
ASAA NEWSLETTER

Association for the Study of Australasia in Asia

Website: www.asaa.net.au



Association for the Study of
Australasia in Asia

Visit of Australian Vice-Consul Chennai to Osmania University

Mr. Andrew Collister, Australian Vice -Consul Chennai visited Osmania University Hyderabad on 3rd September 2021. He was entertained on the occasion by Professor C Muralikrishna and several members of the Staff and students of the English Department of the University. Regrettably, the Vice Chancellor was unable to attend as he was away from the University and a meeting could not be fitted into the very narrow time frame Mr. Collister was obliged to adhere to as he was leaving India on the same date. Osmania University remains indebted to Mr. Collier for the generous grant of Australian books to Osmania University (made earlier and currently held in the office of Professor Muralikrishna till appropriate provision for them can be made at the planned Centre for Australian Studies to be formally established at Osmania University in the near future.



Signing MOU Between UWA and OU

The University of Western Australia and Osmania University have formally signed a Memorandum of Understanding. In July 2022 Professor C. Muralikrishna, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, OU, guided the document through the final stages of its passage through the relevant administrative processes at OU.

The long-drawn out odyssey dates back to 2019 and the attendance of Associate Professor Kieran Dolin at the Hyderabad Literary Festival. Australia had been selected as the Guest Nation for the first time by Prof. Vijay Kumar, who was simultaneously President (Asia) of ASAA and a Director of the Festival. Kieran, who was also Vice-President of ASAA, took the opportunity to initiate—with the help of Professor Parimala Kulkarni (OU)

and also Vice President (Asia) of ASAA – a visit to Osmania University. The discussions with Professor C. Muralikrishna and Professor YL Srinivas which ensued have now found fruition in the signing of an MOU between the English Departments of OU and UWA. At UWA, Kieran Dolin was supported by departmental colleagues, Professor Tony Hughes D’Aeth and Professor Tanya Dalziell, and also Dr Cynthia vanden Driesen, at the time a Research Fellow at UWA. These persons together put in the hard yards necessary to achieve this first major international initiative in India on the part of the English Department. Professor Anu Rammohan who has responsibilities for promoting international projects in India at UWA, and Raymond da Silva Rosa, Professor of the Business School and Chair of the University’s Academic Board, provided valued encouragement and moral support for this new project.

A joint Lecture Series which was subsequently organised and successfully carried out between the two groups in a difficult year of Covid problems, was testimony to the enthusiasm and goodwill which prevailed.

Prof. Muralikrishna plans a book publication of the Lectures, which should serve as a useful base for introductory studies of Australian and Indian English Literature by future students. Kieran Dolin will co-edit the publication with Prof. Muralikrishna. [See ASAA Newsletter 2021 for more background information re the above: www.asaa.net.au]

Association For the Study of Australian Literature Conference 2022

In the first week of July, the Association for the Study of Australian Literature held its annual conference in Hobart. The conference theme, ‘Coming to Terms, 30 Years On: The Mabo Legacy in Australian Writing,’ derived from the famous legal case of *Mabo v. Queensland*, which acknowledged ‘native title’ as part of Australian law for the first time. *Mabo* laid the foundations for a new, postcolonial vision of Australia by overthrowing the legal principle that Australia was a land belonging to nobody, a *terra nullius*, at the time of British colonisation. But to what extent had that vision come into being? Could a legal decision influence the broader culture, especially literature?

As befitted its focus, the conference keynote addresses were all delivered by First Nations scholars and artists, among them Gail Mabo, the daughter of Eddie Koiki Mabo, the driving force behind the original case, who spoke about his belief in ‘the power of the word.’ Associate Professor Jeanine Leane (University of Melbourne), a former ASAA Australia President, delivered the first keynote, ‘Unwinding Australia: the Politics of Evasion post-Mabo.’ Professor Alice Te Punga Somerville (University of British Columbia) challenged the ASAL audience to broaden their focus with ‘Reading as Cousins: Indigenous Texts, Pacific Bookshelves.’ Dr Evelyn Araluen (editor of *Overland* magazine) spoke on ‘They Haunt-Walk In: Settler

Fantasies of Reconciliation and Aboriginal Refusal.'

This was an international event with speakers from India, Pakistan, China, France, Norway, Germany, the UK, Canada and Hungary as well as Australia. Though primarily focused on literature, the interdisciplinary nature of the theme saw speakers with backgrounds or interests in law, history, medicine, politics, creative writing, visual arts, performance, film and television, and teaching as well as literary studies. Panels were organised on such topics as climate change; Australian history; First Nations sovereignty; poetry, especially Aboriginal poetry; popular fiction; law, performance and place; contemporary approaches to teaching Australian literature; time and space in pre- and post-Mabo Australia; and relations between law and literature.

Wide-ranging and intellectually enriching, the conference was also very timely, given the Australian government's intention to hold a national referendum on establishing an indigenous Voice to Parliament as called for in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.



Kieran Dolin

University of Western Australia

Six Siege Sonnets

I

Just Rage?

What is rage? I would say it is often red...blood-red in fact, like strewn corpses left among ruins of Ukraine cities, near bereft of happiness. Smashed wood is mere coffin fodder in Bucha or Kiviv. Tears bitter as aloe or gall weep this sacrilege. Against such horror we should grimly pledge to exclude from our race such drear litter, monsters seeking to claim sovereign Ukraine. This spawn dishonours the earth whilst teeming over farmlands, forests and towns. The stain of blood-letting their signature, seeming to blight all they cruelly seek to bequeath. And defile virtue with their deathly wreath.

II

Ploughshare Re-make

To tend fields takes new tempo when spring comes to frozen soil warmed in northlands. People turn to ploughshares and stored seed. In each steeple of village churches Easter bells ring. Drums, however, beat their war lust. Dismay shrouds besieged cities now waiting attack. For envy has brought an enemy, alack;

now over field and farmland the dread
grey
shapes of war tanks begin a mass
advance.

In cellars deep, women and children
wait
hopefully for sweet deliverance
by patriot fighters against a rogue state
that descends on them each day to
bring
rapacious assault of Ukrainian spring.

III

Scorched Earth

Have you ever thought to live in far
off lands,
places where towered towns flank
fields of grain?
Where plovers wing over grasslands,
cows
nod on bended knees, ruminant and
chew
languorously? Insects might buzz and
display
as evening approaches but twitch
at sound of thunder in northern skies.
You
think it must be weather—and then
other
sounds come. This time light flashes. Is
it storm
confrontation? Yet no, something else
fires
a trail of white smoke across the black
sky.
And a church tower explodes—sheets
of fire.
More trails now in the southern sky.
Buildings
burn as crowds flee to cellar-sheltered
doom
[...].

[NOTE At this time and in my
advanced years I can only strike out
against the horror of war with a lifted
brush or pen.]

Glen Phillips

Edith Cowan University

Breaking the Age-old Model of Motherhood



Different countries have different
dates to honour their mothers. Here in
Singapore, we celebrate this day in
May in tandem with the United States,
which has a more modern relationship
to the holiday, celebrating it first only
in 1907.

American Mother's Day was the
creation of Anna Jarvis, who continued
the work of her mother Ann Jarvis, a
peace activist and suffragette whose
crusade for a Mother's Day for Peace
had its roots in the horrors of the
American Civil War. The pioneer
English paediatrician and
psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, in a
postscript to his 1957 collection of
broadcast talks on BBC [...], calls for
better recognition of all that the
"ordinary good mother" contributes to
society simply by her loving devotion
to her child.[...] He says: "If there is no
true recognition of the mother's part,
then there must remain a vague fear of
dependence (upon women)...
including the fear of domination."

Fear of domination

Such unconscious fear of domination can be seen over and over again in the world, from the smallness of an unhappy misogynistic marriage to the brutal mass subjugation of women by the Taliban in Afghanistan and other countries with feudal-type regimes.[...] Today, 26 women serve as heads of state in the world, an unheard-of aspiration a few decades ago, and many of those women are young mothers, such as New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who took maternity leave while in office to give birth to her child. Women everywhere are setting new norms for motherhood.

Being zen at childbirth

In comparison, my own experience now seems archaic. I had my first child at the age of 19, while living in the middle of rice fields in Japan. At that time, the country was not the modern, vibrant tourist destination it is today. It was a traditional nation, still relatively closed to the world. Its women made an art of submission to men. Even the word for wife, *okusan*, has a patriarchal history, its pictorial kanji character indicating the inner part of the house where a wife was expected to stay, almost in purdah. Pregnancy and motherhood adhered to strict time-honoured norms that were alien to me. My obstetrician spoke no English, and I no Japanese, at that time. No anaesthetics were given in childbirth, and in the labour ward my companions made barely a sound. Only I gave vent to my fear and my pain. Afterwards, I was told that it was only foreigners like myself who made

such a noise. I had no idea then of the Japanese concept of *gaman*, a term of *zen* Buddhist origin that applies to physical and emotional suffering, and which means bearing the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity.

Observing first my daughter's and now my granddaughter's entry into modern motherhood, I am aware of how much things have changed. Young mothers band together in supportive prenatal classes, and husbands are beside them to witness the miracle of birth. They speak easily on the growth and progress of their unborn child, and the mechanics of birth. A child is born in a monitored, epidural or planned C-section way, and immediately it is a citizen of the modern digital world. A choice of apps guide the young parents through the early growth of their child, and what to expect in its regular leaps of development. It is, thank goodness, a long way from rice fields and my much-thumbed copy of Dr Spock's Baby and Child Care manual.[...].

Apps and Bumps Fashion.[...]

Recently, pictures abound of the eight-months-pregnant singer Rihanna, domed bare belly thrusting out between black bikini pants beneath a fall of see-through chiffon. The headline in The Guardian reads, "A Symbol of Strength: How Rihanna's bump has changed pregnancy style". Debatable though such overtness is, these women are breaking the age-old model of motherhood in their own way, as only they can do.

Some things, however, never change. Motherhood is more than hard, it is gruelling. Yet, the moment a

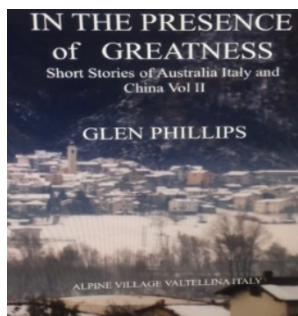
woman sets eyes upon her newborn child, her life is irrevocably changed forever. The silent heroism of *gaman* that Japan demanded of its birthing mothers is a strength that is required the whole of a woman's mothering life. No number of apps or trendsetting "bump" fashion can hide the sacrifice, the unconditional superhuman love, the joy and pride, the exhausting, daunting, magical, depressing, miraculous, inspiring, anxiety-ridden, yet transformative, landscape of the most sacred journey any woman will travel in her life.



Rihanna - A Symbol of Strength

Meira Chand

Review—Patsy Millett



With his latest collection of short stories, Glen Phillips should formally establish his credentials as arguably the most productive writer in the country. Drawing from the grist accumulated in the course of his improbable life - from country boy to a significant figure on the Australian and International

Literary scene - Glen continues to mill quality poetry and prose. Since the publication of 'Far and Wide' in 2020 he has brought out another splendid book of verse and illustrative sketches ('Trees in my Life') and more recently, a performance of his landscape poetry read to guitar accompaniment, part of a series of this genre soon to see publication.

Setting out on any jaunt with Glen, readers should be prepared for a far-flung journey. Transcending borders and time zones he leads us down paths high and low, light and often intriguingly dark. He'll be the driver of course. Vehicles play a significant role in his narratives, attesting not only to his expertise at the wheel and knowledge of internal combustion, but his mastery of the detour and unexpected turn. Another hallmark of any Phillips work is an underlying alloy of humour and irony, as exemplified in the hilarious and squirm-making title story of this collection.

The story 'In the Presence of Greatness' is a merciless piece of characterisation, the author capturing to the life the alter ego of a celebrated litterateur (to whom any resemblance is accidental) and the crapulent eloquence with which he mortifies his companion for the day. Glen's propensity for dialogue-driven stories is enhanced by his singular aptitude for the vernacular, especially of the richly creative Australian variety. In the course of a bush outing with the boorish Uncle Vivian ('What I mean to say') we are assaulted by the mutation of our mother tongue as heard in the

country towns of Glen's memory while 'Road Kill' captures the very essence of Aussie drongo-ism, at the core of which is the essential element of 'mateship'. All harmless enough when compared to 'The House of Childhood', an exercise in seduction subtly disguised as a cosy monologue. Then, in a blink, we will be transported to a high-minded discussion on Australian Literature as heard within the precincts of a foreign language institution.

In 'Happy New Year', the author effortlessly shifts gears and transfers our imaginations to Beijing and an introduction to the way things work in China for an Australian couple on a guided tour, where it is unwise to ask questions or stray from prescribed paths. With the bonus of a recipe for 'savory goats' head stew, 'Fugitive' comes with a warning of the penalties faced by Chinese students.

Millett included this review in her biography, *Inseparable Elements: Dame Mary Durack, A Daughter's Perspective* (Fremantle Press, 2021)

Patsy Millett

Modi's Civilizational Twist to Indo-Lanka Relations



Civilizational Twins

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2020 described India as 'a civilizational

state' [...] and called Sri Lanka one of, and obviously junior, the civilizational twins. Continuing that theme BJP chief

pointed out that in Modi's thinking, India's largesse to Sri Lanka during the current economic crisis, is a "civilizational duty". As part of his civilizational twist, Modi also decided to exhibit to the world, India's Buddhist past and announced in that regard to inaugurate India's world-class digital library on Buddhism. [...] all this is part of India's reimaged geostrategic power game in which Buddhism and Sri Lanka would take the centre stage.

Tactical Neutrality

To comprehend Modi's added urgency to prioritize Indo-Lankan relations after 2020 one must go back to the years immediately following 2009 when the Sri Lankan army won the separatist war and eliminated Prabhakaran and his LTTE. [...] India's neutrality was tactical' to betray the Tamils for LTTE's madness in assassinating Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. That neutrality freed Sri Lankan government from worrying about the Indian quarter. [...] India ignored the post-war development needs of the island, and that neglect left no alternative for the Rajapaksa regime but to look to China for assistance. [...]. China's economic link with Sri Lanka goes back to the Mao era.

Indophobia

Between India's indifference and China's willingness to aid Sri Lanka is an inconvenient truth, which continues to bedevil Indo-Lanka relations even today. There is a historically nurtured anti-Indian feeling or Indophobia within certain quarters of the Sri Lankan society. That feeling has a

medieval origin, from the Tamil invasions of South India's Pallava and Chola rulers. [...] That Indophobia went through an acute phase during the civil war. For instance, when the Indian air force airdropped food parcels in 1987 to the beleaguered Tamils in the north.[...] Later, it was sheer Indophobia that provoked a Sri Lankan naval cadet to attack Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi during the guard of honour given him in Colombo the same year.[...]most recently, in March this year, the same Indophobia was at play in the deal signed with the Adani Group again to set up two renewable energy projects in Mannar and Pooneryn. In short, the anti-Indian feeling in Sri Lanka and particularly within the Sinhalese community is a constant that refuses to go away.

India's Geostrategy

It is in this background that one should decipher the real motives behind Modi's civilizational twist. India's security interest lies in dragging the island away from China and closer into India's geostrategic orbit. Therefore, to provide a Buddhist frame to this strategic venture seems to be a tactical enticement to Sri Lanka with a view to win the hearts and minds of its Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists. The current economic crisis is a fortuitous event and manna from heaven to achieve this ultimate objective and to counter China's penetration into India's southern water[...].

Victims of Modi's Twist

The victims of this new relationship are the two Sri Lankan minorities,

Tamils and Muslims. Modi's anti-Muslim agenda is well known. To him and his BJP, only a dead Muslim is a good Muslim. Therefore, at least to the Islamophobes of Sri Lanka, Modi and his BJP foot soldiers are friendly allies. But what about the Tamils?[...] Modi himself being a rabid Hindu ethno-nationalist is better placed to understand the thoughts and sentiments of his Sinhala Buddhist counterparts in Sri Lanka. It is time for Tamil leadership to forget India, defenestrate this amendment and work for an all-inclusive and permanent solution to the problems of all minorities in the country. An awakened young generation of Sinhala Buddhists with its demand for systemic change promises that possibility.

Mischievous China

However, one cannot ignore how China is going to react to India's rejuvenated benevolence towards Sri Lanka. China is also opening its purse in competition with its contender. It has expressed its willingness to work through IMF to restructure Sri Lanka's foreign debt and promises more direct economic help. At the same time however, it is interesting to note that Beijing is also opening a Tamil window facing the country's north and east. The visits by the Chinese ambassador and his entourage to the famous Kandasamy Temple at Nallur in the north is significant. However, is the price paid for this revival going to be too heavy? Sri Lanka would emerge at the end with its sovereignty compromised substantially. That would be the price paid for seven

decades of failure to build a nation out of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society.

Ameer Ali

Murdoch University, Western Australia



I
Weird mistakes, wonderful moments
Make our lives—
We hide them like jewels
In the box of our memories:
Some mornings a tiny bird
Flutters at the window pane
To wake you up
To make you hear your voice
Into the memory lane
When the world was without pain
And birds sang, blithely on green
trees.

To make you hear your voice
Into the memory lane
When the world was without pain
And birds sang, blithely on green
trees.
All was bright in the rays of the sun
After the night's fallen rain
Sunset and sunrise
In-between hung the innocence
Of an island paradise?

II
Then came the news
Of children being killed:

They drop them at the school

In the glorious morning light
In the afternoon parents
Rush to collect their corpses.
Praying the sun will not rise
tomorrow.

A nation's heart is broken with pain
As if the monstrous tanks
Were rolling on the body
Of that brave, receding Ukraine.

Then we cry for our children:
Oh, Christ, now we're truly forsaken.
A grief greater than this
I've not known: to bury your children

With a warm kiss on a cold body.
To plant red roses on their graves
For the winter sun:
Hoping it will keep them warm
In the little candle's dim light.

How grief gets distributed
On little mounds of Earth
And grass begins to grow
While you think of your own birth.[...]

III
That little thatched hut by the river
Where you were born
Or by the rugged shore
Of a sea so vast
Your little world floating
Like an unmoored boat
Today those days seem remote.
But you kept on fishing...
Playing with empty seashells.

The pristine river flowed on
Towards the ocean
A few were drowned in flash floods
When it rained in the blue-hazed hills

With white clouds grazing
 Like your cows and goats.
 You had no idea
 Why the river drowns into the sea.
 [...]

The images come hauntingly
 Of tattered homes
 A sister's hand in yours
 Your mother watching her children
 Go to school where you learnt
 To hoe the garden;
 Then she returned to her utensils
 Washed and clean
 Dreaming of another life
 While her mother sat
 Waiting for last night's left-overs
 Looking at the eternal cow
 To be milked;
 The passing sound of the sugar train
 With its coal smell
 Near the well a tulsi plant
 Where the old prayed to the sun
 The ripples in the tiny pond
 Where life grew in such abundance,
 Waterlilies and dancing insects
 Sometimes a rainbow across the hills.

Were we rainbow children
 Growing in rain and wind?
 Brightened by sunlight?
 As the mountains shone after the rain
 In an endless song
 Of Life with unending love:
 On the little, broken road
 We all travel every moment
 Of our lives; sometimes it feels so long.

They shoot children in the schools,
 Don't they?
 And we plant flowers like stars
 In the garden of graves.

Ah, the cost of living
 Oh, the cost of dying Are always the
 same
 Call it by any other name?

There's a silence in the heart
 Of so much inhuman violence.



US President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden talk with principal Mandy Gutierrez and superintendent Hal Harrell Robb

Satendra Nandan
 University of Canberra

**I'm Listening like the Orange Tree: In
 Memory of Laurie Hergenhan**
 Eds. Antonella Riem Natale, Sue
 Ballyn, Stefano Mercanti, and Caterina
 Colomba

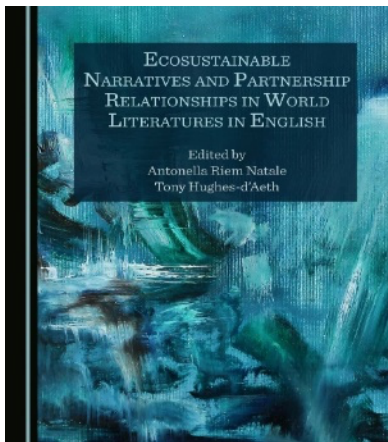


This volume in memory of Laurence Hergenhan is a collective demonstration of affection and gratitude for the kind and wise man he was and for all the wonderful things he accomplished in Literary Studies. He taught generations of students how to study in depth, sharing the finesse

of literature and showing us how friendship, warmth and creativity are gifts to be cherished at all times and across countries. To honour the bountiful generosity of his life and work, the first section of this volume collects critical essays by prominent scholars, colleagues and friends who had an enriching and long-standing relationship with him. The second part of this volume gathers personal appreciations, stories and memories.

Publication details: Udine: Forum, 2021 ISBN: 978-88-3283-277-8

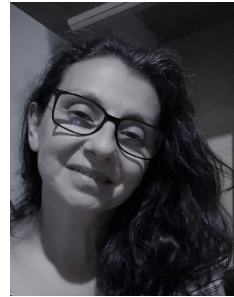
New Publication in Eco-Criticism



The book challenges the myth of the neutrality and detachment of the scholar. Its strength lies in its dynamic, engaging and passionate participation in the meeting of texts and words of different genres, geographical areas and cultures, in the pluralistic diversity of the themes explored, in its fundamental and creative relations with ecosophy, ethnophilology, ecofeminism, system theory and ecolinguistics. It brings together renowned international scholars to focus on postcolonial, ecocritical, mythical, and archetypal studies of

literature, education and its partnership mediation, applied linguistics and plurilingual education. ISBN13: 978-1-5275-8228-6

Cancer in Search of the World



Recently the pandemic brought us all to the vicinity of illness, creating among us a unique and lasting kind of bond. But many of us had been toying with illness for longer. Some, like myself, were lucky enough to leave it behind –and I cross my fingers here. Others were seized, in huge numbers.

Illness is our unfailing companion in one way or another, and poetry, that dear old friend, makes it more bearable. Against the odds and the pain of the infirm body, poetry helps us to remain human, enduring, alive. The poems presented here are part of the unpublished collection *Praise of the Surfboard and other Poems from Breast Cancer*. I wrote it a few years ago, when cancer was assailing my body, and its 67 poems aspire to reflect a varied gamut of emotions, hopes, fears, deceptions and joys among the many punctuating the days of those called on by cancer, that nose and ever-unwelcome visitor. The full catalogue would be impossible to collect, as reactions vary so enormously. *Praise of the Surfboard* compiles my own range of emotions, hopes, fears, deceptions and joys aroused by that condition. Perhaps if you have undergone similar processes you will feel reflected or interpellated.

Perhaps –hopefully– you will feel comforted in some way.

NOTE: The illustrations, “Feeling inside the box” and “Praise of the surfboard” are my daughter’s, Sabrina Atanasiu Alonso.



Feeling Inside the Box

Companion

All those encounters gone by
You and I, just laughing and crying
Together

We managed to nourish hopes
And terrify nightmares together
We toasted the stars
Without grief or respite
Nor a yardstick
And together we danced
Endless nights which never ended
Till they were no more...

We explored a world empty of
darkness
Peaceful yet borderless kingdoms
Affects which did not learn the
manner
To draft probable ends
And then
As if bestowing the world on us
Its largesse

And enchanting our mercy with glow
Had not been sufficient
Then came them both, so gorgeous
As two rising suns, desired
As divine discernment
Adored like the goddess herself
And you, my stunning companion
Hastened to feed them
With galactic munificence

It was all just so perfect
That today
When I have to
Part with you
See you
Tenaciously
Split
From
Me
For
My body’s survival
(No smaller cause
Would sanction
Such harsh abdication)
Now that I’m bound
To mislay you
My deep sorrow
Finds no
Consolation

This grief
Meets no measure nor pause
It is seamless
Pitch black
Like non-being

My bosom, my best
Flesh of my flesh, of my entrails
What I feel on losing you
Is abyssal sadness
Heart-wrenching
Despair

It is pain
Uni
Versal

Caesura

I was purloined
From the claws of death
Will you believe it

I was ruin
I was dread
I was whimper
I was
Almost
Nothing

But I was purloined
From the claws of death

I now live divided
Between grace and lightness
And fright of the odds
That
Like a ravenous creature
Might return
The horror

The horror

Main Character

What astonishing beauty
In the landscape

What barefaced glory
Despite so much devastation
By human hands

Being able to look
What a privilege...

What beauty transported by sea
Clouds
Winds

Rivers
Fashioned up by the chisel
Of generous Fortune

What a conspicuous honour
To be part
As of yet
Of this sumptuous tale
of *polyamory*
which surrounds us



Praise of the Surfboard

Fire and Light

My body is a temple
My body is a chalice
My body is the sacred
Seed of existence
My body is the repository of whole
Of the positive verve of the cosmos

My body we are the highest
My body we are the purest
My body we're bursting with love

A haze made of fire and light
Deluges my body
And mends it

Notebook, or, Illness Was

And slowly this notebook
Approaches its end

And slowly my illness
Comes close to its last page

The paper
Exudates already
A faint scent of joy

A soon-to-come epilogue
Is on its way
And then

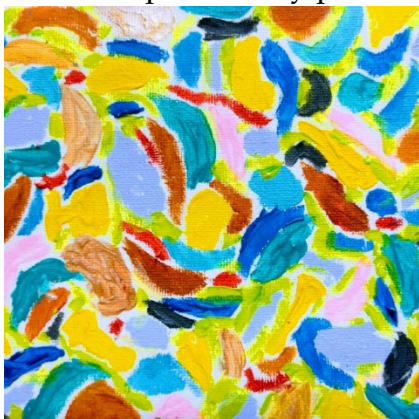
Illness Was

Then
Sunrise

Isabel Alonso-Breto
Universitat de Barcelona

Colours Call Us

Painting from Stephen Alomes'
Pandemic Escapes painting series
and complementary poem



Colours Call Us

Now is the third cold Covid winter
An even more bitter winter of our
discontent
Drawing us to answer the call
The Call of Colours

Bright warming colours
Like clustered spring flowers
Calming and inspiring

A call to pleasure and play,
Unlike grey skies and deadly statistics
Wearing us down

Stephen Alomes
RMIT University, Melbourne



**Sri Lankan Uprising Is a Cry for
Regaining Democracy Brutalised by
the Rajapaksas**

With the stranglehold on polity and economy, characteristic of South Asian politics, the Rajapaksas used a toxic glue of racism and religious enmity to bind the Sinhala majority to their political will, which expectedly misfired.

There are some familiar and tired tropes that have long characterised South Asian politics. Some of these are the rise of populist demagogues, authoritarian rule, the breakdown of the rule of law, militarisation, and ethnonationalist and religious conflicts.

Indeed, the last decade after the conclusion of the war in 2009 has been one of rising ethnic and religious polarisation alongside a growing gap between an affluent urban minority, used to a culture of conspicuous consumption, and a large majority of the population struggling to maintain a decent standard of life.

It was over this highly iniquitous society that the extended Rajapaksa family – led by the charismatic demagogue Mahinda Rajapaksa – built what appeared to be an unshakable political dynasty. But on Saturday, July 9, the Rajapaksa project came to a staggering halt amidst a spectacular people’s uprising, never-before witnessed in Sri Lanka and anywhere in South Asia.

Economic deprivation and cry for political change

The people’s uprising had a singular goal of forcing the incumbent president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa (or Gota), Mahinda’s younger sibling, to resign along with his government.

Gotabaya, elected to power in 2019 with an overwhelming majority, further consolidated by a sweeping electoral win by his party the SLPP (Sri Lanka Podu Jana Peramuna) in 2020, failed to deliver on the vistas of prosperity that his election manifesto promised.

Instead, with faltering income from tourism due to the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks – which those campaigning for Gotabhaya weaponised into an anti-Islamic discourse that shored up majoritarian Sinhala Buddhist sentiment and projected Gota as a national saviour – and mismanagement of the economy along with drastic tax cuts benefiting the wealthy and a disastrous overnight attempt to switch to organic farming, Gotabhaya’s political stock had all but expired.

By July 9 there was virtually no fuel in the country, public transport had ground to a standstill and on the

evening before, the chief of police declared an illegal ‘police curfew’ in a desperate attempt to discourage protestors.

Demonstrators gather outside the office of Sri



Lanka’s Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe

Despite these many obstacles, from early Saturday morning, people began streaming into the capital Colombo from all parts of the country.

Thousands thronged railway stations and forced officials to operate trains. Others walked, cycled, rode on lorries, or scrambled aboard trucks usually used to transport sand. By mid-day hundreds of thousands had gathered in the vicinity of the Presidential Secretariat in the heart of Colombo’s business district – a site which had seen a three-month long ‘occupy’ movement and an encampment named the ‘Gota Go Gama’ (Gota go home village).

Following pitched street battles between the protesters and the police and armed forces, in which protesters were beaten up and multiple rounds of teargas fired, the Presidential Secretariat, the President’s official residence and the Prime Minister’s office and residence were literally and symbolically ‘taken’ over by the people.

It appeared that the security forces realising the overwhelming strength of

the protesters simply gave up. There were ecstatic scenes as people swarmed the Presidential Palace and office with some even jumping into the swimming pool and images and video footage of the triumph circulating widely on social media – a medium that played a vital role in mobilising and sustaining the protest movement called *aragalaya* (struggle) in Sinhala. Throughout the ‘occupy’ movement the Rajapaksa regime and its national security apparatus underestimated the will of the people repeatedly. It all began on March 31 when thousands thronged the President’s personal home in the suburbs of Colombo demanding solutions to power cuts that extended up to 10 hours a day, shortages of fuel and cooking gas, and skyrocketing food prices due to runaway inflation.

Jolted by this sudden uprising the regime responded with overwhelming force – beating up protesters and excessively using teargas followed by mass arrests. But this repression resulted in the establishment of ‘Gota go Gama’ and a nation-wide protest campaign with mini protest sites mushrooming in many towns across the country.

A similar scenario occurred on May 9 when government-backed ‘thugs’ attacked the Gota go Gama site but were unprepared for the instant national backlash with houses of government politicians being torched – ultimately resulting in the resignation of premier Mahinda Rajapaksa. From this point onwards it appeared that the *aragalaya* was fizzling out, with the appointment of Ranil

Wickramasinghe as prime minister – a man with long political experience – who moved swiftly to undermine the protesters by attempting to restore fuel and other supplies.

However, the ‘economic rationality’ of the political elite failed as was evident on July 9. While it was undoubtedly extreme economic deprivation that brought people to the streets, there was and is a clear demand for political change.

A true democratic movement

While some commentators have mischaracterised July 9 as a form of “mob action”, there is a distinct democratic core to the people’s struggle.

Political change in Sri Lanka since 1948 has been through elections where patron-client relationships established by the political elite have often played a key role. Politicians have long wielded a stranglehold on access to key resources. Whether you are a businessman seeking government contracts or a poor farmer looking for subsidized fertiliser, the political class controlled access. The Rajapaksa regime expanded and entrenched this patron-client system as never before and used a toxic glue of racism and religious enmity to bind the Sinhala majority to their political will.

Following the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), the violent militant group that claimed to represent minority Tamil interests, the Rajapaksa’s positioned themselves as saviours of the nation and aligned with a crony-capitalist class and a highly militarised form of governance swiftly moved to build an

ethnocratic national security state – cheered on by a triumphalist Sinhala majority high on the military victory and an unsustainable post-war economic boom propelled by heavy government borrowing in international financial markets.

[...]The *aragalaya* can be identified as a democratic movement due to a number of reasons. It broke the vicious cycle of patron-client politics. People marched to Colombo not because of the promise of a monetary handout, some liquor and food – the usual package doled out by political parties to attract supporters to rallies. It was largely a youth-led movement which was able to speak across ethnic, racial and class divides. It also utilised art and culture in creative ways not witnessed in Sri Lankan politics before.

The *aragalaya* also spoke to issues of economic and social justice, including Sri Lanka's long history of human rights abuses and impunity, which have long been pushed to the margins. However, the *aragalaya* movement was not homogenous, unified and nor did it have a distinct core leadership. It is this very formlessness of the movement that allowed so many groups – ranging from student unions, political party affiliated groups, trade unions, civil society activists, artists and youth – to gather under the *aragalaya* banner.

But this also meant that many unresolved contradictions remained throughout the struggle and the specter of a common enemy unified this diverse group.

Now that the enemy is gone, or very close to going, some of those divisions are re-emerging. Some groups associated with the *aragalaya* are celebrating Field Marshall Sarath Fonseka, a highly divisive figure accused of war crimes during the 2009 conclusion of the war and other groups are calling for a complete overhaul of the state without considering the constitutional implications of such a radical and democratically unsanctioned restructuring of the state.

The current moment in Sri Lanka is what Antonio Gramsci might call an “interregnum” where the “old is dying and the new is yet to be born”. It is a volatile and fluid situation and the future of Sri Lanka's politics and society are by no means guaranteed.

But the *aragalaya* did establish one powerful idea – that despite seemingly overwhelming odds the people's will can prevail. At the very basic level, this is democracy in action. There is a fundamental distinction to be made between the mob that invaded Capitol Hill in 2021 seeking to preserve the Trump presidency and the nationwide mobilisation that led to the ousting of President Gotabhaya Rajapaksa. One sought to undermine democracy while the other sought to regain the promise of democratic politics.

Harshana Rambukwella
Open University of Sri Lanka

The Challenging Precarity Global network: Conference on 'Planetary Precarity and Future Habitability'.

February 18-19, 2022

[Convenors: Janet Wilson University of Northampton, UK; Om Prakash Dwivedi Bennett University, India; and Barbara Schmidt-HaberKamp University of Bonn, Germany]

[...] Hosted by the School of Liberal Arts and School of Management, at Bennett University, India, this two-day event attracted a range of emerging and leading scholars working in the environmental humanities. The topic addressed the network's concerns with environmental precarity, species extinction and above all, with the survival and habitability of the planet].

[...]. It pointed to the widespread consensus that urgent change is needed to deal with climate change [...]. The conference topic acknowledged existing debates and political responses [...]

Papers and presentations probed topics and concepts as varied as a queer utopian vision of ecology, planetary catastrophe and disaster, apocalypse and the affective dimension of precarity; reading and writing as eco-translational practices to consider the limits of thinking back through humanist ideals and thinking forward to the need for more-than-human story-telling projects; the rise of planetary nuclear precarity and anti-nuclear campaigns [...]

One debate considered the relevant merits of poetry or fiction as the most appropriate and effective response to the environmental crisis, while another delegate asked, 'How can ecocritical

narratives imagine more holistic and sustainable planetary futures, given the socio-ecological scale of problems of the Anthropocene'?

Various literary and visual genres and representations were explored in considering how to repair current planetary damage, build resilience and avoid future disaster. For example, how to evaluate Anthropocentric thought and disrupt power structures by reinterpreting heteronormative categories of 'nature' and the 'human'; James Bond movies and environmental injustice in the Global South; how diverse textual imaginings of the apocalyptic *Snowpiercer* (2013) story illustrate human vulnerability in the attempt to survive in a postapocalyptic world; in the genre of petrofiction, the environmentally calamitous effects of oil extraction on local populations in Ogoniland and their collective resilience; the entanglement of human and non-human actors contributing to a renegotiation of agency and hence a move towards planetary solidarity through the lens of fiction; the value of eco-poetry in rendering the complexity and multiplicity of environmental issues by contrast to the novel, and what poet-thinkers like the Canadian Peter Sanger have to tell us about the urgent need to protect the Earth and its life forms, that life (not *homo sapiens*) is the *raison d'être* of the biosphere; pandemic fiction as inspiring mindfulness, and as a potential facilitator of critical self-reflection and a vigilant sense of precarity. The section 'Indigenous Narratives and Environmental Crisis',

considered the argument, also presented by Jason Moore in his keynote address, that contemporary global precarity emanates from past colonial ecological disruptions in native societies, in response to which indigenous stories today offer alternative solutions to those of western societies, as well as indigenous knowledge that may promote environmental justice. Precarity, in Wai Chee Dimock's presentation, is a condition for resilience as much as hardship; she turns to native American Indian resilience during the pandemic as an example of how to establish that reparative agency is possible.

Two panels considered aesthetics responses in art, music, dance, literature and performance, to the planetary emergency caused by global warming:[...] 'Art and (Audio)Visual Aesthetics of Environmental Crisis Planetary' looked at the forms of art as reframings of nature, [...] while the panel 'Survival Aesthetics: New Forms of Collaborative Art and Media Practices', presented experimental collaborative methodologies of dance and performance, using Dalit trance and possession techniques as sea methodologies[, ...], and the role of science fiction and the populist media in imagining a more just world. [...] Four outstanding keynote talks were presented: Wai Chee Dimock (Yale University) "Habitable Precarity: Salmon and the Indigenous Food Cycle"; Sharae Deckard (University College, Dublin) "Precarious Work: The Labour and Ecology of Social Reproduction in World-Literature;

Gabriele Schwab (University of California, Irvine) "Precarious Boundaries: Reflections on Transspecies Imaginaries"; and Jason W. Moore (Binghamton University, New York) "Planetary Justice and the Planetary Proletariat".

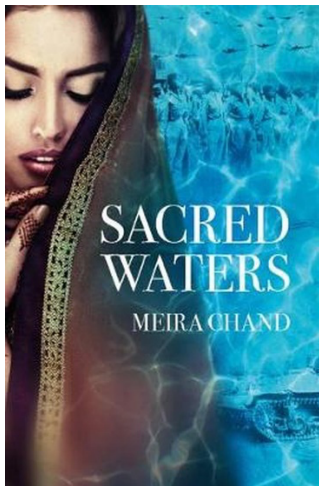
[...] This was a memorable occasion -- one marked by the sharing of new ideas and research, passionate concern for the environmental future, elevated by excellent questions and the chance to debate and consider solutions [...].

Janet M. Wilson
Chair, Challenging Precarity: A Global Network
<https://challengingprecarity.network>
University of Northampton, UK

Bengal Club's Book Club meeting with Author Meira Chand was an invigorating debate on all things history and fiction

It's not everyday that the president of the country you reside in telephones you and asks if you would write a novel on Singapore but such rare phenomenon do happen to some unique people like author Meira Chand," began the very articulate host for the evening, Julie Mehta, a former scholar and professor from University of Toronto, for The Bengal Club's Book Club meeting on November 23, over Zoom. She was taking about Chand's novel that later became the national novel of Singapore — critically acclaimed book *A Different Sky*. However, the book being discussed at the session was *Sacred Waters*, which was written and published in 2018 and made it to Oprah Winfrey's reading list.

Meira Chand's writing has been rooted in deeply important feminist ideas, colonialism and nationalist uprisings that resisted British colonial rule in India. Her first novel was written during her extensive years spent in Japan called *The Gossamer Fly*, followed by four more novels set in Japan. *Sacred Waters* is the story of Sita whose entire life is built on patriarchal restrictions put on women by society, having lost her parents and husband by the young age of 13. Her life is in sharp contrast with her daughter Amita's who is a professor at a university, embarking on a journey, to unravel the mystery of her mother's past. Her revelations take the readers back to the 1940s where Sita was a recruit in the Indian National Army.



Sacred Waters by Meira Chand

Jumping headlong into the debate between historians and historical novelists about the relevance of the other, Mehta asked Chand her thoughts on the significance of this debate. "Historians deal with facts while novelists and fiction writers in any form deal with emotions and relationships," said the award-

winning author. She spoke of her novel which is a deep historical novel on the history of Singapore, formerly Rangoon, where the women contingent of the INA were stationed. Her research was extensive and the scope of work was daunting. The real challenge, she said, was to 'free the imagination from under a mound of facts' that one is buried under after such an intense research process. It is perhaps her ability to seamlessly do that that allows Chand to write books that rarely feel like a historical novel while being rich in history.

The invigorating conversation that went on well over its stipulated time had the audience jumping in with questions and viewpoints leading to a healthy debate, the kind of which are scarce these days. Visit the Bengal Club's YouTube page to catch a recording of the session.

Shrestha Saha, Telegraph India

Provided by Julie Mehta, Loreto College

Advisory Committee – Additions

1. Professor Jane

Fernandez, Provost,
Excelsia College

Professor Jane

Fernandez holds the
position of Provost at

Excelsia College, Sydney, NSW. Jane was until recently also Vice-President, Quality & Strategy at Avondale University College (2011–April 2020). In her role at Avondale, Jane successfully led Avondale's University College and Self-Accrediting projects. She led in the set-up and management of Avondale's Joint-Conferral Scheme with Charles Sturt University. Jane



also founded and continues to lead the national-based Higher Education Private Provider Quality Network (HEPP-QN).

Jane held the office of President of ASAA (Australia) for several years during which she rendered excellent service to the Association.

2. Prof. C. Muralikrishna, Dean of Arts, Osmania University



Dr. C. Muralikrishna is Professor & Dean, Faculty of Arts (fmr Head; CBoS, Dept. of English; Director, ELTC, OU) University College of Arts and Social Sciences (UCASS), Osmania

University, Hyderabad - 500007, Telangana State (TS), India. Professor Muralikrishna was instrumental in securing the formal MOU signed between the University of Western Australia and Osmania University and has worked collaboratively with other colleagues at OU to secure this good outcome. He will also be the Director of the Australian Studies Centre which has already been set up at OU. email: cmkrishn17@gmail.com

All members of ASAA express their sincere thanks to David Mathews, Dept. of English, Nizam College OU for his expert and generous assistance in formatting this newsletter.

ASAA TEAM

Meira Chand— is currently Patron of the Association and has been associated with ASAA for several years. She is a novelist with an international profile and the author of twelve novels (see her website). She is domiciled in Singapore as well as the UK and occupies a special position in the Singaporean literary and cultural milieu. She writes a regular column for *The Straits Times*, the national newspaper of Singapore. www.meirachand.com Email: meirachand@gmail.com

Stephen Alomes— **President, ASAA (Australia)** Adjunct Professor at RMIT University, Melbourne. He is possibly one of the longest-standing members of the Association and has made a distinctive contribution to all our conferences and publications over many years. He has a particular interest in the national and the colonial in a globalising world. Email: stephen.alomes@rmit.edu.au

Kieran Dolin— **Vice-President, ASAA (Australia)** has been a representative for WA with ASAA and has visited Hyderabad for an ASAA Conference. He is a Senior Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Western Australia. He worked to assist the ASAA group attend the Hyderabad Literary Festival 2020: besides presentations at the festival, he also met with officials of Osmania University to initiate official discussions on the possibility of establishing a formal link with the University of Western Australia. Email: kieran.dolin@uwa.edu.au

Kavita Ivy Nandan— **Secretary, ASAA (Australia)** co-edited several literary works from 1998-2007. Her first novel *Home after Dark* was published in 2015. She completed her PhD in

Literature at the Australian National University and has lectured in Creative Writing and Literature at the University of Canberra and other Australian universities. Kavita was born in New Delhi, grew up in Suva and moved to Canberra in 1987. Email: nandan.kavita@gmail.com

Parimala Kulkarni—President, ASAA (Asia) is Associate Professor in the Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad. Her area of specialization is Women’s Writing. Her research interests include Indian Literature, Gender Studies, and English Language Pedagogy. She has co-edited a book, *Contemporary British Literature - Post 1990s: A Critical Study* (2013). She is a recipient of a UGC Research Award 2014-2016. She was previously Secretary (Asia) and has had crucial responsibilities for the production of the ASAA Newsletter. Email: paripavan@gmail.com

K.T. Sunitha—Vice-President, ASAA (Asia) was formerly Professor of English at the University of Mysore. She organised the ASAA Conference in Mysore in July 2010, bringing together several institutions, besides the University of Mysore: Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah’s Dhvanyaloka as well as Professor Anniah Gowda’s International Centre for Commonwealth and American Literature and Language Studies. She has presented research papers on Indian writers at Australian university conferences and taught Australian literature at Mysore University, Email: kt_sunitha@yahoo.co.in

Ishmeet Kaur—Editor, ASAA Website is an Assistant Professor at the Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar. She teaches courses in English literature, language and communication studies and has worked on translations of texts from Punjabi into English and vice versa. Her interests in research lie in Australian Literature, Post-colonial Studies and Sikh Studies. She has worked on Indigenous writing from Australia and India. Her doctoral thesis was a comparative study of Patrick White’s novels and *Guru Granth Sahib*. She has published (2014) a work entitled, *Patrick White: Critical Issues*.

David Matthews – Secretary, ASAA (Asia) teaches in the English Department at Nizam College and is also a Research Scholar at Department of English, Osmania University. working in the broad area of Nationalism, Ireland, and Poetry. He has been associated with the Department of English, OU for the past ten years in various teaching and research capacities. Prior to beginning his work in academia, he was employed in the IT industry.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Greg Battye is Adjunct Professor in Design and Creative Practice at the University of Canberra. His research includes photography, narrative theory and new writing technologies and new media forms. Greg’s works are held by the National Gallery of Australia, the National Library of Australia and other national institutions. Greg was vice-president of ASAA for several years (2007-2013) Email: Greg.Battye@canberra.edu.au

Tony Simoes da Silva was Professor and Associate Dean of International Programmes with responsibility for South Asia at Wollongong University till he took up the position of Head, School of Humanities at the University of Tasmania. Tony co-edited the *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (JASAL)* and *La Question Meridionale (The*

Southern Question.) He attended the ASAA conference at Osmania University and is well-known to many of our Asian colleagues. Email: Tony.SimoesdaSilva@utas.edu.au (Note: TBC).

Glen Phillips is a well-known poet and is Director of the Landscape and Language Centre at Edith Cowan University adjunct ECU professor. He serves on literary boards and Foundations and is represented in more than 20 anthologies and is author or editor of 20 books. Glen has been a long-time supporter of ASAA initiatives since its inception in 1995. Email: glenlyp@bigpond.com

Anjali Gera Roy is Professor in the Department of Humanities of Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur. She has published essays in literature, film and cultural studies on India as well as on African culture. She is now researching the transnational flows of Bollywood cinema and has recently co-edited several volumes in this field. She was President of ASAA (Asia) for several years and has remained an active member of ASAA for many years. Email: agera_99@yahoo.com

Satendra Nandan is Emeritus Professor at the University of Canberra. He is also widely known for his creative work as a poet, and biographer. In March 2012 he was awarded the prestigious Harold White Fellowship at the National Library to write his autobiography. He was appointed a member of the Fiji Constitutional Commission (July 2, 2012). He helped found ASAA at the historic meeting at the ACLALS conference in Colombo in 1995 and has served as vice-president for many years. E-mail: satendra.nandan@gmail.com

Cynthia vanden Driesen is currently Chair of the Advisory Council and also Treasurer of the Association. Her teaching and research career was mainly based at Edith Cowan University and she was subsequently a Research Fellow at the University of Western Australia. She has taught at Universities in Sri Lanka, India, W. Africa and South Korea. With Satendra Nandan she set up ASAA at a meeting of international academics in Colombo (ACLALS 1997) and served for several years as President (Australia). Her research and publications are mainly in the area of Australian literature and other New Literatures in English. E-mail: cynthia.v@westnet.com.au

Additional Committee Members in the Region

India

Dr. N. Bindu (Madras) Dr. Suneetha Rani (Hyderabad), Dr. Keya Majumdar (Jamshedpur); Prof. Indibar Mukherjee (Patna); Prof. Mani Meitel (Manipur); Dr. Jagdish Batra (MDU); Dr. V. Sangeetha (Tamil Nadu), Arindam Das (Kolkata); Dr. Julie Mehta (Kolkata); Dr Suman Bala (Delhi); Prof. R.K. Dhawan (Delhi); A/Prof. Pavan B P (Mysore); Dr. Neeta Sashidharan (Kerala); Prof. Ravishankar Rao (Mangalore); Professor Julie Mehta, Loreto College, Kolkata.

Australia

Dr. Lynnette Lounsbury, Avondale College; Prof. Bill Ashcroft, UNSW; Ms. Julia Gross, ECU; Dr. Abu Siddique, UWA; Dr. Keith Truscott, Curtin University; Prof. Glen Phillips,

ECU; Dr. Ameer Ali, Murdoch University; A/Prof. Abu Siddique, A/Prof. Michael Gillan, University of Western Australia.

New Zealand Professor Mark Williams, Victoria University of Wellington.

Singapore Professor Kirpal Singh, Singapore Management University.

Sri Lanka Frances Bulathsinghala, Open University of Sri Lanka. Writer, Journalist, Academic. Professor Harshana Rambukwella, Open University.

Malaysia A/Professor Carol Leon, University of Malaysia.

S. Korea Professor Kim Hyung Shik, Chung-Ang University.

China Professor Lu Le, Australian Studies Center, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology.

Professor Liang Zhong, Mudangiang, Australian Studies Center.

Japan Professor Yasue Amritsu, Doshisa University, Kyoto.

Philippines Professor Marjorie Evanesco-Pernia, De La Salle University.

Bangladesh Dr. Mashrur Hosain, Jhanaginagar University.

West Africa Professor Karen King-Aribisala, University of Lagos.

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Spain Dr. Susan Ballyn, Dr. Isabel Alonso, University of Barcelona.

Czech Republic Dr. Jitka Vlkova, University of Brno.

Italy Dr Stefano Mercanti, University of Udine.

Professor Antonella Riem, University of Udine.

Austria Dr. Eleonore Wildburger, Univ. of Klagenfurt.

Germany Dr. Sissy Helff, Universitat Darmstadt;

Prof. Dr. Brigitte Johanna Glaser, University of Gottingen.

U.S.A Dr. Nathanael O'Reilly, Texas Christian University.

Assoc. Professor Pavithra Narayanan, Washington State University, Vancouver.

U.K. Professor Janet Wilson, University of Northampton.

Canada Dr. Aparna Halpe, University of Toronto.

South Africa Dr. Bridget Grogan, University of Johannesburg.

Application for Membership of ASAA

Name (in capital letters) Prof./Dr./Mr./Ms. _____

Institutional Affiliation _____

Mailing Address _____

Telephone No _____

E-mail Address _____

Special interest in Australian/NZ Studies Publications/Research/Teaching

Date

Signature

(Please address applications to the presidents or committee members of either the Asian or Australasian branches of the association, depending on where you are located. Email addresses provided above)
