

ASAA NEWSLETTER

ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AUSTRALASIA IN ASIA

Les Murray in Delhi

Noted Australian poet Les Murray visited India in January 2006. In New Delhi, Murray read his poems at the India International Centre to a large gathering of intellectuals, academics and research scholars. Eminent Indian poet Keki Daruwalla presided over the program and talked at length on the qualities of Murray's poetry.

Asialink Authors in New Delhi

As part of the Asialink Literature Touring Program India 2006, two well-known Australian writers Larissa Behrendt and Isobelle Carmody visited India early this year. The School of Language, Literature and Cultural Studies, J.N.U., New Delhi, organized a 'Meet the Authors' programme on January 25, 2006. The Australian High Commissioner Mr. John McCarthy launched the popular programme "AusArts: Celebrating Australian Art and Culture 2006-2007" and on this occasion organized a conversation-cum-dinner for the two Australian authors who were introduced and interviewed by Ashok Vajpeyi, noted poet and critic. This was attended by a large number of academics, scholars and Australianists from various universities in Delhi. **Larissa Behrendt** is Professor of Law and Indigenous Studies and Director of the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). A graduate of Harvard Law School, she is a practising lawyer and lecturer who has worked with the United Nations. *Home*, her first novel, was awarded the 2005 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, Best First Book, South East Asia and South Pacific. **Isobelle Carmody** began the first of her highly acclaimed *Obernewtyn Chronicles* while she was still at High School, and worked on it while completing tertiary education. The series, and her short stories, have established her at the forefront of fantasy writing in Australia. *The Gathering* was a joint winner of the 1993 CBC Book of the Year Award and the 1994 Children's Literature Peace Prize, and *Billy Thun-*

der and the Night Gate was shortlisted for the Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature in the 2001 NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

Christine Williams in India

Christine Williams, an eminent scholar and creative writer, visited New Delhi on 11-18 June 2006. On 15 June, she interacted with Indian scholars and read from her works to the students and faculty members at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Participants included S.K. Sareen, G.J.V. Prasad, D. Gopal, Suman Bala and R.K. Dhawan.

Christine has obtained her doctorate in Creative Writing from the University of Technology, Sydney, and has taught at several universities in Australia. She currently teaches at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. She has published four books of biography, including one on the distinguished Australian writers Christina Stead. She has close ties with India. Her biography on noted philosopher J. Krishnamurti has been well received in literary circles. R.K. Dhawan (University of Delhi) has reviewed this book in the latest issue of the biannual literary journal *The Commonwealth Review*. Christine was accompanied by her daughter Jasmine who evinced keen interest in Indian life and culture. We hope they would visit India as often as possible.

FIJI: Satendra Nandan

Satendra Nandan has taken up position as Foundation Professor of Humanities at the University of Fiji. Fiji—as those who know Satendra, his life and his work—was his birthplace and original, much-loved homeland. His personal diaspora has taken him on many journeys primarily between India, Fiji and Australia. We are currently discussing the prospects of holding the next ASAA conference in Fiji—but these possibilities are still very much in their embryonic phase. (ASAA members are welcome to e-mail their responses and suggestions to this idea to any member of the Executive Commit-

tee.) Satendra will now be the Vice-President, ASAA, Fiji.

Hong Kong: Bill Ashcroft

Bill Ashcroft continues his excellent work putting Australian scholarship and theoretical expertise on the map internationally. He has taken up a Professorship (for three years) at the University of Hong Kong. He will return to Australia at least once annually and is still contactable on his UNSW e-mail address as well as his Hong Kong address. Hopefully Bill's stay in Hong Kong will also see a fillip given to Australian Studies there. He has been a great supporter of ASAA conferences, at each of which he has made a valuable presentation, each of which has been published in each of the three ASAA publications to date. Another friend to Australia is Dr. Agnes Lam (The English Centre, University of Hong Kong). Agnes is also a talented poet and creative writer and her work is well known to Australians.

Dr. Andrew Hassam in India

In January, Dr. Andrew Hassam travelled to India and attended the conference of the Indian Association for the Study of Australia in Pune. He also presented a paper in Kolkata, at a conference organised jointly by Monash and Calcutta universities. At Burdwan University, as guest of the Australian Studies Centre, Dr. Hassam met Vice Chancellor Professor Amit Kumar Mallick and gave the keynote address at an international seminar.

AIC-IGNOU Collaborations

In recent years Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has made good progress in the area of Australian Studies. Australia-India Council (AIC) and IGNOU have been collaborating on the development of new courses to offer to undergraduate and postgraduate students. The financial support amounting to about Rs. twelve lakhs has been provided to IGNOU since 1999. According to Professor D. Gopal, the University has developed a course on Australian Politics for undergraduate students. Further, two courses on State and Society in Australia and Australia's Foreign Policy are being developed for the M.A. (Political Science).

Indian Contributions to Australian Studies

The UGC SAP-Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Language, Literature and Culture Stud-

ies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, organized an international seminar on "Indian Contributions to Australian Studies" on 16 and 17 January 2006. The seminar evaluated many of the themes related to cross-cultural ties and relations between the two countries, more specifically highlighting Indian contributions to Australian Studies.

Research on Australian Studies

A number of Indian scholars have opted for research in Australian Studies at various universities. In literature, most popular areas of study are: Patrick White, Peter Carey, Aboriginal Studies, Multiculturalism and Diaspora. Dr. Suman Bala (University of Delhi) has recently been appointed Supervisor by Madurai Kamaraj University to guide a research project on Sally Morgan's *My Place*. The candidate will work on this best-known autobiography and compare it with some others in the same genre.

Australian Literature:

Identity, Representation and Belonging

Seva-Bharati Mahavidyalaya (Vidyasagar University) Kargari, Midnapore, W.B., hosted a two-day National Seminar on "Australian Literature: Identity, Representation and Belonging," on Feb. 21-22, 2006. The seminar covered areas like: a) Nation and Literature; b) Diasporic writing; c) Aboriginal studies; and d) Australian films.

Globalisation and Postcolonial Writing:

An Australia-India Exchange

The Department of English, Calcutta University, and the Centre for Postcolonial Writing, Monash University, Melbourne, jointly organized an international conference on "Globalisation and Postcolonial Writing: An Australia-India Exchange" in Calcutta from 6 to 8 February 2006.

PROFILE: DAVID MYERS

Prof. David Myers (Univ. of Central Qnsld.) has consistently shown great interest in promoting India-Australia connections. He has visited India a number of times and delivered lectures at various universities. In October 2005, he delivered the Keynote Address at XI International Conference of Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies. He is the author of the short story collections, *Storms in a Japanese Teacup* and *Cornucopia County*, and of the fictional memoir, *The Bohemian Bourgeois*. He

is a former dean of the arts faculty and currently publisher and founding director of Central Queensland University Press. His many academic books include such titles as *The Peacocks and the Bourgeoisie*, *Bleeding Battlers from Ironbark*, *The Great Literacy Debate*, *A Revolution in the Humanities*, *Japanese Society Today* and *Today's Japan*. His most recent book is:

Glorious Gods and Swaggering Heroes: Swashbuckling Tales from the Greek Myths

Central Queensland University Press RRP \$29.95

This is a book about the Classical Greek Outback three thousand years ago. The myths are the greatest fantasy stories.. They are retold here with humour and suspense and a down-to-earth style. David Myers' *Glorious Gods and Swaggering Heroes* is a splendid addition to the library of retellings and reinterpretations of classical mythology. Mythology has always been an important matter of interpretation. The characters are there in all their divinity. The narratives are there in all their action. But how the characters are assessed and how the narrative is shaped is a matter for every individual narrator. Myth, like religion and history and politics, is always subject to the spin that the poet, politician, priest, novelist, historian or moviemaker chooses to give it. That is why the myths continue to survive. They are protean, regenerative and inextinguishable.

Michael Wilding's Comments: David Myers' latest work is unmistakably in the tradition of reinvention and reinvigoration. And they partake of the deft gift for comedy he has demonstrated in his earlier *Storms in a Japanese Teacup* and *The Bohemian Bourgeois*. There is nothing stuffy or solemn here, none of the pedantry of the lecture hall or the earnestness of the book club. Instead, there is the genial merriment of P.G. Wodehouse. It is all one glorious romp. But it is a romp informed with a knowledge both wide and deep of literary tradition and cultural archetype. It is never merely frivolous or facetious.

There have been some great Australian classicists like Gilbert Murray and some great interpreters of the classical spirit like Norman Lindsay with his satyrs and nymphs in endless erotic play. Myers belongs with this tradition.

A Tale of Two Cities: Melbourne, New Delhi

A reception-cum-exhibition was hosted by Australian High Commissioner Mr. John McCarthy in the

third week of May 2006 at New Delhi. The exhibition showcased photographs of Australia taken by Gagan Narang, the 22-year-old, 10-metre air rifle shooting champion who won four gold medals for India at the recently-concluded Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. The photographs will be published in a forthcoming book, *A Commonwealth Journey: From Melbourne to New Delhi*, to be authored by Gagan and Sports Consultant Sunil Kalra. On this occasion, the Australian High Commissioner assured the Indian Govt. of full cooperation and assistance in organizing the next Commonwealth Games, to be held in New Delhi in 2010.

CQU Sydney hosts triple book launch

The New South Wales Attorney-General and Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Bob Debus launched two CQU Press books at the CQU-Sydney Graduate School on 11 May 2006. The titles launched were Michael Wilding's *Wild Amazement* and Wilding & Myers' (ed.) *Travellers' Tales*. The Wilding book is a fictional memoir of Sydney in the early 1970s. The Minister recalled his and Michael's bohemian days at Sydney University and in Glebe. He also compared the ambivalences of a politician's and a writer's relations with the media on good days and bad. Vice-Chancellor Professor John Rickard thanked the Minister for the praise he extended to CQU for keeping its CQU Press as a going concern and for performing such a valuable public and community service, especially to the people of the bush.

Former Justice of the NSW Supreme Court, the Hon. Roddy Meagher then launched Professor David Myers' *Glorious Gods and Swaggering Heroes*. He said the author seemed to be something of an expert on the Olympian gods' sex lives and that this should considerably enliven the staid NSW educational curriculum.

Univ. of Technology, Sydney, & IIT, Kharagpur

Professor Stephen Muecke of Trans/forming Cultures, University of Technology, Sydney, visited the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, on 10 February 2006 and gave a talk on "Is an Experimental Humanities Possible?" This was followed by a visit by Profesoor Heather Goodall, History and Social Inquiry, University of Technology at Sydney, and a talk on "Challenging Urban Green Myths: Recognizing the Cultural, Gendered

and Social Dimensions of Urban Environmental Stakeholder Conflicts" on 10 March 2006. Both talks were well attended and were followed by stimulating discussions.

Silver Jubilee Publication

The Australian Studies Centre, the University of Queensland, has published the 25th Anniversary Collection, edited by David Carter and Martin Crotty. Explaining the purpose of the volume, the editors state in the Introduction: "This volume of essays has been assembled to recognize and celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Australian Studies Centre (ASC) at the University of Queensland." The volume comprises essays by past and present members of the ASC on

major debates in Australian Studies. The book starts with a series of essays that consider the question of Australian Studies' location within or alongside other disciplinary and inter-disciplinary fields. The next series of essays represent the strengths of Australian Studies at the University of Queensland in the fields of colonial history, gender history, and class and race relations. In all, the essays express some of the key debates, theories and shifts in approach which have shaped the field that time. The volume makes a rich contribution to the growing field of inter-disciplinary Australian Studies. Thanks to David Carter, Director of the Centre at Brisbane, who has made the book available to Indian scholars interested in Australian Studies.

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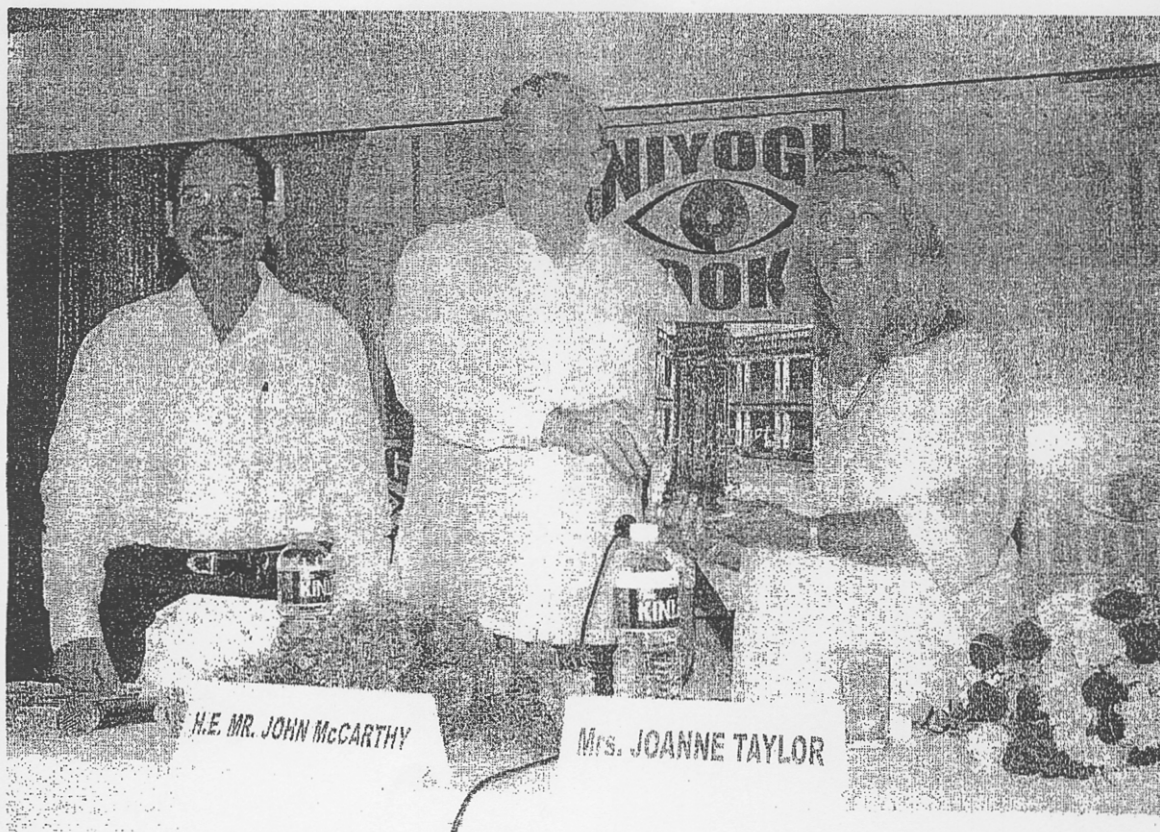
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H.E. Mr. John McCarthy releasing Joanne Taylor's *The Forgotten Palaces of Calcutta*

The Forgotten Palaces of Calcutta

A book of great socio-historic interest *The Forgotten Palaces of Calcutta* was launched by H.E. John McCarthy, Australian High Commissioner to India, at India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, on May 31, 2006. The Sydney-based author of the book Ms. Joanne Taylor was present at the launch. H.E. Mr. McCarthy, spoke of the linkages between Calcutta and Australia, and commended the author's efforts in commemorating Calcutta's architectural heritage. Joanne Taylor spoke of her frequent visits to India and her research into the old palaces of the former kings which had been hubs of the cultural life of the Bengalis. Australian photographer Taylor whose work is included in the book, also researched the past grandeur of Kolkata. Taylor says that the most important thing about India is its culture: "Every village, every city is different. The streets of Kolkata are incredible. It's like a live museum, and everything is like a photograph. I really feel privileged to have explored India in a way not many could do."

THANKS TO THE AIC

ASAA wishes to express its appreciation to the Australia-India Council for purchasing a number of copies of its latest publication *Diaspora: The Australasian Experience* for distribution to Indian Universities interested in the promotion of Australian Studies in India. The volume is a substantial collection of articles on the theme of diaspora in the Australasian context. It should contribute to enhancing the resources being built up by Indian Universities in the area of Australian studies. Thanks to Ms Carol Robertson, Director of the Australia-India Council and Ms Asha Das of the Australian High Commission in India for their continuing interest and support.

**Singapore Conference:
Literatures in Englishes and Their Centres: Perceiving from the Inside
National University of Singapore, 7-10 Dec. 2005**

Convened by Professor Edwin Thumboo, this conference brought together a distinguished group of creative writers and scholars from the Asia-Pacific region over a three-day period. The Papers explored the widespread uses of English over the last thirty years in various parts of Asia and its function as a medium of literary composition and bridge between a variety of different cultures. The particular challenge the conference addressed (to quote from Professor Thumboo's introductory message) was the need to develop a specific theory and mode of criticism that would permit "seeing these literatures steadily and seeing them whole."

Participants addressed the set themes with enthusiasm, energy and occasional brilliance. Professor Wimal Dissanayake's scintillating address covered a range of theoretical approaches to literature drawn from both Eastern and Western traditions in what can only be described as a virtuoso performance. Discussions of Edwin Thumboo's own literary works provoked interesting exchanges which diplomatically just stopped short of confrontation. Meira Chand, distinguished novelist of Indian-Swiss parentage, now living in Singapore, spoke of the pains of literary composition with an eloquence which held her audience entranced. Agnes Lam's sensitive discussion of her own techniques in writing also had its own individual appeal. Distinguished Filipino writer Francisco Jose's readings had an unflinching verve and vitality. Wong Phui Nam from Malaysia, Shirley Lua and Christina Hidalgo from the Phillipines completed the list of creative and academic talents from Asia. Singapore's own veteran writer on Eurasian themes and subjects, Rex Shelley, must not be forgotten. An excellent balance was preserved between the presentations of creative writers and academics though some of the contributors actually wore the two hats. Thiru Kandiah represented Sri Lanka, though he has also belonged in the past to the English Department of NUS. Santosh Sareen and C.N. Srinath were the Indian participants. Among the participants from Europe were Professor Wolfgang Zachs and Dieter Riemenschneider; from Canada there was Julie Mehta and from New Zealand Paul Miller. From the US there was Carlotta Abrams and Adeline Koh. The Australian contingent included Dennis Haskell (UWA), Bruce Bennett (ADFA), Harry Aveling (La Trobe), Robert Imre (Notre Dame), Cynthia vanden Driesen (ECU), Peter Kuch (UNSW) and creative writers, Sunil Govinnage and Ernest MacIntyre.

The latest ASAA publication *Diaspora: The Australasian Experience*, eds. Cynthia vanden Driesen and Ralph Crane (New Delhi: Prestige, 2005) was also launched at this conference. The book, comprising papers on various aspects of diaspora in Australia, received a wide acclaim from the participants.

As is now coming to be expected of a conference organized in Asia—the lavishness of meals and refreshments had participants lingering perhaps longer than they should have, away from the academic rigours of the Paper presentations—but all of it contributed to the convivial gathering of many friends from Asia, Australia and Europe, many of whom have known each other and Edwin Thumboo over a long period of time. The conference was in itself a tribute to Professor Thumboo and the fact that it concluded with a magnificent banquet at which official tributes were paid to him by the University as well as government dignitaries made it an altogether memorable occasion.

Some indispensable titles

New Directions in Australasian Studies, ed. Cynthia vanden Driesen and Adrian Mitchell, A\$ 30 plus A\$ 10 for air postage

Australasian Encounters: From Literature to Women's Studies to Politics and Tourism, ed. Cynthia vanden Driesen and Satendra Nandan, A\$ 30 plus A\$ 10 for air postage.

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