home. I wonder if anyone anywhere has thought to ask his permission to use him in this way. Perhaps we use his photograph rather than that of a wounded adult because we do not have to ask a child. Perhaps some of us believe that, after all he has lost, he will not miss his dignity and privacy.

I also reflect upon our sensitivities to photographs of 'our' soldiers, wounded or as prisoners. Perhaps that is why you chose the other shot, Frank Hurley's image of the morning after Passchendaele, our wounded viewed at a suitable, respectful distance.

Raimond Gaita wrote of the distinction between respect for human life and contempt for it, of crimes against humanity, and of 'the unalienable preciousness of every human being'. Your choice of photograph (I trust it was not Gaita's) diminished his reflections and demeaned us all.

Chris Goddard, Clayton, Vic.

ABR, as it always does, selected the images that accompanied our La Trobe University Essay, not our essayist. We did so mindful of the international controversy over the use of images of Ali Ismail Abbas, and conscious, we trust, of our moral responsibilities. No one here enjoyed reproducing that image, just as it would be impossible for anyone to look at that page without horror or unease. But certain images strike us as being so urgent, so shaming, so universal, that they select themselves. Graphic photographs of Ali Ismail Abbas will become as notorious and influential as the photographs of the little Jewish boy in a ghetto being led away, hands above his head, or a famished Biafran child being futilely weighed, or a frantic Vietnamese girl covered in napalm.

Whom do we, in Australia, really spare by suppressing such images? Shouldn't the jingoists and the warmongers see the results of their militancy? How convenient had they not been confronted with Ali Ismail Abbas's condition. Australia, after all, was part of the small self-appointed 'coalition of the willing' that bombed the very civilians it was supposedly trying to 'liberate'.

Many experts, Associate Professor Goddard included, have eloquently argued that society needs to face up to the consequences of child abuse. What is Ali Ismail Abbas's fate but another form of child abuse? Rockets, not cameras, maimed this boy, and others like him. Ed.

Teutonic inflexions

Dear Editor,

In his review of John Williams's *German Anzacs and the First World War* (*ABR*, June/July 2003), Martin Ball treats as a revelation the German ancestry of the Australian-born General Sir John Monash, who in the war of 1914–18 ultimately led the five Australian divisions.

Ball tells us that Monash was a German Jew born in Australia to parents who had emigrated from Silesia, that he spoke German as his first language and that he later had coaching to rid his accented English of its 'Teutonic inflexions'. In Ball's account, Monash's German background is 'rarely mentioned'. Indeed, we are told that there is a sidestepping of the 'irony of Australia's greatest commander being racially German'. Where there is an acknowledgment of Monash's 'difference', it is usually 'erroneously' in the assertion that he was 'of Polish origin'. The more frequent identification of Monash as a Jew 'serves to displace any other foreign suspicions'. Ball suggests that, in his telling of the Monash story, Williams has played a 'trump card'.

But is the card played by Williams in fact an ace, and is there a collective Australian amnesia about the truth of Monash's ancestry? As long ago as 1982, Geoffrey Serle published his substantial and widely read and praised biography of Monash. As recently as this present year, that biography has been reissued by Melbourne University Press in an accessible and attractive paperback edition. In what must stand for the present as the 'definitive' account of a remarkable Australian life, Serle provides in considerable detail the story of Monash's family background.

In this account, there is no 'sidestepping' of the essential fact of Monash's 'racial' identity, nor is there any 'error' in making a link between the Monash family and present-day Poland, whose national borders have ebbed and flowed historically. The home of the paternal Monash ancestors was Krotoschin in the Posen province of Prussia — Krotoszyn and Poznan, respectively, in modern Poland. In November 1863 Louis Monash, by then naturalised in Australia in the presence of Sir Redmond Barry, married Bertha Manasse in the Prussian town of Stettin. The couple made their journey to Australia early the following year. Their son, the future Australian general, was born at West Melbourne in June 1865.

In the Serle account, twenty-three pages are devoted to the question of Monash's German background, which certainly contributed much to Monash's formation and to his identity. But while the Monash parents encouraged their children to speak and to write in German, they spoke good English and used it with the children. Bertha, especially, read to her favourite son in the English language. Serle notes that this dominant parent had fully accepted the consequences of migration: she mastered the English language; she mixed readily with Australian friends; and she made sure that her son would grow up as an Australian in the prevailing British cultural context.

Within all of this, Monash never entirely lost the sense of himself as 'a double outsider'. It perhaps explains the compensation he sought in recognition and high honours. That same consciousness was possibly enhanced by the whispering campaign mounted against him at the beginning of the war, when his German origins were seen by some as a disqualification for his commission. Even so, Monash was puzzled that people could doubt or even openly question that a native-born Australian such as himself could fail to do his utmost for his country in the crisis of war. And it is surely important to note that, in the highest official circles, Monash's origins were fully understood and accepted: no doubts were cast on his fundamental loyalties to his own country or to the larger British Empire. As the Australian Defence Minister (Sir George Pearce) of the day later noted, if he had listened to gossip and slander as he was urged to do, 'Monash would never have gone to the War'.

It is both a pity and a surprise that, with Serle's judicious and fair-minded biography so long in Australian circulation — and now again in print — Martin Ball should have so comprehensively discounted its existence as to assume wide ignorance of essential and readily acknowledged facts.

John Thompson, Curtin, ACT

Mixing with Miko

Dear Editor,

I read Michael Brennan's review (*ABR*, June/July 2003) of John Jenkins's verse novella, *A Break in the Weather*, with some surprise at its humourless stridency. While recognising Jenkins's considerable skill as a poet, the reviewer then criticises the writing of Japanese Miko, whom he confusedly describes as 'Asian' and a 'character'.

Apparently, he is not convinced of her veracity, and does not like the talk about body difference. What? Spare us the ill-conceived, censorious demand that writers create 'authentic' identity in literature — forget postmodernism — which carries the implicit imperative that fictional identity correspond with the writer's own ethnicity or, for that matter, gender. I really like Miko because she is depicted as a spirited, independent woman physicist with eclectic talents and tastes that range from mathematics to comics. (For a discussion of non-Japanese manga artists, see Sharon Kinsella's *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society*, 2000.) An absence of positive racial and gender representations is political. The international romance between scientists Bruce and Miko, however, seems to have a metacultural purpose as a positive rejoinder to the Australian government's refusal to accept the Kyoto protocol. I was intellectually engaged and, crucially, entertained by the events and narrative of Jenkins's verse novella, and it was refreshingly satisfying to read because of its wide-ranging environmental politics. Perhaps I am the type of feminist reader Jenkins hopes to reach, one who prefers serious dilemmas and big concepts, but only when they are delivered with wit and a strong sense of fun.

Peta Tait, Northcote, Vic.

Young Fogey

Dear Editor,

Having just enjoyed *A Break in the Weather*, John Jenkins's recent verse novel, I was disappointed to see the disapproving review by Michael Brennan in the June/July issue of *ABR*. Brennan initially puts Jenkins in good company — Dorothy Porter, John Tranter and Les Murray — but then goes on to dismiss the entire form as 'prosy poesy'. Judging by the tone of the rest of Brennan's article, this may just be an example of 'narrative envy' from (I assume) a predominantly lyric poet.

Thereafter, the reviewer turns witch-hunter, and seems to be on a search for something damning. He finds it in the character of Miko, who falls in love with Jenkins's main character, the weather scientist Bruce. Brennan dubs Miko a mere 'love interest', reducing her importance in connection with arguments around the Kyoto protocol on global warming, a central theme of the book. Brennan then says that Miko's presence as a 'Manga-like animée is worryingly convincing'. Here, he misses the point. The poem makes clear that Miko, who likes to dress fashionably and enjoys pop culture, is consciously wearing a manga-style 'Adventure Girl' outfit purely for her own pleasure and amusement.

Miko is never presented as a dummy or gratuitous 'love interest'. Quite the opposite. We learn that she is a mathematician; and, while visiting the Blue Mountains, she recounts the myth of the Three Sisters, giving the ancient myth an intelligent, postmodern spin. Finally, she is the one who drives the car, and rescues Bruce from a blazing bushfire. So she's also resourceful, as well as clever and very modern: a model feminist hero.

Brennan really goes awry when he says of Miko that 'the presentation of (her) character as just so much Asian exotica is at times not simply problematic but offensive'. Brennan reviles the erotic interlude in the book where Miko, prior to making love with Bruce, looks (*from above!*) down at her sleeping lover, and finds 'the round eyes of her Western man'

very sexy. Bruce then opens his eyes, and looks up at Miko's face, and he thinks her eyes are beautiful and sexy, too. What is so 'offensive' about this?

Perhaps what Brennan really finds distasteful here is to assume, for a brief moment, the female (Miko's) point of view, and to discover a man's face can truly be erotic and desirable.

If Brennan has read the copious notes in *A Break in the Weather*, he would see that this entire 'offensive' bedroom scene is playful bricolage, based on Roland Barthes's 1970 essay 'The Eyelid'.

Jenkins simply points out that Japanese and Western eyes are actually different, and may be a source of attraction between two cross-cultural lovers, rather than the *opposite*. And was Barthes being 'offensive'? I think not. This conclusion is itself extremely 'offensive' and damaging, and the result of a prim, knee-jerk and mis-targeted political correctness, rather than any real appreciation of this fine book.

Liezl Shnookal, St Andrews, Vic.

Cutting the mustard

Dear Editor,

As one of the nine poets whose work appears in *Meanjin* Issue 1, 2003 ('Read Their Lips'), I write in protest at the manner in which this journal has been reviewed by Nicola Walker in the June/July issue of *ABR*. Her statement 'Of the nine poems here, only two cut any sort of mustard' is both clichéd and lacking in essential detail, considering that she fails to mention either titles or authors. She then quotes a few lines from one of the 'unworthy' poems, in support of her argument that they contain 'little notion of rhyme, metre or substance'. Yes, a reviewer is entitled to an opinion, but surely it would have been better to cite an example of what she considers as good poetry, rather than take such a negative stance. In this case, the reviewer seems lacking in both courage and good grace.

Kevin Gillam, West Leederville, WA

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Our front cover this month shows Frank Hurley's photograph of Eric Webb, one of the members of Douglas Mawson's 1911-13 Australasian Antarctic Expedition, leaning into a 100 mile per hour wind while collecting ice for cooking purposes. Webb, like Hurley, landed with Mawson's main party at Cape Denison in Commonwealth Bay, Adelie Land, in January 1912.

Hurley's appointment as the expedition's official photographer was not an obvious choice. His photographic work had been largely restricted to the postcard industry, and he had no experience as a cinematographer. However, his physical strength, adventurousness and lack of fear more than compensated for his inexperience. Mawson would later write of Hurley: 'His enthusiasm and resourcefulness knew no bounds.' On his return to Sydney in early 1913, Hurley edited his film *Home of the Blizzard*, which was shown to huge crowds. The money raised from the screenings was sufficient for a return trip to Antarctica that November to collect Mawson and the six others who had remained behind with him.

Frank Hurley made six expeditions to Antarctica between 1911 and 1931, spending a total of four years there. In addition to the negatives, lantern slides, vintage prints and exhibition prints of his time in Antarctica, the National Library holds Hurley's images as an official photographer during both world wars, his photographs of his later travels to the Middle East and Egypt, to Papua and New Guinea, and his extensive documentation of Australian scenery, industries, social life and customs. Totalling nearly 12,000 images, Hurley's collection can now be viewed on the National Library's Pictures Catalogue.



Frank Hurley (1885-1962)

Leaning on the wind. ca1912

gelatin silver photograph; 25.3 x 33.4 cm, printed ca 1961

Pictures Collection, an24573807

National Library of Australia

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Neal Blewett, a former politician and diplomat, is the author of *A Cabinet Diary* (1999).

Marion J. Campbell teaches Elizabethan and Jacobean literature in the Department of English at the University of Melbourne.

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Bridget Griffen-Foley's most recent book, *Party Games: Australian Politicians and the Media From War to Dismissal*, will be reviewed in the next issue.

Warwick Hadfield presents *The Sports Factor* on Radio National.

Christina Hill is a Melbourne reviewer and a former lecturer in literature at Deakin University.

Patrick McCaughey's memoir, *The Bright Shapes and the True Names*, will be published by Text in September 2003. An extract appeared in our March issue.

Michael McGirr is the fiction editor of *Meanjin*.

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